FROM: Margaret Walsh, Ed.D.  
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Superintendent of Schools  

TO: The Honorable Karen A. Graf, Chair  
Members of the Alexandria City School Board  

TOPIC: Student Assignment – Long Range Planning  

STRATEGIC PLAN:  
Goal 3. Create an exceptional learning environment.  
Goal 4. Implement a focused, transparent governance model that incorporates effective communications and evidence-based decision making.  

BACKGROUND: Increasing enrollments at every grade level have caused nearly all ACPS schools to face challenges in terms of having sufficient physical space to educate students effectively. Since the close of the 2007-08 school year, student enrollments have increased from about 10,600 students to a projected 13,800 students for the opening of the 2013-14 school year (a 30% increase). The enrollment increases of about 3% per year are expected to continue during the next several years so that enrollments may reach 16,000.  

A facilities expansion plan added a total of over 30 classrooms in the past three years to several elementary schools, including Barrett, Patrick Henry, and Polk. Additions are being planned for George Mason; a learning cottage will be placed at Maury this coming school year; and additional rooms are planned for Barrett and Polk for 2014-15. Jefferson-Houston school is being replaced with a new facility to be opened for the 2014-15 school year. Patrick Henry planning has begun in anticipation of a new school three years from now. Douglas MacArthur is anticipating a new learning cottage and much needed renovations. Each elementary school has been studied to gain maximum classroom space, including the conversion of elementary computer labs to classrooms. The need for additional elementary schools as well as much needed new space for secondary programs is part of the Long Range Planning Committee’s discussions.  

On March 11, 2010 the School Board developed policy and approved regulations to address student assignment options [JCD: Modified Open Enrollment for Elementary Schools and JCD-R: Regulations Governing ACPS Pupil Placement Options]. These
options included: existing administrative transfers, lottery or focus school requests, modified open enrollment reassignment, and new administrative transfers. The policy also ensured a cap on elementary class size.

The policies and regulations related to student assignment were amended by the School Board on May 8, 2013 to address short-term solutions to this “capacity challenge.” Subsequently the Superintendent requested that staff research policies, regulations and practices related to student assignment in order to address school capacity issues, continue support of school choice and enable more students to attend their neighborhood school if that is the family’s choice.

HISTORY: From 1965 through 1971 the Alexandria School Board implemented its desegregation plan. In the spring of 1971, in order to avoid a re-segregation of some of Alexandria’s schools, the Board adopted the “K-6-2-2-2 Plan.” This plan resulted in the merger of Alexandria’s three four-year high schools into one senior high school serving grades 11 and 12 [T. C. Williams High School] and two junior high schools serving grades 9 and 10 [George Washington and Francis C. Hammond].

Beginning with the 1973-74 school year, for purposes of racial balancing, the elementary school “pairing” plan was adopted. Kindergarten students were assigned to their neighborhood school. All of the elementary schools experienced school attendance boundary changes except Mount Vernon Elementary School. As a part of the pairing plan, students in grades 1-3 from two neighboring schools would attend one of the schools and students in grades 4-6 would attend the other school. [Source: Caught Between Two Systems, by Mabel Lyles, Xlibris Corporation, 2006]

Beginning with the 1993-94 school year, due to the expansion of the ACPS full-day kindergarten program, students in grade 6 were moved to either the Francis C. Hammond or George Washington campus and all students in grade 9, citywide, were assigned to the ninth grade Minnie Howard School. In 2009 the Minnie Howard School became one campus of the now multi-campus T. C. Williams High School.

In 1998 the School Board and Superintendent initiated community discussions regarding re-drawing school attendance boundaries. The primary driver for this effort was the opening of the west-end Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School, scheduled for fall 2000. The opening of this school would relieve overcrowding in many schools. Included in this 1998-99 discussion was consideration of the “unpairing” of two elementary schools, Matthew Maury and Lyles-Crouch; as well as assigning some students back to their neighborhood schools after many years of having been bused to others schools as part of the K-6-2-2-2 desegregation plan.

At its June 23, 1999 meeting the School Board voted on its “Re-districting Plan.” In their comments various Board members reiterated the goals of the plan, including;

- addressing space issues
- minimizing the number of families affected
- establishing both K-5 schools and focus schools
- eliminating cross town busing except as warranted by a family’s choice to attend one of the focus schools: Jefferson-Houston School for Arts and Academics, Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy or Mount Vernon Community School Dual Language program.
The Superintendent’s report on re-districting also recommended beginning to develop pre-Kindergarten classes at Jefferson-Houston and possibly Lyles-Crouch. [See attached meeting minutes, full report, focus school proposals and attendance zone map.]

