

**Arlington Public Schools  
Advisory Council on Instruction  
Evelyn Syphax Academic Center (Education Center Annex)  
Wednesday, September 15, 2010**

Present were:

ACI Leadership: Donna Felipe, and Tecla Murphy, ACI co-chairs; Judy Hadden, Yvonne McIntire, Betsy Morse, Theresa Schweser, and Lisa Sockett, ACI Vice Chairs; Mark Johnston, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction (Executive Secretary, ACI).

ACI Membership (returning, new, and prospective members): Kathryn Scruggs (AAUW, alternate); Lee Dorman (for Wanda Perkins, AEA); Julie Gugino (Civic Federation, alternate); Natalie Goldring (LWV); Tina Masciangioli (Abingdon); Janice Bitetti (ASFS); Kathy Rehill (ATS); Matt Karush (Ashlawn); Barret Hildebrand (Barrett); Tracey Kretzer (Campbell, alternate); Hans Baumann (Glebe); Jerry Murphy (Jamestown); Rebecca Hunter (Key); Beth Dowd (Long Branch); Maureen LaPiana (McKinley); Kevin Clark (Jefferson); Pam Silberstein (Swanson); Liz Konick (Swanson); Edwin Yong (Williamsburg); Debbie Spiliotopoulos (H-B Woodlawn, HS); Karolina Walkin (H-B Woodlawn, MS); Bob Trudel (Wakefield); Susan LeFande (Washington-Lee); Luann Moy (Washington-Lee); Martha Hermann (Yorktown); and Karen Hunt (Yorktown).

Advisory Committee Chairs/Staff Liaisons: Chris DeRosa, Chair (Arts); John Kaufhold, Chair, and Kris Martini (CTAE); Sandra Redmore, Chair, and Michelle Picard (Early Childhood); Faith Tabatabai, Staff Liaison, ESOL/HILT; Margaret Gilhooley (Staff Liaison, Gifted Services); Edmund Pendleton, Chair (Health/PE); Pat Robertson (Staff Liaison), Rance Cleaveland and Ron Fecso (Mathematics); Connie Skelton (Staff Liaison, Science); Alisa Cowen and Susan LeFande, (Chairs, Special Education); Rick Jackson (Chair, World Languages).

Guests: School Board Members Abby Raphael, Sally Baird, James Lander, and Emma Violand-Sánchez; Superintendent Patrick K. Murphy; Boy Scout Abe Konick.

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m.

After brief greetings from Donna Felipe and Tecla Murphy, the members of the School Board addressed the group.

Abby Raphael: Thank you for including us in your meeting. I bring Libby Garvey's regards—she is not able to be here tonight but always loves to attend. Many past and present School Board members were on the ACI—Libby, myself. We appreciate the reading you do, the hard decisions you make, and the thoughtful deliberations.

I recently was with a professor from Peking University; he is interested in parent involvement in education and advocates for it in China. I told him about ACI, where parents and the community work with staff on tough issues and bring those issues to the School Board. I told him that the ACI had actually changed how we do business. The best part of School Board work sessions is the discussion, which is beneficial to all.

This summer, the Board met to talk about its priorities. We discussed how to focus, how to be effective and efficient. It was a lot of work; the result is four priorities. [APS School Board FY 2011 Priorities and FY 2012 Budget Direction page is shown on SmartBoard.] These are challenging economic times; we need to be economically and fiscally responsible.

Emma Violand-Sanchez:

**(Board Priority #1: Student Achievement and Student Success)**

Student achievement and success is our number one priority. This will include review of staff, mathematics, minority achievement, and monitoring the special education evaluation process. It includes looking at the graduation rate and other measures of success, delivery of instruction, length of school day, multi-age classes, school groupings, and class size. This is driven by data—the gaps show that while statewide 72 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time, the number is 68 percent in Arlington. And while 68 percent of LEP students at the state graduate on time, the number is 54 percent in Arlington. We need to look at data on English language learners, math achievement, and ask for support.

Tonight is the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month, and I must leave for a celebration.

Sally Baird: **(Board Priority #2: Strategic Planning)**

We worked to drill this down—not only for us but also for the Committee. The Strategic Plan is talked about a lot in ACI, and the School Board can talk with the Committee.

Secondly, we need to take a systematic look at our business operations. This is number two on the list in the State Efficiency Review. We need a program planning model for capacity over the next few years to manage schools, capacity, and resources.

Abby Raphael: **(Board Priority #3: Teacher and Staff Quality)**

At Administrative Conference we discussed teacher evaluation and compensation—all the different factors that make Arlington a great place to teach.

