

**Arlington Public Schools  
Advisory Council on Instruction  
Evelyn Syphax Academic Center  
Wednesday, January 12, 2011**

**Present were:**

ACI Leadership: Donna Felipe and Tecla Murphy, ACI Co-chairs; Yvonne McIntire, Betsy Morse, Theresa Schweser, and Lisa Sockett, ACI Vice-Chairs; Mark Johnston, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction.

ACI Membership (returning, new, and prospective members): Barbara Olivere (AAUW), Wanda Perkins (AEA), Natalie Goldring (League of Women Voters), Tina Masciangioli (Abingdon), Susan Pascoello (Arlington Science Focus), Matt Karush (Ashlawn), Ted Black (Barcroft), Tracey Kretzer (Campbell), Blaise Scinto (Drew), Hans Bauman (Glebe), Rebecca Hunter (Key), Beth Dowd (Long Branch), Maureen LaPiana (McKinley), Deborah Morone (Nottingham), Tracy Malone (Oakridge), Penelope Bender (Taylor), Joanna Hemmat (Kenmore), Pam Silberstein (Swanson), Marian Klymkowsky (Williamsburg), Debbie Spiliotopoulos (H-B Woodlawn), Karolina Walkin (H-B Woodlawn), Susan LeFande (Washington-Lee), Luann Moy (Washington-Lee), Karen Hunt (Yorktown).

Advisory Committee Chairs / Staff Liaisons: Pam Farrell (Supervisor, Arts Education), Chris DeRosa and Lisa Koehler (Co-Chairs, Arts Advisory Committee), Mary Zolman (Supervisor, English/Language Arts), Ross Tyler (Chair, English/Language Arts Advisory Committee)

Guests: Robin Baxter, Chris Ditta, James Kirchenbauer, Cheryl Scott (Members, Arts Advisory Committee)

\*\*\*\*\*

Donna Felipe called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. She thanked everyone for coming and then reviewed the agenda for the evening: presentations from the Arts Advisory Committee and from the English/Language Arts Advisory Committee. She reminded the committees that each had an hour for its presentation and to answer questions, and reminded ACI members that each person would be limited to two questions or to two minutes overall so that everyone would have an opportunity to speak.

Before moving on to the committee reports, Donna Felipe asked Mark Johnston to give an update on the status of Grade 4 Social Studies textbook.

Mark Johnston: On Friday [January 7], the Virginia Department of Education informed school divisions of the comments from reviewers of the textbook, *Our Virginia: Past and Present*. Some were semantic, others factual. Based on the number and scope of the errors that were found, we decided to remove all print copies of the book in use by Grade 4 classes, and we notified School Principals of this action. I just today finished reviewing a draft of procedures for implementing this action and for providing materials to use in the interim. The publisher has agreed to provide us replacement texts free of charge, but they will not be ready until this coming July. They have also said that the corrected digital version will be posted by the end of January and we are now discussing ways to get materials out to teachers and students so as not to lose any instructional time. A notification about this went out in *School Talk* late this afternoon.

Hans Bauman: Was this a new text adopted this year?

Mark Johnston: Yes. The state goes through a process for adopting textbooks and this was one that had been adopted by the Virginia Board of Education. We trusted that the State had looked at and approved the content, which we now know didn't occur. The State is now evaluating its procedures for reviewing textbooks and their content.

Pam Silberstein: Once the publisher has posted the corrected version online, couldn't we print out copies to use now?

Mark Johnston: Yes, we could print out pages from it, but the entire book is quite lengthy and we would not want to make hundreds of copies from it, given the associated costs, because we are getting free copies this summer.

Let me add to what I said earlier. The State is looking to develop procedures to ensure the content is accurate. There has also been legislation proposed concerning the textbook review process that would require books submitted to the Virginia Board of Education to have already had their content reviewed. I might add that this is not a new issue. Some of you may recall that several years ago Science went through a similar situation but it was with a book distributed nationally. We just want to make clear that even though the book we adopted was found to contain errors, it was chosen in good faith. The errors are in the version the State approved and State approval is what we relied upon.

Donna Felipe: Thank you, Dr. Johnston. I am going to pass around a list of ACI members and their e-mail addresses with a final request to check your entry and note any corrections. If you are the last reviewer, please return the list to either Tecla or myself.

Tecla Murphy: Thank you, Donna. I'd now like to turn the meeting over to the Arts Committee. Let me introduce Chris DeRosa and Lisa Koehler, the two Co-Chairs of the Arts Advisory Committee, and Pam Farrell, the Arts Supervisor and Staff Liaison.

Chris DeRosa: Thank you. This is a reporting year for us, so we are not offering recommendations. Both of our recommendations from last year were at the bottom of your list of priorities, which was a bit of a disappointment, but we continue to support both of them: the hiring of a theater technology specialist, and support for improved opportunities for choral music education countywide. We remain very concerned about the decreased enrollment in vocal music classes. We are also concerned what the impact will be of the personal finance course requirement that all incoming high school students must take starting next fall. We are thinking that some students will drop an elective to find the time for this new requirement, and we fear this may impact enrollment in art classes, especially Fine Art classes, so we want to monitor what happens. The Program Evaluation Report presented to the School Board this fall found that students and parents were generally satisfied with the arts programs we offer and, for students, this was especially noted at the secondary level. One finding was the need to better inform Guidance Counselors and secondary staff, as well as parents and students, about the variety of arts courses, and that fees should not deter students from signing up. Also addressed in the Evaluation was the ACT II program, which expanded this year and is now available at all the middle schools.

