



December 21, 2019

Alicia Rich
Key PTA President

Dear Alicia,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Key PTA regarding elementary School Planning. We know this is a difficult process for the schools involved in the APS proposals, and appreciate your leadership in helping your community understand and weigh in on the proposals. As we understand your concerns, you have identified concerns about the future of immersion and the timing and logistics for decisions and possible resulting moves. This letter outlines our approach to this process and responses to specific questions and issues you raise.

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 while all are being looked at with a consistent lens, that impact will vary by school.

To begin let me address your concern about this planning process and APS intentions with respect to the immersion program. *No move will delegitimize any option program.* This process does not propose changing the number of options schools or the type of instruction offered in APS schools. APS will work with Principal Perdomo to develop and implement a transition plan that works for Key Immersion and its students and families. The leadership in every school will ensure the transitions are sensitive to serving the needs of their particular population.

This letter outlines our thought process, lessons learned from recent experience, and new alignment in long-term planning for APS and the County.

1. Why we need to make changes
2. Our guiding principles (in this process)
3. Recent lessons learned
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 – would be the most impacted schools. Our planning team developed a representative boundary scenario starting in the northwest

corner of the county where there is more school capacity than students in these schools. The scenario could allow APS to use all elementary schools to maximum capacity.

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, it would spread the community at Carlin Springs across McKinley (34%), Ashlawn (20%) with only 45% of the current community remaining at Carlin Springs, and the school would sit outside of its walk and attendance zone.

Other variations of the scenario could be drawn, but none would avoid fundamentally altering the composition of the existing student communities within schools. Drawing boundaries for Reed based on its walk zone alone would fail to address the present lack of a neighborhood school in the Rosslyn/Courthouse area. All such scenarios would also fail to allow for maximum walkers Countywide and increased transportation costs would follow.

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 traditional program. Moving ATS to McKinley offered the benefit of being able to keep together a large neighborhood cohort from McKinley (est. 75%) by moving them into the new Reed school facility. The school move proposals avoid long, extended boundaries that do not contain their full walk zones. They contain demands on APS transportation and keep more school communities together.

2. Recent Lessons Learned:

During the 2018 Elementary Boundary Process, the community and School Board felt it would be better to look holistically at boundaries for all schools. This past summer, elementary school instructional leaders met repeatedly with planning and instructional staff. They emphasized 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, we learned 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 map for discussion, it became clear that schools' State accreditations could change for multiple schools (McKinley, Ashlawn, ASFS and maybe more). This signals how a significant change to boundaries can change the student body makeup and impact instruction within the school.

These recent experiences help inform our approaches and the guiding principles developed with instructional leaders over the summer.

3. Guiding Principles:

Earlier in 2019 APS planners formed an internal elementary planning group which includes instructional leaders from schools and operational departments. This group met and considered many types of "what-if" scenarios. Ultimately, we agreed on the following principles to guide this process resulting the alternative proposals we have brought forward. 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 redrawing boundary lines 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 today and into the future. The Boundary-only scenario means busing students close enough to walk to one school to another school further way, likely increasing ongoing operating costs of transportation, making for longer bus rides, and fundamentally changing school cohorts. By moving option schools from high-growth areas where there are currently no neighborhood schools, we provide walkable options to families, and minimize operating costs, which keeps resources in classroom instruction.

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 Facilities Advisory Council (FAC), the biennial Arlington Facilities and Student Accommodation Plan (AFSAP) began evolving into a longer-term planning document more like other County master plans. Following the County plan model allows 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.

Another example of new work as a result of the improved alignment with County planning, is the new corridor zone map which replace the previous map groupings. Envisioned together with the FAC, the new zones align elementary schools 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 the 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, growing the budget to address the social, emotional and academic needs of our students. Operational efficiencies include 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 APS has no likely alternatives. By moving Key, the facilities team can focus its 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, reduce transportation needs and consolidate funding for new construction.

It seems early in the elementary 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 capital plan this Spring so that the bond can be funded in the November vote. This timing aligns with legal filing dates.

If, as you have requested, 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. In addition, the school and community would have less time to plan for the move. 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. We wish to be as transparent as possible, and in this case, that means holding these discussions without final determinations for boundaries.

To your question about our designation of students who “move,” in considering the impacts of school moves, we have taken the lead from the Virginia Department of Education. For example, we count students from McKinley as moving if they are 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 stay a neighborhood school with all the elementary boundary changes required to open Reed, then we would see significant McKinley cohorts “moving” to Reed and elsewhere fundamentally changing the current community, and accreditation potentially shifting to Reed. Actual counts aren’t possible until boundaries are set.

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

1. APS 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 supports to principals to develop and implement a transition plan.
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 excellent existing 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 more questions identified in your letter.

1. Once any decision is made, Planning and Evaluation will coordinate work with each school, community and PTA to prepare for the transition. Schools will be able to plan for implementation, so changes align with the instructional model.

