



# THE CHANGING FACE OF ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS OVER THE PAST SIX DECADES

*Over the past 60 years, beginning with the integration of Stratford Junior High and extending to the current day with plans for new buildings and revising the high school experience, Arlington Public Schools has considered the changing needs of its school population through periods of expansion and decline, changing demographics, technology growth and evolving instructional approaches. Arlington continues to focus on providing high-quality instruction for all students.*



## 1958-67

Arlington Public Schools' commitment to diversity was clearly articulated and demonstrated during the struggle to integrate Stratford Junior High School in February 1959. In fact, that one event represented the culmination of many years of community activism by the Arlington School Board, a dedicated corps of community volunteers in the Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools and the local chapter of the NAACP. Their commitment and dedication to challenge the "separate but equal" laws with the Commonwealth of Virginia led to a long and extensive debate in the Federal courts and eventually the U.S. Supreme Court. Their success was marked by the historic event on February 2, 1959, placing Arlington County at the top of the news throughout Virginia and across the nation. However, while that one day certainly was a milestone for the community, it reflects just one event in APS' and the community's continued focus and efforts to ensure that Arlington's public schools are welcoming and focused on providing optimal and equitable learning experiences for all students.

After the integration of Stratford in 1959, Patrick Henry Elementary and Washington-Lee High School were also integrated at the start of the following school year. Several other APS schools continued to serve solely African-American students, including the Hoffman-Boston Junior/Senior High School until June 1964, Langston Elementary (in the northern part of the county) until 1966 and Drew Elementary (in the southern part of the county) until 1971. To help prepare and support the APS staff during this period of integration throughout

the county, a major initiative in Cross Cultural Professional Learning was introduced and implemented for teachers at all levels.

During this decade, APS experienced significant growth in its student population, reaching an enrollment high of 25,261 students in the 1961-62 school year supported by a cadre of 1,202 teachers. These numbers would not be repeated until the 2016-17 school year when APS reached 26,152 students and an instructional corps of 2,166 teachers.

## 1968-77

The years 1968-77 were significant to APS history for a variety of reasons. In June of 1971, Drew Elementary School ceased to exist as an African-American school, and reopened that September as Drew Model School, a countywide choice school aimed at attracting students with a unique individualized learning approach. As a result of this transition, students in the predominantly African-American Nauck and Arlington View neighborhoods were reassigned and bused to other schools as far away as Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown with the goal of increasing diversity at these and other schools where there was not a broad representation. The transfer policy was also adjusted to monitor that transfers did not cause the percentage of African-American students in the school to fall below 7% or to exceed 19% of the school's population. In addition to the opening of Drew Model School, APS added a Montessori Program that year to Drew to serve three-, four- and five-year-old children, with two thirds of the spaces reserved for students from low income families.

During this decade, Arlington also experienced a sudden and significant increase in its second language population. Since 1971, APS has offered programs for students not yet proficient in English. By 1975, APS had a full program in place for English Learners, the English for Speakers of Other Languages/High Intensity Language Training (ESOL/HILT) Program. Because APS was a forerunner in

this effort in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Arlington's hiring guidelines became the basis for the state's ESOL teacher certification requirements.

Arlington's Asian student population (predominantly from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) was 1.8% in 1970, but grew dramatically beginning in 1975 reaching 15% by 1983. In 1975 there were 879 non-English speaking students in APS. With the fall of Saigon in the mid-70s, the rapid influx of families from Vietnam led to a rapid transformation of the Clarendon business district, which became known as "Little Saigon" by 1976.

While the numbers of second language students increased in our schools, at the same time the overall population of APS dropped by 21.7% during this period, falling from 26,300 in 1968 to 20,593 in 1974. This decline resulted in the School Board's decision to close a number of schools at that time. Between 1971 and 1975, Cherrydale, Edison, Langston, Lee, Stewart, Woodlawn, Clay-Fillmore, Maury and Madison elementary schools were closed with students being reassigned to other neighboring schools. During this same period, due to specific growth in particular areas, both Glebe and Long Branch elementary schools were opened.

In 1972, newly-rebuilt Thomas Jefferson Junior High School opened as the first joint-use facility in collaboration with Arlington County. In 1974, the Career Center opened and offered high school students across the county vocational and technical instruction in skill-level jobs. In 1977, The H-B Woodlawn Program was identified to move to the Stratford site, combining its junior high and high school programs in one location.



Police watch as students enter integrated Stratford



Stratford students



Children in Little Saigon

Photo credit: Paula Endo



Old Thomas Jefferson building

Integration of Stratford

Enrollment of 25,261

Hoffman-Boston Jr. Sr. High School closes

Langston Elementary closes

Drew Model School opens

Thomas Jefferson opens as joint-use facility

Career Center opens

ESOL/HILT Program

Little Saigon flourishes

Stratford & Gunston Jr. Highs close

Hispanic population begins to grow and quadruples during the 1980s



**1978-87**

In 1978 APS closed the Stratford and Gunston Junior High Schools, and after subsequent boundary adjustments, ninth grade was moved to the high school level that year. During this same period, elementary growth continued to decline, causing more elementary school closings: Custis and Fairlington closed in 1979, Ft. Myer and Jackson in 1980, Woodmont in 1982, Claremont in 1983 and Reed in 1984.

