MEMORANDUM

TO: APS School Board

CC: Superintendent Durán
Dr. Gerald Mann

FROM: Jill Abbott, Chair, Advisory Committee on Teaching & Learning (ACTL)

RE: ACTL Committee Report for Work Session on 2/10/2026

DATE: February 4, 2026

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Attached are the reports from the following committees for the February 10, 2026 work session, listed in the order in which the committees will report:

- Advanced Academics and Talent Development
- Dual Language Immersion
- English Language Arts
- Student Health Advisory Board
- Student Services

Each subcommittee discussed its recommendations with the Advisory Council on Teaching and Learning (ACTL). Prior to the meeting, subcommittees submitted their recommendations in writing and then presented highlights during the work session. Following these presentations, separate elementary and secondary breakout groups convened to provide feedback and ask questions using the following framework:

- Community Information
- Thematic-Based Considerations[1]

Subcommittees were asked to use Council feedback to adjust, clarify, or refine their recommendations and accompanying rationales, as appropriate.

Following the work session, these subcommittees will finalize their recommendations and submit them to the School Board in writing.

**Note:** The Arts; Career and Technical Education; Educational Technology; Arlington Special Education; and World Language subcommittees will not present recommendations to the School Board this year. In addition, as the structure of APS Board Advisory Committees is

[1] A copy of the Guiding Question Framework is provided as the last attachment.

currently in transition, subcommittees were encouraged to provide both short-term and long-term (3–5 year) recommendations.

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| **Introductions and opening remarks** (6:30-6:35) | |
| **Advanced Academics and Talent Development** (6:35-6:50) | |
| Co-Chairs: John Schaus and Mary Wierzbicki<br><br>Staff Liaison: Cheryl McCullough | **Recommendation #1: C**onsistently pre-test before all academic units and implement differentiation from the start of each unit.<br><br>**Recommendation #2:** Increase co-teaching of advanced (including AP and IB) courses to students with disabilities and English learner students--both the number of courses offered as co-taught and specific implementation of co-taught courses.<br><br>**Recommendation #3:** Align IB programming in elementary and middle school with the high school IB program; APS should examine expanding the IB program to an additional high school.<br><br>**Recommendation #4:** Ensure student apps are automatically adaptive to student comprehension level and allow for extension or acceleration with instruction where appropriate. |
| **Dual Language Immersion** (6:50-7:05) | |
| Chair: Emmily Haimowitz, Rachel Berkey<br><br>Staff liaison: Terry Murphy | **Recommendation #1:** Strategically place bilingual English Learner teachers who are literate in Spanish at Gunston Middle School to support a co-teaching model.<br><br>**Recommendation #2:** Increase the high school courses offered in Spanish as part of the DLI program, which will be offered to both DLI students and Spanish-speaking students outside of the program. (Both short-term and long-term options)<br><br>**Recommendation #3:** Establish a Dual Language Immersion strand at an elementary school with a high population of Spanish-speaking English Learners (long-term recommendation)<br><br>**Recommendation #4:** APS should commit to successfully completing all recommendations within the Dual-Language Immersion Program Framework (Long-term recommendation). |
| **English Language Arts** (7:05-7:20) | |
| Chair: Jami Gillan<br><br>Staff liaison: Sarah Cruz | **Recommendation #1:** 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. |
| **Student Health Advisory Board** (7:20-7:35) | |
| Chair: Mary Sanders<br><br>Staff liaison: Jodi Bobbitt | **Recommendation #1:** Increase and promote family engagement opportunities in collaboration with Health and PE staff. |

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| | **Recommendation #2:** Explore opportunities to upgrade current bike fleet used for 2nd and 3rd grade PE instruction.<br><br>**Recommendation #3:** SHAB advises the School Board to formally charge the Student Health and Well Being Advisory Council as the community involvement team as part of each Family Life Education (FLE) review period.<br><br>**Recommendation #4:** SHAB advises the School Board to formally charge the Student Health and Well Being Advisory Council with reviewing and evaluating the physical and mental health impacts of device usage, both personal and school issued devices, on student well-being and providing recommendations to the School Board accordingly. |
| **Student Services** (7:35-7:50) | |
| Chair: Dana Milburn, Adora Williams, & Kirstin Pickle<br><br>Staff liaison: Jeffrey Carpenter | **Recommendation #1:** Deepen Social Emotional Learning within APS, benefitting students and school communities in and of themselves, and also benefit APS' progress in implementation and understanding/buy-in for social emotional learning:<br>• Create an APS Community of Kindness, highlighting both elements of kindness related to social emotional learning (SEL) and elements of kindness that might not appear as closely related to SEL<br>• Launch an executive functioning (EF) sills initiative, much of which clearly can be considered part of SEL. |

Advanced Academics and Talent Development Advisory Committee Recommendations
January 28, 2026

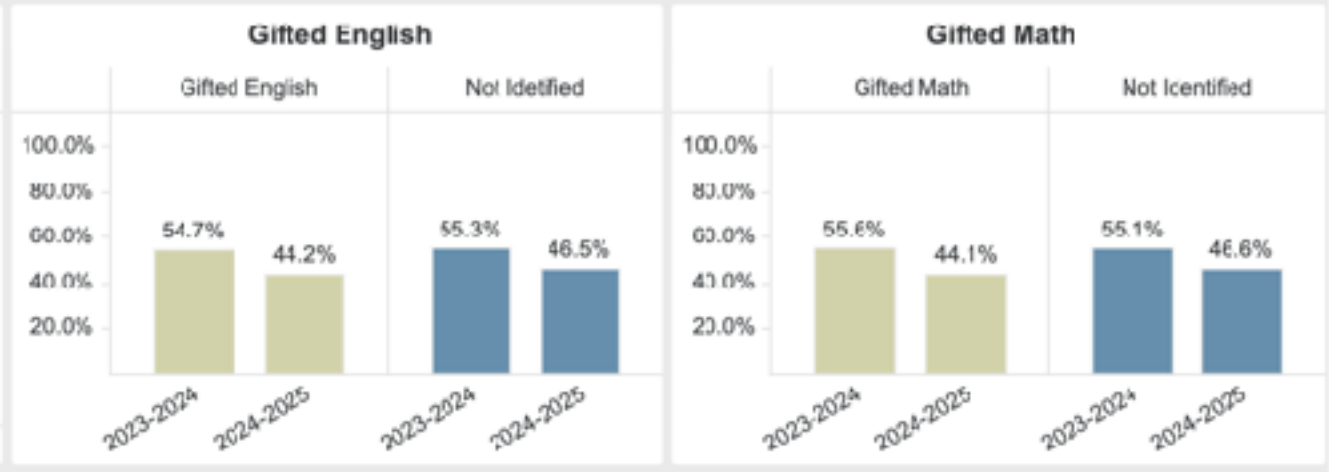
**Continuation and follow-up from previous years' recommendations:**

- Ensure that the central office and school board hold principals accountable for implementing APS policies, in particular implementation of student clustering (See APS Policy I-8.1) and enabling one year of growth for each student each year in each core subject.
- Ensure APS (or principals) are responsible for identifying School Action Plan goals for students at all achievement levels, including advanced academics students. Importantly, ensure accountability for delivering end-of-year outcomes based on their respective School Action Plans from the beginning of the year.
- AATDAC notes that the 2026-2027 Program of Studies includes 6th grade intensified English and intensified 8th grade world geography for all APS schools. We look forward to students at all APS middle schools having the opportunity to partake in those courses in the coming academic year.

**AATDAC 2025-2026 Recommendations:**

- **Recommendation 1. <u>We recommend that APS consistently pre-test before all academic units and implement differentiation from the start of each unit.</u>**
    - Giving pre-tests before each academic unit in all school levels provides educators with timely, actionable insight into students' prior knowledge, skills, and misconceptions before instruction begins. Rather than assuming a uniform starting point, pre-assessments allow teachers to identify students who have already mastered key concepts, those who are approaching readiness, and those who need targeted foundational support. This information enables instruction to be intentionally planned from day one, reducing unnecessary repetition for advanced learners while ensuring that students who need support receive early intervention. Research consistently shows that instruction aligned to students' actual readiness levels increases engagement, accelerates learning for all, and prevents gaps from widening over the course of a unit.
    - Using pre-test data to implement differentiation at the outset of each unit also promotes equity and efficient use of instructional time. When differentiation is proactive rather than reactive, all students are challenged appropriately and provided meaningful access to content at their level, regardless of background or prior opportunity. Early differentiation supports flexible grouping, targeted scaffolds, and extension opportunities that can be adjusted as learning progresses, fostering a growth-oriented classroom culture. At a system level, this approach strengthens instructional coherence, supports data-informed decision-making, and aligns with best practices in formative assessment, ultimately improving student outcomes while honoring the diverse learning needs present in every APS classroom.
    - The APS dashboard on MAP Growth shows that a smaller percentage of elementary students identified as gifted achieve their projected growth than non-

identified students, indicating that APS is not fully meeting the needs of this student population.




- **Background:** These two position papers from National Association for Gifted provide relevant background for this recommendation and our support of continued focus on implementing APS policies for advanced academics.
  - Challenging Gifted and Advanced Learners Through Differentiated Curriculum and Instructional Strategies
  - Universal Educator Preparation in Gifted Education
- **Budgetary implications:** Minimal. This recommendation relies on strategy, implementation guidance, and monitoring; teachers can leverage existing curriculum resources that often include suggested assessments.

- **Recommendation 2. <u>We recommend that APS increase co-teaching of advanced (including AP and IB) courses to students with disabilities and English learner students--both the number of courses offered as co-taught and specific implementation of co-taught courses</u>**
  - Students with disabilities and English learners who demonstrate interest and readiness for intensified, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) coursework at times face structural barriers to participation, despite division commitments to both inclusive practices and expanded access to rigorous academic opportunities. While middle school intensified, AP, and IB programs are designed to reflect high academic standards, some special education and English learner students are excluded not because of a lack of ability, but because the instructional supports and accommodations required for success are not consistently available in those settings. For students with disabilities, accommodations and supports agreed upon in IEPs and 504 plans need to be available also in intensified, AP and IB classes to ensure access and equity. A key element in ensuring support for English learners and SWDs is a co-taught model—pairing a content-area teacher with a special education or English learner teacher. It allows students to engage in advanced curricula

while receiving specialized instructional strategies, accommodations, and skill development aligned with their learning needs. This recommendation applies to both middle school and high school intensified, AP, and IB courses.

- APS has made progress on offering co-taught courses, now offering them at all middle and high schools, and should continue to improve co-taught offerings and implementation. Providing academic resources to support co-taught middle school intensified, AP, and IB courses is important because it aligns educational rigor with equity and postsecondary readiness. Access to advanced coursework has been shown to improve college enrollment, persistence, and career outcomes, including for students with disabilities and English learners. Investing in co-teaching structures, planning time, and appropriate instructional materials, creates pathways for students to meet high expectations without lowering academic standards. This approach supports inclusive education principles, strengthens instructional quality, and ensures that student interest and potential —rather than disability or English learner status—determine access to advanced academic opportunities.
- **Budgetary implications:** Incremental cost to schedule co-teachers.
- **Related recommendations:** English Learners Advisory Committee recommendation on improvements to co-teaching. We have shared the recommendation with the English Learners Advisory Committee Chair.
- **Appendix:** Information from SEPTA review of APS enrollment data and SEPTA survey results

- **Recommendation 3. We recommend that APS align IB programming in elementary and middle school with the high school IB program; APS should examine expanding the IB program to an additional high school.**

  - APS currently identifies approximately 2,086 8th grade students as gifted. It also provides IB certificate programming at Washington-Liberty High School. Students who are not in the W-L neighborhood zone can enter a lottery to join the IB program at W-L.
  - APS delivers pre-IB programming at Randolph elementary (Primary Years Programme, PYP) and Thomas Jefferson middle schools. Jefferson students' neighborhood high school is predominantly Wakefield, with some aligned to W-L, meaning most students who receive pre-IB curriculum in middle school must succeed in the lottery in order to continue the IB curriculum in high school.
  - This means that Randolph students in the PYP are likely to attend W-L high school, but many other students at Thomas Jefferson who participate in the Middle Years' Programme will only be eligible to attend if they are successful lottering into W-L.

- Given the arbitrary nature of a lottery, we recommend that APS allow students who participate in pre-IB programming in middle school be allowed to enroll in W-L without having to enter the lottery.
- As a step toward a longer-term solution, we also recommend that APS examine the demand for IB courses throughout the division and assess whether the IB certificate program should be expanded to at least one additional high school to meet demand.
- For example, for school year 2024-25, there were 150 applicants for the 80 lottery seats available in 9th grade in the Washington-Liberty IB program. https://www.apsva.us/school-transfer-data/
- APS data suggests an unmet student interest in AP and IB, or similarly challenging course work, particularly as students transition from middle to high school. Meeting that demand will enhance APS's ability to enable students to achieve their potential.
- **Budgetary implications:** Longer-term costs, APS should consider and budget for meeting student demand for advanced high school courses including expanding access to programs like the IB program

- **Recommendation 4. <u>We recommend that APS ensure student apps are automatically adaptive to student comprehension level and allow for extension or acceleration with instruction where appropriate.</u>**
  - AATDAC recognizes that views on apps in classroom instruction vary within the APS community. APS is leveraging apps to supplement instruction, intervention, and/or for extension.
  - Leveraging the full capability of apps, to adapt to a student's educational level and with students' learning growth is essential to getting the most for APS students from the apps APS chooses to use.
  - To do so, it is essential that these platforms are implemented in ways that adapt to the wide range of student learning needs and levels of readiness. This includes through gating, targeted instruction, and advancement. Educational apps should provide a floor (minimum proficiency) but never a ceiling (maximum growth).
  - Students enter classrooms with varying academic backgrounds, learning profiles, and rates of progression. Static, one-size-fits-all applications often fail to meet those differences effectively. Without adaptive learning features—such as real-time adjustment of content difficulty, pacing, and instructional support—educational apps can unintentionally limit student growth, by overwhelming students who need scaffolding or by failing to challenge those who are ready for more advanced material. In practice, this most often appears in two ways:

(1) Artificial caps on progression in adaptive apps that prevent ready students from advancing, leading to boredom and disengagement (e.g., guidance to teachers that puts artificial caps on Lexia and IXL despite these apps providing adaptive learning features/ individualized pathways);

(2) The use of apps primarily as digital worksheets, which positions students as passive consumers rather than creative producers and critical thinkers.

- Additionally, APS should ensure that apps it adopts are inclusive and meet accessibility requirements for APS students with special needs, including students who have visual or hearing impairments (e.g., that apps are compatible with screen readers).
- Ensuring that app-based educational tools incorporate adaptive learning is important because it directly supports equity, instructional effectiveness, and responsible use of instructional time and resources. Adaptive platforms allow students to access content at their level while receiving individualized support, including accommodations for students with disabilities and targeted extension for high-performing students. For schools (and teachers), this results in more precise data on student progress, better alignment with personalized learning goals, and stronger academic outcomes overall. APS is investing—and will continue to invest—in apps and app systems to support educational outcomes.
- Finally, APS should ensure that teachers have sufficient training and access to supporting materials to ensure the apps generate benefits for themselves and their students without needing to put in a great deal of additional time. For example, IXL is aligned to NWEA MAP Growth scores and can generate personalized skill plans based on student RIT scores, allowing teachers to assign targeted practice that matches each student's level. To realize the full value of these investments, APS should ensure that teachers know the potential and are trained on implementation for apps to maximize student growth in ways that promote deep learning, creativity, and continuous academic growth.
- **Budgetary implications:** Minimal costs in teacher training/tech support and leveraging existing curriculum differentiation options.

**Alignment to strategic plan (all 4 recommendations):**

Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success

**Committee Members Supporting these Recommendations:**

Co-Chairs: John Schaus, Mary Wierzbicki

Secretary: Amanda Miesionczek

Committee members supporting recommendation:

Dr. Deanna Caputo

Elizabeth Corry

Greg Eastman

Dr. Natalie Goldring

Andrea Hansen-Phillips

Sheila Leonard

Carlisle Levine

Colleen Lunsford

Friederike Niepmann (SEPTA)

Brindis Ochoa

APS Liaison: Cheryl McCullough, Director, Advanced Academics and Talent Developments

# Appendix: Report on Access of Students with Disabilities (SWDs) to Advanced Academic Services in APS[1]

## Analysis of APS Data on Participation and Performance of SWDs in AP/IB courses

**Findings: Differences in academic performance between students with disabilities and those without are unlikely to explain the low participation rates of SWDs in AP and IB programs. There is evidence that SWDs face accessibility issues, being vastly underrepresented in those programs.**

- SWDs are vastly underrepresented in IB and AP courses at all APS high schools. Representation is greatest at HB Woodlawn and lowest at Wakefield. (Table 1)
- If some disabilities affect school performance, we may expect a lower representation of SWDs in AP courses and IB programs. Only 13 percent of SWDs are identified as gifted while 36 percent of students without disabilities are identified as gifted in APS (based on all APS students). To which extent these differences in identification rates reflect differences in academic performance is an open question.
- To understand whether differences in academic performance can explain the low participation of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program, we calculate benchmark (or hypothetical) participation rates of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program:
    - We assume that gifted SWDs take AP courses or participate in IB programs to the same degree as gifted students without disabilities. This assumes that SWDs and students without disabilities are equally likely to be identified as gifted conditional on the same academic performance.
    - We assume that SWDs have a participation rate that is only 25 percent of that of students without disabilities. The 25 percent implicitly assumes that non-gifted SWDs show academic performance that makes them only ¼ as likely as non-gifted students without disabilities to participate in AP/IB courses, an assumption that can be modified. SOL pass rates of SWDs are around half those of students without disabilities. The share of SWDs achieving an advanced score in SOLs is only a quarter that of students without disabilities (6.1 percent versus 24.1 percent in 2024-2025). The 25 percent assumption therefore appears plausible.

[1] Prepared by Friederike Niepmann, SEPTA.

- Under these assumptions, we would expect the number of SWDs in AP courses to be higher by a factor of 1.4 to 3 at various high schools (**Table 2**). For example, while currently only 2.5 percent of students in AP classes at Wakefield are SWDs, under the above assumption, the number of students should be 3 times as high and would imply an SWD participation share of 7.3 percent.
- Assuming that only 10 percent of SWDs not identified as gifted participate in AP and IB courses because of lower academic performance would still not bring the benchmark participation rate down to the observed participation rate (except for HB Woodlawn) and would still imply 1.4-2 times higher participation at Wakefield, W&L, and Yorktown. In other words, lower academic performance alone is unlikely to explain the low participation of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program especially for high schools other than HB Woodlawn. Representation of SWDs is particularly low in the IB program, suggesting that accessibility for SWDs is very limited.
- Looking at performance of SWDs in AP and IB classes, there are some clear differences.
    - While SWDs take the AP/IB exams at the same rates and SWDs' performance in the IB exam is similar to students without disabilities, SWDs perform significantly worse in AP classes compared to non-SWDs across all schools. Discrepancies are especially large for AP classes at Washington-Liberty (**Table 3**).
    - It is unclear what explains the lower performance of SWDs in AP classes. It is most likely that SWDs face hurdles in accessing the content in AP classes and are not getting the required support to succeed in those classes, making them perform worse than their non-SWD peers in final exams. This explanation is supported by the survey responses discussed below. Alternatively, the lower performance in AP exams could suggest that SWDs are more generously admitted to AP classes (requiring lower academic performance, which then gets reflected in lower test scores), but this goes counter to the previous finding of very low participation rates, which are unlikely to be explained by differences in academic performance alone.

