

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Arlington School Board  
**FROM:** English Language Arts Advisory Committee (ELAAC)  
**DATE:** March 18, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** Non-recommending Year Report

### **Current Year Activities:**

The activities of the English Language Arts Advisory Committee (ELAAC) over the past year have included:

- Review of middle school reading assessments and data;
- Several presentations and discussion of middle school ELA curriculum, course structure, and a pilot of intensified or alternative courses;
- Presentations and updates on the ELA Evaluation, including participation in the data review process;
- Review of SOL and PALS data results;
- Review of academic achievement data, with a focus on subgroups;
- A discussion on secondary writing instruction, expectations, skills, approaches, and standards with a panel of high school English teachers who also teach graduate writing courses and professional development programs on writing;
- A survey of and panel discussion regarding the impact of APS high school writing curriculum, instruction, and expectations on post-graduate writing requirements.
- A presentation on the pilot of a RAN/RAS screener in the early elementary grades as a supplement to PALS for the early identification of students with dyslexia and struggling readers.

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

**Past Recommendation #1: Building on ATSS progress at the elementary level, effective ATSS literacy interventions must be available to all students in the secondary grades as well, including the high schools, with a focus on fidelity, targeting student needs, intensive training, and progress monitoring.**

**Status:** We have not seen any evidence of progress in providing effective interventions at the high school level. Although we understand that the ELA office and ATSS have created an English Language Arts Intervention Protocol for grades 6-12, anecdotal reports from parents uniformly indicate that families are unable to obtain interventions for reading and writing. We have heard many reports of continued frustration that access to Orton-Gillingham intervention, or any reading or writing intervention that is targeted to the individual needs of the student, is provided on a regular schedule, and involves progress monitoring. The only Reading class is an elective limited to special education students. Secondary special education reading teachers are using Leveled Literacy Intervention, a program with the authors concede is not designed or effective for students with reading disabilities. We understand that

many high school teachers have received O-G training, so find it perplexing that it is not actually being provided to students who would benefit. We also understand that all teachers have access to Step Up to Writing materials and training as part of the ELA curriculum, but again, we have received many reports from parents who have requested writing remediation but have not received it. Parent reports suggest that there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for providing interventions, lack of specific enough testing information to identify a specific student's needs, and inability to identify teachers with appropriate intervention skills and training. Schools continue to cite difficulty scheduling teachers and students, lack of intervention training or materials, and lack of trained teachers with expertise in intervention.

#### **STAFF RESPONSE:**

Our staff continues to support this recommendation and the Department of Teaching and Learning and ELA Office will continue to provide access and training on various intervention and remediation approaches and resources based upon student needs, particularly at the secondary level. Along with ATSS, we closely monitor the timelines of training, the applicability and need for training, the names of staff members who have received training on specific interventions, and those teachers' assignments within the division. We routinely ask for feedback regarding purchasing, as well as the need for replenishing resources or provisioning for new classrooms and teachers, based upon guidelines established by the division.

We have continued to train teachers in Orton-Gillingham at the middle and high school levels, including support regarding fidelity of implementation, scheduling student interventions and progress monitoring, as well building teachers' expertise in the use of literacy interventions. Currently, we have 61 middle school teachers and 26 high school teachers trained in Orton-Gillingham as well as 44 middle school and 8 high school teachers trained in Leveled Literacy Intervention. With the training that has taken place, students who need to access Orton-Gillingham are able to do so, and if there is a concern about access, it can be addressed at the school or division level. Additionally, we will continue to provide on-going training for intervention strategies and programs for teachers, while providing oversight and consultation regarding O-G at the secondary level.

When considering the use of LLI in our high schools, we will continue to assess and evaluate the professional monitoring systems we have in place for teachers, both for their understandings of the structures and appropriateness of interventions for students, and how to make data-driven and assessment-based decisions for those interventions. Finally, we value clear and consistent communication with parents regarding interventions, and we will continue to monitor parent feedback in this area to ensure that questions and concerns are addressed in a timely and sufficient fashion, at both the individual school and division levels.

#### **2018 – 2024 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

This recommendation serves three of the Core Values in the 2018-2024 Strategic Plan:

- “Excellence: Ensure all students receive an exemplary education that is academically challenging and meets their social and emotional needs;
- Equity: Eliminate opportunity gaps and achieve excellence by providing access to schools, resources, and learning opportunities according to each student’s unique needs; and
- Innovation: Engage in forward-thinking to identify bold ideas that enable us to be responsive to the expectations of our organization and community while cultivating creativity, critical thinking, and resourcefulness in our students.”