We hope that ACI members see the Arts as an important component of a student's education. We post a calendar of events on our web site and encourage you to take advantage of them. Tomorrow evening, for example, is the Pyramid Concert at Washington-Lee, with choral singers

from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, all performing. Then, on January 19, there will be a reception starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Central Library for the opening of the Scholastic Arts Exhibit. I'll end here and we can entertain questions.

Barbara Olivere: What is the ACT II program?

Chris DeRosa: This is an after school program that was started about 6 years ago at Kenmore. It was initiated based on a recommendation from our committee. A block is added to the schedule at the end of the normal school day that allows students to take an additional elective course. Participation is voluntary, but students must make a commitment in signing up for these courses--attendance is taken and the courses have the same expectations as ones taken during the school day. Many of the classes are in the Arts but some are now also offered in other subjects.

Barbara Olivere: Are the ACT II programs fully enrolled?

Mark Johnston: No.

Barbara Olivere: But enough to justify supporting them?

Mark Johnston: The offerings have increased significantly from last year, so enrollment is spread over more courses, so generally, yes.

Pam Farrell: Any elective offered during the day can be offered as an ACT II class.

Marian Klymkowsky: Is your committee looking at this as a way to bolster participation in choral music programs?

Chris DeRosa: That isn't a specific goal of the program, but we asked Dr. Johnston to meet with us last month on this topic. We do see ACT II as one way to increase participation and opportunities for students.

Marian Klymkowsky: This opportunity is especially important given the concerns you raised about students needing to take a personal finance course.

Chris DeRosa: Yes, but the ACT II classes are at the middle school level, and the finance course requirement is at the high school level. The drop in enrollment starts in middle school and is more significant then. Enrollment starts to increase in the Fine Arts once students are in high school.

Marian Klymkowsky: I am concerned that enrollment is decreasing and you say you are monitoring the situation. Monitoring just means following the enrollment numbers. What is being done to better understand why this is happening?

Mark Johnston: The committee is looking for a reason. We do know that students are pulled away from taking electives during the regular school day for academic strengthening, and this results in a loss of enrollment in electives. Also, several years ago, in order to build enrollment, we had a teacher who split her time between high school I and middle school for choral music. Eventually this model was so successful, this person moved full-time to the high school level and we did see enrollment in the middle school choral program begin to fall.

Marian Klymkowsky: Is there something in the middle school choral program that is not engaging the kids?

Lisa Koehler: We are not in a position to address the curriculum and what is covered there.

Mark Johnston: That is a topic we could address with the Advisory Committee at future meetings so they can have input in the curriculum.

Beth Dowd: I want to follow up on the Theater Technology Management position that your committee recommended last year. One alternative that was suggested was to offer a course in theater management through Career, Technology, and Adult Education to train students.

Chris DeRosa: Yes, theater tech classes.

Beth Dowd: This was an idea raised last year. Has anything been done to implement it?

Chris DeRosa: We have focused on staff training and on making safety corrections to the facilities.

Pam Farrell: In response to the findings of the Fisher [Theatrical] Report, we held safety inspections and looked at setting up a priority list. We also arranged for safety training for theater staff. The first was held in November and we have plans for additional training sessions for teachers and students. So, progress is being made.

Tracy Malone: To address the declining enrollment, are there opportunities for students involved in choral programs at the secondary level to visit other schools to get the students there energized about joining chorus? So, for example, have the middle school chorus perform at several elementary schools, or have one of the high school choral groups visit and perform at one or more of the middle schools.

Chris DeRosa: Some of that is already being done with the Pyramid Concert, which includes elementary through high school students.

Tracy Malone: I'm not thinking so much about evening performances, but some time during the school day. For example, have the middle school chorus perform for the fifth grade students during the day.

Chris DeRosa: I believe some of that is being done, but not on a countywide basis.

Pam Farrell: This kind of exchange has been started this past year with high school chorus groups visiting the middle schools and the middle school choral groups visiting elementary schools.

Chris DeRosa: There are also some countywide opportunities, such as the Honors Orchestra and Band for Grades 4 through 6 and for Grades 7 and 8. There is also an Honors Chorus for Grades 4 and 5, but nothing at this time for Grades 6 through 8, so that is a gap.

Matt Karush: I am concerned about the lack of opportunities for younger students to get instruction in instrumental music.

Chris DeRosa: Yes, we have one advisory committee member who has a lower elementary aged child who is a talented violinist but because of the student's age, orchestra instruction is not available in school.

Matt Karush: Do these limitations exist at all schools? And has it always been this way?

Chris DeRosa: I'm not sure the age rule as ever been challenged by asking the principal's permission for a younger student to take band or orchestra.

Matt Karush: Do you know how other jurisdictions handle it?

Chris DeRosa: I know that in Fairfax County instrumental instruction also begins in Grades 4 and 5.

Maureen LaPiana: In reference to the choral arts, is the decrease in enrollment in middle school a national trend or just local?

