



**Durham Association of Educators / NCAE PAC**  
**Candidate Questionnaire: Durham County Commission - 2020 Election Cycle**  
**DAE COUNTY COMMISSION ENDORSEMENT PROCESS:**

1. Completed questionnaires are due to DAE by 11:59pm on Tuesday, December 31, 2019.
  - a. Please **contact Lindsay Johnson** to reserve an interview time slot on Sunday, January 5th.
2. You cannot edit this version of the document. Please follow the steps below:
  - a. Click “file” and select “make a copy.” Make the file name: Your Name - DAE PAC Questionnaire.
  - b. Type your answers in the field below each question. Text boxes will expand as you type.
  - c. Please print the entire document. Fill in this cover sheet with your original signature.
3. To submit your responses, you may EITHER:
  - a. scan this cover sheet with your signature along with your responses **into a single .pdf file and send it to DAE PAC coordinator Lindsay Johnson at: [lindsay.olivia92@gmail.com](mailto:lindsay.olivia92@gmail.com)** ; or
  - b. **Mail a hard copy** to Lindsay AND email her to let her know it is in the mail:  
**DAE PAC % Lindsay Johnson**  
 1025 Southpoint Crossing Drive  
 Durham NC 27713
4. DAE will hold candidate interviews Sunday, January 5th from 9:30am-4pm at Lakewood Elementary School, in the media center.
  - a. Please keep this time period clear on your calendar.
  - b. DAE PAC reserves the right to endorse or not endorse candidates for any particular office based on their response to this questionnaire, the candidate’s existing record, our interview and other interactions with the candidate, and other relevant factors.
  - c. DAE PAC will publish the responses we receive and share and share them with the general public. **Questionnaires will be published in full, without editing, excluding contact info.**
5. **Candidates should complete this entire questionnaire.**

6. Please indicate the best methods for DAE to be in touch with you. Provide contact information for your campaign and separate contact information that you would use if you are elected.
  - a. Contact information below is for DAE use, and will not be shared with the general public.

<i>Name:</i> Heidi Carter	<i>Position Sought:</i> Durham County Commissioner
<i>Personal Cell Phone:</i> 919-225-4268	<i>Personal email address:</i> hhcjog@yahoo.com

7. Please sign below to indicate that you understand the endorsement process that DAE PAC will use and that you agree to our process as you seek our endorsement.



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Signature: Heidi Carter DATE: 12/31/2019

**Please respond to all of the following questions.**

1. Please provide your name, as it will appear on the ballot, & the position you seek.

<i>Name:</i> Heidi Carter	<i>Position Sought:</i> Durham County Commissioner
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2. Briefly describe your involvement with public schools in Durham or elsewhere.

I have been a very active volunteer for Durham Public Schools since my first child entered kindergarten in 1991. From 2004-2016, I was a member of the DPS Board of Education, serving four years as vice-chair and another four years as chair. I have also served as the chair of the Instructional Services Committee, school board representative to the district's School Health Advisory Council, board appointee to the City-County Workforce Development Board and Youth Council, and board representative on the Gang Reduction Steering Committee. I have also been a member of two local non-profits that support our public schools: Student U Board of Directors for ten years; was a founding member of the Crayons to Calculators Board; advisory capacity for Bull City Schools United for LGBTQ student supports and advocacy. I am currently serving another term on the Student U Board.

Before my tenure on the school board, I served on the PTA Boards and/or School Improvement Teams at Southwest Elementary School, Githens Middle School, Shepard Middle School, Durham School of the Arts, and Jordan High School. I served in the roles of PTA president, vice-president, fundraising chair, and science fair and egg drop contest coordinators. I also regularly helped as a Math Superstars coach and as a literacy volunteer throughout my children's elementary school years. I worked part-time as a substitute teacher for several years prior to serving on the school board.

My current involvement with our public schools is in my role as a County Commissioner. I serve on the NC Association of County Commissioner's Education Steering Committee, where I advocate for policies that support public schools and often find myself in conflict with commissioners from other counties that are focused on protecting County coffers, keeping taxing authority away from school boards, and supporting charter schools.

