

COMMENTS ON WORKING GROUP'S ADVISORY RESTRUCTURING PROPOSAL

ACTL Advisory Committee on Student Services (ACSS), October 2025, by Unanimous Vote

A big thank you to the talented group who have contributed time and talent:

1. **It is clear that quite a bit of work and thought has gone into this project.** Our committee members appreciate your efforts.
2. **We are very pleased to see personnel and operations included in the new advisory proposal.** Currently, there is no ACTL-like structure for community input regarding personnel. While the FAC and J-FAC have done excellent work, other aspects of operations are frequently identified by community members as weak and in need of attention as well. We thank the working group for this inclusion, and regardless of other changes, we strongly support adding advisory roles in these areas.
3. **We also gratefully welcome the idea of deliberately recruiting students and staff members on all committees.** The reality checks that these diverse groups can provide each other will be invaluable, and the intentional inclusion of these populations will break down silos. In the past, committees have not always been encouraged to include staff beyond their designated liaisons, so this represents a genuinely positive and appreciated improvement.

Below are our questions/concerns:

We recommend a candid and thorough evaluation of what will be lost and gained, as well as which needs are currently met and which may no longer be served by the proposed changes:

1. **Rationale: could you specify more clearly which issues these changes are intended to address and explain the methods by which they will do so?** This information will assist both us and the public in better assessing the proposed changes and understanding their reasoning. Most importantly, how will our students benefit from these proposed changes?
2. **A straightforward analysis of what will be sacrificed and why** this loss still constitutes progress for our students, including details on how the lost elements will be replaced.
3. **It is important to recognize the value of the existing subcommittees and their contributions.** Why would we take a step backward by removing them? How do we plan to make up for the loss of recommendations that have benefited our students over time?

We worry that diversity, involvement, and viewpoints – as well as the focus on important issues and needs for children – could decline instead of improving. Additionally, enthusiasm to serve and the positive results/impact on students might both diminish:

1. **Requiring that committees/subcommittees consist mostly or entirely of main council members leads to fewer people participating and contributing in two ways:**
 - a. Overall involvement decreases because fewer people – and therefore less representation of our students and their communities – are included in comparison to the current structure. (ACTL has more than three times as many members as the council alone when subcommittee members are counted alongside school and community organization representatives.)
 - b. Doubling the workload means fewer Arlington residents, especially those facing economic challenges, who work long or irregular hours or hold multiple jobs, will have the time to engage in both the main council and any subcommittees. Mandating that most or all subcommittee members come from the main council could undermine rather than helping to meet our goal of promoting diverse representation.
 - c. In general, there is already limited diversity of representation of our student population among parent and guardian council representatives and committee members, despite sincere efforts.
 - d. Overall, we would expect less representation of student populations via parent/guardian council and committee members.
2. **Having School Board members select council members raises the following concerns:**
 - a. Assigning recruitment and selection duties to School Board members adds to their already heavy workload. Many have left office over recent years after just one term, often citing the job's high pressure, while others have stepped down before completing expected tenures, resulting in a loss of valuable experience and productivity.
 - b. Relying on only five people to recruit advisory members appears to narrow the range of perspectives and reach rather than broadening it. This approach seems at odds with our past mission to encourage broad and diverse volunteer participation from across the community to best represent our students (which admittedly could use improvement).
 - c. Since advisory members are already approved by the School Board, the Board already makes the final decisions.
 - d. This selection process may feel less welcoming and inclusive, potentially creating an exclusive atmosphere. It could also lead to underrepresentation of some students or student groups if individuals choose not to volunteer.
 - e. We seek clarification on whether representation will continue to come from every school and civic organization. If not, this could reduce the diversity of viewpoints and student representation, weakening the advisory structure's positive impact on student growth, progress, success, and educational experience.
 - f. Those of us who have worked hard to recruit diverse members for ACTL and various committees know how challenging this is. Many efforts have already been made to attract members from diverse backgrounds. How will this new structure significantly improve the success of the search for diverse members?

