

MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board
FROM: Early Childhood Advisory Committee
DATE: February 27, 2024
SUBJECT: Final Report and Recommendations

COMMITTEE CHAIR/CO- OR VICE CHAIR: Maggie Slye and Kate McKenney

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Gail Gerry, Miranda Turner, Meredith Jaekel, Ellen Vicens

STAFF LIAISON(S): Elaine Perkins and Cameron Childs

Background: The Early Childhood Advisory Committee works in collaboration with APS's Office of Early Childhood to ensure that students in Preschool-Grade 2 thrive. Our focus is educational equity; in particular we are interested in ensuring that Arlington's most vulnerable young students have access to APS's high-quality early childhood programs.

Recommendation: Fund PreK Curriculum Resource Adoption and 50 hrs of Curriculum-Based Professional Learning for all VPI and Early Childhood Special Education Teachers and Assistants

- **Challenge:** Currently the VPI and Early Childhood Special Education classes use Opening the World of Learning (OWL) as our VDOE approved curriculum. ***This resource has been retired from the VDOE approved curriculum list.*** Programs currently using OWL as their instructional resource have been provided a "grace period" through the fall of 2025. ***By fall 2025, APS preschool programs are required to adopt approved curriculum resources.*** VDOE required CLASS evaluations will reflect APS's timely adoption (or lack thereof) of a comprehensive curriculum in alignment with Virginia's Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). Finally, our new approach to literacy instruction, which follows the Science of Reading, necessitates that we revisit vertical alignment across PK-12.
- **Solution:** Allocate funds in the APS budget to purchase high-quality PreK curriculum resources and support highly effective implementation by providing at least 50 hrs of curriculum-aligned professional learning to all VPI and Early Childhood special education teachers and assistants. **At least 25 hours of professional learning could be allocated to learning occurring during pre-service and APS designated professional learning times. The remaining hours would be acquired through job-embedded professional learning work with school-based teams.**
- **Budget:** The one-time cost is approximately \$600,000.
- **Rationale:** With high-quality early childhood experiences, people are more likely to have a higher income as adults, more likely to own a home, more likely to graduate from high school on time - and less likely to need special education or public aid. A recent study has shown that school readiness skills acquired by age 4 have a lasting impact on the students' academic performance through fifth grade. In fact, the VDOE PreK curriculum site communicates similar rationale: "Research shows that stimulating and supportive interactions between teachers and children, and effective use of quality curriculum promotes children's holistic learning and development, resulting in improved school readiness." According to research (Blank et al, 2008), teachers need 50 hours of professional development in order to maximize new curricular materials; nationally, teachers generally receive only 8. While APS is above that average, we have not met that benchmark and our teachers and assistants deserve to have the time and support to learn the materials thoroughly so that they can better differentiate for students' diverse needs.

- **Strategic Plan Alignment:**
 - *Student Success and Well-Being:* High-quality, engaging instructional resources ensures all students are academically challenged and supported through high-quality adult-child interactions, thereby reducing opportunity gaps.
 - *Engaged Workforce:* On-going, job embedded professional learning on the effective use of the new curriculum resource prepares teachers to meet the needs of all students.
- **Committee Vote:** Number of members voting: 4, Number of votes in agreement: 4

Staff Update: The Early Childhood Office appreciates the continued efforts of the ECAC and fully supports the recommendation to fund new PreK curricular resources and corresponding professional learning. The adoption of new resources and providing ongoing professional learning to all VPI and Early Childhood special education staff will ensure our students receive the maximum benefit from our Early Childhood programs and will assist in preparing students for future schooling and lifelong endeavors.

Future Recommendation Under Discussion:

- 1) ***Making a Decision about Universal PreK:*** We believe that all families who want to have a high-quality preschool experience for their child should be able to access one. Universal PreK has been discussed sporadically in Arlington for many years, with no decision made. We want to understand the barriers to Universal PreK and explore if there is political will to make it a reality for Arlington's families in coming years.

Staff Update: The Early Childhood Office supports continued dialogue and research into this future possibility. We are also working closely with our partners in the county child office and Early Head Start/Head Start through our Ready Regions collaboration.