

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES

JOINT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AND SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET WORK SESSION
MARCH 26, 2024

CALL TO ORDER – A joint work session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors and the Stafford County School Board was called to order by Meg Bohmke, Chairman, at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 26, 2024 in Conference Room ABC in the George L. Gordon Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford, VA 22554.

ROLL CALL – The following members were present: Meg Bohmke, Chairman; Vice Chairman; Deuntay T. Diggs; Darrell E. English; Monica L. Gary; Crystal L. Vanuch; Dr. Pamela Yeung.

Absent was Vice Chair Tinesha Allen.

Dr. Yeung motioned, seconded by Mr. Diggs, to allow Ms. Vanuch to participate in the meeting remotely.

Ms. Bohmke confirmed that the motion passed unanimously by voice vote (6-0). Ms. Allen was absent from the vote.

Also in attendance were Randal E. Vosburg, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Julia Holmes, Assistant Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

Ms. Bohmke asked that the attendees of the meeting observe a moment of silence to recognize the recent tragedy that had occurred in Baltimore.

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM

DISCUSSION ON PROPOSED FY25 BUDGET

Ms. Bohmke thanked the children who had given the Board very beautiful and unique cards. She said that the Board appreciated it very much.

Ms. Siegmund said that they left a small bag containing some note paper and items to bring everyone's attention back to the purpose of their meeting. She said that they also had the car magnets that some had requested previously, which were for placing on cars or sharing with

constituents. She said that she needed a new one as well. She said that it served to emphasize their focus on student mental health.

Ms. Siegmund said that the initiative, spearheaded by their student representatives to the Board, aimed to distribute these green ribbons. She said that each of them had received one and they encouraged all members of their community, both within the schools and outside, to wear these green ribbons as a show of support for this important effort. She thanked the Board for the prompt rescheduling of the meeting and their ongoing support.

Ms. Bohmke said that before they proceeded with the details of the budget process, they should take a moment to acknowledge the significance of their gathering. She said that they would maintain civility and attentiveness throughout their discussions, steering them toward constructive outcomes regarding the impending budget decisions that would impact the future of their community. She said that the day offered another opportunity for each of the Boards to ask questions that may guide and aid their decision-making process. She said that this included any questions the School Board may have provided to the County Administrator.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to set some ground rules for their engagement that day. She said that mutual respect should guide their interactions by ensuring that they respected when someone was speaking, listened to one another's perspectives, and understanding that some topics may need to be addressed in a future engagement due to time constraints that day. She thanked the School Board for their presence once again and noted that they had a hard stop at 4:55 p.m., as they had a budget work session scheduled immediately afterward. She said that she would now turn the meeting over to Ms. Siegmund.

Ms. Siegmund said that she had similar opening remarks, but in the interest of time, she would simply agree with what Ms. Bohmke had said. She said that she would like to request, on behalf of the schools, that they postpone their questions until the end. She said that they should take notes as they review the slides, and then they could revisit any unaddressed concerns or choose to defer discussing certain topics later.

Dr. Taylor said that he would be sharing updates regarding the school system budget, both positive and difficult aspects. He said that it was never easy for Stafford County families to discuss challenging situations and that they might encounter images that challenge their perceptions about their schools in specific circumstances. He said that he would reiterate the intentions of the remarks made by their chairs, which were to find constructive solutions to the challenges they faced. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting to hear the School Board's perspective on the adopted budget and expressed gratitude for their interest and the work they would do moving forward.

Dr. Taylor said that they aimed to provide a brief update on the state budget, which had both positive aspects and some political realities to consider. He said that they would also discuss the findings of the additional question posed by a Supervisor and provide printed copies of the report. He said that they would like to discuss their economic challenges, as understanding their economic situation might help shed light on the challenges faced by the school system and demonstrate why their funding request appeared reasonable to them.

Dr. Taylor said that they would discuss Drew Middle School, as this had been a topic of interest at previous meetings. He said that finally, they would conclude by discussing their three R priorities, which were rehabilitation, replacement, and renovation, as well as some critical maintenance items that had arisen. He said that to begin, he would share the good news, which was that the state legislature had acknowledged the needs of public education and its funding, as evidenced by the most recent JLARC study on the subject.

Dr. Taylor said that Virginia ranked as the 39th worst state in the country for public education funding, which presented a significant disadvantage for them. He said that the legislature had taken steps to address some of these challenges but was unlikely to tackle the major issue until a future legislative session. He said that this would involve addressing the standards of quality and the funding formula, transitioning to a weighted student funding formula. He said that there were still significant changes to be made, but progress had been made.

Dr. Taylor said that the most significant advancement was an adjustment up from the governor's budget. He said that initially, the Board's proposed budget had a gap of about \$6 million, which was recently adjusted before resubmitting it to the Supervisors for consideration. He said that additional information came to light after the General Assembly adjourned; they added an extra \$3 million to public education that would impact Stafford. He said that the growth of their school system had indeed been advantageous in terms of state revenue. He said that however, there was a complication. He said that there was a conflict between the legislature and the governor's office regarding a few critical issues, such as an arena proposal in Alexandria and tax relief for Virginians, which was causing friction.

