



# Campbell Elementary School

*An Expeditionary Learning Community*

November 5, 2019

Arlington Public Schools staff and Members of the School Board:

We, the undersigned, strongly oppose "Schools Moves Proposal 2," which would relocate our option program. Our opposition is based on three considerations:

- 1) **Embracing Diversity:** Campbell is a demographically diverse and highly successful option school. In a building that failed as the high-poverty neighborhood school Glencarlyn Elementary, and that faced closure due to dwindling enrollment, an exemplary project grew to become a thriving countywide option school that last month was credentialed by the national Expeditionary Learning organization.<sup>1</sup> The Expeditionary Learning instructional model and outdoor learning focus have created a sought-after program for families both living near the school and from around the county. Campbell's unique program and its location in an area accessible to families who face more transportation barriers have resulted in a school that reflects the broader Arlington community and its economic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and ability-status diversity. Campbell is devoted to providing equity to its diverse student body, and in so doing, is making continual strides toward narrowing opportunity gaps.

We at Campbell embrace our diverse community and believe that our diversity benefits the student body as a whole. Beyond Arlington, educational leaders and researchers have demonstrated that all students benefit from diversity.<sup>2</sup> Moving the Expeditionary Learning option program to a building in a different location would undoubtedly and unpredictably impact its composition. The Arlington Public Schools strategic plan names "equity" as a Core Value, with the definition "Eliminate opportunity gaps and achieve excellence by providing access to schools, resources, and learning opportunities according to each student's unique needs." Campbell's success in this area should be a model for the school system, not something jeopardized by a move.

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<sup>1</sup> Arlington Public Schools, "Campbell Elementary School Receives Expeditionary Learning Education Credential for Excellence in Character and Scholarship," news release, October 17, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See "The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms," The Century Foundation: April 29, 2019; and Amy Stuart Wells, Lauren Fox, and Diana Cordova-Cobo, "How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students," The Century Foundation: February 9, 2016.



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- 2) **Outdoor Learning:** Campbell's outdoor spaces—created and maintained by sweat equity from students, parents, and staff—and its location adjacent to natural areas are integral to its implementation of the Expeditionary Learning model.<sup>3</sup> The portfolio submitted for Campbell's recent credentialing as an Expeditionary Learning school explained that integration:

*Students at Campbell are frequently and uniquely exposed to urban outdoor learning opportunities as the outdoors is considered to be an extension of the physical building. They are encouraged to become active investigators of the natural world through intentionality that starts with comfort, grows with confidence, and culminates in a deep knowledge of the space surrounding the school and how it might transfer to the larger world. Learners are not simply encouraged to observe their surroundings but also to consider and contribute to the beauty and functionality of their school.*

During the 2016–17 academic year, more than 411 lessons were taught outside, many of them uniquely built around the existing schoolyard at Campbell, and at least 30 lessons incorporated field work (walking trips) at Long Branch Nature Center. Campbell teachers and staff seek out opportunities to use that existing County resource to enhance and deepen instruction. All students at Campbell benefit from outdoor learning, including special needs students and those in the Interlude program, who have created and maintain a calming garden.<sup>4</sup>

- 3) **Team Players:** The Campbell community has proven its willingness to work with Arlington Public Schools (APS) to address challenges faced by the system as a whole. In this case, we think the costs and unknowns of moving option schools have not been weighed against the one benefit, which we understand to be fewer buses. Here are recent examples of how Campbell has absorbed changes and engaged with APS to benefit the Arlington community as a whole:
- a) In 2016, we welcomed the countywide Interlude program, understanding that our diverse school community with its outdoor learning emphasis would be an ideal home for these students.

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<sup>3</sup> See Kevin J. Coyle, "How Outdoor Education and Outdoor School time create High Performance Students," *Back to School: Back Outside*, National Wildlife Federation: September 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See Alexandros Stavrianos, "Green inclusion: Biophilia as a necessity," *British Journal of Special Education* 43, no. 4 (2017).



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- b) In 2017, we backed the staff proposal to remove the south Arlington preference from our lottery to make the Expeditionary Learning program equitably available to all residents.
- c) In 2018, we accepted the loss of our Montessori class, because the classroom was needed for K–5 capacity.
- d) In 2019—just last year—we participated thoughtfully in the Instructional Programs Pathways process, explaining the unique features of the Expeditionary Learning model, the best practices it employs, and its success at narrowing opportunity gaps.

School populations move and change, as do capacity needs. Proposal #2 would affect Arlington Traditional School (ATS), Campbell, Carlin Springs, Key, and McKinley, with a total current enrollment of 2,961. In Campbell's case, we worry that many of the students who currently live in the Campbell walk zone and attend Campbell would not move with the program to the ATS building, resulting in immediate overcrowding at the neighborhood school and much higher bus costs to fill the Expeditionary Learning program in its new location. Before making a decision, we respectfully ask staff to answer the following questions, which we believe are essential for a full analysis of the two proposals:

1. Can the boundary process occur concurrently with the discussion of school moves? Can staff present boundary scenarios in addition to the "Representative Boundary Scenario Involving Only Neighborhood Schools"? Which of the boundary considerations were included in that scenario, which is described as "using schools efficiently (maximizing capacity)"?
2. How many elementary students currently reside in the Campbell walk zone? How many of those students currently attend Campbell? How many of those students currently attend Carlin Springs?
3. What are the demographics of the students in the Campbell walk zone?
4. Have the impacts on staff—whose often plan their homes, childcare, and commutes based on the school they serve—been considered? Could APS poll staff at the schools it is proposing to move to ask how such action would impact them and whether they would seek alternate employment?
5. How would Interlude and VPI classrooms be impacted by each proposal?
6. What was the cost of moving the Montessori program to the former Henry building, and Henry to the new Fleet building?



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7. Have future capital improvement plans along the western end of Columbia Pike been considered in relation to this proposal? Specifically, do you foresee a time in the near future when there will be excess seats in this part of the county?
8. Would school bell times be changed as a result of the moves envisioned by each proposal?
9. Please detail the negatives of the proposals, in addition to the positives (e.g., How many students overall—not just neighborhood students—would be moved in each scenario? What are the costs of those moves? What are the instructional impacts on the programs that would be moved?).

Let's not create new problems. We urge you to take the proposal to relocate Campbell off the table and to seriously consider whether the disruptions to other school communities are worth the envisioned payoff.

Sincerely,

**2019–20 Campbell PTA Executive Board and Representatives**

Barbara Martinez, President

Kathryn Evans-Cordon, Vice President for Communications

Julie Angelis-Boehler and Erica Lord, Vice Presidents for Fundraising

Monica Flores, Vice President for Programs

Shana Brown, Secretary

Amanda Lowenberger, Treasurer

Claudia Cuellar, Ambassador to APS

Noël Durman, Representative to the ACI

Katherine Novello, Representative to the CCPTA

Melissa Wadman, Representative to SEPTA