



*Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools &
Programs for the Deaf*

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Report on the Re-Accreditation Site Visit
for the
Atlanta Area School for the Deaf

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

Jane Mulholland, Chair
Retired Superintendent
Washington School for the Deaf

John Serrano
School Superintendent
Atlanta Area School for the Deaf

Introduction

The Atlanta Area School for the Deaf (AASD) underwent accreditation in March 2019. The visiting site team consisted of Jane Mulholland, Chair, Nancy Hlibok Aman, and Ron Stern. The school achieved provisional certification due to deficits in Standards 8 and 9. The site team Chair returned to AASD for a two-day visit March 29-30, 2021. The primary purpose of the visit was to determine if AASD had made substantial progress in addressing 8 key recommendations contained in the March 2019 report in order to achieve full accreditation status. The schedule for those days consisted of six classroom observations—2 elementary, 2 middle school, 2 high school—and the following Interviews:

- Curriculum/Professional Learning—Librarian/Media Specialist
- Literacy Support—Literacy Coach
- Administrative—School Superintendent
- MTSS/Math Support—School Psychologist & Math Coach
- ASL Support—Bilingual Consultant, ASL Specialist, Outreach & Support Supervisor
- PBIS—Outreach & Support Supervisor, School Psychologist, Behavior Specialist
- Leadership—Elementary, Middle School and High School/CTAE Department Heads
- State Schools Division, Georgia Department of Education—State Schools Director, Chief Academic Officer, Language and Literacy Director
- Diversity/Equity—Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Members

Overview

Immediately upon completion of the original site visit and the provisional accreditation announcement, the school superintendent held a town hall meeting with faculty and staff to review the key findings and recommendations. He also facilitated a series of meetings with the AASD leadership team to debrief and formulate a plan to respond to the major recommendations within the next two years. Some of the highlights are as follows:

- Revised AASD's professional development plans to maximize professional learning for teachers and staff;
- Re-established teacher/staff cohorts to focus on bilingual principles and strategies with the collaboration and facilitation of a bilingual consultant;
- Worked toward reviewing and determining curriculum needs such as developing a definition for curriculum at AASD and making significant hires to enhance and improve instruction: Curriculum/Professional Learning Coordinator, Literacy Instructional Coach;
- Made strides to reassess ELA curriculum needs and identify potential curriculum/programs for AASD;
- Strengthened PBIS programming to address students' socio-emotional and mental health needs, school climate and enhance teacher/staff relationships with students;
- Revitalized AASD's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee to address cultural responsiveness and school climate;
- Joined the Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) cohort sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education, and engaged in professional learning related to MTSS to address tiered instruction, assessments and supports with a focus on elementary math for the 2020-2021 school year.

Challenges

Instructional Model: In March 2020, AASD shifted from its on-campus instructional model to a distance/remote learning instructional model. Many of the professional development initiatives that had begun in Spring/Fall 2019 in response to the accreditation recommendations were put on hold in order to implement the online instructional model. Originally, AASD believed students would return to campus in August 2020 and the professional learning opportunities identified to address the recommendations would resume. However, due to COVID-19 community trends and guidance from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and Georgia Department of Public Health (GPH), AASD determined it was not safe to reopen for in-person instruction and services at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. All professional development time was then focused on supporting students and teachers/staff in continuing to implement a remote learning format on a long-term basis. At the time of the revisit, AASD had only had students back on site for 3 weeks. Teachers were using a hybrid model with some students physically in the classroom and others participating virtually.

Budget Reductions: Additionally, AASD has experienced budget reductions during the last 2 years. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, AASD absorbed a 4% budget reduction by freezing non-essential positions, which affected the ability to create positions specifically dedicated to support some of the key recommendations. For the 2020-2021 school year, AASD had to make an 11% reduction. This was accomplished by freezing all non-essential positions and drastically scaling back on spending. In November 2020, AASD received news that the fiscal outlook for the state schools appeared better in light of Georgia's recovering economy and the State Schools' preemptive measures to significantly limit spending. AASD is slowly recovering from the reductions and the immediate priority is on filling the essential vacant teacher positions. It is hoped that in the near future, AASD will have the opportunity and means to be able to create and/or reallocate positions to further support AASD's academic needs and plans.

Key Recommendations

The following section of the report focuses on each of the 8 key recommendations from the 2019 accreditation report and a summary of what AASD has done to address them.

Recommendation 1

The CEASD accreditation team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf, in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Education, hire a Curriculum Coordinator for the purpose of overseeing curriculum development and training, materials selection and purchasing, and vertical and horizontal curricular alignment.

