

Instructional Vision and Coherence

Priority 1	Ensuring Equity and Excellence	Short Initiative:	All students must have equity of access to rigorous and comprehensive content implemented through inclusive and engaging instructional practices. Deeper Learning concepts and practices will serve as the anchor for the APS instructional vision.
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Overarching Goal

What is the goal that this initiative seeks to accomplish in five years?	We will use Deeper Learning as an organizing framework for pedagogical focus and instructional coherence in APS. ¹ Deeper Learning overlaps with several other key concepts, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), experiential and project-based learning, competency-based assessment, and culturally responsive teaching. ² Research on Deeper Learning emphasizes the prioritization of student agency and voice in the educational setting. ³ With a coherent instructional vision that includes a strong focus on pedagogy, APS faculty will be able to collaborate on teaching with shared vocabulary and resources. An instructional vision is one of the most important companions to a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), as is described in Initiative 3. A strong instructional vision is a necessary driver in evaluating and selecting curricula and instructional materials.
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Responsible Person	Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning
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¹ APS is participating in the Deeper Learning Dozen (DLD) project, which provides significant resources on understanding Deeper Learning as a concept. Many resources [are available here](#). One essential working definition that the DLD refers to is outlined [in this document](#) from the Hewlett Foundation. A transcript of [this conversation](#) from the Harvard EdCast podcast provides a summary from scholars Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine who have led the discussion on Deeper Learning.

² One framework for thinking about Deeper Learning is articulated by Jobs for the Future [here](#), which shows how several elements comprise the unified student experience. Also, see: Thomas S. Dee and Emily K. Penner, "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence From an Ethnic Studies Curriculum," *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 127–66, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216677002>.

³ Mehta and Fine (2015): [The Why, What, Where, and How of Deeper Learning in American Secondary Schools](#). Also: Yong Zhao, *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students* (Corwin Press, 2012); Bill Lucas and Ellen Spencer, *Teaching Creative Thinking: Developing Learners Who Generate Ideas and Can Think Critically* (Williston, VT: Crown House Publishing, 2017).

Summary

A summary of what we are trying to accomplish and why

If APS is to ensure equity and excellence, an essential, foundational component will be a strong instructional vision. Any instructional vision must be student-centered, emphasizing student agency, evidence-based thinking and argument, peer collaboration, and comprehensive teacher feedback. It must facilitate universal design of instruction that ensures all students have suitable opportunities to wrestle deeply with academic questions in lessons that don't leave them unproductively frustrated. Deeper Learning also prioritizes the development of relationships in the academic setting, which contributes to students' confidence to take on risks and challenges in their learning, which is directly aligned with the APS vision to create educational environments that support a sense of belonging, academic growth, and joyful learning experiences.

There are myriad different instructional models available that are research- and evidence-based, each of which have great promise. While APS must codify a shared vision, and while we will use Deeper Learning as a framework, we recognize that other frameworks are useful and have important lessons to teach us. We will pay attention to areas where we feel Deeper Learning doesn't meet our needs and supplement those areas. An example might be with specifics around culturally-responsive practice.

A strong and cohesive instructional vision will be aligned with the APS Vision and Mission. It will help guide curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and professional learning decisions. With a strong APS instructional vision, instructional leadership teams will be able to work to guide their schools in developing focus areas that best suit their community's needs.

Deeper Learning explicitly gives us content and techniques to move forward, and APS is actively involved in a pilot program with teachers and administrators already building knowledge of the framework.⁴ Deeper Learning pedagogical techniques include the following instructional strategies, for example:

- a. Posing open-ended questions that illuminate and deepen student understanding;
- b. Allowing students to demonstrate understanding and show mastery of standards in multiple ways;
- c. Focusing on broad and conceptual, analogical ("higher-order") thinking and problem-solving;
- d. Supporting students in their constructive and creative endeavors;
- e. Utilizing appropriate and relevant assessment tools to determine the efficacy of instructional practices and use competency-based assessments to engage students in the application of academic concepts;

⁴ Mehta and Fine (2015): The Why, What, Where, and How of Deeper Learning in American Secondary Schools.

- f. Weaving student identities into curricula so students see themselves in the curriculum and can contextualize learning while building relationships with their diverse peers and understanding diverse perspectives;
- g. Prioritizing lessons that require completing complex tasks over rote work; and
- h. Providing consistent opportunities for diverse means of expression (e.g., writing, speaking, artistic expression, computer-supported tools).

