

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Arlington School Board

**FROM:** Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC)

**DATE:** April 27, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Non-recommending Year Report

The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC) would like to begin this annual report without recommendations by acknowledging the tremendous progress that has been made toward meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the Arlington Public Schools. While there is still significant work to be done, the solid collaborative partnership between ASEAC and the Office of Special Education allows us to move forward with great optimism for the future. We would like to recognize Superintendent Dr. Patrick Murphy and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Alvin Crawley for their support in fostering this collaboration.

### Recognition and Appreciation

ASEAC also wishes to highlight the following activities and initiatives undertaken this year to improve services to students with disabilities:

#### Autism

- APS' Office of Special Education (OSE) is expanding and improving its programs for students with Autism. New programs were added this school year at Wakefield, Hoffman-Boston, and HB Woodlawn, and additional programs for the fall will be added at Hoffman-Boston, Ashlawn, Barcroft Elementary Schools, as well as at Jefferson MS and Yorktown HS;
- APS was one of eight school districts out of over 50 applications, chosen to receive three years of support to improve education services for students with autism from the Virginia Commonwealth University-Autism Center for Excellence. The OSE put forth significant effort and collaborated with ASEAC and Arlington parents during this application process.

#### ADHD

- Kathleen Donovan, from the Parent Resource Center, developed many new and informative presentations for the parent community. Several of these Parent Resource Center's sponsored presentations received rave reviews from parents;
- Kathleen Donovan and Cristin Miller trained two classes of over 20 parents in the CHADD Parent to Parent ADHD Course, with another 80 parents signed up to take the class in the future. Kathleen and Cristin also began a monthly support

group for parents of students with ADHD. The support group regularly has 30-40 participants.

#### Reading

- Linda Arnsbarger of ASEAC, along with Special Education Coordinator and Reading Specialist Heidi Wagner, Dr. Kelli Krug and others have met this year with Dr. Crawford as a Reading Focus Group to explore and address special education issues related to reading. The first product of this Focus Group has been the creation of a FAQ Reading Resources webpage that is being helpful to parents and teachers alike. This FAQ webpage is now being used as the model for a similar page being developed for Math Resources.  
<http://www.apsva.us/154010321155911687/blank/browse.asp?A=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&C=67621>

#### Strategic Planning

- ASEAC Co-Chair Susan LeFande and Dr. Alvin Crawley deserve to be recognized for their efforts to ensure that new APS Strategic Plan will include objectives and measurements that are appropriate for students with special needs.

#### Evaluation

- Lisa Stengle, of the Office of Planning and Evaluation, is to be appreciated for her keen insight in crafting a thorough RFP for the Evaluation of Services for Students with Special Needs currently underway. Dr. Linda Campanelli and Nancy Van Doren both of ASEAC also serve as members of the evaluation committee and have contributed extensively on the design of the evaluation.

#### Budgeting

- Dr. Crawley provided strong leadership in mid-range planning for the new budget and has skillfully avoided a funding cliff for services as the AARA funding comes to an end. The special education community is both grateful and relieved by his work and attention to detail.
- Dr. Crawford and Dr. Crawley served as excellent stewards of the AARA funding to acquire new physical assets for the school system and increase the available range of materials for the Office of Special Education.

#### Collaboration with APS and Arlington County

- Becky Suttell of the Therapeutic Recreation division of Parks Recreation and Cultural Resources continues to support special education students in school-based recreation as well as summer and weekend classes. We are particularly impressed by her responsiveness to parent input and obvious desire to meet everyone's needs.
- Dr. Caputo, of the Arlington Career Center, graciously hosted ASEAC and PRC events at the Career Center.

### School Board and Staff Support

- The School Board worked hard to include an additional Autism Specialist in the 2011-2012 budgets to help handle the increased enrollment of students on the autism spectrum and to manage corresponding supervision needs.
- ASEAC is also thankful for the guidance and support services offered by Marilyn Taylor.
- ASEAC is ever appreciative of the expanded and helpful APS webpage for families of students with special needs, and the successful use of APS School Talk to announce our special events.

