

Dear Fayette County Public Schools Families:

As we close out our first week back to school, I wanted to reach out to share factual information about the proposed Comprehensive 10-Point Safety Investment Plan, which we introduced in July. Families are our partners in all that we do, so it's critical that I help answer any questions about the proposal and clear up the misinformation being shared by some members of our community.

After the tragic school shootings in Marshall County, Kentucky, and Parkland, Florida, last January and February, we established the Fayette County Public Schools District Safety Advisory Council to examine best practices in school safety and develop actionable recommendations to ensure that our children are safe at school, at home, and in the community. The council was comprised of 28 students, parents, educators, first responders, city officials, and business, faith and community leaders selected for their experience and expertise in the area of safety and emergency management. If you want to review their work, please click [here](#).

While the council was working, school safety issues continued to be top of mind across our nation and right here in Fayette County:

- After removing an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition from his bedroom, the Lexington Police arrested a student who had reportedly threatened violence at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School.
- In the span of just nine days, a student at Henry Clay High School was arrested for bringing a loaded gun to school, and a student at Frederick Douglass High School accidentally shot himself in class with a gun he had in his pocket.

In May the council released its recommendations, which were developed with input from hundreds of community members and drew upon the best thinking from across the state and nation. The white paper they produced outlines specific actions for lawmakers, schools and districts, families and students and the community at large.

The Comprehensive 10-point Safety Investment Plan, which is attached to this letter along with the answers to some frequently asked questions, is our response to the recommendations the council made for schools and districts and reflects the values of our families, students, employees and community. Each component of the plan addresses an existing need, not only to prevent a school shooting, but also to mitigate the other risks our students face including bullying, self-harm, suicide, drug use, online exploitation, trauma and community-based issues.

The 10 initiatives are designed to work in tandem to make our schools among the safest in the nation. They include placing a law enforcement officer in every school, hiring more mental health professionals to bring the per pupil ratio closer to national best practices, adding teams of security monitors in all middle and high schools, and addressing adolescent health in a comprehensive way by adding full time nurses in every middle and high school and special program, and contracting with University of Kentucky for follow up medical and mental health care.

The cost for the first year of implementation is \$13.5 million, with additional costs in subsequent years. The plan was developed so that as one-time investments are completed, those dollars cover full implementation of other expansion in the future.

For example, some of the recommendations for the first phase are one-time expenses, such as purchasing walk-through metal detectors for middle and high schools, adding alarms to all 1,700

possible entrances to our schools, constructing secure vestibules and installing cameras in schools without them, and reinforcing interior door security. Once those improvements are complete, those dollars will be used to implement phase two of the additional staffing needs for counselors, officers and nurses.

After considering other ways of funding these critical investments, the Fayette County Board of Education voted in July to approve a 5-cent property tax to pay for the safety plan. That will cost the average homeowner less than \$7.50 a month.

Please recall that in May, we cut more than \$4.4 million from the central office in order to protect our classrooms from a \$5.5 million reduction in state funding. In the past decade, Fayette County Public Schools has grown by more than 7,000 students, yet today there are fewer people working at the central office than there were in 2005.

Over the past three years, our district has also made a concerted effort to reduce administrative spending in order to hire more teachers for our most vulnerable students, provide training and support for new teachers, expand professional learning for experienced teachers and principals, add college and career coaches, invest in challenging reading and math materials for every classroom in every school, add supports for struggling schools and put the latest technology into the hands of our students.

We are seeing great gains from these initiatives. Unless we want to stop that progress or cut back on instruction, we need to fund these safety investments in a way that ensures there will never be a doubt our schools have the resources needed in the future.

That's why using our contingency fund is not a legitimate solution. State law requires school districts to set aside money for unexpected emergency expenses, like families have savings accounts. The existing contingency fund for Fayette County would cover less than six weeks' expenses.

Maintaining a contingency fund for emergencies also has resulted in an upgrade in the school district's bond rating, which saves taxpayer money when new schools are built. Draining that emergency account will not solve the problem long term and leaves students and families less certain about future investments in making our schools safe.

We have proposed hiring more than 200 additional mental health professionals, school nurses, law enforcement officers and security monitors. Those are recurring costs that cannot be funded by tightening here and there and should not be paid with contingency funds that can only be spent once. \$13.5 million is the equivalent of 207 teachers. Our children need teachers as much as they need law enforcement officers, nurses and mental health professionals.

We have already cut everywhere we can and prioritized spending on instruction. Our children deserve the best education we can provide in the safest environment possible. We have an opportunity at this moment in history to make a continuing investment that can only be used for school safety.

The time is now.

Your Partner,

Manny Caulk