March 2024 QnA
Family Council

Note – We are continuing to track 2023-24 Open Questions, FYI. Answers from ACPS are in Blue, and Officer followup and comments in Red. (Feel free to send follow-up questions our way for May, too.)

<u>Instruction: All Grades</u>

1. Instruction [from Baker-Butler] – For students who are the furthest behind in reading, will Lexia software be used as a substitute for in-person instruction with a reading specialist or special education teacher? Will parents get progress reports to see if the software is working? [Officers note: we clarified that this parent is asking about Tier 3 intervention & the software being provided for All-In VA.]

   Direct instruction is always the first and preferred method for delivering content to students. As such, Lexia software will not be used as a substitute for in-person instruction. Lexia is a tool that combines effective, teacher-led instruction with interactive, user-friendly experiences to support the abilities of a wide variety of students. With Lexia, teachers are able to prioritize and differentiate instruction, allowing students to develop critical reading skills at their own pace.

2. Math & Reading [Brownsville] – For All in VA tutoring, is ACPS signing up for free software licenses for Lexia, Zearn and **Ignite**? Will they be used in schools? It looks like even if they're not used in schools, parents would have access to this software in homes! We would REALLY like that, please!

   Lexia – From Dr. Hayes on Feb 9 – In an effort to be responsive to the needs of our secondary students who are struggling readers, I along with Mr. Dommer began investigating programs and methods to help our Tier 3 students. We determined that Lexia PowerUp was a evidence based program being utilized across not only Virginia but the country to close the learning gaps in older students. At the time we began working with Lexia to secure a quote for licenses, the VDOE notified school division they were working with Lexia PowerUp to provide licenses to secondary students as a part of the All-In plan. With these licenses being free we decided to work with the state to procure this resource. We did not want to be fiscally irresponsible with division dollars purchasing something that would be free for a significant portion of students. Not only does Lexia PowerUp provide a diagnostic, but it also tailors support based on student performance. The state is moving slower than we anticipated with the release of the license, however we are expected to hear something Monday.

   [Officer Follow-Up Request:] Please confirm use in school-delivered tutoring and/or classrooms, and also availability for students to use at home.]

Lexia was procured, but we are awaiting instructions from the state on how to enroll students into the platform using our division data sharing software. Once this is complete, students will be able to utilize the program at school and at home.

Zearn – From Dr. Hayes on Feb 9
Due the state's delay in tutoring resources (Ignite, Zearn, Lexia access) the roll out of the All-In plan has been met with numerous delays. We too have heard about the success of the Zearn platform (Walton is already using), but without the state releasing the "slots" we cannot completely move forward with the program.

[Officer Follow-Up Request:] Use in school-delivered tutoring and/or classrooms was confirmed in Division Compass on 2/22, but we'd really like to know availability for students to use at home please.]

Yes, students can use the platform at home.

Ignite – Will this platform be used by ACPS?
No, the division went with Lexia as it was more comprehensive and allowed us to expand the usage into high school.

3. Instruction [from Mountain View] – Would the division consider building time into the calendar so teachers have allocated time to hold mid-year conferences? The mid-year data sent home was appreciated, but parents are wary of burdening busy teachers with too many questions. A mid-year conversation with teachers would be very valuable.

   Thank you for sharing. ACPS can consider building time into the schedule for mid-year conferences. We currently have time for fall conferences, but we can investigate a way to add allotted time for spring conferences.

4. Technology / Instruction [from Henley] – What are the guidelines in ACPS for kids playing video games during classes? It still seems like these kids have way too much access to screen time. Why don't the school laptops have something like GoGuardian installed to keep kids safe and focused? [Officers note that we received an answer referring to teacher training previously, but continue to receive Qs on this topic so are submitting with focus on what software / controls may be built into laptops to aid teachers.]

   The Department of Technology and the Department of Instruction share your interest about screen time and the effective use of technology for learning. The expectation during classes is that students are actively engaged in their learning. Several instructional programs include activities that appear in a video game format, however students should not be engaged in those games unless directed to do so by their teacher. The **Acceptable Use of Technology** outlines those expectations as does the ACPS **Student Code of Conduct**. ACPS does the following to help keep students safe and focused:

- ACPS has both a firewall and Internet filter, Lightspeed, in place to protect all laptops. The firewall serves as a defense against cyber threats and hacking, while the filter helps to weed out inappropriate content. Of course, as the internet is a constantly evolving place, no filter and firewall are perfect and on occasion some inappropriate content may get through. In these cases, we encourage students and staff to share that information with their teachers and/or administrators so we can investigate.

