

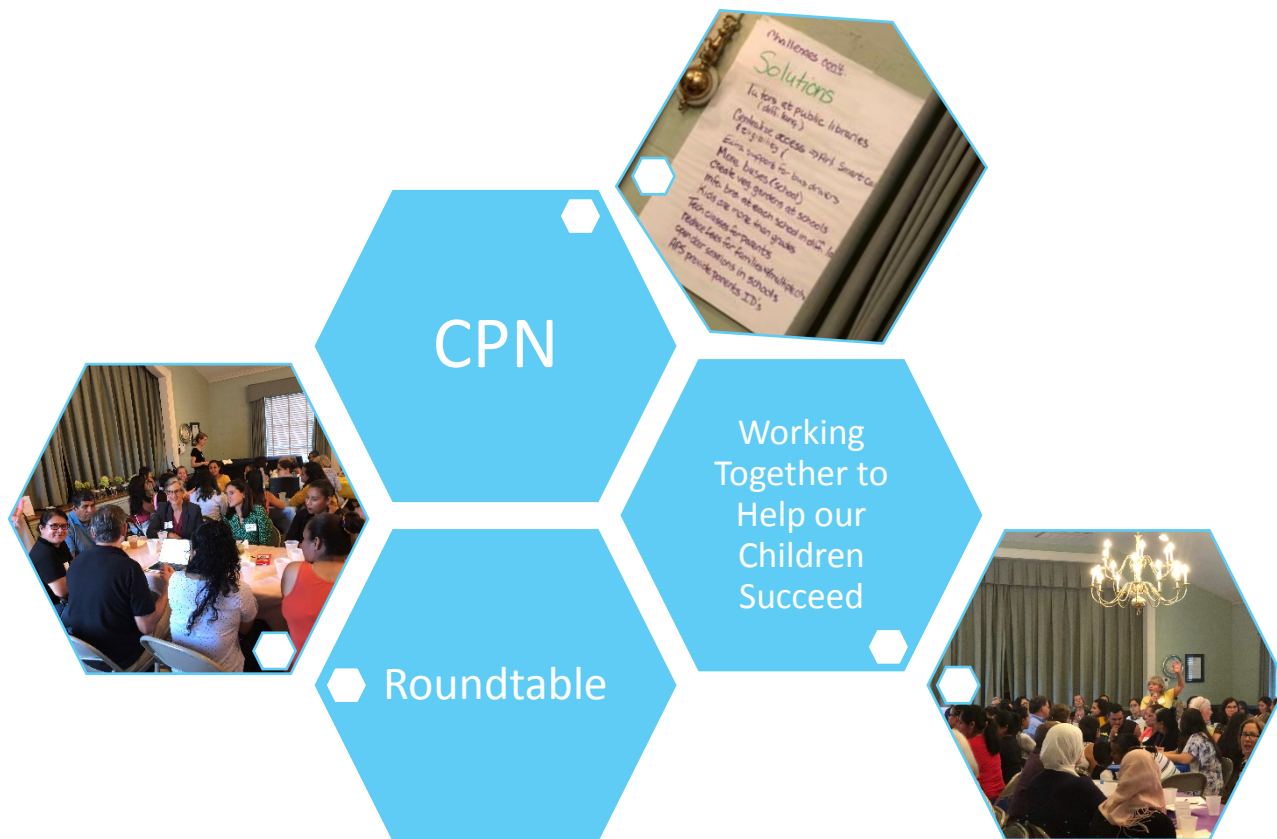


COMMUNITY PROGRESS NETWORK

PROMOTING
EQUITY THROUGH
EDUCATION,
ENGAGEMENT
AND ADVOCACY

**Community Progress Network's Education Roundtable:
Working Together to Help our Children Succeed
August 23rd, 2018 from 5PM-9PM**

Appendix Table Notes



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Blue Table: Kids of all ages

Spanish Speaking Table.

Discussion 1: What Works?

My daughter already graduated – APS is wonderful and Wakefield is a great school. They had counselors who speak Spanish and supported my daughter, who didn't know a lot of English when she got to Arlington 5 years ago. All of the schools are good, but some are better than others; one daughter at Claremont Immersion. Fortunate to have bilingual [resource] assistants. Child in high school also had a good experience. A lot of support

Key Elementary – I can teach them Spanish at home and they can learn other things at school. Very important that children be bilingual.

Science Focus - Difference in the advantages and resources of Key/Science Focus. A lot of times parents don't know that they have the option between the two schools. We lack the leaders to inform the community about opportunities (when geographically they're eligible for both). The parent can decide between Spanish instruction or sciences as a focus. The same situation with Yorktown and Wakefield. APS needs to tell parents that they have options.

I would like for the teachers to share their cell phone numbers, so I could contact them. Benefits of being in touch (last year a teacher gave me her personal contact info) – the teacher can tell the mom when the child is anxious. Exchanged contact information to send reminders about bringing in forms, materials, etc. Got a text to confirm that she'd received the form – gives peace of mind. First main theme: **WHEN YOU CAN EASILY COMMUNICATE WITH TEACHERS**

Child at Jefferson in the Life Skills program. The registration process is difficult; Jefferson is spectacular; very knowledgeable teachers. Child has special needs and limited language skills but has improved a lot. Good IEP meetings – mentioned clubs and opportunities for the child. Very attentive and coordinated

Elementary schools: Well-trained teachers; 12-14 students in Pre-K; Very good communication, a bilingual assistant, and a very involved principal, BUT other mom had a different opinion: schools like Science Focus have 12-14 kids per class and two teachers (English/Spanish) whereas in the other school there are like 28 students with one teacher. It'd be better to limit the number of students in each class. In Elementary School there aren't specialists. Teachers lack general knowledge about how to handle special needs kids. They should hire/train so that they know how to manage these students, so these students can take advantage. Different from the special ed specialists at secondary schools – like the Life Skills program at Middle & High. The main teachers just put the special kids in the corner with their iPad. The school made a change and hired people who were trained and had good strategies

Another mom has a child in the special ed program. They put Hispanic students who can't read or write in Special Ed

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Lately – the schools are digitalizing a lot so it's more difficult for parents to access information like student grades; Need a way for the parents to be able to get involved without having to use that system; Sometimes they can't find out how their kids are doing – problems with nutrition or clothing – they're not reaching the parents who work a lot and who don't read the emails. 3 moms agreed on this point.

All of my neighbors' kids go to and from school alone and don't see their parents until they come in and give them a hug after work at midnight. Tell the parents that the child is their responsibility. The authorities take kids away without educating the adults on the topic of spending time with their kids. When the kids are alone and the parents are busy we're doing harm to our own kids and other kids. An older child is not a parent

With their phones they're accessing inappropriate content like pornography (even on their school tablets). Extended Day doesn't have specific rules about technology. They do need their phones after school, but during the day or school programs they're not being supervised

Hispanic parents started a group to talk about the information they received; Lack of information, parents have to organize amongst themselves. We support each other with the parent group in WhatsApp and calls to talk about the messages we get from the school. Or when they have relatives that go to the same school

Kids that just arrived from other countries are more scared and sadder because of their lack of English. What can the parents do in that situation? While they're adapting, maybe you can go with them at the beginning. One mom says not to worry, in a few months they'll be speaking English.

The foundation of everything is communication. Many don't understand the emails; Better—a text or call. The lack of information of all the great opportunities that Arlington has for someone who's new (newcomers don't know the resources that exist, how will they know about the clubs and other things at school, PTA, trainings for parents). Some place where they can find all the available resources. They can share amongst themselves, but otherwise the information doesn't reach them

Middle schools have great teachers [but] need training in human relations. Don't know what to do with kids who have different needs – if they don't realize it, the students could go a whole year without the support they need, also, don't know how to communicate with Hispanic parents. Another mom agreed—there are people who don't want to interact with Hispanics, one mom called it “Latinos attending to other Latinos Syndrome”

Bullying is growing – very strong presence. Don't just give talks to the kids but also the parents and teachers, parents must take on the role of training themselves. Give clear rules about what it is. It's not a joke. Teach kids to defend themselves and respect others

PTA did talk about this and assault and drugs; Last year they talked a lot about it. It's important for parents to learn to see the two sides of the behavior

Work together, many parents don't know how to read and write and can't help their kids. Connect resources with the people who need them.

On the topic of immigration – the community is worried and fearful. Individuals must approach the available services carefully. Helping families have more time with their children.

Discussion 3: Solutions

The technological issue is very serious: How it's affecting the kids, clarify the school rules on usage, before and after school only. Use of the tablet in after-school. Someone supervising this in Extended Day. They need to be doing other activities

Misinformation: ID to get into a school; information passed between parents – so they know the law and don't share something incorrect. Know your rights. Give adequate information; comments are interpreted as true and cause fear. News vs threats. How to identify real risks

Free/reduced lunch as a federal program intimidates Latinos. The resources need to clarify that they won't put you at risk with the government. Immigrant parents (especially those who don't speak English OR Spanish) don't know what to do. The schools sent a voice message to everyone last year talking about immigration and to reassure them that everything was OK. Someone in the APS department of communications who's in charge of the topic of immigration. Communities are afraid of attending talks that could help them. They don't want to expose themselves [to harm] – but in their own school they will go

Schools are interested in parent participation, but they don't accommodate them. Information published in schools showing the resources (especially translation services). Also with information about special education. Many students are feeling the effects of immigration [policy]. Do announcements like "if you need to talk with someone you can come to your counselor". Teachers should intervene when they see a student dealing with this (it might be that they're not participating because they're undocumented). Teacher learns of something – reports immediately to the counselor, alert the Resource Assistant, contact parents (without making the student feel anxious)



Yellow Table Notes: Ages 0-5

Composition of our table: African American single mother of 2 children who works; married Hispanic mother of 3 children (who cleans houses); Married Middle Eastern mother of 6 children—3 children were with her—12-year-old girl and 2 twin infants born on July 4, 2018.

Discussion 1: What Works?

Some of the BEST Things in Arlington: Friday night roller skating at TJ school—2 people mentioned. Penrose Plaza and the water fountain—2 people mentioned. New Observation Tower located in Rosslyn. Teacher at Barrett school who teaches her son how to play chess after school. Fort Henry After School Program—children picked up from Drew and taken to program; children receive help with their school work and it costs \$100 for entire season.

Early Gifted ID Program at George Mason U (available to some Arlington students). High Intensity Language Program—through this program, the 12-year girl mentioned above (see composition of our table), learned other languages (she speaks three); she also attends the George Mason U program.

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

There are not enough preschool programs in Arlington: Insufficient slots at Montessori Program. Virginia Preschool Initiative—program oftentimes is too far away from where people live who need the program

Drugs: Children are approached outside schools with drugs—one table participant told the story of helping a young man who then offered drugs to her son. At Dunstan school, a police car cruises around the school, the entire day.

Transportation: Getting children to and from after-school programs, clubs and sports, etc. is a hardship especially for those not permitted to get driver licenses, don't have a driver's license, etc. An additional problem exists for working parents who rush to pick up children from school and take to another location for after-school programs and ensure they get there on time before that location closes

Reading Comprehension: This topic emerges as a serious one especially in the late elementary grades and into middle school where reading material gets harder, but comprehension is declining. For some students, there is a drop in their SOL reading score. Based on this, are the school curricula still focused on reading? Are middle schools giving the same individual attention to reading as in the elementary schools? It appears students are falling through the cracks? Do parents know that they can ask to have their children tested to get help for them? Does the middle school curriculum still focus on reading comprehension? Reading problems are compounded for those in Spanish Immersion in middle school because certain subjects are taught in Spanish, yet the SOL tests are in English. Those students with a home language other than English are not familiar with the vocabulary for example, in science and math. An Arabic speaking family took its child out of Spanish Immersion because of the above.

Insufficient Number of Teen Programs—After School, Summer, etc.: Families are worried that there are not enough places for teens to go to and activities to participate in after school. Some teen programs are only at night; others end too soon for parents to get home from work in time to pick up their children. The summer presents a larger problem. County Parks and Recreation programs and classes often fill up quickly, but more importantly, classes and

activities are too expensive, even with fee reductions. This is especially true for families that have several children.

Considerations and Possible Actions: In Arlington, 80% of parents work according to Katie Cristol who has collected this data in conjunction with her Child Care Initiative. Parents are under continual stress worrying about child care arrangements and programs. They want good affordable programs with hours permitting them to drop off and pick up their children.

With regard to the data collected by Ms. Cristol, Rutsohn suggested holding a forum that includes parents and all those engaged in providing child care, so each hear the issues and problems on both sides. The objective would be to adjust so that the situation can become a win-win for both sides. In addition, a component of this forum would be inclusion of the State of Virginia Department of Labor to offer training \$ to educate, train, and provide certification for current child care workers and those interested in going into this career. Perhaps, seed \$ could be provided by the State for people opening new child care facilities.

Obstacles include but not limited to: Insufficient preschool slots; before and After School Care programs and hours of operation; gap time between programs; arranging child care for the entire summer; cost of all the different programs vary considerably; hours not coinciding with parents' work hours and the time needed to commute from one place to the next to deposit and pick up their children and not enough slots in many programs for school age children.

Discussion 3: Solutions

More Montessori slots; additional preschool sites/offerings; Change the hours of Extended Day—one parent works in a day care in her neighborhood and must rush out to pick up her own children in the same neighborhood who are in Extended Day. Why not try closing at 6:30 pm? Lower price of Extended Day for low-income families. Provide lower fees for Parks and Recreation Programs to low income families with several children--\$100 may not sound like much, but if you have 3 children, \$300 can put you over the top—use a sliding scale approach for program pricing. Think twice about changing the way things are done, i.e., No camp on Friday. Result: What is a parent to do with their children? Provide incentives for new businesses (and current businesses) to provide onsite Day Care for employees' children.

Red Table Notes: Ages 0-5

Spanish Speaking table; Ages 0-5 (Note: All participants at the time of this event had children all above the age of 5, however, many of their children have been in APS since kindergarten) Group Details: Participant 1 – Has lived in Arlington 17 years; 3 children all college graduates and educated in APS. Participant 2 – Has lived in Arlington 30 years; 2 children all working professionals and educated in APS. Participant 3 – Has lived in Arlington 10 years; 2 children currently at Claremont Elementary. Participant 4 – Has lived in Arlington 11 years; 1 child and expecting one more; Claremont. Participant 5 – has lived in Arlington 8 years; 2 children at Barcroft Elementary. *As stated previously, all participants currently have children above the age of 5; 2 participants had their children enrolled in both Head Start and VPI

Discussion 1: What Works?

While this section was geared toward “what is working,” Participant 1 opened the conversation with concerns around housing and an inability to adequately afford rent. Participant 1 also expressed concerns about limited housing options for her children who are all college graduates trying to make a living in Arlington. Participant touched on quality of education at APS and difficulties affording medical school after he graduated. One child was also recruited into a gang while attending Washington Lee. Expressed that going to “charlas” or other community talks, helped garner support from other families and connect her to resources to help her son leave the gang. “Charlas” also helped when looking for scholarship opportunities for children.

Multiple parents mentioned that other community talks around Arlington exposed them to additional resources and communal supports - Group conversation was temporarily diverted to talking about “pandillas” or gangs and intervention—

Head start and VPI was a huge help for families and their children who were able to get into program. Mothers appreciated the bilingual abilities of children when their children were able to attend Head Start. Families also lauded APS system for adjusting to their child’s needs when they started in the middle of the school year—APS was accommodating, and teachers and staff expressed a willingness to assist. Access to Free and Reduced lunch program has opened doors to other economically saving activities in the community like camp. “Proyecto Familia” critical resource for new families. Claremont has been a great experience academically and for extra-curricular activities. After school homework clubs have provided children with additional academic supports, especially for bilingual families. School provided speech therapy for child. Parents at Claremont and Barcroft received economic support with purchasing school supplies; School supplies could also be purchases on site at a reduced rate

Discussion 2: What Doesn’t Work?

