

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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



Welcome to the thirty third 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) T.C.W. German Students and the Wanderbus; (2) Tips for Ensuring Student Success in Math; (3) One Moment Meditation; and (4) Tips for Ensuring Student Success in Science. It also includes a section on SEAL - Social-Emotional-Academic Learning.

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



Putting the "SEAL" on Student Achievement

At a recent Executive Leadership Team meeting, we had a very powerful discussion of what needs to be enhanced or expanded in Alexandria City Public Schools. The group members all agreed that social-emotional learning is a key factor that requires more systemic attention and focus. As a result of that meeting, we thought it would be beneficial to our readers to revisit the concept of "Social-Emotional-Academic Learning" (now popularly referred to as "SEAL"). An expanding body of educational research confirms that unless SEAL is a priority in all classrooms and schools, student achievement results will not be where we need them to be. Perhaps even more importantly, the "SEAL" effect is essential for ensuring the success of all our students, particularly in light of our richly diverse student population.

SOCIAL

The social component of "SEAL" involves direct instruction and ongoing coaching and support designed to ensure that students acquire and apply effective social interaction skills, both within the classroom learning environment and the overall school as a learning community. The social components of learning include students' ability to self-regulate and to adjust their behavior to accommodate varying perspectives, backgrounds, and communication patterns among their peers and teachers. Social components of the teaching-learning process include a focus on clear and consistent classroom rules and procedures, opportunities for students to interact in a variety of discourse-based ways, and periodic reflections by the class on what it is working on in terms of its social dynamics—and what might be improved to help improve the learning process for all. A key strategy involves asking students to reflect on and metacognitively process the extent to which their citizenship and social interaction skills are being used effectively and consistently.

EMOTIONAL

All of us have feelings and emotions that influence our behavior—and how we interact with others in our environment. The emotional component of "SEAL" involves students' ability to self-observe and to practice what many have called "Mindfulness." This process can include asking students to wait a few seconds before responding to a question—or responding to the communication of another student. It also includes direct instruction and discussion about ways in which our brain can short-circuit our reactions, causing us to engage in the "fight-or-flight" response (based in the amygdala) in which we react in an overly aggressive or emotional way. Teachers can encourage students to recognize their "hot buttons," patterns in which their amygdala can be activated or triggered. Students can also be given periodic opportunities to express their feelings and emotions using "I statements." Once again, providing opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection (i.e., metacognition) on a regular basis can help students maintain the state of mindfulness as an evolving "habit of mind."

The next issue will cover Academic Learning so please stay tuned!

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.

German Students Participate in the "Wanderbus" Project by the Goethe Institute



On Friday, March 8, 2019, over 100 T.C. Williams German students participated in the Wanderbus project sponsored by the Goethe Institute of Washington, D.C. The Wanderbus, a gigantic tractor trailer mobile classroom, arrived from Germany by ship on Tuesday.

By Thursday evening, the bus was parked in the Minnie Howard parking lot. ACPs students were the very first group to experience it before it left for a tour to high schools nationwide.

At the event, students were welcomed by aerobics in German, group games, and a giant Kahoot using student's personal electronic devices.

In the bus, students took part in several iPad stations, a German themed photo booth, and even a virtual reality tour through several German cities - a highlight for many of them. The entire presentation was done in German and a fun time was had by everyone! A special thanks to T.C. German teachers, Frau Johnson and Herr Levine, who organized this amazing event.

For more information, please contact Tanja Mayer-Harding via email (tanja.mayer-harding@acps.k12.va.us) or at 703-619-8020.

Tips for Ensuring Student Success in Mathematics: Word Problems

Many students struggle with traditional word problems because the context is sometimes unrealistic. The traditional word problem can be routine, creating a predictable pattern for solving. These problems usually present students with given information followed by a question students are supposed to answer using the given information.

Traditional Word Problem:

Neela is making rectangular place mats that are 12 inches wide and 15 inches long. What is the least amount of ribbon that she will need to create a ribbon border around 1 place mat? The following modifications to the traditional word problem will help build student perseverance, critical thinking skills, and transfer to real-world problem solving.

1. Headless Problems	In headless word problems, students are presented with a question, but the information needed to answer the question is omitted. The students are then tasked with determining what information is needed to answer the given question. <i>Example: What is the least amount of ribbon Neela will need to create a ribbon border for a place mat?</i>
2. Tailless Problems	In tailless word problems, students are given information, asked to make observations about the information, and then tasked with creating questions that can be answered using the given information. <i>Example: Neela is making 1 rectangular place mat that is 12 inches wide and 15 inches long.</i>
3. Numberless Problems	Numberless word problems require students to process what the problem is and what is needed to solve it. This process supports students in understanding the meaning of the context before solving for an answer. <i>Example: Neela is making rectangular place mats that have a length and a width. What is the least amount of ribbon that she will need to create a ribbon border around one place mat?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step 1: Students will process problem without numbers. Step 2: Teachers will supply snippets in information. Step 3: Teachers will add quantities to math story.

For more information, please contact [Julia Neuffer](#) at 703-619-8020.

