



NEW HANOVER COUNTY

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

230 Government Center Drive, Suite 175, Wilmington, NC 28403

P: (910) 798-7149 | F: (910) 798-7145 | NHCgov.com

Jonathan Barfield, Jr., Chairman | **Julia Olson-Boseman**, Vice-Chairwoman
Patricia Kusek, Commissioner | **Woody White**, Commissioner | **Rob Zapple**, Commissioner

STAR NEWS OPINION ARTICLE

By Chairman Jonathan Barfield, Jr.

New Hanover County increases funding for Public Schools year over year

Children are the future of New Hanover County, and that is why your county government invests a significant amount of our budget and resources in the public school system. Our funding to the schools makes up nearly a third of New Hanover County's overall general fund budget and is a priority for us each year.

This year is no different. In the county manager's recommended budget, which will be presented at our May 20th Board of Commissioners meeting, the total amount of funding to our public and charter schools is \$116.2 million for Fiscal Year 2019-2020. This is a 6.9 percent increase in funding from last year, and shows that the county remains committed to superior public education in our community.

I began serving as a County Commissioner in 2008. In those 11 years, we have increased our total funding for the schools by 26% – from \$86.29 million (FY08-09) to \$108.73 million (FY18-19). And that number will rise again by more than \$7.5 million with the county's recommended budget for FY19-20.

Each year, we work hand-in-hand with our public school system to understand what their needs are and we fund them to the extent our budget and tax dollars allow. We make a significant investment, and that funding has increased every year to serve our schools.

It's important to note that, while counties in North Carolina are required by statute to provide local schools with facilities, maintenance, and repair, New Hanover County has historically done much more. In fact, New Hanover County is in the top 10% in the state for local public school support.

We invest more in our schools because we know it will help ensure our children have the best opportunities to learn and grow. And I am proud of that.

We support the schools in a number of ways that, together, make up the \$116.2 million being recommended this coming fiscal year for school funding. One of those is direct funding in a "per pupil" amount (which refers to the number of students expected at both public and charter schools that year). The FY19-20 budget recommendation is to fund the schools at a \$2,900 per-pupil amount – which will total \$81 million.

Even though student growth in our public schools is about .6 percent over the past year, the recommendation is to increase per-pupil funding by 3.4 percent. For perspective, we funded our schools at a \$2,800 per-pupil rate this year, so this will increase funding by \$100 for each student. That is a

substantial increase in the county's investment, and something I think our community should know about.

The county contributes to the schools in other important ways that are all part of the \$116.2 million in recommended funding. We fund their debt service (which is \$31 million this coming fiscal year), and we cover the cost of three additional pre-k classrooms that provide structured learning environments for 45 three and four year olds.

New Hanover County's support helps to supplement teacher pay so that teachers make around \$4,000 more, on average, than the state currently funds. We also help to fund 653 budgeted positions in the schools, assist in purchasing new school technology and equipment, provide student scholarships for future teachers to come back and teach in our schools, and so much more. We are helping our children get the education they deserve, and helping our teachers have the resources they need.

In addition to the \$116.2 million, the county also funds 40 School Resource Officers (SROs) who help ensure the safety of our students, and provide school landscaping and field repairs through our Parks and Gardens Department. We also support the schools with 40 school nurses and 16 school-based therapists, and an additional five SROs through grant funding.

It may sound like we do a lot, and that's because we do. We consistently put our money where our mouth is to ensure our schools are among the best in the state.

I am incredibly proud of the support New Hanover County has provided, and continues to provide, to our public schools. In partnership with our school system, the Board of Education and our amazing teachers, New Hanover County is creating a strong foundation for our children to grow and thrive.

Jonathan Barfield, Jr. has been a resident of New Hanover County since age one and graduated from New Hanover High School in 1984. He is the Chairman of the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners and has served as a Commissioner since December 2008.