

Executive Summary

The Community Progress Network (CPN) is a coalition of Arlingtonians committed to advancing our community's vision of inclusivity and diversity. Comprised of more than 30 non-profit, government and civic leaders, CPN works to engage, educate and advocate for equitable programs, policies, and investments in Arlington. Recognizing that the voices of low-income Arlingtonians often go unheard, CPN launched a series of facilitated roundtable discussions focused on key service areas essential to every individual and family. The CPN Roundtables provide an opportunity for community residents to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports. The first of four roundtables took place on August 23, 2018 at the Women's Club of Arlington, focused on the theme, *Working Together to Help Our Children Succeed*.

Removing barriers to participation and creating a welcoming environment for 58 participants was a key priority. Volunteers included translators to support the full participation of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Mongolian and English speakers, and childcare was provided. 12 small group tables were organized both by language spoken and the ages of the participants' children. Two tables focused on adult education opportunities and one was set aside for middle and high school participants. Table hosts included Katie Cristol, Chair Arlington County Board; Christian Dorsey, Vice-Chair, Arlington County Board; Arlington School Board Members: Nancy Van Doren and Barbara Kanninen as well as senior staff leaders from Arlington Public Schools, Arlington County Government, and non-profit service providers.

The evening kicked off with a family style dinner allowing participants and table volunteers to get acquainted and build trust to encourage more open conversation. After introductions, facilitators led participants at each table in a discussion about what is working well for them and their children. A second round of discussion explored challenges and barriers, giving participants the opportunity to raise concerns and difficulties they had experienced. The third and final round focused on identifying possible strategies (big or small) that might make a difference. Each round of table discussion was followed by a full-room "harvest" time to uncover emerging common concerns and cross cutting issues.

Notetakers at each table recorded closely the comments and concerns of participants. CPN will publish the full report as well as all table notes on its website, www.communityprogressnetwork.org.

Overall participants in the roundtable were generally happy with education in Arlington. Although, some pointed at areas for improvement, as with anything, participants were grateful and felt that Arlington Public Schools are providing a strong and excellent education for their children.

One of the most energetic discussions of the night proved to be focused on identifying opportunities. Admittedly, participants in these conversations may not always have been aware of restrictions or resource constraints that could inhibit implementation of the recommendations below. However, we encourage community leaders, organizations and County agencies to take seriously these challenges and the strategies proposed by resident voices. Many of these ideas are creative suggestions to respond to felt needs in our community. Highlights from ideas generated by participants to address challenges, promote equity and improve outcomes are outlined below:

Inclusion and Diversity

Multi-Lingual Information Boards: Having schools post basic information in the schools in multiple languages.

Multi-Lingual Parent Programs: Ensuring that parents who do not speak English as their native language are able to access school programs and community services.

Cultural Competency Training: Increasing cultural competence training for school and county staff—as well as for other community members, including students and parents.

Communication and Engagement

More Programming During Parent/Teacher Conferences: Asking schools to offer additional programs, flyers, or other information (on drugs, technology safety, etc.) to parents as they attend conferences.

Administrative Office Hours for Parents: Planning for principals, assistant principals, or other school wide staff to have dedicated times for walk in office hours.

Welcoming Programs for New Families: Streamlining the registration process, offering parent trainings, and developing a buddy system for new families and students to help them adjust to the new system and learn about all of the opportunities the system offers.

Student and Community Well-Being

Groups to Walk with Students: Organizing groups of parents in neighborhoods where many children walk to school to walk with students, particularly to support parents who may not be able to be home when it is time for students to go to and from school.

Increase Stress Management Resources: Offering more support for students who are feeling overwhelmed with school or issues outside of school.

Increase Supervision: Having increased adult supervision of social times at during school, after school, and community programming to assist with monitoring bullying behavior.

Think Through Scheduling: Considering the impact of the schedules when providing programs, particularly those designed to help working residents.

Support for Bus Drivers: Providing all bus drivers, not just those for students with special needs, with an assistant on the bus to help monitor student behavior.

Healthier Food: Changing food services to allow more consistent, appealing healthy options for all grade levels.

Parent Groups for Gang Prevention: Creating groups and programs to educate parents about potential gang issues, help divert students from joining, and supporting parents whose children have already joined.

Student, Parent and Community Success

Tutoring in multiple languages: Providing tutors able to provide instruction in other languages (Mongolian, Spanish) who could work with the parent and child.

Mentors: Developing a mentorship program, particularly for students who are in any of the “at-risk” categories, to help have another positive adult voice in their lives and find a strong career and life path.

Revive the “Workshop” program: Developing an apprenticeship program for teens.

Expand beyond academics: Ensuring that school days are not solely devoted to getting certain test scores, particularly for middle school and high school ages.

Technology Classes for Parents: Providing trainings for parents related to the devices and programs their children will be using throughout the school year.

Increase Access to School Officials: Provide groups particularly for low-income individuals to help with individual advocacy and increase communication across school offices/staff/administrators, so parents do not have to repeat their story/problem so many times.

Systems Change and Operational Excellence

Incentives for New Daycares: Providing incentives for new and current businesses to provide onsite day care for employees' children.

Provide IDs for residents: Issuing an ID to residents who lack other identification that they can use to enter the schools and other county programs.

Centralized Systems and Data: Streamlining applications for various programs in the county and schools.

"Arlington Smart Card": Creating a student/community Smart Card or Arlington Smart Card to centralize access and eligibility across systems.

Reduce Fees for Families with Multiple Kids: Providing a sliding scale for participation fees when a family has multiple children, particularly for those who also qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Transportation and bus options: Facilitating greater assistance with transportation, including bus services.

Overall, the event allowed community leaders to see areas of concern with suggested actions, but also areas where people are happy and programs that can be continued to grow. Beyond those who participated in the event, the hope is that this information will help leaders recognize the needs, desires and strengths of all members of the Arlington community.