Dear Henrico colleagues, families, students, community stakeholders and friends,

When you value something, you invest in it. And Henrico County Public Schools surely values the input you’ve given us about the school division’s needs and priorities.

I want to share with you some of the details of our recommended budget for 2020-21, a budget that you helped craft. As I’ve talked with you, in groups and individually, I’ve gained a greater understanding of areas that need our investment if we are to continue to grow and thrive as a school division. In survey responses, emails and discussions, you told me that we need to continue to provide more opportunities and support systems for students and teachers alike; to continue to invest in safe and well-maintained learning spaces; and to keep working to restore the cuts suffered during the Great Recession. The budget builds on the progress made this year and continues to focus on the goals in our strategic plan.

HCPS teachers across the county have told me some of the ways we can help them do what they do best: teach and nurture our students. That input from you in our classrooms is crucial, and I hope you will continue to tell us ways to be responsive to your needs. So what’s in the recommended budget? Below are some of the highlights, including investment in important areas.

Compensation. What you earn is always a priority in our budget. Our employees are the very best, and it’s crucial to recognize them for their dedication to our students and community. So far, this includes:

- A “career ladder” program, enabling staff members to climb in experience, expertise and pay.
- A 6% increase in what HCPS pays to cover the cost of health insurance.
- Funding for the increase for HCPS’ contribution to the Virginia Retirement System accounts of our employees, proposed in Gov. Northam’s budget.

What about a pay increase? In Henrico, unlike our neighboring localities, it’s customary for employee raises to be considered for all schools and government employees a little later in the budget process. I urge you to stay tuned for more information in the spring.

More support for students and HCPS staff. The recommended budget enhances instructional programs, expands social and emotional programs for students, and gives our staff members more support. In particular, it pays for:

- Forty school counselors, nearly doubling the number of counselors at the elementary level in order to address a critical need among students for social and emotional support.
- Daily elementary teacher planning time. This fulfills a promise to our hard-working instructors to provide resources they need. We continue to add support staff in our buildings, such as counselors, innovative learning coaches and library assistants, so that master schedules can be adjusted to ensure daily planning time.
- Thirteen elementary library assistants, to ensure that elementary library programming offers greater student opportunities, and to help our teachers leverage their resources.
- Four teachers for the Gifted Young Scholars Academy program at L. Douglas Wilder Middle School, providing more opportunities for students.
- Sixteen additional seats for high school students at CodeRVA. More opportunities at this regional computer science academy gives Henrico students more access to #LifeReady experiences.
- Restored funds for instructional materials cut during the Great Recession.
- Funds to expand the Achievable Dream Academy at Highland Springs Elementary School to grade 5, completing the four-year plan to add one grade per year for the unique program.
- Converting 25 exceptional education instructional assistants from temporary to full-time positions. This strengthens the support for students with special needs, gives them more continuity in the classroom, and provides these valued employees with full-time benefits.

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- **Fifteen reading specialists for elementary schools.** This is the second year of a multiyear initiative to increase support for K-12 literacy.
- **Eleven teachers to continue to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio,** primarily at the secondary level. This batch of funding completes the current phase of pupil-teacher ratio reduction, something that is always a priority.
- **Two school psychologists, two social workers and one exceptional education reading teacher** to help support our teachers and students. This is the final year of this current initiative.
- **Elimination of the physical education fee paid by secondary education parents.**
- **Thirty-five full-time substitutes to provide more consistent coverage** in our schools. All 35 positions now have higher salaries and full-time benefits, in order to attract the best candidates.
- **Eight associate principals for elementary schools that lacked that position.** We continue to allocate resources to provide equitable support across our schools.
- **Planning funds for staffing and curriculum development for the opening of Holladay Elementary School expansion,** which will house a dual-language immersion program, the first of its kind in Henrico County.
- **Investing in the second-grade swimming program.**

**Operations and Safety.** A safe and secure school environment is essential for our students and staff. The recommended budget includes funding for:

- **Developing a school bus tracking app** to allow parents to locate their student’s bus in real time.
- **An emergency planning and response system** known as “Anonymous Alerts,” and for updating our visitor registration software.
- **Ensuring that middle-school sports safety equipment** can be consistently updated and replaced.
- **Additional building maintenance.**
- **Safety staffing for transportation hubs.**

**Henrico’s strong investment in public education.** Overall, the general fund budget included in this Recommended Annual Financial Plan reflects an increase of $19 million over the current budget, and totals $533,489,709. That’s a 3.7 percent increase over the current year. Student enrollment is expected to remain steady as we head into the 2020-21 school year.

The development of the budget is possible through the hard work of schools and county staff. I would like to express my appreciation to school division staff members as well as County Manager John Vithoulkas and his staff for their assistance in the development of this budget. We greatly value our partnership and the generous support of HCPS by Henrico taxpayers, the School Board, the Henrico Board of Supervisors and the County Manager.

Sincerely,

Amy E. Cashwell, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools