

AN UPDATE: LWFVA Schools Positions – Part 1

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Introduction: At the 2006 LWFVA annual meeting, the membership approved a study of the League's positions on schools for the purpose of reviewing and updating them to reflect the current situation in Fairfax County/City. Following unit discussions, members will be asked to concur with the revised positions recommended by the study committee and listed elsewhere in the Bulletin. The Board will consider suggestions from the units for changes in the recommendations. Due to the large number of schools positions, the study will be done in at least two parts. This first part covers topics and positions included in *Here We Stand* under the headings of Program; and Personnel Policies, Staffing/Classroom Management. The study will only cover topics that are addressed by the current positions, and due to space limitations, some topics will receive minimal attention.¹

Organization, Personnel, and School Services:

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), the 13th largest school system in the nation based on its enrollment of over 164,000 students, has a total of 239 schools and centers. Since the LWFVA last studied FCPS, its basic organizational structure has changed from four areas to three areas to the current eight clusters. Each cluster consists of approximately three adjacent high schools and their feeder middle and elementary school pyramids--resulting in close to 30 schools and/or centers per cluster. These clusters retain the responsibilities addressed by the League's current position, but the cluster offices are small and their task is to decide when a school is in trouble and negotiate with the central departments, such as the Department for Instructional Services, for the resources needed to address any problems. The clusters closely monitor student achievement data, but the measuring is done through the Department for Accountability. They also evaluate principals, monitor and assess school effectiveness, recommend training, respond to problems, and follow up parental questions. In effect, the shift to smaller clusters has brought administration closer to the school communities, reducing the span of control and enhancing communications, but has moved the service components to a higher, more centralized level.

A Note about Fairfax City: This study covers Fairfax City as well as County schools. Fairfax City contracts with FCPS for the management and operation of its schools (one high school, one middle school and two elementary schools). These schools are included in the cluster with Chantilly and Centreville high schools. There is good communication between the City and County. The City School Board oversees

the contract and the management of its facilities, and the City is invited to attend meetings to provide input, although it does not vote. Fairfax City provides extra funds for special programs, but otherwise its schools have the same programs, policies, class sizes, etc. as FCPS.^{2 3}

Principals⁴: Most educational research identifies the principal as the critical person in school performance. Many believe that this is particularly true in the wake of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Primarily due to retirements, the school system has had a high turnover in school-based administrators in recent years, including an almost 100 percent turnover in high school principals. Therefore, FCPS is actively striving to identify and develop educational leaders. Efforts include:

- "The Learning, Empowering, Assessing, and Developing (LEAD) Fairfax program, which promotes systemic reform of leadership to significantly improve learning for all students. Key components in this process are attracting, developing, and supporting leaders who (a) have the ability to influence the action of others; (b) are knowledgeable about research-based practices in curriculum, instruction and assessment; and (c) are capable of managing people and resources effectively." This program, with support from the Wallace Foundation, is now in its fifth year. The major focus is on 82 schools with the largest numbers of disadvantaged students.
- FCPS has also centralized staff training and development in a new Office of Professional Learning and Training. The school system provides its own in-service training, and works with the state colleges and universities.
- A relatively recent development has been the inclusion of parents in the selection of principals. This may increase the investment of the school community in the performance of the school leadership. It can also make it harder to move a principal, which may sometimes be a problem.

Teachers⁵: The recruitment of teachers for FCPS is influenced by national trends in the job market, state licensing requirements, and the salaries, benefits, and working environment in each school district. "The teacher shortage that is plaguing the educational system is prompting all school divisions in the area to offer higher salaries and incentives to attract a quality teaching staff," per FCPS budget documents.

The Washington Area Boards of Education compiled a comparison of teacher salaries in nine area school divisions. In FY 2007, Fairfax County had the highest salary for Step 1 & Bachelors Degree: \$42,400. Fairfax County's average teacher salary of \$62,638 was third highest, behind Arlington

County (\$69,156) and Montgomery County (\$66,611). Fairfax ranked sixth in salary for Step 9 & Masters Degree (\$58,067).⁶

The FY 2008 budget calls for 13,661.6 school-based teachers. FCPS teaching positions are highly sought after by qualified applicants. They like the location and the system's excellent reputation for staff development, according to the FCPS Recruitment Coordinator.⁷ All new teachers may take a course called Great Beginnings and are offered workshop sessions on organization and classroom management. All new teachers and teachers new to FCPS receive the assistance of a mentor during their first year. There is also a Smooth Transition program for teachers, featuring interest-free loans, apartment rental incentives, discounted Internet service, and moving assistance.