Dr. Taylor said that unfortunately, K-12 funding found itself caught in the middle of this friction. He said that while there may be potential for additional aid beyond the current adopted budget, it was essential to manage expectations due to the ongoing budget battle between the governor and the legislature as they attempted to resolve these conflicts. He said that this uncertainty did not benefit anyone, especially during the contract issuance period for employees, teachers, and staff. He said that a stable budget was as crucial as having sufficient funds to support it.

Dr. Taylor stated that the proposed expenditures remained unchanged, which should provide some relief. He said that they still had \$16.6 million in new non-discretionary expenses due to their growth. He said that this did not cover all of their needs. He said that additionally, their \$20.1 million in discretionary expenses had been significantly reduced because of the cuts they made prior to presenting this budget to them.

Dr. Taylor said that he would point out that this still left them \$56.4 million short of their actual projected needs, as outlined in their five-year plan from last year. He said that this situation was not unexpected; they had been working diligently to bring the numbers as close to a tight figure as possible. He said that however, considering their rapid growth, they must accommodate the increasing number of students by providing new classrooms, buses, ancillary services, additional staff, and resources.

Dr. Taylor said that they had not spent much time discussing the discretionary funds when they presented the budget to the Board of Supervisors. He said that it was essential to understand that the School Board considered cuts every year, and these were the cuts they made before even sending the budget to the Board of Supervisors. He said that to create a balanced budget aligned with the County Administrator's proposed budget, they had to make several reductions, such as increasing class size in various areas. He said that their request of \$15 million came with \$4.2 million of cuts to class size. He said that he specifically wanted to highlight this aspect.

Dr. Taylor said that the remaining discretionary funds were for compensation. He said that if they needed to make any reductions at this point, they would have to cut compensation. He said that the Board of Supervisors had been excellent partners over the past couple of years in helping them attempt to implement a phased-in approach to improve their salary structure. He said that they spent a considerable amount of time discussing this two years ago, and they appreciated the Supervisors' patience in trying to understand what they were attempting to do, which was to eliminate salary compression and do so in stages of large chunks of their salary scale.

Dr. Taylor said that they had successfully managed to achieve this for the past two years. He said that the question now was whether they would be able to do that in the upcoming years to finish out the phased approach. He thanked the Board of Supervisors for this partnership, as it had been absolutely crucial in their retention strategy. He said that their efforts had been effective as they had reduced turnover from 18% to 13% in the past year. He said that this was a positive development, indicating that their strategies were working. He said that however, they were still far from their desired goal.

Dr. Taylor said that the information requested by Ms. Vanuch about all school staff over the past five years included what was proposed, what was appropriated, and what was actual. He said that

there was a slight discrepancy between what was proposed and what was appropriated and actual. He said that however, what was appropriated and what was actually expended were identical. He said that in the pandemic year, there was a 4.8% salary increase proposed for teachers, but zero percent was allocated for them.

Dr. Taylor said that the following year was favorable, with a 7.2% salary adjustment for teachers proposed, along with significant corrections to their service scale. He said that these were what was appropriated and what was adopted. He said that this process mostly followed their plan. He said that his first budget with them also followed this line of thinking and made significant adjustments to their teacher scale but not to their service scale. He said that they experienced the debacle they faced the previous year with the mid-year adjustment.

Dr. Taylor said that it was far from enjoyable, and they wished to avoid such circumstances in the future. He said that considering their position within the economic landscape, one might question the importance of salaries. He said that consequently, when examining Stafford and its starting salary of \$50,000, displayed in the upper right-hand corner of the slide, he pointed out that their two nearest competitors present contrasting scenarios.

Dr. Taylor said that Spotsylvania County to the south offers a starting teacher salary of approximately \$53,000. He said that in contrast, Prince William County to the north boasts a starting salary exceeding \$58,000. He said that the proximity of these locations, mere 15-minute drives from Stafford, highlights the financial disparity.

Dr. Taylor said that as they delved further into the issue by examining Prince William County more closely, they began to understand the reasons behind the frustration and dissatisfaction regarding the finances in Stafford County. He said that despite the \$8,000 difference between Stafford and Prince William County, experienced teachers in the latter earn \$56,000 more than their counterparts in the former, merely due to their geographical location. He said that this disparity needed to be fixed.

Dr. Taylor said that it takes 30 years of service and having more than 10 months on one's contract to become a teacher earning over \$90,000 in Stafford. He said that in contrast, Prince William offers such remuneration in the 14th year of one's career. He said that this reality was difficult for their staff members to accept, as it implied they must work an additional half of their careers to achieve what Prince William teachers accomplish in half the time. He said that this disparity placed them at a considerable competitive disadvantage and they must strive to overcome this predicament.

