

Episode 14: 2018 Community Ready

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:10;04 - 00:00:30;20

M1: Hey welcome to Episode 14 of the What's Up. APS podcast host Frank Bellavia and today we're going to talk about the 2018 community Reid initiative and we'll be back to talk to two of the people that are heading up that initiative right after the break. So.

00:00:31;24 - 00:00:46;05

F8: I guess just everybody why I love my job. You love driving the bus. I really do. Well. I love riding your bus Mr. Dan. When I was. All buddy here Christmas issue.

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M4: Arlington public schools is looking for bus drivers. If you are interested go to AP SBA us for more information. Arlington public schools one hire at a time.

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M5: Welcome back I'm frank Bellavia your host and we're talking with Teresa Flynn of Library Services and supervisor of leverage services and Cathy members who is in our planning and evaluation office and a repeat guest on the podcast.

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F2: But today she's wearing a different essay Yorketown PTA president city we're going to talk about the 2018 community read project and want to thank you both for joining us on the podcast and we'll start with just telling us a little bit about what the 2090 community read as well in 2017 one school managed to get Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely to come and present a presentation to them about *All-American Boys*. The presentation was so engaging to the students and really heighten the conversation among them that challenging racism which is a group in D.C. came in and began having community conversations with Wakefield. It was so successful that the PTA chairs and members from the Yorketown PTA came to me in the spring and said we want to do it again. So we went on a search for an appropriate book and available author and something that could continue this conversation about race and society in America today and certainly in our community.

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M5: I know there are a few sponsors for this event who are there helping out with this.

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F7: Well the PTA is from your town high school Washington Lee and Wakefield High Schools are among the sponsors and have been planning this.

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F6: We've also been working with the County Council PTA CPS library services of course and challenging racism as Theresa mentioned as well as Arlington County Library and friends of Arlington County Library.

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M3: She mentioned this get started last year. How did you get started. What was that was the impetus behind putting this all together.

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F7: Well last year. What happened is the librarians from Wakefield and her schools started working together and they were the ones who brought the two authors to both schools and who they thought wouldn't you know would interest the students. They applied for grants from the PTA. And that's how we started together. And last year as Teresa said the Wakefield PTSA really took the lead and our participation from Yorktown has grown this year really thrilled that Washington the PTA has joined and I have to really commend Theresa who took the lead and working with librarians and residents and volunteers from all three school communities and in order to find a book that would be appropriate and interesting and kind of you know bring us all on the same page so to speak.

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F2: What was kind of neat about last year is that I really wasn't part of the planning. It started small and it just grew and it grew and grew and the story was so compelling that it became something that had huge impact much more than I think was even originally planned. It was just going to be a couple others talking about a book and then it kind of went from there.

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M3: And that book was all-American boys by Jason Runnels and Brandon Kiely and then they came out and talked about the book and there was a really compelling story about how growing up in their different experiences that they both had and there was a community event there was also an event where the high schools came. Students came together at Wakefield and listened to the authors and ask them questions. What do you think it was about that that particular book that made it so successful and compelling for the students.

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F2: He was absolutely ripped from the headlines. The story of *All-American Boys* is a black youth who is going to a party on a Friday night and a white young man who's also going to the same party. Two young boys in the same school going to the same party and the black boy stops at a convenience store to pick up something there's a misunderstanding and he is beaten very much by the police. And the white boy witnesses that the white boy has some connections to the police officer who is the uncle of a friend of his and are two perspectives throughout the book of this issue which I think every young person today is aware of with the Black Lives Matter campaigns. And then Brooke Jason really spoke eloquently and personally about the story talking about his experience of being stopped by police as a young person. And then Brendan did a counterpoint to that of being stopped by the police and how you know remarkably different the two experiences were even though they had similar childhoods similar ages similar events and yet their experience of interactions with the police were so very different this year.

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M5: You guys are showcasing an Newbery award winning book A New York Times best seller *Mexican White Boy* by Matt de la Pena. What was it that brought you to choose this book.

