

SSAC Executive Summary for January 28, 2020 Work Session with the School Board

The Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC) reviews the services offered by school counselors, substance abuse counselors, psychologists, and social workers, and makes recommendations to the Arlington Public Schools (APS) Advisory Council on Instruction and the Arlington School Board for changes or improvements in those services.

Key challenges and needs for APS Student Services programs:

1. Lack of consistency in evidence-based social emotional learning (SEL) programs and policies for all students, across all schools,
2. Lack of accountability for implementation of intended programs;
3. Lack of consistent, equity-focused communication and partnership with parents and families that is focused on youth SEL;
4. Need for focused, system-wide professional development for SEL supports, programs, interventions, services, and practices.

Recommendations for addressing these key Student Services challenges and needs:

1. Create consistency across all APS schools and programs in district-wide SEL curriculum goals, expectations, and evidence-based program components.
2. Student Services central office guidance and professional development training for all APS school staff and administrators in the key elements, goals, and desired outcomes, for evidence-based SEL programs, interventions, services, and practices available through APS to support student well-being and success.
3. Strengthen central office guidance for system-wide and school-based parent/family communications and engagement efforts focused on SEL in APS schools and programs, as well as between students and their families and friends.
4. Develop an APS SEL Coordinator position, and hire an experienced SEL professional to provide much needed guidance, training and coordination of district-wide SEL curriculum. This coordinator will provide district oversight, ensure equity, and measure the success of the program goals and outcomes.

SEL research and support

- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is an organization that works toward integrated SEL for preschool through high school. CASEL describes SEL as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." CASEL states that SEL can be "seamlessly integrated into a school's culture and norms or explicitly taught outside of academic learning time."
<https://casel.org/core-competencies/>
- The Pennsylvania State University, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has developed a series of research briefs that address "the need for research, practice, and policy on social and emotional learning (SEL)." The Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School brief indicates that "extensive research shows that SEL programs can promote academic achievement and positive social behavior, and reduce conduct problems, substance abuse, and emotional distress."
<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/04/social-emotional-learning-in-elementary-school.html>
- Ready to Lead – A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools found that "advancing social and emotional learning will require a significant shift in our approach to raising academic achievement and improving schools, and it will take a concerted effort from educators, researchers, policymakers, families, community providers, and others to make the effective

promotion of SEL a lasting reality. But as this report and others have shown, the will to advance SEL exists among administrators and teachers, who understand its value and are already seeing its benefits. Social and emotional learning is not a fad; it has always been at the heart of education, and now is the time to make sure it is treated as such.” http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead_FINAL.pdf

Arlington youth data and research

- Arlington Youth Risk Survey results, 2017 – See <https://apcyf.arlingtonva.us/2017/09/youth-risk-behavior-survey-summary/> for complete data.
- Your Voice Matters survey results, 2018 – See <https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/10/APS-Insights-Report-Updates-1015.pdf>
- Community Report on the Status of Children, Youth and Families, 2019 – See https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2019/04/2019-APCYF_Report_Final_forWeb.pdf

Past APS SSAC recommendations, responses, and actions taken:

1. **2015-16 Recommending year:** Recommended 1. Provide Mental Health First Aid training (MHFA) for all APS teachers and administrative staff; 2. Reduce social worker and psychologist ratios from 1:1650 to 1:650; 3. Expand the reach and impact of youth social-emotional and mental health/resiliency resources, and develop new resources and accessible formats in collaboration with community partners. SSAC also asked for a “[In Crisis/Need Help Now?](#)” “button” on the APS homepage and school homepages, linking to county-wide services, programs, and information.
2. **2016-17 Non-recommending year:** APS trained 380 teachers and staff in MHFA; Hired 6 additional psychologists and 6 social workers; and added the “In Crisis/Need Help Now?” button to the APS website.
3. **2017-18 Recommending year:** Recommended 1. Increase the number of counselors across all elementary schools with the goal of improving the counselor-to-student ratio by reducing the ratio from 1:470 to 1:371 over a 2-year period. 2. Continue to increase the number of school psychologists and social workers across all schools to support the improvement in the ratio. 3. Expand the number of APS substance abuse counselors,(SAC) with the goal of one full-time SAC serving each middle school, high school, and secondary program in order to address the growing student, family, and staff needs for critical substance abuse prevention and intervention services. (At the time, there were 6 SACs providing services to 12,000+ students in the 13 APS secondary schools.)
4. **2018-19 Non-recommending year:** Counselor-to-student ratio in elementary schools, 1:444, and in secondary schools, 1:244; the American School Counselor Association recommends 1:250. Psychologist-to-student ratio, 1:775; the National Association of School Psychologists recommends 1:650. Social Worker-to-student ratio, 1:850; the recommended ratio is 1:400. SAC-to-student ratio 1:2,000; there is no ratio recommendation for SACs.