

TEACHER EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

PROGRESS REPORT

OCTOBER 2008

Introduction

Believing that the quality of the teacher is the most important variable affecting student learning over which the schools can exercise influence, the Arlington School Board adopted the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) to ensure a competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers. Now woven into the fabric of teacher excellence in Arlington, components of the TEI were first featured prominently in the 1999-2005 Strategic Plan.

The TEI resulted from collaborative efforts among School Board members, staff, community members, and consultants. Given that Arlington Public Schools has implemented numerous initiatives in response to the original report, staff takes this opportunity to review the major components of the original document and report on its status. This report is also an opportunity for the School Board to affirm its commitment to the TEI. The report provides an overview of the original TEI principles, proposed revisions resulting from progress in the identified areas, an account of progress on achieving the initiative's goals and next steps.

School Board Principles Governing the Teacher Excellence Initiative

In September 2001, the Arlington School Board formally adopted the following principles governing the Teacher Excellence Initiative.

The Arlington School Board believes that:

1. Within the school setting, teacher excellence is the most important variable in student learning and achievement.
2. To attract, retain, and support teachers of excellence, a workplace must represent a competitive advantage over neighboring jurisdictions when considering a combination of the following factors:
 - an organizational climate that respects teachers and involves teachers appropriately in decision-making
 - favorable class sizes
 - sufficient planning time
 - ample opportunities for professional growth and development
 - an evaluation system that is fair, effective, uses multiple measures, and recognizes different stages of professional growth
 - high quality teaching resources (e.g., computers, texts, manipulatives)
 - clean and safe work spaces appropriate for instruction
 - competitive salary and benefits
3. Different levels of knowledge, skills, and performance should be recognized by differentiated compensation. How to fairly award such compensation in Arlington should be explored with teachers, parents, and the broader community.

4. Any plan to strengthen teacher excellence must be accompanied by evaluation procedures to show how well the proposal attracts, retains, and supports teachers of excellence.

Among the changes recommended by staff, is that principles two through four become operational principles for achievement of the overarching principle which is that within the school setting, teacher quality is the most important variable affecting student learning. Staff recommends the following revised Teacher Excellence Initiative framework:

Overarching Principle:

Within the school setting, teacher excellence is the most important variable in student learning and achievement.

1. To attract, retain, and support teachers of excellence, a workplace must be competitively advantageous over neighboring jurisdictions when considering a combination of the following factors:
 - A. An organizational climate in which teachers are respected and involved appropriately in decision-making;
 - B. A school climate in which teachers know they have a positive impact on student learning and are supported in exercising that impact by their colleagues and their principal;
 - C. Favorable class sizes;
 - D. Sufficient planning time;
 - E. Ample opportunities for professional growth and development;
 - F. An evaluation system of teachers that is fair, effective, uses multiple measures, and recognizes different stages of professional growth;
 - G. High quality teaching resources, including technology, and support to teachers for their effective use;
 - H. Classroom environments that are clean, safe and conducive to learning; and
 - I. Competitive salary and benefits.
2. Different levels of knowledge, skills, and performance can be measured and should be recognized by differentiated compensation.
3. Initiatives to strengthen teacher excellence must be accompanied by evaluations showing how they attract, retain, and support teachers of excellence.

What follows is a status report on Arlington's progress on the Teacher Excellence Initiative that aligns with the suggested revisions to the framework. It is not intended to be a complete list but an illustrative overview of selected practices and accomplishments.

Overarching Principle

Within the school setting, teacher excellence is the most important variable in student learning and achievement.

The Arlington Public Schools (APS), through its Strategic Plan and Best Practices, identifies the research-based foundation, objectives, guidelines, relationships and assessments that inform the overarching principle. The Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) links to the four Strategic Goals of the 2005-2011 Strategic Plan: rising achievement, eliminating the achievement gap, responsive education and effective relationships. As described in Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan, a Framework for Responsive Education and Inventory of Instructional Approaches that reflect best practices has been developed. Progress on the overarching principle depends on progress on the following operational principles.

Principle 1

To attract, retain, and support teachers of excellence, a workplace must represent a competitive advantage over neighboring jurisdictions when considering a combination of the following factors:

- A. An organizational climate in which teachers are respected and involved appropriately in decision-making. Initiatives in this area include:
 - Teachers' Council on Instruction (TCI)¹
 - Collaborative Problem Solving Team (CPST)²
 - Lead teacher initiative which resulted in system-wide position descriptions, consistent pay tied to the APS Pay Plan, and positions allocated to each school/program (i.e. Instructional Lead Teachers, content lead teachers, and program lead teachers in Special Education and ESOL/HILT)

- B. A school climate in which teachers know they have a positive impact on student learning and are supported in exercising that impact by their colleagues and their principal. Initiatives in this area include:
 - Mentor Program³
 - School-based specialist positions for targeted support such as those in reading, mathematics, gifted services, and technology, and in specialized school-specific exemplary projects
 - Collaboration mechanisms across all schools through staff meetings, team meetings, and other such structures for instructional decision-making

¹ The Teachers' Council on Instruction serves in an advisory capacity, providing the Superintendent with access to teachers' concerns on system-wide instructional issues.

