The logo for Arlington Parents for Education is centered on a dark blue background. It features the text "ARLINGTON PARENTS FOR EDUCATION" in white, uppercase letters. A vertical orange line is positioned to the left of the text. Below the logo, the tagline "Accountability. Transparency. Educational Excellence." is written in an orange, sans-serif font.

ARLINGTON  
PARENTS FOR  
EDUCATION

Accountability. Transparency. Educational Excellence.

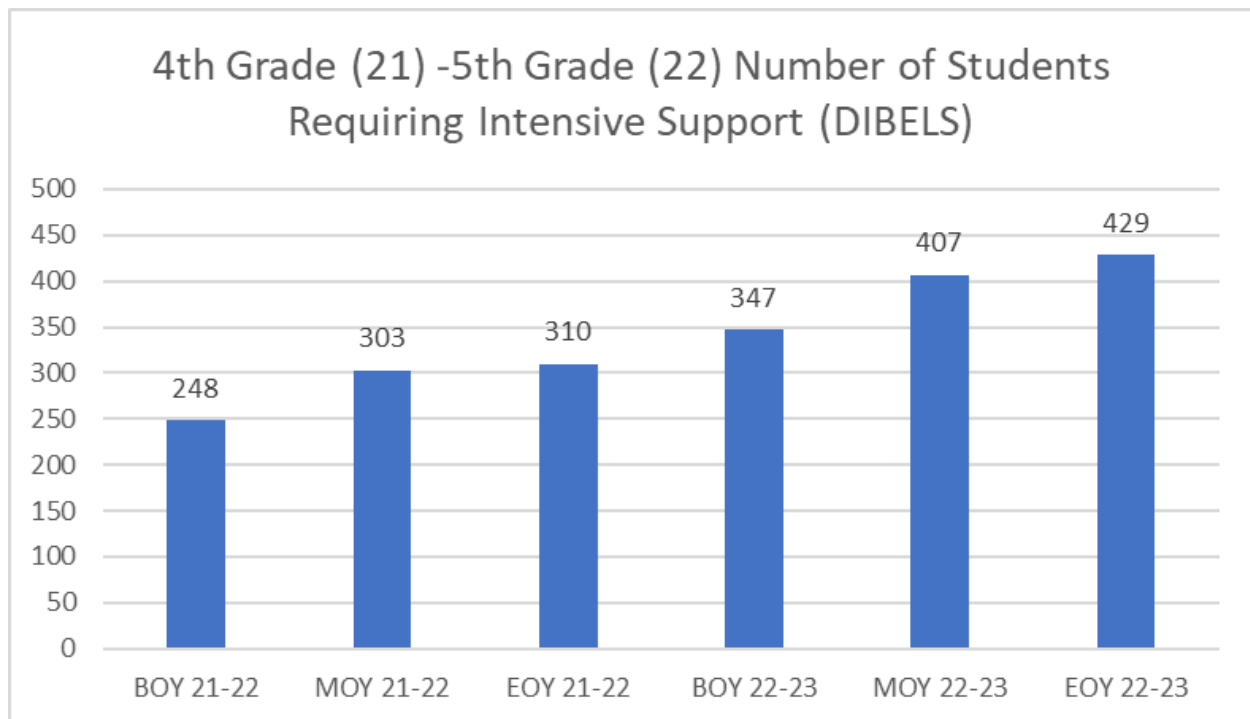
July 11, 2023

Board Member Kadera, Dr. Durán and Members of the Arlington School Board:

Writing on behalf of Arlington Parents for Education, we are following up on the analysis Ms. Kadera recently published based on APS' DIBELS scores. We agree with her that this year's DIBELS test scores show good progress, including an uptick in the percentage of APS students scoring in the proficient zone (from 72% to 75% on the end of year exam), and a reduction in the number and percentage of students needing intensive support in the 2022-23 school year.

These numbers appear to show promise and provide evidence in support of the new CKLA curriculum and reading instruction. But, in reviewing the data ourselves, we identified a continuing trend that merits urgent attention by APS. Specifically, our graduating 5<sup>th</sup> grade class includes an increasing number of students identified as needing intensive support. Overall, 14.9% of our elementary students are identified as needing intensive support. However, that rises to 21.2% when looking at just 5<sup>th</sup> graders. In other words, one-fifth (or 429) of those students entering middle school this fall need intensive support in reading. Our 5<sup>th</sup> graders were among some of the last to receive balanced literacy instruction in first and second grade and were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade during the pandemic.

Over time we expect to see the number of students in this cohort needing intensive support shrink, but the opposite has been true. At the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 248 students in this cohort needed intensive support. Now as this cohort enters middle school, 429 students need intensive support. This is an increase of 73%, or 181 students, who need intensive support compared to when they started 4<sup>th</sup> grade. We are also hearing of more specific harms for some students. For instance, one family's son has been denied admission into APS's Secondary Program for Autistic Students (SPSA) because he is too far behind in reading. Families of students with disabilities should not be required to decide which of their child's needs should be met.



This performance continues the trend [identified](#) amongst 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students last year, though the number of affected 5<sup>th</sup> grade students this year (429) is 9 percent higher than last year (395).

Further, though admittedly not apples-to-apples, the HMH data from this year's 6<sup>th</sup> graders suggest that APS only achieved a modest reduction in the number of students who are reading below grade level from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Further, the HMH data reflects a persistent percentage (27-29%) of students reading below grade level through each of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, suggesting that current remediation efforts in middle school may not be sufficient to address the burgeoning needs of our graduating 5<sup>th</sup> grade class.

We urge APS to take bolder action to remediate this issue as students advance into APS' middle schools this fall, beyond the Grade 6 Reading Strategies course. This might include the creation of an intensified reading course targeted on an opt-out basis to those students in need of intensive support. Alternatively, it might include targeted tutoring, or developing a partnership with certain local non-profits to offer additional support for those students outside of the classroom. The above data strongly suggests that the status quo instructional program is not addressing the needs of this 5<sup>th</sup>-grade cohort.

We flagged this issue [last year](#) and have repeatedly called for more specific intervention - including high-dosage tutoring and partnerships with non-profit groups working with APS students outside of the classroom. Likewise, School Board members have previously [raised questions](#) about those [secondary students](#) who need more intensive support and yet those numbers continue to grow. What specific steps is APS undertaking to ensure these students have access to intensive reading support classes or tutoring? Are intervention groupings limited to 3 students per best practices or are students being grouped in larger but less effective groups? Is there an adequate assessment tool for secondary students, similar to DIBELS used in the elementary grades? Are there a sufficient number of staff who have been adequately trained to deliver necessary reading interventions?

Rather than pass these students along until high school, where remediation becomes still harder, we urge APS to implement a program this summer that could be deployed in the fall for this targeted subset of APS' student population. We likewise recommend that APS set a goal that no student leaves an APS middle school still needing reading intervention.

We appreciate all your work this past year in making the progress we have seen.

Sincerely,

Arlington Parents for Education

Alison Babb  
Reg Goeke  
Sheila Kelly  
Katie Sunderland