

**REMARKS: FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET ADDRESS
GEORGE ARLOTTO, ED.D., SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

DECEMBER 18, 2019

President Corkadel; Vice President Ellis; Members of the Board; City, County, and State Elected Officials; and residents of Anne Arundel County:

When I think about the obligation that we, as a school system, have to the nearly 85,000 students we serve every day, three words come to mind: opportunity, intentionality, and impact. It is only through the creation of opportunities, carried out with intentionality, that we can have the positive impacts on children that they deserve and that our parents and community expect. Without these three ingredients, we simply cannot do our part to help mold and shape young minds and bodies into the excelling leaders not just of tomorrow, but of today. Without these three ingredients, we are left only with hope. And ladies and gentlemen, while hope is absolutely essential in every endeavor, hope alone is not a strategy.

Much of the focus and discussion about our school system rightly surrounds the opportunities we create directly for our children, but we must recognize that a vast number of opportunities created outside of our classrooms lay the foundation for those created inside of them.

We saw a shining example of that last week with a first-of-its-kind donation: A 1972 Sabreliner aircraft by Northrop Grumman that was retired from its fleet last year. Instead of scrapping it, the company opted to make an enormous investment in our children. The twin-engine jet, which will be housed at Tipton Airport on Fort Meade, will allow our students interested in aircraft maintenance careers to get the hands-on experience in our new Aviation Maintenance Technician Program that they would never get through textbook lessons or simulations. We will be training the future airline maintenance specialist workforce right here in our school system and our county.

While many of the opportunities we create come through material means, others are philosophical and driven by the passion and purpose our amazing employees have to create better worlds for our children.

You can see it in our Office of Equity and Accelerated Student Achievement and in our Equity Leads at every school, whose tireless dedication to developing strategies to ensure equitable approaches both inside and outside of our classrooms was recognized this year with an award from the National School Boards Association. This is the second straight year that we have been honored with this national award for our work around equity, and we are very proud to be the only school system in the nation with more than 20,000 students to earn it in each of the last two years.

You can see it in people like Teresa Beilstein, a third-grade teacher at South Shore Elementary school who is Maryland's 2019-20 Teacher of the Year. Spend just a few seconds in Ms. Beilstein's class and you will get a clear glimpse of the boundless love her students have for her. That's because in addition to her phenomenal instructional abilities, she goes the extra mile to build relationships with every single child. Knowing them helps her create opportunities. Outside of the classroom, she coordinates the school science fair and dance team. Through all of that and more, she builds a lasting trust with her students, who know she is in their corner and will do anything to help them succeed.

You can see it in people like Larry Fisher, who culminated a 43-year career with our school system when he retired as the Chief Custodian at Cape St. Claire Elementary School at the end of November. Mr. Fisher spent the last 30 years of his career at the school, forging bonds with generations of families whose children have been educated there. He was far more than the man responsible for keeping the building running. He became a friend to students and staff alike, sharing as much with them as they shared with him. Those bonds afforded him the opportunity to better the lives of countless children in countless ways over the course of four decades.

You can see it in people like Tammy Littleton, the Education Support Professional of the Year. Tammy's official title at Northeast High School may be student advocate, but she truly takes on multiple

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roles, from parent to advisor to mentor and friend. In everything she does, she aims to create better opportunities for students.

And you can see it in people like Isabel Mendez, a World and Classical Language teacher in her first year at MacArthur Middle School. Ms. Mendez epitomizes passion and perseverance. A teacher in her native El Salvador, she relocated to the United States for family reasons in 2016. Not speaking English, she became frustrated that she could not continue teaching, and took another job to support herself and her family. She also took English classes, though, because her dream of returning to teaching never dimmed, and colleagues at her job encouraged and supported her.

I had the pleasure to meet Ms. Mendez at New Teacher Orientation in August, and I will never forget the words she said to me with incredible pride in her eyes: “I am going to teach in the classroom I used to clean.”

That first job she took? A custodian at MacArthur Middle School. Those colleagues who supported her? She now teaches beside them. Isabel Mendez seized her opportunities to be able to inspire and impact children in a different way. She knew her passion – and the best place for her to impact children – was in the classroom, and she did everything it took to get there. That is exactly what we want our students to do as well.

While there is much we can – and must – do inside the walls of our schools, some of the opportunities we create must be intertwined with those outside of our school system. We are one piece of a larger puzzle, especially when it comes to social issues. I take very seriously our responsibility to do everything we can to eradicate hate and bias from our society. As I have said before, we do not bear this burden alone and we cannot fix this problem alone.

