

Introduction

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Board. This evening I present our Bedford County Public Schools Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposal. I appreciate that each of you provided us individual budget input, and as you know, we also went to great lengths to gather input from parents, teachers, support staff, principals, as well as others in our community. We also spent about a year gathering input from even more school and community groups about the future direction of our school division, culminating in your adoption of a revised strategic plan in November and setting the stage for future budgets that clearly support strategic goals and actions that our community has identified as priorities.

We have a revised mission, Empowering Learners for Future Success, which has compelled us to rethink and redesign our Industrial Age model of education, so that our learners can be prepared for the jobs of their futures instead of the jobs of our past. With that thought in mind, let me start by sharing some budget highlights that are specifically targeted at preparing learners for future careers.

Decreasing Class Sizes and Increasing Program Offerings

First and foremost, we need to modify our staffing standards so that our learners have the best possible chances for success. If you recall, this time last year I proposed reducing teacher staffing standards for elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools, to Fiscal Year 2014 levels over a period of three years. With limited resources available, we were unable to make any of that happen in the final budget, yet the need to improve class sizes and program offerings has remained. In the Fiscal Year 2018 budget, I am proposing a similar comprehensive reduction over the next two years in teacher staffing standards at the elementary school, middle school, and high school levels. Additionally, I am recommending a series of targeted support to schools through our staffing standards in key areas of need including middle school aides, elementary art, music, and physical education teachers, instructional technology resource teachers, and school nurses, as well as strengthening counseling support at Bedford Science & Technology Center and the Alternative Education Center.

Many of us have heard from parents and teachers about the challenges of elementary class sizes during the past several years, as well as challenges at the middle and high school levels with class sizes and limited program offerings. Though recently we have heard a strong plea from one segment of our community about the need for an agriculture program at Bedford Middle School, which this proposed budget does support; that program is merely one example of the limitations that all of our middle and high schools have faced over the past several years in offering career and technical education programs, expanded dual enrollment and early college opportunities, career

internship experiences, fine arts programs, and other elective offerings that our learners will need to adequately prepare for successful careers after graduation.

School Facilities: Maintenance and Capital Projects

Though restoring teachers and other school support positions is arguably our most pressing need, it is not the only focus of our long range planning or this proposed budget. Yes, we need great teachers, smaller class sizes, and more program offerings, but we also need to be more proactive in addressing the many maintenance and capital improvement challenges with our current school facilities. Let me start by thanking the School Board and the County Board of Supervisors for working together to support the construction of Liberty Middle School, the new competition gymnasium at Liberty High School, and new tracks at all three of our high school campuses. Not only are these projects necessary, but they also represent our collective commitment to our learners and our community, and I hope that we can all be proud of these projects after they have been completed.

I wish that the significant investment we are making into these projects was sufficient to meet all of our short-term and long-term needs, but as we learned from our facilities study in December, we are really just getting started. Looking forward into Fiscal Year 2018, we are planning an estimated \$3 million of projects selected from among the highest priority items in the facility study that include security camera upgrades, roof replacements, HVAC systems, flooring replacements, repaving of parking lots, as well as the long awaited elevator project at Staunton River Middle School. We feel confident that we can complete the majority if not all of these projects next year with existing funds and the savings we expect to realize from the Liberty Middle School and Liberty High Gymnasium projects. We also look forward to working with Bedford County later this spring and summer to integrate the long list of remaining maintenance projects identified in the facility study into the County's long range Capital Improvement Plan.

Teacher and Support Staff Compensation

As we consider major investments for smaller class sizes, increased program offerings, and maintaining school facilities, I hope we all remember that none of those investments will make a major difference without the commitment and dedication of our amazing teachers and support staff. Last year we conducted a third-party salary study, and we learned that we have a long way to go to restore our compensation to regionally competitive levels. Although our employees certainly deserve immediate implementation of the salary study recommendations, I am proposing that we address our salary shortfalls over the next two years, just as we are proposing for our teacher staffing standards. While there are a multitude of ways to phase in a two-year salary adjustment, I am proposing that in this first year we start by implementing the new recommended pay scales, bringing all employees to the minimum on those scales,

instituting a step increase across the new scales, and then begin to address salary compression issues for those who have been stuck on the same pay level since step increases were frozen almost ten years ago. Make no mistake, following this recommendation will commit us to providing step increases annually, and our hope would be that in Fiscal Year 2019 we would be able to fully correct salary compression issues while also providing a step increase.