As a county commissioner, I have been a strong supporter of the Community Schools pilots that are in 4 elementary schools and serve on the technical advisory committee that meets monthly. I love the Community School model and want to do everything I can to help the pilots demonstrate how successful this can be. Hopefully, we can spread the approach to all public schools.

I also am a member of the advisory board of the Bull City Schools Foundation and am very excited about their work to support continued improvement in DPS, support teacher



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leadership and growth, and to encourage community engagement with our public schools (including their work to bring more families into our public schools). I have met with small groups of parents to discuss my own children's experiences in DPS and hopefully to help them see that DPS is the best choice for their families.

Perhaps of greatest importance is my current role as a champion for DPS on the Board of County Commissioners. I believe my presence there has led to a shift on the part of management to be less disparaging of our public schools and more willing to recommend local funding that is closer to the Board of Education's request. For the past three years, the County Commissioners have come closer to full funding of the BOE request than in previous years. I have pushed hard for this every year during budget season (so much so that other commissioners have suggested that "it's time to remove my school board hat". The hat I will always wear is the hat of an ardent and steadfast defender and funder of our public schools.

3. There are many candidates for County Commission this year. What about your experiences and/or policy priorities distinguish you from the other candidates? Why should DAE support your candidacy?

My experiences and policy priorities that distinguish me from other candidates and help validate your support for me are:

- Twelve years of service on the DPS Board of Education and my record of commitment to progressive policies lift up students, teachers, and families and promote equity
- Numerous ways of being involved with public schools (see question 1)
- Advocate for healthy school environments, including the development of the first district Wellness Policy and ongoing work to improve nutrition and quality of school meals
- Service on the Durham County Board of Health (BOH) for eight years where I pushed for local policies and programs to support student health: BOH research in support of bell schedule change where high schools start later; advocacy for comprehensive reproductive health education; participation in school-based health centers; innovative nutrition education via the DINE for LIFE program; anti-smoking policies to include e-cigarettes and vaping; school-based mental health programming; recommendations for nutrition guidelines for all foods consumed on school campuses; local funding for more school nurses; vision screening that expands to middle schools, as well as elementary schools; etc.
- Leader for more physical activity and PE in our schools
- Greater willingness to raise taxes for our schools' needs
- Vehement opposition to charter school expansion in Durham, including taking a policy position (vote) not to authorize the use of tax-exempt bonds for a new charter school construction as a County Commissioner.
- Member of the steering committee for the CHAMPS grant from the National League of Cities to increase the number of summer meals, school breakfasts, and afterschool snacks and



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meals that DPS serves to our children

**4. What is DPS doing well?**

DPS is a leader in providing innovative and enriching learning opportunities at every school and for children along the entire spectrum of needs. The district offers very many program and calendar magnets from which families can choose. The district is attracting and supporting high quality teachers and principals, using local supplements and teacher/principal mentoring programs. In addition to a strong focus on literacy, math and the other core subjects, DPS offers an array of enrichment courses in elementary, middle and high schools, including Art, Music, PE in elementary schools; Band, Theater, Chorus, Strings, Dance, Technology in Middle Schools; and an array of AP, Honors and IB classes in high schools. DPS has a very strong Department of Advanced Academics with excellent services for academically and intellectually gifted students. DPS understands the importance of assessing and addressing our students' non-academic needs and works with our community to provide many social supports for our students. The DPS Hub Farm is amazing.

The district has a strong strategic plan to guide its programming for students and to support its continuous improvement. The members of the Board of Education are excellent, smart and committed to the success of DPS. The Director of School Nutrition Services is an innovative leader in his field and is working to dramatically improve school meal quality and access. The district is committed to working with Durham County to increase the number of pre-school classrooms in elementary schools.

DPS is doing each of these things well, and we can and will do better, still.

**5. What could DPS do better?**

DPS must pursue continuous improvement in all areas of academics, operations, and student support services in order to be the system where every school is a great place to be a child, send a child and teach a child.

