

**2024-30 - APS Strategic Plan
Development Process
Phase 1 Engagement (Sept 5 - Oct 11) - Hopes & Aspirations
Highest Frequency Themes**

Questionnaire

Hopes and Aspirations: Highest Frequency Themes- By Role

Top 10	Overall	Students	Staff	Parent/Community
1	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Recruiting/Retaining Teachers	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality
2	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Academic success	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs
3	Recruiting/Retaining Teachers	Teacher Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Safety
4	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	College/Workforce Readiness	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Recruiting/Retaining Teachers
5	Equity	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Equity	Overcrowding/Class Size
6	Safety	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Educator Support	Equity
7	Overcrowding/Class Size	Course or Elective Offerings (Specialized Programs)	Overcrowding/Class Size	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health
8	College/Workforce Readiness	Culture	Staff Pay	College/Workforce Readiness
9	Teacher Quality	Workload	Safety	Community/Family Involvement
10	Community/Family Involvement	Homework	Community/Family Involvement	Facilities

Highest frequency themes for students, staff and parent/community respondents – By Race/Ethnicity

	Overall	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multiple	White
1	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality
2	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs	Equity	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs
3	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs	Safety	Overcrowding/ Class Size	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers
4	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Safety	Academic Success	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health
5	Equity	Teacher Quality	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Equity	Overcrowding/ Class Size
6	Safety	Safety	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Teacher Quality	Safety	Equity
7	Overcrowding/ Class Size	College/ Workforce Readiness	Academic Success	College/ Workforce Readiness	Community/ Family Involvement	Safety
8	College/ Workforce Readiness	Equity	College/ Workforce Readiness	Equity	Course or Elective Offerings (Specialized Programs)	College/ Workforce Readiness
9	Teacher Quality	Overcrowding/ Class Size	Teacher Quality	Whole Child Supports	Educator Support	Teacher Quality
10	Community/ Family Involvement	Academic Success	Community/ Family Involvement	Community/ Family Involvement	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Educator Support

Highest frequency themes for staff and parent/community respondents – By Region

	Overall (Staff, Parents, Students, Community)	North Arlington	Central Arlington	South Arlington
1	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality
2	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/ Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Safety
3	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	Equity	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs
4	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Overcrowding/Class Size	Safety	Equity
5	Equity	Equity	Recruiting/Retaining Teachers	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health
6	Safety	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Overcrowding/Class Size	Overcrowding/Class Size
7	Overcrowding/ Class Size	Safety	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers
8	College/Workforce Readiness	College/ Workforce Readiness	College/Workforce Readiness	Community/ Family Involvement
9	Teacher Quality	Facilities	Facilities	College/Workforce Readiness
10	Community/ Family Involvement	Teacher Quality	Growth Support	Facilities

Highest frequency themes for students – By Subgroup

	Overall (Staff, Parents, Students, Community)	English Learners	SWD	Gifted
1	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Success	Academic Success	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality
2	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Rigor/Instructional Quality	Academic Success
3	Recruiting/ Retaining Teachers	College/ Workforce Readiness	Teacher Quality	Teacher Quality
4	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Teacher Quality	College/ Workforce Readiness	College/ Workforce Readiness
5	Equity	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs
6	Safety	Whole Child Supports	Whole Child Supports	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health
7	Overcrowding/ Class Size	Discipline/Behavior	Workload	Course or Elective Offerings (Specialized Programs)
8	College/Workforce Readiness	English Language Learners	Social/Emotional Learning/Mental Health	Culture
9	Teacher Quality	Tutoring	Equity	Homework
10	Community/ Family Involvement		Preparedness For Life/Citizenship/Jobs	Workload

Focus Groups

Focus groups were asked eight similar questions which were modified based on the audience. The themes identified in those questions are organized by role in the table below. Staff will not be included until we have been able to speak to a greater number.