Chris DeRosa: We haven't looked at the issue nationwide. The committee did contact two middle schools in Fairfax County. Both had increased or strengthened their programs. This hasn't been true for middle schools in Arlington.

Maureen LaPiana: Maybe it would be worth looking at other jurisdictions to see what they have been doing in terms of programs or ways of encouraging student participation.

Pam Silberstein: The Program Evaluation presented to the School Board last fall showed an uptick in enrollment in Arts programs at the high school level overall, but a decrease at the middle school level. My perception was that as you go up in grade, requirements crowd out electives. Is that true? Also, how will the middle school design process impact the ability of students to take art electives?

Tecla Murphy: The Design Review process is an issue that will need to be covered at another time.

Mark Johnston: Several years ago, the Arts Education Office and the Advisory Committee were exploring ways to make electives accessible to more students in middle school. The ACT II program was one response by the Advisory Committee, but certainly access to electives has been a part of the conversation relative to the Design Review process.

Tecla Murphy: We have developed a system called the "Parking Lot" as a place to "park" ideas or questions that merit further discussion but not at the immediate moment. Donne is putting down your question (referring to Pam Silberstein's query) on our list for tonight. [NOTE: The complete list from tonight's meeting is at the end of the Minutes.]

Theresa Schweser: Is the ACT II program now available in all middle schools? I thought that last year some ACT II classes were eliminated because of budget cuts.

Mark Johnston: There was one middle school that added to its ACT II classes because it had discretionary funds and applied them to this effort. The school then had to reduce courses due to the reduction of discretionary money so is now in line with the other middle schools.

Theresa Schweser: I was at a PTA meeting recently where financial concerns and the impact on elective classes were discussed.

Deborah Morone: Just briefly—what is the Middle School Design process?

Mark Johnston: It is a planning effort that is looking at issues such as scheduling, and how classes and electives are offered.

Blaise Scinto: Have the Pyramid Concerts been done at all the high schools or just Washington-Lee?

Pam Farrell: This idea was reconstituted several years ago, to bring together the choral groups from the main schools that feed into Washington-Lee. We hope to expand the idea to the other high schools.

Karen Hunt: Do the ACT II offerings include the visual arts?

Pam Farrell: Any elective is eligible to be part of it.

Mark Johnston: And not just the arts.

Karen Hunt: There seems to be much attention paid to choral arts. How about the visual arts?

Chris DeRosa: Visual arts are extremely strong in our schools. Several years ago our committee proposed that each elementary school be allocated \$10/student for art supplies to ensure all students have access to good quality materials. This year we've been focusing more on theater tech and choral programs.

Pam Farrell: The visual arts are not under-represented at the secondary level. We underwent a curriculum review this year, and just added a ceramics III class for next year.

Karen Hunt: If schools were to better prepare students in the Arts at a younger age, this might then feed more students into taking art and music classes in Middle and high school. Are the courses and structure in place at the secondary level to handle this? I mean courses that are enriching and challenging so the students do not feel they have already gone beyond what the secondary schools can offer.

Natalie Goldring: It seems that the outcome of the Middle School Design process will be key to the issue of how electives are offered, especially the prospect of block scheduling. I am also wondering if you are seeing the effect of more students applying to the IB program and therefore needing to take foreign language as an elective in middle school. That would affect enrollment in the fine arts and/or music. I am also concerned that you seem to be focusing on only one element, and that is enrollment in choral music. I think the important idea is interest in music overall, and that the form it takes is not so important.

Pam Farrell: Under the Program Evaluation, we did pick up a thread that high school choral students had often participated in music as part of an ACT II class. The Advisory Committee's primary concern is not wanting to see choral music go away, and not so much in trying to isolate a specific reason. We are thrilled by the increased interest in high school, but the committee wants to be sure that choral music is on everyone's radar and to resurrect it at all levels, if possible. The Pyramid Concert is a positive step.

Susan LeFande: The honor chorus for elementary grades—it seems complicated to enroll and comes across as somewhat elitist. I've had parents tell me they feel the whole application and audition to be intimidating, especially for students who are only in Grades 4 and 5.

Pam Farrell: The Honors Chorus operated under the Gifted Services program until this year when it was moved over to the Arts Office. This fall, we had about 250 applicants for 90 slots. At the auditions I walked many of the students to the door and tried to calm them down. Some jurisdictions feel that age is too young to go through that kind of audition and stress, but the program is very popular in Arlington.

Susan LeFande: I haven't read all of your 217-page report, but it struck me one thing that was missing, especially at the elementary level, was using art to support the curriculum. I think this is

very important and a beautiful piece, including works of art relevant to the curriculum, but I didn't see any mention of it in your report. A great example is when the students are studying ancient Egypt--

Pam Farrell: I'm not sure what report you are referencing, the Program Evaluation? We do that sort of thing all the time--maybe we just took it for granted rather than addressing it explicitly.

Mark Johnston: In terms of Program Evaluation, it is hard to develop a measurement instrument for this in terms of professional evaluation, but the case you raised about the study of Egyptian history and culture is an excellent example of arts integration.

Susan LeFande: Another area I found missing in the Program Evaluation concerns discrepancies between the elementary schools and their art and music programs. There are some with excellent visual art programs that are weak in music, and visa versa. There doesn't seem to be much of a standard or consistency.

