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Loudoun County School Board, Legislative, Audit and Policy Committee Meeting, Thursday, April 25, 2024

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- BoardDocs (School Board): <https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/Public>

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[00:02:21] Good afternoon. This is April Chandler calling to order the Legislative Audit and Policy Committee meeting for April 25th, 2024. We would normally begin with public comment, but seeing none, we'll move on. We are absolutely delighted today to welcome our Loudon delegation and to join us in this Legislative Audit and Policy Committee meeting, as well as the many members of the school board.

[00:02:49] We all appreciate having the opportunity to hear directly from each of you about the successes and challenges of the recent session and to learn more about the bills that we work together to champion in support of the students and staff of Loudoun County Public Schools.

[00:03:07] Today, we'll start with Chair Mansfield and Dr. Spence offering some brief comments before we'll hear from each important member of our delegation. And I would also like to take a moment to recognize our school board members who are in attendance.

[00:03:26] You'll see there's Chair Mansfield, Vice Chair Estreffi, Ms. Chernoff, Dr. Deans, Dr. Rasheed, and of course, Ms. Donahue. Oh, right, Ms. Donahue?

[00:03:46] Yep. Right. Thank you for taking this time to join us today, school board members. And please take the opportunity to note your questions, as we will have some time at the end of the meeting to ask questions of our esteemed delegation.

[00:04:09] And before I hand over the microphone to Chair Mansfield, I would like to say welcome back, Delegate Reeser, and say thank you for all of your hard work as a delegate and also as past chair of this committee. Delegate Reeser worked tirelessly to develop our Loudoun County School Board legislative program.

[00:04:30] some of which will be highlighted today. And congratulations also, Delia Reeser, on the passage of Adams Law. This is so important to our shared Algonquian community, and we also appreciate your work as the only Loudoun member of the K-12 subcommittee.

[00:04:47] Now, I'll hand the microphone over to Chair Mansfield. Thank you, Chair Chandler. Good afternoon to all of you. Thank you so much for being here, and thank you all so much for your support of Loudoun County Public Schools. Our partnership with our state delegation is so critically important to our success as a school division, so thank you for being our advocates in Richmond.

[00:05:10] I want to give a huge thank you to Senator Subranayam for coming and for your advocacy for our students while you served on the K-12 subcommittee in the House last year. We appreciate you carrying SB 187, a Loudoun County School Board priority, that would have DOE develop a plan for revised special education staffing requirement.

[00:05:35] That bill that has been rolled into Senator Lucas's large omnibus and is still awaiting for the governor's action. And I'm hoping that we will see movement as a result of your efforts. Thank you. And to Delegate Higgins, who was not all that long ago served in this very room as a school board member.

[00:05:52] Got a little picture. I think he's right there. Come see you later. Only yesterday. I thank you for your continued interest in public education and for bringing forward legislation this year related to school connected overdoses. We also appreciate your consideration of the bill's expansion to include community-wide reporting of overdoses. We can all agree that opioid access in our community is a significant issue that requires a collaborative, intentional response. We know

[00:06:29] that most juvenile overdoses in Loudoun County do not happen in our schools, which means that without expanded community-wide reporting, our parents and community would likely not know about them. And lastly, a special thank you to Delegate Martinez, who tirelessly advocated for the literacy audit bill. HB 211 would have required audits of education preparation programs. While the bill was continued to 2025, I'm confident that with help from our delegation in the community, we can get that passed next year. And now I would like to hand the mic over to our superintendent, Dr. Aaron

[00:07:05] Spence. Thank you, Madam Chair. And Ms. Chandler, thank you as well. And again, I would express the same thing on behalf of the administration, how pleased we are to be able to be with our delegation this afternoon in conversation about the ongoing session. And I would like to start by specifically thanking Delegate Trina Vassanen and Senator Perry for being great budget patrons and advocates for one of our top priorities, which was bringing funding and authorization for a recovery school of Loudoun County. And I'm very pleased and want to praise your staff from both offices as you were

[00:07:43] working that funding through the legislature. Just a quick update in terms of where we are based on our understanding of that funding. We are first and foremost extremely grateful for the consideration and want to be clear in here with the delegation that the funding we received is going to allow us to support a planning year in 24-25. So we're not going to be able to open a building with that

funding, but what we will be able to do is further develop a very comprehensive program to include a curriculum, identified resource materials, figure out the scheduling and other logistics to include the space where we would put the building.

[00:08:19] So we look forward to a productive planning year and keeping our delegation informed both as required in the funding mechanism, but also just through our conversations. And we certainly look forward to continuing to partner with the Loudoun County delegation to keep this priority and need at the forefront of our continued work together.

[00:08:38] Also, if you'll indulge me, I'd like to just talk a little bit about our priorities as you head towards the budget special session. And here are a few things that we're thinking about. First and foremost, we are really hopeful that we can quickly get to a resolution on the budget, that the General Assembly and the governor can quickly get to a resolution on the budget.

[00:08:57] As you know, that does impact our funding and our planning as we head into the new school year. and so we're hopeful for productive conversations there. One area that the governor and General Assembly both have shown a commitment to is teacher salaries, and both budget proposals provided funding for teachers at a 3% pay increase next year.

[00:09:16] That is sorely needed for the division to continue to recruit and retain the highest caliber teachers in the state. In contrast, restoration of payments in lieu of the grocery sales tax removal is very important to LCPS, although I don't speak for them directly, know that we have also heard it's important to our Board of Supervisors. As a reminder, the state did eliminate the sales tax on grocery and personal hygiene products effective January 1st, 2023, and concurrent to that, recognizing the negative impact this would have on schools, the state also committed to providing payments in lieu of the sales tax that would have been collected had it not been eliminated. The General Assembly budget

[00:09:56] included funding to continue the payments, those in lieu payments, and we're very grateful for that and grateful for our delegation support but the governor's budget does not include that and we want to advocate for the inclusion of that in the budget an estimated 9.6 million dollars of state funding is in jeopardy and if it's not received lcps would need to engage in discussions with the county to fill that gap in our budget so with those as our as our budget priorities as you head into the the next session or the special session we would just say again thank you for all of your work on behalf of Loudoun County Public Schools and your willingness to remain

[00:10:33] in constant contact with us as we've talked about the various issues that we've been facing together. And with that, Ms. Chandler, I'll turn it back to you. Thank you, Dr. Spence. I'm happy to start the program off with Senator Perry. Good afternoon to y'all. I just want to say thank you first and foremost to everyone for having us all here today. I think I can speak on behalf of the delegation and the wonderful people that I have the privilege to serve with. I'm going to start out by talking just a little bit about the budget that came out of the General Assembly this year because I think the budget that came out of the General Assembly budget, we first and foremost

[00:11:11] describe it as a pro-education budget. And it was incredibly important to those of us who passed that budget that that's exactly what it was. And so I just want to talk real briefly about what it is that that budget does. That budget, compared to the governor's proposed budget, the budget that was passed out by the General Assembly includes an additional \$1.2 billion for public schools.

