

**Arlington Public Schools
FY 2017-26 Capital Improvement Plan
Community Engagement**

Key Takeaways

Arlington Public Schools created a feedback form to solicit community feedback about possible school crowding solutions to be considered as part of the FY 2017-26 Capital Improvement Plan. The feedback forms, which were made available in hard copy and electronic form and in both English and in Spanish, collectively received 473 responses between February 3 and March 4, 2016.

The questions and unedited responses in both English and Spanish are attached. There were 13 questions total. Not every participant every question. 453 was the highest number of responses and 182 was the fewest number of responses.

The following report summarizes key takeaways from the responses, organized by school level and themes. Numbers in parentheses reflect the number of respondents that answered in a particular manner. Where quotes appear, the text is provided in the form it was submitted and has not been altered.

Elementary Schools

- **Building additional classroom spaces.** Participants said that building additional classroom spaces would be the most effective capital option.
 - 81 participants said that building more schools is a good opportunity for adding capacity. About half of these participants, 38, noted that the Oakridge area needs a new school the most. 29 participants answered with similar responses.
 - §□ *“Build more elementary schools, both neighborhood and magnet. Expand existing elementary schools.”*
 - §□ *“Construction of new schools, preferably not using the greens of existing APS facilities. The kids need space to play.”*
 - 38 participants also said that building additions to existing schools are the best capital solutions.
 - §□ *“Increase capacity of existing schools. Build second stories, even if it's more expensive.”*
 - §□ *“Additions to current buildings wherever possible.”*
- **Converting former elementary schools.** 22 participants said that facilities that once served as elementary schools could quickly be converted back to classroom spaces.
 - 12 of these participants specifically identified Reed as the best option, while 5 identified Madison.
 - §□ *“Turn Reed back into a neighborhood elementary school.”*
 - §□ *“Look at converting less utilized, older community centers back to school sites. e.g.- Madison, etc.”*
- **Moving Pre-K and K out of elementary schools.** 43 participants identified the removal of Pre-K and K classrooms out of elementary schools to make more room for Grades 1-5. Out of all the participants that identified this as a non- capital solution, there are two prevailing schools of thought:

- 32 participants suggested the creation of an early childhood education center for Pre-K and K students, with some participants specifically identifying the Oakridge Elementary attendance zone or Reed as possible locations.
 - §□ *“Pull out preschool classes from overcrowded schools where appropriate and rehome to other county resources (Lubber Run, Madison).”*
 - The remainder of these respondents (11) indicated that Pre-K and K could be housed at available spaces at community centers, churches, or schools that are currently not crowded.
 - §□ *“Increase seats at Reed-Westover. More pre-K AND Kindergarten seats could be carved out of that space.”*
- **County help with finding and purchasing sites.** 48 participants indicated that APS and the County should collaborate in the finding and acquiring of sites to build new schools.
 - §□ *“The County needs to give or buy more land for the schools.”*
 - §□ *“Do an assessment of county buildings and space availability. Is there a building with 6-8 rooms that could be a kindergarten/pre-K center, opening up PreK/K rooms at nearby elementary schools.”*
 - §□ *“County-owned lands need to be studied for potential development of education facilities.”*
- **Oakridge Elementary.** 39 participants identified Oakridge as a school with a growing crowding issue. While most of these Oakridge-related responses (29) contained identical language, the respondents addressed the need for a new school in the Aurora Highlands/Pentagon City area as recommended by the South Arlington Working Group. These participants specifically noted that the creation of an early childhood education center, a choice school, or an upper/lower elementary school would help relieve crowding. They also recommended funding a study to evaluate the feasibility of possible sites in the Pentagon City area.
 - §□ *“Follow the recommendation of the South Arlington Working Group for the two boards to work together with the communities to find a suitable site for a new school in the Pentagon City area. The School Board should, at a minimum, fund an appropriate study for this recommendation through the CIP.”*
 - §□ *“In the Oakridge attendance zone, APS should consider creating an early childhood education center which can house Pre-K programs as well as Oakridge’s Kindergarten program. APS should also consider the creation of a choice school or an upper/lower elementary school in the area.”*

Middle Schools

- **Maximum seating capacity.** Most participants (303) indicated that they do not support increasing the preferred maximum seating capacity at middle schools beyond 1,300.
 - The major concern noted by these participants is the student middle school experience.
 - §□ Most of those participants (79) indicated that large middle schools would affect the students’ learning environment, including participation in extracurricular activities.
 - *“There are too many students and too few enrichment extracurricular and sporting activities.”*