Figure 3.3: Focus Group Themes by Role and Question

Question	Students	Parents/Families	Community
What should we be working to accomplish for the students of Arlington Public Schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Preparation/Achievement Career Readiness/Life Skills Extracurricular Activities and Balance Diversity and Representation Community Engagement and Impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Success/Preparation for the Future Confidence and Balance Social and Emotional Development Diversity and Global Citizenship Communication, Technology, and Practical Life Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joy in Learning Real-World Experiences Equity and Inclusiveness Preparation for Success Emphasis on the Whole Child
What are the most important aspects of Arlington Public Schools students' school experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socialization/Relationships Academic Learning/Grades Community and Support from Teachers/Counselors Preparation for the Future Extracurricular Activities/Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Engagement and Challenge Sense of Belonging and Safety Communication and Follow-Through Social and Emotional Well-being Variety and Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety and Well-being Quality of Teaching and Teacher/Student Relationships Academics and Learning Opportunities Inclusivity and Diversity Community and Social Interactions
What are your aspirations for the students of Arlington Public Schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career and Education Goals Independence and Financial Stability (differences between N/S Arlington) Making a Positive Impact Personal Growth/Happiness Passion/Creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Success and Independence Happiness/Well-being Life Skills and Resilience Education and College Readiness Social Skills and Community Involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personalization: Maximizing the Individual Potential of Each Student Preparation for College and Career Well-Rounded Education Development of Life Skills and Citizenship Diverse and Inclusive Education

Figure 3.3: Focus Group Themes by Role and Question

Question	Students	Parents/Families	Community
How do you define success for the students of Arlington Public Schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Fulfillment/Happiness • Financial Stability/Independence • Achieving Goals and Accomplishments • Positive Impact/Contribution to Society • Pursuing Passions/Interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness and Well-being • Independence and Responsibility • Academic Achievement and Engagement • Empathy and Social Awareness • Lifelong Learning and Curiosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Learning Outcomes • Preparation for the Future • Personal Growth and Resilience • Well-Rounded Education • Community Engagement and Equity
What is Arlington Public Schools doing well to support student learning and success?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Teachers/Personal Relationships • Effective Communication/Collaboration • Recognition and Extracurricular Activities • Resources and Support Systems • Flexibility and Student Voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Teachers • Diverse Program Offerings • Community Engagement • Counselors and Special Services (esp students with IEP/English learners) • Inclusivity and Equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on Flexible Planning and Adaptability • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives • Wide Variety of Educational Experiences • High-Quality Teachers and Staff • Student-Centered Approaches
What are the biggest barriers to student success in Arlington Public Schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling and Course Credits (transfer students) • Lack of Individualized Counseling • Quality of Teaching and Learning Experience • Limited Electives and Language Options • School Start Times (Time Management) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class sizes • Teacher Support and Compensation • Communication and Transparency • Curriculum and Instructional Methods • Equity and Inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity and Diversity • Teacher Support and Quality • Communication and Transparency • Student Mental Health and Well-being • Class Sizes/Overcrowding
In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Exposure to Career Pathways (early as MS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Recruitment and Retention • Equity and Inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing and Teacher Shortages

Figure 3.3: Focus Group Themes by Role and Question

Question	Students	Parents/Families	Community
facing the school system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional Guidance and Support • Balancing School/Life Expectations • Flexible Scheduling/Breaks • Engaging Teaching Methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth and Infrastructure • Academic Level and Expectations • Bias, Special Education and Low Expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health and Student Well-being • Funding and Resource Allocation • Communication and Trust • Curriculum Relevance and Educational Innovation
What should Arlington Public Schools be working on to be successful as a school system in the eyes of the community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized Support and Communication • Flexibility and Breaks • Engaging Teaching Methods • Less Testing and More Collaboration • Understanding Student Needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity and Budget Support • Preparing Students for the Future • Inclusive Decision-Making • Diverse Requirements and Expectations (Create a School System rather than a System of Schools) • Transparency and Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Communication and Transparency • Equity and Inclusion • Mental Health and Student Well-being • Innovation and Future-Readiness • Resource Allocation and Budgeting
		<p>Follow Up Question (engage all families more effectively)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spaces and Opportunities for Collaboration • Financial Support for Staff and Resources • Inclusivity and Equity of Voice • Improved Communication and Parent Education • Support for Diverse Communities 	

Equity (Outcome & Access)