Pam Farrell: Both art and music are part of our ongoing textbook adoption process. This should bring more consistency across the County in terms of curriculum and the consistency of its implementation.

Karolina Watkins: Do you foresee the Honors chorus as expanding to cover Grades 6 to 8?

Pam Farrell: We hope so. We proposed funding for a Middle School Honors Chorus in next year's budget. Our intent, if it goes through, is to add Grades 6, 7, and 8. Our Office is in full support of this, but it is a budget issue.

Debbie Spiliotopoulos: ACT II sounds like a good solution to a difficult issue. For high school, are there efforts by APS to reach out to professional artists or programs that might be willing to work with students in areas such as media, textiles, or printing? Or maybe it could be in subjects currently offered but professional involvement would allow students to participate at a level that the schools cannot offer. This might allow kids to explore other forms of art, and I mean that to include studio art, fine art, music, all aspects.

Pam Farrell: We do have several mechanisms in place to draw on the expertise and talents of outside artists. The Humanities Program, which is run by Allison Gilbert in the Arts Office, places resident artists in schools to work with students on a variety of projects. The Arlington Community Foundation has also provided funding for this effort. Allison is also responsible for the Apprentice Program, which is for students in Grades 10 to 12 interested in visual arts, dance, music, or theater. These students are selected on an application and audition basis, and have an opportunity to work individually or in small groups with artists and to participate in workshops to gain experience from professionals in their field of interest. Our Office also works with the Arlington Independent Media to increase Arlington students' exposure to film and video. Those are a few examples, but we will take any other ideas you might have.

Debbie Spiliotopoulos: What about GIS or graphics depiction--do we have anything like that available in APS?

Mark Johnston: We currently offer a dual enrollment course with James Madison University on Geospatial Tools and Techniques. It is offered through Washington-Lee and we have about 20 students enrolled this year. This program has been active for several years but we don't have much along this line in other disciplines.

Debbie Spiliotopoulos: Do these programs, such as when artists come in or the dual enrollment class, are they for credit?

Pam Farrell: Participation in the Apprentice Program earns one-half credit.

Mark Johnston: The dual enrollment course offers both high school credit and college credit at James Madison.

Ted Black: Are there any changes to the Program of Studies?

Chris DeRosa: Every year, Pam [Farrell] proposes changes to the Program of Studies.

Pam Farrell: For next year, we have added a sequence of courses in Ceramics by adding Ceramics III. Arts took over supervision of the Honors Band, Honors Orchestra, and Honors Chorus, as well as the Apprentice Program, all of which used to be part of Gifted Services. We also expanded some courses at the Secondary level. The Program Evaluation gave us some valuable data and information which helped inform decisions on courses to add. In addition, the textbook adoption process will help us in revising our curriculum. We are excited to review textbooks, along with art and music resources.

Ted Black: Will there be an opportunity for public input?

Pam Farrell: In February we will have examples of books available for parents or community members to look at and to provide us comments. We are just getting started in the process.

Yvonne McIntire: Was the Pyramid Concert at Washington-Lee advertised?

Pam Farrell: We had notices in *APS School Talk*, on the Washington-Lee web site, and as part of the calendar on the Arts web page. I think the word was put out in a variety of venues.

Yvonne McIntire: I am just concerned that *School Talk* and other web-based outlets are not accessible to everyone.

Pam Farrell: We rely on our Arts Education calendar to be a major source of information for residents interested in finding out about upcoming events. It can be accessed from computers at the public libraries. We also put up notices at schools and send out flyers through backpack mail, although the Pyramid Concert was not advertised that way.

Yvonne McIntire: In terms of your Program Evaluation, there was a period when the data showed that high school participation in the Arts was decreasing and now it appears to be increasing. The position then was that minority students did not have access to the Arts in high school because of other academic requirements. Is minority student enrollment in art classes currently increasing or decreasing?

Pam Farrell: The data show a slight variation. At the middle school level we are see an over-representation of Caucasian students and not as strong numbers for minority students. We have made sure that there are no mandatory fees attached to art courses as a way to ensure that this is not the reason that students are not signing up for them.

Mark Johnston: We added language to the Program of Studies about the fees, so we are fairly certain that financial need will not be the reason that students are not signing up for Art classes.

Pam Farrell: So in middle school we are seeing more disparity but in high school the differences have leveled out.

Tecla Murphy: We have four minutes remaining if anyone has a second question or comment.

Lisa Sockett: In terms of textbook review, are there currently textbooks used in the visual arts and music?

Pam Farrell: At the elementary level we do have music textbooks and we are looking to update these. By that I also mean looking at adding resources through flash drives, iTunes, etc. In visual arts, we do not have a textbook for pre-K through Grade 8. We are looking at the options now, although it might be that we only purchase the teacher edition. At the secondary level, we already have textbooks in use for our courses. So, we will primarily be looking at the pre-K through Grade 8 level.

Karen Hunt: For the K-8 curriculum, are you looking at any multiple medium approaches? We usually teach in one medium at a time. Are there any textbooks that take a different approach, one that looks at different media simultaneously?

Pam Farrell: We are just starting the textbook review work, so we have not yet had an opportunity to look at the variety of options available. We have been gathering information on music selections, but we haven't started with the visual arts.

