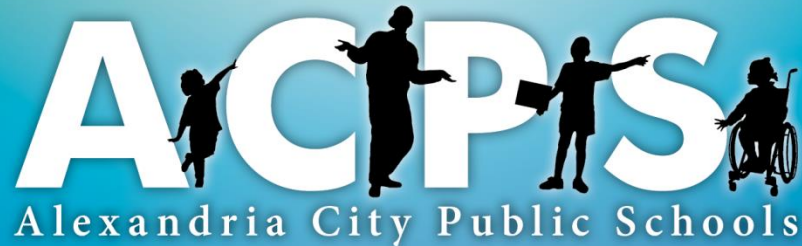# School Board
Election Cycle, Terms and Composition

Background Information

School Board Work Session
November 14, 2019

ACPS
Alexandria City Public Schools

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Current Framework

- 3-year term begins January 1 following November election

- Board Members serve concurrent terms

- Board terms coincide with City Council terms

- 2012: Elections transitioned from May to November

- Next election: November 2021

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Legal Basis

I. Code of Virginia

➢ **Cities and counties have different legal standards.**

➢ **Elected vs. appointed School Boards have different legal standards.**

§§ 22.1-57.3, 24.2-222, 24.2-223: Elected School Boards (Cities)

- Elections coincide with governing body's elections
- School Board term = governing body's term (1-4 years)
- School Board terms of office defined by City Charter
- Board Member terms staggered only if governing body's terms staggered

II. City of Alexandria Charter

§§ 3.01, 10.01, 15.10: Council and School Board Elections

- 3-year concurrent terms for Council Members and Mayor
- City Council elections held in November 2015; every 3 years thereafter
- School Board elections held every 3 years; coincide with Council elections

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Comparison of Local Jurisdictions

School Board	Arlington County	Fairfax County	Falls Church City	ACPS
Term	4	4	4	3
Staggered/ Concurrent	Staggered	Concurrent	Staggered	Concurrent
Election Cycle:	1st Year : 1 2nd Year: 1 3rd Year: 2 4th Year: 1	Odd years preceding presidential elections	1st Year: 4 3rd Year: 3 (Every 2 years in odd years)	Every 3 years, beginning in Nov. 2012

Statewide:
- ➢ **Approximately 2/3 of School Boards serve staggered terms.**
- ➢ **Only 3 city School Boards in Virginia serve concurrent terms.**
- ➢ **121 School Boards serve 4-year terms.**
- ➢ **14 School Boards serve 3-year terms.**
- ➢ **1 School Board serves a 2-year term.**

Alexandria City Public Schools

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Transition Benefits

Benefits of Staggered and Extended Terms:

- Ensures **retention of institutional knowledge as a continuing body** by avoiding large-scale turnover

- Ensures **continuity of policy** instead of frequent changes in focus

- Members have more time to gain **experience** before running for reelection.

- Allows voters to **focus** on local issues/schools more frequently

- Increased voter **interest**: allows voters to focus on fewer candidates/election

- Members **better able to serve** public/constituents

- Good government practices: more **effective** and more **efficient**

- Non-partisan

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Transition Drawbacks

Potential Drawbacks:

- Voters must **wait longer** to change direction of elected body's policies/priorities if desired

- May be easier for organized groups to **oppose** individual candidates

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Transition Requirements

Requirements:

- Requests to stagger terms or change term length require City Charter amendment:
  - ➢ Initiated by Council
  - ➢ **Apply to both School Board and City Council**
  - ➢ Amendments to City Charter approved by General Assembly

- Majority of Board elected first cycle, remaining members elected subsequently

- General rule is to extend, not shorten terms during transition

School Board Election Cycle & Terms: Transition Process

Process:

- June 2018: *Resolution to Explore School Board Election Cycle and Composition Adjustments*

- School Board proposes specific City Charter amendments for Council consideration
    - Regular Order /Public Hearing prior to Resolution adoption

- City Council proposes Charter amendment for:
    - Regular Order /Public Hearing
    - Inclusion in Legislative Package for General Assembly Session
    - Possible Citywide Referendum