2. In moving Key to a smaller facility, APS will use a combination of tools to determine and accommodate the size of the school over time. In the short term, immersion will continue to require relocatable classrooms as do most of our elementary schools. In 2019, Key has four relocatable classrooms and ATS has eight. 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.
3. Student body diversity is a hallmark of most APS option programs, including Immersion and ATS. Immersion programs have struggled to fill the Spanish speaking kindergarten slots, while ATS has waitlist 278 students. The ATS building is as close or closer to Spanish speaking communities than McKinley, making it a better fit for Immersion.
4. If the School Board adopts proposal 1, Kristin Haldeman, the Director of Multimodal Transportation will work with county transportation staff to determine if there are ART bus route adjustments that could make the ATS building more accessible to families who live near the Key building.
5. We recognize that Carlin Springs is close to Claremont, but it is even closer to the largest concentration of Spanish-speakers in the County. This would give us optimism that we could better fill the 50% Spanish side of immersion than currently. As with ATS, most immersion families are passionate about where they are provided countywide transportation. Located at the mid-point of the County along route 50, the location is still widely accessible.
6. We don't believe that the 50/50 Immersion model would increase segregation at either the ATS or Carlin Springs location. The Latino community has demonstrated a high preference for proximity in schools. The current makeup of Carlin Springs is 69% Hispanic and ATS is 15% Hispanic according to Civil Rights Statistics. Carlin Springs is 81% economically disadvantaged (www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SNPMonthlyEligibilityReport.pdf), Key is at 39% and Claremont at 31%.
7. If the School Board adopts a proposal, we will work with the principals to begin to address the feeders for 2021-22. This is a great question and an example of where clearly something would change, but how would require input from the community. As with other types of attendance changes, APS could use grandfathering to keep siblings together who lottery into immersion. Another possible consideration will be the likely use of hub bus stops for option schools. This idea was piloted last summer, and will be rolled out for all option schools in the future.
8. APS will work with the school principal to conduct extensive outreach following any possible moves of option programs as we know this will open up different kinds of choices for families to consider. This outreach would be to families and staff alike. The decision of school administrators and teachers to remain with their program or remain in their current location will depend on the desires of those concerned. If a program moves, we assume that the staff moves with the program.
9. Your concern for the current Key community is commendable. Please let me emphasize that every school creates a caring community and is sensitive to the needs of its member families. You name the types of supportive services which are not uncommon in APS schools. Making the decisions about placement of option programs sooner than later also allows APS to hire

principals who can work with social workers and bilingual resource assistants and even a prospective PTA to plan for as seamless a transition as possible. Your collaboration will not only be welcome, but critical to any changes.

10. APS does not have a plan for changes it hasn't decided to make. However, the challenges of distance from families and common space accommodation are not new to the system. By deciding well in advance of 2021, there is time for detailed recruitment, feeder schools, transportation, communication and staffing can be developed before the move. We can look at the creative solutions other schools have adopted and be responsive to identified needs.

An example for families at a distance from Wakefield included shuttle busses to and from low-income areas on back to school night. The new Heights building has unique parking challenges for school events. We don't need to reinvent every solution, but welcome your offer to work together.

11. When the school board makes its decision regarding possible program moves, we can begin to assess boundaries and take into account any families who choose to stay at the school in the Key building. Individual family decisions, particularly for students not yet in school are very difficult to predict as you say. We appreciate your work within your community to begin the conversation.

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

Sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Lisa Stengle.

Lisa Stengle
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/>.
- A chart showing the number of walkers for each building as a percentage of the capacity of the school is provided on the Engage page resources as analysis of walk zones by proposal: <https://www.apsva.us/engage/planning-for-2020-elementary-school-boundary-process/>
- 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.

September 30, 2019 Enrollment

Table 1. Spanish Speakers Attending Immersion at Key

| Neighborhood School | SPANISH SPEAKERS Total No. of K-5 Students | Percent of K-5 Enrolled at Key Students Language = Spanish |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Alice Fleet | 5 | 1% |
| ASFS | 149 | 22% |
| Ashlawn | 2 | 0% |
| Barcroft | 2 | 0% |
| Barrett | 21 | 3% |
| Carlin Springs | 5 | 1% |
| Discovery | 2 | 0% |
| Drew | 7 | 1% |
| Glebe | 14 | 2% |
| Hoffman-Boston | 6 | 1% |
| Jamestown | 2 | 0% |
| Long Branch | 33 | 5% |
| Nottingham | 1 | 0% |
| Randolph | 1 | 0% |
| Taylor | 18 | 3% |
| Total | 268 | 40% |

Table 2. High Proportions of Spanish Speakers Attending Other Schools

| School | Total No. of K-5 Students | Percent of K-5 Enrolled Students Language = Spanish | Proximate to ATS |
|------------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Carlin Springs | 548 | 59% | Closer to ATS than Key |
| Barcroft | 399 | 46% | Yes, along George Mason Drive |
| Barrett | 501 | 45% | Yes, along George Mason Drive |
| Randolph | 410 | 42% | Closer to ATS than Key |
| Key | 676 | 40% | |
| Drew | 386 | 32% | Closer to Claremont |
| Claremont | 711 | 28% | |

268 Spanish Speakers is 40% of 676 Total Students K-5 attending Key - 9/30/2019 Enrollment