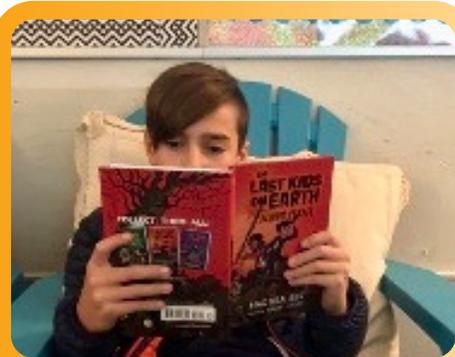


English Language Arts

# BRIEFING REPORT



MAY 2020



Arlington  
Public  
Schools



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The APS English Language Arts (ELA) Office enhances, develops and sustains high-quality curriculum, instruction, professional learning, assessment, and intervention in the English language arts. Our program seeks to develop students who are strategic readers, effective writers, engaging speakers, and critical thinkers. Literacy—the ability to read, write, and use language proficiently—is at the center of our ELA program. Students should be taught to become literate citizens, with the ability to think analytically, solve problems, communicate effectively, as well collaborate with diverse groups in their communities and workplaces.

## MAJOR SERVICES PROVIDED

- Communicate to a variety of stakeholders a common vision, curriculum, professional learning, instruction, intervention, and enrichment opportunities.
- Develop, revise, and enhance curriculum and instructional programs, and identify and create teacher resources that support rigorous teaching and learning aligned with state standards.
- Analyze formative and summative student achievement data and support site-based staff in this analysis.
- Identify and implement formative assessments to monitor student progress and inform instruction and intervention.
- Monitor instruction and program implementation, while promoting high-quality teaching and learning through observation and feedback cycles for teachers.
- Facilitate and sustain high-quality professional development for staff.
- Review current research for innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

## BRIGHT SPOTS

### COMPLETION OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

The ELA Office completed the 3-year program evaluation cycle in May 2019, which has influenced our work during SY19-20 with alignment to the 2018-24 Strategic Plan. The ELA Office continues to be focused on the goal of **Multiple Pathways to Success for All Students**, “Ensure that every student is challenged and engaged while providing multiple pathways for student success by broadening opportunities, building support systems and eliminating barriers. APS will eliminate opportunity gaps so all students achieve excellence.” The ELA Office collaborates and works across departments, offices, and schools to increase achievement for all reporting groups on district and state assessments, and to show progress toward eliminating the opportunity gap.

Additionally, the ELA’s Office response to the program evaluation findings are aligned to the Strategic Plan goal focused on an Engaged Workforce, in which APS is committed to recruiting, hiring, and investing in a high-quality and diverse workforce. Specifically, we provide opportunities to strengthen professional learning, by providing growth and leadership opportunities for all staff, as well as meaningful, high-quality, and relevant professional learning opportunities in the area of literacy.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF RAN/RAS SCREENER

Previous to School Year 18-19, the offices of ELA and ATSS were following downward data trends with PALS (the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening). Our offices wanted to seek out additional information to investigate why students were experiencing lowered scores, and not meeting grade

level benchmarks on PALS (K-3). Reading research indicates that both phonemic awareness and rapid naming are the earliest predictors of reading success. Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN) tests measure serial naming speed for one of four types of symbols (letters, numbers, colors, and common objects). Dr. Sandman-Hurley, the Dyslexia Consultant for APS, recommended that a rapid automatic screener be used to supplement the PALS. The use of a rapid automatic naming screener allows us to “capture” an additional group of students who might have gone un-discovered (using solely PALS), as being potentially at-risk for having reading difficulties.

In 2018-19, APS implemented RAN at seven schools to determine if it aided in identifying additional students who may be flagged for naming speed and may develop fluency challenges. During the 2019-20 school year, three schools joined in the implementation of RAN, for a total of 10 schools. From 2018 to 2020, these schools received support from multiple members of the Department of Teaching and Learning staff, who checked in monthly with first-grade teams to assist with instructional planning, and to follow-up with data collection and analysis. For SY20-21, all elementary schools in APS will be using RAN with their first-grade students.