- *“The larger the school population, the more anonymous a student feels, and the effectiveness of education is diminished.”*
 - §□ 9 participants noted that large schools would not benefit students during these formative years.
 - *“This is a sensitive time in child development, and more kids will fall through the cracks in bigger schools.”*
 - *“Kids in this age are in-between finding themselves as children and teens. Give them the space (literally) to grow into their skin.”*
- **Building a new middle school.** Participants responded both broadly and specifically about the need to build a new middle school.
 - 51 participants identified building one or more middle schools as a favored capital solution. A majority of these participants did not specify where APS could build a new school, and in some instances, it is unclear if they are talking about moving forward with the building of a new middle school at Stratford or building additional schools in addition to a new middle school at Stratford.
 - 51 participants specifically mentioned that the funding and building of the new middle school at Stratford by 2019 should be a priority to help alleviate crowding in middle schools.
 - §□ 14 participants also noted that their preference would be to build a 1,300-seat middle school at Stratford instead of the currently proposed 1,000.
- **Focused programs.** 28 participants indicated that renovating and/or building additions to existing middle schools could help alleviate crowding.
 - Others suggested that the relocation of special programs to alternative spaces (9) or the creation of another focused program, like HB Woodlawn or STEM (10), would help to alleviate crowding.
 - §□ *“Consideration of special programs in potential urban settings to make use of unoccupied commercial property in Arlington.”*
 - §□ *“Possibly an additional focus/magnet school to reduce seating at all middle schools across the county.”*
- **Alternative school schedules.** Participants suggested alternative school schedules (e.g., block scheduling, flex scheduling) (24) or year-round schools (16) as non-capital solutions to alleviate crowding.
 - §□ *“Year-round school, staggered schedules where some students may finish around 2 but others go until 5 or 6.”*
 - §□ *“Year round school so that each child has 3 months off in monthly intervals on a rotating basis so that all students go to school 9 months out of the year and so that school is open 12 months out of the year.”*
 - §□ *“Split sessions. Busses are cheaper than buildings”*
- **Grade level grouping shifts.** 13 participants also suggested that shifting grade levels would help to alleviate crowding.
 - A majority of these participants favored the idea of moving 6th grade to elementary school (10).
 - §□ *“If capacity can be created at the elementary level, consider keeping Gr 6 at ES, creating capacity at MS or HS, depending upon where the need was greatest.”*

§□ *“Change grade level groupings - e.g. High School to 10-12 program, Junior High - upper 8-9 and lower 6-7 grade junior high, or move 6th grade to elementary and move-out all pre-K and special programs into their own center).”*

- **Increased coordination with the County.** 27 participants indicated that increased coordination and communication with the County is important to effectively address middle school capacity.
 - 31 participants said that the County offering more of its land and existing facilities to be developed or converted into educational spaces could help alleviate crowding.
 - Other respondents (18) said that asking the County for more funding or joint funding would help APS build more schools.
 - §□ *“Investigate opportunities to transition county land into a new middle school facility.”*
 - §□ *“Take back the Community centers that used to be schools - ridiculously low usage when kids are crammed together.”*

High Schools

- **Maximum seating capacity.** 273 participants said that the preferred maximum seating capacity at high schools should not be increased beyond 2,200.
 - Of respondents that elaborated on their answers, 23 indicated that the student high school experience would be diminished in a large school. Some participants said that the needs of the “whole child” will not be met and issues such as bullying and truancy will surface in a large school.
 - §□ *“Although ‘studies’ may show that size of the school doesn't matter to kids' ability to learn, from personal experience with a child in an APS high school, middle-of-the-road kids get overlooked and lost in the shuffle. They are way too large as is.”*
 - §□ *“Bigger is not better. Bigger becomes impersonal both for staff, families and students.”*
- **New comprehensive high school.** A substantial majority of participants (360) said that building a new comprehensive high school should be considered.
 - Of respondents that elaborated on their answers, 15 participants said that the biggest issue for this solution to crowding is finding a suitable location to build a new comprehensive high school.
 - §□ *“A new facility of this size may also provide additional capacity for other County facility needs.”*
 - §□ *“Arlington should continue to consider all options for additional high schools, the opportunity to build a school was just put back on the table. Explore all options that will best serve Arlington in the intervening years until the school is built.”*
 - 13 respondents are also open to developing schools with specialized focus or special programs,
 - 7 respondents suggested that a comprehensive high school does not require fields for sports or other extracurricular activities.

