



April 18, 2022

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of the Alexandria City Council:

The March 29th crash involving a nine-year-old student who sustained serious injuries at Jefferson Houston School has shined a spotlight on pedestrian safety at and near Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). ***The next crash isn't a matter of if, but when.*** The Alexandria Parent Teacher Association Council (PTAC) requests that the Alexandria City Council prioritize the following recommendations to ensure that ACPS students, families, and staff can get to school safely.

- 1) **Accelerate Progress on Safe Routes to Schools Audit Recommendations.** In the 2016-2017 school year, audits were conducted at 13 ACPS schools that resulted in recommendations to increase safe walking and biking to schools. Six years later, only 100 of the 250 recommendations stemming from the audits have been completed. At Jefferson Houston, for example, only 9 of the 21 short and medium term recommendations to mitigate risk to our students have been completed; outstanding items include seemingly simple requirements like installing a high visibility crosswalk and painting drop-off area curbs yellow. At Patrick Henry, which now hosts the population of two ACPS schools, only 3 of the 13 recommendations have been completed; outstanding recommendations include items like conducting signal timing analysis to determine if a protected left is warranted, or studying the intersection to see if an all-way stop is warranted. City Council action is needed now to enable more progress against walk audit recommendations. Please do not wait for another, potentially more serious tragedy to occur.
- 2) **Complete More Safe Routes to School Audits.** Despite the growth in the ACPS population since 2016 and the addition of another elementary school on the heavily trafficked Beauregard corridor, no new Safe Routes audits have been conducted since 2016-2017. The City Council should ensure that resources are prioritized for schools without an audit, including Ferdinand T. Day Elementary, Francis Hammond Middle School, George Washington Middle School, and Alexandria City High School. An audit and the completion of resulting recommendations should precede the opening of another ACPS school on the Mark Center commercial campus in light of the many unique issues that have surfaced at Ferdinand T. Day, including but not limited to the need to work with commercial stakeholders to mitigate risks on privately owned streets.
- 3) **Address City Transportation Department staffing shortfalls.** We are confident that Transportation Department leadership is fully committed to providing safe streets in

Alexandria, particularly near schools, yet 5 years elapsed before grant applications were submitted to address infrastructure shortfalls identified in 2017. Clearly, only a long-standing, pre-pandemic staffing shortfall could account for a delay of this magnitude. Please add sufficient staff to safe streets to complete the items above, as well as ensure a continuing effort to keep streets safe for children

- 4) **Address the Crossing Guard Shortfall and Misalignment.** Crossing guards play an absolutely critical role in protecting ACPS students, caregivers, and staff, but today only 17 of 27 crossing guard positions are filled. To make matters worse, the too few crossing guards that are employed by the city are not working where they are needed most because crossing guards are able to designate a preferred school of assignment. As a result, a school like Charles Barrett currently has three crossing guards, while schools like Ferdinand T. Day, Jefferson Houston, Patrick Henry, and Alexandria's middle or high schools have none. The City Council should consider creative solutions to improving recruitment and retention of crossing guards, e.g. making more positions full time by combining them with other functions in the city government or ACPS. The City Council should also ensure that the Alexandria Police Department works with ACPS to align crossing guards to where they are needed most to mitigate pedestrian risk, or consider whether it makes mission sense to move the program into ACPS—a step other Safe Routes to Schools districts in Virginia have taken to great success.
- 5) **Take action to reduce excessive vehicle speeds near schools.** Multiple studies show that speed kills and speed limits of 15 mph are appropriate near schools. Examples of areas with unsafe speeds near schools that need 15 mph school speed limits are Seminary Road in front of Francis C. Hammond, and N. Beauregard Street near Ferdinand T. Day, John Adams, and William Ramsey. Please establish 15 mph speed limits near all Alexandria schools as soon as possible.
- 6) **Install Photo Speed Monitoring Devices at School Crossing Zones.** An Alexandria Police Department pilot in January 2021 on Beauregard demonstrated that automated speed enforcement cameras are capable of achieving operating objectives at school crossing zones. During the pilot, which occurred during COVID lockdowns when many commuters were still working from home, 65 percent of the vehicles transiting Beauregard were going above the posted speed limit, and the highest recorded speed was 69 MPH. The installation and operation of speed monitoring devices at high-risk school crossing zones should be prioritized in this and future year city budgets, especially on the heavily trafficked Beauregard corridor that is home to three (and soon to be four) ACPS schools.
- 7) **Commission an ACPS Pedestrian Safety Task Force.** Pedestrian safety at or near ACPS schools is an issue that cuts across several ACPS and City of Alexandria departments and offices; in other words, various ACPS departments and offices play a role in identifying pedestrian risks and implementing solutions to keep our children safe. To ensure that resources are aligned to where they are needed most, the City Council

and the ACPS School Board should commission a joint Task Force that defines and prioritizes pedestrian risks by school, outlines strategic and tactical requirements to mitigate the risks, and defines a timeline, key milestones, and entities accountable for executing the requirements. This Task Force should provide periodic reports to the Joint ACPS School Board/City Council committee. Given the cross-cutting nature of the issue, the City Council and School Board should regularly address ACPS pedestrian safety at joint sessions. These sessions will ensure that sufficient progress is being made to protect the safety of Alexandria's children.

PTAC appreciates your consideration of these recommendations to make our streets safer. We ask that you give full consideration to prioritizing ACPS pedestrian safety in this and future year budget cycles, and that you hold all city stakeholders accountable for the timely mitigation of risk to our city's greatest asset—our children.

Thank you,

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