

Memorandum

To Dr. Francisco Durán, Superintendent, Arlington Public Schools
From Levi Novey and Laura Watchman, Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Sustainability
Topic 2020 Annual Memorandum
Date July 2020

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). Although the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the school year and interrupted the committee's activities, we thought it would be useful to summarize the committee's activities and outlook for the coming year. We hope that this summary shows the vigor of the sustainability work even during these unusual times, and the opportunities to work with you to infuse sustainability programs throughout the school system.

Key Accomplishments from 2019-2020 for the Committee

The Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Sustainability (SACS) accomplished a lot in the 2019-2020 school year, even though many of the activities we had planned for the spring were canceled because of the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic in early March. Some highlights include:

Launching and Celebrating the 1st Annual APS Custodian Appreciation Day

In the spring of 2019, SACS proposed to create a day to honor custodians for their important role in helping to reduce waste in schools and recycle. The idea was embraced by the Superintendent's office and the School Board. The first annual APS Custodian Appreciation Day took place on October 2nd (in tandem with National Custodian Day). Many schools celebrated their custodians for their wide variety of contributions. There are approximately 280 employees in custodial roles. The celebration was inspiring to witness as many schools posted on their social media channels the unique ways that they celebrated and valued their custodial staff. SACS members spoke at an October School Board meeting about the genesis of the idea, and also published an Op-Ed on ArlingtonNow.com about why it's important to honor these critical staff members in the APS community.

Recruiting New Members to the Committee

In the Fall of 2019, SACS decided that it was also time to add new members to the committee. We were happy to receive many enthusiastic applications from qualified parents, teachers, and students. We added a group of impressive people to the committee, including 3 new parent members, 2 new teachers, and 4 high school students (2 from Wakefield and 2 from Yorktown). In particular, the students were an exciting addition to the committee. It has given us new ideas about how we can better engage them and involve them in helping to guide and implement SACS activities. In the future, we think it would be ideal to have representatives from a good diversity of high school programs, and potentially student sustainability liaisons at each school. See Appendix A for a list of committee members.

Relationship Building throughout APS and the Community

SACS continues to cultivate relationships throughout APS and the community in service of our goals. This year our members participated in meetings with a variety of groups and also gave brief presentations about our work. Some of the events and groups included a Green Schools Summit hosted by the Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council, meetings with the APS Council of Parent Teacher Associations, the APS School Board, the APS Superintendent’s Office, EcoAction Arlington, and APS Food Services. We also participated in the Superintendent Search process.

Guiding and Strengthening the Sustainability Liaison Program

In its fourth year, the sustainability liaison program continues to thrive and grow. The work that teachers are doing as liaisons continues to impress us, and their enthusiasm when they meet as a group is energizing. Twenty-one schools and 23 teachers participated in the sustainability liaison program this year. Please see Appendix B for a Fact Sheet covering the program’s history and future direction. Although the pandemic curtailed many of the liaison projects, some Earth Week celebrations continued online.

2019-2020 Sustainability Liaison Projects

2019-2020 Sustainability Liaison Projects			
<p>Arlington Career Center Cynthia Kotakis Nora Swisher</p> <p><i>Made Ecobricks from plastic</i> <i>Planned Ecobrick art installation</i></p>		<p>Arlington Traditional ES Tonya Nelson</p> <p><i>Renovated school garden</i> <i>Earth Week celebration online</i></p>	
<p>Ashlawn ES Alison Sheahan</p> <p><i>Recycling Raiders</i> <i>Composting</i> <i>Food Bus</i> <i>Ozone-reducing / anti-idling campaign</i> <i>Native and vegetable gardening</i></p>		<p>Barrett ES Cara Doherty</p> <p><i>Recycling Club</i> <i>Recycling Rally</i> <i>Scrap paper bins</i> <i>Plastic bag drive</i> <i>Reusable bag distribution</i></p>	

2019-2020 Sustainability Liaison Projects

Campbell ES
Nicole Croce

EcoTeam Educators
EcoTeam
Environmentalists



Discovery ES
Kristin Wine
Katherine Williams

Hydroponics lettuce for lunch and AFAC
Waste-free lunch
Vegetable garden
Eco-Action Team



Fleet ES
Susan Spranger

Recycling Rangers
Pollution Patrols
Walk to School Wednesday
Black Out Friday



Glebe ES
Toni Wexler

Green Team
Letter to Principal
Skits to educate students



H-B Woodlawn
Michael Cruse

Grant and plans for school garden
Educational signage
Design challenge for reusable utensils
U.N. Sustainable Development Goals
Global School