## Current Year Activities of the Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee

<b>September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented new committee structure</li> <li>• Created working group to support APS' development of the 2011-2017 Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Reviewed ASEAC's 2010-2011 Annual Blueprint of Action, as recommended by Virginia Department Of Education (DOE)</li> <li>• Set up process for active involvement in the Evaluation of Services for Students with Special Needs</li> <li>• Received feedback from parents on the status of several new Autism programs</li> <li>• Established a Reading Task Force to focus on interventions and programs to address reading services</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Crawford presented the annual "Status of Special Education in Arlington"</li> <li>• Received follow-up feedback from parents on the development of new autism programs</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Crawley presented the APS budget process, the existing budget for Special Education and the challenges of the upcoming budget, especially the termination of AARA Stimulus funds</li> <li>• ASEAC provided input on the priorities for the APS evaluation of programs for students with special needs</li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisited new APS autism programs and reviewed ongoing feedback related to planning and implementation of initiatives</li> <li>• Discussed critical staffing for successful Autism programs and the need to individualize the delivery of the services within the autism—specific programs description</li> <li>• ASEAC held a joint meeting with the ESOL/HILT ACI committee to discuss the coordination of services to dually identified English language learners</li> </ul>
<b>January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed and discussed the graduation rates for students with disabilities and the conflicting information in School Board presentations and state reporting documents</li> <li>• Discussed the Special Education evaluation and its scope, including procedures, timeline and anticipated outcomes</li> <li>• Reviewed and endorsed the ESOL/HILT Advisory Committee recommendations and visited their monthly meeting for a collaborative discussion of special education needs within the ESOL/HILT program and the larger ELL community</li> </ul>
<b>February</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received a presentation by Suzanne Raber on the process and administration of the Stakeholder Survey for the Strategic Plan. ASEAC strongly urged Ms. Raber to consistently include measures not only for ethnic groups but also for students with disabilities and English Language Learners, aligning APS' strategic plan and data reports with U.S. Dept. of Education's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) reporting standard.</li> </ul>

<b>March</b>	Hosted two events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 12<sup>th</sup>,-- a family-friendly open house at the Arlington Career Center during which Dr. Caputo gave an introduction to the Center's curriculum and student ambassadors gave tours to students and parents,</li> <li>• March 22<sup>nd</sup>, ASEAC's Annual Parent Forum, which included parent speakers, a presentation by Dr. Crawford on the Office of Special Education (OSE) Annual Plan and a preliminary briefing on the APS Budget and its implications to the OSE budget and staffing. We also received current reporting on the 2009-2010 SOL results benchmarked alongside of similar jurisdictions;</li> </ul>
<b>April</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed ACI yearly report</li> <li>• Dr. Crawford provided a presentation on projected special education enrollment and staffing for 2011-2012</li> <li>• Received a presentation on the professional development for educators involved with students with Autism,</li> <li>• Began a conversation on the transition practices between school levels, including the alignment of policy and practices for IEP coordination and inter-school communications</li> </ul>
<b>May</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASEAC will hold its final meeting of the year at the Arlington Career Center from 6:00-7:30pm featuring a Pizza Dinner and an encore Open House courtesy of Dr. Caputo and his student ambassadors in response to requests by many families for an evening session similar to the March 12<sup>th</sup> Saturday event.</li> <li>• ASEAC's meeting will follow the open house from 7:30-9:00 pm</li> </ul>

**Relevant Topics**

**Data**

ASEAC strives to base all of its work and recommendations on data. We have stressed the need for appropriate data to be collected, managed and analyzed at multiple levels in order to enable effective instruction of all APS students and to foster superior leadership in the schools. ASEAC is very pleased that APS has independently collected and shared detailed data regarding the performance of all AYP subgroups as well as benchmark data comparing APS to other similar Virginia school districts. This data has already strengthened our system by encouraging reflective discussion and generating new ideas. We believe the insight this data has provided is incredibly valuable, has revealed both strengths and weaknesses in the system and provided excellent direction for the future. We look forward to seeing continued collaborative reflection at all levels to be followed by solid action plans for improvement designed to alter current strategies and focused efforts on meeting the needs of each individual child.

