

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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

Welcome to the thirty fourth 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) Tips for Ensuring Student Success in TAG; (2) Recognizing and Dealing with Anxiety; and (3) Professional Development Updates. It also includes a section on SEAL - *Social-Emotional-Academic-Learning*.

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



**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.

Putting the "SEAL" on Student Achievement - Part II

Last week, we introduced you to the concept of SEAL and focused on the definition of the first two principles - Social and Emotional. **This issue, we will look at the last two - Academic and Learning.**

ACADEMIC

In a majority of the recent studies on social-emotional learning, the "Academic/A" component has been added. **Educational experts assert that we can no longer separate the social and emotional from the academic:** in effect, they are all of a piece and interconnected. A great teacher helps learners to become great students when he or she emphasizes the following key elements in the classroom: **(1) clear expectations for excellence and success communicated to every learner; (2) clearly articulated rules and procedures that become "owned" and internalized by all learners within the classroom; (3) emphasis upon personalization and variety of options within the classroom, allowing students to see the relevance of what they are studying, why they are studying it, and how they can use it with growing levels of independence in their own learning process and lives; and (4) opportunities for independent inquiry and exploration, extending and refining the core curriculum to accommodate students' varying ability levels, interests, and learner profiles.** The "Academic" component of "SEAL" emphasizes that every learner is **unique**—and that one size most definitely does not fit all in the learning process.

LEARNING

Finally, "SEAL" recognizes that a **key principle of education is to prepare** (as John Dewey reminds us) **life-long learners. True learning is internalized and applied by the learner to situations that are unanticipated or unique.** Learning is not formulaic. What we retain and apply over the course of our lifetime has meaning to us. It connects to who we are and what we value. It resonates to us emotionally at a **deep level of feeling and affective response.** Learning also depends upon the way in which we interact with others, process their communications, and grow in our ability to analyze competing perspectives, express empathy, and make deep and lasting connections. Wiggins and McTighe (authors of the Understanding by Design framework) suggest that **teachers consider the WHERETO of learning:** (1) How will I **ensure that my students understand what they are learning and why they are learning it?** (2) How will I **hook and engage** my learners? (3) How will I **explain key concepts and skills** to all students so that they internalize them? (4) How will I encourage my students to **revisit, revise, rethink, and refine their learning process?** (5) How will I engage my learners in **self-evaluation**? (6) How will I **tailor (differentiate) the learning process** to address each student's unique strengths and needs? (7) How will I **organize my lesson(s)** so that my students have a clear roadmap to guide and inform their learning process?

We look forward to exploring the concept of "SEAL" with you and cannot wait to hear how you currently incorporate the "SEAL" approach in your classrooms and schools.

*Please [click here](#) for more fascinating information on Social-Emotional-Academic Learning.

Tips for Ensuring Student Success: Talented and Gifted (TAG) Students

Familiarize Yourself with the Characteristics of Intellectually Gifted Students

- Students who are intellectually gifted demonstrate many characteristics, including: a precocious ability to think abstractly, an extreme need for constant mental stimulation; an ability to learn and process complex information very rapidly; and a need to explore subjects in depth.
- Gifted students learn differently and have unique academic needs.

Let Go of "Normal"

- Not all gifted students in your classroom will be identified and even those who are may not always appear to be gifted.
- Don't allow yourself to be distracted by false stereotypes or bias when identifying gifted candidates.
- Gifted students come from all ethnic groups, they are both boys and girls, they live in both rural and urban areas and they aren't always straight A students.

Assessment and Differentiation is Essential

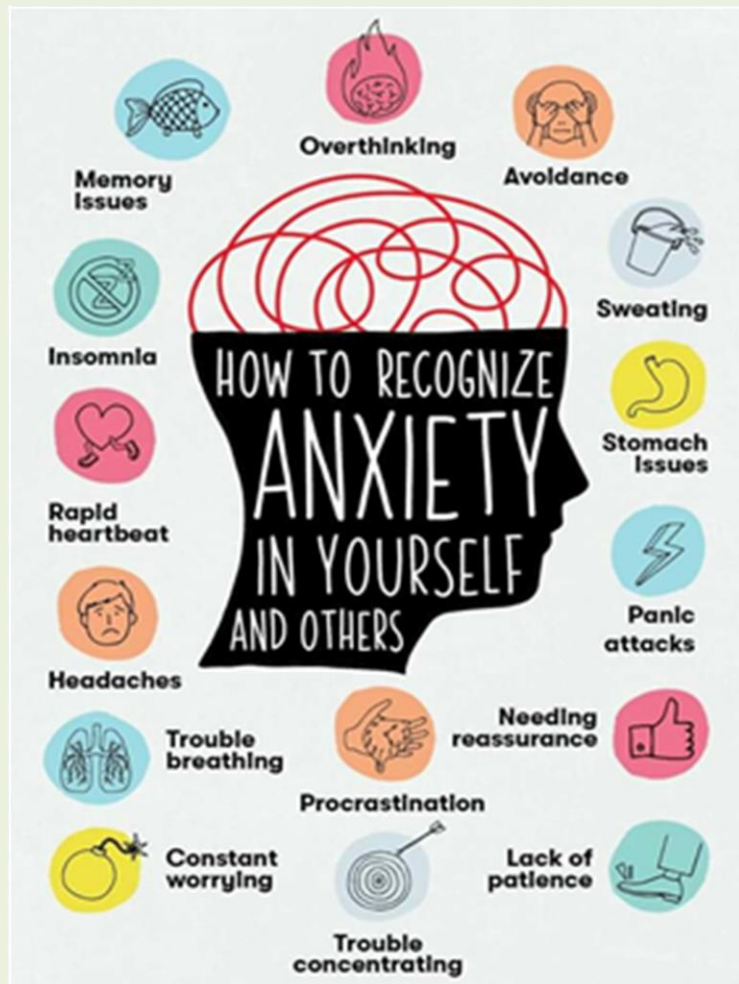
- One of the easiest ways to better understand how to provide challenging material is to conduct informal whole class assessments on a regular basis.
- Students who score above 80 percent should not be forced to "relearn" information they already know. Rather, differentiate the instruction.