- Staff works with General Assembly delegation to draft and sponsor bills

City Council Election Cycle & Terms: Recent History

City Council Docket:

- **February 11, 1997**
  - ➢ Revision of City Council Member terms (length & staggered cycle)

City Council & School Board Election Process Committee:

- **March 2007 - Formed by Mayor to examine & make recommendations on:**
  - ➢ Moving City elections from May to November
  - ➢ Creating staggered terms for Council and the School Board
  - ➢ Revising Council and School Board compensation
  - ➢ Related issues (non-partisan Council elections; at-large vs. districts, etc.)
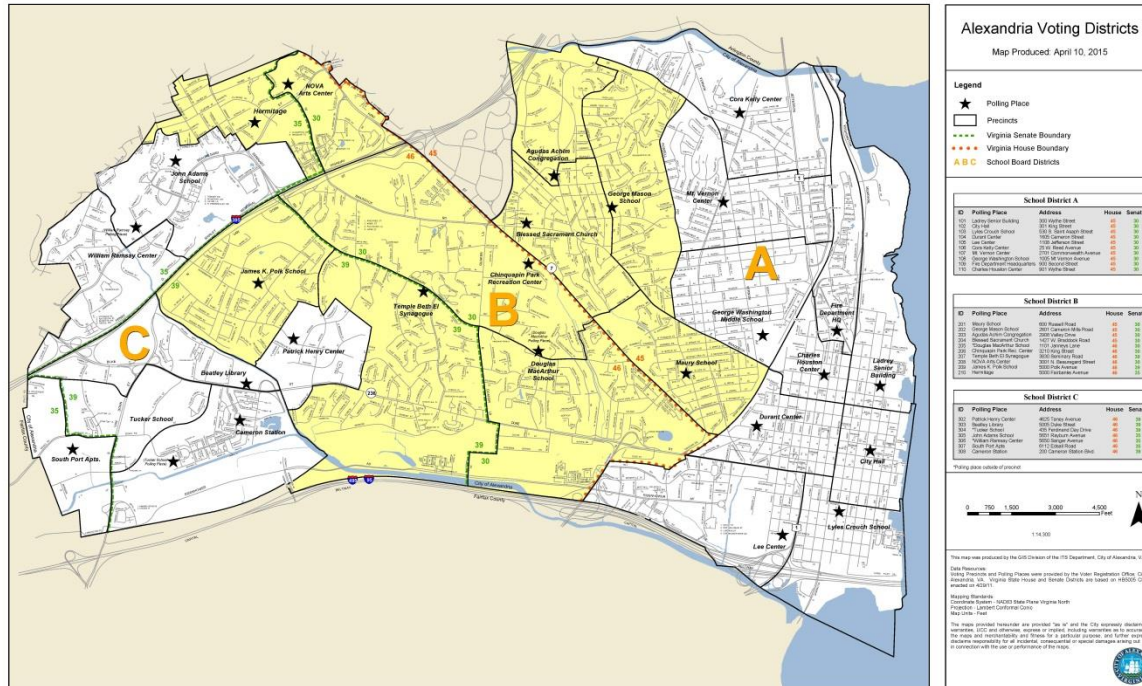- **June 2007 Public Hearing re: issues examined by committee**

City Council Docket:

- **November 10, 2009**
  - ➢ City Charter Amendments re: Council Elections
- **June 2010**
  - ➢ City Council approved moving elections from May to November **2012**; Council terms extended 6 months during transition

School Board Composition: Current Framework

- 9 Board Members

- 1 Chair and 1 Vice Chair
  - Selected by Board at Organizational Meeting to serve 1-year term

- 3 Board Members Elected from Each Voting District:
  - A (Eastern Alexandria)
  - B (Central Alexandria)
  - C (Western Alexandria)

- Voting Districts Determined by City Council

School Board Voting Districts:

Redistricting:
- Follows census every 10 years
- Voting district population variance: no more than ± 5%
- 2011: Population of districts remained within acceptable variance; boundaries unchanged

School Board Composition: Legal Basis

I. Code of Virginia

- ➤ **Cities and counties have different legal standards.**
- ➤ **Elected vs. appointed School Boards have different legal standards.**

§§ 22.1-50, 22.1-57.3: Appointed & Elected School Boards (Cities)

- 3 Board Members per voting district (appointed)
- When School Board transitions from appointed to elected, first elected board must consist of same number of Members as appointed Board it replaced
- Board Members shall be elected from the same voting districts they were previously appointed from.

