

Memorandum

To Dr. Francisco Durán, Superintendent, Arlington Public Schools
From Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Sustainability
Topic 2021 Annual Memorandum
Date June 2021

Since 2013, the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Sustainability (SACS) has prepared an annual memorandum with highlights and recommendations for the Superintendent to advance sustainability in Arlington Public Schools (APS). This year has certainly been the most unusual and difficult of those nine years, and we want to start by sharing our appreciation for the extraordinary commitment, effort, and resilience that APS staff have shown during these challenging times. We also acknowledge the APS students who weathered this year and continued to learn. We are particularly appreciative of the graduating seniors on our committee: Peter Brown (Yorktown), Alexa Gromada (Yorktown), and Ben Spindler (Wakefield).

While our committee was able to continue key initiatives (see below), and sustainability made good strides at APS despite the pandemic, we want to start this memo looking toward the future, with the opportunities presented as we make a new start in the fall. We hope and ask that when our leadership meets with you this summer, and continuing into SY 2021-22, we can discuss this fresh start for sustainability, and the resources that would help implement effective measures. In particular, our committee has long advocated that sustainability can be equitably and systematically implemented through investing in sustainability liaisons for all schools, and in a new Sustainability Coordinator staff position. We have identified three reasons why this makes sense right now:

1) Sustainability is a natural part of the “new normal.” We realize that a “new normal” is taking shape, which includes a strong focus on equity, budget considerations, and the ability to adapt to varying requirements related to Covid-19. Sustainability practices, such as outdoor learning and walking/biking to school, have proven to be excellent pathways to supporting the creation of resilient school communities and programs that promote the physical and mental well-being of students and staff. Our committee, staff liaisons, and sustainability liaisons are poised to identify and implement these sustainability practices for this “new normal.”

2) The County supports sustainability. APS does not need to do this in a vacuum. Prior to the pandemic and continuing during 2020 and 2021, Arlington County has made significant sustainability commitments. It has adopted a Community Energy Plan that commits to being a carbon neutral community by 2050. Arlington joined the Biophilic City Network, to improve the connection between residents and urban nature. It is implementing curbside food scrap pickup for composting in September, and it committed to developing a zero waste plan. APS adoption of enhancements to waste reduction, outdoor learning, and energy savings in buildings and transportation would play an important role in aligning APS's practices with these commitments.

3) Sustainability in new buildings and renovations pays for itself. The expansion of the school system to accommodate student population growth also provides a good opportunity for renovations and new school construction to be in line with the County's climate goals. For example, a new school can

incorporate biophilia design principles, carbon neutrality, and infrastructure for waste reduction, such as dishwashers. Recent new construction goes a long way to align with these principles, and additional upfront costs for these features will be paid for in energy savings within a few years. We would like to see a systematic approach and overarching goals on these sustainability principles, to improve consistency.

That need for a systematic approach and overarching goals leads us back to our desire to discuss with you our recommendations for an expanded sustainability liaison program and a Sustainability Coordinator position, as well as ideas that you have. In the meantime, we thought it would be useful to summarize the committee's activities during the 2020-21 school year.

Key Accomplishments from 2020-2021 for the Committee

Support for the Sustainability Liaison Program

During the fifth year of the program, the sustainability liaisons from 17 schools showed not only that the projects can continue in a virtual or distanced environment, but that those projects play an important role in bringing schools together through virtual educational programs and outdoor projects. Recognizing that importance, the School Board has continued to express support for maintaining and expanding the program. Please see Appendix B: "Sustainability Liaison Projects."

Resources for Remote Teaching and Learning: In October 2020, to support the sustainability liaisons and other staff, parents, and students, we assembled a curated list of online educational programs on sustainability topics. Sustainability liaisons took advantage of links to online programs and at-home projects on carbon and climate, water conservation and marine ecosystems, wildlife, and virtual field trips. When the curated list was featured on the APS Friday 5, the entire community could easily access the resources.

Sustainability Liaison Project Library: Early in the 2020-21 school year, SACS started a Sustainability Liaison Project Library on our website. The library has detailed descriptions of sustainability liaison projects, and each entry is intended to allow another sustainability liaison (or other staff) to pursue a similar project without having to "reinvent the wheel." We developed a template of questions to guide a detailed account of how the project was developed, what resources were necessary, and how challenges were overcome (or not!). Amidst the stress of late spring 2020, seven sustainability liaisons wrote summaries of their successful projects, resulting in ten library entries. In the summer of 2021, we expect additional library entries.

