

Dr. Walts FY21 Budget Speech to School Board February 5, 2020

- Good evening... Chairman Lateef, Vice Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Board.
- This evening I will be presenting my budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year.
- First, I want to thank our teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, community, and School Board for their support and the great successes we have achieved this year, and for the past 15 years I have served as your Superintendent.
- Among the achievements we have accomplished together, and I am most proud of during my time as Superintendent, include:
 - An on-time graduation rate that continues to rise, to a high now of 92.4 percent. That's nearly 10 percent over where we were a decade ago and exceeds our neighbors in Fairfax County and Montgomery County.
 - The implementation of full-day kindergarten and division-wide PreK expansions. These are critical to placing our students on an early path toward success.
 - High achievement in academic success, including 100 percent of schools receiving full state accreditation and high growth in our career and technical education certifications.
 - Opening 24 new schools and 36 additions on time and within budget.
- It is also worth noting the significant changes that PWCS has undergone in the past 15 years:
 - Our enrollment has increased from 65,000 to a projected enrollment of more than 92,000 – an increase of 40 percent.
 - Enrollment of English language learners has increased from 4,900 to nearly 15,000 – an increase of 300 percent. While at the same time we achieved double digit increases in our math SOL scores for ELL students last year.
 - Our students who qualify as economically disadvantaged have increased from about 15,000 to more than 37,000 - an increase of 250 percent.

- We also lowered class size during this time and did not layoff a single employee during the great recession – unlike nearly every other division locally and nationally.
- However, for all these numbers – there is one statistic that has not changed in my 15 years. In 2005 we were second to last in the Washington, D.C. region in per pupil funding, just ahead of Prince George’s County Maryland.
- And 15 years later – we remain second to last, now just ahead of Manassas Park.
- PWCS also falls below the national per pupil spending average.
- If funded on a per pupil basis at the rates of nearby school divisions, PWCS would receive additional annual revenue of approximately \$260 million if funded similarly to Loudoun, \$294 million if funded similarly to Fairfax, or \$736 million if funded similarly to Arlington.
- This is not acceptable.
- Our students, teachers, and families deserve better.
- So, tonight – I am proposing a true needs-based budget - as is my responsibility under the state-code.
- As the great Martin Luther King, Jr said – “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.”
- And so, I can no longer wait for change to happen with the hope our children receive the necessary support. I must advocate for them – every year in a child’s education is irreplaceable.
- Let me share a bit more about our changing needs...as many of you know, in the past year I began to engage on Twitter – and of course, much of the visibility came from snow days.
- However, it has gone well beyond that – it has provided the opportunity to engage first-hand with thousands of students, parents and staff.
- Let me give you a few real examples – I am not going to include their names, but the stories are true:
 - I heard from a Forest Park high school student - who was so stressed by her myriad of responsibilities supporting her family that she was not sure she would graduate. Her counselor was able to help her.

- A Gar-Field High School student who wasn't sure he could afford to go to college – I was able to encourage and support – and he went on to get a scholarship to Cornell.
- A Middle schooler who was having thoughts of self-harm, that we were able to get the support they needed.
- An elementary teacher – who was so proud to show me how she is using technology to help her English language learner students connect and engage with each other and the curriculum.
- A parent who shared that our PreK program helped their student graduate on time and go to college.
- It is for these students and staff – and thousands of others like them - that tonight I propose a budget that does the following;
 - supports our teachers;
 - equips our students equitability with the tools necessary to succeed in school, college, and careers;
 - and provides additional resources to provide the critical wrap-around services critical to student wellbeing.
- However, our budget this year faces a number of challenges.
- First, we do not expect any support for teacher pay increases from the state in this year's budget – resulting in a gap of nearly \$9 million.
- Second, we anticipate an increased enrollment of approximately 1,000 students next year – a cost of \$17 million.
- Third, we are opening two new schools in September 2021. The associated costs next fiscal year to start preparing, including additional staffing, are expected to be approximately \$3 million.
- Fourth, the state has cut funding for the regional school for special education by approximately \$14 million total – with a \$3 million impact this next fiscal year, and further cuts in FY 2022.
- Fifth, the state is increasing our Virginia Retirement System expense by \$6.2 million.

- Lastly, we made a number of significant investments last year that we plan to maintain, including the hiring of 55 counselors, and fully funding the findings of our special education audit recommendations.
- Recognizing our fiscal limitations, and our significant needs, my needs-based budget proposal this evening focuses on six major priorities.
- Our core business is student success and my top budget priority is educational equity and academic achievement.
- To assist our schools in their efforts, I am proposing an increase in economically disadvantaged funding of more than \$5.5 million.
- This budget proposal also includes more than \$2.1 million for sustaining our class-size reduction efforts - which we have been successfully reducing for the past five years.
- Looking at what we do through an equity lens, during the current year we initiated the work of the Superintendent's Advisory Council on Equity. And because equity is an action word, I am proposing the creation of a Chief Equity Officer who can lead and coordinate our efforts Division-wide to close gaps in access and opportunity for students and staff.
- I am also adding a Title nine officer to ensure compliance in this key area. Title nine is the law that protects people from discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance.
- Academic preparation and access are critical to closing equity gaps, so I have included more than \$1.2 million in funding to provide fee-free access to our Virtual High School program.
- Also, the SAT remains a barrier for many students with college aspirations – and SAT preparation can be a cost out of reach for many students – so I am proposing funding for the creation of a Division-wide SAT preparation program for all students.
- Perhaps one of the most critical ways that we can help close gaps and set our students up for success is to equip them with the learning and tools necessary to succeed in a digital economy.
- This includes a focus on developing the “5-Cs” Profile of Virginia Graduate skills: critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication and citizenship.