DISCUSSION: The Code of Virginia provides guidance in the area of School Board authority and responsibility to address the pupil assignment:

“§ 22.1-79. Powers and duties. A school board shall:

4. Provide for the consolidation of schools or redistricting of school boundaries or adopt pupil assignment plans whenever such procedure will contribute to the efficiency of the school division; …

8. Obtain public comment through a public hearing not less than 10 days after reasonable notice to the public in a newspaper of general circulation in the school division prior to providing (i) for the consolidation of schools; (ii) the transfer from the public school system of the administration of all instructional services for any public school classroom or all non-instructional services in the school division pursuant to a contract with any private entity or organization; or (iii) in school divisions having 15,000 pupils or more in average daily membership, for redistricting of school boundaries or adopting any pupil assignment plan affecting the assignment of 15 percent or more of the pupils in average daily membership in the affected school. Such public hearing may be held at the same time and place as the meeting of the school board at which the proposed action is taken if the public hearing is held before the action is taken. If a public hearing has been held prior to the effective date of this provision on a proposed consolidation, redistricting or pupil assignment plan which is to be implemented after the effective date of this provision, an additional public hearing shall not be required;”

ACPS Policy BBA: School Board Powers and Duties mirrors the Virginia code cited above.

Sample community engagement approaches taken by other school divisions:

- Henrico County, Virginia  School Board approval December 2012
  - Community-led redistricting process with two volunteer members from each affected school
  - Public hearing(s) prior to School Board approval
  - Phasing in of student assignments
  - Broad-based, multi-media community engagement
  - boundaries@henrico.k12.va.us  804 652 3830

- DeKalb County, Georgia  School Board approval March 2011
  - Re-districting and school consolidation process
  - Public engagement charrettes
  - Online surveys
  - Multi-media outreach and engagement
  - At the recommended options stage, conduct public input workshops
  - Formal public hearing(s)
• Public review of financial analysis of options

• Anne Arundel County, Maryland School Board consideration December 2012
  - Similar process as DeKalb, County, Georgia

• Arlington County, Virginia: acknowledging that it expects to enroll at least 1,000 more students annually, Arlington County has held a significant number of parent information sessions in recent months.

• Clarke County, Nevada:
  - "School assignment is determined by residence address. School boundaries are re-evaluated each year and may be adjusted accordingly, school boundary information is provided for the current school year only."
  - Public hearings are required.

Choice programs used in sample of school districts include:

• White Plains, New York:

  “Controlled Parents' Choice Program
  The school district’s nationally recognized Controlled Parents’ Choice Program was established by the White Plains Board of Education in May of 1988. A model for parental choice, it governs the placement of students in the system's elementary and middle schools. The Board initiated the choice program because of its belief that balance of the racial and ethnic diversity of the schools' population would promote students' understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of persons of different racial, ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds. As a result of it, classes in our schools are of comparable size and represent the fine degree of racial and ethnic balance that the Board had in mind when it established the program in 1988."

• Montclair, New Jersey:

  “Recognized as one of the top six magnet school districts in the United States.
A pioneer in the magnet school concept, Montclair has, for over 30 years, offered parents a choice of school best suited to their child’s individual talents and needs. Some, for instance, emphasize arts and science; others feature science and technology or visual and performing arts.

Yet all Montclair schools follow the same basic curriculum, a rigorous educational program that not only meets, but exceeds, the New Jersey core content standards.”

- Seattle, Washington

[http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617&pageid=192380&sessionid=&sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617](http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617&pageid=192380&sessionid=&sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617)

**“Apply For A School Or Program Choice Assignment for 2013-14**

Open Enrollment is your best opportunity to request a different school or program for your student. You can choose to apply for another attendance area school, an option school; or programs such as Montessori, Spectrum, and APP. The school board finalized the [2013-14 New Student Assignment Plan Transition Plan](http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617&pageid=192380&sessionid=&sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617), including tiebreakers, on January 31st. [Click here](http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617&pageid=192380&sessionid=&sessionid=6cabeaba1b5ac0b7531ab10b95474617) for more information.”

**Research:**

On December 27, 2012, the Hanover Research organization, of which ACPS is a subscriber/member, published its latest findings on “Enrollment and Student Assignment Planning Practices.” This report refers to the importance of using a data-informed approach to the work of student assignment and long-range planning. It stresses the importance of community engagement and school division transparency throughout the planning process. As has been noted in numerous other studies on this topic, educational equity, school choice and neighborhood schools are important guiding principles.

**RECOMMENDATION:** It is recommended that the School Board and Superintendent engage the public in a discussion regarding student assignment practices and long-range capacity planning. Using a series of facilitated meetings the administrative staff would provide student assignment options for the community to consider and then for approval by the School Board. Such a process worked well as the community studied more than a dozen options for the design and location of the new T. C. Williams High School before coming to consensus on the current building design and site location. The review process should include members of the Schools/City Long Range Planning Committee. Included in the review should be options such as redrawing school boundaries, open
enrollments, magnets, and other approaches serving as national models to improve student achievement as changing enrollment patterns are addressed.

**BUDGET CATEGORY:** School Administration

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Cost of facilitation of community meetings

**LEGAL REFERENCES:**
Virginia Code: §§22.1-79
ACPS Policy: BBA School Board Powers and Duties
              JC School Attendance Areas
              JC-R/JCD-R Regulations Governing ACPS Pupil Placement Options
              JCD Modified Open Enrollment for Elementary Schools

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