

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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

Welcome to the fifth 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) ACPS' Teaching and Learning Framework; (3) highlights from a Principals meeting; and (4) updates from the Office of Talent Development.

Time to Refresh, Recoup, and Enjoy!

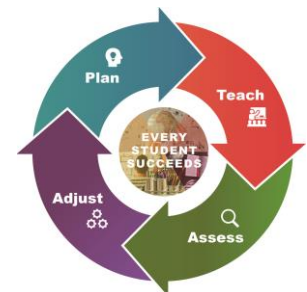
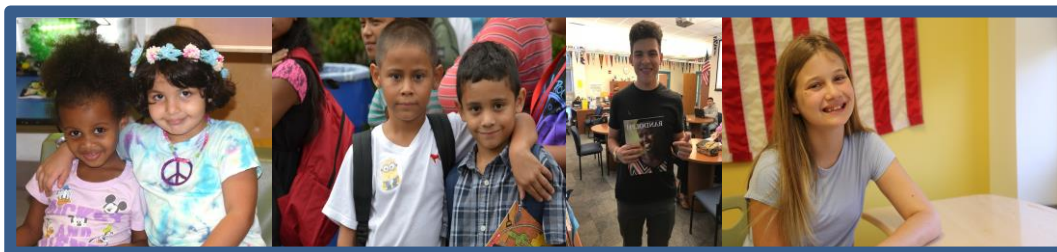
Since this is our last newsletter before Spring Break, we wanted to express our deep appreciation to you for your support, dedication, and professional commitment. Because of you, our students in ACPS are becoming increasingly successful and prepared for the challenges of our rapidly changing world. Spring is a time of renewal and transformation, as we see in the beautiful blooms on many of the trees throughout the city of Alexandria. We sincerely hope that each of you will enjoy your upcoming vacation and take time to reconnect with family, friends, and the beautiful Washington, D.C. area. You are the individuals who prepare our ACPS students for their futures, and we sincerely hope that part of that preparation involves modeling the power of self-reflection, enjoyment, and pleasure in being part of this interesting, profound, and sometimes challenging human experience! Thank you all for everything you do for the students and citizens of Alexandria City Public Schools!

Revisiting the ACPS Teaching and Learning Framework

As we hope you will recall, we introduced at the beginning of this academic year a new *ACPS Teaching and Learning Framework*.

In August 2017, representatives of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction shared this new publication with administrators and teachers in a variety of settings, including new teacher orientation, in-service back-to-school workshops, and administrative meetings. Like all educational innovations, this framework requires that all educators in ACPS revisit its key design principles and tenets, reflecting on their implications for their instructional practice as well as the needs of the students they serve. Therefore, we are attaching with this newsletter a copy of the *Teaching and Learning Framework* for you to revisit.

Briefly, the framework emphasizes that great teaching and learning are interconnected. Effective educators address the needs of the “whole child,” including students’ cognitive/academic as well as social-emotional and physical needs. Like any effective strategic planning process, our framework encourages ACPS educators to plan carefully in alignment with state and division curriculum standards. Planning—the first stage of the framework’s four-part model—is followed by effective teaching, including differentiation to accommodate students’ varying readiness levels, interests, and learner profiles. Assessment—the third model component—is critical, including a sustained focus upon progress monitoring in relationship to identified standards, with diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment a key part of every teacher’s repertoire. Finally, the framework reminds educators that great teaching involves revisiting areas in which students may benefit from additional coaching, support, intervention, and/or acceleration. We hope that you will share with us your experiences using the *ACPS Teaching and Learning Framework* and give us suggestions for helping it guide and inform our work in ACPS.



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.

Plan

When a teacher plans effectively, he or she:

1. **Designs clear learning targets that are communicated to students as evidenced by:**
 - One or more **learning objectives (i.e., content and language objectives)** that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-specific;
 - Learning objectives that express a **cognitive complexity** (aligned with *Bloom's Revised Taxonomy*) that matches the identified SOLs and learning sequence of the lesson; and
 - An **essential question** that synthesizes the big idea of the lesson.
2. **Reflects on data to modify plans to respond to student needs as evidenced by:**
 - A **variety of assessments** (diagnostic, formative, summative) to monitor student progress within the lesson.
3. **Incorporates resources (including technology) to foster literacy in the content areas, engagement, critical thinking, creativity, and other globally competitive skills as evidenced by:**
 - A **meaningful learning sequence** that moves students from the concrete to the representational and abstract (**C-R-A**):
 - Integration of **key academic language and vocabulary** throughout the lesson sequence;
 - Differentiated and **scaffolded learning** activities to accommodate students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learner profiles; and
 - A plan for **purposeful closure** that requires students to reflect upon their learning and revisit lesson objective(s) and essential question(s).