Jamestown ES
Sheri Sharwarko
Pumpkin catapults from recycled items
Paper use reduction for teachers
Planned Trashion Show



Jefferson MS
Kaila Leonberger

Intervention period gardening
Native pollinator garden and food garden



Key ES
Pat Hynes

Lunchroom food scrap composting



2019-2020 Sustainability Liaison Projects

Long Branch ES

Catherine Pawlowski

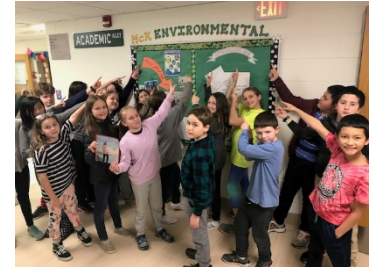
Recycling Rangers



McKinley ES

Charles Campbell

*McKinley Environmental Improvement Agency (students)
Trash audit*



Oakridge ES

Sean Jones

Expanded gardening program

Food Bus

Program to reuse items



Taylor ES

Julie Campbell

Lunchroom recycling and waste reduction



Tuckahoe ES

Margaret Egan

Used marker and crayon collection

Light switch covers

Food garden for AFAC

Green tips on school news program



Wakefield HS

Sean Tracy

Eco-informational videos

Four Mile Run and campus cleanups

Staff newsletter

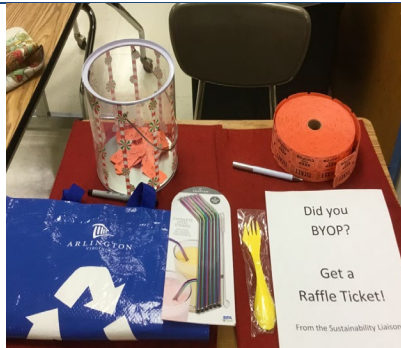
Outdoor learning space



Williamsburg MS

Anne Coia

Encouraging staff to bring their own mug and plate



Yorktown HS

Ana Ratcliffe

Lunchroom compost collection

Local stream cleanups

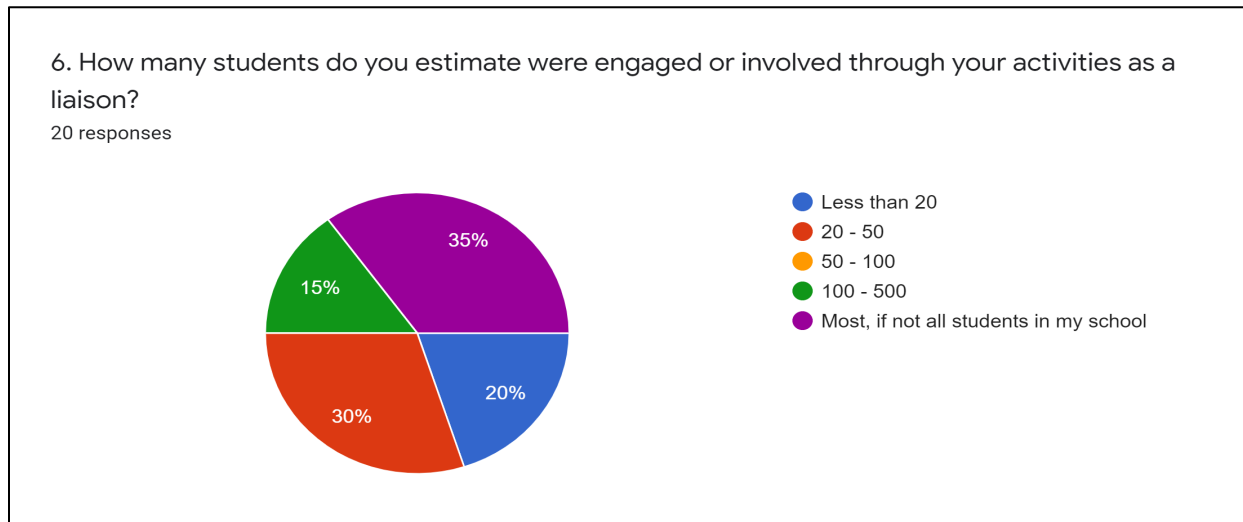
Waste-free cooking

Education on reducing plastics

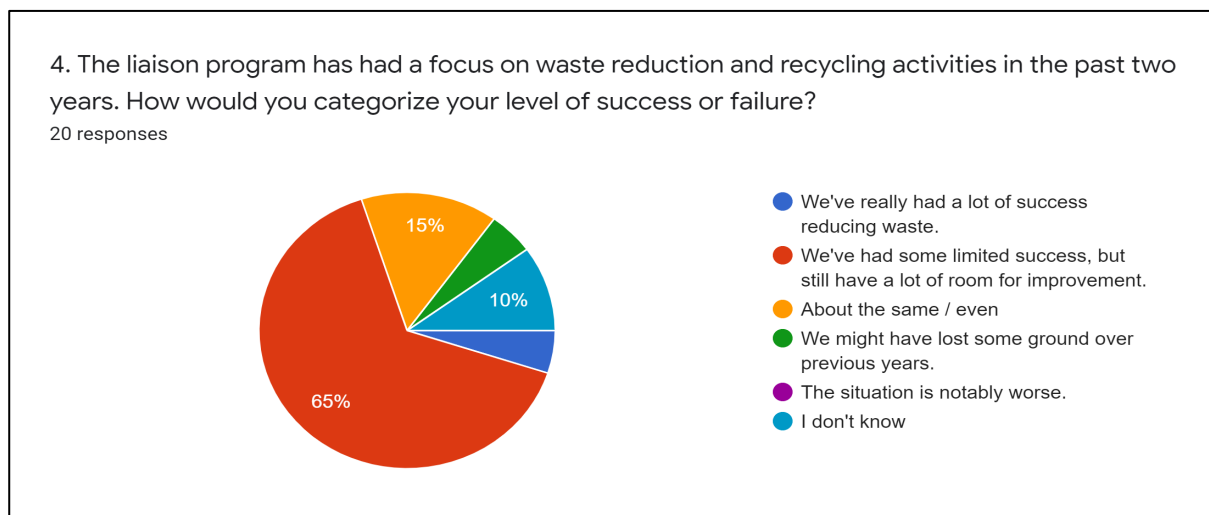


May Questionnaire on the Impact of Liaisons

In May, SACS requested that liaisons complete a questionnaire describing their projects this year and the outlook for the future. Their answers provided us with some key data about their reach with students, and perceived success with implementing waste reduction efforts. Based on the responses of sustainability liaisons, it's easy to see that their projects engaged a combination of smaller groups of students and often the whole school. Seven out of 20 liaisons (35%) believed that they had reached "most, if not all students in my school" which allows us to easily say that the sustainability liaison program at large is reaching thousands of students.



When asked about how well they were making an impact, for better or worse, at their schools to reduce waste and improve recycling, the good news is that only one teacher believed that her / his school was doing worse. One teacher reported that her / his school "had a lot of success reducing waste." Thirteen out of 20 liaisons (65%), a majority, believed that "we've had some limited success, but still have a lot of room for improvement." This finding mirrors what we have heard verbally from liaisons.



