

October 11, 2023

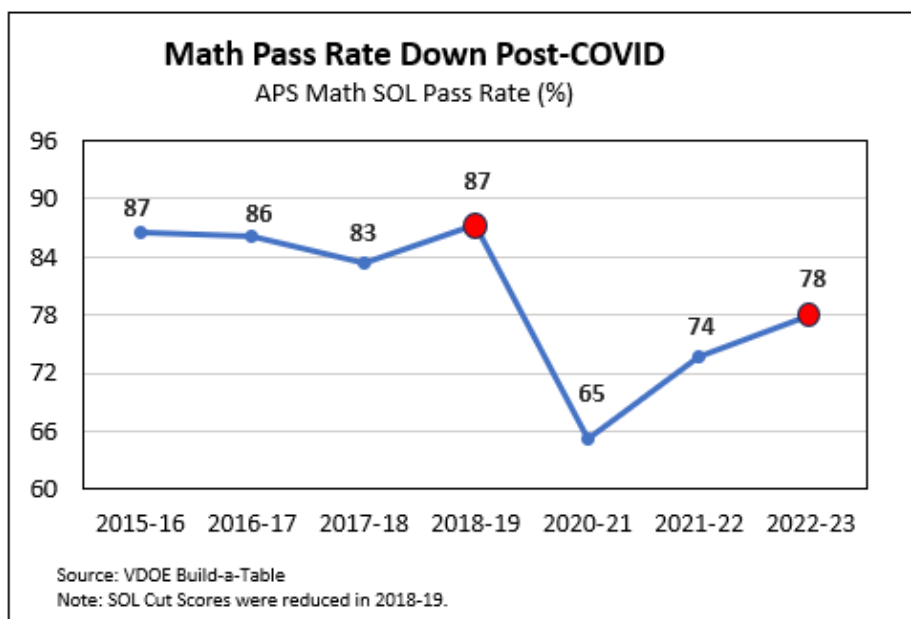
Dear Dr. Durán and Members of the Arlington School Board:

**We have reviewed the Mathematics Monitoring Report [slides](#) to be presented to the School Board on Thursday and are concerned that the information presented to the Board does not present a complete picture, and in several instances suggests that current efforts are sufficient for our students (or are leading APS to outperform the state).**

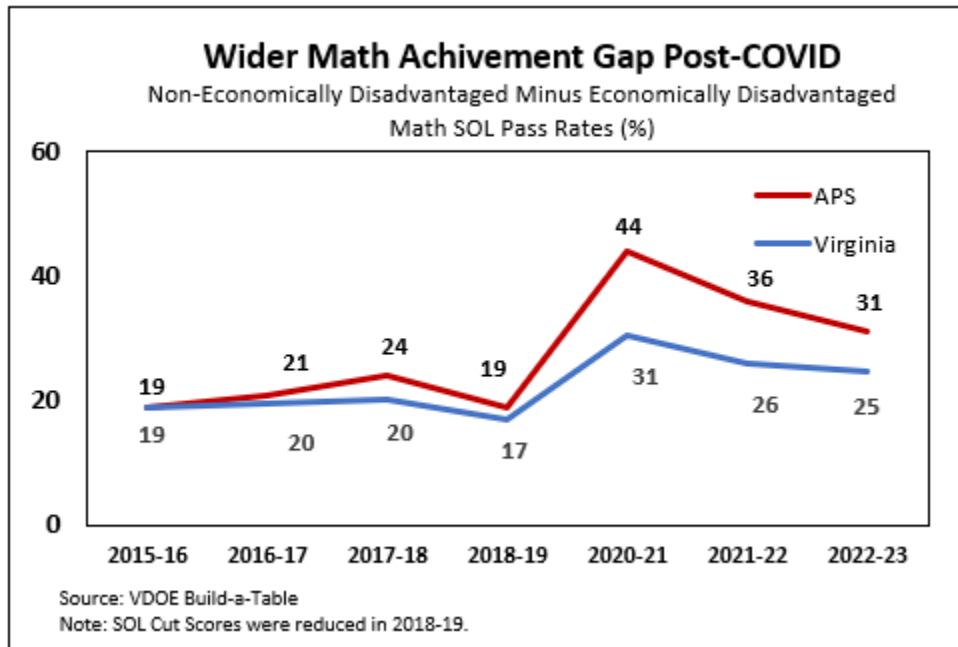
We say this not to criticize in particular the math team and its efforts -- we believe the math team is earnestly looking for ways to advance APS' students. But absent a complete picture, the School Board and the community may conclude that the current remediation steps and level of investment are sufficient. **We believe that only by fully and frankly assessing the status of our system can APS and the School Board identify the problems that currently exist and develop a plan to fix them.**