**Table 1: Representation of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program, by school**

| | | AP classes | | IB program | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School | SWDs at school | SWDs in AP courses | SWDs taking AP exam | SWDs in IB program | SWDs taking IB exam |
| **HB Woodlawn** | 19.0% | 12.6% | 12.4% | | |
| **Wakefield** | 16.4% | 2.5% | 2.6% | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Washington-Liberty** | 12.5% | 4.0% | 4.2% | 1.5% | 1.6% |
| **Yorktown** | 15.4% | 3.8% | 4.0% | | |

**Table 2: Benchmark participation rates of SWDs in AP and IB courses adjusting for lower academic performance of SWDs, by school**

| | | | AP classes | | IB classes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School | SWDs identified as gifted | Non-SWDs identified as gifted | Factor by which benchmark participation is higher | Counterfactual share of SWDs in AP classes | Factor by which benchmark participation is higher | Counterfactual share of SWDs in AP classes |
| **HB** | 33.1% | 65.5% | **1.36** | 16.4% | | |
| **Wake** | 10.7% | 34.4% | **3.00** | 7.3% | | |
| **W&L** | 16.1% | 48.4% | **2.61** | 9.8% | **6.25** | 8.5% |
| **York** | 18.5% | 47.2% | **2.92** | 10.4% | | |

**Table 3: Comparing performance in AP exams for SWDs and others**

| | SWDs | Non SWDs | |
|---|---|---|---|
| School | Score 2 or less | Score 2 or less | Difference |
| **HB** | 38.9% | 22.9% | 15.9% |
| **Wakefield** | 27.7% | 19.2% | 8.5% |
| **W&L** | 56.1% | 26.9% | 29.1% |
| **Yorktown** | 36.7% | 20.2% | 16.5% |

## Results from SEPTA Survey

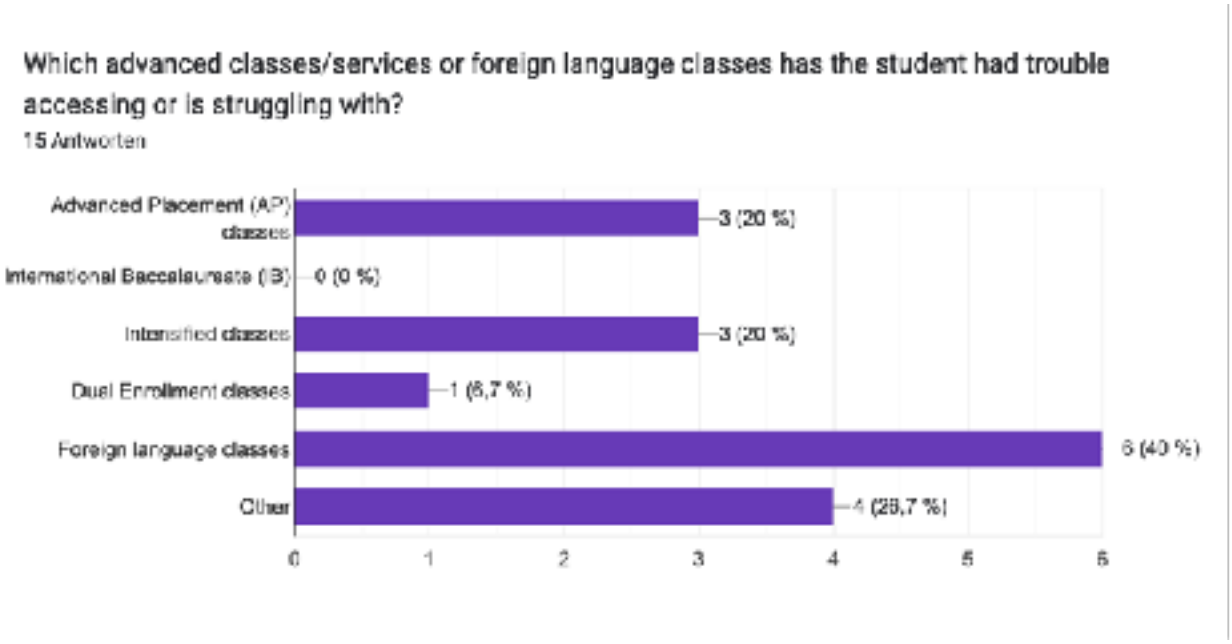
### Findings: The most common problem that prevents SWDs from accessing advanced/ foreign language courses is that support and accommodations in IEPs/504 plans are not provided for these courses. Support is lacking especially for students struggling with executive functioning.

*Overview of the survey*

To understand the issues with access to advanced academic services in APS, SEPTA conducted a survey of its members. The survey ran from mid-November 2025 to mid-January 2026.

The survey solicited 18 responses. It covered students in a large range of schools and grades. Around 70 percent of responses covered students with IEPs, 17 percent had a 504 plan; the rest had none of the two. Around 90 percent of responses were related to students that participate in the general education classroom at least some of the time. 40 percent of the responses were about students identified as gifted. Around 80 percent of respondents reported having trouble accessing advanced academic services or foreign language classes, which were covered in the survey. 40 percent reported having trouble with accessing foreign language classes (**Figure 1**). The remaining respondents described access issues with AP, intensified, dual enrollment and other courses. No response covered access issues with IB classes.

**Figure 1**




*Issues described by respondents*

From the written responses to the survey, the most prominent issues are:

**1. Lack of accommodations implementation in advanced/foreign language classes**

- Teachers not following/understanding IEP or 504 plan accommodations
- Lack of clear written policies on supporting students with disabilities in advanced/language classes
- Case carriers incorrectly believing they only need to support core subjects (English, math, science, social studies); students pushed to drop classes rather than finding support solutions
- Accommodations that work in core classes (like Grammarly) not being allowed in AP/ foreign language classes, inaccessible course material.

**2. Executive functioning support gaps**

- Students struggle with organization, Canvas navigation, video uploads, and assignment tracking
- Little to no proactive support for executive functioning challenges
- Instructional Studies classes described as ineffective for addressing these issues

**3. Lack of co-teaching in non-core subjects**

- Foreign language classes typically not co-taught
- Too little additional instructional support in intensified and AP classes
- This includes ASL classes which attract dyslexic students

**4. Extended time creating problems**

- Students miss class while using extended time on assessments, fall behind on current material while making up previous work
- Creates perpetual cycle despite students knowing the material

**5. Issues with gifted identification among SWDs**

- Especially when child has executive functioning issues

*Suggestions for improvements*

- Making sure accommodations are met. Communication ahead of time which accommodations cannot be met if any.
- Write down explicitly in student support manual that accommodations have to be met also in advanced academics classes/foreign language classes.
- More support for SWDs through additional staff in class including in foreign language classes, co-taught ASL classes.

- Allow for fewer questions in the tests rather than only extra time. Allow SWDs to demonstrate mastery of material in more flexible ways.
- Communication ahead of the school year with teachers about SWDs' needs to succeed in class. In-person communication easier than having teacher just read IEP/504 plans.
- More teacher training on identifying gifted students among SWD population.

# Appendix

## Details on the calculation of benchmark participation rates

- Calculate the share of students in AP/IB courses among gifted and non-gifted by school.
- Apply the same AP/IB participation rates to gifted SWDs as to gifted students.
- Apply the participation rate multiplied by 0.25 to SWDs not identified as gifted.
- Add number of hypothetical gifted and non-gifted SWDs participating to get total SWDs participating.
- Compare to actual SWDs participating. Divide benchmark (hypothetical) number of participating SWDs by the actual number to obtain factor.
- Add additional SWDs participating to total number of participating students and calculate counterfactual share of SWDs in all participating students if benchmark was met.

## Underlying data for school year 2024/2025

**Appendix: SEPTA analysis of co-taught classes and SEPTA survey results**

# Report on Access of Students with Disabilities (SWDs) to Advanced Academic Services in APS[2]

## Analysis of APS Data on Participation and Performance of SWDs in AP/IB courses

**Findings: Differences in academic performance between students with disabilities and those without are unlikely to explain the low participation rates of SWDs in AP and IB programs. There is evidence that SWDs face accessibility issues, being vastly underrepresented in those programs.**

- SWDs are vastly underrepresented in IB and AP courses at all APS high schools. Representation is greatest at HB Woodlawn and lowest at Wakefield. (Table 1)
- If some disabilities affect school performance, we may expect a lower representation of SWDs in AP courses and IB programs. Only 13 percent of SWDs are identified as gifted while 36 percent of students without disabilities are identified as gifted in APS (based on all APS students). To which extent these differences in identification rates reflect differences in academic performance is an open question.
- To understand whether differences in academic performance can explain the low participation of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program, we calculate benchmark (or hypothetical) participation rates of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program:
    - We assume that gifted SWDs take AP courses or participate in IB programs to the same degree as gifted students without disabilities. This assumes that SWDs and students without disabilities are equally likely to be identified as gifted conditional on the same academic performance.
    - We assume that SWDs have a participation rate that is only 25 percent of that of students without disabilities. The 25 percent implicitly assumes that non-gifted SWDs show academic performance that makes them only ¼ as likely as non-gifted students without disabilities to participate in AP/IB courses, an assumption that can be modified. (Additional information on the academic performance of SWDs relative to students without disabilities may help better pin down this number.)

[2] Prepared by Friederike Niepmann, SEPTA.

- Under these assumptions, we would expect the number of SWDs in AP courses to be higher by a factor of 1.4 to 3 at various high schools (**Table 2**). For example, while currently only 2.5 percent of students in AP classes at Wakefield are SWDs, under the above assumption, the number of students should be 3 times as high and would imply an SWD participation share of 7.3 percent.
- Assuming that only 10 percent of SWDs not identified as gifted participate in AP and IB courses because of lower academic performance would still not bring the benchmark participation rates down to the observed participation rates (except for HB Woodlawn). In other words, lower academic performance alone is unlikely to explain the low participation of SWDs in AP courses and the IB program especially for high schools other than HB Woodlawn. Representation of SWDs is particularly low in the IB program, suggesting that accessibility for SWDs is very limited.
- Looking at performance of SWDs in AP and IB classes, there are some clear differences.
    - While SWDs take the AP/IB exams at the same rates and SWDs' performance in the IB exam is similar to students without disabilities, SWDs perform significantly worse in AP classes compared to non-SWDs across all schools. Discrepancies are especially large for AP classes at Washington-Liberty (**Table 3**).
    - It is unclear what explains the lower performance of SWDs in AP classes. It is most likely that SWDs face hurdles in accessing the content in AP classes and are not getting the required support to succeed in those classes, making them perform worse than their non-SWD peers in final exams. This explanation is supported by the survey responses discussed below. Alternatively, the lower performance in AP exams could suggest that SWDs are more generously admitted to AP classes (requiring lower academic performance, which then gets reflected in lower test scores), but this goes counter to the previous finding of very low participation rates, which are unlikely to be explained by differences in academic performance alone.

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## Results from SEPTA Survey

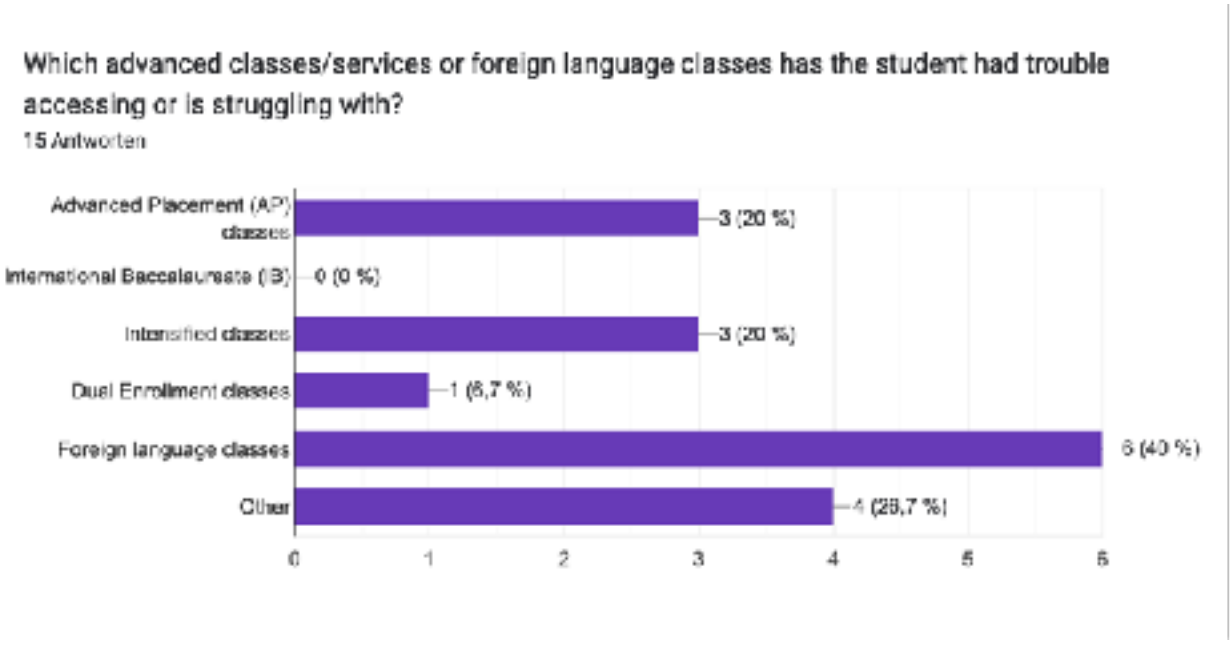
### Findings: The most common problem that prevents SWDs from accessing advanced/ foreign language courses is that support and accommodations in IEPs/504 plans are not provided for these courses. Support is lacking especially for students struggling with executive functioning.

*Overview of the survey*

To understand the issues with access to advanced academic services in APS, SEPTA conducted a survey of its members. The survey ran from mid-November 2025 to mid-January 2026.

The survey solicited 18 responses. It covered students in a large range of schools and grades. Around 70 percent of responses covered students with IEPs, 17 percent had a 504 plan; the rest had none of the two. Around 90 percent of responses were related to students that participate in the general education classroom at least some of the time. 40 percent of the responses were about students identified as gifted. Around 80 percent of respondents reported having trouble accessing advanced academic services or foreign language classes, which were covered in the survey. 40 percent reported having trouble with accessing foreign language classes (**Figure 1**). The remaining respondents described access issues with AP, intensified, dual enrollment and other courses. No response covered access issues with IB classes.

**Figure 1**




*Issues described by respondents*

From the written responses to the survey, the most prominent issues are:

**1. Lack of accommodations implementation in advanced/foreign language classes**

- Teachers not following/understanding IEP or 504 plan accommodations
- Lack of clear written policies on supporting students with disabilities in advanced/language classes
- Case carriers incorrectly believing they only need to support core subjects (English, math, science, social studies); students pushed to drop classes rather than finding support solutions
- Accommodations that work in core classes (like Grammarly) not being allowed in AP/ foreign language classes, inaccessible course material.

**2. Executive functioning support gaps**

- Students struggle with organization, Canvas navigation, video uploads, and assignment tracking
- Little to no proactive support for executive functioning challenges
- Instructional Studies classes described as ineffective for addressing these issues

**3. Lack of co-teaching in non-core subjects**

- Foreign language classes typically not co-taught
- Too little additional instructional support in intensified and AP classes
- This includes ASL classes which attract dyslexic students

**4. Extended time creating problems**

- Students miss class while using extended time on assessments, fall behind on current material while making up previous work
- Creates perpetual cycle despite students knowing the material

**5. Issues with gifted identification among SWDs**

- Especially when child has executive functioning issues

*Suggestions for improvements*

- Making sure accommodations are met. Communication ahead of time which accommodations cannot be met if any.
- Write down explicitly in student support manual that accommodations have to be met also in advanced academics classes/foreign language classes.
- More support for SWDs through additional staff in class including in foreign language classes, co-taught ASL classes.

- Allow for fewer questions in the tests rather than only extra time. Allow SWDs to demonstrate mastery of material in more flexible ways.
- Communication ahead of the school year with teachers about SWDs' needs to succeed in class. In-person communication easier than having teacher just read IEP/504 plans.
- More teacher training on identifying gifted students among SWD population.

## Details on the calculation of benchmark participation rates

- Calculate the share of students in AP/IB courses among gifted and non-gifted by school.
- Apply the same AP/IB participation rates to gifted SWDs as to gifted students.
- Apply the participation rate multiplied by 0.25 to SWDs not identified as gifted.
- Add number of hypothetical gifted and non-gifted SWDs participating to get total SWDs participating.
- Compare to actual SWDs participating. Divide benchmark (hypothetical) number of participating SWDs by the actual number to obtain factor.
- Add additional SWDs participating to total number of participating students and calculate counterfactual share of SWDs in all participating students if benchmark was met.

Dual Language Immersion Advisory Sub-Committee
February 2026

**Members**
Emily Haimowitz, chair
Staff liaison: Wendy Bermudez, Dual Language Immersion Coordinator

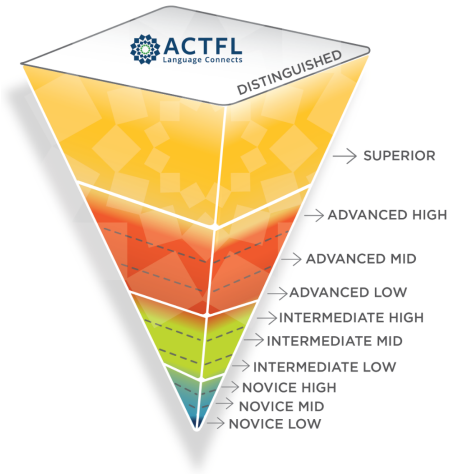
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Paula Cordero Salas | Meredith Judy | Julienne Thomas |
| Rachel Berkey | Anjali Martinez | Ali Goldwater |
| Maria (Leti) Delgado | Heydi Tejeda Maldonado | Yun Kang |

Recommendation 1: **APS should strategically place bilingual English Learner teachers who are literate in Spanish at Gunston Middle School to support a co-teaching model.**

**Alignment to Strategic Plan**
Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success
Performance Objective: SOL ProficiencyGrowth in Reading & Math
Strategies: Increase co-taught sections of courses and classes

**SUMMARY**

Arlington Public Schools provide English Learner (EL) students with EL services, including certified EL teachers. Currently, in the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program at Gunston Middle School, EL teachers primarily support students in English classes. However, the strategic placement of EL teachers in Spanish classrooms would significantly strengthen biliteracy outcomes and better serve the unique needs of the same EL students in the DLI program.




