

Dear APS, Steering Committee, and Staff,

Why should a select group of kids obtain fluency in a 2nd language in APS while 90% of Arlington children do not? All adults, who grew up in the US, know that the current model of teaching language primarily in middle school and high school was torturous and ineffective for most of us. APS deserves kudos for FLES but this falls way short.

Why is APS continuing the failed practices of the past and not embracing foreign language immersion in younger years like we are doing in Key and Claremont schools and as Utah and Canadian children are enjoying? Why are we stunting the cognitive and social development of 24,000 children? .

Here are some good reasons for implementing foreign language immersion in elementary school:

- a) higher cognitive and academic achievement in languages and math
- b) social, employment, and cultural benefits
- c) dual language immersion should not cost more than our current system
- d) dual immersion has been done successfully in Arlington for a quarter century.
- e) staffing challenges will be less than almost any other school district in the US because of our cosmopolitan metro area and attractive salaries.
- f) classtime in middle school and high school for other needed STEAM subjects could be liberated for current unpopular language classes. (or gym, music or math could be taught in a foreign language)
- g) financial support from France, the Gulf or China/taiwan is plausible if we open up a 3rd or a 4th immersion language.
- h) immersion won't displace other educational initiatives. E.g., there is an bi-lingual immersion Montessori ES in DC.
- i) Foreign corporations looking to invest or locate in DC area will be strongly attracted to locate in Arlington and help us fill up empty office space and diversify our economy.....and provide revenue for our schools.

Here is a recent low key article that provides An overview of language immersion research<http://carla.umn.edu/immersion/documents/ImmersionResearch_TaraFortune.html>.

My hope is that the APS will pursue a universal dual language immersion (in the elementary schools) program in the upcoming strategic plan.

It is not a question of if....but when APS implements this vision because it has so few downsides. I believe we can deal with the challenges of finding good staff and curriculum, kids

with special needs, resistant parents, and monolingual kids from other school districts. We can deal with it because it is being done in many places in the world.

Unfortunately, the strategic plan steering committee process is not well set up to engage the public in such a specific plan. The Committee's strength is coming up with mission and vision statements, but not so for a cross-cutting vision such as this. Any big change in language teaching is going to take 10 to 12 years to implement, and the strategic plan is only set up to look at the next 5 years. The other obstacle for the committee is that there are so many possible variations for implementation that uncertainty makes discussions with citizens difficult. What we need is SB and staff leadership to help the steering committee engage citizens in a long running discussion in some way. I don't know how to do this, but the World Languages Committee could be part of the solution. I am not asking you to de-prioritize the trains of personalized learning, ATSS, and project-based learning. These trains are already on the track with staff in the driver's seat. How can we get this dual language immersion train on the track with staff in the driver's seat?

I have fire in the belly about this because every year that goes by, 1900 more kids are having their cognitive development stunted. That is a hard word to write, but it applies to us and the SB because we are letting it happen. APS will be the envy of every school district in the country when we implement this. Let me know if I can be helpful in moving this discussion forward.

I have offered feedback on the form provided, but afterwards had one or two more thoughts:

"Global" and "nurturing": I'm struggling with the frequent use of Global in the statements. What does it mean? Not all students will study abroad during their APS years. So what then? Is it new newer, weaker sister to diversity? If it's just respecting diversity, then why not just say that?

I'm disappointed at the demotion of diversity. I had hoped we'd be striving for diversity, not just "nurturing" it.

I don't really like the language of "nurturing" differences. I wish we were working to *make bridges* across differences. Acknowledging and respecting them is a required starting point for developing the skills to go beyond recognizing and feeling that differences are okay, to *developing skills to reach across divides*. Let's get beyond holding hands and singing kumbaya.

Words like multi-cultural (and nurturing diversity) miss this distinction between feeling okay with differences and using differences for creative outcomes. Inter-cultural is an active label and still while it requires respect it goes further to promote *productive* communication, navigation and even creativity that comes from diverse teams. When diversity is productive, it is valued for what it does and what it is.

"Global" doesn't do anything for me but sound like a cool buzzword.

"Citizens": I'd like to suggest that we need to form good citizens in our schools. This crosses a couple of items proposed and includes:

- valuing diversity
- inspiring students to improve the world around them
- the importance of community
- partnership
- and I would add respect, responsibility and engagement

In other words, I might try putting citizenship at the top and see how many of these values fall under it. Strong sense of citizenship would promote these values in schools and beyond. It also would require beefing up our civics teaching and might encourage more civic volunteerism (not just business internships).

I am sure you have received ample communications from many directions about the strategic planning effort you are leading -- since I did not get a chance to weigh in on the draft version circulated with a Friday, Jan. 19 deadline for comment, I thought I'd reach out directly. I've been meaning to do so for some time anyway, and this seemed like an opportune inflection point to do so.

I several main concerns, although not exhaustive, that I believe need to be addressed.

- Goal 1 of the previous plan indicates that all children need to be challenged and engaged. Gifted children aside, APS has failed to meet this goal. While the School Board can rely on test scores to demonstrate that APS children exceed overall state averages, if the curriculum is not challenging in and of itself, then the test scores are relatively meaningless. To put a finer point on this, we recently passed my fifth grader's homework to my second grader to complete, and he finished it within 10 minutes. As far as I am concerned, this is not acceptable. The fact that my child will not be introduced to multiplication tables until 3rd grade, even though he understood the concept of multiplication in 1st grade is letting a mind atrophy, not be challenged and engaged.

