

MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board

FROM: David Rosenblatt, Chair 2021 - 2022, ASEAC

CC: Dr. Francisco Durán, Superintendent
Dr. Kelly Krug, Director of Special Education, Elementary
Heather Rothenbuescher, Director of Special Education, Secondary
Kimberley Graves, Chief of School Support
Dr. Jason Ottley, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer
Brian Stockton, Chief of Staff
Symone Walker, Vice Chair 2021 - 2022, ASEAC

DATE: May 4, 2022

SUBJECT: ASEAC Comments on Proposed FY2023 APS Budget

Dear School Board Members:

The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC) has a mandate to advise the School Board on matters pertaining to the needs of students with disabilities in APS (8 VAC 20-81-230 D). We have engaged in discussions about the proposed budget for FY2023 and are submitting our comments for your consideration.

Overall, ASEAC strongly supports the overdue investments in special education capacity that are included in this budget, and we encourage the school board to employ new planning factors to align staffing with student needs, thereby reducing disruptive annual scrambles to fund needed staff. ASEAC strongly supports investing in retaining and expanding mental health services in APS. Lastly, ASEAC is concerned that this proposed budget does not make significant progress on addressing the anti-inclusion bias built into APS planning factors for students with disabilities, and encourages the school board to seriously consider whether resources could be re-allocated to address this core strategic goal.

Investments in Special Education Capacity

ASEAC strongly supports the following investments in special education capacity, as proposed:

- Continue Student Support Coordinator Initiative (7.0 FTEs)
- Change Pre-K special education assistant planning factor to 2.0 per class (17.5 FTEs)
- Change Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) planning factor to 1.0 per 50 students (5.0 FTEs)

ASEAC also supports additional capacity investments, but urges the school board to amend the budget to align these investments with student needs:

- 1:1 assistant staffing (30.0 FTEs) – This staffing should be driven by a new 1:1 assistant planning factor that aligns allotted FTEs with the number of students who require 1:1 support in their IEPs. Providing this support to students is legally required, thus the staffing allocation should follow the identified needs.
- Interpreters for Deaf/HH students (5.0 FTEs) – As with the 1:1 assistants, this staffing should be connected to a new planning factor for interpreters and driven by the services outlined in students' IEPs.
- FLS Coordinator (1.0 FTEs) – The description of this role in the superintendent's proposed budget does not align with ASEAC's understanding of its actual purpose. The budget should be clear that this role has specific responsibilities with regard to high school programs and community engagement, not for FLS programming from K-12.

Investing in Mental Health Supports

ASEAC strongly supports investing in mental health supports, aligned to student needs.

- Interlude therapist planning factor (6.5 FTEs) – ASEAC's understanding is that this proposed change is aimed at serving students outside the Interlude program who need counseling as a related service. ASEAC suggests that a planning factor should be created to staff therapists in proportion to the number of students who need this service, without regard to enrollment in the interlude program specifically.
- ASEAC supports changing the psychologist and social worker planning factors to retain the 2.0 psychologist positions and 2.0 social worker positions that would otherwise be cut based on enrollment.

Investing in Inclusion

During this school year, ASEAC members have contributed to analysis of APS planning factors that showed that APS' lack of progress on its strategic goal to include 80 percent of students with disabilities for 80 percent of the school day is partly rooted in a system that systemically allocates more resources into segregated settings. While APS has had this strategic goal in place since 2018 and has made virtually no progress, the FY2023 proposed budget does not make significant steps to remedy these decades-old inequities.

Rather than continue postponing a real commitment to inclusion, ASEAC calls on the school board to allocate resources to follow-through on its strategic goal immediately:

- Elementary School – rather than reduce class sizes by 2, as proposed, ASEAC urges the board to consider reducing class sizes by 1 and devote the remaining resources (16.5 FTEs) to increasing staffing for students with disabilities in Category I and Category II to support inclusion. Providing appropriate staffing to support authentic inclusion in the general education setting benefits all students who experience inclusive education, whether or not they have identified disabilities.
- Middle School “Teams” model planning factor update (33.0) – ASEAC encourages the board to ensure that this planning factor includes *all* students with disabilities and eliminates the 1/7 staffing formula for some students with disabilities in middle school.
- High School – Rather than reduce the across-the-board general education planning factor by 1 as proposed, ASEAC suggests that the board use the same resources (11.2 FTEs) to increase general education classroom planning factor for some SPED students to 3/7 instead of 1/7.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit feedback on the proposed budget.

Sincerely,

David Rosenblatt, Chair, ASEAC