- §□ *“Please also be open to having a ‘comprehensive school’ that may not need football fields - or that can share fields - so that we have more options on location.”*
 - §□ *“Yes, but would also strongly consider a school of choice with a STEM or STEAM focus at the secondary level”*
- **Using community centers that were once schools.** 21 participants indicated interest in reclaiming community centers that were once schools and renovating for school use. The Madison site was mentioned the most frequently (13), followed by Reed (9).
 - §□ *“Replace a community center / former school, such as the Madison Center with a new high school, or use such spaces for ‘remote classrooms.’”*
 - §□ *“USE THE COMMUNITY CENTERS FOR SCHOOLS INCULDING MADISON CENTER WHICH HAS BEEN AN OBVIOUS SOLUTION FOR YEARS”*
- **Leasing commercial office space.** 29 participants suggested leasing vacant commercial office space in urban corridors such as Rosslyn and Crystal City to be used as classroom space.
 - §□ *“Use some of the commercial space that is sitting vacant. There may not be sports fields but something needs to be done quickly.”*
 - §□ *“The school board should consider use of existing commercial space as an alternative location for some school programs. While commercial space may not be suitable for all levels of education or school programs, some programs may be able to be provided in commercial space.”*
- **Alternative scheduling and remote learning.** According to participants, non-capital solutions to crowding could include alternative scheduling and remote learning.
 - 49 participants are open to alternative scheduling, including year-round schools.
 - §□ *“Year round school with staggered breaks (i.e., 4/5 of the student population is in school while 1/5 is on break). Guarantee families with multiple high schoolers that their children will be in the same "section" so their breaks will be at the same time. Each section should have at least one break coincide with one of the middle and elementary school breaks (at least a two week period) so families with children in multiple schools can also have a time to vacation together.”*
 - Other participants (40) suggested that remote learning, including online courses, internships, independent studies, home school, and college courses, could help to provide much-needed capacity in schools.
 - §□ *“Offer online, home-based programming 2-3 days a week complemented by in school programming. You could stagger the students such that some are working from home while others are working at school.”*
- **Ask County to use facilities and land for educational spaces.** 62 participants indicated that there are underutilized County facilities and land that APS could possibly use to build capacity.

- §□ *“Since enrollment is typically cyclical, opening up some county buildings for school use during the increase with the understanding that they will be returned when enrollment drops again.”*
- §□ *“Arlington County government IS APS (drawing a distinction between the two is not the right approach) and the county should utilize all the land that it has available to meet the needs of its citizens, in particular its mandate to provide primary education to its young residents. If that means designating lands currently used for things other than schools to become schools, then that is what it should do.”*

Other Themes

- **Boundary changes.** 31 participants said that boundary changes should be one of the non-capital options on the table to balance enrollment among schools. The idea is that some schools are under capacity, and the burden of enrollment could be shared among all schools.
 - §□ *“You can redistrict NOW, which would provide some much needed interim relief to WMS and Swanson while we all wait for Stratford to be built.”*
 - §□ *“Move boundary lines to fill in low capacity schools to reduce student teacher ratio.”*
- **HB Woodlawn.** Two prevailing themes regarding HB Woodlawn emerged in the responses:
 - 24 participants mentioned that the success of HB Woodlawn could be replicated to build another program similar to it in an alternative space to help alleviate crowding.
 - 31 participants indicated that programs like HB Woodlawn should not be immune from enrollment increases; therefore, the capacity at the new school being built at Wilson should be increased to accommodate more students.
- **Working with or taxing developers.** 30 participants suggested the idea of taxing or working with developers that build high-rise and high-density buildings in the County. Participants indicated that these developers should contribute to building more schools if they are also building facilities that could potentially attract families to Arlington, thus adding more students to the school system.
 - §□ *“The county should also be asking more of developers if they are going to increase density and therefore increase school enrollment.”*
 - §□ *“Work with the County about developer fees--that will need to be a joint effort.”*
- **Arlington residency verification.** 8 participants indicated that stringent residency verification measures must be implemented to make sure students who go to public schools in Arlington live in Arlington.
 - §□ *“STRICTER RESIDENCY REVIEW (ensure every student enrolled at EVERY Arlington school is a current Arlington resident) and require proof of residency EVERY year.”*
 - §□ *“Increase enforcement efforts of those non-residents who are fraudulently receiving schooling in Arlington. Check residency status of all students more frequently to ensure compliance.”*

New Forms of Outreach:

The three community CIP Forums were Periscoped.

- Meeting #1– 41 live views, 15 views since posting
- Meeting #2 – 24 live views, 14 views since posting
- Meeting #3 – 138 live views, 15 views since posting