[00:11:31] This is an unprecedented level of investment in public schools, and I think that demonstrates the importance to this delegation of public schools, what it is that our public schools provide to us as a community and to us as a country and to us as our democracy. In our budget, that includes for Loudoun County Public Schools in particular, a total of \$57 million.

[00:11:52] That's \$4 million for low-income students, \$700 per pupil, \$5 million for English language learners or ELL students, 60 new ELL instructors, \$20.4 million for teacher and staff salaries, including the 3% salary increase with a four-year goal to bring salaries to the national average and keep them there.

[00:12:11] Virginia, as we learned in the JLARC study, has fallen behind surrounding states and is, in my opinion, far behind where it is that we need to be to support our students, support our staff, and the folks who are relying and depending on us to do the right thing. As many of you all know, the General Assembly rejected all 233 of the governor's amendments and called a May 13th special session.

[00:12:35] We will be down there to try to negotiate the budget and come to some resolution. I do know that Loudoun County Public Schools, along with all localities and counties and towns and cities in the state, are depending on us to come to a resolution and to deliver for the people, and I know that that is important to each and every one of us here on this delegation.

[00:12:52] As was mentioned, I was privileged this year and am incredibly proud to have been able to carry the budget amendment. Superintendent Spence approached me prior to session about carrying that recovery school budget amendment.

[00:13:07] my background is as a prosecutor. I did a lot with kids, but I also served on our drug court here in Loudoun County. So being able to deliver on the opioid crisis and the opioid crisis as it particularly impacts the youngest amongst us is of particular importance to me. I want to thank Delegate Srinivasan for carrying the House version of it. That money was included in the budget this year. The conference budget included a total of \$750,000 for the Loudoun County Recovery School, \$500,000 in the first year to cover startup costs with an additional \$250,000 in the second year for operational costs. I don't anticipate that that will get removed out of any kind of a

[00:13:45] negotiated budget. I expect that that will be included in the budget, and we're very privileged to be able to deliver on that. Obviously, the issue of the opioid crisis has been a very important topic here in Loudoun County, as it should be, and across all of Northern Virginia. Again, I think we owe it to our students, to our children here, to do everything we can to take care of them, And I think providing for them some sort of a recovery school where they can go and be away from those who know recovery people, places, and things that can trigger relapses, that can trigger an inability to continue on with their education, which is probably the most important thing for those kids.

[00:14:18] I know there's a lot of discussion around notification and this, that, and the other, and I'm happy to answer any questions about any of that in my particular position on it. But for right now, I'm just pleased to be able to deliver that money to Loudoun County and to the people and folks who are delivering on it. I do want to talk about, I did co-patron the bill that, the Senate bill that came out related to opioid overdoses, and I also co-patroned an additional bill that authorized all counties and cities to enact an additional sales and use tax to support schools if it was approved by a voter referendum.

[00:14:51] That rate should not exceed 1%. That bill was vetoed by the governor, but it is, I think, an additional bill that will come back before the General Assembly as a way for schools across the country to

implement their own localities decide whether or not they think that, hey, some additional local funding would be helpful to us in funding our public schools. So that continues to be a priority for the General Assembly. Another bill that I signed onto and co-sponsored had to do with providing free meals for kids in public schools who are struggling, kids who, you know, don't have meals,

[00:15:28] don't have a free meal for them to have the state kick in and provide money so that no kid goes to school and is hungry there that will continue to be a priority for us in the General Assembly and is a bill that I believe the governor did sign and it will go into law. I'm not going to continue to talk. There are some other bills that some of my friends and colleagues have carried and so I am though happy to continue to partner with each and every one of you. I made a pledge to not be part-time legislator, but to be a full-time legislator, which we all actually do. But that means that I intend to work on introducing legislation all year long, getting legislation

[00:16:08] drafted and having it be good legislation. So please don't wait until November to talk to me. I'm here now. I'll be here tomorrow and the next day and the next day here, either here or in Richmond. But reach out and let me know what it is that I can do for you, what it is we can do for you. I think I speak for all of us when I say we're here to serve. I'm going to turn this over to my colleague and the other senator from Loudoun County, Senator Suha Subramaniam.

[00:16:37] Thank you, Madam Chair, and everyone here on the school board for having us today. And thank you, Senator Perry, for your comments. I just want to build on what Senator Perry covered on the budget first, and I think highlight a few differences.

[00:16:53] I, for instance, really applaud the initiative of the General Assembly and the governor for making a commitment to increase funding for teachers. I think the governor's proposal, though, funds it for the first year at 1%, and then the second year at 2%.

[00:17:10] And so he's saying 3%, but ours actually does it at 3% for the next two years. So there's little differences in the budget that we're going to be fighting for as we negotiate this. that I think in the end reflects the values that I know many of you and I certainly have, which is fully fund our schools, pay our teachers, do what's best for our students.

[00:17:34] Senator Perry mentioned the investment, the commitment we're making to schools, and we wanted to make sure that Loudoun County schools especially get the resources that they need. Another thing that the governor's budget does not do that I think we do a better job of in the General Assembly's budget is the funding needs for special education as well as additional literacy support.

[00:17:58] I think those are things that when we think about fully funding schools again, we have to fully fund all the programs and make sure all the kids are taken care of and not just keeping the lights on. And so part of, I went to this session and carried legislation, SB 187, that got rolled into Senator Lucas's omnibus bill on making sure that we have the staffing requirements for special education, students with special needs.

[00:18:31] And we sent that bill to the governor. He came back with some amendments. I'm happy to talk in more detail later about those amendments. But the long story short is we rejected those amendments. We hope he'll sign the bill that we put forward because I think in the end, this was based on Jay Lark's very extensive study on the issue, and I'd say the number one thing when I was talking to folks over the past

couple years I came up, when I came to education, was really the special education and sort of the deficiencies we have and the needs that every level of government needs to help support that initiative.

[00:19:09] And so we're really looking forward to hopefully getting the governor to sign this bill as is and making sure that we can shore up special across the Commonwealth and especially here in Loudoun. - Senator Perry mentioned free school lunches, that work group I hope will move forward with good recommendations to implement that.

[00:19:29] I know some initiatives were meant for just COVID times, but I think some initiatives proved to be very successful. And so we should learn from what really worked and what really helped kids during COVID and make that permanent. And I think that's one example of something that should. And the final thing is, Senator Perry just talked about how legislation should happen all year round.

[00:19:49] one of the best bills I got this session actually was a very last minute bill SB 707 and it's from a group of middle school kids who really wanted to start a HOSA chapter in their middle school a formal middle school and unfortunately because of the the rules and regulations in Virginia they were told that they were not allowed to start one and I heard from several other schools and kids from those schools as well that they wanted to start these career and technical education clubs whether it was a health club like HOSA or another technical education club but they needed to have the required class to do it but other states don't require that

[00:20:26] and so these students actually helped me write the bill themselves talking to 7th and 8th graders and then they came and testified for the committee and even the Department of Education had someone go up there and oppose the bill but they were able to out-debate the Department of Education and then what I loved was we got the bill passed and we even had them testify remotely.