The school superintendent worked with AASD Human Resources Office to review existing vacancies and subsequently reallocated some positions to create new positions. One of the positions included a full-time curriculum/Professional Learning (PL) coordinator. Approval was obtained from the State Schools Division (SSD) to proceed with the new job posting and the position was posted around late April/early May 2019. Applications were submitted and interviews conducted during June and July 2019. The job was offered to and accepted by A. Lee, who had been AASD's school librarian/media specialist for many years. Since the position hiring was finalized late in the summer, it was agreed that Ms. Lee would manage both the curriculum/PL coordinator and librarian/media specialist duties on a temporary basis until the latter position was filled. It was believed this would be manageable on a temporary basis due to some overlap related to overseeing instructional materials and resources.

As mentioned previously, prior to the beginning of SY 19-20, AASD was informed it would need to absorb a 4% budget reduction for the fiscal year. As a result, AASD was instructed to freeze all existing non-essential positions and only essential positions upon careful review and approval of the SSD could be approved. Only teachers, paraprofessionals and related services staff were deemed as essential positions. Consequently, the librarian/media specialist position was put on hold.

Additional support in the area of curriculum and instruction is available to AASD through the SSD. Over the past several years, the SSD has expanded to employ a full-time Chief Academic Officer and a full-time Language and Literacy Director. The Chief Academic Officer's primary responsibilities include but are not limited to leading professional learning activities for AASD and overseeing curriculum/instruction initiatives as directed by the State School central leadership. In addition, she is designated as the Federal Grants coordinator for the SSD. The Language and Literacy Director was initially created in response to Act 462, a newly enacted Georgia law that aims to improve the language and literacy outcomes for Georgia's children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH). The Director is responsible for overseeing a large federal grant focusing on literacy and assessments for schools and programs serving D/HH students including the two State Schools. These two SSD roles have assumed increased oversight of State Schools' instruction/curriculum initiatives on a district-level basis.

Toward the end of SY19-20, Ms. Lee made the decision to return to the librarian/media specialist position full time in light of the need in that area and the increased support for instruction/curriculum available through the SSD. She still is very much involved with curriculum and instruction. In an interview with this observer, she reports she is physically in charge of every piece of curriculum—textbooks, online subscriptions, other resources—and is on the State Schools ELA Curriculum Advisory Committee.

The primary responsibility for curriculum leadership appears to reside with the SSD Language and Literacy Director and the Chief Academic Officer. Both these individuals have a wealth of

experience and qualifications that could benefit AASD. Clarification about the role of SSD vs. AASD leadership and staff in decision-making in these and other areas, and opportunities for teachers/administrators to “buy in” to adopted curricula, new instructional tools, and other decisions impacting the school and its programming, will be important in the future.

Emphasis on department heads’ responsibilities as instructional leaders will help with implementation of new curricula, especially related to administrative functions. Coaches should be seen as peer coaches available to support teachers in the classroom; department heads should be setting expectations and following through on requirements given to teachers. Discussion between the department heads and coaches to clarify roles, and a subsequent sharing of that information with teachers, will help improve lines of communication and support.

Recommendation 2

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf develop/review written curriculum and instruction policies and procedures to provide direction to the staff, leadership, and other stakeholders in the development, implementation, and improvement of its educational program.

At the beginning of SY19-20, the new curriculum/PL coordinator immediately began scheduling and facilitating curriculum committees focusing on science and social studies. The coordinator also conducted meetings with various ELA and math teachers to solicit feedback on curriculum needs. She participated in GaDOE Curriculum Directors monthly meetings/webinars coordinated by the Director of Curriculum and Learning at GaDOE to stay abreast of topics/issues concerning curriculum and instruction.

Based on survey results and additional input from teachers and staff members, a definition of curriculum definition was drafted and then adopted:

The curriculum at AASD is “a sequential blueprint (scope) of a specific content area that includes vocabulary, resources, Essential Questions (EQ’s), objectives, summative and formative assessments, instructional strategies and differentiation that follows current state standards to meet diverse student needs.”

In addition, the curriculum/PL coordinator worked on drafting a protocol to address the selection and purchase of instructional materials and curriculum, which also included a process for curriculum adoption. The protocol is currently tabled in light of the need to focus on implementation of the distance/remote learning model.

Regarding policy review and development, the SSD Chief Policy Officer has primary responsibility for updating SSD’s existing policies as well as develop new policies concerning State Schools. This includes policies concerning instruction and curriculum.

In partnership with the SSD Language and Literacy Director, AASD decided to pilot a new curriculum program, Foundations for Literacy (FFL) for 2 identified elementary classes. FFL was specifically designed for DHH students and has both a visual phonological and auditory phonological approach. The AASD literacy coach, SSD Language and Literacy Director, elementary department head, school superintendent and curriculum/PL coordinator collaborated to plan for the pilot classes, which involved training the two elementary teachers for the selected classes and developing FFL lesson plans, materials and resources. The pilot produced some mixed results due to fidelity issues. One of the two teachers who participated in the pilot unexpectedly left in mid-year and another teacher was assigned to take over the class. This teacher had to be trained to continue with the pilot. In mid-March, AASD had to shift to distance/remote learning due to the pandemic outbreak. The abrupt shift in instructional delivery model resulted in a disruption to the pilot program.

