

**SUPERINTENDENT'S ENTRY PLAN:  
FINAL REPORT ON LISTENING AND LEARNING TO FACILITATE  
RELATIONSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arlington Public Schools (APS) named a new Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Patrick K. Murphy, in April 2009. To guide the Superintendent during his first six months, an Entry Plan was developed.

### **Development of the Entry Plan**

The purpose of the Entry Plan was to organize a set of activities to allow the new Superintendent to gather information to create an understanding of the current and future state of the school division. The Entry Plan was developed in the context of the APS Strategic Plan and followed five themes – vision, communication, achievement, strategies, and future. From these themes, several guiding questions were identified to direct data collection activities and ensure the objectives of the Entry Plan were met. Timelines and suggested activities to answer the guiding questions were components of the Entry Plan and enabled the Superintendent to begin the listening and learning process.

### **Methods for Collecting Data/Information**

To answer the guiding questions posed in the Entry Plan, a mixed-methods approach was used. Individual interviews of APS School Board members, senior staff members, and principals were conducted. Additional individual and small group interviews were used for students and several employee groups. Community chats, or focus groups, were used to collect data from parents, community members, and Arlington County staff members. A comprehensive document review was also conducted to organize and summarize information about the APS planning and management process.

Upon completion of the interviews and community chats, qualitative analyses were conducted to identify themes. These themes were identified by constituency group as well as presented as overarching themes that were common across groups. The document review was conducted by an independent research organization, Hanover Research Council, and presented to the school division.

### **Findings from the Entry Plan**

From the various data collection activities, the new APS Superintendent has a better understanding of the APS school division and the Arlington community. Key findings are presented below.

- APS offers a wide variety of programs and services to meet the needs of students, families, and the community.
- Communication across the school division and with constituent groups is critical for success. Because of the diversity of the APS community, diverse strategies for effective communication will be required.
- A high quality staff delivers a wide range of programs and services for students, families, and the community. The special education process and services can provide

challenges for families. Additional strategies may be necessary to make the special education process more family-friendly.

- Parents are involved in schools and the school division; and the APS community encourages and supports family involvement. Outreach efforts or new strategies to attract underrepresented parents/families would strengthen parent involvement.
- Schools and departments are aligning work plans and strategies with the APS Strategic Plan. Accountability for plans is necessary to ensure goals and objectives are being met.
- School system processes and operations may challenge efficiency.
- School boundaries and program availability at schools are concerns for the community, as are strategies to address the achievement gap.
- The APS community desires a first-class education for students, choices to meet the needs of students, and a united school division to support all students and families.

### **Next Steps for the Superintendent**

The Superintendent has listened and learned from students, parents, employees, and community members and leaders throughout the organization, thereby gaining an understanding and knowledge about the individuals, the organization, and the community. From the findings and next steps, five areas of focus that need to be addressed in order to take the organization to the next level of excellence have been identified:

1. Student achievement plans;
2. Student service models;
3. Communication framework;
4. Business operation practices; and
5. Cycle of improvement model—“Plan, Do, Study, Act” (PDSA).

In addition, specific activities have been identified in each of the Entry Plan themes that reflect the findings – vision, communication, achievement, strategies, and future. The measurable activities clearly represent the answers to the guiding questions and address the overarching issues presented by the information gathered throughout this process.

In order to implement the findings, a plan will be created that will guide the steps to be taken over the next three years.

**SUPERINTENDENT’S ENTRY PLAN:  
FINAL REPORT ON LISTENING AND LEARNING TO FACILITATE RELATIONSHIPS  
FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

In July 2009, Arlington Public Schools (APS) welcomed a new Superintendent of Schools. It had been more than a decade since the school division hired a new Superintendent, and an Entry Plan was created to assist in a seamless transition with all constituencies. The Entry Plan was posted on the APS website in May 2009 to allow the school community to become familiar with planned activities. The following sections of the report describe the *Development* of the Entry Plan; the *Methods* for collecting data/information to answer the questions presented in the Entry Plan; the *Findings*, or answers to the Entry Plan questions and overall themes that emerged from the data collection activities; and the Areas of Focus and *Next Steps* for the Superintendent based upon the findings.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENTRY PLAN**

Dr. Patrick K. Murphy was selected as the Superintendent of Arlington Public Schools in April 2009. Upon selection, the incoming Superintendent developed a plan to learn about the policies and procedures of the school division; meet and establish relationships with the students, parents, and school division staff; meet with APS School Board members; establish a supportive working relationship with Arlington County officials; and meet and get to know the larger Arlington County community. The Entry Plan detailed a set of objectives and proposed activities by constituency group so that the Superintendent could measure progress in meeting the goals of the Plan and provide periodic updates.

