

**ACTL Response for the Proposed Restructuring  
of the School Board Advisory Committees  
to the  
School Board Advisory Committee Work Group**

**Submitted October 15, 2025**

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## Overview

The Advisory Committee on Teaching and Learning (ACTL) Representatives voted to submit a formal response to the draft framework proposed by the School Board Advisory Committee Work Group. This response was developed using data collected through a targeted survey distributed to ACTL members and focused only on the questions pertaining to ACTL with one additional question and provides a high-level summary of the responses provided.

ACTL thanks the School Board Advisory Committee Work Group on the thoughtfulness, effort, and organization reflected in the Draft Working Group's proposal. The plan was described as comprehensive, well-structured, and aligned with APS's strategic goals.

## Survey Methodology

- The survey questions mirrored those distributed to the general community.
- An additional open-ended question was added to the Subcommittee Section:  
"Please explain why you chose Option 1, Option 2, or Neither Option."
- 33% of ACTL representatives completed the survey.
- Representatives were also given the opportunity to review and edit the ACTL Response before final submission.

## Response Components

The ACTL response consists of two main sections:

1. Qualitative Data Summary - This section synthesizes open-ended feedback provided by ACTL respondents.
2. Quantitative Data Summary - This section presents aggregate survey results from ACTL members.

## Background and Information Provided to ACTL Representatives

Prior to completing the survey to develop the ACTL Response to the Draft Framework proposed by the School Board Advisory Committee Work Group, ACTL Representatives

were provided with several sources of information to ensure informed participation and feedback.

## Formal Presentation

- September 10, 2025 Presentation:  
Delivered by Jonathan Turrisi, Director of Accountability, Evaluation and Strategic Planning (Arlington Public Schools), and Jenny Roahen Rizzo, Chair of the School Board Advisory Committee Work Group. The presentation included an overview of the draft framework, its rationale, and implications for teaching and learning across APS.
- Presentation Materials:  
Following the formal session, ACTL Representatives received access to the presentation slide deck for review and reference.

## Supplemental Reference Materials

- APS Website:  
Comprehensive background information about the School Board Advisory Committee Work Group and its draft proposal was made available on the APS website:  
<https://www.apsva.us/sbadvisoryworkinggroup/>
- ACTL Subcommittee Summary:  
ACTL Subcommittees provided a summary of information about the draft proposal, concerns of the proposal, and potential impacts and implications.

## Additional Learning Opportunities

Outside of ACTL, representatives were also provided opportunities, such as Community Forums, to further explore the draft framework and gather diverse perspectives from the broader APS community.

# Qualitative Data Summary

“Is there anything you would like to share about the proposed organizational structure?”

## 1. Concerns About Overly Broad Focus Areas

Several respondents expressed concern that the proposed structure, particularly the *Student Academic Growth and Success* category, may encompass too many academic domains, making it difficult to provide focused attention to specific areas.

“Student Academic Growth and Success is a very large bucket... we should keep subcommittees, perhaps new ones.”

## 2. Value of Subcommittees and Volunteer Sustainability

There was a strong theme emphasizing the importance of maintaining subcommittees to preserve specialized expertise and engagement. Respondents cautioned that dismantling current structures could risk losing volunteers and institutional knowledge.

“We already struggle with needing volunteers. Dismantling the current volunteers would risk that.”

“The ‘silo’ issue can be overcome by ACTL serving as oversight to the subcommittees.”

## 3. Alignment and Grouping of Focus Areas

Some comments questioned the logic of how certain topics are grouped, suggesting that certain areas (e.g., technology) require dedicated focus due to their complexity and evolving nature.

“It doesn't seem like technology and free lunch belong together... technology needs a more dedicated effort.”

## 4. Broader Reflections on Strategic Priorities

A few respondents commented on the broader strategic direction of the system, noting a desire for greater emphasis on a range of student proficiencies beyond standardized test scores in reading and math.

“I wish that other proficiencies were highlighted besides reading and math.”

## Organizational Structure Overall Summary

The qualitative feedback highlights appreciation for the intent to organize and streamline advisory structures but raises caution about maintaining depth, volunteer engagement, and clarity of focus areas. Respondents generally favored continuing subcommittees or similar structures to ensure expertise, sustainability, and adequate attention to diverse educational priorities.

