

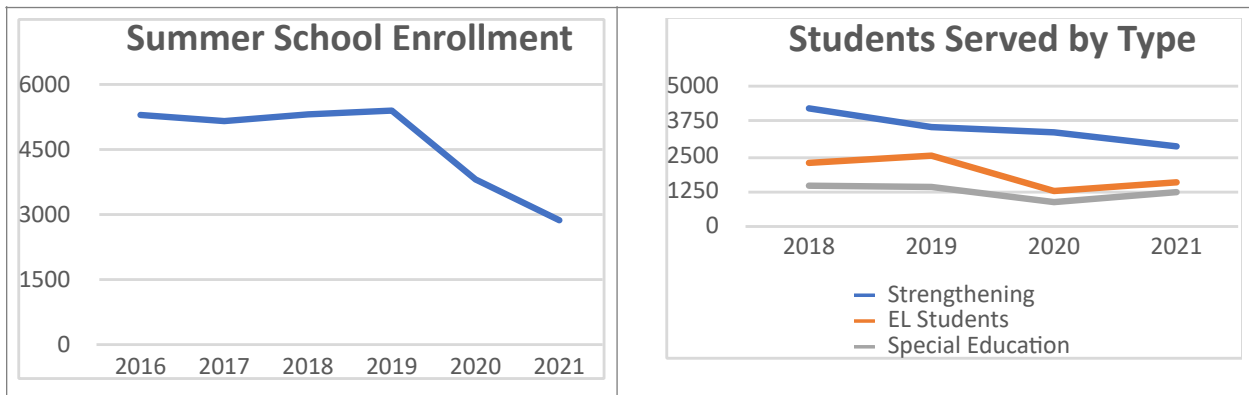
APS' Summer School Program

Too Few Students Provided Too Little Results at Too Great a Cost

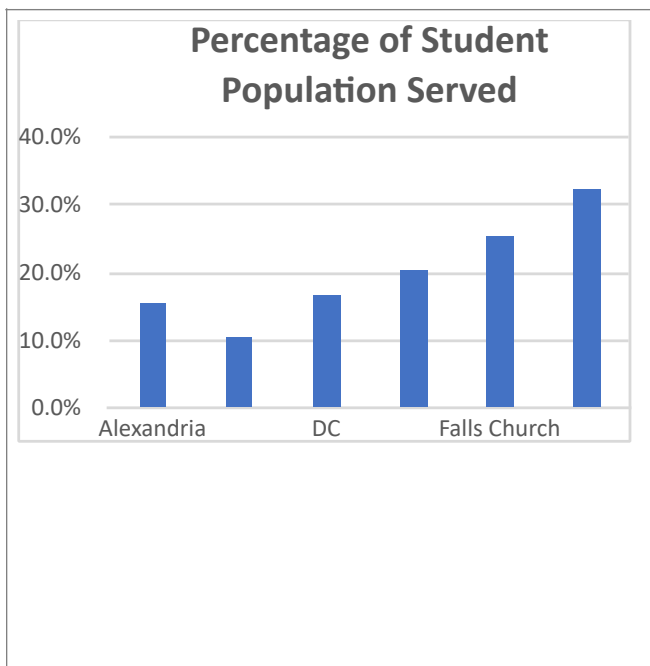
Last summer, many APS parents were led to believe that their children would be eligible for summer instruction (sometimes even canceling positions at summer camps), only to be told at the last minute that there was not sufficient space due to a shortage of teachers. Those following APS' use of ARP funding (in which APS budgeted \$4.6 million for summer school) hoped that a silver lining to the smaller-than-expected summer school program would be left-over ARP funds that might be used for learning loss recovery. However, in APS' [Report](#) provided at the November 16, 2021 School Board meeting, we learned that despite having a summer school class almost half the size of prior year classes, APS managed to spend almost 25% more in exchange for only modest performance gains amongst students enrolled in the program. This performance raises significant questions about how APS spent all those funds, and what steps APS will take going forward to improve the effectiveness of its summer school program and to address learning losses from the past 18 months.

APS Summer School Enrollment

APS' 2021 summer school enrollment was the lowest enrollment of any year in the last six years. The drop off in the number of students results largely from APS not offering enrichment instruction in 2020 and 2021. But APS's summer program has also seen a decline (compared to 2018 and 2019) in students receiving strengthening instruction, and in English language learners and special education students.