The Superintendent’s Entry Plan was intended to provide a framework for learning about the people and programs throughout APS. Specifically, the Entry Plan aimed to:

- Build collaborative and team-oriented relationships;
- Develop a more comprehensive understanding and knowledge of the people, community, and school division; and
- Create an environment that moves the school community forward to address both short-term and long-range academic and operational goals.

Keeping in mind the existing structures and guiding documents, the Entry Plan was developed in the context of the APS Strategic Plan. It focused efforts on examining the strategies in place to raise student achievement; eliminate the gaps in achievement among identified groups; provide instruction and other school experiences that respond to each student’s talents, interests, and challenges; and build effective relationships with parents and the community in order to build active support for the education of students. Furthermore, the Entry Plan provided a process for reviewing the following themes across APS constituencies and programs: vision, communication, achievement, strategies, and future. (The Entry Plan and APS Strategic Plan can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.)

To ensure effective implementation, the Entry Plan was divided into three phases: Pre-Entry (May-June 2009), Entry (July-August 2009), and Post-Entry (September-October 2009). Throughout each phase, data were collected and analyzed to allow the Superintendent to create a picture of the current state of APS and to begin to plan for the future of the school division. Guiding themes included:

- Thinking about the future of APS and the aspirations for the students;
- Examining students' academic accomplishments; and
- Providing an opportunity and forum for sharpening the commitment to student success.

Beyond serving as a means of transition from one Superintendent to another, the Entry Plan also allowed the school division to take a methodical look at the organization as a whole and determine what is working and where there may be opportunities for growth. Updates upon the completion of the Pre-Entry Phase and Entry Phase were presented to the community and posted on the APS website. This final report comes at the completion of the Post-Entry Phase and provides a springboard for future activities, including the Superintendent's FY11 budget and the 2011-2017 APS Strategic Plan.

To accomplish the goals of the Entry Plan, the Superintendent met with a wide range of constituencies. For each group, an objective was identified to guide meetings and activities. These objectives served as a foundation for developing reciprocal working relationships to ensure future success for students. Table 1 presents a list of objectives by constituency group.

Though the objectives are clearly focused on relationships, each group participated in the entry process by providing valuable information on the state of the school division. To guide this process, a series of guiding questions and objectives were tied to the five themes of the Entry Plan (i.e., Vision, Communication, Achievement, Strategies, and Future). The guiding questions shaped the data collection strategies. Guiding questions and objectives are presented in Table 2.

The Entry Plan also established a timeline and suggested activities for each constituency group. These activities supported the objectives and questions presented in the Plan and allowed the new Superintendent to begin the listening and learning process.

The Entry Plan was intended to serve as a roadmap for the new Superintendent and provide an organized framework for getting to know the APS school division and community. The Entry Plan presented goals, guiding questions, objectives, and activities for the Superintendent to transition into the first few months of his tenure. The six guiding questions were used to format information – gathering activities with the APS constituencies and for the new Superintendent to become immersed in the context of the school division. The Plan also provided the foundation for specific data-collection methods and instruments.



<b>Table 1. Entry Plan Objectives by Constituency Group</b>	
<b><i>Constituency Group</i></b>	<b><i>Objective</i></b>
APS School Board Members	Establish team-oriented working relationships with individual board members and the board as a whole to support the work and success of APS
Senior Staff	Develop strong professional relationships with all Senior Staff members to create a collaborative team to lead APS
School and Department Leadership	Cultivate strong professional relationships with all school-based and department leaders to become knowledgeable and to understand each community they serve, their instructional and support services and resources, and the goals of each program
Teachers	Create open, professional relationships to facilitate communication between teachers and school-based and senior leadership to support staff in meeting the needs of students and families
Other Employee Groups	Develop relationships with other employee groups to facilitate open communication, provide opportunities for feedback, and align our work to support students and families
Students	Establish partnerships with representatives from student groups at all levels to gain perspective and understanding of the opportunities and contributions of students within APS
Parents	Establish partnerships with local, division, and regional parent groups to become knowledgeable of their advocacy and contributions for all students in APS
APS Advisory Groups	Establish effective partnerships with representatives from the district-wide advisory councils and committees to become aware of their work and priorities to support the goals of APS
Community Members	Generate goodwill, build support, and establish channels for communication with community leaders and faith-based and business organizations that serve the students and enhance the Arlington community
Political Leadership	Create partnerships and establish means for consistent communication with local, regional, state, and national leaders to support the students, their families, and the Arlington community
Media	Generate an early “listening and learning” focus to clearly communicate goals to the press, public, and education community

