



McKinley Elementary School PTA

1030 N. McKinley Road, Arlington, VA 22205

October 22, 2020

Arlington County School Board
c/o Monique O'Grady, School Board Chair
Syphax Education Center
2110 Washington Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22204

Dear Ms. O'Grady:

On behalf of the McKinley Elementary School PTA, I would like to thank you for your attention and engagement on the 2021 Elementary School Boundary Process and share our school community's feedback¹ on the current proposal. The McKinley community is concerned that this boundary proposal creates uncertainty and avoidable imbalance at an unprecedented time for our students and families.

We also understand, however, the importance of creating a neighborhood school zone for the new school at the Reed site and are committed to working with APS to achieve that goal. In that spirit, we suggest three amendments to the current proposal to ensure this boundary process is done safely, preserves maximum flexibility for APS to address county-wide concerns, and proceeds with minimum disruptions for our community and for the other affected schools:

1. Move the entire McKinley community (as defined in current boundaries) to Reed until APS conducts a full county-wide elementary school boundary process in 1-2 years;
2. Grandfather 5th grade students to their current school (or, in the case of McKinley, to Reed) so that they can finish elementary school with their current classmates; and
3. Ensure the full completion of the Reed school building and its outdoor spaces (e.g., playground and playing fields) before moving students to that location.

We believe these adjustments to the current proposal would achieve APS's near-term logistical goals, better align with APS's broader boundary policy, and promote additional benefits for our students, our communities, and the school system writ large. Specifically, our proposal:

- **Minimizes disruptions.** Moving all of McKinley to Reed means only 24 planning units (PUs) would move under the current proposal, reducing the total students impacted in the proposal to approximately 846 students²

¹ Exhibit A: Community Survey

² Exhibit B: Notional Boundary Map

- **Preserves flexibility for APS.** Moving fewer planning units now will provide APS with more options in the future county-wide elementary school boundary process to ensure that those changes align to a more holistic vision, driven primarily by instructional considerations.
- **Maintains community.** Moving the entirety of McKinley to Reed now will reduce family anxiety and promote school community stability during the pandemic.
- **Engenders good will and engagement with families.** We believe our amendments will help rebuild trust and rapport between APS and our community, which will lay the groundwork for smoother elementary, middle, and high school boundary change processes in the near future.
- **Responsibly utilizes APS building space.** Our proposal will fully utilize Reed upon completion, thereby avoiding APS and School Board concerns about having an expensive taxpayer-funded school building sitting empty.

Please see below for additional details on the three parts of our proposal.

#1- Move The Entire McKinley Community to Reed Next Year

We urge the School Board to press APS for a proposal that would move the entire McKinley school community to the new Reed school until a comprehensive boundary process is completed. We believe the data show our students can fit within the capacity of the school. Specifically:

- **It's feasible.** The published capacity for the Reed building is 732 students. McKinley's enrollment is currently 680 students – 95 fewer than planned for SY2020. Assuming all projected kindergartners who deferred enrollment this year due to the COVID-19 situation return in SY2021 (45 students), we believe a more realistic enrollment for McKinley next year is 704 students.³ This still leaves room for additional returning students in other grades if needed. We are confident in our estimate, considering pre-COVID decline in enrollment at McKinley and APS' forecast enrollment decline for the next three years. Further, we believe any reserve capacity held for PreK/VPI students can be accommodated in the short term through additional capacity at nearby option sites, including ATS at the current McKinley site.
- **It's supported.** Our survey shows a clear majority of McKinley families (73%) want to keep the community together at Reed next year, even if it means Reed is at capacity⁴.
- **It promotes stability.** Over 80% of McKinley families surveyed don't want their students re-zoned more than once during their elementary careers⁵. Rezoning to nearby schools now does not necessarily ensure students won't move again if their school is designated an option site or deemed too crowded as part of future analyses. Further, the current APS boundary proposal divides the existing McKinley community

³ Exhibit C: Reed Capacity Estimation

⁴ Exhibit A: Community Survey

⁵ Exhibit A: Community Survey

among three schools—Reed (68%), Ashlawn (21%), and Glebe (11%)—with the potential to add a fourth school (Tuckahoe) to the mix if additional planning units are ‘pushed west’ to balance capacity. No other school community in the APS proposal is splintered into so many pieces. Nor is any other school’s students isolated into so many small pockets across different school buildings next year, at a time when school may still be partially virtual making it much harder to build new friendships and connections with teachers and staff.