Dr. Taylor said that another significant issue they noticed was that Stafford used to be one of the highest performing school divisions in Virginia. He said that in 2011, which marked a turning point for Stafford County, they were ranked 15th best in terms of SOL performance and 79th best in terms of school finance per pupil. He said that this ranking had decreased to 68th. He said that out of 132 school districts, 66 was the midpoint, so they were now definitely in the bottom half of school district performance in Virginia.

Dr. Taylor said that however, they were in the bottom quartile when it came to per-pupil funding. He said that this decline did not happen overnight and would not be resolved overnight either. He said that everyone was aware that it would take several years to address this issue. He said that nevertheless, they must begin contemplating how they would address this problem because it affected performance, which in turn impacted the quality of staff they could attract and retain, the energy spent on staff churn, and the number of staff in their schools.

Dr. Taylor said that he wanted to illuminate that there was an inflection point right after the pandemic where their enrollment dropped, and it made sense that revenue dropped as well. He said that then, they became one of the few schools in Virginia whose enrollment returned to pre-pandemic levels the year before, and then exceeded the pandemic levels. He said that what did not occur at the time was the return of revenue. He said that instead, ESSER funds were supplanted in lieu of local funds to cover the loss.

Dr. Taylor said that ESSER funds were not intended to replace but to supplement the work occurring within the school system, as numerous unforeseen consequences were expected. He said that these included chronic absenteeism, declining performance, mental health concerns, all of which were meant to be mitigated by COVID funds. He said that however, these funds were allocated toward operational expenses instead.

Dr. Taylor said that simultaneously, over the past six years, two significant occurrences warranted attention. He said that there had been a steep increase in the number of 504 plans. He said that these plans catered to students with documented disabilities requiring additional support and resources to perform better in school, providing necessary scaffolding. He said that with nearly a thousand additional students added to this list, countless meetings with 504 committees had been held, along with numerous additional support sessions and instructional time dedicated to these students. He said that yet, there had been no financial provisions for this increase.

Dr. Taylor said that also, there had been a substantial surge in the number of English learners, rising from 2,400 to 4,242 today. He said that these students possessed varying levels of English proficiency, with the majority having none prior to attending school. He said that they joined them

from kindergarten through 12th grade, necessitating significant investment to help them overcome their challenges. He said that this certainly explained some of the recorded drop in performance.

Dr. Taylor said that the community was understandably concerned about certain figures and statistics. He said that there was a feeling that the schools felt the blame when tax rates increased, which may seem unfair when compared to the percentage of revenue that went to schools. He said that this could contribute to the negative feelings that schools had about being blamed for something they did not directly benefit from.

Dr. Taylor said that to provide more context, over the past 13 years, their budget had increased by 55%, but 38% of that increase was due to inflation and another 16% was due to student population growth. He said that as a result, the actual budget growth during this period was only 1%. He said that they had gathered a large amount of information during this time period, and he could confidently say that coming out of the pandemic, 1% budget growth was insufficient to address the student mental health issues, student disruptive behaviors, staff turnover, and major maintenance issues that existed.

Dr. Taylor said that he did not intend to dwell on this topic, but he did want to add context and note this as a challenge for them. He said that some of this was tied to perspective, and some of the issue was due to the emotions wrapped up into this. He said that he would ask the Board of Supervisors to please see this from the school system's perspective in terms of how the blame associated with the rising budget did not correlate with the benefits received by the schools.

Dr. Taylor said that Mr. Fulmer would discuss the Drew Middle School rebuild. He said that critical decision points must be made, and the Supervisors had indicated that they would like to be involved in some of the conversations prior to those decisions.

Mr. Fulmer said that he would like to thank County staff and the Board of Supervisors for recognizing the need and attentively listening to the concerns of the School Board and staff regarding the immediate needs and challenges faced by Drew Middle School. He said that as Dr. Taylor mentioned, they were wanted to include the Supervisors in the discussions as Drew became more of a reality, with the possibility of securing funding for the rebuilding or replacement of Drew Middle School.

Mr. Fulmer said that during their last work session with the School Board, they began discussing several significant decision points. He said that the School Board was very cognizant of the costs associated with this project and the impact it would have on the land search process. He said that the major decision points they faced were whether to opt for their standard 1,100-seat school,

which was originally budgeted for, or whether to consider a larger 1,500-seat school to achieve long-term savings.

Mr. Fulmer said that opting for a larger school would entail higher initial costs; however, it would result in savings on overhead costs, replacement costs, and maintenance costs in the long run. He said that the alternative was to stick to the current budget, which would mean building a 1,100-seat school. He said that another aspect of the discussion revolved around the location of the new school. He said that based on the guidance provided by the School Board, they wished to keep the Drew Middle School boundary intact. He said that consequently, their focus should be on ensuring that families currently using the old Drew Middle School could benefit from the new facility.

Mr. Fulmer said that they would discuss the pros and cons of expansion. He said that the advantage was that it offered more flexibility to draw students from overcrowded schools, such as those in the northern region. He said that however, it complicated the placement process and school boundary zones. He said that the matter was connected to the schedule's timing and the timeline displayed on the screen. He said that over the next few months, they would engage in dialogue with the School Board and the Board of Supervisors regarding the size of the school and the identification of land.

