

FairfaxCAPS Newsletter December 2009

Parent Advocate Patty Reed Wins Special Election for School Board Member for Providence District

On November 3, 2009 Fairfax County voters in the Providence District elected Patricia S. Reed (Patty) of Oakton to fill a vacant seat on the FCPS School Board. Reed was an early and active volunteer in FAIRGRADE. As such, improving School Board relations with parents, teachers and the public was a cornerstone of her campaign for School Board.

Reed said her election "is a win for all Providence District citizens. (My) message of accountability, transparency, innovation and improved community relations clearly resonated with parents, teachers and taxpayers. I will work to provide all stakeholders a more active, constructive, ongoing role in School Board decisions."

In her campaign, Reed said she will focus on protecting class sizes, getting kids and teachers out of trailers and asking tough questions about spending priorities for our schools. She thanked FairfaxCAPS for its endorsement during the campaign.

Reed has a longstanding record of involvement in many community groups ranging from the Girl Scouts to Vienna Youth Soccer to Friends of Oakton Library. In addition, she has volunteered in her children's schools as a tutor and teacher's aide. She also possesses 20 years of consulting experience managing contracts and budgets, which includes experience with public/private partnerships.

Patty Reed can be reached at patty.reed@fcps.edu.

Coming Soon: Special Election for School Board Member for Mason District

In other School Board news, School Board member for Mason District, Kaye Kory, won the election to the Virginia General Assembly as Delegate for the 38th District. A special election in January will be held to fill this Board seat. Further information will be posted at www.fairfaxcaps.org.

Highlights

- Parent Advocate Patty Reed Wins Providence District Special Election
- Special Election for School Board Member for Mason District
- Issue Update: Alternative to SOL Testing Artificially Inflates FCPS Adequate Yearly Progress
- New Grading Scale Modified 10-point scale
- FCPS Anticipates More Budget Cuts; Budget Meetings and Hearing Schedule for 2010 FairfaxCAPS Targets Administration Funding
- School Advocacy Helps You, and We Need Your Support
- How You Can Help

Issue Update: Alternative to SOL Testing Artificially Inflates FCPS Adequate Yearly Progress

The Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) is a collection of worksheets administered to selected children in the public school system throughout the school year. These worksheets are given to selected children *in lieu of* Standards of Learning (SOL) tests which is required under the No Child Left Behind federal mandate. While the stated purpose of VGLA is to test those children who have special needs or that are not proficient in the English language, an analysis of testing data by FairfaxCAPS shows that VGLA results artificially inflate Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB.

New Grading Scale

Effective with the 2009-2010 school year, FCPS adopted the following "modified 10-point" grading scale.

A (93-100) = 4.0
A- (90-92) = 3.7
B+ (87-89) = 3.3
B (83-86) = 3.0
B- (80-82) = 2.7
C+ (77-79) = 2.3
C (73-76) = 2.0
C- (70-72) = 1.7
D+ (67-69) = 1.3
D (64-66) = 1.0
F (below 64) = 0.0

In addition, high school students taking Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate courses will receive an additional 0.5 GPA weighting.

FairfaxCAPS would like to recognize and thank FAIRGRADE for driving this change through FCPS and the School Board.

Furthermore, the costs of administering and evaluating the portfolios are extensive. FCPS rented space at Dulles Expo Center for eight days in June 2009, and brought in 1,500 teachers to "grade" the portfolios of worksheets. The cost to FCPS just to audit the testing was \$972,856.

A full analysis of the VGLA testing results and its overall impact on FCPS' SOL pass rates is posted on FairfaxCAPS' web site at www.fairfaxcaps.org.

Press Coverage of VGLA Testing (links to articles are on www.fairfaxcaps.org)

Alternative test may inflate score gains

By Michael Alison Chandler, The Washington Post, November 19, 2009

Alternate assessments are better for educators than students

By Barbara Hollingsworth, Washington Examiner, September 29, 2009

Fairfax public schools officials cheat on test scores

By Barbara Hollingsworth, Washington Examiner, September 22, 2009

Alternative Testing on the Rise; Va. Expands Use of 'Portfolio' to Measure Learning of Challenged Students

By Michael Alison Chandler, The Washington Post, June 8, 2009

FCPS Anticipates More Budget Cuts; FairfaxCAPS Targets Administration Funding

Fairfax County Public Schools says that it "anticipates having to face a budget deficit of \$100 to \$200 million for FY 2011." As the annual budgeting cycle is set to begin in early January 2010, FCPS has been busy engaging in "community dialog." While FairfaxCAPS supports greater community involvement in FCPS decision-making, we remain concerned that the School Board and administration will treat this as an opportunity to send parents to lobby the Board of Supervisors for higher taxes and more funding. FairfaxCAPS is committed to fully analyzing the FY2011 Advertised Budget to

identify any and all budget cuts that can be made at central administration rather than in instruction and classrooms. FCPS has posted a list of potential program reduction or eliminations at <http://www.fcps.edu/news/fy2011/possiblecuts1119.pdf>.

Public Hearings and Meetings

January 7, 2010
Superintendent releases FY 2011
Proposed Budget.

January 25-26, 2010
School Board public hearings

February 4, 2010
School Board adopts FY 2011
Advertised Budget

April 6-8, 2010
County Board of Supervisors
(BOS) public hearings

May 11-12, 2010
School Board public hearings

May 20, 2010
School Board adopts FY 2011
Approved Budget

School Advocacy Helps You, and We Need Your Support

In only its second year of existence, FairfaxCAPS has established a reputation throughout Fairfax County as an independent and reliable source of information about Fairfax County Public Schools proposals, school performance and programs, budgets, and building plans. We provide parents, taxpayers, policymakers and others in the community with fact-based and balanced research and analysis. We advocate for openness and transparency in FCPS decision-making.

FairfaxCAPS Accomplishments in 2009

- Hosted a debate with candidates Sharon Bulova and Pat Herrity for the Board of Supervisors chairmanship – the first-ever between candidates focused exclusively on schools and education.
- Held an information open house meeting for parents on the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs, and high school pupil placement option.
- Performed a comprehensive financial and budgetary analysis of “Gatehouse II,” FCPS administration’s effort to purchase a second headquarters building; FairfaxCAPS educated the community and many representatives on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, which voted on February 23 to discontinue any consideration of the purchase.
- Participated in school board meeting and hearings to support parent-led initiatives including changes to grading scale and changes in high school start times.
- Uncovered FCPS’ escalating use of alternative testing to SOLs and its cost to taxpayers. FairfaxCAPS’ analysis showed that alternative testing assessments artificially inflated FCPS overall performance under No Child Left Behind.
- Analyzed candidates for the special election to the Providence District seat on the School Board, and endorsed parent-activist Patty Reed.
- FairfaxCAPS President Scott Chronister participated in the School Board’s “community dialog outreach” sessions in November. Plans and progress from the November work sessions remain to be seen.

Your contributions are needed to support our ongoing mission. Many of your friends and neighbors volunteer from 2 to 20 hours per week to support FairfaxCAPS research and advocacy efforts. Even though FairfaxCAPS is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization, our research, programs, and advocacy efforts do cost money.

How You Can Help

Contributions to FairfaxCAPS help cover the following types of activities:

- _____ \$200 Research data and material, including FOIA* requests
- _____ \$100 Parent and community meetings on school programs
- _____ \$50 E-mail and web information services
- _____ Other Newsletter printing

* FairfaxCAPS researchers have received notices from FCPS of fees from \$10 to thousands of dollars to fulfill requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Please make a secure online donation right now at www.fairfaxcaps.org or send a check to:

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