

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Work Session on the English Learners Program Evaluation
October 22, 2019

Item C-1-a

The Arlington School Board convened on Tuesday, October 22, 2019, at 7:02 PM at 2110 Washington Blvd., Arlington, Virginia.

Present were:

Tannia Talento, Chair
Monique O’Grady, Vice Chair
Reid Goldstein, Member
Barbara Kanninen, Member
Nancy Van Doren, Member
Melanie Elliott, Clerk

Also present were:

Cintia Johnson, Interim Superintendent
Dr. Jeannette Allen, Acting Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services
Catherine Ashby, Interim Assistant Superintendent, School and Community Relations
Leslie Peterson, Assistant Superintendent, Finance and Management
Dan Redding, Interim Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources
Lisa Stengle, Executive Director, Planning and Evaluation
Ty Byrd, Director, Secondary Education
Samuel Klein, Supervisor, Office of English Learners
Michael Frickel, Assistant Director, Planning and Evaluation
Ellen Smith, Principal, Hamm Middle School
Jennifer Denino, Assistant Principal, Randolph Elementary School
Anne Zebra, Chair, Advisory Council on English Learners (ACEL)
Dr. Aida Walqui, Teacher Professional Development Program, West Ed
Dr. Martha Castellón Palacios, Teacher Professional Development Program, West Ed
Carolyn Jackson, Supervisor, Equity and Excellence
Lori Silver, Supervisor, English Language Arts
Robyn Ristau, Planning and Evaluation

Ms. Talento called the meeting to order. She welcomed attendees and reviewed the agenda. Ms. Johnson acknowledged staff and advisory committee members who contributed to this work, and thanked staff from throughout APS who collaborate and provide support to EL students.

Overview

Mr. Klein acknowledged staff from the Office of English Learners and from other offices within the Department of Teaching and Learning, and explained the recent name change for the program. He also spoke to the recent DOJ Settlement Agreement that focused on helping APS improve instruction for English Learners (ELs).

The evaluation of the English Learner Program was a collaborative effort between WestEd consultants, staff, and the community, and Mr. Klein described how the report and DOJ settlement agreement have guided staff's work since the spring. He confirmed that recommendations from the agreement for increased staffing and translation services will be implemented but have budget implications. He then commented on strengths and key findings of the evaluation that align with APS strategic plan goals, such as the performance of ELs on state assessments, the time it takes ELs to become proficient in English, and work done by the bilingual family liaisons. Opportunities for growth include providing more quality interactions to students, increased opportunities to engage in language practice, and more rigorous academic activity.

WestEd Final Report

After acknowledging Arlington's commitment to supporting ELs, Drs. Walqui and Castellón Palacios presented the findings of the evaluation. Dr. Walqui described the collaborative evaluation methodology used for this work, and she shared five overarching questions that were used to guide the evaluation. She also explained that data was gathered through online surveys, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and student shadowing. Dr. Walqui then reviewed in more detail each of the findings of the evaluation report.

WestEd Recommendations and APS Action Steps

Mr. Klein presented the recommendations from the program evaluation. The first is to articulate and communicate an ambitious vision for ELs and to identify steps to achieve that vision. The second is to offer opportunities for professional learning focused on ELs to all educators. Additional recommendations relate to ensuring a positive school climate and relationships throughout APS, and to defining, operationalizing and communicating the purpose, design, approach and practice of instructional programs for ELs. Mr. Klein then described next steps to respond to the recommendations and reiterated the overall goal to strengthen support for ELs.

Board comments and questions

Board members appreciated the evaluation report, the recommendations and the presentation. The group discussed needed staff training, and Mr. Klein noted that APS staff will be able to provide much of the training in-house. He confirmed there will be costs for the recommended increased staffing and translation services. Additional discussion was held on engaging and ensuring equity for all students, dual identification of gifted students, and the importance of staff development to strengthen instruction. Mr. Klein shared additional information about the co-teaching model APS is exploring, as well as the recommended training that will address the settlement agreement. The group also discussed how to increase rigor and how push-in or pull-out techniques can support this effort. Dr. Castellón Palacios described some concerns about this approach, and Mr. Klein provided additional insight into how APS can provide increased rigor. Recognizing that students have different learning styles, the group acknowledged the importance of adapting instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Also discussed was the importance of students feeling engaged and having opportunities to practice speaking the new language.

The group further discussed professional development. Ms. Smith spoke to the training that was provided as part of evaluation and noted that the student shadowing exercise was particularly

informative. Additional staff members shared feedback on the takeaways that they found to be most valuable in the evaluation process, such as the importance of the teacher-student relationship, and providing ELs with opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Ms. Talento shared concerns about ELs who are not successful and asked for more information about who these students are and what challenges need to be addressed to help them learn. The group briefly discussed how to use coteaching effectively, and the importance of ensuring early childhood opportunities are made available to EL families. Board members looked forward to implementation of the recommendations, and Mr. Klein described the plans to move this work forward. Other topics also briefly discussed were how to measure success and how the requirements in the DOJ settlement agreement will be implemented.

In closing, the Board again appreciated the evaluation and work being done, and encouraged staff to work to implement the recommendations and improve instruction for all students.

The meeting adjourned at 9:37 PM.

ATTEST:

Melanie Elliott, Clerk
Arlington School Board

Tannia Talento, Chair
Arlington School Board