**“Please use the box below to provide any additional comments about your answers above or to share other thoughts about the proposal for the Academics Advisory Council.”**

### 1. Representation and Membership Balance

Respondents broadly supported a diverse composition for the Council that includes parents, students, teachers, community members, and subject matter experts (SMEs). Many participants emphasized that students’ perspectives are particularly valuable since they are most directly affected by academic initiatives.

“Students are directly impacted by academic initiatives, so their voices are most important.”

“The Council should be primarily parents, but it would be helpful to include small numbers of students and teachers who understand how things work in reality.”

Several respondents also suggested that secondary schools, because of their larger populations, should have greater representation than elementary schools.

“Secondary schools are much larger and need more representation... at least two parent reps from each middle school and three to four from each high school.”

### 2. Volunteer Recruitment and Participation

A recurring theme was concern about the difficulty of recruiting and retaining volunteers. Respondents cautioned against establishing rigid limits on participation and advocated for flexible involvement policies to encourage engagement from anyone willing to contribute.

“If someone is willing to volunteer, I don’t think we should cap the number of volunteers we accept.”

“Volunteers are hard to find - we should welcome more students, community members, and SMEs if they are available.”

### 3. Structural Considerations and Use of Subcommittees

Several comments highlighted uncertainty around how roles and responsibilities would be divided within the proposed structure. Respondents suggested that standing subcommittees might more effectively address specific academic areas or demographic needs than a single consolidated council.

“Some standing subcommittees seem like they would address those needs more directly.”

### 4. Term Limits and Leadership Structure

A few respondents sought clarity on the proposed eight-year term limit, questioning whether it would be consecutive or cumulative and expressing concern that it may be too lengthy.

“I’d like to better understand why eight years was selected — it seems rather long.”

Others recommended expanding leadership roles within the Council to distribute responsibilities more evenly.

“Would recommend five for the leadership - Co-Secretaries, Co-Vice Chairs, and Chair.”

### 5. Concerns About Feasibility of Proposed Numbers

Multiple respondents noted that the proposed number of parent representatives (40) might be unrealistic given current challenges in recruiting volunteers. Several suggested more flexible membership criteria, allowing community members or SMEs to fill open seats.

“Forty parent representatives is too ambitious... allow community members and SMEs to fill those roles if not enough parents volunteer.”

### ACTL Structure Overall Summary:

The qualitative feedback emphasized the need for a balanced, inclusive, and flexible structure for the Academics Advisory Council. Respondents support expanding representation across stakeholder groups, particularly students and subject matter experts, while ensuring that expectations around term limits, leadership, and volunteer recruitment remain realistic and sustainable. Maintaining adaptability and clarity in structure was seen as essential to the Council’s success.

# “Is there anything you would like to share about the proposal for subcommittees?”

## 1. Strong Support for Maintaining a Core Set of Subcommittees

Many respondents affirmed that subcommittees are essential to maintaining specialized focus and depth within the advisory system. A consistent theme was that core, standing subcommittees, aligned with School Board charges, should continue to operate, supplemented by ad hoc committees for short-term or emerging topics.

“A core set of subcommittees is valuable, especially knowing their work will be guided by a School Board charge.”

“Option 2 seems most flexible, allowing both standing and ad hoc subcommittees as needs arise.”

Respondents felt subcommittees should not be limited to members of the parent council but should also include subject matter experts, students, and community members who can provide focused insight.

“Subcommittees shouldn’t be made up only of parent committee members. They should include people solely dedicated to that topic.”

## 2. Barriers to Volunteer Participation

Several respondents expressed concern that a formal application process for subcommittee membership could unintentionally discourage volunteers. They emphasized that many schools already struggle to recruit and retain volunteers, and additional administrative steps could make participation less appealing.

“When applications were required for volunteers at my school, no one applied afterward.”

“We don’t need an additional barrier to entry when we already have difficulty finding people to serve.”

Participants urged APS to adopt a welcoming, accessible approach to subcommittee recruitment and to focus on marketing and outreach to attract subject matter experts and interested community members.

## 3. Flexibility and Responsiveness

Respondents valued flexibility in both topic selection and membership. Some raised concerns that requiring subcommittee workplans to be “mutually agreed upon” early in the year could limit the ability to address emerging issues later on.

