

Progress Memo

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

From: School Health Advisory Board (SHAB)

cc: Deb DeFranco and Laura Newton

Date: 12/11/20

Re: Progress memo on School Health Advisory Board

1. What is working well for teaching and learning?

Topic:

Physical Education and Health Education at the Elementary School level.

Information source:

1. SHAB members met via MS Teams for one hour every two weeks from August through October 2020. 2. The SHAB Chair and Workgroup Chairs collected feedback from their respective workgroups via email, meetings, and calls. 3. SHAB leaders engaged with parents and teachers via the Arlington Education Matters Facebook group. 4. The SHAB Chair conducted key informant interviews with APS PE and Elementary School teachers.

Description:

PE teachers report consistent, on-screen engagement by students in K-3. Their cameras are on and they are participating in PE activities at home. Grades 4-5 are less likely to stay on camera but are completing assignments and assessments. Basic PE skills are being taught with items easily found in the home. Health Education is being taught for the first time by PE teachers instead of classroom teachers or school nurses. PE teachers appreciate the ability to alternate class time between physical activity and important health topics, including communicable diseases and COVID prevention/precautions.

PE teachers also feel they will be better teachers when they return to in-person instruction, because they have learned so many ways to integrate technology into their teaching, and to find best practices among local and national networks of PE teachers.

<p>Topic: Socio-Emotional Wellness Education WITH teacher or counselor engagement</p>	<p>Information source: Same as above, plus a poll conducted on the Arlington Education Matters Facebook group.</p>
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Description:

APS teachers are pushing out Socio-Emotional video lessons and activities provided by APS during asynchronous time on Mondays. Until very recently, knowledge about the existence of these lessons varied widely among parents, teachers, and students. Receptivity to these lessons seems to be poor among middle and high school students. Teachers who are successful engaging their students on these topics are the ones who guide the students through the lesson and include class/group discussion, rather than simply assigning the asynchronous activity. Socio-emotional lessons are also being delivered by school counselors at the elementary school level, with enthusiastic reception from students and teachers. SHAB would like to see more school counselor engagement, particularly in the middle schools.

Nevertheless, SHAB believes that distance learning is an inferior medium for socio-emotional education, given the inherent lack of connectedness.

2. What is not working well for teaching and learning?

<p>Topic: Overuse of Screentime and Synchronous learning, without enough emphasis on Ergonomics</p>	<p>Information source: Same as #1.</p>
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Description:

Proposed expectations for synchronous versus asynchronous learning are not being met consistently across schools and grade levels. Although the spring relied on insufficient synchronous instruction, parents were given clear parameters of what to expect this fall. However, many teachers consistently exceed their synchronous instruction during what should be asynchronous time. Additionally, much of the work assigned during asynchronous time is on-screen work, which means students don't get a break to rest their eyes, move their bodies, or vary their learning modalities. Less asynchronous time also means less time to complete "in class assignments," which adds to the homework burden. Likewise, the amount of homework being assigned often exceeds parent expectations, particularly in high school, leading students to spend long days and nights on the computer trying to keep up.

Students need more paper books, workbooks, textbooks, pen to paper writing, manipulatives, tactile art, outdoor observation, and other off-screen assignments to stay healthy and engaged.

There is a worldwide epidemic of myopia (near-sightedness) in children attributed to too much time spent indoors on near-screen activities. There are growing reports of children experiencing eye strain, dry eye disease, headaches, migraines, sleep disturbances, "tech neck," depression, and other neurologic and orthopedic pathologies caused by the excessive time spent on screens. Rates of overweight and obesity are also rising among children and youth during the pandemic, owing to excess sedentary time spent indoors and insufficient physical activity.

Extra efforts must be made to give students time away from their school devices to take physical breaks and outdoor breaks during the daytime to move. Teachers should lead their classes in periodic movement and stretching breaks during synchronous learning. APS and teachers should send parents and students recommendations periodically for maintaining a healthy ergonomic workspace for students. iPad stands should have been issued along with detachable keyboards to maintain proper eye height.

Topic:

Insufficient efforts to get groups of students together through outdoor education and extra-curriculars

Information source:

Same as #1

Description:

APS missed an important opportunity to get students and willing teachers together at the start of the school year when the infection rates were lower and the weather allowed for outdoor learning. SHAB would like to see APS prioritize the development of outdoor learning spaces within our schoolyards. There are several community groups willing to support this effort financially and through volunteers and inexpensive materials. Many APS students are experiencing mental health issues as a result of the pandemic and the resulting isolation and lack of connectedness. Most have never met their teachers in person, and would have benefitted from a meet and greet, or an occasional PE session outdoors. High school and middle school classes and extra-curriculars could have met outdoors periodically.

Outdoor time with other students should not be reserved for students with the privilege of participating in competitive sports. All students should have a periodic opportunity to leave their home and family to reconnect with their peers in a safe, structured environment. SHAB strongly encourages APS to plan and partner with community groups through the winter to maximize opportunities for outdoor student engagement at all grade levels as early as possible in the spring.

3. What are implications and/or solutions for teaching & learning for the longer term?

The shift to online education has been tolerable for many, extremely difficult for some, and perhaps beneficial in some ways for others. Overall, SHAB members believe this is not an appropriate medium for K-12 education, particularly for elementary school. The substantial risks to mental health, eye health, physical fitness, and social connectedness are too great. Although APS teachers continue to grow and improve in their online teaching skills, these advances should not be construed as a potential model for education post-pandemic. Online learning is not an acceptable solution for dealing with overcrowded schools in the future.