[00:20:49] About seven or eight kids lined up and testified on Zoom in front of the Education Committee, and Delegate Reeser was there to see that. And we got this bill before the governor, and the Department of Education came down with suggestions that would essentially kill the bill.

[00:21:06] And I got that email at 9 a.m., and by 5 p.m., the governor had backed down and said, we'll sign the bill, don't worry about it, because kids across the state were reaching out to the governor's office, telling them that we want to make sure that this bill gets signed as is and sure enough the bill got signed and so I think if we get more of our students and not just students but you know faculty and you all supporting these types of initiatives that's the best way legislation happens is when it comes from the community and I look at us as just a conduit for that so thank you for supporting that bill and I know the kids are really excited and I think we're all invited to the launch of their HOSA chapter this fall too so I thank you

[00:21:43] for being a part of that thank you senator Perry and Senator Subramaniam we're so grateful for those updates and we'll move on to the house delegation delegate Higgins you have the floor thank you very much it's a wonderful opportunity to be here again with you all I need to correct the record on one thing I when I was on the school board we didn't meet in this building we met over in Leesburg in what is now the I think it's adult senior center or something on north street but while i was on the board we did uh vote for this building that's a whole nother

[00:22:22] story that i won't bother you with tonight this afternoon um you know as we all know uh and i've had the opportunity and been blessed to be able to sit at the school board level and the board of

supervisors level and now in the house of delegates i kind of seen this thing from a lot of different directions um i will say that in in the end uh when you get to the budget it's a series of choices, and nobody gets everything that they want, although you should fight for the priorities that you think are important. And so, you know, I've seen, I think now, three iterations

[00:22:59] of the budget, one that the governor brought, one that the House brought, one that the Senate brought back to the House after they talked. And so we've had three budgets, and we're going to get ready to have our our fourth and I think some of these priorities need to be hammered out you can't have everything you want when you have choices I mean we have a budget that came back out of the joint committee of the house and senate with a two and a half billion dollar tax increase and the governor isn't ready to sign that and has indicated he will not so I'm encouraged that the rhetoric

[00:23:36] from both parties has ceased going into these discussions, serious discussions about the budget, and I hope that people will get serious about getting to some place that is the right place to be. You know, one of the problems that I had when we go to the budget and the priorities that people set, and I've always supported teacher pay, go back and watch all the votes, maybe not all that everybody wanted, but we've always supported increases in teacher pay.

[00:24:06] My wife is a teacher, so I hear it from both sides. Having said that, you know, in the budget that we dealt with initially from the House and Senate, while there was increases in the teacher's pay, some of the things that nobody talks about that were cut out of that budget include \$350 million that were earmarked for teachers' pensions, and that's big money.

[00:24:29] And maybe I have a problem with things like that, having been a Taft-Hartley trustee, But when you start messing around with pension money, you create things that you can't necessarily catch up with. The state of New Jersey and the state of Illinois has both played with public pension money, and you can see the situation they got into financially.

[00:24:50] So Virginia doesn't want to be like that. Virginia's pension plan is funded at 80%, which is good, but that's not real good. It should be funded more like 90%, and we shouldn't be pulling money out of the pension to spend it elsewhere. Another thing that was near and dear to my heart that got cut out of that budget was \$8 million in funding for school resource officers.

[00:25:11] When I ran for state senate in 2019, every person in this county ran for school resource officers and increased funding for them. And we've had at least two iterations of cutting that by, I think, a total of \$17 or \$18 million.

[00:25:26] So, you know, when we talk about safety of our schools and safety of our children, I think school resource officers play a big part in that. So right now, it'll be interesting to see what happens with the discussions on the budget. I don't think, and correct me if I'm wrong, I don't think any of the delegation from Loudoun is part of the committees that are meeting, although we have communications with some of those individuals.

[00:25:52] So we look forward to giving them input and talking about, you know, what kind of things we need to hear from you all that need to be funded. I was also a co-sponsor on the recovery school. I think that's a great opportunity for Loudoun, particularly in the face of the opioid situation that we've been facing.

[00:26:12] I have to say that I was disappointed in how the opioid thing notification was ultimately handled. There were four different persons, Democrat and Republican, that brought forth those bills.

[00:26:29] All four of them included the 24-hour notification. Somehow it got stripped out in committee, and then when the governor put it back, all he did was put back in what was the original request of the four legislators that put them in, and that was voted down in the House, that amendment.

[00:26:53] So I don't quite understand that. Somebody upstairs had, I guess, made that decision. They weren't going to support that. But my concern is that parents need to know what's going on in the schools, need to know about overdoses and other things. In the situation we have today with social media, the only people that won't know about the overdoses will be the parents because everybody else will be talking about it in social media.

[00:27:16] So they need to be notified. And unfortunately, that didn't happen. But I have a feeling we'll see it again next year. So we'll talk about that then. Let me think what else I want to talk about here for a minute. We'll have to see what comes out of the budget negotiations, and hopefully things will be in the right area for school funding and adequately.

[00:27:44] I know the other thing I want to talk about. There was a bill in the House that was going to mandate getting all of our school systems up to the average, I think it was Bill HB 187, that was going to mean that all of our schools in Virginia over a period of time were going to have to get up to the average of, I believe, across the country, average competition of teachers, average teacher salary.

[00:28:18] And while we want to get teacher salaries up, that mandate on the part of many of our schools in rural areas would have put a mandate on them that they couldn't have dealt with. So the governor brought that back with an amendment saying that we would study that every year and make sure that we, you know, consider that in our deliberations about school teacher salaries, which was not supported in the House. And I don't understand why that wasn't supported, but it wasn't. So hopefully we can get something like that passed again next year as well. I have enjoyed working with

[00:28:57] my friends from Northern Virginia. We work together on a lot of different issues, not just school issues, but other issues, and so I think it's great that whatever partisan differences get set aside on those issues and we can work seriously together, and I appreciate that, and I do appreciate the work that you all do. I know about the work that you all do, and I would love to hear from you about the things that you want us to work on, so thank you for the opportunity to be here and listen today.

[00:29:28] Thank you, Delegate Higgins. Delegate Reeser, the floor is yours. Thank you, Madam Chair. It's really nice to say that. Well, it's really good to be back here with you all. It feels a little bit like coming home. So thank you for continuing to have this road from Richmond for our delegation to come and talk with you and report back to you everything we've been able to do.

[00:29:50] Some of you know my district runs through all of eastern Loudoun County. It's 100% in Loudoun. And I think this is the first year that your Loudoun delegation, I know some of the senators have bigger districts, but you have your very own dedicated delegates in your delegation.

