

Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#406

I would like to provide: *

Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: *

General Public Comments

Topic *

proposed safety advisory group

Full Name *

Jonathan Krall

What is your relationship to ACPS? *

Community Member

Enter your comments here OR upload below:

We are writing because we are deeply concerned that an important open community conversation about the health and safety of Alexandria City Public School children is being avoided in favor of a process that instead focuses on the relationship between ACPS and the Alexandria Police Department. We refer to a proposal from ACPS for a School Law Enforcement Partnership advisory group. This is not what students, community groups, and members of City Council have been requesting for nearly two years.

We instead need a Community Task Force for Student Health and Safety. Law enforcement should not be in the title of the task force. Law enforcement should not be in the mission of the task force. Yes, it should appear in any list of topics to be considered, but that is all.

(please see attached letter)

March 9, 2022



Dear Alexandria City School Board:

We are writing because we are deeply concerned that an important open community conversation about the health and safety of Alexandria City Public School children is being avoided in favor of a process that instead focuses on the relationship between ACPS and the Alexandria Police Department. We refer to a proposal from ACPS for a School Law Enforcement Partnership advisory group[1]. This is not what students, community groups, and members of City Council have been requesting for nearly two years.

We instead need a Community Task Force for Student Health and Safety. Law enforcement should not be in the title of the task force. Law enforcement should not be in the mission of the task force. Yes, it should appear in any list of topics to be considered, but that is all.

We ask for the following:

1. Please center the name of the proposed task force on student health and safety.
2. Please center the mission of the proposed task force on student health and safety.
3. Because the history of this issue (see below) shows that ACPS has not been responsive to community concerns, please ensure that ACPS representatives (not including student representatives) constitute a minority of the task force. The majority should be members from the community, including parents and students.

Let us review the history of this issue.

- In 2020, over a year ago, ACPS conducted a survey to ask students and parents if the School Resource Officer (SRO) program should remain the same or be modified. They were not asked to consider ending the program. While the decision to conduct a survey appeared to be part of an open process, the survey itself was slanted in favor of an apparently predetermined outcome, the continuation of the SRO program.

- In response, ACPS students raised concerns about the presence of police officers in school. The students specifically focused their concerns on the health and safety of the students, asking for "care not cops." Individual members of the Alexandria City Council similarly reached out to the School Board, asking for an open community conversation that would include the possibility of ending the SRO program.

- In defiance of the expressed wishes of individual students, individual members of City Council, and organizations such as Tenants and Workers United and Grassroots Alexandria, the School Board ignored requests for a community conversation and voted to continue the SRO program.

- In 2021, students and community groups continued to ask for "care not cops." In response, City Council voted to move funds away from the SRO program and towards youth-focused mental health resources. At the time, City Council expressed disappointment that their requests for an ACPS-led open community conversation about student health and safety had not occurred.

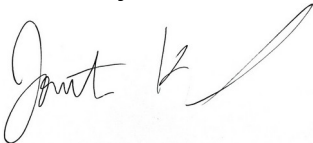
- Later in 2021, City Council reversed itself, restoring funding to the SRO program for one year only, again asking for an ACPS-led open community conversation about student health and safety.

Given this history, it is clear that the proposed advisory group is not acceptable. While the relationship between ACPS and the APD is necessarily part of the conversation, the importance of this relationship should be an open question, not a predetermined outcome. It should certainly not be placed at the center of a conversation, one that should instead be centered on student health and safety.

Put simply, placing the police at the center of this important community conversation is like planning a wedding ceremony around the wedding dress instead of the happy couple. It makes no sense and distracts from the central purpose, which is the health, safety and future of ACPS students.

We thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Krall", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Jonathan Krall, Grassroots Alexandria Steering Committee

[1] https://alexandriapublic.ic-board.com/public_itemview.aspx?ItemId=15973&mtgId=1923