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**Re: P-8 Design Proposal: Academic Resiliency**

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Many of our students' experiences, prior cultural knowledge, and language are all remarkable assets they bring to our school communities. We believe and expect that each Aurora Public School (APS) student comes to us with knowledge and experiences that contribute to the teaching and learning process in our schools. Our students have many opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and skills and are able to see in their evaluations that these strengths and their knowledge are valued. It is our commitment at APS to continue to create opportunities for our students to show, tell, and demonstrate what they know and can do in our schools and in their communities.

However, in order for us to continue to build upon the strengths of our students and to produce students who are achieving academically, we need to fully understand how the impact of their social and emotional health will affect school and life success. The information we have gathered around our current practices indicates that many of the support systems that should help students overcome some of the challenges they face are not being sufficiently and efficiently supported at the school and/or district level. As it stands, many of our Latino and African American students are continuing to fall behind academically.

*This proposal is suggesting a model where the central purpose of the new P-8 school will be to increase academic achievement by using a challenge-based educational philosophy to build academic resilience.*

***The Data***

When examining the demographic makeup of the students who attend Aurora Public Schools, it is important to consider the need for support both inside and outside of school that would give our students maximum opportunity to experience success in school and in life. The estimated demographic data indicates that the new P-8 school, projected to open for the 2015-16 school year, will serve a diverse student population as compared to the rest of the district. The numbers also suggest that many of the students likely to attend the school will be Hispanic (63.8%), require English Language Acquisition and Special Education support (46.3%), and qualify for free and reduced lunch (69%).

### Potential K-8 Student Enrollment for New School

Race/Ethnicity	New Sch K-8 #	New Sch K-8 %	District K-8 %		New Sch K-5 #	New Sch K-5 %	District K-5 %		New Sch MS 6-8#	New Sch MS 6-8%	District 6-8%
Nat. Amer.	6	.7	.6	Nat. Amer.	4	.7	.8	Nat. Amer.	2	.8	.9
Asian	10	1.2	6.8	Asian	8	1.4	3.6	Asian	2	.8	3.9
Black	80	<b>9.8</b>	<b>13.3</b>	Black	60	<b>10.6</b>	<b>17.4</b>	Black	20	<b>8.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>
Hispanic	521	<b>63.8</b>	<b>39.5</b>	Hispanic	351	<b>61.9</b>	<b>60.4</b>	Hispanic	170	<b>68.0</b>	<b>59.4</b>
White	157	<b>19.2</b>	<b>32.9</b>	White	114	<b>20.1</b>	<b>13.3</b>	White	43	<b>17.2</b>	<b>13.2</b>
Hiw./Pac. Is.	7	.9	.4	Hiw./Pac. Is.	4	.7	.5	Hiw./Pac. Is.	3	1.2	.4
2 or more	36	4.4	6.5	2 or more	26	4.6	4.1	2 or more	10	4.0	3.2
Total	817			Total	567			Total	250		

ELL	New Sch K-8 #	New Sch K-8 %	District K-8 %		New Sch K-5 #	New Sch K-5 %	District K-5 %		New Sch MS 6-8#	New Sch MS 6-8%	District 6-8%
ELL	378	<b>46.3</b>	<b>26.6</b>	ELL	274	<b>48.3</b>	<b>50.4</b>	ELL	104	<b>41.6</b>	<b>36.3</b>
LEP	282	34.5	18.3	LEP	184	32.5	31.1	LEP	98	39.2	30.6
NEP	98	12.0	8.3	NEP	89	15.7	19.3	NEP	9	3.6	5.7
Total	817			Total	567			Total	250		

F/R Lunch	New Sch K-8 #	New Sch K-8 %	District K-8 %		New Sch K-5 #	New Sch K-5 %	District K-5 %		New Sch MS 6-8#	New Sch MS 6-8%	District 6-8%
Free	461	<b>56.4</b>	<b>38.8</b>	Free	313	<b>55.2</b>	<b>71.4</b>	Free	148	<b>59.2</b>	<b>71.7</b>
Reduced	86	10.5	7.8	Reduced	66	11.6	7.7	Reduced	20	8.0	7.9
Full Pay	270	33.0	53.4	Full Pay	188	33.2	20.9	Full Pay	82	32.8	20.4
Total	817			Total	567			Total	250		

District K-8 percents are only K-8s. District K-5 and 6-8 numbers exclude k-8s

To that end, our research around academic resiliency has helped us to understand that this research based approach increases the likelihood of academic success for at-risk and military students by building upon students' *existing traits of resiliency* and focusing on "alterable factors" that impact success in school. Researchers have identified these specific alterable factors in several ways; the formulation below is drawn from Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg and the Military Child Education Coalition (Bower, 2011).

