

Now that the Super Bowl is over, it's time for the next huge event – no, not March Madness, not the Olympics – that's right.... BUDGET SEASON!

I'm eager to hear the Superintendent's proposed budget tonight. I feel encouraged by the shared land acquisition plan between the School Board and Board of County Supervisors and by last year's supplemental budget, which showed the magnitude of the cost of reducing class sizes and overcrowding in hundreds of millions of dollars. However, more needs to be done to address these and a myriad of other critical unmet needs.

In researching WABE reports, I learned that Prince William County has ranked dead last in per-pupil spending compared to other Northern Virginia school systems. Not just this year. Not just last year. Not just the last 5 years. Prince William County has ranked dead last since FY 2003, which is as far back as I could find information for.

Our current per-pupil spending is \$11,222 per student.

Loudoun County's is \$13,688. -- If we were funded at this rate, there would be over \$200 million more per year in our budget.

Fairfax County's is \$14,767 per student. If we were funded at this rate, there would be over \$300 million more per year.

Maybe it's not realistic to be funded to the levels of Loudoun or Fairfax Counties at this time, but it's still appropriate to consider where we rank and the magnitude of the difference in funding with other school systems.

There are benefits to having a revenue sharing agreement with the BOCS. However, it does cause the school division budget to be shoehorned into the expected revenues from the 5-year plan tax rates.

What if, instead, the School Board used the revenue sharing agreement as a *floor*, not a ceiling, and budgeted around addressing critical needs instead of 'expected revenues'? The School Board has a great opportunity to drive the discussion for and make the case for additional funds beyond the revenue sharing agreement by giving specifics about how critical unmet needs would be addressed. This is the way budgets are done in other school divisions without revenue sharing agreements.

Rome wasn't built in a day, and obviously everything cannot be addressed in one budget cycle, but now is *not* the time to halt or slow efforts to address class sizes, overcrowding, and other needs. I'm proud to be both a graduate and an employee of Prince William County schools. While amazing things are happening in our schools every day, this opportunity must be seized by going bold (bowl-ed).