<b>Table 2. Entry Plan Guiding Questions and Objectives</b>		
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Guiding Question</i>	<i>Objective</i>
<i>Vision</i>	What is currently being done to accomplish our mission, vision, and goals?	Develop an understanding of the perspectives of all stakeholders to establish a roadmap for the vision and expectations of APS
<i>Communication</i>	How will we communicate our mission and vision in order to accomplish the goals?	Establish an understanding and ownership of the process by which the division’s vision, mission, core beliefs, commitment, and action plans are dedicated to providing the best possible education for every student
<i>Achievement</i>	What successes have been achieved toward meeting the APS Strategic Plan goals?	Determine “where we are and where we need to go” in terms of organization effectiveness and efficiency
	What successes must be achieved to meet the established goals outlined in the APS Strategic Plan?	
<i>Strategies</i>	What steps are necessary for APS to accomplish the goals outlined in the APS Strategic Plan?	Identify successful strategies the APS staff is using to meet the goals and objectives of the APS Strategic Plan Determine gaps in strategies that may not be fully realizing APS Strategic Plan goals and objectives
<i>Future</i>	What are the future aspirations of APS?	Examine key issues in the school division to determine how the organization may function in the future

## **METHODS FOR COLLECTING DATA/INFORMATION**

The purpose of the Entry Plan was to organize activities so that the new Superintendent could gain knowledge and information that would create a picture of the current and future state of the school division. It provided a framework and focus for the Superintendent to begin meeting with the school and local community prior to his arrival and throughout the first few months of his tenure. Both formal and informal meetings enabled the Superintendent to gather information and learn more about APS.

### **Entry Plan Design Methods**

The Entry Plan was designed to gather information from various constituencies using a variety of data-gathering tools. This mixed-methods approach allowed data to be gathered in large and small groups, using both standard and nonstandard methods. Implementing the Entry Plan included extensive data collection. Table 3 presents an overview of the Entry Plan data collection plans and methodology.

**Table 3. Data Collection Plan and Methodology**

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Data Collection Instrument</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>
Develop an understanding of the perspectives of all stakeholders to establish a roadmap for the vision and expectations of APS	School Board members Senior staff Principals Teachers Students	Interview protocol	Establish themes by group
	Community members	Focus group protocol	
Establish an understanding and ownership of the process by which the division’s vision, mission, core beliefs, commitment, and action plans are dedicated to providing the best possible education for every student	School Board members Senior staff Principals Teachers Students	Interview protocol	Establish themes by group
	Community members	Focus group protocol	
	Planning and management documents	Document review	Qualitative review
Determine “where we are and where we need to go” in terms of organization effectiveness and efficiency	School Board members Senior staff Principals Teachers Students	Interview protocol	Establish themes by group
	Community members	Focus group protocol	
	Planning and management documents	Document review	Qualitative review
Identify successful strategies that APS staff members are using to meet the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan	Senior staff Principals Teachers	Interview protocol	Establish themes by group
	Planning and management documents	Document review	
Determine gaps in strategies that may not be fully realizing Strategic Plan goals and objectives	Senior staff Principals Teachers	Interview protocol	Establish themes by group
	Planning and management documents	Document review	
Examine key issues in the school division to determine how the organization may function in the future	Planning and management documents	Document review	Qualitative review

Qualitative data collection instruments were developed and implemented to gather detailed information from individuals and groups. Individual interviews of APS School Board members, APS senior staff members, and APS principals were conducted. (See Appendix C for the Interview protocol.) Focus groups (i.e., summer community chats) were used to collect data from parents, community members, and Arlington County staff members. (See Appendix D for the Focus Group protocol.) Additional individual and small group interviews were used for students and several employee groups. A comprehensive document review was also conducted to organize and summarize information about the APS planning and management process. (See Appendix E for the Superintendent’s Entry Plan Document Review by Hanover Research Council.)

