

County Council Members:

The students at Arcola Elementary need the Innovative School Year schedule. Please continue to fund 5 additional weeks of learning at a school where 76% of students are low-income and 88% are Latino or African American. Our ISY weeks are not optional summer school. Teachers begin in earnest in July with students who will be in their class for the next 11 months and face challenges that are not as extreme at other MCPS schools.

Mobility - Our school typically has a 25 percent mobility rate, which means that 1 in 4 students either leave Arcola or move into our community during the academic year. According to the Schools At A Glance data, which was compiled in September 2022, that figure jumped to 42.7% in the 2021-22 year. Each time a new student arrives, teachers have to assess their skills, search for information about their educational history, and help them integrate into the classroom. That's time that the teachers can not spend planning lessons or providing feedback on student work. That also means that nearly half the students at Arcola have not had the benefit of the additional weeks of instruction as provided by the ISY schedule. The County Council needs to address this with programs to increase homeownership in areas with high mobility rates. The County Council also needs to require that apartment rental leases for families with children under the age of 18 end between June 15 and July 1 to minimize disruption to children's education caused by moves within Montgomery County.

Concentration of Poverty - Schools like Arcola, with high percentages of low-income, Latino students and English as a Second Language (ESOL) students are clustered in already dense suburbs such as Silver Spring, Wheaton, and Gaithersburg. In 2019, three-quarters of African American, Latino, and ESOL students and more than 80% of all low-income students in MCPS were enrolled in high-poverty schools. Our school district boundaries have barely budged since then. Yet half of MCPS schools are overcrowded, meaning that students learn in portable classrooms, and 19 schools are under-utilized and could potentially hold more students. The Board of Education needs to examine the results of the 2021 analysis of school boundaries and make adjustments to improve school utilization, decrease transportation expenses, and increase the socio-economic diversity of our schools.

The impact of Arcola's ISY calendar can not be measured during a five-year period that includes quarantine and 12 months of remote learning. In the late 1960s, researchers evaluated Pre-K programs and found they did not impact students' test scores. However, James Heckman and other economic researchers with longer-term studies have found that students who attended Pre-K have high lifetime earnings, better physical health, and are less likely to get arrested, go on welfare, or be unemployed as adults. Time will show that our ISY programs that include learning with mindfulness and Project Lead the Way science lessons, and additional food and safe supervision during the summer will propel our students' growth as they mature into adulthood.

The Board of Education and the County Council need to address barriers in our community and continue to fund 5 weeks of learning, nourishment, safety, and community for children who need it most.

Sincerely,  
Sara Nathan  
English Language Development Teacher  
Arcola Elementary School