

# PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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

This newsletter provides us an opportunity to express my most sincere appreciation for all that you have done for the students of Alexandria City Public Schools. As we continue our work in addressing Strategic Plan 2020 priorities, it is always important to take some time for reflection: *For what should we be grateful? What have we conferred to our students, staff, and community?*

As I reflect personally upon these essential questions, I find myself grateful for many things in our school system from our dedicated staff, to our outstanding leadership, and the rich and varied collaborations taking place between school-based and central office staff.

Together, we are making genuine strides to ensure that *Every Student Succeeds*. We are rewarded with increasingly positive results as seen in our classrooms, our assessment results, the Teacher Talk Conversations, and school visits. Perhaps most significantly, is how each of you contribute to promoting a safe, orderly, inviting, and engaging community of learning.

ACPS is a community where students can truly become life-long learners; a community where excellence prevails! As you will read in our newsletter this month, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction also has much to celebrate and be grateful for during this past year. Please enjoy our summary of recent accomplishments. Also, we are pleased to attach our first in a series of *Tips for Teachers*, a series of support documents related to SOL performance and strategies for improving student achievement.

It is indeed a pleasure to work with you!

## Top 12 Priorities for C&I

1. Enhance the implementation of **Professional Learning Communities**
2. Expand the concept of **content academies** throughout the academic year
3. Implement the **MTSS Framework** division-wide
4. **Analyze data** and develop actions based upon identified needs
5. Implement a **Specialized Instructional Plan**
6. Conduct a Professional Development **Leadership Needs Assessment**
7. Implement a **teaching and learning framework** to reinforce planning, teaching, assessing, and adjusting
8. Develop and implement a comprehensive **K-12 Science Plan**
9. Collaborate with teachers to **develop exemplary lesson plans**
10. Develop **division plans** for reading, writing, and secondary mathematics
11. Conduct “look-fors” and “walk-throughs” with school leaders
12. Design and implement a **systemic coaching model**

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## Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

It's been a great start to the year for staff and students committed to the AVID systems. Thirty-two ACPS staff members across seven schools and the Curriculum and Instruction Department attended the two-day AVID Paths training back in October.

George Washington and Francis C. Hammond Middle Schools are taking part in a national pilot program by benchmarking the AVID Coaching and Certification Instrument (CCI), which is the newly enhanced and required assessment tool slated to be released in July 2017. This tool will be used to certify all sites and includes criteria to show AVID school-wide metrics and overall effort related to college and career readiness for all students.

**For more information, contact Jodie Peters at (703) 824-6784.**



## Career and Technical Education



T.C. Williams is proud to be offering *Virginia's Teachers for Tomorrow* (VTfT) in Career and Technical Education, taught by Family and Consumers Science teacher, Kimberly Wilson. Kim is trained in the VTfT curriculum and hopes to capture the interest of students to "grow your own" potential teachers who return to Alexandria City Public Schools. The *Virginia's Teachers for Tomorrow* Program is offered to high school juniors and seniors interested in pursuing a career in education.

*Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow* (VTfT) fosters student interest, understanding, and appreciation of the teaching profession and allows secondary students to explore careers in education. They learn the structure and governance of teaching, apply professional teaching techniques in the VTfT classroom and in an off-site supervised internship. Students are also offered educational leadership opportunities through the student organization, Educators Rising.

**For more information, contact Sherri Chapman at (703) 619-8020.**

## Curriculum Design and Instructional Services

### *Expanding the Concept of Content Academies Throughout the Academic Year*

A *Content Academy* is a professional development opportunity available for teachers responsible for a specific content or program area. We have greatly expanded the number and types of Content Academies offered in all content and program areas. These academies focus on strategies and processes aligned with teaching, learning, and assessment priorities identified in School Education Plans and the division's Strategic Plan. Our department's "priority" list identifies four key design principles for these academies:

**Continue** to analyze student achievement data to determine areas of under-performance and "gap areas."

**Model** and reinforce best practices in professional learning, including active and engaged learning, differentiation for the adult learner, and practical resources and strategies that have direct application to classrooms.

**Design** and implement division-wide content academies to address key achievement issues and priorities in various content areas.

**Provide** school-based professional learning "customized" to the needs of individual buildings.



The wide range of content academies reinforces these four areas of focus and commitment. The department has offered academies on high-yield strategies related to key SOL target areas in reading (e.g., Comprehensive Balanced Literacy and Writing in the Content Areas); writing (e.g., Teachers' College Writing Project); mathematics (e.g., Think Through Math and Supporting All Students in Mathematics); science (e.g., SAILS Science Academy); and social studies (e.g., Implementing New Standards of Learning in Social Studies as well as Document-Based Questioning). Additionally, ACPS instructors now have access to professional development sessions involving Physical Education (e.g., Best Practices for Physical Educators Working with All ACPS Students); Family Life Education (e.g., Refresher Course for Family Life Education Certification); World Languages (e.g., Balanced Assessments and Feedback in World Languages Instruction); and all of the Fine Arts (e.g., General Music, Secondary Instrumental, Visual Arts, and Drama).

Information about upcoming Content Academies can be found in the [Professional Learning Website](#), and on PLMS.

**For more information, contact Dr. John Brown at (703) 619-8020.**

## Early Childhood

The Office of Early Childhood is excited about a number of new initiatives and programs that will enhance our pre-K programs. Due to the generosity of ACT for Alexandria funders, our teachers are now members of UpCycle Creative Reuse Center! They will be able to obtain unlimited quantities of materials from UpCycle to use in their classrooms for the period of one year. Teachers will also be able to participate in one professional development session during the school year.

The John Adams early childhood program has been accepted to the *Early Care and Education Learning Collaborative* (ECELC) of Virginia which is part of a National Collaborative. ACPS early childhood special education staff will lead this wonderful initiative designed to prevent early childhood obesity while developing strategies to create healthier environments for children.

For more information, contact Michelle Smith-Howard at (703) 619-8026.

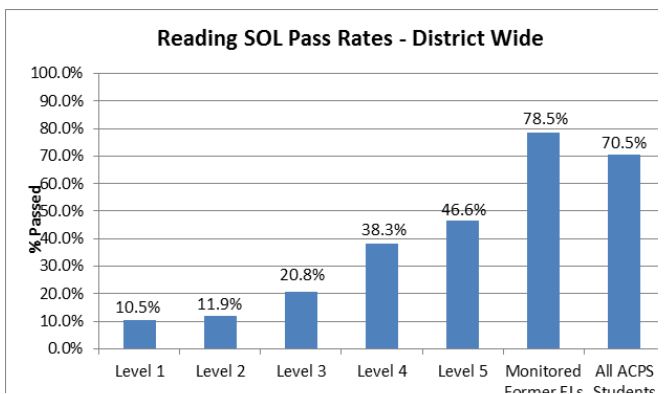
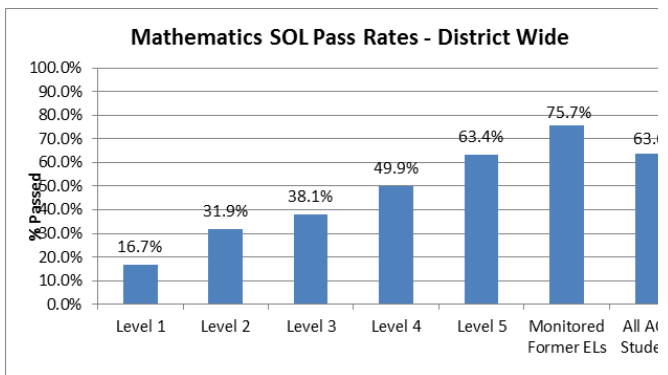


## English Learners

### What Does Our Data Show About EL Achievement?

As English language proficiency increases, students' achievement on standardized tests also increases. Once EL students in ACPS attain English proficiency (Level 6), they outperform the district average on SOL assessments for all students. On average, students attain English proficiency within 5-7 years. To meet this target, the focus of core (Tier 1) instruction for ELs is to accelerate language acquisition through implementation of the ACPS EL Best Practices:

- **Activating Prior Knowledge and Building Background**
- **Comprehensible Input**
- **Explicit Instruction of Language**
- **Differentiation**
- **Quality Student Interaction**
- **Cultural Responsiveness**
- **Metacognition**



For more information, contact Dr. Bethany Nickerson at (703) 619-8022.

## Talent Development

### Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

The very core of a PLC is a focus and commitment to the learning of every student. Collaboration in a professional learning community represents a systematic process in which teachers work together in an effort to impact classroom practices in ways to achieve better results for their students, for their team, and for their school. Highly successful *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)* do not just happen when schools bring a group of educators together. They take focused effort to build and sustain. Members of professional learning communities understand that powerful and engaging learning always occurs in the context of taking action, and they embrace engagement and experience as effective educators. The ultimate goal of a professional learning community is to engage in a process of studying data, developing strategies and ideas to address learning, analyzing the impact of those strategies and best educational practices, and creating conditions for increased student achievement. Below are some foundational components for highly-effective professional learning communities:



#### NORMS

Norms are a set of commitments developed by each team geared to help team members work together efficiently. Just like we teach our students that certain behaviors and routines are dependent upon the activity and location, norms are situation and group specific, and should be developed by the team. An example of a norm for one team might be, "All members of the PLC will arrive on time and begin working immediately" while another may have "All members of the PLC will keep on topic during meetings."

#### ROLES

We all know how much smoother things run when we fully understand what is expected of us. We also know how much more engaging meetings are if we have a specific job to do, with specific tasks. Roles including Note Taker, or Team Leader are integral for many PLCs, while others may include creative roles such as Visualizer or Skeptic.

#### MISSION STATEMENTS

I am going to bet that none of us went into education for the money, or for the great working hours, or because you really like writing lesson plans. We went into education because we believe in it. We believe in students, in education, and believe that we can make a positive difference in the lives of young people. It is from these beliefs that our mission statement comes. It's important for PLCs to develop Mission Statements they believe in so that it may guide their work and outcomes.

#### AGENDAS

We've all been in meetings where we are not sure the purpose or leave meetings unsure of our next steps. Meeting agendas are necessary to keep meetings focused, goal oriented, and keep the CLT moving forward. Some of the essential elements of a meeting agenda are the topics to be discussed, the team member responsible for leading the different topics, the estimated time the discussion on the topic will take, and the outcome/action steps stemming from the topic.

**For assistance with fostering PLCs at your school, check out the additional resources on the [Professional Learning Website](#), or contact Dr. Debra Lane at (703) 619-8028.**