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F2: I originally kind of connected with a collection of stories called flying solo that is the first book published by a group called We Need Diverse Books. And in the collection the very first of the stories is by Matt de la Pena. He had just won the Newbery last year. And it kind of spoke to me. But the committee as we can. I read the book and I looked at each of the stories they felt the characters were a little young. So we started looking at Matt's older books more high school level books and came across Mexican white boy because at its core it is about identity and race in America. And I think those are issues that we are struggling with today.

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M2: It's very much in the forefront and it's something I think our kids are struggling with all the time. What do you think students in the community may take away from from this book.

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F4: Well the book is about a number of things.

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F2: It's about a young boy named Danny who is the child of a white mother and a Mexican father. He does not know his father much or even by sight. His white mother has moved in with the well-to-do boyfriend and he's like I don't want to spend the summer with this guy I don't particularly like. And he's feeling uncomfortable at his prep school where he's too brown for the white community. So he says declares I'm going to go get to know my father's relatives down in San Diego for the summer and mom's like okay but he goes down there and discovers he's a little too white for the Brown community. He does not speak Spanish. And it is very much. Who am I am I my father's child. My my mother's child and my me is a 95 mile an hour fastball. He's a baseball player and he can't get on a team so he doesn't feel like he belongs anywhere. So I my sense is getting back to your regional question that kids will connect to it because I think all young people and even many of us adults ask that question where do we belong. Who are we. Are we part of a tribe or are we part of a community or are we part of a culture. And I think our society is asking that right now is you know unfortunately with the rhetoric of who belongs and who doesn't belong. Well who are we as people is is kind of an essential question. So it's about having students walk out and ask themselves what belonging means and what identity means.

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M2: I think you'll get something to that the students take from it that they don't have to be one or the other they could just be themselves.

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F2: Yeah there is a uniqueness in every individual. And this is America more than other cultures I think struggles with the idea of individualism versus community. We are a nation that is all about individualism. And you look at some other cultures and they're much more about community. And so I think America in this transitional time is looking for the balance between that between being a unique individual and yet being part of a greater whole.

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M2: JAFFE as a member of the PTA. Two things. Why did you want to get involved in this. What is it for the PTA is want to see of this and what do you hope that the students will learn from this experience.

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F7: We felt that an activity like this really helped strengthen our school communities and it increases dialogue between the school communities. You know it's very easy to become focused on what you're doing in your own life and not really have those make those connections or have those conversations.

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F6: You know I think it's always a learning experience when you're considering someone else's perspective and the challenges that someone else faces in life and that is part of what this is about as Theresa says you know addressing those essential questions and one of the things that I remember the author's last year at the community read when they spoke is that people often find it easier to talk about difficult issues when they're discussing a work of fiction rather than talking about their own lives. And so I think that this is such a great way for us to help young people talk about these issues.

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M2: I am kind of going along with what Teresa was talking about. You think this is a book that the students will get engaged with and get read and participate in the discussion.

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F3: This is why we involved library expert high school population.

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F4: I think the appeal for young people will be very strong. It speaks in natural language which is typical to the American team and I will leave it at that. To say that you know it's not filtered for adult content. It's just it is what it is. I personally liked it because you know I often see some of these communities is what you call drive by communities and that's that kind of gets mentioned. These are places you drive by and you make random assumptions about who's there who lives there what their life is like. And I really had that vision kind of shook up with the idea of you know these are individuals these are guys who you know have crushes on girls and these are girls who are trying to decide you know how far that relationship's going to go and what their roles are.

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F2: And it's it's just very human. It's you know it connects to that. And that struggle I think many of us have.

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F6: And I think also the fact that this book includes baseball.

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F3: Yeah I mean everyone can speak the language baseball yet and sports really seems to be a way in this country of bringing people together who may have different political views or you

know just different opinions on various things but they probably agree on their favorite sports teams or gets the best picture. So maybe that is also you know something in this book that can help people.

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F2: I really like the male protagonist and I tend to look for male protagonists when we're looking for large community reads because I think boys particularly when it comes to reading there's a certain kind of distance. So I wanted something that male readers could connect to. And there's two characters in the book who are searching for father and searching through I did for identity through father figures. And I felt it was really something that hopefully will speak to male readers. You know that idea of fathers and sons because we talk a lot about mothers and daughters but not enough about fathers and sons having two sons.

