



August 22, 2022

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

The Alexandria Parent Teacher Association Council (PTAC) requests that Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) prioritize several recommendations to ensure that students, families, and staff can get to school safely, particularly in light of the recent guidance encouraging families returning for the 2022-2023 school year to consider alternatives to bus service due to the driver shortage. The March crash involving a nine-year-old student who sustained serious injuries at Jefferson Houston School, and the June crash in neighboring Fairfax County that killed two Oakton High School students and critically injured a third, highlight the importance of strengthening pedestrian safety at and near Alexandria's schools. ***The next crash isn't a matter of if, but when.***

- 1) **Fund a Full Time Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Coordinator Under the ACPS Office of Transportation or ACPS Office of Security.** PTAC understands that ACPS no longer employs an SRTS coordinator and instead will have a newly created part-time position dedicated to the biking and swimming education program. While PTAC supports those educational programs, ACPS should also follow the lead of neighboring near-peer jurisdictions like Arlington and prioritize a full-time SRTS coordinator in its budget to ensure children can walk, bike, and be dropped off at school safely. ACPS should fund a full-time position under the ACPS Office of Transportation or Office of Security to:
  - Build an equitable and sustainable program aimed at evaluating, institutionalizing, and ensuring continued support for SRTS, especially to ensure the engagement of and responsiveness to all segments of ACPS's diverse population, including students with disabilities;
  - Work with the city, ACPS, and private stakeholders (e.g. on the Mark Center campus) to improve the physical infrastructure of streets within 1-2 miles of schools, so they are safer places to walk and bike to school;
  - Serve as the ACPS representative to the Pedestrian Safety Task Force (see next recommendation);
  - Create welcoming campuses to ensure safe arrival and dismissal procedures; and
  - Promote safe behaviors via education and outreach to our diverse student body, parents, and community groups.

- 2) Establish a Joint Pedestrian Safety Task Force.** Pedestrian safety at or near ACPS schools is an issue that cuts across several ACPS and City of Alexandria departments and offices; in other words, various ACPS departments and offices play a role in identifying pedestrian risks and implementing solutions to keep our children safe. To ensure that resources are aligned to where they are needed most, the City Council and the ACPS School Board should commission a joint Task Force that defines and prioritizes pedestrian risks by school, outlines strategic and tactical requirements to mitigate the risks, and defines a timeline, key milestones, and entities accountable for executing the requirements. This Task Force, which could be created by broadening the mandate of the Speed Enforcement Task Force that recently was established by the city to determine the optimal placement of speed enforcement cameras near ACPS schools, should provide periodic reports to the Joint ACPS School Board/City Council committee. Given the cross-cutting nature of the issue, the City Council and School Board should regularly address ACPS pedestrian safety at joint sessions. These sessions will ensure that sufficient progress is being made to protect the safety of Alexandria's children.
- 3) Take Ownership of the Crossing Guard Program and Seek Innovative Solutions to Fill Gaps.** Crossing guards play an absolutely critical role in protecting ACPS students, but today only approximately two thirds of the 27 crossing guard positions are filled. To make matters worse, the too few crossing guards are not working where they are needed most. Some schools like Charles Barrett have prioritized their own resources to fill gaps, while others in highly trafficked areas like Ferdinand T. Day, Jefferson Houston, Patrick Henry, and Alexandria's middle and high schools remain without guards. PTAC understands that the city, to include Mayor Wilson and the Alexandria Police Department, is highly supportive of transferring the crossing guard program to ACPS, and stands ready to fund full-time FTE for these positions to make them more attractive to candidates seeking full-time employment with benefits. ACPS should take advantage of this offer to fill other staffing needs, e.g. parent liaisons and paraprofessionals. In the meantime, ACPS should seek out innovative solutions to addressing gaps, to include providing dedicated stipend funding to schools without guards to enable principals to pay existing staff to serve as guards without depleting funding used for other principal priorities.
- 4) Pass a School Board Resolution to Reduce Excessive Vehicle Speeds Near Schools.** Multiple studies show that speed kills and speed limits of 15 mph are appropriate near schools. Examples of areas with unsafe speeds near schools that need 15 mph school speed limits are Braddock Road in front of Minnie Howard, Seminary Road in front of Francis C. Hammond, and N. Beauregard Street near Ferdinand T. Day, John Adams, and William Ramsey. Virginia code enables the ACPS School Board to reduce speeds on 25 mph streets to 15 MPH in school zones by passing a resolution with agreement from the city. The ACPS School Board should pass this resolution immediately for all schools in 25 mph zones without 15 mph school zone limits, to include Francis Hammond, Minnie Howard, and Alexandria High School. ACPS and the

School Board should ask the city to take action as soon as possible to establish 25 mph limits elsewhere in the city that later can be reduced to 15 mph via resolution.

- 5) **Work with the City to Address Safety on Private Streets.** Many pedestrian safety concerns have surfaced at Ferdinand T. Day (FTD) that are unique to its location in the Mark Center commercial campus with private streets. ACPS, jointly with Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES), should engage relevant business and residential stakeholders on the campus to mitigate risks on the privately owned streets, and to address parking concerns raised by FTD's neighbors at parent pick up and drop off. ACPS should also ask T&ES to prioritize a Safe Routes audit of FTD and complete resulting recommendations before it opens another ACPS school/swing space on the commercial campus.

PTAC appreciates your consideration of these recommendations to make our streets safer and is grateful to the input provided to PTAC by Dr. Hart, Mr. Contreras, and Mr. Merriman. We ask that you give full consideration to prioritizing ACPS pedestrian safety in this upcoming budget cycle, and that you hold all ACPS stakeholders accountable for the timely mitigation of risk to our children.

Thank you,

Alexandria PTA Council Executive Board 2022-23

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