

City Council/School Board Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

April 28, 2025

5:00 p.m.

Alexandria City Public Schools Central Office

1340 Braddock Place, Alexandria VA 22314

**City Council and School Board Member Attendees:**

Mayor Alyia Gaskins

Councilman John Chapman

School Board Chair Michelle Rief

School Board Member Tim Beaty

**DASH/ACPS TRANSPORTATION:**

*DASH Presentation:* Josh Baker (General Manager, DASH) and Martin Barna (Director of Planning, DASH) presented an analysis on student ridership patterns for DASH and route utilization.

**Key Points included:**

- 86-87% of ACHS students have access to DASH services within ¼ mile of their home address.
- 60-67% of ACHS bus riders could use current DASH lines 31,35 and 36 (A/B) directly to ACHS within 30 minutes.
- Current ridership surveys show that approximately 1,100 ACHS students ride DASH buses daily and 1,700 ride ACPS buses daily.
- Next steps will be identifying current DASH bus capacity for students, identifying bus lines that would be most applicable, and identifying additional routes/trips that would need to be added to expand services to accommodate students.

**Presentation Discussion:**

Dr. Kay-Wyatt (ACPS Superintendent) raised concerns about the data on DASH ridership, specifically about differentiating public and private school students. Mr. Baker explained that DASH continually collects data on ridership and compares it to past trends, in this instance showing that private school ridership on DASH is in the single digit percentages. He will determine if they can confirm this number.

Chair Rief requested information on the current DASH capacity for students. Mr. Barna stated that some routes directly servicing ACHS are at around 50-60% capacity while others are at 25% capacity and reiterated his intention to hone in on that data for the next session.

Dr. Alicia Hart, (Chief Operating Officer, ACPS) requested a more precise ridership count for ACHS students and pointed to other divisions/partnerships who have mechanisms to track student ridership. Mr. Barna recommended a survey of ACHS students to have them self-identify their preferred and real methods of transportation to and from school. Both Mr. Baker and Mr. Barna offered to collaborate on targeted days to collect student ridership data and methods to collect that data.

Mayor Gaskins recommended that a section in the City Manager's summary be dedicated to and explanation of the collection of ridership data given each session has had prolonged discussions about the efficacy and precision of ACHS student ridership data.

School Board Member Beaty asked Mr. Baker and Mr. Barna to identify circumstances that will require continued hybrid use of ACPS, DASH and other transportation partners such as transportation for children with special needs, or locations that may continue to be best served by traditional ACPS transportation given current resources.

#### **ACPS Presentation:**

Dr. Hart presented data from an ACPS study on routes and capacity.

#### **Key Points included:**

- Most precedent routes have been established for decades and are regularly reviewed to ensure optimal efficiency, to accommodate new students, and to accommodate special populations (specialized transportation, McKinney-Vento, etc.).
- Route consolidations occur regularly when ridership changes, stops become redundant, and when populations change.
- Routes vary from ridership as high as 55 passengers daily to as low as less than 14 daily
- There are 63 East-end routes (20 ACHS routes) & 106 West-end routes (30 ACHS routes).
- Overview of other localities with Public Transit Models for their students:
  - Arlington, DC, and Hampton City public schools were used as examples
  - Arlington and DC provide students with a card to tap for access to transit and to track ridership data
- ACPS has added 17 EVs since 2021
- ACPS owned mini-buses and vans to accommodate students with specialized transportation needs and decrease reliance on private carriers
- Utilizes cost-benefit ratios on all ACPS vehicles to ensure maximized lifecycle of each vehicle

### **ACPS Presentation Discussion:**

Mr. Beaty asked for other insights gleaned while discussing public transit models with other localities. Dr. Hart emphasized that all other localities reported the importance of collaboration with private partners and that a hybrid model is what allows the most flexibility and accountability (i.e. tracking student movement). Mayor Gaskins raised a follow up question about the tracking of student movement for after-hours programs and if other divisions provide benefits for students who attend after school programs.

Chair Rief requested clarity on the capacity for both ACPS and DASH given that ridership across both platforms shows approx. 2800 students when the school supports 4500 students. The chair encouraged collecting feedback from students and their families about the current state of transportation to and from school. Mayor Gaskins agreed, adding that it would be a good data source for the future.

Chair Rief asked DASH representatives if there would be a mechanism for DASH to reintroduce a tap system for students. Mr. Baker explained that because DASH is fare free it would be difficult to implement. Councilman Chapman agreed with Chair Rief and the mayor that a survey would be good to identify the total number of students driving (parking at the school and in area neighborhoods), riding buses (ACPS/DASH), and other means. Mayor Gaskins raised concerns about the efficacy and cost-benefit of the reimplementation of a tap to enter system for students

Mayor Gaskins recapped the meeting and directed the City Manager to develop a memo to the City Council and School Board summarizing the findings of the subcommittee and providing an outline of potential next steps. Mayor Gaskins requested that the City Manager collaborate with DASH, and ACPS staff on the memo, and suggested a joint session with the City Council and ACPS Board to review the memo and to move towards a decision.

Mr. Beaty requested an analysis of the implementation of previous studies of transportation fleet and maintenance to help identify areas of synergy and collaboration on transportation services in the City. Mayor Gaskins recommended including this analysis as an appendix. The City Manager raised concerns about resources needed and time constraints to perform that analysis before his memo is delivered to the Council and School Board. He noted that analysis on fleet maintenance may have a key role as the Council and School Board review and deliberate on next steps. Councilman Chapman recommended looking into those studies in the fall or winter of 2025.

