

Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#509

I would like to provide: *

Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: *

Budget

Topic *

Class Sizes

Full Name *

Cynthia Swisher

What is your relationship to ACPS? *

Parent/Guardian of an ACPS Student

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The proposed budget will result in classroom sizes in grades 3 and 5 at Naomi Brooks that exceed the 26 student capacity limit for these grades. The proposed Brooks staffing budget should be changed to assign two additional homeroom teachers to Naomi L. Brooks Elementary, so that Brooks has three homeroom teachers at each grade level in FY'24.

The ACPS budget allots only two homeroom teachers for grades 3 and 5, relying on projections that assume enrollment in these grades will be lower than it has been for the last two years. This assumption is contingent on several current students not returning next year. It also requires that the capacity transfers students out of Brooks, who were not permitted to enroll at Brooks because their grades were full, will not be NOT enrolling in their neighborhood school in the next school year.

For FY'23, ACPS allotted only two homeroom teachers to each of grades 3, 4, and 5. By the fall of 2023, these grades were either at or over capacity, and new students who should have been able to attend Brooks were turned away and forced to attend schools outside their neighborhood. In the fall, Brooks parents engaged with several board members and ACPS staff members about the negative impact of these large class sizes on our students and teachers. ACPS hired instructional aides for Brooks, with the intention of hiring additional teachers next year. But that process understandably took several months, and has not been successful as one of the aides has stopped coming to work. The students are in the same position as they were before and many are frustrated and feel the classrooms are too noisy and crowded for them to

concentrate. With so many students in the room, it is difficult for all students to get the individual help they need.

As a parent of a child currently in second grade, I am concerned about the class sizes next year. My child is in the class where their first year of school was in a virtual environment. Our children missed out on a year of learning the fundamentals, something they have been catching up on over the past two years. Thankfully with our wonderful teachers at Brooks and small class sizes, I believe we are finally normalizing. We cannot take a step back. We need to continue fostering an environment where our children can continue to catch up and thrive. Small class sizes are imperative to that effort.

The Brooks parent community agrees with and strongly supports the school board's direction that ACPS prioritize small classroom sizes in this year's budgeting process. ACPS capacity limits exist to ensure our teachers can provide individualized and differentiated instruction to all students, so that they all may have opportunity to learn and thrive. The class size limits recognize that teachers are not able to provide the same level of individualized support as class sizes grow beyond them.

Unfortunately, the 'FY24 budget sets Brooks up to have class sizes that exceed the prescribed capacity limits. The budget projects Brooks' classroom sizes for grades 3 and 5 will be at 51 students – just under the 52 student maximum capacity for two teachers – and assigns two homeroom teaching positions to each grade. But Brooks currently has more than 52 students enrolled in each of these grades. The projections also fail to account for the students that were turned away as capacity transfers out of Brooks this school year, and fail to leave space for the categories of new or returning students that must be allowed to enroll at Brooks even if the grade is at capacity. The result is that class sizes in grades 3 and 5 will exceed the 26 student capacity limit next year.

Fortunately, we are early enough in the budgeting process that the school board and ACPS can address the problem and ensure that in FY'24, students in grades 3 and 5 will have class sizes within the ratio. We urge you to allot two additional homeroom teachers to Brooks so that students currently enrolled in grades 3 and 5 may return knowing their class

sizes will be within ACPS capacity limits. Recent, historical enrollment data supports that Brooks will need three homeroom teachers in each grade level in FY'24 for classroom sizes to be within the ratios set by the school board and in ACPS policy.
