

MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board

FROM: Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee

DATE: October 25, 2013

SUBJECT: Recommending Year Report 2013-2014

Introduction

The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC) is pleased to present this Report with Recommendations to the Advisory Council on Instruction (ACI), the Superintendent of Arlington Public Schools, and the Arlington County School Board. ASEAC wishes to express its sincere appreciation to Superintendent Patrick Murphy, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Brenda Wilks, Director of the Office of Special Education Kristi Murphy, and Director of the Office of Pupil Services, Jeffrey Carpenter for their dedication to our students and their continued support in fostering a strong collaborative working relationship. It also recognizes and thanks Kathleen Donovan and Vickie Barr, Parent Resource Center, Wendy Carria, Office of Pupil Services and Becky Suttell, Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation. ASEAC is particularly grateful for the administrative assistance provided by Rosa Ewell and Veronica Tellez and its Spanish language interpreter, Soraya Strobach.

ASEAC is tasked under Virginia Code to advise Arlington Public Schools (APS) of the “needs in the education of children with disabilities.” Children with disabilities include those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) found eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), students identified for support under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the related Amendments act (ADA AA) and students supported through Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT). (Note: IAT is available to any student in need of assistance and is not limited to students with disabilities.) As ASEAC represents the needs and interests of all children with disabilities, the Committee recognizes that there are numerous children with disabilities not formally identified as such, yet in need of assistance and support.

To date, in 2013-2014, approximately 3,540 or 15.6% of APS students have IEPs and qualify for services under IDEA. (This figure is an estimate provided by the Office of Special Education based on the 2012-2013 school year and 2013 summer figures. Glitches with Synergy preclude the Department from pulling exact figures at this time. An updated number count will be provided in ASEAC’s addendum report in January.) While the overall number of APS students with disabilities continues to increase, it is significant to note that the overall percentage of the APS special education student population has consistently hovered around 14-15%. APS’ enrollment growth will

inevitably include a comparable growth in the number of students with disabilities. These students receive a variety of services and/or accommodations provided either in general education classrooms or “self-contained” special education classrooms (or a combination thereof). 365 students receive accommodations and/or services through Section 504 and 650 are served by supports through the IAT process.

Update

Since our last report in the Spring of 2013, ASEAC held its annual public forum, three regular committee meetings, participated in a joint meeting with the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on the Elimination of the Achievement Gaps and took part in multiple SEPTA events.

In April, ASEAC’s annual public forum focused on Autism. APS staff, ASEAC members (Alexandra Arriaga (Co-Chair), Heather Alderman (Secretary) and Terrig Thomas), Virginia Commonwealth University-Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) representative Steven Celmer, Congressman Jim Moran, and Virginia Delegate Patrick Hope presented at the event, which was attended by approximately 100 people. Summaries were presented on current initiatives for the improvement in services for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder at the local, state, and federal levels.

In May, current ASEAC members, Nadine Asef-Sargent (Chair) and Donna Owens led participants through the Dyslexia Training Institute’s “Dyslexia for a Day” simulation. Attendees learned about the neurological basis of dyslexia and experienced what it is like to be an individual struggling with dyslexia, through reading and writing simulations.

Also in May, ASEAC Chair Nadine Asef-Sargent and ASEAC members Linda Arnsbarger, James Smith and Rebecca Hunter, along with Director of Special Education, Dr. Kristi Murphy, attended a joint meeting with the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on the Elimination of the Achievement Gaps to discuss areas of joint interest in, and the outcome and recommendations of, the Evaluation of APS Services for Students with Special Needs.

In June, ASEAC hosted a meeting with the Director of Pupil Services, Jeff Carpenter, and Tom Wallace, Bureau Chief, Children’s Behavioral Healthcare Services, Arlington County Department of Human Services. Mr. Carpenter discussed how APS addresses mental health issues of students and Mr. Wallace focused on the County’s pediatric mental health services.