Particular areas of challenge include:

- Understanding and undoing systemic racism that continues to harm our children and serves as an intense barrier to the success of Children of Color
- Breaking the link between social and economic disadvantage and lack of success in school so we can unleash the endless possibilities within each child
- Lifting the academic achievement levels of all students, with a focus on disparities by race, class, and special needs
- Ensuring our budget needs are adequately met and that resources are equitably,



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effectively and efficiently deployed

- Being responsive to the needs of our educators and families
- Improving communication both internally and with the community
- Addressing the needs of the most academically advanced students
- Addressing the needs of our student refugees, Latinx population and non-English speakers
- Creating school environments that are welcoming of the LGBTQ community
- Getting test-based accountability right and helping our community understand the actual meaning of student test scores
- Empowering teachers!

6. How do you view the relationship between the Durham Board of Education & Superintendent, and the Board of County Commissioners?

I think the relationship must be that of a partnership of equals. Unfortunately, because the County has the taxing authority and controls local funding decisions for education, the relationship can feel awkward and challenging. In general, I think the relationship between the BOE, Superintendent, and Board of County Commissioners is respectful and amicable in Durham. When I attend meetings with other County Commissioners across North Carolina, the BOE/BOCC relationship issue seems more fraught than in Durham. We have worked to maintain a positive working relationship here, but I do think Commissioners must always remember it is the BOE members who devote countless hours to studying the education issues, hearing from the public and making policy decisions. Commissioners need to honor the BOE members' commitment, expertise, and position as elected officials.

7. What do you think we can learn from student standardized test scores? What do you think we can learn from the school performance grades assigned by the NC DPI?

Standardized test scores can help inform teachers about what their students know and can help guide instruction to increase student learning. Standardized test scores have not been shown to be scientifically valid or reliable indicators of teacher quality or effectiveness, however. Low emphasis should be placed on standardized test scores when making high stakes personnel decisions. When using test scores, we can learn more about student performance by looking at student improvement or statistical growth measures. Our goals should include a year's worth of academic growth for a year's worth of instruction. For students who are below grade level proficiency, we must try to accelerate improvement in order to catch up to the students' grade level peers, but the focus must be on high quality teaching over high stakes testing if we are to succeed.

The School Performance Grades assigned by DPI are an accurate indicator of one thing, and only one thing. These grades are consistently and tightly associated with the student poverty rates in the school and tell us more about the performance levels of students upon



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entering school than how well the school performed. The DPS Board of Education finds these grades to be unfair and extremely harmful to our students, teachers, families and community. That is why, during my tenure on the school board, we passed a resolution against these grades and sent a letter to the NC General Assembly demanding they discontinue the assignment of these grades.

8. Assess the impact of charter school expansion within the Durham Community and on Durham Public Schools.

The unfortunate reality is that charter schools have become a substantial part of the education landscape in Durham County, especially since the NC General Assembly lifted the 100 count cap on NC charter schools. Durham is among the top counties with the greatest number of charter schools per capita. Currently, approximately 10,000 children from Durham and the surrounding region attend one of 14 Durham brick-and-mortar charter schools. The large number of charter schools in Durham has led to another reality—the creation of a two-tiered education system. As the number of charter schools has grown in Durham, the public schools have become increasingly segregated by race and by class. Additionally, the increase in charter schools is associated with greater numbers of schools with very high concentrations of disadvantaged students, the overwhelming majority of whom are African American and Latinx. **Given these realities, charter schools should play a limited role in educating our children, and our community’s energy should flow to Durham Public Schools and the 33,000 children they educate.**

There are many good people who have supported the creation of charter schools and continue to believe these schools can help improve academic outcomes for students. There are many parents, avidly seeking the best education possible for their children, who choose charter schools. And there is much good teaching and learning taking place in some of our charter schools.

