

Special Education

# BRIEFING REPORT



APRIL 2020



Arlington  
Public  
Schools



# SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special Education is an integral part of the overall educational program within Arlington Public Schools. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), the Office of Special Education (OSE) ensures a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students with disabilities who require special education and related services.

OSE ensures that services are provided in the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** to the maximum extent possible for students from Pre-K to age 22. OSE is charged with providing support for students with disabilities, through evaluation, identification, placement, instruction, and transition services.

## CORE SERVICES INCLUDE

- Full Continuum of Support under IDEA
- Assistive Technology
- Audiological and Hearing Services
- Child Find
- Extended Services Year (ESY)
- Functional Vision Services
- Related services (Speech, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy)
- American Sign Language (ASL)/ Cued Language Transliterator (CLT)
- Transition
- Disability Specific Support
- Instructional Support
- Compliance Support
- Parent Support
- Countywide Programs
- Parent Resource Center

## BRIGHT SPOTS

### PROGRAM FOR EMPLOYMENT PREPAREDNESS (PEP)

The students in the PEP program have a variety of individual skills and goals. The PEP program worked to provide them with a bedrock of support focused on living independent lives. They participated in internships and public-speaking programs, learned money-management skills, took field trips and navigated confusing public-transit systems, and garnered experience in decision-making and self-advocacy.

### COLLABORATION

The Office of Special Education (OSE) has been busy this year collaborating with various offices within APS to ensure our services and programs are meeting the needs of all of our students and families. Collaborative work has focused on transportation and facilities, academic, social emotional and behavioral supports, technology and community engagement.

### COMMUNITY PEER PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM (CPP)

Pre-K children without identified disabilities ages 2 years 6 months (by September 30) through 4-years old from the Arlington community have the opportunity to participate in one of the preschool special education programs through the Community Peer Pre-Kindergarten Program (CPP). The CPP program is designed to support general education experiences for our younger students

with disabilities. Through this program, preschoolers from the community participate in a high quality Pre-K program at an APS elementary school. Our toddler programs provide play-based instruction to target all developmental areas with a focus on communication, interactions with peers and adults as well as fostering growing independent skills. Our 3-5 program provides instruction that is aligned with the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) program and is differentiated to meet student's needs. CPP provides Pre-K students with and without disabilities opportunities to learn together and grow in all developmental areas.

APS has been able to expand inclusive programming in Pre-K in 13 classes across the county and are serving an additional 73 students without disabilities during a time when more child care and Pre-K seats are needed in the Arlington community.

Next year APS is planning to increase CPP capacity at another school as well as expand our co-taught Primary Montessori classes.

### I'M DETERMINED – TEACH SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS TO STUDENTS IN ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Self-determination is the concept of knowing and believing in yourself, what you want your future to be like, how to make plans to achieve this future, and knowing the supports that you need to take control of your life. For many students with disabilities, achieving self-determination can be extremely challenging. Too

often, students are omitted from having a voice in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), even though it is federally mandated for them to be included to the best of their ability.

In APS, many staff and students have been learning about and living the principles of self-determination for over a decade. Using resources from "I'm Determined," the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) source for teaching Self-Determination skills, many students have been able to have a say in their education and future goals. Some of the activities that are being done in APS include:

- Training
- Direct Instruction
- Including students in the IEP process
- Clubs


The students in the Program for Employment Preparedness (PEP) can join a club called The Order of Self-Determination. Over the past 4 years, club members have met weekly to learn about how to be self-determined. More than 40 students have participated and conducted such activities as:

- Organizing 3 conferences for other APS students with disabilities
  - Mentoring younger students who are participating in their IEPs for the first time
  - Teaching classes on Self-Determination to younger students
  - Speaking at trainings for parents and staff
  - Being the key-note speakers for the Community of Leaders in Autism state-wide conference in June 2019
  - Creating Power Standards
- A team from APS involved in teaching self-determination (Deborah Hammer, Laura Dinardo, Christina Eagle), created Self-Determination Power Standards to help teachers create meaningful and appropriate self-determination goals with their students.

### PARENT RESOURCE CENTER (PRC)

New PRC initiatives during the 2019-20 academic year include visiting school-based special education teams at all Arlington schools; updating our six-week ADHD parent curriculum; launching monthly PRC Drop-Ins; collaborating with Virginia's Parent Education and Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) to offer Transition University; supporting APS' new Student Support Team process; participating in a newly formed collaborative parent/staff Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) work group; and finalizing the Special Education Telenovela project and developing companion training guides to support extended learning.

Annually the PRC has offered around 55 events to our families.



**Arlington Public Schools**

**“** PEP has helped me find a path by engaging better with work and social skills, and by putting myself out there!**”**

