



December 9th, 2019

Dear Arlington Public Schools and Members of the School Board,

Ashlawn Elementary School's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is closely following the ongoing school change proposals. We recognize that change is essential, as we are one of many schools over capacity, even after completing an addition in 2014. Staff and parents have all expressed the difficulty and frustration of having a school that is over capacity. Overcrowding has resulted in logistical challenges with lunchtime planning, additional relocatable classrooms located on now unusable outdoor play space, splitting our long time annual holiday-sing-along into two separate assemblies, as well as having to host music concerts off site. **Our main goal and hope for Ashlawn during this process is to find a balance between alleviating the overcrowding and minimizing the changes to Ashlawn's boundaries. To that end, we strongly oppose the "what if" representative scenario initially presented by APS this fall.** In this scenario around 80 percent of the existing Ashlawn student body would be sent to other elementary schools. We do not view this as an acceptable solution. We support changes that address overcrowding as a county-wide issue.

Ashlawn is a close-knit, welcoming community of learners that values diversity, kindness and creativity. Our Global Citizenship Project ensures that students leave their Ashlawn experience knowing it is important to *Work for Peace, Protect the Environment, Accept All People and Help Those in Need*. We have students from over 30 countries and cultures. Students at Ashlawn learn to extend these four pillars into their neighborhoods, communities and classrooms.

Many of our students walk to school, a daily ritual that builds this sense of community. At 8:25am on school mornings the sidewalks are covered with families walking together from the neighborhoods surrounding the school. Our students who live along the Bluemont trail look forward to being old enough for their turn to meet "at the rocks" to bike and walk together. Many friendships have been forged during these walks. And

while a lot of us walk because of the ease and sense of community, we also walk because we are global citizens and it is good for our Earth.

Our neighbors who live behind Ashlawn watch closely over Reevesland, home to the Reevesland Learning Gardens. These gardens are a much-valued part of science education at Ashlawn. On a snowy day off from school you see the same children who tend to the gardens sledding down the historical hill with their school friends. Our most beloved Reevesland volunteers are retired community members whose own children attended Ashlawn many years ago.

Ashlawn takes care of and supports all members of our school community. For our families who need extra help, as a community we supply gift cards around the holidays, provide daily snacks, pay lunch debt at the end of the school year and make sure that during special events all students are included (our “book fairy” guarantees that all students go home with new books during the book fair). That is just a short list.

Through the years of being a neighborhood school, Ashlawn has built a special place at the center of numerous neighborhoods up and down Wilson Boulevard. Ashlawn seeks for this process to minimize disruption to our community. We know many other schools feel just as strongly about their own communities, but we felt it was important to highlight ours. None of us want our schools to change, but we understand that is not realistic. Our main intent with our letter to you today is not only to highlight what an exceptional school Ashlawn is, but to ask that the changes you make to our schools countywide are executed as carefully and holistically as possible, based on objective and transparent criteria.

We would like to express our gratitude for your tireless work throughout this complicated process and your openness to hearing community feedback. As you are aware, our PTA signed on to the letter drafted and signed by six other PTAs raising our concerns about the timing of a vote in February, as well as requesting more transparency and more data. After the December 2nd Question & Answer session we understand more clearly that time is of the essence for several reasons. However, we remain interested in receiving additional detailed information, including maps and enrollment projections, from APS related to your two current proposals. It is also clear after listening to the Q & A session that not only is this process complicated, it is emotional for communities across the county. In our view, this speaks to the quality of the education provided by Arlington Public Schools and the importance communities place on instructing our children, as well as the unique culture each school works hard to uphold. In short, APS schools are congested because Arlington is an amazing place to live.

Sincerely,

Danielle Blanchard, PTA President

Jamie Brys, Ashlawn Ambassador