### **Interviews**

Individual and small group interviews were conducted in May and August 2009 with several constituency groups, including School Board members, senior staff members, principals, and several APS groups. Student interviews were conducted in September and early October, the timing of which allowed for transition back to school. Interviews were scheduled in advance, were often informal in nature, and were conducted by the Superintendent. An interview protocol was developed to guide the discussion and ensure that Entry Plan objectives were met and the above stated questions were answered. This protocol was used for all interviews. The interviews included a series of 15 questions and took approximately 60 minutes to complete. Participants also had the opportunity to provide additional comments and to ask questions of the Superintendent. The Superintendent typed the responses directly into a data file to improve accuracy and efficiency.

### **Community Chats/Focus Groups**

The Superintendent and division staff members conducted 12 community chats in July and August 2009 with parents, Arlington County staff members, and Arlington community members. The purpose of the chats was to gather information from parents and the local community about their views on the state of APS. The chats, or informal focus groups, were held in family homes, community centers, and government civic rooms and took approximately 90 minutes to complete. The community chats were informal, although they followed a general agenda with two main questions. Typically, the Superintendent provided an overview of the Entry Plan and discussed “big issues” for the 2009-2010 school-year. This was followed by two open-ended questions – describe the best of APS and the challenges facing APS. An Arlington staff member took notes throughout the chats to capture all comments. In addition, attendees were invited to provide written questions or additional comments. Upon completion of the chat, APS staff transcribed oral comments into a data file organized by location of the chat. Follow-up comments and/or questions were transcribed into a different data file. Those who attended the chats were sent a link to a follow-up survey that provided additional opportunities for attendees to provide ideas or ask questions.

### **Document Review**

A comprehensive document review was independently conducted by Hanover Research Council to assess the APS planning and management process as it relates to the four goals of the APS Strategic Plan. Hard copy documents as well as electronic documents from the APS website were used throughout the review. Documents reviewed include the APS Strategic Plan, school

improvement plans, annual school management plans, department plans, and administrator work plans. Specifically, the document review aimed to identify the strengths and opportunities for improvement within the planning and management process as it aligns activities with the Strategic Plan. A copy of the final report is included in Appendix E.

### **Limitations**

The Superintendent's Entry Plan was developed as a framework to guide his transition into APS. The Plan was intended as a communication tool and to encourage the building of relationships between the new Superintendent and the APS and Arlington County communities. It served as a roadmap for the first few months of the transition to a new APS Superintendent. As such, the Entry Plan was not a formal program and did not include a formal evaluation or accountability component. Rather, the Entry Plan provided an opportunity for the new Superintendent to gather a wealth of information in a short period of time.

The data collection activities and individual and group meetings reported in this study were purposeful. Findings are reported as a summary and are meant to represent a snapshot at a given point in time.

## FINDINGS FROM THE ENTRY PLAN

The data collection plan and activities developed as a component of the Superintendent's Entry Plan provide a valuable resource of information for the Superintendent and the Arlington community. Through interviews, community chats, and a thorough document review, the new APS Superintendent has a better understanding and depth of knowledge of the APS school division and the Arlington community. Qualitative analyses were conducted to assess information gathered from all interviews and community chats as well as a document review. Findings are presented below by guiding questions reported in the Entry Plan.

### **What is currently being done to accomplish our mission, vision, and goals?**

In interviews, School Board members, senior staff, principals, students, and the community identified a variety of programs, from preschool to the arts curriculum, as well as a wide range of services (e.g., special education, gifted education, sports, and extracurricular activities) that provide opportunities for Arlington students and families. These strategies and activities were intended to implement the mission, vision, and goals of APS as evidenced by the documentation found in school and department management plans. The document review indicated that the strategies detailed in current School Improvement Plans and School Management Plans to implement various programs and services are aligned with the goals and objectives of the APS Strategic Plan. Often, school plans identify the APS Strategic Plan goal or objective that a specific strategy or activity is intended to address.

### **How will we communicate our mission and vision in order to accomplish the goals?**

Communication was identified as a critical factor in the success of the school division. Many groups identified establishing efficient and effective means of communication as a critical area of focus and stated a need to bridge the communication gaps among central office staff, school staff, and the community. Furthermore, communication with families and the community was identified as a necessity. The community is diverse; therefore, communication efforts must be diverse to ensure that all are included. Several participants indicated that additional efforts may be necessary to address issues specifically related to diversity (e.g., translation of information, new strategies). Several participants also mentioned utility of the APS website as a viable avenue for improved communication.