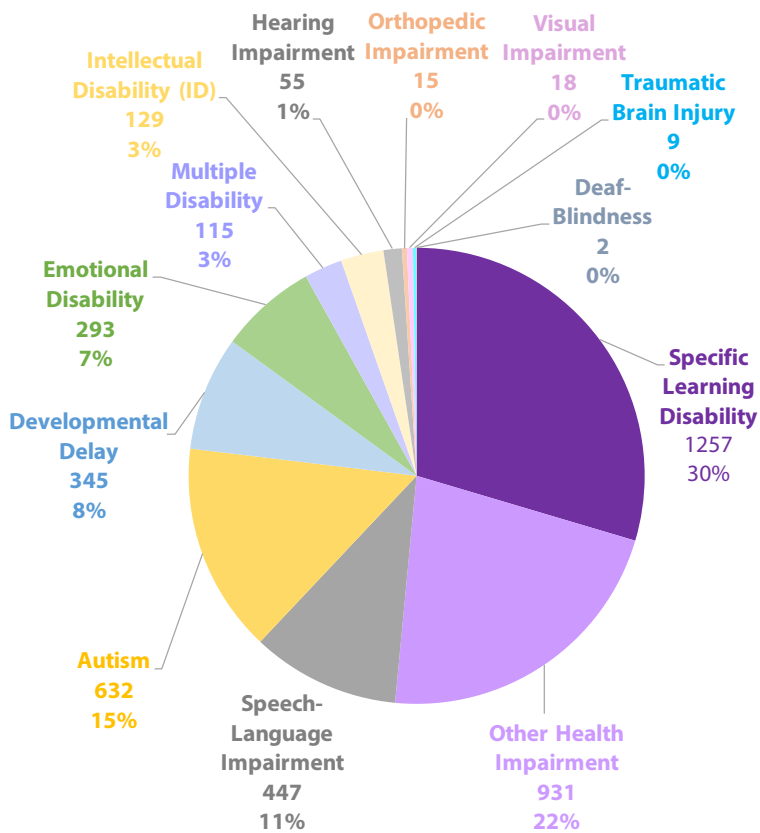
*- Sarah Cornett*

**Program for Employment Preparedness**

[careercenter.apsva.us/programs/pep](http://careercenter.apsva.us/programs/pep)

## DATA THAT PROVIDES INSIGHT

SPED Enrollment as of Dec 1, 2019



### SPED ENROLLMENT OVER TIME

Total APS Student Population	25352	26263	26932	27518	28066
SWD % of Overall Population	14%	14%	15%	15%	15%
DISABILITY	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Specific Learning Disability	1087	1073	1126	1206	1257
Other Health Impairment	742	777	879	914	931
Speech-Language Impairment	494	518	530	505	447
Autism	468	513	544	593	632
Developmental Delay	235	265	270	327	345
Emotional Disability	251	265	278	278	293
Multiple Disability	120	118	122	121	115
Intellectual Disability	122	127	123	121	129
Hearing Impairment	55	52	54	52	55
Orthopedic Impairment	22	17	17	16	15
Visual Impairment	18	22	18	17	18
Traumatic Brain Injury	13	15	17	13	9
Deaf-Blindness	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3627</b>	<b>3762</b>	<b>3978</b>	<b>4164</b>	<b>4248</b>

## WHAT WE LEARNED

There is a need to build and expand on the existing initiatives to **increase consistency** across schools through a system of support and communication from the Office of Special Education to schools to **streamline processes and build capacity to impact student success and well-being**.

The recent program evaluation included 54 overall recommendations that fell into 5 categories:

1. Arlington Tiered System of Support (ATSS)
2. Referral and Eligibility
3. Special Education
4. Section 504
5. Organization and Operations

## MOVING FORWARD—PROGRAM EVALUATION

### ARLINGTON TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (ATSS)

#### Commitments

- Continue a multi-tiered system of support that includes high-quality first instruction followed up with flexible models of intervention based on individual student need.
- Utilize a consistent Student Support Team (SST) approach districtwide to monitor, revise and implement new interventions and strategies intended to keep the focus on maximizing student achievement in general education.
- Implement the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process after all general education tiered systems of supports have been utilized.
- Use data to determine if struggling students are appropriately referred for evaluations.

### SPECIAL EDUCATION

#### Commitments

- Provide access to quality educational opportunities and services for students in the least restrictive environment.
- Inform all stakeholders of the needs of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Define and implement a Service Delivery Model that allows access for all students to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).
- Provide consistent, authentic and responsive two-way communication between staff, family, and the community.

### SECTION 504

#### Commitments

- Improve processes and protocols to address disparities in Section 504 identification practices and ensure equitable access to supports.
- Inform all stakeholders of the needs of students with a Section 504 Plan

### OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATION

#### Commitments

- Implement a leadership approach that is collaborative, visionary, and transparent to all stakeholders.
- Implement a resource allocation system that is responsive to the needs of students and supportive of the least restrictive environment.

Implementation of these recommendations will accomplish the following goals:

- Set an overall district-wide vision for providing high quality services to students with disabilities and those requiring intervention
- Create a culture that promotes successful inclusion and integration of students with disabilities and other underserved, at-risk and economically disadvantaged students
- Enhance parent and community engagement by creating warm, respectful and welcoming environments and be flexible in accommodating the spectrum of family needs
- Strengthen links between school and home to help culturally and linguistically diverse parents help their children learn and gain equal access to all APS educational programs and services

## 5-YEAR ACTION PLAN

APS is working with the Public Consultant Group (PCG) to finalize the 5 year action plan to implement the program evaluation recommendations. The draft plan will be available for review in late March. The final plan should be available on APS' website by the end of April.

The action plan will include specific targets for each year and performance metrics. The overarching goals in the plan aligns with the APS strategic plan in the areas of inclusivity, excellence, equity, access, and collaboration.

#### Inclusivity

At least 80% of students with disabilities will spend 80% or more of their school day in a general education setting.

#### Excellence

The achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers will decrease in English Language Arts (ELA).

The achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers will decrease in Math.

#### Equity

District-wide special education and 504 demographics will mirror overall district demographics by race and ethnicity.

#### Access

An increased number of students with IEPs will enroll in advanced level courses.

#### Collaboration

An increasing percent of students with disabilities will participate in paid employment, post-secondary education, and/or employment training.