Annual contract teachers are evaluated each year until they receive continuing contract status. Continuing contract teachers are evaluated every third year. The evaluator is the program manager, principal, or his or her designee. The assessment and evaluation process offers professional growth opportunities, provides support, recognizes teaching performance that exceeds expectations, gives special assistance to teachers in need of improvement, provides intensive assistance to teachers with conditional reappoints, and identifies teachers not meeting expectations.⁸

Aides: All school levels use both paid and volunteer aides for a variety of services, including cafeteria, clinic, and instruction. The paid cafeteria aides are often assisted by parent volunteers, as are the school clinic aides, especially when needed to conduct required health screenings. The classes for special education and children with learning disabilities are provided aides based on the number of students served. In addition, each school is provided with paid instructional aides based on its enrollment; the school decides how to use the aide(s), with some schools choosing to assign the aides to the library, computer lab or to work with small groups. Parent volunteers are also used for these purposes. With the strong shift to the mainstreaming of special education students at all levels, the instructional aides have become critical to the process. FCPS employs nearly 2,800 instructional aides who are generally over-qualified, and some believe underpaid, for the positions.

Psychological and Counseling Services: FCPS employs more than 130 school psychologists. Of these, approximately 90 are assigned to schools in the general education program. The others evaluate preschool children at the Preschool Diagnostic Centers to determine their eligibility for special education services. At each school, alternative school and special education center, a psychologist works with students, parents and staff providing individual, group

and parent counseling, crisis and behavioral intervention, instructional consultation, assessment and evaluation of students suspected of having an educational disability, administrative case management for children with disabilities, healthcare promotion, and psychological evaluation. They serve as liaisons between schools and community-based service providers, e.g., mental health centers and courts.

Each elementary school has at least one full-time school counselor. Schools with higher student enrollments have additional counselors. The elementary school counseling and guidance program is a part of the total school program and complements learning in the classroom. The elementary school counselor also conducts guidance lessons; consults with parents, teachers, and other professionals; and coordinates student services in the school.

Secondary school counselors play a critical role in communication between students, parents, teachers and school administrators, a role played partly by classroom teachers in the elementary schools. They focus on maximizing student potential and coordinating student services in the school. A sequential series of guidance activities helps students to gain competence in the areas of educational, career and personal life planning and decision-making. These activities include providing FCPS course offerings and college and career planning materials, explaining graduation requirements, assisting in developing an academic and career plan, arranging and interpreting standardized testing, assisting in the college application process, helping identify personal strengths, interests, abilities, and aptitudes, and providing post secondary options websites that may be of interest.

Class Size and Management

Considering class size in education does not mean just reducing the number of pupils per teacher but finding appropriate class loads. Studies have shown that smaller class size results in greater achievement gains for students in the early grades, for those with lower academic ability, and for those who are economically or socially disadvantaged. Smaller classes improve pupil achievement because they allow teachers to spend more time with individual students. Class size also has a great influence on student attitudes, attention, interest, motivation and behavior.^{9 10}

In Virginia public schools, class sizes are governed by the Virginia Board of Education's Standards of Quality (SOQ). In 2006, the SOQ required that each school board: "assign licensed instructional personnel in a manner that produces division-wide ratios of students in average daily membership to full-time equivalent teaching positions, excluding special education teachers, principals, assistant principals, counselors, and librarians that are not greater than the following ratios: (i) 24 to one in kindergarten with no class being larger

than 29 students; if the average daily membership in any kindergarten class exceeds 24 pupils, a full-time teacher's aide shall be assigned to the class, (ii) 24 to one in grades one, two and three with no class being larger than 30 students, (iii) 25 to one in grades four through six with no class being larger than 35 students; and (iv) 24 to one in English classes in grades six through 12." It also requires full-time equivalent teaching positions of 21 to one in middle schools and high schools. All middle and high school teachers must have one planning period per day without any teaching or supervisory duties.¹¹