[00:30:07] And it's nice to have a full delegation. It's been really wonderful to partner with everyone, both in the other chamber and across our chamber, to be able to deliver for Loudoun County. As you know, the decisions that we make don't impact just our district. Just as yours impact the entire school division and the school district ours also impact all of the commonwealth but I think it's fair for me to say on behalf of

my colleagues and I that we worked really hard to continue to move Virginia forward with the priorities of taking care of Loudoun's families the businesses the the students the workforce here and keeping that top of mind

[00:30:44] is is what was kind of my my guiding principle in in the work that I did I was able to serve on three committees this year. I was on courts of justice, education, the K-12 subcommittee, as Chair Chandler said, and on county cities and towns, which all tapped into my professional experience and my time working here on the school board. And I think that the depth of experience from having been here for four years is probably what enabled me to really dig in on the issues that came up in the K-12 subcommittee, which I believe, my staff tells me, had the most number of bills of any subcommittee.

[00:31:21] So it was a lot of work. We started at 7.30 on Tuesday mornings, and sometimes we met twice on Tuesday. And it was really one of the highlights was having the Loudoun students come and speak on Senator Supermanian's bill. They did remember coming to speak to our previous board here, and they did a really good job, I think, representing Loudoun and using their student voices, which I know is something that this school division has championed for many, many years since before I was able to serve on the board and I'm sure for long after.

[00:31:54] Those student voices make a really big difference, and we appreciate the excellent education that you have equipped them with that allowed them to represent the division so well and to be so successful. As Senator Subramaniam said, even in having something pass that maybe the state's Department of Education initially thought wasn't a good idea.

[00:32:15] So in prioritizing education, as my colleagues talked about, we did prioritize teacher pay. I think that getting to at least the national average is a floor and not a ceiling. Closing the funding gap for our students who have the most need, the ELL students, the economically disadvantaged, those that are at risk because they have special needs. Those are things that we all worked on and your board continues to work on. And I think we know as educators that helping those students allows our professionals, our educators and our staff to then also be able to help students who don't have special needs or are at risk because when there's

[00:32:53] proper funding it allows for proper staffing ratios and other supports that then frees up educators to help everyone in their classroom. So I hope that the new budget or the future budgets will continue to prioritize those needs because I think that helps every student and all of our families. I'd also like to talk a little bit about what we were able to prevent not just what we were able to champion. I believe that in divided government, you do have to make compromises, and it is the General Assembly's position that giving tax breaks to the wealthiest and shifting the economic burden to those who have the most need and are the most vulnerable Virginians is

[00:33:32] not the way that Virginia should move forward. So I believe that the General Assembly's approach to taking the governor's proposed tax on digital services and making it, I think we call it modernizing the tax code, making it a little bit more fair so that it's not just individuals like you and I who are paying taxes on digital services, but also including companies and corporations in that will give us more of the income that we need to fund some of these priorities that we've all talked about here today.

[00:33:59] And it's my hope that with the budget that comes back in May that we're able to support the priorities we talked about by shifting some of the proposed tax burdens across to businesses and not just those of us who already have a lot of burden to bear.

[00:34:20] So some of the bills that I was able to work on also supported these priorities I'm talking about. In terms of supporting families and workforce, one of my favorite bills was what my staff called the Babies in Buildings Bill. It allows for businesses to provide child daycare, which currently is not something that's allowed. It'll be a local option, so no one has to do it, but if you should choose to do that, you'll possibly be able to also provide child care in buildings where people work. This helps families, it helps working moms, it helps working dads, but it also helps businesses

[00:34:55] that have empty commercial space. And it was something that I heard from different chambers of commerce, as well as the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce, as a helpful step forward to filling up some of the space that continues to sit empty since the pandemic caused some shifts in spaces being occupied in buildings, and more people are still continuing to work hybrid as they make their work-life balance.

[00:35:23] Another one of the bills that Senator Perry and I got to co-patron, well, chief patron across the different chambers, raises the statutory cap on court-appointed counsel. And while I'm mentioning these bills, and they may not seem to touch on education specifically, I think they touch to some of the bigger things that our community needs.

[00:35:42] Our court-appointed counsel provides constitutional protections, which ultimately comes back to help every single one of us, just as workforce development does. I had about 11 bills that we filed initially.

[00:35:58] Nine of them passed both chambers, and seven of them were passed into law. Of those, all of them had bipartisan support, and many of them were unanimously supported by both chambers. And I mention this because I think it's important for you to know that despite how things seem sometimes on the outside, we really do try to collaborate and pass legislation that works for the Commonwealth for the good.

[00:36:22] I think that it is our duty and our responsibility both to our local government and all of the folks that elected us to continue to try to push forward things that people can agree on. And it's my hope that the change in that climate and that attitude trickles down to how local boards are treated as well.

[00:36:44] One last thing I'll talk about, well, two last things I'll talk about. As one of you mentioned, I was able to work with the Oaks family to bring forward and have successfully passed some legislation that you will have to work on writing a policy for implementing hazing prevention instruction.

[00:37:02] I know that at one point, the school division wanted to add that instruction for athletic directors, and perhaps that's something we could think about taking back in passing, although I have heard that the Senate has indicated that they would look less favorably next year on education bills that put more requirements for school divisions to implement, and I think it's inherently obvious why, but if that is something that Loudoun County Public Schools and the Loudoun County Public Schools School Board decide you would like to have championed it's certainly something that we can take back and and work on and expanding that

[00:37:40] instruction to athletic directors but I think certainly there's nothing that would prevent your athletic directors from participating when the students are receiving the instruction so it may be something that you just choose to do without having a state mandate to do it. And the last thing I'll touch on is some work that I was able to do with delegate Laura Jane Cohen who was a school board member in

Fairfax. I talked in the beginning about priorities that we had for the Commonwealth, and I talked about taking care of our workers, being one of the priorities, and taking care of the safety of our students was another one of the priorities. With gun-related

[00:38:16] deaths being a major threat for students and being a number one killer of students, one of the things that we talked about doing was how we could better inform families about existing laws. So not passing more law, but just informing them about what's already required in terms of safe storage of weapons. We both had that bill. We wanted school divisions to send a notification to parents, making it really transparent and obvious for them what their existing duties are.

[00:38:49] We decided to just roll our bills into one. Frankly, hers was more well-written, so I became a chief co-sponsor of her bill, and that bill was amended to the point where she didn't feel like it, my mistake. Her bill was actually vetoed, so we weren't even able to consider accepting the amendment.

[00:39:09] So hopefully we'll be able to bring that back next year and see if we can champion that along with any other bills that you all decide as a committee to put together. Thank you. Thank you, Delegate Reeser. Delegate Srinivasan, the floor is yours. Thank you, Madam Chair.

[00:39:27] Thanks for having me. Thanks for what all you do. This was an extraordinary opportunity to work in the General Assembly with a fellow delegation and across the aisle. A couple of bills that relates to education that I was able to work on and pass, that I worked with your teams, House Bill 919, that's an MOU on mental health services to enable partnerships with virtual service providers.