### **FOCUS ON PHONEMIC AWARENESS (GRADES K-1)**

During SY19-20, the ELA Office provided expectations regarding English Language Arts instruction at the elementary level (K-5) to include time for teachers to spend providing explicit instruction in phonics. Particularly, Kindergarten teachers were asked to designate instructional time for students to receive systematic, explicit, and direct instruction in the area of phonemic awareness—which is also indicated through specific Standards of Learning (SOL) for the Kindergarten and first grade. Also, research on early reading demonstrates that the two best predictors of early reading success are alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness, which is the understanding that spoken words are made up of individual sounds, called phonemes.

In the fall of 2019, all Kindergarten teachers, and the first-grade teachers at the schools implementing the RAN screener, received training in the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Curriculum. Heggerty, in both English and Spanish, provides APS teachers with daily practice lessons that lead students through phonemic awareness activities. This work will continue into SY20-21, in which all first grade teachers will be trained using Heggerty to support phonemic awareness routines for their students.

### **ONLINE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Throughout the past three years, ELA has provided teachers with a multitude of online opportunities to expand their professional learning and knowledge in the area of English Language Arts, grades K-12, with associated resources and instructional strategies to support students. Using Canvas, our numerous online modules for teachers may be accessed on professional learning and early release days as a choice for teachers. As well, our modules may be used to support

face-to-face collaborative meeting sessions or trainings, while also providing readily available repositories of information for teachers. Specifically, at the secondary level, our teachers participate in monthly collaborative content county-wide meetings. Teachers have provided the ELA office with positive feedback regarding this format, as they have had the opportunity to both discuss and plan in ways that support student learning in the areas of English and reading, while reaching across the division.

The ELA office will continue to revise and refine existing courses to meet the needs of all K-12 teachers, as well as create new content to have available at the request of teachers and schools to build professional learning around instructional pedagogy and APS approved resources in the area of literacy.

### **APS ELA CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES**

Beginning the summer of 2017 and on-going throughout the last three years, teams of teachers (classroom, special education, EL teachers, reading specialists/interventionists, RTGs, and librarians) have met to continually review, revise, and increase instructional activities and resources available within our APS curriculum documents, which demonstrate alignment to the 2017 Virginia Standards of Learning. The following goals for the APS curriculum have been met:

- To develop a shared vision for curriculum, instruction, and resources that is aligned with APS’s beliefs about teaching and learning;
- To ensure a K-12 articulation for English Language Arts that may be demonstrated through the formatting of consistent curriculum documents;
- And to create an accessible format for the scope and sequencing of the SOL that shows alignment to resources and performance assessments that support our instructional goals.

In APS, the curriculum is meant to examine each grade level’s SOLs fully, while providing teachers with structures for their instruction to include pacing throughout the year, with unit plans and alignment to APS approved resources. Students are provided with authentic reading and writing experiences that focus on the strengths and needs of each student.



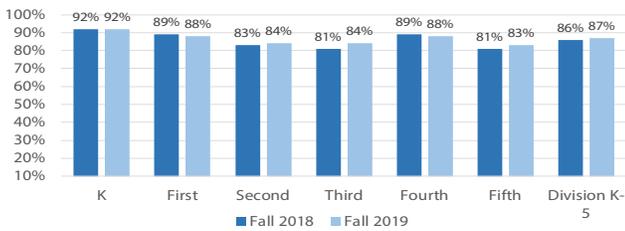
## DATA THAT PROVIDES INSIGHT

### Universal Screening in Reading – PALS and Reading Inventory

PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) is a universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring tool for measuring fundamental components of literacy. It is used as a growth metric in APS. Students who do not meet the grade-level benchmarks are identified within the PALS system as needing additional instructional support in the skills demonstrated to be weak.

The ELA Office continues to examine the trends in elementary literacy that have occurred during the last four years. Beginning the fall of 2016, PALS (Grades K-3) and PALS Plus (Grades 4-5) were used for universal screening. The number of students meeting their grade level specific benchmarks, in the fall of 2019, is between 83 and 92 percent.