This recommendation directly serves Goal 1 -- Multiple Pathways to Success for All Students, which “ensure(s) that every student is challenged and engaged while providing multiple pathways for student success by broadening opportunities, building support systems and eliminating barriers. APS will eliminate opportunity gaps so all students achieve excellence.”

It also directly serves Goal 2 -- Healthy, Safe, and Supported Students, which provides that APS will “Create an environment that fosters the growth of the whole child. APS will nurture all students’ intellectual, physical, mental, and social-emotional growth in healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments.”

**Budgetary Implications:** We estimated \$75,000 to restore a staff position under ATSS to support intervention training, progress monitoring, and oversight. We estimated approximately \$47,500 for professional development in reading interventions and \$4800 for professional development in writing interventions.

**Past Recommendation #2: APS should adopt a rigorous secondary writing curriculum incorporating instructional best practices for grades 9-12 that is continuous from year to year, ensures that all students have mastered fundamental writing skills, and includes writing experience over the four years that reflect sufficient quantity, quality, and diversity to ensure that all students make at least a year of growth during each school year, and are college- and career-ready by graduation.**

**Status:** We understand that, last year, the ELA Office worked with a team of teachers to develop yearlong ELA curriculum maps for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades and that the work is continuing this year to develop curriculum for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. We don't know to what extent this curriculum planning includes writing instruction and expectations. The Virginia SOLs outline what appear to be rigorous expectations for high school writing. The problem we have identified is that those standards are not being met in many classrooms across all high schools, regardless of the level. Teachers are left to their own devices to interpret and teach the standards, without meaningful oversight or accountability for actually covering them. The consequence, as we spelled out in our last report, is a very high degree of variability in writing experiences from classroom to classroom, little diversity in types of writing, little actual instruction in writing, and generally low expectations. We have continued to review this topic this year.

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:** This recommendation serves the first Core Value in the 2018-2024 Strategic plan: “Excellence: Ensure all students receive an exemplary education that is academically challenging and meets their social and emotional needs.” This recommendation also directly serves Goal 1 -- “Multiple Pathways to Success for All Students,” which “ensure(s) that every student is challenged and engaged while providing multiple pathways for student success by broadening opportunities, building support systems and eliminating barriers. APS will eliminate opportunity gaps so all students achieve excellence.”

**Budgetary Implications:**

Developing a curriculum will require paying teachers during the summer months, and paying for substitutes for teachers who attend curriculum development meetings during the school year. The estimated cost is about \$10,000. To the extent that the developers determine that additional teacher training is required, that may be a budget item for the following year (2019-20).

**STAFF RESPONSE:**

Staff supports this recommendation and will continue to strengthen our instructional and assessment practices in secondary writing. Beginning in June 2017 and revisited throughout the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, APS teachers have been working with the Department of Teaching and Learning and the ELA Office to develop and revise yearlong curriculum maps and units in Kindergarten through 12th grade in order to create a rigorous APS ELA curriculum that is aligned to the 2017 Standards of Learning, which includes four related strands of Communication and Multimodal Literacies, Reading, Writing, and Research.

Throughout this process, the ELA office has worked with teachers on the creation of units which explicitly define what students need to know and be able to do, the assessments to measure progress, and the resources for instruction. These units include explicit writing instruction. For example, within one of the tenth grade writing units, with a focus on personal narratives (for English SOL 10.6 and 10.7), students are asked to compose an essay, with a focus on writing a specific, personal anecdote. At the secondary level, students craft reflective, interpretive, and analytic pieces, with an overall emphasis on persuasion and analysis. We will continue to examine and refine the pacing and implementation of effective instructional strategies across grade levels to build towards consistency within our overall writing continuum.

In addition to these efforts, our staff is working closely with neighboring school divisions and consulting with representatives from the Virginia Department of Education regarding writing. This collaboration is to both provide and receive feedback regarding writing at the secondary level (grades 9-12) for the following: to examine appropriate pacing of the writing curriculum; to engage in consistent and timely progress monitoring of students' growth in writing; to provide and monitor usage of performance tasks as assessment tools for writing; and to determine necessary professional learning for teachers in the area of assessment of student writing.

**ELAAC Committee members:**

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