



# Dominion Hills Civic Association

Arlington • Virginia

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October 26, 2020

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Dr. Francisco Duran, Superintendent

Arlington Public Schools

2110 Washington Blvd

Arlington, VA 22204

**Re:** Elementary School Boundary Proposal

Dear Members of the Arlington School Board and Superintendent Duran:

The Dominion Hills Civic Association (DHCA) is deeply concerned about the possible effects of the October 5, 2020 Elementary School Initial Boundary Proposal on the children and families of our neighborhood. Dominion Hills consists of 613 single-family households in two APS Planning Units. Approximately 58 percent of these households are in PU 14030, currently zoned to McKinley Elementary, with the other 42 percent in PU 13040, currently zoned to Ashlawn Elementary.

### **Background**

The Dominion Hills neighborhood has been dealing with overcrowding and imprudent boundary changes for years. During the last major boundary shift, Arlington Public Schools (APS) moved multiple planning units to McKinley Elementary from Tuckahoe and Glebe, despite many attempts by the neighborhood to present data demonstrating that McKinley would be overcrowded. McKinley underwent a major renovation in 2015-2016 to address overcrowding, with the renovated building designed for 685 students. However, due to the boundary changes made by APS, McKinley opened in 2016 with over 800 students, more overcrowded than it had been before the construction.

APS has repeatedly promised relief from this overcrowding, and rallied support for construction of the new school at the Westover-Reed site on the premise that the new school would provide the needed relief at McKinley. Instead, APS's decision to close McKinley means that Reed is not a relief valve, it instead is resulting in the closure of a school that our neighborhood has attended for over fifty years. As part of that, the initial

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proposal put forward by APS not only closes McKinley, but splinters the community, including sending DH Planning Unit 14030 to Ashlawn, another seriously overcrowded school. We congratulate the administration and staff at Ashlawn for continuing to provide an excellent education to many of our children, despite the overcrowding. However, DHCA strongly opposes the current proposal in the short-term as it will negatively impact our community in three major ways:

- **Equity** – It is inequitable to move the 14030 planning unit to an already overcrowded Ashlawn, when other schools in the county (ex. Tuckahoe) would be left significantly under capacity.
  - Ashlawn is already overcrowded, and remains overcrowded under the current proposal.
  - Ashlawn had the largest kindergarten class of any elementary school in 2019, and has a FARMs rate of 15%. Tuckahoe is significantly under capacity with a FARMs rate of 5%.
  - Adding planning unit 14030 to Ashlawn does not support the APS’ goal of equity.
- **Overcrowding** – Ashlawn is currently overcrowded and under the proposed boundary plan would remain overcrowded with the addition of the 14030 planning unit. Opening Reed should be alleviating the capacity crisis in this county, and the current plan does not reflect that.
  - The Reed facility can handle the capacity of the entire current McKinley population, including 14030.
  - The entire McKinley population could be “shifted” to the new Reed location without an issue based on current enrollment numbers, avoiding further overcrowding of Ashlawn and Glebe. See data below (Table A) to support this assertion.
  - An already overcrowded Ashlawn should not be gaining any new planning units in this limited boundary change process.
- **Community/COVID** – APS should consider as few changes as possible to existing school communities, in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic.
  - If APS minimizes changes to communities in the short-term, the community will be more willing to support a more fulsome boundary discussion in the future when APS can assess ALL boundaries/schools county-wide
  - Dominion Hills encourages the county not to make the proposed boundary changes to our planning units at this time, and instead take the time to come up with a holistic plan to address the needs of all of Arlington County.
  - Families are experiencing significant fatigue and stress during this unprecedented time, and APS can support its community/students by providing consistency and as few boundary changes as possible in the near term.
  - APS’s stated policy is to limit the number of moves that any planning unit will make between schools during a certain time period. By keeping as many planning units “as is” as possible, APS maintains the greatest possible flexibility when it undertakes a subsequent countywide effort.

**Recommendation**

The Dominion Hills Civic Association (DHCA) on behalf of our neighborhood, recommends APS “Lift and Shift” McKinley as an entire school – all current planning units, including 14030 – to the new Westover-Reed school. DHCA also requests that no additional planning units be moved to Ashlawn in this short-term boundary process, as the school is already significantly overcrowded. This recommendation will help APS achieve the following:

- Address the overcrowding situation at Ashlawn and Glebe.
- Address equity concerns, by not further impacting overcrowded schools with higher farms rates, while leaving high-income schools drastically under capacity.
- Maintain the McKinley school community in the short term at the Reed site given current enrollment volume, minimizing uncertainty and stress on our children as the community struggles during the global pandemic.
- Allow APS to address the larger boundary and capacity issues county-wide in the future, when enough time and data can be gathered post-pandemic on enrollment numbers. Short-term moves that only address a small part of the county will only worsen an already complex capacity problem.

**Summary**

In recent weeks, DHCA and a number of our neighbors have held discussions with the current school board candidates. A consistent refrain in these discussions is that “no one knows your neighborhood better than you do.” With that in mind, we are writing to you to explain what our neighborhood has been through, and what we need to thrive as a community in the future. We ask that you work with us and consider our recommendations, as our community has always reached out in good faith to work with APS. Please work with us on viable, logical, and long- lasting solutions to school boundary issues.

We appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Brian Hannigan

President

Dominion Hills Civic Association

Attachment

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)					
<b>Total</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>(95)</b>					

  

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