Participants did not appear to have overwhelming concerns about what is not working for their children; conversation was diverted back to gang recruitment. Some themes regarding concerns touched on the following:

Overcrowding in schools - waiting lists for VPI and Head Start; No space in Extended Day Program- Parents expressed a desire for their children to enter program sooner than later so that they wouldn’t be behind their peers

Transportation- Students who don’t live far enough must either walk to school or take ART- Participants expressed that on various occasions the ART bus was full and subsequently left

students waiting for the next bus, which is generally another 30 minutes. Summer School transportation was not accurately advertised to parents; school bus route is limited and less frequent—children unable to participate as a result

Language - There is a need for a bilingual PTA so that parents can be more proactive in their schools. “Becas” or Scholarship workshops for parents offered and advertised mostly in English. Parents expressed a need for these opportunities to be bilingual

After School - Extended Day programs are sometimes not close enough to home school, which poses as an inconvenience with transportation.

Cultural awareness - One participant said she was asked about her “status” during a teacher’s conference meeting and a teacher allegedly offered to adopt her son.

Safety - Concerns around gang involvement. Some reports of bullying in schools—not experienced by participants or their children—however, just a general awareness that it takes place in most schools

Discussion 3: Solutions

Transportation: More school buses offered for children, even those who live within the walking distance. Public Transportation buses should be more cognizant of the school hours and provide more buses during the morning and evening hours to adequately accommodate children going to school. Create parent groups to support one another and keep an eye on other children as they walk home for school. Parent-child “walk-bus” of sorts, wherein parents who are available can offer to accompany children home, who would otherwise walk alone. Identify community neighbors based on location; connect better with neighbors; overall outreach and community building.

Scholarships: Scholarship listings should be bilingual to ensure equitable access and exposure; Educate parents on scholarship process; connect them with other immigrant parents who may have already gained this experience from having older children.

Food: More nutritious foods should be offered in schools; more variety of fruits and vegetables and all foods to encourage children to eat it. Community garden so that students can participate more in the food that arrives at their table; allowing students to grow their own food might encourage them to eat more fruits and vegetables that they had a role in growing; less chemicals—more organic.

Waiting Lists: Create more space for popular programs and more funding for these programs. Immigration: Cultural competency training for teachers and staff. More awareness and training about immigrant populations.

Safety: Better interventions and trainings around bullying. Parent groups for gang support, interventions and awareness

Green Table Notes: Ages 6-12

Introduction: Our table started the evening with two participants, both with two students each in APS schools. One participant shared her story of attending Arlington Community High School and graduating this past May. She highlighted the help of Communities In Schools, tutors, and school staff as support systems that helped her stay on track to graduate. Another participant shared her story of growing up in Fairfax County, becoming displaced in her housing and dropping out of high school as a senior, and eventually gaining employment at Full Circle Montessori School where her family also lives. Our table was joined by four other participants later in the evening. Although none had students currently enrolled in Arlington Public Schools, all had relatives or personal connections to the schools (i.e. one graduated from Wakefield in the late 1950s, others had family members that attended or attend school in Arlington).

Discussion 1: What Works?

Two participant's children both have attended summer school this summer (and in the past) and are very involved in school and extracurricular activities. Both felt that there are many opportunities for students and parents to be involved in Arlington. They both spoke highly of their students' teachers and schools. Both were able to name teachers that have made a positive impact on their children. One participant expressed that her students are very involved with extended day and after-school activities either through the schools or a community organization. She feels like there are many opportunities for her children, but they may be too busy or overwhelmed with school and extracurriculars. Another participant explained that her students attend summer school each summer and are very busy with after-school activities including gymnastics and Real Madrid (Arlington Soccer Association). She wants to continue studying English; she feels that she needs to continue practicing like she was doing at Arlington Community High School. We connected her to Maribel Rocks later in the evening, who works for Arlington County's adult education programs.

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Technology was the main challenge and barrier during our discussion. All participants spoke about different aspects of technology as a challenge. Managing students' devices that are issued by the school. Difficulties in assisting students with homework on a device. Students spending too much time on devices (specifically not working on school-work). Cyberbullying and safety concerns. Concerns about students not effectively learning through technology (i.e. performing math problems by hand vs. using technology)

Other issues raised by the group included: Competition/stress that is placed on students even at an elementary age; too much homework and not enough time for leisure/extracurriculars; racism and discrimination; bus drivers being unfriendly; being unaware of what is expected of students at a middle school and high school level.

One participant was not as concerned about managing her students' technology because she is "very strict" and monitors her children. Thinks students receive too much homework and that they are very stressed even in lower grades. Has a hard time understanding and helping her students with their own homework. Thinks that her students' bus drivers are not friendly and also raised her concern about drugs in the schools.

Another participant was concerned about students using technology too much in the classroom and at home; feels that technology is not the most efficient way to learn all skills (i.e. math);

has a more difficult time managing her students' technology; thinks that technology at home is being used for activities other than school work; difficult to monitor what they are doing on devices.

Another participant at the table shared his concerns that racism and discrimination a big challenge to students' success and well-being.

One participant thinks that students are using devices for gaming, Face Time or other activities not related to school work; thinks that parents are not technologically savvy and need to receive training or support in managing their students' technology and devices in the home

Two participants discussed how children are bullied and do not feel comfortable coming forward to tell an adult.

Another participant shared her observations of how students are feeling stressed from "competition".

Discussion 3: Solutions

Our group picked technology as our challenge to address. We narrowed down to "managing students' technology" as the challenge we would address during this portion. Group members shared the perspective that the answer to technology challenges is not to take away devices, as students need to learn how to use and work on technology to be successful in the "real world". Several group members discussed that the schools do not provide adequate training or information to parents before students are given technology/devices:

- Unaware of how to monitor student activity on these devices
- Unaware of what students are doing on the devices or what platforms are being used by the schools (i.e. Google Classroom). Not sure how to help students with homework or assignments since they are not familiar with using iPads or laptops themselves

The solution that the group discussed was for the schools, nonprofit partners and community organizations to provide training/classes to parents that would address these issues. Discussed how organizations could partner with APS to implement this idea. The parents at our table agreed that they would be interested in attending such trainings/classes and would find this helpful

One participant expressed that she did not feel the solution to any of the technology challenges was to take away devices from students. She shared that knowing how to use certain technology (i.e. ParentVue) is incredibly helpful and allows her to monitor and help her students in school

One participant did not feel the solution was to take away devices since many families cannot afford these devices on their own. She also raised the issue of being able to more effectively communicate with school staff outside of visiting the school, emails or phone calls

Another participant echoed the perspective that students need to learn how to use and work on devices to be ready for the "real world"

One participant raised the idea of training sessions and education for parents



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Light Blue Table Notes: Kids all Ages

Spanish Speaking Table

Discussion 1: What Works?

Key's and Claremont's Immersion programs, we like it because it's bilingual. The Reading Club at Claremont helps to learn to how to read, it's called Vamos Adelante. There is a PAWS class, 3 kids with one teacher and they take them to teach them what they're doing wrong, in what they need help with, that helps the kids a lot.

School Support and Staff: I live in the school. When my child entered kindergarten, I didn't know anything about the educational system here. I was terrified of even entering the school. But they welcomed me and helped my daughter enroll in summer school (she said she didn't like it because there wasn't any television!). When I got pregnant again, I stopped working and ended up spending my days in the school helping out. They know me now and give me things to do. My oldest child knows how to read and write in Spanish because I make her read me the letters my sisters send. I told my child's teacher from the beginning that I wanted her to tell me how my child is doing, if she is behaving, if she doesn't do something well...

After School Programming: The afterschool program at my community center has helped me a lot. Since my child started school, I put her in the after-school program and they help with homework, etc. My kids go to the community center where I live. They feed them, help them with homework, take them on field trips, etc. There are many sports and options for the kids in the community.

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Safety: The schools are over-populated. My daughter was sexually assaulted and doesn't want to continue attending school with her assailant but when I tried to change her to another school, they tell me all the other schools are too full. My biggest worry are drugs. I've already heard of experiences other families have had with drugs at middle school. I am most worried about bullying and harassment, especially as my child enters middle school. I have a friend who discovered her son had drugs and she had no idea. He overdosed and was taken to the hospital. She had no idea he was using drugs. Worse, I only know about this because other parents share. The school doesn't tell us about things like this that happen.

Accessibility to Administrators: When a parent wants to talk with the principal it is almost impossible. They say, "You have to make an appointment," but then there are no appointments available. The principal is never there. I even tried to go to the Superintendent about my child's issues, but he was always too busy. Principals need to be more accessible when a parent needs help.

Mentoring: When both parents work, some kids go astray. The school needs to talk to those kids because they are on the wrong track – nothing good will come of that without intervention.

Transportation: The buses don't have air conditioning. My child arrives sweating and many children are beet red in the face. The bus route is good though.

School Meals: My child won't eat the breakfast they serve. I'm worried about my child's weight and the school lunches are full of lasagna and pizza that encourage weight gain. The ground beef has no taste.

Discussion 3: Solutions

Safety: At recess time, there needs to be closer monitoring to identify bullying. Prevention is the most important thing in the school... and in the home. The school should inform parents about drugs. Parents don't know what is trending. Sometimes you see things and don't even recognize that they are actually drugs. The school could organize workshops (but the problem is few parents come). Or maybe they could share fact sheets at the parent-teacher conference – almost all the parents come there. But the time for parent-teacher conferences is too short – they are always rushing you out, especially if someone before you went over time. They need to extend the time allowed for parent-teacher conferences. It is important to take incidents of bullying seriously. Many times the parents don't even know something has happened.

Tutoring: I feel like in high school, they see the kids more like numbers than as kids. The local library provides free tutors.

Communications: There is a Whatsapp group for Spanish-speaking parents of high school students. There is also a TJMS Whatsapp group in Spanish. They share the school supply lists, when parent meetings are, etc. That's very helpful – you should join that. Leaving messages for teachers or a counselor doesn't work – you have to just show up.

White Table Notes: Adult education focus

The 3 participants at the White Table were family/friends with one another. That they knew each other before the roundtable allowed for easy flow of conversation. Throughout the discussion, it was clear that the women valued strong connections and support system between family and friends. Two of the three women had raised/fostered children when other parents in their network were unable to. Community is vital.

Discussion 1: What Works?

APS Transportation: Training from Fairfax. Both two participants worked in FCPS transportation before working in Arlington and both said they received great training in Fairfax. APS did more thorough training before but has since stopped. Though, drivers are trained to use the wheelchair lift. In Fairfax, students with special needs are required to have a note pinned to their jacket with details about the kids' needs, what to do, parents' info, etc. Fairfax drivers get more information about the kids and their needs.

One bus driver exchanges phone number with the parents of her students to stay in touch and so parents can notify her if there are any issues. However, this is her doing and is not necessarily done across the board. She says that parents need an easier – but still official – way of notifying changes to kids' activities or schedule. Because they have her number, they will contact her directly to tell her a friend wants to come home with their kid, but she is not permitted to take kids who are not on the official roster. She tells the parents to notify the school/transportation about these changes to she can comply.

APS bus drivers have a lot of responsibility to keep track of their kids and their needs.

Job Training & Extra Curricular Activities: There are a lot of good opportunities for job training for adults and recent graduates: Arlington Mill Community Center has adult classes, computer classes, a rec center to keep kids busy, arts & crafts, farmers market, and Spanish classes. It is important for kids/youth to have positive activities to do outside of school, so they don't get involved with bad activities. If kids have too much idle time, "thugs" will mess with the good kids, interrupt the good activities that kids are doing, and can lure them towards gangs, crime, drugs, alcohol, etc.

There are enough positive programs for kids in Arlington (TJMS, skate night, etc.), but the education starts at home. Parents need to instill these values and encourage kids to take part in these activities. There are not enough mentors. We need more mentors to keep kids focused education, sports, etc.

Foster Support: One participant fostered her brother's stepsons and they excelled in school and were respectful. She had support she didn't know she needed. They had a good experience at APS. She rented a house to help her kids and foster kids. When one of the foster kids stole food, she tried to listen to him and find out why he stole to get at the root of the issue. She got a lot of help from the system. She says the foster kids never told the teacher at Hoffman Boston that she wasn't their birth-mom. They were happy in her home. She went to court for these kids and the judge could tell they were happy. The boys were granted visitation with their birth-mom and the older brother's attitude changed. Eventually the boys went to live with their birth-mom again. Arlington is always trying to do better.

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Transportation: Doing APS transportation for 22 years, one participant feels that drivers are uninformed, do not receive enough information, about kids' special or unique needs. This can put drivers in a difficult situation; for example, if a child has seizures, the driver won't necessarily know to expect it until it happens. She makes a point to check with the teacher about the kids' special needs, so she can be prepared; however, she feels that these types of details should be on the roster that drivers receive so she can be prepared if she needs to do something. Also, the bus has a first aid kit and EpiPen, so drivers should be informed about how students' specific needs and to use these supplies. There was a suggestion to "maybe talk to the new Director of APS Transportation about adding these details to the student roster." Not many complaints about the education itself, two of the participant's kids all did well in school.

One-on-one attention: More one-on-one help, individual attention. One participant's daughter had one-on-one tutoring & weekend activities and it helped her.

Vocational training: Add another vocational school for 20-somethings and teens to learn a trade, to have more guidance when they're on their own. Revive the "workshop" program that allowed to teens to punch time cards, learn trades, and learn how to behave in the workplace. Workshop allowed teens to obtain jobs and apprenticeships in the afternoon. Career Center does this (auto, EMT, veterinarian, culinary), but we need more.

Mentors: Need mentors for older teens who need to find direction, passion, & access to scholarships. Mentors will help teens keep open-minds and motivated about their futures and will help kids feel supported and loved both at home and at school. Mentors are especially important for foster kids who need consistency in their lives. Foster parents need more support and information to help them care for those kids. A staff member at Claremont mentored and counseled one participant's foster child who needed a lot of support (he stole and got into trouble). The mentor was a big help, but this child needed even more intervention and support.

Discussion 3: Solutions

Note: Some participants were very comfortable speaking and storytelling in the small group setting but were uncomfortable speaking and/or going into detail in front of the full room.

Transportation: Add more bus and routes to make sure kids don't have to walk so far. Even 3 miles is too far. This will also ensure safety of kids, so they aren't exposed to drugs, gangs, crime, etc. Bus drivers have a big impact on kids' lives. They know them by name, provide a constant rhythm for kids who struggle with change, and provide comfort to parents knowing their kids are safe and in good hands. APS has the resources but may need to redistribute them to provide extra buses and drivers. Discount passes for teens to take the ART bus. Need crossing guards & to enforce stop signs to ensure safety of kids who walk.



Purple Table Notes, Ages 13-18

6 table members: 4 parents with a total of 15 kids grades K-12 between them! one grandparent; and one Wakefield senior. Countries represented: Egypt (1), Syria (3), Sudan (2)

Discussion 1: What Works?

Teachers are "very good" (multiple mentions); Extended day is "great". Information from APS to their households comes via email, calls, letters, Peach Jar. These means work pretty well for this particular group.

Prompt: What are your kids doing in the summer? Summer school, Arabic program at Kenmore (great but the welcome sign in Arabic was backwards), AHC programs, Aspire, Outdoor Lab, Parks and Rec summer camps.

Wakefield student enjoys her school clubs, had a great experience attending the Women's March through her school.

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Counselors are not student-focused, are inflexible (multiple mentions). Some counselors make assumptions about students/parents based on their skin color, language and culture.

Mom had trouble with communications regarding the gifted program, went to School Board about this and the above. Schools are not always welcoming, especially for people new to APS (multiple mentions). Alexandria and New York schools are much more welcoming and organized for newcomers.

Electronic devices are distracting and short cut the learning (multiple mentions). Parents want access to textbooks to go along with the curriculum. They want better information from APS about what programs are on the devices. But in some cases, the devices can help students accelerate their learning.

