

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Item C-1-b

Work Session on Enrollment and Transfers for Schools and Programs

January 9, 2017

The Arlington School Board convened on Monday, January 09, 2017, at 7:02 PM at 1426 N. Quincy Street, Arlington, VA 22207.

Present were:

Nancy Van Doren, Chair
Dr. Barbara Kanninen, Vice Chair
Reid Goldstein, Member
James Lander, Member
Tannia Talento, Member
Melanie Elliott, Clerk

Also present were:

Dr. Patrick K. Murphy, Superintendent
Linda Erdos, Assistant Superintendent, School and Community Relations
Cintia Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services
Dr. Kristi Murphy, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources
Dr. Tara Natrass, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction
Lisa Stengle, Director, Planning and Evaluation
Sarah Johnson, Integrated Project Manager, Planning and Evaluation
Lionel White, Director, Facilities Planning
Kate Graham, Coordinator, Preschool Program

Introduction

Ms. Van Doren called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. She outlined four major initiatives the Board is undertaking, including review of School Board Policy 25-2.2 Enrollment and Transfers for Schools and Programs (SBP 25-2.2), the recently approved high school boundary refinements, a visioning process for Drew Elementary, and high school redesign/instructional focus for the new high school. This policy review is part of an ongoing process to address capacity needs as enrollment grows, and community engagement throughout the process is encouraged. Dr. Murphy confirmed that all APS policies are undergoing review and revision when needed. He outlined how SBP 25-2.2, was developed and has been amended over time to respond to pressures and challenges faced by APS. This session will identify possible revisions, with additional questions or concerns placed in a parking lot for further discussion. Ms. Stengle then outlined feedback needed from the Board to guide this process, and shared key definitions.

- The School Board's Charge

Ms. Stengle presented the charge, outlining expectations for the proposed policy revisions. She also reviewed Board direction to the Superintendent, which includes proposing initial revisions, soliciting feedback, and presenting a final proposed revision for implementation in 2018-19.

- Guiding Principles for the Updates

Seven guiding principles for the policy revision process were presented, which include to balance neighborhood and option schools, provide equitable access, and simplify the policy. In addition, this work should engage the community, standardize transfer processes, schedule work to align with other initiatives, and provide a transparent update process. Appreciating that the charge identifies what should be done, Mr. Lander felt that a mission statement is also needed to clarify what the Board wants to achieve. Ms. Stengle suggested that some of questions to be discussed will help identify a mission, and the group agreed this topic may be revisited later in this process.

- Questions for the School Board

Twelve staff recommendations were presented to the Board for agreement or further exploration. The Board agreed with the first three recommendations, to simplify the policy and move procedural steps to the Policy Implementation Procedures (PIPs), to retitle relevant policies to better communicate their purpose, and to create a separate policy for pre-Kindergarten. Related to the third recommendation, Ms. Stengle noted that there would be additional discussion of a policy focused on high school. Also recommended was to align this work with other initiatives underway. With the expected continued enrollment growth, this policy will likely need more frequent review.

The Board agreed with two recommendations related to simplifying the policy by eliminating repetition and moving procedural steps to the PIP. Ms. Van Doren noted that these changes reflect the purpose of policies, which is to provide broad guidance. Ms. Stengle reiterated that all suggested changes will be shared with the community for feedback as the process moves forward. There was also a recommendation to eliminate the employee professional courtesy transfer, and the Board considered whether this should be retained as a possible recruitment/retention tool. Ms. Johnson noted there is an appeals process for staff if there are extenuating circumstances.

Assuming that pre-K enrollment will be handled in a separate policy, staff is recommending that the Montessori transfer process be moved to the PIP. Ms. Graham and Ms. Johnson explained that there is variation in how Montessori enrollment and transfers are managed, and confirmed that this change will simplify and standardize the process. The group discussed this idea, considering equity and how it ties in to the overall goals. Dr. Murphy appreciated efforts to balance and simplify the policy, but also spoke to the importance of providing students with options as they move through their education. He recognized that the pre-K program provides flexibility in managing crowding, and again encouraged the Board not to eliminate options. Board members asked for more time to consider this recommendation and to receive community input, so it was added to the parking lot.

