Dear Arlington School Board Members:

As you are aware, APS launched its Elementary Planning Initiative this month. While the Tuckahoe community appreciates and understands the need to evaluate elementary school boundaries in light of the opening of several new elementary schools in Arlington, we are concerned about the process and timeline for evaluating sites for countywide option programs. To this end, we have laid out process concerns that we hope can be addressed before any decision is made. Secondly, we have specific concerns about possibility eliminating Tuckahoe as a neighborhood school. We have shared many of these concerns with APS Staff through the Ambassador program. In the spirit of open dialogue, we wish to share the concerns raised by our community below. We look forward to meeting with you and talking about these issues in person.

Concerns Related to the Criteria, Timetable, and Process

Risk of Inaccurate and Stale Data. The new elementary school at the Reed site, which is the impetus for re-drawing boundaries in the NW quadrant of the county, will not open until 2021. Yet, the current timetable has the Board making a decision on countywide option school locations in June 2018, using 2017-2018 walk zone student density data. We do not believe there is any reason to make this decision now, based on data that will be four years old by the time Reed opens. Making the decision now will not account for any increase in births or children moving to the community or future real estate development in the neighborhoods surrounding the site.

Initiative Does Not Address Essential Criteria. Using 2017-2018 walk zone density data as the sole criteria for recommending option sites ignores criteria that should be integral to a comprehensive school planning initiative: the need to ensure adequate neighborhood seats in areas targeted for current and future development (see below), future neighborhood enrollment projections, efficient use of APS land, enrollment data for students in option programs (transfer data), and distance from the majority of students currently enrolled in option program.

Decision to Move Option Program Not Easily Corrected. Unlike boundaries which can be adjusted (relatively) easily if data is later found to be inaccurate, the decision to move an option program cannot be easily corrected. If the future student walk zone density around Tuckahoe after 2021 exceeds the current student walk zone density (as we expect it will), APS will not be able to easily adjust for this.
Moving an Option Program Far from Current Location Risks Unpredictable Capacity Consequences. If an option program is moved to a site far from its current location, it could lead to undesirable capacity consequences. Families who chose their option program in part due to location could leave the program and return to their neighborhood school because they are unhappy with daily transportation times or the distance required to travel for school events and conferences. It will be very difficult to predict the enrollment patterns in this scenario. Under the timetable, elementary school boundary adjustments will occur before the Board decides which option program to relocate. If moving an option program results in unpredictable enrollment patterns, boundaries cannot be adjusted to account for that, or boundaries may need to be adjusted twice.

Timetable Risks Future Complexity and Delay. The timetable plans for the Board to make a decision on sites for option programs in 2018, but not make decisions on what programs will move to those sites until 2019. These matters should be considered concurrently. Otherwise, it risks a scenario where a site is chosen in 2018, but in 2019 it is determined that it does not work for any of the option programs. At that point, neighborhood boundaries will have already shifted, and the enrollment consequences could become complicated.

Timetable Creates Unnecessary Uncertainty for Families. Under the current timetable, the Board will vote on the new sites for countywide option programs in June 2018, but decisions for placing schools at identified sites will not come until June 2019. This creates up to one full year of uncertainty in the communities that will be receiving countywide option programs as well as the option programs that could potentially be moved to those sites.

Concerns Specific to Tuckahoe Elementary School
Based on Criteria of Current Student Walk Density, Tuckahoe Exceeds Many Neighborhood Schools. Even under the limited criteria of 2017-2018 student walk density data, Tuckahoe exceeds many other neighborhood schools. Based on the presentation at the School Board Work Session on Elementary Boundaries on January 23, 2018, Tuckahoe has 295 students in its potential walk zone. This is before any expansions of the walk zone under Phase I of the current initiative. The January 23 staff presentation was somewhat confusing because it lists Tuckahoe as having 78 students in its "exclusive walk zone." (p. 24) This does not reflect Tuckahoe's overlapping walk zone with Nottingham which contains 217 students (p. 26). Many current Tuckahoe students walk from that zone--so many that we qualify for a crossing guard at the corner of Sycamore and 26th Street. With 295 current potential walkers, Tuckahoe exceeds the number of potential walkers at a number of other neighborhood elementary schools, including Jamestown (100), Long Branch (125), Taylor (159), Ashlawn (213 including overlap with McKinley), and Abingdon (274). https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ES-Boundaries-Draft-WS-Final-1.pdf