[00:39:57] Health is what brought me to politics, so I'm in the Health and Human Services Committee, So this will enable more virtual mental health services, very important, particularly post-COVID, and also the administration has a big initiative, RightHelpRightNow, which I'm a big fan of.

[00:40:15] So I was very proud to work on this bill, get it passed and get it signed. So hopefully this is another tool in the toolkit to offer these services. There are multiple companies that can join. This will obviously, it's permissive, and it also will follow your standards.

[00:40:33] what you will negotiate. So I was happy to do that. The second one, the budget amendment that Senator Perry talked about, I was happy to carry that on the House side. It was actually \$1.5 million. Then I realized it is split with Virginia Beach, \$750.

[00:40:51] And I said, wow, Superman and Spence is from Virginia Beach. So, you know, it's perfectly fine. So that's for Zone 4 here. So that's wonderful that, you know, we are able to get this thing in the budget and I'm very confident this will be in the final budget version and I'm looking forward to working with you all. I'm also very proud of a house joint resolution. It took a lot of work and I'm extremely happy that this got in. It's a fentanyl opioid study statewide by the Joint Commission of Health. It's extremely important given the crisis that

[00:41:28] we are facing in the state. This will be studied by the professionals, by the right experts. They will look at the policy options, the insights, not just fentanyl, all other opioid chemicals, and see what the trends have been and what we can do from a policy perspective to address it.

[00:41:47] So I'm really excited. The study will start in January 2025, and I'm really looking forward to get the study. We can all work then on policy solutions. I would say the budget that we passed, the conference budget, made historic investments in education, which I'm very proud of.

[00:42:12] Both my parents were teachers. It's very personal to me, and it's very, very important. Education is what brought me to this country for my highest studies. If we do not invest in education, we have no future. And I'm very committed to promoting excellence in education. That's one of the reasons why I ran.

[00:42:30] And I am your ally. I am your advocate in the General Assembly, along with our colleagues here. We will make sure that we work with you. I'll make sure that I listen. I'm always available. It's all about ideas. Ideas is what becomes legislation.

[00:42:47] Obviously, it requires a lot of work, which I painfully learned in the General Assembly. After crossover, you have to convince the senators, not just the delegates. But it's worth the work, so I'm looking forward to working with you all.

[00:43:03] Thank you. Thank you, Delegate. We will also hear today from Mr. Bianco, who's here for Delegate Reed. Just a few comments, I guess, on the special session outlook. Thank you. Thank you very much for having me today.

[00:43:21] I did, she already introduced me. I was going to say I'm not the new youngest delegate in Loudoun County. I'm Delegate Reed's Chief of Staff. I've been with him about two years now. He does send his regrets that he couldn't be here today. He had a personal conflict. And I did want to touch on one bill first that we did work on that we were proud of.

[00:43:43] Last year, we had the idea that we should require Narcan in public schools because, unfortunately, the opioid crisis is affecting students, children, schools. Then we got down to Richmond and realized two other delegates had the exact same idea.

[00:44:00] And so our bill was actually ruled in Delegate Sewell's bill, but it did pass, and I believe the governor signed it already. So that said, looking towards the future, Delegate Reed was very proud of the budget that we produced, the education-forward budget.

[00:44:18] It did include record spending on education around the Commonwealth. We felt that it gave LCPS the resources it needed. Unfortunately, you know, the governor, I think, had 233 budget recommendations and we didn't have the time during reconvene to address all those.

[00:44:36] And so now we're headed towards a special session. That said, appropriations staff or appropriations members on both sides have already started talking, working with each other, with the governor to produce a compromise budget. And since it will be a compromise budget, we expect that a lot of what was in the legislature's budget will, you know, it might be, we might have to meet the governor in the middle on some of those.

[00:45:05] But Delegate Reed is committed to ensuring that we can put forth as much of the legislature's budget as we can, ensure that our schools are properly funded. And of course, he's dedicated to securing the funding needed to support schools all around the Commonwealth.

[00:45:22] we should see a budget by May 13th and then we'll go down May 15th to vote on it and unfortunately I don't have too much insight as of yet and what that might look like but like I said approach appropriation members are already talking with each other with the governor to ensure that we can have a budget that works for everybody so with that I just want to say thank you keep the remarks nice and brief thank you for having me well thank you all so much for being here and sharing your thoughts with us.

[00:45:55] We will move on to the next phase of the meeting, which is school board member comments and questions. I will call on each school board member and ask, please, that you limit your comments and questions to five minutes. And we will start with my colleagues in the Legislative Audit and Policy Committee.

[00:46:14] So, Ms. Donahue, if you're ready to go now, I'd be happy to offer you the floor. Thank you, Chair Chandler. I would like to extend my gratitude to the delegation and representatives uh dan uh for being here and for the work that you have been doing in richmond to support our students and our community not just here in loudon although that is my priority but all over the commonwealth we appreciate you fighting the good fight for us I did have I had a couple of questions

[00:46:53] about a couple of the bills that did not go through. I was going to ask about HB 498, which Delegate Reeser co-patroned, and you mentioned, I believe, that it was actually vetoed, not amended by the governor.

[00:47:17] Is that correct? I was waffling because I was trying to remember exactly what happened. Madam Chair, may I? Thank you. Actually, there were amendments to it, and this was an interesting one. I think there was a motion made for the speaker to rule on whether some of the amendments were germane, and they were, and if I'm remembering incorrectly, I'll ask my staff to furiously correct me.

[00:47:41] So the veto included some amendments, sorry, the vote included some amendments that were deemed not germane, And then it was sent back to the governor with the rest of the amendments being rejected. So he still has the opportunity to sign into law a notification of parents regarding what their safe storage requirements under existing law are in Virginia.

[00:48:09] Could you tell us what the or remind us what the governor's proposed amendments were? I think it would probably be best if I sent you a link to read them. I'm not sure that I could adequately encompass them and not make a mistake from memory.

[00:48:27] So we'd be happy to follow up, and I'll have my staff send you an email with the link. Thank you. Sure. That's an issue that's near and dear to my heart as a Moms Demand volunteer, which is what got me into activism and inspired me to run for this position in the first place.

[00:48:44] That was one of the issues that I campaigned on was I would like to see Loudoun roll this out here in our district and was very excited to see the proposed bill that would require it throughout the state. I think that's a great move, and I hope that there's more success next year.

[00:49:01] And as you probably already know, the Ferris County School Board sent those notifications out also without a state mandate, so that's something that your board could consider without the bill being signed into law. Thank you. I had been intending to also ask similar questions about the governor's amendments for HB 224, but I don't believe anyone from Delegate Martinez's office is here for me to pose those questions.

[00:49:34] And then I had also been curious about the state and the back and forth of the bill that Senator Perry and Delegate Higgins supported regarding notification, overdoses, school-related overdoses and notifications of those.

