Public Schools: An Investment in Mediocrity

Madam Chairman, Members of the Board, Mr. Superintendent:

My name is Arthur Purves. I address you as president of the Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance.

The “One Fairfax” policy adopted by the Fairfax County supervisors and school board is a stunning admission that decades of strategies to end racial equality in public schools have been a failure. Also, SAT scores show that overall achievement is low. The average SAT score for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) seniors is at the 76th percentile. The average SAT score to get into the University of Virginia is at the 95th percentile; for Virginia Tech it is the 85th percentile. A lot of colleges accept students at or below the 76th percentile, but the four-year graduation rates of these colleges are less than 50 percent.

Years ago, as a Scoutmaster, I was helping an FCPS middle-school student prepare the menu for a campout. We had nine campers, and each would get ½ pound of hamburger. When I asked how much hamburger we had to buy he replied that he could not figure that out. My observation is that FCPS seniors do arithmetic at the 4th-grade level.

Low achievement of African-American and Hispanic students is evident in 4th-grade reading and math tests, because FCPS is not teaching reading and arithmetic correctly. This is because of the century-old adoption of John Dewey (different from the Dewey of the Dewey decimal system) “progressive education.” Dewey replaced phonics with “whole word,” which has created a nation of 14 million dyslexics. He opposed arithmetic drill, thereby creating a STEM crisis; and he replaced unbiased history with atheistic Social Studies, because he wanted schools to turn out Socialists.

“Progressive education” favors affluent white and Asian students, who learn phonics and arithmetic drill at home while discriminating against low-income predominately Hispanic and African American students, who do not have that advantage.

More money and staffing are not the solution. Since the first school board election in 1995, spending has increased from $1 billion to $3 billion, or $1 billion more than needed to keep up with enrollment and inflation. Staffing has increased from 17,000 to 25,000, or 3,000 more than needed to keep up with enrollment.

According to the dictionary, a racist is a person who discriminates against people of other races. The FCPS early elementary school curriculum discriminates against Hispanics and African-Americans and also has a negative effect on whites and Asians, which results in low achievement overall.

This can be fixed. Bring back phonics, arithmetic drill, and unbiased history in early elementary school. That would end racial inequality in the school system and would probably end racial inequality in society overall. Fixing the curriculum should be done
before FCPS receives any increase in funding. The Fairfax Education Association and the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers, who advocate for higher taxes, ignore low achievement and discrimination against African-Americans and Hispanics.

Investing in public schools is an investment in mediocrity and racial inequality.

Thank you.