“If topics must be set at the start of the year, latent issues that appear later can’t be addressed, which is problematic.”

Flexibility was seen as essential for ensuring subcommittees remain responsive and relevant throughout the academic year.

#### 4. Distinction Between General and Specialized Participation

Multiple respondents noted that not all volunteers want or are able to serve on both the general council and subcommittees. Some prefer working in depth on specific issues, while others are generalists focused on broader policy and communication roles.

“Some parents are interested only in deep work on a specific subject, while others are generalists. Requiring both roles could overload the same people.”

“It will be difficult for ACTL representatives to also serve on a subcommittee - it’s a large time commitment.”

Respondents recommended allowing separate membership tracks for council and subcommittee participation, with strong communication between the two groups to ensure alignment.

#### 5. Relationship to APS and Use of Subcommittee Feedback

Several comments reflected skepticism about whether APS and the School Board will actively use subcommittee input. Respondents stressed that maintaining subcommittees is only valuable if their recommendations are valued and acted upon.

“There’s no point in having subcommittees if APS and the Board aren’t open to their feedback.”

“If feedback isn’t valued, subcommittees may shift toward advocacy roles outside the APS framework.”

This theme highlights a desire for transparency and respect for subcommittee contributions in APS decision-making processes.

#### 6. Need for Improved Coordination and Communication

A number of respondents suggested strengthening communication among ACTL, subcommittees, and the School Board to ensure alignment and efficiency.

“There needs to be better communication between ACTL reps, subcommittees, and the School Board.”

“Marketing membership and searching for experts who can serve is vital.”

Respondents see open communication as key to maintaining engagement and clarity of purpose across all advisory levels.

## Subcommittee Overall Summary:

Respondents expressed strong support for maintaining subcommittees as vital components of the advisory system, emphasizing that they foster depth, inclusivity, and meaningful participation. However, they cautioned that the success of subcommittees depends on accessibility, flexibility, and respect for their input. Participants urged APS to minimize administrative barriers, diversify membership beyond parent representatives, and ensure clear communication channels between ACTL, subcommittees, and the School Board.

**“Please share any additional feedback on the Working Group’s proposal.”**

## Concerns About Term Limits and Volunteer Sustainability

Several respondents cautioned against term limits or any measures that could restrict participation by willing volunteers. Given ongoing challenges with recruitment, many emphasized that APS should prioritize inclusivity and accessibility over rotation or turnover.

“If people want to volunteer, we should eagerly accept them and not limit how long they can serve.”

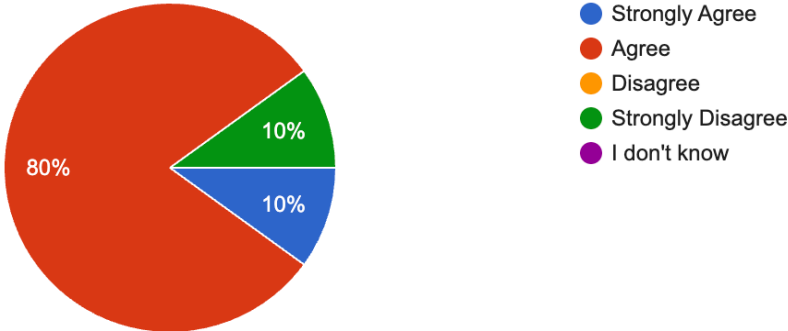
“We need to focus on retaining experienced members, not cycling them out.”

This theme aligns with earlier concerns about volunteer shortages and underscores the need for flexibility in participation policies to sustain engagement over time.

# Quantitative Aggregate Data

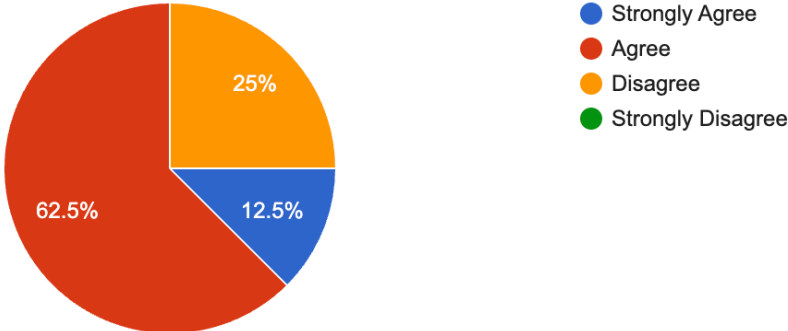
## 1. Organizational Structure

Based on the information provided in the table above and the graphic below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: The proposed five Advisory Councils are properly aligned with the priorities in the Strategic Plan:



