



**Superintendent's Advisory Committee on
Immigrant and Refugee Student Concerns**

November 8, 2024

Mary Kadera, Chair, APS Arlington School Board
2110 Washington Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22204

Dear Ms. Kadera:

The leadership of the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Immigrant and Refugee Student Concerns (SACIRSC) appreciated the opportunity to meet with you on November 4, 2024 regarding the FY 2026 budget outlook and process.

As promised, below please find a synopsis of our committee's questions and concerns.

1). Keep student-facing staff, and bring an equity lens to cutting: We understand that cuts are highly likely to be necessary to enable APS to close the projected budget gap. We urge that, with regard to English Learners, if cuts must be made, the front-line, student-facing staff are spared. As the CCPTA analysis of last year's SOLs reflects, the equity gap between ELs and their peers at large continues to be wide. If APS hopes to try to reduce that gap, EL staff working directly with students must not be cut.

Likewise, we were heartened to hear that APS is not likely to impose an across-the-board cut, which would disproportionately impact schools with high EL populations. The APS equity policy says that "Available resources, including local, state, and federal funding, staffing, and instructional materials, are allocated to deliberately ensure targeted and differentiated investment in teaching and learning experiences for the varied and unique needs of each student while maintaining a strong instructional program for all students and maximizing student achievement and well-being." We are hopeful APS will use that policy as a guide in producing its FY 2026 budget.

2). Incorporate parent feedback: We urge that, as part of the independent consultant's budget analysis, parents be consulted about the most helpful APS engagement strategies and programs that support them. What's working well? What's not? Where do parents turn first for information and support? Based on feedback, APS may need additional resources in one program and fewer in another.

3). Maintain student mental health supports: The Committee focused much attention last year on student mental health and wellness. This includes the need for higher-risk students, many of whom aren't currently engaged, to have free, school-based

after-school opportunities that attract student interest and help them build a sense of community and skills that mitigate against high-risk behavior, such as substance use. We are hopeful there will be no cuts made to current resources targeting mental health supports for students.

4). Assess the cost of classroom resources: Another area for examination exists around classroom resources. Teresa, an EL teacher, noted that APS continues to buy certain math and other textbooks for EL classes, even though teachers have indicated they prefer to use other resources. She also raised the question of whether APS could furnish students with computers at a lower price than Apple charges.

Additionally, we know from our Committee's experience that front-line staff are insightful and can provide creative suggestions. Are staff given an opportunity to provide input as a standard practice in budget development?

5). Software upgrade request: Finally, here is an email from an EL teacher on the Committee, who is requesting funds, whether redirected or new, for a software upgrade to help teachers access WIDA scores:

"In follow-up to my comment in our last meeting, my single greatest request on behalf of my EL students is that next year's budget include a software upgrade that allows all their teachers to access their WIDA scores more easily -- in two clicks, not six, or by using a hover function. The current process is sufficiently convoluted so as to essentially obfuscate the scores -- no teacher has time for multiple clicks per student. For my SPED students, for example, I'm able to access their IEPs in two clicks, and I regularly rely on that facility to guide my instruction and ensure accommodations are met. Similarly, I know that my GenEd colleagues teaching EL students would appreciate that facility with WIDA scores and will deliver better instruction if they have better visibility into their students' English Language profile. With full appreciation for how tight things are financially right now, I nevertheless believe that the ROI on that particular Synergy upgrade would reap significant academic and instructional reward for our ELs.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters. We appreciate the Board's dedication and commitment to helping students become compassionate and community-oriented adults.

Sincerely,

Marianne Talbot, Chair
Janeth Valenzuela, Vice-Chair
Teresa Cordova, Vice-Chair
Marjorie Green, Secretary

cc: Brian Stockton, APS Chief of Staff