

4 December 2014

Chairman Graf and School Board members,

My name is Jim Durham, I live in Alexandria's West End, and I am speaking as a grandfather of 6 children in Alexandria, ages 6 months to 7 years old; two of them attend pre-school at John Adams Elementary School and another is scheduled to start at MacArthur Elementary School in September. I am also speaking as Chair of the Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee - a group of volunteers interested in promoting walking and biking. Thanks for the opportunity to speak tonight.

I am here to suggest two initiatives. Combined these two initiatives will help improve academic performance, improve student health and save ACPS operating and capital costs.

Recent studies show that students who walk and bike to school perform better academically, behave better in class, and are less likely to suffer from obesity. Nationally and locally, school systems have adopted programs to provide both education and encouragement for more students to walk and bike to school; these are referred to as Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs, a term derived from Federal transportation funding for those initiatives.

My first of two proposed initiatives is for ACPS to explore options for active and more effective SRTS Encouragement and Education programs in every Alexandria public school. Today there are examples of good SRTS initiatives in some schools in Alexandria. Unfortunately, the results are hit and miss in the absence of dedicated central leadership for the Alexandria SRTS programs. Neighboring jurisdictions such as Arlington County recognize the value of strong central SRTS leadership to realizing the benefits this program has to offer; they have filled a School-district-wide SRTS position with a full time staff member. Alexandria's SRTS program is fortunate to have a talented individual who is engaged in SRTS. That said, with a full time job as a Curricula manager/developer, she is able to allocate less than 5% of her time to SRTS efforts. My primary ask tonight is that ACPS begin to look at options for more effective central coordination, integrated with the Alexandria school transportation program, with a goal of strong SRTS programs in 100% of our schools.

How will this effort save ACPS operating and capital costs? Here's an example: Today, some students in Alexandria are provided bus transportation but live inside the 1-mile limit for elementary schools. ACPS provides exceptions for students who live where conditions are considered too hazardous to walk within 1 mile of their school. If ACPS would share with City staff the locations where they are busing students inside 1 mile (or 1/2 mile for Middle and High schools, then the City can address those conditions and provide parents and students with safe options for walking or biking to school. Strong SRTS education and encouragement programs have been shown to increase the percent of students walking and biking to school by 25% over 5 years. If a fraction of students currently being bused, decided to walk or bike to school, it would reduce the need for buying more buses and hiring more drivers as student population expands.

Volunteers in my organization want to work with ACPS to help address these issues. We would greatly appreciate School Board encouragement of our efforts..

In summary, I have two asks:

(1) That ACPS develop options for more effective central leadership of its SRTS programs, integrated with ACPS' transportation program.

(2) That ACPS begin building a partnership with City Transportation and Environmental Services staff by identifying locations where hazards preclude safe walking and biking options for students.

The payoffs in academic performance, student health and cost savings will take time and effort. That said, my grandchildren are young, so there is still an opportunity for them to benefit if we start now. Together, we can make it happen.

Thank you.

Facts and References

Active youth perform better

- Regular physical activity and good nutrition help students earn higher grades.¹
- Children who walk or bicycle to school have better cardiovascular fitness than do children who do not actively commute to school"²
- Academic success is associated with higher fitness levels. Schools should consider strategies to improve fitness as part of their overall strategy for improving academic achievement."³

... and behave better

- "Research shows that kids who move more aren't just healthier, they also tend to do better academically, behave better in class and miss fewer days of school."⁴

More, safer walking and cycling = less traffic congestion & lower transportation costs.⁵

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1. "Physical Inactivity and Unhealthy Dietary Behaviors and Academic Achievement," *2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
 2. Lubans, D. R., C. A. Boreham, et al. (2011). "The relationship between active travel to school and health-related fitness in children and adolescents: a systematic review." *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 8(1): 5)
 3. Coral Torrijos-Niño, Vicente Martínez-Vizcaíno, María Jesús Pardo-Guijarro, Jorge Cañete García-Prieto, Natalia María Arias-Palencia, Mairena Sánchez-López. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 03/2014 pp104-109
 4. Active Living Research, <http://activelivingresearch.org/taxonomy/schools>
 5. Mark Fenton, Presentation at Greater Washington, DC Safe Routes Regional Network Meeting, Oct, 28, 2014