² The T-scale Collaborative Problem Solving Team has been established to address issues that are of mutual concern to teachers and the administration of the school system. Issues may include, but are not limited to, means of supporting Annual Priorities, facilitating instruction, attracting and retaining excellent teachers, salary, fringe benefits, working conditions and other budget items that affect teachers.

³ The Mentor Program provides intensive and sustained professional support for all first-year and experienced school-based new hires in an effort to attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified instructional staff.

- Teacher pre-service week
- New-hire orientation week
- Implementation of the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) in each school to develop interventions to assist students who may be experiencing difficulty in school. This team is a good first step in providing academic and behavioral assistance to students
- Establishment of school instructional leadership teams to organize and distribute teacher leadership
- Academic progress monitoring of individual students
- Establishment of planning factors for secondary SOL core initiatives
- Establishment of school-based substitute teacher positions

C. Favorable class sizes. Initiatives in this area include:

- Planning factors that include Pre-K enrollment
- Revised planning factor that:
 - reduces kindergarten class size
 - supports a principal's ability to deploy staff in various ways to result in smaller classes
- Elementary school class size was reduced from 19.6 students per class in 2003-04 to 19.2 students per class in 2007-08, middle school class size was reduced from 20.5 in 2003-04 to 19.4 in 2007-08 and high school class size remains the lowest among the three levels, hovering between 18.5 and 18.8
- Percentage reporting feelings in 2006-07 that there is the "right number" of students in the classroom- 68% parents, 60% teachers and 74% students
- Principals having flexibility to deploy staff to respond to specific school needs
- Double counting of elementary special education students

D. Sufficient planning time. Initiatives in this area include:

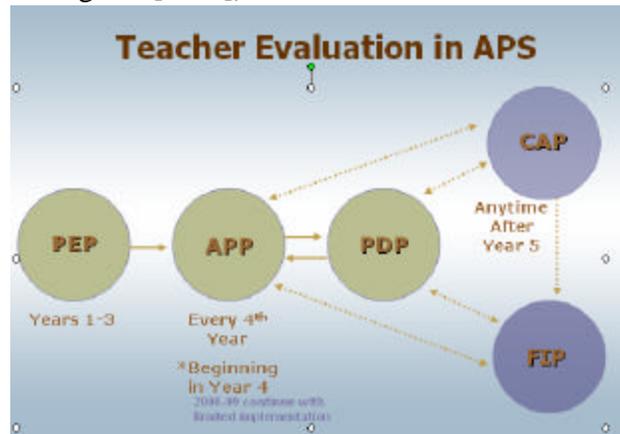
- Elementary school early release Wednesdays to provide opportunities for weekly building-wide planning time
- Inclusion of a foreign language program at 9 elementary schools in lieu of early release has resulted in daily extended teacher planning time for elementary teachers that is commensurate with secondary teachers while providing an opportunity to provide a proficiency oriented language program. Elementary teachers in schools without early release have no fewer than 45 minutes of planning time on any given day and no fewer than 360 minutes of planning time per week.
- Secondary teachers have daily opportunities for individual and team planning time

E. Ample opportunities for professional growth and development that is centrally-offered, school-based, or individually-selected. Initiatives in this area include:

- Examples of professional development opportunities:
 - Teacher Expectations Supporting Student Achievement (TESA)
 - Teaching for Meaning /Understanding by Design (UbD)
 - Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)
 - Support for teachers to attend professional conferences
 - Use of online professional development sources (Blackboard, NorthTIER technology grants)

- Support for school-based Professional Development Plan (PDP) groups
 - Support for school-based classes in such areas as Word Study, Early Reading Strategies, and Guided Reading
- Electronic registration for professional development opportunities and self-tracking of participation
- Teacher scholarships for courses that directly relate to teachers' enhancement of content and pedagogy
- Teacher scholarships pursuing certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)
- Collaboration among schools and central office in communicating school professional development needs and areas of focus to facilitate organized central resources for supporting school-based plans
- Sharing of professional learning via the PDP and Teacher Research Convocation

- F. An evaluation system of teachers that is fair, effective, uses multiple measures, and recognizes different stages of professional growth. Initiatives in this area include:
- Use of the Danielson Framework for Professional Teaching Practice as the basis for the teacher evaluation system
 - Creation of Professional Development Plan (PDP) support materials and workshops
 - Inclusion of a periodic structured observation for continuing contract teachers
 - Implementation of a differentiated knowledge and skills-based compensation system (Career Advanced Program [CAP])



- G. High quality teaching resources, including technology, and support to teachers for their effective use. Initiatives in this area include:
- Highest per pupil disbursement for Instruction in Virginia (VEA, *Virginia's Educational Disparities FY 2006-07*)
 - Operating fund support for teacher mini-grants for innovative instructional approaches to support student achievement
 - Structured and periodic textbook adoptions
 - Computer ratio of 5:1 or lower in all schools
 - Completion of the Mac to PC computer conversion
 - Structured and periodic computer replacement procedures
 - Dedicated computers for secondary foreign language and science