In partnership with the SSD, AASD decided to implement FFL in the entire elementary department in SY20-21. The FFL team worked on developing lesson plans and providing virtual training for elementary teachers during the summer of 2020. The teachers participated in 3.5 days of online training focusing on FFL and Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading (FOWR), which is a supplemental resource to support older students’ fingerspelling and literacy skills.

Both the FFL and FOWR utilize a bilingual approach. The expectation was that on-campus learning would be re-established in August 2020 and a renewed emphasis on implementing FFL and FOWR would take place. Unfortunately, that was not possible and the remote/distance learning model had to be continued.

In January 2020, the SSD established the State Schools ELA Curriculum Advisory Committee consisting of key representatives from all three state schools including AASD. The primary goal of the committee is to identify and adopt ELA curriculum and resources for all three State Schools to ensure standardization and conformity of the quality of instruction and services among the 3 schools. The Chief Academic Officer is leading this effort. AASD has identified teachers and key staff representatives to serve on the committee. After doing some research and gathering input from the leadership team, two outside consultants—an expert in Deaf Education and an expert in Vision needs—were hired to support the committee's work. The committee originally planned to begin meeting in Spring 2020, but the work was tabled due to the pandemic outbreak and the on-campus school closures. The advisory committee held its first meeting in early March 2021, and has regular meetings scheduled through the remainder of the school year and beyond.

AASD began SY20-21 utilizing the distance/remote instructional model for all students due to COVID-19 community-level spread in metro Atlanta. The literacy coach and the Language and Literacy Director prepared materials and resources for teachers for implementation of the FFL and FOWR curricula. The original implementation timeline had to be modified because AASD was uncertain at the start of the year when students would be able to return to in-person instruction. Implementing the new curriculum and utilizing a new instructional model for students was challenging for teachers. This resulted in the administration modifying the expectations for deliverables for teachers. Despite the modifications that have been made, there are still some significant concerns among teachers about the appropriateness of this particular curriculum program, its implementation, and the expectations that were placed on the staff. There has also been some confusion related to the roles and responsibilities associated with the implementation, the AASD staff roles and the SSD roles that need to be addressed and resolved.

At the start of SY20-21, AASD teachers participated in a variety of trainings facilitated by individuals outside of AASD focusing on specific content areas. One notable workshop was an ELA workshop delivered by Dr. Todd Czubek of Boston University, in which the elementary and secondary ELA teachers had the opportunity to learn about bilingual curriculum resources available to support students' ASL and English development (Bilingual Grammar Curriculum). The bilingual curriculum resource will be on the agenda for discussion within the ELA advisory committee. The CTAE teachers participated in a training in October 2020 with an outside consultant to develop aligned curriculum standards for their pathway-specific End of Pathway Assessments (EOPA). The teachers used this guide to develop their year-long plans and unit plans to enhance the quality of their regular lesson plans.

For SY21-22, after the State Schools ELA Advisory Committee makes decisions on the adoption and purchase of ELA curriculum/resources, the focus will move to mathematics. This effort will again be led by the Chief Academic Officer in partnership with the State Schools.

Recommendation 3

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf, in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Education, assess AASD's current language learning environment and its foundational principles for supporting student academic achievement prior to instituting additional school improvement strategies.

Coaching: To address this recommendation, approval was obtained from the SSD to proceed with a new job posting for a literacy coach in late April/early May 2019. Applications were submitted and interviews conducted during June and July. The literacy coach role was offered to and accepted by K. Thompson, a former middle school language arts teacher at AASD. Since the offer was made late summer, AASD was unable to find a teacher replacement in time for the beginning of the school year. Ms. Thompson agreed to continue with some of her teaching duties and was given extra planning periods to do instructional coaching work. A new middle school ELA teacher was hired to replace Ms. Thompson in January 2020, allowing her to assume the literacy coach duties on a full-time basis. (It is important to note that at the time of the last accreditation visit, the math coach, who was in her first year as a coach, also had almost full-time teaching duties due to AASD not having been able to hire her replacement. This has subsequently been resolved and the math coach is now fulfilling her coaching and teacher support duties full time.) The literacy coach has completed her endorsement through the state as a coach, and is highly qualified to provide this support to the teachers. Her responsibilities include providing support to all ELA teachers, as well as collaborating with a couple of CTAE teachers. Her primary focus is on classroom instruction. She also runs the Instructional Collaboration Meetings (ICMs)/PLCs. She developed a yearlong plan for the ICMs this past year and plans to continue having a yearly plan in the future. She meets with some teachers 1:1, others in cohorts.