- It is important to note, however, that we have seen an uptick in students using a type of application on school machines called a VPN, which allows them to easily bypass the filter and access content they wouldn't otherwise be able to. We encourage teachers and families to discuss with their students why using VPNs on school devices is not a good idea. For more information about VPNs and to help with this kind of conversation we have this document available: **FAQ about VPNs**. It may help with those conversations. Blocking all VPNs is something the Department of Technology continues to work on. The challenge is to do so in a manner that will not interfere with access to the digital instructional resources our teachers and students rely upon.

- We are also investigating additional monitoring tools such as GoGuardian, however, we must be sure that they cannot be subverted by VPNs and that they do not interfere with the approved instructional digital resources found **here**. We must also ensure they will not interfere with online testing or those resources required by the VA Department of Education.

- We understand that parenting in the digital age is a challenge, particularly with the availability of so many resources to students that may distract from their academics. In order to help our students navigate these challenges, all middle school students receive instruction in Digital Citizenship. Our recommendation is that ongoing conversations between teachers and students about digital citizenship occur throughout the school year. We also have a **field guide for families** that helps explain our systems and provides a wealth of conversation starters and resources, including information about balancing screen time. Finally, **Common Sense Media** provides a lot of excellent resources and guides around these topics.

- As ACPS continues to adopt new curricula for various subject areas, the Department of Instruction will review printed and digital resources to ensure they are aligned with our curriculum frameworks and are utilized in an appropriate manner that will enhance classroom instruction, not substitute or distract from classroom instruction.

5. Budget / Instruction [from Community Lab School] – The staffing standards in the budget proposal show:
   - School Psychologist as 1.0 FTE per 700 children (page G-10)
   - Speech Pathologist as 1.0 per 2100 minutes per week, approx (page G-10)

- ○ Nurse as 1.0 per school minimum and "partially funded" (page G-12)

But, on staffing allocations by school (page G-19), there is a combined category of "Nurse, SSC, Psychologist" with 1.0 FTE per school (and 2.0 for AHS), which seems to mean that many schools do not have staffing for these positions. Could you please clarify what happens when a child requires these services, such as for an IEP?

The 1.0 and 2.0 FTE allocations shown on page G-19 *Nurse, SSC, Psychologist* column are showing Nurse allocations, which are assigned to individual schools. Psychologists are shown in the same column in *Multi-School.* Speech Pathologists are included in the *SPED Teacher* column on page G-18.

There are 14.2 Psychologists budgeted in *Multi-School* since these positions are generally shared between schools. In addition, 18.6 speech pathologists and other specialists are budgeted in this category as well. Detailed Special Education allocations can be found on page G-21.

If a student's IEP requires additional services beyond what is available at the school, the school staff should consult with the Office of Special Education.

Instruction: Elementary

6. Instruction [from Officers] – What are the expectations for time spent weekly in elementary school math instruction, and what curriculum program is used / planned for future years?

   Elementary students receive on average 60-70 minutes of Math instruction per day. Currently our schools are using the Math Investigations curriculum, however the Virginia Department of Education will be releasing a list of approved Math curricula at which time we will review and determine next steps for ACPS.

Instruction: Secondary

7. Instruction [from Henley] – For math, families are seeing photocopied materials. Xerox print outs get lost and out of order as well as heavy metals from inks. Print outs do not have the gravitas of a text book. It is much harder for a parent to follow along to help. It feels disorganized. Why are there no math textbooks?
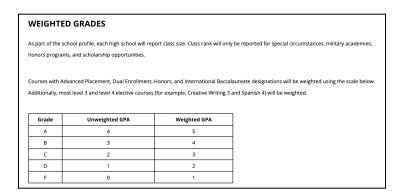
   Because Virginia has its own standards and does not follow Common Core standards, it has been difficult to adopt a textbook that aligns with the scope and sequence of the Virginia standards. Therefore, teams of teachers have curated materials that cover the content students are required to know and understand for each grade level. The VDOE is currently undergoing a textbook approval process for mathematics. The items under review will align with the new math standards. More information about the process can be found here.

8. Instruction [from Mountain View] – Do middle schools group students with a common set of teachers? (Ex: if you have Teacher A for science, you will have Teacher B for social studies and Teacher C for literacy). If not, why not?

