

**To:** Advisory Council on Teaching and Learning  
& APS Department on Teaching and Learning

**From:** English Language Arts Advisory Committee

**cc:** Lori Silver

**Date:** 12/4/2020

**Re:** Progress memo on ELA instruction

<p><b>What is working well for teaching and learning?</b> <b>Topic:</b> Elementary</p>	<p><b>Information source:</b> Parents (only received response from 3 people)</p>
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**Description:**

- Younger kids (elementary ages) gain experience writing and editing on the iPads using applications that will be similar to what they'll use as they progress through school
- Kids have time to think about their writing in a quiet environment where they may be better able to focus (assuming they have a quiet space in the home)
- Online OG is surprisingly good and I'm also able to listen in to some of them so can hear the various words and phrases that the teacher use like "ea says E".

<p><b>Topic:</b> Middle School</p>	<p><b>Information source:</b> Parents (only received response from 3 people)</p>
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**Description:**

- Lots of quiet time to focus on work (but little work)- Opportunity to learn different technology platforms- Opportunity to engage with teacher 1:1 during office hours in a quiet environment
- Teacher (Social Studies) utilization of writing and writing rubric to support idea development beyond English literature; however, student research is limited, and citations were required but not (re)taught.

<p><b>1. What is not working well for teaching and learning?</b></p>	
<p><b>Topic:</b> Elementary</p>	<p><b>Information source:</b></p>

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Parents (only received response from 3 people)
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**Description:**

- There may be confusion over assignment expectations for writing assignments given during asynchronous days regarding length, breadth, and depth of the writing. A child proceeds through the day without a check-in to realign with target objectives.

- No breakouts so far into smaller groups to discuss writing and progress; kids would likely benefit from such discussions

- Having to pivot from Google docs to Canvas to get feedback on assignments is somewhat confusing for the kids

-Coordination between small group instruction and pull-outs is not great but starting Monday, there's going to be a realignment to address it and the team called for the realignment, which is great.

-Get rid of all balanced literacy curriculum resources. The current resources for reading, writing and phonics are harmful to student reading and writing success.

-Need grammar lessons and regular spelling pattern instruction.

-Teacher needs to start correcting student spelling mistakes and TEACH spelling patterns. Students need repeated practice to spell words correctly.

-Provide real feedback on student writing

-Stop using Word Walls. Memorization of whole words is not helpful.

- Students should have opportunities to write about what they know and what they are learning (e.g.: science, history).

-2nd grade student reading at 4th grade level, but nothing has been done to enrich his reading or differentiate instruction.

No differentiation for reading. No small group.

Teacher does a "book walk" with student. Then, student reads the book. This allows student to guess at words they can't sound out. Students memorizes what they have heard.

-Lack of differentiation

Grammar and spelling instruction is lacking.

Handwriting instruction is insufficient. Learning without Tears workbooks are inconsistently utilized across elementary schools.

Provide workbooks and off-screen (less touch screen on SeeSaw) practice of skills Lexia feedback varied. It is useful for some, but the brief teaching of each "new concept" is not adequate for some students.

-Classes are not utilizing breakout rooms or small groups.

-Phonics instruction is minimal (< 10 minutes) and still uses balanced literacy strategies like looking at the picture, and guessing words

-Library time is included as part of the ELA block; often in lieu of reading or phonics

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instruction.

Teacher demonstrates how to write using the sounds you know without being perfect.

Teacher shows the “kindergarten” way of writing. (e.g.: arms might be armz; eyes might be iz). Instead, teacher could tell students that s makes /s? And /z/ sounds.

-2nd grade student reading at 4th grade level, but nothing has been done to enrich his reading or differentiate instruction. (ATS, 2nd)

No differentiation for reading. No small group.

Teacher does a “book walk” with student. Then, student reads the book. This allows student to guess at words they can’t sound out. Students memorizes what they have heard.

-There is no emphasis on decoding skills

-More practice problems with grammar. Need more writing practice (e.g.: worksheets putting in subject/verb agreement answer, etc.).

-No accountability for correct grammatical usage, penmanship, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph and sentence structure. They need to be taught to revise and edit their work. (2nd, ATS)

Writing themes are too broad (e.g.: personal narrative). Students struggle to identify a topic. Personal narrative unit is boring. Students should write about what they are know.

-Lexia does not seem to really teach concepts. Students hear a small intro about what they are to do, and then they quickly figure out the pattern and just do what they need to in order to complete the requirement. I doubt many students are internalizing anything from the app. When student gets something wrong, Lexia makes you redo it approximately 8 times before it takes you back to the actual lesson. Causes frustration for student.

K student is "stuck" on a level. She cannot make progress on the "beginning sounds" skill in level 2. Some examples are offered to help her "learn" it. I don't think she will make progress without one-on-one/targeted small group support - unclear whether that will happen during virtual learning, so I am assuming it is a parent responsibility at this point.

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**Topic:** Middle School

**Information source:**

Parents (only received response from 3 people)

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**Description:**

-No social interaction with other students (esp. when videos are required to be turned off, even in Teams’ breakout rooms or working 1:1 during teacher office hours)

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- Limited writing assignments; students have a LOT more time in virtual learning and to not take advantage of that for writing projects is a shame.
  - No use of external documents/resources to support written work (not allowed in Social Studies)
  - Limited to no textbooks, novels in print
  - Confusion over how to locate “missing” assignments when students submitted them
  - Teachers cannot get to know their students with NO video use
  - Some teachers do not respond to students in a timely manner over email with regard to assignments; this delays work completion and submission.
  - Some teachers do not post Monday’s assignments in a timely manner.
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## **2. What are implications and/or solutions for teaching & learning for the longer term?**

- Remove block scheduling – this schedule is not working for a virtual environment and limits student learning. Classes should be taught everyday for content mastery. Block scheduling was implemented for special projects, writing, and science lab – none of these are happening in virtual.
- Allow students to handwrite and submit projects; remove requirements to type in Google Doc
- Update technology platform and implement one seamless system for student learning as well as for classwork and homework submission – assignments get lost and both students and teachers spend an inordinate amount of time ensuring work has been “turned in” and completed
- Teacher MUST provide direction or identify a student leader if using Teams break-out rooms; no student is leading discussion or offering input during “break out” room time; this is a waste of time and must be re-thought or not used during synchronous time.
- Remove most specials during distance learning (not language classes)– PE is a waste of time as is STAR – this would allow students to get more movement during the day by taking these classes off line and/or only provide asynchronous assignments; replace with typing class for all middle school students
- Teacher feedback in a positive manner is critical – for both written and oral during class work.
- Allow use of classroom library books and provide textbooks and workbooks for all classes
- Maybe it exists but, we’ve enjoyed the intense parent-teacher coordination that is necessary to make DL work