To be effective, this initiative would require a paced rollout: Year 1 would be used to define the vision, involving teachers in the exploration of Deeper Learning methods and concepts. Professional development design and the progressive rollout of key concepts would follow.

While this is an instructionally focused approach, it does not discount the importance of curriculum materials. APS would use the vision as a core resource in a regular curriculum review cycle, starting with the selection of a core literacy resource in 2023 and continuing with the evaluation of curricula at the secondary level to align with Deeper Learning practices and principles. Any effective instruction must be based on a robust, rigorous, and culturally-responsive curriculum for all students.

In addition, an instructional vision informs assessment by setting the conditions for ongoing formative assessments to provide students with meaningful and multiple ways to demonstrate their mastery of the material. A specific component for the vision to address would be the inclusion of frequent writing and other expressive tasks to demonstrate mastery, a particular need identified through data analysis and by the community in interviews and focus groups.

Another component of this initiative includes an examination of structures that have the potential to impede Deeper Learning or otherwise stand in the way of achieving the goals of this initiative. Ongoing pilots of heterogeneous grouping, which combines students across skill and achievement levels in all grade levels of our system but specifically in grades 6-12, will inform whether to continue disrupting structures that research has shown to be detrimental to historically marginalized groups of students. This initiative includes action steps to continue interrogating tracking practices while improving teachers' capacity to hold all students to a high standard, as required by the APS Mission Statement.

Finally, part of implementing a strong instructional vision is combining it with a well-organized instructional infrastructure. This includes the elements that aid in continuous learning and skillful implementation of the vision. Effective instructional leadership teams (ILTs), instructional coaching, mentorship, peer observation tools, teacher walkthroughs, and conversations about teaching are all essential elements that must be built into collaboration structures and professional development. Those who observe and evaluate teachers must be trained in the vision as well.

The result of this concerted work should be an improvement in the student learning experience, with assessments indicating mastery. This should also add to a sense of teacher community across the district, as teachers are able to collaborate around the vision.

Major Milestones

These are the highest priority, most meaningful deliverables, and actions we must achieve to successfully arrive at the desired outcome from our current state.

Financial Impact provides amounts for the community to use as estimates in understanding the cost of undertaking these crucial initiatives. Figures represent the estimated amount that this work would cost in a given year. Annual budgets will implement this plan, which will at times lead to other services being changed and eliminated as we develop aligned budgets that account for the initiatives in this plan.

Major Milestones	<u>Year 1:</u> <u>2023-24</u>	<u>Year 2:</u> <u>2024-25</u>	<u>Year 3:</u> <u>2025-26</u>	<u>Year 4:</u> <u>2026-27</u>	<u>Year 5:</u> <u>2027-28</u>
Develop and Implement Instructional Vision Aligned with Deeper Learning	Establish Administrator Deeper Learning Team (DLT) to study and build shared definition of Deeper Learning Practices	Incorporate teachers into district DLT and conversations about Deeper Learning into school-based ILT inquiries.	ILTs focus on, share, and implement Deeper Learning practices to transform instruction across schools	Continued implementation of APS instructional vision	
	Expansion of ILT stipends				
	Continued Participation in Deeper Learning Dozen	Expand Deeper Learning Dozen Team to include community members and teachers, continue participation, host a convening			
Financial Impact	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
To Fund	Deeper Learning participation, professional development for administration and for staff, Instructional				

Leadership Teams at all schools and their activities with staff, instructional coaching support for school and district leadership starting in 2025 (was funded with ESSER in 2022-24), and ILT stipend increases.					
Identify and Implement Curricula aligned with Deeper Learning Instructional Vision	Establish curriculum review cycle and identify which curricula will be reviewed when	Implement curriculum review cycle			
	Identify new curriculum resource for K-5 ELA and begin implementation for Grades 4 and 5	Implementation of new ELA curriculum resource, Grades 2 and 3	Implementation of new ELA curriculum resource, Grades K and 1	Ongoing Implementation **Implementation timeline may be revised based on ongoing planning for ELA curriculum implementation	
Financial Impact	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
To Fund	Initial purchase of texts and consumable materials, ongoing refresh of materials, ongoing pay and training for teachers and leaders to review and refresh curriculum.				
Analyze and transform assessment and data collection practices	Establish focal groups for closing achievement gaps and identify data sets, both qualitative and quantitative, for monitoring gaps in both summative and formative assessments	Implement use of focal group data analysis and data systems consistently in School Improvement Plans and on school-based ILTs	Establish and implement practices within teacher and administrator meetings and professional development time for using focal group data to reflect on and transform Tier 1 instructional practices, aligned with our vision.		