Beyond aggregating and synthesizing their work here, helping to guide their quarterly meetings, and planning a March meeting of liaisons, SACS, and the Acting Superintendent (which was cancelled), SACS continued to work to support the liaisons through three key initiatives:

Continuing work on improving school waste reduction and recycling efforts: For the past few years, SACS has asked the sustainability liaisons to focus at least one project on waste reduction and recycling efforts. We have consequently tried to build relationships with the appropriate staff working on these issues in APS and for the Solid Waste Bureau of Arlington County. Two SACS members also were several of the key organizers for an EcoAction Arlington event focused on actions to reduce school food waste. It took place in November of 2019. The event was widely attended by concerned APS community members, including parents, teachers, and students. It resulted in some new understanding of the challenges and nuances that it will take for APS to continue improving its Food Services to better achieve lower waste goals. It also created a better sense of solidarity between APS staff and community members, as barriers to certain desired outcomes became apparent, and misperceptions that were causing tension between some community members and staff were disarmed thanks to discussion. A follow-up event was planned for the spring of 2020 but was postponed.

Developing an Earth Week Concept: Thanks largely to SACS student members, an Earth Week concept was developed that would have been piloted in April of 2020. It would have allowed each high school program to compete for a “Green Cup” based on how well each school collectively achieved certain sustainability goals over the course of the week. This template would also provide a proposed focal topic for each day of the week that middle and elementary schools could follow to plan their own activities. Sustainability liaisons were seen as key implementers of this concept. The goal was to also use this opportunity to generate media about APS sustainability activities.