The City Manager noted that he is prepared to collaborate with DASH and ACPS staff to draft a memo for the City Council and School Board. He noted concerns over the timing of a ridership survey as proposed. Councilman Chapman asked questions about timing and cost for a ridership survey as it may provide data that is useful to the City beyond the scope of this project. Dr. Hart recommended a survey of up to 1 month citing concerns over the 3-day length of previous ridership surveys. Dr. Hart also noted the significance of analyzing ridership trends over time.

Dr. Kay-Wyatt asked for clarity on which survey is to be pursued or if both surveys should be pursued referencing an internal ACPS survey of students and the DASH survey of riders. Councilman Chapman and Mayor Gaskins urged the City Manager to include recommendations for a survey in his memo.

Mayor Gaskins closed discussion on the ACPS presentation by noting the importance of continued collaboration and communication between bodies as both groups prepare for subcommittee meetings to ensure that all members are fully prepared.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION UPDATE:**

Kate Garvey (Director, Department of Community and Human Services), provided the follow key points regarding Early Childhood Education:

- Federal Funding Outlook
  - Proposed Budget Defunds HeadStart
  - Programs required to justify funds received
  - Congressman Beyer has requested to visit HeadStart classrooms
- Second Year of Coordinated Enrollment in Alex Preschool
  - Simplified process with one application and registration
  - Improved coordination
  - Citywide waitlist
    - Improves speed of system and access for families
- Month of the Young Child event
  - Link with video sent to members to save time
- Family Day Home Provider Month
  - May 17 Luncheon 10 AM – 1 PM
  - 47 providers will attend

Mayor Gaskins asked what amount of funding would be lost if the federal government moved forward with its proposed cut for HeadStart. Ms. Garvey responded that it would be \$3,648,288.

### **ACPS FOUNDATION UPDATE:**

Dr. Kay-Wyatt provided an update on efforts to start a foundation to support ACPS. Key points included:

- Groundwork for a foundation was started in 2018
  - In 2019 there was an update, but COVID impacted further work
- Educational Foundation through Act for Alexandria
  - Donations could be received on behalf of ACPS
  - Scope would need to be narrow to avoid overlap with other organizations
  - Registration as a 501(c)(3) has been completed
- Approval needed

- Bylaws need to be drafted and adopted
- Renewing any filings that have expired with the state
  - Articles of incorporation/bylaws
- Governance structure
  - Will require close coordination and deliberation
  - Board of governors will need to be appointed
  - Full time staff will need to be brought on

Councilman Chapman asked about costs associated with this process and how we could collaborate with organizations in the City to help offset startup costs. Dr. Kay-Wyatt acknowledged that there are organizations that can receive donations on the city's behalf. She emphasized the importance of narrowing the scope of the foundation so as to not impact other organizations and funding for items such as scholarships.

### **REDISTRICTING UPDATE:**

Chair Rief presented updates on ACPS redistricting efforts. Key points included:

- New Maps Released on ACPS redistricting site
- Steering Committee Staff and 3 School Board members will bring recommendations to the Board.
- Redistricting advisory committee made up of staff and community members
  - Membership available on the redistricting site
- May 12/June 5 Public Hearings
- School Board to vote on final plan on June 12, 2025

Councilman Chapman asked if there will be further iterations of the maps provided. Chair Rief stated that the maps provided are based on current feedback and that they are subject to change after public hearings. Mayor Gaskins asked Chair Rief for an update on expected actions after the June 12 vote. Chair Rief stated that the new boundaries will go into effect in the Fall of 2026 to give families time to prepare.

Mayor Gaskins asked about long range planning for new schools and boundaries. Chair Rief cited a policy that requires boundary analysis every 5 years or when a new school is built and noted that there are long term plans for new schools, conversions, and program changes that would require continued boundary analysis over the next 8 years. Mayor Gaskins asked Chair Rief for information about planned school conversions. Chair Rief said that there is a great need for a middle school and that a cost-effective method would be school conversion given space restraints and noted that collaboration with the City Council will be key. The Mayor reiterated the importance to the City Manager that the City Council and School Board have opportunities to collaborate on these items.

### **OTHER BUSINESS/UPDATES:**

Dr. Kay-Wyatt asked for clarification on the cancelation of the May meeting. Mayor Gaskins noted that the meeting will not occur as a result of several calendar conflicts.

Chair Rief thanked the City Council for their support in the add/delete process and supporting ACPS with additional funding.

Mr. Beaty asked for a consolidated report or document laying out the scope of the subcommittee. Ms. Wedeles (Strategic Initiatives Officer, City Manager's Office) noted that meeting minutes, and presentations are posted for each meeting

(<https://www.alexandriava.gov/subcommittees/city-council-school-board-subcommittee>). Mayor Gaskins asked if there is a single document that lays out the scope. Councilman Chapman stated that there was a visioning session in the past, but no deliverable came out of it. He said that it would be helpful to generate a living document that lists out the scope and areas of collaboration for the subcommittee. Chair Rief acknowledged the visioning session and agreed that a single document would be helpful.

Ms. Wedeles stated that June topic to be scope of work on long range plan and student generation. Mayor Gaskins also requested time for the City Manager to provide an update on his memo.

Chair Rief requested to see the meeting schedule for the full year to help coordinate on a consistent time. Mayor Gaskins agreed.

Mayor Gaskins requested an update on collective bargaining from the City Manager and Dr. Kay-Wyatt. The City Manager noted that there is a meeting scheduled and that updates will follow. Councilman Chapman asked if an update would come at a legislative meeting or in the Subcommittee. The City Manager said that depending upon the results of the meeting he will send a memo to the City Council and School Board. Dr. Kay-Wyatt stated that there will be an update before June.

### **MEETING MINUTES:**

Chair Rief made a motion to approve meeting minutes from March 24th and was seconded by Councilman Chapman. The minutes were approved unanimously.