	Study competency-based assessment practices and hold community forums on grading practices in APS	Pilot experiential, project-based, and competency-based assessments in targeted areas of the district, continue community engagement		Expand promising competency-based assessment practices and professional learning based on student, staff, and community feedback, continue community engagement	
Financial Impact	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
To Fund	Research, Data, and Assessment Coordinator (Year 1); professional development for educators, data platforms and dashboards to aid in reporting and analysis, supplies for community forums.				

Interrogate and Adjust Tracking and Leveling Practices Across APS	Complete and assess pilot of heterogeneous ELA in 9th grade at AHS: Year 2 of Pilot program	Based on findings of the pilot, propose adjustments to leveling practices at AHS in conversation with the AHS community, conduct professional learning and design staffing models to enable heterogeneous 9th and/or 10th grade classes, expand common planning time access for teachers to support heterogeneous grouping.	
	Begin community conversations surrounding skipping and leveling practices in 6th and 7th grade mathematics	Develop options for ensuring equitable access to challenging mathematics content for all students, bring recommendations forward to the community	Implement recommendations for adjustments to leveling practices at the middle school level
Financial Impact	\$50,000	\$100,000 up to \$400,000 (Years 2-5)	
To Fund	Continuation of HGI	Potential funds would be required to: expand co-teaching options to facilitate special	

	9th grade pilot: professional development, common planning, and additional staffing	education student access to heterogeneous courses, provide targeted professional development to teachers for implementation, adjust schedules to allow for common planning time (high school), adjust staffing models to accommodate smaller class sizes
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Key Metrics

These are metrics that can serve as strong indicators of performance and are directly representative of successful execution of the initiative.

Outcome metrics are the indicators that will be tracked, whereas targets are the specific benchmarks to be achieved by specific deadlines.

Major Milestones	<u>Year 1:</u> <u>2023-24</u>	<u>Year 2:</u> <u>2024-25</u>	<u>Year 3:</u> <u>2025-26</u>	<u>Year 4:</u> <u>2026-27</u>	<u>Year 5:</u> <u>2027-28</u>
Outcome Metric 1	<p>For the academic achievement of students, specifically students with IEPs, students of color, multilingual learners (MLs), and students from low-income households, close the gap relative to their peers over 5 years, as measured by assessed subjects on state assessments such as MCAS and local assessments such as common curriculum assessments, benchmark assessments, or performance tasks. These groups are referred to as focal groups.</p> <p>The Arlington Public Schools' true goal is to <i>eliminate</i> opportunity and achievement gaps for all groups of students who experience them. We acknowledge that this takes time and considerable resources, and is impacted by factors both within and outside the control of the public school system. These metrics reflect our commitment to transforming the Arlington Public Schools into a system that eliminates opportunity gaps, thereby allowing all students to thrive, while pacing benchmarks to reflect ambitious and attainable progress .</p>				
Annual Benchmark	<p>Close gaps for focal groups compared to peers by 3 percentage points annually across subject areas. Close gaps for for focal groups compared to peers by 4 percentage points annually for focus disciplinary areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELA Grades 3-5 and Grade 10, • Math Grades 6-8 and Grade 10, • Science Grade 8 <p>Maintain Student Growth Percentiles for focal groups and peers above 50% each year, with focal groups growing at a faster rate than peers to accelerate achievement.</p>				
Outcome Metric 3	<p>Administrators, teachers, and instructional staff are trained (years 2-3) in the instructional vision and report comfort and understanding of the vision (years 3-5), as measured by targeted questions on annual climate and</p>				

	culture surveys.				
Annual Benchmark	50%	75%	95%	95%	95%
Outcome Metric 4	Systematic observations at each school show execution of key components of the instructional vision across classrooms, using a specific, consistent instrument that reflects the vision.				
Annual Benchmark	Tools and procedures will be established.	TBD: Increase in implementation of instructional strategies aligned with district vision, as measured and tracked by established observation tools.			