



**January 21, 2025**

**Buncombe County Commissioners**

Dear Honorable Commissioners,

We write to you today as concerned advocates for our children, families, and educators in Buncombe County. As our community continues to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Helene, we face unprecedented challenges, and we recognize the tough decisions that must be made in order to balance our county's budget. However, as public school leaders, we urge you to reconsider the proposed 4% cut to K-12 education funding.

We understand that the county is facing a significant revenue shortfall of up to \$25.7 million, and that reductions across various departments have been suggested. Certainly, the county staff is to be commended for their tireless work to support the community. While it is essential to find solutions that ensure fiscal stability, it is imperative that we do not compromise the future of our children—our most valuable asset—in the process.

Cutting educational funding in the wake of a disaster is not only short-sighted but harmful. Our schools, including those of us in the charter school sector, are already underfunded, and this additional reduction will be felt deeply by teachers, families, and students – no matter how skillfully leaders navigate the cuts. With no alternative revenue streams and no guaranteed or pending relief funding, these cuts would fall on the shoulders of our youngest citizens.

Research on child development makes it clear that disruptions to educational opportunities, especially during times of crisis, have long-term effects on students' cognitive, emotional, and social growth. For children who have already experienced the trauma of a natural disaster, the impact of losing educational support or ancillary services could lead to an increase in mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. These effects are not just temporary—they carry forward into adulthood, impacting workforce participation and overall quality of life. In the long run, reducing funding for education will cost the community more in the form of greater needs for mental health services, higher dropout rates, and greater truancy.

Moreover, we must consider the economic implications of underinvesting in our children today. If we are serious about rebuilding our community and generating future revenue, we must recognize that the foundation of that recovery lies in the strength of our educational system. Our children are the workforce and leaders of tomorrow, and providing them with the resources they need to succeed is not an expense—it is an investment in our collective future.

We acknowledge the county's goal to maintain its AAA bond rating and to approach this crisis with fiscal responsibility. However, there are other means to balance the budget without sacrificing the well-being of our children. The county's fund balance could be used more strategically to weather this storm while still preserving vital educational services. The county could wait for FEMA assistance and continue to advocate



for revenue replacing emergency funding. We trust that the commissioners have confidence in the resilience and resourcefulness of this community. Now is not the time to be conservative in our approach to the future. If Buncombe County truly believes in its ability to rebound, the best bet is to invest in our children today.

By protecting our children's education now, we will ensure that we have a healthier, more educated, and more productive community in the years to come. We implore you to put the children of Buncombe County first and reject the proposal to cut funding for education.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to the well-being of all our citizens.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sarena Fuller  
Executive Director  
ArtSpace Charter School

Michelle Vruwink  
Executive Director  
The Franklin School of Innovation

Jennifer Townley  
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