The DLI program strives to ensure students have "conversational" and "academic" Spanish to excel professionally and academically. Additionally, the program works to achieve bilingualism and biliteracy. The middle school immersion model allows students to move beyond basic language acquisition skills (conversational Spanish) and into advanced biliteracy (academic Spanish). The ACTFL proficiency standards clearly outline how long true language proficiency takes to develop, underscoring that acquiring academic Spanish, especially the level needed to support future academic and professional goals, requires sustained, long-term immersion that continues through high school and even into college.

Incorporating bilingual English Learner teachers into Spanish Immersion middle school classrooms would allow teachers to co-deliver instruction with the intention of meeting both content and English language and literacy development goals simultaneously. The Native Spanish Lead teacher provides cultural authenticity and advanced fluency, while the Biliterate English Learner Teacher supports EL students and focuses on language acquisition strategies and bridging. To ensure the effective implementation of this co-teaching strategy, it is essential to provide common planning time. The EL teacher should be able to co-plan with both the English language arts teacher and Spanish language arts teacher to identify the vocabulary and skills that require bridging across languages.

Arlington Public School has implemented a best practice of co-teaching in many instances where EL teachers co-teach with Spanish-language arts teachers within the DLI elementary schools to provide bridging.

**Budgetary Implications**

None. This is cost neutral because it is making use of staff already funded by APS. There is currently one Spanish-speaking EL teacher at Gunston Middle School. The DLI Sub-Committee considered recommending an Assistant instead of reallocating the EL teachers portfolio, but did not recommend this since it would require additional qualified staff, incurring a cost.

**Committee vote**: 5 in favor, 0 opposed **Date:** January 27, 2026

**Detail**

Prioritize placing EL teachers in Spanish classrooms at Gunston Middle School to maximize biliteracy development and provide linguistically responsive instruction that honors the goals of the DLI program.

**Key Benefits:**

**Develops True Biliteracy**
EL teachers working in Spanish classes can explicitly teach cross-linguistic transfer strategies, helping students leverage their Spanish skills to accelerate English development—rather than treating the languages in isolation.

**Provides Bridging Support**
Students learn how concepts, vocabulary, and literacy skills connect across both languages, building metacognitive awareness of how bilingualism works in practice.

**Serves All Students More Effectively**
This approach recognizes that EL students in DLI need support developing **both** languages simultaneously, not just English. By embedding EL expertise in Spanish instruction, we ensure students build the strong Spanish foundation necessary for long-term academic success in both languages.

**Aligns with Research**
Research on bilingual education shows that strengthening students' first or stronger language directly supports second language acquisition and overall academic achievement.

| Gunston EL Enrollment | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Grade Level** | **Grand Total EL** | **EL Students in DLI** | **Percentage of EL students** |
| 6 | 125 | 14 | 11% |
| 7 | 117 | 15 | 13% |
| 8 | 100 | 11 | 11% |
| **Grand Total** | **342** | **40** | 10% |

The above number of EL students represents a caseload for one EL teacher. These EL students will get served similarly within the Spanish-speaking classroom. See below planning factor:

**Middle School English Learner Teacher Staffing Formula (From FY 2026 Planning Factors)**

| STAFFING | CRITERIA | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English Learners (EL) Teachers[12] | EL STUDENTS *(includes dually-identified students)* | TEACHER PERIODS | STUDENT FACTOR | STUDENT PERIODS | CO-TAUGHT STUDENT FACTOR | CO-TAUGHT STUDENT PERIODS |
| | EL 1 Students | 5 | 15 | 5 | 10 | 0 |
| | EL 2 Students | 5 | 15 | 2 | 10 | 3 |
| | EL 3 Students | 5 | 20 | 1 | 15 | 3 |
| | EL 4 Students | 5 | 20 | 1 | 15 | 0 |
| | Per Countywide Life Skills and MIPA Class | | | 0.5 Teacher FTE | | |
| | **FORMULA:**<br>1. Calculate each group of EL students using the below calculation:<br>((EL Level Student Projection / Student Factor) * Student Periods) / Teacher Periods +<br>((EL Level Student Projection / Co-Taught Student Factor) * Co-Taught Student Periods) / Teacher Periods<br>2. Sum the raw number for all groups.<br>3. Round up the total to the nearest 0.5 teacher position. | | | | | |

Teacher Roles

| | **Native Spanish Lead Teacher** | **English Learner Teacher in a Bilingual Setting** |
|---|---|---|
| **Role** | Serves as the model for sophisticated vocabulary, nuanced grammar, and authentic cultural idioms. Delivers Spanish language arts instruction in a bilingual middle school classroom, fostering biliteracy and academic language development. | Serves as a bridge to teach cross-linguistic transfer, helping students understand how concepts in Spanish correlate to or differ from English structures. Breaks down the "how" of bilingualism in practical, accessible ways. |
| **Benefits** | Models academic Spanish across reading, writing, speaking, and listening while building cross-linguistic connections. | Provides targeted scaffolds for writing conventions and reading comprehension strategies that work across both languages, making biliteracy development explicit and intentional. |
| **Student Support** | Focuses on Spanish literature, literary analysis, and cultural-historical contexts while developing strong literacy skills. | Supports students in developing biliteracy skills while helping them understand how Spanish and English work together. |
| **Small Group Instruction** | Conducts literature discussions, writer's workshops, and targeted language development sessions that challenge critical thinking in Spanish | Conducts focused lessons on transferable skills, comparative language structures, and strategic language use for academic success. |
| **Student Impact** | Deepens connection to heritage and roots while developing academic language proficiency for success in bilingual contexts. | Equips students with tools to move fluidly between languages, strengthening their identity as confident, competent bilingual learners and communicators. |

**References**


https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tbltW9C_rlr4HLauaxCB5RkKPRNM2JTl/view

https://terpconnect.umd.edu/~memb/MartinBeltran_MLJ_2010_LangBridge.pdf

https://www.teachingforbiliteracy.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Bridge-Making-Cross-Linguistic-Connections-p.-1-6.pdf

https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/bilingual-ed/topic-brief-2-final-2-24-21-a.pdf


**Staff Response**

I strongly support this recommendation as it aligns with best practices in Dual Language Immersion instruction and reflects the realities of teaching in a bilingual setting. Teaching in a bilingual classroom is fundamentally different from teaching in a monolingual setting—students are not simply learning two separate languages, but developing an integrated bilingual identity and skill set. To maximize student success, we must provide explicit support in bridging the two languages. EL teachers positioned in Spanish classrooms can make cross-linguistic connections visible, teach transferable literacy strategies, and help students understand how their knowledge in one language strengthens the other. This approach honors the bilingual nature of our students' learning and ensures they develop the strong biliteracy skills that define successful DLI programs. This means not just offering instruction in two languages, but strategically supporting students to become truly bilingual and biliterate.

Recommendation 2: **APS should increase the high school courses offered in Spanish as part of the DLI program, which will be offered to both DLI students and Spanish-speaking students outside of the program. (Both short-term and long-term options)**

**Alignment to Strategic Plan**
Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success
Performance Objective: SOL ProficiencyGrowth in Reading & MathCollege, Career & Civic Readiness
Strategies: Deliver APS curriculum through rigorous, differentiated, evidence-based, and culturally responsive instruction aligned to the Virginia standards of learning with opportunities to infuse depth and complexity to promote deeper understanding of the content.

**SUMMARY**

APS should create additional Spanish high school courses at Wakefield to continue to strengthen the DLI program at the high-school level, attract more students into the program, reduce the attrition of students that leave the program after middle school, and provide more advanced offerings to EL students. Courses to be considered include advanced math classes, social studies courses, professional Spanish courses, personal finance, or others based on availability of bilingual teachers.

With the current budget reality, the DLI sub-committee is offering a short-term cost effective option and a longer-term option that, while will require additional funding, will have a strong impact on the strength of the DLI program at the high-school level. In the short-term, APS should offer Intensified Geometry, Algebra II, or any other math class that one of the two current Spanish speaking math teachers could offer. These courses could be made available to DLI students and non-DLI EL students.

While this option would certainly strengthen the program, additional courses such as social studies, personal finance, or professional Spanish courses would do even more to minimize student attrition, based on findings from the survey discussed above. The DLI Sub-Committee recommends adding courses at both the regular and intensified levels for both Freshman and Juniors/Seniors. APS can achieve this through several options: courses could be offered by Spanish speaking current APS teachers who work at other APS schools and offer individual courses at Wakefield; part-time Spanish speaking teachers could teach only a few courses at Wakefield; or as natural attrition of teachers takes place at Wakefield, bilingual Spanish/English teachers should be given priority.

Over time, the addition of Spanish classes at Wakefield would allow for the DLI program to increase the number of required courses in Spanish during high school, which is now only five courses over all four years.

**Budgetary Implications**
In the short-term, there would be no budget implications because the teachers are already part of APS staff and able to offer these courses.

**Committee vote**: 5 in favor, 0 opposed **Date:** January 27, 2026

**Detail**

**Current DLI Courses at Wakefield High School**

| 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Immersion 9<br>• Immersion Biology or Intensified Immersion Biology<br>• Immersion Algebra I or Immersion Geometry<br>• ***World History, Intensified** | • AP Spanish Lang or Spanish V<br>• Intensified Immersion Chemistry<br>• Immersion Geometry | • AP Spanish Language or AP Spanish Literature<br>• ***Professional Spanish courses (such as medical, legal, or business Spanish), or personal finance** | • AP Spanish Lit<br>• Advanced Studies in Spanish<br>• Spanish Focused Senior Project<br>• ***Professional Spanish courses (such as medical, legal, or business Spanish), or personal finance** |

***Recommended Courses**

DLI students may not need to take either Algebra 1 or Geometry in high school given their course completion at Gunston Middle School. Therefore, the DLI program at Wakefield is not servicing all DLI students' math immersion needs. There are currently two Spanish speaking teachers who teach math courses at Wakefield. Adding additional Spanish language math courses would not add any additional cost and would expand the options for advanced math courses for DLI students and non-DLI EL students.

**References**
https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2023/05/APS-Dual-Language-Immersion-Program-Framework_Sp.pdf

**Staff Response**
I fully support this recommendation as it strengthens educational opportunities for both DLI students and Spanish-speaking students schoolwide. Expanding course offerings in subjects like advanced math, Latin American or World History, professional Spanish (medical, legal, or business), and personal finance would provide meaningful academic challenge, validate students' bilingual skills as an asset, and create authentic pathways for using Spanish in college and career contexts. This expansion also leverages the strong language skills of Spanish-speaking students outside the formal DLI program for rigorous academic work beyond Spanish

language classes. By offering these courses, we reduce student attrition after middle school, signal that bilingualism is valued at the highest academic levels, and create a more robust, sustainable DLI program that follows through on its promise from elementary through high school graduation.

Recommendation #3: **APS establishes a Dual Language Immersion strand at an elementary school with a high population of Spanish-speaking English Learners (long-term recommendation)**

**Alignment to Strategic Plan**
Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success
Performance Objective: SOL ProficiencyGrowth in Reading & Math
Strategies: Deliver APS curriculum through rigorous, differentiated, evidence-based, and culturally responsive instruction aligned to the Virginia standards of learning with opportunities to infuse depth and complexity to promote deeper understanding of the content.

**SUMMARY**

English Learners (ELs) face some of the most persistent achievement gaps in APS, directly challenging the 2024-30 Strategic Plan's goal of eliminating opportunity gaps. While research confirms Dual Language Immersion (DLI) is the most effective model to close this gap, the current centralized "option school" model creates access barriers for the families who need the program the most. We recommend establishing an additional DLI strand within an elementary school with a high Spanish-speaking population. This scalable solution shifts instruction from remediation to enrichment, leveraging students' home language to ensure high-level English proficiency and academic success.

**Phase 1 (Pilot):** Begin with one Kindergarten cohort. While a two-teacher team (English/Spanish) is used at Claremont and Escuela Key, a single bilingual teacher model is a viable, lower-cost entry point.
**Growth:** Add one grade level per year.
**Alignment:** The program would utilize the DLI curriculum in use at Escuela Key and Claremont. Alumni would naturally feed into the existing Spanish Immersion Program at Gunston Middle School, merging with Key and Claremont alumni.

**Budgetary Implications**
The implementation will be primarily cost neutral as it would replace an English-only classroom with a DLI classroom. However, to begin the strand, teachers would need additional planning time to collaborate with peer teachers at Escuela Key and/or Claremont.

**Committee vote**: 5 in favor, 0 opposed **Date:** January 27, 2026

**Detail**

Currently, DLI in Arlington is housed in dedicated county-wide option schools (Escuela Key and Claremont). Data has shown the success of these programs. For example, the 2024-25 End of Year VALLSS K-3 performance indicates that the DLI program performs about the same as the rest of the county in English VALLSS, despite the reduced number of hours of English instruction, and even better in Spanish VALLS. In addition, Claremont and Escuela Key both demonstrated strong performance in regard to the Virginia Department of Education's recently

released updated accountability and accreditation results using the new School Performance and Support Framework.

While ELs are thriving in the Escuela Key and Claremont programs, these locations are inaccessible to some families due to transportation hurdles for parents as well as a lack of lottery awareness. Additionally some families view immersion schools as remedial programs for Spanish speakers, rather than enrichment programs, or vice versa, depending on how the program is explained to them.

The "Strand" Model (a program within a school building) would allow APS to utilize space in an existing neighborhood school for a smaller, third DLI program that utilizes the DLI curriculum APS has already fine tuned at Claremont and Escuela Key. Through this model, APS would serve students where they are, rather than asking families to navigate an online-only and complex lottery system to access best-practice instruction.

APS has [number] elementary schools where one-third of the student body is native Spanish speaking English Learners. This means we have the "linguistic capital" already in the building to support a robust, one-way dual language immersion model. In a K-5 one-way model, the classroom would be composed of only English learners with a Spanish home language background. This model is designed to develop students' fluency and literacy in English and Spanish. When students develop literacy skills in their first language, it fosters literacy development in their second language (English). This would improve literacy outcomes for EL students in both English and Spanish.

Commented [1]: To add once we receive

| Top 5 Elementary Schools with the Highest EL Population | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **School** | **Total Kindergarten Enrollment** | **Total Number of Spanish-Speaking EL Students** | **Percentage of Spanish-Speaking EL Students** |
| Abingdon | 91 | 29 | **32%** |
| Barrett | 57 | 31 | **54%** |
| Carlin Springs | 53 | 37 | **70%** |
| Hoffman-Boston | 87 | 15 | **17%** |
| Randolph | 67 | 28 | **42%** |
| **Grand Total** | **355** | **140** | **39%** |

Commented [2]: should Barcroft be added?

The strand program would begin with at least one kindergarten classroom and add additional grade-levels as the student cohort progresses, eventually merging with Escuela Key and

Claremont alumni for sixth grade in Gunston Middle School's Spanish Immersion Program. While a strand with two classrooms per grade would be ideal, to allow for the same two-teacher model used at the option DLI elementary schools, it is possible to start the strand with a single kindergarten classroom with one teacher who provides the instruction in both English and Spanish.

**References**

*Ensuring Equitable Access to Dual-Language Immersion Programs: Supporting English Learners' Emerging Bilingualism* by Dr. Conor P. Williams, Dr. Shantel Meek, Dr. Maggie Marcus and Jonathan Zabala of The Century Foundation https://tcf.org/content/report/ensuring-equitable-access-to-dual-language-immersion-programs-supporting-english-learners-emerging-bilingualism/

https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2023/05/English-Learners-Program-Evaluation-FINAL.pdf

**Staff Response**

I agree with the recommendation to establish one-way DLI strands in elementary schools with high English learner populations. These schools have the Spanish-speaking student base needed to support a strong and sustainable program, and research shows that DLI is one of the most effective models for improving long-term academic outcomes for ELs.

Starting with one Kindergarten cohort at selected sites and adding a grade level each year is a practical way to scale the program. Aligning curriculum with Claremont and Escuela Key will also create a clear pathway into the Gunston Immersion program, supporting biliteracy development and overall academic success for our EL students across the division.

**Appendix 1: 2024-25 VALLSS ENGLISH PERFORMANCE COMPARISON**

| Grade Level | School/ Program | Language | % Low Risk | % Moderate Risk | % High Risk | District Average % Low Risk | Difference from District |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kindergarten** | **District Average** | **English** | **75.24%** | **11.71%** | **13.05%** | **75.24%** | **—** |
| | Immersion K | English | 76.1% | 11.7% | 12.2% | 75.24% | +0.9% |
| | Immersion K | Spanish | 75.0% | 20.2% | 4.8% | — | — |
| **Grade 1** | **District Average** | **English** | **68.48%** | **12.72%** | **18.80%** | **68.48%** | **—** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Immersion Grade 1 | English | 70.5% | 12.1% | 17.4% | 68.48% | +2.0% |
| | Immersion Grade 1 | Spanish | 86.8% | 10.0% | 3.2% | — | — |

**DLI Performance:**

- **Both Immersion Kindergarten and Grade 1** exceed district averages in English Low Risk performance
- **Immersion Kindergarten** performs 0.9 percentage points above district average (76.1% vs. 75.24%)
- **Immersion Grade 1** performs 2.0 percentage points above district average (70.5% vs. 68.48%)
- **Dual language instruction is working** - students learning in two languages are achieving at or above levels of district peers learning in one language
- **Students are making strong progress in their second language** while maintaining or exceeding English performance

Recommendation 4: **APS should commit to successfully completing all recommendations within the Dual-Language Immersion Program Framework (Long-term recommendation)**

**Alignment to Strategic Plan**
Priority: Student Academic Growth and Success
Performance Objective: Growth in Reading & Math
Strategies: Deliver APS curriculum through rigorous, differentiated, evidence-based, and culturally responsive instruction aligned to the Virginia standards of learning with opportunities to infuse depth and complexity to promote deeper understanding of the content.

**SUMMARY**
In August 2022, APS published the Dual-Language Immersion Program Framework, which contained "recommendations aimed at strengthening the DLI program to further the goal of graduating students who are bilingual, biliterate and leaders in our multilingual and multicultural world" (page 1). With support from the School Board, APS has made great progress in addressing the nine recommendations contained in the report; however, work is still required to address recommendations 4, five, and 8.

> **Recommendation 4**: That APS allocate funding to hire one Spanish reading specialist for each elementary school that is assigned to the school to support the continued training and development of their respective DLI programs.
>
> **Recommendation 5**: That APS expand access to the DLI program through marketing, recruiting and strengthening the Pre-K-12 pathway.
>
> **Recommendation 8**: To fund, plan, designate staff, and increase course offerings at Wakefield High School to allow it to attract and sustain DLI students at the school.

