

## MINUTES

Action of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board  
Via e-mail

December 20, 2011

Pursuant to the discussion at the VHCA BoD meeting of 12-12-11, Ms. Forschler-Horn drafted a letter summarizing the proposed position of the association on the pending redistricting proposals brought forth in November by the Atlanta Public School (APS) system. It is attached as "Addendum A."

After limited discussion and review, Mr. White moved and Mr. Wolfinger seconded its adoption on 12-18-11. Voting concluded on 12-20-11; it passed unanimously, specifically supported by Ms. Berg, Ms. Carlisle, Ms. Ferrero, Mr. Glancy, Mr. Gross, Ms. Papner, Ms. Wilkes, and Mr. Wolfson.

Mr. Erroll B. Davis, Jr.  
Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools  
130 Trinity Ave. Atlanta, GA 30303  
Atlanta, GA. 30301  
December 21, 2011

Dear Superintendent Davis:

The Virginia Highland Civic Association is committed to neighborhood schools, which play a key role in building a cohesive, strong and civic-minded community. We recognize that there are capacity and underutilization issues across Atlanta Public Schools (APS), which Superintendent Errol Davis is attempting to solve through these four options. But the timeline, methodology, and current options are seriously flawed. We are further concerned that solutions to problems with which we are wrestling today, will have long term implications for our community that are not being considered. We seek a creative and collaborative solution that respects our neighborhoods and promotes the education and well-being of our children. To that end, we ask APS to:

**Slow down the process and increase the level of transparency and inclusion.** The speed of this process is an issue in itself. It's a "rush-to-judgment" that alarms parents and makes thoughtful deliberation impossible. Unlike when SPARK was created to ease Morningside's overcrowding, which had reached crisis proportions, this redistricting impacts every child within APS and, in the vast majority of cases, changes will not address crisis level problems. Given this, we agree with Inman Park's call for a slower more deliberative process that, "would allow our communities to work together to find a common solution that benefits all children." We echo the call to use the Local School Councils (LSC) to achieve the following:

- Combine our SRT's Local School Councils with the initial School Reform Team-3 (SRT-3) Focus Group to create a single task force charged with ensuring all community and stakeholder proposals are heard and included in the rezoning process.

- Dispatch this task force, under LSC bylaws, to engage appropriately with APS, demographers, and the Atlanta Board of Education (ABOE) to arrive at one to two new SRT-3 rezoning proposals to submit to demographers, APS, and the ABOE for actual rezoning consideration.
- Use this task force, under Local School Council bylaws, to build community trust through constructive parent and community stakeholder engagement across neighborhoods. Ensure that all voices and options relevant to this SRT and high school cluster are shared and clearly communicated throughout the process – from the demographic analysis to Superintendent Davis’ recommendation to final ABOE decisions.

If there are tough choices to be made, citizens need to know that all reasonable options have been heard and explored. But we can only do this if the process is fair, transparent, and inclusive.

**Share all of the data being used to make decisions.** It is impossible to evaluate the data’s accuracy or to review all the underlying assumptions without making the data available. The absence of familiarity with neighborhood basics (i.e. knowing what streets are in what communities) and recommendations that don’t meet known state standards do not inspire confidence in observers. For example:

- The current SPARK/Hope-Hill combination, as proposed in Option 3 and 4, does not address capacity issues. SPARK/Hope-Hill K-2 at Hope-Hill can only use 21 out of 28 classrooms because current classroom dimensions do not meet state standards.
- SPARK/Hope-Hill K-2 at SPARK would immediately be over capacity, and this does not include the potential of additional students arriving from the Intown Academy.

**Honor Communities.** APS stated that retaining community and not splitting neighborhoods was a driving objective. We strongly agree with it; research indicates that community plays a very important role in the success and stability of a child. The neighborhoods who currently attend these schools are a community; this includes Midtown, Poncey-Highland, Candler Park, Inman Park, Lake Claire, and Morningside. Morningside and Virginia-Highland have been indistinguishable to most citizens – including your demographers, who didn’t know their boundaries – for many decades.

The current process incentivizes neighborhoods to pick a choice that benefits them at cost to their neighbors’ wishes; it pits neighborhoods against one another. *For this reason, the VHCA rejects all of the options being proposed.*

**Keep and Promote Walkable Neighborhood Schools.** As much as possible, keep our schools within a walkable distance from our homes. Walkable schools contribute to a quality education by reducing absenteeism and increasing parental involvement. They also decrease costs by streamlining and simplifying transportation.

Several of the options presented place Springdale Park and Morningside children miles away from their homes - in the case of Morningside - many miles away. This is counter to APS’ primary goal – the promotion of quality education.

**Expand Springdale Park and Mary Lin’s capacity as rapidly as possible.** The VHCA supports the implementation of solutions that will address current, pressing problems and speak to the concerns of parents. SPARK is currently almost 100 students over capacity for a building that was only opened two years ago. When the parking lot property was purchased, provisions were made to use this area for future expansion; furthermore, property exists adjacent to and in close proximity to the school may be available for purchase. We understand from APS Board Members that SPLOST funding is available to start building immediately in the northern end of the property. Under any scenario, the need for increased space at both schools is clear; the time for that expansion is now.

**Ensure that all students live “in the zone”.** There are inevitably some students at every school who do not live in the community. The numbers may be small and when space was not at a premium, it wasn’t an issue, but now it is. An audit represents a good-faith effort that APS is addressing internal admissions processes while addressing space issues.

In closing, for decades our citizens have advocated for and supported all public schools, even in times when the very existence of their neighborhoods was threatened by highway construction and dwindling populations. These communities – like all those in this city – deserve a fair, informed and deliberative voice in future decisions on educational topics. Such approaches are the right of every neighborhood. We are capable of considering difficult decisions that are the result of a fair, transparent and inclusive process; our disappointment in and resistance to anything less than that will be unending.

We look forward to collaborating with the surrounding neighborhoods and APS in the development of a solution to our capacity issues.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association