

Response to Questions on the FY 2012 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Foust

Question: Please provide a summary of the School Health dollars and how they must be expended.

Response: The Virginia Department of Education provides funding to localities that provide school nurse support. These funds are known as Standards of Quality (SOQ) monies and are based on the number of nursing hours provided to school age children. Item 135, Paragraph A.3.b of Chapter 3, 2006 Acts of Assembly, Special Session I (2006-2008 Appropriation Act), requires the Department of Education to report annually to school divisions the school nurse support cost funded as part of Basic Aid. School divisions are to allocate these funds to support school nurse positions or contracted services for professionals providing health services. Currently the estimated amount that Fairfax would receive is approximately \$3,877,215 dollars. This funding is provided directly to the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)—but beginning in FY 2011, it is required that the funding be posted to the County given the service delivery model in Fairfax wherein the County Health Department provides the majority of the School Health function.

In effect, the posting of this funding to the County will result in a reduction of available funds for FCPS. As a result, the County Executive and Superintendent approved a proposal designed to share the benefit of the funding by implementing a long overdue staffing increase and recognizing the FCPS support of the program in terms of facility utilization and integration into the School community. As a result, of the total funding of \$3.8 million, half will support salaries, benefits, and operating costs associated with the new positions and other Health Department support for the School Health program. The other half will be made available to the School system for services provided by FCPS in support of the School Health functions.

On the County side, the funding is further split between new and existing services. A total of \$1,308,732 will support 8/8.0 SYE Public Health Nurse II and 4/4.0 SYE Public Health Nurse III positions and \$629,875 will be allocated to fund additional support for medically fragile students funded in FY 2011.

The following information is provided as background to the County Executive's recommendation to fund the additional positions at this time, given the opportunity to allocate State funding. The Public Health Nurse (PHN) is responsible for developing and implementing health care plans for students identified with health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, or seizure disorders. The medical complexity of the students continues to intensify each school year as advances in technology provide new interventions and health procedures to support students with acute and chronic medical conditions. Currently, more than one quarter of the 171,610 FCPS students have a health condition that may impact their readiness to learn during the school day. At this time, each PHN develops 900 health plans each year, 323 of which are for newly identified conditions. This process includes coordinating with the student's physician and parents, obtaining orders for care, developing a safe and effective plan of care, and training school staff to carry out the plan. Based on the acuity level of the plan, the student may not be allowed to attend school until the plan is completed and staff is appropriately trained to respond.

To minimize lost educational days, it is the goal of the Health Department to implement 95 percent of new care plans within five school days of notification of the need. At current staffing levels, only 65 percent of new care plans are able to be developed within five days of notification. This outcome is not acceptable to parents or Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) staff, and requires additional PHN staff to meet this demand.

In FY 2011, the School Health Program will begin the implementation of the strategic plan recommendation to align school assignments by FCPS clusters in order to maximize efficiencies and better respond to community needs. Based on newly established acuity ratings for the schools, PHN school assignments should not exceed an acuity rating of 1.3. Assignments are now balanced so one PHN does not receive all high acuity schools, but has a mix of both high and low acuity schools. This balance enables the PHN to respond more readily to health care needs in the school setting and moves away from “one size fits all” staffing. The additional 12/12.0 SYE positions discussed above will be deployed to four of the eight FCPS school clusters which have average acuity ratings of 1.46 and above. Although the school health team is harnessing technology through the use of laptops and wireless service in the school setting to better maximize resources, PHNs are still required to develop individualized care plans based on student needs and train staff accordingly. Much of the training still requires the physical presence of the PHN. In SY 2009-2010, only 57 percent of the needed training was completed by the end of October. These positions are required to match the deployment of essential resources to schools with greatest needs and to provide an initial level of resources to initiate preventive services. As the rates of obesity, asthma, and diabetes increase for school age children, the need for early intervention becomes more critical each year. Early identification and intervention of these medical conditions have been shown to reduce student absences and improve learning. With the national attention on obesity and prevention, the addition of these positions will allow for assessment and intervention with students and families that otherwise could not occur. The standard ratio of nurse to students, as recommended by the American Nurses Association, is one nurse to 750 students. The Code of Virginia (section 22.1-274, School Health Services) identifies, but does not require a desirable nurse-to-student ratio, specifying annual targets ranging from one nurse to 2,500 students to one nurse per 1,000 students. In FY 2010, the ratio of nurse to students in Fairfax County was one PHN per 3,120 students. Since 1999, the County has moved towards the 1:2,000 ratio for school health PHN’s in FCPS. To achieve this ratio for the FY 2012 school year projected enrollment of 178,000 students, an additional 33 school health PHN positions would be needed. Instead, as a result of improved efficiencies and development of the new needs-based acuity system for PHN resource allocation, 12 PHNs are being requested.