#### The 7 Crucial C's of Resiliency

- 1. Competence**– Competence is the ability or know-how to handle situations effectively.
- 2. Confidence**– True confidence, the solid belief in one's own abilities, is rooted in competence. Children gain confidence by demonstrating their competence in real situations.
- 3. Connection**– Children with close ties to family, friends, school and community are more likely to have a solid sense of security that produces strong values and prevents them from seeking destructive alternatives to love and attention.

**4. Character**– Children need a fundamental sense of right and wrong to ensure they are prepared to make wise choices, contribute to the world, and become stable adults.

**5. Contribution**– It is a powerful lesson when children realize that the world is a better place because they are in it. Children who understand the importance of personal contribution gain a sense of purpose that can motivate them.

**6. Coping**– Children who learn to cope effectively with stress are better prepared to overcome life’s challenges.

**7. Control**– When children realize they can control the outcome of their decisions and actions, they’re more likely to know that they have the ability to do what it takes to bounce back.

### *Resiliency Overview*

While it is not possible to protect our students from the ups and downs of life, cultivating resiliency in them is indeed possible. Resiliency skills are valuable for all students, and absolutely critical for students who are most vulnerable. Proven, researched-based strategies can help students develop the resilience to ensure risk factors do not result in school failure. With proper support, families and the schools that serve them can provide students with the tools they need to respond to the challenges of youth and young adulthood and to navigate successfully as productive adults (McClain, 2007).

According to the American Psychological Association (Comas-Diaz et. al., 2013), building resiliency can help our children manage stress and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Resiliency, however, does not mean that children will not experience life challenges. This is especially true when dealing with historically marginalized populations in our society and children of parents who are in the military. Many of these children develop coping strategies that have helped them over time, but are unable to translate those skills into other contexts; while some lack the skills they need because their experiences center on their inability to make meaningful connections to others, serve in their schools and communities, and maintain consistent and daily routines. Other factors may include limited self-care, insufficient goal setting, low self-esteem, despondent outlook on life, and a lack of personal self-discovery and acceptance.

Moreover, factors likely to label a person as being “at-risk” have unintentionally led to lowered expectations for many students in urban school settings. Some of these students and their families have experienced discrimination from the very institutions designed to support them. When viewing students through a deficit point of view, it inhibits our ability to be aware of the exceptional challenges they face and the recognition of their capacity and strength to overcome such difficult life circumstances. Deficit mindedness also does not allow us to truly look at the richness of our students’ individuality and uniqueness.

New ways of thinking about our students and how they respond to their environments at home and school have given educators an opportunity to begin thinking about and developing successful and academically resilient students despite the risk and adversity they may face (Benard, 1991). Research suggests that building resiliency in children requires that school leaders understand them as individuals with strengths rather than individuals who need to be fixed (Capuzzi and Gross, 2000). Building resiliency allows us to truly look at the richness of our students’ individuality and uniqueness. Student

engagement in the school, taking ownership in their learning building personal connections to the school environment, self-determination and self-efficacy are also important factors.

*Students who are resilient are typically more social, optimistic, energetic, cooperative, inquisitive, attentive, helpful, punctual, and task oriented.* To highlight these skills, we have selected three researched based studies that look at resiliency from an academic, athletic, and competitive academics perspective.

### ***Resiliency through Mathematics***

Education professor Geoffrey Borman (University of Wisconsin) and his colleague Laura Overman (Johns Hopkins) conducted a study in 2004 that examined *academic resiliency* among students from families of low socioeconomic status. They tracked the mathematical progress of these children from grades third through sixth grade and specifically assessed risk factors and resilience-promoting features of schools: (a) peer group composition, (b) school resources, (c) effective schools; and (d) supportive schools. The study contrasted the academic outcomes for three groups—African American, Hispanic, and White students—and found that, regardless of race, students from low-income families who achieve resilient mathematical outcomes have greater *engagement in academic activities, an internal locus of control, a more positive outlook toward school, and more positive self-esteem* (Borman and Overman, 2004). They also noted that resilience is a developmental process occurring over time, and if schools can partner with parents earlier, a student’s ability to develop resiliency increases. Resilient students develop good psychosocial and behavioral adaptation skills despite developmental risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities (Borman and Overman, 2004).