Mr. Fulmer said that initially, the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) suggested swapping the Rising Star and Drew Middle School sites to build the schools simultaneously and alternate between sites. He said that however, due to the lack of funding in the CIP for Rising Star at the same time, the current Drew site was insufficient to accommodate the rebuilding of Drew Middle School to a 1,100-seat school because it currently housed around 600 to 650 students. He said that they must expand its capacity, but they must also determine the extent of the expansion.

Mr. Fulmer said that the process of identifying the scope and land would take approximately a year, followed by design work. He said that the ultimate goal was to open the school in August 2028, which was a tight timeline but achievable and aligned with their objectives. He said that in the past year, they had been identifying the scope and land requirements for the project, with some design work already completed. He said that the ultimate goal was to open the school in August 2028, adhering to a tight timeline.

Mr. Fulmer said that the comparison between 1,100 and 1,500 seats had been discussed, with a focus on long-term cost savings versus meeting immediate needs within the current CIP and Drew boundary zone. He said that it was essential to consider that the Board was aware of the budget constraints, which only reflected the 1,100-seat school option at this time. He said that they did not want to jeopardize this proposal or the allocated funds.

Mr. Towery said that he would discuss maintenance and 3R. He said that he wished to highlight a few aspects from the slide. He said that it illustrated the unfunded 3R requirements for FY24. He said that if they referred to their current situation, which was the present year, displayed were all of the unfunded 3R issues they were currently examining. He said that he wanted to emphasize that there was approximately \$10.8 million of unfunded items here.

Mr. Towery said that most of these were not luxuries; they involved mechanical, life safety, paving, and building envelope concerns. He said that when they neglected these matters, they eventually led to significant problems in their facilities. He said that consequently, when they did not fund these over time, the costs continued to rise. He said that as they accumulated around \$10 million dollars of unfunded liabilities annually, the expenses escalated accordingly.

Mr. Towery said that they had compiled another list, some of the urgent and emergent needs that had arisen within the past year. He said that some of these issues were scheduled for the 3R list in the next one or two years, while others had been on the list historically. He said that the majority of these involved aging athletic facility concerns. He said that for instance, the North Stafford High School envelope project, which was fourth from the bottom and required \$1.2 million, was essential.

Mr. Towery said that without that funding, they could not proceed with the project. He said that unfortunately, it must be done. He said that they had proposed to their Board that they could allocate a portion of those funds to address some of the other urgent issues that would arise eventually. He said that most likely, they would spend the majority of those funds on HVAC issues at Stafford Middle School. He said that again, this was a project that had spanned multiple years. He said that they would likely proceed with funding it.

Mr. Towery said that next year, they needed to purchase furniture for the students because their current supply was insufficient for all of their facilities. He said that deferred maintenance looked like what was pictured on the slide. He said that the tasks that went uncompleted resulted in a limited level of maintenance. He said that on the slide were some selected images from their facilities and mentioned there were many more they could display at various locations currently.

Mr. Towery said that Stafford Middle School was one of the pieces they were trying to tackle this summer. He said that they needed about \$12 million to get all of Stafford up to speed. He said that therefore, Brooke Point and Stafford would utilize all of the 3R funding over the next couple of years. He said that consequently, not only did those projects get deferred, but the athletic facilities were so far down on the list they could not possibly address them.

Mr. Towery said that they had a number of facilities that were closed or closing soon, and every image on the current slide was an example of those facilities. He said that in the past few weeks, they had been forced to close the Mountain View track, Dixon Smith track, and the North Stafford tennis courts. He said that unfortunately, the Brooke Point High School bleachers could not get them reliably open or closed, so unfortunately, the gym could only be utilized for gym and practices, and competitive events could not be hosted in those facilities.

Mr. Towery said that they had already rescheduled many of the track meets, but they were still working on what to do at Brooke Point. He said that they wanted to the Board to be aware of the details, as they had begun to hear from parents who were very disappointed about the situation. He said that another prevalent issue at their facilities was the pavement. He said that they attempted to allocate the limited 3R funding they received each year toward HVAC projects, which were critical systems that absorbed the majority of the funding.

Mr. Towery said that as a result, paving projects, sports projects, roof projects, and exterior building envelopes could not be addressed. He said that they should be spending approximately \$2.5 million to \$3 million annually across their facilities on paving and repaving. He said that if they undertook proper care for their facilities, they should be able to obtain approximately 20 to 30 years of service from a typical parking lot. He said that this was contingent upon receiving adequate maintenance. He said that unfortunately, their annual budget for paving was only \$250,000, which allowed them to perform basic patching tasks.

Mr. Towery said that the amount was insufficient, which meant they could only perform some patching work here and there. He said that they should be funding the replacement of approximately one to two parking lots annually. He said that currently, they were replacing them every five years, but it might be closer to seven or eight years. He said that these projects were significantly underfunded. He said that the North Stafford parking lot used by the marching band for practice and driver's education was also affected; they were still determining whether it would be suitable for these activities during the upcoming summer and fall seasons.

