

# PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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

Welcome to the thirty first edition of the *Pursuit of Excellence Newsletter*. This version will update you on the trends, focus areas, and priorities for the Department of Curriculum and Instruction: (1) Empowered Educators; (2) Tips for Ensuring Success in FLE; (3) Being Mindful of our Students; and (4) Tips for Ensuring Success in World Languages. It also includes a section on the challenges of reaching greatness.

Thank you for your continued support! Have a great week!

### Reaching for Greatness: A Challenge for All ACPS Educators

Recently, Superintendent Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., mentioned the idea of reaching for greatness. His questions to staff were: **What does “greatness” mean when we reflect on educating the students of ACPS? To what extent are we reaching for greatness in our work with learners at all grade levels?** I wanted to share these important questions with each of you as you reflect on your relationship to the students with whom you work. **What do great teachers do to ensure the success (and the “greatness”) of all their students? How can we recognize greatness in the teaching-learning process when we see it in action?** To support our exploration of these questions, I would like to share “*Five Secrets to Achieving Greatness*,” published recently in the Hanker Visionary website (<https://hankervisionary.com/5-secrets-to-achieving-greatness/>)

1. **FOCUS:** First, the authors suggest that **living a “great life” means going above and beyond what is required of us**, improving the excellence of those around us - not just ourselves. Striving for greatness requires that our **personal vision and mission statements involve dedication, focus, and a deep commitment to being great in all that we do** - and (by inference) in the lives of the students with whom we interact. In a future class, try **staying mindful** of the following reflections: **To what extent am I encouraging and supporting all my students to demonstrate the very best they can do? How am I bringing out the “greatness” of every student I teach?**

2. **MINDSET:** As Carol Dweck and others remind us, our **mindset shapes and defines how we perceive the reality in which we live**. The second of the five secrets for greatness is an **“unbreakable mentality,”** a mindset in which we **monitor and minimize (or eliminate) distracting or negative thoughts** that restrict us or give us a sense of limitation. Periodically, ask your students to consider: **To what extent am I “practicing” limiting beliefs that restrict me or limit me? How can I replace those thoughts with “turnaround statements” that change my thinking into something positive and powerful?**
3. **RESPONSIBILITY:** According to the “Five Secrets to Achieving Greatness,” we are **responsible for our own actions** - and the **impact they have on others**. When we assume that level of responsibility, we **gain control over our lives**. Blaming external factors limits how we can figure out how to **achieve greatness with the resources and circumstances we currently have** - or may have in the future. Throughout the academic year, encourage students to consider: **How am I being responsible for my actions and their consequences? What can I do to improve my performance and mindset with the resources and support available to me?**
4. **GOAL SETTING:** Ask yourself - and your students - to make certain that your **immediate and long-range goals are clearly articulated and communicated**. As part of that goal-setting process, **engage your classroom or school** with an ongoing investigation of the following essential questions: **To what extent are my personal, academic, and professional goals aspirational - and aligned with my vision and mission for greatness in my life? How are we supporting one another to understand our personal goals for greatness - and collaborate on achieving them?**
5. **EFFICACY:** At all times, but particularly during turbulent or challenging ones, it is essential that **we believe in ourselves and what we are doing to achieve greatness** in our lives. Our students benefit greatly from our **being role models for efficacy**, a sense that we can truly **achieve our personal goals and reach levels of greatness** both now and in the future. Ask your students to consider: **How am I showing that I believe in myself -and that I can achieve greatness in my life? How am I enlisting the support of others around me to help me become all that I can be?**

**FIND YOUR GREATNESS.**

### 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.

## Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality around the World

(By Linda Darling-Hammond)

**The world is changing and so are its schools.** In recognition of the need to prepare students for an **evolving and increasingly interconnected world**, a growing number of countries have remodeled their education systems to deliver an **education built for the 21st century**, producing higher achievement and greater equity than the U.S. **How are they doing it?**

Among the strategies these systems have pursued, none have been more important than the policies they have developed to ensure that **high-quality teaching takes place in every classroom, in every school, for every child.** With the support of the Center on International Benchmarking at the National Center on Education and the Economy, one of the world's preeminent education researchers, **Linda Darling-Hammond**, launched the work from the **Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE)** at Stanford University. Darling-Hammond, now leading the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) in Palo Alto, CA, drew together a **global team of education researchers in the three-year study**, producing unparalleled insights for U.S. educators, researchers, and policymakers.

