

## What's "Traditional" about Arlington Traditional School (ATS)?

"Teaching methods change. New Principals come along. We do not swing with that pendulum. We stay right here..." focused on basic education built on a student-teacher-parent partnership. —Holly Hawthorne, ATS Principal since 1992

ATS is a nationally-recognized countywide elementary school celebrating student diversity from all Arlington neighborhoods representing over 25 countries. Established in 1978 as "Page Traditional School" (but renamed in 1995), ATS began as a "back-to-basics," structured alternative to the mid-1970s' fad of open-space, multi-grade level classrooms. Over forty years later, as the pendulum has swung away from open-space classrooms to other experiments in pedagogy, ATS continues its tradition of excellence with a simple formula for success: Academics, Behavior, Character, i.e., the ABC's.

At ATS, students learn these ABC's by design – not by chance – with a traditional approach to education characterized by the following:

- Emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic, with an annual celebration of Reading Carnival Day and Summer Reading Challenge;
- One classroom teacher for all core subjects in self-contained classrooms, allowing a teacher to adjust to each child's interests and abilities across subject matters;
- Regular, meaningful homework and weekly progress reports sent home at all grade levels, building a student-teacher-parent partnership to promote grade level mastery;
- High standards for adherence to behavior and dress codes, teaching personal responsibility and creating an orderly, quiet learning environment for all;
- Weekly school-wide assemblies where all students participate in choreographed theatrical productions, building school spirit in the ATS community;
- All students begin learning musical instruments in 4th grade (choral, band, orchestra);
- All 5th graders serve as Safety Patrols in service to their ATS school community; and
- The school colors, blue and gold, signify the importance of individual achievement and the Golden Rule.

With this focus on teaching the ABC's, ATS has demonstrated consistent excellence in closing gaps in student achievement so that all students are engaged, educated, and empowered to succeed. As a result, ATS has repeatedly received state and national recognition, including being named a Blue Ribbon School (twice!), and held up as a model for other public schools in newspaper articles and books (see below).

ATS History video (YouTube)

### **Awards:**

National Blue Ribbon School, 2004, 2012, 2019

#1 Public Elementary School in VA and DC Metropolitan Area ([niche.com](http://niche.com)), 2016-17  
Governor's Award for Educational Excellence, 2008-12, 2017-18

Virginia Board of Education Distinguished Achievement Award, 2016  
Virginia Board of Education Excellence Award, 2013-2015  
National Schools of Character (finalist), 2007, 2008  
Parent Involvement School of Excellence, 2006  
Washington Post Distinguished Educational Leadership Award and APS Principal of the Year, 2005-2006

**News Articles/Books:**

“Hope Spreads Through Education,” The Arlington Connection front page (2015)  
“Old School,” Arlington Magazine premier edition feature article (2011)  
On Purpose: How Great School Cultures Form Strong Character, by Samuel Casey Carter (Ch. 8 “Arlington Traditional School: Arlington, Virginia”) (2011)  
“Learning Experience,” Washington Post Magazine, feature article (2006)  
“Why Don’t Public Schools Give Parents What They Want?” Cato Institute (2014)  
“‘Traditional’ Va. schools find themselves in high demand as they eschew experimentation.” Washington Post (2014)