- In the last decade that we have lived in Arlington, there has been no strategy with how to deal with the overcrowding -- this has been a piece-meal approach leading to a set of unsatisfactory options, due, in part, to postponed decision-making that has created far more complex and costly challenges to remedy. Again, I find this wholly unacceptable from a Board charged with providing an environment that supports avid learning -- a decade in the making with no measurable path for a holistic solution is in excusable to me. 4,500 students in a high school is both shameful and an embarrassment to APS.

- Technology in the form of iPads offers little value to the overall performance of students while adding a significant operating cost to APS. Research has clearly documented the value of physical hardcopy books and materials, handwriting lessons and problems, and the brain to hand connection. The iPad only adds to the attention deficit this generation is experiencing, shown scientifically in brain scans and developmental studies of young brains that are not establishing neural connections of previous generations.

- Differentiation (even for non-gifted students) is not a realistic method for addressing the needs of children across a spectrum of performance levels. As much as we don't want to be perceived as differentiating by socio-economic indicators, we are doing so by default anyway -- in trying to raise the lowest metrics in the county, ALL students are impacted negatively, even if the policy is well-intended. The notion of meeting the child where the child is at has been lost.

- Behavioral issues are often linked to the fact that our children are bored. Outside APS, I have visited classrooms that have 1 teacher for 20+ kids, there is minimal noise beyond children quietly working together in respectful dialogue, and the children are being challenged according to their own progress. If a child needs to wait 2 years to get content he is ready for, like my son and multiplication tables, it is not surprising that children are expressing their frustration and boredom by acting out (even though mine has never done so, being the rule follower that he is). In APS, I have witnessed infantilization of children that is disrespectful to their capabilities, intellect, and self-esteem; the factors I've mentioned above collectively produce a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Professionally, I work on strategic planning efforts regularly, and have seen very little APS action that indicates real vision for what our schools should look like -- the steps taken to date are about implementing a operational plan, not a strategy for where we need to be 5+ years in the future. I also have an instructional design background, having spent years developing curriculum, and I do not see evidenced in the APS curriculum or many exercises my children perform a clear progression of content depth and complexity, nor advancement of critical thinking skills and problem-solving.

I don't mean to imply that all is rotten in APS, nor adopt a shrill tone; however, in fairness to the taxpayers whose concerns are consistently rebuffed, these issues are substantive and merit review and should be addressed in the forthcoming plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these perspectives. I hope this year's effort can produce a much more forward-leaning effort, and happy to discuss any of these and related topics, as appropriate.

Thank you again for your responsiveness to the ASEAC member concerns and for your leadership. I've collected some key words and a mission statement that resonated with several members. They are listed below in this email. I realize you can't use all these but it at least gives you a sense of the kinds of words/sentiment they would like to see in the mission, vision and value statements.

We talked about meeting to prep for the ASEAC meeting on the 13th. Let me know if you are still interested in doing that.

Thanks again for all your hard work and dedication!

Key Words from ASEAC members

- Consistent/consistency
- Across APS
- From the top down
- All levels
- child-centered
- whole child
- Meet diverse needs
- Supportive/supports
- Caring
- equity
- supports
- differentiated
- universal design
- belonging
- racism (e.g. doing intentional work to acknowledge & counteract institutional racism)
- structural/institutional bias
- Acceptance
- Inclusive
- Inclusive schools
- Inclusive education
- Inclusion
- Full inclusion
- Fully included
- Unity
- Unified system
- Dignity
- Respect

Falls Church City Schools mission statement:

Falls Church City Public Schools is a student-centered, innovative, and inclusive community of lifelong learners. We strive to guarantee a personalized environment that supports each child's unique needs, where each achieves at least one year academic growth annually, and

where every graduate is prepared for their next step in life as a responsible, caring, and internationally-minded citizen.

My understanding is that the strategy is supposed to guide the Board and Superintendent in making choices and prioritizing resources over the next six years--that means tradeoffs. The point of this process, to me, should be to come to some kind of consensus on direction, at least, for how they should be considering these tradeoffs. I said in the meeting that there was no point in talking about goals if we didn't have agreement on the mission and vision--but now I'm rethinking that....maybe if we talked about some goals and had to think more about how to address the areas of tension, it would be easier to see where the mission and vision should be more clear or specific, so that they communicate a direction and not just a value.

Anyhow, here is the list I compiled based on the community feedback on the hopes and goals:

1. High standards, challenging curriculum, students need to be pushed, held to a high standard

VS

Far less emphasis on IP/AB, fewer tests/less homework, prioritize wellbeing over achievement, less pressure

2. Provide a variety of learning options e.g., vo-tech, outdoor, special interests

VS

More focus on traditional schools like ATS, good solid education

3. Focus on a neighborhood model, walkability, strong neighborhood schools, consistency across all schools

VS

All schools should have or be a choice program, more options with school choice, multiple choices with different focus

4. APS should be competitive in the region/the best, a leader in innovative methods, a role model in the US

VS

APS should focus on providing whatever is appropriate for Arlington students, think of Arlington taxpayers

5. Should be a gifted/pull out program like Fairfax AAP, should be more tracking in middle school

VS

Should be an inclusive environment for all children, should provide differentiated classrooms with sufficient teacher training/support

6. Make sensible attendance zones that aren't gerrymandered, less focus on diversity through race/ELL statistics

VS

Should be socioeconomic diversity throughout the system, make the hard choices

Moira