



January 17, 2024

Re: Public Hearing on 2024-2025 Budget

Speaker 1: Suzanne Elsberry

Good evening. I am Suzanne Elsberry, President of the League of Women Voters of Charlotte Mecklenburg. The League's Education Policy position centers around the belief that a quality public education must be afforded to all children. As such, highly qualified teachers are essential to that education; and teachers must be offered support and paid competitive salaries.

The League comes before you tonight to build upon the progress made in last year's budget. We applaud the County Manager and the Board of County Commissioners for being bold and having a vision of what is possible by both approving the CMS budget, as requested, and by voting to put an historic \$2.5 billion bond referendum on November's ballot. Voters took notice and supported your vision, approving the unprecedented spending by a wide margin.

At the same time, we'd like to acknowledge that the state has failed in their own obligation to provide adequate funding for public schools...therefore continuing to place the county in a tough position.

That said, we still see this as a time of tremendous optimism for our school district.

We live in a vibrant, growing community that believes in, and supports, public education.

We have a new superintendent who has a clear vision: Excellence without Exception, getting 1% better every day. She is taking decisive action to support qualified teachers and putting the people and procedures in place to support her Four Pillars of Excellence: Academic, People, Operations and Engagement.

We have a newly elected Board of Education offering fresh viewpoints yet still operating under Student Outcome Focused Governance goals, which provide specific and measurable targets for literacy, math, and post-secondary readiness.

Last year, 80% of the \$39 million increase in the CMS budget went to fund our greatest asset: our people. We agree with the County Manager, who said at the time, *"It is my hope that investing in employees will provide some stability to the system, allow CMS to attract and retain gifted employees, ensure that each classroom is led by an incredible teacher, and by doing so, academic achievement will improve, particularly for black and brown students."*

You have demonstrated your support to the students, teachers, families and the future of our county. You've also shown your commitment to your own goal of closing the achievement gap. As we approach this year's budget, there is still more to do to support our teachers.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on this very important issue.

Speaker 2: Carol Gray-Adler

Hello. My name is Carol Gray-Adler. In addition to being a league member, this is my tenth year as a literacy tutor in CMS schools.

The League believes that ensuring each classroom is led by an incredible teacher is still the goal. The unfortunate truth is that this is not the reality for many students in CMS.

We have a teacher shortage crisis in CMS.

As I watched last week's board meeting, Dr. Hill spoke to the biggest indicator of students meeting or exceeding expected learning growth is having a certified teacher in the classroom. This is especially true in upper grades and subjects like science and math. Yet there are many examples where schools struggle to staff classrooms, especially high poverty schools.

We cannot attract and don't retain our teachers at a high enough rate. And teacher pay is one reason.

Inadequate teacher salaries are a factor in teachers leaving the profession. Beginning salaries of teachers have been demonstrated to be a powerful predictor of teacher attrition. In NC it has been shown that new teachers, in the first 5 years, have double the attrition rate of teachers after 10 years.

Low pay is also a factor in the loss of new teacher candidates. Between 2012 and 2021 enrollment in teacher training programs in North Carolina dropped 35%.

The process of hiring new teachers and providing long-term substitutes adds to the cost of operations and reduces the quality of teaching. Short staffed schools create additional stress on the remaining teachers and staff, further fueling the cycle.

While Mecklenburg County provides higher supplements than surrounding counties, our CMS starting salary of \$46,300 with a Bachelor's degree is 80% of a starting CMPD officer's salary and less than 70% of an average college graduate salary with a business degree in Charlotte. The cost of living in Charlotte is also higher than many areas of the state. Even renting an average one-bedroom apartment is out of reach on the starting teachers' salary.

Research has concluded that increasing teacher pay improves teacher retention, advances student performance, and improves the quality of college graduates going into teaching. Now,

especially as the one-time federal ESSER funds are ending, is the time for additional county funding.

Clearly effective teachers get results. We need to attract and retain effective teachers.

Speaker 3: Sara Baysinger

Good evening. My name is Sara Baysinger. I am a League member and a parent of two recent graduates of CMS.

I come to you with two stories to bring a human face to what my colleagues have just outlined. First is the story of former CMS kindergarten teacher, Natalie Parmenter. After 10 years of teaching, Ms. Parmenter felt entirely discouraged. The joy she found in teaching had all but disappeared. Despite a wonderful administration at her school, her days were daunting. There was little in the way of support staff. Her workload spilled over not only into evenings and weekends, but also made it that she rarely had a planning period. And teacher pay had stalled out in North Carolina. A pay freeze for new teachers came the year she started teaching. North Carolina dispensed with Master's pay the following year. Then, longevity pay was eliminated. And though, in Ms. Parmenter's words, "It wasn't about the money," she needed to do something else. "All this time, I voted, advocated and participated to make change, but as I reached the 10-year anniversary of my career in teaching—earning less than \$52,000 and still another decade away from hitting \$60,000—I realized I needed to get myself out before this job took all of me," she said.

And though our community certainly cannot alleviate all the stress points that teachers feel; the one thing we can do is help validate their worth by providing them with adequate pay.

Second is a story that hits even closer to home for me. When my younger son was in the ninth grade, he spent a year in a teacherless math class. Just weeks into the school year, his teacher was due to go on maternity leave. As her leave approached, it was clear that despite the district, school and teacher's efforts to secure a long term substitute, none were available. For the remainder of the year, the students were required to learn on their own using the teacher's lesson plans. This is not what the district wanted, nor the school, nor the teacher. And it did not work for many of the students, including my son who struggles with learning challenges in the best of circumstances.

That same year, the district reported that of 9,000 teaching positions, 900 were left vacant. The teacher shortage crisis was mounting even then.

Speaker 4: Jeanne Smith

Good evening. My name is Jeanne Smith and I chair our local and state Education Teams.

Public education is the foundation of our successful society and key to future growth of Mecklenburg County. A good education goes beyond just preparing people for a job, but it also

prepares them to make a positive contribution to the community. This board has played a critical role in improving education in Charlotte Mecklenburg and we appreciate that.

However, the evidence shows that teacher salaries in Charlotte Mecklenburg are too low. This has implications for the long-term quality of public education in our county.

Non-competitive salaries will result in lower quality education for our students.

- Non-competitive salaries reduce the retention of our existing teachers. Experience matters for both better student achievement and attendance.
- Non-competitive salaries reduce the pipeline of new teachers - both in number and quality of students in undergraduate education programs.

We need to provide competitive salaries to ensure our teachers will have an adequate salary for a middle-class life in this county.

Good teachers must be given a compelling reason to stay in the Charlotte Mecklenburg schools.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.