



# 2023 NSPRA GOLD MEDALLION ENTRY

## SPECIAL COMMUNICATION PROJECT/CAMPAIGN

**ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS • ARLINGTON, Va.**

14 School & Community Relations Team Members  
42 Schools and Programs  
28,362 students



## HIGHLIGHTING THE BEST OF APS

Arlington Public Schools • Arlington, Va.

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### SYNOPSIS

The **APS All Stars** program focuses on improving staff morale through recognition and enhancing workplace culture.

Arlington Public Schools (APS) highlights five outstanding staff members monthly to highlight their excellent work and recognize the many ways staff make a difference in our community.

These individuals demonstrate excellence in collaboration, equity, inclusivity, integrity, innovation and stewardship. They are the members of the team who are the first to pitch in, who bring a positive attitude to their work, and who go above and beyond to support their colleagues and serve students and families. All employees (of every scale and employee group) are eligible for nomination.

### APS MISSION

Honorees embrace the vision of APS to ensure all students learn and thrive in safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments.

### APS VISION

These employees, no matter their role or position, contribute to creating an inclusive, supportive learning community that empowers all students.

As a token of appreciation, APS All Stars receive valuable gifts, a surprise photo opportunity with the superintendent and a complimentary lunch with the superintendent and other All Stars. As part of this process, APS strategically reached out to community sponsors to support the employee recognition program.

### APS TEAM

#### Andrew Robinson

*Communications Coordinator of Media Relations and Online Strategies*

#### Catherine Ashby

*Assistant Superintendent of School & Community Relations*

#### Frank Bellavia

*Director of Communications*

#### Sara Daniel

*Supervisor of Web, Multimedia Design and Print Services*

*“The APS All Stars Program performs many essential functions in our school division, breaking through the negativity facing public schools by telling the inspiring and positive stories of our staff and how they help prepare our students for a bright future. It changes the narrative in a positive direction, while being one of the driving components of increasing employee morale.”*

*—Dr. Francisco Durán,  
Superintendent*





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## RESEARCH

### NATIONAL DATA AND TRENDS

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented level of change to the way each of us functions every day; it had an immense impact on public education and teaching. Before the pandemic, around 8% of teachers were leaving the profession each year. Mid-pandemic, research conducted in 2021 showed that over 35% of polled teachers said they are “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to leave the profession in the next two years. These trends are mirrored within Arlington Public Schools.

### APS DATA

Every two years, APS conducts a “Your Voice Matters” survey which polls students, teachers/staff and families to inform the work across both the school division and Arlington County. This survey ties closely with one of the core elements of the 2018-24 strategic plan—an engaged workforce.

#### In 2020:

- 37% of staff responded favorably to questions pertaining to employee voice and professional development
- 67% of staff responded favorably to questions pertaining to staff engagement
- 59% of staff responded favorably to questions pertaining to workplace climate
- 61% of staff responded favorably to questions pertaining to compensation and benefits
- Only 22% of staff responded favorably to the question, “Do you feel you receive recognition for doing good work?”

The data showed that employee engagement was extremely low. Employees were not feeling heard, recognized or involved in decisions.

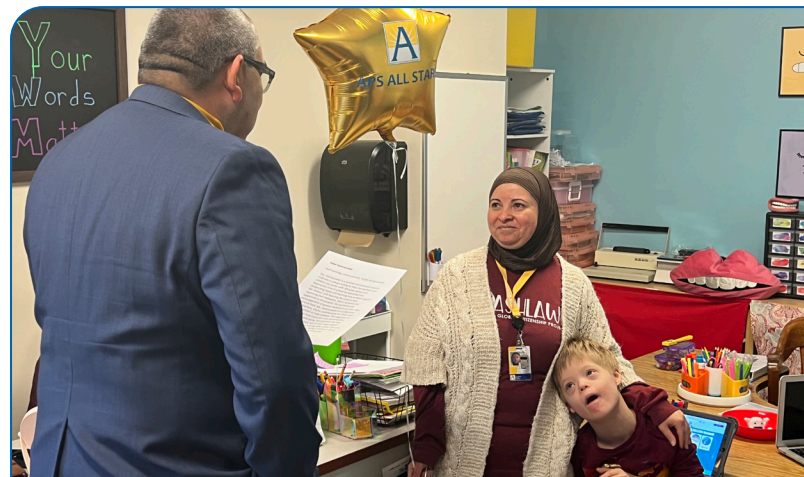
Staff engagement was nearly 30 points lower than the target set in the strategic plan. Workplace climate ratings were the result of several questions about workplace culture, and by far the lowest response was related to recognition. Only 22% responded favorably to that question.