In September, ASEAC welcomed new members, who were given an overview of Committee operations by Co-Chair Alexandra Arriaga and Secretary Heather Alderman. Attendees were encouraged to participate in subcommittees and a new subcommittee was formed to address the unique needs of students with multiple disabilities. Priority topics for the coming year were proposed and Dr. Brenda Wilks and Dr. Kristi Murphy presented their status reports. In addition, ASEAC members Rebecca Hunter, Heather Alderman and Nadine Asef-Sargent represented ASEAC at a number of SEPTA events.

Recommendation: Implement a five-year plan to deploy the Arlington Tiered System of Supports (ATSS) throughout all Arlington public schools in partnership with the Department of Instruction. Establish and follow specific benchmarks, put into place a management system that guarantees accountability, and provide appropriate professional development to ensure fidelity throughout the system.

2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment: ATSS aligns with every Strategic Plan goal, addressing the diverse needs of all students.

Goal One: Ensure That Every Student is Challenged and Engaged

Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps

Goal Three: Recruit, Retain and Develop High-Quality Staff

Goal Four: Provide Optimal Learning Environments

Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child

Rationale: The ATSS model will address all six priority recommendations in the Evaluation of APS Services for Students with Special Needs, ensuring that “all students receive the instruction and interventions they need to support academic and social emotional learning and to achieve at a higher level of performance.”

The six recommendations are summarized below from the PCG Final Report:

1. Multi-tiered System of Supports. Expand on the current IAT process to make it more reflective of a comprehensive and research-based MTSS framework.
2. Inclusive Education. Actualize APS’ vision as a diverse and inclusive school community, committed to academic excellence and integrity, by maximizing inclusive and effective instruction, intervention and support for all students, including those with special and dual needs.
3. Organization & Collaboration. Maximize collaboration between personnel in the Department of Instruction and Student Services and within Student Services to facilitate the coordination of all APS resources to support teaching and learning.
4. Operating Standards. Produce electronic Standard Operating Procedure Manuals (SOPM) to post policies, procedures and expected practices for MTSS, Section 504 and special education/related services with links to additional information and resources.
5. Accountability. Establish a system of accountability that reflects APS’ vision of high expectations for all learners and a service delivery model that is proactive rather than reactive – and inclusive in nature.
6. Parent, Family, & School Partnerships. Increase parent awareness and understanding of the Parent Resource Center, MTSS, Section 504, and inclusive education/special education processes and increase communication between task forces and stakeholders to enhance their effectiveness.

ATSS will address improving educational outcomes for all students, but particularly for students with disabilities, minority students, and ELLs. Implemented with fidelity, ATSS will also support the closing of APS’ Achievement Gaps by providing “an earlier and more appropriate identification of students who are not on track academically and allows differentiated instruction and intervention as soon as a need is identified”

resulting in students not having “to exhibit significant academic failure or behavioral difficulties before they receive support.” (Common Core State Standards and Diverse Urban Students: Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, A Councils of the Great City Schools White Paper).

Budgetary Implications: Professional development and three Supervisors to support ATSS implementation in schools throughout APS. The cost is estimated to be \$350,000 - \$500,000.

School Board Priorities: As requested, ASEAC will submit an addendum by the beginning of January providing input concerning specific issues/questions that need to be addressed regarding improved reading achievement, class size, enhanced STEM opportunities, and 24/7 learning.

Update of Previous Recommendations:

Past Recommendation #1: Continue to be actively involved in the on-going Evaluation of Services for Students with Special Needs.

Status: Ongoing

The evaluation, conducted by the Public Consulting Group (PCG), was finalized in early 2013 and presented to the Arlington County School Board in February, following a January work session. APS staff, including those from the Office of Planning and Evaluation and the Department of Student Services, repeatedly remarked on the positive and valuable experience of working collaboratively with ASEAC members as part of the evaluation team. The results of the evaluation were presented to ACI on May 8, 2013.

PCG’s review of APS services for students with special needs included 20 recommendations that were reorganized and restructured to form 11 overall recommendations, including six that have the highest priority for implementation. PCG stressed the importance, when planning implementation activities, of ensuring that there is an alignment between the standards created for a Multi-Tiered System of Supports and inclusive education practices with training and accountability measures. In other words, to ensure that all standards are linked to training and accountability; that all training provisions are linked to standards and accountability; and that all accountability measures are linked to standards and training.

