

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Arlington School Board  
**FROM:** Student Services Advisory Committee  
**DATE:** March 4, 2015  
**SUBJECT:** Report Without Recommendations 2014-2015

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The Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC) is charged with reviewing the services and programs offered by the school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and substance abuse counselors, and makes recommendations for changes or improvements in these services.

In 2013-2014, the Student Services Advisory Committee (note name change from Pupil Services Advisory Committee) made three recommendations:

<b>2013-2014 Recommendations</b>
<i>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.</i>
<i>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.</i>
<i>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.</i>

The Student Services Advisory Committee is pleased to present this Report Without Recommendations for the 2014-2015 school year to the Advisory Council on Instruction (ACI), the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, and the Arlington County School Board.

### **Current Year Activities**

The committee's activities have been focused primarily on monitoring progress and receiving reports from staff on central office and school-level work related to the recommendations made last year. Monthly committee meetings and activities

have included discussions to provide input on current initiatives as well as dialogue with other groups, such as School and Community Relations staff.

Other opportunities and activities outside of the regular meetings have included:

- Survey of all of APS school websites, particularly looking at middle and high school sites for counseling information, consistency and ease of use.
- Participation in the development and revamp of the website content and layout.
- Participation in the Aspire2Excellence summer workshops led by Student Services and School and Community Relations staff.
- Participation in the Aspire2Excellence meeting that included SSAC committee members, counselors, teachers, and other ACI committee members (see summary notes in appendix).
- Participation in the initial key stakeholders budget forum.
- Participation in the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) working group.
- Attendance at ACI meetings and informal discussions with other ACI advisory committee members.
- Contributions to A2E playbooks for staff and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document for families.
- Attendance at Academic Planning meetings held at schools and community centers.
- Review of Senior Survey data.
- Review of web metrics.
- Review and discussion of Public Affairs and web page support services at each school.
- Attendance at College and Career Night, and Middle and High School Information Nights.
- Focus on Parent Education Resources.
- Began discussions on bridging this year's work into actions and recommendations for next year.
- Review of Aspire2Excellence messaging to include a balanced approach to academic planning with advising that emphasizes career pathways and career development equally with college aspirations.
- Inclusion of the developmental assets as a model for addressing the needs of the whole child.
- Update on students who are working on an Aspire2Excellence app that would be created by students for students. The app would initially include the information from the academic planning map and ultimately allow students to play with academic options and plan their academic future.
- Sharing of professional development opportunities created by the coordinator of counseling to address a variety of topics related to students and families.

## **Update of Previous Recommendations**

### **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.*

Status: IN PROGRESS

2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment: 1, 2, 5

ACI Vote: 24 YES, 0 NO, 2 ABSTAINING

ACI 2013-2014 Rank: #9

Budgetary Implications: Addressed through redirected FY15 Department of Student Services funds.

Great strides have been made on Recommendation 1 that is focused on academic planning information and making the information accessible, easy to find and consistent across the district. This work includes:

- Ongoing support to school counselors to bring greater consistency to school websites and linking to the main district level website. It also entails working with School and Community Relations staff to bring greater consistency across the district to the counseling sites/pages.
- An overhaul of the APS (district level) Counseling, Academic Planning, and College and Career Corner webpages. This includes updated and better designed pages, video links, glossary of terms, academic planning resources for all grades K-12 for staff and families.  
<http://www.apsva.us/Domain/95>
- Most recently principals have been informed of this ongoing work and have been asked to ensure support to the Counseling staff and school webmaster so that adjustments can be made to the schools' web pages, as needed. This work is also being supported by the Department of School and Community Relations- Public Relations Liaisons.
- Aspire2Excellence was featured on the front APS homepage in October to prompt families to visit the Aspire2Excellence webpage. An Aspire2Excellence video was created to provide families with more information about the initiative.

As APS and schools continue to put increasing emphasis on the importance of developing students to succeed in college and/or career, providing consistent, accessible information at all APS websites takes on even more value and significance.

### **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.*

Status: IN PROGRESS

2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment: 1, 2, 5

ACI Vote: YES 22, NO 0, ABSTAINING 4

ACI 2013-2014 Rank: #6

Budget Implication: Addressed through redirected FY15 Department of Student Services funds.

Progress has also been made on Recommendation 2 that centers on communications to families and the importance of using multiple modalities that would include both high and low tech options. Some of the activities include:

- Input and updates on staff's development of the Academic Planning road map that focuses on preparation and readiness for college and career. This tool is for students, families and staff to use to begin conversations about the various options and paths. Updates to this document continue to occur as some of the information has changed per state requirements.
- Input and updates on the student academic planning guides that are companion documents to the map are available for all grade levels and can be used by parents and/or staff.
- Outreach was done by the SSAC staff liaisons to elementary schools and community organizations to promote academic readiness. SSAC advisory committee members were invited to observe one of these outreach events.
- Student Services staff members currently train all school counseling staff to provide informational forums within their schools, through the College Night event, on websites, mail outs and within the school building. At each event, families are provided the opportunity to provide feedback that is collected and disseminated to appropriate schools. There is also a feedback forum on the website. The collected data are used to evaluate and improve.

