

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Work Session on Literacy
October 10, 2017

Item C-1-a

The Arlington School Board convened on Tuesday, October 10, 2017, at 7:04 PM at 1426 North Quincy Street, Arlington, Virginia.

Present were:

Barbara Kanninen, Chair
Reid Goldstein, Vice Chair
James Lander, Member
Tannia Talento, Member
Nancy Van Doren, Member
Melanie Elliott, Clerk

Also present were:

Dr. Patrick K. Murphy, Superintendent
Cintia Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services
Dr. Tara Natrass, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction
Dr. Kelly Krug, Supervisor, Arlington Tiered System of Support
Donna McConnell, English/Language Arts Teacher Specialist
Linda Arnsbarger, Co-Chair, English/Language Arts Committee
Judy Rudman, Co-Chair, English/Language Arts Committee

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Kanninen called the meeting to order. She confirmed that Literacy has been a School Board priority for the last five years, and she summarized the purpose of the work session. Dr. Murphy confirmed that this work session will update the Board on efforts to strengthen literacy instruction.

Background

Dr. Natrass reviewed the agenda and presented background information, confirming that the School Board identified literacy as a priority in 2016-17. She also highlighted updates and reports on literacy that have been provided to the Board since that time.

Our Goal

Dr. Natrass stated the overarching goal in APS is to have 100% of students reading on grade level by 2019 or making more than one year's worth of growth as measured by standard assessments. She described assessments APS uses to measure progress, including the Standards of Learning (SOLs), Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), Reading Inventory (RI), and WIDA ACCESS assessments. After reviewing the grade level each assessment is used for, Dr. Natrass explained that additional assessments are used for English Language learners (ELLs). The group recognized concerns about excessive testing and staff is looking to ensure that assessments used are effective and useful.

Defining Reading

After outlining the five areas that are key to reading, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension, Dr. Natrass explained how these contribute to skilled reading. She also described how assessments are used to identify areas for support, and explained the connection between reading and English acquisition by ELLs. Additional key terms were defined, including curriculum, resources, instructional strategies and language acquisition. Dr. Natrass reviewed several strategies used by APS that have positive effects on reading development. Factors that contribute to achievement and opportunity gaps were also highlighted and staff is working to address these factors in order to build literacy.

Board members asked for additional information on strategies used to address individual student needs. Dr. Natrass shared examples of how APS works with families and other community organizations to provide reading opportunities and support, both in and out of the classroom. She also described interventions provided to students with differing needs such as students with disabilities or ELLs. The group recognized the challenge of measuring the effectiveness of efforts to address contributing factors, and also recognized that these areas can be interconnected. Board members encouraged staff to assess how APS is addressing these contributing factors. Dr. Natrass also described the summer Innovation Academy program, which provided both interventions and enrichment to students. She confirmed that staff did look at student data to ensure that instruction met their needs.

Action Steps to Date

Dr. Natrass outlined action steps taken in 2016-17 to strengthen literacy instruction. These included adoption, implementation and professional learning in writing, using assessments to inform interventions, providing increased resources and opportunities for interventions and developing an intervention monitoring system. Additional actions have included resource adoption for K-12 reading and writing in grades 6-12, strengthening differentiated support, and providing professional learning.

Results and Responses

Dr. Natrass then explained how assessment data are used to identify student needs and support, by identifying skills, developing action steps and ensuring follow-through in the classroom. She confirmed that this work includes review of the curriculum to ensure that the needed skills are being taught, and she shared curriculum documents used by staff that confirm that students are being taught the skills measured by the Standards of Learning.

Responding to comments, Dr. Krug and Dr. Natrass provided additional information about training in Orton-Gillingham and other interventions, and how interventions are being implemented in the classroom. Ms. Arnsbarger and Ms. Rudman shared input from parents, noting that sometimes there seems to be a disconnect between training and classroom delivery. Board members were interested in how staff will assess whether these interventions are effective.

Dr. Natrass then described how data from the PALS screening is interpreted and used to identify action steps and classroom practice, and how to measure if these actions are effective. Dr. Krug shared documents developed by APS for teachers to use to create intervention plans for individual students and how they track progress and determine if additional strategies are needed. She responded to

questions, describing how staff is trained in the new ATSS intervention system. Board members appreciated the work that has been done to develop this tool, and Dr. Krug described how information is shared with parents. The group briefly discussed how this tool is used to support gifted instruction as well as remediation, and how it is used to support summer learning. The group discussed use of alternative learning models, such as project-based instruction, to address learning gaps, and Dr. Natrass confirmed this approach was a strong focus in summer school. Staff also confirmed that appropriate resources and staff support are available to all teachers help them implement the new intervention plan.

Dr. Natrass then shared data gathered from the Reading Inventory and described the action steps that have been identified to respond to this data. This includes analysis of the assessment tools, implementing additional assessments and staff training, and curriculum review and revision. She also reviewed changes in classroom practice that have been implemented to support these action steps. Dr. Natrass then summarized plans to move forward with implementing the new intervention system, and she provided contact information for families who have questions or concerns.

Ms. Arnsbarger appreciated the work that has been accomplished and especially the use of data to evaluate needs, and she supported conducting a school-based survey to measure progress. She noted her support for earlier intervention and encouraged APS to standardize practice throughout all schools. She also encouraged staff to share bright spots and best practices. Ms. Rudman also appreciated progress that has been made and also encouraged working to strengthen consistency of use of these interventions. She also supported efforts to focus on reluctant readers as well as struggling readers.

Responding to questions, Dr. Natrass described efforts to strengthen writing as well as reading. This includes the recent resource adoption. Mr. Goldstein reiterated his interest in seeing results and milestones as this work is done. Dr. Murphy agreed to provide information on accountability to the Board, and also to have staff prepare a brief to the Board on reading. Dr. Natrass briefly described instruction provided to older ELLs who arrive in APS with reading issues. Ms. Van Doren again appreciated the progress that has been made and looked forward to continued work.

Closing Remarks

Board members thanked staff for the presentation and their work, and also appreciated the parent advisory committee members for their efforts. The Board looked forward to continued progress in addressing challenges. Dr. Murphy also acknowledged progress made, and encouraged the Board to share their new knowledge about literacy efforts with the community.

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 PM.

ATTEST:

Melanie Elliott, Clerk
Arlington School Board

Barbara Kanninen, Chair
Arlington School Board