Karen Hunt: I just hope in the selection that there might be one that shakes things up, one that takes a different angle from the one medium at a time approach that we do now, something with a more integrated orientation.

Tina Masciangioli: At Abingdon, we've been able to increase students' exposure to the arts through programs at the Kennedy Center.

Pam Farrell: Yes, Abingdon has been able to work with the Kennedy Center as part of an Exemplary Project. Other Arlington schools—McKinley, Glebe, have arts focused Exemplary Projects; some schools have also taken part in programs offered through the Kennedy Center. But CETA (Changing Education Through the Arts) has a waiting list to participate, so while it supports great arts integration, it is not a resource available to all schools. Abingdon, for example, is a CETA affiliate and is not able to participate in the full CETA program. Kenmore and Drew are CETA schools.

Betsy Morse: The Washington, D.C. area has one of the highest concentrations of choral groups in the country. Each year many of these collaborate with high school choruses and involve a number of young voices. Maybe this could be an avenue for middle school voices in Arlington. I sing with a group that does Christmas concerts and works at the Kennedy Center in the summer. This year we ended up going to Virginia Beach for a high school chorus with which to work. Is there a vehicle in Arlington County to contact the different choral directors to tell them about such opportunities? We've had high school students sing with us who are now study at conservatories. What outreach is available to help connect school choral groups with these local resources?

Pam Farrell: I'll bring your idea up with our music teachers and choral directors.

Hans Bauman: We have a fantastic visual arts program at our school but the vocal music is not what it could be. Will having a textbook influence that? Also, how are we, as ACI members, involved in influencing curriculum decisions and textbook adoption?

Mark Johnston: The curriculum is determined by the Virginia Department of Education, so it is set by the State. The textbook materials may be reviewed by ACI and any other members of the community.

Pam Farrell: We look for commonalities in teaching the curriculum, without giving up the individuality, personality, and teaching style of our teachers. So Glebe may be exemplary, but other teachers may need more structure and guidance. In choosing a textbook, we are not looking to change Glebe and its great program, or to make any other school adhere to a specific program. There is still flexibility even with an adopted textbook.

Hans Bauman: I was thinking of more worksheets coming home—

Pam Farrell: No, that will not be the upshot of adopting a textbook.

Tecla Murphy: Thank you Chris, Lisa, and Pam, for your report.

[short break]

Donne Felipe: I'd like to move on now to our second presentation tonight and hear from the English/Language Arts Committee. Let me start by introducing Ross Tyler, the Chair of the Advisory Committee, and Mary Zolman, the English/Language Arts Specialist and Staff Liaison.

Ross Tyler: Thank you, Donna. Good evening. I am Ross Tyler, the Chair of the English/Language Arts Advisory Committee. As you can see, we are a huge committee [chuckles from room], but we will be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

I have been on the English/Language Arts Advisory Committee for a number of years, so I hope to be able to provide some context. I will share with you our recommendations from last year and, since this is a reporting year for us, I will give you a brief update since that time. Context—what is English/Language Arts? Is it a waste of time? I hope you'll agree with me that it is not. What we strive for is to improve communication, be it through writing, listening, speaking, or reading. These forms of communication function together and on multiple levels, so while they may sometimes appear to stand alone, they are all interconnected and form a network of two-way streets. So we work on communication in English/Language Arts. But communication is important regardless of the context in which it is being used, and that might be books, journals, research papers, love letters, etc. It functions across multiple disciplines and it is core to all of them.

In terms of our advisory committee, we have been strong advocates of teachers attending the Northern Virginia Writer's Project, which is held in Fairfax during the summer. This is a very intensive course and one that requires that teachers explore and expose themselves—their strengths and their weaknesses—as they write, share, and critique each other's works. We have sent both classroom teachers and school librarians to this program to learn about teaching writing and reading. It provides a skill set that we, as a committee, have long supported. Last year we had funding for six staff and four went, the same number as the year before. In the last five years, we have been able to send 14 staff members, all of whom have then brought back what they learned not only to their own classrooms and schools but to the larger APS community. Over the last two years, we had eight staff who received financial help from the County to attend the course and we asked participants to put together a Continuing Education course that will be part of training other staff in what they learned. A course has been organized for February and a workshop just for elementary teachers is also being offered. In addition, we have been discussing ways to reach staff members who have limited time, to capture what the

participants learned and post it so that if a teacher is interested but cannot attend the course or workshop, he or she would still be able to benefit from the experience and knowledge.

Last year we looked at ways to address the achievement gap. The SAT preparation classes we offer have been very popular. Last year had a waiting list for enrollment. With additional support this year, APS is offering a third SAT preparation course, which is now almost full. The last thing I want to mention is that in our discussions this year we have been looking at the relevance of English/Language Arts to the drop-out rate. English/Language Arts relates directly to reading, writing, spoken language and listening but, in fact, a good command of English/Language Arts is at the core of learning most subjects. So we decided to look at the correlation of the way language is taught with the drop-out rate. We specifically are interested in making sure younger students are able to progress versus slipping back and becoming increasingly discouraged, which is one avenue that results in a higher drop-out rate.

Donna Felipe: Thank you, Ross. This time we will start the questioning at the opposite side of the room.

