

## Comments to the Board 5/3/2011

Jim Martin

First I am encouraged to hear discussion that some of you are considering action to rejoin the North Carolina School Boards Association. I highly encourage this action.

We understand that you have little control over the State budget. However, you do submit a budget to the County Commissioners. And I understand, as Chair Margiotta stated in his opening comments, you are not happy with the budget you are proposing. But rather than accepting an inadequate budget, I believe this should be your call to action.

Thus, I encourage you to change your budget request to the County Commissioners to a flat **per pupil** funding of our schools, rather than your proposed flat total budget request. As stated in this meeting's agenda, "With cost increases associated with growth in total enrollment, and operating costs associated with the opening of two additional schools, per pupil funding from the county appropriation will decline for a third consecutive year." It does not cost less to educate a student than it did three years ago. A growing county population should bring in revenue commensurate with growth, thus a flat per pupil request is completely reasonable.

In his recent visit to Durham, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan asked, "Great teachers, great principals, great districts, great states - why aren't we learning from them? Why aren't we shining a spotlight on them? Why aren't we giving them more resources? Why aren't we taking to scale what works?"

I ask the same question. Why as a school board are you asking for a cut at the same time that we know we need more not less teachers in classrooms? When we need more not less rigorous critical thinking opportunities and classes? Why as a State are we willing to sacrifice early intervention such as Smart Start?

We seem to act as though cuts in the short-term can be made up once the economy gets better. But for today's children, these are not short-term cuts. They are cuts that will have a lasting impact on their education and their lives.

On a recent study trip with several NC State students, I was struck when a leader of Smart Start reminded us that the class of 2014 will be the first class to have benefited from Smart Start and More at 4. Will that investment have paid off with respect to the achievement gap and graduation rates? We should soon be able to tell.

My point with this example is that both investment and cuts have long-term impacts. Historically in North Carolina we did not invest in education out of our wealth. We invested because of our knowledge that even a formerly poor State could advance by strategic investment. Investment in our children and youth. The challenges are no different today.