

Key Immersion School Survey: Results

Summary

- The Key PTA surveyed the current (K-3) and future Key Immersion community for feedback on APS' proposals to move the program. The response rate for the survey was very high: Families with 255 Key Immersion K-3 students (about 53 percent of total K-3 students) submitted responses. Families with 149 likely future students also participated in the survey.
- If Key was moved to the Arlington Traditional School (ATS) location, survey responses suggest that 63 percent of current Key K-3 students would follow the school to its new location. Among families with Taylor and Arlington Science Focus (ASFS) as neighborhood schools, only half of the current K-3 Key students would remain with the Key immersion program.
- Of the 60 responding families with K-3 students who primarily speak Spanish at home, only 22 (or 36%) would follow the program to ATS. A much larger share of students from Spanish-speaking families walk to school, and they and their families face more obstacles to making a move away from the current Key location.
- Retention rates among students not yet enrolled in immersion are uniformly lower than those for current students.
- Thus, elementary seats recovered in the Ballston-Rosslyn corridor by busing ASFS and Taylor students away from the Courthouse area to an immersion program located at the ATS site would be lost again (within a few years) as current students transition to middle school and future students zoned to ASFS and Taylor opt not to pursue a more distant immersion program.

Background

Motivated by growing student populations and [dearth of available elementary seats](#) in the eastern and southern parts of the county, in October, 2019, APS announced the beginning of the 2020 boundary planning process. In the first phase of this process, APS is evaluating two proposals to move option elementary schools.¹ The current remaining option proposes moving the Key Immersion program to the ATS building. Moving the Key program to the ATS building would move the Key program inside the current boundary for the Claremont immersion program. Thus, although not specifically discussed by APS as part of this proposal, it seems

¹ On Monday, December 9, 2019, at a community meeting, APS Staff announced that they were not planning to propose "Option 2" to the School Board. APS Staff continues to propose Option 1.

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reasonable that the boundaries for the two immersion programs would change and some individual Key students may be transferred to Claremont.

As part of the planning process, APS is assuming that option school communities will remain with their option schools. [Specifically](#):

*“When we say we’re going to move a school community, we assume the entire community will move,” said APS Integrated Project Planner Gladis Bourdouane.
“When we do boundary changes, we will of course consider changes that include demographics, but if the school moves, the communities will move together.”*

Unlike some of the other option [schools](#), the Key Immersion program draws disproportionately from the populations of two neighborhood schools: Over 360 Key students, more than half, are drawn from Taylor and ASFS attendance zones. The Key PTA wanted to test that the assumption that option communities--both current and future--would travel with the program to a new location. If the community does not move with the immersion program, then the program, which depends on the right mix of Spanish- and non-Spanish speakers could be negatively impacted. Moreover, if the community does not move, then APS will not meet its goal for freeing up badly-needed elementary seats in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor.

The Survey

The Key PTA developed a survey for families with children currently attending grades K-3 at the Key school as well as families in nearby neighborhoods who would be likely to enroll students in the Key Immersion program in the next few years if it remains at its current location at N. Veitch St. and Key Blvd. The survey was posted on the web, advertised in the Lyon Village newsletter, advertised on Nextdoor, and paper copies of the survey were given directly to all students. The survey was written in both English and Spanish. The paper copy of the survey is attached to this report. Comments received at the end of the surveys are also attached.

The survey received 259 responses: 194 on-line submissions and 65 paper submissions. The survey respondents included families with 255 current K-3 students and 149 future enrollees.² Families in which English was the primary language spoken at home comprised about 69 percent of respondents; families primarily speaking Spanish at home account for about 24 percent of respondents.³

² We elected to exclude students in grades 4 and 5 as the huge majority of them will not be impacted by the 2021 Elementary Boundary Process.

³ The figures do not add up to 100 percent because some families reported that they speak other languages at home. Other responses included Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Lithuanian, Italian, Russian, and more.

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Current Key Immersion Students

Table 1 summarizes the survey responses from families who have students currently enrolled in K-3 at Key Immersion. The survey covers 255 students, of whom 60 speak Spanish at home. Responses are broken down by the neighborhood school to which the student is assigned.

