



Prince William County

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Providing A World-Class Education

January 9, 2017

Ms. Kelly Gardner
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

To the Honorable Kelly Gardner:

We are writing today as members of the Prince William County School Board, requesting the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, review recent activities of both the Prince William County School Board (PWCSB) and the Prince William County Board of County Supervisors (PWCBOCS), as we believe recent actions may violate the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (“EEOA”), 20 U.S.C. § 1701 et seq. The DoJ is familiar with the PWCSB as it has recently intervened on numerous occasions with respect to racially unfair proposed school boundaries, non-English language learners and diabetic children.

Of current concern to the undersigned members of the PWCSB is a recent gambit in which the PWCBOCS offered previously-unappropriated funds to the PWCSB for the express purpose of selecting a more expensive and opulent design for a new high school to be built in the predominantly white western portion of the County, which it would then match with an equal amount to be used generally in the predominantly minority eastern part of the County. In other words, a capital improvement of \$10.5 million for a single, primarily white high school in the west, along with \$10.5 million to be used at dozens of predominantly black/Hispanic elementary schools in the east. Potential funding for predominately minority schools was made contingent upon the approval of a more extravagant model for the new high school in the predominately white portion of the county. The anticipated enrollment of the new high school in the west is 2,500, which represents \$4,200/per student, while the combined attendance of elementary schools in the east is approximately 21,000, meaning that \$500/per student has been made available in the primarily minority schools. This proposal was unfortunately accepted by the PWCSB on January 4, 2017, by a vote of 5-3 (with the undersigned providing the three votes against).

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Ryan Sawyers, *Chairman* • Lillie G. Jessie, *Vice Chairman, Occoquan District*
William J. Deutsch, *Coles District* • Diane L. Raulston, *Neabsco District* • Alyson A. Satterwhite, *Gainesville District*
Gil Trenum, *On Deployment, Brentsville District* • Shawn L. Brann, *Acting Member, Brentsville District*
Justin David Wilk, *Potomac District* • Loree Y. Williams, *Woodbridge District*

As you may be aware, all local funds for the Prince William County Schools division are allocated by the PWCBOCS, as the PWCSB has no taxing authority. Rather, it presents an annual budget request to the PWCBOCS, including for capital improvements, which is then acted upon by the PWCBOCS. The quid pro quo offered by the PWCBOCS is unique and extraordinary, and is without precedent to our knowledge. The PWCSB has on three prior occasions voted for the less expensive, more utilitarian design for the new high school in the west. Given that PWC has the largest class sizes in the Commonwealth, making funds available for class size reduction in a minority-majority part of the county contingent upon selecting a high school design that disproportionately benefits a white-majority area of the county is on its face antithetical to racial equality and the policies of the EEOA.

The Washington Post published an article as recently as November 15, 2016 titled "Virginia's schools are growing more racially and economically segregated." That article cites a Commonwealth Institute report that also found that "the number of students attending schools that are considered racially and economically isolated doubling from 2003 to 2014 . . .". A separate report published by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that "isolated schools were less likely to offer a full range of math and science courses than other schools, for example, and were much more likely to use expulsion and suspension as disciplinary tools." Among Northern Virginia counties in 2014, Prince William County had the most isolated schools, over double the number of Fairfax County and more than five times that of Arlington. The Commonwealth Institute also pointed out that "Prince William County is the 12th wealthiest county in the entire country yet you have 11 schools within that school division that have that powerfully negative combination of high poverty and high minority students."

In addition to the substantive shortcomings and the highly inequitable impact that such a "deal" would lead to, there were numerous procedural oddities and maneuvers that reflect upon the improper and highly suspect nature of the actions of both the PWCBOCS and the PWCSB. We request that the Civil Rights Division take immediate steps to review this matter and take whatever action is necessary to ensure that racially-unfair policies are not implemented. Given the plan to begin to break ground in the near future on the new high school, time is of the essence.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Ryan Sawyers
Chairman, At-large

Lillie Jessie
Vice Chairman, Occoquan District

Loree Williams
Woodbridge District