

**TO:** ACI

**FROM:** Early Childhood Advisory Committee

**DATE:** February 17, 2016

**SUBJECT:** ECAC Non-Recommendation Year Report

The Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) comprises Arlington parents who identify, discuss and research issues related to the educational experience and instruction of Arlington Public Schools' (APS) youngest students, Pre-K through second grade. ECAC seeks to ensure that every child in APS during these foundational years experiences a high quality instructional setting that allows him or her to thrive academically and socially, to foster a love of learning.

As of school year 2015-16, there are 7,878 Pre-K through second grade students in APS and it is projected to grow to 8,346 by 2025. Specifically, the reach of this population includes:

- Two Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) programs: 19 classrooms serving approximately 437 students (3, 4 and 5 year olds) in the Montessori program, and 34 classrooms serving approximately 612 students (4 year olds) as part of the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI).
- Special Education preschool programs serve roughly 280 students (2 - 4 year olds),
- At-risk children who benefit most from Pre-K make up a significant portion of APS Pre-K enrollment. Two-thirds of the slots in the Montessori program are reserved for families who make less than \$86,000 (80% of the median income for a family of four in Arlington County) and all of the slots in the VPI program are for families who make less than 350% of the federal poverty level.

Providing early childhood education opportunities is an investment that reaps significant returns not only to the students attending Arlington Public Schools, but also to our community as a whole. Young children between the ages of 3-8 think and learn in ways that differ from those of older children and adults. The foundation laid during these years can profoundly shape what happens in later life<sup>1</sup>; a strong early childhood education program based on research and knowledge of how young children develop is therefore crucial for children's subsequent academic success. Studies prove that children who have rich early learning experiences are better prepared to thrive in kindergarten and beyond. They are therefore more likely to avoid school failure, peer rejection, substance abuse, truancy, incarceration, unemployment, divorce, psychiatric illness, and early death in adolescence and adulthood.<sup>2,3</sup>

#### **Current Year Activities:**

The ECAC began our year by identifying and prioritizing the most pressing issues facing APS early childhood students. Below we have included an overview of those topics, and our key questions for exploration (*greater detail on each after the table*):

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, F., Conti, G., Heckman, J., Moon, S., Pinto, R., Pungello, E., and Pan, Y. (2014). Early childhood investments substantially boost adult health. *Science*, 343 (6178); 1478-1485.

<sup>2</sup> Derzon, J. H. and Lipsey, M. W. (1999), Predicting tobacco use to age 18: a synthesis of longitudinal research. *Addiction*, 94: 995-1006.

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, M. A., Piquero, A. R. and Jennings, W. G. (2010), Studying the costs of crime across offender trajectories. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 9 (2): 279-305.

	TOPIC	KEY QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION
1.	Needs of the whole child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we better meet the needs of the whole child?</li> <li>• Are we accomplishing this?</li> <li>• How do we measure it?</li> <li>• How does this impact the policies around outdoor time?</li> <li>• How is social/emotional learning incorporated into the classroom/outdoor time?</li> </ul>
2.	APS Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the process for registering your child for Pre-K and/or kindergarten?</li> <li>• How does pre-K impact where you start kindergarten?</li> <li>• What improvements can be made to the registration process?</li> </ul>
3.	Technology use in early childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the goals of the digital learning initiative in the primary grades?</li> <li>• Are there school-level and classroom-level strategies in place for effective implementation of tablets and related technology? If so, how are they evaluated (before, during and after implementation)? What does APS hope to accomplish with this initiative?</li> </ul>
4.	APS School Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What recommendations do we have for the growing enrollment needs, specifically class size and physical capacity, of APS?</li> </ul>
5.	Measurement and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you define success in the early years beyond test scores?</li> <li>• What is the evaluation plan?</li> <li>• Is this different for language immersion schools?</li> <li>• Does the way we define/measure success penalize diverse schools?</li> </ul>

**1. Needs of the Whole Child.** There is a wealth of evidence supporting the investment in the wellness of the whole child during early childhood<sup>4</sup>. The Arlington Public School System begins to articulate and promote its interest in supporting the needs of the whole child through Goal Five of its Strategic Plan<sup>5</sup>. During ECAC discussions, members asked to what extent the amount of time dedicated to recess could be limiting the whole child from thriving. Parents also reference the social/emotional benefits which come from unstructured play. It is commonly known that physical activity leads to numerous health and psychological benefits, and that lack of physical activity harms children’s physical and cognitive development. A recent study from the journal, *Pediatrics*, of more than 10,000 elementary kids ages 8-9 found improved behavior with daily recess<sup>7</sup>.

Currently, the APS Wellness Policy recommends 100-125 minutes of recess per week on weeks without holidays for grades 1-5 and 135-150 minutes per week for Kindergarteners. This equates to

<sup>4</sup> ASCD and CDC Report, “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child”, 2014, [www.ascd.org/learningandhealth](http://www.ascd.org/learningandhealth).

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/15/StrategicPlan11-17\\_web.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/15/StrategicPlan11-17_web.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.arlnow.com/2015/08/20/progressive-voice-meeting-the-needs-of-the-whole-child/>

<sup>7</sup> Barros, R.M., Silver, E., Stein, R. (2009). School Recess and group Classroom Behavior. *Pediatrics*. 123 (2).

20-25 minutes for grades 1-5 and 27-30 minutes for kindergarteners<sup>8</sup>. ECAC members have identified great variation across elementary schools in the length of time allotted to recess and even in school policies about recess. For example, the transition time to and from recess may be included in the total time allotted, so students only receive about 15 minutes of unstructured outdoor play each day.

