

To: Alexandria City Public School Board

From: Sharon Yandian Vogel

Date: December 4, 2014

SUBJECT: Advocacy for the Dual Language Program in the City and at John Adams Elementary School

Thank you for the opportunity again to speak to you about the dual language program in the city and specifically about John Adams Elementary School.

I know there are tremendous needs and issues that ACPS must address in these challenging financial times. At JAES alone you will hear if you have not already needs related to facilities and lack of classroom space for instruction, extra support needed for ELLs, concerns that we will lose title 1 status and therefore over \$300,000 even though our free and reduced lunch numbers are quite high, etc...

But I am here to again talk about the DL Programs in the city. The parents of John Adams students, including myself (two children 5th and K) have come in front of the school board multiple times since school year 2011 to advocate for the dual language program in the city and specifically for the program at JAES. At the time our three concerns regarding the dual language program included

- 1) a lack of **vision**;
- 2) insufficient **resources**;
- 3) a lack of **data** on student performance.

I know I have spoken to many of you and emailed to say thank you and to share that there has been tremendous progress on these three areas over the last four years. It is one of the reasons I am here tonight---to thank you and highlight from a parents perspective the changes I have seen. From the hiring of Dr. Acosta, Dual Language Coordinator last year, hiring of our new principal Mrs. Lee who came with background, knowledge and passion about DL programming, securing Mr. Yancy, language specialist at JAES who works with the teachers and Dr. Acosta, to the increased Professional Development opportunities for the DL teachers.

I am participating with teachers, administrators and other parents on the city wide DL leadership team that is developing a strategic plan to submit to you later this year. The team is actively working at the same time to make the needed improvements to the program. There is still a long way to go to make the program a model for others to visit, from the need for inclusion in report cards information to parents about their child's progress in Spanish, to written curriculum to teach and implement the program in Spanish for the particular content areas, to strong written and oral communication with parents about the program and how to support their children, etc.. but much is well on its way. I have total confidence that

with Dr. Acosta's leadership and the engagement of the staff at both schools the program will continue to improve.

Tonight the issue I would like to raise is again the vision for the city for the two programs. It seems that now there is a good working relationship between the two schools. With the leadership at the Central office creating a mechanism for sharing and working together, the finalization of the DL strategic plan will continue to create a path to forward movement.

With that said I would like to ask you to consider and debate how families in the city that are not in the attendance zone of Mt. Vernon or John Adams equitably access the DL programs. Currently as you know the previous superintendent moved JAES away from a lottery procedure for those outside of the attendance zone to an administrative transfer process to attend the JAES DL Program. This is a fairly mysterious process for parents and few take advantage or know about it. For Mount Vernon, according to the website only those in the attendance zone are eligible to participate.

I applaud the effort of Mount Vernon to move to 100% school wide DL programming and understand this will come in front of the school board later this month for consideration. It is a wonderful model and has so much promise. It will be great to be able to study how students do over the years who have participated in a true DL program and for ACPS to be able to learn how not only have students have become bilingual and biliterate but perhaps see if students, both native Spanish and English speakers outperform their peers in either language on standardized tests over time. It is a great laboratory and something that the city can be proud of.

I believe that the School Board should support a school wide DL program that provides reasonable access for families who live both in and out of the Mt. Vernon attendance zone. I know that this complicates the matter but it is an issue that needs to be tackled and it connects to the vision of the city. The decision about Mt. Vernon should not be in isolation but be taken into account when visioning the ACPS DL programming.

For John Adams in the west end, outgrowing itself, wonderfully diverse, with multiple programs (DL, CETA, Inclusion, Pre-k, etc), many that bring kids from all over the city through its doors, the DL program represents approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the K-5 students enrolled, or two classrooms per grade. Entry into this DL program is still even unclear for those in the attendance zone and confusing for those not in the attendance zone. While growing the program is desired, space and other constraints need to be contended with and a decision about who is served, what outreach should be done beyond those in the attendance zone, etc.

In sum, I ask you to think through and act regarding access to the DL program for families in Alexandria, taking into account families who live in the attendance zone, consider a lottery process for those who do not and further on down the line as

additional schools are built or formed consider how the DL program can factor into this design.

This important program prepares our children for the multicultural multilingual society they will live and contribute to as adults ---and benefits children from both Spanish speaking home and English speaking home or as is the case at JAES other languages as well.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you this evening. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have, now or in the future. My contact information is below.

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