Community chat participants provided additional insight into the communication processes. They indicated that the chats provided a venue for open communication among APS constituencies. The community seemed interested in ongoing communication with the Superintendent and with senior staff. They liked the "chat" or "town hall" format and would support chats throughout the school year and/or during the summer. Participants have shared their experiences with neighbors and friends and most have encouraged or would encourage others to attend future chats.

The document review also noted that instructions were available to assist staff in developing school, department, and administrator work plans. The instructions for department and

administrator work plans clearly identified that strategies and activities reported in work plans should reflect the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan.

### **What successes have been achieved toward meeting the Strategic Plan goals?**

Throughout the interviews, community chats, and document review, participants reported on a wide range of successes across the school division. Generally, participants viewed the diversity of the students, staff, and community as a strength and an area of focus for the future. The diversity of APS resulted in high expectations for all and a respect for cultural and ethnic differences. Many participants in the community chats commented on the quality of the staff – teachers, administrators, central office staff. They recognized the dedication of the staff and how the staff members care for students. In addition, it was reported that APS offered many programs and services to meet the interests and needs of its students. Participants commented on the wide range of choices available to students, both for instructional programs and extracurricular activities. The school division openly welcomes and encourages parent involvement across schools and programs. Families are made to feel welcome in the schools and made to feel that their voices count in decision-making.

The document review identified additional successes with school and department management plans. For example, School Improvement Plans, School Management Plans, Department Plans, and Administrator Work Plans throughout the school division reflected the goals and objectives of the APS Strategic Plan. Some plans were more explicit than others, yet all plans attempted to correlate their strategies to the goals and objectives of the school division. Schools and departments individualized how they implemented the APS Strategic Plan to ensure that plans addressed the needs of their population/area of responsibility. APS allowed for flexibility so that the highest levels of implementation and effectiveness were achieved. Instructions were available to assist staff members in developing school, department, and administrator work plans. The instructions for department and administrator work plans clearly stated that strategies and activities reported in work plans should reflect the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan. And, strategies detailed in current School Improvement Plans and School Management Plans clearly align with the goals and objectives of the APS Strategic Plan. Often, school plans identified the APS Strategic Plan goal or objective a specific strategy was intended to address.

### **What success must be achieved to meet the established goals outlined in the APS Strategic Plan?**

Participants reported that the school division was challenged by existing system and operational processes. Stakeholders mentioned the need to develop and implement improved processes for communicating and for implementing and assessing plans so that progress can be tracked and modifications can be made as necessary. Involving community members in the school division at various levels (e.g., classroom, school, division-level decision making) was also found to be a critical factor to consider as the division moves forward. Navigating politics, both within the school division and with the county, was seen as necessary as the school division relies more heavily on outside support.

Though curriculum and instruction were not mentioned in general terms, the mathematics curriculum and Montessori program were identified as issues for the school division. Several participants questioned the mathematics curriculum and expressed their concerns about the Investigations program. Comments also reflected concern for the Montessori program, both for its rigor and for its limited availability.

### **What steps are necessary for APS to accomplish the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan?**

The constituents who participated in the interviews and community chats identified a wide range of programs and strategies that were successful with the students of APS. They also reported areas of opportunity for APS to move forward with the implementation of the Strategic Plan goals. Some suggestions were quite broad and/or process-related. Other suggestions were more directed and detailed. The overall themes that emerged were:

- School boundaries and the choices offered at individual schools seem to be a challenge for the school division. Participants were concerned with the boundary process and how the enrollment projections were created. They were also concerned that program choices or the same choices were not available at all schools.
- The achievement gap among student groups was identified as a concern. Although progress has been made and resources have been devoted to closing the gap, it still existed.
- Parent involvement of underrepresented or minority families was seen as a challenge for APS. Although efforts were underway to correct the situation, and parent involvement was seen as an asset of the school division, participants commented that additional outreach efforts were necessary for adequate representation of minority families.
- Participants suggested that cohesion in the community and APS was necessary to ensure one school division rather than thoughts and references to a “North” and “South” divided community.
- Community chat participants noted that special education services and processes were a challenge. The IEP process was not always family-friendly, especially with ELL families. In addition, participants noted that services for gifted students may not always meet the students’ needs.