#### Concerns with the Math Report:

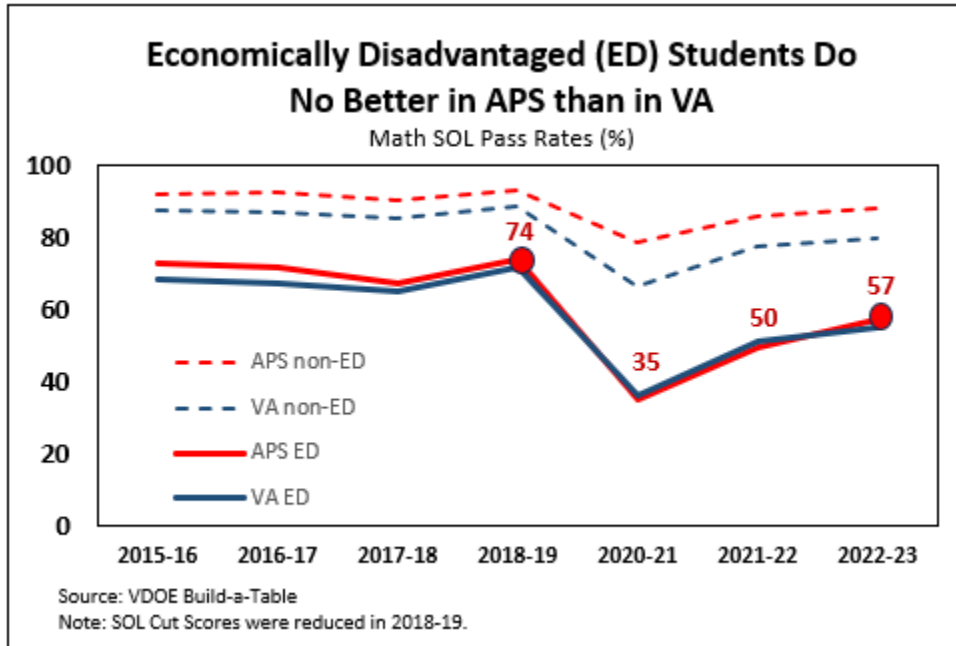
- 1) **The report does not compare current data to pre-COVID data, instead focusing throughout the report on improvements “over the last 2 years.”** After massive learning loss from COVID-related school closures, improved performance is the expectation. The question for the School Board and the community is how much math learning loss do our students have left to recover. **Unfortunately, large math learning losses remain.**



- 2) **The achievement gap between APS' non-economically disadvantaged students and economically disadvantaged students remains well above pre-COVID levels and well above the state.** Our gap increased far more than the state in 2020, and APS still has a larger gap than the state average.

