

Response to Questions on the FY 2015 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Herrity

Question: Please estimate cost savings from a realignment of the eight clusters into four administrative areas as was the case prior to the adoption of the cluster system in FY 2002.

Response: The following response was prepared by Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS):

FCPS previously reorganized from 4 areas to 8 clusters. The primary purpose of the reorganization from three Area Offices into eight Clusters was to improve instructional leadership and support. Reducing the “span of control” for the first level of supervision above principals, from about 65 schools each to approximately 25, increased the onsite monitoring, support, and guidance each principal and school receives. The realignment also facilitated the vertical articulation of instruction within pyramids.

A second objective was to re-focus divisionwide effort on the mission of instruction and the operational needs of schools. Cluster assistant superintendents, by being in more frequent contact with principals, would be in a better position to know day-to-day school support needs and to marshal divisionwide resources to meet them.

The third objective was to flatten the organization and to reduce the number of high-level positions, together with personnel costs. Each Area Office was, in effect, a mini-school division. Most central office functions (such as student services, special services, transportation) were represented in each Area Office and typically totaled 60 to 70 positions.

Cluster Offices, in contrast, would each have three staff, yielding a total of 24 positions. Of course, a number of Area Office positions and personnel needed to be reassigned to the corresponding central offices in order to maintain required levels of school support. The net result was an overall reduction of eight positions, with the remaining positions at lower levels and lower per-position costs.

FCPS explored reducing the number of cluster offices during late summer 2008. At that time, the organizational structures of nine metropolitan school districts similar in size and demographics to FCPS were examined and FCPS had 24 to 32 schools and 18,000 to 23,000 students per cluster, placing FCPS in the mid-range when compared to the nine metropolitan school districts studied.

In FY 2011, as part of the reductions implemented across FCPS, the number of administrative assistants in the cluster offices was reduced by 50 percent. As a result, each FCPS cluster office currently consists of 2.5 positions: 1.0 assistant superintendent, 1.0 director, and a 0.5 executive administrative assistant.

The organization and staffing of and the responsibilities executed by the eight cluster offices is cost effective. CAS have four primary responsibilities, including: providing leadership, direction, and accountability for principals by monitoring school effectiveness through formative and summative data, staff and parent input and surveys, and feedback

from the school communities; reviewing academic performance of students and using the data to work collaboratively with principals and school leaders in implementing and monitoring continuous school improvement through the School Improvement Planning process; recommending, supervising, and evaluating principals; and serving as a liaison to the parents and school communities as they interface with the school system. By all measures, the academic achievement of our students is continually improving. Annually increasing Annual Measurable Objectives in SOL reading and math tests Adequate Yearly Progress requirements and increasing numbers of students with complex needs have required the cluster staffs to intensify our work with school staffs, and to encourage the continued development of high-performing professional learning communities in our schools.