DLI Sub-Committee recommendations one through three directly relate to each of the remaining recommendations from this Framework. For example, recommendation 2 (increase course offerings at Wakefield) would successfully address recommendation eight from the APS Dual-Language Immersion Program Framework.

**Budgetary Implications**
The DLI Sub-Committee acknowledges that there are budgetary implications with this recommendation. As a result, it is being recommended as a long-term recommendation to implement in the coming years.

**Committee vote**: 5 in favor, 0 opposed **Date:** January 27, 2026

**Detail**

**Recommendation 4**: That APS allocate funding to hire one Spanish reading specialist for each elementary school that is assigned to the school to support the continued training and development of their respective DLI programs.

*Progress to Date:* The DLI Advisory Committee has advocated for this position post-DLI Visioning.

- World Languages Advisory Committee's 2022-23 recommendation: Prior Recommendation: Spanish Reading Specialists for the Dual Language Immersion Program
- Dual Language Immersion sub-subcommittee 2023-24 recommendation: Recommendation #1: APS allocates funding to hire one Spanish reading specialist for each DLI elementary school to support student literacy in Spanish.
- Dual Language Immersion sub-subcommittee 2024-25 recommendation: Recommendation 2: APS Establish Planning Factors for the K-12 DLI Program to support high quality instruction throughout the full immersion program included included the Spanish Language Arts Reading Specialist (Elementary School) position.

*Gap:* As of the 2025-26 school year, the Spanish reading specialist positions have not been funded.

**Recommendation 5**: That APS expand access to the DLI program through marketing, recruiting and strengthening the Pre-K-12 pathway.

*Progress to Date:* The DLI Advisory Committee acknowledges substantial progress to expand marketing and recruiting towards prospective DLI families and strengthening the Pre-K-12 pathway. However, there is still work to do.

*Gap:* There is a need to continue recruiting Spanish-speaking families at the elementary level. In addition, while the progress has been dependent on particular staff members and the school staff, there is a need to institutionalize this within APS processes and offices, such as the Welcome Center.

**Recommendation 8**: To fund, plan, designate staff, and increase course offerings at Wakefield High School to allow it to attract and sustain DLI students at the school.

*Progress to Date:* Additional math and science courses have been added to the DLI curriculum.

*Gap:* Social studies and professional courses should be added as detailed in the DLI Sub-subcommittee's Recommendation 2.

**References**

https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2023/05/Dual-Language-Immersion-Program-Framework.pdf

**Staff Response**

I agree that APS should revisit the remaining recommendations from the 2022 DLI Program Framework. While significant progress has been made, Recommendations 4, 5, and 8 still need attention to fully strengthen the PreK–12 immersion pathway.

We support prioritizing funding for Spanish reading specialists at each DLI elementary school, expanding access through targeted outreach and pathway development, and enhancing high school course offerings so Wakefield can better serve and retain immersion students. These steps align with the original visioning process and will help ensure a stronger, more coherent DLI program across the division.

# 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.

**Student Health Advisory Board Recommendations**

**February 2026**

## Members

Mary Sanders, Chair, 2025-2026

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| Alison Babb | James Vell Rives | Keirsten Kelly |
| Desiree Jaworski | Pablo Moulden | Sheila Kelly |
| Candice Lopez | Lori Pines | Christopher Day |
| Irena Sullivan | Kristen Anne Smith | Amy Rzepka |
| Amy Killelea | Lainie Morgan | |

Staff Liaison: Jodi Bobbitt, School Health Coordinator, Office of Student Services

APS Staff/County Representatives: Chris Willmore, Lisa Kaintoch, Liz Hand

## Recommendation 1: Increase and promote family engagement opportunities in collaboration with Health and PE staff

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Student, Family, and Community Partnerships (Family Partnerships Performance Objective)*

## Summary

Health and PE staff can strengthen family engagement opportunities through implementing programs and activities that facilitate school-based wellness initiatives that increase parent-school connections. Increasing family engagement through Health and PE offers significant benefits. For students, it reinforces healthy behaviors, boosts motivation, and strengthens the connection between physical activity and overall well-being. For families, these opportunities create enjoyable, low-pressure ways to participate in their child's school experience and support health at home. Schools benefit from stronger relationships with families, improved student attendance and performance linked to active lifestyles, and a more inclusive and engaged school community. By leveraging the universal appeal of movement and play,

PE teachers can build meaningful bridges between home and school that support healthy choices that lead to lifelong wellness.

Opportunities to engage parents and families in school and PE initiatives could include: field days, Family PE Week; Bike, Walk, and Roll to School Day (once a year or as a monthly program), monthly fitness calendars. Other opportunities could include organizing family fitness nights, creating take-home activity challenges, hosting inclusive community walks or games, and sharing simple, accessible resources that encourage families to be active together. Several APS schools offer some of the above programs and we encourage schools to share successful ideas that have increased family engagement.

**Budget Implication**

Budget Neutral. All of the above opportunities would be cost neutral as PE staff can incorporate these programs into their work plans and daily planning time.

**Committee Vote**

12 in Favor, 0 Opposed  Date: 1/7/2026

**Detail**

The School Health Advisory Board recommends that Health and Physical Education (Health and PE) staff increase family engagement-centered health and wellness opportunities for students and their families. By intentionally incorporating family-focused programs and activities into school community-based wellness initiatives, schools can strengthen parent–school connections, reinforce healthy behaviors, and foster a culture of lifelong wellness that extends beyond the school day.

Family engagement is a critical component of student success and overall school wellness. This is evidenced by the inclusion of family engagement as a pillar in the APS Strategic Plan. Health and Physical Education programs are uniquely positioned to engage families because they design movement, play,

and wellness activities to be accessible, inclusive, and appealing across cultures, ages, and ability levels. When families are invited to participate in school-based health and PE initiatives, schools create meaningful opportunities for shared experiences that promote physical activity, social connection, and positive health behaviors.

Research consistently demonstrates that family engagement in schools is associated with improved student outcomes, including increased attendance, higher academic achievement, and improved social-emotional well-being (CDC, 2012; Epstein et al., 2019). Additionally, regular physical activity is linked to improved cognitive function, classroom behavior, and academic performance (CDC, 2010). By connecting families to Health and PE programming, schools can reinforce these benefits both at school and at home.

Increasing family engagement through Health and PE programming provides meaningful benefits for students, families, and schools, strengthening the overall school wellness environment. When families are actively involved in health and physical activity initiatives, students are more likely to reinforce healthy behaviors learned at school and apply them at home. Reinforcement at home helps increase student motivation, enjoyment, and confidence in physical activity, while strengthening students' understanding of the connection between movement, physical and socioemotional health, and academic success. These experiences support improved attendance, focus, and classroom engagement, as physically active students are often better prepared to learn.

For families, Health and PE-centered engagement opportunities create welcoming, low-pressure ways to connect with their child's school and support student learning beyond the classroom. Activities centered on movement and wellness encourage positive family interactions, promote shared experiences, and build knowledge and skills that families can use to support healthy habits at home. Because physical activity can be adapted for

all ages, cultures, and abilities, these opportunities help reduce barriers to participation and foster inclusion and belonging within the school community.

Schools also benefit from increased family engagement through Health and PE. When families feel connected and welcomed, schools experience stronger relationships built on trust and collaboration. These partnerships contribute to a more inclusive and engaged school climate and support broader school wellness goals. Increased family involvement in health and physical activity initiatives can also improve student attendance, behavior, and academic performance, reinforcing the connection between healthy lifestyles and student engagement. Collectively, these benefits help schools cultivate a positive and supportive school culture that promotes lifelong wellness for students and families alike.

Health and PE staff can strengthen family engagement by implementing programs and activities that align with existing school schedules, resources, and community needs. Examples include:

- Field Days that invite families to participate in inclusive games and activities
- Family PE Week, where families join students during their PE classes or participate in take-home activities
- Bike, Walk, and Roll to School Day, offered annually or expanded into a monthly program with set dates to support active transportation initiatives.
- Monthly fitness calendars with simple, family-friendly activities
- Family fitness nights featuring games, movement stations, or wellness workshops
- Take-home activity challenges that encourage families to be active together
- Inclusive community walks or games that welcome all abilities and backgrounds or organized bike or walking school bus routes

- Sharing accessible health and wellness resources, such as short activity ideas, movement videos, or local recreation opportunities

Several APS schools currently offer some of these programs and can serve as a model to expand successful programs to other schools. SHAB encourages Health and PE staff and school administrators to share successful strategies and best practices that have effectively increased family engagement, allowing other schools to replicate and adapt these models.

This recommendation aligns with national best practices for school health and family engagement. The CDC identifies family engagement as a key strategy for improving student health and academic outcomes, particularly when families are engaged through school wellness and physical activity initiatives (CDC, 2012). SHAPE America also emphasizes the importance of family and community involvement in comprehensive school physical activity programs (SHAPE America, 2015).

By leveraging the universal appeal of movement and play, Health and PE staff can build meaningful bridges between home and school. Increasing family engagement through Health and PE supports healthy choices, strengthens school–family partnerships, and promotes lifelong wellness for students and their families. SHAB strongly recommends expanding these opportunities as an essential component of a healthy, connected, and thriving school community.

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**Recommendation 2: Explore opportunities to upgrade current bike fleet *used for 2nd and 3rd grade PE instruction*.**

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Student Well-Being*

**Summary**

The APS Health and PE Department maintains a fleet of bicycles used to teach bike and road safety to 2nd- and 3rd-grade students. Each year, approximately 12–13 schools receive the bike trailer on a rotating, every-other-year schedule. During the two-week unit, elementary PE teachers integrate the bikes into their classes and provide instruction on bike riding, pedestrian safety, and road awareness.

Over time, staff have retired damaged bikes and the current fleet includes about 50 bikes in various sizes and conditions, along with approximately 70 helmets. PE staff have requested new, high-quality bikes (both balance and pedal bikes) to replace those in poor condition.

The Health and PE Department has received grant funding to provide balance bikes to Title I schools; however, these bikes must remain onsite at the receiving school and cannot be utilized by other schools. Currently, only three APS Title I schools have adequate space to store them. While additional grant funding may be available to expand the program, all the remaining Title I schools lack the necessary storage space. Other grant opportunities do not include a Title I requirement, and we recommend that the APS grant writer actively monitor and apply for grant programs that provide bikes that meet the needs of the HPE program, including, but not limited, to needed bike repairs and replacements.

**Budget Implication**

Budget Neutral

**Committee Vote**

12 in favor, 0 opposed  Date: 1/7/2026

**Detail**

Learning to ride a bicycle during early elementary school years is strongly supported by public health and physical education research. For children in grades 2 and 3, bike riding helps develop fundamental motor skills such as balance, coordination, and spatial awareness, which are fundamental for lifelong physical activity (SHAPE America, 2015). Mastery of these skills at a young age increases children's confidence and competence in movement, making them more likely to remain physically active as they grow older (CDC], 2010).

In addition to physical development, early bike education supports cognitive and social-emotional growth. Learning to ride a bike requires problem-solving, attention, and self-regulation, while also fostering independence and resilience. Students receiving bike instruction gain critical safety skills that reduce the risk of injury and prepare them to safely navigate their communities (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2022). Programs that combine skill-building with safety education are particularly effective in preventing bicycle-related injuries among children.

The APS Health and PE Department currently provides instruction in bike riding skills, pedestrian safety, and road awareness for 2nd- and 3rd-grade students and plays a critical role in promoting physical activity, motor skill development, and injury prevention. The Health and PE Department maintains a fleet of bicycles that rotates among elementary schools on an every-other-year schedule. Each year, approximately 12–13 schools receive the bike trailer for a two-week instructional unit. During this time, elementary PE teachers integrate a bicycle unit into their curriculum to provide hands-on instruction in bike riding and rider safety. This rotating model promotes equitable access to high-quality bike education to elementary school students across the district, regardless of a student's access to bike instruction outside of school.

The current fleet consists of approximately 50 bicycles in various sizes and conditions, along with approximately 70 helmets. Throughout the implementation of the program, APS Health and PE staff have retired damaged bicycles and APS staff currently work with Phoenix Bikes to assess and repair bicycles within the fleet. Phoenix Bikes has recommended that when new bikes are needed, higher quality bicycles, including both balance and pedal bikes, are acquired to replace bikes that are no longer safe to ride. Maintaining a safe and well-functioning fleet is essential to ensuring student safety, maximizing instructional time, and achieving effective skill development during PE classes.

The Health and PE Department have previously received grants to provide balance bikes to Title I schools; however, these grants require that the bikes remain onsite at the receiving school and cannot rotate among schools. Currently, only three APS Title I schools have sufficient storage space to house the bikes. While APS could apply for additional funding through this grant for Title I schools, the remaining Title I schools in APS lack the necessary storage capacity to participate fully.

Grant opportunities exist with other foundations and companies that do not have Title I restrictions. SHAB recommends that APS actively seek grant funding to support and sustain the APS bicycle program that is shared across schools, including the repair and replacement of the current rotating bike fleet. Priority should be focused on funding opportunities that support the purchase of high quality, durable, and easy to maintain pedal and balance bikes. Securing flexible grant funding will ensure the long-term sustainability of this successful bicycle instruction program and allow APS to continue providing developmentally appropriate, equitable bike education that supports student health, safety, and lifelong physical activity.

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**Recommendation 3: SHAB advises the School Board to formally charge the Student Health and Well Being Advisory Council as the community involvement team as part of each FLE review period.**

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Student Well Being*

**Summary**

The Code of Virginia requires local school boards to review Family Life Education (FLE) content areas at least every seven years. Arlington Public Schools implements a division-wide FLE curriculum, and APS has chosen to review curriculum every five years. If the School Board adopts the proposed structure of the new advisory councils, the School Health Advisory Board (SHAB) will be concluding at the end of the 2025–26 school year. SHAB requests that the Student Health and Well-Being Advisory Council serve as the advisory body responsible for reviewing FLE curriculum during each review cycle per the 2020 VDOE Family Life SOL requirements for Superintendents to identify community involvement teams and Virginia Code § 22.1-207.1.

**Budget Implication**

Budget Neutral

**Committee Vote**

11 in favor, 0 oppose  Date: 1/7/2026

**Detail**

The School Health Advisory Board (SHAB) recommends that the new Student Health and Well-Being Advisory Council be formally charged with serving as the community involvement team for any future Family Life Education (FLE) curriculum review cycles. This designation will ensure compliance with Virginia law, maintain continuity in community engagement, and provide a structured, informed forum for stakeholder input on sensitive and developmentally important curriculum content.

The Code of Virginia requires each local school board to review FLE content areas at least once every seven years and to ensure meaningful community involvement in that review process (Virginia Code § 22.1-207.1). Arlington Public Schools (APS) exceeds this minimum requirement by conducting a division-wide review of the FLE curriculum every five years. APS implements a single, consistent FLE curriculum across the division, making a centralized and representative advisory body essential to ensuring both fidelity to state standards and responsiveness to community values.

Under the Virginia Department of Education's 2020 Family Life Education Standards of Learning (SOL), school divisions are required to engage parents and community members through a designated community involvement team identified by the superintendent (VDOE, 2020). This team is charged with reviewing FLE instructional materials and providing input prior to school board consideration. Historically, SHAB has fulfilled this role, bringing together educators, health professionals, parents, and community representatives with relevant expertise in student health and well-being.

If the School Board adopts the proposed structure of the new advisory councils, SHAB will conclude its work at the end of the 2025–26 school year. In anticipation of this transition, SHAB requests that the Student Health and Well-Being Advisory Council assume responsibility for the FLE curriculum review process beginning with the next scheduled review cycle. Charging the new council with this role will ensure continuity of oversight, preserve

institutional knowledge, and align FLE review responsibilities with the council's broader charge to advise on student health and wellness.

The Student Health and Well-Being Advisory Council is well positioned to serve as the FLE community involvement team. Family Life Education addresses topics that intersect directly with physical health, mental well-being, social-emotional learning, safety, and healthy relationships. Oversight by a council dedicated to student health and well-being ensures that curriculum review is informed by current research, best practices, and an understanding of the developmental needs of students, while also reflecting parent and community perspectives.

Designating the Student Health and Well-Being Advisory Council as the community involvement team will support transparency, consistency, and compliance with state requirements, while reinforcing APS's commitment to inclusive and thoughtful engagement around Family Life Education. This approach provides a clear governance structure for future review cycles and ensures that APS continues to meet VDOE guidance.

**References**

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**Recommendation 4: SHAB advises the School Board to formally charge the Student Health and Well Being Advisory Council with reviewing and evaluating the physical and mental health impacts of device usage, both personal and school issued devices, on student well being and providing recommendations to the School Board accordingly.**

**Summary**

A growing body of pediatric and public health research, including guidance from the U.S. Surgeon General and the American Academy of Pediatrics, links increased screen and device use among children and adolescents to risks for mental health, sleep, attention, physical well-being, and safety. Heavy and problematic use—common among youth and amplified by school-issued, "always-on" devices—is associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms, sleep disruption, distraction and learning interference, eye strain and increased myopia risk, musculoskeletal discomfort, sedentary behavior, and exposure to inappropriate online content. While technology can support learning in targeted ways, evidence shows students learn most effectively through direct instruction, and excessive device use carries significant opportunity costs for social interaction and healthy development.

At present, APS has created a Device Use Working Group to review current usage of digital devices within APS, but the working group is not charged with addressing the larger impacts of devices on mental and physical health outside the classroom. SHAB recommends that the School Board formally charge the Student Health and Well Being Advisory Council with reviewing and evaluating the health impacts of increased device usage and make recommendations to the School Board and parent community. These recommendations would encompass both personal and school-issued devices and their impact on student health, learning, and well being.

**Committee Vote**

10 in favor, 0 oppose  Date: 1/7/2026

**Detail**

A growing body of pediatric and public health research links higher levels of screen time and device use to measurable increased risks to the mental health and well being of school-aged children and adolescents. The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory concludes that the evidence base contains "ample indicators" of harm for some youth, with particular concern for anxiety

and depressive symptoms, sleep disruption, social comparison and body image pressures, and increased exposure to riskier experiences such as cyberbullying. While impacts vary by child, content, and context, the American Academy of Pediatrics similarly characterizes today's "digital ecosystems" as a health and developmental hazard that requires intentional guardrails and careful monitoring of how, when, and why devices are used.

Research further shows that problematic or compulsive device use is associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in adolescents and young adults—an important finding given that school-issued devices increase "always-on" access. Notably, problematic and dysregulated use is common among children, in part because digital platforms are intentionally designed to be highly engaging and addictive, particularly for developing brains through dopamine-based reward mechanisms.

From a physical health perspective, extensive screen-based near-work is associated with digital eye strain and an increased risk of myopia. A recent systematic review with dose–response meta-analysis found that each additional hour of daily screen time was linked to increased risk of myopia (nearsightedness), with the steepest increases occurring within the first few hours of use. Prolonged sitting and device-related posture, including sustained head and neck flexion, are also associated with neck, upper back, and other musculoskeletal complaints in youth. In response to these concerns, global health guidance emphasizes reducing sedentary time, which often includes recreational and non-essential screen use, due to its broader health tradeoffs.

