

# Arlington Public Schools Instructional Playbook



## Arlington Public Schools 2024-30 Strategic Plan

### Vision

APS provides a world-class education where every student develops the skills and knowledge to be a responsible global citizen, and graduates college- or career-ready.

### Mission

APS will ensure all students learn, thrive, and excel in high-quality, safe, supportive schools

### Core Values

Excellence	Stewardship
Equity & Inclusion	Whole Student
Relationships	Valuing Staff
Integrity	



**APS will ensure each student achieves academic excellence through high-quality instruction and systems of support to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps.**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this instructional playbook is to provide APS staff with a common language around shared instructional beliefs. The APS Instructional Playbook is intended to:

- Support the APS Strategic Plan
- Provide a focus for teaching and learning
- Provide a focus for curriculum and professional development
- Communicate to stakeholders instructional values.

**Office of Academics:** Our vision is that all students are part of inclusive learning communities where they can develop critical thinking skills, academic confidence, and a deep sense of belonging.

The Office of Academics develops and leads curriculum and instructional programs that guide high quality teaching and learning across Arlington Public Schools. We support schools as they provide students with access to rigorous, engaging, and culturally responsive instruction that honors their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and learning needs.

# INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

*The instructional framework defines the evidence-based practices that guide teaching and learning experiences throughout APS. It defines our expectations across grade levels, classrooms, and content areas for learning experiences.*

## Fostering Inclusive Learning Environments

Foster positive relationships and build a community where all students are included, respected, and valued.

- Create safe, flexible, and engaging classroom environments
- Ensure all students have the supports to access the curriculum
- Recognize students' strengths and value diversity
- Utilize flexible grouping and adapt instruction for diverse learners
- Assume shared responsibility for all student outcomes
- Cultivate student agency and self-regulation
- Establish appropriate classroom routines that result in a positive learning environment

## Assessing

Assess student learning to inform instruction and monitor progress for all

- Design assessments aligned with learning targets
- Enable student choice in demonstrating proficiency
- Use assessments to plan instruction, monitor progress, and foster continuous growth
- Use a wide range of both formative and summative assessment methods including performance tasks
- Include feedback loops
- Promote students' self-assessment and reflection
- Communicate assessment criteria and results

## Planning

Plan meaningful lessons with clear and aligned learning targets

- Identify expected learning targets
- Collaborate to design lessons and rich academic tasks that meet all students' needs
- Incorporate students' prior knowledge, skills, interests, and culture
- Design lessons that incorporate problem-solving, are applicable to the real world, and are interdisciplinary as appropriate
- Use resources to promote communication, collaboration, and critical and creative thinking

## Teaching

Teach for meaning and proficiency using a rigorous, relevant curriculum ensuring equity of access for all learners

- Maintain high expectations for all learners while allowing for persistence during learning tasks
- Employ culturally responsive teaching practices
- Utilize student-centered, interactive, collaborative, inquiry based approaches
- Provide opportunities for the application of new learning
- Use strategies that emphasize higher-level thinking skills requiring students to communicate, question, justify, and create
- Provide processing and reflection time

# INSTRUCTIONAL AREAS OF FOCUS

All APS teachers are expected to ground their instructional practice in the Virginia Standards of Learning and APS curriculum, ensuring that every lesson is purposefully aligned to support student mastery of essential knowledge and skills. Through active participation in Professional Learning Communities, teachers plan for learning, share expertise, examine student work, and reflect on practice to collectively improve outcomes for all learners.

Click on a title below to review specific strategies to support each area of focus.



## Classroom Community

**Why?** A strong classroom community fosters a sense of belonging, reduces behavioral issues, and promotes academic success. When students feel safe, valued, and connected, they are more likely to take academic risks, collaborate, and develop social and emotional competencies.

### What does it look like?

In a culturally responsive learning community, members engage in collective inquiry that values diverse perspectives and experiences. Members provide each other with academic and social support.

*Standard 5: Learning Community*  
*Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices*

### How?

- Implement and reinforce classroom norms that promote respect, empathy, and cultural awareness.
- Foster a sense of belonging through culturally inclusive and responsive activities to support neurodiverse learners.
- Design group projects that yield high participation rates for each individual student.
- Encourage collaboration through group projects and peer-to-peer/small group learning.



## Engagement with Content

**Why?** Engaged students are more likely to understand and retain information, develop deeper knowledge, and persist through challenges. High engagement is linked to improved academic performance, increased motivation, and a greater sense of ownership over learning.

### What does it look like?

Engaged students actively participate in class, ask and answer questions, seek deeper understanding, and show a positive attitude towards learning.  
*Standard 1: Professional Knowledge*  
*Standard 3: Instructional Delivery*

### How?

- Share and discuss learning targets with students and model desired outcomes.
- Design tasks with a low floor, high ceiling approach, meaning all students can find an entry point, but there is also room for deeper exploration and challenge.
- Use critical and creative thinking strategies and resources for rigor to increase engagement and appropriate challenge for all students.
- Enhance instruction with multi-sensory resources to make learning more engaging. This includes assistive technology (i.e. alternative and assistive communication).