ECAC plans to look carefully at:

- Professional development presentation(s) for teachers and administrators to educate them on the scientific benefits of recess, physical activity breaks, and social/emotional benefits of unstructured play.
- Training in social/emotional development for teachers (K-2nd grade). This would serve as a complement to the Conscious Discipline training that VPI APS preschool teachers already receive.
- Researching the barriers to more recess, including if more interdisciplinary work could be incorporated into the classroom allowing more time for recess.
- Prior work done to increase recess as part of the APS Wellness Policy.
- Evolution of APS curriculum and instruction guidelines to understand the history of recess-time allotted and reasons for changes.

**2. APS Registration.** APS registration continues to increase, and providing a strong foundation for every APS child's early academic, social, and emotional development is essential. The ECAC seeks to:

- Better understand barriers to implementing a common application, a centralized registration process and/or an online application for all elementary schools. This builds upon the ECAC's prior recommendation for centralized registration for Montessori Pre-K and VPI. A centralized registration process for all incoming APS students would be valuable.
- Gain a deeper understanding regarding the drivers of the current deadline and process of registration (i.e. specific questions include: why is registration open so long (February 1 – April 15)? Is there a way to rank preference of lottery schools? Why do are the response times for lottery schools variable (Campbell requires 1 week, ATS permits 2 weeks)?

**3. Technology in Early Childhood:** The Arlington Public Schools 2011-2017 Strategic Plan states that APS should create a vital and engaging, technology-rich learning environment for its students. APS set a goal to ensure that every student from grade 2 through 12 has a personalized digital learning device to support instruction. However, the justification for, and the implementation and use of, personalized digital learning devices is poorly understood by the Arlington community. Moreover, there is no long-term, large-scale, scientific study assessing the iPad as a tool for learning.<sup>9</sup> It is the ECAC's understanding that there have been no program evaluation efforts made to assess the use of the iPad for second grade students in APS.

Advocates of iPads in classrooms argue that children need to be taught 21st century skills to prepare them for adult life. While digital skills are necessary, we know that children are consuming far too much technology already -- up to 18 hours per day for teenagers aged 13 - 18.<sup>10</sup> Screen time often

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<sup>8</sup> Arlington Public Schools. 25-3 Support for Students-Wellness. Approved February 5, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Nguyen, L., Barton, S. M., & Nguyen, L. T. (2015). iPads in higher education - Hype and hope. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 46(1), 190-203

<sup>10</sup> Rosen, L. D., Lim, A. F., Felt, J., Carrier, L. M., Cheever, N. A., Lara-Ruiz, J. M., & Rokkum, J. (2014). Media and technology use predicts ill-being among children, preteens and teenagers independent of the negative health impacts of exercise and eating habits. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 35, 364-375.

displaces important face-to-face social interactions, physical activity, and time spent outdoors. Screen time, particularly for the youngest digital learners (including 2<sup>nd</sup> graders), can have detrimental effects<sup>11</sup>. The ECAC seeks to:

- Understand why and how this technology is being used in the early grades, the proposed strategies for its implementation, and the variation in tablet policy and tablet implementation by school (e.g. iPads go home with students vs. iPads must stay at school). Learning more about this initiative and its impact on the youngest learners is a first step in helping APS responsibly use tablets in the classroom. Parents, teachers, and the larger community need to understand how iPads are used in the classroom, how often, for what duration, and for what reasons. For example, parents wonder why APS prefers individual distribution of iPads rather than classroom distribution on a need-to-use basis. APS can make an immediate improvement by communicating the iPad's utility to parents with elementary school aged children.
- Understand how this initiative impacts teachers and classrooms. Too often, technology can become a substitute for meaningful engagement in learning activities. Its effective use depends on district support and ongoing professional development. How is effective professional development provided in a sustained, coherent, strategic way?
- Evaluate the needs of students and how best to address them, both with and without technology. We recommend soliciting formal feedback (i.e.: satisfaction surveys) from parents, teachers, Instructional Technology Coordinators (ITCs), and students on the instructional utility of iPads to date. This would begin a conversation into measuring iPads' effectiveness in Arlington Public Schools.

The committee will discuss APS capacity and measurement and evaluation during our spring meetings (March through May).

#### **Update of Previous Recommendations:**

**Recommendation #1:** The Office of Early Childhood should create and implement a centralized process for VPI and Montessori Pre-Kindergarten registration.

The Office of Student Services has been tasked with leading the efforts in creating a centralized registration process for APS. The LSRC is now under the Office of Student Services. The Early Childhood Office fully supports this effort and is happy to be involved when appropriate.

**Recommendation #2:** APS should contract with an outside firm to conduct a comprehensive, independent evaluation of the Primary Montessori program; concurrent with and in addition to the Early Childhood Program Evaluation.

The Office of Planning & Evaluation is currently in the evaluation year of the Early Childhood evaluation. In addition to the CLASS tool, the Office of Planning & Evaluation will be hiring a Montessori evaluator from the Capital Region Education Council (CREC) who provides Montessori services and training to the public Montessori Schools in Hartford, CT to conduct an additional evaluation on the fidelity of our Primary Montessori program.

**Recommendation #3:** The Department of Instruction should develop accountability measures for ensuring compliance with all aspects of the current APS Homework Policy as written.

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<sup>11</sup> Hall, L. (2015). I gave my students iPads – Then I wished I could take them back. Washington Post Dec 2, 2015. Retrieved Jan 11, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-gave-my-students-ipads--then-wished-i-could-take-them-back/2015/12/02/a1bc8272-818f-11e5-a7ca-6ab6ec20f839\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-gave-my-students-ipads--then-wished-i-could-take-them-back/2015/12/02/a1bc8272-818f-11e5-a7ca-6ab6ec20f839_story.html)

The Office of Early Childhood continues to work with the Dept. of Instruction to support communication regarding the current APS homework policy.

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