Advocacy for a Liaison at Each School: SACS also continued to heavily market the sustainability liaison program and its value for schools. When learning about the program, many schools who were currently without liaisons wanted to get access having a teacher serve in this role. By February of 2020, there were already six schools on a “waiting list.” SACS therefore continues to advocate for the funding to be expanded to all schools and programs (see Appendix B).

Looking Ahead

In the short term, the pandemic will continue to create many uncertainties during the 2020-21 school year for APS, SACS, and the sustainability liaisons. We anticipate retaining flexibility for the liaison program, with options to focus on projects and activities with connections to climate change, waste reduction and recycling, and promoting equity. Fortunately, many liaison programs are already adapted to needs related to the pandemic. For example, twelve projects in 2019-20 took place outside, in school gardens, or were stream cleanups. After the pandemic shut down the school campuses, four of the liaisons continued Earth Week celebrations online. Finally, with food insecurity as an expanding crisis, many liaison programs involve growing food for, or donating food to, the Arlington Food Assistance Center.

In the medium term, we have heard from liaisons who want more opportunities to learn from each other and collaborate in small groups. In summer 2020, SACS is starting a Sustainability Liaison Project Library on its website. Sustainability liaisons write summaries of their successful projects and we post them to that website, so that other liaisons can try similar projects at their own schools. In addition, even during the pandemic and beyond, we want to create opportunities for smaller working meetings so that liaisons can learn from each other in person.

In the long term, we will continue to coordinate with Food and Nutrition Services, and Facilities and Operations, on big priorities for many sustainability liaisons: improving waste reduction and recycling, creating more opportunities for reusability in the lunchroom, and mainstreaming compost collection. We will continue working toward the goal of having a liaison position available for each school and program that wants one (see Appendix B). In order to coordinate that and provide guidance on climate change, equity, and other large issues, we hope there will be an opportunity for APS to hire a central sustainability coordinator/officer. This approach has been successful in neighboring school districts and would allow for a more systematic approach to sustainability.

We hope that this report provides you with a good sense of the efforts and future direction of SACS. Again, welcome to APS, and we look forward to meeting you and discussing sustainability in the school system.

Appendix A: SACS 2019-2020 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, Senior Construction Manager, Capital Brand Group
Kate Marshall	Real Estate Senior Manager, GDIT
Leah Nichols	Executive Director, Institute for a Sustainable Earth, GMU
Levi Novey	MS, Outreach & Education Specialist, International Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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 Energy Manager
Dat Le	Ph.D., APS Science Supervisor

Student Liaisons

Peter Brown	Yorktown High School, Class of 2021
Ela Gokcigdem	Wakefield High School, Class of 2020
Alexa Gromada	Yorktown High School, Class of 2021
Natalia Uro De León	Wakefield High School, Class of 2020

Liaisons to Other Committees

Gregory Lloyd	Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs
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APS Sustainability Liaison Program Overview

The Arlington Public Schools (APS) Sustainability Liaison Program was created in 2016 to help bolster sustainability in APS such that students, staff, parents, and the communities at their schools gain environmental literacy and exhibit behaviors that reflect sustainability in their lives and the culture of the school. Principals nominate interested teachers to serve as the liaisons for their school. In exchange for completing a certain number of sustainability tasks and projects, teachers receive a small stipend.



2016-2017

- Pilot year of program
- 10 Schools with Liaisons
- Explored how we might provide more coordination and structure to sustainability initiatives in Arlington Public Schools

2017-2018

- Expanded to 15 Schools with Liaisons
- Added Committee Member support as “buddies” to liaisons
- Refined data collection effort to better demonstrate program impact and monitor the breadth of sustainability activities happening at APS

2018-2019

- Expanded to 18 Schools with 20 Liaisons
- Mandated focus on waste reduction and recycling to stimulate APS-wide improvement
- Each school conducted a waste audit
- Published reports on our research about what sustainability activities are happening at APS schools

2019-2020

- Expanded to 21 Schools with 23 Liaisons
- Celebrated 1st Annual Custodian Appreciation Day after advocating for it
- Plan to create a toolkit that showcases projects and lessons learned to date by liaisons
- Exploring if climate action can be another focus area in addition to waste reduction

Future Goals

- There is funding for every school and program to have a Liaison
- Secure additional APS staff support and / or establish an Office of Sustainability to fortify and coordinate the program
- Have additional funding for liaisons to accomplish projects