In Fairfax County, the annual schools budget sets the formulas for the staffing and provides a detailed breakdown of the requirements for each core (English, math, science, social studies, and foreign language) and non-core position and school level. There are weighted factors that take in account the needs of programs such as special education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). FCPS staffing standards must meet the minimum standards required by the Virginia SOQ, the Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia and Standards for Accreditation by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges. In 2007, the average division-wide elementary school ratio is 20.7 students for each teacher. Excluding kindergarten, when all teacher scale positions – resource teachers in special programs, librarians, guidance counselors, art, music, reading, physical education and English for speakers of other languages – are included, the division wide elementary school ratio is reduced to 12.8 students for each teacher. Each individual school decides how to assign the teaching personnel allotted to it.

The Fairfax formulas for staffing are intended to provide a fair way to distribute teaching positions and exceed the SOQ requirements. However, they don't take into account individual situations or instructional objectives except in the broad sense. Does teacher workload affect the quality of instruction? Factors such as the number of classes, the number of preparations, subjects taught, student diversity, non-teaching responsibilities (such as supervision of extracurricular activities), in-service obligations, and the impact of including special needs students in the regular classroom are the subjects of current research.

Studies have shown that in small classes, classroom management improves and there are fewer discipline problems. This is an ongoing concern of many teachers, and includes: 1) making sure that negative behaviors by students are not an ongoing situation; 2) ensuring that students feel socially and emotionally safe in class; and 3) helping all students participate in classroom interaction.^{12 13}

FCPS policy makes the educational employee responsible for maintaining order and control in the classroom through

effective teaching and leadership techniques and, in cases of minor infractions, through imposition of appropriate classroom discipline. Teachers cite the need for continuing administrative support and in-service training to change or adopt instructional methods appropriate to changing class size, to modifying student behavior, and to communicating with students' parents.

Programs and Special Populations

In its studies for over 50 years, the LWVFA has supported special programs and groupings of students to help them develop their potential at their own rate. The areas currently addressed by the positions are described below. One cross-cutting concern for all areas is the need for adequate numbers of qualified, well-trained teachers.

ESOL¹⁴: Since the current position was adopted, the name of the program was changed to ESOL or English for Speakers of Other Languages. When the program began in 1975 it had 275 students; by 1999 the enrollment had grown to 11,000. Today that number has reached over 21,000. Recently, the growth rate of students participating in all levels of ESOL programs has slowed. Factors contributing to this trend include the lack of affordable housing in the Fairfax area and visa program changes limiting the growth of the immigrant population in general.

In 2006-07, FCPS had ESOL programs in all but three elementary schools and all middle and high schools. The final three will be added in 2007-08. In addition, four transitional ESOL high schools provide instruction for older international students (Falls Church, Robert E. Lee, Annandale and South Lakes) and three alternative high schools (Bryant, Mountain View and Pimmit Hills).

At the elementary level, the schools use ESOL teachers in a variety of ways – forming "small-group" classes (formerly known as "pull-out"); providing in-class support by collaborating with the classroom teacher; and monitoring individual students by using specific materials and strategies to assist students in reading, writing, listening and speaking until they can exit the ESOL program.

At the secondary level, beginning students receive three periods of ESOL: one in science and social studies concepts and vocabulary and two in literature and language. They take other classes with their English-speaking peers. Intermediate proficiency level students have two ESOL periods, and advanced students receive one period of ESOL. The middle and high schools also receive some additional staffing to help students transition into their content classes (for example, co-teaching a biology class that has some intermediate ESOL students). All ESOL students receive grades in ESOL courses as well as their other courses.

ESOL Student Assessment: FCPS trains all ESOL teachers on comprehensive assessments of their students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing. A portfolio is maintained for each student demonstrating his/her progress. Once a student reaches the specific designations for exiting ESOL services, that portfolio is reviewed and signatures are gathered from the ESOL teacher, the language arts teacher, and principal. It is then submitted to the ESOL office for review and approval.