**Despite these truths, charter school policy is not good public policy for several reasons. First**, charter schools have not led to the improvement of traditional public schools in the US or in North Carolina, as is demonstrated by research on charter schools in NC by Duke University’s Helen Ladd and by the national 2013 CREDO (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes) report. **Second**, charter schools make it more challenging for traditional public schools to serve the community’s children, the vast majority of whom will attend our traditional public schools. The challenges include an inability to accurately project student enrollment which drives the budget and efficient financial planning, an inability to effectively plan for the siting of a school based on projected enrollment/capacity, and diminished resources for educating what is often a more difficult population of students. The state’s budget for charter schools has grown from just over \$16 million in 1997 to more than \$674 million for the 2018-2019 school year, and most of that money would have gone to school districts for traditional public schools. A recent study



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([https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3082968](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3082968)) by Helen Ladd found a large and negative fiscal impact in excess of \$500 per traditional public school pupil in one urban school district, which translates into an average fiscal cost of more than \$3,500 for each student enrolled in charter schools. **Third**, charter schools in Durham tend to be hyper-segregated and have accelerated re-segregation in DPS.

If charter schools are going to co-exist alongside our traditional public schools, it is important that they offer innovative programming not available in DPS and are located in an area where student enrollment exceeds public school facility capacity. County oversight of charter schools should be comparable to that of DPS. If we assume the NC legislature is going to continue to support and expand charter schools, the state must expand its oversight of financial practices and academic outcomes of charter schools, and they must close all low performing charter schools and schools with financial mismanagement. The state must limit the expansion of charter schools in NC overall, and especially in counties with a high per capita number of charters. The state should give local boards of education chartering authority to help control for duplication of programming and/or location, to allow a school to be chartered based on a specific need, and to ensure accountability to a governing body elected by the people. Charter schools must provide transportation, school meals, and services for children with limited English skills and special needs.

In order for charters to have any chance of helping to improve outcomes in the public schools, the paradigm in NC government must change from one of competition to cooperation. That is why I spent over a year working with charter school leaders to try to develop a common vision for high quality public schools in Durham and a compact for collaboration. There are many operational areas where DPS can provide support for charters, but the one way charters could help DPS would be to share the challenge of educating our most difficult and expensive children to educate—those who are poor, have limited English skills or special needs. For DPS leaders, this was the single, non-negotiable element in the draft vision. Our attempts to collaborate with charters fell apart when a commitment to sharing the burden of poverty was not forthcoming.

Without this commitment, attempts to integrate our schools are stymied, and re-segregation is likely to continue. We know that segregated schools belie the promise of public education and American democracy. And we know that diverse schools raise test scores and help kids learn to live with empathy in a multi-cultural world. In as much as charter schools are associated with increasing re-segregation of our public schools, they are harmful to the advancement and progress of Durham's school system. We must seek policies, programs and solutions that lead to systemic improvements in public education. Charters schools operate more like private schools with little regard for the good of the system, and for many in North Carolina, are a step toward dismantling public education and replacing it with a more privatized system. Public education system improvements will require a massive shift in thinking, one that at a minimum mitigates against the significant negative externalities of charters on the system.



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9. The racial demographics of DPS enrollment do not reflect those of Durham County. Is this a problem? Explain.

Yes, I think this is a problem.

A major source of Durham's strength is its cultural and racial diversity. Durham is a city without a majority, and I wish our school system's demographics reflected the wonderful diversity we celebrate in our community. Our district demographics are nearly 80% African American and Hispanic students with less than 20% white students, and approximately 2 out of 3 students qualify for free lunch. While DPS must always embrace and welcome with open arms the children we do serve, the triple promise of American Public Education—social cohesion, social mobility and social capital—is threatened by school segregation.

Public schools are the heart of our community and have a critical role to play in creating an inclusive society, especially during these times of racial, ethnic and economic unrest and divide across our country. Public schools are *the* places where we can all come together, ride the same school buses with each other, sit beside one another on the bleachers, eat with one another in the school cafeterias, learn and play together and come to understand, value and celebrate our differences, as well as our common humanity. This is one of the promises of public education, and for it to be realized, we must have strong, innovative and nurturing public schools where the best teachers want to work, and all Durham's families want to send their children to learn. We need to be very concerned that our public schools are re-segregating along racial and economic lines, do not reflect the demographics of our community, and that a growing majority of our African American and Latinx students attend high poverty schools.

As I said above in question 12, we know that segregated schools belie the promise of public education and American democracy. And we know that diverse schools raise test scores and help kids learn to live in a multi-cultural world. In as much as the racial demographics in DPS do not foster racially or economically diverse schools, this is a problem.