- g. All of the above said, if School Board members want to help with recruitment, the current and future structure certainly should allow for their involvement.
- 3. While it is important to ensure that the advisory committee's work aligns with the School Board's priorities, having the School Board primarily or exclusively define the topics presents some drawbacks:**
- a. For many years, our advisory committees have served as a model for our students of a deliberately inclusive, grassroots democratic process—something Arlington openly values and takes pride in providing. Issues, concerns, and needs have traditionally emerged organically from the community, including students, families, schools, and staff. The proposed new structure seems to make both membership and topic selection more top-down, which appears to go against the original intent and may result in losing vital information needed to best support our students.
 - b. When topics are not allowed to arise naturally from the community, important issues and priorities could be overlooked.
 - c. This approach could make participation feel less appealing and less welcoming—more like unpaid work than a respected volunteer role representing one's community—because topics are imposed and volunteers might have to take on multiple roles if they are interested in specific subjects.
 - d. This structure for topics feels less welcoming of diverse perspectives and needs.
 - e. Critical minority concerns are likely to be overlooked or disappear.
 - f. The Strategic Plan already serves as a guiding framework that committees use when developing recommendations and evaluating their work. All committee recommendations already must support and help fulfill the Strategic Plan, and they are required to explain how they do so.
 - g. As engaged community members and thoughtful volunteers, committee members' views on topics and needs (within the Strategic Plan's framework) should also be valued.
 - h. Of course, committees would welcome specific issues or topics suggested by the School Board. To date, the School Board has not frequently communicated areas of focus, except for requests that recommendations avoid additional spending. Since volunteers naturally want their efforts to be meaningful, relevant, and appreciated, clear guidance on the School Board's priorities would be both welcomed and helpful.
- 4. Eliminating the standing subject-matter subcommittees and relying solely on the two councils (Academic and Well-being) to address all the needs currently managed by these 15 subcommittees—and only through council members—raises several concerns:**
- a. How can we ensure that the critical topics and student needs previously handled by the 15 subcommittees will still be adequately addressed within just two large, potentially cumbersome council groups? Each subcommittee focuses on a specific area of student need and has contributed valuable recommendations that have led to real improvements in academic success, student well-being, and often staff satisfaction as well.
 - b. In the new proposal, might there be unproductive competition between different academic subject-matter issues/student needs because of a scarcity of time/ focus? Similarly, might mental/social/emotional vs physical student well-being needs compete for focus?
 - c. We suggest considering how to keep the newly-created silos -- dividing academics from well-being -- from having any detrimental effects. While some silos are broken down by the proposed (and applauded) deliberate inclusion of staff and students, a couple of notable new silos are created. Even assuming all standing subcommittees are kept, as we request, subcommittees accustomed to being on ACTL together and having the opportunity to work together would now go to one of two different councils, instead, possibly losing a sense at least some have of overall same-mission camaraderie and cooperation. Our committee has worked with others in the past, and we have a potential joint recommendation underway, in addition to the possibility of a staff morale recommendation.
 - d. If subcommittees must be composed of council members only, expertise would be lost when council members cannot dedicate time to both the council and a related subcommittee, assuming subcommittees exist in the new structure. Some important student needs would inevitably be neglected without dedicated standing subcommittees to address them.
 - e. Under this new structure, communities like SEPTA, which seek representation on multiple committees relevant to students with disabilities, may find it more challenging to maintain adequate representation.
 - f. Staff liaisons provide important info/reality checks/access to other staff, and facilitate answers to staff-related questions for each subcommittee, and also should be kept.
- 5. Each ACTL Advisory Committee was established because it addressed a set of ongoing and essential student needs, and this remains true today.** In our committee's case, the focus is on mental, social-emotional health and the mental and social-emotional health professionals who support our entire schools, providing specific assessments, interventions, and staff training. Which students would lose support if the committees stopped their continuous discussion, research, and advocacy for the issues within their purview? How can we ensure these needs are met within a more generalized structure that may struggle to cover every area?

We understand this has been a lengthy and sometimes challenging process. Although we disagree with certain aspects of the proposed plan, we sincerely thank everyone involved in the Working Group for their dedication, care, and hard work.