Academic Rigor: Professional learning opportunities have focused on helping staff reflect on and revise their view toward academic rigor and expectations for student achievement. Prior to the beginning of SY20-21, the SSD hosted a 2-day Professional Learning Institute for all teachers from the three State Schools. Workshop topics included:

- Academic Rigor
- Implicit Bias/Cultural Responsiveness
- Literacy Strategies for D/HH students
- Math Strategies for D/HH students
- Differentiated Instruction
- Introduction to the Learning Management System- Canvas
- State Schools Student Achievement data analysis
- Overview of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for State Schools

The 2-Day Institute was a part of AASD's preplanning/in-service week for teachers/staff. Some of the topics from the 2-day institute were carried over to future professional learning opportunities for the rest of the school year. AASD implemented teacher/staff cohorts to focus on bilingual strategies and principles, which also addressed foundational principles for academic achievement. More information on this is available as part of Recommendations 5 and 6.

AASD and other the other State Schools joined a 5-year cohort to implement the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS). A district-level MTSS leadership team was established consisting of the SSD Director, several SSD members and the 3 school level superintendents. The team worked with the MTSS specialist from GaDOE to plan for MTSS implementation at AASD and the other State Schools. Activities for Year 1 (SY19-20) focused on having the team attend professional development and trainings to learn about MTSS in the following areas:

- Tiered interventions/Multi-level Prevention systems
- Data-Based Decision-making process
- Infrastructure
- Screening
- Progress monitoring

AASD established its school-level MTSS team consisting of all instructional leaders, instructional coaches and the school psychologist (the designated school-level MTSS coordinator). The team met on a monthly basis and underwent an intensive process to determine the school fidelity rating for each MTSS component related to academics and behavior using the specific criteria provided for each area. The process prompted the team to critically assess AASD's academic foundational principles including how and what assessments are administered and used. If a rating of 3 or above 5 was given, AASD had to provide documentation to support the rating. The MTSS coordinator and the school superintendent met with the SSD MTSS Specialist to go over the fidelity ratings. After discussions with the district-level team, it was determined that for Year 1, AASD would focus on elementary math. The school-level MTSS team decided to begin with the screening component. An action plan for the 2020-2021 school year was developed to address the following elementary math areas:

- Setting up screening to get baseline data.
- Using online math assessments (IKAN/GLOSS) to carry out math screening.
- Setting up training for elementary teachers to conduct screening.
- Meeting regularly with the MTSS sub-committee meets regularly to discuss progress.
- Setting up professional learning communities with teachers to go over screening data.
- Beginning to address Tier I instruction & using screening data to guide instruction.

After AASD closed for in-person instruction in March 2020, a plan was formulated to establish a small MTSS sub-committee to primarily focus on elementary math. The team consisted of the school-level MTSS coordinator (our school psychologist), school superintendent, elementary department head and the math coach.

During SY20-21, the MTSS sub-committee met on a monthly basis to go over the implementation of the action plan. The sub-committee agreed to utilize the Numeracy Project, a math resource from the GaDOE math department. It's a free numeracy development resource that supports teachers and leaders in acquiring a solid foundation in numeracy. It is focused on developing students' understanding of numbers and their ability to use numbers to solve problems. Students may solve number problems by counting, adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, or any combination of these operations. The goal is to have students develop strategies that support their use of these operations in real-world and mathematical problems. The Number Project is a 4-part process, which consists of screening assessments and intervention activities. The sub-committee decided to utilize the GloSS and IKAN assessments as a part of the screening process.

The math coach facilitated a training in early fall for an identified group of elementary teachers to focus on MTSS and screening. Due to distance/remote learning, it was not feasible to include all classes, particularly the young students. AASD focused on students who would be able to participate in the Numeracy Project assessments virtually and provide valid and reliable results. The math coach then shared an overview of the assessments. The coach worked with the teachers to administer the screening for identified students. The teachers observed while the coach administered the assessment virtually and the coach developed a spreadsheet to tabulate screening results. The sub-committee reviewed the results and the math coach subsequently met with the teachers to go over the results together to identify and address instructional needs. The subcommittee worked on developing an action plan for SY21-22, which will focus on extending screening to younger elementary students who weren't able to participate in the first round of screening this year, as well to middle school students. The committee also agreed to review the elementary academic schedules to build in time for academic interventions and groupings. The math coach facilitated virtual PLC meetings with the elementary teachers to go over the administration of the screening assessment, interpreting results and learning how results can be used to drive instruction as well as identify specific activities using the Numeracy Project.

The literacy coach reports she works with teachers on an individual basis to help them identify where they can “bump up” their level of instruction to better challenge students. This is based on her observations in classes. She has also provided trainings on rigor for teachers. Helping teachers recognize students’ potential to be challenged and raise their expectations for student outcomes is an ongoing focus.

Recommendation 4

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf administrators formulate an action plan to create a culture of high expectations and academic rigor among school leaders, teachers/staff and students.

During May and June 2019, the AASD leadership team met to review lesson plan expectations and work on identifying non-negotiables and negotiables related to the expectations for the plans. Materials and resources related to the development of weekly lesson plans, unit plans and year-long plans were developed and uploaded in a shared folder (school network) for teachers to access and use. The goal was to ensure a shared understanding of what effective instructional planning should entail.

