



March 30, 2023

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board:

We write on behalf of Arlington Parents for Education to urge the county to increase its financial support for Arlington Public Schools (APS) by \$10 million and to condition that funding on expenditure by APS on learning loss recovery. The students in APS now are running out of time to regain grade-level competency, and we are asking the County Board to help our students now.

APS' Learning Loss Is Widespread, Prolonged, and Largely Affects Arlington's Most Vulnerable Populations

Arlington's students continue to struggle from learning loss suffered as a result of the decision to close schools. Notably, learning loss is disproportionately concentrated in APS' most vulnerable student populations (i.e., economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English Learners and Black and Hispanic students).

The SY 2020-21 SOL scores [confirmed](#) unprecedented loss in math and reading SOL scores not seen in more than 20 years. SOL scores from SY 2021-22 [reflected](#) only a modest improvement, far [less](#) than neighboring districts, resulting in many students (20-30 percent of the APS student population) failing their SOL exams.

More recently, data from mid-year math inventory scores [reflect](#) that over a quarter of our middle school students are below basic in math, and data from our mid-year DIBELS scores (a literacy measure) reflects no meaningful reduction in the number of students scoring below basic between the beginning of year tests and middle of year tests. Dr. Durán's recent [update](#) described as an improvement the fact that 20 percent of our middle school students with disabilities score proficient or advanced in the Math Inventory; *80 percent do not*.

In short, every available metric confirms that learning loss has continued unabated as our students continue to be passed along in our school system, and business as usual instruction over the past two years has not made a significant impact in addressing this generational crisis.

Additional Funds Are Needed for APS to Properly Address Learning Loss

The need remains in APS as we start our third post-pandemic year. APS itself estimated that addressing learning loss would require an investment of at least [\\$15 million](#). To date, it has made no investment approaching those amounts. APS [invested](#) \$628,000 in a virtual tutoring program, but there has been limited usage of that program. APS added six math interventionists and the present budget recommends adding four new math interventionists, along with additional math coaches. However, math staff identified that APS needs [34 math](#)



[interventionists](#), which an APS advisory committee also [recommends](#). And, this year, the APS proposed budget sets aside a \$1 million reserve for potentially hiring tutors, or other initiatives to address instructional needs. In contrast, [other school districts](#) have invested tens to hundreds of millions on learning loss recovery efforts, and the District of Columbia recently [announced](#) plans to invest \$7 million into a tutoring program. At a time when our neighbors are investing more money, [monitoring more regularly](#), and seeing faster recovery for students, APS has taken an underwhelming and scattershot approach to this [education crisis](#).

Last year, the County Board generously provided an additional \$8 million toward the APS budget. However, that money was not invested into hiring tutors or implementing other learning loss recovery programs, but was instead used to replenish reserves.

Nevertheless, we ask the County to provide APS with an additional \$10 million in incremental funding this year, and—this time—*condition the provision of those funds* on APS' use of those funds in providing additional instructional time for those students who continue to perform below grade level. We include the request to condition the funds because, while APS has data demonstrating the need and the resources that would enable it to offer additional instruction time (whether in the form of tutoring, longer school days and longer school years), to date APS's response has been insufficient to support those students who were most injured by the closure of our schools.

The County Board has the authority to provide funds with such conditions attached, and can and should do so. As has been discussed with County Board member Matt de Ferranti, Virginia law provides that the County Board may make its [appropriations](#) to the School Board, and with which the School Board [must](#) comply, subject to certain major expenditure [classifications](#) (e.g., instruction, pupil transportation, operation and maintenance, contingency reserves, etc.).

We have attached a copy of the letter that we submitted to Dr. Durán and the APS School Board as well. As you will note, we identify several sources of potential savings from the APS budget that might help to fund additional investments in the schools. This includes freezing growth at Syphax, consistent with recommendations from the [Budget Advisory Council](#) last spring, and a revision to the vacation policy recently implemented in which 12-month employees now receive 31 days of leave (in addition to their accrued annual leave). While we believe those revisions are important and should be implemented to fund other long-term investments in academic excellence at APS, we believe that a one-time investment from the county to address learning loss is the most immediate need.

* * * * *

As we [noted last year](#), the education of Arlington's students is not just the responsibility of APS—it is the responsibility of the community, including the County Board. We ask that you



partner with APS to ensure that it invests the necessary resources to overcome the learning loss resulting from APS' prolonged school closures.

We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Respectfully,

Arlington Parents for Education Board Members
Alison Babb
Reg Goeke
Sheila Kelly
Katie Sunderland

cc: Arlington School Board
Dr. Durán