

# HANOVER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Michael B. Gill, Ed. D.  
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear School Board Members,

I am pleased to present the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget for your consideration. Over the past three years, we have truly demonstrated the strength of our community. This strength has been shown through the trust of our families in supporting us as the only school division in Virginia to return to school in-person for five days a week in 2020-21 at all grade levels, while simultaneously offering a comprehensive online school, and through the dedication and talent of our faculty and staff in supporting our resilient students over the course of several challenging school years. This was also made possible through the strong, unwavering, and longstanding support of our many community and business partners, volunteers, county leaders, and our broader community who are vital to our continued success. As I have often remarked, our schools are a direct reflection of the community we serve, and our community is strong.

Working closely with our partners in Hanover County Administration and the Board of Supervisors, we have been deliberate in exhibiting our commitment to our students and staff since the onset of the pandemic and beyond while maintaining our devotion to fiscal responsibility. It is with this mindset and gratitude that I am proud to share with you another exciting and optimistic budget proposal.

This budget continues to place our highest priority on meeting our students' unique, complex and evolving needs while investing in our amazing team of talented teachers and staff. Specifically for our faculty and staff, it brings me pleasure to say that this budget includes not only a substantive compensation increase for all employees, but also funding to fully cover rising health care premiums, salary enhancements for specific job families, increased stipends, and more.

I am confident that this budget continues to uphold the Tradition of Excellence we pride ourselves on in Hanover County while placing the highest priority on caring for and supporting our students, families, faculty, and staff.

The key highlights of this budget are as follows:

- 5% salary increase for all employees
- Salary enhancements and decompression for targeted job families to further improve starting salaries, pay equity, and regional competitiveness
- Funding to cover 100% of increasing health care premiums for Calendar Year 2023
- Increased stipends for teacher mentors
- A new financial incentive for career switchers who want to become teachers to reward relevant work experience
- Continuation of \$15 per hour minimum pay rate for all employees
- Increased substitute teacher pay rate
- Funding to continue four clinical social worker positions to support student mental health needs in partnership with Hanover Community Services Board (in the event that state grant funding does not continue)
- 13 additional special education teachers to support increasing enrollment and the ever-growing and extensive needs of our students
- Staffing to support our youngest learners with special education needs in an inclusive learning environment

- Two additional English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers
- Local funding to continue providing positions and resources to our staff and students that were originally funded by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), including:
  - Eight elementary resource teachers
  - Five school social workers
  - Four health assistants
  - Hanover County Online School
  - Paperless Human Resources onboarding software
  - Funding for Google for Education Plus Licensing
- Advancing the schedule for replacing Battlefield Park Elementary, Washington-Henry Elementary, and a campus-style elementary school, as well as renovating Beaverdam Elementary

This budget represents the exhaustive efforts of many who are passionate about ensuring Hanover County Public Schools (HCPS) remains exceptional, and I am grateful for their valuable contributions. This process involved engaging both internal and external stakeholders to include employees, administrators, parents, various employee and community advisory committees, School Board members, and County staff. This budget proposal continues to reflect the strong support of our local funding partners who continue to make education a top priority in Hanover County and enables HCPS to remain a leader in public education.

Fiscal Year 2024 represents the second year of the state's biennial (two-year) budget. The Governor's proposed budget, which was released in mid-December, includes technical updates based on enrollment, increased sales tax and Virginia Lottery proceed entitlements based on updated projections, continuation of the planned 5% pay increase for Standards of Quality (SOQ)-funded positions, and funding for several new initiatives related to teacher performance and recruitment incentives. As a result of these changes and an anticipated increase in student enrollment, we are expecting approximately \$7.98 million in additional funding from the Commonwealth. As you know, the General Assembly convened on Wednesday, January 11 and will consider the Governor's proposed amendments to the biennial budget. My team will closely monitor any educational policy adjustments throughout the legislative session for any potential fiscal impacts that we may need to consider.

To say that I am proud of our faculty and staff for the tremendous amount of support they have provided to our students and their families since the onset of the pandemic nearly three years ago would be an understatement. They continue to go above and beyond and are worthy of more praise than I or anyone else can ever express. We remain deeply committed to caring for those who care for our students. This budget once again reflects that commitment, building on the investments in our most recent budgets that show our gratitude and appreciation for our employees at all levels.

I am proposing a 5% salary increase for all employees in Fiscal Year 2024. Additionally, as was the case in calendar year 2022, HCPS will be covering 100% of the increase in health insurance premiums for calendar year 2023 for employees. We will continue to offer a \$15 per hour minimum pay rate for all employees. This is in addition to our most recent budgets, which provided at least a 5% salary increase – and up to 7% with longevity payments – for all employees in our current fiscal year and at least a 2.5% salary increase for all employees in Fiscal Year 2022. That budget also provided teachers a 4.5% pay increase while enhancing our salary scale to create at least a \$350 differential between each step on the teacher salary scale as well. If adopted, this latest salary increase would amount to at least a 12.5% and up to a 16.5% increase for all employees since the 2020-21 school year.