By addressing the above themes, participants in the interviews and community chats believed that APS could move closer to reaching the goals of the Strategic Plan. The document review also found steps that APS could take to further strengthen the Strategic Plan. For example, department and administrator work plans should link strategies directly to the goals and objectives of the APS Strategic Plan. This type of alignment will assist the community in understanding how the individual plans relate to the overall school division plan. Furthermore, alignment will assist in developing relevant performance measures to better ensure that strategies are effective and efficient. Individual school and department work plans will benefit from a data-driven approach that includes a variety of performance measures to assess effectiveness. Though



schools and departments use SOL data, staff should explore other forms of data readily available through the Community Satisfaction Survey and materials developed for the visit of the Quality Assurance Review Team from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools/Council (SACS CASI) on Accreditation and School Improvement. Finally, to improve communication regarding implementation of the APS Strategic Plan, schools and departments should include their work plans on the APS website so they are accessible to APS staff and the community.

Results also indicated that constituencies were interested in ensuring that programs and services address the needs of all children and in engaging all parents and the community in the school division. APS will need to identify what works in the school division and what opportunities for growth are evident so that the school division can move forward and accomplish the goals of the Strategic Plan.

### **What are the future aspirations of Arlington Public Schools?**

Simply put, interview and community chat participants reported that they wanted a school division that provides a first-class education for students, presents choices to meet the needs and interests of the students, and is united to support all students and families.

### **Overview of Interviews**

The new Superintendent conducted individual interviews with School Board members, senior APS staff, principals, students, and various groups. Over the course of two months, the Superintendent was able to obtain in-depth information regarding the policies and procedures of APS as well as the opportunities and challenges facing the school division. Interestingly, the themes that emerged from interviews with School Board members and senior leadership staff were quite similar. Both groups identified the budget, HVAC system, student diversity, and community involvement as the primary issues for the new Superintendent to address. Principals also identified the diversity of students and community involvement as important issues facing the school division. Principals also mentioned the communication throughout the school division as a critical area of focus, as are issues related to school boundaries. Students were interested in specific programs or issues related to themselves or their groups.

Beyond School Board members, the senior APS staff, and principals, other employee groups, most notably TCI, identified areas of focus for the new Superintendent. Since TCI serves as an advocate for educators and school staff members, the groups had an array of issues related to high quality instruction. The diversity of students, a well-qualified staff, variety of programs offered, and connections between and among staff members and the community were seen as strengths of APS. Several areas are seen as opportunities for growth, including the need for attention to the HVAC system and technology (e.g., information services systems, data management).

### **Overview of Community Chats**

In addition to individual and group interviews, community chats, or focus groups, were conducted in July and August 2009. The chats were located throughout the community to encourage participation and to allow the new Superintendent to get to know the Arlington community. The chats focused on recognizing the “Best of APS” and the “Challenges Facing

APS.” Community members had the opportunity to present their views on the school division and share their thoughts with the Superintendent.

The community viewed the highly qualified staff and wide array of programs available throughout APS as strengths of the school division. The participants also identified the diversity of the community and parent involvement as positive characteristics that define the division. Conversely, community chat participants reported that although parent involvement was a strength, some groups are underrepresented. Furthermore, communication processes between the school division and schools/central offices presented challenges. Additional challenges mentioned by numerous participants included special education processes and services, gifted education services, school boundaries and enrollment projections, the achievement gap, the budget, and the maintenance of the HVAC system.

### **Overview of Document Review**

The document review provided another opportunity for the new Superintendent to gain a better understanding of the APS school division. Supporting the same objectives and themes as the interviews and community chats, the document review sought to identify the processes that optimize the APS Strategic Plan. Conducted by an independent organization, the document review provided insight into the interrelationships among various plans and processes that impact the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Results indicated that school and department work plans generally align objectives/strategies with the goals and objectives of the APS Strategic Plan and they were flexible and individualized to ensure success. To improve communication, recommendations indicated that school and management work plans should be posted on the APS website and that performance measures or other methods of accountability should be strengthened in plans.

Results from all data collection efforts indicate that the APS community and its constituencies recognize the hard work of students and staff. They identified many positive characteristics of the school division and several areas of opportunity to move forward. The following section presents next steps for the new Superintendent to ensure success in meeting the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan and the future aspirations of the school division.

## AREAS OF FOCUS AND NEXT STEPS

The Superintendent's Entry Plan provided a forum for stakeholders across the division to engage in dialogues about their ideas, thoughts, and desires regarding the education of the students in Arlington Public Schools. The intent and design of the Superintendent's Entry Plan was to stimulate conversations and involve people in a process for moving the organization to the next level of excellence. Although stakeholder groups recognized the accomplishments of the school division, they look forward to improving the organization and increasing student achievement, not only to benefit our students, but to benefit the community as a whole. For the organization to function more effectively and efficiently in meeting all Strategic Plan goals now and in the future, it is necessary for the organization to reevaluate, realign, and create new systems and processes to ensure the level of achievement continues to rise.

