



June 1, 2022

Dear Dr. Hutchings, Chair Alderton & Alexandria City School Board Members,

The Executive Board of the Alexandria PTA Council (PTAC) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to ACPS on the use of American Rescue Plan funding. In advance of the upcoming ACPS School Board public hearing on the ESSER III grant, we would like to update our July 2021 letter with the addition of a funding “wish list” that is a compilation of needs and priorities expressed by our school communities during the 21-22 SY. We ask that the Board consider the use of the ESSER III funding to support:

- A creation of a “micro classroom” grant project that will enable educators to apply for classroom grants supporting social-emotional activities/projects based on the needs of their own students
- Salary bonuses for ACPS Parent Liaisons to encourage retention in a competitive job market for these multilingual, highly skilled professionals
- Staff capacity for the ACPS Communication department to develop school-specific, multi-lingual audiovisual messaging for our families with lower literacy levels
- The development of a school-based English class pilot for immigrant parents/guardians, modeled after the MVCS Padres Activos English Language program
- The creation and expansion of partnerships with gang violence prevention organizations, such as Northern Virginia Family Service
- Specialized tutoring services for students with IEPs
- A Ferdinand T. Day playground monitor to supervise the playground access during afterschool hours, which will support family engagement
- A thorough analysis of a year’s worth of COVID data in ACPS schools to determine which school buildings are at higher risk of transmission and the identification of additional mitigation efforts in these schools (i.e. a second HEPA filter in classrooms, outdoor lunch equipment, consultation to schools regarding safe gatherings)
- Upgrading the ACPS Safe Routes to Schools Coordinator from a part-time position to a full-time role.

## Original Letter from July 2021

- **Truly Prioritize Students with Disabilities.** The ACPS School Board frequently references its prioritization of students with disabilities (SWD), but these students have not been sufficiently prioritized in the ACPS Budget. In 2018, the pre-COVID SWD Evaluation Report found that “without an appropriate allocation of resources, mandated professional development, and clear, non-negotiable, accountability measures...” the division’s services for students with disabilities would stagnate. Virtual and hybrid schooling has dealt a significant blow to student progress, but no population has suffered more academically than our city’s SWD population. PTAC recommends that ACPS back its stated prioritization of SWD students with robust ARP funding to truly ensure that *every student succeeds*. In addition to funding tutoring for our SWDs, PTAC recommends that ARP funding be leveraged to fund the SWD Evaluation Report’s recommendations and differentiated compensation to attract and retain teachers at neediest schools, providing incentives for current staff to obtain special education certification, as well as funding community-based learning experiences for students with disabilities through contracted services.
- **Prioritize Teachers and Staff:** Recognize the commitment and time put in by teachers and staff during the pandemic through across-the-board raises that exceed inflation and compensation to include bonuses and additional pay that make Alexandria competitive with neighboring districts.
- **Address Food Insecurity.** In Alexandria, over 13,000 people are food insecure, according to Feeding America, to include thousands of children. Students who grow up without adequate nutrition will face significant barriers to academic achievement. PTAC strongly supports the use of federal funding to partner with community organizations to ensure that ACPS students are not wanting for food when school is not in session, including on weekends and during holidays and summer break.
- **Ensure Robust Communication.** The ACPS Helpline--supported financially by PTAC during the pandemic--provided key social, emotional, technology, and academic support to ACPS families during the pandemic, and enabled easy access to information on child care options and food access. PTAC strongly supports continued funding to operate the Helpline in multiple languages--i.e. English, Amharic, Arabic, and Spanish, as well as the adoption and broad implementation of multilingual communication apps like TalkingPoints to enable two-way multilingual family engagement to help teachers and ACPS families to stay connected via text message throughout the school year.

- **Parent Liaison Positions at all ACPS Schools.** ACPS Parent Liaisons play a critical role in connecting families to resources that support learning and assist families in understanding school policies, procedures, and cultures. This was true before the pandemic, but COVID 19 highlighted the absolutely critical role that Parent Liaisons play in connecting schools and families. In the aftermath of the pandemic, Parent Liaisons undoubtedly will be crucial in ensuring robust student attendance and enabling parents with the right knowledge and tools to get their children back on track after significant learning loss. In a district where students and their families hail from 114 countries and speak 119 languages, PTAC believes that parent liaisons should not be reserved for our Title I schools. PTAC recommends that ESSER III funding be leveraged to ensure that all ACPS school budgets include full funding for parent liaisons, and these positions should be reflected in the ACPS' budget submission in future years well after COVID relief funding runs dry.
  
- **Implement Enhanced Safety Protocols & COVID Mitigation Procedures, to include:**
  - Provide an adequate supply of well-fitting face masks for all students & staff
  - Provide regular, rapid in-school COVID surveillance testing to unvaccinated students & teachers who have provided consent
  - Diagnostic COVID testing for symptomatic students & staff
  - Outdoor mealtime structures (tents, picnic benches, etc.)
  - Creation of outdoor classroom spaces
  - Provide an At-home COVID testing option for teachers & staff: As part of ACPS' surveillance testing program, teachers who are not feeling well should have the option to test for COVID in the privacy of their homes. Rapid, at-home testing not only prevents cases from reaching schools, but also gives teachers and families the peace of mind that the school environment is safe by enabling cases to be identified early.

PTAC appreciates your consideration of these ESSER III funding priorities.

Thank you,  
Alexandria PTA Council Executive Board  
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