Mr. Towery said that he wanted to point out that these were issues observed every day as people walked around their facilities, but this was only the tip of the iceberg. He said that he would like to discuss an incident that occurred at Rodney Thompson Middle School the previous week. He said that the event involved the HVAC system and was quite alarming. He said that the school, like many others, employed a hot water system with boilers that heated water before it passed through pressurized tanks and circulated through the building to regulate temperature.

Mr. Towery said that the bladder in one of the hot water expansion tanks ruptured catastrophically at around 12 midnight. He said that the exact time and consequences of this failure were uncertain.

He said that under normal circumstances, the system pressure should range between 30 to 35 psi. He said that however, the pressure had increased to approximately 100 psi, causing a pipe to burst above the cafeteria. He said that as a result, 165-degree water cascaded into the cafeteria.

Mr. Towery said that when staff arrived after reports of water pouring in and steam escaping from the building, they described the atmosphere as akin to a sauna. He said that it was extremely hot, stripping the wax entirely off the floors. He said that fortunately, there were no students present. He said that they were quite fortunate because such incidents were highly concerning to staff. He said that just the previous week, they had replaced a similar pipe at Drew Middle School, which cost them approximately \$30,000 for an emergency replacement.

Mr. Towery said that the issue was discovered in the boiler room as they removed some of the insulation from the pipe. He said that however, they could not catch everything. He said that this tank should have been replaced between 2015 and 2020. He said that these tanks typically have a lifespan of 15 to 20 years, and this one had surpassed 25 years. He said that when discussing their critical systems and potential failures, this was their primary concern.

Mr. Towery said that he would like to bring up one more point quickly. He said that they would like to present the 3R list for FY25 and had attempted to highlight by magisterial district the 3R list so that each of them could see the specific projects they planned to undertake in the schools near their respective areas. He said that the yellow highlights on this list represented the projects that they would be able to complete if they did not fund the critical systems projects.

Mr. Towery said that if they did not fund the critical systems list that was now part of their major capital list, all the 3R funds that would otherwise be allocated to roofs and security systems, intercoms would be used for HVAC projects. He said that as they went through this list, it mainly involved replacing freezers and refrigerators with nutrition funds. He said that the 3R list submitted back in October assumes that crucial systems list is funded. He said that if it was not funded, the scope of what they could accomplish on that 3R list would significantly decrease, and their concern with that was that they might encounter more situations like the one they had just experienced.

Dr. Taylor said that he had two final unpleasant matters to share and urged everyone to consider the gravity of the situation. He said that if students had been at Rodney Thompson during the incident in question, their discussion that day would have been quite different. He said that also, the annual 3R list shared every October ensured that everyone in the room was aware of the issue. He said that these were hard realities that they faced. He said that he recognized they had a challenge, but finding a solution was imperative.

Dr. Taylor said that working together was essential but that misleading comparisons hindered their efforts. He said that comparing adopted budgets to proposed budgets was not accurate since adopted budgets were always less than their proposed counterparts. He said that by comparing proposed budgets to proposed budgets, they would be looking at a \$217 million comparison versus a \$229 million comparison. He said that the cost increases each year due to deferred maintenance; it does not decrease or remain stable. He said that their failure to address maintenance concerns only exacerbated the issue and increased expenses annually.

Dr. Taylor said that deferring maintenance could be a beneficial budgetary tactic for one year if addressed the following year. He said that deferring maintenance year after year created complications. He said that they were funded at less than half the required amount to address these problems, making it challenging to respond when parents and constituents asked why they did not resolve them. He said that to be completely candid, they could not simply cut a check without first checking a bank account. He said that these were very real situations that had arisen due to decades of neglect, which were now catching up to them.

Dr. Taylor said that addressing these problems by working together was necessary. He said that they would like to invite staff from the County and the Supervisors to audit all of the components in their 3R list that they had shared every year for the past several decades to validate that what they were saying was true and to see for themselves. He said that he believed that when they visited their buildings, they would find that they appeared beautiful on the surface, but behind the walls and on the roofs, they experienced numerous challenges.

Dr. Taylor said that every time he visited a place like Rodney Thompson or Mountain View High School or Colonial Forge, it was hard for him to believe that these schools were all over 20 years old, but behind the walls, they certainly showed their age. He said that they could not ignore this problem any longer. He said that it would not magically disappear. He said that Stafford County was not shrinking or ceasing its growth, and Prince William had no plans to cut salaries anytime soon.

Dr. Taylor said that major maintenance would not resolve itself. He said that this was essentially a plea, and at this point they really needed the Board of Supervisors' help. He said that this was also a pivotal point in time where partnership can be formed and they can work together today. He said that he understood that this issue would not be resolved immediately or within this budget season, but there must be a plan, a path forward, and a strategy. He said that the school system would like to be their partners in that strategy.