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M3: Like father and cycle. Yes. So there are two events coming up. There's a student event and then there's a community event at the Central Library talking about what those those are.

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F4: So we're going to have Mr Della Pena speaking to ninth grade because as it turned out this was the perfect book selection it was already on the ninth grade reading list. Just luck of the draw. Didn't know that. So yay. So yeah they'll be speaking with ninth graders at Yorktown for two sessions on the morning of the 13th between sessions at the moment. We're working on getting some of the clubs smaller groups of students to meet with Mr. De La Pena for a book signing and then that evening he's going to be at the public library doing an open presentation. And then on Wednesday March 14th we're going to run him around the county. We're going to start him at Washington early in the morning and then take him down to Wakefield in the afternoon. And somewhere in the midst of all of that we're working to Folden students from career center HP with New Directions and Lexton. We want to make sure all students have access to this.

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M3: Are you going to I know you're bringing the first the first group is honor or are you going to bring other freshmen into Yorketown like with last year's thing or was it just with each individual school.

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F2: I'm thinking that Langston might Folden with your tent one of your town's presentations. We're still working out the details after the semester break but New Directions may be at NHP maybe it now BNL career center. Oh in Arlington community high school. Want to forget that one going down to Wakefield. Again we don't know the details on that. OK.

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F6: One of the things we did last year at your town that I think was really successful is you know as Theresa mentioned that there is an opportunity for a small group to meet with the author. And last year we had some reporters from Yorketown century newspaper who came and were part of that session. So it is a way that they you know they wrote about and I was able to shared at least with with other students that we're kind of hoping that it can happen again.

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M3: How does somebody from the community once participate get involved and participate especially in a community event.

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F6: Well in terms of the school's high school students can get a copy of the book in their school libraries or perhaps it is on a class reading list so they can participate in the school assemblies and the community discussion will take place at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday March 13 at Arlington Central Library on North Quincy Street. So this a community discussion this event is free of charge. It's open to the public. So anybody who would like to come can it doesn't mean you have to have read the book ahead of time.

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F3: And in fact one of our sponsors which I'm sorry we left off the list earlier.

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F6: It is one more page bookstore independent bookstore in Arlington and one more page has these books in stock and they're also going to be selling them that night of the community event. And the author will sign it. And we also want to mention that Arlington County public library has copies of the book so people certainly can check out the book if they're interested in reading that.

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F3: And we're really excited that we gave copies of the book to Superintendent Dr. Patrick Murphy. The members of the Arlington School Board and county board last year we were thrilled at their participation.

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F6: So we're hoping that they will join us as well this year. Yeah.

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F4: Any copies because we're all about digital now. So we have copies of your Kindle your ordinary page. If you're a teenager on your phone on your phone because you have the eyes you can read that little teeny weeny print.

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M3: So this is the second year this is happening. I'm assuming that it's going to be the white years after. So when you start planning for the next event.

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F2: We started this in June and I just had a conversation with a parent who wanted to bring in an author this year. And she just reached out to me and I said I would love to but this is January we need to be talking about this six months eight months out mostly for booking the authors because these authors you know they booked months up to a year ahead of time and in the case of mantled Pena he's pretty top shelf.

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F5: And in order to get him we really needed to move quickly and fast.

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F7: But he knows Arlington and he likes us so we had moved fairly quickly after last year's event was so successful. Just sort of on the momentum of that. There were several parents who wanted to be part of the selection committee. And so with Teresa taking the lead on that we really were able to juggle you know what is a good book for an event like this.

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M1: And at the same time with an author that might be available for us to bring Tarling which sounds like a very great event and it's important topic for our community and for the time that we're in now I want to thank you both for sitting down and talking with me and again that community event for staff for parents and the community want to participate. March 13th 7:00 p.m. at the Central Library. Pick up your copy your book by the library. One of our sponsors on the bookstore. Thank you again for joining us. We look forward to the March for anybody who has any questions or you want to hear a topic on the podcast. Give us an email apsnews@apsva.us or just send us a tweet @apsvirginia. And we'll talk to you next time.