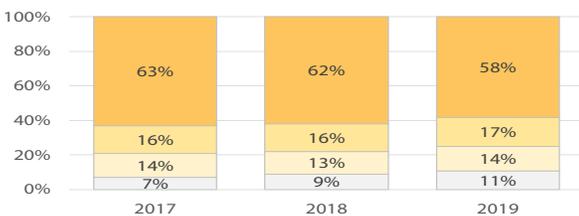
Universal Screening Scores by Grade, Fall 2018 and Fall 2019



### Middle School – Reading Inventory

The Reading Inventory (RI) is a computer-adaptive reading assessment and growth metric that measures reading comprehension using Lexile measures. Each year since 2013-14, APS has used the Reading Inventory as a resource to guide instruction. All students who take the English SOL test also take RI. More than 58% of middle school students who were assessed, using RI, have scored in the advanced range of performance for each of the past three years.

Middle School Reading Inventory, 2017-2019 (Spring Scores)



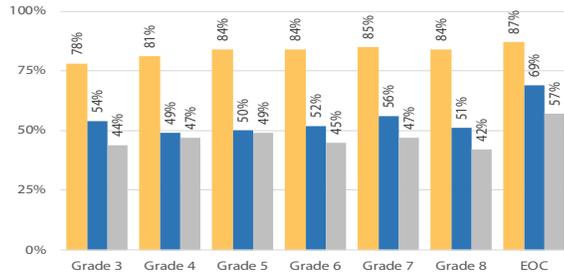
### Opportunity Gap Data

In 2018-19, Reading SOL pass rates for the sub-groups of English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities are lower than the overall APS pass rate. Also, with many scores, the sub-group score is only slightly higher than, or even with, the State of Virginia pass rate for that sub-group.

#### 2019 SOL Scores (Pass Rates) by Sub-Group

- APS Overall
- Sub-Group
- State Pass Rate for Sub-Group

Students with Disabilities



English Language Learners

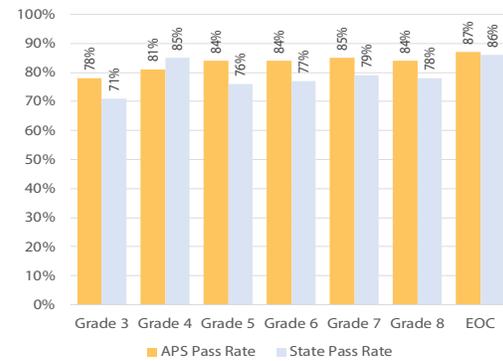


### VDOE Standards of Learning in Reading

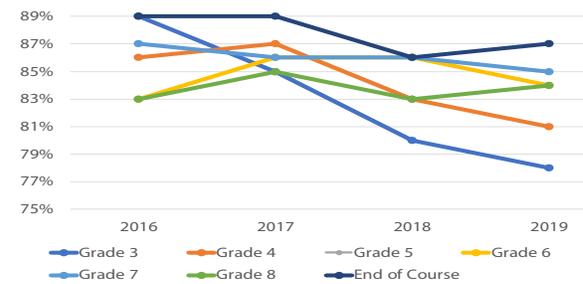
The Standards of Learning (SOL) for Virginia public schools establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course in English. Students in Virginia take the Reading Standards of Learning (SOL) exam each year between 3rd and 8th grade, and as an End of Course (EOC) assessment in high school, typically in 11th grade.

In the spring 2019 and overall, APS continued to outperform the State of Virginia for all students, with the exception of Grade 4. Also, the APS overall Reading SOL pass rates for students have continued to drop within a four-year trend. This is a concern to the ELA Office, and this lack of progress may be attributed to student performance related to opportunity gaps (please see data below).

2019 Reading SOL Scores by Grade (Percentage Pass Rate)



Reading SOL Scores by Grade – 4 Year Trend



## WHAT WE LEARNED

### IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY – RAN SCREENER/PALS SCREENER

With two years of data collection, we have learned that by using data from both RAN and PALS, we are identifying students who have:

