



Sunbeams

Parent Teacher Association Newsletter
Nov. 13, 2009

Dear Sunrise Valley Families,

This week's Sunbeams newsletter is devoted exclusively to the budget crisis facing Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) for fiscal year 2011 (i.e., next school year). The stakes are high for our schools and our children. For example, Sunrise Valley could lose our band and strings programs and School Based Technology Specialist (Mr. Unser), and see class sizes increase between one and three students. Adding insult to injury, Instructional Assistants could be cut - making those class sizes effectively larger - and student: teacher ratios for autism students could increase from 2.25:1 to 3:1. And these are just a few of the possible cuts that are being considered.

As a PTA, our goal is to inform and educate the SVES community about the current budget situation and its implications, to advocate for our school and our children, and to encourage members of the SVES community to do the same. The PTA Board recently met and agreed on the following steps:

- Leverage PTA communication tools (e.g., web site, newsletter, meetings) to raise awareness of the budget issues and promote constructive action within our community.
- Draft a position paper that seeks to protect Sunrise Valley's programs and resources - communicate our views with key decision makers.

These actions will be refined and supplemented as needed as events unfold. We hope that you will join us in speaking out for our children, and for all of the children in Fairfax County.

Melissa Gifford
PTA President



What's All the Fuss About? What Exactly is the Current Situation With the Budget?

Currently, Fairfax County is anticipating a \$316 million deficit for next year. In addition, FCPS is anticipating a \$176 million deficit. FCPS receives the vast majority of its funding from the county through a transfer of funds. By law, the budget must be balanced - so additional revenue must be raised and/or programs/expenses must be cut. However, Virginia is a "Dillon Rule State", which means that counties only have powers expressly granted by the General Assembly - so Fairfax County is severely limited in its ability to raise revenue. The county relies most heavily on dwindling real estate taxes to fund all county programs - not just schools. These roadblocks to raising revenue have put many county programs, especially our schools, at risk from cuts.

How Does This Affect My Child - What is at Risk?

FCPS Budget Staff have been developing a *List of Potential FY 2011 Program and Service Reductions for Discussion Purposes*. It is a list of possible measures to bring the budget into balance. The complete list can be found at <http://sunrisevalleypta.webnode.com/a2011-budget/>. Here is just a sampling of the proposals:

- Increase class size by one student across the board
- Increase class size by two additional students (total of three) for Advanced Academic Programs
- Reduce Instructional Assistants by 20%
- Eliminate elementary band & strings
- Reduce School-Based Technology Specialists by 50%
- Increase Autism Student: Teacher Ratios to 3:1 (from 2.25:1)
- Eliminate Full Day Kindergarten (except Title 1 schools)
- Eliminate summer school



What is the Budget Process in FCPS?

FCPS and the Superintendent prepare the Proposed Budget for the year. This Proposed Budget goes through the School Board, which amends it to produce the Advertised Budget. The Advertised Budget is presented to the County Board of Supervisors (BOS), which determines the amount of funds to be transferred to FCPS. The transfer amount is then used by the School Board to produce the Approved Budget. Work sessions and public hearings are held throughout the process, which follows this timeline in 2009/2010:



Oct. -Dec.	FCPS prepares & finalizes Proposed Budget
Jan. 7	Superintendent releases FY 2011 Proposed Budget
January	School Board prepares Advertised Budget
Jan. 25-26	School Board holds public hearings on Advertised Budget
Feb. 4	School Board adopts FY 2011 Advertised Budget
April 6-8	County BOS holds public hearings on budget
April 7	School Board presents Advertised Budget to County BOS
April 26	County BOS approves transfer to schools
April-May	School Board prepares Approved Budget
May 6	School Board presents FY 2011 Approved Budget
May 11-12	School Board holds public hearings on Approved Budget.
May 20	School Board adopts FY 2011 Approved Budget
July 1	FY 2011 begins



Where Can I Find Information on the 2011 Budget?

To help the Sunrise Valley community stay informed and participate in the budget process, the PTA has put up a special 2011 Budget web page at <http://sunrisevalleypta.webnode.com/a2011-budget/>. It is referred to throughout this edition of Sunbeams, and includes links to the county's budget site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget and the FCPS budget site at <http://www.fcps.edu/news/fy2011.htm>.

What Can I Do to Participate in the Process?

There are many ways to have a voice in how the new budget will affect your child and other children in our schools, including those listed below. Refer to the PTA's 2011 Budget web page at <http://sunrisevalleypta.webnode.com/a2011-budget/> for more details.

- Attend a Community Budget Dialogue: Three new sessions have been added on Dec. 2. Registration is required at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11communitydialogue.htm>.
- Share your views via the Budget Feedback Form: Call the Budget Hotline at 703-324-9400 or fill out the form by going to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11suggestions.htm>.
- Write a letter or send an e-mail to those involved in the budget process: Superintendent Jack Dale, School Board members, members of the Board of Supervisors (BOS).
- Sign up to speak at public hearing or meeting held by the County BOS (https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker_bos.htm) or FCPS School Board (<http://www.fcps.edu/schlbld/requestspeak.htm>).
- Sign or start a petition to advocate for a specific program or programs: For example, the one advocating for elementary band & strings is <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/2/save-our-fairfax-county-public-schools-band-and-strings-programs>.

What Are the Community Budget Dialogues?

Fairfax County and FCPS are holding community meetings to solicit public input to the FY 2011 budget. Several SVES PTA representatives attended these. The meetings began with an overview of the budget situation at the county and school level. Following the presentations, attendees broke up into small groups to address two questions: 1) *Which budget decisions from last year were most and least agreeable?* 2) *Discuss strategies and recommend a framework and rationale for balancing the 2011 budget to address group priorities.* Each group then presented their recommendations. At these particular meetings, there was overwhelming support for raising revenue to minimize the impact on educational instruction. Copies of the county and FCPS presentations and the small group suggestions from all of the meetings are available online – links are provided on the SVES PTA website. **Due to public demand, three new sessions have been added on Dec. 2 – register to attend at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11communitydialogue.htm>.**