One Moment Meditation

Education is a rewarding career, in that we know we are helping students to succeed and reach their full potential. We know that it can be stressful, and the anxiety it produces can sometimes take its toll on us. In order for us as educators and staff to do our jobs, we have to take care of our own health as well. The one moment meditation is a way that we can take a short one minute break throughout the day to breathe and reduce stress, anxiety, and fatigue. One moment meditation helps to put you in a more relaxed, calm, and high-performance state of mind.

Please click the link and try for yourself:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6eFFCi12v8>

Submitted by Arnecia Moody, Lead School Social Worker and Adapted from OMM Training, LLC.



Is it better to have students out in the forest trying to figure out what eats what? Or is it better for students to be back in the classroom with a teacher using direct instruction strategies to explicitly teach what a food chain is? The answer, surprisingly, is both, and the order matters.

Effective science instruction walks students through the inquiry cycle, whose many components would be difficult, if not impossible, to cover in a single day. This is why effective teachers teach new science content over several days using an ordered process. Science teachers refer to learning through the inquiry cycle as the "5E Model." This best practice provides a structure where students naturally become engaged in the learning as they sequentially construct meaning while reasoning like scientists.

Follow these steps to ensure student success in a science inquiry:

Engage

- **Start with the Essential Question.** The essential question drives learning by provoking student curiosity. It should be visited at the beginning of the daily lesson to frame the learning and at the end of the daily lesson to encapsulate the learning and provide closure. *Real scientists work to answer questions.*
- **Identify Prior Knowledge.** Formative assessment probes can be used to guide instruction. In ACPS, the *Uncovering Student Ideas in Science* series is used at all grade levels (K-12) to uncover student misconceptions on science topics. *Real scientists build on what they know.*
- **Use an Activator.** Students often need that spark to connect with the science content. A science hook, such as *Sick Science!* experiments, a Nature Hunt, or a GLAD observation chart can make the new content immediately engaging. *Real Scientists are intrigued by what they study.*
- **Make Connections to Real Life.** When teachers explicitly provide students with the context for their learning (i.e., how new content connects to previous learning or real life) students are able to add new learning to existing schema. This promotes retention of the content knowledge. *Real scientists know the relevance of their work.*
- **Set Students Up for Success.** Sometimes students need to be explicitly taught or re-taught a skill (i.e., how to read a thermometer) using the gradual release method (I do, We do) immediately before students authentically apply that skill during an activity (You do). Having the prerequisite skills to be successful in a lesson inherently increases students engagement with the content. *Real scientists have the skills they need to do their work.*

Explore, then Explain

- **Shared Experiences.** At the elementary level, students can collect information in a wide variety of ways, from an interactive read-aloud fiction story where Mr. Squirrel looks for a new home to a hands-on experiment in the classroom. A shared experience gives students the opportunity to begin to construct meaning on their own and they need opportunities to discuss shared experiences with each other in small groups. *Real scientists collect and process information.*
- **New Vocabulary is Discovered.** New vocabulary should be introduced when students discover they need a term to describe what they are experiencing. For example, if students are on a nature walk looking for how the earth has changed around their school, the best time to introduce the term erosion is when students notice that the ground is bare in some spots. *Real scientists use academic language to describe phenomena.*
- **After the Experience, Make Content and Vocabulary Explicit.** All students need explicit instruction on content and vocabulary following a shared experience. In this step of the inquiry, the teacher looks for ways to directly teach the student the content. The teacher might create an anchor chart, lead the elementary class in a GLAD chant, or have students interact with a selected passage in the Discovery Education Techbook. It is especially important to our SWD and EL learners that teachers make this component of the lesson accessible to them. *Real scientists understand how their work fits in with the big picture.*

Elaborate Sometimes, Evaluate Always

- **Extend the Learning When Time Permits.** Once students fully understand the content and vocabulary, they can go a step further by applying that knowledge in more advanced ways. When time permits, students can ask their own questions, develop their own experiments, conduct their own research, create a new model, or engage in a STEM challenge. It is especially important to our TAG learners that we identify their prior knowledge at the beginning of an inquiry so that we can provide them with ample time to extend the learning once they have demonstrated mastery of the content and vocabulary. *When real scientists get results, they ask additional questions.*
- **Choose Authentic Assessment Opportunities.** Assessment is most authentic when there is a performance task embedded into the learning experience. At the kindergarten level, assessment might look like students finding an object that is magnetic and bringing it to the carpet. Other assessments might include ordering pictures of the planets, completing a graphic organizer, drawing a picture, or crafting a written response to the essential question. *Real scientists do authentic work.*
- **End with the Essential Question.** Once the grade-level standards have been taught, it is time to move on to the next inquiry. Being able to answer the essential question at the conclusion of the inquiry provides closure. A good essential question is open-ended and can be answered with increasing complexity so students just might revisit this question again: in their personal life, in upper grades, college, or, very possibly, in their own laboratories when they enter the workforce as real scientists.

For more information, please contact Erica Meili via email (erica.meili@acps.k12.va.us) or at 703-619-8020.

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