- Achievement Gaps in Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies for
 - Black/African-American Students
 - Hispanic/Latino Students
 - Students with Disabilities
 - English Language Learners
- Parent focus group responses mention efforts towards inclusivity and equity, although opinions on the effectiveness of these efforts vary. Some mention positive steps taken by the school district, while others believe there is room for improvement.
- Students mention that their ultimate goals are financial stability. However, generally students in Northern Arlington schools indicated that they wanted the independence that financial stability provided, while students in Southern Arlington schools suggested financial stability would alleviate the stress and anxiety of meeting monthly living expenses.
- PTO fund-raising mentioned regularly. Family focus group respondents emphasized the importance of ensuring equity in education, especially for schools without additional funding through the PTA. There is a desire for leveling the playing field and providing extra budget support, particularly for Title I schools or those in need.
- Comments in the foundations elements questions, related to equity were mixed with some support for continuing to improve on strategies to achieve equity and some calling for equality
or
- Community focus group respondents placed strong emphasis on ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, feel included and comfortable in the educational environment. This includes addressing disparities among schools and providing resources to underrepresented communities.
- Community focus group participants indicated the lack of understanding by parents of historically underrepresented students about how to enroll or access choice programs, extracurricular activities, etc.

Teacher Quality & Compensation

- Students, Parents, Staff, and Community all recognize the importance of students having at least one caring adult advocate.
- Parents and Community Members are concerned with staff shortages and the impact compensation has on retention.
- Students value the sense of community within their schools, including relationships with teachers, administrators, and fellow students.
- Student focus group respondents indicated they appreciate the support they receive from teachers and staff, especially in the last two years. Students indicated that building personal relationships with teachers creates a better learning environment. Students also say that teachers provide extra help, guidance, and flexibility, contributing to students' understanding and success.
- Student focus group participants also discussed the quality of their teaching and learning experience citing the impact of negative experiences with teachers, particularly in subjects like math, which were mentioned frequently. Students emphasized the importance of effective teaching and express concerns about teacher preparedness and training.
- Many students express the need for more personalized support from teachers. They want structured time for meetings and conversations with teachers to discuss their progress, clarify doubts, and receive feedback.
- Additionally, students value open communication and the opportunity to share their preferred learning styles with teachers.
- Parents cited the quality of teachers in APS and their dedication to students' success. This includes teachers reaching out to involve parents, strong parent-teacher communication, and creating emotionally safe environments.
- Parents also frequently cited the need for better teacher support and higher compensation. Some respondents felt that teachers cannot afford to live in Arlington, and there was a call for increased investment in teacher resources, including pay and materials.

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE READINESS

- Students, parents, and the community all cited the need for additional career preparation and exposure (as early as middle school) and pathways that exist for all students.
- Students' aspirations for themselves include a focus on acquiring practical life skills, such as time management, communication, leadership, and problem-solving. Students want to be well-prepared for not only college but also the job market, emphasizing the importance of skills for future careers. Some students expressed the desire to graduate early to move on with their lives and career goals.
- Students see access to extracurricular opportunities as a connection to college and careers.
- Community members want students to receive well-rounded and engaging educational experiences that prepare them for both trade skills and college. The idea of creating career clusters and trade school programs is emphasized.

Trust, Transparency, Communication

- Several community focus group responses mentioned the need for improved communication and transparency between the school system, parents, and the community. There are concerns about trust and the impact of past decisions on current relationships.
- Many community members emphasized the importance of clear and transparent communication between the school system, parents, and the community. They expressed the need for better information dissemination and understanding of APS priorities and strategies.
- Parents of English language students and historically underrepresented populations provide conflicting information about communication. Some indicate a support for the tools the district uses, while others indicate that the regular changing of applications to communicate is making communication less effective.
- Several parents raised concerns about communication between schools and parents. They cited issues with transparency, inconsistent communication, and a lack of clear explanations regarding school policies and decisions.
- Several parents cited the lack of feedback to students about what they are missing on assignments and how both they (parents) could support student improvement at home and how students could remediate their own deficiencies without the knowledge of what they are doing incorrectly.
- Families expressed a desire for greater inclusion in decision-making processes. They want the Superintendent and leadership team to actively include families and listen to staff when making decisions. Transparency in how feedback is used, and the decision-making process was also emphasized.
- Transparency in communication was a common theme. Families would like clearer, more open communication from Arlington Public Schools, even when the school system is working on addressing issues that may not have immediate solutions.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

CURRENT FOUNDATIONS – Little to No Revisions Needed