Yvonne McIntire: I am concerned about how the basics of English language—nouns, verbs, adjectives—are being taught because I have a 6<sup>th</sup> grader who cannot write. In elementary and middle school, they look at many forms of writing—short stories, poetry, fables—but not the basics of grammar, and I mean the basics such as recognizing the subject and verb, and writing in complete sentences. My son doesn't get it and he needs to. I am concerned about this and would like to see it addressed.

Ted Black: I agree with your take on English/Language Arts and the drop-out rate. It is key for schools to address and prevent frustration early.

Ross Tyler: We looked at the drop-out rate overall, not just as it pertains to English/Language Arts. But our committee does feel we should examine more closely the unique role of English/Language Arts in this. If we can improve communication skills early on, it may help lower the drop-out rate. We have no unrealistic notion that we will cut it in half, but we do feel it can be addressed.

Ted Black: It might be hard to measure the effectiveness. Having some interventions early on may set a student on the right path, so I feel it is an intriguing and laudable goal. However, as I said, it might be hard to actually measure the results.

Debbie Spiliotopoulos: Listening to your report made me think about the disconnect between writing and reading that is often found. It took my son studying Latin to finally understand grammar. But even that does not necessarily mean he understands the architecture of writing. While I agree the writing issue is key, I also think it is important to recognize that a number of kids hardly read anymore, at least not beyond what is assigned. The ability to read, and not just understand but interpret what you read, should not be overlooked.

Karolina Walkin: I want to echo what Yvonne said. I find there is a disconnect in elementary and middle school in terms of understanding how sentences are put together, and especially the use of adverbs. I found it interesting that in studying a foreign language my child learned more about sentence structure than she did in any of her English classes. I also still believe in a point I think you raised earlier, and that is to ensure that proper use of written language is promoted in courses other than just English. My experience is that this is spotty, and there is no consistency about when a teacher in another subject corrects a student's use of English. I'm not saying the teacher should take off points for poor English, but they don't seem to even correct it. As a

result, my daughter doesn't think it matters if she spells words incorrectly in other subjects. I'd like to see more consistency on this front. This will also help students when they get to college.

Susan LeFande: I am very supportive of the summer writing program. There is definitely a lack of quality writing education. On another front, I want to know the progress with replacing the Handwriting without Tears and Word Study programs. Are there any parents who like these? I don't really know if these programs just don't work or if they just aren't being implemented correctly. Our child's teacher doesn't like them and, as a result, doesn't put much time into the mechanics of how they are taught or used. I would love to see some analysis on whether either of these programs is working, and what have been the gains or losses since they were started. Also, in Special Education there are so many problems with early reading and not enough intervention, that the Special Education Advisory Committee has put together a Task Force on Reading.

Mary Zolman: We are aware of the points you raise and plan to look at them during Program Evaluation, which is just starting. The program design phase is almost finished; in spring we will start classroom evaluations. So, data analysis, classroom observations, and surveys will all be part of the effort.

Susan LeFande: Since the APS Strategic Planning effort now underway, have you considered this as an avenue for making changes to how English/Language Arts is taught and what it covers? I don't believe a representative of the English/Language Arts Advisory Committee has brought its concerns and input to the Strategic Planning Committee.

Mark Johnston: The final Strategic Planning forum was last Monday (January 10). The committee is now assimilating all the information it has gathered. Many people contributed to this effort.

Susan LeFande: I just feel you have valuable information to share with the Strategic Planning Committee.

Natalie Goldring: One comment on the low membership of your committee--maybe that suggests that people are satisfied with what you are doing because people tend to join efforts when they are dissatisfied. Moving on, I do encourage you to be more ambitious. If you look at the big picture, what do you want students to have when they exit APS? Take writing--there doesn't appear to be much unless you are in the IB program, which requires a lengthy essay (approximately 4,000 words). I think you should look at the expectations for writing when you do your Program Review. The use of Smart Boards is not helping with this either because they lend themselves so well to worksheets. And from Grade 6 upward, there is not much non-fiction writing. So, I encourage you to look at the K-12 continuum and find ways to encourage writing at all stages. I might add that this is not a problem unique to Arlington. Johns Hopkins University offers summer writing courses and there is a huge demand for these. Also in the Program Evaluation, you might address the different ways to teach grammar. For kids to be learning the nuts and bolts of English grammar in their foreign language classes doesn't seem right.

Rebecca Hunter: I agree with many of the points already voiced. A consistent theme I've heard is that communication is key and that students need to be prepared on the communication front when they go to college. But many teachers find even short notes written to them by students are incoherent. We are not giving kids a sufficient base from which to effectively develop their communication skills, even though we all know that writing and speaking--be it in the office or to the public--are vital components for many jobs, especially many of the high-powered ones in the D.C. area. In addition, reasoning, organized thought, and critical thinking are all important,

and usually depend upon a strong foundation in the basics. From an elementary school perspective, the cutting and pasting words as is required with Word Study, this does not seem very engaging. In terms of *Handwriting without Tears*, I want to report that one component may be fixed. I have twins and my daughter is left-handed. Her teacher said that the program had no component for left-handed children. My daughter was getting very frustrated so I called the company. The representative I spoke with said you do it the same for left- and right-handed students, and it had no instructions for teachers about how they might teach these children differently. So I helped the teacher with what I could, providing left-handed scissors, and instructions on how to hold the pencil and align the paper. It seemed that no one had provided the teachers information on how left-handed children learn to write...and in my daughter's class, there turned out to be three left-handed kids.