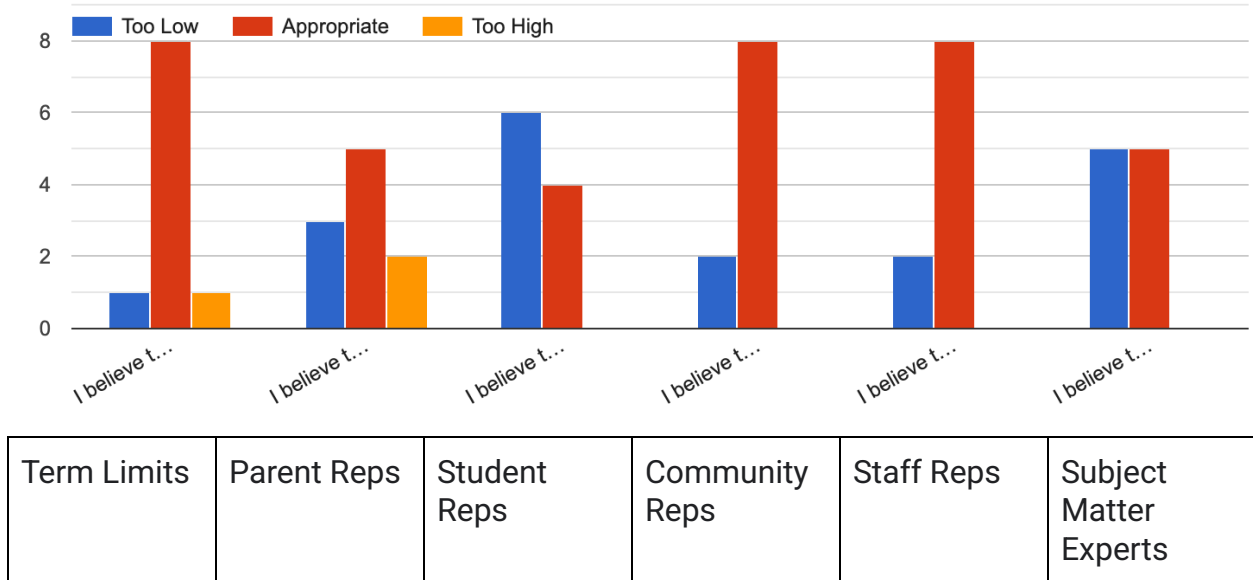
## 2. Strategic Plan Alignment

The proposed council's **aligned Strategic Plan Priorities and Focus Areas** will support development of useful recommendations to the School Board.



### 3. Membership Structure - Makeup

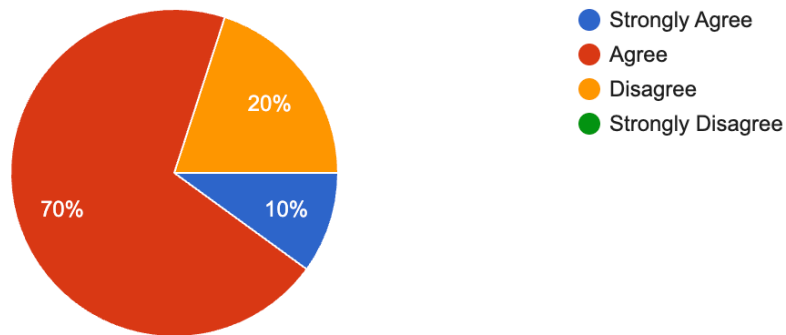
Considering the aligned strategic plan priorities and potential focus areas for the **Academic Advisory Council**, please share your perceptions about the following components of the proposed **membership structure**:



\*This table aligns to the above graph.

### 4. Membership Structure - Recommendations to the School Board

The proposed **membership structure** will support development of recommendations that are useful to the School Board.



## 5. Options

Which option do you believe will best support the work of Advisory Councils and School Board Priorities?

