

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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

Welcome to the eighth edition of the *Pursuit of Excellence Newsletter* for 2018. This version will update you 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) news from Curriculum, which includes the latest from Tips for Teachers as well as some tips for students and teachers on relaxation; (3) updates from the Office of Talent Development; and (4) a big congratulations to all our teachers nominated for the ACPS Teacher of the Year Award.

Spring Is in the Air!

As the beautiful flowers and leaves emerging all over the city of Alexandria will attest, spring is here! In spite of our recent torrential downpours, and in light of the inevitable stress that seems to accompany SOL administration time, we wanted to acknowledge each of our readers for their commitment, dedication, and deep and abiding loyalty to all our students. Without question, you are making a profound impact on the students within our division.

Please remember that the scope of a great teacher's influence is wide and far-ranging. Your influence upon the students you serve will last throughout their lifetimes.



As you read this, please take a few minutes to consider the individual teachers who have shaped and influenced your own mind and heart as you grew from your early learning years to adulthood. Each of us can remember multiple examples of when a teacher made a huge difference in our lives, and impacted the arc of our education and our life experience. You all have had a similar effect on many of your students. Thank you for that impact and for its effects upon our individual students' growth and maturity. In spite of occasional test weariness and the inevitable frustrations of being a part of any organization, please remember the profound difference you make in the students with whom you work.

We all deeply appreciate you! Enjoy the upcoming holiday!



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.

The Curriculum Column

11th Edition of Tips for Teachers

We are very pleased to share with you the eleventh edition of our ongoing series "Tips for Teachers." In this issue titled, "Personal Health and Wellness: Taking Care of You!", various health and wellness-related tips, statistics, and resources are highlighted to assist ACPS employees and their loved ones in reaching optimal health. Please enjoy this latest "Tips" and share it with your teachers and fellow administrators. All editions are available on the Curriculum website on Canvas (<https://www.acps.k12.va.us/canvas>).



The National Education Association (NEA) has also recommended a few ways that our teachers can help their students de-stress before, during, and after standardized testing. Please see below:

1. Model calmness. Let kids know this is simply one piece of their education puzzle.
2. Supply students with strategies for test success (e.g., skipping the tougher questions and coming back to them).
3. Physical activity just prior to the test--light stretching or movement in classroom or activity/game in the gymnasium.
4. Following the test, allow students to unwind.



Relaxing Tips for You and Your School

As we enter the last semester of the school year, we think about all that needs to get done by our students, colleagues, and ourselves. Closing out a school year brings many things including stress. I know that, at this present moment, we have many students, as well as some teachers, who need a moment to breathe and relax during this SOL testing time.

I was reading *The Cool Cat Teacher Blog*, by Vickie Davis, who suggested some amazing stress-busting secrets of great teachers:

1. Acceptance. Destroy worry by planning for the worst and working to improve it.
2. Interrupt negative thought loops and replace them with positive ones.
3. Keep a "Joy Journal." Record what brings you feelings of happiness and contentment.
4. Make sleep a priority.
5. Drink more water. Dehydration causes mood swings and irritability.
6. Get outside and move more.

10 Wellness Strategies for Educators

Practice mindfulness regularly. Mindfulness can help teachers avoid burnout.

Live in the present rather than dwell on the past.

Laugh more. It's a great way to reduce stress and tension.

Move your body. Stretch and get your heart pumping.

Remember to relax! Give your mind time to wander and your body a chance to relax. Drink a glass of water and/or eat a healthy snack.

Connect with your "spiritual self" - however you define it.

Take care of yourself. You can't nourish others when you're running on empty.

Practice deep breathing. It sends oxygen to your brain which causes you to relax.

Take a short time-out every day where you have no interruptions. This mini recharge will become something that you will look forward to everyday.

Reflect on the little things. Think about all of the things for which you are grateful.



Office of Talent Development

What is an Unconference?

An *Unconference* is an unconventional model for a conference in which participants identify topics, break into smaller groups, and discuss ideas, issues, strategies, and resources in an informal and community driven forum. An *Unconference* breaks out of traditional silos and allows participants to direct their own learning.

What can I expect at an Unconference?

You can expect to be the driver of your own learning! You decide the topics, guide the discussion, and share your own expertise while learning with and from others. Participants are encouraged to stay for as many or as few of the sessions as they want and join others that interest them. It's all up to you!

Learn more about the *ACPS Unconference* here:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAC3KNAERMk/bg3PpIXYjGi72Swtcz81g/view?utm_content=DAC3KNAERMk&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton

Read more about *Unconferences* here:

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/47940/how-teachers-can-learn-from-one-another-at-unconferences-meet-ups-and-edcamps>

For questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Talent Development at 703.619.8313.



"Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world." – Nelson Mandela

Congratulations to our Teachers!

On Thursday, May 10, 2018, Ms. Laura Simons was recognized at the School Board meeting for being awarded the title of ACPS *Teacher of the Year*. Ms. Simons has been with ACPS since 2010 and is a Physics teacher at T.C. Williams High School. She was also the ACPS nominee for *The Washington Post Outstanding Teacher of the Year*. Congratulations to her!

Also, big congratulations to her fellow teachers for being nominated:

- Ms. Rachel Bhatia, Patrick Henry
- Ms. Lisa Bryson, Mount Vernon
- Ms. Kara Cashwell, Charles Barrett
- Ms. Marci El-Baba, George Mason
- Ms. Meredith Forbes, Matthew Maury
- Ms. Jessica Fundalinski, George Washington
- Ms. Kellie Haley, William Ramsay
- Dr. Lauren Herr, Cora Kelly
- Mr. Anthony Jackson, Douglas MacArthur
- Mr. Damian Johnson, John Adams
- Ms. Katie Kaplewicz, Jefferson-Houston
- Ms. Monica Koski, Samuel Tucker
- Mr. Zachary McBride, Detention Center
- Ms. Laura Murphy, Lyles-Crouch
- Mr. Stephen Neeley, James K. Polk
- Ms. Hazel Petty, Francis C. Hammond

- Assessment-capable learners** know where they are going and are confident to take on the challenge!
- Teachers know** what students need to learn and should **communicate** learning intentions to students.
- Teachers and students understand** success criteria.
- Have clarity!**
- Have students answer** these three questions:
 1. What am I learning today?
 2. Why am I learning this?
 3. How will I know that I have learned it?



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