[00:49:56] And I've been a little confused with the status of that, with where that bill is. My understanding is the governor vetoed that bill. There were four bills submitted, and if Senator Perry put one in, I

apologize, I didn't see it.

[00:50:13] There was one by Seabolt, there was one by me, there was one by Amanda Batten. And there was one by somebody else. Those four bills all included a 24-hour notification to the parents of any overdoses in school-related activities.

[00:50:34] There didn't seem to be any problem with them. We all sort of morphed them into the one bill that Siebel got passed. It went to committee, and in committee, the 24-hour notification got stripped out of it, and it was then changed to be sent to the Board of Education to develop a policy.

[00:51:00] And I think that everybody, Senator Foy was the other one that put it in, and her remarks are out online and aren't very good, that parents should be notified about these. The problem with the policy, I think, is that policies can change.

[00:51:16] But if it's in state code, it's in state code, it's a different ballgame, it has to be complied with. So anyway, it came back without the notification in it, went to the governor. He just added the 24-hour notification, which was included in all four of the original bills that were submitted.

[00:51:33] And the patron, who was Sebold in the House at that time, decided that she didn't support that and asked everybody, or asked her side to vote against it. Of course, the House, it's a 5149, so it was going down, and that's where we are with that bill.

[00:51:51] I'm sure that we'll see an effort next year as well, and I think it's important information that people need to have. As the superintendent said, he was in Richmond, and we talked about law enforcement and school system, and everybody should be working together on this. It shouldn't be one of these, but the parents are the ones that need to know about it.

[00:52:12] So anyway, that's where it is. Thank you very much, Delegate Higgins. Thank you, Madam Chandler. Thank you, Ms. Donohue. Ms. Chernoff, you have the floor. Thank you so much, Chair Chandler. Thank you all of the delegation for being here today and representatives.

[00:52:28] It's great to see you all again. I will say this has been a pretty steep learning curve on this side for me, but one that I've really enjoyed and working with all of you and talking with you all and meeting on the Hill, that was particularly exciting for me in this new role. I just want to reiterate, as all of my board members I'm sure will, the thanks for your support for public education and your advocacy because this is the heart of the community and it matters. And so we really appreciate that. I know it was an unprecedented amount and just hearing about the most bills coming out of the education committee just makes

[00:53:03] my heart very happy because I think it's important even if they don't get past that these things are on people's radars. And it is really important, especially post-COVID, you know, public education taken a bit of a hit and it's nice to see that the commonwealth is really rallying behind the various concerns so we um we appreciate that i wanted to just bring i don't really have any questions i did have a question about the the awareness the reporting for opioid and fentanyl overdoses um but you answered that so i appreciate that and um we'll hope that that will continue to be a conversation because i think that the reporting piece is really important i think

[00:53:40] parents and the community everyone like you said needs to know and and so i'll look forward to that continuing um i'm also want to echo what chair mansfield said which i know she's going to speak to

um the audits of secondary um education really post-secondary education making sure that our teachers are prepared with the training that they have and that brings me to my next point so um really appreciative of the jlrk study highlighting that we are behind with teacher pay, and I think teacher pay is obviously important. I was a teacher for 17 years, so we like to get paid. It's important, but it's not the whole piece of the puzzle, and now with the

[00:54:19] shift of focus on pay, which I do appreciate, and I don't want that plate to drop, I really also want to put on your radar how we can help the teacher burden and lighten the load, because right now we're seeing an unprecedented amount of mandated training from the VDOE for staff, and a lot of it is well-intentioned, and a lot of it has to do with best practices in literacy, which is near and dear to my heart, and I want teachers to have that. I think it's a bigger issue with them not coming with that knowledge from most colleges, so that's a root cause, but additionally, this is going to

[00:54:56] cripple our teachers. It's becoming a point for me where I feel like we almost have to have a max amount set because we're reaching such a high number of hours and modules that are just outside of the range of doability and with our teachers really struggling with so many things on their plate and we all know they're not just teachers we know they're counselors you know we know they're nurses you know they're taking care of the well-being of their students you know they in a sense they're doing mental health work around the clock now so I just want to put a plug in for thanking you for advocating for teacher pay and now hoping that while we keep that going we can

[00:55:35] pivot and really think about ways that we can support the teacher burden at the state level because I think we've reached that point. Thank you. Mr. Knopf, Madam Chair, the floor is yours. Let's see if I can do this in five minutes. So once again, thank you all for being here and I'd really like to thank Delegate Martinez for carrying the Literacy Teacher Prep Audit Bill. It was a huge ask because there's so much resistance to changing literacy culture and he truly dove right in and I appreciate his willingness to take something like this on. I wanted to give a somewhat abbreviated

[00:56:10] history of literacy legislation that has been passed to change educator prep programs to no avail. Decoding Dyslexia started this work in 2016, but I'll save you two years and just mention legislation that directly relates to higher ed, teacher prep, and literacy. And we started with students with dyslexia because that was our population and our kids. And when we realized that the evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in science-based reading research was necessary for all students and not just our kids with dyslexia, we pivoted our advocacy so that all may read.

[00:56:44] We started by trying to change the culture of balanced literacy and whole language by targeting reading specialists because they were our children's first interventionists. In 2018, the General Assembly passed SB 368 requiring each education preparation program offered by a public institution of higher education or private institution of higher education that leads to a degree, concentration, or certificate for reading specialists shall include a program of coursework and other training and identification of and appropriate interventions, accommodations, and teaching techniques for students with dyslexia or related disorder.

[00:57:20] However, this law was not sufficient because VDOE minimally advised reading specialist programs of this new requirement and simply requested them to self-report. VDOE did not review content, syllabi, lectures, internships, etc. to make certain that there was compliance.

[00:57:39] Needless to say, a self-report of yes or no with no accompanying third-party audit of instructional materials or for teacher prep is not an appropriate way to ensure compliance. In addition, Decoding Dyslexia discovered that the Board of Education required only new endorsement programs to include a full review by content specialists.

[00:58:00] So after initial approval of educator prep programs, there was no continuing audit of syllabi, instructional materials, or internships by VDOE, and no focus on literacy instruction. We all know that legislation without teeth is not effective, and we must be specific to make change.

[00:58:19] That legislation was only for reading specialists, no one else. Teachers were still coming out of teacher prep not knowing how to teach reading, and we know we have to change core instruction because you cannot intervene your way out of poor core. That means all teachers needed to learn evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in science-based reading research.

[00:58:40] So we figured that perhaps professors should discuss among themselves how to get this done. And in 2020, SB 904 was passed to assist institutes of higher learning in determining how educator prep programs should teach evidence-based literacy instruction.

[00:58:57] They had meetings with the State Council for Higher Education discuss what that evidence-based literacy instruction should look like and how they should provide that instruction in their educator prep programs. That was four years ago. And again, nothing has changed.

