

Arlington Public Schools
Community Dialogue Feedback
June 10, 2018

During the afternoon and evening of June 10, 2018 approximately 50 stakeholders convened a community dialogue at the Arlington Public Schools. The meeting began at 3:15 PM with a tour of the Arlington Public Schools facilities and ended at approximately 8:00 PM.

Purpose:

The purpose of the meeting was to solicit ideas from selected stakeholders of the Arlington Public Schools about the future direction of the school district, including the facility needs for the school district. Stakeholders were asked to provide ideas to assist the Board of Education and Administration in the establishment of goals and priorities for the future.

Focus:

The Board of Education and leadership Team were focused on listening about the wants and needs of stakeholders in regard to, but not limited to, the following topics:

1. What is the current reality of the school system?
 - a. Is the academic performance of students meeting the goals established by the board?
 - b. How does Arlington Public Schools measure up with comparable schools in academic performance and success in school activities?
 - c. Does the school district have current bonded indebtedness?
 - d. Where do Arlington Public School students reside? (Resident and option students)
 - e. What is the experience of the Arlington Public Schools when replacing teachers and staff?
2. Under what conditions should the Arlington Public Schools commit to building new facilities or remodeling existing facilities?
 - a. Please consider overall student population (now and projected), assumption of additional debt, academic needs of students, state and federal mandates and patron support when addressing this question.
3. What circumstances will drive growth or limit growth in the Arlington Public Schools in the future?
4. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Arlington Public Schools?
 - a. Look at the next 5-10 years?
5. What does the community expect of its schools? What priorities do stakeholders perceive the school district should investigate?
6. What is the responsibility of citizens to help the school meet the expectation?

The Arlington Board of Education and Leadership Team issued invitations to people who represented a wide range of interests and backgrounds to attend the community dialogue to address the questions posed above. The community dialogue was a special board meeting and was conducted in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Law.

Three activities were carried out in the community dialogue. First, Superintendent Lynn Johnson and her staff provided up-to-date information about the current realities of the Arlington Public Schools; budget, student assessment, student populations, curriculum, facilities, staffing, school related activities, and other pertinent information about the school district. Next, the stakeholders were asked to Stakeholders to meet in small, working groups to discuss their expectations and priorities for Arlington Public Schools during the next 5-7 years. They began to address the priorities by stating; “ I expect the Arlington Public Schools to . . . The third and final activity was to address the questions; “What are you prepared to do to help the community and school district meet the expectations you have outlined?”

Each small group had a recorder and a spokesperson that shared the information they generated with the entire group. Also, school board members and district staff were available at each small group table to answer questions or provide information as needed.

The first activity was the presentation of the current realities of the Arlington Public Schools. The information provided a broad view of school district operations, the requirements the district had to meet, by state law, to be accredited, and a review of the past 20 years of facility construction and planning. Curriculum and instruction were discussed as well as the goal of maintaining a well-educated and high performing staff.

The second activity was for the stakeholders to communicate their future expectations for the Arlington Public Schools. When asked to communicate their expectations for the school district the stakeholders were organized into 5 subgroups. *(The number in parentheses indicates the number of groups that specifically mentioned a particular expectation.)*

- 1. We expect Arlington Public Schools to: maintain and improve quality (5) programs and curriculum,**
 - Provide high level of education for all students at an efficient cost.
 - Have a good academic program with master teachers in place so dual enrollment classes can be improved.
 - Follow positive trends and utilize best practices in instruction
 - Continue to update and expand the curriculum.
 - Maintain and improve current programs.
 - Address the social and emotional needs of students and families (3)
 - Add a mental health curriculum
 - Encourage more trades and work skills in the curriculum. (4)
 - Expand career readiness and computer science classes.
 - Balance vocational and academic curriculum
 - Provide Life Skill training (social awareness, work place skills.
 - Teach leadership skills through regular classes and activities programs.
 - Strengthen music and fine arts program. (2)
 - Commit to the other half of education – activities and athletics. (2)

- Provide opportunities for participation in school activities programs
- Provide mentorships or internships with local area businesses.
- As special education numbers increase continue to expand the SPED program offerings
- Focus on student programs: have high expectations for student involvement and student engagement in learning.
- Implement foreign language in elementary as early as Kindergarten.
- Include an adult option class.
- Students need to know how to communicate (verbally, without I-Pad or phone
- Stay current on technology upgrade plans so we have updated technology. (3)
 - Add IT staff and professional development to support this initiative.

2. We expect Arlington Public Schools to Maintain and Update facilities to accommodate growth and changing needs. (4)

- Continue to update facilities to accommodate growth and change
- Ensure there is adequate space for all program needs.
 - Restrooms in high school and elementary
 - Locker rooms
 - Install energy efficient windows; use solar energy (grants may be available)
 - Fix drainage by main gym entrance
 - Update the kitchen space
 - Add a dedicated space for wrestling
 - Upgrades to current facilities are necessary (academic and activities)
 - Improve or add facilities to accommodate the fine arts performance space and add needed equipment.
 - Investigate the possibility of reallocating space; does Kindergarten need more space than middle school?
 - Investigate the possibility of adding space off-site for pre-school.
 - Expand lunchtime nutrition options possibly through school (FFA) gardens, and community involvement in the use of locally sourced **food**.