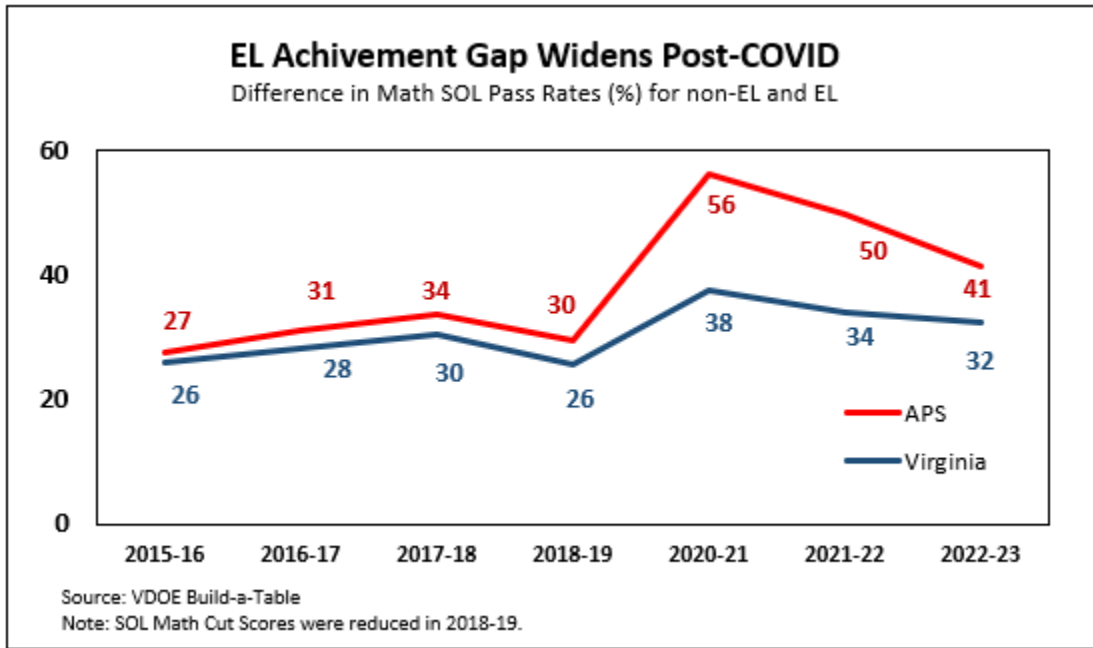
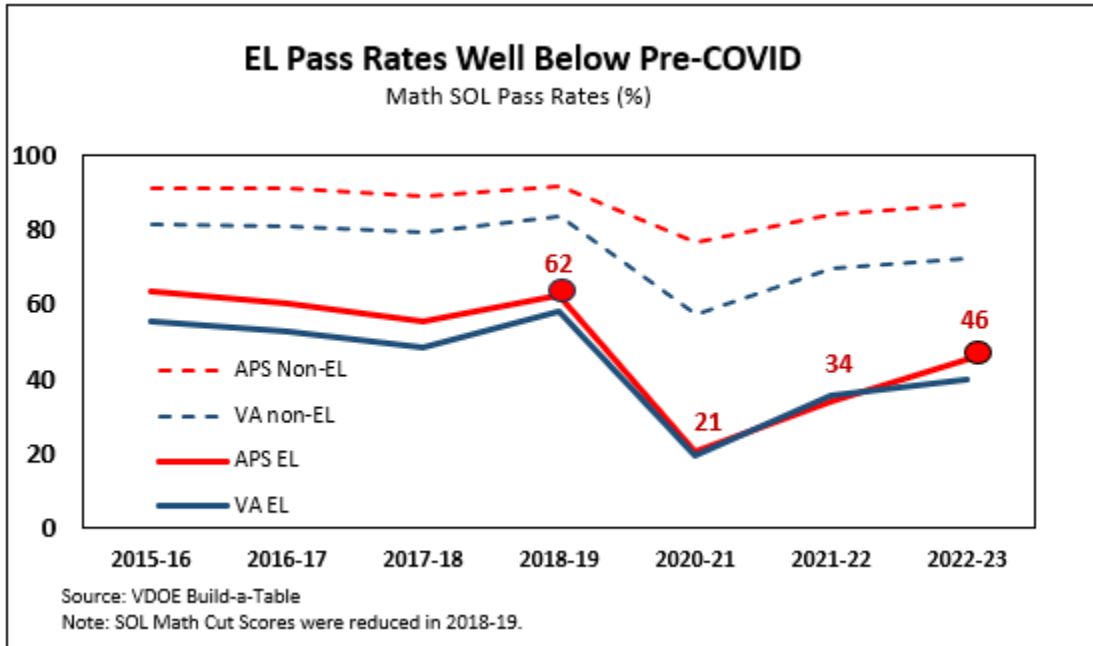


- 3) **The performance of economically disadvantaged students (and of other at-risk students) is consistently at the median of performance for the state of Virginia.** The presentation (slide 6) highlights as a Student Success that “APS is closing the gap faster than the state!” This overlooks the point above that we are “closing the gap” faster primarily because there is a bigger gap to close (in comparison to the state).