Other ESOL Programs: Fairfax County serves the pre-school population by providing an ESOL specialist on pre-school teams. The ESOL curriculum is infused into the regular preschool program. In addition, the schools promote programs for the parents of preschoolers. Dual Language Assessment teachers serve special needs students.

The Adult ESOL program offers English classes at several levels to foreign-born adults at 13 locations throughout the county. Businesses are offered the opportunity to conduct on-site classes for limited English-proficient employees and there are community-sponsored ESOL classes in community centers and churches throughout Fairfax. A Weekend Learning Lab (WELL) provides instruction at beginning and intermediate levels to small groups of students every Saturday at the Willston Multicultural Center.

Family and Early Childhood Education (Head Start):

Through the Head Start program, parents, other volunteers and community professionals work with school staff to provide comprehensive services to meet children's educational, health, nutritional, social and emotional needs—helping them develop the skills important to success in kindergarten. The program serves nearly 1,100 students, ages 3 through 5, in classrooms located in 52 schools. The students must meet federal and local income eligibility guidelines. Changes in the availability of low-income housing have resulted in a reduced number of eligible students at some sites, while population shifts have affected the space availability and wait lists in other schools. An Early Head Start program serves 24 children from birth to age 3 in a home-based option and 16 in a center-based option. The program addresses children's emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs.

Gifted and Talented (GT) Program: Programs are available for gifted and talented students, kindergarten through grade 12. The program includes both school-based programs at all schools, grades K-12, and full-time center programs for the highly academically gifted, for grades 3-8. In FY 2005, there were nearly 20,000 K-8 students served through school-based and center-based programs. The high schools offer Advanced Placement courses, the International Baccalaureate program, pre-IB, and honors courses in several subject areas.

School-based GT services in elementary and middle schools include K-2 response lessons, differentiated lessons for grades 3-6, and honors classes in the four core subject areas for middle school students. The center-based program for students in grades 3-8 offers a full-time challenging instructional program at 23 elementary school and 10 middle school centers. In addition, eight elementary schools in FY 2006 offered the GT center-based program for students in their schools.

To increase the number of students from historically under-represented populations receiving GT services, FCPS began a Young Scholars (YS) initiative 2001 in 12 schools. In 2007, YS was in 58 schools, and funds are in the 2008 budget to provide for an additional increase. In YS, students with gifted potential are nurtured through flexible grouping, summer school, and after school programs to raise their personal expectations and prepare themselves for more challenging courses. Middle school honors classes function as a continuum of services to support the Young Scholars identified in the elementary schools.

Sixteen of the 24 FCPS high and secondary schools offer the AP program that provides rigorous academic work in major subject fields, with course content designed at a college level. The IB program also provides a comprehensive rigorous coursework with an international perspective and is open to 11th and 12th grade students. It is offered at eight high/secondary schools. The Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, a regional governor's magnet school, offers a comprehensive college preparatory program emphasizing the sciences, mathematics, and technology.

Alternative School Programs¹⁵: FCPS has about 30 alternative school programs and participates in about 40 inter-agency school programs to meet the educational and emotional needs of its diverse student body. These are administered by the Office of Alternative School Programs. The goals for this office are to: 1) Improve test scores, passing SOL tests; 2) Increase community service and responsibility; 3) Increase enrollment in higher education; 4) Increase employment success during and after high school; 5) Keep students from dropping out; 6) Decrease serious discipline problems in schools. The majority of alternative school placements are not for behavior problems.

Students whose needs are served by alternative school programs include pregnant and parenting teens, older students returning to finish a high school diploma, serious discipline problems who would otherwise be expelled, students who are mentally disturbed and need hospitalization, those who are incarcerated in the Juvenile Detention Center or teens old enough to be in the adult detention center, and other students whose needs are best met outside the regular county

schools programs. The large number of programs gives a range of possibilities for meeting the needs of different students. Alternative school programs range in size from very small up to 450 students in an alternative high school. Some of the alternative programs for disruptive students are very short-term interventions such as time-out rooms. Eleven elementary schools, four middle schools, and five secondary or high schools have time-out rooms where students are expected to stay for an hour and to work on class work for the remainder of the period.

