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July 17, 2009

Hello, I'm Del Burns.

I want to provide another update on our budget situation, but this week share with you how that is affecting our support for our schools from Central Services.

The General Assembly has still not come to an agreement on a budget, and has passed another continuing resolution. This continues to be a very challenging time for all of our schools, especially those on the year-round calendar that have already opened. All of us are hoping for clarity from the legislature very soon so that principals will know what resources they have to work with in staffing and supplying their schools.

State funding is, by far, the largest source of funding for our schools, and with the large cuts being contemplated by the General Assembly it's inevitable our schools would feel the impact. It's reasonable to ask, then, about our Central Services, and whether reductions there could offset the reductions in our schools.

Central Services is more than administrators at our main office. In fact, only two percent of our employees are central administrators. When we talk about "Central Services" we are also talking about maintenance employees, bus drivers, the technology staff that keep our computers running, and benefits processors who ensure paychecks are issued and insurance claims are filed. They are the customer service staff that help new families moving to the area and our human resources staff that train and recruit our excellent personnel.

These are the people who, from behind the scenes, support our school-based staff so that they can focus on learning and teaching -- our core business.

For a school system responsible for 140,000 students, and 18,000 employees, it's a surprisingly lean operation. 88 cents from every dollar goes to our schools which leaves only 12 percent of our total budget going to the business functions that support and maintain our operations.

This is the first year that budget cuts have had such a direct impact on our schools and our classrooms. Protecting schools from funding shortfalls is a strategy that we have been following for years. As a matter of fact, since 2002 we have cut more than \$18 million from Central Services budgets, and we have consistently cut Central Services funding by a greater percentage than our schools.

Most recently, when we began seeing signs of this economic hurricane on the horizon, we immediately froze Central Services hiring – and as of today 8 percent of our Central Services positions are vacant. Frankly, I don't see these positions being filled anytime soon; in fact, I see many of those vacant jobs being eliminated to help absorb state budget cuts as we try to protect the classroom.

Our schools will always be our first priority, because that is where learning and teaching happens. These are the people who serve your child directly. When we're faced with state funding cuts of this magnitude, however, reductions at the Central Services level alone will not be enough to insulate our schools from the impact. The state funding cuts will affect everyone.

We have created leaner work teams in Central Services which are working harder to become more closely aligned with our schools' and students' needs. Those of us who work outside the classroom know that what we do either directly or indirectly supports our teachers and principals in helping your child succeed. We will continue to rise to challenges facing all of us.

Next week, I will be able to discuss our preliminary results on End-of-Course and End-of-Grade testing for last year. I hope you'll come back to watch it.

Thanks, and I'll talk with you again soon.