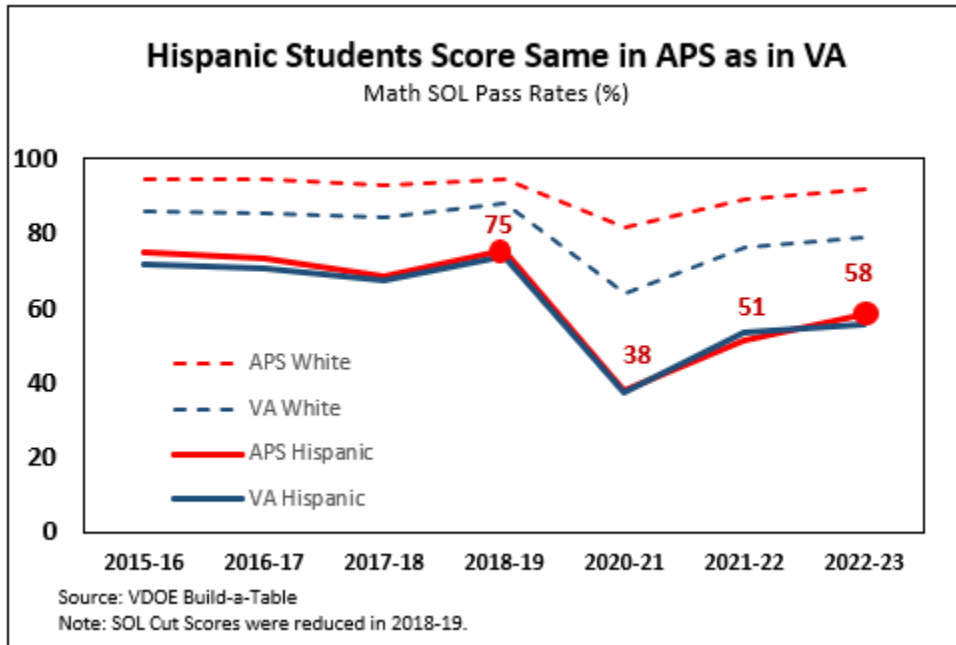
As will be discussed in our upcoming eNews, **APS' currently ranks 65<sup>th</sup> out of 130 districts in Virginia in terms of math SOL rates for economically disadvantaged students.** This is down ten places from our ranking in 2016-17. In other words, not only is APS failing to improve the performance of at-risk students at the same pace as the state, in comparison to the year 2016-17, our performance relative to other districts has declined.

- 4) **EL pass rates in APS are still 16 percentage points below the pass rate from 2018-19, and the achievement gap is wider.** The math presentation (slide 6) states that APS shows the largest gain in terms of gap closing "amongst the APS EL population, at a 24%-point proficiency increase and an 11%-point gap reduction." However, looking at EL performance with the necessary pre-COVID data, large gaps still remain.



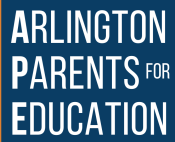
- 5) **APS' performance with respect to Hispanic students is effectively the same as the state, with a larger achievement gap between Hispanic and White**

**populations than the state.** The presentation states that APS is closing the opportunity gap related to multiple subgroups, including Hispanic students. However, as the below chart shows, there is still a long way to go.



- 6) APS asserts that according to the Math Inventory (MI) data “almost half of elementary students ended the 2022-2023 school year in the advanced range. ***This is the highest gain we have ever achieved.***” Although this claim sounds impressive, APS fails to disclose that it ***only began collecting MI data in grades 2-4 in 2021***, so the “highest gain” ever achieved dates back only one year (which falls during the post-pandemic period).
- 7) **The report states that “professional learning...is positively impacting” student learning without citing any evidence** (slide 3). This is important because much of what APS proposes in this presentation moving forward (slides 14-15, and 21) is more professional learning, thereby implying that teachers skills are the primary impediment to better performance.

We agree that there are some bright spots. And we are heartened to see that APS (slide 19) has determined that additional interventionists resulted in more growth. Arlington Parents for Education has [advocated](#) for and continues to support the addition of interventionists.



Nonetheless, APS should not obscure the large remaining challenges to the School Board or the public – it still has a long way to go in terms of recovering from the learning losses caused by prolonged school closures, which have dramatically increased the gap in performance between at-risk students and other students. And the rate of recovery on both dimensions is too slow.

The School Board should direct APS to take more aggressive actions with respect to its math program, including the implementation of intensified tutoring, the addition of instructional time for students performing below grade level, and a system-wide program dedicated to ensuring that 90% of students can perform math at grade level within two years. The School Board should also fund the request for additional interventionists in the upcoming budget.

Thank you,

Arlington Parents for Education