We all must do our part and collectively it starts with an honest assessment of where we are. For me, it’s this: Our county has a problem with biased and hateful mindsets and actions. We cannot tolerate hate and bigotry at any time, in any place, and we all need to do something about it.

We can spend hours, days, and months debating this issue, but such debate often does nothing to move us forward. No matter our calling or occupation, we must all admit that we all have opportunities to help our children unlearn the biases that have been imparted to them since birth.

That is why I was so grateful that our Board of Education last year unanimously approved making our Global Community Citizenship course a graduation requirement beginning with this year’s ninth-graders. While there was some opposition to this effort, I am proud that our Board strongly agreed that we must seize this opportunity to find ways to help our students engage in civil discourse and broaden their awareness of the vast, multicultural communities in which they live. This year, more than 6,000 students will take this course.

There is merit to the notion that we must engage our students in this process at earlier ages. Changes in our middle school advisory lessons and the implementation of Second Step, which focuses on social/emotional coping skills at the elementary level, are among the actions that we are taking to do just that. But let’s be clear: There is much, much more work for all of us to do, and that work must include the homes across our county.

We also continue to fight a battle against a rapidly rising number of social and emotional issues encountered by young people in our county every day. Last year, the county provided funding in our budget for 35 positions – including 18 new school counselors and eight new school psychologists – to help address this issue. I am requesting additional positions in this budget, because this is a monstrous battle that is preventing many of our children from taking full advantage of the academic and extracurricular opportunities we provide for them every day.

**REMARKS: FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET ADDRESS
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DECEMBER 18, 2019

Our Board also created a Mental Health Task Force to examine key contributing factors and develop recommendations as to ways to best attack this issue, and I am proud that the County Government and others have so readily joined forces with us on this front.

Inside the classroom, we continue to attack achievement gaps wherever they exist. We do so in a variety of ways, but increasing opportunities for all of our students is paramount to that effort. After all, the achievement gap is, in many ways, a result of historical opportunity gaps. The County has also partnered with us on the Task Force to Eliminate the Achievement Gap, and I am hopeful that bringing more resources to bear will accelerate the pace at which we are impacting this issue.

We have had an impact that has resulted in continued success, and it should not be ignored. Our overall graduation rate, for example, has risen by 5.5 percentage points to 89.2 percent since 2011. Over the same time period, the graduation rate gap between African-American and white students has closed by 2.6 percentage points.

The latest Maryland Report Card ratings, released by the state earlier this month, offer more proof of our impact. Twenty of our schools gained two stars on the five-star scale and another 53 moved up one star compared to last year's ratings. Overall, 95 percent of our schools earned three, four, or five stars, with 23 reaching the five-star mark. When it comes to five-star schools, we have a higher percentage than any of the five largest school systems in Maryland.

We are now offering the PSAT and SAT free of charge to all of our high school juniors, providing a powerful tool to help open doors to postsecondary educational opportunities that may otherwise have remained closed. Last year, more than 4,900 juniors took the SAT for free in our classrooms, and we expect another 5,000 to do the same this year.

More than 10,000 students are being educated in our cutting-edge magnet programs at the high school and middle school levels, and another 2,500 are involved in our innovative, community-specific signature programs at our 12 comprehensive high schools. And, thanks to federal grant funding secured through the hard work of our Division of Advanced Studies and Programs, we are expanding opportunities for robotics clubs at all of our high schools.

The opportunities for students pursuing career and trade schools after leaving us also continue to expand. Today, more than 1,800 students are enrolled in programs at our two exemplary Centers of Applied Technology, a 12 percent increase over three years ago. Our Career Technology Education program continues to be recognized as among the best in the state, with students earning nearly 1,400 industry certifications last year alone.

Thousands of students continue to take advantage of the opportunities we offer through our AVID program, which exists in 44 schools, including all of our high schools and middle schools, to help students in the academic middle become more prepared for postsecondary education, be it at a two- or four-year college or a career-oriented trade school. We have more than 11,000 students currently participating in the program, and 13 percent of all secondary students are benefitting from the AVID elective course. We also continue to infuse AVID strategies on a schoolwide level, further preparing students outside of the specific AVID course for college and careers.

