



May 29, 2018

Dear Arlington County Board and Arlington School Board:

The Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families (APCYF)<sup>1</sup> prioritizes the **physical and mental health** of the community's children and adolescents and strongly supports schools' role in developing the **whole child**, including and beyond academic indicators. We also believe in **equity**: that all county residents—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, country of origin, ability level or any other characteristic—have access to the opportunities they need to live healthy, successful lives.

Facilities planning should prioritize and consistently reflect Arlington's commitment to meet the diverse needs of all students and residents, including in physical activity opportunities, which are essential in promoting lifelong health. In addition, physically active students tend to have better grades, school attendance and classroom behaviors, as well as improved cognitive performance.

In the Superintendent's Proposed FY2019-28 CIP, we are concerned a **proposed new high school at the Career Center site has very limited field space onsite and lacks other critical physical activity facilities that the comprehensive high schools in Arlington offer**. We are also concerned that current students at Arlington Tech, full-time programs at the Career Center and Arlington Community High School, as well as 800 students scheduled to attend the new school, will not have field space onsite for physical education or other sports and outdoor activities until two years after the new school opens at the earliest, as discussed in various scenarios based on the Superintendent's Proposed CIP.

In addition, given the central nature of the Career Center site, facilities there could potentially provide immediate opportunities and benefit to thousands of nearby residents who face disproportionate risks for physical activity related chronic diseases.

Therefore, **we recommend the School and County Boards collaborate in development of the Career Center site during the FY2019-28 Capital Improvement Plan process, jointly investing in projects that:**

- **Address the physical activity needs and opportunities for all our children; and**
- **Provide public spaces that will allow the community as a whole to improve its health**

Our letter expands on the importance of equity in physical activity opportunities on school campuses, highlighting findings from APCYF's Healthy Communities Action Team (HCAT), which has been gathering data and conducting community assessments to determine needs and appropriate responses to prevent and reduce childhood obesity in Arlington.

---

<sup>1</sup> APCYF is a community led advisory group comprised of committed citizens, county government representatives, and school staff that identifies local needs, works with community members to develop goals, and promotes collective action. Our vision is an Arlington where all young people are cared for, valued and receive the support they need to become contributing, caring adults. Our mission is to improve the health, well-being and safety of children, youth and families in Arlington through researching young people's needs, advocating for policies and programs to meet those needs, and engaging all members of our community as part of the solution.

## Ensuring Equity in Physical Activity Opportunities on School Campuses

A disparity in access to athletic and other extracurricular activities between low-income students and their upper-income peers has been well-documented throughout the country, as have disparities in physical activity and in health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> There are also disparities in Arlington, where students of color are less likely to be physically active and more likely to consider themselves overweight or obese, according to the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).<sup>3</sup>

A key recommendation from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) for strengthening and improving programs and policies for physical activity and physical education in the school environment is to ensure equity in access. Specifically, the IOM recommends:

Federal, state, district, and local education administrators should ensure that programs and policies at all levels **address existing disparities** in physical activity and that **all students at all schools have equal access** to appropriate facilities and opportunities for physical activity and quality physical education.<sup>4</sup> (*emphasis added*)

Current full-time high school programs on the Career Center site serve a very diverse population. In addition, using the demographics of Thomas Jefferson Middle School as a proxy, a neighborhood high school at that site will serve a significantly higher population of low-income students and students of color than several other neighborhood high schools in Arlington. Moreover, HCAT's community assessments show the neighborhoods that school would serve face some of the highest childhood obesity rates in the county, coupled with some of our lowest life expectancy rates.<sup>5</sup>

The vast majority of parents interviewed by HCAT in these communities report wanting their children to get more physical activity than they currently do, and that the **lack of appropriate amenities including a pool, field, afterschool field and playground programs is a significant barrier to increased physical activity in their children**. When asked by HCAT what would most help to foster adequate physical activity by their children, these parents asked for:

- Support to help incorporate essential physical activity in their daily life as a daily, social norm (in and out of school); and
- More afterschool onsite physical activity focused programs for low-income populations.