- **It enables flexibility.** Moving all of McKinley to Reed reduces future constraints for APS. For example, APS stated it is considering moving another option school north of Lee Highway as part of its efforts to better balance capacity and equity across the system.⁶ APS also reinforced during its community and PTA engagement sessions that planning units moved to a new school now should not be moved again in the next 5 years barring a significant overcrowding issue. Moving McKinley as a whole to Reed now, while leaving the Tuckahoe, Glebe, and the Ashlawn boundary as currently drawn, would preserve maximum flexibility for APS to explore all boundary scenarios once a county-wide elementary school boundary process can be completed.

#2- Grandfather 5th Graders

We urge the School Board to encourage APS to retain its long-standing policy of grandfathering 5th grade students during boundary changes, especially given the uncertainties and stresses of the ongoing pandemic. Over 86% of our families support the continuance of grandfathering⁷, as it helps keep communities together and supports student mental health, a top APS priority.

- **It’s been done.** APS has previously allowed 5th graders to grandfather so that they are not forced to change schools one year before they move to middle school. This longstanding practice tacitly recognizes that moving students to a new school for 5th grade disrupts crucial, trusted bonds with teachers and friends at a critical transition point in a student’s educational experience.
- **It’s compassionate.** This particular group of rising 5th graders had their 3rd grade year cut short by COVID-19, and currently are doing their 4th grade year virtually. Now APS is asking these students to transition to a new school next year for 5th grade, where they won’t know any teachers and may know very few other students, and may further struggle to integrate if school is still virtual or hybrid next year. This difficult 5th grade transition will be followed by a transition to middle school the following year, which will also coincide with the APS middle school boundary change process. We believe this is too much instability and transition impacting the same small group of students.
- **It’s adaptable.** We understand there are potentially significant transportation costs associated with grandfathering students to their original school, but strongly believe there are creative solutions available to mitigate them. For example, APS could allow 5th

⁶ Summary of Initial Boundary Proposal Draft 10-5.2020, Page 3

⁷ Exhibit A: Community Survey

grade families to opt out of bus service, similar to what APS is doing now with the hybrid model. APS could also explore ways to streamline bus routes, such as allowing 5th graders to walk to the nearest bus stop going to their grandfathered school or piggy-backing on county-wide option school bus routes.

#3- Ensure Reed is Fully Completed Before Moving Students

Lastly, we respectfully request that the School Board press the APS Facilities Office for a clear timeline of when the Reed school site will be fully completed, including the outdoor areas like the playground, playing field, and parking lot. At the same time, the School Board should request the APS Planning Staff create a school moves contingency plan if Reed's building and grounds are not completed on time. We are concerned that there are potential delays with the Reed construction that are not being fully disclosed by APS and that, as happened during the McKinley addition, they will impede our students' ability to safely inhabit their new school.

- **The scope is expanding.** We understand that Arlington County plans to excavate and install an underground reservoir beneath the Reed playing field. While we know this is an important part of the County's stormwater mitigation efforts, construction plans are just being formulated now, potentially placing the original Reed schedule at risk.
- **It's happened before.** The McKinley community, including all the rising 5th graders who will attend Reed, endured a similar construction delay during the McKinley addition process. That addition was "on schedule" to be completed by September of 2016, until APS unexpectedly changed the timeline and informed us that the addition would not be completed until January of 2017. Despite this delay, APS moved forward with planned boundary changes that over-crowded our community in a school building with no gym, art or music rooms, or 4th and 5th grade classrooms, for 4 ½ months. Additionally, our playground remained half-completed until the following spring, and our field space never returned.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss any of these issues in further detail and address your questions.