## **Paraprofessional and teacher professional development**

Nearly every recommendation that is presented to ACI has a professional development component attached. The importance of having high quality, competent and happy teachers in every classroom simply cannot be stressed enough. For students with disabilities this issue is compounded exponentially by the differing needs of each child and the legal obligation to provide services by appropriately trained professionals and paraprofessionals.

The OSE has expanded professional development offerings that specifically address the needs of students with disabilities. For several years, ASEAC has expressed concern that there is inadequate linkage between the teacher evaluation system and the professional development delivery system. We look forward to the development of a tracking system that will help streamline the planning process for distribution and delivery of professional development throughout the school system. ASEAC also urges APS to provide additional training to teachers on how to effectively manage and collaborate with the paraprofessional instructional assistants assigned to their classrooms in order to improve academic outcomes.

## **Relationship with ACI**

ASEAC is a state mandated committee that reports to the school board through the superintendent. (See attached.) In Arlington, we are positioned as a subcommittee of the Advisory Council on Instruction and present some of our recommendations through ACI to the Superintendent and School Board. This is an excellent opportunity for ASEAC to interact with curriculum committees. ASEAC hopes to increase opportunities to meet with the leadership of other ACI committees and to have meaningful discussions regarding overlapping topics of significant interest related to student achievement (for example, reading and math performance for students with disabilities).

We would very much like to see the chairs of ACI committees meet regularly to plan committee work, basing priorities and efforts on needs as defined by student performance data and strategic plan goals. We believe all ACI subcommittee chairs should be active, voting members of ACI. Currently, the ASEAC chair is not allowed to speak or vote at monthly ACI meetings. This seems counterproductive to the purpose of including ASEAC as a subcommittee of ACI. We hope we can work with the ACI leadership to develop a more productive structure and relationship that will allow us to advise APS in its efforts to improve student achievement.

## **Update of Previous Recommendations:**

**Evaluation:** In 2010, ASEAC recommended “**that Arlington Public Schools objectively evaluate its services and support for students with special needs**”.

That evaluation has been funded by the School Board and ASEAC is now working with a multi-disciplinary team, under the direction of Lisa Stengle of the Office of Evaluation, to guide this to fruition. This summer, a Request for Proposal will be issued and the evaluation should be underway by fall. We are very pleased with this effort and continue to be actively involved in its outcome and success.

**Electronic Grading and Assignment Posting:** In December of 2009, ASEAC recommended to the School Board “**that the Superintendent require the use of electronic posting of assignments for use throughout APS**”. The current system in place and most widely used in APS is Blackboard. Currently, this electronic posting of assignments is sporadically available, but extremely helpful to students and families where it is available. We also support the electronic posting of performance reports and urge that this be implemented system-wide as soon as possible. All families and students, with or without disabilities benefit greatly from electronic posting of assignments and grades, particularly those students who have difficulty writing, reading and those who have difficulty with executive function skills. This is an essential component of the goal to prepare our students for college and for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of employment and is critical for our students to be successful participants in that future. We hope the School Board will consider this recommendation going forward.

Thank you.

**Committee Members:**

Chair, Alisa Cowen  
Co-Chair, Susan LeFande  
Secretary, Linda Campanelli  
Members:

Linda Arnsbarger  
Alexandra Arriaga  
Jay Brent  
Valerie Gamache  
Jakob Klaus  
Rosario Maldonado  
Kate Moore Patton  
Bertha Parada  
James E. Smith  
Terrig Thomas  
John Toner  
Nancy Van Doren

ACI Liaison: Donna Felipe  
Staff Liaison: Dr. Julie Crawford

**ASEAC Sub-Committees:**

ADHD  
Autism  
Mental Health  
Reading  
Budget and Planning  
Evaluation  
Bridging – Inclusion ESOL Sp. Ed.  
Communications – Outreach – ACI Liaisons - Recognitions  
2011-2017 Strategic Planning



**PURPOSE OF ASEAC:**

The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee is mandated by the Virginia Department of Education and:

1. Advises the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities
2. Assists in the development of long range plans designed to provide needed services for children with disabilities
3. Participates in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities
4. Submits periodic reports to the school board
5. Assists the school division in interpreting educational plans to the community for meeting the needs of children with disabilities.

The Arlington special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC) exists as a result of State of Virginia regulations requiring each school division to have a local advisory committee on special education.