As I mentioned earlier, we were all grateful that Bedford County has been so supportive of the construction of the new Liberty Middle School, Liberty High School Gymnasium, and tracks for all three high schools. In addition, the County should be commended for appropriating local funding to restore lost state aid for a 2% salary increase for teachers and support staff in the current budget. Bedford County is blessed with financial resources, and I commend the members of the Board of Supervisors for assisting school division employees this year, as well as making a significant and long overdue investment in salaries for County staff. Now that those salary adjustments have been implemented, I am optimistic that the County will provide a comparable level of investment in the salaries of teachers and other school division employees over the next two years. In addition to the local investment required, our ability to make this salary study adjustment happen in just two years will be aided by favorable reserves and projections in our health care fund, and at this point we do not anticipate increasing any health, dental, or vision premiums for Fiscal Year 2018. We are also anxiously awaiting updated details about the potential state health care plan, and we are hopeful that such a plan could further improve our employee health benefits starting in July 2018.

Personalized Learning and Innovative Practices

Without question, implementing the salary study, adjusting staffing standards, and maintaining our school facilities represent the largest investments included in this Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposal. However, the budget also continues to reflect our commitment to personalized learning and other innovative practices that empower our learners for future success. Three years ago we introduced internal personalized learning grants into our budget, with the idea that our teachers would be more likely to innovate through personalized learning if they could be supported through technologies and other materials that the regular budget simply couldn't provide. Many of our early grant winners became the pioneers of the three school-level personalized learning pilot programs that we currently operate, while others have continued to expand innovative practices in their own classrooms, departments, or grade levels. The feedback we are receiving from staff across the school division is that we need to expand our pilots, expand our internal grants, increase teacher training opportunities, and simply provide more student devices, all of which are reflected in our revised strategic plan. Tonight I am pleased to report that our Fiscal Year 2018 budget supports all of these items, and that we can make all of this happen with only a modest investment of new funding.

Providing devices for all students, or going “1:1” as it is frequently termed, is made possible by the infrastructure work that has been completed to date, along with the remaining infrastructure work that is scheduled this spring. Our improved technology infrastructure will provide the bandwidth required to support all of the new devices and allow us to redirect technology resources to purchase, repair, and replace student devices on a continuous cycle. Following our model of providing technology to support innovative practices, we plan to begin the initial large-scale deployments of student devices next school year at our three personalized learning pilot schools, then we plan to expand the 1:1 deployment to all middle and high school students during the next several years. Since our comprehensive 1:1 deployment plan will take several years and because it currently does not include all elementary schools, I am proposing that we expand the existing personalized learning grant program, so that all teachers interested in personalized learning will still have an opportunity to obtain technology and other support for their innovative practices. In order to make a 1:1 deployment successful, we will also need to increase support for servicing and repairing devices through a combination of full-time staff and student computer repair teams, while simultaneously providing more personalized learning training opportunities and embedded school-level support for teachers. Like the 1:1 deployment itself, growing our computer repair and personalized learning teacher training capacities will be a multiple-year endeavor, and a necessary component of this transformation for our school division.

Conclusion

I know that changing our education system will not be easy, but I am encouraged by many of the innovative practices that have already emerged in our schools. I also believe that for this innovation and transformation to grow and continue, those of us in traditional leadership positions must continue to place greater trust and autonomy in our teachers and other staff. Our roles as school division leaders are changing from being experts that drive the change process, to supporters of the change process that our teachers are creating. Empowering learners for their future success starts with us, and I am excited at what the future holds for Bedford County Public Schools. I also look forward to working together with you and our Bedford County colleagues to discuss this budget proposal in greater detail, as we work together to make the best decisions for our students, their families, and our community.

Thank You