While some students may end up with identical teachers across multiple subjects, middle schools do not intentionally group students with common sets of teachers. When students enter 6th grade, they have the opportunity to explore various electives so their course requests and the arrangement of the master schedule will determine the teacher(s) they have. Some course are only requested by a small number of students resulting in the class only being offered once during the day. This means that all students wishing to take that particular class must do so during a specific time. This choice may prevent them from having the same teachers as other students in their same grade level. With each student situation being different, families should contact their students' school for specific answers around course offerings and requests.

9. Weighted Grades – [Officer Follow-up on behalf of WAHS] Weighted Grades – [Dec 2023 via MS/HS Program Guide Feedback] Which **specific courses** are weighted? The info provided just says "most level 3 and level 4 elective courses", but not which ones.

Counseling Directors are in the process of finalizing the list. Once this is complete, it will be added to the Program of Studies.

WEIGHTED GRADES

As part of the school profile, each high school will report class size. Class rank will only be reported for special circumstances: military academies, honors programs, and scholarship opportunities.

Courses with Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, Honors, and International Baccalaureate designations will be weighted using the scale below. Additionally, most level 3 and level 4 elective courses (for example, Creative Writing 3 and Spanish 4) will be weighted.

Grade	Unweighted GPA	Weighted GPA
A	4	5
B	3	4
C	2	3
D	1	2
F	0	1

10. Instruction [from Henley] – With so many children dying of unknown fentanyl ingestion, will the district think about adding drug safety to the family life curriculum? At least the "one pill can kill". In the same vein, the dangers of social media for girls esp. surely carry the same weight as safe sex. There is so much literature about how damaging the effects of social media are. Why is this topic relegated to "Technology talks" for parents? These two topics, drugs and social media dangers, are far more pertinent to today's children and belong in the curriculum.

The Health Education curriculum contains some information about opiates and the FLC contains content on making good choices. We do have several offers to bring more information about the new dangers in street drugs posed by fentanyl and other synthetic opioid lacing to both students and families.

Attendance

11. Health – [Scottsville; Feb 2024] One of my children was out of school with a fairly mild GI bug for two days. The school said he would need a doctor's note if he was out three days. He was not sick enough for me to spend several hundred dollars at the pediatrician, but certainly needed to stay home and away from other children and staff. Not everyone has the time or resources to go to the doctor for every illness. This also unnecessarily clogs up the primary care system, which is already difficult to access in this area. I would imagine some parents would feel like they have to send a sick child to school on that third day to avoid any issues with the school system. I haven't seen any communication about this policy. Can this be clarified, please? I would especially appreciate an answer to the equity question.

In most cases, a note from a parent/guardian is sufficient documentation for an excused absence. An excused absence is one for which parents or guardians have prior knowledge or have consented to the absence, and/or other legitimate reasons. Legitimate reasons may include: illness of the student (including mental health and substance abuse illnesses), injury, death in the family, doctor or dental appointment, observance of a religious holiday/cultural observance, legal obligations, suspension or expulsion, military obligations or visit from a family member who has immediately returned from deployment, emergency conditions in the student's home, civic engagement, participation in a 4-H educational program or activity, attendance at a tribal nations pow wow gathering, or another reason preapproved by the principal/designee. However, if there is a history of attendance issues/chronic absenteeism (excessive absences/+10 days), school administration will request additional documentation to better understand circumstances regarding the absence, and identify/provide support to address attendance issues.

Student Mental Health

12. DESSA – [Walton] DESSA was described by ACPS leaders as a "universal screener". Do parents have access to these scores?

DESSA is the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment and is a universal SEL screener. This is not a mental health screener and does not ask students about the state of their mental health, but rather is looking at skills that are associated with academic success such as goal directed behavior, decision making process, etc… Please see the parent resource site below for the full list of skills.

§ Parent Resource Site - https://info.apertureed.com/parent-portal

While there is currently no systematic process for sharing these results with parents. They are available upon request as we are currently only using these scores for school and division based level evaluation of SEL programing implementation.

<u>Communications</u>

13. CLC Communication [Sept 2023; WAHS & MoHS] – For families who have kids attending a CLC different from their home high school, families can only receive whole school emails from our home school (WAHS). As a parent I want to be notified when & if there are threats/lockdowns/etc, so I want both school-specific emails. CLC families need to have a way to receive whole school emails from 2 schools while in attendance at both. Can this please be addressed?

   According to our communication system provider, BrightArrow, CLC families will now automatically receive email messages from all sites their students attend. This setting became automatic about 2 weeks ago. Prior to that it was up to the school to do manually.