



December 13, 2019

Kenny Kraft
ATS PTA President
855 North Edison Street
Arlington, VA 22205

Dear Kenny,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Arlington Traditional PTA regarding Elementary School Planning. We know this is a difficult process for the schools involved, and appreciate your leadership in helping your community understand and engage with APS on the proposals. As we understand your concerns, you have identified the IPP as a threat to the Arlington Traditional program and would like to better understand our approach in this process. This letter outlines the status and role of the Instructional Pathways Program (IPP) and the current planning process.

We recognize that PTAs and families are a vital part of the community support in every school and for that, we are grateful. As good stewards of our system, our shared mission is to ensure our students can continue to learn and thrive in safe, healthy and supportive learning environments. The planning process is iterative, complicated and unsettling but ultimately, we remain focused on academic excellence as we manage enrollment growth using a strategic, countywide perspective. Most schools are likely to be impacted, and all are being looked at with a consistent lens.

Let's begin by addressing your most fundamental concern about this planning process and APS intentions with respect to the traditional model. *No school move from one facility to another will delegitimize any option program.* This planning process does not propose changing the number of options schools, nor the type of instruction offered in APS schools. Instructional leaders will refine the ideas presented in the draft IPP over the next year or two with the guidance of new leadership.

The IPP provides a framework for keeping instruction and student well-being at the forefront of all planning initiatives. It is intended to serve as a roadmap for managing growth and change – from new schools and boundary adjustments, to program moves and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) priorities. At present, the IPP is simply still being developed. Next steps include:

- Later this school year, the SB will consider updates to the [Policy J-5.3.31 APS Options and Transfers](#).
- The list of options will be revisited and take further shape. Initial shaping will be considered by an internal planning team that includes all elementary school administrators and is led by the Department of Teaching and Learning, along with support from other departments.
- Existing schools will not go away; over time, it is possible that some schools may evolve to better align with APS' long-term vision in the IPP.

This letter outlines our thought process, the countywide perspective we're using, and new alignment in long-term planning for APS and the County.

1. Why we need to make changes
2. A Countywide Perspective
3. Our guiding principles in this process
4. Developments in long-term planning approaches

1. Why we need to make changes

In 2021, when the new elementary school at Reed opens as a neighborhood school, the schools surrounding it – Ashlawn, Glebe, McKinley, Nottingham and Tuckahoe – will be the most impacted. Our planning team developed a representative boundary scenario starting in the northwest corner of the county where there is more school capacity than students.

The result was a cascading boundary scenario that would move almost 40 percent of all APS neighborhood elementary students *and* would significantly change a majority of their current (2019-20) school communities. For example, developing an attendance zone for Reed based on its walk zone alone would move nearly half of the McKinley cohort and, under this scenario, would result in only 31% of McKinley students who could potentially stay at the school. In addition, it would fail to address the present lack of a neighborhood school in the Rosslyn/Courthouse area.

As an alternative, we began to explore moving the immersion program from Key, resulting in a series of changes including the proposed move of the Arlington Traditional program. Moving ATS to McKinley offered the benefit of being able to expand the ATS program from the waitlist of 600+ in SY2019-20, and keeping together a large student cohort from McKinley (est. 75%) by moving them into the new Reed school facility. As you know, ATS would move entirely—the principal, staff and teachers would move, and all enrolled students would have the opportunity to move with the school.

The school move proposals avoid long, extended boundaries that do not contain their full walk zones. They contain demands on APS transportation, allow more students to walk to their neighborhood schools, and keep more school communities together.

2. A Countywide Perspective

During the 2018 Elementary Boundary Process, the community and School Board felt it would be better to look holistically at boundaries for all schools. Over the past summer, as we worked with elementary school instructional leaders, an observation was made that limiting the focus of the South Arlington Working Group to just Arlington schools South of Route 50 may have missed the opportunity to think about the location of option schools more globally and more strategically.

This year, APS experienced the process by which the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) aligns accreditation with the students who make up a school. If more than 50% of students move from one school to another site, the new site may take on that school's accreditation. In looking at boundaries only as illustrated in the Representative scenario for discussion, it became clear that state accreditation could change for multiple schools (McKinley, Ashlawn, ASFS, and maybe more).

