Draft Recommendation: English Language Arts Advisory Committee
Feb 2026

Recommendation: Increase support for reading specialists in schools, especially Title 1 schools, which will help bring equity to the role in light of the Virginia Literacy Act.

Alignment to Strategic Plan

Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success | Student Centered Workforce

Performance Objective: Growth in Reading & Math | Employee Retention; Workplace Climates

Strategies:

Summary

Our recommendation is for APS to employ strategies to better support reading specialists tasked with the implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act. This move will strengthen academic growth and success, providing improved employee retention in a student centered workforce. Currently, APS reading specialists are not incentivized to become or remain reading specialists.

The Virginia Literacy Act seeks to uplift the literacy of every student; requiring individualized reading plans for each student who needs a reading intervention based on performance data indicating high risk in reading. While this is essential for a student's academic growth and success in reading, it also creates a higher workload for reading specialists. This workload is dispersed inequitably as students needing reading plans are disproportionately represented in Title 1 schools, placing a deeper burden on these faculty members in comparison to their counterparts in other schools.

The emerging issue surrounds equity and employee retention. Credentialed reading specialists are challenging to retain in high need schools, and change is needed to support these employees.

Creating and updating student reading plans requires reading specialists to: assess students with the VALLSS (Virginia Literacy and Language Screening System); analyze the data for each student for instructional indicators; determine the goals and objectives; create, schedule, and implement intervention; select and evaluate a progress monitoring tool; solicit parent input; and schedule the student in a small group time. During the week, plan maintenance entails: track attendance, participation, and monitor progress.

According to our fall 2025 reading specialist survey, 66.7% of reading specialists needed to create between 1-25 reading plans, with an estimated workload of between 1-8 hours. This is reasonable. In contrast, ~33% of reading specialists created between 26-199 reading plans, with 9.5% writing between 100-199 plans. The time difference is great. These educators reported "more than 10 hours" to write these plans, although precise numbers are not known. This alone showcases the disparities among the same position throughout APS.

Potential Strategies for Change:

- Dedicated planning time for reading specials to write on student reading plans.
- Policy shift: Reading specialists do not provide substitute coverage.
- Coordinate with principals to find ways to spread the task among more faculty.
- Reduce scheduling challenges and staffing issues to facilitate higher focus on reading plans.

- **Increase compensation by two to three pay steps** for Reading Specialists assigned to elementary schools with **100 or more Student Reading Plans (SRPs) or middle schools with 150 Student Reading Plans**.
- "Grow your own" reading specialists by **Providing substitute-covered release days** for recommended teachers to complete the **Virginia Reading Specialist Microcredential**.

This recommendation may be in alignment with Governor Spanberger's "High-Quality Public Education Directive" executive order.