At the start of SY19-20, department heads shared lesson plan resources and expectations with teachers during the preplanning/in-service week. This included expectations for submitting year-long plans, unit plans and weekly plans in a shared folder for the department heads to review.

The curriculum/PL coordinator and the school superintendent developed a year-long professional learning plan for teachers and staff, and the information and expectations were communicated with the teachers/staff. The professional learning plan addressed:

Training on curriculum access (an outside consultant specializing in teaching students with additional disabilities was hired to provide training and ongoing coaching with teachers). Since AASD has a large group of students with additional disabilities, it needs to ensure they have appropriate curriculum access with high academic expectations in alignment with their developmental needs and abilities.

Training for elementary teachers and secondary ELA teachers was provided as a part of the follow up from the 2-Day institute described previously, focusing on high leverage practices and specific strategies especially for D/HH students. The training was provided by the SSD Literacy and Language Director. Math training for secondary math teachers was provided and facilitated by the math coach and a team from the GaDOE math department for secondary math teachers. In addition, training on Thinking Maps was given to new teachers, and a review of Thinking Maps was provided for all teachers to ensure students would be given sufficient opportunities to practice using Thinking Maps as a strategy.

As mentioned in an earlier section, prior to the beginning of SY19-20, the SSD hosted a 2-day Professional Learning Institute for all teachers from the three State Schools, including AASD. One of the workshops in the 2-day institute involved a discussion of academic rigor and high expectations, which was led by an outside consultant. Later during the fall semester, the SSD hosted a training specifically for school leaders and instructional coaches on academic rigor. During the training, the group discussed defining rigor and what it should look like for all three State Schools. The group eventually developed a common understanding of rigor and made plans to have the consultant work with each State School during their designated professional learning days. The consultant was scheduled to provide training and facilitate activities related to academic rigor during AASD's designated professional learning day in March 2020. Due to the pandemic outbreak, AASD had to shift its professional learning focus to remote learning. Consequently, the academic rigor training was postponed.

As noted previously, a new literacy coach was hired. Even though the coach wasn't able to devote full-time to the new role at the beginning of the school year, she was able to use some of her extra planning periods to partner with the math coach to support teachers related to instruction and facilitate after-school meetings with groups of teachers to address instructional strategies and practices. Rigor and student achievement expectations were part of these meetings.

Monthly meetings were set up consisting of all department heads, instructional coaches, curriculum/PL coordinator and the school superintendent to specifically focus on instructional support and professional learning for teachers/staff. Specific topics included but were not limited to scheduling PL sessions for teachers, setting up cohorts to engage in bilingual practices training, discussing curriculum & rigor, discussing plans for the FFL in the elementary department, grading practices, and support for new teachers. The monthly meetings were suspended in the spring of 2020 due to the on-site school closure.

A structural change was made in the instructional area in SY20-21. The CTAE department head's responsibilities were expanded to include the high school department. One of her greatest strengths is instruction and curriculum, which includes building capacity. She has been focused on these areas with the teachers and providing instructional resources as a way to build capacity and a culture of support within the high school department. The benefits of this change can already be seen in terms of instructional improvements and the culture of the department.

As soon as it was confirmed AASD would begin SY20-21 using the remote/distance learning instructional model for students, AASD shifted its PL focus to supporting teachers and building capacity to provide virtual instruction. The AASD leadership worked on standardizing academic schedules for departments to maximize instruction and provide a program that would meet the needs of students and families' schedules at home. AASD implemented Canvas as its primary learning management system for students and teachers. The department heads supported the teachers and paraprofessionals in establishing virtual academic schedules/routines and addressing family needs to ensure attendance and student engagement. Support service staff provided home visits and delivery of technology and hot spots. They worked 1:1 with students as needed through in-person, socially distanced visits to ensure students understood how to log on to systems. Expectations were communicated with the students and families, and modifications were made to address extenuating circumstances. The leadership held monthly attendance committee meetings to monitor attendance and academic support, and identified strategies and action steps to address attendance and academic concerns. Teachers were expected to do instructional plans for their virtual lessons and online. Online classroom observations were conducted to provide coaching and support by the department heads and instructional coaches.

Professional learning was conducted virtually focusing on a variety of relevant topics including but not limited to implementing FFL for elementary teachers and paraprofessionals, and optimizing instructional technology (Canvas & Microsoft Teams). Given the current events and the pandemic that had had such a profound impact on students and staff, AASD made a commitment to address student and staff mental health and socio-emotional needs. An external mental health team with experience of working with D/HH clients was hired as consultants to provide ongoing training and consultation focusing on trauma-informed school

practices. They worked with staff school-wide as well as with the Tier 3 MTTS team for additional training throughout the year. The math and literacy instructional coaches facilitated monthly meetings with teachers to address best instructional practices and needs particularly in the area of distance/remote learning instruction. Additionally, specific content area training was provided virtually in English and language arts, mathematics, science and social studies during AASD's designated professional learning days in partnership with the SSD in September, October, February and March.