Mr. English said that in reference to their 3R program, when they give these figures related to the program, he wanted to know where they came from. He said that he wanted to know if the figures

were derived from the staff's assessment of HVAC systems and their estimated repair costs. He said that he was interested in seeing an independent audit conducted on all the schools to determine their current status regarding repairs. He said that he was not implying a lack of trust but wanted to know their standing if they received a report at Stafford Elementary School listing specific repairs needed and their estimated costs, and if they failed to address these issues, the costs might escalate over time. He asked about an independent audit on that.

Dr. Taylor said that they would absolutely appreciate that; however, if they were aware of the issue, they must fix it. He said there was that aspect as well. He said that Mr. Towery would explain how their repairs should be costed.

Mr. Towery said that regarding the independent assessment, they did have an independent third party that conducted analyses of the facilities. He said that they recently completed the second part of this assessment last year, so they had up-to-date facility assessments available. He said that they were available on their website for transparency purposes, showcasing all the details about each facility, including costs and needs. He said that they had also attempted to document the years when these facilities were initially proposed on the 3R list, along with any associated issues they discovered during their review.

Mr. English asked when the last time the audit was done.

Mr. Towery said that it was about one year ago.

Dr. Taylor said that it should be kept in mind that their system was so big, they could not do every school in one year, so an audit had to be done in chapters. He asked how many schools were included in the last audit.

Mr. Towery said that they had about 15 or 16, and they audited the other half a few years before that.

Mr. English asked why they could not do all of them at the same time to know where they were at.

Dr. Taylor said that they could not do all of them in one year, so they did all of them over two years.

Mr. English asked if shared maintenance and shared janitorial duties could be shared between the County and the school system.

Dr. Taylor said that they were open to the suggestion but emphasized that they must ensure it would be completed within the timeline necessary to maintain school operations. He said that when issues arose, they took action immediately, even during the night, as it was essential to reopen schools the following morning. He said that when they had a building that was not online, they were forced to close, and their closure period was limited by law. He said that he did not think this situation would result in significant cost savings. He said that the required investments over the past two decades had not been made, leading to the need for hundreds of millions of dollars to be allocated to schools.

Mr. English said that he requested the \$100,000 for every individual earning over \$100,000, regardless of their position. He said that it made no difference to him who they were. He said that according to the provided information, there were approximately 240 individuals earning over \$100,000. He said that this amounted to roughly \$24 million. He said that he proposed allocating the funds raised by these high earners this year to support staff who needed it to make ends meet.

Ms. Siegmund said that teachers were on that list of individuals.

Mr. English said that he knew that they would say it would mess the scale up, but he would propose temporarily putting a cap on everyone who was making \$100,000 or more. He said that if someone was making \$150,000 and got a 5% raise, that was a lot of money. He said that they had to do it to the Sheriff's Office, where everyone who was first sergeant and above had to forego a raise to take care of the people not making enough. He said that he was focusing on support staff because if they walked out tomorrow, the school would close tomorrow because they needed them.

Dr. Taylor said that they needed every employee that they have. He said that he would humbly ask that Mr. English workshop that with his constituents about asking their principals to forego a salary increase given how hard they work to keep the schools open as well.

Mr. English said that he was just asking.

Ms. Gary said that she was going to ask a question about the burst with the 165-degree water and what that would do if the children had been in the school at the time. She said that she looked it up, and not to be graphic, human skin is destroyed at 150 degrees. She said that if they were sitting in this room right now and were told that there was potential for a water break that would spill that water at that temperature, they would not be sitting in this room. She said that were forcing their children to attend schools that they would not fund to fix things like that.

Ms. Gary said that it was incredibly upsetting, and she thanked God that no one was in there. She said that it was frightening, and it painted the correct picture of how far the neglect reached. She said that these were serious safety issues, and they needed to find the money to make this happen. She said that she supported funding the 3R as proposed, because they needed to. She said that it was frightening to learn about this, and she could not sleep at night knowing that they were neglecting their children like this.

Ms. Bohmke said that she understood that the tennis courts were in very bad shape. She asked if that program was still in the P.E. arena for middle schoolers. She said that she thought that it had left the P.E. system a couple of years ago.

Dr. Taylor said that it was part of the Virginia Standards of Learning for Physical Education in middle school and high school up to 10th grade. He said that varsity and J.V. sports competed at the high school level, and at the middle school level it was a unit of P.E. in all grades. He said that they had supplanted it by doing it at the gym, but they did not have a net or court in that case.

Ms. Bohmke asked if the ESSER funds were \$3.1 million.

Dr. Taylor said that they had used ESSER funds to cover salaries; however, it was not ideal to utilize one-time funds for ongoing expenses. He said that to balance the budget, the school division had to ensure adequate support for students, recognizing the necessity of school psychologists and school social workers for specific functions. He said that consequently, the school division made challenging decisions to employ these professionals.

