

Remarks from the Education Association of Charles County to the CCBOE May Meeting.

Good Afternoon Chairperson Kreamer, Dr. Navarro, and Members of the Board of Education,

My name is Veronica Golden, EACC Vice President, and I am speaking on behalf of EACC.

Today, I am not here to speak only about budgets. I am here to speak about people, because behind every line in this budget is a child trying to learn, an educator trying to hold it all together, a family doing their best, and a school community carrying more than most will ever see.

Over the past month, our schools have recognized Assistant Principal Appreciation Week, Principal Appreciation Week, and Teacher Appreciation Week. Across Charles County, people paused to honor those who give their lives to public education.

And those moments matter.

Because our assistant principals and principals are not just administrators, they are crisis managers, mentors, mediators, and steady hands in moments of chaos. Our teachers and school staff are not just delivering instruction; they are counseling children, de-escalating crises, comforting students in distress, and showing up day after day even when the weight they carry extends far beyond their job description.

But appreciation cannot only exist in words, banners, or designated weeks on a calendar.

Real appreciation is measured in what we choose to fund, protect, and prioritize.

It is measured in whether schools are safe enough for students and staff to focus on learning, whether staffing is sufficient to meet needs, and whether educators can stay in this profession without being stretched beyond exhaustion.

And that brings me to one of the most urgent realities educators are facing: school safety.

Recently, our community was shaken by the discovery of loaded weapons at St. Charles High School. EACC recognizes and commends the student who had the courage to speak up, and the administrators, staff, and School Resource Officer who responded swiftly and professionally. Their actions may very well have prevented an unimaginable outcome.

But we cannot ignore what this moment reveals.

Across our district, educators are seeing a steady rise in serious safety concerns. In several middle schools, knives have already been discovered this year. Vaping and smoking inside school buildings have become increasingly common, and drug paraphernalia is being found on campus.

These are not isolated incidents. They are warning signs.

And in our elementary schools, educators are facing something deeply heartbreaking—more frequent and more intense aggressive behaviors among our youngest learners. Teachers and support staff are

being hit, kicked, bitten, threatened, and verbally abused while still trying to meet academic needs and support emotional development, all while maintaining safety for every child in the room.

No one enters this profession expecting this level of harm to be part of the work.

And yet, it is becoming part of the daily reality.

We must also acknowledge that educators are often working within systems that limit what they are able to do. State discipline policies, staffing shortages, and lack of resources leave schools trying to solve complex problems with insufficient tools.

But we cannot continue to place this burden on schools alone.

School safety does not begin at the school door.

It begins at home.

It begins in the conversations families have with children about empathy, accountability, respect, and consequences. It begins with teaching children how to regulate emotions, resolve conflict without harm, and understand the impact of their choices on others.

Because when students arrive at school already in crisis, already overwhelmed, already struggling without support, educators are left reacting instead of being able to intervene early and effectively.

And I say this not only as an advocate, but as a parent.

I am a parent of a first grader who struggles behaviorally. Every day, I work with his teachers to help him understand what it means to be safe, to keep others safe, and to respect the learning environment. I share this because I understand that this work is not easy for families either.

It is hard. It is emotional. And it is constant.

That is why the partnership between home and school is not optional. It is essential.

When educators reach out to families, it is not an act of blame. It is an act of care. It is an early intervention. It is a request to join together before small challenges become larger crises.

And those moments only work when there is trust, communication, and shared responsibility.

Educators will always do everything in their power for students. But they cannot do it alone.

And they were never meant to.

School safety, student success, and emotional well-being must be shared commitments between schools, families, communities, and policymakers.

Which brings us back to this budget.

Because safe schools are not created through goodwill alone.

They require investment in counselors and mental health supports, in staffing levels that make supervision and intervention possible, in behavioral supports and alternative pathways, in prevention

programs for vaping and substance use, and in retaining experienced educators who hold relationships that cannot be replaced.

Over the past several weeks, this community has shown exactly how much it values public education.

On April 29th, more than 130 EACC members attended the County budget hearing. Over 20 speakers, including students, stood up and shared their lived experiences. They spoke about overcrowded classrooms, mental health needs, school safety concerns, staffing shortages, and the growing pressures facing our schools.

They spoke with courage because this is not abstract. This is personal.

Since February, hundreds of emails, cards, and phone calls have been sent in support of our schools. That collective voice has made a difference.

When EACC first learned the Superintendent's proposed FY27 budget was only \$8 million over Maintenance of Effort, we raised immediate concerns because we knew what that would mean for schools already stretched thin. Because of advocacy, that proposal increased to approximately \$16 million over MOE.

That is meaningful progress.

And for that, we are grateful.

But we also know the work is not finished.

While the County Commissioners' proposed FY27 budget increases CCPS funding from \$12 million to \$13 million over MOE, reflecting EACC's continued advocacy, it still does not fully meet the needs identified in the budget request. It is progress, but it is not yet enough.

And every day that gap remains, educators continue to carry the weight.

They show up early.

They stay late.

They spend their own money to fill classroom needs.

They comfort students in crisis.

They de-escalate situations that most people will never see.

They pour themselves into children's lives in ways that cannot be measured on paper.

And still, they come back the next day.

Because they care deeply about their students.

But care alone is not a sustainable system.

On behalf of EACC, I am asking this Board to continue standing firmly with educators, students, and families.

Continue advocating to the County Commissioners for the funding our schools have identified as necessary.

Continue fighting for safe, stable learning environments.

Continue supporting investments that honor negotiated agreements, strengthen student services, and help retain the educators who make a difference every single day.

Because budgets are not just financial documents.

They are moral documents.

They reflect what we believe children deserve.

What we believe educators are worth.

And what kind of community we are choosing to be.

And if we truly believe in our children...

If we truly believe in public education...

If we truly believe in safety...

Then our actions, and our investments, must reflect that belief.

To every educator, administrator, student, family member, and community member who has spoken up, shown up, and stood up during this budget season, thank you.

And to this Board, thank you for your leadership, your time, and your continued commitment to the students and employees of Charles County Public Schools.

EACC will continue this work, because our students are worth it, our educators are worth it, and our future is worth it.

Thank you.