Mary Zolman: This issue of teaching left-handed kids using *Handwriting without Tears* hadn't come up before. We will definitely explore it.

Karen Hunt: I am interested in the intervention opportunities for English/Language Arts. A good command of English is core to all kinds of learning, to being successful as a student and in a multitude of pursuits, academic or otherwise. I encourage your committee to work on this and how it relates to the achievement gap. Writing may be the most fruitful component of the English/Language Arts curriculum based on what you learn about its role in closing the achievement gap and in reducing the risk of students dropping out.

Blaise Scinto: I found interesting the comments that children are learning more about grammar from studying a foreign language than in English class. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned on how grammar is taught in these other classes that can be applied to the Language Arts curriculum. Another idea would be to teach aspects of grammar simultaneously in English and in foreign language classes so the parallels and differences are clear. In terms of the summer courses for teachers, it seemed like in the past that there were teachers from different grade levels, but more recently it has been skewed toward elementary and middle school. In 2008 there were more from middle school, and the four last summers they were all from elementary schools, with a mix in 2009. We need to try to get the word out to all teachers, including high school, so the ideas to be shared reach all grade levels.

Deborah Morone: My daughter's teacher went last summer; she does all sorts of different creative activities with her class.

Maureen LaPiana: Do teachers ever instruct students in sentence diagramming? It isn't easy, but I write and edit for work and I am amazed at how often writing that is submitted to me needs intensive re-working. Diagramming sentences does help teach better writing.

Mary Zolman: It depends upon the teacher. Some middle school teachers cover sentence diagramming or teach the parts of speech. The others integrate it, with some modification, as part of other instructional units.

Matt Karush: It is good to hear teachers in elementary school are finding the summer writing program so worthwhile. Have you followed the schools where program graduates work to see what longer-term changes have been embraced?

Ross Tyler: No.

Matt Karush: Also, I haven't had a negative experience with Word Study, but I agree with many of the sentiments expressed earlier about Smart Board and worksheets, and the lack of writing.

Mary Zolman: As many of you know, you have to write to become a better writer, just as you become a better reader by reading. We will be looking at this whole issue around writing in our Program Evaluation.

Tracy Malone: The SAT preparation course--has there been a good response?

Mary Zolman: This winter's SAT class has space for 80 students and there are over 70 enrolled, with two weeks left to sign up. Last year we only had space for 60 students and there were about 20 on the waiting list.

Susan Pascocello: Is there a requirement that the participants in Northern Virginia Writing Institute follow up and train other teachers?

Mary Zolman: Yes. In February three graduates will do a half-day workshop for K-12 teachers. There will be three topics and the teachers will share the presentations they made at the end of the summer program. In March, two teachers at ATS will do a Countywide workshop, and I only see this sort of turn-around training continuing. And this is in addition to what is shared within the teachers' own schools.

Ross Tyler: We've invited staff to come to one of our advisory committee meetings after the training and they do voluntarily. The enthusiasm is amazing. I say this as a point of reinforcement. The staff finds the course empowering and they feel inspired. I don't think the teachers are reluctant to participate or share their experiences about what they learned.

Mary Zolman: The graduates also did workshops related to writing.

Mark Johnston: This isn't actually the kind of training that can be replicated in-house. It is graduate level coursework and specialized. But many components can be shared.

Susan Pascocello: You mentioned that you have a small committee this year. Is there something we might take back to our schools to let parents know about it and to encourage them to join?

Mary Zolman: We invite everyone to share what we do with parents and community members, and we certainly would welcome new members to our Advisory Committee.

Pam Silberstein: I get a sense that writing is hard to teach in a way that fact-based curriculum is not. In my professional life, I see so much writing that is appalling. I like the sound of the Writing Institute you described and I'm glad the teachers who went are enthusiastic, but how can you measure or assess whether it makes them better writing teachers? I have nothing against the summer writing program, but what do the graduates do better in terms of teaching writing as a result of their having gone to it?

Ross Tyler: That is a good question. As a committee, we have not looked into quantifying that. We asked the staff how attending the program has made a difference and we heard about how they appreciated the opportunity to attend and what they plan to do with their own classes, but in terms of a quantifiable result, no we don't have that.

Pam Silberstein: How would you measure it?

Mark Johnston: That is the question. Often the SOL writing test is what is fallen back on, but it is not a good assessment for what you are asking.

Pam Silberstein: I do wonder sometimes if the focus on math and science courses [as part of STEM] comes at the expense of English/Language Arts. As I said before, Mark, we need to expand the school day! But I still wonder how you can evaluate what goes into teaching writing.

Tracy Kretzer: I have a question about testing. Is it true that when a child is tested in English/Language Arts, that they stop after one grade level above their current grade, even if the students has gotten all those correct? When this is done, you have no idea of the true baseline from which you are starting and how much higher a child could go. If I had a child with Special Needs, does the same model hold, that he or she would be tested only one grade below and no more, even if that was not the level he or she was really at? If we get the proper data for each child then parents would know exactly where a child is starting.

