

LWVFA testimony regarding the proposed FCPS FY2010 Budget, January 27, 2009

Good evening Chairman Storck, Superintendent Dale, and School Board members. I am Sarah Mayhew, speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area for President Sherry Zachry, who cannot attend tonight.

The League of Women Voters is a strong supporter of public education and we know you face a tough challenge in coping with increased enrollment and a reduction in the proposed revenue for the School Operating Fund.

We agree with the School Board's priority to adhere to state and federal mandates. The proposed increase in class size by .5 students is still within the requirements in the Virginia Standards of Quality. We would oppose exceeding the staffing standards set by the SOQ. The League believes that the main considerations in determining pupil/teacher ratios should be instructional goals and enhancing student achievement.

We believe that it is desirable to delay the start time for instruction at all high schools and middle schools in order to provide the best opportunity for student learning and to promote adolescent health and safety. We support the cost-neutral bell schedule revisions that are included in Iteration #3. We are pleased that the School Board is scheduling extensive community outreach and discussion of these proposals.

However, we are concerned that community members have not been included in the deliberations regarding the replacement of Project Excel. The Proposed Budget Highlights give the impression that the funding for the Project Excel programs is merely reduced, while other budget sections indicate that it will be replaced, that is eliminated. According to "Potential Tiered Budget Reductions Impacts:" *"Fewer schools will be served due to the reduction of funds and all elementary schools will revert to the same calendar, with early dismissal on Monday."*

This statement, clearly describing the effects of the proposed spending cuts, was not included in the Proposed FY2010 budget. However, the budget also states that a project team is designing a process for identification and support of high-needs schools to replace Excel using existing (but reduced) budgets.

We support maintaining the full day Monday schedule in Excel schools by substituting a less expensive program model such as one of the proposals that was considered in 1989 and 1990.

There are four other Project Excel schools that have a modified calendar. On page 63, the budget says that the Modified School Calendar Program will be eliminated at the middle and high school level. Franconia, Parklawn,¹ and Timber Lane Elementary Schools also have the modified calendar and they are not slated to lose this calendar in the proposed budget.

¹ The FCPS website states that there are 22 Project Excel elementary schools. (<http://www.fcps.edu/supt/suptoff/projexcel.htm>). However, a sort for Project Excel in the list of schools shows that there are 20 in the group. Parklawn and Wyanoke, listed under Excel on the cited webpage, are not in the program. Parklawn is included in the Modified Calendar program.

Why should the Excel schools be slated to lose their modified calendar when the three other elementary schools keep their calendar? All seven elementary schools with a modified calendar should be grouped together in the budget.

Studying this proposed budget is like walking in a thick fog. You can't see where you are going and you can't see from where you've come, either. The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible. Although voluminous budget materials are provided to the public, the proposals and their anticipated effects are not always clear to even the most careful reader. We feel it would have been helpful to include clear line item changes between FY 2009 and FY 2010 in the proposed budget itself rather than just in the Tiered Potential Reductions table located in a separate document.

We would like to note that if school budget constraints require the imposition of some activity fees in order to maintain the basic school program, the League is not opposed to charging legally permissible fees if adequate provisions are made to provide for and encourage the participation in activities by those unable to pay the fee.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you tonight, and for your continuing efforts to provide a consistently good education to a diverse student population.

Sarah Mayhew
For Sherry Zachry, LWVFA President