

Mimi Carter

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Dear Members of City Council and Mayor Euille:

Thank you for having me. My name is Mimi Carter and I am President of the Mount Vernon Community School PTA and I am here today as an advocate for the entire city's schools, its teachers, and children.

But before I begin asking, I am going to first say thank you for the last few years and the way you have supported Alexandria City Schools. As some of you know, I have been involved in the schools for the last seven years and began my advocacy in 2000 as part of the Del Ray Education Committee. Back then we were trying to keep middle income earners in Alexandria Schools, instead of moving away and going to Arlington and Fairfax. We held events, such as State of the Schools, and others where we proselytized how fabulous the city schools' were if members of the Alexandria parent community would just walk through the doors, and see what we had to offer.

Well it worked. Middle income earners began staying. They began renovating their houses and slowly growing each school's active parent community, family by family. Additionally, ACPS too kept its end of the deal. Between 2000 and 2007, ACPS has gone from having 2 schools being accredited to 14 out of 16 schools now accredited. This is fantastic but it's not enough. And I'll tell you why.

According to the 2007 Washington Area Board of Education (WABE) Report, Alexandria has the highest Free and Reduced Price Eligibility, with 61 percent of its students qualifying. This is **higher** than **any** school district in the area. With those kinds of numbers, we have a harder road to hoe in terms of bringing these children to where they need to be academically. It's simply more expensive and requires more services, such as special education, social services and the like. We as a community and you as our City Council have a responsibility to provide a "free and appropriate education" to these children in Alexandria.

According to same report, Alexandria City also has the highest drop out rate and some of the lowest SATs scores of any school system in the metro area. We are at 4.5 percent which is not only higher than any other school district, its DOUBLE, any other school district except Prince George's County. In this same report, we are third from the bottom in SAT reading scores, and third from the bottom in SAT math scores.

Maybe it has something to do with what we pay our Alexandria teachers. According to this same report, Alexandria has the **lowest average teacher salary** in metro area. According to the report, Alexandria has an average teaching salary of \$42,000 a year, while our counterparts in Arlington pay \$69,000, Fairfax \$63,000, Falls Church \$62,000, Loudoun \$58,000, Manassas pays \$59,000, Montgomery County \$67,000 and Prince George's County still pays more than we do with \$55,000.

This is appalling. And ~~you~~^{the} city manager suggests we shouldn't pay our teachers a cost of living adjustment? _{yet}

This is crazy. And it is **very** short sighted. We as a city, you as council, have come so far in understanding what this incredibly economically and socially diverse school community needs in terms of education. For the last several years you **supported** the schools **and understood we needed a state of the art high school, elementary schools with small class sizes, and teacher training programs that encourage young teachers to succeed and flourish.** You get it and you have supported us for years and understood that we needed this money to improve the schools, retain middle income families and move student achievement forward. This City Council has for many years now understood that an investment in the schools is an investment in the community.

Crime is down. Commercial investment is up. Real estate prices are steady.

But this could all change. If we cut this budget and cut teachers' pay, and lose programs that are improving student achievement, families will not stay and will begin leaving ...again.

I am recommending that we thoughtfully look at the tax rates of other jurisdictions, which also spend between 35 and 40 percent of their budget on schools and see if we can't do a little better than what your city manager suggested. Yes, maybe we could ask school administrators to begin paying part of their health insurance, maybe we could ask the school board not to fast forward the Capital Improvement budget, but maybe too we could look at our community, and the children we serve and realize that for the time being, an investment in the schools will lead to thoughtful and productive children who will give back to this community.

I think many of us, many of my neighbors, even those without children in the system, would see this as a solid investment.

Thank you.