In addition to these notable compensation increases and benefits over the past several years, within the Governor's proposed budget are proposals for staff retention incentives and pay for performance bonuses to teachers. While these proposals still require support and approval of the General Assembly, there is the possibility that additional funding above and beyond my proposed budget may be available throughout the finalization of the state budget in support of HCPS teachers and staff. Again, we will monitor these developments and keep you apprised of any changes to this proposed budget that may be necessary.

We recognize the significant and tireless effort that has been required of our educators over the past three years and are forever grateful for their service to our students and families. Undeniably, they have risen to the occasion time and again, forever making a difference in our students' lives and supporting their needs through the most challenging period in our lifetime. Whether it is through our salary increases, bonuses, salary decompression, referral incentives, adding more assigned substitute teachers, paying staff members for covering another class, using our PREP employees (retirees) to provide more coverage for unfilled substitute positions, and more, we have been committed to addressing the challenges our staff have faced. We know that providing this relief allows our teachers and support staff to better serve our students and families, and we will continue to explore new ways of providing this support as needs inevitably evolve.

In this budget, I am also proposing targeted salary enhancements for several employee groups (also known as job families) as part of our ongoing efforts to help address growing recruitment and retention challenges. For our instructional assistants, there is funding in the proposed budget to decompress and differentiate pay to further support our instructional assistants who serve special education students. There is also funding to adjust salaries for senior teachers, assistant principals, student activity directors, coordinators, curriculum specialists, finance staff, human resources employees, maintenance, social workers, psychologists, technology staff, and transportation support employees. This is the fourth phase of salary adjustments for job families, meaning that, should this be adopted, every position within HCPS will have been reviewed and adjusted (if necessary) to provide pay rates that are more in line with the current and highly competitive job market. In addition, I am proposing to increase our daily substitute teacher rate from \$108 to \$135 per day. This would provide differentiation in the daily rates for substitute teachers and substitute instructional assistants.

Not only do we firmly believe in investing in our staff via salary increases, we are equally committed to recruiting and retaining the very best talent. In this proposed budget, I have included increased stipends (\$225 to \$500) for our teacher mentors who help our new educators navigate their first years of teaching. In the current budget, you approved funding for the launch of the Provisional Academy for Teachers in Hanover (PATH), a first-of-its-kind program to support educators with provisional teaching licenses. This program, which has garnered much acclaim and attention throughout the state, is a testament to our commitment to supporting our new employees in innovative ways. To that end, included in this proposed budget is a new supplement for those who change careers to become teachers, giving them credit for their invaluable work-related experiences.

For years we have been committed to taking a holistic approach to serving the complex, unique, and ever-evolving needs of our students – academically, socially, physically, mentally, and emotionally – to help ensure every child reaches their fullest potential. We have been leaders in this area, becoming in 2018-19 the first school division in Virginia to form a Mental Health Task Force. This initiative arose to address the needs of concerning data trends we saw related to students' mental health, a disturbing trend that is pervasive across our country. The data is only growing more concerning and we continue to address the issue. This year, for example, we added five new school counselors and an additional school psychologist.

Our county's school-based mental health services program with the Hanover County Community Services Board has also been recognized for its exceptional work. While grant funding for the continuation of part of this partnership remains a possibility, these positions have proven to be indispensable to helping us to address this critical issue and I have included funding in the budget to continue the four clinical social workers that we added to our schools this year should the grant funding not materialize.

Our school division has a proud track record of serving students with disabilities, leading families to seek HCPS out as they search for the best options for their children. Across our school division, we have seen not only an increase in the number of students with disabilities (2,466 this school year compared with 2,376 last year), but also an increasing number of students requiring intensive special education services. For example, we are projecting a 12% increase (136 to 152) next year in the number of students who will require instruction from a teacher endorsed in adapted curriculum. Additionally, we are projecting a 37% increase (84 to 115) next year in the number of students

with autism who require more intensive behavioral and communication services from a teacher endorsed in adapted curriculum. Accordingly, I am proposing that we add 13 new special education teachers. This proposed budget also includes staffing to support our youngest learners with special education needs in an inclusive preschool environment. In addition to helping to meet the growing needs among this population of students, these additional positions would help us to ensure that we remain compliant with state and federal requirements, specifically as it relates to caseloads, for students with disabilities.

