

**TO:** Arlington School Board

**FROM:** Early Childhood Advisory Committee

**DATE:** December 16, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Non-recommending Year Report

The Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) studies issues related to the instruction of the Arlington Public Schools' youngest students, preK through second grade. Young children between the ages of three and eight think and learn in ways which are related to their stages of development and which differ somewhat from those of older children and adults. A strong foundation in an early childhood education program enables later achievement. Research has demonstrated that investment in the early childhood years brings as a return, as high as nine dollars for every dollar spent.<sup>1</sup>

APS currently serves more than 1100 students in preschool programs:

- **Special Education:** 200 preschool-age students
- **Primary Montessori:** 437 students ages 3, 4, and 5 in 19 multi-age classrooms
- **Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI):** 542 students who are 4 years olds in 34 classrooms.

A significant number of APS' preschool students are at-risk children who benefit most from Pre-K. In the Primary Montessori program, two-thirds of the slots are reserved for families who make less than \$86,000 (80% of the median income for a family of four in Arlington County). All of the slots in the VPI program are for families who make less than \$86,000. Both programs enjoy strong interest from the parents in our community. The fact that these programs have for decades consistently required waiting lists indicates that there are children who are not yet being served.

#### **Current Year Activities:**

The School Board has asked each committee to consider specifically the need for consistency among programs within the district. While this committee maintains an on-going interest in many topics, we will focus this year's report on two new areas of concern that speak directly to consistency:

- **Homework:** *The ECAC is exploring the consistent implementation of the current Homework Policy as it pertains to the first three years of elementary instruction.*

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<sup>1</sup> Meier, 2004; Belfield, C.K. (July 2006) *Fiscal Impacts of Universal Pre-k: A Case Study Analysis for Three States*. Queens College, City University of New York.

We intend to explore the available research on the proper use and value of homework with children at this stage of development; as well as how the current policy is implemented throughout the district. This issue has implications not only for questions of differentiation and literacy, but also for the crucial role of effective communication between the school and family.

- **Teacher Support:** *The quality and availability of coaching and mentoring support for teachers, particularly in the areas of classroom management and differentiating instruction is also an area of concern.*

In a recently released study “the most important aspects of quality in preschool education” are identified as “stimulating and supportive interactions between teachers and children and effective use of curricula”<sup>2</sup>. This report goes on to state that coaching or mentoring support provided to the teacher has the most benefit to improvement.<sup>3</sup>

We as a committee would like to explore what coaching or mentoring support is available to the teachers of early childhood in our district and how those services can be improved and offered with consistency. A creative solution is needed for providing the appropriate resources for all teachers.

## **Update of Previous Recommendations:**

**Recommendation #1: The Office of Early Childhood should create a policy or position statement articulating the guiding principles of developmentally appropriate classroom management and outlining best practices.**

**Status:** The Office of Early Childhood is currently in the process of developing guidelines.

**ACI Vote:** Yes: 19; Against: 0; Abstention: 1

**Budgetary implications:** The direct budget increase would be zero, although it should be noted that the recommendation would require allocation of staff time.

**Recommendation #2: The Office of Early Childhood should continue to review instructional practices related to social emotional learning, particularly classroom**

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<sup>2</sup> Yoshikawa, et al. (October, 2013) *Investing in Our Future: The evidence Base on Preschool Education*. Society for Research in Child Development and Foundation for Child Development; . Alexandria, VA.

<sup>3</sup>The executive summary can be viewed at:

[http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb\\_2013\\_10\\_16\\_investing\\_in\\_children.pdf](http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf)

**management techniques, in early childhood classrooms across the district, including further disaggregation of the CLASS data collected for program evaluations.**

**Status:** The Early Childhood office offered a course during the “Festival Of the Minds” professional development session in June for any interested K-2 teachers. The class was full and feedback was very positive. Many schools were trained in Responsive Classroom over the summer at the discretion of the individual principals. There has also been differentiated Conscious Discipline training for VPI teachers, representing two groups of learning needs. The advanced group is receiving observations specifically in Conscious Discipline with a trainer and a monthly book study. Pre-K instructional assistants continue to receive training. A professional Montessori trainer has provided training for both teachers and assistants on normalizing a Montessori classroom, a term used to indicate that the students are functioning and focused.

**ACI Vote:** Yes: 19; Against: 0; Abstention: 1

**Budgetary implications:** The direct budget increase would be zero, although it should be noted that the recommendation would require allocation of staff time.

**Recommendation #3: Allocate additional funds to the Office of Early Childhood to expand training in social emotional learning to kindergarten teachers in Title I schools.**

**Status:** No funding was made available to offer the recommended training to Kindergarten Title I teachers. It is essential that social emotional learning does not cease to be a priority consideration beyond PreK. The success of this program within the VPI classrooms over a three year period gives our committee further confidence in its value to a larger portion of the school population. This committee will continue to work with the Office of Early Childhood to find ways in which the benefits of social emotional learning can be expanded to students in Kindergarten, First and Second grades. Comprehensive Professional Development enables teachers and staff to positively instruct all students in self regulation and decreasing bullying behaviors. While this committee holds in high regard the wonderful diversity of programs within the district, we contend that a consistent emphasis on social emotional learning is vital for student success in every school.

**ACI Vote:** Yes: 18; Against: 0 ; Abstention: 2

**Budgetary implications:** The cost of substitutes for one full day training would be \$3,599. The cost of a Conscious Discipline trainer for a six-hour session would be \$900; note that a Responsive Classroom trainer would cost more.

### **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

Our two areas of focus align well with APS' strategic plan goals. Articulating best practices, analysis of teacher performance, and professional development in social emotional learning directly and powerfully support Goal 5: Meeting the needs of the whole child. They also support Goal 1: Ensuring every student is challenged and engaged, by developing our students as responsible citizens, fostering character development and ensuring the necessary foundation for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through development of self-regulation, awareness and problem solving. Training teachers in social emotional learning also works to support Goal 2: Eliminating the achievement gap and Goal 5: Meeting the needs of the whole child by giving teachers tools to create a culturally competent classroom environment.

### **On-going areas of interest:**

1. Supporting Social Emotional learning in all early elementary grades
2. Support staff training in the best practices of Social Emotional learning to include Extended Day and Cafeteria employees
3. Capacity issues and access to PreK for identified at-risk four-year-olds
4. Outdoor Learning
5. Outreach and assimilation programs for incoming Kindergarten families
6. Appropriately differentiated instruction in the early years
7. Adding a Montessori specialist to the Early Childhood Office

### **Committee Members:**

Allison Collins, Bette Flentje, Amy Fry (chair), Robin Goffen, Liz Hendrickson, Julie Luncher, Bethany Matz, Jean McCarty, Susan Mordan-White, Kelly Polsinelli, Adena Porter, Amanda Raziano, Taryn Roman, Jessica Tierney, Stacey Whyte. Our ACI liaison is Karen Hunt.

The ECAC would like to thank our staff liaison, Kate Graham, Coordinator of Early Childhood and Pre-K Programs, for all her work on our behalf. We are indebted to Monique O'Grady and Sandra Redmore for their continued support and wise counsel.