II. City of Alexandria Charter

§§ 3.01, 3.05 15.10,: City Council & School Board Composition

- 6 Council Members and 1 Mayor elected at-large
- Vice-Mayor is a Council Member; elected by majority vote of full Council
- City of Alexandria is single school division
- 9 School Board Members; elected from districts determined by Council

School Board Composition: Comparison of Local Jurisdictions

School Board	Arlington County	Fairfax County	Falls Church City	ACPS
Composition	5 (At-large)	12 (1/District plus 3 At-large)	7 (At-large)	9 (3/District)
Student Enrollment	Approx. 25,700	Approx. 189,000	Approx. 2,700	Approx. 15,500
City/County Population	Approx. 234,000	Approx. 1.138 million	Approx. 14,000	Approx. 160,000
Board Member: Student Ratio	1 : 5,000	1 : 15,500	1 : 385	1 : 1,700
Voting Districts	-	9	-	3

Statewide:
- 67 School Boards have 5 members
- 41 School Boards have 7 members
- 10 School Boards have 9 members
- 9 School Boards have 6 members
- 5 School Boards have 8 members
- 1 School Board each: 12, 11, 4, or 3 members

School Board Composition: Transition Benefits

Benefits of Smaller School Board

- **Creates Efficiencies** - Eases difficulty of aligning 9 schedules for:
  - ➢ Regular, Special Called & Closed Board Meetings
  - ➢ Work Sessions and Retreats
  - ➢ Professional Development Opportunities

- **Increased Voter Interest** - Allows voters to focus on fewer candidates/election

- 2 Board Members/district would **allow Members from the same district to meet together with constituent groups** more frequently.

- At-large Board Member(s) could **focus on Citywide issues.**

- Good government practices: more **effective** and more **efficient**

School Board Composition: Transition Drawbacks

Potential Drawbacks:

- May be **easier** for organized groups **to oppose** individual candidates

- **Decreases diversity** of perspectives/experience/approaches to issues

- Fewer Board Members addressing each district's **unique needs**

- Fewer Board Members to serve as **liaisons**

School Board Composition: Transition Requirements

Requirements:

- Requests to change the number of School Board Members or their constituencies require City Charter amendment:

    - ➢ Initiated by Council
    - ➢ **Does not impact composition of City Council**
    - ➢ Amendments to City Charter approved by General Assembly

School Board Composition: Transition Process

Process:

- June 2018: *Resolution to Explore School Board Election Cycle and Composition Adjustments*

- School Board proposes specific City Charter amendments for Council consideration
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- Staff works with General Assembly delegation to draft and sponsor bills