The SSAC will continue to focus on identifying additional ways to communicate about academic planning information to the diverse range of APS families (in addition to School Talk, mobile apps, social media), particularly keeping in mind the importance of ensuring that there are low tech ways that exist so that all families have access to this information.

### **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.*

Status: IN PROGRESS

2011 – 2017 Strategic Plan Alignment: 1, 2, 5

ACI Vote: YES 23, NO 0, ABSTAINING 3

ACI 2013-2014 Rank: #12

Budgetary Implications: Addressed through redirected FY15 Department of Student Services funds.

Recommendation 3 has moved more slowly, in part because of the breadth of what the committee would like to see achieved. APS and the broader Arlington community is resource-rich and coordination and collaboration across the county and district, and between organizations does take place. That said, the committee believes that there is frequently a lack of awareness of these resources and they often are not adequately connected to best serve students and families.

Activities related to Recommendation #3 include:

- Staff efforts to strengthen the partnership and collaboration with the School and Community Relations Office.
- Updates to the APS website to provide the most recent information for academic planning, college and career information for children, families and staff.
- In collaboration with George Mason University and career and technical education students and staff, an app is being developed to facilitate self-monitoring on student progress toward academic, college and career goals.
- Schools have now been charged with holding these meetings and delivering this information to families. School counselors are leading the meetings, but all staff are encouraged to participate as college and career planning must have a broader focus in the schools.
- Schools are being encouraged to develop an Aspire2Excellence team that includes administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, students (where appropriate) and community members to ensure that Aspire2Excellence becomes a part of the culture of the school and is being cultivated in every classroom throughout the school. School counselors already have an advisory team, so this team could add Aspire2Excellence to their agenda.

The committee would like to see future conversations take place to be inclusive of SSAC members and the wider community. In close alignment with the FY 2015 School Board Priority that focuses on Communication and Community Engagement, the committee will continue to seek ways to work with the various stakeholders across the district and wider Arlington community.

## **Future Efforts**

Looking ahead - discussions have already begun regarding possible focus areas for next school year's recommendations. Some of the topics include:

- Stress and anxiety and overall mental health issues -- looking at numbers/data on academic stress being experienced by our students.
- Mental health support in all schools - Ex: Mental Health Cadre - increasing access to this and having more teachers go through the training.
- Psychologists and social workers - looking at how to increase numbers as their workload increases.
- Making connections and collaborating with other advisory committees such as ESOL/HILT, Career, Technical and Adult Education, and Special Education.
- Making connections and working more closely with other groups in the community such as the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families to include its focus on developmental assets.
- Family and Community Engagement (FACE) - coordinating with appropriate staff to work on the implementation plan for Family and Community Engagement. The FACE policy was adopted by the School Board in September 2014.
- Support for teachers - staff well-being.
- Review of the Arlington Tiered System of Supports (ATSS) - how this system can be used to address some of the issues around social-emotional well-being.
- Ongoing professional development on a variety of issues that builds the capacity of staff and families to be well-equipped to address the changing needs of our students.
- Professional development opportunities that include video or online options and accessibility such as free webinars so that all staff and families could potentially participate.

## **Committee members**

Erin Beckles  
Jill Flack  
Alicia Guajardo, Co-Chair  
Jennifer Landis-Santos  
Lydia Robertson, Co-Chair  
Linda Hardy  
Janis Johnson  
Judy Hadden  
Karolina Walkin, ACI Liaison

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

The Student Services Advisory Committee would like to thank the APS staff liaisons for their continued support in fostering a strong collaborative working relationship with our committee. We also appreciate the support of the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services and Special Education Brenda Wilks. A heartfelt thank you to Judy Hadden who served as the ACI liaison last year, and continues as a valued member this year. At the end of the 2014 school year a few committee members stepped down due to other commitments. We remain grateful for our current members' time, efforts and commitment.

## **Appendix**

Summary from November 2014 meeting with advisory committee members and school counselors



## **Department of Student Services & Special Education Feedback from November 18 Meeting**

- **Student centered**
  - Use inclusive strengths based language to reframe message – How do you excel at your interests?
  - Individualized with consideration for various groups
  - Equity in scheduling and course options
  
- **Advising philosophy**
  - Strong feelings about A2E messages - career path equally weighted with college path
  - Consistency in messaging for various populations of students
  - Beliefs about developmental appropriateness for promotion of college and career
  - Keep options open for student exploration
  
- **Continuous Improvements**
  - Timeliness, availability of and use of resources among schools
  - Add Career Center as a resource
  - Professional development for teachers
  - Counselors explore service delivery models
  - Communication – give it some time, let it penetrate and go deeper before moving on to something else
  - Everyone needs to be clear about who they are to deliver the message to
  - More frequent parent sessions
  - Standardize websites
  - Develop an A2E team in the schools

December 2014