Schools increasingly recognize that school-issued devices also function as pathways for exposure to inappropriate or harmful content. Studies show substantial rates of youth exposure to online sexual content, including pornography that depicts, normalizes, and glorifies sexual violence—most often against women and girls. Exposure to such content is associated with problematic sexual attitudes and behaviors, underscoring the importance of including content safety, filtering effectiveness, exposure pathways, and

downstream impacts in any health-focused evaluation of school device programs.

Evidence also suggests associations between higher screen time and increased attention difficulties, including ADHD-related symptoms, though findings often reflect small effect sizes and important confounding factors. These findings reinforce the need to distinguish between device use that meaningfully supports learning and use that promotes frequent multitasking, distraction, and reduced instructional effectiveness. While technology can facilitate learning in specific contexts, it is well documented that children learn most effectively through direct interaction with teachers.

Finally, extensive device use carries a significant opportunity cost by displacing in-person social interaction, outdoor play, motor skill development, and other experiences essential to healthy child development. At present, APS does not provide detailed data on school-issued device usage, including total time spent on devices, patterns of use by grade or class, the amount of homework completed on devices, or the types of content accessed. As part of the charge for next school year, the School Health Advisory Board requests that access to this data be provided to the Student Health and Well Being Advisory Council in order to conduct a comprehensive review of the mental, physical, and developmental health impacts associated with school-issued device use.

**Priority Health Impacts to Examine and Recommended Areas of Study**

**1. Mental Health and Sleep (Ages 5–18)**
*Research suggests:* Associations between device and social media exposure and anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, cyberbullying, and social comparison/body image concerns, with highest risk observed among heavy and problematic users.
*Areas to study:* Total daily use; after-9:00 p.m. use; in-school versus at-home use on school-issued devices; educational versus entertainment or social use; multitasking during homework; trends in sleep quality, mental health

screenings, counseling visits, and disciplinary incidents related to online conflict.

**2. Attention, Learning Interference, and ADHD-Related Concerns**
*Research suggests:* In some cohorts, increased screen time is associated with worsening ADHD symptoms within the same year, while broader reviews link longer screen time to higher symptom scores, emphasizing non-causality and modest average effects.
*Areas to study:* Classroom off-task indicators such as tab switching, non-instructional app use, and notification frequency; differential impacts for students with ADHD, 504 plans, or IEPs (with appropriate privacy protections); changes in attention and behavior before and after device policy adjustments.

**3. Eyestrain, Headaches, and Myopia Risk**
*Research suggests:* A dose–response relationship between screen time and myopia risk, with sustained near-work contributing to eye strain and headaches.
*Areas to study:* Duration of uninterrupted near-work; use of breaks (e.g., 20-20-20 practices); display ergonomics including font size, brightness, and viewing distance; emerging trends as screen exposure increases.

**4. Posture, Musculoskeletal Pain, and Sedentary Time**
*Research suggests:* Prolonged device use and sedentary behavior are associated with neck, shoulder, and back pain, with broader health implications tied to excessive sedentary time.
*Areas to study:* Daily seated instructional time; balance between device-based and movement-based learning; classroom ergonomics; student-reported discomfort and symptom trends.

**5. Exposure to Inappropriate Content**
*Research suggests:* High prevalence of youth exposure to sexual, violent, and self-harm-related content online, with some evidence linking exposure to harmful attitudes and behaviors.
*Areas to study:* Effectiveness of content filters; sources of exposure (e.g., browsers, apps, VPNs, hotspots); pathways of access such as searches,

social feeds, group chats, and shared links, using available device monitoring data.

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# Student Services Advisory Committee

February 2, 2026

**Members**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dana Milburn, chair | Staff liaison: | Mr. Jeffrey Carpenter, Jr., Ed.S., NCSP, SHRM-SCP, |
| Adora Williams, co-secretary | | Executive Director of Student Services |
| Kirstin Pickle, co-secretary | | |
| Elizabeth Fabrizio | Larissa Leclair | Stacey Stump |
| Judy Hadden | Maddie Leclair | Bethany Vanderbilt |

**Recommendation: We offer two related proposals to deepen Social Emotional Learning within APS, that will benefit students and school communities in and of themselves, and also benefit APS' progress in implementation and understanding/buy-in for social emotional learning:**

- **Create an APS Community of Kindness, highlighting both elements of kindness related to social emotional learning (SEL) and elements of kindness that might not appear as closely related to SEL; and**
- **Launch an executive functioning (EF) skills initiative, much of which clearly can be considered part of SEL.**

**Alignment to the Strategic Plan**: The committee recommendation supports the Strategic Plan priorities and performance objectives in multiple areas, such as:

***Student Wellbeing*:** School climate and mental health, Reducing chronic absenteeism and suspensions, Students feeling safe in schools (including students in vulnerable populations- racially/ethnically diverse, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+, English learners, and other historically marginalized groups)

***Student Academic Growth and Success***: Graduation competencies (College, Career, Civic Readiness Indicators), General education access to Students with Disabilities

***Student, Family and Community Partnerships*:** Student and family engagement and education, Equitable family engagement

## SUMMARY


**KINDNESS, SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL), AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING (EF) SKILLS – A NATURAL SYNERGY WE SHOULD CAPITALIZE ON FOR OUR STUDENTS (See full Recommendation on Page 5)**

**Executive functioning skills** serve as what's often called the brain's "air traffic control system," providing organization, and cognition. Our students require these crucial and practical skills to complete assignments, manage their time, prioritize work, and many other tasks. Most executive functioning skills can be considered to fall under the rubric of SEL, but EF skills often are smaller and more specific chunks of the whole, applying directly to the ability to perform a number of tasks necessary for success in school, work, and life.

**Social emotional learning** adds the emotional intelligence to interpret situations and make informed and responsible decisions, in addition to self-awareness and relationship skills. Our students require these crucial life skills, also, to work with others, understand their emotions and control their behavior, build relationships, work in groups, resolve conflict, understand and interpret the world around them, and empathize with the perspectives of others.

**Kindness** requires both SEL and some EF skills, and is the application of them for the greater good – for the well-being of others, and of oneself, and often the well-being of one's group or community. When one is calm; when one is not under stress; when one understands oneself, others, and a situation clearly; and when one has the personal and interpersonal skills to apply to a situation, kindness becomes far more possible. Further, as we'll see below, kindness is contagious and can create or further enhance calm, happy feelings, building on itself and providing the best basis for further learning of all types, including EF skills and SEL.

**Virginia Portrait of a Graduate and the 5 C's – How Kindness, SEL, and EF Skills Enhance Student Success:**

- **Critical Thinking:** EF and SEL are both directly related to this category in that the regulation, impulse control, and cognitive control that students gain by building both then allow them to engage in problem solving, analysis of real world problems, and taking the perspective of another.
- **Creative Thinking:** Similarly, EF and SEL both bolster a student's ability to think "outside the box" with an open mind; if cognitive load is decreased and the student's emotional needs are met, they are more likely to be able to think creatively, have flexible responses, and use their imagination.
- **Collaboration:** This is the category where all three (EF, SEL, and kindness) come together: in order to work effectively with others, students need to be able to organize and share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions clearly and with empathy and respect for other students. Particularly in our area, where students are coming from an incredibly diverse variety of backgrounds and experiences, supporting their ability to work effectively and compassionately with others will set them up for success when they leave APS.
- **Communication:** reflection is a core element of social emotional learning; a student's ability to understand themselves, their emotions, and the emotions of others sets the stage for effective communication. Further, the ability to organize and sequence thoughts and ideas supports a student's ability to speak, write, and convey themselves effectively to others. Focusing on kindness in communication ensures that students go beyond being "nice" to one another and instead develop the skills to be respectful, empathic, and understanding of others.
- **Citizenship:** SEL builds the foundation of good citizenship by focusing on skills like empathy, responsible decision-making, relationship building, conflict resolution, and self awareness. Kindness supports this by encouraging a culture of care, mutual respect, curiosity, and understanding. Solid executive functioning skills also support citizenship by reducing cognitive load and improving cognitive flexibility, impulse control, and planning.

**Helping *All* APS Students, Especially Those Who Are Vulnerable or Disadvantaged:**
Adding more deliberate emphasis on both kindness and EF skills will make a positive difference in academic performance, personal success and happiness, and school climate for all of our students, but we believe, and have seen evidence, that our students who are disadvantaged or historically marginalized will benefit even more. By combining kindness, SEL, and EF skills we believe a more caring school environment will be created, filling in some of the blanks in the protective safety net we all want for them. We believe all students, including those most vulnerable, will develop more of the skills that both increase academic/work success *and* create more protective factors and/or help students create protective factors for themselves, too, building more robustly the safety net we all want them to have. We've included some citations below that might be helpful in illustrating this point:

- **Students with disabilities:** see Executive Functions and Special Educational Needs and Their Relationship with School-Age Learning Difficulties - PMC; 5 Ways to Help Neurodiverse Students Improve Executive Function Skills | Edutopia; and Executive Functions in Social Context: Implications for Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Supporting Developmental Trajectories

- **English learners:** see SEL for English Language Learners: What Educators Need to Know | Colorín Colorado; and SEL for English Language Learners: What Educators Need to Know | NEA)

- **LGBTQ+ students:** The Trevor Project (2025). Friends, Family, and Community: Social Support and the Health of Transgender and Nonbinary Young People of Color; The Trevor Project (2025). Anti-Bullying Policies in School and LGBTQ+ Young People. (Also, please see Appendix 4.)

- **Students from racial/ethnic/religious minorities:** Culturally Responsive SEL for Black Students; Honoring the Cultural Backgrounds of All Students

- **Students from from disadvantaged backgrounds:** Reimagining Social and Emotional Learning: From Individual Competencies to Systemic Transformation; The power of centering equity in social and emotional learning; Why Marginalized Students Need Hope to Succeed

- **Students with trauma in their backgrounds:** Executive functions in trauma-exposed youth: a meta-analysis; How Trauma Affects Kids in School

**We see close relationships between kindness, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Executive Functioning Skills (EF skills).**
There are strong overlaps between the three, as we demonstrate in Appendix 1, our Venn diagram. We believe that SEL

acceptance and success can be enhanced and deepened by reinforcing it with these two more concrete concepts, which have a great deal of inherent value of their own, as well. **Kindness** is something everyone understands, and most people value very much. Kindness builds more caring and inclusive communities, fills students' (and adults') emotional bank accounts; builds protective factors; helps people feel accepted as and who they are; helps people feel welcome at school; and helps people feel safe at school, among other benefits.

While the term, **Executive Functioning Skills** might not ring a bell with everyone, conversation with any fellow parent soon is likely to reach concerns about meeting deadlines, planning/organizing work, knowing what to do when, or other related issues, all of which are EF skills, and all of which, similarly to SEL skills, have crucial impacts on whether one is successful in school, work, relationships, and membership in society.

**Deepening SEL:** We see metrics within APS and beyond that indicate continued behavioral issues, suicide ideation, and other concerning issues have persisted since the pandemic. In more recent years, students have also been exposed to an increasingly polarized world, and often-stress-inducing messages. Our Student Services staff members already function at top capacity and work hard to support students, staff (with behavioral issues, for instance), and whole school communities. The APS SEL (Social Emotional Learning) initiative has been maturing over the past several years and provides instruction on a number of skills that also serve as social and emotional protective factors for students as they navigate their school and lives. As we consider next steps to solidify and increase progress, we see two integrated paths towards increased success, and further, acceptance and understanding of SEL among students, parents, and even staff in general, could be improved, allowing SEL to be even more beneficial:

**WE RECOMMEND:**

- **A kindness initiative, which might be called something like "Creating a Community and Culture of Kindness,"** which can serve both as an intrinsically valuable addition on its own, and an expansion of SEL lessons, using a free, CASEL-coordinated/SEL-related kindness curriculum.
- **An executive functioning skills initiative,** dovetailing with and expanding upon current SEL work in APS.
- **(While building upon and continuing the important SEL** practice staff have been implementing**.)**

**Budgetary Implications** **None**

**Committee vote: Unanimous vote** **Date: October 16, 2025**
**Full Recommending Report: Unanimous vote, Including New Members** **Date: February 2, 2026**

**The Student Services Advisory Committee wishes to thank the following APS Student Services staff members for their kindness in contributing to this recommendation from their wisdom and experience:**

- Mr. Jeffrey Carpenter, Jr., Ed.S., NCSP, SHRM-SCP, Executive Director of Student Services
- Dr. Darrell Sampson, EdD, MA, LPC, NCC, NCSC Former Executive Director of Student Services
- Ms. Jennifer Gross, Coordinator, Social-Emotional Learning
- Mr. Gradis White, Director, Office of School Climate & Culture
- Dr. Chip Bonar, Student Behavior Coordinator, Office of Climate and Culture
- Ms. Grace Santarelli, M.A., N.C.S.P., School Psychologist
- Ms. Xenia Castaneda, Administrative Specialist, Office of Student Services

**We also wish to thank ACTL and its leadership, as well as the School Board and Dr. Duran, for this opportunity to share our recommendations, research, and connection with the community.**

## DETAIL:

**THE SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND KINDNESS, SEL, AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS**

The science of learning emphasizes that learning is not passive, but an active process of making connections, driven by neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to change), and heavily influenced by emotion, motivation, and social context.

This science relates directly to teaching social-emotional learning (SEL), kindness, and executive functioning (EF) by providing evidence-based strategies to develop the whole child, optimizing the brain for both academic and social success.
Key Connections: Science of Learning & Student Development

- Social Emotional Learning (SEL):Research shows that SEL (managing emotions, empathy, positive relationships) is not "soft skill" fluff, but fundamental to brain development. A positive, safe, and supportive school environment reduces stress, which lowers cortisol and allows the prefrontal cortex—the brain's center for learning and decision-making—to function effectively.
- Kindness: Acts of kindness are "neurologically smart." They trigger the release of dopamine (pleasure), serotonin (mood regulation), and oxytocin (bonding) in the brain, reducing stress and increasing emotional regulation. Regular practice of kindness can actually increase the density of gray matter in brain areas responsible for empathy. (See discussion of "The Science of Kindness" in Appendix 2, below)
- Executive Functioning (EF): Often called the "air traffic control system" of the brain, EF includes working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control. The science of learning shows that EF is developed through practice, particularly through structured, consistent, and scaffolded opportunities, such as in Montessori or project-based learning. (See "The Science of Executive Functioning Skills and the Developing Brain" in Appendix 3 below.)

**DEEPENING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND ITS POSITIVE IMPACT**
**Both kindness and executive functioning skills should join SEL in becoming permanent parts of APS life across all schools and all levels:**

1. Each of these is crucial to our children as both students and whole people;
2. Each will be important for both work success and quality of life in the future;
3. Each is important for us to teach throughout our school system.
4. Each will deepen students' SEL competencies, as SEL in turn enhances both kindness and EF skills;
5. Kindness will contribute to a more caring school community, deepening of SEL, with EF skills added, will contribute to a more emotionally intelligent and self-managed school community, lessening bullying and discipline issues, which we know to be persistent concerns for APS. (Creating a Culture of Kindness: Using Research-Based Approaches to Prevent Bullying)
6. They hold importance in and of themselves, and would be natural recommendations from a committee such as ours in any case, given the state of current research as well as the world climate.
7. But they also hold the importance of their relationship to SEL, in that their deliberate inclusion/expansion could increase the success of our SEL efforts in several ways:
    a. **Communication and definitions**: SEL is a rather dry term that is less accessible to many than the concept of kindness, or, say, learning time management or getting started on work assignments. Most parents we have consulted do actively want their kids to be kind people, and TA periods have community building/SEL requirements. We have yet to speak to a parent who would not like to see one or more (often many) of their kids' EF skills improve. But while a whole industry now exists around tutoring for EF skills, many of our families, *particularly* those in disadvantaged circumstances, cannot afford to hire a tutoring service for these skills that are crucial to success in school and beyond.
    b. **More politically neutral:** SEL does not deserve the reputation it has been given by some people, few as they are, for "indoctrinating" students into a political philosophy. This issue is recognized elsewhere, as well, as is discussed, for instance, in an article from *Education Week*, SEL by Another Name? Political Pushback Prompts Rebranding. EF skills and kindness do not appear to carry the same concerns.
    c. **More concrete:** Executive functioning skills, many of which can be seen simply as extensions of any one of the five core social and emotional competencies, often are more conceptually accessible in each one's narrower focus and simpler definition – meeting deadlines, for instance. Kindness, too, is a more fully accessible term to all, and more universally understood.

# STUDENT SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE 2025-26 RECOMMENDATION SYSTEM-WIDE KINDNESS AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS INITIATIVES

To implement the Kindness and Executive Function Skills Initiatives, the committee recommends APS take the following actions:

- **The School Board and Superintendent announce kindness and EF skills initiatives**, with a name approved by them, such as "Creating a Community and Culture of Kindness." /"Deepening our Students' 21st Century Crucial Skills for School, Work, and Life." The initiatives would feature **regular inclusion of one concept from each category (kindness and EF skills) in the School Board's and Superintendent's update messages** to parents and staff, and students. This communication should also talk about the connections between kindness, SEL, and EF skills. We also recommend that Dr. Duran and the School Board suggest that administrators bring these topics into teacher/staff meetings.

- **Include families and older students; and capitalize on the involvement of parents/guardians and school-related community groups:**

    - **Ask PTA's to carry the above messages in their own newsletters and offer implementation support to their schools, and/or ask principals to carry the above messages in their own newsletters.** Ask both to consider this area in any potential initiatives of their own. ("Kidsgiving," and "Kindness Clubs," offered at some schools, already demonstrate kindness in action, for instance, and might be amplified further. Speakers on kindness, SEL, and/or EF skills might be brought in by PTA's, as already happens occasionally.) A community of kindness, for instance, certainly includes families and should request their involvement.

    - **Provide parent educational event(s)** as part of the introduction of the kindness and EF skills initiatives.

    - **ACSS/APS can ask to work with CCPTA on similar surveys for PTA's**, and share results and recommendations for PTA support for" Creating a Culture of Kindness in our Schools" (or however it is named), along with the EF skills initiative.

    - **Hold listening sessions organized by ACSS, with staff assistance or by APS:** with elementary school parents; middle school parents and students; and high school students to determine the most important elements of kindness and EF skills from each group's perspectives, and their suggestions for implementation.

    - **Create systemwide Kindness, SEL, and EF Skills events**. This can be done by APS alone or in partnership with ACSS, ACTL, CCPTA, school PTAs and other community groups.

