



K.W. Barrett PTA
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November 22, 2019

Ms. Lisa Stengle
Executive Director, Planning and Evaluation
Arlington Public Schools
2110 Washington Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22204

Re: Elementary School Planning/ Elementary School Boundary process

Dear Ms. Stengle:

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Elementary School Planning/ Elementary School Boundary process. While we appreciate the difficulties APS faces in exploring potential solutions to address the imbalance of neighborhood seats across the county – and the challenges that it faces in the years ahead – we are concerned with the impact that the proposals will have on the Barrett Elementary School community.

APS has asked us to de-couple the current school-move planning process (occurring now through February 2020) from the school boundary planning process that will occur beginning in September 2020 for the school year beginning September 2021 – which raises concerns because it ignores the reality that moves and changes to option schools will have distinct effects on school boundaries and thus, on the communities that attend our neighborhood schools.

We also urge APS to make the process more transparent. For example, there have been some concerns from community members who initially found information on the effects (i.e. boundary maps based on Proposals 1 and 2) for specific school communities, only to notice later that informational material was substantially changed or removed altogether from APS' website, which made answering the questions and providing the most informed input difficult.

With the above concerns in mind, we attempt to specifically respond to APS' proposals below:

For Barrett, "School Moves Proposal 1", which would require more than 2,400 neighborhood elementary school students be reassigned to another school, is of particular concern. Based on the Neighborhood Schools in Scenario chart for Proposal 1, 57 students currently attending Barrett would attend Ashlawn; while, 59 students currently attending Ashlawn would attend Barrett, a proposal that absent specific corresponding proposed boundary change information raises questions about why the change would be necessary or beneficial. As no boundary change maps have been made available (or are no longer available on the APS website), we are left to wonder about the impact and are particularly concerned with any proposal that would:

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- **potentially divide the Arlington Forest neighborhood** into two or more separate school boundaries by sending the north, Greenbrier section of Arlington Forest to Ashlawn. We do not support a move that would seem to harm strong, diverse, neighborhood schools like Barrett.
- **add to vehicular traffic**, which would seem counter to the goals of the boundary planning process to encourage and support more walkable neighborhood schools. Although a small portion of our students are bus eligible (only three buses – one for general education and two for special education), many of these students walk to Barrett with their families – but would not be able to do if attending Ashlawn.

While the “School Moves Proposal 2” would have the least impact on Barrett (according to APS, the proposal would result in 97 percent of current students staying at Barrett), we remain skeptical of any APS’ proposal unless, and until, an actual map showing the school boundaries be made available under the various proposals. APS should make it a priority to keep students at the current neighborhood schools together, while enabling students to walk to their neighborhood schools as much as possible.

We are also concerned with the “representative boundaries” scenario as it also seems to run counter to APS’s stated goals for its school district. In particular, we oppose a scenario that would prioritize option schools (in which families have elected to send children to schools outside their communities) over neighborhood schools that build communities. APS seems to be offering this as a “what if” worst case scenario, but it is not clear why this is the only option for using schools efficiently. Option school acceptances could be reduced to prioritize neighborhood schools and community building instead. It was not clear how the lines were drawn or what data was used to assess and encourage demographic balance and diversity that is such a strength at our school and has been a noted area for improvement at APS.

Finally, any impact on the demographic makeup of a school should be considered under all proposals. The APS FAQ notes that

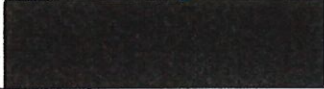

“demographics are not addressed in these proposals...we have prioritized the use of available resources to address the needs of students within a school, rather than using the resources to bus some students to a school for the sole purpose of balancing demographics.”



We strongly urge that APS consider the impact on the demographic makeup that any potential school boundary changes will have on all schools, including Barrett. A Title I school, Barrett Elementary is currently comprised of 57 percent English learners, 61 percent economically-disadvantaged – including 55 percent who are eligible for free or reduced meals – and 20 percent of students who have disabilities. Any potential changes to the demographics would have an adverse impact on our wonderfully diverse school.



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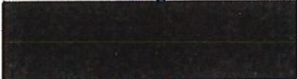

We thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments and to raise concerns that we have with APS' Elementary School Planning proposals. We hope that you consider our concerns as you move forward with any proposal.

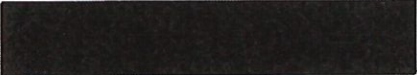

Regards,

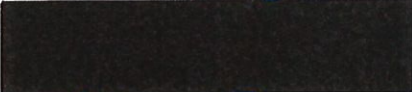
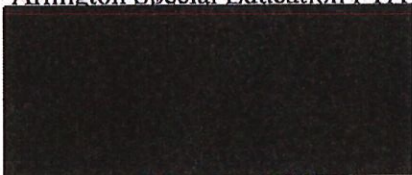

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President, K.W. Barrett PTA


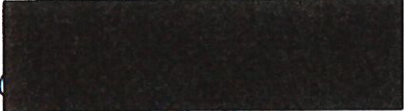


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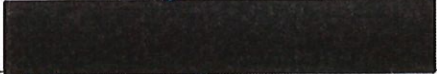

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