I am also proposing that we add two new English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers to help support our ever-growing enrollment of English Learner students. We have 625 English Learner students in our schools this year – nearly double the enrollment in 2016-17 and more than three times the English Learner enrollment in our schools just 10 years ago. I fully anticipate this trend will continue.

Additionally, I have included local funding for Google for Education Plus Licensing, a behind-the-scenes upgrade that will benefit our students and staff. As you know, starting in the 2020-21 school year, all of our students have Chromebooks, supporting our continued emphasis on strong blended learning. This licensing would allow for increased storage as we quickly approach our storage limits provided in the free edition as well as greater video conferencing in Google, creating greater synergy in our hardware and software.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our students, families, and staff is undeniable, and its effects will be realized for many years to come. While I believe our comprehensive instructional plans have been exceptionally strong and well-executed by our staff throughout the pandemic, we are clearly not immune from the realities of unfinished learning. With an influx of federal funding in response to the pandemic, we have intentionally allocated those resources to best meet the increased needs of our students and staff. These new positions, programs, and more have significantly helped us during one of the most challenging periods we have experienced together in public education. While supporting our students and staff in the moment, we have also been committed to sustainability.

We have seen the tremendous value that the positions and resources funded through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) have brought to our schools, directly supporting the new realities of greater need among our students and staff. In this budget, I am proposing that, as it relates to positions currently funded through ESSER, we continue, with local funding, eight elementary school resource teachers to allow for additional planning time for our educators, five school social workers to address student absences and students' Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), and four health assistants to serve our students' growing health needs as our clinics see an increased number of visits and a greater number of students with chronic health conditions.

Additionally, I have included local funding in this budget for the continuation of the Hanover County Online School and our paperless employee onboarding software (NeoGov) that are currently funded by ESSER. Again, these positions and resources have proved essential to our operations and I believe that they support our efforts to serve the new realities faced by our students and staff.

Also included is a plan to continue to use ESSER funding to compensate staff members who cover other classes during their planning period and to have assigned substitutes in our schools to help address the ongoing shortage of substitutes.

Not only does this proposed budget invest in our students and staff, it instills a renewed commitment to the future of our school buildings – centerpieces of our community that ensure our students and staff have safe, innovative, and inspiring learning environments that will serve generations to come. In addition to the operating budget, the proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) represents an investment of more than \$198 million over the next five years.

There is palpable excitement in our county with the construction project to consolidate Henry Clay and John M. Gandy elementary schools, the first school constructed in Hanover since 2008. I am pleased to share that based on conversations with our partners in County Administration, who have indicated that funding in the CIP will be available earlier than anticipated, I am proposing that we advance the schedule for replacing Battlefield Park Elementary School

into Fiscal Year 2024 (from Fiscal Year 2025) and for replacing Washington-Henry Elementary School into Fiscal Year 2025 (from Fiscal Year 2027). Additionally, I am proposing to advance the schedule for renovating Beaverdam Elementary School into Fiscal Year 2024 (from Fiscal Year 2027).

As you may recall, funding for the replacement of a to-be-determined elementary school was included as part of the School Board's approved CIP in 2018. Later that year, School Board members learned through the results of a study requested by the Board that Battlefield Park, Henry Clay, John M. Gandy, and Washington-Henry were elementary schools in need of replacement. After touring the three schools identified in the independent study, the School Board announced its desire to consolidate Henry Clay and John M. Gandy elementary schools as a first step in the long-term capital planning process. That consolidation project is moving forward and remains on track to open for the 2024-25 school year.

While construction would not begin next year and students would remain in the current Battlefield Park and Washington-Henry buildings for the 2023-24 school year, this funding would allow initiation of the design process to replace these two schools while ensuring that their rich legacies are honored. For Beaverdam Elementary, we would begin the design process for this extensive renovation in Fiscal Year 2024.

In addition to these three schools, I am proposing that we add the replacement of a campus-style elementary school in Fiscal Year 2028. Additionally, while we are grateful for the action that the Board of Supervisors has taken with regard to a future replacement middle school and high school in the Mechanicsville area, we are still very much in the early planning stages of this project and I am not yet proposing to include funding in our CIP for that project within the five-year plan.

We remain proud of our efforts to provide a top-tier education and recognize that we must strategically build upon our current and past successes to ensure we remain exceptional in the future. This proposed budget invests in our students and staff, our community, long-term sustainability, and the buildings in which our longstanding Tradition of Excellence is made a reality. It upholds our promise to prepare all students to be successful and life-ready by teaching them to be empowered learners, responsible citizens, globally engaged communicators, and resilient individuals.

Thank you for your consideration of my proposed budget, as well as for your continued support of Hanover County Public Schools.

In education,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Gill".

Michael Gill, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools