



McKinley Elementary School PTA

1030 N. McKinley Road, Arlington, VA 22205

November 6, 2019

Lisa Stengle and Gladis Bourdouane
Department of Planning and Evaluation, Arlington Public Schools
2110 Washington Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22204

Dear Lisa and Gladis:

I'm reaching out on behalf of the McKinley PTA to request changes to APS's proposed process and timeline for the 2021 Elementary School Planning. We are also requesting additional information that will help us understand and analyze APS's work to date more thoughtfully.

It was hard for us to hear that in both of APS's proposed scenarios, McKinley would cease to exist as a neighborhood school and become an option school site. Besides the obvious reason that change is often difficult, there are other notable reasons that the McKinley community feels particular concern about what has been proposed:

- First, we are quite disappointed with APS's "Representative Boundary Scenario" map, which portrays McKinley's boundaries in a particularly unflattering manner. It seems to us that there are a number of ways that APS could have drawn up this map, such that *any* school's boundaries look reasonable and others appear convoluted. It appears to us as if APS started drawing the map from the location of the schools to our north and west (Tuckahoe, Nottingham, and Discovery) and then worked south, such that McKinley, Carlin Springs, Barcroft, and others compare unfavorably. We would be delighted to learn that we are wrong about this.
- Second, we believe that the way data is being presented in the "Analysis of Students Moving" doesn't reflect the true impact on McKinley students. The Representative Boundary Scenario data table in that document counts the movement of McKinley students to Reed in one way—as 69% who are moving—and yet in the data tables for Proposals One and Two, these same students aren't counted as "moving" at all because APS changed the heading of that column. In fact, both proposals require 100% of McKinley's current students to move elsewhere, and it seems misleading to represent it otherwise.
- Third, our community has been in "good sport" mode for the past several years, through construction and then afterwards when we found that despite expansion, McKinley was still significantly over capacity in its enrollment.
- Finally, individuals within our community and our PTA have invested significant time and financial resources in the renovation and expansion of our neighborhood school building. And while it's true that we've been able to enjoy the fruits of these labors for five years, I think it's understandable that we had hoped to enjoy them longer.

Nonetheless, our PTA's position has been, and continues to be, that we will support solutions that are well-vetted, data-driven, forward-looking, and equitable. We understand and agree that APS needs to make significant changes to achieve a long-term solution, even if the immediate impacts might be substantial—in fact, we encourage this. We are not in the business of advancing any type

of self-interested, knee-jerk, emotion-laden dialogue within the system. It's in this spirit that I am reaching out to you today.

It is challenging for our community—or *any* group—to consider school moves in isolation from the boundary changes and longer-term capital improvements scheduled to follow. Available data provided by APS and used to calculate “students moving” under the two proposals hint at boundary changes APS is considering around the school moves; however, those boundary changes are not fully identified, thus limiting our ability to comment on the proposals in a meaningful way. Additionally, the data is clear that school moves alone will leave some schools over or under capacity, and APS will need to remedy those instances through the follow-on boundary change process in 2020. Until we work through the entire process, none of us can be sure that the combination of moves contemplated in either proposal + subsequent boundary changes will net a more sensible set of boundaries than what's shown in the “Representative Scenarios” map.

For this reason, we are requesting that **before any vote is taken by the School Board, APS should conduct one holistic process** that includes:

- school moves
- neighborhood boundary changes
- and acknowledges the likely need for tweaks subsequent to Fall 2021, based on the latest and best available enrollment data.

We believe that a **logical, equitable, data-driven, and transparent process would involve the following steps:**

1. Begin with an analysis that considers all schools, whether they are currently neighborhood or option school sites. Think of them as “Building 1,” “Building 2,” “Building 3,” etc.
2. Label them as such on a map and draw the walk zones around each, including where there may be overlaps.
3. Using planning unit-level data, tally how many students live within each building's walk zone (current and projected) and compare it to building capacity to assess what percent of that building's overall student population could walk to school.
4. In parallel, engage the Department of Teaching and Learning and draw from the Instructional Pathways Program report and other sources to confirm what option programs APS intends to offer in the future and what facility requirements must be considered for each (necessary capacity, program-related equipment, etc.)
5. Decide where to locate option programs based on careful, transparent analysis of the data in #3 and #4 above. Primary goals should be to minimize transportation costs by locating neighborhood schools in areas where a high percentage of the school's available capacity can be filled with walkers, and to ensure that option programs are located at sites that align closely with their programmatic needs and enrollment projections.
6. Boundaries should then be drawn for neighborhood schools in a way that considers the six factors in the existing APS policy governing school boundary changes.