Sincerely,

Jon Judah, McKinley PTA President

cc:

Colin Brown, Principal, McKinley Elementary School

Dr. Francisco Duran, APS Superintendent

Lisa Stengle, APS Planning and Evaluation

Emily Vincent, CCPTA President

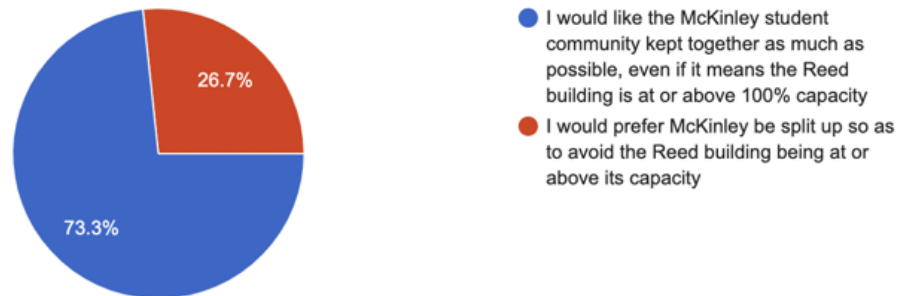
EXHIBIT A: COMMUNITY SURVEY

The McKinley PTA represents roughly 508 families across 8 different civic associations. We recognize that not all McKinley families have the same perspective on the school moves and boundary changes. In order to identify areas of agreement, the McKinley PTA conducted a survey of our school community from October 12 to October 14th on a range of topics related to the school boundary process. We received 367 survey responses.

Key findings related to items in this letter are noted below. McKinley PTA is happy to provide a full brief of our results upon APS request.

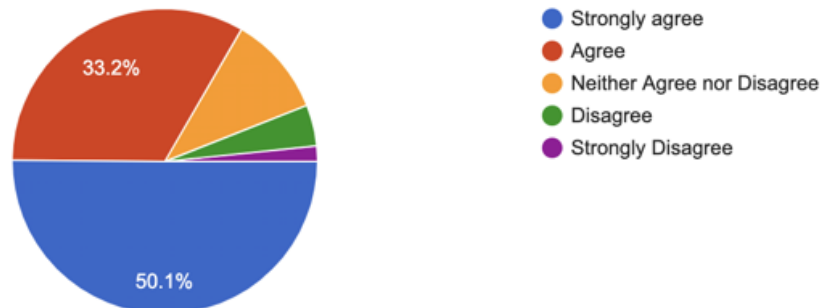
Please select which of the following statements most closely aligns to your views on the new school at Reed.

367 responses



Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: APS should ensure elementary students aren't rezoned to new schools more than once during their ES career, even if that means some schools become overcrowded.

367 responses



Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: I want APS to allow grandfathering, so that current 4th graders at McKinley, Ashlawn, Tuckahoe, Glebe, Taylor and Arlington Science Focus will be able to attend 5th grade and finish elementary school with their current classmates, even if their Planning Unit is rezoned to attend another neighborhood ES.

367 responses

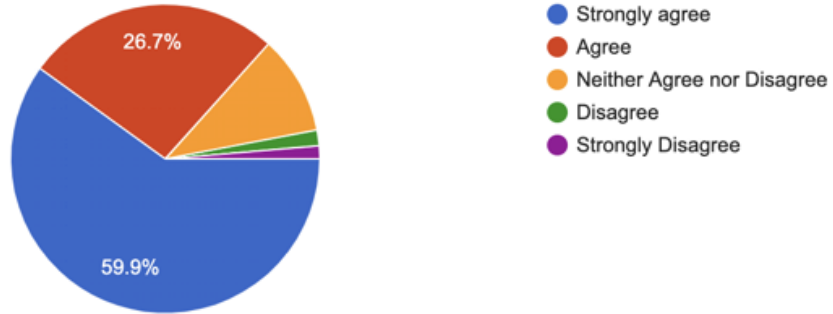


EXHIBIT B: NOTIONAL BOUNDARY MAP

The map below shows the further reduction in total planning unit moves achieved through the McKinley proposal to move its entire boundary into the Reed building.

Fall 2021 ES Boundary Proposal - Limited Planning Unit Moves, Maximized Flexibility Arlington County, Virginia