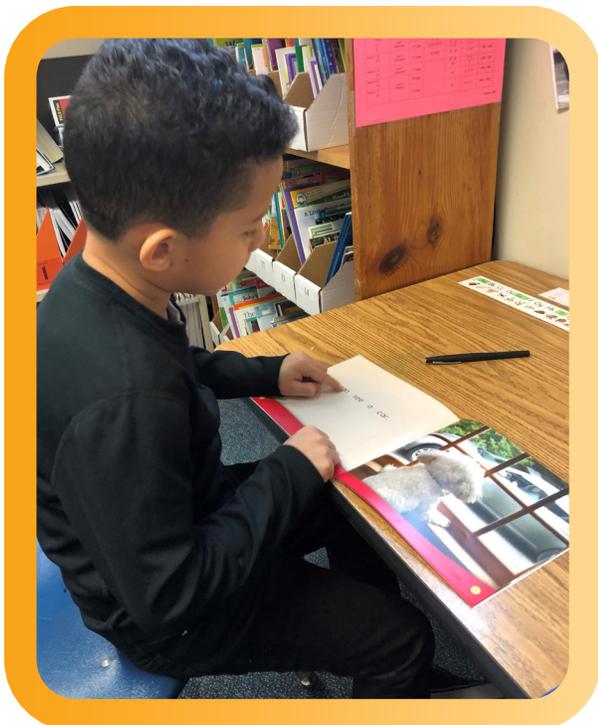
- Phonological needs
- RAN needs (fluency in retrieval needs)
- Phonological needs and RAN (fluency in retrieval) needs (referred to as a double deficit)

The use of RAN will continue to allow the ELA Office, in collaboration with ATSS, Special Education, and Office of English Learners, to collect data regarding our student performance on this screener and PALS. As well, having division-wide RAN data, with participation across all elementary schools for SY20-21, will allow for aligned programmatic decision-making regarding early literacy initiatives. This data, alongside efforts of working closely with first grade teams, will provide the ELA Office with information regarding APS's needs and related supports for utilizing research and evidence-based strategies and resources in the area of reading.

### ADDRESSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

The ELA Office will continue to collaborate across content offices, as well as with the Office of English Learners, Special Education, ATSS, and the Office of Equity and Excellence to work toward eliminating the opportunity gap for APS students. We have learned:

- Implementing and enforcing research-based priority practices in the area of literacy, with coaching models of support, allows for an increase in high-impact practices for working with diverse



groups of students, and meeting their needs.

- Establishing consistent support of literacy practices regarding the time allotted to reading, writing, and phonics instruction, and the instructional models used (which are aligned to APS curriculum and resources), provides clear expectations for literacy across the division, for grades K-5.
- Having an aligned ELA curriculum, within APS, allows for a communication of consistent expectations for literacy for Grades K-12. The curriculum documents provide teachers with the following: supports for purposeful planning throughout the school year, or within a course; developmentally appropriate pacing for instruction; APS approved resources for instruction within each unit; performance assessments to progress monitor student learning; and suggestions of effective strategies in the teaching of reading and English.
- Contributing to documented district-wide policies and universal professional learning opportunities, as they relate to providing high-quality literacy instruction to all students, demonstrates a shared goal and vision for literacy, aligned to the APS 2018-24 Strategic Plan.
- Increasing the level of teachers' content knowledge, as it applies to the area of best practices, personalized reading instruction, and differentiation of ELA strands, is of benefit for all students in grades K-12.



## MOVING FORWARD

Our office has adopted multiple resources to support instruction in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening across all grade levels. As well, there is an ongoing need to support teachers in the implementation of these resources while using evidence-based instructional strategies. In ELA, we will be moving forward with the following:

- Establishing professional learning requirements to provide teachers with support of direct, systematic, and explicit instructional strategies in the area of phonics, K-5.
- Improving core instruction in grades K-5, and ensuring that students receive reading/writing interventions as indicated by their needs.
- Supporting teachers' knowledge of APS-approved interventions, and systematic implementation of those interventions with students, K-8.
- Supporting teachers regarding the implementation of phonemic awareness routines in Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, which includes providing training to first grade teachers on phonemic awareness resources during SY20-21. (Kindergarten teachers were trained in the fall of 2019.)
- Continuing to strengthen the grades 6-12 APS English curriculum, and to include content and high impact instructional strategies for our Reading and Reading Strategies courses.
- Supporting and training secondary intervention teachers regarding foundational knowledge in research-based instructional practices for struggling readers (which includes phonemic awareness and phonics).
- Providing professional learning opportunities to secondary teachers in the area of writing, particularly in the area of assessing student writing and providing feedback.
- Updating APS ELA resources and classroom reading texts to be of high-quality and relevant, and to promote student voice and choice with literacy, within their learning environments.

