



June 11, 2024

Re: Plans to address school overcrowding in 22202

Arlington County School Board,

Since 2019, the presidents of Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City civic associations, collectively joined under Livability22202, have been jointly voicing the concerns of our members regarding the need for more K-12 seats in 22202. The four schools serving our student population of 22202, Oakridge Elementary, Hoffman Boston Elementary, Gunston Middle School, and Wakefield High School, are overcrowded and, according to the 2023 Pre-CIP Report, will remain so as long as something isn't done to address the issue. We ask the School Board to develop a long-term plan that will remedy overcrowding and modify current approaches to appropriately consider overcrowding and student growth.

While the rest of the county is seeing a decline in student population, the Pre-CIP enrollment projections in this region of the county show ~280 more students than seats at the elementary level by 2027-28 (capacity utilization ~122%), ~120 more students than seats at the middle school level (capacity utilization ~112%), and ~155 more students than seats at the high school level (capacity utilization rate of ~107%). In human terms, this means a kindergartener who started at Oakridge Elementary in 2015 will have been in overcrowded schools for his or her entire academic career. This story will continue to be true for all our incoming kindergartners if the intended outcomes of the Pentagon City and Crystal City sectors plans come to fruition and generate more positive fluctuations in the student generation rates.

As we exited the pandemic and our student populations continued to rise, we expected a clear process through which APS would address the need for more K-12 seats in 22202, either through a new elementary school or expansion and renovation of existing schools to deliver more seats and address overcrowding. Instead the proposed CIP treats the county as a monolith, highlighting factors that are only true for the northern regions of the county. While we appreciate APS's effort to develop a Facilities Condition Assessment (FCA) Report, and associated methodology to identify and assess facilities and prioritize capital investments, we believe that there are critical considerations that were omitted.

The Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs (FAC) highlighted three critical considerations for deliberation before recommending schools for feasibility studies: educational space inadequacies, overcrowding, and relocatables. We agree with FAC that actual and projected capacity utilization should be factored into the methodology to ensure that schools with current and projected enrollments above building capacity are properly considered, as they likely have a higher number of students in the prescribed educational space. It is also a sound investment to renovate and/or expand facilities that could immediately relieve overcrowding, alleviate the need for boundary changes and the associated transportation costs, and adequately support larger student populations.

Communities cannot prosper, socially or economically, without high quality neighborhood schools to attract residents and develop talent pipelines. If the FAC methodology will determine renovations far into the future, we request the School Board ensure the process is founded in reasonable and equitable principles and commits resources to address inadequacies. We also ask the School Board and APS to think beyond boundary changes to meet the needs of our growing student population. As the county emphasizes increased development and brings in thousands of new residents to Crystal City and Pentagon City, relying on boundary changes will push students further away from where they live and hinder APS' ability to meet its strategic goals. The result will be an inadequate public education system that continues to exacerbate inequity by preventing children from accessing education equally across the County.

We look forward to working with the School Board and APS to develop plans for 22202, where investing in APS facilities will remedy overcrowding and ensure a growing population of students have the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

Sincerely,



Kateri Garcia, President
Arlington Ridge Civic Association



Rachel Hicks, President
Aurora Highlands Civic Association



Eric Cassel, President
Crystal City Civic Association