James Lander: **(Board Priority #4: Communication)**

A consistent concern of the School Board and the community is communication—and not just language, because there are more than 100 languages spoken in Arlington. This communication is exchange of information. Arlington is full of activists but also parents. Some parents are able to advocate, navigate, and communicate, and interact to pick the best programs and opportunities for their children. We need to improve communication—not just get the information out. It is a two-way street; we want to ask ACI to help.

Now we have a few minutes for questions.

Hans Baumann: On the first priority, there are four instructional areas to be reviewed. Were these chosen or scheduled?

Abby Raphael: Some departments are on a cycle; some were targeted by interest.

Kathy Rehill: How is our enrollment compared with projections?

Dr. Murphy: The seven-day count is being pulled together and then there will also be the 30-day count. We projected 21,083 and our Day 1 count was 19,903. This number does not include the pre-k students now rolling in—we expect around 750. Also not counted are the secondary alternative education students. We may be right about on target. Last year we were at 94 percent capacity at the same point in time.

Abby Raphael: We projected an enrollment increase of 5 percent. Our expected 850 students could be 1,200. There are a lot of students; we've added trailers to a couple of schools, and the contingency fund for staffing has been exceeded by a lot. Capacity and enrollment are big issues.

Betsy Morse: When I was a Rep [to ACI] long ago, there was a lot of back and forth then about reconciling and closing the achievement gap and improving student success. Now it seems there is more emphasis on the gap and less on success.

James Lander: We looked at the terminology. There are different types of learners. What do we want to eliminate? Race as a predictor of success. If programs work well, we want to communicate this to all; that race is not a predictor of success. The School Board tried to narrow down what to accomplish, and that is success for all.

Sally Baird: As we go into the Strategic Plan, there are lots of factors—race, socioeconomic issues. “Success” means different things for different students. There has been lots of conversation about how to refer to it in the years ahead. Words are key; we need to determine this as a community.

Betsy Morse: As a former ESOL teacher in another county, we had better communication. It's not an either/or.

Abby Raphael: There is no thought to one being more important than another. We want students to be happy, well-rounded, and good citizens. Student success is about much more than test scores; we want them to be good readers and to be engaged ....

James Lander: Responsible parents of affluence do well—they don't think the gap is important to them. But not all white students are at the top and all black students at the bottom. “Responsive” is not a slogan—we want to be responsive to all. Eighty percent of Arlington citizens don't have children [in Arlington Public Schools].

Debbie Spiliotopoulos: About the graduation gap—are there issues with kids not graduating from college because they are not prepared?

James Lander: My daughter just went away to school. Often we do such a good job, yet not about how to prepare to be successful. My daughter didn't know there would not be bells at college. (Laughter) We need to prepare for a global workforce. We need to see beyond just college as preparing for success after high school. I chose the military.

Abby Raphael: There is some remediation in college, but we are not looking at college graduation rates.

Mark Johnston: We've done some surveys in the past, but we're not sure how reliable they are.

Sally Baird: We are working with NOVA...

Mark Johnston: ...and with other divisions.

Susan LeFande: Regarding the Teacher Quality priority--from the Special Education community, we feel teachers do best who do communication best. We need a parental component requirement for evaluation. I am happy to see this in the priority.

Abby Raphael: Now we will hear from Dr. Murphy.

Dr. Murphy: Good evening, and thank you all for coming tonight. Last year at this time we were a little further ahead in the budget process than we are now. Several of you asked me before the meeting for an update or any news on the budget. I just met with Senior Staff and with the County Manager to pull together the pieces that will determine what the budget will look like this next fiscal year. For now, all I can say is that more information on the budget will be available in the next several weeks.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the time, effort, and commitment all of you make to ACI. I see a number of familiar faces, and I know many of you have served for multiple years. The message delivered at the start of last year revolved around the challenging economic times that we were facing. What impressed me is how ACI accepted this reality and embraced the belief that we will make things work within the tight budget constraints. The recommendations you put forth clearly fit those realities. And in them was portrayed a message of reasonability, responsibility, and sustainability. These will continue as key tenets as discussions and recommendations unfold this coming year.

We do, nonetheless, have choices and options. School Board members just made clear a set of priorities that will help direct and focus where we want to be, both in the short-term and in the long-term. The document shared with you by the Board was put together using the nominal group technique. We started by listing out all the things we wanted to do. From there we began to sort, group, and prioritize, eventually distilling out ideas that ended up in the stated priorities you just heard presented by the School Board. A tremendous amount of thought and work went into this process and in the resulting document. As ACI gets underway, we hope your ideas, discussions, and efforts will develop creative solutions under these common priorities or goals.

