

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Arlington School Board

**FROM:** Pupil Services Advisory Committee

**DATE:** October 25, 2013

**SUBJECT:** 2013-2014 Recommending Year Report – With Staff Response

### **Background**

The Pupil Services Advisory Committee (PSAC) reviews the services offered by school counselor, psychologists, social workers, and substance abuse counselors, and makes recommendations for changes or improvements in those services.

In the last several years the Committee has focused on two main issues: 1) Improving connections, relationships and communication among students, their families and staff with a focus on the impact that these issues can have on student mental and physical health, academic performance and future goals and planning, and 2) the definition and process of academic planning, transition and how to inform and involve parents, students and staff of these issues.

During 2012-2013 the PSAC conducted a review of APS Middle and High School websites to look for strengths, consistency and information on academic planning, and how students and parents find information and work with school staff in the process. The review of work and recommendations from previous years, and last year's exercise, has helped inform the recommendations for 2013-2014.

### **School Board Priorities FY 2014**

The Pupil Services Advisory Committee carefully reviewed School Board Priorities for FY 2014 to ensure our recommendations are aligned and consistent with the School Board's view toward success. The recommendations from the Committee respond to the Priorities that focus on **Student Achievement** and **Communication**.

The PSAC believes that its recommendations specifically help address these two priorities by focusing on student achievement and 24/7 learning, as well as more effective communications. The recommendations detailed below center on increased consistency in communicating information to the school community (students, parents, staff and the Arlington community), maximizing existing opportunities and increasing what is offered to communicate to the school community, and enhancing collaboration between all stakeholders. The recommendations identify ways to enhance student learning and development by building stronger collaborations and communication within schools, between schools and parents, and between APS and County systems.

In addition to the School Board Priorities, three of the five **APS Strategic Plan 2011-17** goals necessitate more effective communication of information regarding academic planning, including:

- Goal #1: Ensure a Challenging and Engaging Education for All Students
- Goal #2: Eliminate Achievement Gaps
- Goal #5: Strengthen Support Services to Meet the Needs of the Whole Child

<b>2013-2014 PSAC Recommendations</b>
1. Make academic planning information on APS websites – elementary, middle and high schools, as well as the APS website - prominent, easy to find and consistent in content, language and form.
2. Evaluate -- and improve and expand where necessary -- the methods of communicating college, career and academic planning information to make the information user-friendly, easy to find and responsive to the broad range of needs of Arlington students and families.
3. Build stronger collaborations and communications within schools, between schools and parents, and between APS and County departments and programs that serve children and families.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**Make academic planning information on APS websites – elementary, middle and high schools, as well as the APS website - prominent, easy to find and consistent in content, language and form.**

**Staff Response: With our focus on making information more accessible to families, we agree that it is important that academic planning information be prominent, easy to find and consistent in content, language and form. The Department of Student Services is working with school counselors to link school websites with the district level website. We will also work in collaboration with the School and Community Relations Office to bring greater of consistency to counseling websites.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

This recommendation is aligned with Strategic Plan Goals 1, 2 and 5 as well as the **School Board FY 2014 Priorities** on Communication and Student Achievement.

**Rationale:**

The PSAC defines the phrase "academic planning" as broadly as possible to encompass all aspects of academic life, including social, emotional, and behavioral development, as well as the more obvious focus on making long-term academic, college-preparation and career decisions.

Currently, location of information on academic planning on APS websites (individual

school level and at the APS level) is inconsistent. The Committee's survey of elementary, middle and high school websites revealed that information on academic planning is difficult to find, confusing and, in some cases, nowhere to be found. The new APS **Academic Planning Road Map** is an excellent beginning, but the Committee feels that we need to go further in making this tool easily accessible and useful to students and parents through the APS central site and individual school websites.

Consistency in providing information facilitates awareness for families who are either transitioning between school levels (elementary to middle, middle to high) or families who are coming new into the APS system. Communication studies indicate that website users look for consistency in messaging within and between a family of websites; this helps build trust from the “customers” and repeated visits to the websites for information (link in appendix).

The APS **2012 Community Satisfaction Survey** suggests that students and parents feel confused about academic planning and need more direction, information and support. (See appendix)

In addition, the **2013 Department of Student Services Report** (compiling the survey results from several focus groups that included students, parents, and school staff) indicated that:

- Students want more support, direction and information.
- Parents feel that the process can be overwhelming for them.
- Staff members recommend increased access to information that explains the academic planning process in-depth for student and parents.

An additional factor is Arlington’s highly transient population (government service, military, etc.). Families new to Arlington need to be able to find information for their students when they are entering a brand new school system, are making decisions on which school to send their student, and preparing for transition to middle and high schools.

Arlington County data for 2013 (link in appendix):

- 28,860 individuals move to Arlington County annually (79/day) and approximately 3,600 are school-age children – the majority of whom enroll in APS.
- In any given year, roughly 1 in 6 APS students (16%) are new to the system.