The system for qualifying for discounts for iPad hot spots, Parks and Rec camps, band trips, class trips, extended day, etc. via Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility is cumbersome (have to apply each time) and discourages participation. There should be a way to make this more streamlined and less stigmatizing. (Multiple mentions)

Discussion 3: Solutions

Streamline the FRL discounts so that it is a one-time process. Make schools more welcoming when families register. The moms shared about their positive experiences with Alexandria, VA and Westchester County, NY public schools, including a more streamlined registration process, parent training and a buddy system for new students.

[Note: introduced the moms to Dulce Carrillo who will link them to APS's Parent Leadership Institute, Parent Academy, and other Arlington offerings. Also noted that, given this "unwelcoming" feedback over the years, making the registration/enrollment process more welcoming and streamlined for newcomers was adopted this past year as a focus of one of the Bridges Out of Poverty committees headed by Emily Ward of AHC and Corina Coronel, APS Welcome Center.]



**COMMUNITY
PROGRESS
NETWORK**

PROMOTING
EQUITY THROUGH
EDUCATION,
ENGAGEMENT
AND ADVOCACY

Silver Table Notes: All ages
Amharic/English Speakers

Discussion 1: What Works

The education which has been given to our children are good. The teachers in the school are working well for our children. The field trip for parents and children facilitated by the school enhance a better understanding and relationship between the parents and children, as well as among other parents, teachers, children who participated in the trip.

Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Misunderstanding of children background and cultural orientation between school bus drivers and children, which leads the children to be transferred to a special need bus without any disability issue or any doctor's recommendation. The school told the parents that they will assign a tutor for the child, which they didn't assign yet.

Discussion 3: Solutions

In order to break the misunderstanding between School bus drivers and children, the driver needs additional assistance on the bus.

Orange Table Notes: Teenagers

Opening Conversation: One participant: Taking 2 AP classes in upcoming year; One participant: Really liked 7th grade, favorite so far; One participant: did an internship this summer shadowing Clerk of Circuit; was referred by mentor through PRIME; shadowed court room including juvenile. All three attended because their mothers were participating and brought them

Discussion 1: What Works?

Resources: Students have plenty of resources (examples: textbooks, teachers, technology). Its about how well students take advantage of resources. Being able to choose classes in high school; lot of great options (e.g. AP classes). Teachers and counselors help you choose classes. Teachers keep an eye on how you're doing in class and make helpful suggestions; A lot of language courses to choose from.

Extra-curricular activities: After-school Homework Club; After-school tutoring 1:1 with teacher. This can be even more beneficial than Homework Club. Senior Project: focus on Islamophobia and stereotypes, Muslim women in Western society. Considering setting up a booth at school where women can wear a hijab for a full day (in and out of school).

Things that make me excited about education: Virginia Junior Academy of Science (Fair): after school program that involves the whole state. IB Community Project at Jefferson: Picking a topic/way to make a difference in the community. Intro to law class, learned about things that happened outside of school in the "real world" (US & international); learn from classmates and teacher, class helped people grow to understand different sides and opinions. Prepares you for real world, doesn't shield you; a "safe haven" to discuss tough issues. Class size maybe 20 people; 1 semester law, 1 semester world affairs. Watching the news makes me want to do something; drives you to want to make a difference

Social and culture: Some friends are taking advanced classes too which influences motivation to work hard; don't feel like the only one doing it. Feel a lot of support in school for cultures and communities; students are vocal about being inclusive and it feels welcoming. Knowing that you are part of a place with people who look like you and have things in common. Students' display of welcoming immigrants helps build school culture. 6th grade mixer (competitions and activities): 7th graders help with running the event and 8th graders organize event. Wakefield regularly asks for opinions of everyone and appeals to goals/interests. "Warriors Period"; "Town Hall". Pledge to be an "upstander" not a "bystander". Don't think about safety in Arlington - just do feel safe. Not really a "popular" clique at Wakefield and not a lot of bullying; See some bullying in middle school. Know kids do drugs at school but don't know someone personally. Don't really see Juuling but have heard about it. Don't see harassment

Note-taker observations: Students were overall very positive in discussing their school; Volunteers even laid out some openings to discuss challenges but students had a lot of good things to say. Conversation largely focused around school system and culture but the students didn't bring up many external influencers (e.g. home life/family/parents). A lot of conversation tended to orient around programs/resources/activity outside of the classroom including extra-curriculars and school culture. High school students mentioned that high school is much better than middle school



Discussion 2: What Doesn't Work?

Access to Resources: Counselors aren't very good so you don't hear about scholarships etc; they mostly only meet with you to determine your class schedule; students end up finding about resources (e.g. scholarships) from other sources. Teachers may reference resources and then you never hear about it again. Counselors should meet with students more; more counselors or maybe the process is just not set up well. Don't know who social worker/psychologist is at their school. Note: students don't currently feel the need to access. No one seems to address the stress students are feeling

Social and culture: Students sometimes self-segregate by race at lunch; students don't tend to notice it but the teachers do point it out. Don't like APS putting up extra technology barriers (e.g. social media); people can get around it anyway. Student Council is more of a popularity contest

Theme: Academics. Sometimes teachers have too much focus on academics/test than actually learning material

Stress: Making tradeoffs between homework and after school activities is tough. AHC center has someone who helps out with tutoring. Adults don't get the stress/peer pressure (home and school); peer pressure might be less in high school.

Overcrowding: See it in the halls; kids have to eat lunch in hallways and outside; in the future teachers might start to lose control. Eventually going to take a toll

Note-taker Observations: In discussing the different challenges, the two that seemed to rise to the top during the conversation were stress and school counselors

Discussion 3: Solutions

Academics: Connecting academics to real life. Emphasizing Real World skills: taxes, mortgages, how to pay for college/financial education.

Resources: Better communication from counselors; **Gifted & Talented:** preparing kids earlier than middle school; **Technology:** switch everything back to paper OR allow everything online; do a better job with censoring technology. Have that system where teachers can shut down computers when they see students not on task (censor less and give power to teachers). Parents could use a computer class to help understand what their kids are doing

Stress: School should notify kids about therapists being available; Teachers should emphasize that they are available to students when needed. Offer "Stress Week" resources more often (e.g. activities at lunch to de-stress). Meditation room/quiet room/peace room; Thinking about "whole person" and not just academics (e.g. you're more than just your GPA); Personal stress could be coinciding with school stress

Black Table Notes: Adult Education

INTRODUCTIONS

Raw Notes:

What do you want out of this session?

Librarian: Worry that there aren't enough library services for older adults, for those who are lonely. Maker space coming to the library. Volunteers will come and teach classes. Hopeful Adult Ed will grow in new directions. They offer language services for people learning English. Very active volunteer program.

Another participant wants to learn more about what adult ed opportunities are available in the county.

Epilepsy and memory make it hard for one participant to get out in the community to take advantage of adult ed opportunities.

More programs for people to meet other people. Hard to meet people in Arlington because she works outside of the county. So the community, to get to know other people in Arlington, would be a good thing. (Asked what she likes to do) Mostly stays home. Likes to read. When she became a mom, it was hard to keep reading. Beautiful place near a water fountain on Columbia Pike that might be a good place to host a book club.

Virtual meet-up book clubs for people who might have mobility issues or disabilities.

Summary Notes:

- Adult education is seen by participants as a possible way for adults to connect with each other. Loneliness is a problem in Arlington.
- Because of schedules, disabilities, and other complications, finding ways to connect with others, make friends, and learn things together can be difficult.
- Hands-on, technical skill-building programs as well as both in-person and virtual book clubs could address some of these issues.

WHAT'S GOING WELL IN ARLINGTON

Raw Notes:

Q1: How do we make connections between people to advance education?

Community work. Political activism/grassroots. Network/friends to go hiking with. Politics has been the entryway though for one participant.

Q2: What county buildings/resources do you access to build community? Schools?

Arlington Mill Community Center. Alexandria sometimes uses the school buildings for meetings.

Q3: Who do you ask first to use space to build connections?

No one.

Q4: What does adult ed mean to you?

Advancement. When you have a good education you can advance in your workplace.

Give more opportunities to adults. Arlington has wonderful programs for senior citizens but when it comes to education I think about immigrants. What is there for immigrants? English classes, technical opportunities. And for low income people? Need is met for senior citizens (she gets a catalogue with many opportunities) but still exists for others.

Q5: Have you thought about the library as a place to go?

I have never thought about the library as a place for adult ed.

Summary Notes:

- People have found different access points for building friendships/community, including community activism and politics. Adult education has not been one of those places.
- Community members do not know what adult education opportunities are offered by the county, other than for senior citizens. But they do see it as a valuable potential resource.

- Community members do not understand their access to public spaces and facilities to host their own meetings to build community.

WHAT THINGS MIGHT PRESENT PROBLEMS IN THE COMING YEAR

Raw Notes:

Working in a school, with immigrants kids who are undocumented. It is a big problem because they are worried about what is going to happen and it interferes with their educations. It's an issue for adult learners even more than kids. Immigrant population is shrinking in Arlington because people are leaving, it's expensive to live and people are having a hard time here. But the fear is a big challenge.

The kids in high school they don't want to achieve because they can't get into the workforce or even college without help for FAFSA, paying tuition, etc. So they give up.

And yet they pay taxes the whole time they're here.

When they realize they can't go beyond high school, they quit. If there were more trade schools, maybe there would be more options as kids become adults. There is the Career Center and NOVA in Arlington.

Another participant thinks we are lucky to be here, the schools are wonderful in Arlington.

Other counties don't have what we have. Disagree with the idea of charter schools, we need to make all of our public schools better. Knows DC does a lot with charter schools but doesn't even know if Arlington has them. Charter schools produce inequality.

The problems I see in Arlington is that it's becoming more expensive and driving people away. People are moving other places (Woodbridge, etc). If it keeps getting more expensive we will drive people away.

One participant noted 10% of all residences in Arlington must be for low income people.

But they have very high standards so that you have to be very, very low income to qualify. I was in a housing program but I am not in the program anymore, but my husband and I still with two incomes have a hard time making it work.

Arlington Co is a relatively educated place. Our adults are primarily educated. For our adults in need of education, they can't find resources. It's not seen as a need or priority here. It's only 25% who need extra training, etc. By providing that extra resource, it would make up the difference in the gap between college educated adults and non-college-educated group.

Q1: What are the issues driving this lack of awareness of need?

Communication. No knowledge about resources.

I think Arlington is good about advertising some things. I think it's hard to have a voice as a minority. If you have 2-3 jobs it's hard to find the time and energy. And people are afraid. And they feel like even if they do speak up they will not be listened to. People fight for it but those in power won't listen. People talk about wanting diversity but NIMBY (Not in My Backyard—in other words, people give lip service to valuing diversity and providing for immigrants, low income earners, etc., but do not want the provision for others to disrupt their own lives). The minority also cannot vote.

Almost 40% of people eligible to vote didn't in the last election. Need to educate people about voting but also understand why they aren't doing it. (Need for surveying community).

Particularly whether and why/why not they are voting in local elections.

If you work all the time, laundry, dishes, getting ready for a work shift the next day, there isn't a lot of time or energy left over for anything else.

Underlying intolerance: we say one thing but mean another. We should call that out because its hidden in plain sight. If it's a community value, then what are we doing about that to make sure it's a safe and secure place to live, get married, raise kids, etc. We need more evidence in

education, opportunities, fair housing, equal schools, participation in civic associations, and not just lip service to these things.

Also never enough money to pay for all the things. Arlington Co's annual budget is over a billion dollars. Need to know from the county: conversation around priorities and how money is spent, why on some things and not others.

Q2: What other issues/challenges/barriers?

Transportation for the kids. Had to send email to transportation director because for some reason the busses miss my neighborhood. Busses are for people who live in houses and kids from apartment buildings have to walk 13-14 minutes. If they have such a big budget, why not more busses? Kids aren't coming to summer school because they have to walk more than a mile. The school bus driver drives right past my building on the route.

The transportation is a big issue. Bring it up to the school board.

Have the school board members (or transportation person?) walk the route to see what it was like. A participant asked transportation this question and their response was to find a friend/neighbor to walk your kid to your bus stop. The participant was eventually threatened to take to court. Need transportation to take seriously the care of the children. As well as county transport for adults.

- Employment Issue: One participant noted that she'd like to work for Arlington Co schools but couldn't get hired even though her kids are part of the schools. This parent has to work in the schools in another county but would prefer to work for her own school district.

Summary Notes:

- This portion of the discussion centered primarily on immigrants and the challenges and fears immigrants face.

- Immigrant adults work and pay taxes in Arlington, but because they do not have the proper identification, they have limited access to opportunities in the workforce. When students realize this, they sometimes do not finish high school or apply for college because they don't see the point if they won't be able to work legally. Participants were unclear on what the Career Center and NOVA Community College provide for this group of people.

- Participants discussed a tension in Arlington. Most Arlingtonians are very highly educated relative to other counties. The 25% or so who aren't are not as visible. Adult education for non-college-educated adults is not seen as a need.

- Similarly, while 10% of housing may be dedicated to lower-income families, it's extremely hard to qualify for this limited housing stock. Arlington has a wealth of resources, but they're not meeting the needs of lower-income people.

- This (lack of) awareness of need in the community is an issue. Immigrants and low-income people do not have a voice. Many are not able to vote. If they find a way to organize themselves to advocate for change, they find that only lip service is given to diversity and equity. They do not see equity reflected in the resources available to them.

- Participants desire clarity, accessibility, and transparency around the County's budget. They want to know how tax dollars are being spent.

- The lack of equity and funding for adequate school bus transportation is especially apparent to the participants. One participant said a bus route goes past her apartment building to pick up the students in houses but will not stop for her kids. This is concerning to her because when students have to walk over a mile to get to school, if there's any barrier (bad weather, for example) the students just won't go.

- A participant also noted that the County should prioritize hiring its own residents to work in county services. She works for another county's school system but would prefer to work for Arlington where her own kids are being educated.

SOLUTIONS

Raw Notes:

Choose one issue: Transportation. Discrimination. Affordability. Voice. Equal access to resources.

Participants decided to focus on Voice. How can we increase voice?

For transportation, a solution would be getting parents organized around the issue. Start with your building and neighborhood and talk to the other parents. The transportation office would better hear us as a group than just one person.

Are you willing to pay higher taxes for more school busses? Everything has a cost.

How do you deal with counter arguments? Maybe the county could provide additional options other than school busses. Be option to providing creative solutions. To have voice, you have to be able to change the nature of the conversation.

Calling county board members hasn't worked for another participant who is trying to solve an issue with a dog park in her neighborhood. So how does raising your voice work in that situation? Find the legal system as an in (noise code violation in this case).

Helping people get ID cards. Take citizenship class. Have to have IDs to get into the school seems wrong.

Bridging silos between county offices so when people raise their voice they don't start from ground zero with each county office (school, library, parks and rec). SOLUTION: Student smart card. Has info on all accessible services for that person. Functions as a library card, free and reduced lunch access, school supplies, etc. So for example, the library, school, parks and rec will all know that family has FRPL . Also smart cards for adults.

Same time the schools take child's photo, they can take adults photo. Challenge to this: how would we ensure ICE doesn't get access? That's people sensitive info is protected?

Smart card could also grant online access.

SOLUTION: Centralize access card and centralize eligibility to overcome barriers. Arlington card: How to access Arlington. Like a library card but to all services. Does not contain personal info or monetary info.

Summary Notes:

- Participants wanted to focus on a solution for giving Arlington residents a voice.
- They also discussed how it should be easier to access resources across the county without having to present the same paperwork and documentation all over again at each office (for example, having to prove Free and Reduced Lunch status repeatedly to access resources). This is inefficient and sometimes feels degrading to people.
- One solution for giving people a voice is better awareness of local codes and laws that people can use to advocate for their needs.
- One solution for streamlining accessibility to resources is to create an Arlington Access Card. The card would contain basic data about what services a person is eligible to receive or is already receiving. It would function much like a library card and could be scanned at county offices so that eligibility documentation and services received could be accessed electronically via a central database.

