

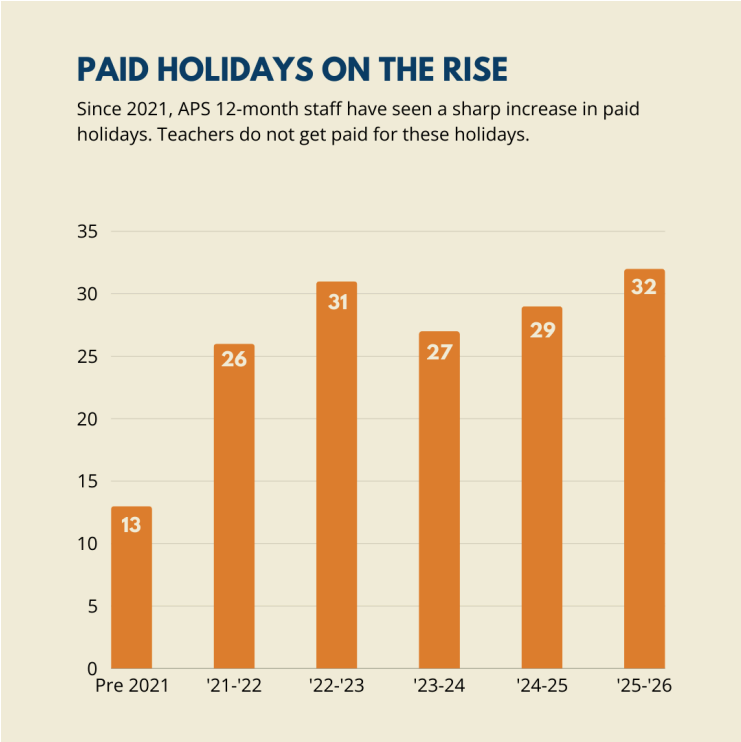


January 23rd, 2024

Alice Blount-Fenney
Director, Internal Audit
Arlington Public Schools
2110 Washington Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22204

Dear Ms. Blount-Fenney,

We are writing on behalf of Arlington Parents for Education (APE), a local educational advocacy group. APE advocates for transparency, oversight, and educational excellence in APS. We are requesting that the APS internal auditor examine the additional paid leave days for 12-month employees that have been added since the 2021-2022 school year. Twelve-month employees, roughly 20% of staff, now have 26 to 32 paid holidays depending on the adopted school calendar (e.g., length of winter break; no school closure for religious holidays that fall on a weekend etc.). Relative to the practice before 2021, 12-month staff now have an *additional* 13-19 paid holidays annually (in addition to other types of leave).



Background:

- Before the 2021-2022 school year (SY), 12-month employees received 13 paid holidays, consistent with [APS policy G-1.32 Holidays](#).
- For the SY 2021-2022, five more paid leave days were added when APS added new religious and cultural holidays to the school year. We are unaware of any public discussion about whether APS should be *fully operationally* closed on those new days.
- Additionally, in November 2021, Superintendent Durán sent the following email to APS staff announcing additional holidays for staff (paid for 12 month and unpaid for 10-month staff) with no financial estimate, School Board vote, nor budget approval:
 - “APS Will Fully Close for Winter Break and Spring Break 2021-22 – I am adjusting the current school year calendar to make Winter Break (Dec. 20-31, 2021) and Spring Break (Apr. 11-15, 2022) holidays for all staff—12-month employees in addition to our 10-month employees. This action does not require School Board approval since they are non-student days. I have also proposed making this change for the 2022-23 calendar which is currently in development.”

Sources of Cost to APS:

- When asked about the financial cost, APS has indicated that there is no financial cost. However, APS has previously assessed the value of work by 12-month employees. In the 2020 proposed budget, APS proposed a one-day furlough for an estimated \$300,000 of savings ([pg. 109 of 2020 budget](#)). While providing additional paid holidays is different than an unpaid furlough, it is possible to extrapolate the value of this lost work to APS. Extrapolating from that proposal, these additional paid holidays cost upwards of \$6 million **annually**. Looking at this question another way, APS currently has 5,142 full-time equivalent employees, of which 1,008 are 12-month employees. APS is losing as many as 19,000 days of work depending on the calendar year. We previously estimated that backfilling for those lost work days had an **annual** cost of [\\$8 - \\$9 million](#) under the assumption that APS would not permit service-level degradation resulting from fewer work days.
- An additional financial cost is that APS 12-month employees are now able to more quickly bank leave, some of which can be paid out when they retire. Employees hired after July 1, 2011 are capped at separation pay of 40 days of accumulated annual leave, while employees hired before that date do not have capped separation pay ([APS Policy G-2.15 Retirement](#)).
- There is also a significant operational cost to these closures on non-student days. We first learned of these new paid holidays in Fall of 2022 as teachers raised concerns. We have heard of the following examples:

- Teachers cannot address certain matters (e.g., compensation mistakes, retirement issues, health care changes, key cards, etc.) when Syphax is operationally closed. They now have to find time on days when school is in session to address matters they previously could have addressed on non-student days.
- Syphax was operationally closed for all of winter break as APS staff transitioned to new health insurance in 2023 (APS' health insurance switch is [separately under audit](#)). Retirees were reduced to asking for help on social media because they could not reach staff while Syphax was closed for an extended time.
- Families cannot reach staff on non-student days including to register students or to address specific issues involving their children (e.g., parents must visit Syphax in-person to initially enroll a child in extended day). This is more acute during lengthy closures like winter or spring break.
- Lastly, this has a significant impact on the morale of the 80% of staff who do not receive this benefit. Since early 2023, teachers have repeatedly provided public comment at School Board meetings on this topic.

We believe there is a strong rationale for either the School Board to add this to the work plan or for the auditor to initiate this audit. APS policy states that the internal auditor “shall prioritize” audits based on *risk to the division, and compliance with School Board policies*, among other factors ([APS Policy B-30 Internal Audit](#)). This practice of providing 12-month staff with 26-32 paid holidays is now inconsistent with APS' [holiday policy](#) which still technically provides for only 13 paid holidays. Additionally, there is ample evidence, as noted above, that this practice is adversely impacting APS operations and therefore presents a risk to the division.

As noted, this change in practice began with the 2021-2022 school year. With more than 2 years of history, it is eminently reasonable for the internal auditor to examine this additional paid leave for 20% of APS employees for budgetary and operational impacts. We respectfully ask that either the School Board add this to the work plan or that the auditor initiates this audit.

Thank you,

Arlington Parents for Education

Board:

Alison Babb

Sheila Kelly

Sheila Leonard

Amy Rzepka

Katie Sunderland

CC: APS School Board