#### **Budgetary Implications:**

- The bulk of the content and language on academic planning already exists and we estimate the following work would be done by APS Information Technology personnel
- 22 Elementary Schools x 1 hr. = 22 hrs.
- 5 Middle Schools x 2 hrs. = 10 hrs.
- 4 High Schools and Secondary Schools x 2 hrs. = 8 hrs.

- 6 Other Programs x 1 hr. = 6 hrs  
Total = 46 hrs. x \$30/hr. = \$1380

ACI Committee Vote:	Yes	No	Abstaining

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

Evaluate -- and improve and expand where necessary -- the methods of communicating college, career and academic planning information to make the information user-friendly, easy to find and responsive to the broad range of needs of Arlington students and families.

**Staff Response:** With APS' focus on continuous improvement, we support the idea of using multiple modalities of communicating information to families. We most recently developed our academic planning roadmap that is a tool that can be used by students, families and staff to conduct academic planning sessions and begin the conversation about various Pre-K-12 academic options. Companion documents are also in development. We've begun reaching out to the elementary schools and community organizations to promote academic readiness and being informed of the various options. In the future, the Office of Pupil Services will continue to work with PSAC to identify methods of communicating with families to include School Talk, mobile apps, and various social media. We will continue to explore various other options through business partnerships in the community.

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

This recommendation is aligned with Strategic Plan Goals 1, 2 and 5 as well as the School Board's Priority on Communication.

**Rationale:**

Findings from the 2012 Senior Survey, 2012 Academic and Career Planning Report (both done by APS Pupil Services) and the 2012 APS Community Satisfaction Survey, as well as APS middle and high school information on college, career and academic planning, indicate a need for comprehensive review and system-wide improvements to accomplish the following:

- **Ensure expectations and options are clear to both students and parents.** They should have a good understanding of what is available in terms of programs and the paths for graduation and beyond, what accommodations exist for students and families, and how to access these various programs and resources.
- **Ensure that students and parents truly understand what is meant by APS Academic Planning.** Key terms should be clear and a student version of the academic planning map and other tools can be developed.
- **Ensure that all possible information channels, including those in the following chart, are utilized for maximum reach to students and parents.**

<b>School and Family Events</b>	Make use of the heavily attended activities – back-to-school night, middle and high school information nights to share important information on the full scope of academic planning. Make use of parent teacher conferences, and other meetings such as
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	PTA meetings to share information.
<b>Use of technology</b>	Consider the use of Skype or conference call if a face to face meeting is not possible or is easier for some families. Create a tutorial of how to navigate the APS website. Enhance use of APS TV – for virtual meetings including middle and high school information nights, back to school nights, PTA meetings, etc. Increase exposure to and usage of Naviance for all students beginning at the middle school level and ensure that parents are oriented to the program. Include development of a scope and sequence – certain steps must happen in order. Assign Naviance registration and use as a homework assignment.
<b>Non-technology</b>	Evaluate current systems used and look for ways to increase outreach to students and their families who may have limited or no access to information.

**Budgetary Implications:**

Staff time to develop APS website tutorial: approximately 10 hours of technology staff time. No new staffing required.

Staff time to videotape, edit and post key APS parent information events on APS TV: 20 hours of staff time for county-wide APS events, and approximately 20 hours per year at individual schools (unless a parent/PTA volunteer is available to do this). No new staffing required.

ACI Committee Vote:	Yes	No	Abstaining

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**Build stronger collaborations and communications within schools, between schools and parents, and between APS and County departments and programs that serve children and families.**

**Staff Response: We will continue to partner with School and Community Relations to build opportunities for families to take advantage of the wealth of county programs and resources. School and Community Relations has hosted a community partner meeting and invited APS staff and we will continue to be part of any future meetings. As resources and opportunities for families become available, the Office of Pupil Services will continue to communicate these opportunities in alignment with APS policy.**

**2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment:**

This recommendation is aligned with Strategic Plan Goals 1, 2 and 5 as well as the School Board Priority on Communication.

**Rationale:**

Arlington is a community where the education and well-being of all students is a responsibility shared by the whole community. In support of this, the APS Department of Student Services "...encourages the cooperation of school, home, and community," and staff of the Office of Pupil Services, "...work collaboratively with community agencies to provide assistance to students."

When community stakeholders work in partnership, all conditions for improved student achievement, as well as mental and physical health can be addressed. Research shows that integrating school and community resources and services can lead to stronger families and safer more vibrant communities where all young people can thrive. (See *the last page of this report for links to examples of relevant research.*)

This recommendation focuses on improving student learning and development by building stronger collaborations and communication within schools, between schools and parents, and between APS and County departments and programs that serve children and families. The following actions are critical to the communication and collaboration needs identified by the PSAC:

- Include school counselors and other Pupil Services staff in school **Professional Learning Communities** (definition in appendix).
- Provide adequate time and access to resources to ensure all students make academic progress and develop necessary college and career readiness skills, including time and access to computer labs during the school day for counselor meetings with students for career and college activities such as Naviance.
- Provide multiple opportunities in the evenings and weekends at middle and high schools for parents to work with together with their student and counselors on academic planning and college and career readiness activities.
- Provide parents with current information about the APS, County, and community resources and network of supports available to aid in their student's academic, social, and emotional growth and development.
- Establish a team (with representatives from APS Student Services and School and Community Relations, Arlington Departments of Human Services and Parks and Recreation, the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families, and other stakeholders) to ensure that information on school and County services, programs, and events that support the whole child are(1) easily accessible and (2) consistently and uniformly provided to students, their families, school counselors, and other Pupil Services staff.

