

2020-2021 Year-End Report

Superintendent's Advisory Committee

On Immigrant and Refugee Student Concerns

Committee Goals and Objectives

To raise concerns voiced by immigrant and refugee students and parents to the Superintendent; to leverage the Committee's knowledge, networks, and resources to help identify and solutions to issues and advocate for timely implementation; to support the APS vision "To be an inclusive community that empowers all students to foster their dreams, explore their possibilities, and create their futures."

2020-2021 Summary

As distance learning stretched into the new school year and persisted to the end for a significant number of students in the immigrant community, the Committee focused its energies on two areas: identifying system-wide problems and getting resolutions; and helping individual families facing language, technology, and other barriers to connect with the right APS staff about a particular issue and get an answer. Individual Committee members spent thousands of hours on these direct supports. The Committee also produced a weekly What You Need to Know newsletter in English and Spanish to inform families about APS announcements and community resources. Committee meetings provided a safe space for community and staff members to discuss problems and exchange ideas about how to address them during this unusual school year. The Committee frequently leveraged its members' reach in the community to survey families about distance learning issues, experiences with School Resource Officers, and food and rent needs, and then to compile results along with recommendations for the Superintendent and senior staff.

2020-2021 Accomplishments

1. Tapped relationships between Committee members and within the community to organize monthly food and diaper/formula distributions to approximately 180 APS families, connect hundreds of families with County and non-profit services, create a learning pod for families at the affordable-housing complex, Gilliam Place, and work with the County's COVID vaccine committee to help make sure immigrant families and communities had access to the vaccine.
2. Hosted town halls with Dr. Duran for immigrant families with questions about APS operations during the pandemic.
3. Answered questions and helped hundreds of families get resolutions to their concerns about their students during an unprecedented distance-learning year.
4. Throughout the year, advised APS administrators and frontline communications and family engagement staff about concerns and questions of families and suggested ways to adapt to meet families' and students' needs. This took the form of written recommendations and participation in meetings with senior instructional and other staff.

5. Provided members to serve on distance-learning task forces and also offered frequent written input as APS worked through problems with implementation of distance learning.
6. Produced a weekly *What You Need to Know* newsletter in English and Spanish to provide short information blurbs lending themselves to WhatsApp use on APS policy/practice changes, community food distributions, rent and utility assistance, mental health supports, and COVID testing and vaccine availability.
7. Provided members for the APS working group on School Resource Officers, offered meeting and between-meeting input to the Facilities Advisory Committee, and contributed feedback on the Instructional Program Pathways decision whether to move the Academic Academy from the Career Center to Langston.
8. Provided Committee members to participate in interview panels for senior staff positions in the APS central office.
9. Testified before the state Advisory Committee on Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Education Practices and provided written recommendations designed to ensure that changes to Virginia Standards of Learning and professional development emphasize the need to reflect the lived experiences and contributions of all students. Also initiated a discussion with APS staff about how curriculum and professional development in our school system can support culturally responsive education.

Key Takeaways for 2021-2022 School Year

1. **Communication and engagement:** As the pandemic exacerbated technology, language, cultural, and other barriers, many families simply got lost this last school year, unable to communicate or not understanding how to do that with APS or make use of the messaging from the school system. Need: It is critical that APS take pro-active steps – especially at the beginning of the year -- to ensure that it reaches all families and that they are equipped to advocate for their students. Needs: A) APS must redouble its efforts to ensure all families know how to access and use ParentVUE and explore what other tools would be more effective for the segment of parents for whom ParentVUE will not be feasible to use in the short term. Short videos in various languages on how to use ParentVUE and accomplish other online tasks would be very helpful. B) An Amharic-speaking bilingual liaison is needed. C) Greater use of WhatsApp would be helpful. We welcomed the addition of a Spanish-language WhatsApp group and urge WhatsApp groups for other major languages.
2. **Environment:** The pandemic heightened the role of housing, food, and income security in enabling all students to focus and succeed in school. Need: Greater resources for the social workers and counselors who connect students and families with crucial services, as well as training for other front-line staff such as teachers who interact with families regularly. Per Mr. McBride’s comment, “pairing the Social Worker with the Bilingual Resource Assistant, Admin and Counselors to respond to crisis needs and connectivity issues worked” this last year.
3. **Learning loss:** Learning loss was comparatively greater in the immigrant community last year. Need: Extra academic supports to enable students to catch

up. Literacy classes for parents to enable them to support the new focus on literacy for the students.

4. **Mental health:** Pandemic-related losses were comparatively larger for students of color, from deaths and serious illness to family-devastating income loss. Need: Additional social-emotional supports for these students and pro-active check-ins to ensure students and their families know about resources and are connected to them as needed. APS should not rely on push-out messaging and assume families' awareness or understanding.
5. **Flexibility and willingness to adapt:** To jump-start thinking for next year, please see the Attachment (#5) from Mr. McBride on what worked well this last year at Kenmore.

July 2021