The researchers investigated **seven jurisdictions across four continents.** Their findings reveal **two principle** answers to the central question of how other countries have surpassed the U.S. in **preparing their students to compete in the 21st century global economy:**

- **First**, these countries have **focused on building effective systems**, opting not to chase silver bullets or short-term, narrow-focused solutions.
- **Second**, these countries have held at the core of their work a **commitment to professionalizing teaching as an occupation.**

The centerpiece of the study, **Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World** from Jossey-Bass publishers, is a cross-cutting analysis of all seven systems. Also from Jossey-Bass are five e-books offering deep dives into each jurisdiction studied.

**Empowered Educators**, the new international comparative study of teaching quality systems led by Linda Darling-Hammond with **funding and support from the National Center on Education and the Economy's Center on International Education Benchmarking**, describes what some of the world's top-performing education systems have done to realize that goal. Namely, they have **focused on building effective systems and made a commitment to professionalizing teaching as an occupation** central to their education agendas.

Read the full report, *Empowered Educations: How High-Performing Education Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*, at: [www.ncee.org/Empowered-Educators/](http://www.ncee.org/Empowered-Educators/)

## Tips for Ensuring Success: Teaching Family Life Education

**Family Life Education (FLE)** includes lessons and discussions on occasionally sensitive material, and the thought of teaching it to students can be panic-inducing for some teachers. To help you successfully teach this content, follow these words of advice from Indiana University about teaching students sensitive material:

### Before Classroom Discussions Begin

- **Consider possible sources of student views.** On many issues, students' viewpoints may be wrapped up in their personal identities, influenced by family members, or connected to religious/spiritual/moral beliefs. So a challenge to an idea may be seen as a personal challenge as well.
- **Establish some discussion guidelines.** Work with students to establish a set of guidelines for class discussion; their input is important here so the rules are part of the classroom community, not just rules you impose. Some possible guidelines include:
  - Listen respectfully, without interrupting
  - Allow everyone the opportunity to speak
  - Criticize ideas, not individuals or groups

### During Class

- **Provide a framework and starting point.** Prepare some questions to get the conversation started, balancing the needs for both focus and openness in responses. Avoid questions that seem like there is one right answer.
- **Actively manage the discussion.** Be ready to prompt students as needed for follow-up, explanation, or evidence. Remind the students of the discussion guidelines, and let them practice re-stating comments as needed.
- **Stay a neutral facilitator whenever possible.** Weigh the impact of you sharing your own opinions on an issue, knowing that could silence students who hold other views. If you do share your own ideas, be sure to elaborate on your thinking process enough to model the disciplinary thinking you want them to do, not necessarily the outcome.

### Follow-Up

- **Synthesize the discussion.** Leave some time at the end of class for people to synthesize what they heard, particularly in terms of how it relates back to course concepts and the activity's stated goals.
- **Share relevant resources as needed.** If you think some students may need assistance processing a difficult discussion, and may need emotional or psychological support, make sure they know about resources available to them.

For more information, please contact Michael Humphreys via email ([michael.humphreys@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:michael.humphreys@acps.k12.va.us)).



## Your Feedback is Valued!

Do you have any topics of interest that you want featured in the *Pursuit of Excellence*? If so, please email [Sahar Wiltshire](mailto:Sahar.Wiltshire).