Dr. Taylor said that one of the largest expenses was paraprofessionals. He said that it was probably not a decision that would be repeated. He said that it certainly helped to augment instruction, however, it had become a large ongoing expense, so the school division cut about 100 paraprofessionals. He said that this reduction did not resolve the learning loss issue; instead, it eliminated the workforce addressing that learning loss.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was referring to the slide labeled “grant funding.” She said that it was in the slides that came over to them. She said that it was labeled ESSER funds and it was \$3.1 million.

Mr. Fulmer said that they made an adjustment to this year's budget for the funds transferred from the ESSER fund, which amounted to approximately \$3.1 million. He said that it had been included in the summary there.

Dr. Taylor said that the \$3.1 million referred to an ongoing expense that was previously financed by ESSER funds.

Ms. Bohmke asked if it was now being rolled into the operating fund. She said that it was a part of COVID-19 and was now a part of the operating fund.

Dr. Taylor said yes. He said that the problem did not go away, but the money did.

Ms. Bohmke asked if there were other grants like ESSER that are in the operating budget now, or if those were the biggies.

Mr. Fulmer said that ESSER was definitely the biggest one for COVID-19 relief money. He said that in this budget, they had one title position that was shifting over as part of a phased-out approach, which was a small amount of the \$3.1 million.

Ms. Bohmke asked for clarification regarding the increases of 15% and 20% in some of their schools. She asked what the needs are in those schools.

Dr. Taylor said that those increases were tied to enrollment and differentiated according to a couple of risk populations. He said that as the school's enrollment increase, which sometimes had jumped 15% to 20%, so would their per-pupil allotment. He said that this allocation was done per student. He said that English language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students also had an additional allocation due to the costs associated with services for them. He said that there was some differentiation, but it was to account for differences in student populations as a best practice. He said that this had been done for years.

Ms. Bohmke asked if Rocky Run's increase of 16% was due to the relocatable classrooms or their enrollment in that school.

Dr. Taylor said that it was both due to relocatable classrooms and rising student populations.

Mr. Fulmer said that it was predominantly due to student growth at Rocky Run. He said that also, at each of their schools that had modular classrooms, either added this year or projected to be added next year, approximately \$500 was allocated to assist them, whether it was for water coolers or hourly pay for staff members to walk students back and forth during the middle of the day.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to further discuss a statement Mr. Towery had made regarding the boiler. She said that he had stated that they could not be aware of everything. She said that this gave her pause, because they were aware of Rodney Thompson, and they had

collectively agreed not to fund that. She asked for more information regarding what other schools were in a situation like that so they could prevent health and safety issues in their schools that they could know about right now, today, that should be addressed as soon as possible.

Mr. Towery said that there was likely a deeper level of analysis they could perform to give a better picture.

Ms. Bohmke said that she understood if staff must return to the Board with that information, but she did not want to leave the room without addressing his statement about not being aware of everything.

Mr. Fulmer said that he had discussed this topic extensively with Mr. Towery before and after the incident at Rodney Thompson. He said that they had talked about how so many of their things had gone past useful life that it was impossible to know what would break tomorrow. He said that every school had some project that had been delayed, although perhaps not Moncure or the Stafford High rebuild.

Mr. Fulmer said that all of their schools had begun aging. He said that he had made the statement before that Stafford had significant growth and they were adding one to two schools per year in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He said that this was 25 years ago, and the typical useful life for major mechanical equipment was 25 years. He said that the list had been building and building, and now they were at the point where items were rapidly being added to the list.

Mr. Fulmer said that there were some that had been on the list, but other items continued to become unfunded. He said that as Mr. Towery said, they did not know what pipe was going to burst tomorrow, but they had the list on 3R that detailed all the projects that needed to be done. He said that however, they could only do so much when they only had \$5 million but needed \$20 million.

Ms. Bohmke asked if a list of health and safety related projects could be provided.

Dr. Taylor said that a short list was provided in the slides. He said that generally, any time that they had multiple years of deferred maintenance, they were on borrowed time. He said that this was just what was programmed into this current fiscal year, which it included multi-year deferrals that had stacked up. He said that an appropriate question may be how something got deferred. He said that the answer was that something that was life safety breaks ahead of something scheduled to be replaced.

Dr. Taylor said that they fixed the thing that was broken first, and the thing that was nearing its useful life was put right back in the queue. He said that they now were dealing with the fact that

everything is in the queue and had been in the queue. He said that how long it had been in the queue and its current status was the real question. He said that when going through the 3R list, there were a handful of items ending their useful life, but the majority were programmed during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Mr. English said that he had asked this question before. He asked if engineers had been taken out of the schools.

Dr. Taylor said no.

Mr. English said that was not what he had been told. He said that engineers had been taken out of the schools. He asked if engineers had been taken out of the schools. He said that he had been told that they had been.

Mr. Fulmer said that all the middle schools and high schools still had plant engineers.

Dr. Taylor said that this had not changed.

Mr. Fulmer said that they had taken one from each school and created centralized teams that performed major maintenance tasks at the schools. He said that the number of people allocated remained the same, if not better allocated resources to the schools now. He said that having the person at the school versus centrally did not resolve their issue of replacing the equipment.