[00:59:13] Finally, in 2022, along with the VLA, which is the Virginia Literacy Act, legislators passed HB 419, which requires each VA education preparation program offered by a public institution of higher education or private institution of higher education that provides training for any student seeking initial licensure by the Board of Education to include a program of coursework and require all such students to demonstrate mastery in science-based reading research and evidence-based literacy instruction.

[00:59:47] The VDOE will audit each program at least every seven years to ensure compliance. Effective date starts 2024-2025 school year. Here's the problem. Educator prep programs are audited in cohorts with a seven-year cycle.

[01:00:06] HB 419 requirement doesn't start until next year. That means that the programs that were accredited last year will have seven years before they're audited. We have no baseline audit to make certain that these teacher prep programs are teaching teachers how to teach reading in accordance with the Virginia Literacy Act.

[01:00:26] Other states like Colorado have conducted literacy baseline audits of education preparation programs and found them to be woefully insufficient. Colorado now requires literacy audits of education preparation programs every five years. And some of the universities have been so resistant to change their instruction that it has taken them three to four years to comply after they were found to be out of compliance.

[01:00:50] Therefore, if in seven years that cohort of educator prep programs are found to be not in compliance, they could take another three to four years to get into compliance. And that's a whole other generation of teachers and students. And we simply don't have that time or money.

[01:01:07] As you've heard through this somewhat shortened VA literacy legislation history lesson, educator prep programs have had enough time to comply with the Virginia Literacy Act for teacher prep

and reading specialist programs. Unfortunately, according to the January 2023 National Center for Teacher Quality Study, out of the 25 programs reviewed where six did not participate, only 36% of them adequately covered all five components of the science of reading.

[01:01:38] The only way to help fix these issues is to advocate for a two-year baseline audit so that it is clear which teachers' prep programs comply with VLA. Teachers must come out of educator prep programs knowing how to teach reading.

[01:01:54] This last Tuesday's school board meeting, we were told that effective with the start of 2024-2025 school year as a way to get all teachers and administrators up to speed on what they should have learned in their educator prep programs. BDOE is providing literacy modules that must be concluded by the end of the 2024-25 school year.

[01:02:17] Depending on the identified teacher group pre-K through 12, that training can take anywhere from 27 to 40 plus hours. This will be on top of mandated brand new core instruction, K through 5, training on four new core standards, Training for new SOLs, understanding the new benchmarks for SOLs, learning the new accountability measures for school districts, etc.

[01:02:43] And while I am thrilled about the changes and have spent 10 years of my life advocating for this, I cannot help but be worried about what a huge heavy lift this is for our school districts with not a lot of support. And I still have questions. What happens if the universities continue to resist compliance with VLA?

[01:03:03] Do we continue to have new teachers take this 27 to 40-plus hours of evidence-based literacy instruction training? Shouldn't they be getting this in their teacher prep? How will we ever know if teacher prep programs and reading specialist programs will ever be in compliance?

[01:03:21] As you know, LCPS had a baseline teacher prep audit on their legislative agenda this year, and universities came out against it, complaining that this was all new, including GMU. And I need you all to know that this is not new.

[01:03:37] They have had since at least 2018 to get with the program. And universities simply do not want to be told what to teach in their classes. Many professors still adhere and will continue to teach pre-service teachers and reading specialists non-evidence-based literacy instruction like reading recovery, whole language, and balanced literacy.

[01:03:58] Please consider partnering with LCPS to make certain all teacher prep and reading specialist programs have a baseline audit that is not merely a self-report. To have to unlearn non-evidence-based literacy instruction and learn something else after you have spent thousands of dollars becoming a teacher is not a good look.

[01:04:23] It's not fair to our teachers. It's not to our school. It's not fair to our students. It's not fair to our school community. and it's not fair to our teachers. Thank you. Thank you, Chair Mansfield. Vice Chair Estreffi, the floor is yours.

[01:04:41] Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the entire Loudon delegation for being here with us and for being with us along the journey. I just have a few comments. One, I just want to express my gratitude to the entire delegation for what was termed pro-education or education-forward budget that

focuses on teacher pay and retention and recruitment and really just tries to protect the passion of our teachers to basically do their life's work.

[01:05:10] And on that note, just echo Ms. Chernoff's comments, is that that is part of the puzzle, and we need to really dig deeper in terms of how we can get our teachers to do their best work. I worked in the private sector side of education and hired a bunch of public school teachers who were looking to leave public education, but once you scratched the surface, and we interviewed so many, and got them talking about their experiences in public schools really that passion and creativity really came out again and so we really need to just look at what is suffocating that passion and creativity and just things like

[01:05:45] protecting their time and allowing them more autonomy in the classroom so these are some of the things that that I hope that we dig into together the recovery school was noted by a few of you specifically just want to mention you know my hope is that you saw the energy behind this from the LCPS community and just how excited we were.

[01:06:09] And I also saw that excitement come out in many of you, and so appreciate the work that was done to really push this. Also, you know, funding support. Senator Subramanian mentioned funding support for our most vulnerable student populations, special education, English language learners, supporting these students.

[01:06:31] You mentioned, Delegate Reeser, that supporting these students and building in the resources for these students helps our entire student population. So I really appreciate those comments. I also appreciate the focus of this delegation on collaboration, not only with LCPS, but as Ms. Rieser mentioned, again, building an air and spirit of working together and finding solutions together, even in areas of disagreement.

[01:06:59] That example that you all said as a delegation trickles down not only into LCPS, but the broader community. and it's something that we are striving towards as a school board as well. One thing that I do want to mention that hasn't been mentioned yet is the area of alternative career pathways and how do we engage maybe our learners to be, you know, how do we engage them about their own curiosities for their future, thinking about alternatives to, you know, a college education and building workforce pipelines.

[01:07:32] I think LCPS has done a fantastic job over the years in these areas and really found ways to innovate and break new ground, working with higher education partners. There are some really great initiatives out there right now, and I would just call on the delegation to increase collaboration with LCPS in terms of finding new solutions and new areas to focus on alternative career pathways and where we can go from here.

[01:08:04] And I would also just call on our LCPS community as well to work with our Loudoun delegation as we think about the areas that we want to go. Because I think that we need to, we have a bunch of projects, we have initiatives that we've been working on, but I think we need to extend the field of sight even further and the thinking and the ideas that we generate.

[01:08:29] I think we need to just increase our vision and ideate even longer term to plant some seeds for the future. So with that, thank you very much. Thank you, Vice Chair Estreffi. Mrs. Griffiths, the floor is yours.

[01:08:47] Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the delegation for being here today. My colleagues have touched on the items I was going to ask about. I was concerned about the fentanyl bill and the 24-

hour parental notification, so thank you, Delegate Higgins.

[01:09:08] Also, teacher retention was another thing that I was going to mention, and I thank you for bringing that up as well. But my colleague, Mr. Estreffi, did touch on somewhat CTE programs and trade programs.

[01:09:25] And I would like to ask about more funds for CTE programs. I'm looking for an expansion at all schools in Loudoun County. If we can discuss current bills or any upcoming bills, that would be fantastic. I'm looking at bills focusing on trades.