School Board Election Cycle, Terms & Composition: Transition Considerations

Cost:
- Negligible impact; elections already held in Alexandria each year; schools already closed on Election Day (Bd. of Elections)
- Negligible increased costs (Bd. of Elections)
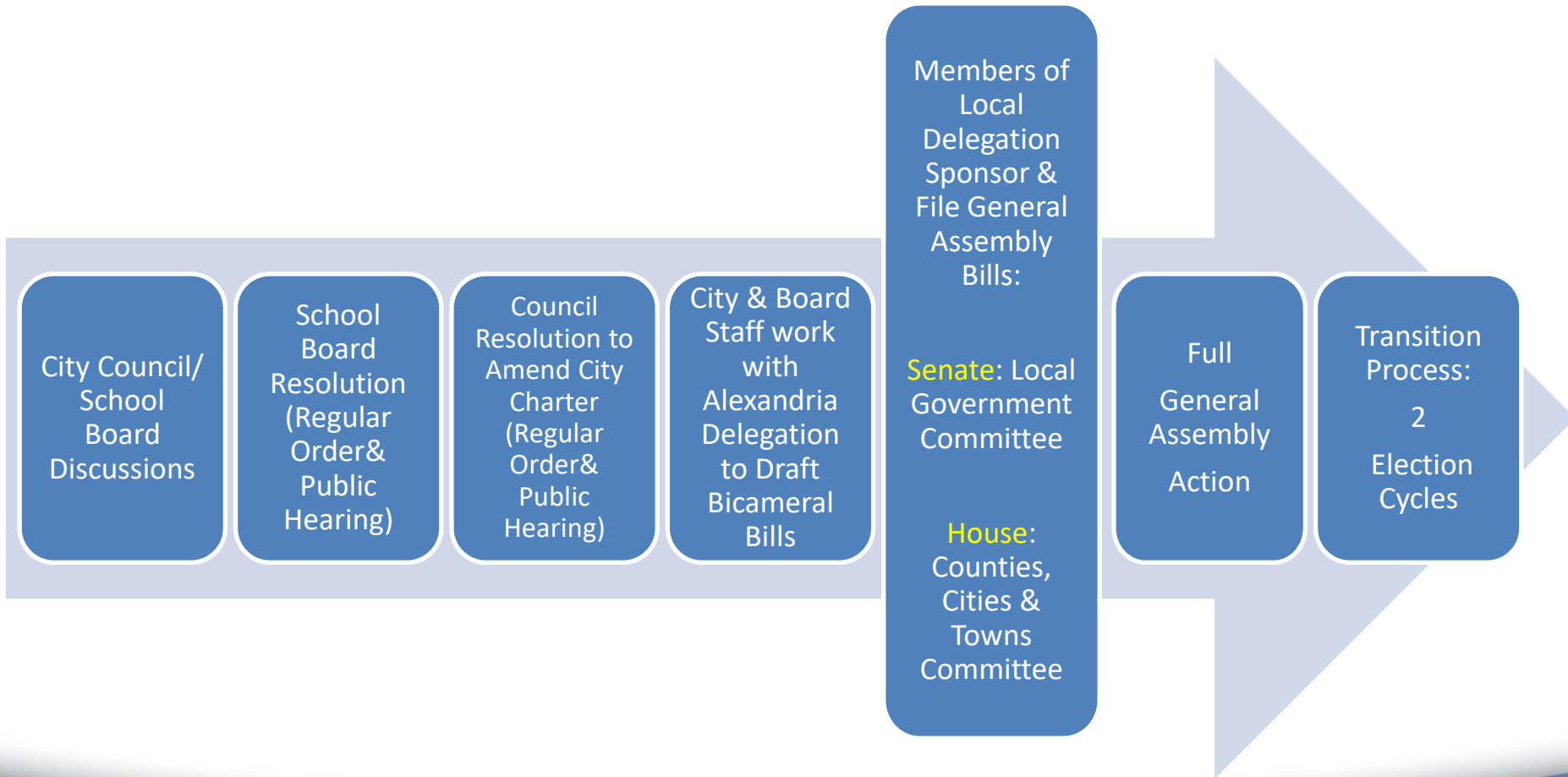- Negligible increased staff time (Bd. of Elections)

Timing:
- Examination of scenarios that would avoid election cycle coinciding with presidential elections:
  - Local issues would not be overshadowed by national issues
  - Avoids straight-ticket voting

- First possible staggered election: 2021

Voter Turnout:
- No anticipated increase in voter turnout (Bd. of Elections)

City Charter:
Amendment Process

City Council/ School Board Discussions

School Board Resolution (Regular Order& Public Hearing)

Council Resolution to Amend City Charter (Regular Order& Public Hearing)

City & Board Staff work with Alexandria Delegation to Draft Bicameral Bills

Members of Local Delegation Sponsor & File General Assembly Bills:

Senate: Local Government Committee

House: Counties, Cities & Towns Committee

Full General Assembly Action

Transition Process: 2 Election Cycles

Questions and Discussion

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