

# Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#919

I would like to provide: \*

Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: \*

Equity

Topic \*

Dari / Pashto registrar

Full Name \*

Laura Gardner

What is your relationship to ACPS? \*

Community Member

Enter your comments here OR upload below:

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[testimony\\_afghan\\_registrar\\_on\\_letterhead.pdf](#)

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# IMMIGRANT CONNECTIONS

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS  
AND ORGANIZATIONS

June 19, 2024

To Whom it May Concern:

I am the Founder and CEO of a national organization called Immigrant Connections ([www.immigrantsrefugeesandschools.org](http://www.immigrantsrefugeesandschools.org)). We provide professional development and capacity-building for educators and school districts all over the U.S., all related to working with immigrant and refugee students and families. In particular, we focus on creating a welcoming environment, understanding the backgrounds of students, family and community engagement, and equity.

We have been working with ACPS as a vendor since 2018 through contracts with the Family & Community Engagement department as well as the office supporting English Learners. Just this school year we delivered two trainings in ACPS on “Welcoming Afghan Students and Families.”

With this in mind, I was extremely disappointed to learn that ACPS is eliminating the Dari/Pashto registrar position. Having bilingual/bicultural staff in positions such as this is crucial to welcoming Afghan students and families and for explaining how we “do school” here in the U.S. and ACPS. As you may know, the U.S. government resettled approximately 100,000 Afghans through Operation Allies Welcome over the past couple of years and thousands of them ended up in Northern Virginia, including Alexandria. In fact, Northern Virginia is one of the top destinations for Afghans in the U.S.

Please consider reinstating the Dari/Pashto registrar position. It is an extremely important position from an equity standpoint because equity for immigrant and EL students/families starts with language access. Furthermore, even beyond language, having someone who can connect with families instantly and explain how the school system here differs from school in Afghanistan is crucial. For Afghans all around the U.S., so many education-related laws here have been confusing to understand, such as mandatory education for girls, the challenges of completing a high school diploma after age 18, and so on. Someone who is simply interpreting (through Language Line or in-person) will translate the words, but all of this really requires more explanation and “hand holding” from a human being. I’ve been doing this work for decades and I can assure you, just using an interpreter is rarely enough, particularly for a population like this with large differences in terms of culture and gender norms.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Sincerely,

Laura Gardner, MSW

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