Involve Parents

- Parents of gifted children are often active advocates for their children.
- Offer to collaborate with them, rather than resist them, to work together to see that their child's needs are met.
- Flexibility and a willingness to think differently can create win-win situations.

For more information or questions on TAG, please contact [Donna Brearley](#) or [Tiana Dominick](#) (K-3).

Recognizing and Dealing with Anxiety



Feeling worried or nervous is a normal part of everyday life. Everyone is anxious at times. Mild to moderate anxiety can even be beneficial, as it helps them to **focus their attention, energy, and motivation**. However individuals with heightened anxiety, or generalized anxiety disorder, have persistent worry that they are unable to control. They are **preoccupied with or worried about their success** in activities and their abilities to gain others' approval. Often times they worry about being perfect.

If your anxiety is severe, **you may have feelings of helplessness, confusion, and extreme worry** that are out of proportion with the actual seriousness or likelihood of the feared event. Overwhelming anxiety that interferes with daily life is **not normal** and may be a symptom of another problem.

Here are some signs on how to recognize signs of anxiety. Below are some tips for how to relieve anxiety.

- **Practice relaxation techniques**, such as deep breathing, counting to 10, yoga, one moment meditation, and other meditation techniques. Learning to relax can empower you, help you develop mastery over symptoms, and improve a sense of control of your body.
- **Talk to someone who calms you.** Reach out to a colleague, friend or family member who can help calm you when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- **Practice gratitude.** When you find yourself stressed out or anxious, immediately think of one thing you are grateful for.
- **Recite positive affirmations.** An affirmation is a sentence that can help you calm yourself and think more positively. You can use different affirmations for any negative mindset you find yourself in. For example, I can do this.

Submitted by Arnecia Moody, Lead Social Worker

1. 2019 Summer ACPS Teacher Trainings

Learn about how your watershed connects to your standards and curriculum Earth Force 6 Step Process Training. There will be tons of fun in the sun (field experience and canoeing) and you will dig deeper into the state of our watershed and network with environmental professionals (i.e., CivicTREK, local experts, and learn from ACPS' own Mary Breslin)!

Transform learning into real and meaningful experiences for students by connecting learning to their community.

*Teacher stipend included.

[Register Here!](#)

Two training options are available:

June 24 - 28, 2019

8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

August 5 - 6, 2019

8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Click [here](#) for more information.



2. 2019 Summer Training Public School Leadership and Earth Force Engaging Students in Chesapeake Bay Environmental Stewardship

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) will be hosting the 2019 Summer Training for administrators on July 22-24, 2019.

Through the Administrators Environmental Leadership Program, CBF provides **high-quality professional learning to meet the evolving needs** of administrators and schools. The program supports school principals and administrators in **developing environmental stewardship opportunities** for the whole school community.

Learn about the six-step Earth Force process your teachers are using with your students to build science content, stewardship, and civic engagement skills. **Network** with other school district leaders from across the state to discuss implementing and leading a program for your school and district. Strategically plan for your district's work in building the next generation of environmental stewards. **Visit** beautiful Tangier Island and relax out on the Bay at the CBF Port Isobel facility.

Professional Development Hours: 24

Register at: <https://www.cbf.org/join-us/education-program/professional-learning/summer-courses/principals-summer-course-schedule.html>

3. ACPS Unconference 2019

Join us for the 2019 ACPS Unconference on June 27, 2019, at George Washington Middle School. An Unconference is an innovative approach to conferences where **participants bring their own ideas and engage in rich conversations with colleagues** (instead of pre-set topics). All ideas are welcome! **We look forward to a day full of rich discussion and collaboration.** The Unconference will begin at 8:30 a.m. with breakfast and selection of breakout topics. The rest of the day will be spent in sessions. You can **talk, listen, and even move from session to session** as you see fit. **It's an exciting way to connect with real issues and ideas and to come away with strategies.**

Click [here](#) for more information.

For questions or more information, please contact Dr. Debra Lane via email (debra.lane@acps.k12.va.us) or call 703-619-8000.

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](#). Log in with your ACPS Google ID to access these newsletters.

