

# Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#504

I would like to provide: \*

Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: \*

Budget

Topic \*

Naomi Brooks Budget Allocation

Full Name \*

Kathryn Marks

What is your relationship to ACPS? \*

Parent/Guardian of an ACPS Student

Enter your comments here OR upload below:

The ACPS budget for the 2023–2024 SY 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 is an assumption and not supported evidence to be accurate. This assumption is contingent on several current students not returning next year– How has ACPS determined this? 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. There are students who would LOVE to be at Brooks and ACPS has taken that right away from them and their families. How is transferring students OUT of their neighborhood school supporting equity for all? The school boards mission, as written on the ACPS website "is to ensure success by inspiring students and addressing barriers to learning." Removing students from their neighborhood school is ADDING barriers for learning. It makes it more difficult for parents to get their children to and from school as well as reduced the community relationship building that occurs outside of school hours.

For FY'23, ACPS allotted only two homeroom teachers to each of grades 3, 4, and 5. By the fall, 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. These students are the most negatively impacted from COVID shut downs and virtual schooling. As an professional specializing in reading and language development I have seen first hand the negative impacts on reading development in this age group and have

extended myself to support individuals in their learning growth to catch up from lost learning. It saddens me that ACPS did not support their own students in this time allowing for smaller class size and thus better differentiated teaching to close the learning gap. It has been reported a large number of students in 3rd grade qualified for after school tutoring because of their low performance, yet ACPS continues to push this population aside for the necessary support and basic staffing for their deserved education. The children at Brooks are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Education, like all of other students in ACPS, despite the assumption of the board that parents can seek support privately outside of school for their student's needs. This may or may not be true, but it is the community's (outside of Brooks) thoughts on the matter.

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. An aide does not have the same specialized instruction as a teacher and thus also is not a true solution to the problem, but rather a bandaid to satisfy parents who may not understand or know the qualifications and different backgrounds for staffing. I understand staffing is an issue across the district (and the country). If teachers are not available, ACPS needs to get creative in their solutions. Calling in staff from Really Great Reading for on campus, regular reading lessons; training volunteers in specific programs for learning for regular individualized instruction and working with colleges/universities in the area for volunteers to learn and implement specific reading instruction. Rising 3rd graders who are not reading at grade level expectations will continue to lag behind in their studies and success as they enter 4th grade where the curriculum switch moves from "learning to read" to reading to learn"- At the very LEAST Brooks needs 3 homeroom teachers for 3rd and 4th grade to support these much needed skills for academic and life success.

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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. Has ACPS "assumed" the influx of students into the zoned area for Brooks due to the transient nature of our community?

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.

Thank you for the Board's consideration in hiring more licensed teachers for Naomi Brooks Elementary.

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