3. Maintain a quality student to teacher ratio; Add teachers as necessary (3)

- Recruit and retain good teachers (3)
- Keep good teachers in Arlington.
- A supportive environment for all staff is important.
- Hire master teachers.
- Provide up-to-date professional development opportunities
-

4/5. Be aware of potential growth plus possible population increases. (2)

- Be aware of the development potential for the community and school; land and growth (2)
 - Costco is likely to affect population and educational demand
 - Option enrollment students may increase.

4/5. Provide a safe and secure learning and teaching environment. (2)

- Safety and security for all students and school personnel (2)
 - Provide safe learning areas.

Other:

- Continue to involve parents and community members in the school.
 - Work to make all students feel welcome at school.
- Continue to be responsible with financial resources (evaluate wants and needs)
- Seek out opportunities for coop with sports and activities

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of groups that included the overall expectation.

For the third activity the sub-groups responded to what people in the community should or could do to ensure Arlington Public Schools could meet the expectations of the community.

The stakeholder response for the second activity follows:

We are prepared to:

- Capitalize on the community we have and talk it up!
- Mentor students
- Organize and participate in fundraisers
- Organize efforts for major donations to the school district
- Volunteer time to help restructure space
- Work to improve the alumni involvement with the school district (2)
- Be Study buddies/ social, not academic
- Continue to stay actively engaged (provide input and offer ideas)
- Communicate via the chain of command
- Provide support despite differences in agreement; have civil conversations.
- Volunteer as necessary (3)
 - Recognize volunteers for their services.
- Parent my children and be involved in their education
- Value the education process
 - Support and respect teachers
- Recognize individual strengths of students
- Stay fact-based when making decisions/be transparent about our concerns.
- Seek impartial opinions

- Engage the senior citizen population – get them organized
- Be willing to compromise.
- Ask business owners to engage with the school – There are a lot of (2) them who could be of valuable assistance to students.
 - Partner with local businesses
- Research Master teachers other than current Arlington Teachers who could help with dual credit classes.
- (Roots to Wings) can help write grants – FFA
 - Arlington Education Foundation
 - Arlington Community Foundations
 - Arlington Youth Foundation
 - Arlington PTO
- Help the community support its non-profits; a community is only as good as the non-profits they support!
- Partner with educational companies to pilot books and programs.
- Help get students involved in community activities
- Use our time and talent to help the school and community.
- Get new teachers involved with mentor families – invest in the community.
- Develop an on-going list of needs for community members to see.
- Get elected to the school board.
- Encourage community outreach
- Communicate about the positive successes as well as the needs of the Arlington community and Arlington Public Schools.

Note: The responses to the second activity were varied and they tended to point to working together in ways to build a stronger school system and community. Notice the wording; cooperate, communicate, compromise, support, etc. When looking at the 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival, Arlington has many of those clues in working order.

Possible Next Steps:

- Publish a prioritized list of the anticipated needs for the Arlington Public Schools for the next 5-7 years. Include curriculum development, facility needs, teacher recruitment and retention, and general upkeep needs. Consider the needs as legitimate needs rather than a wish list – prioritize the needs - then organize citizens to develop ideas about how the needs can be met and when they can be met.
- Take advantage of the attitude that exists in the community. It appears to be positive, progressive, developmental, and there are people who are willing and able to assist.
- Continue to be transparent about the budget and the cost of upgrading facilities, equipment, and programs.
- Many people have little knowledge of the rules and regulations schools must comply with from state and federal regulators. Continue to communicate assessment results, student successes in activities and

academics, and what the school needs to continue to be accredited and move forward.

Observations (from the facilitator):

It was obvious that there were people in attendance who were not on the invitation list but since it was an open meeting they were welcome to be there. There was no open hostility or contentious behavior during the dialogue - - - the entire group of stakeholders was mature and open in their comments; both good signs for the future of the schools and the community.

It was clear there were people present who wanted new facilities for wrestling and the fine arts. It was also clear some of the people present wanted the facts laid out as to why the needs exist and how they can be accommodated. They wanted to separate wants from needs.

The June 10th meeting was at least the second meeting or event that focused on the needs of citizens or at least on their priorities for the schools. The academic program was clearly the focus of stakeholder comments – maintain it, improve it, and keep good teachers. Given all of that, people have expectations. They expected to be heard and they were. Now they will expect action to be taken and they appear to be willing to help if they are invited to do so.

It is clear people expect high quality learning in modern and safe facilities while having excellent teachers in the classrooms. Now is the time to develop a 5-7 year timeline for meeting those expectations. If there are expectations that cannot be met; provide rational and logical arguments for why that is so. However, the expectations heard on June 10 are not likely to go away.

It was interesting that while possible, future, population growth was mentioned along with the future of option students, it was keeping current with academic and activity needs of the student body that occupy the school now and in the near term that seemed to drive the dialogue. Growth would provide the school district with opportunities for facility renovation or new facilities, however rapid growth was not viewed as a near future possibility. Even if rapid growth were eminent, there would be a lapse of time before the growth could be accommodated. Keeping up, maintaining the good things the Arlington Public Schools already has in place and adding to them was a theme that was mentioned over and over. So, action is necessary. Planning and organizing for the next 5-7 years is necessary and expected.