Based on interviews with department heads, instructional coaches, and other staff, it is this observer's opinion that continued reflection and dialogue on academic rigor and expectations for student achievement should be embedded in department meetings, coaching sessions, and professional learning on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 5

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf strengthen its bilingual program by creating a school wide language plan focusing on three areas: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning.

This is an activity that will be undertaken by the SSD-led State Schools ELA Advisory Committee, resulting in a language plan for AASD as well as for the other State Schools. Language planning as a component of lesson plans was seen during the 6 classroom observations. The development of this plan will ensure the appropriate role of each language and how each is to be implemented, both on a class and individual-student basis.

Recommendation 6

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf engage in staff dialogue to promote a shared understanding of the role of ASL beyond just being a language of instruction, and a shared commitment to the acquisition of both ASL and English, thus demonstrating equal value for both languages within its instructional program.

For SY19-20, a year-long professional learning calendar was developed in response to the accreditation recommendations. One of the key components of the plan was training for teachers, administrators and direct support staff related to ASL/English bilingual principles. Four cohorts were set up consisting of new teachers, secondary ELA/social studies teachers, secondary math/science teachers and elementary teachers along with support staff. Cohort sessions were held Wednesday afternoons on a monthly basis. AASD has worked closely with an external bilingual consultant who well known in the field of Bilingual Deaf Education and is one of the original STAR/CAEBER trainers. The consultant first worked with the leadership team by facilitating professional learning sessions for the leadership team to address key bilingual principles and strategies. The team then identified cohort sessions where each leader would co-facilitate the training with the bilingual consultant for the remainder of the year. Topics included:

- Seven Principles for Effective Language Learning
- Twelve Instructional Strategies for D/HH students
- BICS/CALP
- Language Allocation & Separation
- ASL Content Standards

The new teacher cohort included teachers/staff who were hired in the past three years, which was the last time AASD hosted bilingual training for teachers. The cohort facilitators covered the aforementioned topics in depth for the new teachers whereas for the other cohorts, the topics were reviewed as a refresher. Teachers/staff from the cohorts were expected to apply the strategies and bring examples to the next session to share with others. The consultant worked with each department head to conduct classroom observations to specifically focus on identifying bilingual practices and strategies used by the teachers during classroom instruction. Classroom observations were conducted throughout late fall and early winter (January/February) and the consultant and the department head discussed feedback/observations with the teachers. Due to the on-site school closure in early March, bilingual cohort sessions for the remainder of the school year were postponed.

AASD was not able to secure a highly qualified ASL teacher through its recruitment process for SY19-20, which led to setting up a short-term plan to re-assign an ASL specialist to work with elementary students and a HS teacher to work with middle school students to offer weekly ASL classes. Both teachers worked in partnership with the ASL specialist to conduct ASL evaluations and support classroom teachers.

To support its ongoing efforts to increase ASL opportunities for students, AASD entered into a contractual agreement with a well-known Deaf performing artist to work with its students to

prepare for the annual spring ASL community performance in March 2020. Unfortunately, his trip was cancelled due to the pandemic outbreak.

Due to utilizing the distance/remote learning instructional mode for the majority of the SY 20-21, AASD had to change some professional learning priorities, and it was decided to postpone restarting the cohort sessions to avoid overburdening the teachers/staff with additional online trainings. Due to budget cuts/constraints, AASD has been unable to fill the vacant ASL teacher position as it was deemed a non-essential position as per GaDOE. currently. Nevertheless, the ASL specialist has worked on providing 1:1 ASL support (e.g., storytelling) with identified students who particularly benefit from increased language exposure and support. The ASL specialist has continued to conduct ASL evaluations for students and work with teachers to monitor ASL goals and progress. AASD also utilized a contract with an outside ASL teacher to work with a few classes, one group of parents, and to see some students individually. Additional staff from AASD's media studio have provided ASL instruction to parents/families of toddlers/preschoolers. In January 2020, several bilingual training sessions for new teachers/staff were set up as a part of the New Teacher Institute, which was facilitated by AASD's bilingual consultant.

AASD has initiated a new project—development of a Language Planning Profile. The profile provides a snapshot of a student's language needs for teacher and staff use. The ASL specialist is leading this project, in conjunction with the literacy coach. The SLP has also contributed to the project. The team identified current data that could be extracted from existing AASD databases for the Language Planning Profile. The profile includes all ELA assessment results as well as expressive and receptive BICS and CALP data for students. Feedback was obtained from teachers and staff and use of the profile was piloted with a few students. The goal is to finalize the profile for all students by the end of SY20-21, with school-wide implementation to begin Fall 2021.

