Response to Questions on the FY 2015 Budget

Request By: Supervisor McKay and Supervisor Smyth

Question: Please provide additional information on the School Readiness Program including the staffing plan and operational strategies that the proposed new funding will support.

Response: School readiness is being expanded as a result of the recommendations presented to the Human Services Committee of the Board of Supervisors on November 26, 2013. These recommendations are the direct result of the work completed by the Successful Children and Youth Policy Team (SCYPT) which is comprised of both County and Fairfax County Public Schools Board members and staff. School readiness describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools and communities that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Early childhood education programs support the development of children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development skills which are strong predictors of success in school. In the fall of 2012, 33 percent of kindergartners in FCPS were eligible for free/reduced meals; 16 percent of kindergartners in FCPS did not meet the reading intervention benchmark and were referred for services; and 6 percent of children under the age of 5 were living below the poverty level. The County addresses school readiness through quality community-based programs that are accessible even to those most vulnerable. Additional funding has been included in FY 2015 to expand and support community-based programs. Funding is aimed at creating a network of programs that promote school readiness through the alignment of curricula to the Virginia Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, as well as supporting children living in poverty to reach fall kindergarten benchmarks. Funding of $714,013 and 3/3.0 FTE Child Care Specialist II positions, as well as benefits-eligible support, specifically supports the following community-based school readiness initiatives:

- Neighborhood School Readiness Teams (NSRTs): NSRTs exist to support school readiness in communities where there are large numbers of children at-risk for school failure by fostering collaborative partnerships between schools, County, community and early childhood programs. The teams develop and implement action plans to support school readiness to ensure that children successfully transition to kindergarten. The expansion of the NSRTs included with this funding will make it possible for all Title I elementary schools to participate on a team.

- Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System (VQRIS): This funding enables additional County child care centers/preschools and family child care homes serving children living in poverty to participate in this key program that defines standards for early childhood education and creates a framework for accountability. An additional 30 programs will be rated and receive mentoring as part of VQRIS.

- Coaching and Professional Development: Increased coaching and professional development opportunities for early childhood educators in community programs will support quality early care and education. Funding will support 3/3.0 FTE Child Care Specialist II positions and will enable the County to provide on-site

coaching to 360 early childhood professionals in child care centers, preschool settings, and family child care homes.

- Virginia Preschool Initiative: The Virginia Preschool Initiative serves at-risk four-year olds in a comprehensive preschool program in community-based settings (child care centers, preschools and family child care homes) and Fairfax County Public Schools. Additional funding has been included to serve an additional 50 children in community-based settings. This funding will also allow the County to draw additional state revenue totaling $150,000.

The County has worked closely with FCPS to develop a mixed-delivery system providing community-based as well as school-based options for school readiness. It is hoped that the FCPS School Board will support the expansion of school-based programs; however, expansion of community-based programs is not contingent on additional school funding.