## Academic Discourse

**Why?** When students are actively participating in discussions and sharing their thoughts and ideas, they are able to deepen their understanding of the subject matter and develop important critical thinking and communication skills.

### What does it look like?

All students are speaking and interacting with one another using academic vocabulary to make connections and see the relevance of content.

*Standard 3: Instructional Delivery*

### How?

- Use scaffolds and structures to guide conversations.
- Utilize “talk moves” to facilitate discourse.
- Create opportunities for all students to present their ideas and receive feedback.
- Incorporate the use of academic vocabulary through structured activities and practice.



## Specially Designed Instruction: Scaffolds, Supports, & Extensions

**Why?** Student engagement, perseverance, and self-efficacy is increased when we meet students where they are and engage them with the supports or extensions that they need to further their learning and growth.

### What does it look like?

All students are accessing instruction that allows them to meet or exceed established learning goals.

*Standard 2: Instructional Planning*

### How?

- Provide multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.
- Differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs without lowering expectations.
- Provide language supports, visual aids, graphic organizers, and other tools to support understanding.
- Plan extension activities for advanced learners to deepen their knowledge.
- Establish a growth mindset of high expectations and shared responsibility for **ALL** students.



## Evidence of Learning and Effective Feedback

**Why?** Evidence of learning lets teachers know if students met the learning target and what they need next to keep learning. Providing feedback to students allows them to understand and address the difference between their performance and identified learning goals in order to guide future behavior.

### What does it look like?

Evidence of student learning includes student work like exams, papers, projects, presentations, and performances as well as surveys, interviews, and teacher observations/checklists.

Effective feedback is timely, specific, and actionable. It clearly communicates what students understand and what needs improvement and provides concrete guidance for next steps. All students actively use feedback to self-assess and adjust their approach to learning.

*Standard 4: Assessment of and for Student Learning*

*Standard 8: Student Academic Progress*

### How?

- Determine what evidence of learning you will use to measure student success for the learning target.
- Ensure that students understand what success looks like for the lesson learning targets.
- Communicate student progress towards goals and objectives.
- Incorporate student goal-setting, self-assessment and peer feedback opportunities. Students should be able to answer: How much progress have I made? What should I do next to achieve the goal?

References to relevant teacher evaluation standards are included in the “What does this look like?” section of each area.



# APS LESSON FOUNDATION

*These elements should be present in each and every lesson.*



## Classroom Community

Build and sustain a culturally responsive learning environment that values diverse perspectives.

Classroom norms are reinforced and teacher has planned for:

- Belonging activities
- Collaboration Opportunities
- Supports for Neurodiverse Learners



## Clear Learning Target

Learning targets are provided in the APS Curriculum. They outline what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson.

Learning Target: What will student's learn?

Language Objective: Specifies how students will learn and demonstrate their understanding of the lesson's content through language skills like reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Success Criteria: How will students know they have met the learning target?



## Academic Task

“Task Predicts Performance”

The quality of the academic tasks students are given directly influences their learning and achievement.

The academic task engages students in levels of thinking that align with the standard and ensures they clearly understand what is expected, how to approach it, and what knowledge and skills they need to develop in order to succeed.



## Scaffolds, Supports, and Extensions

Provide assistance and opportunities to students so that they are accessing instruction that allows them to meet or exceed established learning targets.



## Evidence of Student Learning

For each student we know:

1. Whether or not they met the learning target.
2. Where they excel or where they are stuck.
3. What they need next to keep learning.

Remember:

- Student practice generates evidence.
- You need evidence of learning for each and every student.
- Evidence of learning is not always graded.
- No one type of evidence will be enough.

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

A PLC is an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively to plan for learning in order to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators.



## 4 Critical Questions of a PLC at Work

1

What is it **WE** want our students to know and be able to do?

2

How will **WE** know if each student has learned it?

3

How will **WE** respond when some students do not learn it?

4

How will **WE** extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

# HIGH LEVERAGE CO-TEACHING STRATEGIES

## Collaboration and Communication

- Establish clear roles and responsibilities.
- Develop models for collaborative and intentional planning that includes for both in-person and electronic formats.

## Utilize Varied Co-Teaching Models

Parallel, Station and Alternative co-teaching models should be used most often as they allow for both teachers to be responsible for instruction, helps to make smaller instructional groups and increase student engagement.

Learn more about the preferred co-teaching strategies

## Develop an Inclusive and Safe Learning Environment

- Explicitly teach and model social behaviors.
- Provide constructive and specific feedback to students.
- Implement the SEL and anti-bullying curriculum

## Establish Short-Term and Long Term Instructional Goals

- Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goals.
- Break down smaller tasks sequentially in order to achieve the overall designed goal.
- Adapt curricular tasks and materials.
- Explicitly teach both cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
- Provide scaffolds and accommodations.
- Maintain a brisk pace with multiple practice opportunities.