ASL is utilized as the language of group instruction in classrooms; individual follow-up in the students "preferred language," according to various people interviewed, is part of the classroom instructional environment. This underscores the need for a language plan for the school and for each classroom. It can be a trap to say "we provide whatever the individual student needs." Unless there is a plan for how to handle spoken English within a bilingual classroom, it may be done in such a way that makes some students feel oppressed and marginalized.

Recommendation 7

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf set up Professional Learning opportunities and/or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for department heads, teachers, and paraprofessionals to focus on cultural sensitivity training as it relates to instruction, behavior programming, and communication.

Prior to the beginning of SY19-20, the SSD hosted a 2-day Professional Learning Institute for all teachers from the three State Schools, including AASD. One of the workshops addressed Implicit Bias/Cultural Responsiveness, which was presented by an outside consultant who specialized in cultural responsiveness. In October 2019, AASD hosted a similar Implicit Bias/Cultural Responsiveness training for school staff who did not attend the 2-day Institute. Following the workshop, AASD partnered with the consultant to provide additional support and facilitation for the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. The consultant and the committee discussed needs and priorities to guide the next steps. A plan was developed with activities and timelines. This observer was impressed with the commitment of the committee members and their desire to facilitate the needed conversations and activities to ensure a safe and healthy working and learning environment for all students and staff.

Prior to the first day of school, the PBIS Tier I committee team created an action plan for the 2019-2020 school year to address a reboot/re-implementation of PBIS. AASD behavior staff from the PBIS team met with the leadership team to address the decision-making process for dealing with student behaviors and consequences. AASD fine-tuned the school-wide expectations and conducted surveys with staff to gather feedback and foster increased buy-in and ownership. The committee made modifications to the expectations and consequences.

The PBIS core team participated in the PBIS Basic Training Refresher and some members attended Tier 2 PBIS training. PBIS Tier I committee meetings held monthly meetings to address school-wide expectations, modifications, rewards and training, while a smaller team (Tier III) held weekly meetings to specifically focus on programming and supports for students who need additional interventions and resources. Both of these teams continue to meet monthly and weekly respectively. Tier II needs are addressed in individual meetings with the behavior support staff and their supervisor, or with the Tier III team, depending upon the intervention to be used and the staff who are responsible for such intervention.

During the spring of 2020 when AASD moved to online learning, the PBIS team worked on developing presentation materials and took advantage of the opportunity to train all paraprofessionals. The team developed online training focusing on 10 important behavior strategies and fostering positive relationships with students. The training was replicated for substitute teachers and supervisors during the 2020-21 school year in preparation for returning to in-person school. Department heads then partnered with PBIS team members and re-delivered a condensed version of the training for teachers.

In light of significant events such as the death of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the protests that occurred over the summer, AASD's commitment to addressing cultural responsiveness and equity was affirmed as being even more important. Given the AASD student and staff demographics, the events had a profound impact on AASD. AASD and the SSD worked on setting up cultural responsiveness trainings for the State

Schools during the pre-planning week that were conducted via Zoom. The training was facilitated by the same consultant who previously led the implicit bias training the previous year.

A high school teacher, who previously served on the committee and who had demonstrated commitment and passion regarding supporting AASD's Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) students, was appointed as co-chair of the DEI committee. Over the summer, the superintendent, the supervisor of support services and the co-chair worked on planning for the DEI committee meetings and came up with some ideas and direction for the committee. It was agreed the consultant would facilitate the first committee meeting to gauge the needs of the committee. The committee had its first meeting in August and proposed to distribute a survey to AASD staff to identify needs and priorities concerning diversity and equity at school. The committee met on a bi-weekly basis for the fall semester to go over the survey results and agreed on the following goals/priorities:

- Prioritization of Equity and Diversity as a school
- Creation of safe spaces for students and staff
- Increasing diverse representation in the school decision-making process

The committee engaged in numerous discussions that addressed tough conversations about the leadership, staff morale, student needs and how school decisions and protocols over the years have had an effect on staff and students. This was a part of the process of unpacking and building relationships among the committee members in order to be able to move forward and do authentic and meaningful work related to diversity and equity. An action plan was developed to respond to the priorities agreed upon based on the survey results and the information was communicated to the school community in December 2020. Four sub-committees were formed to focus on each priority/goal with additional staff members outside of the DEI committee. The subcommittees have been meeting on a regular basis to address the action items.

Prior to the beginning of the school year, AASD established a new school theme: **Reconnect, Reimagine & Rethink—We ARE AASD**. The theme was purposefully chosen to respond to the challenges with the pandemic outbreak, which have led AASD to respond and think outside the box to better support student and staff needs. The new theme is seen throughout the school and has been incorporated into the culture.

AASD recognized that in order to be culturally responsive, it had to also address the mental health and social emotional needs of its students and staff. All teachers/staff participated in the trauma-based school practices training led by a mental health/counseling team, and the team also provided follow up training and consultation with the school's mental health team that has been available year-round. This allowed the Tier 3 team the ability and capacity to provide support to students and staff in the current climate and pandemic.

