

EACC Report to the Board of Education

April 8, 2008

The Education Association of Charles County has been lobbying during the current General Assembly session to preserve state funding for public education from the state. On March 10th, we took a bus with our members from Charles and St. Mary's county to visit with our legislators in Annapolis. Senator Mac Middleton and Delegates Peter Murphy, John Wood, and Anthony O'Donnell listened to members voice their concerns. We asked them to support the Thornton allocation and NOT to balance the state's budget deficit by cutting education spending. We know that you on the elected board of Education share our concerns about preserving education funding.

Speaking of funding, we know that the Board of Education is in the process of compiling its request to the county government for local funding. In doing so, it is your responsibility to submit to the county a budget request that accurately reflects the true needs of the system. We are aware that in strained economic times, estimates about funding can fluctuate rather widely and tensions run higher than in good times. So in order to have a solid base of information on which to rely, the EACC has retained an independent fiscal analyst to do a review of the county's budget for us. Some of you may know RJ Pellicoro Associates – they have done work for us in the past and have done numerous analyses of government budgets across the state for many years.

The full report is still being completed by Mr. Pellicoro, yet it's clear even from the initial findings that the school system has not been receiving its promised 52.4% percent of actual revenues from the county. The county has historically overestimated expenditures and underestimated revenues, but the Board Of Education allocation is based on the county's projections, rather than actual receipts. Basically, when more money is received than projected, the county does not revise its funding to the Board of Education to bring the allocation in line with 52.4% of actual revenues. Here is an excerpt from Mr. Pellicoro's initial report to us:

- From FY 2002 to FY 2008, the % of total General Fund Expenditures and Transfers appropriated to the BOE declined from 50.4% to 44.8%, a decrease of 5.6 percentage points. One percentage point equates to \$3.0 million in FY 2008. Had the county maintained their level of support at the FY 2002 level, an additional \$16.8 million would have been allocated to Education for FY 2008.

Notwithstanding these facts, there is a popular misconception in the public that the Board of Education gets half the county's budget. For example, I have here a copy of a misleading, inflammatory advertisement from the "League of Maryland Homeowners"

printed in the Maryland Independent March 26th. It states “the Board of Education already receives 52 cents out of every dollar of county taxes.” Well, Mr. Pellicoro’s analysis clearly shows this has not been true, certainly not from FY 2002 to FY 2008.

The result of the county’s funding practice is the Board hasn’t gotten what it should have received. There has been less money for opening new schools, employee compensation, materials of instruction, and additional staff to reduce class size. I know that we will not be in negotiations until later this month, but our teachers work very hard, and they expect salary increases comparable to those in surrounding jurisdictions. With the rising costs of fuel and other living expenses, not to mention a projected increase in premiums for insurance and a 1% increase in their retirement contribution to the state next year, you need to help us keep our quality staff here by addressing compensation. Mr. Richmond has clearly stated in a number of venues that employee compensation is his number one priority. Not surprisingly, we agree with that – and for good reason: there is a nationwide shortage of teachers, and living in Charles County is way more expensive than living in other jurisdictions where teachers are paid the same or even more. No doubt we will get into more specifics in our upcoming bargaining.

The bottom line is the county commissioners have many resources available to them in order to properly fund education. All of them have stated publicly their commitment to having good schools and to making education a priority. Mr. Cooper recently reiterated his commitment to education when he met with me and Meg a few weeks ago. But everyone gets antsy when the money is tight.. As the elected Board of Education, we urge you to continue strongly advocating for our public schools, and to truly represent the needs of the system in framing your budget request. The 1900 members of the Education Association of Charles County stand ready to help you get what’s right – not what’s left – for our schools. We will certainly join you at the county budget hearing in May.

Thank you.

Bill Fisher

President, E.A.C.C.

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