These recent experiences help inform our approaches and the guiding principles developed with instructional leaders in this process.

3. Guiding Principles

Earlier this year, APS planners formed an internal elementary school planning group which includes instructional leaders from schools and operational departments. This group agreed on the following principles to guide the alternative scenarios they and we considered together. The principles are:

- **Keeping students in each school community together as much as possible**
- **Maximizing walking to neighborhood schools**
- **Using schools to maximum capacity**
- **Using existing facilities to match neighborhood seats where needed for current and predicted growth**

To summarize, simply developing new boundaries to more equitably fill schools to capacity ignores the remaining principles of keeping students in school communities together, maximizing walkability and presenting neighborhood seats in their attendance zones. The Boundary-only scenario means busing students close enough to walk to one school to another school, likely increasing ongoing operating costs of transportation and fundamentally changing school cohorts. By moving option schools and providing neighborhood school seats where needed, we provide walkable options to families and can minimize operating costs and keep resources in the classroom.

4. Developments in Long-term Planning Approaches

Finally, with our foreseeable growth, good governance compels us to take a holistic or countywide look at how we will use and grow our facilities over the long term. This will ensure our resources are focused on providing support for student success and well-being into the future.

Necessity has brought the County and APS to better joint planning as both land and capital funding are increasingly squeezed by population growth and aging infrastructure. Last Spring, with input from the Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs (FAC), a new Arlington Facilities and Student Accommodation Plan (AFSAP) began evolving into a longer-term planning document more like other County master plans, allowing for more productive conversations about budgeting and planning with the County and the Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (JFAC). By creating a new AFSAP which is both larger in scope and projection timeline, APS planners and County planners are developing a shared understanding of our school division's long-term needs.

One example of new work as a result of the improved alignment with County planning, is that APS has evolved some planning tools. Our new corridor zone map, envisioned together with the FAC, aligns elementary zones with Arlington's planning corridors. In working from a broader vision of County growth, APS can better anticipate where there will be more housing development and transit and potentially more student population growth. This will inform one-time school and program moves as well as any focus for new school sites to be developed. The zone map is an interpretation of the County Corridor development maps with APS school boundaries. The zones are not intended to draw hard lines between schools, but to look at districted schools that serve specific growth corridors today. This visualization will evolve as programs move, boundaries change, and new schools come online.

Today's Planning Process

The planning proposals take a short and long-term view. APS' FY20 Budget process laid out some difficult choices, and the upcoming FY Budget is on a similar path. APS must find operational efficiencies while continuing to budget for enrollment growth and creating space in the budget to address the social, emotional and academic needs of our students. Efficiencies include operating costs such as balancing

utilization of buildings and minimizing ongoing transportation services that compete for operating funds which can impact Teaching and Learning.

We are seeking to place neighborhood seats close to Rosslyn/Courthouse where growth is anticipated and where APS has no clear alternatives to meet capacity needs in the short term. Then, the CIP can focus work with the County to site new schools or add to existing schools in other growth areas with that potential. Efficient use of current properties should limit the number of new schools required and consolidate funding for new construction.

It seems early in the elementary school planning process, but we need to make decisions this winter that will help determine the 10-year APS Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Those CIP construction and funding plans will be based on how efficiently we can reduce the need for new buildings with current capacity. The School Board will vote on the CIP this Spring so that the bond can be funded in the November vote. This timing aligns with legal filing dates.

If, as some have proposed, APS engaged in a full boundary process with community engagement for multiple scenarios before deciding on school or program moves, there would not be adequate time to develop the CIP. ATS would have far less time to plan for any move and work out how best to enroll students from the waitlist. So, this current planning process is not a boundary process and will not detail new boundaries. The data used to arrive at the big-picture decisions of school location does not include all the factors involved in a boundary process.

Boundary adjustments will be addressed in Fall 2020 with an understanding of which schools will be neighborhood schools. We believe boundary adjustments will allow the majority of more school communities to stay intact with smaller adjustments to attendance zones to balance utilization and other factors. Our goal is to be as transparent as possible, and in this case, that means holding these discussions without final determinations for boundaries.