Tuckahoe's Attendance Zone is an Area of Significant Recent, Current and Future Development. The sole criteria being used to determine the designation of sites for countywide option programs is 2017-2018 walk zone data. As noted above, the current criteria do not consider the fact that Tuckahoe's attendance zone includes areas of Arlington-East Falls Church that have seen a great deal of recent development in terms of high rises and multi-unit buildings near the East Falls Church Metro. No other zone in the NW quadrant of the County has as much...
development on the horizon. This is set forth in the East Falls Church Area Plan (2011) and the Lee Highway Visioning Study (May 2016) described below. We believe it is essential for APS to consider this significant driver for seats in its comprehensive planning initiative. If Tuckahoe were converted to a countywide option program, APS would lose vital neighborhood seats to meet needs of the planned developments in this area.

Recent developments in Tuckahoe’s attendance zone include The Crescent at Westmoreland & Lee Highway (completed in 2010 with 214 rental units); The WestLee at Westmoreland & Lee Highway (completed in 2006 with 128 condominium units); 18 West at Westmoreland & Lee Highway (completed in 2005 with 18 townhouses); and the SunTrust Development at 6711 Lee Highway (27 townhomes currently underway).

Future potential residential development under the East Fall Church Area Plan (2011) (https://arlingtonva.s3.dualstack.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2014/03/E-Falls-Church1.pdf) includes:

- Exxon Station (Lee Highway & Westmoreland Street): recommended for 5-story residential development (p. 50)
- Verizon Site (6700 Lee Highway): rear portion of lot recommended for 3-4 story townhome/low-rise multi-family development (p. 50)
- Suburban Animal Hospital/Mercedes Site (6879 Lee Highway): recommended for 3-4 story low-density residential development (p. 51)
- La Cote D’Or and Econo Lodge (Westmoreland & Lee Highway): recommended for 6 story development (p. 52)

Additional planned development for the Tuckahoe attendance zone is described in the Lee Highway Visioning Study (2016) (pp. 58-59) (https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2016/05/LeeHighway_VisioningStudy_May2016.pdf) including large-scale mixed use development on Metro parking lot (7-12 stories); mixed use buildings at Lee Highway & Washington Blvd; and townhouses/small apartment development on NW corner of Sycamore and Washington.

We believe that the School Board and APS staff must seize this opportunity to collaborate with County planning staff and the County Board to ensure we have the seats we need for the East Falls Church region of Arlington, which the County has targeted for transit-oriented residential development with the advent of Metro’s Silver Line.

_Tuckahoe’s Discovery Schoolyard and Outdoor Learning Program Would be Jeopardized by the Designation of Tuckahoe as an Option School Site._ Tuckahoe Elementary School students, parents, teachers and the broader community have invested decades of time, energy, money, resources and sweat in the development and maintenance of its extraordinary Discovery Schoolyard. APS was supportive of this educational initiative as evidenced by its designation as an Exemplary Project. Tuckahoe has a .5 Special Projects position devoted to running its Discovery Schoolyard program. In recent years, the schoolyard has also been used to support STEAM learning so important to today’s learners. If the Tuckahoe site were to become a countywide option school, that option program might not have the staffing to maintain the
schoolyard nor an exemplary project to use its unique resources. This nationally-recognized program and jewel of community collaboration could be lost to APS and the neighborhood that built it. We have attached a description of this treasured resource and its value to APS, Tuckahoe and the broader community.

_Tuckahoe Elementary School as Necessary for Community Cohesion._ The 2011 Falls Church Area Plan was adopted, in part, as a comprehensive plan to bring cohesion to the Arlington East Falls Church neighborhood. This neighborhood was permanently divided in 1982 when its central business district was demolished and Interstate 66 bisected the community. Since that time the Arlington-East Falls Church Civic Association has been working closely with the County to address significant transportation and traffic challenges and to restore cohesion to this residential community. Elimination of the community’s beloved neighborhood elementary school (founded in 1953) would deal a fundamental blow to that effort.  