As the new school year gets underway, let me tell you a few of the “no’s” that we face:

- There is no international health epidemic
- There is no world leader visiting us on the first day of school
- There is no major snow in the forecast....(laughter)

There are also some significant positives:

- The SAT scores for the Class of 2010 that were just released by the College Board showed double digit increases in reading, writing, and mathematics. Furthermore, these increases were found among students of all ethnic and racial groups. SATs are only one component to assessing student achievement, but these results attest to the quality of our instruction and to the overall health of our educational system.
- Arlington Science Focus School was honored at a ceremony last evening in Washington, D.C. as a finalist in the 2010 INTEL Schools of Distinction Awards. This program honors schools for implementing innovative science and math programs and for serving as models for other schools. ASFS received \$5,000 with this award.
- Today, Wakefield High School had the honor of recognizing one of its teachers, Colette Fraley, who was selected as the Virginia 2011 Region IV Teacher of the Year. Ms. Fraley was selected as Arlington’s Teacher of the Year last spring, and her name is now entered with the other regional finalists into the competition for Virginia Teacher of the Year. It was a pleasure to be on hand to recognize Ms. Fraley for her achievement.

All of these items not only reflect positively on individuals and specific schools, but on the quality of instruction and effort throughout the school system and the community. This is also seen in some of the efforts already underway this year, such as formation of the Math Articulation Committee spanning Grades K to 12 and the Graduation Task Force mentioned earlier in the meeting. These and many other initiatives reflect the integrity and positive attitude that underscores our efforts on behalf of all APS students and their families.

I’ll end by again thanking you for all the work you did last year, and for volunteering to serve again on ACI. I look forward to your input and to our continued dialogue in the months ahead.

After a short break, Mark Johnston, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction, addressed the group:

Mark Johnston: Thank you all for coming this evening. As you can see [shows PowerPoint illustration], due to a change in the policy, I have become the “Executive Secretary” of ACI. Sitting in the back of the room is my administrative assistant, Marilyn Taylor ... who is really the “executive secretary.” (Laughter)

I want to be sensitive of the fact that we have both new and returning ACI members here this evening; welcome to all of you. I’d like to bring everyone up-to-date on activities in the Department of Instruction.

- This year we are working on a new [secondary] grade book program which we are piloting in two schools; we hope to launch it countywide in secondary schools in 2011-12. We are looking for parents of middle school and high school students to serve on the secondary grading committee. If you are interested in this, please see me. The first meeting will be Thursday of next week, September 23, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Some of the questions we are addressing include “How do we provide feedback for the students?” “How do you earn an ‘A’?” The book we are using to guide our study is *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades* by Ken O’Connor. It is really about expectations. Our goal is that an “A” will mean the same thing in all schools. And how about a zero? Statistically, a zero on work can be weighted very heavily; it could be very difficult for a student to overcome even one zero for one missed assignment. We will consider the implications of this.
- Second, we are hoping to expand the membership on ACI’s advisory committees. As one way of doing this, we are having a community coffee on Saturday, October 16, in the Career Center Dining Room from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. where we’ll first present an overview of ACI and the function of the advisory committees, then have a round-table discussion featuring each committee individually.

At Dr. Johnston’s invitation, the individuals in attendance introduced themselves by name; when applicable, where their child(ren) is/are enrolled in APS; and stated the organization they represent on ACI or their staff position with APS.

Mark Johnston: [continuing with PowerPoint on SmartBoard]: Here you can see the structure of ACI. The co-chairs and vice-chairs serve in leadership roles and as liaisons to the advisory committees. There, they are a point of contact for questions.

[Showing the list of the 14 advisory committees]: These committees are on a two-year reporting cycle; that is, they make recommendations once every two years, the ACI as a whole votes on those recommendations, and they are all sent on to the School Board. When committees are in their non-recommending year, they present an update on what they are working on.

As you can see, each committee has membership (up to 20 members), a chair (or co-chairs), a staff liaison, and a vice chair liaison. This is a nice, supportive structure.

Now I’d like to give you an overview of the ACI website. [Shows ACI website home page; then committee reports and staff responses.]

Bob Trudel: Where would I find sports?

Mark Johnston: That is a subject that could be found in several places; I’d start with Health/Physical Education and Athletics. You might also find some reference to sports in the Student Services Department; “sports” could find a home in many places.

Pam Silberstein: How does the Strategic Plan work as a part of ACI?

Mark Johnston: The Strategic Plan committee will begin to map it out on Monday; I'm not sure of the details of it at this point as they are just working on it.

Matt Karush: Would you please comment on the timing of the staff responses [to the recommendations]?

Mark Johnston: The committees bring their recommendations to the ACI; ACI votes on each recommendation; APS staff prepares a response to each recommendation and that staff response goes to the Board along with the reports and recommendations before the Board Work Session on ACI in the spring.

Bob Trudel: Are there any new graduation requirements? How about economics / personal finance credit(s)?

Mark Johnston: That requirement was delayed by the State because of budget.

