

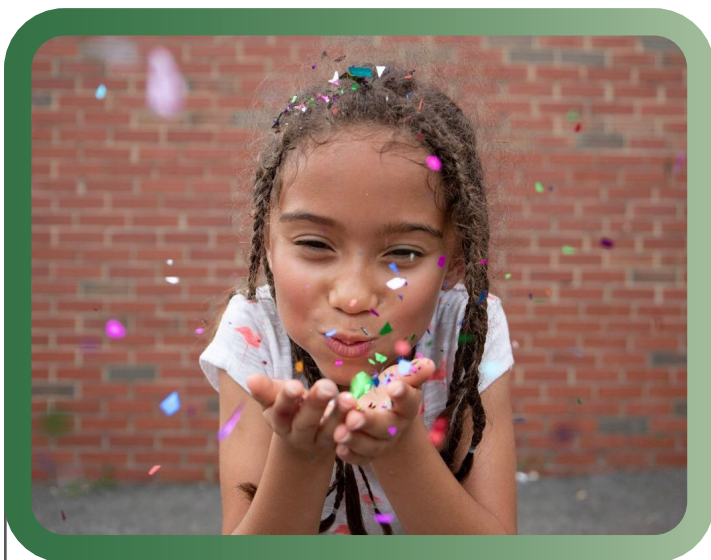


Arlington  
Public  
Schools



# Advisory Council on Teaching & Learning BRIEFING REPORT

FEBRUARY 2021



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## ADVISORY COUNCIL ON TEACHING & LEARNING

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The Advisory Council on Teaching and Learning (ACTL) is composed of representatives from each school as well as community organizations, who assist in reviewing the system-wide curriculum and instructional program, and in developing recommendations for improvement. ACTL is made up of approximately 50 individuals appointed by the School Board who are familiar with or interested in instructional issues. Additionally, 14 curriculum-based advisory committees report to the council annually.

### 2020-2021 MID-YEAR UPDATES

ACTL paused its usual cadence of having its 14 department committees provide alternating recommending and non-recommending reports, to respond more directly to the transition to distance learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To that end, ACTL Committees produced Progress Memos that highlighted what was working with distance learning, what was not working, and implications for teaching and learning outcomes across the 14 committee areas. Each memo contains valuable information from parents, teachers, and students about the current teaching and learning experiences across APS. Information and data were gathered by ACTL Committees through various means, including working with staff supervisors; teacher, student and parent outreach; surveys; focus groups; and interviews. ACTL staff liaisons reviewed the Progress Memos and have suggested the following potential actions, steps or key takeaways.

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## ARTS

- Continue with supporting teachers with needed resources and training to effectively teach in the concurrent model.
- Continue to work with APS Director of Safety to expand ways for students to safely participate in the Arts during the current pandemic and safety guidelines.
- Continue to promote and showcase the arts through virtual concerts and art shows.

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## CAREER, TECHNICAL & ADULT EDUCATION

- Manage realistic expectations for assigned work during distant learning. Students are having trouble keeping up and teachers are having a difficult time determining how long work should realistically take to complete.

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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Continuing to work with teachers regarding the coordination and planning of small group instruction in the area of ELA, particularly with the utilization of resources that lend themselves to distance and hybrid learning environments, with scheduling that supports differentiated instruction for students.
- As feedback is an essential component to students' growth with the writing process, at all levels, we will follow up with classroom teachers and ELA leads regarding the use of a timely feedback cycle that supports student editing and revision of assigned pieces. Teachers are attempting to do this in the most time-efficient ways possible, via voice recordings rather than in writing. We are working with Information Systems to explore technology that can support this effort.
- Lexia is a new resource to APS this year. We will continue to monitor the use of Lexia with students and teachers, and the balance that should occur between students being engaged in the platform, while also receiving direct core literacy instruction and extension/remediation from their teachers.

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## ENGLISH LEARNERS

- Students are not having the same opportunities to have sustained academic conversations as they have during in-person learning. This is key for their language and content learning. The distance learning environment does not provide that opportunity as easily or as frequently.
- The Office of English Learners is thrilled that, "EL Teachers have learned and adopted a wide variety of new technological platforms to help support students." EL teachers have worked very hard to be able to provide lessons that include both language and content, and help students grow in this distance learning environment.
- APS Resources - The Bilingual Family Liaisons have been working closely with social workers, local support services and Arlington agencies to support families and their varied needs. BFLs often are the 'go to' for families in need.

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## EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Expectations for increased small group instruction have been shared with school teams and are supported through CLT meetings that happen on a weekly basis.
- Additional professional learning opportunities and share fairs are being scheduled for Mondays, so that colleagues can learn from each other about increasing student engagement, small group instruction and developing social skills from a distance.

