

Superintendent's Recommended Budget Outline

OPENING

If you ask one of our Frederick County Public Schools kindergarten students what they want to be when they grow up, you will get answers that inspire and make you smile.

They might say they want to be a doctor, a teacher, a musician, a movie star, an athlete or just about anything in between.

They are just starting their educational journeys, the answer they give today is likely to change by the time they graduate from high school.

Supported by their families and dedicated educators, every step of the way, they have time to learn, develop and grow while narrowing down their future career choice.

At its core, that's what public education is all about. Every student, every day gets the precious opportunity to learn new skills, develop interests and grow into successful adults. When we make supporting students socially, emotionally, and academically our priority, our community is better for it.

Much like our kindergarten students, I too, am new to Frederick County Public Schools. Since being announced last spring as the superintendent of this great school system, my goal has been to listen. Even before I officially started on July 1, I visited schools, I met with community members, elected officials, students and staff.

We held five listening sessions this summer, and I greatly appreciated everyone sharing their experiences. Since then, I have visited our schools and listened to staff and students. I have attended gatherings that bring our community together, and met many of you.

Thank you for sharing what you feel is best for students now and in the future. Everyone has differing viewpoints and experiences, which is to be expected in a wonderfully diverse community such as ours. Through those differences, I have heard a common refrain:

In Frederick County, **we take great pride** in this community and **we take great pride** in our school system.

When our students aspire to do something truly great – like working together to solve a problem, performing an outstanding theater production, or winning a state championship, you can feel the support. When a family suffers a significant challenge or loss, our community asks what they can do to help. We pull together and rally around each other during good times and those that bring us sadness.

You are proud of the academic programs and opportunities provided for our students. You are proud of our staff serving in classrooms, offices and in our various facilities across the school system. Students are proud of their schools. Staff feel a sense of pride in the work they do to support our students and their colleagues.

To meet your expectations, we must provide an optimal learning environment for every student and a healthy work environment for each staff member. We must ensure that the academic and

social/emotional needs of all students are met. We must give staff the resources needed to successfully do their jobs.

We must do all of this while acknowledging we are growing as a community. It is my hope – and my belief – that we can all grow together. As I unveil my first superintendent’s recommended budget, my focus is simple: To ensure we provide an outstanding public education, one that every child deserves.

With the needs of our students at the forefront, I am pleased to submit to you my proposed Fiscal Year 2024 operating budget for Frederick County Public Schools. The development of the FY 24 proposed operating budget was crafted in partnership with the FCPS community – families, teachers, staff, students and community members.

This needs-based budget builds on the past support from the Board of Education of Frederick County, former County Executive Jan Gardner, and the Frederick County Council. I am appreciative of their unwavering support and I look forward to working together with our current County Executive Jessica Fitzwater and county council to do what is best for our students.

My recommended budget supports my foundational goals for FCPS moving forward:

- We will strive for an **organizational culture of achievement** focused on high-quality teaching and successful student outcomes.
- We will **focus on operational excellence.**
- We will make the **Safety and wellbeing for all students and staff a focus**, which includes effective intervention strategies.
- We will engage the community and provide them with **timely, transparent and clear communication.**

And

- We will provide **an outstanding student and staff experience.**

My Fiscal Year 24 recommended budget totals \$933 million. \$79.5 million above maintenance of effort.

The primary cost drivers of this budget are attracting and retaining qualified staff to serve the growing number of families choosing FCPS, providing critical staff and resources for our students with the highest needs, addressing significant budgetary challenges related to recent increase in costs due to inflation, and supporting the innovative initiatives put forward by the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.

In just the last two years, our student population has grown by more than 3,600 students from FY2021 to FY2023 – making FCPS one of the fastest-growing systems in the state. In this

year's operating budget, I am calling for the hiring of general education, special education, English learner teachers, school counselors, administrators, custodial staff, grounds crew, bus drivers, therapists, psychologists, technology staff, operations staff, and fiscal services staff. As we grow, we do not want to see cracks in our foundation. The path forward simply requires more teachers, more custodians, more bus drivers, more cafeteria workers, more school counselors.

We are a people-rich organization. Twenty-seven percent of our increase to the recommended operating budget is focused on salaries for our dedicated employees. As students progress through our system, we want them to be inspired and encouraged by teachers, administrators and support staff. That's why it is critical that we provide competitive salaries to neighboring districts. Doing so allows us to attract and recruit the best staff possible, particularly while we face a national teacher shortage.

It is no secret that most of our neighboring counties offer higher starting salaries for educators than we do. It is also essential for us to retain the dedicated staff who have always been there for our students. Thus, I am recommending \$29.3 million to the salary resource pool for our employees.

An important part of the growth in Frederick County Public Schools is providing for the needs of our students receiving special education services and our English Language Learners. Our students receiving specialized services must continue to have the very best staff and exceptional resources throughout the course of their time in FCPS.

Inflationary costs have also posed a challenge to everyone this year, and our public education system is no different. With the prices of everything going up, during the last year, it has greatly impacted our budget, from diesel fuel to educational technology. To ensure we continue meeting the operational needs of our school system, approximately a quarter of the overall proposed budget increase is to combat these significant inflationary increases.

Fortunately, in Maryland, our elected officials shared our commitment to excellence in public education by passing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which prepares all communities across our state for tomorrow.

This investment will be implemented during the next decade and focuses on increasing early childhood education, ensuring high quality and diverse teachers and leaders are supporting our students, preparing students for success in career and college, expanding career and technical education, and providing resources to ensure all students are successful. To meet the mandated requirements of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, \$7.5 million is being proposed for the FY24 Recommended Budget.

Like the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the road map for the future of FCPS requires that we continue strengthening the foundation that this outstanding school system is built upon. Meaningful growth, for our students, cannot happen without addressing our current and future needs - that is the focus of my FY24 Recommended Budget. In short, the increase of \$110.2 million focuses on two main areas. One, **operational excellence**; of which \$71.7 million addresses *growth and enhancements* that will:

- Allow us to hire the staff needed to support our growing student body and the needs of schools by enhancing our Tier 3 staffing model.

- Increase our salary resource pool, allowing FCPS to attract high-quality staff and retain new and veteran staff.
- Strengthen our ability to continue providing the best learning environment and opportunities for each student by addressing their unique needs and abilities. For example, this budget includes increasing staff for special education specialized programs.

And

- Add three special education advocacy centers within schools, in convenient locations across the district, based on recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Task Force and Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee.

Finally, \$38.5 million of the FY24 Recommended Budget, will ensure we are able to address ***inflationary & mandatory costs*** related to:

- Increases in daily expenses, such as fuel, utilities, along with classroom and office materials & resources needed to continue effective instruction & operations.
- Growing our composting efforts and green initiatives based on interest from local schools.

And

- Requirements outlined in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which provides a foundation for every child in the state of Maryland to reach their full promise and potential.

In FCPS our focus is clear, everything we do, every day, is for each and every child/student.

I encourage everyone to stay involved and informed in the budget process. We have posted the full recommended budget to [FCPS.org/budget](https://www.fcps.org/budget), where we also have posted the full budget calendar. In the weeks to come, we will have Board of Education budget discussions and a public hearing where the community can share their feedback, all before the FY24 operating budget goes into effect on July 1 – just a few weeks before our new kindergarten students arrive in classrooms and begin dreaming about what their professional futures will be.