At the elementary level, eight of our 12 clusters now have the Triple E program, which provides an additional avenue of instruction designed to allow students to explore ideas and topics such as Arts & Humanities, STEM in Society, Global Studies, and World Culture & Language. The aim is to spark inquiry and creativity, helping students to broaden their horizons – and perhaps career ambitions – at a young age.

We are also creating more of the right kinds of opportunities for our youngest learners. Last year, we converted six more schools with half-day prekindergarten programs to full-day programs, creating

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DECEMBER 18, 2019

environments that allow students – especially those in the gaps – to become more acclimated to, and successful in, full-day school settings before they reach kindergarten. Nearly 1,100 students are enrolled in full-day prekindergarten programs at 25 schools this year.

A year ago, County Executive Pittman and the County Council, along with the State, provided an incredible amount of funding to allow us to create and enhance opportunities like the ones I have just described. We received 99 percent of the Board's total operating budget request and used it not only on students in our classrooms, but on adults. We were able to provide compensation enhancements for all employees that included two back step increases for those who were eligible, putting a dent in the problem of catching our teachers and other employees up on wages lost during the recession.

I say again now what I said last spring: We are making prudent and efficient use of the resources that we have been provided, and I am confident that we will continue to see positive results.

Our needs continue to grow, as do the number of students we serve. We are educating about 1,700 more students in our classrooms now than a year ago – the biggest year-to-year increase in about 30 years.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is a testament to the opportunities that we are intentionally creating and the impact that we are having on the lives of young people. It is also a clear call – as we have said before – that making a dent in a single year will not get us where we need to go.

The \$1.36 billion operating budget I am recommending to you this evening does not contain everything we need to address every issue. While I understand the desire of many to do just that in a single year, we must realize that there are many other compelling needs across our county.

This budget recommendation represents an \$84.7 million increase from our current funding level, with \$34.4 million of that dedicated to compensation enhancements for our incredible employees. While negotiations with employee bargaining units must still be completed, that amount is sufficient to provide the equivalent of a step increase for all eligible employees, a 2 percent cost-of-living increase for all employees, and a back step for all eligible employees who were in an eligible bargaining unit or position in the 2011-2012 school year. We must continue to make inroads on this vital issue.

The teacher shortage in Maryland and across the nation is real, and we must continue to do what we can to recruit and retain not just our exceptional teachers, but all of the exceptional employees across our system.

More than 91 percent of the new positions I am recommending in this budget are for people who have daily contact with our children. Fifty-seven positions are allocated to the first phase of staffing for the new Crofton High School, the first high school we've added in our county in almost 40 years. The school will open for freshmen and sophomores in September, and we will round out the staffing there as the school grows by a class in each of the next two years.

The enrollment growth I spoke of earlier means that we simply continue to need more classroom staffing. I am recommending adding 195 classroom teachers in this budget to address ongoing enrollment increases and help reduce class sizes. Additionally, this budget contains funding for 20 teaching assistants and permanent substitute positions, 11.2 cultural arts teaching positions, two elementary reading/language arts teachers, and two internship teachers to continue to facilitate key practical experiences for our high school students. This year, we expect more than 2,000 high school students to take part in valuable internships, with the goal over the next few years of getting every student to have an internship experience before graduation.

Also included in the staffing request are 18 assistant principals as part of our ongoing plan to put assistant principals at all elementary schools, and 6.5 school-based secretaries. The last time we added positions to our complement of school-based secretaries was in 2009, and we have added 11,000 students since that time.

**REMARKS: FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET ADDRESS
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DECEMBER 18, 2019

To help address the needs of our growing number of English Learners and their families, this budget contains funding for 10 English Language Acquisition teachers and five bilingual teaching assistants, as well as two additional bilingual facilitators. We added 25 ELA teachers and 10 bilingual teaching assistants a year ago, but our needs continue to rise. We now have more than 6,000 English Learners – a 13 percent increase since 2018 – and our ELA teachers have caseloads of approximately 48 students each. We simply must do better.

We have also seen significant growth in the number of students with special and alternative education needs, and this budget adds 73.3 new positions to help address those needs. That number includes 32.8 positions in our comprehensive schools and 19.4 more positions at our specialty sites. It also includes 6.5 positions to facilitate accommodations in accordance with student Section 504 plans and another 6.6 positions to open a therapeutic elementary school program that will allow us to better address the growing number of young students who are exhibiting challenging behaviors that can best be addressed in a more diagnostic setting. It also includes eight additional bus aides to assist children to and from school.