- No matter the path our students pursue – college, career, or military - it is imperative that they have these knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- Tonight, I propose the first of a multiyear investment to achieve digital equity, within the next four years, across all of our schools.
- This effort will equip every student with a learning device assigned to them for the school year, along with the necessary professional development for our teachers. This will enable our teachers to enhance differentiated learning, enable students to engage in new and creative methods of learning, and to accelerate learning.
- This will also offset investments at the local school level, allowing schools to meet many other locally determined student, teacher, and school needs.
- Another key investment we will make in equity, and in closing our achievement gaps – is support for our students receiving special education services. Beyond sustaining the investments we made last year in special education – tonight I propose we hire 50 special education teacher assistants, full-time with benefits.
- We also know that the key to closing gaps in student success is parent and guardian engagement. To assist in this effort, I am proposing to staff our Parent Resource Center full-time to provide improved outreach regarding the many resources we have for parents and guardians.
- Of course, our top priority cannot be achieved without outstanding teachers and staff. And my second priority in this budget is support for our teachers and staff - who are at the heart of our success. I am very pleased tonight to propose a step increase for all eligible employees, in addition to a cost of living increase. This will total an average of nearly 4.8 percent increase in pay for employees – this is the same increase as we provided this current school year.
- Additionally, while health care costs have increased nationally this year by 5 percent - I am proud to announce that my budget proposal includes no increase in employee health care costs – for the second year in-a-row.

- My third budget priority is Prekindergarten access, that directly relates to equity and achievement. Tonight, I propose a significant investment in our PreK programs – an increase of nearly \$5 million – to nearly double our total PreK classrooms to a total of 49.
- This will bring more of our Prince William tax dollars back to the County through an increased use of available state matching dollars.
- My fourth priority is student mental health and wellness. This budget increases our wrap-around support in a number of ways.
- As I stated earlier, this budget proposal sustains our \$5 million investment in our counselors made for the current school year.
- I am also proposing the hiring of 11 additional social workers, a total investment of more than \$1.1 million. We know this is a critical resource for our schools and our families.
- Additionally, I am proposing a full-time psychologist shared between our Global Welcome Centers. This key resource will ensure we are meeting children’s needs from the moment they arrive in PWCS.
- The fifth priority within my budget proposal is career, military, and college readiness.
- Beyond our traditional academic programming, it is critical that we fund Career and Technical Education programs that provide the 21st Century skills necessary to thrive in the digital economy.
- This budget will continue the investments in our CTE 5-year plan, including the creation of a culinary program at Gar-Field High School, and the first classes in firefighting at Osbourn Park and Stonewall Jackson High Schools - Stonewall will also begin Aviation Maintenance. Woodbridge High School will launch “Project Lead The Way” Software Engineering, and Freedom High School will start Medical Coding and Billing. These are among other career and JROTC programs found at our high schools.

- To support our students on a college track, I believe we need an expansion of our dual enrollment course offerings. This budget includes a dual enrollment incentive stipend to teach dual enrollment and tuition reimbursement to entice more teachers into this field.
- I am also proposing creation of a position responsible for identifying underrepresented students and increasing their access and opportunities for dual enrollment, AP, IB, and Cambridge offerings.
- My sixth priority is around sustainable facilities, school safety, and support infrastructure.
- This investment starts with a pursuit for equity in our older schools and funding outlined in our Capital Improvements Program.
- This includes the proposed additions of natural light and windows through fenestration projects at Woodbridge, Gar-Field, Osbourn Park, and Stonewall Jackson High Schools.
- It also includes security upgrades for Woodbridge and Graham Park Middle Schools.
- Included in this proposal is \$4.1 million for Brentsville District High School stadium improvements.
- Our CIP also proposes funding for lighting for high school tennis courts.
- I am also proposing the funding needed for a study to determine how can we might make our schools more sustainable.
- Additionally, we must continue to make investments in our support infrastructure and this budget includes the initial work necessary to upgrade our legacy financial and human resource information technology systems.
- As I stated at the beginning of my remarks – the work of teachers, administrators, and staff to deliver a World-Class Education - *without World-Class funding* - is remarkable.
- Now is the time to make the investments in our children, our teachers, our schools, and our community. We cannot wait another year.
- As I challenged our School Board previously – I ask our Board to be advocates for our children, our teachers, and our families and join me in seeking the full funding of our needs-based budget.

- The next 10 days are critical, and I believe this should be the top priority of this Board during this time.
- Together, we will make a significant positive impact on the ability for every child to succeed and thrive, and for every teacher, administrator, and support staff to feel supported and appreciated.
- I am as enthusiastic as I have ever been in my entire educational career – and in my 15 years here in PWCS. Anyone who spends time with our students in our schools can only walk away energized and excited for the future. I am committed to being their advocate.
- I want to thank our partners at the County Board of Supervisors who have expressed their support for our students and teachers, and in fact just yesterday, passed a resolution supporting Red4Ed and designated education funding as a priority for the Prince William County Fiscal Year 2021 budget.
- I thank the School Board as well, for your continued support and partnership, as we work together to ensure every one of our more than 92,000 students in Prince William County has a *World-Class* Education.
- I am now pleased to introduce John Wallingford, our new associate superintendent for finance and risk management, who will provide a few more highlights and additional detail on the numbers... John....