The FCPS Hearings Office is responsible for deciding to place students with discipline issues in an alternative school program. The number of students placed at any given time for disciplinary reasons may be a few over 1,000. The office attempts to fit the student to a program within the least restrictive environment that meets the student's needs.

Alternative High School Programs: The alternative high school programs enroll only students age 17 and above and offer credit courses leading to an FCPS diploma. Fewer than 15 percent of students in alternative high schools have any disciplinary record. These schools are designed to help students whose life circumstances could result or have resulted in an interruption in their education or in dropping out. This includes pregnant and parenting teens, older students who are finishing courses to complete a diploma, older ESOL students, students who may need a flexible or extended program due to family or work requirements, and occasionally students who want to accelerate their regular FCPS high school program. Students who have not graduated from high school have a right to an education until age 20. Those who have disabilities or ESOL students have a legal right to education until age 22.

Project Opportunity, at two of the alternative high school sites, provides classes to complete a high school diploma and training in marketable skills to pregnant and parenting teens of both sexes. Such services as counseling and parenting classes, mentoring, and in some cases day care assistance are provided. Interagency alternative schools are located at 24 sites and funded by other public agencies, three of them by state and federal grants. Each school is specifically designed to meet the needs of the host agency. Host agencies provide facilities, support staff, and utilities, while FCPS provides the teachers and educational program. The Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board hosts programs for students with alcohol and drug problems and serious mental health issues. Other programs are with the Virginia Department of Education, the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, and in the Boys and Girls Probation Houses.

Special Education (SPED):¹⁶ FCPS offers comprehensive educational and support services to students with disabilities,

from ages 2 through 21, in all elementary and high schools and 12 special education centers. [About 300 students with serious disabilities are placed outside the FCPS system by the Contract Services Program when there is no program that meets their needs within the FCPS system. There is an attempt to place them as close to home as possible, but some attend schools in other parts of Virginia or out of state.] SPED services are designed to (1) identify students with disabilities, (2) to meet the needs of all students with disabilities in accordance with the goals and objectives specified in their individualized education programs (IEPs) and (3) to assure that due process rights of parents, students, and staff members are met in all phases of program operation. Increasingly, services to SPED students are provided by school-based teachers using general education content and emphasizing literacy development.

In 2005-06, 2,950 FCPS teachers and over 2,000 other personnel provided comprehensive services to 23,685 special education students. Total expenditures on special education services were nearly \$321 million, or 16.8% of the FCPS operating budget for the year. For 2008, the FCPS budget projects that more than 42,000 special education services will be provided to the 23,700 students, 14.4% of total membership, at a total cost of \$371.3 million, or 17.1 percent of the total FCPS operating budget for the year.¹⁷

Special education services are determined by each student's IEP, which is developed by a team including school staff, parents, and at the secondary level, the student. Staffing for the provision of these services is based on ratios established by the School Board. Virginia has specific regulations governing the program.

Level 1 services are provided to students in primary or secondary disability service areas for less than 50 percent of the school day. Services are provided in a general education classroom setting or in a Level 2 classroom. If a student receives only Level 1 services, he or she is counted for FCPS membership purposes as a general education student.

Level 2 services are those provided to students in primary or secondary disability areas for 50 percent or more of the school day. These services may be provided in general education, special education, or center classrooms. Students receiving Level 2 services are reported as special education students for FCPS membership purposes. Preschool special education services are provided to students under the age of 5. These services may be provided either in a classroom setting or in the child's home.

SPED services are provided in many areas. Services for emotional disabilities and learning disabilities are grouped into Category A. Autism, mild retardation, moderate retardation, physical disabilities, noncategorical, and severe disabili-

ties services are grouped into Category B. The Commonwealth of Virginia mandates that special education be staffed according to ratios for each category/service provided at a site. Services are also provided for adaptive physical education, communication disorders, deaf and hard-of-hearing, integrated (assistive) technology, class-based preschool, preschool resource, preschool autism classes, therapy services (physical or occupational), visual impairment, and career and transition services.