2011-2017 Strategic Alignment: Goal One: Ensure That Every Student is Challenged and Engaged

Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps

Goal Three: Recruit, Retain and Develop High-Quality Staff

Goal Four: Provide Optimal Learning Environments

Goal Five: Meet the Needs of the Whole Child

Budgetary Implications: None

ACI Vote: 25 – 0 – 0

Past Recommendation #2: All staff and ACI reports that include data on student achievement should include specific data on students with disabilities.

Status: Ongoing

ASEAC was pleased to see progress in this area with the ESOL/HILT and English Advisory Committee's reports containing data on students with disabilities. We look forward to improved data collection, through the implementation of the Synergy™ student information system. ASEAC notes that reporting of data on students with disabilities was not present in all staff reports in 2012-13 and reiterates the importance of disaggregating the data for each of the seven Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) categories.

We still see our students (as well as Limited English Proficient and Economically Disadvantaged) left out of reporting. We would like to see the Department of School and Community Relations take these groups' data to heart. The last press release on graduation rates issued October 8, 2013 mentioned the data for racial subgroups but not those three. <http://www.apsva.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=23543>. While the data is in the linked schedules, it is not in the press release. The September 26 press release on SAT/ACT scores also talked about and linked to racial group data but made no mention of these three groups, nor were they represented in the linked data. The August 20 press release on SOLs does not mention any subgroups at all, nor does it link to any charts with that info other than a generic link to VDOE.

Students with Disabilities, Limited English Proficient, and Economically Disadvantaged students routinely underperform and if we do not include these subgroups in reporting, we will not see where we need to focus our efforts in closing all Achievement Gaps.

2011-2017 Strategic Alignment:

Goal One: Ensure That Every Student is Challenged and Engaged

Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps

Budgetary Implications: None; can be done using existing resources

ACI Vote: 23 – 0 – 2

Past Recommendation #3: Review the structure and operating procedures of ACI and its committees so that greater emphasis is placed on 1) aligning efforts with strategic plan goals, 2) utilizing student data as a starting point for considering committee priorities, and 3) increasing the sharing of information among committees. Additionally, ensure that committees are given opportunities to formally review major staff initiatives together with other ACI committee members.

Status: Completed

ASEAC welcomed the importance the ACI Co-Chairs placed on aligning recommendations with APS strategic plan goals in its initial charge to the Committee. In addition, the Advisory Committee Chair meetings have been a valuable opportunity to encourage information sharing and camaraderie across committees.

2011-2017 Strategic Alignment:

Goal One: Ensure That Every Student is Challenged and Engaged

Goal Two: Eliminate Achievement Gaps

Budgetary Implications: None

ACI Vote: 11 – 0 – 14

Committee members:

Nadine Asef-Sargent, Chair

Alexandra Arriaga, Co-Chair

Heather Alderman, Secretary

Linda Arnsbarger, Cloe Chin, Misty Woodall Costner, Linda Gulyn, Katherine Harris, Genevieve Heighberger, Rebecca Hunter, Kay Luzius, Yvonne McIntire, Donna Owens, Raquel Pastor, Katherine Price, James Smith, Terrig Thomas, Kate Van Slyck, Heather Weir

Dr. Kristi Murphy, Staff Liaison

Appendices

Count of APS Students with Disabilities by Category, 2008-2013

What is MTSS?

VTSS (Virginia Tiered System of Supports)

SEAC Regulations

Count of APS Students with Disabilities by Category
(2013 count is current estimate)

	2013 <u>(10/1)</u>	2012 <u>(12/1)</u>	2011 <u>(12/1)</u>	2010 <u>(12/1)</u>	2009 <u>(12/1)</u>	2008 <u>(12/1)</u>
Disabilities						
Autism	439	421	361	324	286	276
ID	99	106	107	109	102	105
Developmental Delay	260	222	206	261	318	320
Emotional Disability	235	227	227	229	241	238
Hearing Impairment	51	49	46	47	28	25
Multiple Disabilities	118	118	116	108	88	78
Orthopedic Impairment	17	18	22	21	24	25
Other Health Impairment	764	724	654	552	489	476
Specific Learning Disability	1046	1023	1008	959	907	904
Speech/Language Impairment	493	436	437	481	483	458
Traumatic Brain Injury	7	7	7	12	9	10
Deaf-Blindness	1	0	0	0	0	0
Visual Impairment	10	12	13	13	12	18
TOTAL of SPED Students	3540	3363	3204	3116	2987	2933

The following is excerpted from Common Core State Standards and Diverse Urban Students: Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, A Councils of the Great City Schools White Paper

What is MTSS?

