



August 31, 2022

Dear Dr. Kay-Wyatt, Chair Alderton & Alexandria City School Board Members,

The Alexandria Parent Teacher Association Council (PTAC) recognizes that many challenges loom large over the start of the 2022-2023 school year in the City of Alexandria. These challenges include teacher and staff shortfalls, school violence, increasing demands for student mental health services, support to address learning loss due to the pandemic, reengaging parents who have been physically distanced from their school communities, and ensuring a healthy environment for students as the pandemic persists. PTAC requests that Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) advance the following priorities for the 2022-2023 school year.

- **Fill Critical Staffing Shortfalls.** ACPS should continue its efforts to aggressively and creatively recruit staff and incentivize them to remain in the system, not only via competitive pay and benefits that enable staff to live and thrive in the Alexandria area but also by ensuring that educators work in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning. Special focus should be given to ensure that newly hired staff feel adequately trained and supported in their new roles to avoid frequent turnover. Similarly, veteran staff salaries should be boosted to the step level commensurate with their experience to avoid the loss of institutional knowledge that would result from their leaving the district. ACPS should increase school-specific and city-wide communications about staffing levels and how ACPS is working to address shortfalls.
- **Keep our Children Safe.** School violence and disciplinary problems escalated as students returned to the classroom, and reached a deafening crescendo at the close of the 2021-2022 school year with the tragic death of Alexandria City High School student Luis Mejia Hernandez. Too many students reported in the ACPS Equity Climate Survey that they do not feel safe at school, a fundamental prerequisite to learning. PTAC appreciates the recently implemented security measures related to identification, school entrances, and closed campuses. ACPS should ensure transparent communications about safety incidents, communicate robustly on efforts to mitigate risk, maintain school resource officers, and increase personnel in schools to address the underlying causes of violence.
- **Provide a Supportive and Healthy Environment.** It is clear that students are still struggling emotionally and socially from the pandemic, and the loss and disconnection of quarantine is continuing to impact students. Meanwhile, teachers report that the challenges many students face have made their work far more difficult, contributing to

retention challenges. ACPS must ensure robust counseling, behavioral specialists, therapeutic interventions, and social work support that will enable teachers to focus on learning. Meanwhile, ACPS should expeditiously communicate what the most recent COVID-19 guidelines from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention mean for APCS and how our most vulnerable students will be protected. ACPS should proactively review COVID-19 case data at each school at regular intervals and determine if school-specific communication and mitigation measures should be implemented to reduce transmission.

- **Provide Equitable Access to Tutoring, Field Trips, and Programs.** ACPS should continue its efforts to provide robust tutoring, academic enrichment, and after-school support to prevent academic gaps stemming from the pandemic from widening. Bussing should be provided so all students can equitably attend after school programs, especially tutoring. The pandemic also contributed to disconnection from peers, and removal of the programming that contributed to a sense of normalcy and created joy — programming like after school clubs, plays, field trips, concerts, dances, etc. that allowed students to learn, explore, develop friendships, laugh, and generally feel good about themselves. ACPS should ensure that students have equitable access to a wide variety of such programming even in schools without PTAs that organize and provide financial support for such activities.
- **Reengage Parents.** The pandemic has taken a toll on community involvement in ACPS schools—some parents have never stepped foot in their child’s school, nor had the opportunity to volunteer in support of the school. ACPS should lean forward in welcoming families back to the schools and promote volunteerism and volunteer opportunities. School leadership should consider partnering with their PTA units to plan community-building events and activities.
- **Ensure Building and Grounds Equity.** Facilities and grounds maintenance and recapitalization projects should be planned and executed with an eye toward ensuring that families across the district have access to equal learning, recreational, and social opportunities. Ferdinand T. Day’s community has voiced concerns to PTAC about families not being able to access the school playground during off-hours, which poses a barrier to the development of social connections and a sense of community. Meanwhile, the nearby John Adams playground lacks sufficient maintenance to support three schools—the Early Childhood Center, Ferdinand T. Day, and John Adams Elementary—and has been without a working swing set since April.
- **Seek Input on Crucial Policy Decisions.** The ACPS School Board should develop creative mechanisms to seek student and parent input on policy decisions. Such measures could include student roundtables, office hours, community forums in each district, community walks, visits by each School Board member to every school (not just the ones to which they are assigned), participation in PTA meetings and cultural competency training for families, more community surveys (including ones specifically

geared toward our Special Education families), lunch visits to see community needs first hand, issue-based task forces (like Special Education and Dual Language) made up of stakeholders qualified to speak on various issues, etc.

PTAC appreciates your consideration of these priorities for the 2022-2023 school year.

Thank you,

Alexandria PTA Council Executive Board 2022-2023

Missy Estabrook, President

Betty Cook, Treasurer

Linda Williams, Secretary

Sally Hunnicutt, VP of Advocacy

Julia Sylla, VP of Programs

Staci Rijal, VP of Communications

D Ohlandt, VP of Outreach

Maureen McNulty, Past President

Dena Penner, Special Education Parent Liaison

Greta Gordon, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Co-Chair

Mariam Fikre, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Co-Chair