Kathy Rehill: Do some of the advisory committees still need members? What shall we do to try to recruit them?

Mark Johnston: All of the advisory committees have room for additional members, though CTAE and Special Education are nearly filled.

Sandra Redmore: I'd like to remind everyone that "Early Childhood" means instruction through Grade 2. Many people think it means just preschool.

Rance Cleaveland: As for recruiting, we could make a brief presentation at our PTA meetings.

Mark Johnston: I can load up these pictures (slideshow) on the ACI website and you can use it. [This has been done; the information can be found under "Minutes and Meeting Materials" for September 15.]

Jerry Murphy: How well do ACI's recommendations fare with the School Board?

Mark Johnston: Each year in January I make a presentation to the Board giving the status of the previous year's ACI recommendations. You can see this on BoardDocs.

Beth Dowd: I'd like to remind all of us that it's important to take a long-term view of our work here. We need to be big picture thinkers; if you want things to go fast, this is not the place you'll be happy.

Kathryn Scruggs: I'm concerned about the schools which are not represented here tonight. We need a very aggressive outreach; maybe those of us who represent a community organization might "adopt" a school ....

Mark Johnston: Point well taken.

Natalie Goldring: Mark, would you please outline how the recommendations fit into the budget cycle?

Mark Johnston: Good point. Each recommendation must include its budgetary implications. This includes staff development costs. It's easy to say "the cost is zero, the teachers can handle it." But we have to remember that for them to do one thing, it means they are not doing something else; at the very least, there is the cost of paying for subs to cover their classes while they are doing "x."

An example of a recommendation that has borne fruit is that we now have a line item in the budget for art supplies. This was enacted a couple of years ago.

Natalie Goldring: ... the budget cycle ...

Mark Johnston: Oh, yes; APS begins its budget deliberations for FY 2012 in December of this year; ACI begins hearing and voting on this year's recommendations in the spring, so the soonest you can expect a recommendation to be acted on is the following year.

Rick Jackson: In our advisory committee [WLAC], we find that it's helpful to spend the first couple of meetings looking over past recommendations and determine how much we are still interested in pursuing.

Mark Johnston: That's a good strategy.

[Dr. Johnston then ended his presentation by showing the results of last year's ACI priority ranking which is on the ACI website / "Committee Reports"].

[Short break]

Tecla Murphy: I am happy to join Donna as ACI co-chair this year and I want to thank you for all you do. As Beth mentioned earlier, I, too, needed to learn to take a long-term view of what we do here on ACI. I've also been thinking of what I might mention here at the start of the year that would be helpful to us individually and as a group. Here is what I thought of:

- use the ACI website [[www.apsva.us/ACI](http://www.apsva.us/ACI)] as a resource
- use the staff liaisons and vice chair liaisons as resources too

Some general rules will help things run smoothly:

- No APS employees may serve as members of ACI
- The templates for advisory committee reports are very important; they give our work uniformity and a professional presentation [these are found on the ACI website under "Committee Reports"]
- Please respect deadlines and timelines / lateness creates a ripple effect and stress on others

Mark Johnston [showing the website page listing the advisory committee meeting times and vice chair liaisons]: ACI vice chairs can drop into the meetings just to see how things are going; maybe not stay for the entire meeting.

Donna Felipe: Some of the reports can be rather lengthy. If this is the case for your committee, it's a good idea to create an executive summary.

Tecla Murphy: Also, don't be surprised that some of the questions your report might receive from members of ACI are likely to be rather pointed; don't be put off by that.

Betsy Morse: That's right; the ACI members will come representing their own point of view, but the School Board is going to look at a broader perspective.

Connie Skelton: Yes; but ACI members need to remember to be civil in their comments. I would urge everyone to keep in mind that the committee chairs and members are all volunteers just like you are; they work hard on their reports and should be treated with respect for that effort, even if you don't agree with all of their conclusions and recommendations.

Edmund Pendleton: Are there any budgetary guidelines [for recommendations]?

Mark Johnston: Last year was unique for ACI's advisory committees. The recommendations across the board were more consistently "to maintain" or "not decrease" what we have; they were all basically low budget items. That is the first time I had seen that in the six years I've been in this position. As the budget comes more into focus, you'll have a better idea of what is realistic. To answer your question, though, there are no specific dollar limits.

Betsy Morse: Do we have a sense of the budget at this point?

Mark Johnston: I wouldn't be wise to say ... (laughter). Back to the October 16 Coffee. We hope to encourage wider community participation in our advisory committees; we want to be sure to have at least one representative from each committee at the coffee. I have a sign-up sheet here and encourage you to volunteer to represent your committee at the coffee.

Thank you all for coming this evening.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

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**Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 13, 2010**

**Education Center Annex / Large Conference Room**

**1439 North Quincy Street**

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