_Transportation Challenges Associated with the Arlington East Falls Church Community._ The 2011 East Falls Church Area Plan includes discussion of well-documented transportation concerns and automobile traffic associated with Interstate 66 and the East Falls Church Metro station. [https://arlingtonva.s3.dualstack.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2014/03/E-Falls-Church1.pdf](https://arlingtonva.s3.dualstack.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2014/03/E-Falls-Church1.pdf) The neighborhood experiences a high volume of cut-through traffic each day directly past Tuckahoe due the entrance to west-bound I-66 near 25th St. N. These issues have only been further complicated by the recent and planned changes to Interstate 66. In addition, it is important to note that Tuckahoe is directly across the street from Bishop O'Connell High School (a 1100 student private high school). Bishop O'Connell brings a significant volume of automobile traffic to the AEFCC community each day from the greater metropolitan area. If Tuckahoe becomes a countywide option program, additional buses and automobile traffic will come to this congested residential neighborhood. This will be further compounded by buses coming to the neighborhood to transport current Tuckahoe walkers to and from their "new" neighborhood school.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns. We look forward to opportunities to discuss these issues with you in person in the months to come.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

President

[Signature]

Vice President

Timothy Riordan, Secretary

[Signature]

Treasurer

Tuckahoe PTA Executive Board
Tuckahoe’s Discovery Schoolyard and Outdoor Learning Program

Facts About The Discovery Schoolyard
- An integrated network of seven outdoor classrooms, including a courtyard pond habitat designed to replicate the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Beatrix Potter Garden, ancient Greek plaza, a colonial village, a reading garden, and a friendship garden.
- Outdoor learning is integrated with curriculum objectives at all grade levels, including motor skill development, plant life cycle, inquiry skills, weather-related measurement, animal adaptations, properties of matter, natural resources and living systems, Virginia watershed, colonial history, and ancient history.
- Began as a school beautification effort in 1994 and grew over decades into a nationally-recognized model for outdoor learning.
- Courtyard Pond Habitat was physically built by Tuckahoe parents, staff, and community members in 1999. The pond ecosystem includes fish and turtles. It requires regular maintenance including cleaning of the filter, cleaning out of the pond, and feeding of the animals. All of the gardens require substantial care and maintenance, which is accomplished by students as part of the outdoor learning program, staff, parents, community members, and periodically landscaping crews paid for by PTA.

Awards and Recognition
- Recipient of National Science Teachers Association grant award
- Recipient of VA Environmental Endowment and Capt. Planet Foundation grant award
- Recipient of National Wildlife Federation grant award
- Recipient of Jamba Juice “It’s All About the Fruits and Veggies” grant award
- National host of American Horticultural Society’s Youth Gardening Symposium
- Featured on cover of national publications including Scholastic News; publication of National Home Gardening Club; and National PTA magazine

Community Collaboration & Investment
- Volunteers within and outside the Tuckahoe community give well over 400 person hours per year supporting the Discovery Schoolyard and Outdoor Learning Program.
- Student and community volunteers maintain gardens through weekly lunchtime Schoolyard Stewards program. Each year volunteers give 150 hours to this program.
- Family, staff, students, local scouting groups, and community members contribute over 200 volunteer hours each year through Garden Workdays.
- Tuckahoe Alumni regularly contribute to repair/renovations of gardens through boy and girl scout projects including the colonial gardens (2016) and the Greek pavilion (2014)
- Long-standing partnerships with the Rock Spring Garden Club (6 programs each school year) and the Arlington Food Assistance Center.
- PTA has invested over 20 years in support of this integral educational priority through volunteerism and consistent financial support. Fundraising efforts include annual Home and Garden Tour and sale of Commemorative Bricks in front of the school. These efforts fund a part-time assistant, necessary for the substantial amount of garden work including over the summers. These resources also directly support the educational program including maintenance, capital improvements and curriculum supplies.