Mr. English said that he understood that, but when they were taking those out, and he looked this up and found that they bought \$300,000 of vehicles last year for these engineers. He said that he knew that they did because he checked the numbers. He said that he had no problems helping the schools, but if they were doing stuff like that and could take \$325,000 to put toward a project to fix, he would rather it see that done than buy vehicles.

Mr. Fulmer said that those were work vehicles for engineers to go to the schools and do their jobs.

Mr. English said that they were new vehicles.

Dr. Taylor said that the trade-off would be no service whatsoever for their elementary schools while all of their secondary schools would have two personnel, or all of their secondary schools would have one personnel and then they would have service at the elementary schools.

Mr. Towery said that they had actually seen a significant improvement from what they had done. He said that they had actually found a lot more things behind the walls that folks had honestly

gotten used to. He said that bringing people into the central maintenance team and having teams inspect the facilities, they had found a lot more of these issues. He said that so far, it had proven to be efficient and effective.

Dr. Yeung said that they all were big supporters of the school system and that she had personally served on the School Board, understanding the necessity of funding and the constant demand for resources. She said that Ms. Bohmke had rightly pointed out that the Board of Supervisors had a broader perspective, encompassing not only the schools but also the entire County and its diverse needs. She said that they were mindful of this responsibility and committed to working together.

Dr. Yeung said that regarding the \$15 million request for funding, they had fallen short by starting with a tax rate of \$0.91 instead of the \$0.94 proposed by the County Administrator. She said that this had resulted in a reduction of \$7.8 million. She said that they could not fulfill the request unless they re-advertised at the \$0.94 tax rate. She said that they were at \$0.91 and that was where they would start.

Dr. Yeung said that she wished to bring up the matter of COVID-19 funds. She said that they had used the available funds for two years and had to raise the tax rate by one penny to cover some of the expenses. She asked what specific COVID-19 funding they were currently missing that they considered essential, given the need for staffing and other required positions.

Dr. Taylor said that it was an excellent question. He said that they had attempted to simplify this into a few key aspects. He said that the state incentive funds allocated for high dosage tutoring would indeed be beneficial in terms of academics. He said that some of the truly critical issues that required substantial financial assistance involved strengthening the social structure elements to support student mental health and provide wraparound services.

Dr. Taylor said that consequently, this would primarily involve school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers, who would form that mix. He said that although the legislature was attempting to address this matter, full funding may take some time.

Dr. Yeung said that she understood that many parents required care for their children, particularly those with 504 plans, IEPs, and English learners. She said that regarding these programs, they could not continue with the same approach. She said that she was unsure if alternative methods had been considered yet. She said that they have had 100% of English learners who did not speak English. She said that she often encountered them and wondered how they managed to get through school. She asked if they were planning on changing the way of how they taught them, because this was also pulling down the numbers.

Dr. Taylor said that while they often discussed the things they fight about, but this was actually one of the things they could say that they win at. He said that two years ago, the Board implemented a shift in staffing for English as a second language classrooms, transitioning from a uniform approach to a tiered approach.

Dr. Taylor said that level one and level two classrooms, which catered to students with no English language proficiency, were staffed differently than level three and level four classrooms, which accommodated students with more language proficiency. He said that this change was significant as the state ratio prior to this was 54 to 1. He said that subsequently, they made the necessary modifications and integrated them into their staffing standards. He said that recently, the legislature had adopted this new standard.

Dr. Yeung asked if it had helped.

Dr. Taylor said that it resulted in huge financial savings for them, because they were already doing it and could leverage it into more for compensation. He said that it was a huge win.

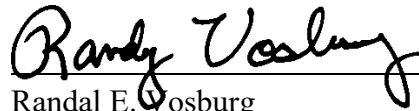
Ms. Gary said that she appreciated Dr. Yeung's input and would be more than happy to support any motion for a higher tax rate to re-advertise that she proposed. She said that regarding health-related issues and their sports facilities, they had a serious mental health crisis. She said that they were wearing their green ribbons for a reason, and if they were not willing to invest in the things that support their mental health, they should take these ribbons off because they did not mean anything. She said that the Virginia Department of Health pointed out two different things that were most important for mental health: housing and recreation. She said that this directly affected their students.

Ms. Bohmke said that they were constrained by time as one of their Board members needed to leave by 6:15 pm, and they still had a closed session scheduled following their meeting. She said that the reason they had to ensure the agenda was adhered to promptly was because of this time constraint. She said that the vice chair was expected to be present; however, she had started a new job which potentially caused traffic delays. She apologized for her absence.

Ms. Guy said that they were available for additional meetings, and if Ms. Bohmke desired further time, she could always request it.

ADJOURNMENT

At 5:08 p.m., Chairman Bohmke adjourned the March 26, 2024 Joint Stafford County Board of Supervisor and Stafford County School Board work session.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Randy Vosburg", written over a horizontal line.

Randal E. Vosburg
County Administrator

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Meg L. Bohmke", written over a horizontal line.

Meg Bohmke
Chairman