The PBIS team along with several other teachers worked on creating Reconnect activities for middle and high school students to provide opportunities to discuss and process a variety of events that have happened since AASD changed to online learning in March 2020. Doing so gave the teachers and support staff some structure to foster meaningful and safe conversations with the students about a variety of issues. The ability to discuss topics such as racism, socio-emotional needs and the pandemic in a safe and meaningful way has been important for the students. The team was also tasked with forming post-election discussion

groups for students to understand and process the results of the election, discuss the unrest in the county and talk about issues the students saw in their home areas as a result of the division.

The support services supervisor and school social worker participated in a pilot training with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities on trauma-informed practices in order to provide support to staff working with students who have experienced trauma. Burn out and self-care for staff on the Tier III team was the primary emphasis.

The support services supervisor and behavior support staff also attended a training for trainers to implement the Sources of Strength program, a radically strengths-based, upstream, suicide prevention program. The program is designed to address the increasing mental health needs of students by using student peer leaders to change the culture of the school. AASD plans to add this for 2021-22 as a part of its PBIS programming and utilize the class meeting structure to enable students to create 3-4 “campaigns” a year to focus on the 8 strengths people have that ensure healthy coping when things are difficult. The positive outcomes this program reports include not only supporting students that are struggling, but creating team work, positivity and cultural change that hugely impacts school climate.

Recommendation 8

The CEASD Accreditation Team recommends the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf determine and display student progress in multiple ways, and analyze data to adjust instruction and support student achievement.

The AASD School Improvement Team consisting of various representatives, including the SSD and the GaDOE's School Effectiveness Division, was established to meet on a monthly basis starting in August 2019. The team reviewed the school improvement plan as well as the CEASD accreditation recommendations and went over a variety of student data including College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores and MAP results. The team discussed and identified MAP targets/projected growth for students in reading and mathematics, and addressed the correlation between MAP targets and Georgia Milestones (state assessments). Due to the pandemic and shift to virtual learning, the School Improvement Team has not yet met during the 2020-2021 school year.

In addition to ELA assessments and MAP that was administered online for the students this year, the primary focus for this year is re-assessing students' IEP goals upon the return to in-person instruction to identify possible regression and determine whether compensatory services are indicated. Assessment results will be reviewed by the IEP committees to discuss next steps for compensatory services if data demonstrated such a need.

The instructional coaches, in partnership with the school psychologist, set up monthly teacher meetings based on content area and age group to address instructional strategies and data support.

A key component of this response is the MTSS work that has been done. See recommendation #3. In addition to addressing math assessment needs, the literacy coach begun the process of identifying and re-evaluating all current ELA assessments and how they are used. This work will move under the purview of the State Schools ELA Curriculum Advisory Committee.

Accreditation Recommendation

After re-visiting the school and considering the evidence seen and heard during the visit, the CEASD Chair is charged with making a recommendation to the CEASD Board regarding the accreditation action the board should take.

Based on the evidence presented by the school in response to the CEASD Visiting Team's recommendations and based on the evidence seen and heard by the Chair from the school's community of stakeholders, AASD has now met Standards 8 and 9. The Chair recommends to the CEASD Board that it take the following accreditation action. This recommendation will be acted upon at the next regularly scheduled CEASD Board Meeting in April 2021.

FULL ACCREDITATION

Next Steps

- ***Recommendations***

The original report contains 15 major recommendations to be addressed prior to the next full accreditation visit. The 8 recommendations with an asterisk (*) were to be substantially addressed prior to the revisit by the Chair in spring 2021. AASD made significant progress in creating more infrastructure and capacity to address the 8 recommendations. Due to the shift to online learning from March 2020 – March 2021, many of the plans and activities were initiated and then postponed. The onus is on AASD to continue these plans, leading to the achievement and/or substantial completion of the recommendations prior to the next accreditation visit.

- ***Implement the School Improvement Plan***

When CEASD grants accreditation to a school, it does so with the understanding that the school will make a good faith effort to implement the School Improvement Plan that served as one of the bases for accreditation.

- ***Conduct Periodic Reviews of the School Improvement Plan***

While CEASD does not "collect" evidence of the school's annual review of the School Improvement Plan, the school is expected to conduct periodic reviews of its Plan. The purpose of the periodic reviews is to ensure that progress is being made in implementing the Plan, to update and revise the Plan as needed, and to pause to celebrate successes. The school should keep records of what transpired during each review such as meeting agendas, minutes, documented changes to the Plan, and summaries of results of the assessments being used to measure progress toward achieving the objectives. Documentation will be required by the next Visiting Team.

Conclusion

The CEASD Visiting Team congratulates the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf for its commitment to school improvement and the accomplishments it has achieved in the CEASD accreditation process. This commitment to school improvement is evidenced by AASD's work over the past two years in addressing the 8 major recommendations.

CEASD wishes AASD much success in its school improvement work and hopes the accreditation process has been and will continue to be helpful in ensuring a positive future for the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf.