

Arlington County Civic Federation

The civic voice of Arlington for 82 years

Newsletter

December, 1997

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December Meeting:

School Board Visit and Public Arts Policy Briefing

7:30 pm, Tuesday, December 2nd
John T. Hazel Conference Center
Columbia Arlington Hospital
1701 N. George Mason Drive

Our December meeting will feature the annual visit by the School Board and a briefing on a new proposal for a policy covering art in public works by the Arts Commission.

The Schools Committee has submitted to the School Board a list of questions to help guide the visit, also our first meeting with the new Superintendent of Schools. We have an article inside by Royce Lowry and the Schools Committee on their reading of current trends in Arlington's schools.

The briefing by the Arts Commission on their proposal for a Public Arts Policy for Arlington will follow the School Board presentation. Copies of a draft version were distributed at the October and November Federation meetings. The article to the right explains details.

Arts Commission to Propose A Public Arts Policy for Arlington

The ACCF Cultural Affairs Committee has been reviewing the Arts Commission's proposed Public Art Policy. This policy deals with County and privately-financed art which will be maintained by the County in public spaces. The proposed Policy will be presented to the Federation at the December 2nd meeting prior to its presentation to the County Board early next year.

The briefing will be presented by Cathy Freshly, a member of the Arts Commission. The proposal features a new fund to receive contributions by developers, private citizens and others to finance art in public places, incorporating art as a normal component of public works. The Commission is also exploring a proposal to automatically devote one percent of the County's capital expenditures to the fund. Although the Commission is not requesting a resolution from us at this time, delegates will write reactions to the proposals on paper and deposit them in a box after the program. Here is a chance to provide early input before a new policy is set in marble.

Copies

Schools Committee Shapes Discussion with Questions for the School Board

This has been a tumultuous year for Arlington's public schools. The school population has continued to grow, increasing the pressure on existing facilities and available financial resources. The schools have been saddled with unsought responsibilities in the administration of the Comprehensive Services Act. The need to accommodate school facilities and educational programs to rapidly changing technology has continued unabated. Demands for increased accountability have become more specific, especially in the new State-imposed Standards of Learning. The manner in which we have selected students for our alternative schools has been found to be unconstitutional.

To guide us through this maelstrom, we have, for the first time in over 40 years, placed our trust in a School Board chosen by us rather than by someone else, and the Board has chosen a new Superintendent, to provide the executive leadership to carry out the Board's policies.

The new Superintendent has not been long in proposing a new path for the schools to take, and the Board has adopted his suggested priorities for the current year as its own. A copy of Annual Priorities 1997-1998 is attached.

You will recognize that a number of these priorities respond to criticisms and suggestions that the Civic Federation has made over the last few years. Our questions to the School Board and the Superintendent are, for the most part, based on this document. Our focus is on priorities 1, 5, and 6. The other priorities are important to the achievement of

these three priorities, but they appeared to be less significant for the purposes of our annual dialogue with the Board and the Superintendent. They are detailed in a separate article below.

1. Improve Student Learning...

What has been done, is being done, or is expected to take place to achieve the targeted test score goals?

What are the respective responsibilities of the central administration, principals, and teachers in reaching these goals? What changes in resource allocations have been made or are planned to further the achievement of these goals?

5. Provide Appropriate Education Spaces...

What plans are in place, proposed, or under consideration to address overcrowding in elementary and middle schools? Given expectations of continuing increase in enrollment, albeit at a decreasing pace, how long do you expect it to take before all Arlington students are housed in permanent facilities?

6. Continue to Increase Student and Staff Use of Technology...

The four-year technology plan has not been funded as originally envisioned. Can you describe for us how the plan has been modified and when the objectives of the original plan are expected to be achieved (if, indeed, they remain objectives)? The technology objectives have been described in terms of cable installation of equipment, staff development, and student familiarization with and instruction in the use of computer technology. Can you describe what bottom-line benefits in terms of student academic achievement are expected to result from this effort?

Some Other Significant Schools Developments

The Superintendent has appointed a Budget Advisory Group, composed of citizens and Finance staff and headed by the Assistant Superintendent Finance. The Committee, which has met several times, has been examining the budget document and the budget-making process.

The Group has been looking at the budget document to see how it might more clearly portray the relationship between the application of resources to the achievement of the goals of the Strategic Plan (and now presumably of the Annual Priorities as well) and to do this in a way that is broadly understandable to citizens.

The Group is also looking at the budget formulation process to determine whether there are opportunities for better citizen access to and participation in the process. Finally, the Group has been discussing whether an advisory committee, similar to the County Board's Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee might serve a useful purpose to the Superintendent and the Board.

Alternative Schools Admissions Policy

In a memorandum to the School Board dated November 10, Superintendent Rob Smith made the following recommendation:

"That the School Board accept the committee's report and approve the basic approaches or (1) increasing the diversity of the applicant pool through outreach and (2) conducting a lottery with certain variables weighted if their representation in the applicant pool is different from their representation in the student population of the Arlington Public Schools."

Excerpts from the Arlington Public Schools Annual Priorities 1997-1998

1. Improve student learning as measured by student achievement on the following measures: (various measures of achievement on the Stanford 9 Achievement total battery test)
2. Implement a planning and management system focused on student learning...
3. Develop a revised system for teacher evaluation based on procedures to improve instruction performance.
4. Provide curriculum and instruction that assists students in meeting high academic expectations through (defining student standards and objectives, defining best teaching practices and developing staff).
5. Provide appropriate instruction spaces as indicated by: addressing space issues, developing programs to deal with them, opening Arlington Mill and pursuing construction programs at various schools

Coming Up

January Newsletter: Results of the Legislative Package Debate and Vote.

January Meeting: County Board Visit
- Two New Members!

February Meeting: Water and Its Environmental Concerns - Congressman Moran, other interesting guests.



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