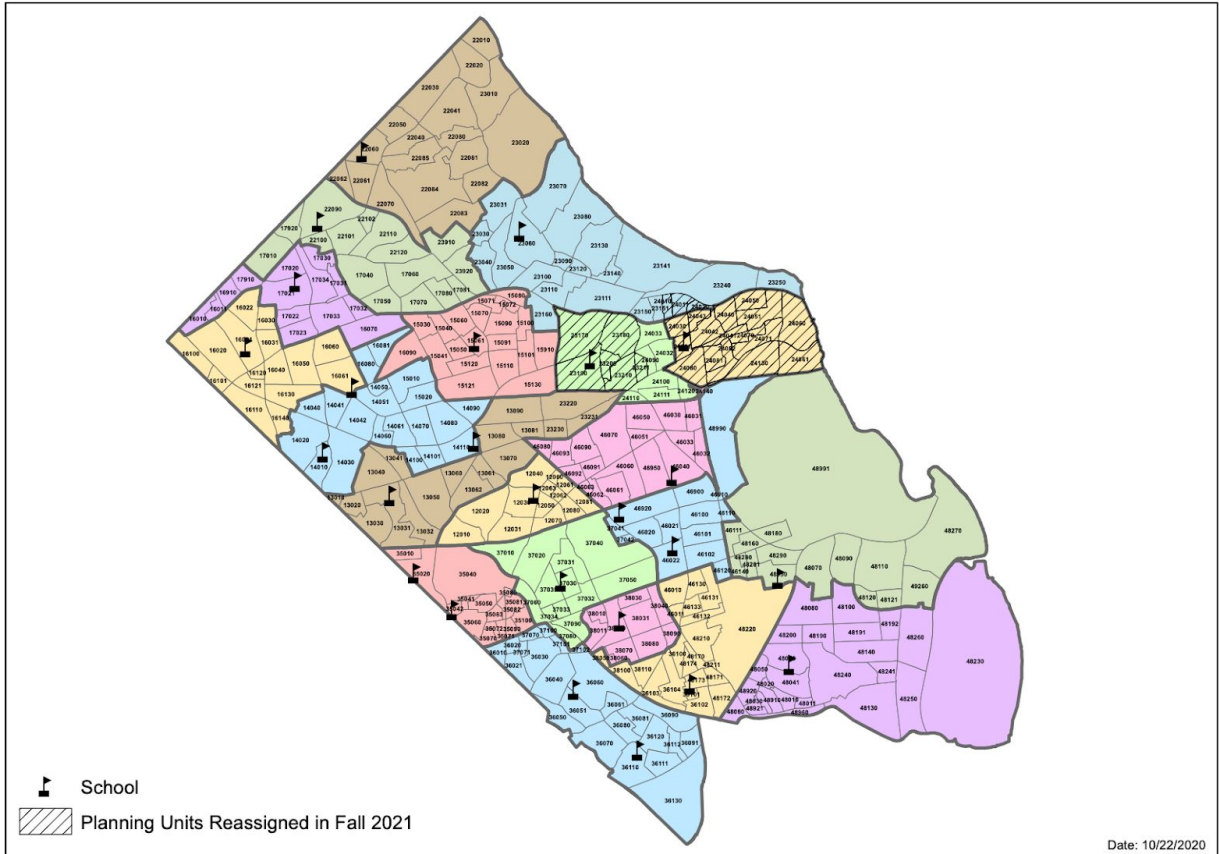


EXHIBIT C: REED CAPACITY ESTIMATION

The table below uses current McKinley enrollment as of September 2020 and APS' published projections based on McKinley boundary for SY21-24.

McKinley Elementary School - September 2020 Enrollment								
	Actual	Projected	Difference					
K	83	128	(45)					
1st	109	120	(11)					
2nd	136	146	(10)					
3rd	123	130	(7)					
4th	110	123	(13)					
5th	119	128	(9)					
Total	680	775	(95)					

APS Projections based on McKinley boundary for SY21-22, 22-23, 23-24								
	Projected	Modifications						Modified Enrollment
		Redshirt K return	Missing K	Missing 1st	Missing 2nd	Missing 3rd	Missing 4th	Total
SY21-22	745	45	(45)	(11)	(10)	(7)	(13)	704
SY22-23	719	45	(45)	(11)	(10)	(7)		691
SY23-24	690	45	(45)	(11)	(10)			669

We understand that the McKinley capacity estimate is based on an assumed 23.33 students per classroom. Increasing the assumed average class size to 25 students per classroom would yield a new projected capacity of 775 students.

Also, the overall square footage of the Reed site could accommodate up to 775 students with an average square footage per student of 143 gsf/student, which is above the national mean and commensurate with other APS elementary schools including Fleet. We also estimate, based on cafeteria design, that the Reed cafeteria can accommodate 237-273 students per seating, depending on table design, for a maximum of 819 students.