If this is the process APS has undertaken to arrive at the two proposals it has put forward, we request that APS share the root-level data and analysis it used at each step; as former FAC chair Stacy Snyder often urged (and as we tell our students), “Show your work.”

If this is not the process APS used, we strongly urge APS to hit pause and take the time over the next twelve months to work carefully through these steps. We believe that this process is fair and data-driven, and we hope other schools will think so, too.

I am also attaching a list of questions we have drafted about the *current* proposals and process for 2021 Elementary School Planning. If APS agrees that the process we outlined above makes sense

and commits to working it through, it's likely that many of the questions on our list may no longer apply. Therefore, we're requesting a response to our process recommendation (above) before a response to our questions (attached).

Because of the particular impact of both proposed scenarios on McKinley, we'd appreciate the chance for our school community to have some dedicated time with you to discuss our requests and questions. We understand that you are working to identify a date, and we're looking forward to that opportunity in the near future. We expect that we'll have responses to the issues raised in this letter at that meeting or beforehand.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your efforts in what we know is incredibly complex work.

All best wishes,


Mary Kadera, McKinley PTA President

cc: Colin Brown, Principal, McKinley Elementary School
Terri Schwartzbeck, McKinley APS Ambassador
Cintia Johnson, APS Interim Superintendent
John Chadwick, APS Assistant Superintendent, Facilities and Operations
John Giambalvo, Chair, APS Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs
Maura McMahan, President, Arlington County Council of PTAs
Dr. Barbara Kanninen, McKinley Liaison to the Arlington School Board

McKinley's Questions About the 2021 Elementary School Moves and Boundary Changes:

1. In April 2018, APS delivered a presentation to the School Board that included a suitability assessment for option school locations for a subset of elementary school buildings. In that presentation, APS concluded that McKinley only met one of the criteria (buses) and was a poor choice for an option location. Has this analysis been updated in some way that now suggests McKinley is a more favorable site? If so, please share that updated analysis.
2. Related to #1 above: Has the analysis been expanded to include other Zone 1 school locations that were not considered initially? We note specifically that Jamestown and Tuckahoe were excluded from the 2018 building analysis.
3. How did APS determine the boundaries for Zones 1-4? The fact that particular zones show deficits and surpluses is, it seems to us, tied to how the zones were drawn in the first place. For instance, if the zones were drawn slightly differently, with one zone comprising the central part of the county (roughly along I-66), it would highlight more prominently the capacity issues that McKinley, Ashlawn, and Glebe are facing. Separating McKinley and Ashlawn into different zones as currently drawn seems to minimize these capacity issues.
4. Related to #3: Can we see more detail on how the zone-based surplus and deficit figures were calculated? It appears to us that the data point showing a surplus in Zone 1 was calculated to include PreK seats (instead of just K-5).
5. Related to #4: in Zone 1, we know McKinley and Glebe are over capacity today, so it would seem that any surplus of seats projected forward to 2023-24 (assuming current boundaries) must be centered in the neighborhoods around Jamestown, Discovery, Nottingham, and Tuckahoe. Can we see school-level projection capacity data on this to confirm?
6. The Instructional Pathways Program draft report published September 30 doesn't appear to include the ATS model in the long term. From the report, it appears that APS intends to replace this program with a full-capacity IB elementary program. Is that the intended longer-term plan for the option program that would move to McKinley? And if so, what's the basis for assuming the demand for this program will be the same as the current demand for ATS?
7. It's not clear to us how either proposal will relieve significant overcrowding at Claremont. What's the plan there?
8. It's our understanding that the FAC was not consulted as part of your initial work to develop these two scenarios. If that's the case, can you share why?
9. If there are other scenarios you considered and rejected, will you share what those were and the data and analysis that shows why they were rejected?
10. Has APS considered other "out-of-the-box" solutions to its capacity issues (e.g., embedding more option programs in neighborhood schools, shifting to an upper/lower elementary school model like Falls Church)? If so, can you share your analysis?
11. Given current budget constraints, it seems particularly important to understand the costs of the proposed scenarios relative to each other and relative to a more conventional boundary change scenario. Has APS done a cost analysis (particularly of Proposal Two, which includes several school moves)? If so, please share it.