\*Please note: all *Pursuit of Excellence* newsletters are posted on [Canvas](https://www.canvas.com). Log in with your ACPS Google ID to access these newsletters.

### Being Mindful of our Students

This is a reminder to us all that we don't know the issues that our students are dealing with on a daily basis. A central part of a student's success in school is linked to their experiences outside of the classroom. Let's continue to be **MINDFUL** of the challenges that our students face every day.



#### Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil

by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up  
Because we ain't got an alarm clock  
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,  
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform  
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,  
Cause the lights ain't on  
Even got my baby sister ready,  
Cause my mama wasn't home.  
Got us both to school on time,  
To eat us a good breakfast.  
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed  
Cause I ain't got a pencil.

#### Suffering In Silence

by Nenny Hap

There's betrayal so unexpected  
In silence it turns into a torn  
A torn in my side it forever stays  
O hurt fills my solitary world

There's a secret behind closed door  
A guise displayed for the world  
The pangs of grief yet untold  
O disquiet heart finds no peace

There's a struggle inside of me  
Sadness and anger I tried to rid  
Seeded since so very long  
O frustration triggers my pain

Submitted by Arnecia Moody, Lead Social Worker

### Tips for Ensuring Success: World Language Learning

The **American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)** suggests the following **six core practices** to ensure success in learning World Languages:

- Facilitate Target Language Comprehensibility:** "Students and teachers speak, listen, read, write, view and create in the target language as close to 90% or more during classroom time, comprehensible input, contexts and interactions." This requires teachers to provide students with a language rich environment, use visuals, gestures, contexts, interactions and scaffolds to support students' comprehension and language production. Furthermore, students need to know how to ask for help and clarification if they struggle with comprehension.
- Guide Learners through Interpreting Authentic Resources:** "Present interactive, reading and listening tasks, using authentic cultural texts, with appropriate scaffolding while promoting interpretation." The instructional implications to ensure learners' success include the selection of age appropriate, student interest and proficiency level related texts as well as providing appropriate scaffolds. Additionally, the authentic text should not be changed; rather the task needs to be adjusted to meet the students' proficiency levels.
- Design Oral Interpersonal Communication Tasks:** "Teachers design and carry out interpersonal communication tasks for pairs, small group and whole group instruction." As interpersonal communication proficiency is the most difficult to attain, it is crucial that teachers provide students with many well planned and scaffolded activities. This also includes opportunities for presentational communication tasks in speaking and writing to allow students processing time and practice of content, vocabulary and grammatical structures as a stepping stone towards interpersonal and spontaneous communication tasks.
- Plan with Backwards Design Model:** "Instructors identify desired results, THEN determine acceptable evidence, THEN plan learning experiences and instruction." In World Language instruction, unit and lesson objectives should be functional goals and presented in "Can Do Statements."
- Teach Grammar as Concept and use in Context:** "Students focus on meaning BEFORE form." Most effective grammar instruction should be focused on inductive instructional strategies and tasks." Glisan and Shrum (2016) identified the **PACE** model for effective contextualized grammar instruction. **First**, a new grammar concept is **Presented** in an authentic text and the focus is on text comprehension. **Next**, the teacher draws **Attention** to the grammatical concept/structure by highlighting its uses in the discussed text. **Then**, students and teacher **Co-Construct** the meaning of the grammatical structure through discussion and guided questions. **Finally**, **Extension** activities allow students to apply the new structure(s) within a context.
- Provide Appropriate Oral Feedback:** "Oral corrective feedback is a tool for learning and language development." Respond to the student's comment and/or question by rephrasing what the student said correctly in the target language. Then, ask clarification questions (from open ended to either/and yes or no). Use the appropriate language functions and vocabulary, thus offering a model for the student to self-correct. Finally, if necessary, direct feedback on the mistake, with an effective explanation.

For more information, please email [Tanja Mayer-Harding](mailto:Tanja.Mayer-Harding).