The next recommendation discussed was to balance neighborhood and option programs to provide equitable access for all residents. After reviewing programs currently available, Ms. Stengle stated that staff is not making specific recommendations until data can be reviewed and analyzed to inform the discussion. This data will include who is applying to the different options, demographic information for those programs, and whether students are staying in the programs. Staff will also provide historical data to see how enrollment has changed over time. Additional information requested by the Board included how proposed changes might impact countywide programs and how changes made to the current policy have affected balance and equitable access to options.

As the choice schools currently use different lottery structures, staff recommends standardizing the lottery process. Staff will solicit feedback from the community on current practices to ensure

any changes do not have a negative impact. The group discussed factors related to lotteries, such as marketing, central registration, and clear articulation of how lotteries function. The group briefly discussed implementing a county-wide lottery. The Board agreed that this recommendation requires community conversation as well as further consideration. Mr. Lander encouraged staff to reach out to a broad group, including residents who do not have children in school yet, and Ms. Van Doren encouraged engaging advisory groups in the community conversations.

The next recommendation looks to implement central registration and to ensure simple, equitable communication about neighborhood and option schools and transportation to all families. Mr. Goldstein supported looking to standardize provision of transportation throughout the policy. While supporting a standardized registration process, Ms. Van Doren did not support registration at a central location, noting the benefits of school-based registration to both families and the schools. The group agreed this recommendation should be explored in community conversations.

Another recommendation is to move procedural text to the PIP to standardize how siblings, transportation and attendance zones are addressed. For attendance zones, the group discussed demographics and how to provide equity and Mr. Lander again noted the importance of identifying a mission for this policy. Also discussed were admissions criteria and how they relate to the policy and guidelines for all types of schools. The group recognized the need to maintain a focus on the instructional approach at each school as they look to address crowding. For example, as the Drew visioning process proceeds, the Board must consider how boundary adjustments will affect other schools. Acknowledging the range of choices available, Dr. Murphy stressed that APS must ensure that families know they have equitable access to all programs. Acknowledging that each school is unique, Mr. Lander stressed the importance of providing the same level of consistent quality instruction to all. It was agreed that the consideration of walk zones be moved to the parking lot.

The final recommendation was to determine if current options provide equitable access for all residents, and if it is necessary include additional options that ensure that access. Ms. Stengle confirmed that additional data is needed to inform this decision, so it will be included in the community conversations. The Board then briefly discussed other changes to the current programs that might be considered, such as adding an elementary IB program, and whether these suggestions should be part of the community conversations.

Ms. Stengle summarized the discussion, confirming that the Board agreed to move forward with recommendations 1 through 5 as well as recommendations 9, 10 and 12. The additional recommendations and items delegated to the parking lot will be discussed further and staff will provide the requested information to inform those discussions.

- Timeline and communication plan

Ms. Stengle reviewed the proposed timeline for the process. There will be a work session each month, and an update presented at each Board meeting. Staff will take the Board's feedback, questions and comments, and cluster the responses into work session topics. Ms. Stengle then outlined the tentative timeline for community deliberations of the proposed changes. The communications plan will include outreach to advisory committees and will provide options for feedback. Mr. Lander encouraged staff to reach out to non-traditional groups, such as community churches, for feedback.

- Related considerations and next steps

In closing, Ms. Stengle reviewed next steps. Ms. Van Doren thanked the Board and staff for their efforts on this initiative.

The meeting adjourned 9:07 PM.

ATTEST:

Melanie Elliott, Clerk
Arlington School Board

Nancy Van Doren, Chair
Arlington School Board