

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

A Message from Dr. Terri H. Mozingo, Chief Academic Officer

Welcome to the second edition of the *Pursuit of Excellence Newsletter* for 2018. This edition will keep you updated about the latest developments in a variety of key areas including: (1) trends, focus areas, and high-priority projects involving the Department of Curriculum and Instruction; (2) updates from the Office of Curriculum Design and Instructional Services; (3) updates from the Office of Talented and Gifted; and (4) AVID achievements.

Recently, I was reading *Seven Strong Claims About Successful Leadership*, and I thought that you would be interested in the summary of key findings. Simply put, leadership has a significant effect on teaching and learning. The article reinforces the idea that leadership acts as a catalyst without which other good things are quite unlikely to happen. In terms of the research, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its student achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. They further emphasize four essential leadership practices: building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, building collaborative cultures, and managing the teaching and learning programs. Moreover, the article suggests that school leaders have strong and positive influences on staff members' motivation, commitments, and beliefs about the supportiveness of their working conditions.

As you would expect, distributive leadership also impacted student learning and school improvement. The last claim asserts that the most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. Also, they are flexible in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent in the pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning, and achievement for all students. Finally, the author suggests that the seven claims listed below explain why successful leaders facing daunting conditions are often able to push forward when there is little reason to expect progress (Kenneth Leithwood, Christopher Day, Pam Sammons, Alma Harris and David Hopkins). This newsletter will include some areas of focus for increasing student achievement, supporting teacher development, promoting effective leadership, and ensuring parent and family engagement.

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Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership

- 1 School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
- 2 Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practice.
- 3 The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices - not the practices themselves - demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
- 4 School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions.
- 5 School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
- 6 Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
- 7 A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

ACPS 2020 Strategic Plan Goals

1. **Academic Excellence and Educational Equity:** Every child will be academically successful and prepared for college, work and life.
2. **Family and Community Engagement:** ACPS will partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.
3. **An Exemplary Staff:** ACPS will recruit, develop, support, and retain a staff that is best for Alexandria's students.
4. **Facilities and the Learning Environment:** ACPS will provide optimal and equitable learning environments.
5. **Health and Wellness:** ACPS will provide access and support that enables students to be healthy and ready to learn.
6. **Effective and Efficient Operations:** ACPS will be efficient, effective, and transparent in its business operations.

Office of Curriculum Design and Instructional Services

7th Edition of Tips for Teachers

We are very pleased to share with you the seventh edition of our ongoing series "Tips for Teachers." This latest edition explains the importance of Document-Based Questions (DBQs) for students in all grade levels. It also showcases strategies to help them better understand different texts using DBQs as they read. Please enjoy this latest "Tips" and feel free to share it with your fellow administrators and teachers. All editions are available on the Curriculum website on Canvas (<https://www.acps.k12.va.us/canvas>).

Opportunity for Feedback on K-5 Progress Report

On an annual basis, we seek feedback and recommendations regarding the K-5 Progress Report. We are very pleased that every elementary school has now identified a contact person to provide feedback and recommendations from staff pertaining to our Kindergarten and our Grades 1-5 Progress Reports. When spring approaches, we will invite these representatives to a series of focus groups to provide updates concerning: (1) commendations--what is working well with the formatting of each of the two progress reports and (2) recommendations about potential modifications. Based upon this feedback and evaluation of the feasibility of recommendations generated by the focus groups, we will modify the progress reports in time for the next academic year. We will also work with Instructional Technology to ensure that the recommended changes are technologically feasible. If you have questions, please contact Suzanne Lank at 703.619.8020.



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Effective Leaders
lead by example ...
with honesty ...
confidence
and *compassion ...*
intelligence
and *humor!*
Ineffective leaders
merely mislead themselves ... :)
Sharon Rhea Ford

A Special Thank You to All Our Principals!

The week of January 21-27, 2018, is Virginia Principals Appreciation. To celebrate this occasion, all of us in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction wish to extend our sincere appreciation and deep gratitude to each of you for the outstanding job you are performing as instructional leaders. Indeed, you are the heart and soul of building safe, orderly, and inviting learning environments for our richly diverse student population. You are models for being educational cheerleaders, culture builders, and facilitators of culturally relevant and engaging teaching and learning. Throughout this and previous years, we have marveled at your grace under pressure, your deep commitment to the welfare of our students and families, and your capacity for juggling successfully multiple balls in the air at one time!

