

Monday, December 2, 2019

Tannia Talento, Chair, Arlington School Board
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Reid Goldstein, Member, Arlington School Board
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To the Arlington School Board:

We, the undersigned local PTA organizations, representing more than 2,700 Arlington families and seven school communities, respectfully ask the School Board to advise APS leadership and staff that it will not take a vote on any elementary school moves in February 2020.

Rather, we urge the School Board to vote next fall at the conclusion of a holistic, twelve-month process that incorporates analysis of school moves, planning unit data review, and neighborhood boundary changes (APS's proposed Phases I-III).

We believe that a February vote on school moves is premature and will not yield the long-term, sensible, and sustainable solution that Arlington Public Schools urgently needs. More specifically, our analysis of the data and two proposals that APS has shared to date is concerning for the following reasons:

- Both proposals fail to leverage excess capacity projected in northwest Arlington--in fact, both proposals actually increase the neighborhood seat surplus in this part of the county.
- Both proposals leave some schools significantly under or over capacity, with a utilization variance of 66–145%. We are concerned that this will result in subsequent Phase III neighborhood boundary adjustments that are as extreme and ill-advised as those in APS's "Representative Scenario" map.
- The proposals do not reflect APS's long-term plans for, and the facilities requirements of, elementary school option programs and do not instill confidence that APS is being transparent regarding the future role of option schools within the APS system.
- APS has not conducted a survey or analysis to determine how many families would actually move with option schools versus transferring to their neighborhood schools, instead assuming that 100% of students in option programs will move to new sites. APS should not uproot multiple school communities without first analyzing how the proposed moves would negatively affect diversity and access at Key, ATS, Campbell, and Carlin Springs (e.g., availability of mass transit and parking, bus needs for relocated option schools).
- Consideration of the two proposals will be predicated on flawed community engagement survey data. We are concerned that the survey conducted last month was designed to yield data that will reinforce conclusions in the draft IPP that has not been approved by the School Board; additionally, the survey questions should have been asked in plain language that was simpler to understand and available in additional languages to encourage

participation from all affected communities. We are also concerned that the survey did not include diversity/demographics as a choice among the goals for boundary changes, even though it is one of six criteria identified in APS's policy.

- The two proposals under consideration *imply* subsequent corrective efforts in the 2021-30 Capital Improvement Plan (for example, expansion of the Arlington Traditional building to accommodate Key Immersion program enrollment), but since the CIP will not be developed and adopted until next spring, we question whether it is prudent to make these assumptions.

If the School Board votes next fall, it will be in a much better position to evaluate the combined impacts of school moves, boundary changes, and proposed capital improvements in order to achieve the goals of this comprehensive process.

We believe that a transparent, data-driven process would include:

1. Confirmation of the long-term plans for option programs and the facilities requirements for each of those programs.
2. Confirmation of the criteria for option school sites and an analysis of the suitability of all APS elementary school facilities using that criteria, including transportation and parking options for students, parents, and staff.
3. Planning Unit data review.
4. Utilization of Planning Unit-level five-year enrollment projections to determine how many students are within the walk zone for each APS elementary school facility and what percent of total capacity that represents for each building.
5. Decision making about option school moves that would:
 - minimize transportation costs by locating neighborhood schools in areas where a high percentage of the school's available capacity can be filled with walkers,
 - balance the above consideration with a desire to achieve greater racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools across the county,
 - ensure that option programs are located at sites that align closely with their programmatic needs and enrollment projections,
 - maximize use of available capacity in all areas of the county,
 - accommodate projected growth where needed, and
 - align with the 2021-30 Capital Improvement Plan.
6. Boundary adjustments for neighborhood schools that consider the six factors in the existing policy governing boundary changes.
7. APS data sharing and opportunities for public engagement in connection with each of the steps outlined above. Specifically, we would like to see background analyses and data supporting any existing or new proposals that APS puts forward for community engagement so that parents and neighbors can meaningfully review and respond to proposals.
8. School Board approval only after all of the aforementioned have been completed.

We appreciate the complex nature of the task and the hard work of APS staff and believe adjustments to the process will result in more meaningful community engagement. Together, we can work toward the best possible outcomes for Arlington's students, families, and educators.

Respectfully,

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