

Arlington County Council



November 2, 2020

Dear Dr. Durán and Members of the School Board:

The CCPTA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback about APS's Initial Proposal and the more recent Options A and B presented at the School Board Work Session on 10/29. As we review APS's proposed boundaries and the related data, a number of questions and concerns come up in six primary areas: Efficiency, Capacity, Proximity and Walkability, Demographics, Pre-K and special education programs, and grandfathering.

We have collected a number of questions we have and we respectfully request answers to these questions for the benefit of our members and the broader APS community in conjunction with the presentation and discussion of the Superintendent's Proposed Boundaries next month. We look forward to participating in a more comprehensive set of boundary changes in the near future that will address the concerns of the elementary schools not included in this process, and we ask APS to commit to a date when that process will occur. Additionally, we are already working on additional long-term, systemic recommendations with our member PTAs that we hope you will incorporate in any upcoming comprehensive boundary process.

Questions and Concerns Related to the Initial Proposal and Options A and B:

We understand the goals of this boundary process to be the following:

- drawing attendance zones for the new neighborhood schools at the Key and Reed sites; and,
- creating a new attendance zone for Arlington Science Focus so that the school is located within its boundaries.

Questions about Efficiency:

1. Is Efficiency (balancing enrollment and capacity) a goal of this process? APS writes (FAQ, Data #4): "Staff has not stated that this process was undertaken to achieve balance between capacity and enrollment. Our objectives in this boundary process are to develop attendance zones for our new school facilities opening in Fall 2021 at the Key and Reed sites and bring enrollment to manageable levels at our elementary schools."
2. What is the difference between "bringing enrollment to manageable levels at our elementary schools" and "achieving balance between capacity and enrollment"? Please clarify.
3. Please note that when the CCPTA delivered its Boundary Process Recommendations in April 2019, we noted that unclear goals have been an issue in previous boundary processes (for example, the middle school process in 2017 and the elementary school process in 2018, both of which the community understood would balance enrollment across schools and in fact did not.) We ask that you clarify these goals so that families have confidence in this process and feel that their input during community engagement is meaningful and relevant to the process.

Questions about Capacity:

1. If Capacity is a consideration, then we observe that none of the proposals currently being considered (the Initial Proposal, Option A, and Option B) completely alleviates capacity issues at the schools currently under consideration. The Initial Proposal exacerbates overcapacity conditions at three schools (Ashlawn, Glebe, and Key Immersion). It appears that Option A

leaves three schools (ASFS, Glebe, McKinley) at more than 100% permanent capacity, and Option B also leaves three schools (Ashlawn, Glebe, and McKinley) at overcapacity.

2. When you present the Superintendent's Proposed Boundaries on November 5, will you share more detail about how the recommended boundaries will set us up for success in a future boundary process to balance capacity equitably across all schools?
3. How are you ensuring that the enrollment numbers being used to understand capacity needs in our schools will be as accurate as possible so that the changes we make are addressing our future needs?

Questions about Proximity and Walkability:

1. Why are Walkability and Proximity prioritized in the Initial Proposal as well as in Options A and B for some planning units, but not for others where more low-income children live?
2. When you present the Superintendent's Proposed Boundaries on November 5, will you please provide more transparency about the demographics of the planning units that will be walkable compared to the planning units that will be assigned to schools outside their walk zones?

Questions about Demographics:

1. Why doesn't the Initial Proposal promote demographic diversity?
2. We note that F/RM data for Options A and B were not included in the Data Table presented in the School Board's 10/29 Work Session. Please share any analysis about how demographic diversity is affected in these options.
3. We note that the School Board's policy governing boundary changes states: "Staff shall prepare a report of boundary change options, which includes a discussion of how each option addresses, at a minimum, the considerations listed above, and will make the report available to the public as part of the community engagement process as adopted by the School Board." Why is APS not adhering to this policy during this process?
4. Reporting the net change per school of students qualifying for F/RM for only one of the scenarios under consideration does not constitute a report of options that explores the pros and cons relative to diversity and other factors. Please provide more information about demographic diversity across the option(s) currently under consideration, as well as any others that APS may have previously considered.

Questions about program moves for PreK and students with disabilities:

1. Discussion during recent School Board meetings and consideration of the data suggest that absent another option school move in the near future, APS will need to move programs for income-eligible preschoolers and students with disabilities out of schools that are more crowded, and more likely to be in the center of the County or in low-income areas, to locations in the north where there is space to house them.
2. How is APS going to address concerns about longer bus rides for these students and families' ability to access those programs via public transportation when parents need to participate in conferences, pick up a sick child, or want to attend school events?
3. Although we understand that placement of PreK and special education programs normally doesn't happen until February, we believe it is possible for APS to forecast where it might place programs for income-eligible preschoolers and students with disabilities given what is known about capacity to house these programs under each of the option(s) under consideration. Before a vote is taken on boundaries, will you share with the community and with the School Board an analysis of how many PreK program participants and students with disabilities will be moved under the Superintendent's Proposed Boundaries, how this will affect students' bus ride times, and whether their families will be able to access their schools via public transportation?

4. Will you also share how many of these students have previously been moved from school to school in the last few years and help our families understand why it is acceptable to APS to move these students more often than other students moved by boundary processes?

Questions about Grandfathering:

1. APS has stated that it will not be able to grandfather 5th grade students affected by these boundary changes. We are very concerned about the population of students who have already experienced significant disruption during 3rd and 4th grade years and will now be asked to attend a new elementary school during 5th grade, all before beginning over again in 6th grade for middle school.
2. When the Superintendent presents the Proposed Boundary recommendation next month, will you please share data about how many students fall into this category under the proposed recommendation and what the costs would be to grandfather these students, with transportation provided for those who need it?

Questions about Community Engagement:

The CCPTA earlier expressed concern about the levels of community engagement possible during a pandemic and general uncertainty in our community. We appreciate the steps APS has taken to engage our families, particularly in the number of languages that information has been shared in and the frequent updates to the online FAQs. Many of our PTAs have partnered with APS staff and school administrators to ensure that information is being shared widely.

1. What data has APS collected about the reach and inclusivity of its community engagement process this year? Above and beyond the data shared with the School Board on October 29 (we note Slide 11 of the staff presentation), what detail can be shared about which community populations were represented (by school or zip code, language, and/or other demographic factors)?
2. What communities are missing?
3. Does the feedback received about the boundary process reflect the diverse demographics and needs of our students?

We believe it is important that we carefully consider the impacts of the proposed limited boundary changes because decisions we make today will constrain the range of options we have available to us in any subsequent boundary processes. We are also very interested in better understanding the role of community engagement in decision making at APS.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to engage with you on this topic. We are happy to discuss any of the questions we have asked in this letter, and we look forward to receiving answers to these questions within the context of the Superintendent's Proposed Boundaries this month.