



Superintendent and School Board Reaffirm APS Commitment to Support All Children

Dear APS Students, Families, Staff and Community,

We first want to offer our sincerest gratitude to all of you for your daily support to provide a welcoming, safe and caring learning environment for each and every student. It's our most important duty. We have heard from families, students and staff about concerns in light of the most recent changes to our nation's political landscape. Please be assured that all of us in APS are here to support our students, their families and our staff as we work to find ways to move forward.

Although some of the information that follows is not new, we want to take this opportunity to:

1. Reaffirm for our entire community that we are unwavering in our commitment to maintaining school communities where ALL students know they are safe, nurtured, welcomed, respected, and included so they can achieve their full potential.
2. Share the APS policies that support our work to ensure a climate of caring and support.
3. Provide resources for families.
4. Impart final thoughts about our commitment and ask you to join us in these uncertain times to work together for the good of our children.

Our APS Vision and Commitment to Children

The hallmark of our work is that ALL students should experience freedom from harassment, judgement or prejudice. In these challenging times, we want to remind everyone in our APS family that our Vision as a school system has not changed:

“Arlington Public Schools is a diverse and inclusive school community, committed to academic excellence and integrity. We provide instruction in a caring, safe and healthy learning environment, responsive to each student, in collaboration with families and the community.”

Over the past few months, some of our families and students have expressed apprehension and fear about the safety of students at school. We have heard concerns from a wide array of community representatives including immigrant, LGBTQ, Jewish, Muslim and other faith communities, African-American and Latino neighbors, and those from across the entire political spectrum. We want to assure all APS families that we are here to work with you to ensure that your children have a safe place to grow and learn, and that families and their beliefs will be respected in our schools.

APS Policies That Guide Our Work

Several APS policies articulate our promise for ensuring that schools are caring, safe and welcoming:

- As we shared a year ago, APS is committed to providing an excellent public education to every school-aged student residing in Arlington County. [In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled](#) that public schools may not deny access to any child, whether present in the United States legally or otherwise. As educators, APS has always acknowledged our legal and, more importantly, our moral obligation to provide an education to all students who live in our community.
- Most notably, our [APS Bullying Policy](#) clearly states that, “APS is committed to creating a safe, caring, respectful learning environment for all students. Bullying or harassment of students, including **bullying based on an actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and mental, physical, or sensory disability**, is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated.”



- Within the framework of our Bullying Policy, we also continue to support our transgender students and allow them to utilize neutral or staff facilities or facilities that correspond to the gender with which they identify. This has been our response since this issue first arose several years ago, and we will continue to follow this practice.
- We will continue to keep all of our principals and administrators up to date about current issues; provide them support in addressing questions; and communicate with them about steps to keep students safe at school.
- We also will continue to work with all of our families and staff to provide a supportive, caring and respectful school environment so our children can continue to learn and grow without fear. We urge all families to contact your principal if you have questions or need support. We may not immediately have all of the answers, but we will work with you to address your concerns.

Resources for Immigrant Families

We want to assure every family that we are also working to implement procedures in our schools to ensure an effective, consistent and smooth response in the event of inquiries by representatives from federal agencies.

- This week, Arlington County unveiled a new one-stop [Immigration Resource Website](#) that includes [Frequently Asked Questions](#), information about community and county services, and links to organizations that provide information to helpful topics such as 'Know Your Rights' and 'Legal Aid.' Links to this website can be found on the APS district site as well as all individual school home pages under "Quicklinks."
- We also want to emphasize the importance of keeping your family information with your child's school up to date, especially for parent/guardian and emergency contacts, so that we can always reach you in an emergency.

Final Thoughts

Our important work continues. We are proud of the way our students and staff embrace their common interests while continuing to respect and celebrate their differences.

In closing, we want to share three important actions that we firmly believe can guide all of us as we continue to work to support ALL of our children and families:

- Be Kind – we believe our world needs this now more than ever.
- Be Calm and Respectful – our children are watching us and we need to model civil dialogues.
- Be Hopeful – "[We] must be the change [we] wish to see in the world." (adapted from Mahatma Gandhi)

Sincerely,

Patrick K. Murphy, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Nancy Van Doren
School Board Chair

Barbara Kanninen
School Board Vice Chair

James Lander
School Board Member

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