

## Response to Questions on the FY 2011 Budget

**Request By:** Supervisor Foust

**Question:** The FY 2011 Advertised Budget Plan includes a \$629,875 increase in the medical contract for the medically fragile children who attend Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). What is the total FY 2011 cost associated with this service? What is the anticipated FY 2011 increase in the number of students receiving this service? Why is this service contracted out? How many additional nurses does this increase include?

**Response:** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation that was passed by Congress in 1990 with the latest amendments in 2004. The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services. Under IDEA, local jurisdictions are mandated to provide one-on-one nursing services to disabled or seriously ill students, if needed, to enable the students to attend school in the least restrictive setting possible. In 2000, a County Medical Services Review Team (MSRT) with representatives from FCPS and the Health Department (HD) was established to review requests for students with serious illnesses or disabilities to attend school and make a recommendation as to how to best meet the medical needs of the child. When the program was initiated it was determined that the Health Department did not have nurses on staff that have the expertise needed to conduct these services (e.g. ventilator care, tracheotomy care, nasogastric tube etc.) nor the ongoing training and monitoring to sustain the variety of complex skills needed to provide care. As a result, the decision was made to obtain the services through a contract with private nursing agencies to obtain the nurses needed. In addition it was decided by both the HD and FCPS that the HD had the infrastructure and management tools already in place to manage the contracts and the nurses associated with the contracts. However, the MSRT team, with representatives from both FCPS and HD determines if skilled nursing services are warranted and reviews service requests annually with the understanding that many of these students will require one-on-one nursing services from kindergarten through high school.

Due to the complexity of individual health conditions, advances in medical technology and the scope of nursing skills needed by these students, combined with the national shortage of nurses, obtaining a nurse for each medically fragile student has proven to be difficult. In FY 2009, complaints from parents were made both to FCPS and the state, that students who fell under this act were not being issued a nurse on a daily basis, therefore, were unable to attend school as mandated by law. The state found the County was non-compliant with the IDEA. In order to combat these issues and stay in compliance with the IDEA, the MSRT brainstormed different avenues to ensure each medically fragile student had a nurse available every school day. After careful consideration, the decision was made to add two additional nursing contracting agencies to the already existing contract. These three contracting agencies work in unison to ensure a nurse will be available for each student on a daily basis, that back-up coverage is available and to provide additional coverage through the addition of two (2) full time floating nurses through the contracting agency to serve as a back-up when other nurses aren't available. The increase in the number of nursing contracts will ensure that a nurse is always available for the students needs.

The anticipated total FY 2011 cost of \$1,229,875 is to support mandated one-on-one nursing services to approximately 29 students and the cost of the two additional full-time floating contracted nurses, which equates to a total of 32 nurses. This program began in FY 2000 with approximately 2 students and has grown to 24 students in FY 2010 and is projected to serve 29 students in FY 2011. In order to insure compliance with IDEA this plan is being implemented in FY 2010 and the agency is absorbing the additional costs; however, based on reductions in the agencies budget in FY 2011 the agency can not continue to absorb these additional costs funding is needed in FY 2011. Costs have increased as a result of the need to insure that students covered by IDEA are able to attend the requisite numbers of school days, an increase in the number of students enrolled in FCPS who fall under the IDEA, the complexity of the students' illnesses and the overall increase in the cost to provide nursing services. The MSRT will continue to monitor the program and the new contracting model and if it proves to be inefficient the MSRT will explore alternative options.