Teach

When a teacher is effective, he or she ensures that every lesson:

1. Includes an engaging **"activator or warm-up"** activity that hooks learner interest and makes connections between lesson content and prior learning experiences.
2. Starts with a **"framing the learning"** activity for students, helping them understand the purpose of what they are learning—and why they are learning it.
3. Includes **key concepts or skills** that help students understand the sequence of skills they are to learn and apply in order to complete a required lesson task(s).
4. Incorporates the **gradual release of responsibility** as learners progress from modeling to shaping (via guided practice) toward growing levels of independent use, application, and transfer.
5. Engages students in **experience-based applications** of key lesson and unit vocabulary, especially academic language essential to mastering content.
6. Incorporates **flexible grouping** (including cooperative learning structures) to reinforce students' growing level of independent practice and transfer.
7. Reinforces the **"10-2" rule** (ensuring that no more than 10 minutes of direct instruction occurs before students engage in independent and/or small group debriefing, reflection, and questioning).
8. Integrates **blended technology** into the teaching-learning process to reinforce student engagement, proficiency, and understanding.
9. Makes certain that the overall lesson or key lesson segments culminate in some form of **performance task** confirming students' level of understanding related to the lesson objectives.
10. Ends every lesson in a meaningful **closure activity**, allowing students to reflect upon what they have learned—and **why** they have learned it.

The next newsletter will cover the Teaching and Learning Framework steps: Assess and Adjust.

Principal Meeting Highlights

Think Fun's Mathematics Dice Game

Thank you to all the principals who participated in a fun game of Math Dice with us at the principals meeting. We cannot wait to bring this opportunity to your school.

Here are some highlights mentioned at the meeting:

□ Computational Fluency

Mathematics instruction must simultaneously develop students' conceptual understanding, computational fluency, and problem solving skills. Concurrent development of conceptual understanding and computational skills can enhance students' problem-solving skills.

Computational fluency refers to having **efficient** and **accurate** methods for computing. Students exhibit computational fluency when they demonstrate **strategic thinking** and **flexibility** in the computational methods they choose, understand and can explain, and produce accurate answers efficiently. Speed is not a factor of computational fluency.

□ Our Goal

To hold a Math Dice Tournament in Every Alexandria Elementary School, 4th or 5th Grade, in Spring 2018

□ Think Fun's Commitment

Bill or Alana will come to your school to organize and run a demonstration Math Dice Mixer Tournament (informal and fun) to get you started

□ Resources

Video: <https://youtu.be/yUWzSqZhkSw>

Math Dice Teacher Resources (this is where you can find the tournament station cards):

<http://pintsizeart.com/thinkfun/md-teacher-resource-center/index.html>

□ Contact

Julia Neuffer: julia.neuffer@acps.k12.va.us

Bill Ritchie: billr@thinkfun.com

If you are interested in hosting a Math Dice tournament this year, or need the Math Dice set to get started, please contact Julia Neuffer via email (julia.neuffer@acps.k12.va.us) or at 703.619.8020.

Happy National Social Work Month!

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has designated March as National Social Work Month. The theme for this year is, "*Social Workers: Leaders. Advocates. Champions.*" As leaders, ACPS social workers intervene in crises, mediate conflict, and advocate on behalf of students. They help students and families during some of the most vulnerable times. As advocates, ACPS social workers work to ensure that students and families have access to resources to assist them in meeting their basic needs. As champions, ACPS social workers speak on behalf of students and families when they are unable to effectively do so themselves. To recognize the unique contribution that ACPS school social workers make in the lives of our students and families, we request that their work be celebrated across the division. Thank you in advance for acknowledging the hard work and dedication of our school social workers, by celebrating during National Social Work Month.

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"The most powerful
leadership tool you
have is your own
personal example."

John Wooden

News from Talent Development Office

National Board Certified Teacher Information Session for 2018-2020 Cohort

Find out what it means to become a NBCT in ACPS!

Dates: April 24 - 4pm @ Central Office: Room 310-3A
April 25 - 4pm @ TCWHS: Room A209

NBCT is a career continuum for teachers. It starts in pre-service teacher preparation, which leads aspiring teachers to pursue and achieve their Board certification. The continuum culminates in meaningful teacher leadership roles for those who wish to seek them.

Information will be shared by our NBCT Leaders, Michelle Hudgens and Melissa King. Candidates also interested in renewing their certification should apply!

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Debra Lane via email (debra.lane@acps.k12.va.us) or at 703.619.8313.