

BOARD BRIEF

Date: April 12, 2024

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION:

FROM: Carmen Sanders, M.S., Executive Director of Instructional Support
Tanja Mayer-Harding, Humanities Coordinator and World Languages Instructional Specialist

THROUGH: Pierrette Finney, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Michelle Rief, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: ACPS Humanities Updates (Fine Arts, Health, Physical and Family Education, Social Studies, World Languages)

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 1: Systemic Alignment
Goal 2: Instructional Excellence
Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support

SY 2023-2024 PRIORITY AREA:

Academic Achievement
Tier 1 Instruction: Alignment, Rigor, Engagement

FY 2024 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Academic Achievement
Student Supports
Staff Supports
Safe Routes to School Coordination
Target Chronic Absenteeism
Increased Support for Social and Emotional Learning

SUMMARY:

This board brief will provide highlights of some of the work of the ACPS Humanities team throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

DETAILS:

Fine Arts Update:

Scholastic Art Awards

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- A number of Alexandria City High School (ACHS) art students submitted artwork to the 2024 Regional Scholastic Art Awards. Four students received awards and five additional students received honorable mentions.

Modern Music Course

- This year, a new middle school music course has been piloted at George Washington (GW) and Francis C. Hammond (FCH) Middle Schools, titled *Modern Music*. This is a semester-long music class with no prerequisite requirements. The course focuses on contemporary styles of music, and students have the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of instruments such as the ukulele, guitar, electric bass, keyboard, and drumset. This course has created a music option for students who might have scheduling conflicts with traditional, year-long music courses or do not meet the necessary prerequisites for certain music ensembles.

Honors Music Ensembles

- Three ACHS band students were selected to participate in the Virginia All-State Band, which is one of the highest music honors in the state.
- One ACHS orchestra student was selected to participate in the Virginia All-State Orchestra, which is one of the highest music honors in the state.

Fall Play/Spring Musicals

- This past fall, ACHS Theater premiered an original play written by ACHS senior Yahney-Marie Sangare titled, *Everything Happens at Night*.
- This spring, ACHS Theater will present the musical, *Bring It On*, and GW Middle School (GWMS) Theater will present the musical, *Finding Nemo Jr.*

Community Partnerships

- **MLK Jr. Art Exhibition with the Alexandria Black History Museum and City of Alexandria:** Elementary students submitted works of art depicting the theme *Living the Dream*. Selected works were then displayed in the Vola Lawson Lobby of City Hall throughout the month of January and the students were honored in a ceremony in the Council Chamber on MLK Jr. Day.
- **Earth Day Art Exhibition with the Alexandria Department of Transportation & Environmental Services:** Elementary and middle school students submitted works of art depicting the theme *I am an Eco-City Superhero*. Selected works are currently displayed in the Vola Lawson Lobby of City Hall until the end of April. Students will be honored in a ceremony at City Hall in mid-April.
- **Teacher Scholarship Classes with The Art League:** A local nonprofit, The Art League, has provided professional development for all our art teachers PK-12, as well as access to four free art classes throughout the school year. ACPS art teachers enjoy this opportunity for professional learning and community building.
- **Middle School Choral Collaboration with the Alexandria Choral Society:** A local nonprofit choir, the Alexandria Choral Society (ASC), worked with the middle school choral groups at GWMS to put on a collaborative, intergenerational concert this past fall. Furthermore, the conductor of ACS provided coaching sessions to the GWMS choir prior to the assessment.

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- **Music Offerings with Sound Impact:** A nonprofit organization made up of professional musicians, Sound Impact, has worked with ACPS students K-8 in a number of capacities. They have performed in-school concerts, coached middle school band and orchestra students, and are currently offering an after-school Ukulele Club to students at William Ramsay Elementary.
- **The Alexandria Symphony Orchestra's (ASO) Sympatico Program at John Adams Elementary:** The ASO continues to offer music instruction before and after school to students at John Adams Elementary via their Sympatico program.

Health/Physical and Family Life Education Update:

Physical Education (PE):

SPLASH (Students Physically Learning About Swimming and Health) & Aquatic Program

Expansion

- By the end of April, thirteen of the fourteen elementary schools will have participated in SPLASH this school year sending their 4th or 5th grade students to Chinquapin Recreation Center for a week of one-hour instruction on water safety and swimming basics. This was the highest number of schools participating in SPLASH and we are aiming for all fourteen in FY25. Currently, Title IV grant funds support swimsuit needs, transportation costs, and instructor stipends.
- 86.5% of student participants have rated themselves as “comfortable in a swimming pool” after the program. Additionally, the students rating themselves as “advanced swimmers” before SPLASH was 54.2% and grew to 72.8% after SPLASH. Lastly, 95.4% of student participants said they “learned important water safety skills” during SPLASH.
- With the new ACPS pool at Alexandria City High School: Minnie Howard Campus, our aquatic program will be expanding to include elective courses for high school students, aquatic fitness, and lifeguard training/water safety instructor certification. Both high school PE programs will be encouraged to incorporate an aquatic unit into their curriculum pacing guides. Lastly, the next steps are to think about the possibility of expanding SPLASH to middle school students through PE depending on logistics and funding.

