

Dear School Board members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Kursten Phelps and I'm the parent of a Patrick Henry first grader and a Satellite Campus junior who attended Patrick Henry in its former building. I'm here to ask that you put equity into action and address the ongoing and inequitable enrollment and capacity issues at Patrick Henry and other West End schools.

Patrick Henry values diversity as our strength, and our school community works hard to welcome new students and families. What our staff and administration have done to manage overcapacity enrollments is remarkable. And it will take time to address the social stratification in Alexandria that is at the root of disparate enrollment. But I am concerned about the impact of high class sizes on both students and teachers at our school and other west end schools and we can't wait for redistricting to address the immediate concerns.

Patrick Henry is currently over capacity with over 1,000 students enrolled. Our overflow students are currently being sent to Polk, but Polk is also over capacity. Meanwhile, we just built a new school, Douglas McArthur, down the road, that is reportedly significantly under capacity. This is not equity.

Every time I talk to my child's teacher and ask what we can do to help, they say they need an assistant teacher. They are one teacher in a class of approximately 27 children, many of whom are new to the U.S., are still learning English, have experienced trauma, or have disabilities.

Large class sizes make differentiated instruction and classroom management more difficult for teachers. Patrick Henry has already lost teachers who went to ACPS schools with more reasonable class sizes. We need more equitable classroom sizes to meet the needs of all students and retain our teachers.

Equality is not equity, and it's precisely schools like Patrick Henry - CEP schools with large populations of ELL students, that need more resources, not less; that need smaller class sizes, not larger class sizes.

As we patiently wait to finally have our planned outdoor space that was approved over 7 years ago, our single, small playground is woefully inadequate for our student population. Equipment breaks frequently due to heavy use, the fence is broken in multiple spots, and the playground is incredibly crowded with as many as 150 or more students having to use the playground at the same time.

School wide evening events are essentially impossible because attendance would exceed legal maximum occupancy. This has meant we either have to split events, further straining staff and

facilities, or simply not revive treasured events like Heritage Night that are meaningful to our community.

I know that ACPS leadership is aware of these class size and enrollment issues. We are told redistricting will help, but that we have to wait until the 2026-2027 school year for that process to be complete. Overcrowding became an issue at Patrick Henry in the 2022-2023 school year. Meanwhile a brand new school that is less than 2 miles away has the capacity to create more equitable classrooms. We are asking you to look at every tool in your tool box - temporary boundary shifts for 2024, enrollment policies, sibling policies, overflow decisions, and resource allocation - to mitigate the problem between now and redistricting.

The Patrick Henry community has been nothing if not patient. But addressing these unsafe, unfair inequities simply cannot wait until Fall 2026. The time is now to put equity into action.

Sincerely,
Kursten Phelps