During the initial transition period, the Superintendent has listened and learned from students, parents, employees, and community members and leaders throughout the organization, gaining understanding and knowledge about the individuals, the organization, and the community. Entry Plan questions were answered and a set of next-steps developed to move forward. From these findings and next steps, five areas of focus that need to be addressed in order to take the organization to the next level of excellence have been identified:

1. Student achievement plans;
2. Student service models;
3. Communication framework;
4. Business operation practices; and
5. Cycle of improvement model—"Plan, Do, Study, Act" (PDSA).

Based on these focus areas, it is apparent that the first step is to develop systems for increased productivity. These systems will include continuous improvement models, decision-making frameworks/matrices, and delineated processes for monitoring, adjusting, and evaluating the work of the school division. A system of accountability is necessary for designing, deploying, implementing, and monitoring different components within the organization so that they become an embedded part of the way the organization operates. A continuous comprehensive cycle of improvement such as "Plan, Do, Study, Act" (PDSA) implemented throughout the school division in areas of student achievement, school management, and centralized business operations will provide the leverage for the organization to gain feedback, monitor progress, and make informed decisions for improvement. The learning that will result from this cycle of continuous improvement will help the people within the organization build their capacity, skills, and abilities to assist the organization in reaching a higher level of maturity.

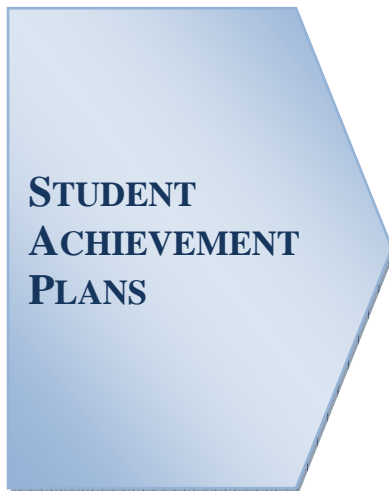
The core mission of the organization is student achievement, including high graduation rates and preparation of students for postsecondary education and workforce readiness. The services within the organization that support the core mission must be designed to meet the differences and diverse needs of the community. In other words, the services must be dynamic and differentiated, recognizing that there are variances among the needs within the student body, and different paths necessary for students to be successful. Using a continuous cycle of improvement will provide the tools to enhance and strengthen the APS service models to improve student

achievement and affect the outcomes of our core mission. The backbone of accomplishing our core mission through the work and service of the organization must be attached to an effective communication framework. This framework is a series of communication methods and protocols that align the organization and support the varied resources and services that, ultimately, provide the opportunities and access for students to be successful. Finally, supporting the core mission of the school division requires coordinated and integrated business operation practices.

To implement the next steps, a plan will be developed to ensure that over a three-year time period, the organization moves toward that higher level of excellence to which all of us aspire.

The following diagrams connect the activities conducted by the Superintendent's Pre-Entry, Entry, and Post-Entry Phases. Areas of Focus emerged from the conversations, interviews, and documents reviewed as topics that were consistently and repeatedly noted throughout the collection of information from participants. The Next Steps present a series of strategies for the Superintendent and APS community to implement that directly address the findings of the Entry Plan.

Although directed by the Superintendent, implementation of the plan is a shared responsibility of the Superintendent, School Board, and Senior Leadership in schools and in central administration, and indeed, of everyone in the organization.



### **NEXT STEPS**

- Create a Roadmap PK-12 that provides students with an academic and co-curricular plan for their comprehensive educational experience, linking to post-secondary education and workforce readiness
- Create a cohesive graduation plan to support students at risk, collaborating with a network of agencies that include parents, students, and community members
- Develop a plan to create a culture of student responsiveness to enhance cultural awareness, promote appropriate and effective student intervention practices, and eliminate the achievement gap
- Establish a plan of action to reduce out-of-school suspensions and other disciplinary infractions



**STUDENT  
SERVICE  
MODELS**

**NEXT STEPS**

- Evaluate current school-based program initiatives in relationship to school division needs, strategic direction, and the interest of the community
- Evaluate current procedures and processes of student service delivery models to ensure comprehensive and consistent communication of each model



