

Arlington County Council



## Resolution on the Need for APS to Fund School Supplies

### SUMMARY:

APS's reliance on parents and teachers to donate necessary school supplies is inconsistent with its own policies on equity and external funding; is enormously wasteful of time, effort, and money; exacerbates inequities among schools; and does not provide students with sufficient supplies in a consistent manner. The Arlington CCPTA urges APS to fund school supplies.

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WHEREAS, APS has adopted Policy A-30 "Equity" that commits APS to embed equitable and inclusive practices, stating that student success is not determined by socioeconomic status, and further highlights the concept of equity as the elimination of opportunity gaps and achievement of excellence by providing access to schools, resources, and learning opportunities according to each student's unique needs; and

WHEREAS, APS has adopted Policy D-2.35 "Financial Management – Budget Direction" stating that community input is a factor in the School Board's direction to the Superintendent on the budget; and

WHEREAS, APS has adopted Policy D-15 "External Funding – Commercial Activities" that requires any gift to a school over \$1000 to be reviewed by the Superintendent to ensure, among other things, that such a gift would not foster or exacerbate inequity among schools; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia PTA Board of Directors has adopted a Position Statement on Advancing Equity and Diversity dated June 16, 2020 that urges its members at all levels to monitor, support, and advocate for programs and policies that embrace diversity and inclusivity as strengths and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the reliance on donations from parents for basic school supplies creates tremendous uncertainty in classroom management, because a teacher is unable to predict what will be donated due to the varying financial conditions of their students' households from year to year; and

WHEREAS, a 2018 study found that teachers on average in Virginia spend \$400 for classroom supplies each year,[1] which adjusted for inflation amounts to \$456 in 2022 dollars, resulting in

Arlington's 2100+ classroom teachers possibly subsidizing APS operations up to \$1 million each year; and

WHEREAS, the cost of classroom supplies directly affects teacher retention at schools with lower-income student populations when teachers spend more of their money for classroom supplies when their students are economically disadvantaged; and

WHEREAS, local PTA units are frequently approached by teachers and administrators for the purchase of basic instructional supplies after running out of donated supplies halfway through the school year, yet a PTA should not pay for core instructional items that are more appropriately covered by public funds; and

WHEREAS, almost one-third of APS students come from low-income households,[2] as determined by eligibility for free or reduced lunch, and face significant pressure on how to make financial tradeoffs to purchase school supplies; and

WHEREAS, all families are faced with multiple categories of expenses (clothing, technology) for back-to-school in addition to the instructional supplies requested by schools, with a study finding that the average K-12 family faced \$864 in expenses in 2022;[3] and

WHEREAS, a survey found that 46% of parents planned to purchase pre-configured school supply kits, with the top reason being convenience,[4] which highlights the fact that even for parents who are not financially constrained, the time and effort of tracking down dozens of particular school supplies is burdensome, resulting in paying middleman costs; and

WHEREAS, parents must purchase school supplies at retail markup prices, diminishing the buying power of every dollar spent relative to the value of the same dollar under a bulk wholesale purchasing program, such as one that APS could utilize under existing procurement practices; and

WHEREAS, APS already provides all the requisite supplies (such as pencils and notebooks) for students attending the Virtual Virginia program; and

WHEREAS, there does not appear to be any oversight on the type, quantity, or utilization of requested school supplies and uniforms, making it unclear whether these requests are necessary in all cases; and

WHEREAS, there is a lack of coordination for the reuse of durable items (such as rulers and scissors), leading to potential waste;

THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Arlington CCPTA supports the Board's request in its FY 2024 Budget Direction for APS to conduct a study of a Planning Factors for school supplies to assess whether the type and quantity of school supplies required by APS's own program of instruction

are being provided in an equitable manner, taking into consideration any unique needs of instructional programs; and

RESOLVED, that the Arlington CCPTA requests APS to work with principals to develop a plan for the purchase of necessary school supplies, based on projected need, in a manner that results in taking full advantage of bulk purchasing discounts, while ensuring that the types of items purchased are utilized and not wasted; and

RESOLVED, that the Arlington CCPTA requests APS to work with principals to develop a plan for the distribution of necessary school supplies so that schools receive what they need prior to the start of the school year and on an ongoing basis, and have adequate storage space as necessary, including whether each school should undergo its own purchase of items to mitigate any challenges of central distribution; and

RESOLVED, that the Arlington CCPTA urges the Superintendent to propose a budget for FY 2024-2025 and all future budgets that will consider how to fund school supply purchases in a manner that ensures their availability across all classrooms.

October 17, 2022, Adopted by the Arlington CCPTA general meeting attendees.

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[1] <https://www.epi.org/blog/teachers-are-buying-school-supplies/>

[2] <https://www.greatschools.org/virginia/arlington/arlington-county-public-schools/>

[3] <https://nrf.com/media-center/press-releases/families-prioritize-back-school-and-college-spending-amidst-rising>

[4] [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/articles/us175490\\_back-to-school/DI\\_Back-to-school-2022.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/articles/us175490_back-to-school/DI_Back-to-school-2022.pdf)