

Student Services Advisory Committee  
FINAL Recommendations to the APS School Board  
February 27, 2024

**Recommendation #1: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs for all secondary students should include timely and relevant topics, ample student and staff voice, comprehensive staff training with opportunities to practice implementation, and support to school staff teaching SEL, as required by both state and national standards. Effective SEL and prevention must focus on the intersection of mental wellness, substance use prevention, and SEL core competencies rather than SEL lessons in isolation. Programs should focus on increasing protective and preventive factors, including those that lead to resilience and help prevent risky behaviors.**

**SEL programs should cover topics such as drug prevention; racial equity; implicit bias; appreciation and acceptance of diversity, including LGBTQ; and responding to observed acts of bullying. APS currently supports the development of the protective factors of SEL and DEI competencies. By listening to high school students, APS can continue to support these protective factors by teaching and practicing SEL competencies through drug prevention, DEI and other relevant and life-saving topics.**

**Background:** Researchers have found that youth who possess a diverse set of protective factors can, in fact, experience more positive academic outcomes. These internal and external protective factors include regulating one's emotions, internal resiliency, positive peer groups, caring adults, connection to school, and engagement in school and community activities. The protective factors in a young person's environment influence their ability to overcome adversity. Therefore, promoting positive asset-building is a critical strategy. By increasing protective factors (e.g., school connectedness, resiliency, self-worth, etc.) we can reduce the negative impact of risk factors which in turn leads to mental wellness.

**Need:** SEL, drug prevention and mental health are intertwined, and the implementation must be interconnected in order to be effective. To help students be more prepared to face challenges now and in the future, we must increase protective factors and decrease risk factors. APS is duty bound to provide these resources and, per the strategic plan, seek to create an environment that fosters the wellbeing of students. This is an urgent need; by building these competencies, increasing protective factors, and mitigating risk factors, we will save lives. One overdose is one too many.

**Solution:** Secondary SEL must also include science-based effective drug prevention that includes education on internal and external protective factors like healthy coping strategies and an understanding of teenage healthy brain development. This can be infused with practicing the SEL competencies through discussion of timely and relevant topics that encourage student and staff voice. Students and staff should have voice and choice in selecting relevant SEL competencies to be taught in consideration of curricula, current events, and current school needs. Education must include helping students identify their own protective factors and mitigate the negative impact of risk factors. This aligns with the Superintendent's mandate to know every student by name, strength, and need.

Effective SEL instruction and Community Circles can increase school connectedness, form trust between students and staff, and resolve disputes.

**Budgetary Implications and/or Implementation Needs:** This recommendation does not have budgetary implications as additional funding for social-emotional resources was approved in the FY 24 budget cycle. Implementation needs include deliberate connection and collaboration between SEL, mental health, and substance abuse and across representative departments as well as embedding SEL lessons across the curriculum.

**Strategic Plan Alignment:**

Core Values Supported: Excellence, Equity, Inclusivity and Integrity.

Goals Supported: Student Wellbeing

Strategies Supported: Student Wellbeing Strategies 2, 3, 4 and 5.

<https://www.apsva.us/strategic-plan/student-well-being/>

**Committee vote:** Unanimous

**Staff response:**

Staff supports this recommendation, as it is in alignment with current efforts to support schools with the implementation of social-emotional learning. APS Student Services is working with high school students and staff at several campuses to gain feedback and collaboratively plan lessons and strategies. Moreover, Arlington Tiered Systems of Support and Student Services staff are working with high school principals to consider strategies to provide professional learning to staff in upcoming staff meetings.

 Resources

Recommendation #2: **Ensure Adequate Staffing and Role Definitions as set forth below: Hire one Director of Student Wellness & Support, two Student Services Specialists [Descriptions], and additional school-based Student Services professionals (consistent with nationally-recognized professional organization ratios). Additional Student Services professionals are needed district-wide to ensure ALL schools meet the recommended ratios of their respective professional organizations.**

**Need:** Adequate staffing within Student Services is vital to APS' ability to effectively support students. APS must have enough staff who serve schools full-time, regardless of funding source, and central office staff dedicated to supporting school-based staff, and ensuring APS can provide all students with equitable access to student services professionals, support, resources and a foundation crucial to their overall wellbeing and success. This cannot happen without sufficient school staffing. APS must prioritize mental health by seeing the need for more Student Services staff so that they can deliver comprehensive school services.

