

I want to thank those of you who took time to join us tonight, either here in person or via television. Your commitment to our students, staff members and schools – and ultimately the continued betterment of our community – is evident by your advocacy and attendance here tonight.

I wanted to take a minute first to remind everyone how we got where we are tonight:

Last spring, the School Board and Board of Supervisors approved a school operating budget for FY2009. During the next several months, several changes were made to that budget in order to help balance it in light of budget shortfalls being recognized at the state and local levels. At that time, we became concerned about the prospects for our FY2010 operating budget that was created and adopted at the same time as the FY2009 budget.

During the past several months, local and state revenues have continued to decrease. Last fall, we faced a \$38 million funding gap based on local and state contributions. In mid-December, the Governor released his budget amendments which increased the funding gap to \$52 million. The number is astonishing and has been hard for some people to get their arms around. The damage may not be done, but that is where we are today.

Early last fall, staff members began developing the budget proposal we currently have before us.

- Departments/schools developed budget requests based on 20% reductions.
- The Budget Advisory Committee – made up of internal and external stakeholders – met to review options and make recommendations.
- The Superintendent reviewed recommendations and worked with the Finance staff to develop a balanced budget.

As the Superintendent has noted, the cuts that are proposed are far-reaching and will impact every student and every staff member. We already have heard from many in the community who disagree with some proposals and others who want to offer their own suggestions. We appreciate that feedback. We are listening, as evidenced by the Superintendent's remarks about amendments. And we care. This is not our school division, this is the community's school division.

The Superintendent's proposed cuts are not cuts we want to make. They are not cuts he wants to make. These are not cuts we believe are in the best interest of the school division.

By now, you've heard the message:

- Our county is what it is today in large part because of successful schools
- Our schools are leaders in public education in Virginia and the division is the largest in the state to have all of its schools fully accredited.
- Our schools operations are effective and efficient, according to local and national ratings

Many have asked us to run our schools like a business. However, I'm not sure we could ever operate 100 percent like a business. Nor can our cost benefits be measured like other businesses. Our students are not widgets that all can be processed in the same production line. They are people who come to us from various backgrounds with different learning styles and different needs. For this reason, a cost analysis on programs likely would not produce an accurate analysis of what the "overall" benefit of a program or employee is. In addition, we cannot throw away the widgets that are defective. We must teach and serve all who come through our doors.

There are tough decisions that have to be made regarding our budget because of the funding we have been given. We will make the choices we believe are in the best interests of our students.

We encourage the public to continue to participate in our process. Share with us your thoughts and suggestions, and remind our other elected representatives at the state and local levels that you expect them to continue to make public education a top funding priority.

Everyone in Chesterfield County benefits from the school division – whether it is the instructional services we provide, the facilities we open to the community or the successful graduates who return to Chesterfield to serve residents as teachers, doctors, emergency responders, elder-care professionals, accountants, etc. – people you need the services of during your everyday life.

We face a challenging year ahead. That said, we expect to persevere. And we expect to continue to deliver quality services our community has come to expect.

There will be changes in the delivery of service along the way, but our children should not be punished by the choices we are forced to make.

I respectfully ask tonight that we not pit employee group vs. employee group; that we not make employee contracts the main issue; and that we all work together to make informed decisions based on accurate information. Let's keep our eye on the big picture: the teaching and learning that occurs daily inside our classrooms. We owe it to our students to remember that they are why we are here tonight.