A range of service options is available to implement each student's IEP in accordance with the principle of least restrictive environment. This refers to the setting determined by the IEP team to give the child as much contact as possible with typical age-appropriate peers while meeting the child's unique educational needs. Students often receive services in more than one setting. For example, a student may spend part of the day in a general education classroom and part of the day in a special education classroom. As a student's needs change, different educational environments may be appropriate. Overall, there has been an increased focus on student access to grade level curriculum and the participation of all students in grade level assessments, in addition to an emphasis on educating SPED students in the general education classroom.

Special Education Issues and Trends: The current issues in SPED include some that are long-standing as well as some of more recent concern. They include:

1. The 2008 projected per-student cost of providing special education services (\$20,343) continues to be significantly higher than for general education (\$11,388), with resultant budget implications. The federal government has agreed to provide 40 percent of additional cost but has never funded more than a fraction of this obligation.
2. There is a shortage of qualified teachers and the quality of the teaching and individual attention that many special education students receive can be quite variable. One result of this shortage is schools' heavy reliance on provisionally licensing SPED teachers for three years while they take SPED courses. Another is the continued emphasis on professional training and development for SPED teachers.
3. The paperwork load that must be prepared and filed for each special education student by each teacher can be onerous and time consuming. Special education teachers often have to choose between keeping up with the paperwork or giving more service to the students. Some teachers who try to do both well can burn out. Improved use of computer systems may offer solutions to this problem. It may also be that the best teachers are not always the best diagnosticians or educational program developers. Most schools rely on

teachers to write the lengthy IEPs for each student and make SPED teachers case managers for individual students. Many academics argue that the case manager model has serious weaknesses and that a better model should be developed.

4. The emphasis on mainstreaming special education students into regular general education classes with special education teacher support works well only if both teachers have time to plan together and can truly share the load of presenting the material and testing so that all students can understand the material and have a successful experience in the class. This does not always happen.

5. One result of the fact that **most** SPED students' test scores are included in making determinations of Annual Yearly Progress for NCLB is that schools are placing great emphasis on assisting highest-functioning SPED students in passing SOL tests. Teachers now must focus on instruction based on SOL content in core curriculum areas in addition to a traditional focus on life skills.

6. Increased public awareness of autism and possibly greater incidence of autism is leading to significant increase in the number of students eligible for autism services. Research proven methods for instructing children with autism rely heavily on one-on-one or one-on-a-few instruction, which is very expensive.

Summer School: Summer programs are available for students who will complete grades K-11 during the 2006-2007 school year. Summer programs include opportunities for students to strengthen the skills and knowledge required for the SOL tests. Classes will be offered at 21 elementary schools, five middle schools, and five high schools and are also designed to reinforce academic skills and improve achievement on SOL tests. Enrichment opportunities in academic areas are also available as well as extended day programs, camps, and online courses. Students who receive free and reduced cost lunches receive free or reduced summer school tuition.

Instructional Programs

The LWVFA has studied various programs of instruction over the years and currently has positions in these two areas:

Family Life Education:¹⁸ The Fairfax County Public Schools' Family Life Education (FLE) program was implemented by FCPS in 1990 in accordance with Virginia law (§22.1-207) and regulations, and reflects both state requirements and the values of the Fairfax community. It is "a K-12 program designed to provide students with age-appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills to make healthy, responsible, respectful, and life enhancing decisions related to human growth and development, sexuality, relationships, [and] men-

tal health." (Because of the opt-out provisions of FLE, the *state-required* alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD) program was recently moved to the regular health program.)

In accordance with state requirements, the FLE program is abstinence-based, includes a curriculum advisory committee that approves all objectives and materials, allows parents to opt-out their children from participation, and provides alternative lessons for students not attending the FLE lessons. Training is given to all teachers who provide instruction in Human Growth and Development, Personal and Community Health, Human Life Education (high school biology), and HIV/AIDS. Each school designates one employee as its FLE administrator, often an assistant principal. The advisory committee includes 10 teachers, three school-based administrators, 21 community members, and four students.

