

December 11, 2020

Subject: ASEAC December 2020 Progress Report to ACTL

From: ASEAC Executive Board

To: Rebecca Hunter, ACTL Chair

The Advisory Council on Teaching & Learning (ACTL) has asked its advisory committees to provide a summary of feedback regarding the 2020-2021 school year in the Arlington Public Schools (APS), including a) what is not working; b) what is working; and c) recommendations for students with disabilities (SWD). The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee's (ASEAC) executive board is providing the following information based on discussions within ASEAC's membership and extended community:

What Is Not Working:

1. Related Services
 - a. Families have observed inconsistency in the provision and quality of related services. Some service providers are not providing services or are doing so inconsistently. The quality of services varies considerably.
2. Increased Mental Health Concerns and Social Isolation
 - a. The strain of being at home and isolated from in-person interaction with friends has been difficult for some students. During the pandemic, there has been a rise in psychiatric hospitalizations among youth. The supports from APS appear to be inadequate to address the increasing needs.
 - b. It is worth noting that many SWD do not have the same opportunities as typical kids to participate in after-school activities, including sports. Most of the adaptive sports programs have been discontinued during the pandemic.
3. Lack of Communication with Families
 - a. Families noted the lack of communications from their schools regarding Level 1 arrangements. In addition, some families feel that their IEP teams have not been responsive to parent concerns.
4. Inefficient use of Instructional Assistants
 - a. SWD are not receiving adequate individualized supports. Assistants could be better utilized during virtual schooling to provide these supports.
5. Lack of Academic and Behavioral Assistance After School Hours
 - a. Some students are struggling academically as well as mentally. APS services do not seem to be adequate in providing support outside of school hours (i.e., access to tutors and behavioralists).
6. Inconsistent Use of Technology
 - a. Families are still facing challenges keeping-up with newly introduced APS apps and other technology interfaces.

What Is Working:

1. For some students, virtual learning is beneficial as it can remove social pressures, reduce anxiety, and provides more flexibility for kids with ADHD, sensory needs, etc.
2. APS' parent training program is helpful (i.e., Project Core, Dyslexia conference, CPI training).
3. Canvas is being used more consistently than last spring.
4. The APS-provided manipulatives have been helpful.

Recommendations:

1. Best practices in the virtual delivery of related services should be collected, disseminated and reinforced through coaching of related service providers.
2. Best practices on the possible roles and contributions of assistants in the virtual environment should be collected and provided to general education teachers, special education teachers, assistants and families.
3. For significant transitions (e.g. start of school year, return to in-person school), proactive communication between families and LEAs/case carriers should be designed, modeled and reinforced by OSE. If not the practice already, there should be benchmarks and data collection leading up to these kinds of transitions about reaching all families with substantive two-way communication.
4. Mondays should be better utilized, as specified by Bridget Loft at the beginning of the year, for check-ins with students by both assistants and teachers, increased delivery of related services, and emotional supports/small group activities. These actions should be planned across the division in a consistent manner.
5. APS should partner with Arlington's Therapeutic Recreation Program to provide in-person small recreational group programs outside of school hours.