



www.fairfaxfederation.org ~|~ P.O. Box 3913, Merrifield, VA 22116-3913

May 23, 2022

Dr. Reid and Ms. Lloyd:

We write to you both to welcome Dr. Reid to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and to offer our counsel on how to improve FCPS' communication with the broader Fairfax County community. In light of FCPS' central role in a number of highly public controversies this year—including COVID-related policies in schools, the ongoing federal lawsuit regarding TJ admissions, and the superintendent search process itself—we believe that clear, timely, and responsive communications are more essential than ever.

For context we note that enrollment figures for FCPS remain significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. Projected figures, as shown in the FY 2023 Proposed Budget, show that further enrollment decreases for FY 2023 may be likely. We are concerned that this may indicate diminished community support for our public schools, which are often referred to as the “crown jewel” of Fairfax County, and which we know are essential to our economic future. As additional context we mention that FCPS is today working with a politically polarized citizenry, in which educational issues are often viewed through a political lens.

Given this background, we respectfully offer the following comments:

- **Political Language**—To build trust in an era of fractured politics requires you to recognize that certain terms are fraught with political meaning, and to avoid placing FCPS on one side of political debates. For example, we are deeply concerned that the Office of Communications and Community Relations' top strategic objective¹ is to align communications “centered on equity.” The word “equity” is laden with partisan meaning. While our county's One Fairfax Policy provides a framework to consider equity in decision-making, this policy defines the term “equity” as equality of opportunity.² Increasingly, however, “equity” and “equality of opportunity” are claimed by members of our political parties as two very different things. Press releases and e-mails cannot litigate such linguistic distinctions. FCPS' stated mission centers education.³ We strongly suggest that all communications from FCPS do the same.

¹ *Strategic Plan, 2021-2023*. FCPS Office of Communication and Community Relations. June 28, 2021.

² “One Fairfax defines equity as [t]he commitment to promote fairness and justice in the formation of public policy that results in all residents – regardless of age, race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, marital status, disability, socio-economic status or neighborhood of residence or other characteristics – having opportunity to fully participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to its readiness for the future, and connect to its assets and resources.” <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/one-fairfax>

³ “Fairfax County Public Schools inspires and empowers students to meet high academic standards, lead healthy, ethical lives, and be responsible and innovative global citizens.” <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/beliefs-mission-vision>

• **Proactive and/or Timely Communications**—We recognize that the number of public controversies in schools during the past few years have made it difficult to provide timely and/or proactive communications about various policy changes. That being said, the public’s impression of FCPS is damaged when communications lag behind public events. We are unaware of whether there are structural or bureaucratic changes that may need to be made in order to streamline communications. Too often over the past year, however, FCPS’ e-mails or press releases arrived later than similarly-situated area school systems, or those communications lacked the kind of full detail which would give the community confidence in the thoroughness of your reflection on the issue at hand.

• **Meaningful Two-Way Communication**—Fairfax County must be assured that the FCPS administration is operating in a democratic manner, and therefore that our views are not just respected but sought out. While parents receive many surveys on a number of topics, often they do not receive reports about the results of those surveys. Such surveys do not represent meaningful community engagement; rather they ought to mark the beginning of ongoing conversation among administrators, the School Board, and the broader community. At times key constituencies have not been consulted before significant policy changes were proposed, which leads to the impression of an insular institution uninterested in building community support.

We are hopeful that Dr. Reid’s entrance to FCPS will provide an opportunity for a fresh beginning in community relations, and we hope you receive these suggestions knowing that the Federation continues to act as FCPS’ community partner in helping to maintain our schools’ reputation for excellence in education. We also hope you will view this letter as part of an ongoing conversation between our organizations, and that you will reach out whenever possible to continue that dialogue.

Sincerely,

The President and Education Committee of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
president@fairfaxfederation.org, education@fairfaxfederation.org


Sridhar Ganesan
President


Annmarie Swope
Co-Chair
Education Committee


Nancy Trainer
Co-Chair
Education Committee