Biking in the Schools (BITS)

- ACPS has fourteen bike fleets that are shared among the seventeen schools and one balance bike fleet that is being piloted for Grades K & 1.
- BITS at the elementary level teaches beginners how to ride a bike and all students about bike safety and trail riding skills. It is implemented through PE in Grade 3.
- Eight elementary schools have completed their biking unit in PE with Grade 3 this school year and other schools are scheduled to teach their units this spring. Of the 3rd grade students who have participated in BITS this school year, in the pre-survey they rated themselves as 12.8% beginners, 23.7% intermediate, and 63.5% advanced riders. After

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BITS, in the post-survey, they rated themselves as 3.3% beginners, 20.1% intermediate, and 76.6% advanced riders.

- At the middle and high school levels, teachers have incorporated biking units into their PE pacing guides for this school year where they focus on more advanced biking skills, such as bike maintenance and riding on city streets.
- Three elementary schools so far have piloted the balance bike unit for kindergarten and first grade with great success and plan to incorporate this unit into their annual pacing guides moving forward. As more schools pilot this, we hope to grow our balance bike fleets based on funding availability.
- The success of this program is highly dependent on our full-time ACPS Pedestrian and Bike Education Support Specialist for their hands-on support for schools during this unit and volunteers through our Bike Buddies program. The daily support provided in collaboration with the PE teachers allows all students support on their skill level and helps with logistics and student safety.

Pedestrian Safety Education

- Pedestrian Safety is a suggested PE unit in the curriculum for Grades K-2. Many of the elementary schools create a mock town in their gymnasiums for students to practice safety skills and incorporate a school campus scavenger hunt where students look for road signs, signals, and infrastructure to support pedestrians.
- Our Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Pedestrian and Bike Education Support Specialist spearheaded collaborative assemblies at all four middle schools for 6th-grade students this school year reaching all 1130 students. They brought together the ACPS Health and PE department, our Alexandria Police School Resource Officers, and our community partner Alexandria Families for Safe Streets to present to students a refresher on pedestrian safety. This was the third year holding these assemblies for 6th graders at all middle schools.

Other PE Programs

- Optional PE units beyond common sports/physical activities outside of the SOLs are incorporated broadly into annual pacing guides at schools. For example, Grades 5-10 engage in: cast and reel fishing, archery, pickleball, inline skating, and CrossFit Kids. Training for these units was provided to teachers and is offered annually to increase staff participation.

Health:

Middle School Curriculum Revisions

- The middle school health curriculum was revised during the summer of 2023 to align with the VA SOL revisions.
- Teachers were engaged with the new curriculum during the back-to-school Professional Development which was implemented this school year.

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Family Life Education (FLE):

Secondary Family Life Education Curriculum Revisions

- The Family Life Advisory Committee is finalizing the secondary FLE curriculum revisions that will align with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) FLE 2020 Standards of Learning (SOL) revisions. These drafts will then be presented to the School Health Advisory Board for the next steps in the approval process of the revised curriculum.
- The goal of teacher training in August and October 2024 will be to fully implement in the 2025-26 school year.

Health and PE Staff Training's

Positive Coaching Alliance

- Trains teachers on positive behavioral concepts that model and encourage students to improve their ability to work as part of a team, build greater personal resilience, and teach them how to bounce back from mistakes.

Signs of Suicide Training

- A training session provided by the City of Alexandria was offered during a professional development day for all secondary Health and PE teachers in October of 2023.

Medical Training

- All Health and PE staff were trained at the start of the school year on the following: concussion awareness, stock albuterol administration, naloxone administration, first aid basics, adult & child choking, CPR and AED administration, and use of an EpiPen.

Community Partnerships

Stroke Smart Virginia

- Through our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement, ACPS 2nd, 6th, and 9th grade students receive a lesson on how to recognize signs of a stroke using the BE FAST acronym and become Stroke Smart Champions.
- Stroke Smart Virginia provides magnets and wallet cards for students to take home to their families.

Alexandria Little League (ALL)

- ALL is in their 3rd year of providing PE takeovers for four lessons to 4th-grade students at all fourteen elementary schools teaching the basics of baseball and softball. Bringing in experts in this field has been a huge hit and we hope to continue this partnership.

Alexandria Soccer Association (ASA)

- ASA pushes into the PE setting providing lessons on soccer to students both during the school day and after school in many of our schools at all grade levels.

Alexandria Families for Safe Streets (AFSS)

- AFSS supports our pedestrian safety education programs, especially helping to ensure our assemblies to 6th graders at all four middle schools is a success.

Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)

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- BPAC greatly supports the BITS program generating daily volunteers for our Bike Buddies Program and assisting with grant writing opportunities to support our bike fleet needs.

Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP)

- ACAP currently provides grant funds to support the Draw the Line, Respect the Line curriculum that is part of the middle school FLE unit.
- They are participating in the Family Life Education Advisory Committee to assist with curriculum revisions.
- They are partnering with ACPS to assist with the Family Life Education annual teacher training needs.

Social Studies Update:

Revised Standards of Learning in History & Social Science

- The Board of Education approved the revised Standards of Learning for History and Social Sciences in April 2023. VDOE has established a timeline for implementation that includes a crosswalk year in 2024-25 and full implementation in 2025-26. In the 2024-24 school year, teachers will have the opportunity to learn about the new standards and participate in revising the curriculum to be fully implemented in 2025-2026.

High School: Using State-Developed Performance Tasks for Verified Credit

- Under Virginia Board of Education guidelines, divisions may use state performance tasks for Locally Awarded Verified Credit (LAVC) in social studies courses. This year, ACPS is making the shift to verified credit using this option. Throughout the year, students have worked on curriculum-embedded performance tasks that include analyzing documents and writing with evidence. Students who have scored proficient on these tasks and pass the course will earn their verified credit at the end of the year, without needing to take the end-of-course SOL test. Results thus far suggest a significant increase in students who will earn a verified credit in history this year. Using performance tasks instead of an end-of-course test allows instruction to focus on authentic assessment, project-based learning, and deeper exploration of key course themes.

National History Day

- Francis C. Hammond Middle School and George Washington Middle School held school-wide competitions in January and February. On March 2, 2024, forty-four ACPS middle school students who advanced from those competitions participated in the Virginia History Day District 5 Competition held at West Springfield High School. At that contest, eight ACPS students advanced to the statewide Virginia History Day competition to be held in Richmond on April 27, 2024.

“We the People” Competitions and Showcase

- ACHS government students participated in “We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution,” is an educational program that instructs students on the history and principles of American constitutional democracy. Simulated congressional hearings serve as the final assessment of the “We the People” program and provide an excellent opportunity for students to improve their

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public speaking as well as their research and analytical skills. Select teams participated in the regional competition in December, qualifying for the state competition in January. Other teams participated in school-based simulated hearings where they presented to panels of judges.

Civic Action Projects

- ACPS students in 8th-grade Civics and Economics courses and 12th-grade U.S. Government courses have been working on a civic action project, in which they identify a public policy issue they care about, research policy options, and propose civic action to address the issue. As part of this process, students have connected with community partners, elected officials, and civic organizations to better understand community issues and inform their proposals.

Collaboration with the City of Alexandria's Office of Historic Alexandria

- The Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) is working with ACPS teachers to develop educational resources using our community's historic resources. Selected teachers will work with museum educators, archeologists, and library staff to create outputs to support classroom social studies SOLs with a focus on local resources.

World Languages Update:

American Sign Language

- During the 2023-24 school year, ACPS offered American Sign Language I online as a new World Language option for high school students. ACPS received many requests for the online course but enrollment was limited by the vendor. During this school year planning began to offer American Sign Language levels I and II in person to be implemented in the 2024-25 school year to meet the growing requests of students to learn American Sign Language.

World Language Credit by Exam

- This year, over 230 students registered for the exam. Assessments were administered at six different schools and additional testing will be offered during summer school for graduating seniors in need of credits to meet graduation requirements. This exam is available in over 100 languages for students in Grades 6-12 who are proficient in a language other than English and provides them with the opportunity to earn up to three high school credits. Credit awards are based on students' proficiency ratings per policy and regulations IKFD/IKFD-R.

Diploma Seal of Biliteracy

- All level four World Language students in Chinese, French, German, Latin, Spanish and Spanish for Heritage III will take a nationally normed assessment at the end of April. Taking this exam offers them the opportunity to meet the World Language requirement for the Seal of Biliteracy.

State Latin Convention

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- In November, students from Francis C. Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools attended the State Latin Convention in Richmond, Virginia. They participated in language and cultural competitions with other Latin students such as: Dramatic Interpretations, English Oratory, Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, Colored and Black Pencil, Jewelry, Black Ink, and Mosaic. Individual ACPS students earned placements from first through tenth in their competitions and certificates of excellence.

Global Partnerships

- French and German middle school teachers at Francis C. Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools reconnected with their partner schools in Caen, France, and Hamburg, Germany to plan a cultural experience visit. Cultural experience trips offer students an opportunity to improve their language proficiency and gain a deeper understanding of a world culture's history, perspectives, and lifestyles. Additionally, all students in these programs get an opportunity to interact with students from other countries. Often, cultural experience trips result in lifelong friendships.

BACKGROUND:

This is the 2023–24 update from the Office of Instructional Support Humanities team.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the information the ACPS Humanities team provided.

IMPACT:

ACPS Humanities initiatives have provided enhanced opportunities for students to explore and engage in authentic learning experiences in these areas. The focus of the Humanities team will continue to be on providing meaningful aligned, engaging, and rigorous experiences.

REFERENCES:

None

ATTACHMENTS:

None

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