

English Language Arts Advisory Committee (ELAAC)  
FINAL Recommendations to the APS School Board  
February 21, 2024

**Recommendation #1: APS should hire three district-level writing coaches (one for elementary, one for middle school, and one for high school) to provide teachers with job-embedded professional learning in support of ELAAC's 2022-2023 recommendation.**

**Background:** Last year, ELAAC recommended that “APS should create and implement a long-term plan for writing instruction that spans K-12 and guarantees that secondary students produce longer, multi-draft, research-driven writing supported by substantive teacher feedback. This must include focused instruction on writing mechanics in the lower grades.” We are delighted to hear that this recommendation is being integrated into ELA curriculum documents; our 2023-2024 recommendation aims to ensure that last year’s recommendation successfully transitions from curriculum documents to lesson plans, coming to fruition at the classroom level.

**Need:** As noted in our 2022-2023 recommendation, “We recognize that teachers may need wide-ranging professional development in order to deliver high-quality writing instruction.” This is especially true given the significant instructional shift that will occur because of our recommendation and the fact that teachers receive limited training on how to teach writing in their teacher-preparation programs (Brimi, 2012; Hillocks, 2002; Smith, 2003).

In order to see a measurable impact on instruction, teachers require consistent and actionable professional learning that is embedded in their practice and includes ongoing support (Knight, 2019; Snyder et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2007) through a coaching cycle (Abbot et al., 2013). Instructional coaching has a statistically significant, positive impact on student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018).

**Solution:** Our recommendation is that APS add 3 writing coaches to enhance the ability of the ELA office to provide job-embedded professional learning for teachers. Writing coaches would not be limited only to instruction in English Language Arts; they would work between and among academic departments to improve writing across disciplines, district wide. *We would like to emphasize that although these positions would be hired and supervised at the district level by the ELA office, the writing coaches would spend 85-90% of their time in schools working directly with teachers.*

Writing coaches can provide job-embedded support to teachers during the school day, including cross-disciplinary support and consultation. This can include modeling high-quality instruction and providing targeted professional development during CLT or planning time. The professional learning that the coaches will provide to teachers will include data analysis, diagnostics and intervention planning, writing instruction, providing student feedback, and curriculum implementation.

We would very much like to see ELA class sizes reduced from the current division-wide cap of 24 students, but we believe that writing coaches are a cost-effective step toward addressing the problem of workload to the extent that it would prevent teachers from effectively having students write longer, multi-draft pieces supported by substantive teacher feedback.

**Budgetary Implications and/or Implementation Needs:** 3 additional certified staff positions to the ELA budget.

**Strategic Plan Alignment:** This recommendation aligns with the following elements of APS's 2018-2024 [Strategic Plan](#):

Core Values: Excellence, Equity, Inclusivity, Collaboration, Innovation

Goal: Engaged Workforce

Strategies:

Provide growth opportunities by implementing a competency-based professional learning and evaluation framework inclusive of all staff members. (S-EW-2)

Grow and develop current and future high-quality leader/managers. (S-EW-3)

**Committee vote:** 6 in favor, 0 opposed

**Staff response:**

The ELA office is in agreement with ELAAC in the need for additional support in writing. Utilizing coaches as job embedded professional development would work within the current professional learning environment for APS. The ELA curriculum revisions for the 23-24 school year are focused on increasing the writing instruction and research-based writing tasks. A writing coach would be utilized to assist with Collaborative Learning Teams in the planning and implementation of genre specific and research-based writing.

The ELA office has invested in training the current literacy coaches in The Writing Revolution in order to provide professional learning on providing feedback on writing in the high school, and expanding sentences and paragraphs in the elementary schools.

The ELA office also agrees that one coach per level: elementary, middle, and high is a strategic way to provide schools with more in-classroom support. While we are in full agreement that coaches are highly beneficial, we are cognizant of the budgetary restraints that the division and school board are facing for 24-25 school year. In light of that, the ELA office put forth a budget request for one literacy coach for the middle schools for the 24-25 SY, and proposed to use the Virginia Literacy Act funding to further fund the elementary and secondary literacy coaches for an additional year without impacting the new budget request for the ELA office. This would bring the total number of district coaches to three to cover both reading and writing at this point. It would be the intent of the supervisors to be sure that a portion of their work is directed explicitly to coaching and training teachers in writing. Separate additional writing coach positions would be prioritized in future years.

