



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

March 5, 2024

Dr. Reid and Members of the School Board:

We would like to call your attention to some recent consequential administrative decisions which we believe to have taken place in the absence of proper due process and stakeholder engagement, and which raise questions about the quality of the analysis on which they were based. We urge you to **review the substantive matters which we are raising with you today, while implementing a decision-making framework** which will, in the long run, prevent these kinds of problems from arising. The most recent Virginia Department of Education School Efficiency Review in 2013 advised FCPS to implement just such a decision-making framework, to improve its management practices.¹ We are concerned that FCPS' failure to heed this advice is resulting in educational policies and practices that are not evidence-based, implemented with fidelity, and/or properly monitored. Today we specifically mention the following examples:

- **New Barriers to AP-Level Courses in World Languages**—In the fall of 2023 FCPS changed its operational practice regarding the sequencing of World Language courses. Previously, students had been permitted to progress from a Level 3 World Language course directly to that language's AP-Level course at many high schools, and notably this sequence was the norm (rather than the exception) at TJHSS&T. Today, the FCPS course catalog lists all AP World Language courses with either a Level 4 course or an equivalency test as prerequisites. We have been told by the Instructional Services Department that these changes were made to align curriculum content more accurately with our surrounding Virginia divisions. We are puzzled that FCPS would find such a rationale compelling. FCPS operates differently from its surrounding jurisdictions on numerous fronts, and rightly so, given that our population's needs and expectations are unique.

This practice is inappropriate for our native speakers and for our advanced learners, who should have access to a World Language progression which meets their needs. It also takes the AP World Languages program out of play for any student who didn't enroll in Level 1 of a language in middle school, which diminishes students' ability to test out of or move forward more quickly with language requirements in college. We will also mention that the College Board recommends that students advance to an AP-level course in their fourth year of study. Students at TJHSS&T continue to be permitted to follow that progression, raising concerns about equitable access to appropriate instruction across the remainder of FCPS' high schools. Finally, we find these new barriers misplaced in light of our Portrait of a Graduate's focus on developing "Global Citizens." We do not understand why FCPS would prevent students from pursuing World Languages with as much enthusiasm and rigor as possible.

We note that this practice was not only implemented without significant public discussion—including consultation with the School Board—but also without input from the K-12 Coordinator of Advanced Academic Programs (AAP). The AAP's services in high school consist of honors courses, the AP and IB programs, and dual enrollment courses.

- **Policies Governing Secondary Grading and Assessment**—At a November 15, 2022 School Board work session, FCPS staff and the School Board reviewed a series of instructional and grading practices which were

¹ Gibson Consulting Group. "School Efficiency Review of Fairfax County Public Schools." September, 2013. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/1088/637946304800800000>

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations

shifted during the Coronavirus pandemic and/or which had been implemented inconsistently. Following FCPS staff's presentation, Board members expressed skepticism that staff had sufficiently paid attention to experimental design in its analysis, noting that schools made multiple changes simultaneously, and that the metrics shown were insufficient to judge success. Staff agreed to create a Secondary Assessment and Grading Committee to further gather and analyze data. The committee's scope of work includes the practice of using 50 as a minimum score; the treatment of late work; rolling vs. quarterly gradebooks; policies regarding reassessments, and standards-based grading.

We appreciate and support FCPS' continued analytic work on this important topic. We urge the recently elected School Board to refine its policies in light of the recommendations of the Secondary Assessment and Grading Committee, with the goal of ensuring consistency throughout FCPS.

Overall, however, we observe that the lack of a decision-making framework has led to a piecemeal, ad-hoc process on this topic especially since the pandemic. Schools have shifted their assessment and grading policies without extensive stakeholder communication and engagement, without showing that such policies are based on sound pedagogical analysis or best practices, and without tracking tools to measure success.

We believe that a decision-making framework would have clarified the locus of such policy decisions, leading to smoother implementation but also to improved accountability.

We agree with Dr. Reid that FCPS ought to shift toward a true school system, rather than a system of schools. For this shift to be successful, **a decision-making framework is essential** in ensuring that both individual schools and the school system utilize practices and policy based on the best available evidence combined with rigorous analysis. In the short term, we urge FCPS to **revisit both of these substantive matters** in a deliberative process with full stakeholder engagement. In the longer term, the implementation of a decision-making framework can help FCPS achieve improvements in the project management process and, importantly, achieve better substantive results for our students.

Sincerely,

The President and Education Chairs of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations



Sridhar Ganesan
President



Annmarie Swope
Co-Chair
Education Committee



Nancy Trainer
Co-Chair
Education Committee