10. 2019-20 is the second year in the implementation of the community school model at four Durham elementary schools (Lakewood, Club Blvd, EK Powe, and Southwest). This work is rooted in nationally recognized best practices ([Link to Report from Center for Popular Democracy](#)) and represents an important partnership between the Durham Association of Educators, DPS, Durham County, and the Community Alliance for Public Education.
- a. Provide your assessment of this partnership and of the community school transformation project.





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The Community School project in the four schools has the potential to make our schools the ones our children deserve, where there is deep learning that is supported by authentic family/community engagement, strong curricula, high quality teaching, shared leadership and wrap around support services. The model believes in the power of educator and family input and the capacity within communities to come together around our children. The model is rooted in evidence of success, with many examples of where and how it is working across the US, when implemented with fidelity. The CS model is anchored by a full-time community schools coordinator who supports school faculty and families with school needs assessments, goal identification, and strategic initiatives. The deep engagement of teachers and families as co-leaders in this process is key to success, and improvement science is used to address the needs that are identified. At its core, Community Schools is about tapping the power of community to offer our children the genuine opportunity to learn, develop, pursue their dreams, and be a full participant in our economy and our democracy.

It has been amazing to watch the progress of the model in our four schools. One of the most noteworthy achievements so far is the incredible levels of teacher and staff participation and belief in the model. The other outstanding accomplishment is the success in engaging families in the work of school improvement. The levels of participation by parents exceeds any level I have ever been part of during all my years of connection to our schools. It is truly dramatic and could be the secret sauce for success.

The partnership between the DAE, DPS, Durham County and the Community Alliance for Public Education (CAPE) is significant in that it blends funding and support from within and outside of DPS. This allows some level of autonomy from the district, but the fact that there is district funding also shows commitment to the model. CAPE has been an integral part of making the partnership work by acting as the fiscal agent and intermediary in the project, helping to keep it embedded in the community, versus being an isolated project of either the school district or the county. There has even been discussion about bringing the City of Durham in as a partner, even though local funding and responsibility for education typically lie with the County.

b. Do you commit to making the policy and budgeting decisions required to sustain and expand this community schools work? Why or why not?

Yes, I strongly endorse the Community School model. I sincerely believe in its values and how it relies on enriched curricula to foster deep learning, high quality teaching over high stakes testing, shared school leadership, authentic and meaningful family/community engagement (including wrap around services to address identified social needs that are educationally relevant) to help close the persistent gaps in our schools and reverse the growing inequality in our society. This is one of the promises of public education, and Community Schools can be the foundation for making it a reality

11. Each of the last two years DAE has led and organized work stoppages so that educators could demand more from state lawmakers for our students and for educators. Please describe your



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thinking about these sorts of actions, and elaborate on why you either did or did not support them.

I applaud the steps that DAE takes to organize within Durham and across the state for policies and funding that will improve our public schools. Our schools are the keystone of our democracy, so our teachers should absolutely be encouraged to participate and lead in the democratic process. I was also impressed with the ways in which educators who were going to be absent from school worked in advance to plan for their absence if schools closed. In particular, many educators worked long hours to make sure our students who depend on school meals would still have access to food.

12. According to a [recent report](#) the national average for per student education spending is \$14,046. While Durham County invests significantly in DPS, [budget data](#) shows that per student spending in Durham totals \$10,641 (\$3,405 per student *below* the national average).
  - a. To what extent should local policy makers stretch their budgets to fill in the gaps left by



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b. inadequate state appropriations?

Durham County provides local funding for a host of services that are essential for a thriving community and shared prosperity. Three of the most critical areas are public health, social services, and education. Outcomes in these three areas are interdependent, and there can be no trade-offs or we will not achieve any of our goals, and our local resources are limited. Therein lies the challenge. We have critical needs for funding in all three areas, and more, but our methods of raising local revenue are limited mostly to property taxes and sales taxes, neither of which take into account the ability of the resident to pay. As our population swells, the needs of our residents may outpace the growth in our local tax base, and we have to make difficult funding decisions.

