

MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board
FROM: Student Services Advisory Committee
DATE: June 12, 2023
SUBJECT: Topics Under Consideration

COMMITTEE CHAIR/CO- OR VICE CHAIR: Kirstin Pickle, Adora Williams

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Elizabeth Fabrizio, Alicia Guajardo, Judy Hadden, Dana Milburn, Abbey Smith, Karish Mehta

STAFF LIAISON(S): Dr. Darrell Sampson

Background

The Advisory Committee on Student Services (ACSS) reviews programs and services offered by Arlington Public Schools Student Services Department, including those provided by school counselors, psychologists, substance abuse counselors, and social workers. Of particular focus is the implementation and handling of the system's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) related programming, professional development, and structure. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an important aspect of ensuring, improving, and maintaining mental health. It is imperative for APS as a district to analyze whether the mechanisms in place are sufficient in supporting and nurturing student and staff mental health. APS should be using any data collected in a systematic way to ensure that all students are supported.

Topic 1: Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Analysis

Last year the committee recommended that APS conduct a full program evaluation of the APS Student Services Department programs and services relating to the implementation of SEL programs and the tiered system of support; and partner with CASEL for an independent assessment. This evaluation with CASEL is the SEL Readiness and Engagement Analysis (SELREA). The results of this analysis will help APS create a roadmap for systemic SEL to ensure the work ahead is coordinated, doable, and sustainable. CASEL's experience working with districts and external perspective can help APS advance SEL in support of all students.

The committee hopes that when the analysis is returned, APS will be willing to commit the necessary resources and budget to any recommendations that it plans to adopt. Research shows that SEL creates greater access to academic success for all students, and those benefits continue long-term. SEL allows every student to celebrate their strengths by promoting skills that help students identify and understand their strengths and learn to take diverse perspectives. SEL builds listening skills and communication skills that develop empathy and supportive relationships. SEL also helps adults strengthen practices that promote equity and inclusion. Deeper learning happens through meaningful connections with students, and SEL provides teachers with skills to better understand students' perspectives and backgrounds, create inclusive learning spaces, and collaborate on solutions for equity and access. Teaching and modeling a few simple skills and ideas can help students and teachers build empathy and have better relationships skills, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and decision-making skills. Finally, SEL helps deepen school-family-community partnerships to support students' social, emotional, and academic development so that every student has a support network.

The APS Strategic plan includes a goal around student well-being to create an environment that fosters the growth of the whole child. APS will nurture all students' intellectual, physical, mental, and social-emotional growth in healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments. APS is striving for:

- A learning environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults;
- Prevention and intervention services for physical, mental, behavioral, and social-emotional health;
- Engagement in healthy practices that can be continued throughout life

Performance Objectives include:

- Disproportionally in suspension rates by race/ethnicity, students identified with a disability, and English Learners will be annually reduced and overall suspensions will not increase. (PO-SWB-1)
- By 2024, at least 80% of students with disabilities will spend 80% or more of their school day in a general education setting. (PO-SWB-2)
- Key findings on the Your Voice Matters survey will show improvements in student social, emotional, and mental Health. (PO-SWB-3)

These are areas where APS' approach to SEL can have an impact on how successful APS is in meeting goals around student well-being.

As we know, APS has already invested a minimum of \$60,000 to complete the CASEL SELREA. The Board should be prepared to commit the additional funding and resources to support any recommendations/needs that come out of either evaluation. Once APS restructures how it will manage and implement end-to-end SEL programs, then recommendations, such as mandatory professional training, establishing standard SEL performance goals against core SEL competencies, consistent data collection & usage, consistent SEL implementation, and communication should fall in line across the district creating a transparent understanding within the community of how SEL is supporting student well-being.

Topic 2: Student Services Staffing

The committee has previously recommended adjusting the staffing ratios for school psychologists and social workers to allow for one full-time psychologist and one full-time social worker assigned to each elementary, middle, high, and alternative program school. In the meantime, APS has begun a pilot program adding SEL school leads and support in the central office. The committee believes APS should be prepared to continue this additional SEL support in the future. The SEL leads have been able to provide additional help to the schools in the handling of SEL, for example:

- Provide communication to parents and families around SEL survey results (interpreting the report) and in general information and knowledge
- Help increase the overall survey response rates (89% response rate vs. 60% prior to having the leads)
- Help principals in schools review survey data, and use the information to assist the school in decision making, not just in SEL areas.

As noted before, the strategic plan has goals and objectives around student well-being, and furthermore a mission that all APS students learn and thrive in safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments across the entire system (and in each school). Adequate support in the implementation, rollout and continuing management of SEL is vital to this goal. We believe that adding specific central office leadership and paid school based support will be important. A future recommendation may be to allocate the following resources to schools and central office:

- SEL leads in schools. Need additional funds moving forward. Make sure additional funds in stipend are included in the student services operating budget
- Central Office Director of SEL programs, with a specific focus on student well-being goals.
- Central Office Specialist to support the universal roll out of the SEL curriculum and CASEL recommendations.
- Give parents resources to help them know how to build student well-being skills at home (as community support/services is limited)

Adequate staffing in this area (including school-based staff and central office staff that will provide vital support to staff based in schools) will help APS provide all students equitable access to student services professionals. In addition, it can ensure equity between all schools in supporting all of our students at a time when mental health related issues for students are on the rise, and at a time when crucial mental health referral services are limited. There is not sufficient mental health care available to our children locally to meet the needs that already exist and are expected to continue. This makes it more important than ever that APS have adequate internal resources to address rising needs for students. Not all elementary schools currently have full time

services for their students, and some school Psychologists and social workers have multiple school responsibilities. Student needs for school psychologists and social workers do not match the availability of these professionals.

The budget expense for additional full-time social workers and psychologists was estimated to be \$2,160,000/year. The projected budget for the School SEL leads and central office SEL support staff is \$400,000 to \$500,000 per year. We are aware of the budget constraints that APS faces, but we believe this need is too great to be left unmet.