Of the 255 students currently enrolled in K-3 at Key Immersion, 92 respondents are likely to enroll in their neighborhood schools if the immersion program were relocated to ATS and 163 (or 63.9%) would remain with the program.

Nonetheless, geography strongly predicts which students stay with the program and which do not. Students from neighborhood schools further away from Key---namely Barrett, Discovery, Fleet, Glebe, Jamestown, and Long Branch---are highly likely to follow the program if it was to move to ATS. Students from Taylor are less likely to follow the program, and the majority of students districted to ASFS will leave the program (presumably to attend their neighborhood school).

More importantly, nearly two-thirds of Spanish-speaking students will also leave the program: of the 60 students from Spanish-speaking households, only 22 students plan on following the program to ATS.

A few of the comments indicate that some families who say they would follow the program to ATS would, in fact, be happy with the new location.

Of the students who would not follow the program to ATS or Claremont, up to 72 students would be interested in enrolling in the middle school immersion program at Gunston if the students met the proficiency requirements. Moreover, of those 72 students, 30 are from families where Spanish is the primary language spoken at home.

Future Key Immersion Students

Table 2 summarizes the results from families who anticipate enrolling students in an immersion program through 2025, if it was to remain at its Courthouse location on Key Boulevard and North Veitch St. Of the 149 responses from families with future students, 92 were from families who are zoned to ASFS, Taylor, or Long Branch.

The dropoff for enrollment among future students assigned to school located geographically close to Key is considerably more pronounced. Of the 149 students considering an immersion program, fewer than half (65) would attend the program if it was relocated to ATS.

Almost none of those future students from Spanish-speaking households would enroll in the immersion program if it moved to the ATS location.

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The dropoff is particularly acute among students zoned to ASFS, both from Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking households. Almost none of that projected enrollment would be directed toward an immersion program located at ATS.

Future students assigned to schools located geographically further from Key are more likely to enroll in the program at ATS.

Individual Student Transfers from Key Immersion to Claremont

Extremely few students would remain in the program if the individual student was transferred to Claremont. Only 20 percent of existing students and 10 percent of future students report that they would remain with the program if the student was reassigned to Claremont. In particular, only 3 of the 38 future prospective immersion students speaking Spanish at home would continue to pursue the immersion program if their future student was assigned to Claremont.

Reasons for Moving

If respondents reported they planned to switch to their neighborhood schools or an alternate option program, respondents had the opportunity to list reasons that were important to their decisions. Table 3 lists the responses and their incidences.

A large number of families, irrespective of the language spoken at home, have transportation concerns. Large numbers of households both Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking worry about time spent on the bus. Moreover, similar numbers of respondents work downtown and would have trouble providing transit to a location located further west.

Non-Spanish-speaking households are more concerned with accessibility of aftercare options, by contrast, Spanish-speaking families predominantly walk to Key school, and almost all respondents list walkability concerns as a reason for not moving with the program. Furthermore, a greater proportion of Spanish-speaking households rely heavily on public transportation, which makes transit to locations further from their homes more difficult.

Concerns about the lack of continuity of the Key community, whether it be other families, students, or instructors, are cited with similar incidence by both Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking families.

Summary

From our survey results, we conclude that location matters a great deal to many of the families of the students attending the Key Immersion program. Moving the Key Immersion program to

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the ATS location will result in a significant disruption to the current Key community. Most students from the ASFS neighborhood school zone are unlikely to follow the school, and the large majority of Spanish-speaking students will not follow the program to ATS. Enrollment decisions from Spanish-speaking families appear to be particularly sensitive to program location, likely due to concerns about transportation options. We conclude that:

Any move will significantly disrupt the Spanish-speaking constituency of the Key Immersion community. Furthermore, elementary seats recovered in the Ballston-Rosslyn corridor by busing ASFS and Taylor students away from the Courthouse area will be lost again within a few years as current students transition to middle school and future students opt not to pursue immersion studies at a more distant location.