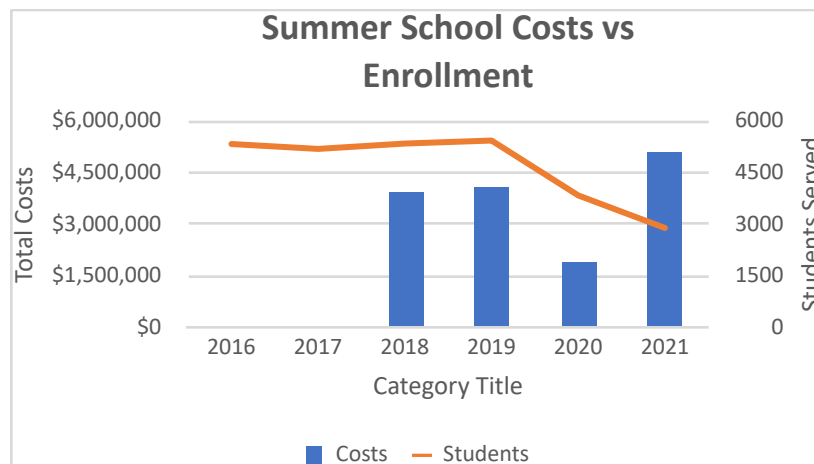
As Mr. Goldstein noted, this past year’s summer school program only served 100 students who were not English language learners or special education students.



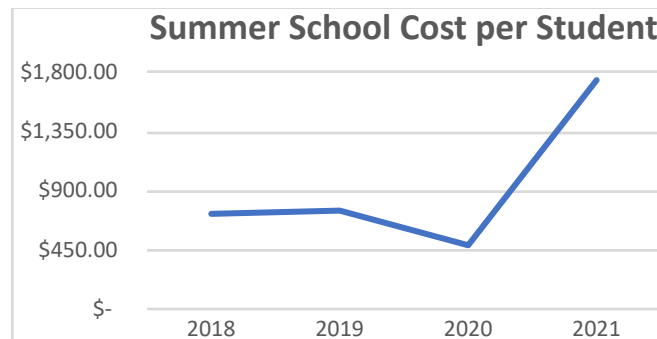
Other school districts in the area saw this past summer as an opportunity to begin to make up the learning losses suffered over the prior year, and [reportedly](#) saw some of their largest summer programs ever. Fairfax [reportedly](#) doubled summer school attendance from 2019, Baltimore city increased its summer program 70 percent, New York City offered summer school to all students for the first time, and both Norfolk and Virginia Beach dramatically increased their summer [programs](#). Based on available publicly reported information, Arlington appears to have served the smallest percentage of its student population among neighboring school districts.

APS Summer School Spending

Although APS enrolled the fewest students in the past six years, APS reported that its 2021 summer school program cost approximately \$5.1 million, the most in at least the last four years. That this year’s summer program was 2.6 times the cost of the 2020 summer program (even though APS taught fewer students in 2021 than it did in 2020) might be expected given the virtual instruction in 2020. But, the 2021 summer program also cost 24% more than the 2019 summer program, even though APS served almost half the number of students in 2021 compared to 2019.



As a result of spending far more to serve far fewer students, APS’ cost per student more than doubled over the average from prior years. Some of those increased costs are attributable to the need to provide bonuses to attract a sufficient number of teachers, but that could not explain the entire difference. APS [reported](#) in May 2021 that it had recruited 175 teachers; a \$1,000 bonus per teacher would only increase costs by \$175,000. Ms. Loft indicated in comments to the Board that the increase was due in part to the need for contract services staff to deliver extended school year instruction, and the need to supplement elementary students’ learning using a digital model. However, according to a response to a FOIA request, APS spent only \$331,597 on purchased services, with the balance being used to pay for salaries and benefits. The School Board did not seek any clarification regarding those costs following APS’ presentation, and Arlington Parents for Education continues to seek data to understand why these costs increased so dramatically in a year when fewer teachers were available and fewer students were served.



APS Summer School Performance

APS reported that students in this last year’s summer program saw very modest performance improvements. Middle school students who started the summer program 39% behind the average of their national peers on their Reading Inventory (RI) scores improved by only 2% over the summer, starting fall still 37% behind their national peers. At the elementary school level, the gap was narrowed by only 3.3% (using the DIBELs score). In math, APS students eligible for summer school closed the gap by 7.5%, starting the summer at an average of 38.5% below the national average Math Inventory (MI) score, and ending the summer 30.9% below average. APS also reported that based on Virginia Growth Assessments administered to students eligible for summer school, for two categories of students (those scoring low proficient and above, and those scoring at high basic) students who did *not* enroll in summer school outperformed those who *did* enroll in summer school. Only for students who were identified as Below High Basic did summer school attendees outperform those who did not attend summer school.

Ms. Loft reported that the historic efficacy of the summer program was difficult to assess due to inconclusive student performance data. This seems odd, as APS has historically (in [2017](#), [2018](#) and [2019](#)) evaluated the summer school program using SOL data, which consistently showed a median improvement of between 0 and 50 points.

APS noted that its historic summer school program has not been particularly focused, and described its summer program as being of “Low efficacy.” APS also recognized that the current summer school program of 20-half days equates to only 10 full instructional days of school, which would not be sufficient to ensure students recover a full year of instruction.

