

BOARD BRIEF

Date: December 18, 2020

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION: _____

FROM: Clinton Page, Ed.S, Chief of Accountability and Research
Terri H. Mozingo, Ed.D., Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
Julie Crawford, Ed.D., Chief of Student Services and Equity

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Cindy Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Q1 Chronic Absenteeism and Student Grade Distribution

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Goal 2: Instructional Excellence

SY 2020-2021 FOCUS AREAS

Focus Area 1: Reopening of School

FY 2021 BUDGET PRIORITY

Chronic Absenteeism among Hispanic Students

SUMMARY

Our schools have been intentional and focused on the mitigation of Quarter 1 disparities with regard to chronic absenteeism and grade distribution since November 2020. The school division will conduct a comparative analysis at the end of Quarter 2 which will permit progress monitoring for the first semester of the 2020-21 academic year. This comparative analysis data will be highly informative in determining the impact of the strategies implemented to improve student outcomes. An analysis of Quarter 1 data on chronic absenteeism and student grade distribution was conducted, showing increases in both chronic absenteeism and secondary students receiving grades of F. Chronic absenteeism increases were driven by high absenteeism on asynchronous learning days (Monday) with synchronous learning days (Tuesday through Friday) attendance up two percentage points from last year. Higher rates of absenteeism and increases in grades of F at the secondary level disproportionately impacted Hispanic, Black, English Learner (EL), and Students with Disabilities (SWD) students.

Our teaching, learning and leadership teams met during Quarter 1 to make refinements to the virtual schedule for students incorporating additional time for student support regarding social, emotional, and academic needs. These refinements included movement breaks, one on one sessions, and small group sessions as well as utilizing our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) services for students experiencing social, emotional, and/or academic challenges. During Quarter 1, our technology team worked collaboratively with our schools and families to

BOARD BRIEF

ensure all students had the necessary technology devices and internet access during the first 4-6 weeks of Virtual PLUS+ learning to improve our student engagement experiences and remove any barriers of student learning.

BACKGROUND

Nationally, the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the continuity of learning and social-emotional development opportunities for students in schools has crossed all race, gender, ability, and socio-economic and regional demographics. The impact on learning loss is compounded for students with learning challenges associated with special needs, limited English proficiency and other risk factors.

Students experienced significant interruptions in learning as schools implemented virtual learning strategies to complete the 2019-20 academic year. As schools prepared to reopen for the new school year, the persistence of the pandemic's critical health and safety concerns required schools to design innovative, standards-aligned instructional models for students while prioritizing teachers' health, safety, and families.

In the Fall of 2020, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) launched the Virtual PLUS+ model. This brief discusses high-level key findings, refinements, adjustments and action steps regarding Quarter 1 chronic absenteeism and student grade distributions that started in Quarter 2 of the 2020-21 academic year.

Key Findings

- The division's overall rate of chronic absenteeism (percentage of students absent 10% or more of school days) for Q1 was 17%, up from 6% for Q1 in 2019; however, that increase was driven by high rates of absenteeism during asynchronous (Monday) learning days (41% chronically absent) compared to synchronous (Tuesday through Friday) learning days (8% chronically absent).
- The largest differences in Q1 grade distributions were seen at the secondary school level and specifically in the increase in grades of F (10% in 2019 up to 20% in 2020). Elementary grade distribution changes were smaller compared to secondary grade distribution changes.
- Across chronic absenteeism and student grades, Hispanic, Black, EL, and SWD students were disproportionately impacted. For example, at the secondary level, the increase in the ratio of grades of F compared to the previous year was largest for high school Hispanic students (+22 percentage points), middle school ELs (+22 percentage points), and middle school Hispanic students (+20 percentage points).

BOARD BRIEF

Refinements, Adjustments and Action Steps

Schools are implementing various monitoring systems to identify and align social, emotional, and academic supports to specific student needs. Elementary and secondary schools also engage in weekly multidisciplinary team meetings to discuss student performance data, intervention plans, and supports through the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) including:

- Analyzing assessment data (MAP, PALS etc.) to identify students who may need additional support from the Reading and/or Math specialists;
- Daily individual and small group, specialized service support provided by Reading and Math Interventionists, English Learner, and Special Education staff;
- Individualized outreach and support to parents to review current performance and how children can be best assisted at home;
- Increased flexibility in how students demonstrate mastery and adjusted on-line course end dates for high school students for students with attendance concerns; and
- Communication with students and families by school social workers, administrators, teachers, and other Student Support Team (SST) members to determine barriers to attendance and discuss interventions, particularly on asynchronous learning days.

School teams will continue to examine student progress data to improve the efficacy of targeted supports and identify high-leverage interventions.

RECOMMENDATION

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the brief and attached analyses for an understanding of Quarter 1 chronic absenteeism and student grade distribution data.

IMPACT

These data, along with ongoing implementation meetings and feedback forums, continue to inform next-steps and refinement areas within the Virtual PLUS+ implementation.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Q1 Chronic Absenteeism Analysis
2. Q1 Elementary Student Grade Distribution Analysis
3. Q1 Secondary Student Grade Distribution Analysis
4. Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning Supports in Q2

CONTACT

Clinton Page, clinton.page@acps.k12.va.us