

Date: December 22, 2011

For ACTION

For INFORMATION

For Agenda: yes

no

From: GwenCarol Holmes, Ed. D., Chief Academic Officer

Through: Morton Sherman, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

To: The Honorable Sheryl Gorsuch, Chair, and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Educational Specifications for PreK to 8 Schools for ACPS

BACKGROUND: Three new PreK to 8 schools are planned to be built by ACPS during the next several years at the following sites: Jefferson-Houston, Patrick Henry, and Cora Kelly. Intended as an option to the traditional route of matriculation through an elementary school followed by a middle school, these new schools will provide students an education in prekindergarten to grade 8 at one campus in a community school setting. The creation of these schools calls for education specifications which do not simply combine the elementary and middle school programs; rather, the PreK-8 program should reflect learning opportunities unique to that configuration. In addition, these new schools will provide much needed space for ACPS students as the division's enrollment continues to increase.

To develop a program reflective of PreK-8 schools, an Educational Specifications Committee was formed. We appreciate the energy and committee of the committee members and the Ad Hoc committee, comprised of over 80 individuals (from Jefferson-Houston, Patrick Henry, Cora Kelly, the Curriculum and Instruction Office, the Office for Student Support and Institutional Advancement, and the community) to draft educational specifications for new ACPS PreK-8 schools. This team had the privilege to develop a proposal to include suggested inclusion of human resources, services to students, and a learning environment to support existing and future curriculum for PreK to grade 8 schools in Alexandria Public Schools.

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that ACPS adopt a PreK to 8 model of education specifications that will be differentiated to reflect the areas of focus at each planned school. The educational specifications for an ACPS PreK to 8 school call for an environment in which all grades are a vital part of a collaborative learning community and in which there is a continuity of experience. These educational specifications for ACPS PreK to grade 8 schools are contained in the *Proposed PreK to 8 School Educational Specifications, December 2011, v.2*

The Education Specifications Committee was guided in the drafting of these educational specifications by the following key points:

- The Educational Specifications to be considered are to present the ideal division-wide model for PreK-8 schools. These ideal specifications will be adapted at each specific

school site during the building planning and design stage based on the unique programming needs of the school as well as the realities of resources available (land, monetary, etc.). PreK-8 schools are unique unto themselves; they are not an elementary and middle school combined.

- The children of Alexandria deserve cutting edge facilities designed to allow for changes in educational delivery over the next 100 years as well as extensive developments in technology in the future. This means flexible spaces that allow multiple functions and are easily adapted for reuse. It is our responsible to provide schools that will sustain multiple generations. Flexibility in space and time is key.
- This should be a space that encourages collaborative work across the school, both among students and staff, in small groups and larger groups. There should be communities that both students and staff are a part of on a daily basis and those communities also are encouraged to collaborate across the school.
- There should be space that encourages collaboration between the school and the community both during the school day and outside of the school day. Space should be flexible so that it can be used to the maximum.

These specifications suggest that grades be grouped together in ongoing learning communities of PreK and K, grades 1 and 2, grades 3 and 4, grades 5 and 6, and grades 7 and 8. This clustering of students however, does not preclude the collaboration of students across additional grades. In fact these communities of learners will share space across communities such as the Media Center, the gym, Encore space, and other such common areas. In addition the space would support a range of learning styles and the variety of instructional strategies to support them.

In addition, a subset of the Education Specifications Committee, worked with Dr. Michael Rettig to draft a test schedule to ensure there were adequate spaces in the specifications to facilitate the educational programming and grouping of students as planned. He will be providing a formal report in the near future. However, his assessment is that the space is very appropriate and that the difficulty in achieving the educational programming will be the division's very short school day.

IMPACT: The adoption of these educational specifications for all ACPS PreK to 8 schools will provide ACPS will community schools where students from PreK to 8 work in collaborative teams and across teams to learn together in highly flexible space that can be easily repurposed and reused as educational strategies and technologies changes over time. The community will have a building that is flexible and provides space for community use outside of school hours maximizing the return on community resources.

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