

Elementary School Capacity in South Arlington: Next Steps February 5, 2015 Statement of the Arlington School Board

Introduction

On January 27, 2015, after receiving the report of the Thomas Jefferson Working Group, the County Board responded to our request to build a new elementary school on the Thomas Jefferson site. The County Board's answer was, "Not now." They asked us to engage in a broader process to review more sites and invited us to return with more information. Importantly, they also offered support to help us identify new options in South Arlington, in particular, County-owned facilities and privately-owned spaces.

We thank the County Board for its support and partnership as we move forward to address the challenge of growing enrollment. We believe that, as a result of the Thomas Jefferson Working Group process and the County's review, the two Boards have a shared understanding of our school capacity challenges, the many competing demands on our limited land in Arlington, our limited financial resources, and the community's expectation that the Boards use the community's resources effectively and efficiently.

We would like to thank the many citizens who participated in the Thomas Jefferson Working Group process. We especially thank Chair Carrie Johnson, School Board liaison Emma Violand-Sanchez, and County Board liaison Mary Hynes. The Group spent many months analyzing the issues and their contributions will strengthen and inform our process going forward.

We thank Dr. Murphy, John Chadwick, Scott Prisco, Meg Tucillo, and Lionel White for their professionalism, expertise and tireless work on behalf of our schools and students throughout this process. We also thank the County staff for their significant contributions to the Working Group process.

Commitment of Both Boards

We appreciate the County Board's commitment to partnering with the School Board to provide a minimum of 725 new elementary school seats in South Arlington not later than the start of school in September 2018, using a combination of interim and permanent solutions. This commitment increases the variety of options available. The County Board has offered to provide technical support to identify and evaluate County buildings and private commercial spaces that might help meet our capacity needs on an interim basis. On January 28th, School Board Chair Lander sent a letter to County Board Chair Hynes asking that a discussion begin immediately between the County Manager and Superintendent, and between the leadership of both Boards, to identify interim solutions using County-owned and privately-owned sites. In addition, the School Board has asked the Superintendent to include in his discussions with the County Manager County-owned or privately-owned sites that could be used on a permanent basis.

As stated in our Strategic Plan, the School Board's goal is to provide optimal learning environments for all of our students because this supports student achievement. We are

committed to maintaining a focus on student achievement as we conduct this next phase of decision-making about capacity needs.

The School Board also is committed to ensuring that the \$50,250,000 bond that the community approved in 2014 will be expended to deliver a minimum of 725 elementary school seats in South Arlington by the start of school in the fall of 2018. We recognize that this does not fully meet the need for elementary seats in South Arlington and we will continue to plan for those additional seats through the 2016 Capital Improvement Plan process.

Next Steps

The School Board charges the Superintendent to:

- Work collaboratively with the County Manager to review the inventory of County-owned facilities and privately-owned spaces to identify a new set of potential short-term, medium-term, and long-term solutions;
- Update APS feasibility studies of APS properties, as appropriate;
- Outline a process and timeline for considering solutions that enable us to meet our deadline of providing a minimum of 725 new elementary school seats in South Arlington by the start of school in September 2018; and
- Provide a status report to the School Board by April 30 2015.

The School Board will seek the input of its Advisory Councils, PTA's, civic associations, and community organizations that represent the diversity of our community, in developing this process and timeline. Once sites have been identified, APS will have a meaningful community engagement process, consistent with the School Board's policy on Family and Community Engagement, to consider the sites in light of our Strategic Plan Goal of providing optimal learning environments for all students to support student achievement. The process will be inclusive, transparent, and focused on community consensus building. This process will include a discussion of plans to move programs, expand programs, or create new programs.

To be clear, a new elementary school at Thomas Jefferson and additions at Barcroft and Randolph will remain in the pool of potential options for meeting capacity needs in South Arlington. In addition, we expect that the collaboration between the leadership of both Boards and between the Superintendent and County Manager will produce a variety of new options, including County-owned spaces and privately-owned spaces.

Conclusion

The School Board is optimistic that more options will serve our community better. We are moving forward in collaboration with the County Board and will work to build community consensus around capacity solutions. Together with Dr. Murphy, APS staff, the community, and the County Board and its staff, we are confident that we will maintain our focus on student achievement as we meet our capacity challenges. Because APS facilities are community facilities, used for a wide variety of community activities, we believe that providing new facilities for Arlington's students will benefit the entire Arlington community.