### INFORMAL RESEARCH

School & Community Relations staff also conducted focus groups with staff members across various stakeholder groups: teachers, PR liaisons, principals and administrators.

Notes summarized from the focus groups showed that staff were receptive to a staff recognition program, if it was well thought-out and executed. Most of the feedback from employees focused on the fact that APS only recognizes a small group of “Employees of the Year” once per year, which leaves 99 percent of the workforce feeling left out.

**Armed with this information, School and Community Relations created the “APS All Stars” program, with the goal of enhancing one of the six drivers of staff morale—workplace culture and recognition.**





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## PLANNING

### GOAL

To increase employee recognition and morale and build stronger connections between leadership and all staff.

### AUDIENCE

We knew from past research that, in addition to staff, our families, students and the broader community had a strong interest in celebrating and recognizing our educators and staff. Therefore, the nomination process targeted APS:

- Staff
- Students
- Families
- Broader Community
- Businesses & Potential Partners

### STRATEGY

1. Create a school year-long program using our various communications platforms to recognize outstanding staff members who embody the APS mission, vision and values.
2. Engage and secure the buy-in of the superintendent and leadership team.

## TACTICS

- Established a theme for the program: APS All Stars “Highlighting the Best of APS”
- Met with various internal stakeholders to solicit feedback on the plan prior to launch
- Created a branded hashtag **#APSAAllStars**
- Created a nomination form that was user-friendly and easy to complete
- Actively promoted the recognition program internally and externally
- Announced and promoted the program internally via the employee intranet, Staff Central
- Utilized the division website, APS SchoolTalk (communications platform), social media and other channels to generate nominations
- Recruited business partners in the community to sponsor the program and to provide meaningful employee gifts
- Secured buy-in from the superintendent to conduct monthly visits to surprise winning staff
- Created an internal group of diverse staff members to select the nominees each month
- Strategically planned recognitions to ensure all scales and schools are represented
- Developed campaign materials and giveaways







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## IMPLEMENTATION

The research, planning and implementation paid off, as we received over 400 quality nominations from families, students, the broader community and staff within the first month of soliciting nominations.

- Coordinated monthly All Stars selection and planned Friday surprise visits from the superintendent and other leaders
- Coordinated with principals, supervisors and Human Resources to review nominees and plan the surprise visits
- Various internal leaders invited to assist in the surprise visits
- Highlighted the surprise visits from the superintendent and leaders on social media using a variety of media including video clips, photos and graphics customized for the different communications channels
  - » Public website, Staff Central (intranet), Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Planned semi-annual luncheons with the superintendent to bring all winners to celebrate and to discuss their experiences
- Based on the evaluation, APS will establish employee focus groups of past All Stars winners to serve as a sounding board on key decisions within the division



## PARTNERS

APS partners with Amazon and Elements Massage to provide gift cards and spa packages to All Stars. These quality gifts help to ensure that employees feel valued. In addition, All Stars receive a swag bag—a backpack filled with branded APS gear.





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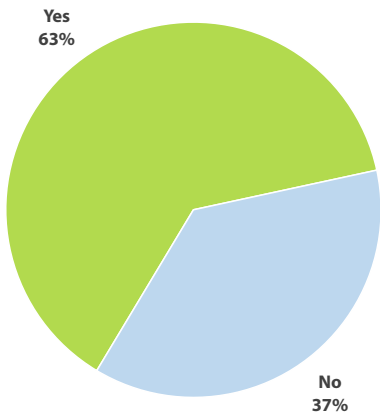
## EVALUATION

We gathered feedback in a variety of ways, including soliciting feedback from past winners via an online survey. We will analyze the results from the next *Your Voice Matters* survey to see if there are any changes/increases in employee engagement.

*On a scale from 1-6, with six being the best/most positive, how valued do you feel working for APS after receiving the APS All Star award?*



*Did receiving the APS All Star award change how you felt about being a valued APS employee?*