Social Media Campaigns: In February and April of 2021, SACS spearheaded campaigns to promote sustainable practices within the community and amplify the extraordinary work of our dedicated educators. The February campaign was centered on an overall love for sustainability while the April campaign, coordinated in conjunction with a couple of APS high school environmental clubs, focused on Earth Week education. Through each campaign, we grew our viewership and developed goals for the future. SACS is committed to a growing presence on social media platforms that will foster connection between students, staff, and the community, as well as provide a space to celebrate sustainability-focused efforts by all.

Connections With the Larger APS Community

Our committee had opportunities throughout the year to connect with and provide input into APS and County programs. In November, we provided recommendations for the FY 2021 and FY 2022 budgets. This input was sought from all advisory committees, because of the significant shortfalls caused by the pandemic. In the memo, we pointed out the savings being provided by programs such as the Solar Power Purchase Agreement, and the disadvantages of deferring maintenance. To review those points, as well as others, please refer to the memo in Appendix C.

In February, Laura Watchman (SACS chair) and our staff liaison, Cathy Lin, participated in interviewing candidates for the Assistant Superintendent of Facilities and Operations. We appreciated this holistic approach to ensuring that the interviews covered all aspects of that role, including the position's central role in implementing sustainability. In March, Charlie Resnick from the Outdoor Lab briefed our committee on how Outdoor Lab staff are developing outdoor learning training as well as site assessments of all elementary schools. We are gratified to hear about this investment in outdoor learning, and the School Board's support for it. Our committee will be happy to promote opportunities, particularly with sustainability liaisons, to take full advantage of these resources in outdoor learning.

Throughout the year, our committee laid the groundwork for expanding the APS Environmental Literacy Plan. In its current form, this plan connects science standards of learning to environmental literacy, with examples of how to teach this content, especially through sustainability liaison projects. In SY 2021-22, teachers will work toward identifying standards of learning in other disciplines, such as social studies and physical education, that can connect to environmental literacy. Our committee is excited to assist with making these connections, and with sharing these connections with sustainability liaisons and other staff. Given that this environmental literacy plan is a new state mandate, we are proud that APS has a jump start on meeting this requirement.

In conclusion, we look forward to meeting you and discussing all that our committee has done, the wonderful work of the sustainability liaisons, and especially opportunities for sustainability as schools pivot to the "new normal" in SY 2021-22.

Appendix A: SACS 2020-2021 Membership

SACS meets on the third Tuesday of each month, except for July and August. All meetings are open to the public. Members are appointed to two-year terms and participate on a volunteer basis.

Appointed Members

Meredith Allen	Senior Instructional Technology Coordinator, Tuckahoe Elementary School
Nicole Croce	Third Grade Teacher, Campbell Elementary School
Heather Dantzker	MS, PhD, Owner and Principal, Dantzker Consulting, LLC
Barbara Englehart	MBA, CPA, Senior Project Finance Controller, ICF
Elenor Hodges	M.Ed., Executive Director, EcoAction Arlington
Rachel Lang	MS, PLT Program Coordinator, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc.
Gregory Lloyd	CCM, LEED AP BD+C, TRUE Advisor, Construction Manager, Wesley Housing
Kate Marshall	Real Estate Senior Manager, GDIT
Leah Nichols	Executive Director, Institute for a Sustainable Earth, GMU
Levi Novey	MS, Director of Communications, Verra
Cynthia Palmer	JD, MPH, Convener, Sports for the Earth
Robin Puttock	LEED AP BD&C, AIA Architect, Architecture Faculty at Catholic University
Mimi Shah	Principal, Amplify for Change
Roxana Soltero	Trained Emergency Physician and volunteer, Oakridge Elementary
Laura Watchman	LEED AP Neighborhood Development, Principal, Watchman Consulting

Arlington County Liaison

Joan B. Kelsch	LEED AP BD+C, Green Building Program Manager, Office of Sustainability and Environmental Management, Arlington Department of Environmental Services
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Staff

Cathy Lin	CEM, APS Director, Facilities and Operations
Dat Le	Ph.D., APS Science Supervisor

Student Liaisons

Peter Brown	Yorktown High School, Class of 2021
Alexa Gromada	Yorktown High School, Class of 2021
Kate Haley	Yorktown High School, Class of 2024
Ben Spindler	Wakefield High School, Class of 2021

Liaisons to Other Committees

Gregory Lloyd	Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs
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