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## EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

- Continue to create paths for historically and institutionally marginalized populations towards equitable access to college and career preparation. By closing opportunity gaps, more students will gain knowledge and explore a variety of initiatives associated with post-secondary scholarships, internships, post-secondary preparations, summer enrichment programs, and national leadership experiences. Collaboration with community organizations, Arlington County Government, local businesses, and high education institutions are essential to advancing equitable opportunities for students. Our plan includes increased communications with stakeholders through online communications such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Currently, the secondary coordinators have facilitated student meetings, affinity groups, and provided social-emotional support in the virtual setting. Additionally, staff in the office have partnered with our non-profit organizations to provide leadership development, academic support and mentoring during hybrid instruction. These partnerships include but are not limited to AHC, NC100BW, George Mason University, Virginia Tech College Access, MSAN and NOVA.
- Continue to provide professional learning opportunities to staff in the virtual setting that will enhance culturally responsive education and cultural competencies to advance equity in APS. The training will support teaching and learning as it will prepare staff with the tools to educate and support diverse learners. The objective is to deepen educators' understanding of why equity, race, social justice, and student voice matter to create a more inclusive school culture.

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## GIFTED SERVICES

- Continue to enhance and diversify communication to various stakeholders to expand understanding of the collaborative cluster model and how this supports learners in the virtual/hybrid model.
- Continue to offer multiple professional learning opportunities for administrators and teachers on understanding diverse gifted learners, social emotional needs of gifted learners, equity in gifted education, and differentiation, presenting high-quality resources and strategies all teachers can use to challenge and engage all learners, and extend standards based on readiness during virtual/hybrid instruction.
- Continue RTG collaborations to enhance consistency of practice and implementation in a virtual/hybrid model. (e.g., Canvas course for all teachers with virtual resources to extend standards, Choice Boards for critical and creative thinking strategies for families and teachers (asynchronous time).



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## MATH

- Math coaches and the Math Office have provided and continue to provide choice boards for elementary teachers that promote differentiation and personalization for students based on student need. A variety of lessons and tasks (including lessons and tasks that do not require the use of technology) have also been provided and will continue to be provided to assist teachers in both the virtual and hybrid learning models. Lessons and activities also support small group instruction.
- Secondary teachers and Math coaches continue to collaborate and plan countywide for both virtual and hybrid models to ensure consistency and quality of instruction for APS students.
- In addition to other forms of formative assessment, the Math and ATSS Offices are collaborating to provide more explicit guidance around using Dreambox to support the personalization of learning for all students. This work includes supporting unfinished learning, which data has revealed for even our most advanced learners, as well as providing targeted Tier 2 Interventions, through lessons determined by Dreambox’s artificial intelligence and in small group instruction.



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## SCIENCE

- The Science Office is following the VDOE science safety recommendations for distance learning to ensure the safety of our students and families, resulting in significant limitations for at-home, hands-on lab activities.
- We believe that there is great value in sharing and highlighting best practices, especially during distance learning. Science teachers have opportunities to collaborate and share best practices for synchronous and asynchronous learning in Collaborative Learning Teams, and department and countywide meetings.
- The Science Office is very concerned about science instruction time at the elementary level. According to the SAC survey, “two elementary school families stated that there had been no science instruction at all so far this year.” Both the SAC and the Science Office strongly support and will continue to advocate for adequate science instruction time in elementary schools.
- Encourage teachers to continue reaching out to families with students who are performing below expectations to provide additional support (e.g., targeted remediation, peer tutoring, etc.).

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## SOCIAL STUDIES

- Continue to encourage and support teachers in fostering civic discourse and dialogue in the online environment and classroom.
- Continue to encourage and support teachers to use small group instruction in order to increase student-to-student interactions.
- The Social Studies Office is very concerned about instructional time at the elementary level. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between time spent in Social Studies and increased reading comprehension scores. We will continue to collaborate with the ELA office to integrate Social Studies content into ELA instruction to maximize instructional time.

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## SPECIAL EDUCATION

- The Office of Special Education will continue to build capacity and consistency across related service providers and instructional assistants who are providing instruction in the distance learning model.
- The Student Support Coordinators will support IEP teams to navigate the transition process with families and students virtually, to ensure that students who are currently in the distance learning model have a successful transition to in-person learning.
- The Office of Special Education will continue to collaborate with school-based teams and content area supervisors in DTL on consistent use of time on Mondays.

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## STUDENT HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

- APS staff is available to provide information and evidence as necessary to inform SHAB.
- All PreK-10 HPE teachers are providing a balanced delivery of physical and health education along with social-emotional support and activities.
- APS is aligning with CDC and Virginia Governor's Executive Orders in planning and delivery of instruction.
- APS continues to offer Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to students in a variety of delivery options, including integrated in-classroom lessons and during Monday's asynchronous learning.

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## STUDENT SERVICES

- Continue to implement Arlington Tiered Systems of Support in meeting the academic, mental health and social-emotional needs of all our students.
- Our school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists will continue to identify student needs and provide timely/targeted interventions tailored to the individual needs of our students.
- Continue our efforts to strengthen our partnerships with community organizations to provide wraparound services, including mental health services and supports.

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## WORLD LANGUAGES

- Due to slower pace of instruction, we will follow up with teachers through department chairs on how to provide valid final exams this year.
- When providing PD or countywide meetings, we will continue to offer choice and collaboration time to lessen teachers' overwhelming loads.
- Continue PL on interactive slides for student and teacher engagement so teachers and students can better understand the available visual cues to gauge understanding.