- Wireless access infrastructure providing greater flexibility in accessing technology resources
 - Remote teacher and administrative access (i.e., IEP Online and report cards)
 - Establishment of the Blackboard online learning tools
 - Electronic student management and attendance system
 - Interactive technology tools
 - Planning factors for various resources
- H. Classroom environments that are clean, safe and conducive to learning. Initiatives in this area include:
- Capital Improvement Plan
 - Increased funds to address HVAC needs in all buildings
 - Funds for chemical managers in secondary school science
 - Increased funds for security to include perimeter cameras and monitoring systems and a system-wide visitor management system
- I. Competitive salary and benefits. Initiatives in this area include:
- APS ranked first in salary and certain fringe benefits (VEA, FY 2007-08)
 - Highest salary for teachers with 10 years experience on BA scale (VEA, FY 2007-08)
 - Increased summer school pay to \$32.50/hour or actual salary, whichever is higher
 - Increased payment from \$22.50 to \$26.00 per hour to teachers providing after school remediation and who make professional development presentations
 - Academic and athletic stipend policy with pay rates established in the APS pay plan
 - Supplemental defined retirement contribution match of 2.3% of salary
 - Live Where You Work Program
 - Non-resident APS Employee Tuition Initiative for employees' children
 - The Children's School childcare services for employees
 - Continued provision of access to comprehensive fringe benefits

Principle 2

Different levels of knowledge, skills, and performance should be recognized by differentiated compensation.

- Establishment of the Career Advancement Program (CAP) and salary schedule aligned with the Danielson Framework for Teaching, making it possible for teachers to skip a step on the pay plan three times in the their careers
- Development and incorporation of the differentiated compensation system in the APS Pay Plan beginning in FY08
- Recognition of advanced certifications, including National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification and other national certifications for those teachers for whom there is not a NBPTS certification (i.e., social workers, psychologists, and therapists)
- Two CAP portfolio options available with a third option under development
- 160 classroom and non-classroom based T-Scale staff granted CAP (92 NBPTS certified and 68 T-scale staff with other certifications such as psychologists, social workers, occupational and physical therapists for whom no NBPTS certification is available)

Principle 3

Any plan to strengthen teacher excellence must be accompanied by evaluation procedures to show how well the proposal attracts, retains, and support teachers of excellence.

- Evaluation of the Analysis of Professional Practice (APP) limited implementation FY08 in collaboration with Departments of Information Services, Personnel and Instruction that led to changed procedures for testing in FY09
- Started 2008-09 school year with no classroom teacher vacancies
- Among the 2008-09 new hires, 66% had master's degrees or higher
- Among the 2008-09 new hires, 36% had six or more years teaching experience
- Implemented and evaluated pilot procedures for the differentiated compensation CAP that resulted in final procedures adopted by the School Board
- 98% of APS teachers highly qualified
- Community satisfaction survey includes data in a number of areas disaggregated by elementary, middle, and high school teachers to include such items as:
 - Q1. Using the letter grade scale, A, B, C, D, or F, what overall grade would you give the performance of each of the following?
 - (c) Your school
 - (e) The Department of Instruction
 - Q2. To what extent are you satisfied with the following?
 - (a) Your ability to influence the policies that affect you.
 - Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?
 - (b) I feel valued at school.
 - (c) I feel supported in the school.
 - (e) Teachers in my school encourage their students to learn new things every day.
 - (g) Teachers in my school use many instructional approaches.
 - (h) The professional development programs are aligned with our school goals.
 - (j) The students in my classes are prepared to work at this current level.
 - Q5. Do you believe that the achievement gap can be narrowed substantially while maintaining high standards for all children or not?
 - Q7. Are school buildings and grounds clean and in good condition?
 - Q8. Does equipment in your area meet the needs of students?
 - Q13. Please mark one answer for each of the following statements.
 - (a) My principal is open to teachers' involvement in school issues.
 - (c) I have implemented tools and techniques I learned through professional training offered by the school.
 - (e) I teach for meaning.
 - (f) In my teaching, I differentiate instruction.
 - Q17. Do you prefer to participate in professional development activities
 - (1) At your school
 - (2) At another location
 - (3) Have no preference

Next Steps

The Teacher Excellence Initiative will continue to assure a competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers and support the recognition that the most important variable impacting student achievement is the quality of teachers, using the following procedures:

- Continued commitment to promoting productive and positive school climates that support teachers and are focused on student needs
- Continued efforts to organize central resources in support of school plans with centrally provided professional development being directed by school plans
- Further development of collaborative and productive relationships as accomplished through the cultural competence initiatives, TESA, and other such professional development efforts targeted to responsive education.
- Third CAP portfolio under development
- Continued evaluation of our efforts
- Continued expansion of instructional resources
- Development of a TEI brochure to be used for recruiting purposes

For information on the 2008 Progress Report on the Arlington Public Schools Teachers Excellence Initiative, please contact the Arlington Public Schools Office of Professional Development at 703-228-2113.