### ***Resiliency through Athletics***

Another study focused on resiliency studied the connection between student achievement and athleticism. Research conducted by Randolph Hawkins and Lynn M. Mulkey of the *University of South Carolina–Beaufort* revisited the work done by Michael Rutter which looked at the psychosocial resiliency demonstrated among athletes (Rutter, 1987). Hawkins and Mulkey used Rutter’s work to explore athletic investment and academic resiliency amongst African American male and female middle school students. Hawkins and Mulkey (2005) distinguished four mechanisms that they believed would help individuals to mediate adverse circumstances or demonstrate resilient behaviors. Included are mechanisms that (a) *reduce the impact of risks, (b) reduce the likelihood of negative chain reactions associated with adversity, (c) establish and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) create new opportunities for success.* Sport involvement is ideally suited to each of these four tasks in a variety of ways (Hawkins and Mulkey, 2005). Hawkins and Mulkey’s research ultimately determined that, “academic resilience and attachment parallel the athletic persistence and determination that is generated in the day-to-day activities of coming to practice, stretching and conditioning the body, competing, and finally starting the process all over again, despite occasional losses” (Hawkins and Mulkey, 2005). “In athletic participation, the major risks involved are competitive losses. However, the structure of sport competitions generally guarantees several chances to place before losses take on a permanent status. Examples include preseason games and scrimmages and even early season losses. This structure reduces the impact of the risk of competing—students are able, between risks, to regroup, reorganize, and practice to make a better showing in the next competition. Each effort to prepare anew is a resilience mechanism that could be applied within the academic setting. If, for example, students had several

opportunities to master certain academic tasks and were given time between tasks to analyze weaknesses and to practice, then academic performance and mastery would very likely improve” (Hawkins and Mulkey, 2005).

### ***Resiliency through Competitive Academics***

Resiliency-building capacity can be taught as part of our instructional practices. For example, Dr. Joe Bellon author of, “A Research-Based Justification for Debate across the Curriculum,” (Bellon, 2000) conducted an in-depth evaluation of both quantitative and qualitative data sets around argumentative literacy and subsequently determined that students who engaged in debate platforms both from an instructional vantage point or a competitive one, showed tremendous growth academically. The study also showed that debate naturally built resiliency skills that instilled and encouraged self-advocacy. Perhaps the most important skill debaters learned is the ability to think rigorously and critically (Bellon, 2000). Bellon also determined that debate participation promoted problem solving and innovative thinking, and helped students build links between words and ideas that made concepts more meaningful. Debate students were also taught to synthesize wide bodies of complex information, and to exercise creativity and implement different ways of knowing. Learning to think well has far reaching effects into every aspect of a student’s life (Bellon, 2000). Additionally, debate required students to “engage in serious subject matters in a mature and professional environment. Debate students show more maturity in the face of adversity and tend to develop stronger relationships with peers and mentors than the average student. Debate teaches students to recognize how others think, which improves their ability to cooperate and resolve conflicts. This makes debate one of the most successful vehicles for providing effective education to at-risk students. Ultimately, debate increases students’ self-confidence by helping to teach them the skills necessary to become competent adults” (Bellon, 2000).

### ***Resiliency, Student Academic Success, and our Schools***

Research has established that resilience can be taught, even to students who considerably lack these skills and researchers have further concluded that everyone has a capacity for learning resiliency, and once recognized, these self-protective characteristics can be improved and strengthened over time. Additionally, after the family, educators are best positioned to provide the supportive conditions that promote resiliency in youth (Henderson and Milstein, 1996). According to Henderson and Milstein from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, there are six resiliency skills critical to academic success:

- Goal setting/Valuing the importance of education
- Academic confidence
- Strong connections with others
- Stress management
- Balanced sense of well-being and,
- Intrinsic motivation.

Students who learned these six resiliency skills and how to refine the skills they possessed demonstrated higher grades, higher attendance, and an increased rate of passed classes. These results were also replicated at other schools with large free and reduced lunch populations (Henderson and Milstein,

1996). The most robust school characteristics for promoting academic resiliency are represented by supportive school models that actively create safe learning environment while maintaining an atmosphere of *challenge and transformative* change for everyone participating in the school environment. These characteristics include:

- Caring and supportive teachers
- A safe and orderly school environment
- Positive expectations for all children
- Opportunities for students to become meaningfully and productively involved and engaged in the school and
- Efforts to improve partnerships between the home and school.

One of the more pressing questions regarding resiliency centers on the difference between students who exhibit resilient characteristics and those who do not. In general, students who are resilient have demonstrated competency (not just academic competence), have or feel a sense of belonging in their environments, are useful, feel empowered-even when they fail, and are generally optimistic. “Young people who leave every day having participated in certain experiences are students who leave school optimistic about their educational and personal futures” (Sagor, 1996). According to Sagor, these key experiences are ones that:

- Provide them with authentic evidence of academic success (competence)
- Show them they are valued members of the community (belonging)
- Reinforce feelings that they have made a real contribution to their community (usefulness) and
- Make them feel empowered (effective).

This is a brief overview of the extensive research on the strategies and benefits of building academic resiliency in students, which will lead to increased student success. Because students who will likely attend the new P-8 school, which will be located at the APS Community Campus, may need support in increasing resiliency because of their life experiences, including socioeconomic status and being children of parents in the military, the models for creating academic resiliency should be considered in the development of the new school.

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