

Budget Public Hearing
January 23, 2020
Cynthia Barron

Dr Hutchins, Colleagues and Members of the School Board,

My name is Cynthia Barron. I was hired as a .5 Reading Specialist at Douglas MacArthur 5 years ago.

I am honored to be a teacher in Alexandria City Public School and to be among a sea of dedicated professionals working to educate **all** students.

I am speaking to you today about goal 3 -Exemplary Staff: ACPS will recruit, develop, support, and retain a staff that meets the needs of every student.

Recruiting and retaining quality teachers is crucial to our success.

You work hard to make sure that you are competitive with other nearby districts. There is one area, however, where you fall behind other districts and that is benefits for part time employees. Other districts allow more part-time teachers to receive benefits.

I am here today to urge you to consider part-time personnel when you strive to reach Goal 3.

I hope my case is unique in that I was hired with the understanding that I would receive benefits (partial health insurance and retirement), as was the case when I worked for Arlington County. Only later, I learned that this was a mistake. The current policy is that you must be in a contract position of 20 hours or more to receive any benefits. I can understand how mistakes were made because it confusing what percentage of a job you need to be to reach that magic 20 hours. I figured I'd need to be about 5.25 to get benefits not the 6.7 that was stated last week at the board meeting. You must work 30 hours or be employed .9 to get retirement according to your policy

I know that you are not required to give benefits to any part-time employees, but I strongly urge to reconsider your policy and allow teachers who are at least half time (.5), like myself, to receive retirement and health insurance. Or allow us to be .6 in order to get benefits.

All other jurisdictions in the area, that I checked – Arlington, Fairfax, Prince Williams, Prince Georges and Montgomery County Schools all give health insurance to employees who work at least half time.

I previously worked as a Reading Specialist with Arlington County Public Schools. I took some time off when my father was ill and decided to continue to work in Virginia where I have my teaching certification and retirement. Arlington contributed towards VRS and gave partial health insurance when I worked part time. Arlington's policy is that anyone above 15 hours

gets benefits. VRS says that ACPS does not have to consider me a teacher when I am working part time. VRS allows school districts to make that discretion.

For my position, I must be certified. I go through the same evaluation process as full -time teachers, yet I'm not considered a full teacher who can put years towards retirement or get benefits.

Part time employees are valuable to the system. Finding quality people to fill part time positions must be challenging.

Retaining staff in positions without benefits can be even more challenging. In addition to educating students and supporting staff, they often work in unpaid positions caring for their own children or like in my case, caring for an elderly parent. Working for ACPS is our main job. We are the ones who often give extra time to help students, meet with a parent or support a staff member, stay late for meetings or school events.

There has never been a week that I have worked less than 20 hours. I am encouraged to take on extra hours at an hourly rate using PALS money but without giving me any benefits.

My contract hours did increase when principals were allowed to give partial contracts for positions that were not filled. These extra contract hours were taken away as well as my benefits. I am good at my job. My position is needed. I enjoy educating students and working to support teachers in their knowledge of literacy practices.

I urge you to value part time employees like myself. We need you to care about us as well and to show us how serious you are about Goal 3.

Please change your policy and allow anyone who works .5 to take advantage of the group health insurance and to continue to collect years of employment in the Virginia Retirement Systems.

Thank you for allowing me to speak and for listening to my concerns.