**Recommendation #2: APS should hire two additional district level literacy coaches (one for elementary and one for secondary) to provide teachers with job-embedded professional learning.**

**Background:** One of APS's priorities this year is secondary literacy.

**Need:** In addition to pandemic-related learning loss, middle and high-school students' lack of exposure to the science of reading in early elementary levels has resulted in a significant number of students who need additional reading support to be successful in secondary school and beyond. Our committee continues to be concerned about supporting struggling readers at the secondary level. Additionally, APS is in the second year of using the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum as part of the shift towards the Science of Reading approach in elementary school. As with the implementation of any new curriculum, teachers require professional development and support.

There is simply not enough time on the calendar for professional learning to take place. Even if there were enough time for professional learning, teachers tend to be skeptical or dismissive of one-day, in-service style professional development; this alone does not necessarily have a positive impact on student achievement (Garet et al., 2016). Teachers continue to request more differentiated support.

As stated in our first recommendation, the research on job-embedded, consistent professional learning and its impact on instruction is clear.

**Solution:** APS has proven success with the current grant-funded one elementary literacy coach and one secondary literacy coach. Our recommendation is that APS add an additional literacy coach per level to enhance the ability of the ELA office to provide job-embedded professional learning for teachers. The professional learning that the coaches will provide includes data analysis, diagnostics and intervention planning, explicit/systematic phonics instruction, and curriculum implementation. Literacy coaches will also be able to model instructional strategies, providing support and training in appropriate and research-based interventions to secondary-level teachers. *As noted earlier, our committee would like to emphasize that although these positions would be hired and supervised at the district level by the ELA office, the literacy coaches spend 85-90% of their time in schools working directly with teachers.*

As literacy encompasses reading and writing, our literacy coaches should dedicate at least 50% of their time to writing instruction. There are students who need reading interventions, but almost all students need additional support and feedback in writing; the need for improved writing instruction seems especially acute and wide reaching.

**Budgetary Implications and/or Implementation Needs:** 2 additional certified staff positions to the ELA budget.

**Strategic Plan Alignment:** This recommendation aligns with the following elements of APS's 2018-2024 [Strategic Plan](#):

Core Values: Excellence, Equity, Inclusivity, Collaboration, Innovation

Goal: Engaged Workforce

Strategies:

Provide growth opportunities by implementing a competency-based professional learning and evaluation framework inclusive of all staff members. (S-EW-2)

Grow and develop current and future high-quality leader/managers. (S-EW-3)

**Committee vote:** 6 in favor, 0 opposed

**Staff response:**

We are in agreement with ELAAC regarding the hiring of additional district-level literacy coaches to provide teachers with job-embedded professional learning. The two literacy coaches that we currently have are making an impact with supporting new teachers to APS and providing classroom specific support in curriculum, instruction, analyzing assessment data and interventions.

This year, we proposed a single budget request to the ELA budget for a literacy coach to support middle schools. We believe that this is a realistic request given the projected budget implications. Having a total of three literacy coaches, one at each level, would allow teachers to receive support with job-embedded professional learning to include: data analysis, diagnostics and intervention planning, explicit/systematic phonics instruction, curriculum implementation and modeling of instructional strategies.

In response to secondary school administration and staff, the ELA office submitted a budget request on behalf of the high school principals for one full time literacy coach per comprehensive high school and a .5 literacy coach for the programs. This would provide in school leadership to oversee the screening, diagnosing, interventions and progress monitoring for students that require additional instruction in reading and writing at the high school level. After analyzing data and engaging with the ELA and ATSS office, high school principals recognize the need for an in-school literacy coach to oversee the secondary interventions. These positions would be site based.

In response to the middle-school administrator and middle school reading teacher requests, we submitted a budget request for a full-time literacy interventionist at the middle schools as a site-based position. This addition of trained personnel would support the new structured literacy courses that will be offered at the middle school levels in 24-25 SY. The current middle school reading teachers are working overtime to provide the literacy leadership of screening, diagnosing, providing interventions and progress monitoring the students that need support in reading. The middle school interventionists would work in tandem with the current reading specialist to ensure all students needing structured literacy would receive it at the middle schools.

The ELA office has invested in training literacy coaches in explicit/systematic phonics instruction in order to support teachers on the implementation and progress monitoring of research-based reading interventions. We are fully in favor of additional coaches focused on literacy as we work to ensure all APS students are proficient in reading and writing.

<b>Appendix A</b> <b>Committee Members</b>
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**Chair:** Mike Miller

**Vice Chair:** Kate Merrill

**Secretary:** Cloe Chin

**Members:** Rasha AlMahroos  
Jamie B Gillan  
Katherine Godesky  
Kristin Hauser  
Jessie Howe Brairton  
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Carolyn Sheedy

**Staff Liaisons:** Sarah Cruz, Supervisor, Secondary ELA  
Gaby Rivas, Supervisor, Elementary ELA

## Appendix B References

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