

April 13, 2023

Dear members of the School Board and Dr. Duran,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed FY 2024 budget. The executive board of the CCPTA, in consultation with our membership, would like to offer the following comments (in no particular order) on the budget:

- Arlington parents are focused on how to support student's mental health and well-being - both through treatment of developed disorders and through preventative investments that foster relationships and connections for youth. With respect to treatment, the executive board of the CCPTA fully supports the 3 additional substance abuse counselors and the efforts to embed county behavioral health treatment providers in schools in order to provide tier 2 and 3 interventions. We also believe that it is important to allow students to self-refer to these county providers for even tier 1 support, if that student lacks trust or perceives a conflict of interest with APS-employed counselors. Additionally, we believe it's important for all schools to create physical space with tools and instructions on how students can use the space for re-regulation (a.k.a. calm down rooms).
- Arlington parents saw the benefits of outdoor lunch policies for students, i.e. additional opportunities for exercise, socialization, and exposure to outdoor settings, something that the CCPTA continues to urge APS to strive for and maintain at all county schools and programs. We continue to believe that secondary schoolers do not have enough opportunities for midday movement, such as recess, which helps student mental health. We recommend that these opportunities be added to the school day. In addition, the executive board of the CCPTA requests the addition of a new 1.0 FTE position of an outdoor learning curriculum developer, to help teachers incorporate outdoor learning opportunities into existing curriculum objectives. Such a goal is consistent with the performance measures mentioned in the budget on Whole Child indicators of a healthy and supportive learning environment.
- Arlington parents are concerned about the higher levels of SPED casework impacting teachers. We are supportive of the budget allocation for the planning factor study, and we support the additional psychologists and social workers in the budget that would provide levels that are above the outdated planning factor recommendations, as a necessity to respond to what are historic-levels of crisis in student mental health. However, we note that the levels for psychologists and social workers are still below nationally recommended ratios. We also share ASEAC's concerns with how assistants and other support personnel for special education are budgeted for, which is not based on projected need levels. For example, any staffing that is tied to student needs (such as services in an IEP) should be structured as a planning factor, not as an ad hoc allocation of staff. Failing to sufficiently address student needs under IEPs subtracts from the time and attention that is available to all students.
- Arlington parents continue to be concerned about teacher retention and recruitment, so the executive board of the CCPTA is supportive of the proposed step increase of \$25.6M and the proposed COLA of 3% for teacher salaries.

- Arlington parents are concerned about bus driver retention and recruitment, which is a safety and learning issue when bus drivers have to cover additional routes when they are not familiar with the families on that route, and when students are still arriving late to school. The bus driver shortage also creates knock-on effects impacting the availability of field trips transportation as well, to the detriment of student experiences. The executive board of the CCPTA believes that bus driver working conditions, including planning for necessary Trade Center optimization to address the lack of bus driver parking spaces onsite, need to be addressed promptly.
- Arlington parents remain concerned with inconsistent availability of classroom supplies, which particularly impacts Title I schools. The CCPTA passed a resolution on Oct. 17, 2022 requesting that APS adequately fund essential classroom supplies. The executive board of the CCPTA is supportive of including supplies in the planning factors study, but would also like additional funding to address known shortfalls in supplies - such as testing headphones - in the FY 2024 budget.
- Arlington parents are concerned with the conditions of school facilities, including system failures. The executive board of the CCPTA believes that an additional FTE plumber on staff could ameliorate the current wait times experienced for bathroom repairs, and an additional FTE electrician could provide better routine maintenance of existing systems (such as HVAC), thus promoting reliability, cost savings, and energy efficiency over the long run.
- Arlington parents are concerned with student hunger as an impediment to learning. The executive board of the CCPTA supports the funding for free meals during summer school, and encourages APS to take full advantage of the recently-announced USDA expansion of the Community Eligibility Program.
- Arlington parents are concerned with school safety and promoting a safe environment for learning, recognizing that anti-bullying and classroom management are important factors in promoting safety. However, the executive board would like to better understand how the additional 8 school safety coordinators and Threat Assessment Specialist – along with the additional 145 security camera licenses – are intended to enhance current practices. For example, will these positions and cameras accomplish something that is not currently being done, or are they just “more” of what is currently being done? Were alternatives considered, such as positions that support classroom management or combat bullying? We would also like some clarity about the anticipated roles of the 3 new Dean of Student positions to support restorative practices, and whether these positions will accomplish something different than what is currently being done.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Claire Noakes

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