- **Add/offer the free Pre-k through 12 Kindness Curriculum** with age-appropriate curricula for each level, designed to coordinate with existing CASEL SEL curriculum and provided by The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, which offers, among other things, for example:

    - For Pre-K through 8th Grade: FREE K-8 Kindness in the Classroom® Curriculum
    - For High School Students: High School Curriculum
    - Allows schools to become a "Distinguished Kindness School."
    - Accompanying kindness project ideas, free training materials, and free resources such as: Kindness Ideas; Kindness Posters; Coloring Pages; Kindness Bingo; RAK Tag Cards; Kindness Award Certificates; Kindness Bookmarks; 50 Ways to be Kind Poster; How to Start a Kindness Club; Recommended Kindness Books; and Grab and Go Games
    - Kindness at Home lesson plans and Daily Dose of Kindness; Kindness Ideas; Kindness Quotes; Kindness Videos; Kindness Stories; and The Kind Blog

    - Kindness at Work, and Become A Distinguished Kindness Workplace; Workplace Assessment; Free Kindness at Work Calendar; 7 Steps to Create Kindness at Work; Kindness at Work Poster; Kindness Award Certificate; RAK Tag Cards; Kindness Idea

- **Expand SEL work to include Kindness and EF Skill specifics, using the existing CASEL framework and curricula.** (See Appendix 8, or p. 7 of APS-CASEL Brochure for outline of CASEL Core competencies and their elements.) Solicit SEL lead advice (and that of interested staff) on how the initiatives can be incorporated into existing school days/hours and staff work. It is anticipated that a successful kindness/EF initiative will, in the future, lessen some of the existing need for discipline, anti-bullying enforcement, etc.; and support academic performance of all students (including those in vulnerable populations).

- **Share information and resources, capitalize on knowledge already in existence in APS:** Allow ACSS in conjunction with staff, and/or just APS, to conduct a brief on-line survey of schools, to compile an inventory of school-level kindness campaign info, to be redistributed once compiled. (We know that many elementary schools, especially, already do something related to kindness, at the least during Kindness Week, and sometimes more.) Incorporate what is already happening around kindness and EF skill building in APS, and evaluate where, at what levels, with what success, and how can we collect and share information for everyone's use, combined with resources APS has available more broadly. See Appendix 5 for examples of potential survey questions.)

- **Require that principals support kindness, SEL, and executive functioning skills initiatives.**

- **Monitor survey results and assess survey result changes** for improvements and/or areas for future work.

Together, it is our belief and hope that these two additions – kindness and executive functioning skills – will help expand the competencies of all students, and at least equally importantly, will expand the safety net of protective factors needed by all children and youth, but even more by those from more vulnerable populations.

**STAFF RESPONSE:**

## Potential Student Services Committee (ACSS) Future Recommendations/Projects/Events:

- ***Ensure that every APS school has at least one full-time social worker and one full-time school psychologist, as required by the 2024 APS Planning Factors Study Final Recommendations, Slide 10****, by hiring an additional 5.3 elementary school social workers and 4 elementary school psychologists. (Committee's 2024-25 recommendation.)*
- **Possible follow-up work on kindness and EF skills initiatives**
- **Event(s) – ACSS has a history of helping to create a bridge to the community through events that will be beneficial and of interest:**
    - **conflict resolution**/tough conversations across today's divides
    - **Kindness event(s),** both info for families and possibly other ideas
    - **"Crucial Life Skills,"** with SEL and EF combined or separate
    - **Substance use**
    - **Stress, resilience, and/or trauma-informed**
- **Continue to follow SEL progress as well as any Kindness and/or EF skills initiatives**
- **Contribute to more robust trusted adult program** – relationship research shows successful relationships have 20 positive interactions for every single negative.
- **Inventory of ALL free resources in mental wellness** -- we would like to collect a more comprehensive inventory, to reshare across schools and families.
- **Teacher/staff morale** -- what shall we do with last year's research? (EAP – Employee Assistance Program – does lots of work on morale, but we also could pass our interview write-up's to the School Board, too.)
- **Mandatory Adult SEL for school administrators and Syphax;** PL available for all adult staff?
- **Revisit and update ACSS 2017 Sources of Student Stress document**
- **Info sheets/one-pagers on things parents might not know kids are facing,** such as the dangers of AI companions or "friends," new drugs or ways of hiding them.
- **Look into free yoga lessons in schools,** maybe to PE classes or after school, via yoga teacher training programs (teacher certification requires a certain number of hours of free teaching)
- **More on student well-being overall**
- **Trauma-informed practices in our schools,** both in and of themselves and connected to SEL
- **Building resilience/protective factors** – where do we stand at APS, and what further can we recommend?
- *Other ideas would emerge with time, too, as the idea for our current recommendation did, over the course of last year.*

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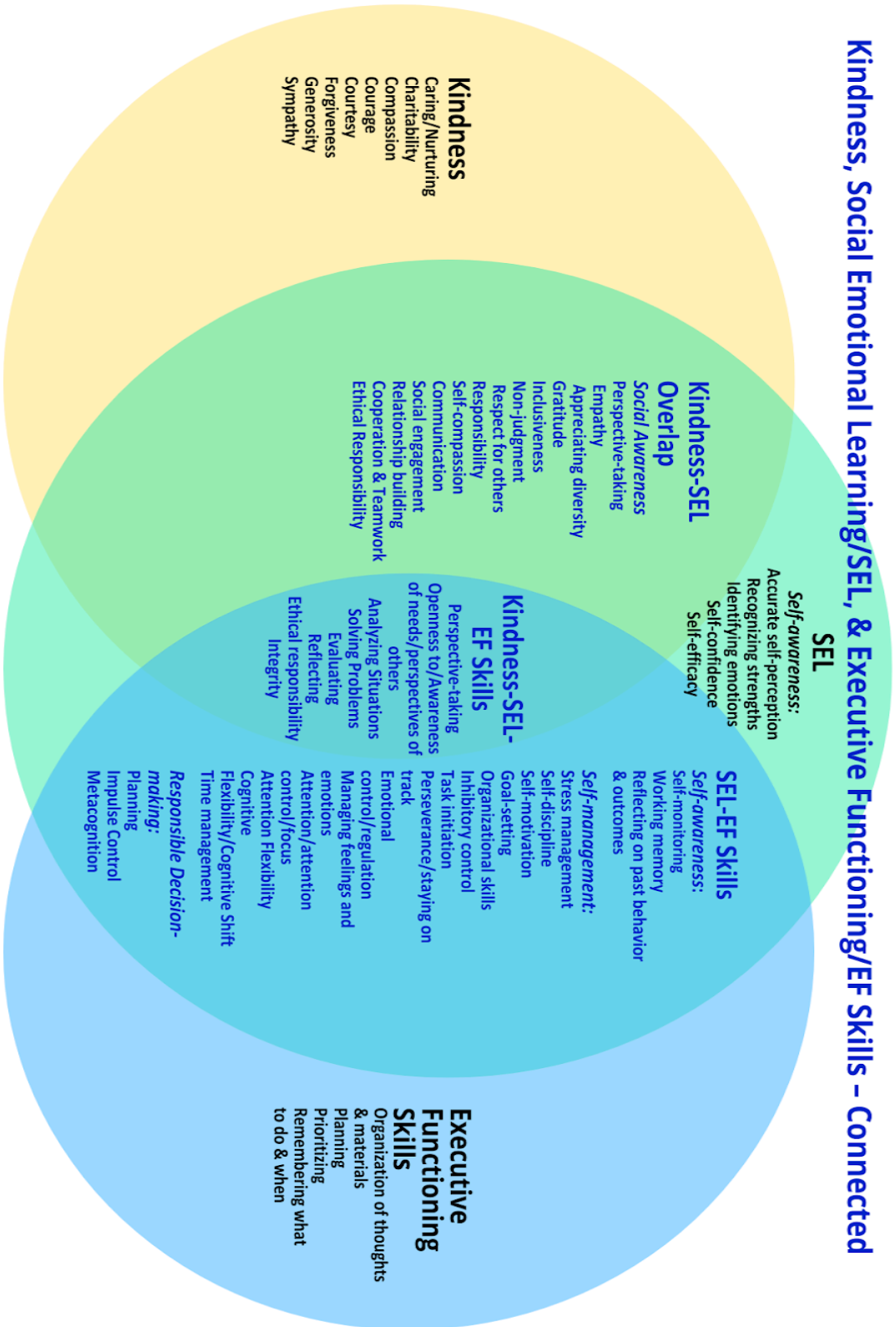
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## APPENDIX 1

**VISUALIZING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN KINDNESS, SEL, & EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS:**
**KINDNESS, SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING/SEL, & EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING/EF SKILLS – CONNECTED**



# APPENDIX 2
## KINDNESS INITIATIVE RATIONALE, KINDNESS SCIENCE & THE BRAIN, AND CONNECTIONS TO SEL

**EXAMINING KINDNESS AS A PRIMARY GOAL:**
Everyone deserves kindness. Everyone deserves to feel respected, understood, safe, and valued. Everyone also deserves to experience the joy – and often growth – that giving kindness to others brings. But it would be a mistake to assume that our children all know how to give kindness, in spite of the fact that they all have the capacity to learn kindness and learn to give it. A kindness initiative in APS, as we envision it, would include everyone, from the very top, to administrators, to teachers, to all other staff, both providing examples for our children and perhaps also making each other's work lives a bit more joyful; and from preschoolers to graduating high schoolers and their families.

**Rationale for a kindness initiative recommendation: "**The ultimate goal of a kindness initiative is to create a safe, comfortable culture and environment for students and teachers alike. By involving students and parents, the likelihood of success increases significantly, and the hope of sustaining kindness over time is a probable outcome." (Why Should My School Have a Kindness Focus? - The Power of Kind). The author continues, outlining the benefits of school-wide kindness initiatives:

- **Improved culture and environment**
- **Reduction in bullying and conflict**
- **Enhanced social and emotional skills**
- **Boost in academic performance**
- **Promotion of inclusion and community**
- **Enhanced mental health and well-being**
- **Strengthened parental/guardian involvement**
- **Long-lasting positive impact**

**Connecting SEL and Kindness:**
As we looked for thoughts that had come before our own, we saw some direct references to the connection between kindness and SEL:

> Acts of kindness can support social and emotional learning areas. Activities that focus on improving relationship skills, such as active listening, conflict resolution, collaboration, and fostering empathy, encourage kindness.
>
> To support the connection between SEL and kindness, parents and teachers alike can explore the following options.
>
> - Model kindness by setting and mirroring the example.
> - Explain what empathy is and show how to be empathetic.
> - Encourage children to give compliments to others.
> - Discuss how acts of kindness make children feel and how others feel when someone is kind to them.
> - Celebrate kind acts. (Social-Emotional Development and the Connection to Kindness)

**Connections between Kindness and SEL at APS.** Ms. Jennifer Gross, APS Coordinator, Social Emotional Learning, put together a set of slides that began the discussion of connections between SEL and kindness (with final page giving examples of connections with executive functioning skills): Kindness and Social Emotional Learning

We appreciate teachers and staff very much. We are very sensitive to how busy they are, and it is not our intention to add to their plates, but rather, for APS to provide free resources for teachers/staff as they continue things they are already doing through SEL, in conjunction with SEL leads and Student Services Staff, and through the Office of School Climate and Culture. As Ms. Jen Gross said when she participated in our October 16 meeting, there are systems already in place, but this addition gives a bit more focus and free, up-to-date resources to pull from at all levels. The free Kindness curriculum provides tools for the toolbox, with no effort needed by staff to write or design a new curriculum. (See ACSS Meeting Minutes, October 17, 2025) The free Kindness curriculum provided by the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation provides a reference point with help, to add to already-in-place work such as Responsive Classroom and Second Step, for instance.

We believe that the next steps to fuller and more robust implementation and results of the APS social and emotional learning initiative involve broadening the scope beyond current SEL curricula and align with the work of the Office of School Climate and Culture in creating awareness of the importance of the power of kindness, in two important ways:

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- First, we propose **capitalizing on the significant overlaps** between kindness and the SEL work that already exists within APS.
- Second we propose also **utilizing the fact that kindness is its own concept, too, and one that is accessible and understandable to all students and adults**. We hope that a kindness initiative will both make SEL concepts more accessible *and* provide benefits to individual students and school communities of its own, as it is a necessity for positive relationships and inclusive communities.

Our recommendation dovetails well with work by Ms. Jennifer Gross, Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning; and also with the work of the Office of Climate and Culture, as we found when we spoke with Mr. Gradis White last year, and with Dr. Bonar more recently. Creating a climate of kindness would broaden the Tier 1 SEL work and the work of the Office of Climate and Culture in important ways, helping to lower the occurrence of serious incidents, creating a more proactive than reactive approach. As Dr. Bonar told us when he kindly met with us, kindness, or lack thereof, is at the base of many problems and their solutions: improved attendance; improved suspension rates; feeling safe at school; improved morale of students and teachers. Behavior also is improved by kindness: classroom management is enhanced greatly by positivity/kindness/positive reinforcement – positive reward instead of punishment – using the proverbial carrot rather than stick. Dr. Bonar told us that APS finds that many of its master teachers (or those who have mastered classroom management) already do this. The code of conduct he said, in fact, boils down to kindness – discipline and Code of Conduct essentially would not be needed if kindness prevailed.

Dr. Bonar also suggested that a Climate of Kindness campaign likely would help with providing a trusted adult to more students. He said that in his observation, too many APS students still do not have a trusted adult, or rather the two or three each student should have. In his experience as a principal, every staff member under him had a list of kids; then those not on anyone's list would be assigned to an adult, who would touch base for 10 minutes. (See ACSS Meeting Minutes, November 20, 2025.)

In connection with protective factors, Dr. Bonar told us The "Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families (APCYF) promotes the Search Institute's framework of 40 developmental assets to help young people grow up to be healthy, caring, and responsible adults. Some of the protective factors cited (roughly 15 of the 40) are relevant to our conversation, as they are kindness components and/or SEL competencies. The APCYF uses this framework to encourage community-wide efforts to increase these assets for local youth. ( 40 Developmental Assets®, by Search Institute)

**The Science of Kindness:**
We all have personal definitions of kindness, an intangible but immeasurably important part of our lives, characters, and hopes for ourselves and our children. Only recently, however, has the science of kindness become an area of formal study. "Once considered too esoteric to study scientifically, kindness joined topics such as gratitude and forgiveness as research themes after the "positive psychology" movement prompted a shift in the late 1990s from focusing solely on mental health problems to examining the effects of positive experiences, emotions, and traits, VanderWeele notes." In the "nature vs. nurture" question, this same researcher, VanderWeele, says that while it is true that some people seem to be more naturally inclined towards acts of kindness towards others, "it's possible to nudge yourself toward a different mindset. Performing acts of kindness — even if your heart isn't fully in them at first — can change you from the outside in, VanderWeele says." This same piece notes something we've seen many times over – that kindness begets more kindness: "If you act kindly toward another, there's also a propagation effect — that person goes on to act more kindly," VanderWeele adds. "There's a profound contagiousness to kindness. "https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-healing-power-of-kindness. Harvard's Gina Vild, writing in *Psychology Today* goes a big step further, saying kindness can, in fact, create a "butterfly effect," where the the ripple effects are many times broader than the original good deed.

Brain science tells us that acts of kindness increase the happiness hormones in the brain – oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin. (The Science of Kindness | Cedars-Sinai) In addition, studies have shown that acts of kindness decrease stress, anxiety, pain, depression, and blood pressure, while some study results showed not only the above-mentioned increases in positive brain hormones, but also increased energy, and even increased lifespan (44% lower risk of dying early, according to one study cited). RandomActsOfKindness.org – The Science Of Kindness

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The study of kindness is young yet, and we could not find a definitive, broadly agreed-upon list of the elements of kindness. In addition to those mentioned above, we sampled a number of additional publications, including The Four Pillars of Kindness - The Honey Foundation; 6 Keys to the Power of Kindness | Psychology Today; Kindness matters guide | Mental Health Foundation; and The Power of Kindness - Lindner Center of HOPE.

We saw a number of lists of the elements of kindness, none of which we would disagree with, but also none of which seemed comprehensive. By listing them overtly, we believe we can see more clearly the strong relationships, and in fact many overlaps, between kindness and SEL. (See Venn Diagram on Appendix 1, as well). This clear relationship lends itself to further connecting kindness and SEL in day-to-day, as well, including throughout APS:

**Caring/Nurturing**
**Charitability**
**Compassion**
**Courage**
**Courtesy**
**Empathy**
**Forgiveness**
**Generosity**
**Gratitude**
**Appreciating Diversity**
**Inclusiveness**
**Integrity**
**Non-judgment**
**Openness to Awareness of needs/perspectives of others/perspective taking**
**Cooperation & Teamwork**
**Respect for others**
**Responsibility**
**Self-compassion**
**Communication**
**Sympathy**
**Social engagement**
**Relationship building**
**Cooperation & Teamwork**
**Ethical Responsibility**
**Integrity**

# APPENDIX 3
## MORE ON EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS, BRAIN DEVELOPMENT SCIENCE, & CONNECTIONS TO SEL

**Rationale for Executive Functioning Skills Initiative:**
The other expansion upon SEL we propose is adding more explicit work on executive functioning skills. These, too, are crucial life skills. Also, like SEL, they are necessary for success in school, work, and life. Many parents recognize and express concerns about their children's executive functioning, whether they use the term or not, as they think about their students' current and future needs.

**According to the Cleveland Clinic, executive functioning skills are defined as: "skills that you use to manage everyday tasks like making plans, solving problems and adapting to new situations. The three main skills are working memory, cognitive flexibility and inhibition control…**.Executive function refers to mental processes (executive functioning skills) that help you set and carry out goals. You use these skills to solve problems, make plans and manage emotions. Research suggests strong executive functioning skills make a difference in your mental and physical health and quality of life. Poor skills can affect your daily ability to do well in school, find and keep a job, or have strong social connections."

**The Science of Executive Functioning Skills and Brain Development**
Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child calls executive functioning skills the brain's "air traffic control system," which, in turn, needs, among other things, supportive relationships and activities, with modeling, engagement, reduction in stress, and fostered social connections. Harvard's In Brief: Executive Function states that, "When children have had opportunities to develop executive function and self regulation skills successfully, both individuals and society experience lifelong benefits, including school achievements, positive behaviors, good health and successful work."

As brain science tells us, the process of developing these skills occurs throughout childhood, teens, and into our 20s, involving the prefrontal cortex, which we know matures over the course of this time. For EF skills, the prefrontal cortex builds and strengthens many connections or pathways between itself and other parts of the brain, again with these connections maturing during our 20s. So all of the years of childhood and youth are critically important for building these skills, which in the brain involves building and strengthening these brain pathways, in order to reach success in not just school, but in work, relationships, life, and as part of society. InBrief: Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning

**Which Skills Are Considered Executive Functioning Skills?**
Harvard, in 2012, identified three skill families: working memory, inhibitory control/self-regulation, and mental flexibility. EF skill consideration has continued since then, but the list seems not to be entirely definitive yet, as this relatively young field continues to develop, and as many of the lists available come from schools and tutoring organizations. Here is a sample of pieces we found with different lists: Executive Functioning Skills - The Pathway 2 Success; The 8 pillars - LD@School; Executive functioning is key to future success. Here's how educators can embed it in the classroom | K-12 Dive; Executive Functions Explained – Lively Minds Tutoring; Executive Function (EF) and Study Skills | The StudyPro; https://cerebrate.education/; and How Executive Function Links SEL/Academics. (Please see Appendix 6 for examples of different lists of EF skills made by different organizations.)