Pink Table Notes: All Ages

Spanish Speaking Table

What is WORKING



- Special Education, Carlin Springs and Stratford. Child has been in Stratford for 5 years, very pleased. They came from Leesburg. Child made greater progress at Carlin Springs than in Leesburg.
- Principal responded quickly to concerns about bullying. He made time to meet the same day that she called; when he intervened the bullying stopped. (Kenmore)
- Support for child with ADHD very good (Kenmore)
- English language learning has been very positive. Children learning quickly to speak, read and write (Kenmore, Carlin Springs, Campbell)
- All moms like being able to volunteer in the school, builds relationship and allows them to know more of what is going on with the school and their children.
- Access to additional supports, such as social worker and psychologist at the school

DIFFICULTIES

- Safety: 3 kids hit by cars walking home from Kenmore
- Bullying
 - o especially in beginning when students were new. Kids didn't want to go to school because of it. (Kenmore)
- Negative peer pressure
 - o Cutting, kids inviting a child to cut herself
 - o Offered drugs (W-L)
 - o Encouraged to grab girls, taunted for not doing so
- Drug use at
 - o Kenmore (shared by most at the table).
- Kids are using medications, not just marijuana. Wants to prevent use.
- Kids consider Second Chance as an opportunity to experiment and get away with it with no repercussions.
- Many parents have 'not my child' attitude.
 - o also Career Center. Students are offered drugs and dared to try them (you're not a man)
- Kids walking through woods (Kenmore) to get home. Dangers of
 - o Men in cars who can offer kids alcohol and drugs
 - o Bullying/fighting
 - o Smoking and drinking by kids
- Kids enrolled in APS who are not Arlington residents
- Time on screens/electronic devices; not enough supervision
- Requiring ID's for parents to enter schools, will be a big barrier

NOTES:

- there was general agreement around the table about concerns over drug use at Kenmore as well as the issue of kids walking home through the woods.
- Nancy Van Doren asked about Vaping; some moms indicated they gotten a lesson on it; none have seen evidence of it, nor heard about it from their children at school; one mom caught kids vaping in the hall of their residence and chased them out.
- Two other concerns that arose, not related to schools
 - o Safety in Tyrol Hill Park. There was an assault on a child (by another child) on August 17. A mom shared that her kids indicate that they don't feel safe there
 - o When asked about relationship with police (unrelated to the first point), families indicated that when they call they feel like they are the criminals. They feel challenged when the person on the line ask 'did you see it happen'.

SOLUTIONS

- Parents, it starts with parents
- o Educating kids at home, teach strong, positive values
- o Parents need to make time for kids and be involved in their lives; have a relationship with them.
- o Be attentive to what is happening to them; have them and their friends over so parents can get to know the friends.
- o Parents connect and network with one another;
- o Parents need to be involved in the school, volunteering, paying attention to what is going on in the school
- Better patrolling in the parks near Kenmore (Glencarlyn Park)
- Improve communication between schools & families.
- o People who don't have emails, get on WhatsApp, paper, for people who don't have cell phones
- Hold meetings/classes to teach parents about drugs, phones,
- Have more buses, so kids don't have to walk home

Blue Table (Spanish-Speaking, kids of all ages)

Common themes: Communication Special Ed Technology Immigration

Discussion #1: What's working well in your experiences with the schools

- My daughter already graduated – APS is wonderful and Wakefield is a great school
 - o They had counselors who speak Spanish and supported my daughter, who didn't know a lot of English when she got to Arlington 5 years ago
 - All of the schools are good, but some are better than others; one daughter at Claremont
- Immersion
- o Fortunate to have bilingual [resource] assistants
 - Child in high school also had a good experience
 - o A lot of support
 - Key Elementary – I can teach them Spanish at home and they can learn other things at school
 - o Very important that children be bilingual
 - o Science Focus
 - o Difference in the advantages and resources of Key/Science Focus
 - o A lot of times parents don't know that they have the option between the two schools
 - o We lack the leaders to inform the community about opportunities (when geographically they're eligible for both)
 - o The parent can decide between Spanish instruction or sciences as a focus
 - o The same situation with Yorktown and Wakefield
 - o **YOU MUST TELL THE PARENTS THAT THEY HAVE OPTIONS**
 - I would like for the teachers to share their cell phone numbers so I could contact them
 - o Benefits of being in touch (last year a teacher gave me her personal contact info) – the teacher can tell the mom when the child is anxious
 - Child at Jefferson in the Life Skills program
 - o Exchanged contact information to send reminders about bringing in forms, materials, etc.
 - o Got a text to confirm that she'd received the form – gives peace of mind
 - First main theme: **WHEN YOU CAN EASILY COMMUNICATE WITH TEACHERS**



- The registration process is difficult
- Jefferson is spectacular
- o Very knowledgeable teachers
- o Child has special needs and limited language skills but has improved a lot
- o Good IEP meetings – mentioned clubs and opportunities for the child
- o Very attentive and coordinated
- Elementary schools
- o Well-trained teachers
- o 12-14 students in Pre-K
- o Very good communication, a bilingual assistant, and a very involved principal
- BUT other mom had a different opinion: schools like Science Focus have 12-14 kids per class and two teachers (English/Spanish) whereas in the other school there are like 28 students with one teacher
- o It'd be better to limit the number of students in each class
- In Elementary School there aren't specialists
- o Teachers lack general knowledge about how to handle special needs kids
- o They should hire/train so that they know how to manage these students, so these students can take advantage
- o Different from the special ed specialists at secondary schools – like the Life Skills program at Middle & High
- o The main teachers just put the special kids in the corner with their iPad
- o The school made a change and hired people who were trained and had good strategies
- Another mom has a child in the special ed program
- o They put Hispanic students who can't read or write in Special Ed****Lesbia Guerra

Discussion #2: Challenges

- Lately – the schools are digitalizing a lot so it's more difficult for parents to access information like student grades
- o Need a way for the parents to be able to get involved without having to use that system
- o Sometimes they can't find out how their kids are doing – problems with nutrition or clothing – they're not reaching the parents who work a lot and who don't read the emails
- o 3 moms agreed on this point
- All of my neighbors' kids go to and from school alone and don't see their parents until they come in and give them a hug after work at midnight
- o Tell the parents that the child is their responsibility
- o The authorities take kids away without educating the adults on the topic of spending time with their kids
- o When the kids are alone and the parents are busy we're doing harm to our own kids and other kids
- An older child is not a parent
- With their phones they're accessing inappropriate content like pornography (even on their school tablets)
- o Extended Day doesn't have specific rules about technology
- They do need their phones after school, but during the day or school programs they're not being supervised
- LACK OF TRAINED PERSONNEL
- Hispanic parents started a group to talk about the information they received
- o Lack of information, parents have to organize amongst themselves



- o We support each other with the parent group in WhatsApp and calls to talk about the messages we get from the school
- o Or when they have relatives that go to the same school
- Kids that just arrived from other countries are more scared and sad because of their lack of English
- o What can the parents do in that situation?
- o While they're adapting, maybe you can go with them at the beginning
- o One mom says not to worry, in a few months they'll be speaking English
- The foundation of everything is communication
- o Many don't understand the emails
- o Better—a text or call
- The lack of information of all of the great opportunities that Arlington has for someone who's new (newcomers don't know the resources that exist, how will they know about the clubs and other things at school, PTA, trainings for parents)
- o Some place where they can find all of the available resources
- o They can share amongst themselves, but otherwise the information doesn't reach them
- Middle schools have great teachers [but]
- o Need training in human relations
- o Don't know what to do with kids who have different needs – if they don't realize it, the students could go a whole year without the support they need
- o Also don't know how to communicate with Hispanic parents
- o Another mom agreed—there are people who don't want to interact with Hispanics
- One mom called it “Latinos attending to other Latinos Syndrome”
- Discrimination
- Bullying is growing – very strong presence
- o Don't just give talks to the kids but also the parents and teachers
- o Parents have to take on the role of training themselves
- o Give clear rules about what it is
- It's not a joke
- o Teach kids to defend themselves and respect others
- o PTA did talk about this and assault and drugs
- Last year they talked a lot about it
- o It's important for parents to learn to see the two sides of the behavior
- o Work together
- Many parents don't know how to read and write and can't help their kids
- o Connect resources with the people who need them
- On the topic of immigration – the community is worried and fearful
- o Individuals have to approach the available services
- o Helping families have more time with their children