These HCAT findings are consistent with a March 2018 presentation on the update of the Public Spaces Master Plan to the Career Center Working Group, which showed the County needs several additional public spaces in the next 20 years, including facilities such as rectangular fields, basketball courts, volleyball courts, outdoor tracks, diamond fields and small games courts that could be located on school grounds with the intention of shared use with the community. This presentation also noted that the Career Center site is located near or within possible focus areas that currently have limited access to rectangular fields, diamond fields, volleyball courts, tennis courts and basketball courts.<sup>6</sup>

Athletic fields, tracks and other outdoor facilities are particularly important in considering how to increase physical activity for high risk students because evidence indicates providing "multiple and varied outdoor

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, see <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002716214548398>; [https://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org/\\_WMS/publications/wmj/pdf/115/5/245.pdf](https://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org/_WMS/publications/wmj/pdf/115/5/245.pdf); and [http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/20865/cdc\\_20865\\_DS1.pdf](http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/20865/cdc_20865_DS1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://apcyf.arlingtonva.us/youth-risk-behavior-survey/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2013/Educating-the-Student-Body/EducatingTheStudentBody\\_Insert.pdf](http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2013/Educating-the-Student-Body/EducatingTheStudentBody_Insert.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://novahealthfdn.org/interactive-map-opportunity/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/POPS-Career-Center-Presentation-03-10-18.pdf>

fitness facilities” is one of the few school design strategies supported by substantial evidence that is associated with increased physical activity.<sup>7</sup>

Research distinguishes between “theoretical access” and “meaningful access” to physical activity opportunities. Should a high school open without certain facilities, students may theoretically have access to them at other locations. However, low-income students often have work and family obligations that hinder their participation in after-school activities, and low-income families often work in less flexible jobs and have more challenges with transportation than middle- and upper-income families. Adding travel and travel-time burdens to those students makes their participation in those activities even more difficult.

Thus, if a new high school at the Career Center site or any site is a neighborhood school drawing from an attendance zone, this school should have comparable facilities to Arlington’s other neighborhood high schools and be designed to include to the maximum extent possible athletic fields, a running track and a pool. Attending a school that lacks facilities comparable to those at other County schools will likely **increase pre-existing disparities between low-income students and their wealthier peers.**

### **Accelerating Collaborative Efforts to Ensure Healthy Environments**

The APCYF requests each Board considers its FY2019-28 CIP and work in a deliberately collaborative manner to fund projects that ensure all students, whether already at established high schools in Arlington or future participants at a new school or site, receive equitable services and opportunities, and that all residents have access to facilities that will help them live healthy lives.

In this work, there are evidence-based standards by which the Boards can evaluate current and proposed offerings at the Career Center site, as well as ALL existing and proposed schools, to ensure they offer:

- Adequate indoor facilities for physical activity;
- Adequate outdoor facilities for physical activity, including fields and playgrounds that meet safety standards.

These include the We Move Schools Forward<sup>8</sup> Physical Activity School Design Guidelines and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s “Healthy Schools Framework”<sup>9</sup> and “Healthy Out-of-School Time Framework”<sup>10</sup>

The Partnership stands ready to assist in these evaluative efforts and to discuss further innovative ways to ensure equitable access to physical activity on each of our school campuses and to accelerate school/community collaborative efforts to ensure healthy environments across our County.

Sincerely,



Anne O’Brien, Chair



Sheila Fleischhacker, Vice-Chair

Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families

703-228-1667 | [apcyf@arlingtonva.us](mailto:apcyf@arlingtonva.us)

---

<sup>7</sup> Brittin J, Sorensen D, Trowbridge M, Lee KK, Breithecker D, et al. (2015) Physical Activity Design Guidelines for School Architecture. PLOS ONE 10(7): e0132597. <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0132597>. See p. 10 & p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> [https://issuu.com/vmdoarchitects/docs/buckingham\\_physical\\_activity\\_design](https://issuu.com/vmdoarchitects/docs/buckingham_physical_activity_design)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.healthiergeneration.org/\\_asset/l062yk/07-278\\_HSPFramework.pdf](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/l062yk/07-278_HSPFramework.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.healthiergeneration.org/\\_asset/pqkqhk/HOST-Framework.pdf](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/pqkqhk/HOST-Framework.pdf)