From the number of lists we consulted, we developed what we might call a "master list," below, for the purposes of this recommending document. Obviously, not all elements of the collection below are on every EF skills list, but we see reason to consider all of those below necessary to academic success. All are closely related to – or even can be considered to be contained within – SEL core competencies, as well:

**Attention/attention control/focus**
**Attention Flexibility**
**Cognitive Flexibility/Cognitive Shift**
**Emotional Control**
**Goal-setting**
**Metacognition**
**Managing feelings and emotions**
**Organization of thoughts & materials**
**Perseverance**
**Planning**
**Prioritizing**

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**Problem-solving**
**Reflecting on past behavior & outcomes**
**Remembering what to do & when**
**Self-control/inhibition control**
**Self-monitoring**
**Staying on track**
**Task Initiation**
**Time-management**
**Working Memory**

The clear connection of EF skills to SEL presents exciting opportunities to build and improve our students' EF skills while also building and improving their SEL skills. Our research found favorable discussion regarding exactly this, of which the following is an example:

> By intentionally connecting executive functioning skills with SEL competencies, educators can create learning environments that support both academic performance and social-emotional development. This holistic approach:
>
> - **Fosters Relationship Skills:** Students learn to navigate social situations effectively.
> - **Promotes Self-Management:** Students develop strategies to regulate their behavior and emotions.
> - **Supports Responsible Decision Making:** Students make thoughtful choices based on reflection and understanding. (The Intersection of Executive Functioning Skills and Social-Emotional Learning: Foundational Skills As The Building Blocks for Academic and Life Success Part 2 - MCIU - Learning Network)

We see EF skills as foundational life skills along with SEL, and see the link with SEL as a source of support for both. We believe teaching EF skills should be a consistent part of what APS does for all students, as part of the curriculum. We also know that coordination among a student's teachers becomes less and less practicable as students move beyond elementary school and through the secondary grades. Also, while IEPs and 504s might often list EF skills whose deficits have become major obstacles, a more consistent approach, early and throughout, and a more deliberate decision to teach EF skills across the board, will help *all* students navigate more independently, manage differing teachers' expectations, exert more impulse control and plan their work, feel greater self-confidence and less stress and frustration as they succeed more in part by building habits and skills through repetition and upward spiraling of skills learning as they progress.

In a November 2025 piece in *K-12 Dive*, two members of CASEL leadership are quoted in addressing the behavioral, self-esteem, and future success they say EF skills teaching can bring:

> Rista Plate, senior researcher at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] cited literature showing that the development of social-emotional learning skills like organization, planning and self-management that fall under the executive functioning umbrella are associated with higher rates of graduation (by about 23%) and even employment and overall well being later in life….Additionally, research points to "executive-functioning-related skills as being a key mechanism for supporting students' behavior in the classroom, giving them skills and tools that help them engage in learning," she said.
>
> "These are skills that need to be practiced," said Heather Schwartz, practice advisor at CASEL. "They can be learned and strengthened."
>
> Schwartz said classroom jobs (as an example) give students an opportunity to practice those roles. "It also creates a strong sense of belonging when kids understand that they all have important roles in the classroom," Schwartz said. "The students who are struggling the most with self-management benefit from both having the jobs to practice those skills, but also being seen for their strengths in the classroom." (Executive functioning is key to future success. Here's how educators can embed it in the classroom | K-12 Dive.)

## APPENDIX 4
### EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS – SAMPLE LISTS

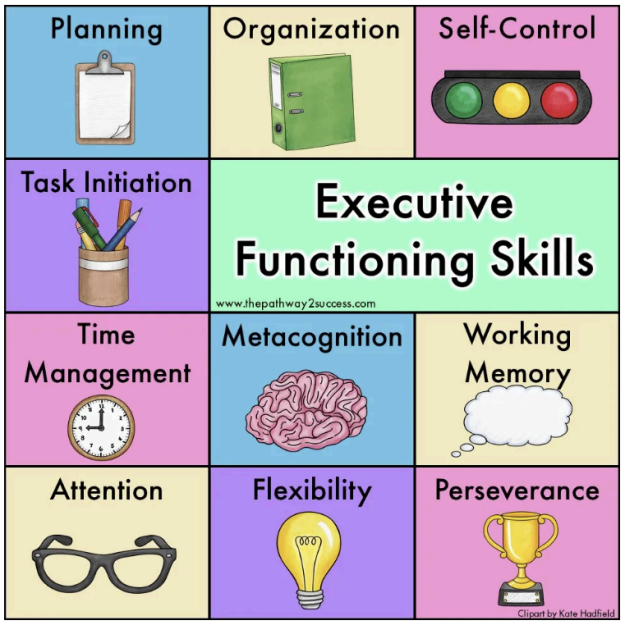
As you can see, lists of executive functioning skills differ in their exact content, most likely as the field moves towards a more definitive and agreed-upon list, but has not developed it yet. Here is a list of six competencies, followed by a somewhat differing list of 8 executive functioning skills:

**A closer look at what's involved in EF**

Executive function is a set of cognitive processes that not only provide the ability to control thoughts and behavior but also emotions. I like to concentrate on the following six:

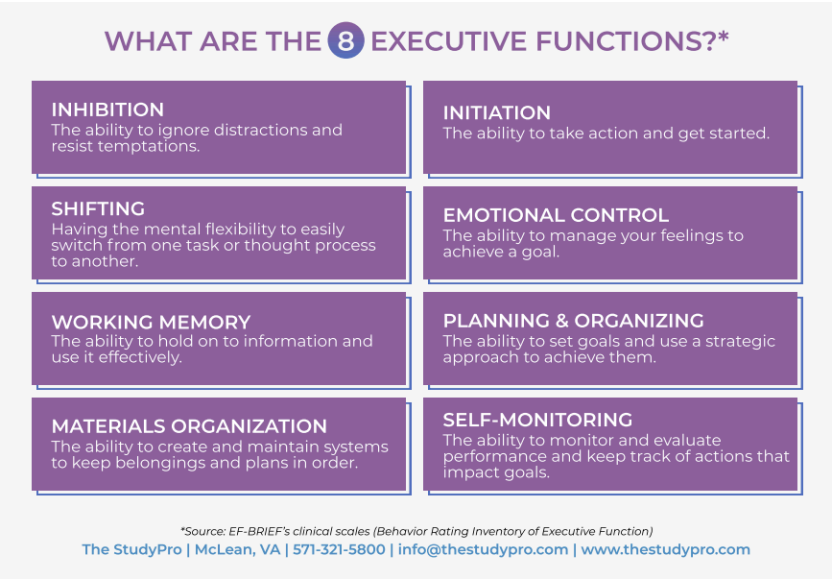
1. *Attention and focus:* The ability to tune in and stay on task.
2. *Working memory:* The small amount of information that can be held in mind and used in the execution of cognitive tasks.
3. *Cognitive flexibility:* The ability to switch between thinking about two different concepts or to think about multiple concepts simultaneously.
4. *Planning and organization:* The ability to sequence your steps to reach your goal.
5. *Impulse inhibition:* The ability to inhibit natural, habitual, or dominant emotional or behavioral responses in order to select a more appropriate emotion or behavior that is consistent with completing our goals
6. *Self-monitoring:* How we understand our behaviors and how we adjust to make changes for the future.

[How Executive Function Links SEL/Academics](#).



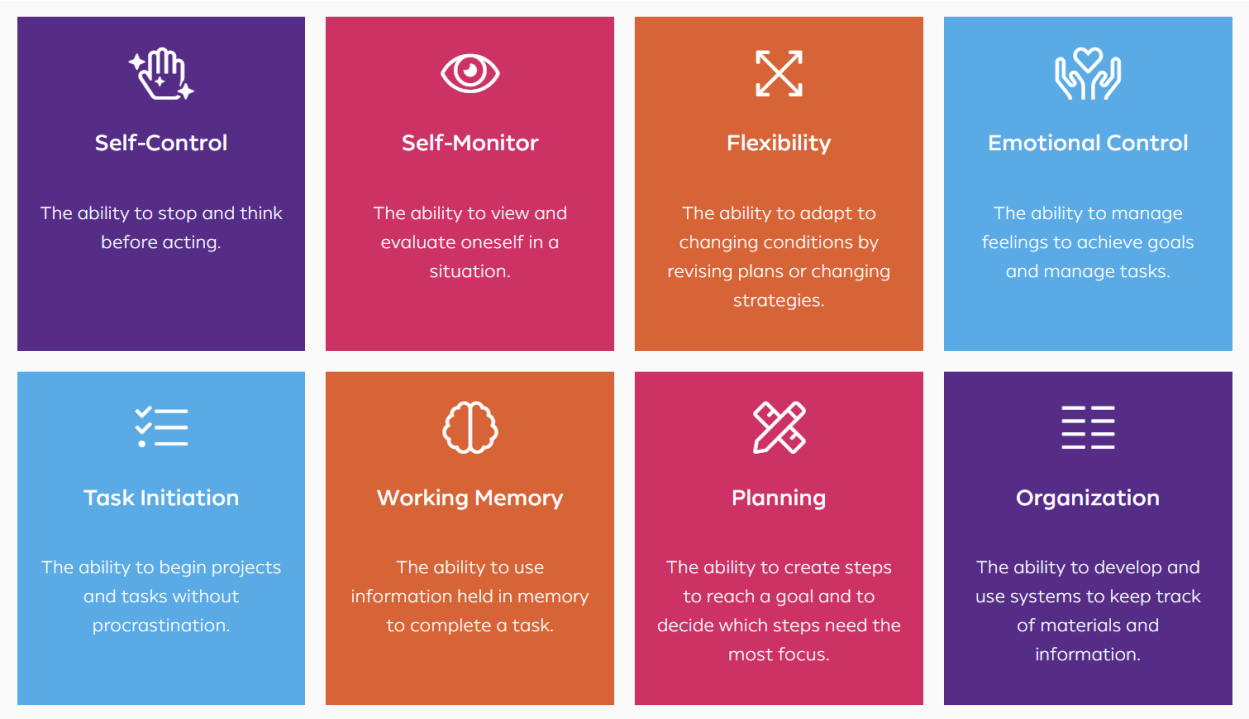

[Executive Functioning Skills - The Pathway 2 Success](#)

We often see lists of eight executive functioning skills or competencies:




https://thestudypro.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Quick-Guide-to-Executive-Functions-and-Study-Skills.pdf

However, they do not necessarily agree on the exact skills or wording:




https://cerebrate.education/

For this reason, we've combined those we found from different lists below, preferring to err on the side of perhaps a touch of redundancy over excluding anything:

**Attention Flexibility**
**Cognitive Flexibility/Cognitive Shift**
**Emotional Control**
**Goal-setting**
**Metacognition**
**Managing feelings and emotions**
**Organization of thoughts & materials**
**Perseverance**
**Planning**
**Prioritizing**
**Problem-solving**
**Reflecting on past behavior & outcomes**
**Remembering what to do & when**
**Self-control/inhibition control**
**Self-monitoring**
**Staying on track**
**Task Initiation**
**Time-management**
**Working Memory**

## APPENDIX 5
### POTENTIAL QUESTIONNAIRES TO SEND TO STAFF

**WE RECOMMEND CHECKING IN WITH STAFF FOR THE PURPOSES OF ASSESSING HOW MUCH OUR SCHOOLS ALREADY HAVE KINDNESS AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS INITIATIVES, AND COLLECTING AN INVENTORY OF GOOD IDEAS, LESS SUCCESSFUL IDEAS TO AVOID, AND FREE RESOURCES OTHERS IN APS CAN USE**

We recommend inventories on current levels of both kindness and EF skills. We are aware that schools within APS sometimes differ in their approaches, and hope this effort could help all to see what is available to them. Below are draft questionnaires to send to school leaders such as principals, Student Services staff, SEL leads, and any interested teachers. We would expect that the questions might be changed to suit APS more closely, but they serve as an example.

**POTENTIAL KINDNESS QUESTIONNAIRE:**

- What work on kindness at your school are you proud of?
- Is kindness part of your SEL work, or is it a separate initiative?
- What could be replicated in other schools? (We are doing data gathering for our recommendation.)
- What materials do you have access to/do APS schools have access to for free?
- Do you have a kindness initiative, and if so, what is it? What's working; what isn't?
- Do you have thoughts on an easy way to quantify or measure success?
- Does your initiative tap into student groups – Nat'l Honor Society; Youth Advisory Bd? Kindness Club? Senior Project?

**POTENTIAL EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE:**

- Do you teach any EF skills? If so, which ones and how?
- How are they being incorporated into the curriculum? Are they part of your SEL work, or separate?
- In what classes or at what levels are they being taught?
- Is this teacher-specific, or do all teachers teach EF skills?
- Approximately what percentage of kids are struggling with EF skills at your school?
- In which EF skills would you say your students most need improvement?
- What materials do you/your teachers use? What can be replicated throughout your school or at other schools?
- Survey to all teachers? Must be easy/quick: check boxes, like 25%/50/75% struggling, check box
- Connection between homework and EF skills?

## APPENDIX 6
### THE RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS FOUNDATION'S KINDNESS FRAMEWORK

Below are some features of the free Kindness Curriculum that we recommend APS use in the kindness initiative we recommend (with agreement from the Office of Student Services, including Mr. Jeffrey Carpenter, Jr., Executive Director of Student Services, and Ms. Jennifer Gross, Coordinator, Social-Emotional Learning):




## The Kindness Framework

There's a lot to read about kindness here on our website. But one of the most beautiful things about kindness is its ease and simplicity.

That's reflected in our "Kindness Framework", which is what we call the simple, five-step cycle that we follow in each of our lesson plans. Here's how it works:

Kindness in the Classroom lessons teach kindness skills through a step-by step framework of Share, Inspire, Empower, Act, and Reflect. Each lesson starts with the 'share' step to reinforce learning from previous lessons. The 'act' piece is woven into the lessons but really takes place in the projects.

### STEP 1: SHARE

Each of our lessons starts with a 'share' where the class can share what they've learned and experienced with others since the previous lesson. This reinforces what they've learned and experienced, helps others to experience it and makes it far more likely that they'll express kindness again!

### STEP 2: INSPIRE

Through various modalities, each kindness lesson is designed to inspire students and allow teachers to feel inspired as well!

### STEP 3: EMPOWER

Inspiration is good—but transformation begins to happen when students are given the tools that will let them act on that inspiration. The 'empower' step is for teachers to lead the class through discussions designed to empower students to find ways to be kind in their daily lives.

### STEP 4: ACT

The opportunity to act exists throughout the lessons, but it really comes into play in the projects. Once students have the ideas and the tools, they put it all into action. The unit projects will have students bringing real, tangible kindness into the world.

### STEP 5: REFLECT

At the end of each lesson and project, students will have experienced how great it feels to perform acts of kindness. And what does everyone want to do after doing something that feels great (besides 'do it again')? Talk about it, of course! At the end of each lesson, teachers guide students to reflect on what they've just experienced and learned & identify how doing kindness affects their own lives and the lives of those around them.

**What makes our lesson plans unique?**

**100% FREE**
CASEL SELect® Program
Rooted in Kindness
Focus on Teacher Self Care
Mapped to Standards
Strong Equity Lens
Teacher Approved
Available In Over 100 Languages

Note: We use Google Translate to create translated materials, so please be aware that translations may not be 100% accurate.

**The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation**
**FREE K-8 Kindness in the Classroom® Curriculum**

# APPENDIX 7
## THE TREVOR PROJECT AND ANTI-BULLYING

Regarding students with LGBTQ+ identities, recent studies by The Trevor Project have examined social and community support, as well as anti-bullying policies in schools, to see their impact on the mental health of transgender and nonbinary youth. The goal of kindness initiatives and anti-bullying policies are the same: ensure that students feel safe in school.

In 2025, The Trevor Project released a study examining, in part, the effect of social support from friends and community. To measure social support, the researchers used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, which asks these 12 questions. (Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) - Scale Items and Scoring Information)

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.
2. There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows.
3. My family really tries to help me.
4. I get the emotional help & support I need from my family.
5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.
6. My friends really try to help me.
7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.
8. I can talk about my problems with my family.
9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.
10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.
11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.
12. I can talk about my problems with my friends.

Using this scale, researchers determined that youth with self-reported high levels of social support was associated with 28% lower odds of considering suicide in the past year. This suggests that programs designed to create more positive interactions as measured in this scale could improve the mental health of LGBTQ+ students.

The Trevor Project (2025). Friends, Family, and Community: Social Support and the Health of Transgender and Nonbinary Young People of Color. https://doi.org/10.70226/WKQJ1410

Similarly, another 2025 study from The Trevor Project that looked at anti-bullying policies in schools is relevant to a kindness initiative. This study found that:

- LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school had an anti-LGBTQ+ bullying policy reported the highest rates of feeling that their school affirmed their LGBTQ+ identity (69%).
- LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school had an anti-LGBTQ+ bullying policy reported the lowest rates of being bullied at school (28%).
- Past-year suicide attempts were lowest for those reporting a policy prohibiting anti-LGBTQ+ bullying (10%) and those who did not know their school's policy (11%).

Together these studies indicate that schools can undertake affirmative programs that should have a positive impact on students' mental health.