The FLE curriculum consists of two general parts: mental health in grades K - 10, and human sexuality in grades 5-12. The elementary FLE program is generally delivered by the regular classroom teacher and emphasizes the importance of families and friendships, distinction between good and bad touches, identification of common emergencies, etc. Human sexuality is introduced in the 5th grade Human Growth and Development unit, where students learn about male and female reproductive systems and the maturation process. Students are also taught that AIDS is a preventable disease. In grades 7 and 8, students are taught by health and physical education teachers and continue their study of human anatomy, physiology, the development of sexuality, and behaviors that put them at risk for substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). They are also taught that abstinence is the only way to guarantee prevention of pregnancy and STDs. Gender-separate instruction is provided for the Human Growth and Development lessons for the elementary and middle school students and self-exam units in high school.

In high school, 9th and 10th grade students participate in FLE through their biology, health and physical education classes. The state-required units on HIV/AIDS and ATOD for 11th and 12th grade classes are handled by history and government teachers in social studies, since they must be covered in classes that are required for graduation. The 12th grade students are also provided instruction in "The Family in Virginia Law" through their social studies classes.

Information about the program, including course descriptions and materials, and opt-out request forms are made available to parents through the FCPS website and in written form in seven languages. The materials are also available for community review at media centers in individual schools, the Technology Center and on the Red Apple Channel 21.

The negative reaction to the FLE program is now limited to occasional episodic complaints from individuals or parts of the community. These are most often associated with the introduction of program changes. The most recent major controversy (2005) was over the inclusion of contraceptive information in an abstinence-based program. The general opt-out rate for FLE has decreased over the years and now stands at 1.9 percent. However, the opt-out rate for the 5th and 10th grade classes in Human Sexuality is close to 2.5 percent.

Current issues and initiatives of the FLE program include:

- Timely and regular revision of the curriculum and materials to ensure that instruction is accurate, up-to-date, consistent with changes in state law and curricula, and reflective of best practices in FLE and changing community values and needs. Some units are more than 15 years old. Because of the need to align the FLE program with Virginia SOL revisions, especially those affecting graduation requirements, the most recent changes have been made in the middle and 9th and 10th grades. For example, the 9th grade mental health unit was revised to include information on Internet safety and exploitation.
- Providing needed teacher training in new ways. About 400 FLE teachers, including 320 elementary teachers, are trained each fall in groups of about 25. Teachers in grades 5 – 8 and 11 – 12 participate in a one-day training program, while 9th and 10th grade teachers attend a 10-week academy course in the evening.
- Other issues include the use of standardized opt-out lessons to ensure consistent quality and appropriateness of instruction and the production of modified and updated curricula for students with low-incidence disabilities (autism and mental retardation).

In 1997, the Virginia Board of Education voted to make the FLE program voluntary for school divisions, and a 1998 attempt by the General Assembly to restore it as a mandatory program was vetoed by then-Governor Gilmore.

Technical Education: The LWVFA last reported on technical education in Fairfax County in 1995. Since then, the school system has opened five academies that integrate academics, technology and career pathways for students interested in pursuing careers in international studies and business, engineering and scientific technology, health and human services or communications and the arts.

Advanced technical and specialized elective courses are offered to 11th and 12th- grade students. The academies and the programs they offer are: Chantilly (engineering and

scientific technology/health and human services; Edison and Marshall (engineering and scientific technology/international studies and business); Fairfax (communications and the arts); and West Potomac (communications and the arts/health and human services).

In addition, Falls Church High School offers academy courses in criminal justice and health technologies. This year, two new academy course offerings were introduced: Pharmacy Technician, at Chantilly and West Potomac Academies, and Landscape Architecture and Turf Management at Edison Academy.

Students enrolled in the programs are provided with opportunities to participate in shadowing, mentoring, and/or internships with local businesses. In addition to courses offered at the academies, specialized programs for students with particular interest are available at community-based locations and at single school sites. There are currently over 3,300 students enrolled in academy programs. In the past two years, total student enrollment increased by 13.4 percent. Before entering an academy, students take a core of standard career and technical education courses in middle school and high school. The academies provide students with opportunities and experiences that are not available in their base high schools. Many of the courses lead to certification, licensure, or college credit.