[01:09:43] So if you do have anything you can mention today, I'd appreciate it. If I may, I think Delegate Sue Haas had worked on some bills.

[01:10:03] I can ask him. I don't have anything to my knowledge. I'll pass the information along, though. Okay, I'd be looking for that information. I did work with somebody that had sent some information on some continuing technical education bills.

[01:10:21] So I'd appreciate that information. But those were my three items. So thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much, Mrs. Griffiths. Dr. Deans? Thank you for coming today.

[01:10:38] I'm just really excited that you were willing to take the time to share with us personally all the good news from Richmond. Thank you, Dr. Deans. Dr. Rasheed? Thank you to the senators and delegates and everyone for coming.

[01:10:55] I think it's really great to get updated about everything that's going on. For me, one of my passions is always constantly bettering the line of safety. because I lost a child in the past. So for me, that's one of my big passions. And, you know, I heard from, I believe, Delegate Higgins, if I'm not mistaken, about constantly bettering that line.

[01:11:19] And I hope we continue to do that. And as a professor, you know, in order to keep those teachers or have a better retention of our teachers, I feel like to increase their pay and then to look at their salary, I think it's pretty much really important to look at the broader perspective that that is what is what's needed, and it's really critical to keep our students in school because of that, because of that same reason, and once again, thank you so much.

[01:11:45] Thank you, Dr. Rasheed. I'll just go ahead and take a moment. I am so grateful for everyone for being here together today and participating in this conversation with us. I would like to share with you an experience that I had on the campaign trail last year in Algonquian District.

[01:12:06] I met the mother of a child who died of an overdose. And the overdose happened in our community. It didn't happen at school. And one of the things I think we could do together to strengthen information for all of us to have so that we're really working on it as a community, every aspect together, is to make sure that we're expanding the reporting, not just at schools, but actually reflecting what's happening in the community.

[01:12:40] You know, it's so hard to think about that mother's loss. And perhaps if we were taking a wider view on the problem and looking for where it's possible that there are places in our community where there are hotspots, where people are buying these pills.

[01:13:02] This is not necessarily something I'm super familiar with, But I think if we really took a wider view and had all of the information, we could really work on this together for the betterment of our

community. I am also heartened to hear about support for all of the gun safety measures.

[01:13:23] I'm also a Moms Demand Action volunteer and have been for a long time, and I would like to see funding available to strengthen our school communities. I think when we really take a look at the climate in each building and make sure that we have the mental health supports, we can make a difference.

[01:13:43] There have been so many instances in our country where there have been law enforcement agents in the room when a shooting occurred, and it didn't always make a difference.

[01:14:01] I can remember an instance at a community college out west where a Marine was in the classroom as a student and knew that he couldn't, and I believe might have had a weapon on his person at the time.

[01:14:18] But given the heated situation with an active shooter, a lot of times people choose not to engage for fear that they'll be targeted when the police come into the building. So although I do appreciate the work our SROs do, I would like us to study this a little bit further and make sure that we're looking at exactly the right personnel and identifying the people that strengthen our schools in the most effective way.

[01:14:48] And with that, if there are any delegates or – Delegate Higgins, did you? Yeah, if it's appropriate, I'd like to make a couple remarks that I didn't make before and on a couple things. One is my wife and I have three daughters that all graduated from Loudoun Valley High School.

[01:15:09] So along with being on the school board, we have a little familiarity with that. And, you know, nothing is perfect. However, they had an SRO at Loudoun Valley at that time that all the kids knew, all the kids loved, and he was on top of things.

[01:15:26] So I think SROs are an asset, and, yeah, certainly you want to have people that are properly trained and have the ability to deal with the situations that go on in the schools. With regards to the overdose issue, I mean, my nephew overdosed, not on fentanyl.

[01:15:45] That was not the drug of the day then. It was Oxycontin, and it was about 20 years ago. It was right here in Loudoun County. And to be honest, I had to text my wife, but I didn't hear, I don't know that it was associated with the school in any way, but it's something that I think this information is good, not just for the school system to have and the larger community and the law enforcement, but you, like you mentioned, I think hotbeds, you know where things are going on and parents need to be in touch with that.

[01:16:18] And so one of the issues that you mentioned, and I think was mentioned over here as well, about alternative education, and I know there was some conversation once upon a time with Woodgrove High School, but I worked for a trade association for 38 years, and we have an apprenticeship program that is part of the building trades.

[01:16:43] and i'm telling you um excuse me it's um a great opportunity if i had i didn't have any boys if i had boys and they weren't sure about they want what they wanted to do i would have sent them that way um an apprentice in that program makes fifty thousand dollars a year with benefits he earns while he learns he does not accrue he or she does not accrue any debt and by the end of the five year apprenticeship program they're going to make uh six figures and if you look at all these data centers

around here, all those young men and women are building these data centers, and it's high tech work. It's not a shovel and dirt and that kind of thing. So, I don't know

[01:17:22] what it would, I know the people that I can get in touch with, you all, I don't know what it would take to get a closer relationship built with them, but it's a great opportunity, and really it's the American dream. If you want to work as an electrician or whatever if you want to do it, that's fine.

[01:17:39] You can work into management. You can also work into owning your own business. So it's a great opportunity, and anybody who wants any information about that, I'd be glad to get it for you. Thank you, Delegate Higgins. I do find that particularly heartening. As someone who came to Washington to work in bipartisan politics, I'm finding myself very excited at the idea of being able to find these areas like CTE, where there's so much interest across the aisle where we can work together and build our relationships.

[01:18:13] And having conversations like this, I think, also go a long way to making it possible for us to continue to work together. We want to say thank you again. With your help, each one of you, we were able to pass a number of bills this year. And when authorization for the recovery school, we know that doesn't happen without intentional collaboration.

[01:18:34] And we are grateful, as we've heard from our lobbyists, for the help that each one of you provided to support Loudoun County Public Schools and the Loudoun County School Board on the recovery school and on all of our other priorities.

[01:18:49] As the general assembly session eventually winds down, our process to create and approve our legislative platform begins, and we will be reaching out to you over the course of the next few months, and we'll invite you to our legislative breakfast as we get to that point later in the year.

[01:19:08] We'd love to engage with each of you, and we'll reach out to you privately in the coming weeks to start to have conversations on how we can receive your feedback and also continue to engage with you in the most productive way so that we can work together in support of our students and teachers.

[01:19:25] Thank you all for your time today, for your commitment to public service and your commitment to public education, and for the growing friendship that we have here between the delegation and the division. We hope you'll call on us any time to share your thoughts, ideas, and concerns, and criticisms.

[01:19:47] That's all important for us to learn and grow. And we'll continue to knock on your doors in Richmond whenever the opportunity arises and in your district as we continue to work together to manage the best school division in the country. With that, this meeting of the Legislative Audit and Policy Committee is adjourned.

[01:20:07] Thank you.



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