As I said earlier, meeting the social and emotional needs of our students is an area that must be addressed on a societal level, but we must recognize our ongoing responsibility to do what we can. In that regard, this recommendation contains \$1.4 million for 14 new positions that include nine additional school counselors, two additional school psychologists, and an additional social worker.

In addition to doing what we can to keep pace with the needs of our students, we must continue to enhance the opportunities for them to access new and innovative curriculum. When we launched the Triple E program at the elementary level in 2014, our plan was to add three clusters a year over four years. Funding has not allowed for that pace, but now is the time to complete the job. This budget contains \$4.3 million for 42.4 positions to implement Triple E in our four remaining clusters – Arundel, Old Mill, Severna Park, and South River – as well as at Richard Henry Lee and Oakwood elementaries, which could not launch the program this year due to construction-related constraints. The program has not only been a huge plus for our young learners, but it also allows for critical additional planning time for elementary teachers.

As I said earlier, we are continuing to convert prekindergarten programs from half-day to full-day where we can in order to better prepare our 4-year-olds for kindergarten. The seven prekindergarten teachers and seven teaching assistants in my recommendation will allow us to convert four current half-day programs to full-day and add three new full-day programs to our offerings. Two additional positions will allow us to add 20 more full-day students at the highly popular Carrie Weedon Early Education Center in south county. Full-day programs also allow us to access state funding through the Kirwan Commission recommendations that would otherwise be unavailable.

As you know, we have been working with a transportation consultant to examine and find ways to maximize efficiencies in the ways we transport nearly 60,000 students to and from school every day. As we await the consultant's final report, I have included funding for seven additional positions in our Transportation Division. Three of those positions are routers who are essential to accurately process and disseminate approximately 3,000 bus route changes made each summer and another 3,000 made during the school year. Three other positions will be used to enhance communications with our drivers, schools, and families. The remaining position will serve to dispatch buses from the newly established bus yard near South River High School, which replaces leased space we have used in the past.

Our transportation system has been one of the most efficient in the state, but as we have directed additional staffing elsewhere to meet increased needs, we have not enhanced our transportation workforce. With about 7,000 more students riding buses than 10 years ago, the creation of a 13th high

**REMARKS: FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET ADDRESS
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DECEMBER 18, 2019

school feeder system, and our full complement of magnet programs now in place, this is the time to bolster this area.

As we add more square footage to our building inventory, this is also the time to add to our Facilities team. This budget contains funding for four additional custodians and two additional preventative maintenance technicians, and I hope to continue to add more to that area of our team in future budgets.

Our entire Facilities team is, of course, vital to the opportunities we provide to students in educational settings across our county. As we have continued to improve those environments over the years, we have had the staunch support of the County and State when it comes to capital funding. The \$214.9 million capital budget I am submitting tonight will require continued support from our partners.

The capital budget is \$49 million more than the current year, and includes \$139 million in design and/or construction funds for seven projects that are currently under way: Edgewater, Tyler Heights, Richard Henry Lee, Quarterfield, Hillsmere, and Rippling Woods elementary schools; as well as Old Mill West High School.

Also included in this recommendation is \$9 million for full-day kindergarten and prekindergarten additions at Sunset and Van Bokkelen elementary schools, and \$11 million for a classroom addition and cafeteria expansion at Arundel Middle School.

Our student projections clearly show the need for another elementary school in the western portion of the county and this budget contains \$3 million for the design of that new school, to be constructed on the west side of Route 3 in the vicinity of the Two Rivers community. It also contains \$4 million for the feasibility study and design of a new Old Mill Middle School South, to be built on the current Southgate/Old Mill Park. This will be the second major step in the Old Mill project, which will eventually break down the current three-school complex on Patriot Lane and provide two new high school buildings, two new middle school buildings, new Rippling Woods and Quarterfield elementary schools, and a new Center of Applied Technology – North.

Thomas Edison once proclaimed that “Most people miss opportunity because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.” Ladies and gentlemen, I am incredibly proud that in my 14 years with Anne Arundel County Public Schools and the last six as your superintendent, we have never – ever – been afraid to do the hard work.

Despite difficult times and adversities, we have forged ahead for a cadre of children whose number continues to grow each year. We have never been content to be stagnant, for to do so would rob our children of opportunities they deserve.

Instead, we have continued to create those opportunities and to support them with an intentionality that allows us to impact our children in ways that help them achieve their full potential. I stand here tonight challenging us to continue on that path, and I look forward to working collaboratively with all of you in the coming months to do just that.

Thank you.