

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Item C-1-a

Work Session

Update from the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families,
The Whole Child, and Wellness
December 6, 2017

The Arlington School Board convened on Wednesday, December 6 2017, at 7:01 PM at 1426 North Quincy Street, Arlington, Virginia.

Present were:

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

Also present were:

Dr. Patrick K. Murphy, Superintendent
Cintia Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services
Dr. Tara Natrass, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction
Laura Newton, Director, Student Services
Pam McClellan, Supervisor, Counseling Services
Debbie DeFranco, Supervisor, Health and Physical Education
Ann Vor der Bruegge, Co-Chair, Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families
Rebecca Hjelm, APCYF Data Specialist
Kim Durand, Partnership Coordinator

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Kanninen called the meeting to order. Dr. Murphy welcomed members of the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families (APCYF) to the work session, and Dr. Natrass briefly reviewed the agenda.

Ms. Vor der Bruegge explained that APCYF is a joint School and County Board partnership that focuses on the health, well-being and safety of children, youth and families. Dr. Natrass then described the APS Whole Child focus which is based on the vision, framework and recommended goals developed by the Whole Child Working Group. Dr. Natrass outlined the whole child approach to education, confirming that the data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) informs this work.

Ms. Vor der Bruegge described development of the YRBS, which is administered every three years and provides data that informs APCYF recommendations. She then presented a broad overview of results from the most recent survey, highlighting participation and confirming that the data has been presented to many community groups. She summarized the trends in areas that have shown improvement and in areas of concern, and noted new data points added to the latest survey.

Detailed information from the survey related to bullying, sexual contact or harassment, and mental health issues was then shared, and data on screen time was also presented. Board members were interested in the increase in depressive symptoms seen in older students. Partnership staff noted that the cause of this increase cannot be determined from the data, however they confirmed they will explore this further. One positive finding was that the number of students who drank in the 30 days prior to the survey has gone down. However, the use of marijuana, prescription drugs and over the counter medications has increased, particularly in older students. The group discussed how students access medications that contain controlled substances, and Board members asked that if possible, data be provided that clarifies the sources of these substances. The group also discussed whether students are predisposed to substance abuse and if factors such as demographics, housing issues and socioeconomic challenges might contribute to the trends they are seeing.

Ms. Hjelm then described some correlatives from the data, focusing on depression and bullying which may play a role in other issues. She shared data about correlations between depression and school stress, dangerous personal relationships, and social media use. She also described relationships between incidences of bullying, depression and self-injurious behavior. The group recognized the difficulty in differentiating between correlation and causation, agreeing that such data analysis is challenging due to many intertwined issues. Ms. Hjelm also shared data on assets, such as having a trusted adult to talk to, and their effect on levels of substance abuse. She confirmed that the more assets a student has the less likely they are to participate in dangerous behaviors.

Ms. Vor der Bruegge summarized the APCYF's preliminary recommendations, which include strengthening data sharing and coordination of services. They also support additional substance abuse counselors, more training for specialists, and more prevention efforts in the schools, especially at earlier grades. Students expressed interest in peer-to-peer programs, consistency in consequences for bullying, and expanding health education to grades 11 and 12. Ms. DeFranco confirmed that staff is working with students to offer more health education, and noted that many current programs can be strengthened and expanded to meet some of these needs. Also discussed was the importance of maximizing existing resources and reconfiguring processes to be more effective, including working with community groups. Ms. Vor der Bruegge appreciated the feedback, and confirmed the Partnership will continue to refine their recommendations.

The School Board was concerned about bullying and sexual harassment, especially in middle school, and encouraged efforts to set clear expectations and strengthen communication with parents about issues. Board members looked forward to continued conversations with stakeholders to help refine the recommendations, and the group further discussed collaborating with community groups that support families. The group supported incorporating areas of concern into the curriculum, to help students handle issues such as stress, depression, body image, and understanding consent. Dr. Kanninen noted that many colleges provide incoming students with training on these topics, but the importance of teaching younger children about these issues was noted. Ms. Johnson spoke about efforts to update and strengthen the relevant policies and policy implementation procedures (PIPs) to better deal with bullying in the schools. Ms. Talento asked that this work include teaching students about the legal ramifications of their behavior, as well.

In closing, Ms. Hjelm highlighted the Partnership's next steps in data collection and interpretation. This includes implementing a new survey instrument and aligning their work with the Whole Child – Whole Community – Whole School framework.

Whole Child Implementation Update

Dr. Natrass introduced the update on the implementation of the Whole Child focus. Specific components are to ensure that each student is healthy, safe, supported, engaged and academically challenged, and Dr. Natrass outlined objectives for each of these components. In terms of health, Dr. Natrass briefly reviewed the policy and PIP related to student health and wellness in terms of instruction and monitoring progress. Ms. DeFranco then shared efforts that respond to specific topics such as substance abuse, stress and building relationships. The group then viewed a video created by Williamsburg Middle School staff that builds awareness of addressing mental health issues.

Ms. McClellan outlined the curriculum and counselor training done in APS to address safety concerns noted in the YRBS, and she shared information about the evidence-based bullying curriculum used and a new curriculum being implemented on unsafe touch. She also described efforts to increase student engagement through activities such as building opportunities for career exploration and skill development and confirmed integrated efforts to educate students, staff and parents. Dr. Natrass then spoke to efforts that support developing relationships with caring adults, and confirming that this work aligns with Family and Community Engagement. In terms of academic challenges, Dr. Newton described academic planning efforts and the multiple pathways available to students. In closing, Dr. Natrass confirmed that staff is bringing all of these elements together to build support for all students throughout APS.

Ms. Talento was interested in surveying students in the immigrant community about concerns about their families' safety, and Ms. Hjelm confirmed that while that is not part of the data that has been collected, the Partnership does plan to look at this issue. Responding to other questions, staff confirmed that support for mental health issues is provided for staff as well as for students.

Board members appreciated the work of the Partnership, staff, and the community to address concerns and support students. Recognizing budget constraints, Mr. Lander reiterated the need to focus more collaboration between organizations and programs already in place. Ms. Vor der Bruegge plans to work more closely with the schools to integrate services and strengthen connections between programs throughout Arlington. Ms. Kanninen also appreciated the discussion and asked about wellness. Dr. Natrass confirmed that staff is focused on wellness throughout the curriculum and through collaboration with groups such as the Partnership and the School Health Advisory Board.

Dr. Kanninen thanked all for their participation, and the meeting adjourned at 9:12 PM.

ATTEST:

Melanie Elliott, Clerk
Arlington School Board

Barbara Kanninen, Chair
Arlington School Board