



April 13, 2023

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of the Alexandria City Council,

The Alexandria Parent Teacher Association Council (PTAC) appreciates that the City Manager's proposed budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 fully funds the approved operating budget of the Alexandria City School Board. As noted in the April 2023 [Council Connection](#), the budget is a reflection of the values of our community, and it is clear to PTAC that the City's proposed budget values the education of our City's most valuable asset—its children.

PTAC also appreciates the Mayor's Add/Delete proposal for five additional speed cameras at school crossing zones, which also received support from most members of the City Council. If adopted, PTAC looks forward to the new cameras being deployed by Transportation and Environmental Services early in the 2023-2024 school year, ideally before National Walk-to-School day on October 4th or the return to standard time on November 5th.

PTAC is highly concerned, however, that the City Manager's proposed FY 2024 - FY 2033 budget for the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Capital Improvement Program (CIP) provides no funding toward the \$10 million renovation of the Chance for Change (CFC) Academy, ACPS's alternative education campus for Alexandria City High School (ACHS) students. Although CFC is not a household name, it plays an outsized role in ensuring Alexandria's commitment to equity and that "Every Student Succeeds" in the City of Alexandria.

ACPS is struggling to manage behavioral and safety challenges in the wake of the pandemic. Its administrators estimate that 5 percent of ACHS students (225 out of 4,500) should be enrolled at CFC to receive the benefits of CFC's small student-teacher ratio and behavioral and therapeutic interventions and support. CFC's site currently accommodates only 50 ACHS students, a small fraction of the overall need. Absent City support for the CIP proposal, 175 ACHS students who would benefit from being educated on the CFC campus will remain without needed support on an annual basis.

PTAC urges City Council to consider the following data points:

- Teachers and staff report that the challenges stemming from the isolation of quarantine have made teaching far more difficult, contributing to retention issues. Teacher turnover in Alexandria is higher than surrounding districts and national averages, and ACPS has gained hundreds of students at the high school level since 2020 but has seen no increase in enrollment at CFC. Absent an alternative education option with space to accommodate more students, experienced teachers who are spread too thinly and not experts in dealing with significant behavioral and disciplinary issues in large classrooms will leave ACPS for districts that provide more robust alternative education support for their students.
- Too many students, staff, and families reported in the ACPS Equity Climate Survey that they do not feel safe at school, a fundamental prerequisite to learning. Without budgetary support from the City, CFC will not be positioned to receive students recommended to the campus via disciplinary hearings. These students will not get critical support and will continue to remain in traditional classrooms, impacting other students' learning and further exacerbating staff retention challenges.
- CFC cannot accommodate middle schoolers, and currently there are no alternative education options in the City for middle school students with significant behavioral and disciplinary challenges. The City's two largest middle schools at 1,500 students each are ill equipped to handle such students in traditional classrooms, and the lack of an alternative education environment is a contributing factor to frequent violence and teacher retention issues in the middle schools.

The *Council Connection* also highlighted the City's commitment to building an additional 11,500 housing units in Alexandria. These will undoubtedly bring more families to Alexandria, increasing enrollment at ACPS schools, and leading to a proportional increase in demand for alternative education. With this projected growth, ACPS and its families should not have to choose between renovations of antiquated schools (e.g. Cora Kelly/\$116 million, George Mason/\$104 million) OR the renovation at the CFC Campus (\$10 million). The City can and must prioritize both in the CIP.

It was clear to PTAC from the frustrations expressed by the City at the March 2023 Work Session that ACPS could have supported its CFC CIP request with a far more robust justification and communication. Indeed, the CFC campus needs should have been identified far earlier in the 10-year CIP plan. ACPS can and must do better. PTAC urges the City and ACPS to leverage this issue as a catalyst for more robust

communication and shared planning to ensure the success of our city's students and families.

PTAC appreciates your further consideration of CFC funding needs in the FY 2024 - FY 2033 CIP budget.

Thank you,

Alexandria PTA Council Executive Board 2022-2023

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cc: Dr. Kay-Wyatt  
Alexandria City School Board