In considering the impacts of school moves, we have taken the lead from the State Department of Education. For example, we count students from McKinley as moving if they are reassigned to a school and separated from a majority of today's McKinley students. If--as proposed in the move to Reed--let's say that 75% of McKinley students move together to the new facility, then the school at Reed will not be considered a new school by the State, though the students will be in a different building. So, we haven't counted those students as "moving." If McKinley were to remain a neighborhood school, then the boundary process would result in significant McKinley cohorts "moving" to Reed and elsewhere, fundamentally changing the current community, and potentially shifting accreditation to Reed.

In summary, once any school moves have been decided in February 2020:

1. Finance, Facilities and Transportation will begin preparing the CIP for the School Board.
2. On the instructional side, transition planning and visioning, and the hiring of a new neighborhood school principal can proceed with input from the school community (Reed or Key).
3. Planning and Evaluation will provide support to schools that are moving to help with transition planning.
4. Refined boundary proposals will be informed by updated projections and community input in the Fall of 2020. The boundary process in Fall 2020 will ensure that there are no negative impacts or relative overcrowding in the neighborhood schools.

We hope that this information addresses your questions about the process, decisions--including the role of the draft IPP--and the intentional decision to separate the broader instructional program moves from the work of reviewing planning unit data and determining final boundaries.

Below are specific responses to additional questions in your letter.

1. Once any decision is made, Planning and Evaluation will coordinate departmental support to each school, community and PTA to prepare for the transition. Schools will be able to plan for implementation, so that changes align with the instructional model.
2. You have inquired about buses at McKinley if an option program is placed at this location. Numbers of buses and walkers are impossible to predict with precision. For reference, 10 buses currently serve McKinley students, and during Summer 2019, 22 buses served students in programs at McKinley. By very rough estimates, ATS's 14 buses could grow by an estimated two or three (McKinley sends 58 students to ATS, and some portion of them would become walkers). In other words, a larger ATS would not have more buses than the summer school program at McKinley already accommodated. The APS Transportation Department has stated that this is manageable.
3. In moving Key to a smaller facility, APS will work with school administrators to determine the size of the school and work together to accommodate school needs over time. In the short term, immersion will continue to require relocatable classrooms as do most of our elementary schools. As with all option programs, admissions are controlled; every year, capacity utilization of all schools is reviewed and admissions for option programs may be adjusted through the lottery.

APS is not seeking to shrink the immersion program. Some schools today have more Spanish-speaking students than are found in the immersion schools. It may make sense to offer immersion classrooms within one or more of these schools as has been successful in the past.

4. Student body diversity is a hallmark of most APS option programs, including ATS and immersion. Immersion programs have struggled to fill the Spanish-speaking kindergarten slots, while ATS has a waitlist of 278 students. We believe that the ATS community is passionately committed to the program and will want to continue with it if the program moves the two miles to another reasonably central location at McKinley.

To see the range and types of data we referenced as we analyze school sites, please visit the APS Engage page on elementary pre-boundary planning. Links to much of this data are provided in the addendum to this letter.

Sincerely,



Executive Director
APS Planning and Evaluation

ADDENDUM

- Report developed with the help of the FAC Future Facilities Need Report <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/New-Appendix-F-Future-Facilities-Needs-Report-and-Cover-Letter.pdf> . This report examines capacity and uses broad projections and school size practices to understand the magnitude of future needs.
- We will look at revised enrollment projections to update the data we have used to date.
- Application and waitlist figures for option programs <https://www.apsva.us/school-options/school-transfer-data-2/pre-k-elementary-options-transfers-application-data-school-year-2019-20/>
- Planning Unit data available with last Fall's data here: <https://www.apsva.us/engage/middle-school-boundary-change/boundary-change-data/> and an analysis of walk zones by school is available here: <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Analysis-of-Walk-Zones-Final-Oct-31-1.pdf>
- You can see maps with walk zones by school as developed in the walk zone study <https://www.apsva.us/transportation-services/bus-eligibility-zones/>.
- Transportation data including the number of bus routes serving each school today <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SY2019-2020-Bus-Counts-Per-Facility.pdf>
- Anticipated growth in County planning corridors.