In a move to bring African-American students living in the Nauck and Arlington View neighborhoods closer to home, school assignments were changed and implemented starting in 1987. This resulted in students being reassigned to neighboring schools including Barcroft and Abingdon. In addition, APS eliminated the 1971 transfer plan that had limited the number of African-American students.

During the early 1980s, internal issues in Bolivia as well as parts of Central America, also resulted in many families leaving those countries and immigrating to the United States, resulting in significant growth in Arlington's Hispanic population. In 1980, APS had 409 Spanish-speaking students, and by 1990 the number had more than quadrupled, reaching 1,660. As the Hispanic population grew in the area surrounding Key Elementary, a Spanish Immersion Program was introduced in 1986 in part to attract non-Hispanic families and provide a balanced enrollment at the school.

With the increase in Hispanic and Asian students and the steady proportion of African American students, attention was given to

minority achievement culminating in the creation of the APS Minority Achievement Coordinator position in 1985. This position later expanded into an office that included school-based coordinators who continue to work with minority families to address the achievement needs of students.

**1988-97**

This period in APS history was marked by steady growth across the grade levels. In 1988, the School and Grade Configuration Study Committee reported to the School Board on numerous options to address elementary crowding and diversity. As a result of its recommendations, the Middle School Model was implemented across Arlington in 1990, moving sixth graders out of elementary schools to the current sixth, seventh and eighth grade Middle School configuration. Also, additional space was achieved by redistricting the Key attendance area and moving HILT programs from Swanson to Williamsburg and from Washington-Lee to Yorktown.

The hallmark of this ten-year period was the large-scale community involvement initiative known as The Futures Planning Process. From its inception in early 1992, to the final Superintendent's Recommendations Report in November 1993, this process focused on planning for the educational needs of Arlington's growing population. A joint citizen/staff steering team, along with a 100+ member citizen forum, addressed three challenges in developing a range of options and opportunities. The challenges included

1. Maintaining and improving educational quality,
2. Alleviating crowding, and
3. Dealing equitably with diversity.

The Futures Planning recommendations included 32 initiatives to be implemented from 1994 through 1998. Included in these initiatives identified by the forum were the

opening of Gunston Middle School in 1994, adjusting the elementary and middle school boundaries to balance enrollment and moving the Jackson Special Education Program and the older student HILT Program to H-B Woodlawn. At the elementary level, the initiatives included moving Arlington Traditional Elementary to the old Jackson Elementary School site (its current location) and opening Arlington Science Focus Elementary School in the old Page School building and establishing the Key/ Science Focus, Jamestown and Taylor team in 1995. In addition, the Claremont Early Years Center (Pre-K through second grade) opened in 1993 to relieve crowding at the Abingdon, Randolph, and Glencarlyn elementary schools. Middle school immersion instruction moved to Gunston in 1997 to bring students from Key, Abingdon, and Oakridge together for middle school.

This time period also saw the expansion of full day kindergarten to all schools in 1994 and the introduction of the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) four-year-old classes in 1995.

**1998-2007**

This ten-year timeframe saw some continued growth of enrollment in the late 1990s and early 2000s followed by slight dips from 2003 to 2007 when enrollment was at 17,502 in 2007.

Oakridge Elementary experienced significant growth in the late 1990s leading the School Board to open Hoffman-Boston as an elementary school, initially as an annex to Oakridge in 1996, and as its own school with boundaries in 1999. In addition, in 2004, elementary students living in the Nauck Civic Association area were given the option to attend either Hoffman-Boston (their neighborhood boundary zone) or Drew Model School.

With the opening of a second full elementary immersion school at Claremont, new immersion boundaries were



Barcroft Elementary, 1979



Gunston Middle School



Claremont Elementary School

Minority Achievement Coordinators  
Spanish Immersion at Key

Middle School model implemented

Futures Planning Process  
Gunston Middle School opens  
Full-day Kindergarten  
ATS moves, ASFS opens  
VPI Initiative

Hoffman-Boston Elementary opens  
Cultural Competence initiative

Spanish Immersion at Claremont

Barrett Cluster



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1988

1996

2005

2006

2007

drawn for both Key and Claremont in 2003. These "boundaries" divided Arlington east and west in an effort to increase both language and ethnic diversity at both choice schools. In 2003, a number of other boundary adjustments were also made for Abingdon, Barcroft, Hoffman-Boston, Henry, Long Branch, Oakridge and Randolph to better balance enrollment across South Arlington elementary schools. In addition, with the move of the Glencarlyn school to the newly-built Carlin Springs, early childhood program formerly located at the Claremont site was moved to the Glencarlyn site as a full elementary school and renamed Campbell Elementary. A new admissions policy for Campbell was approved, making it a choice program with preference given to South Arlington students.