## APS ALL STARS BY THE NUMBERS

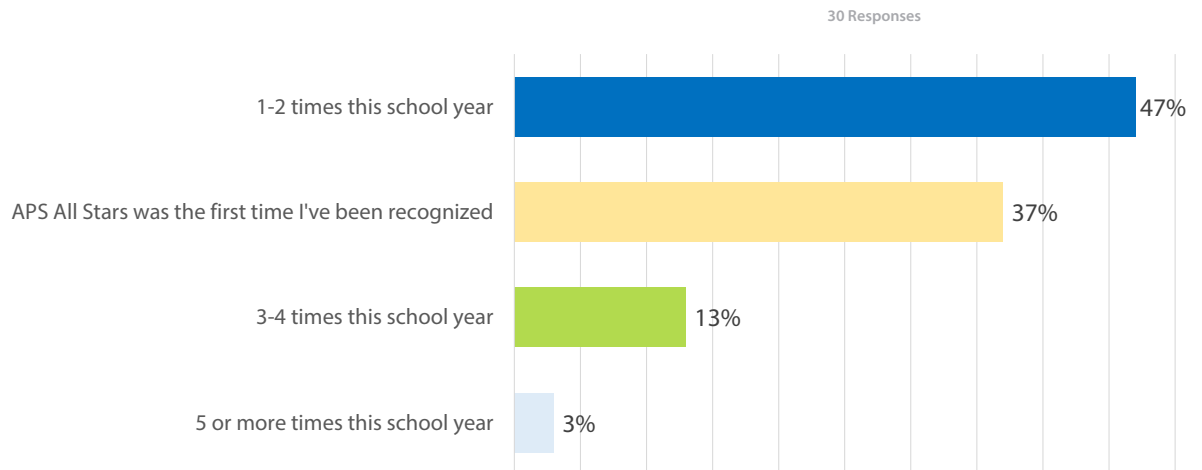
**923** - Submissions to date

**65** - APS All Stars awarded

**57,612** - Views on Twitter  
APS All Stars award videos

**3,823** - Webpage views

*How frequently are you recognized for your work?*







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*"The program is a wonderful way to recognize employees from all over the county in all the different scales, and I think that is one of the most important features. The surprise visits are a highlight in my opinion; my students were as slack-jawed as I was when the Superintendent, Principal and entourage walked in while my back was to the door. The swag bag was fun, but the best part was the letter from the parent who nominated me." – APS All Stars Feedback*



*"I think this is a great program as it spans across the entire school system and recognizes all types of employees in a very nice way. It is an initiative that has had a positive effect." – APS All Stars Feedback*



**Francisco Duran, Ed.D.**  
@SuptDuran

Congratulations to Washington-Liberty School Psychologist Lori Ockerman for being an [#APSAIStar](#) who is one of the best parts of the student services at W-L. She's been a W-L staple for years & brings a quiet & wise energy to every environment & meeting. [@GeneralsPride](#)



Followed by some Tweets you follow  
**Wendy Carria** @WendyCarria · Feb 24

Replying to [@SuptDuran](#) and [@GeneralsPride](#)  
So proud of Ms. Ockerman, School Psychologist extraordinaire. As a psychologist holding many roles (including Intern Supervisor) for many years, her influence and impact on students, families and staff have been immense. [@nasponline](#) [@APS\\_StudentSrvc](#)

2 11 450



**devin shirley** @devinshirley · Feb 24

Replying to [@SuptDuran](#) and [@GeneralsPride](#)  
So proud! Absolutely deserved!!

6 83



**Francisco Duran, Ed.D.**  
@SuptDuran

Our next [#APSAIStars](#) stop took us to [@ASFSOnline](#) where we got to congratulate admin assistant Teresa Smiroldo. Congratulations and thank you for all you do!



*"Hearing the letter from my coworker while surrounded by my team was the best part! It was so moving to know that I am valued. I really appreciated the superintendent and his team coming to Arlington Science Focus School." – APS All Stars Feedback*





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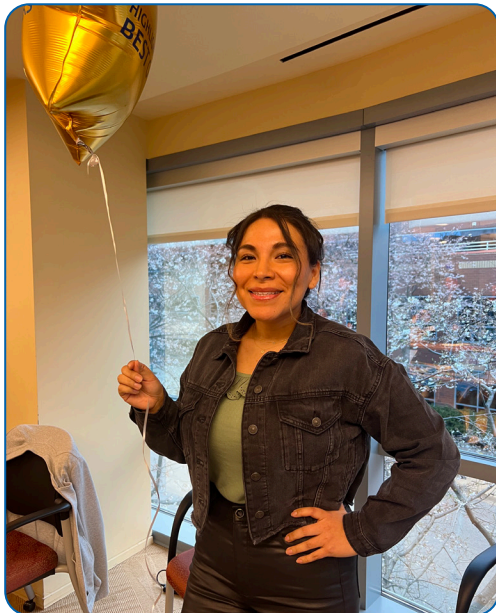
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*"Ms. McKeown is extremely hard working. She seems to work 24 hours a day to create an inclusive learning environment for my child! Her classroom is my child's safe space. She beams with positive energy and hope."*  
– APS All Stars Submission



