

12 February 2010

An Open Letter to the Fulton County Board of Education:

As involved parents in our schools, we realize that the school system's budget is going to need drastic cuts in the short term and new approaches for the long term. We offer the following suggestions not only as money saving avenues, but also as starting points for new lines of thinking. We present them in the hopes that money can be saved in ways that will not greatly impact the core mandate of Fulton County School System –providing the best education we can for our students. Maintaining smaller class sizes, providing teachers with adequate training before school starts, and utilizing any resources available to retain our best instructors are the keys to sustaining a high level of achievement.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Consider furloughs for all employees.

For every day the teachers are furloughed, **ALL** 12 month employees and Board members should have a furlough day (this may not do as much for budgets as for system morale, but in this economy every dollar counts).

Consider allowing principals to “work from home” for part of the summer.

We can save money by closing the schools 2 to 3 days a week during the summer. Also, lower the thermostat settings by 1 or 2 degrees and remind Fulton County employees to turn items off when not in use (lights, computers, etc). This will save on current and future utility costs.

Consider outsourcing jobs and departments.

For example, can Fulton County contract out human resources? Which administrative departments can be reorganized and downsized?

Consider altering or changing the benefits system.

The private sector is using new ways to save on employee benefits. Many companies are switching from a pension retirement system to employee owned personal retirement accounts. We are not suggesting removing those employees who are already vested in the pension system, but rather to allow a buy out of any employees who would like out of the pension system and any new hires are part of the new system. This may have greater savings for long term over short. Some companies are also imposing penalty charges if an employee's spouse is eligible for another health care plan but uses Fulton County instead.

TESTING

Reevaluate testing schedules and materials.

While testing can provide valuable information, testing over 90,000 students multiple times per year is a costly endeavor. What is the full cost of the Checkpoints testing system? Can we reduce the number of Checkpoint tests administered through the year? Are there other services that provide a similar service for less cost (Amana Academy uses a testing system from Northwest Evaluation Association (www.nwea.org); is this cheaper)? Can we suspend the Iowa Test of Basic Skills test until we have an adequate budget?

COMMUNITY

Approach local manufacturers to purchase materials at a wholesale cost.

Numerous companies have either their corporate headquarters or offices in Fulton County. Companies such as Hewlett-Packard (computers and printing supplies), Georgia Pacific (paper and paper products), Kimberly-Clark (paper products, Kimwipes, cleaning wipes, and shop towels), AT&T (phone, internet, and television service), Home Depot (construction materials and other hardware items), Newell-Rubbermaid (Sharpie, Papermate, and storage containers) may be able to provide supplies at a greatly reduced cost. Fulton County Schools should not approach these companies for a donation, but for a business relationship.

Create a corporate Adopt-A-School Program.

Local companies can assist individual schools not only with material needs, but also with volunteer hours.

REVENUE

Consider raising the millage rate.

As much as people do not like to hear it, this is the long term solution for our budget crunch. While we realize this will not do much to impact the 2010-2011 budget, it will benefit future budgets. Fulton County has had stagnant millage rates for over 5 years (and one of the lowest in metropolitan Atlanta); as we emerge from this recession, it is time to generate enough revenue to provide our students the education they deserve. Since millage rates are required to be decreased as housing values rise, the rate will decrease as the economy improves.

Consider a small loan or issuing a bond.

Fulton County Schools has a very high credit rating. Can a loan be secured for some of the shortfall to maintain any programs? Can we issue a bond to cover any costs?

GEORGIA PRE-K

Consider removing Pre-K from the school system.

The money from the state does not cover the entire cost of this program. This is a program that impacts under 1,600 students, some of whom may not stay in Fulton County. It is a program that takes up 76 classrooms (and space is already at a premium in Fulton County) and requires 152 teachers. This is a program that Fulton County Schools is NOT required to provide, can be found with the SAME curriculum and cost (free) outside of the Fulton County Schools, and costs Fulton County Schools an unknown amount in periphery costs (bussing, trailers, staff, cafeteria, supplies, etc). Fulton County School dollars are better spent on the K-12 students that we are required to educate and to provide programs that these students may not be able to find at a similar level and cost outside of the system. With the state's budget as tight as it is this year, we are concerned that the lottery funding will be reduced AFTER the board submits and approves the 76 classes. This leaves Fulton County Schools obligated to maintain these classes with even less funding, which will have to come from somewhere. Other metropolitan Atlanta counties (Cobb and Gwinnett) have chosen not have this program in the school system. Fulton can follow their lead.

BUSSING

Consider removing bus stops.

Cobb County cut almost 8,500 bus stops from its routes for a savings of \$1 million.

Consider changing or combining bus routes based on ACTUAL ridership.

Consider removing the start-up charter bussing hubs or require the charters to cover these costs.

Budgets will be tight for the foreseeable future. We need to work together to find creative solutions for cost savings in order to maintain the high quality of education Fulton County provides. We need to think outside the box. We need to think frugally. During the space race of the 1960's (as the story goes), NASA spent over \$1 million to develop a pen that would work in the extreme environment of space. The U.S.S.R. used a pencil. We need to find more places to exchange our expensive pens with a simple pencil.

We look forward to a continuing constructive dialogue on these suggestions and others as they arise. We hope that you will engage us as a sounding board and, in turn, we will help gather feedback from the community.

Thank you for your service.

Respectfully,

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