The efficiency of the academy model has been questioned and may change significantly as the "High Schools of the Future" initiative is further defined and developed. Its goal is to provide greater access for all students to advanced technical and highly specialized courses, while minimizing the loss of instructional time due to required travel.

New Programs, Innovations and Initiatives

Both innovations and initiatives are usually defined (and used interchangeably) as the introduction of something new, such as a new idea, program, or method. Although the FCPS budget for 2008 states that it does not fund any new programs, it continues funding for the continuation and expansion of initiatives of earlier years, such as full-day kindergartens, foreign language in the elementary schools, alternative schools, positive behavior support, 24-7 learning, and the Young Scholars program. There are cost savings initiatives (e.g., no new programs and not increasing base spending levels); the Initiative for Excellence for teacher salary enhancements, and the School Board's strategic governance initiative.

There is an ongoing concern that proven initiatives are not fully implemented throughout the system before something new is introduced and supported. Another concern is that innovations are more often introduced and implemented from

the top down rather than from the schools up. Several school principals noted that innovations could come from focus groups, faculty meetings, or other school-based sources, with interactions at all levels.¹⁹

One current initiative is "High Schools of the Future," which is a vision for the FCPS high school curriculum that includes the strategic location of, and access to specialized programs. Superintendent Jack Dale has noted its importance in ensuring that FCPS is able to make strategic decisions on where to locate high school programs and academies, which high schools should be grouped together for efficient transportation, and on identifying courses that might be offered as FCPS gains greater understanding of how to best prepare its graduates.²⁰

Endnotes and Sources:

¹ A significant portion of the information in this study was obtained through the FCPS web site: www.fcps.edu. This includes the 2008 budget documents. Individual attribution will not be provided.

² Included in a report of a discussion between Jeanne Agee and Janice Miller, Chair of the Fairfax City School Board.

³ Fairfax City web site: www.fairfaxva.gov.

⁴ This topic was discussed with Ann Monday, FCPS Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services and Jane Strauss, member of the Fairfax County School Board (Joanne Field).

⁵ FCPS Performance Assessment and Evaluation Handbook: A Resource for all Teacher-scale Employees, 2005, was a source for this section.

⁶ Washington Area Boards of Education WABE Guide, FY 2007.

⁷ Telephone conversation with Joyce Dantzer (Ginger Shea).

⁸ Ibid. FCPS Performance Assessment and Evaluation Handbook.

⁹ School Class Size: Research and Policy, by Gene Glass (<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICwebportal>)

¹⁰ Educational Issue Series – Class Sizes, WEAC – Wisconsin Education Association Council (www.weac.org/sage/research/classsize)

¹¹ Virginia Board of Education website (www.pen.k12.va.us)

¹² Ibid. Education Issue Series, WEAC.

¹³ "Teachers Want Training to Hone Instructional, Management Skills," *Virginia Journal of Education*, Dec 2006.

¹⁴ Information for this section was provided by the FCPS web site and Teddi Predaris, Director of the FCPS ESOL Office and (e-mail) with Keith Buchanan, Coordinator, FCPS Office of ESOL Services (Mary Valder)

¹⁵ Information was provided by the FCPS web site and Teresa Zutter, Director of the FCPS Alternative Schools program (Jane Hilder).

¹⁶ Information was obtained through the FCPS web site, including the Special Education Parents Handbook, and from the Report on Implementation of the 2005-06 Special Education Annual Plan by Fairfax County and discussions with special education instructors (Sheila School).

¹⁷ Latter figures provided by Mario Schiavo, FCPS Director of Budget Services, in an e-mail to Therese Martin.

¹⁸ Information was also obtained from Elizabeth Payne, FCPS K-12 Coordinator for Health and Physical Education (Therese Martin).

¹⁹ Discussions with Linda Haaj, Principal of Lake Anne Elementary School, and Bruce Butler, Principal of South Lakes High School (Barbara Beecy, Margo Sterling, and Nancy Larson).

²⁰ E-mail from Jack Dale to Therese Martin.