### **NEXT STEPS**

- Enhance and cultivate parent involvement in all PTAs through the collaboration and support of school division principals, teachers, and PTA members
- Establish a menu of professional growth opportunities that enhance School Board, Superintendent, and staff communication to accomplish the work of the organization
- Develop consistent communication protocols for communicating with parents, students, the community, and other constituents
- Identify and integrate a broad spectrum of communication tools to articulate school and school division programs, initiatives, and activities that support students, families, staff, and the community

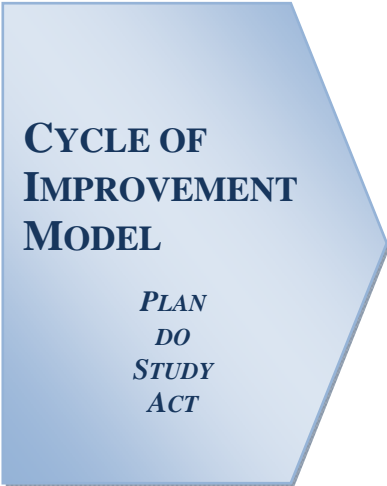


**BUSINESS  
OPERATION  
PRACTICES**

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Evaluate the effectiveness of current data and information services systems and operations
- Evaluate processes and procedures in facilities and maintenance in order to develop, refine, and establish protocols and controls for operations
- Establish a schedule to conduct personnel management reviews of all departments to assess their alignment with APS strategic goals
- Update policies and practices in Human Resources
- Develop training modules to administer consistent personnel management procedures
- Evaluate current finance and budgetary practices to streamline procurement procedures and identify efficiencies and cost savings
- Develop and implement a budget framework as part of the 2010-2011 budget cycle
- Evaluate HVAC systems; and develop a comprehensive plan for personnel management, resource alignment, maintenance protocols, and a long-range plan to achieve stability in all school and office environments





**CYCLE OF  
IMPROVEMENT  
MODEL**

*PLAN  
DO  
STUDY  
ACT*

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Redesign the current accountability system in relationship to the Strategic Plan, including school management plans, department plans, work plans, and program evaluations
- Provide continual support to schools to enhance and evaluate instructional practices, teacher effectiveness, and use and need of resources and materials
- Provide ongoing professional learning experiences to enhance administrator and teacher effectiveness and student learning
- Use the Plan, Do, Study, Act Model to evaluate all areas of focus: Student achievement plan; Student service models; Communication framework; Business operation practices

## Appendix A: Entry Plan

[http://www.apsva.us/1540104114240100/lib/1540104114240100/Entry\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/1540104114240100/lib/1540104114240100/Entry_Plan.pdf)

Appendix B: APS Strategic Plan

<http://www2.apsva.us/15401081151420393/>

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Name:

Date of Interview:

Position/Title:

### Achievement

1. What do you consider are your top three accomplishments?
2. What are your areas of focus?
3. What are hallmarks of Arlington Public Schools?
4. If necessary, how are you meeting the goals and objectives of the APS strategic plan?

*Alt. Ques.: How does your work support APS's efforts to meet the strategic plan goals and objectives?*

### Future

5. What do you think will make us a stronger school division?
6. What are the most critical areas that you believe I need to place my focus?
7. Describe for me what you think Arlington Public Schools looks like in 2015.

### Strategies

8. What can I do to assist you in being the best you can be in your position/role?
9. What do you see as inhibitors for us to move forward?

### Communication

10. What is the communication (processes and/or procedures) that ensures alignment with plans and actions of the APS Strategic Plan?

### Vision

11. What are your dreams for the students of APS and for your own personal and professional development?

### Professional

12. What books are you currently reading?

### Personal

13. What else gives you satisfaction in your life?

### Summary

14. What else do you think is important for me to know?
15. Do you have any questions you want to ask me?

### Comments

## Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

<b>Introduction</b>
Overview of Entry Plan by Dr. Murphy
Overview of Big Issues for 2009-2010 by Dr. Murphy
<b>Questions</b>
1. What is the best thing about APS?
2. What is the biggest challenge for APS?
<b>Comments</b>
3. Please provide any additional written questions for comments.

**Appendix E: Entry Plan Document Review**

[http://www.apsva.us/1540104114240100/lib/1540104114240100/Document\\_Review.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/1540104114240100/lib/1540104114240100/Document_Review.pdf)