

# Message from the Superintendent

## Sustaining a Future of Excellence: Investing in Our Competitive Edge



The 2013 National Citizen Survey™ conducted by Albemarle County local government found that 95 percent of respondents believe providing a quality education to children and devoting county resources to quality education is essential or very important. No other service provided by local government was ranked higher by the public.

While that level of approval on any public survey question is rare, the logic behind such a value judgment is not difficult to understand. Public education is the force that binds communities together and makes them better.

We are at a significant decision point regarding our county's future. Two paths are before us: One positions our children to excel from opportunity; the other limits the best we can do for children. The consequences of our decision are evident in a U.S. Census Bureau study. It found that a college graduate earns \$2.7 million over a lifetime, while a high school graduate can expect to earn more than a \$1 million less. We need to be developing more college graduates and technical professionals, and we need them to contribute to Albemarle County's prosperity. This funding request moves us closer to that goal.

There are nearly 80 different languages spoken in the homes of our students; our families reside in urban, suburban and rural communities; income levels range from the almost 30 percent of our students who qualify for free or reduced lunch to those students who transfer from private schools for greater educational opportunities. Yet all of these families come together around one central truth: Public education is the one sure path to the betterment of one's life, family and community. The widely held belief that more advanced creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills will improve one's future explains the 95 percent community support for public education.

So does the performance of our students. Whether the metric is our on-time graduation rate, Standards of Learning and SAT scores, the percentage of students who earn Advanced Studies Diplomas, or the number of our nationally and internationally recognized academic and college and career readiness programs, the quality of education in Albemarle County Public Schools continues to meet the highest expectations of our citizens.

**When educators, business leaders and public officials ask the secret of this success, my answer is unequivocal. While many school divisions have access to the same infrastructure, technology or supplies, what separates great school divisions from average ones are the people who use these tools to make uncommon excellence very common.**

As directed by state code, my responsibility each year is to submit a needs-based funding request, a plan that represents the minimum investment necessary to meet our responsibilities to deliver a quality education to all students.

### **Maintain Market Competitiveness**

Today, our greatest need is retaining, recruiting and developing the professionals who empower the academic performances that distinguish our community as one of the best places to live in America. It is these remarkable and dedicated public servants who enable every student to realize their full potential for lifelong success.

**Since 2010, county employees have had their real wages reduced by 6.3 percent. It is not unusual for teachers to take home less pay than they did several years ago. In a recent survey of our instructional staff, over 60 percent of respondents said it is economically necessary for them to supplement their income. Yet many of our professionals hesitate not a minute to use their own funds to pay for classroom supplies or to support a student in need.**

This funding request takes a modest step toward protecting the value our employees add to our families and our county. It sets aside \$1.3 million, less than one percent of its total, for employee pay increases that would not take effect until six months into the new fiscal year. For the first six months next year, employees will take home less pay than they now earn due to increases in their medical insurance premiums.

### **The Impact of Reduced State Funding**

More than 1,200 members of our community recently responded to a survey asking their opinion of budget priorities. Over 85 percent of all responses identified employee compensation, class size, and fully funding student enrollment growth as their top priorities. This funding request is consistent with all three.

**Expenditures are projected to increase from \$160.44 million this year to \$166.93 million in 2015-16. The largest portion of this increase, \$2.7 million, will allow us to meet the new demands created by student enrollment growth and demographic changes. This will ensure that students next year will receive the same level of services that students now receive. Another \$2.2 million is for higher health insurance costs. Changes in the Comprehensive Services Act, which mandates residential and private day services for special needs students, will require additional spending of \$500,000. With the proposed half-year increase in employee compensation, these items exceed the overall expenditure increase. With the assistance of additional targeted reductions, including not filling the current vacancy for an Assistant Superintendent, we have been able to reduce the deficit in this funding request from \$4.4 million forecast last month to \$3.1 million. That is less than two percent of the overall request.**

Recently, Virginia's Governor issued an economic report that said Virginia's economic growth has fallen behind the rest of the country and now has trailed the national average for three consecutive years. This year, the report predicts Virginia will lose another 22,000 public and private sector jobs.

### **Positioning Students for the Future**

Among the industries that hold the most promise for turning the Commonwealth's economic fortunes from red to black, the governor's economic report said, are biosciences, cyber security, advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and technology start-ups. All of these industries are a near perfect fit with our academies in math, engineering and science; health and medical sciences; environmental studies; and our summer computer coding academy. There is a near exact fit, too, with a multi-million dollar federal grant we recently were awarded to broaden our advanced manufacturing program to all of our middle schools in partnership with the University of Virginia, the Smithsonian Museum, and neighboring school divisions in Charlottesville City and Fluvanna County.

I am extraordinarily grateful for the leadership and the support for quality education that has been so consistently provided by our School Board, local government, taxpayers, community partners, teachers, staff, parents, advisory groups, and volunteers. In the midst of some of the most difficult financial challenges I have seen in my professional career, your efforts have been nothing short of heroic.

Respectfully,



Dr. Pamela R. Moran  
Superintendent of Schools