We are in a mental health and substance abuse crisis that is killing our students. Low-income students in particular lack access to and availability of therapists. Coordination with community mental health providers and incorporating DHS staff into schools helps to ensure equitable access, but it is not a substitute for school-based mental health services. We need more Student Services staff to meet recommended ratios AND to meet the ratios set forth by APS. Without sufficient APS staffing, programs cannot be effectively implemented; students cannot be known by name, strength, and need; and student sobriety and mental health cannot be prioritized. Current ratios are inadequate to student needs and lead to decreased retention of staff.

**Solution:** Hire a sufficient number of school Student Services staff to meet professionally recommended staffing ratios in recognition of APS' diverse student needs.

- Hire three new Syphax FTEs to provide support to school based staff in the implementation and management of various student services programs in schools. The proposed Syphax staff should help coordinate and integrate SEL, drug prevention, and mental health support in addition to overseeing any contracted services. They should work toward alleviating some of the strain experienced by school student services staff in Medicaid billing for all students, and assist teachers who are implementing SEL in ways that teachers deem helpful.
- Prioritize filling the current vacancies of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and substance abuse counselors. The School Board has previously acknowledged the importance of providing these positions by including them in the budget. **All schools must have full-time, daily coverage of school psychologists, social workers, school counselors, and substance abuse counselors consistent with national ratio standards.** This is crucial to the effective implementation and integration of SEL throughout the system, and to the wellbeing of Arlington students that these positions are filled. **The School Board should make filling existing Student Services vacancies an HR priority, and assess what changes might be needed for the effective recruitment and retention of these staff (including compensation and benefits commensurate with area localities).**

**Budgetary Implications and/or Implementation Needs:** 3.0 FTE, potentially fully-or-partially offset by Medicaid reimbursement funds.

**Strategic Plan Alignment:**

Core Values Supported: Excellence, Equity, Inclusivity and Integrity.

Goals Supported: Student Wellbeing

Strategies Supported: Student Wellbeing Strategies 2, 3, 4 and 5.

<https://www.apsva.us/strategic-plan/student-well-being/>

**Committee vote:** Unanimous

**Staff response:**

Per the Arlington School Board's Strategic Plan, APS is working to implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programs and evidence-and-research-based interventions for students who need more targeted or intensive support in the areas of behavioral health and wellness. Further, due to higher levels of need for intensive supports as substantiated by data, APS has also entered into multiple partnerships that expand opportunities for students to access mental health services within the community. Additionally, Medicaid reimbursement is changing to allow for more services, including those for general education services, to be eligible. In order to support implementation, coordination, and training, to include on-site side-by-side coaching, of all of these initiatives, and to align them with ongoing work around the Arlington Tiered Systems of Support, additional staff are needed.

<b>Appendix A</b> <b>Committee Members</b>
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**Co-Chairs:** Kirstin Pickle  
Adora Williams

**Secretary:** Dana Milburn

**Members:** Olivia Bartrum  
Amy Cannava  
Tammie Dzubak  
Elizabeth Fabrizio  
Marjory Franklin  
Vishal Gupta

**Staff liaison:** Dr. Darrell Sampson, Executive Director, Office of Student Services

## Appendix B Resources

### Proposed New Role Descriptions:

#### **The Importance of SEL in Enhancing Youth Protective Factors and Reducing Risk Factors**

[Youth Protective and Risk Factors](#)

#### **National Professional Associations' Recommended Student to Staff Ratios**

ASCA:

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/a0565224-7cc7-4119-883a-2aa900e296b6/student-to-sc-ratios.pdf>

NASP:

<https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/critical-policy-issues/shortage-of-school-psychologists>

NASW:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/NASW-Standards-for-School-Social-Work-Services#:~:text=School%20social%20work%20services%20should,1%3A50%2C%20is%20suggested>

#### **Empirically Supported Social Emotional Learning Resources**

<https://www.apsva.us/mental-health/social-emotional-learning/>

<https://www.coursera.org/lecture/sel-for-students/the-origins-of-casel-by-roger-weissberg-6sWAp>

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/09/social-emotional-learning-under-fire#:~:text=Backlash%20against%20SEL&text=Parents%20express%20fears%20that%20SEL,gender%20identity%2C%20and%20sexual%20orientation>

[https://youth.gov/youth-topics/risk-and-protective-factors#\\_ftn](https://youth.gov/youth-topics/risk-and-protective-factors#_ftn)

<https://nida.nih.gov/about-nida/legislative-activities/testimony-to-congress/2022/strengthening-federal-mental-health-and-substance-use-disorder-programs-opportunities-challenges-and-emerging-issues>

[VDOE SEL Guidelines](#)

[National Health/PE Standards Aligned with SEL Competencies](#)