From all us within the department, please understand how grateful we are to have each of you as the captain of your respective educational ships. You truly are touching the future as part of your great life's work!

Office of Talented and Gifted

- In an effort to reach out to the parent community across the division, the TAGAC meetings are rotating their locations this year. The next meeting will be on February 26th from 7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m. at George Washington Middle School. All parents are welcome to attend.
- Elementary and Middle School Differentiated Education Plans (DEPs) for Quarter 2 should be scanned/emailed to the TAG office. Your help is appreciated in reminding the teachers to provide a copy to the TAG Designees/Resource Teacher. For any questions, please feel free to contact Donna Brearley at 703.619.8093.

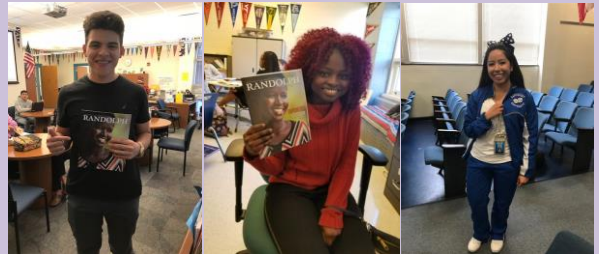
AVID Achievements

Getting Students College-Ready Across ACPS

College access is alive and well in ACPS! From college fair planning to college campus trips, and college research, students K-12 have a great deal of resources and support in our school division. AVID schools recently finished their general data collection and have some great data to share. Here are some updates on how students are preparing for post-high school decisions:

- It was **College Week at Patrick Henry Elementary School** where they “Work Harder to Get Smarter.” As a new AVID site this year, they have created a college going environment with various pennants, signs and growth-mindset messages around the building. This week, they created resumes, researched their teachers' colleges, and chatted with TCW seniors about college choices. They rounded their week out with a visit from the George Mason University Wrestling team and had a virtual tour of various colleges through a culminating assembly.
- At **GW Middle School**, AVID students traveled to Marymount University, where they had an intimate tour of the campus and ate in the dining hall (all complimentary of MU). Marymount is a private university that happily serves undocumented students and strongly supports AVID’s work. An upcoming 6th grade field trip will include a visit to TCW which includes a tour, a visit to the planetarium, shadowing an AVID student, and a presentation by the College and Career Center.
- **Excitement is in the air at FCH!** Veteran AVID teacher, Hazel Petty, has been nominated as their Agnes Meyer Teacher of the Year candidate.
- At **TCW Minnie Howard**, they are fortunate enough to have a teacher intern who has been sharing great inspiration about her college experience at Hollins University. Their Friday team building presentation included hearing the “WHY” behind higher education and promoted the message of “being afforded a better life.”

- At **TCW King Street**, there is a great deal of buzz in the College and Career Center with college application completion, fee waivers, FAFSA completion and onsite interviews coming up with Longwood, Mary Baldwin, and Mary Washington. Eleven AVID seniors were awarded Randolph College’s AVID Scholarship designated just for NOVA students through an onsite interview process. AVID seniors have received more than 30 acceptances thus far and more than \$1M in scholarships already!
- Recently, AVID School Counseling and College and Career Center partnered to sponsor access to a college fair experience, the Alfred Street HBCU Festival, slated for February. This year, approximately 100 students will have the opportunity to be provided breakfast and transported to the fair located at the Gaylord Hotel in Oxon Hill, MD.
- This past January, AVID held their 2nd Annual Alumni Reception. Although the weather was slightly uncooperative, it didn’t keep a handful of past grads from coming out to the Dessert Reception. The Alumni are working to create a local chapter and formulate a non-profit in order to help develop a self-sustaining chapter that can give back.



Recruitment is in the Air!

Through an application and interview process, students in grades 5-9 will be considered for the AVID elective recruitment, which will take place in late January. Please support our students in their quest to be college ready through access to this unique course. The GMU Early Identification Program recommendation process will begin this month as well. Counselors will be asked to recommend first generation college goers in grade 7. Please support students if they ask for a recommendation!

Every Student Succeeds