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports is the term used to describe an evidence-based model of education that employs data-based problem-solving techniques to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. This integrated instruction and intervention system is provided to students in varying levels of intensities (tiers) based on student needs. This needs-driven decision-making model seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students at suitable levels of quality and concentration to accelerate the performance of all students.

When implemented appropriately, MTSS has the added potential benefit of addressing the discrepancy in disciplinary rates among African American students and students with IEPs. National suspension data indicate that 17% or 1 of 6 African American students in grades K-12 were suspended at least once; a significantly higher rate than among Native Americans (8%), Hispanics (7%), Caucasians (5%), or Asian Americans (2%). Among all racial groups combined, more than 13% of students with disabilities were suspended, twice the rate of their non-disabled peers. Source: *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School*. Los Angeles: UCLA (2012).

MTSS provides a framework and set of critical tools and additional time to support teaching and learning at differing levels of intensity, depending on the academic needs of the students. Furthermore, MTSS provides an earlier and more appropriate identification of students who are not on track academically and allows differentiated instruction and intervention as soon as a need is identified. So, students do not have to exhibit significant academic failure or behavioral difficulties before they receive support. Using a tiered, systematic and schoolwide approach has the great potential to increase student engagement in learning and reduce behavioral and disciplinary distractions. Best practices in MTSS thereby support appropriate and acceptable behavior and bolster student achievement and can result in less reactive interventions and a greater concentration of scarce personnel and program resources onto students in greatest need.

The system leads to greater student engagement and decreased discipline referrals, as well as fewer students requiring special education services. MTSS can also help reduce the disproportionate representation of students from various racial/ethnic groups and those with developing levels of English proficiency in the ranks of those requiring special education services as the needs of such students can be met at the outset of the instructional process rather than after they begin to slip behind.

Virginia Tiered System of Supports

The Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS) is a framework and philosophy that provides resources and support to help every student to be successful in academics and behavior. It begins with systemic change at the division, school and classroom level that utilizes evidence-based, system-wide practices to provide a quick response to academic and behavioral needs. These practices include frequent progress-monitoring that enable educators to make sound, data-based instructional decisions for students. The following initiatives fall under the VTSS umbrella:

- Response to Intervention (RTI)
- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Content Literacy Continuum (CLC)

The [VTSS guide](#) (PDF) provides information to support division leaders in implementing VTSS division-wide research-based best practices and evidence from expert educators. This information will support division leadership teams as they assemble the structures necessary at all levels.

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/virginia_tiered_system_supports/index.shtml

Special Education Advisory Committee Regulations

The special education regulations pertaining to local SEACs provide a great deal of flexibility to localities as they implement this requirement. The regulations at 8 VAC 20-81-230 D state that:

D. A local advisory committee for special education, appointed by each local school board, shall advise the school board through the division superintendent.

1. Membership.

A majority of the committee shall be parents of children with disabilities or individuals with disabilities.

The committee shall include one teacher.

Additional local school division personnel shall serve only as consultants to the committee.

2. The functions of the local advisory committee shall be as follows:

Advise the local school division of needs in the education of children with disabilities;

Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;

Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;

Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services;

Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board; and

Participate in the review of the local school division's annual plan, as outlined in subdivision B.2. of this section.

3. Public notice shall be published annually listing the names of committee members and including a description of ways in which interested parties may express their views to the committee.

4. Committee meetings shall be held at least four times in a school year and shall be open to the public.

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_advisory/special_ed/local_sped_advisory_committees/index.shtml