Summer School and Learning Loss Recovery Going Forward

APS has in the [past](#) indicated that the summer program would be a significant means of addressing the needs of students who suffered from virtual instruction. Indeed, of the ARP funds that APS initially [identified](#) as dedicated to learning loss recovery, two thirds were devoted to the summer program. More recently, APS [identified](#) the summer program as the *only* program directed at unfinished learning for purposes of the ARP funding requirements. Yet that program served only 10% of the student population, and is described as “low efficacy” and insufficient to recover a full year’s worth of instruction. If students’ learning loss cannot be sufficiently recovered through the summer program, how does APS intend to make up the 4-6 [months](#) of instruction students are behind on average? And given its own assessment of the APS summer program, what does APS intend to do to improve that program? As Secretary Miguel Cardona has [stated](#): “The summer learning experiences we’re talking about now really need to be better than they ever were in the past.”

Increase Instructional Time. APS must find additional means to address the learning loss from this past year. That might include full-day summer school classes, extending the length of the summer school program, or offering multiple sessions of summer school (as was done in [Arlington](#), Texas). Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education Covid-19 [handbook](#) recommends that summer programs be “full-day lasting five to six weeks.” The limited research ([here](#) and [here](#)) that exists on summer school effectiveness also suggests that to be effective, summer school programs should be full-day, of long duration (at least five weeks to offset periodic absences), should have small class sizes (ideally 8-14 students per teacher), should provide high-quality instruction, and should focus on attendance (but need not disguise academics to boost attendance). Unfortunately, APS’ presentation to the Board proposed a summer program of the same length (four weeks at elementary, 5 weeks at secondary), and same ***half-day*** duration. If APS does not intend to extend instructional time during the summer, it should set forth a plan to provide additional instructional time during the school year, including intensified tutoring, extended school days, extended school year, and double-dosing of certain topics.

Ensure Sufficient Staffing and Increase Participation. APS should find a way to increase participation among APS students in the summer program. At a minimum, APS must not be in a position again of having to turn away students needing those services due to a lack of sufficient teachers. To its credit, APS stated during the November 16, 2021 School Board presentation that it intended to be proactive in recruiting teachers, it would provide funding for incentives for teachers as it did in 2021, it would use smaller class sizes, and it would provide a curriculum and resources (which was prepared last year) so that teachers would not have to write their own lesson plans. Yet, except for proactive recruiting (and perhaps somewhat smaller class sizes),

those steps were largely undertaken this last year, producing equivocal results. At a minimum, APS should commit to having sufficient teachers lined up by March so that it can proactively expand its summer program, and can reassure parents that it will have sufficient teachers to staff the program this year. APS should also more proactively encourage students who need help (and their parents) to enroll in the summer program. If APS runs into challenges in staffing the program with teachers from APS and the surrounding districts, it should expand the scope of its search.

Enrichment Programs. This next year will mark the third year that APS has not provided enrichment options for its summer students. We don't fault APS for prioritizing its resources this year on the critical need for recovery services. But this should not become the new normal. As Dr. Kanninen noted during the November 16, 2021 Board meeting, new credit opportunities for summer students can be an important means to create additional space for electives. In the recent past (2018 and 2019), APS offered over a dozen summer school enrichment opportunities that served hundreds of students each summer, including for example Google Lit Trips, the Leadership Academy, Introduction to Algebra, Summer Literacy Academy, blended Algebra II, and many others. Offering those enrichment courses permits a broader set of APS students to participate in summer learning opportunities, and also helps level the playing field with those who can afford private summer learning opportunities. An additional benefit: offering an expanded set of summer instruction may help alleviate the stigma some students feel taking summer school classes. Ms. O'Grady explained that even before the pandemic Cintia Johnson had suggested eliminating many of those enrichment programs due to challenges in retaining sufficient teachers. Such excuses should not be acceptable. APS – like any top tier school system – must find a way to overcome such challenges, not shrink from them.

Partnering with the County or Community Organizations. If APS does not offer full-day instructional days (as the research recommends), APS should at least consider partnering with the County, or with community organizations to provide a hybrid instructional/recreational programming day. For [example](#), in New York City, the school system partnered with the Department of Youth & Community Development to offer a hybrid program, with morning academics led by schools followed by recreational activities in the afternoon. Similarly, Miami-Dade [partnered](#) with multiple non-profits to expand educational and enrichment opportunities. APS could partner with the County Department of Parks and Recreation to create day-long programs that would offer instruction in the morning, and recreation in the afternoon. Such a program would both be more enticing for students, and also make it easier for working parents to enroll their students in such programs.

Arlington Parents for Education is a volunteer-led, non-partisan coalition of parents, teachers, students and citizens dedicated to accountability, transparency and education excellence at Arlington Public Schools. Follow us [**@ArlParentsForEd**](#)