**Budgetary Implications:**

Evening and weekend staff time to work with students and parents on college and career activities and plans: 8 hours of staff time per middle and high school, plus H-B Woodlawn, per year (other APS secondary programs may also require staff time). No new staffing is required.

APS participation on the School-County communications team: approximately 6 hours of staff time in the initial establishment and meeting of the communications team and approximately 4 hours annually to participate on the team. No new staffing is required.

ACI Committee Vote:	Yes	No	Abstaining

**Update of Previous Recommendations:**

The Pupil Services Advisory Committee last presented recommendations to ACI and the School Board in 2009-2010. In 2011-2012 the PSAC provided an update on the 2009-2010 recommendations. The Committee will continue to monitor the past recommendations, and at the same time focus the remainder of 2013-2014 on activities that will support this year's recommendations put forward in this report.

**Future Work:**

The committee members believe that further research into effective communication tools, both social and traditional, that can be used to reach students, parents and staff members is a vital part of ensuring accomplishment in two of the APS School Board priorities for 2014 – Student achievement, and effective communication leading to success of all students.

**Committee members:**

Erin Beckles, Melanie Ewell (student member), Mia Ewell (student member), Jill Flack, Barbara Gomez, Alicia Giuliani Guajardo (Co-Chair), Linda Hardy, Janis Johnson, Lydia Robertson (Co-Chair), Jennifer Landis-Santos, and Jean Waterbury

Judy Hadden serves on the PSAC as ACI Liaison.

Our APS Pupil Services staff liaisons are Jeffrey Carpenter, Director of Pupil Services, and Marcia Jackson, Supervisor of Counseling.

## Appendices

### Recommendation 1 - Research and Reports

Academic Planning Road Map: <http://www.apsva.us//Domain/95>

2012 Community Satisfaction Survey:

[http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/141/2012%20APS%20CS S.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/141/2012%20APS%20CS%20S.pdf)

<http://www.sitepoint.com/why-consistency-is-critical/>.

Arlington County data for 2013:

([http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/planning/data\\_maps/CPHDPlanningDataandMapsdemographics.aspx](http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/planning/data_maps/CPHDPlanningDataandMapsdemographics.aspx), Arlington, VA: PROFILE 2013)

The APS **2012 Community Satisfaction Survey** suggests that students and parents feel confused about academic planning and need more direction, information and support. Findings from 603 parents of 5<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> graders:

- The satisfaction levels for parents of middle school students with respect to their child's academic plan decreased from 2009 to 2012 (by 11%) and the level of dissatisfaction with the academic plan increased by 10% from 2009 to 2012. (Community Satisfaction Survey, 2012, p.71).
- One in five parents of children in grades 7-11 reported that they were "somewhat unknowledgeable" about their student's academic planning. (CSS 2012, p, 69).

Arlington County data for 2013:

([http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/planning/data\\_maps/CPHDPlanningDataandMapsdemographics.aspx](http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/planning/data_maps/CPHDPlanningDataandMapsdemographics.aspx), Arlington, VA: PROFILE 2013)

- 28,860 individuals move to Arlington County annually (79/day) and approximately 3600 are school-age children – the majority of whom enroll in APS.
- In any given year, roughly 1 in 6 APS students (16%) are new to the system.

### Recommendation 3 - Research and Reports Supporting Collaboration Recommendations

Henderson, Anne T, and Mapp, Karen L., (2002), New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, ([www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf](http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf)).

Benson, Lee and Harkavy, Ira, ( 2003), Leading the Way to Meaningful Partnerships, ([www.principals.org/news/pl\\_partners0901.html](http://www.principals.org/news/pl_partners0901.html))

Blank, Martin J., Melaville, Atella, Shah, Bella P., (2003) Making The Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools, the Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, DC

- \* Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is a collaborative process by which schools meet regularly in teams to review and analyze student data to make decisions regarding where to focus instruction to achieve results for all students. The idea is that teams look at all student data regularly and if a student or a group of students are not making progress, there is action designed to help those students. PLCs is a new APS initiative this year lead by the Department of Instruction. Some school staff and other administrators were trained in this process this summer. Training is ongoing throughout this year.
  
- \* Naviance is a computer based college and career readiness tool used in grades 6-12. A Naviance scope and sequence of college and career activities for grades 6-12 have been developed that school counseling would like to have students accomplish this year. The activities include developing SMART goals, exploring careers, learning styles inventories, college and career research, financial aid and scholarship research, transition survey and building a resume. The idea is to bring consistency and uniformity to the student experience as well as have students build on previous experiences as they progress through the grade levels. The message from counselors is that it is difficult to get time with students and computer labs are unavailable due to testing and other instructional tasks that seem to take precedence.

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