

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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

Welcome to the thirty sixth 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) Put the Glass Down; (2) Star Breathing; and (3) Fifteen Benefits of Social Emotional Learning. It also includes a conclusion portion on exploring what happens once SOL testing is completed.

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

To the SOLs and Beyond — What Can We Expect When Testing Is Finished?

Last issue, we covered the first three suggestions for refining teaching after the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. This issue, we will focus on the remaining three.

<p>4. Encourage Debates, Presentations, and Performances:</p>	<p>Students benefit greatly from opportunities to explore key content in greater depth, especially in exploring and presenting to the rest of the class their own unique perspectives, opinions, and background experiences. For example, students can use the post-SOL time period to dive deeper into subject matter and debate differing perspectives about problem-solutions, decisions, and/or creative alternatives to conflicts, unresolved issues, and related matters in curriculum content being studied. Opportunities for individual or small-group presentations and performances can also enliven student participation and increase levels of engagement and authenticity.</p>
<p>5. Incorporate Independent Research and Projects into Students' Learning Experiences:</p>	<p>Encourage students to explore topics and issues of personal interest to them. For example, short-term and extended research projects can be used to engage student interest and allow for in-depth exploration of topics that may have been previously investigated somewhat superficially during pre-SOL sessions. Similarly, independent projects in which the student is given latitude about culminating products, performances, and presentations can encourage critical and analytical thinking—and reinforce the learner as having a sense of efficacy and self-regulation where his/her learning is concerned.</p>
<p>6. Extend Opportunities for Differentiating Instruction:</p>	<p>Finally, post-SOL time periods present great opportunities for differentiation, including expanding personalization in the classroom by enhancing focus on students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learner profiles.</p>

We invite our readers to share with us concrete examples and suggestions for engaging students during the upcoming post-SOL testing period. Additionally, please accept our sincere thanks for all that you have done to prepare our students for upcoming SOLs and to ensure that they enjoy their learning in the process.

- 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.

**ACPS 2020
Strategic
Plan Goals**



Put the Glass Down

A professor was giving a lecture to his students on stress management. He raised a glass of water and asked the audience, "How heavy do you think this glass of water is?" The student's answers ranged from 20 gm to 500 gm. "It does not matter on the absolute weight. It depends on how long you hold it. If I hold it for a minute it's okay. If I hold it for an hour, I will have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you will have to call the ambulance. It is the exact same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, we will not be able to carry on as the burden becomes increasingly heavier. What you have to do is put the glass down, rest for a while before holding it up again. We have to put our burdens down periodically so that we can refresh ourselves and carry on."

Now that you have read the short story remember to allow some quiet time in your busy schedule to be mindful.

Submitted by Arnecia Moody, Lead School Social Worker and Adapted from Mindfulness Exercises by Karlyn Hall

Star Breathing

When you are calm, your body is in what is known as "rest and digest" mode. Your breathing and heart rate are normal, and your muscles are relaxed. When you experience a stressful event, your body automatically goes into what is known as "flight, fight or freeze" mode; your heart rate increases and your breathing becomes shallower.

There are lots of different ways to teach students how to breathe deep. Teaching deep breathing exercises such as the Star Breathe can help them to relax and calm down. The goal of calming activities is to get them from "flight,

fight or freeze" mode back to "rest and digest" mode. Deep breathing helps regulate more oxygen throughout your brain.

Submitted by Arnecia Moody, Lead School Social Worker



15 Benefits of Social Emotional Learning

Improves academic performance.

Increases student motivation.

Reduces behavior problems.

Helps students set and meet goals.

Teaches how to have empathy for others.

Improves school and class climate.

Improves self-regulation skills.

Teaches responsible decision-making.

Improves confidence and perseverance.

Increases personal self-awareness.

Improves relationship skills.

Creates the feeling of community.

Increases positive attitudes toward self.

Improves attendance.

Decreases emotional distress.

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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).

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