Having said that, I believe in the fundamental value of public education and the central role it plays in our economy and our society. My bias for funding is the education of our children, and Durham County's local school funding effort must match our County's overall funding capacity.

The NC Public School Forum publishes an annual Finance Report (<https://www.ncforum.org/2019-local-school-finance-study/>) with some very interesting data related to the rank of counties in the areas of property value, actual public school funding effort (per pupil funding amounts), ability to pay (revenue per student), and relative effort (current spending as a percentage of revenue/student). The data in the reports help us examine the capacity and actual effort of counties to support public schools.

If we look at Durham County's investment in public schools for 2018-2019 in the context of our County's taxable resources, Durham ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in taxable real estate, third in actual effort, 16<sup>th</sup> in ability to pay, and 56<sup>th</sup> in relative effort. While this is somewhat wonky, I think it highlights an important issue that *even though Durham ranks third in its local per pupil contribution, our relative effort is dramatically lower than it could be, according to these data points*. It is also disturbing that Durham County's relative effort has fallen from a rank of 21 in 2014 to 34 in 2018 and now to 56<sup>th</sup> in 2019. These numbers make me think that we can stretch our budget more for public schools so that our funding levels are more in line with our funding capacity.

13. Educators within DPS are experiencing significant challenges as we work to meet the needs of each student. Additional resources are needed in order to: 1) expand staffing for ESL and EC services; 2) fairly compensate staff by ensuring all classified employees earn at least \$15 per hour; 3) retain certified staff by increasing the local salary supplement and providing raises for staff paid purely from local funds; and 4) offset increasing costs for utilities and student growth. This is far from an exhaustive list of needs; they are simply among the most pressing.

**a. Will you support and publicly advocate for between \$10-\$15 million in increased county funding for DPS to satisfy these budget priorities, including being willing to raise taxes if necessary in order to provide the required funds? Why or why not?**

My initial reaction and easy response would be, "Yes, yes, hell yes!" That's what I want to say, it's what my gut reaction is, and it also means I would be done with this questionnaire. In all likelihood and based on past performance, I will support and advocate for this funding level.



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And yet, I am finding it difficult to commit to a specific dollar allocation for DPS at this point in time, out of context of all funding decisions. Nevertheless, I think my record speaks for itself. Every one of the 12 years that I served on the Board of Education, I worked diligently to communicate the district's funding needs to the BOCC. My last four years I was the board chair, and in the face of disparaging remarks about DPS coming from the County, I always took this chance to make a compelling statement when we came before the Commissioners and County Manager with our budget request. I was a strong and forceful advocate for our public schools and increased DPS funding, often in the face of County push-back and opposition to increased funding because of low test scores and "accountability". In my last three budget cycles as a County Commissioner, I have fought for every last penny to come closer to fully funding the request of the Board of Education.

I do not mean to be wishy washy. I believe in straight talk and honest answers. What I can commit to now is that I will come out swinging and pushing for full funding of the request of the Board of Education. That elected body studies the issues and community recommendations and knows what the district needs to be one where the best staff members want to work and where families want their children to learn. As you know, my record has been to fight for full funding of the school board's requests, and we have gotten very close to that every year that I have been a commissioner...much closer than many of the years when I was on the other side as a school board member. I hope my presence as an education champion puts pressure on staff and others to increase DPS funding, and I think it has.

As far as raising taxes for our school system's needs, I have not been slow to increase taxes for needed services during my past 3 years as a commissioner. I have supported County budgets that have required a tax increase every year, some of this for education funding. But any tax increase has to be balanced against the real challenges it will present to our lower income home owners, renters, and fixed-income residents. That is why I want to be thoughtful about every possible factor related to a funding decision, especially if it requires a tax increase.

My approach to policy making is one that carefully considers all the facts and contextual evidence related to a policy decision. The annual budget approval is the biggest policy decision that County Commissioners make each year, as it sets the priorities for program implementation. It feels irresponsible of me to make a specific funding commitment without knowing anything about local revenue predictions and potential emergency needs throughout County government...no matter how badly I want that \$10-\$15 million and more for our public schools.