The Trevor Project (2025 study). Anti-Bullying Policies in School and LGBTQ+ Young People

## APPENDIX 8

### SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CORE COMPETENCIES

**CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning**

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING, An APS-CASEL Brochure, p. 7

# CASEL's Five Core Competencies

## SELF-AWARENESS SE

The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

- Identifying emotions
- Accurate self-perception
- Recognizing strengths
- Self-confidence
- Self-efficacy

## SELF-MANAGEMENT SM

The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- Impulse control
- Stress management
- Self-discipline
- Self-motivation
- Goal-setting
- Organizational skills

## SOCIAL AWARENESS SO

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- Perspective-taking
- Empathy
- Appreciating diversity
- Respect for others

## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS RS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- Communication
- Social engagement
- Relationship-building
- Teamwork

## RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING RM

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- Identifying problems
- Analyzing situations
- Solving problems
- Evaluating
- Reflecting
- Ethical responsibility

**Resources to Support Student Success and Well-Being:** A Social-Emotional Learning Reference Guide | March 2019

# APPENDIX 9
## RELEVANT LINKS AND PAST RECOMMENDATIONS

**ACSS Past Recommendations:**

- **Final ACSS Recommendation 2024-25**
- **Final ACSS Recommendation 2022-23**
- **ACTL Recommendations, 2020-22 (ACSS p. 5)**
- FINAL ACSS Recommending Report 2019-2020jh (2)[2319].docx
- ACSS Recommending Report, 2017-18
- **(Student Services Recommendations missing on ACTL website, 2014-19)**

**SEL & School Community:**

- **ACSS High School Listening Session**
- 2017 Brief Interview on Creating Supportive School Community with the Late All-Star Principal, Andrea Taylor
- Student Services Internal Briefing Summary, Heading Towards CASEL Audit, February 2021
- SEL STUDENT ESSAY (permission to share was granted)

**Student Stress:**

Sources of Student Stress Compilation Draft, Student Services Subcommittee Internal Submission, November 2017

**Staff Morale:**

Conversation with Josh Folb, APS Teacher & AEA Officer
CONVERSATION WITH AEA PRESIDENT JUNE PRAKASH, April 2025

**Response to Potential Advisory Changes:**

Why Should the Student Services Committee Continue to Exist? Unanimous Vote October 2025
Comments from Student Services Advisory Committee on Proposed Advisory Restructuring/Reimagining 10-16-25
ACTL Chairs' 10/25 Response to Advisory Working Group Recommendations PDF

## APPENDIX 10
### PAST ACSS RECOMMENDATIONS

**2024-25 RECOMMENDATION:**

**Student Services Advisory Committee**
**Recommendation Final – March 13, 2025**

**Recommendation: Ensure that every APS school has at least one full-time social worker and one full-time school psychologist, as required by the 2024 APS Planning Factors Study Final Recommendations, Slide 10, by hiring an additional 5.3 elementary school social workers and 4 elementary school psychologists.** *(Please see highlighted portions below for changes that have been made since the Committee's initial recommendation submission and Work Session.)*

**SUMMARY**

*When mentally able/ready, students can participate in educational activities, and learn to the best of their ability. Factors that may interfere with their learning include unmet needs such as food/financial/housing insecurity, family disruptions, social-emotional concerns such as bullying/anxiety/depression, and unmet educational needs requiring an IEP or other educational intervention. In addition to teaching staff, all of these needs can involve the support and intervention of the School Social Workers and School Psychologists.*

In addition, it is essential that the experts be on hand, already in the building, when an emergency arises. Support from the trained mental health professionals will be needed immediately, by students and likely by teachers and other staff members, as well. The on-site presence of the psychologist and/or social worker can affect whether an emergency's outcome is positive or negative, and to what degree. Our school system and its students are no strangers to tragedies, and we feel that adequate staffing is an absolutely necessary part of preventing tragedy where possible. The increasing student need at the elementary level is made starkly and frighteningly clear by these APS elementary numbers:

1. Since the start of the 2023-24 school year, **69.6% of all APS Threat Assessments were for elementary students.**

2. Since the start of the 2023-24 school year, **35.3% of all APS Suicide Risk Assessments were for elementary students.**

It is our belief that, due to the potential harm that could come to students if their schools are not properly staffed with these important experts, APS should approach this additional staffing as something it can't afford *not* to do:

- Young lives and futures can be changed for the better with early intervention
- Crises can be averted and/or mitigated
- Viewed from a financially pragmatic perspective, catching problems earlier allows for earlier intervention, which saves potentially much greater amounts of staff time and effort, therefore financial and other resources, later.

School psychologists and social workers also help to reinforce and create the protective factors children and youth need, so that they can be more resilient in the face of our current societal climate and past pandemic effects. The increasing insecurity of Federal jobs due to changes in policy and procedures are already impacting families, an issue that *we know* is trickling down to children. The current political turmoil and the intolerance shown to migrant, minority, and LGBTQIA families and students and those with disabilities, and losses of students in recent years, all contribute to increasing feelings of insecurity as well.

APS elementary schools are the only APS schools without a full-time school social worker and school psychologist in each building. Additionally, our ratios of students to psychologists and social workers far exceed those recommended by their professions (see below).

Finally, adding elementary school psychologists and social workers was ranked as **one of the top 10 recommendations overall,** in the most recent APS Planning Factors Study Final Recommendations, as can be seen on Slide 10, entitled, "The Design Team's ranking represents a prioritization of APS' neediest student populations and teacher support," where the design team, in fact, **recommended more additional staff than our own recommendation requests**. Adding the staff we request would begin phasing in those positions whose need has been recognized and demonstrated.

**We therefore recommend hiring 5.3 social workers and 4 psychologists so that every APS school will have at least one full-time social worker and one full-time psychologist**. While this also does not bring APS to the ratios recommended by the professional associations (see below), it recognizes APS budget difficulties while providing one of each professional, full-time in each building, allowing more staff hours for these professionals' large and sometimes overwhelming workloads. Crucially, as we've emphasized above, it also assures that when emergencies arise, the experts are on hand, rather than at another school that shares them.

**Staff Response**

Staff is supportive of these recommendations, particularly as they are in alignment with the APS Planning Factors priorities established during the 2023-24 school year.

APS has done a great deal to support the social emotional and behavioral health needs of students at the secondary level over the last several years, including adding additional substance abuse counselors and creating intervention counselor positions for the middle and high schools. However, given increased needs amongst elementary students and families since the pandemic, there remains a need for additional staffing to ensure that the appropriate staff are available to assist with student behaviors, mental health, and barriers to attendance for our youngest learners.

As noted in this document, there are a significant percentage of student behaviors at the elementary level that rise to the level of requirement for a threat assessment:

- These situations are not specific to certain schools within the division, but rather occur across the district.
- It is challenging to develop comprehensive plans to support students in the development of new strategies and skills when there are not consistent providers at all elementary schools, five days a week, to provide intensive support to the student and to teachers.

Currently, factors such as school enrollment, percentages of students identified as economically disadvantaged, and percentages of students with disabilities are used to determine the percentages of a school assignment for psychologists and social workers. This does leave some elementary schools with fewer resources to address student mental and behavioral health challenges, particularly those that require more intensive and potentially daily intervention, support, and reinforcement. By establishing a baseline of at least one psychologist and one social worker at each school, APS would be able to better ensure a steady quality of services across the district.

**(Most relevant sections are highlighted in pink below.)**

## 2023-24
## Recommendation 2:

**Ensure Adequate Staffing and Role Definitions as set forth below: Hire one Director of Student Wellness & Support, two Student Services Specialists [Descriptions], and additional school-based Student Services professionals (consistent with nationally-recognized professional organization ratios). Additional Student Services professionals are needed district-wide to ensure ALL schools meet the recommended ratios of their respective professional organizations.**

**Need:** Adequate staffing within Student Services is vital to APS' ability to effectively support students. APS must have enough staff who serve schools full-time, regardless of funding source, and central office staff dedicated to supporting school-based staff, and ensuring APS can provide all students with equitable access to student services professionals, support, resources and a foundation crucial to their overall wellbeing and success. This cannot happen without sufficient school staffing. APS must prioritize mental health by seeing the need for more Student Services staff so that they can deliver comprehensive school services.

We are in a mental health and substance abuse crisis that is killing our students. Low-income students in particular lack access to and availability of therapists. Coordination with community mental health providers and incorporating DHS staff into schools helps to ensure equitable access, but it is not a substitute for school-based mental health services. We need more Student Services staff to meet recommended ratios AND to meet the ratios set forth by APS. Without sufficient APS staffing, programs cannot be effectively implemented; students cannot be known by name, strength, and need; and student sobriety and mental health cannot be prioritized. Current ratios are inadequate to student needs and lead to decreased retention of staff.

**Solution**: Hire a sufficient number of school Student Services staff to meet professionally recommended staffing ratios in recognition of APS' diverse student needs.

Hire three new Syphax FTEs to provide support to school based staff in the implementation and management of various student services programs in schools. The proposed Syphax staff should help coordinate and integrate SEL, drug prevention, and mental health support in

Prioritize filling the current vacancies of school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and substance abuse counselors. The School Board has previously acknowledged the importance of providing these positions by including them in the budget. **All schools must have full-time, daily coverage of school psychologists, social workers, school counselors, and substance abuse counselors consistent with national ratio standards.** This is crucial to the effective implementation and integration of SEL throughout the system, and to the wellbeing of Arlington students that these positions are filled. **The School Board should make filling existing Student Services vacancies an HR priority, and assess what changes might be needed for the effective recruitment and retention of these staff (including compensation and benefits commensurate with area localities).**

**Budgetary Implications and/or Implementation**
Needs: 3.0 FTE, potentially fully-or-partially offset by Medicaid reimbursement funds.

**Strategic Plan Alignment**:
Core Values Supported: Excellence, Equity, Inclusivity and Integrity.
Goals Supported: Student Wellbeing
Strategies Supported: Student Wellbeing Strategies 2, 3, 4 and 5.
https://www.apsva.us/strategic-plan/student-well-being/

Committee vote: Unanimous

**Staff response**: Per the Arlington School Board's Strategic Plan, APS is working to implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programs and evidence-and-research-based interventions for students who need more targeted or intensive support in the areas of behavioral health and wellness. Further, due to higher levels of need for intensive supports as substantiated by data, APS has also entered into multiple partnerships that expand opportunities for students to access mental health services within the community. Additionally, Medicaid reimbursement is changing to allow for more services, including those for general education services, to be eligible. In order to support implementation, coordination, and training, to include on-site side-by-side coaching, of all of these initiatives, and to align them with ongoing work around the Arlington Tiered Systems of Support, additional staff are needed.

**********

## 2022-23
## Recommendation 2:

The committee has previously recommended adjusting the staffing ratios for school psychologists and social workers to allow for one full-time psychologist and one full-time social worker assigned to each elementary, middle, high, and alternative program school. In the meantime, APS has begun a pilot program adding SEL school leads and support in the central office. The committee believes APS should be prepared to continue this additional SEL support in the future. The SEL leads have been able to provide additional help to the schools in the handling of SEL, for example:

- Provide communication to parents and families around SEL survey results (interpreting the report) and in general information and knowledge
- Help increase the overall survey response rates (89% response rate vs. 60% prior to having the leads)
- Help principals in schools review survey data, and use the information to assist the school in decision making, not just in SEL areas.

As noted before, the strategic plan has goals and objectives around student well-being, and furthermore a mission that all APS students learn and thrive in safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments across the entire system (and in each school). Adequate support in the implementation, rollout and continuing management of SEL is vital to this goal. We believe that adding specific central office leadership and paid school based support will be important. A future recommendation may be to allocate the following resources to schools and central office:

- SEL leads in schools. Need additional funds moving forward. Make sure additional funds in stipend are included in the student services operating budget
- Central Office Director of SEL programs, with a specific focus on student well-being goals.
- Central Office Specialist to support the universal roll out of the SEL curriculum and CASEL recommendations.
- Give parents resources to help them know how to build student well-being skills at home (as community support/services is limited)

Adequate staffing in this area (including school-based staff and central office staff that will provide vital support to staff based in schools) will help APS provide all students equitable access to student services professionals. In addition, it can ensure equity between all schools in supporting all of our students at a time when mental health related issues for students are on the rise, and at a time when crucial mental health referral services are limited. There is not sufficient mental health care available to our children locally to meet the needs that already exist and are expected to continue. This makes it more important than ever that APS have adequate internal resources to address rising needs for students. Not all elementary schools currently have full time services for their students, and some school Psychologists and social workers have multiple school responsibilities. Student needs for school psychologists and social workers do not match the availability of these professionals.

The budget expense for additional full-time social workers and psychologists was estimated to be $2,160,000/year. The projected budget for the School SEL leads and central office SEL support staff is $400,000 to $500,000 per year. We are aware of the budget constraints that APS faces, but we believe this need is too great to be left unmet.

**********

## 2015-2019
## Summaries of Recommendations, Responses, and Actions Taken:

**2018-19 Non-recommending year:** Counselor-to-student ratio in elementary schools, 1:444, and in secondary schools, 1:244; the American School Counselor Association recommends 1:250. Psychologist-to-student ratio, 1:775; the National Association of School Psychologists recommends 1:650. Social Worker-to-student ratio, 1:850; the recommended ratio is 1:400. SAC-to-student ratio 1:2,000; there is no ratio recommendation for SACs.

**2017-18 Recommending year:** Recommended

1. Increase the number of counselors across all elementary schools with the goal of improving the counselor-to-student ratio by reducing the ratio from 1:470 to 1:371 over a 2-year period.
2. Continue to increase the number of school psychologists and social workers across all schools to support the improvement in the ratio.
3. Expand the number of APS substance abuse counselors,(SAC) with the goal of one full-time SAC serving each middle school, high school, and secondary program in order to address the growing student, family, and staff needs for critical substance abuse prevention and intervention services. (At the time, there were 6 SACs providing services to 12,000+ students in the 13 APS secondary schools.)

**2016-17 Non-recommending year:** APS trained 380 teachers and staff in MHFA; Hired 6 additional psychologists and 6 social workers; and added the "In Crisis/Need Help Now?" button to the APS website.

**2015-16 Recommending year:** Recommended

1. Provide Mental Health First Aid training (MHFA) for all APS teachers and administrative staff;
2. Reduce social worker and psychologist ratios from 1:1650 to 1:650;
3. Expand the reach and impact of youth social-emotional and mental health/resiliency resources, and develop new resources and accessible formats in collaboration with community partners. SSAC also asked for a "In Crisis/Need Help Now?" "button" on the APS homepage and school homepages, linking to county-wide services, programs, and information.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


**SEL:**

**APS Intro Document on SEL from 2019: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING**

Fundamentals of SEL - CASEL

SEL by Another Name? Political Pushback Prompts Rebranding

**KINDNESS:**

- The Four Pillars of Kindness - The Honey Foundation, by David Jones: Compassion, Empathy, Sympathy, Forgiveness
- 6 Keys to the Power of Kindness | Psychology Today
- Kickstart Kindness program - Mayo Clinic Health System
- Kindness matters guide | Mental Health Foundation
- The Power of Kindness - Lindner Center of HOPE
- The Astonishing Power of Kindness | Psychology Today
- Why Should My School Have a Kindness Focus? - The Power of Kind
  9 Tips for Teaching Kindness in the Classroom

**KINDNESS AND SEL:**

- Kindness and Social Emotional Learning
- Creating a Culture of Kindness: Using Research-Based Approaches to Prevent Bullying
- How Kindness Supports Student Mental Health and SEL Growth
- Social-Emotional Development and the Connection to Kindness

**RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS FOUNDATION CURRICULA AND OTHER INFO:**

- FREE K-8 Kindness in the Classroom® Curriculum
- High School Curriculum

**SCIENCE OF LEARNING, SEL/EF/KINDNESS AND THE BRAIN:**

- The Science of Kindness | Cedars-Sinai
- https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-healing-power-of-kindness
- Kindness and Compassion Are Good for Your Brain | Psychology Today
  RandomActsOfKindness.org – The Science Of Kindness
- The Evidence Base for How We Learn Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development
- A Guide to Executive Function: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-executive-function/
- InBrief: Executive Function: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbriefs/inbrief-executive-function/
- Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function
- A Guide to Executive Function: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-executive-function/
- InBrief: Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning:
  https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/videos/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/

**SERVING DISADVANTAGED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS:**

- SEL for English Language Learners: What Educators Need to Know | Colorín Colorado
- SEL for English Language Learners: What Educators Need to Know | NEA
- Executive Functions and Special Educational Needs and Their Relationship with School-Age Learning Difficulties - PMC
- 5 Ways to Help Neurodiverse Students Improve Executive Function Skills | Edutopia
- Executive Functions in Social Context: Implications for Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Supporting Developmental Trajectories
- The Trevor Project (2025). Friends, Family, and Community: Social Support and the Health of Transgender and Nonbinary Young People of Color

- The Trevor Project (2025). Anti-Bullying Policies in School and LGBTQ+ Young People.
- Culturally Responsive SEL for Black Students
- Honoring the Cultural Backgrounds of All Students
- Reimagining Social and Emotional Learning: From Individual Competencies to Systemic Transformation
- The power of centering equity in social and emotional learning; Why Marginalized Students Need Hope to SucceedExecutive functions in trauma-exposed youth: a meta-analysis; How Trauma Affects Kids in School

**EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS:**

https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/executive-function
Executive Function: What It Is, How To Improve & Types
Executive functioning is key to future success. Here's how educators can embed it in the classroom
Executive functioning is key to future success. Here's how educators can embed it in the classroom | K-12 Dive

**EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS AND SEL:**

Strengthening Executive Function Builds Social-Emotional Competence in Young Learners
The Intersection of Executive Functioning Skills and Social-Emotional Learning: Starting with the Brain - MCIU
The Intersection of Executive Functioning Skills and Social-Emotional Learning: Starting with the Brain - MCIU
The Intersection of Executive Functioning Skills and Social-Emotional Learning: Foundational Skills As The Building Blocks for Academic and Life Success Part 1 - MCIU - Learning Network
The Intersection of Executive Functioning Skills and Social-Emotional Learning: Foundational Skills As The Building Blocks for Academic and Life Success Part 2 - MCIU - Learning Network
Executive Functioning Skills - The Pathway 2 Success
The 8 pillars - LD@School: https://www.ldatschool.ca/learning-modules/executive-functions/eight-pillars/
Executive Functions Explained – Lively Minds Tutoring
https://www.cerebrate.education/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-8-Executive-Functions.pdf

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## Guiding Questions: Evaluate APS and Subcommittee Initiatives

The purpose of these guiding questions is to assist ACTL members in evaluating the various APS and subcommittee initiatives that we will hear about and discuss throughout the year. The focus of our evaluation is on teaching and learning within the lens of our school communities and of the needs of students across all of APS. Please consider the varying needs of the diverse members of your school community to best gather information from and provide feedback to community members.

| **Initiative:** | |
|---|---|
| ***Community-Based Information*** | |
| How will this initiative fit in my school community? | |
| What information do I need from my school community to provide useful input on this initiative? | |
| With whom from my school do I need to engage to gather this input? (Are some voices typically missing? Are there hard to reach populations to consider?) | |
| What about this initiative works/would work well in my school community? | |
| What challenges to my school community does this initiative (and/or its implementation) present? | |
| What does my school community need to best support this initiative? | |
| ***Thematic-Based Considerations*** | |
| How would my school community give/receive personalized, timely feedback on this initiative to families? | |
| How will this initiative impact teachers' heavy workload? | |
| Given the impact on teacher workload, how might this initiative impact the ability to provide timely, personalized feedback to families? | |
| Are there best practices demonstrating this initiative in any APS schools? If so, where? | |
| How can other schools replicate the best practices? What impact will doing so have on the school community? | |
| Do existing research or best practices from other school systems across the country support this initiative? | |
| How will this initiative promote consistency across all APS schools? | |
| How will students be engaged to offer their perspective and express their needs? | |
| How will this initiative impact students (e.g., workload, graduation requirement, etc.)? | |
| Will this initiative adequately prepare elementary students for middle school, middle school students for high school, and high school students for college/career/other post-high school experience? What does the initiative need in order to do so? | |