During this time, portions of North Arlington were also experiencing overcrowding. In 2005, along with some minor boundary adjustments, the Barrett Cluster was established, giving the option to attend Barrett, with transportation, to students in the Ashlawn, Glebe, Long Branch, McKinley, Nottingham and Tuckahoe areas with the added goal of increasing diversity at Barrett while relieving crowding at the other schools.

In this time period, community concerns and lawsuits arose regarding the admissions process to both Arlington Traditional Elementary (ATS) and the H-B Woodlawn Secondary Program, which allocated a set number of slots to minority students. Committees were formed to consider alternative approaches to admissions that might help increase diversity at these schools, while maintaining a random lottery process. The resulting policy for ATS guaranteed admission to students enrolled in the VPI classes at ATS along with their siblings. The policy for H-B Woodlawn allocated a percentage of the total seats available to each neighborhood elementary zone based on the proportion of fifth graders living in that zone. Both policies were initiated in 2002 with the goal of increasing minority student enrollment for these countywide option schools.

With the increase

in population and in the diversity of APS enrollment overall, the Department of Student Services introduced an initiative in 1998 known as Cultural Competence to increase awareness of, and sensitivity to, issues facing our minority population as well as unconscious biases. This staff-focused effort has expanded over the years and work continues to the present day.

## 2008-17

This most recent decade in APS history has been one of increasingly significant student growth. The Fall 2016 enrollment of 26,152 students represents the tenth consecutive school year of growth in APS. Since 2007 (when enrollment was at 17,502 students), APS enrollment has increased by 8,650 students, which equates to a 49% growth over the past ten years. Partly in response to this growth, a countywide committee produced an APS Master Planning Report in 2015 that included a range of recommendations and considerations to both address future growth and ensure the provision of optimal instructional opportunities.

To accommodate this growth, a number of community boundary processes have taken place to address capacity issues while recognizing six criteria identified by the School Board when considering boundary changes. Those criteria include efficiency, proximity, stability, alignment, demographic diversity and contiguity.

In 2009, the School Board adopted a Progressive Planning Model as an approach to implement short- and long-term solutions in a fair and equitable way across schools. These interim steps, along with rebuilding and then expanding all three high schools and reconfiguring the use of internal spaces at all middle schools, have helped to manage this unprecedented growth. A new program, Arlington Tech at the Career Center, opened in 2016 and will expand to serve 800 high school students in new space planned for completion at the Career Center by 2022.

In December 2016, the School Board adopted additional boundary refinements to better balance enrollment among the three

high schools. In 2019, both the new school at the Wilson site (which will house the H-B Woodlawn and Stratford programs) and a new middle school at the renovated and expanded Stratford site will open to address middle school crowding. A community process will take place in the 2017-18 school year to determine new boundaries for the middle school at Stratford. There are also plans underway to add 1,300 more high school seats by 2022.

At the elementary level, the More Seats for More Students initiative began in 2012 with a community process to identify boundaries for the new Discovery Elementary which opened in 2015, along with boundary adjustments for other North Arlington elementary schools. The South Arlington Working Group process began in 2015 and resulted in identification of the Jefferson site to build a new South Arlington Elementary School set to open in 2019 to accommodate the students currently enrolled at Patrick Henry. In addition to adding a new school, plans are underway to move the Montessori program to its own facility at the Henry site in 2019, and to establish Drew as a neighborhood school. These moves will require community processes in the 2017-18 school year to identify boundary changes.

## SUMMARY

Over the past 60 years, Arlington Public Schools has focused on providing high-quality instruction for all students. In the end, the goal continues to be a focus on providing the best instructional environment, staff and resources to ensure that every student has the best support and opportunity to achieve and succeed.

## RESOURCES

*A Chink in the Armor: The Black-Led Struggle for School Desegregation in Arlington, Virginia and the End of Massive Resistance*, James McGrath Morris, 2000

*A New American Community of Learners in Arlington Virginia*, ed. Etta Johnson, 2013

*Annual APS Enrollment Projections Report*, December, 2016

*Futures Planning Report and Recommendations to the School Board*, 1993

*Managing Underutilized School Facilities Resulting from Declining Pupil Enrollment: A Case Study*, Joseph Ringus Jr., 1981

*The Future of Arlington, Year 2000 and Beyond*, Commission on Arlington's Future, 1987

*The History of Arlington Public Schools 1979-1995*, Eric Christenson, 1995

*The History of School Closings*, Henry D. Gardner, 1988

Mr. Mark Macekura and Dr. Alfred O. Taylor Jr. were both valuable sources of historical information, as were the archives of the Virginia Room of the Arlington Public Library.

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Groundbreaking at Discovery Elementary



Activities at Arlington Science Focus

Progressive Planning Model

More Seats for More Students Initiative

Discovery Elementary opens

Enrollment of 25,261 Arlington Tech opens



2011

2013

2015

2016

2017