*"Even though Ms. Harris gets constantly interrupted, she stops what she is doing and pleasantly addresses each new issue that has been brought to her attention. I have never seen her anything but calm, even though her job is very stressful."* – APS All Stars Submission



*"Vanessa embodies all the essential qualities of an APS All Star. Her passion is helping families have a successful experience upon their first interaction with APS at the Welcome Center. She consistently advocates for all families and the registration staff."*  
– APS All Stars Submission



*"Mr. Miles is an experienced special education teacher who is passionate about his field and dedicated to his students. He has a good rapport with the children and interacts with all the children in the classroom, not just those on his caseload. He works extremely hard, sometimes staying at school until after nine at night."*  
– APS All Stars Submission





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## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

APS website All Stars page ([apsva.us/all-stars/](https://apsva.us/all-stars/))

OUR SCHOOLS [Español](#) [Монгол](#) [العربية](#) [Disclaimer](#) [Emergency Alerts](#) [Contact Us](#) [Canvas](#) [Search](#)

[Arlington Public Schools](#) [Health & Safety](#) [Engage with APS!](#) [About Us](#) [Employment](#) [Academics](#) [Programs/Services](#) [Registration](#) [School Board](#)

### School & Community Relations

- School & Community Relations
- News Releases
- Family and Community Engagement (FACE)
- Community Engagement Opportunities
- AETV - Educational Media Production
- Publications
- Volunteers and Partnerships
- APS Podcasts
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests
- Contact APS
- S&CR Staff

## APS All Stars

### [Nominate an APS All Star Today!](#)

APS is highlighting five outstanding staff members each month all school year long to recognize the many ways staff make a difference in our community and to highlight their great work.

These individuals demonstrate excellence in collaboration, equity, inclusivity, integrity, innovation and stewardship. They are the members of your team who are the first to pitch in, who bring a positive attitude to their work, and go above and beyond to support their colleagues, and to serve students and families.

They also embrace the mission and vision of APS to ensure all students learn and thrive in safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments. *(Mission)*

All employees (of every scale and employee group) are eligible for nomination. These are employees who make a difference and contribute to creating an inclusive, supportive learning community that empowers all students, no matter their role or position. *(Vision)*

As a token of appreciation, **APS All Stars will receive an Amazon gift card** (graciously donated by Amazon), a photo opportunity with the superintendent and a meal on the superintendent with other All-Stars.

### March 2023 APS All Stars Announced

APS is excited to announce the March 2023 APS All Stars, selected out of several hundred outstanding staff



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## APS intranet All Stars page and nomination form

The screenshot shows the APS intranet All Stars page. The page header includes the Arlington Public Schools logo and the text "SharePoint". Below the header is the "STAFF CENTRAL" section, which includes the text "Your APS Employee Network" and navigation links for "STAFF CENTRAL", "DEPARTMENTS", and "EMPLOYEE RESOURCES". The main content area is titled "APS All Stars" and features a large gold star logo with the text "APS All Stars" below it. The page text describes the All Stars program, stating that APS highlights five outstanding staff members each month to recognize their contributions. It lists the qualities of All Stars: collaboration, equity, inclusivity, integrity, innovation, and stewardship. It also mentions that All Stars are eligible for nomination if they are employees who make a difference and contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive learning community. The page includes a "Nominate an All Star" button. An inset image shows the nomination form, which includes a title "Nominate an APS All Star", a thank you message, and a section for "Nominee Information" with fields for Name of Nominee (First and Last Name), Building/Work Location, and The nominee is a(n) (Teacher/Instructional Staff or Support/Non-instructional Staff). It also includes a text box for "How would you describe this person in five (5) words or less?" and another for "Why are you nominating this employee?".





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## APS All Stars luncheon with the superintendent

 **Francisco Duran, Ed.D.**  
@SuptDuran


One of my favorite moments as a Superintendent is surprising staff to let them know they're an #APSAAllStar, so it was a pleasure to have a luncheon today celebrating their excellence & exceptional work!



4:29 PM · Jan 13, 2023 · 3,156 Views

5 Retweets 1 Quote 60 Likes

**You're Invited!**



**APS All Stars Luncheon with Dr. Durán**

Wednesday, June 8, 2022  
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

The Liberty Tavern  
3195 Wilson Blvd.  
Arlington, VA 22201

*Carpooling is suggested, as parking is limited*

Please RSVP by Friday, June 3, 2022: [bit.ly/AllStars-RSVP](https://bit.ly/AllStars-RSVP)

Email signature  
image block  
provided to  
honorees



## Social media monthly cover image