Discussion #3: Solutions

- The technological issue is very serious
- o How it's affecting the kids
- o Laws in school about cell phone use
- o Before and after school only
- o Use of the tablet in after-school
- o Someone supervising this in Extended Day
- o They need to be doing other activities
- Misinformation



- o ID to get into a school
- o Information passed between parents – so they know the law and don't share something incorrect
- o Know your rights
- o Give adequate information; comments are interpreted as true and cause fear
- o News vs threats
- o How to identify real risks
- o Free/reduced lunch as a federal program intimidates Latinos
- The resources need to clarify that they won't put you at risk with the government
- o Immigrant parents (especially those who don't speak English OR Spanish) don't know what to do
- o Schools are interested in parent participation but they don't accommodate them
- o But we do want security in the schools
- Parents have to call and give authorization [for someone else to pick up their child]
- o All Arlington schools have the right to request an interpreter
- For all languages
- You just have to contact the school
- o Information published in schools showing the resources (especially translation services)
- Also with information about special education
- o The schools sent a voice message to everyone last year talking about immigration and to reassure them that everything was OK
- o Someone in the APS department of communications who's in charge of the topic of immigration
- Clear up anything from the Superintendent's office
- o Communicate the information that they have
- o For the start of classes, send everyone an email and call
- o Communities are afraid of attending talks that could help them
- They don't want to expose themselves [to harm] – but in their own school they will go
- o Parents should get more involved – how will we be informed if we don't attend
- o Many students are feeling the effects of immigration [policy]
- Do announcements like "if you need to talk with someone you can come to your counselor"
- o Teachers should intervene when they see a student dealing with this (it might be that they're not participating because they're undocumented)
- o A code—steps/process of coordinated help between teachers
- Teacher learns of something – reports immediately to the counselor, alert the Resource Assistant, contact parents (without making the student feel anxious)
- Training for school personnel

Mongolian Speaking Table

7 Table Participants, All spoke Mongolian

A husband and wife – 2 children, both attend Hoffman-Boston, father is an Uber driver, mother doesn't work, children are excelling in school, the parents are very proud of them. They have lived here 2 years.

Woman – 2 boys, one in 5th grade and one who is 3 years old, have lived here 2-1/2 years.

Woman – 4 children, two at Hoffman-Boston and two at Jefferson, have lived here 1-1/2 years.

Woman – 4 children, 1 at Jefferson, 2 at Hoffman Boston, and 1 in Montessori, have lived here 2-1/2 years

Woman – 2 children, 1 is 5 and the other is 9 months.

Woman – 1 child, 8 year old with special needs at Hoffman-Boston. They have lived here for 10 years.

All are married. All are educated, with several master degrees among them. One husband is an electrician; another is in business management. All are working to learn English.

They expressed that they came to the USA for educational opportunities. Roger asked what drew them to Arlington:

- Arlington has the largest Mongolian population outside of Mongolia
- Nice to be with others from Mongolia

WORKING WELL:

- Libraries
- After-School Enrichment
- Recreational Activities: Swimming, Basketball, Parks
- Summer Camps

We like all of the out-of-school time things offered because they are safe and easy.

What has helped your kids learn English?

- Environment
- Teachers
- Everything here is in English
- The only place they speak Mongolian is at home!

How do you feel about the teachers?

- Teachers are very friendly here, very different from Mongolia
- Kids come home and talk about their teachers, like they are their friends
- Teachers are more open; they have relationships with the kids

What is the School System like in Mongolia?

- It is more relaxed and slower paced here.
- The teachers are less connected to the kids, more regimented
- School is not broken into elementary, middle and high, they just finish in 10 years.

What's good about having teachers as friends?

- The kids are more open and they learn to be honest.
- Less stress

- The teachers are good role models

CHALLENGES:

- Homework! I can help with the math, but the other subjects are in English. One parent demonstrated that in actuality even math division is done differently.
 - o In Mongolia they only had 5 subjects, with 45 minutes each.
 - o There, there is nothing to help the parents to help the kids.
 - o And no way to know if the kids did it, did they do it correctly.
- Another challenge is the inappropriate things they learn from other kids, like bullying or different rules.
- My children speak to each other in English, and I can't follow what they're saying.

Are there other times that language is a problem?

- At school – at Hoffman-Boston, they have a Mongolian bilingual resource assistant that can help families, but they don't have that at the other schools.
- It's hard to connect with other parents and teachers.
- They don't want their children to forget their heritage and language, but it's hard when they speak English all day and with their friends.

Other notes:

- It doesn't seem like my kids are challenged much at school, and it's hard for me to know because I don't know what they're learning. I don't know if they didn't do well on a test, if it's because of homework or something else.
- There is a feeling that once behind in a subject or in school, that it is hard to get better. The gifted students have more resources for that. They would like to work for more equity in this area.
- The husband who is an Uber driver says it is hard because they work so many hours, they can't be as involved as they might like, the others in the group agreed.
- One of the mothers has a child with special needs and she has been able to connect with that community, but she is the one person at the table who also speaks English. She would not have that connection if she was unable to speak.
- I worry about them as they get older, specifically around drugs and alcohol.
- Day care! We need help around this, to be able to afford it for the younger children.
- One mother's 3-year-old has been accepted into the Montessori program, but she is worried that she is not speaking well in either language. Will that hurt her child?
- Special need kids are still very restricted; they should be in general education class.
- Parent Teacher conferences are a problem
- I want to help, but I can't understand

What is the barrier to learning English?

- TIME! There are lots of resources, but there is no time.

Challenges for this Harvest:

- Homework
- Language
- Special Needs

- Day Care for pre-school age kids
- As they get older, risky behaviors

SOLUTIONS:

- Have a homework club at the school to support ESL kids.
- Have teachers be the tutors, the ESL teachers might be willing to help ESL kids – they are so supportive.
- The families need time to learn English.
- More bilingual resource assistants – ASF, Hoffman Boston, Jefferson – and they need to work together.
- Communication books – but they're all different, each teacher has their own way, it is not consistent
- There are books that have 1 page in English and 1 page in Mongolia
- Blurb in various languages to help explain the homework, or at least give an idea of what the homework is about and how long it should take so the parents can speak with their child about it.
- Google translate does not help.
- Tutors at public library in various languages -that is a public space and is safe.
- After school – kids can help each other if not too far behind – a support group.

Do you have a community of parents?

- The Mongolian community should work together as a community to support each other; they need space to get together.

What about the Mongolian School?

- The tuition is too much and they are not flexible.
- The school attitude is not helpful.

Overall Impression from Kim:

The table of moms and 1 father all spoke Mongolian with the exception of the translator. As you can imagine, it was difficult to capture all of the conversations, but the themes really boiled down to wanting to help their kids with school work, but because of the language barriers, it was difficult.

The solution they discussed could be something to explore – if we worked with Libraries to host 1 night a week with a Mongolian speaking tutors (or other languages as needed). The tutors would be able to explain the homework to the parents, so the parents could then support their kids more fully. The kids, parents and tutors working together.

Another thought is the “blurb” idea of at the very least, supplying parents with a short description of the unit or theme of what the student will be learning, again, so the parent could ask specific questions about what they're learning during the day, and to connect with their kids.

FYI – I googled Mongolian's in Arlington:

The Mongolian embassy to the United States estimated Arlington, Virginia's Mongolian population at 2,600 as of 2006; they were reportedly attracted to the area by the high quality of



education. As a result of their presence, Mongolian has become the local school system's third-most widely spoken language, after English and Spanish; 219 students of Mongolian background are enrolled in the local school system, making up 1.2% of all students, but often forming a majority in ESL classes. Members of the first generation largely come from university-educated backgrounds in Mongolia, but work at jobs far beneath their qualifications after moving to the United States. Community institutions include an annual children's festival and a weekly newspaper.

Also of interest – when other tables brought up the concern of undocumented families, the table did not indicate that was of concern to any of them. It was dismissed as a concern.