Ross Tyler: Thank you. That is something for our committee to discuss.

Betsy Morse: I think there are different audiences depending on whether there is a written focus or a spoken focus. It is important for kids to know the audience for whom they are writing or to whom they are speaking, and the purpose. The Toastmasters program has been very important in helping me define these. There is also a Junior Toastmasters program and others like it available. The point is that anything APS can look at that would improve communication from written forms to spoken presentation would be valuable. Is this something your committee has considered?

Ross Tyler: No, our committee has not discussed this approach to communication, but it is worth examining. I will say, however, that Toastmasters can be rather daunting.

Betsy Morse: I don't think the kid's version would be that way.

Beth Dowd: On the AP spectrum, how do our students perform against the national standards? There was a recent article in the New York Times that spoke about changes to the AP tests, with a greater emphasis on writing.

Ross Tyler: Our committee has not looked at this issue.

Mark Johnston: For the County overall, we do very well with regard to AP exams. We have had enrollment in our AP program go up and haven't seen our scores drop as a result, which isn't a common finding. We also perform well on the Stanford 10 exams. So, taken as a whole, APS appears as a strong performer. But there are groups of students that do better than others, and this is an area we continue to explore across disciplines and schools.

Susan LeFande: What is the difference between the SOL and NAEP assessment? [This was added to the list of topics for future discussion]

Marian Klymkowsky: I have a philosophical problem with SAT preparatory courses because the SAT is supposed to test what has been learned over the course of 12 years. I have a son in Grade 12 at Yorktown and I've been disappointed that even now his papers sometimes seem incoherent and require multiple drafts, and that includes his essay for college. I don't feel there is enough writing done in the schools or that the students come out prepared to make a cohesive argument. Also, English and Social Studies are two subjects that cross over with the emphasis on writing. I agree that Social Studies teachers should not alter a grade based on English but they should correct it.

Barbara Olivere: I worked at the library at Carlin Springs Elementary School, and I feel that if reading was increased it would result in better writers. Some of the books published now as

Level I readers don't even have complete sentences. Some of the writing you see now reflects more how we talk than how we should be writing. The written word and conversation are very different. Also, I think part of what we are seeing in language use today is the result of not having as many discussions at home, not talking at dinner. It is important to ask your child to tell the story of his or her day, and to bring out details. At Carlin Springs there is an emphasis on telling stories. We've found that once the thoughts are spoken and organized that way, it is easier to write the story. Or we tell a story and have the children respond, which enhances both listening and writing. It is important to communicate beyond one or two sentences, and to encourage story telling. But I do think it doesn't help when what we read is not grammatically correct.

Penelope Bender: Much instructional time is spent on assessments to collect data. It needs to be used better and more consistently.

Wanda Perkins: I remember diagramming sentences for individual kids I was working with and I ended up showing the whole class because they all wanted to know. I learned to read by age 3, and in the summers in early elementary school I would read 40 books in a summer. By Grade 6 I was reading 75 to 80 books a summer. Kids just don't read that much anymore.

Hans Bauman: I feel we don't teach enough of fundamental Math and English. Word Study was raised as an issue and no one in the room—other than Matt [Karush]—seems to like it. When I was in school we learned to write paragraphs and to put sentences together, but my kids are not getting this and it is what they need. They can be good readers and still not know how to write. There is a disconnect between their abilities to decode and uncode. You mentioned the program evaluation--I hope these things came up.

Mark Johnston: Our use of *Word Study* came from the previous Program Evaluation that showed student weakness in this area. When we were looking into the *Word Study* program, research showed it to be effective in teaching vocabulary and in language development, both areas in which we showed we needed strengthening. We have found positive results from implementation, and we will include the study done in material available to ACI. [Note to the minutes: the information referenced can be found on the ACI website using the following link: [http://www.apsva.us/1540108293848173/lib/1540108293848173/January\\_12-Word\\_Study\\_Link\\_for\\_Minutes.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/1540108293848173/lib/1540108293848173/January_12-Word_Study_Link_for_Minutes.pdf) . It can also be found on the ACI website along with the posted minutes for the January 12 meeting.]

Luann Moy: Students in the IB program get some great writing experience. For my daughter the program taught her how to be a better writer and how to make presentations. I'm not sure how this was done, however, or how it can be made available to a wider group of students.

Mark Johnston: The IB program isn't the only way to encourage writing. The Virginia Junior Academy of Sciences requires students to submit a paper on their science work, which teaches students both technical writing and non-fiction writing. The assignments associated with AP classes often involve more lengthy writing components, so there are other ways. But, having said that, there are many students who do not participate in any of these.

Donna Felipe: It is late and we are about 15 minutes over our time, so we'll need to stop tonight. In February we will have two meetings per month. Thank you.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:46 p.m.

\* \* \* (more on next page)

List of Topics Saved for Future Discussion (“Parking Lot”)

1. What is going on with the Middle School Design process?
2. How to evaluate writing?
3. What is the difference between SOL and NAEP testing?
4. ACI representatives and committee membership

\* \* \* \* \*

**Next Meeting: February 9, 2011**  
**Education Center Annex / Large Conference Room**  
**1439 North Quincy Street**