

**LINKAGE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE
EMPLOYEE GROUPS
Gatehouse Administration Center
October 20, 2009**

Convened 7:38 p.m.

Facilitators: Nancy Briggs, Group A
Mary Shepherd, Group B

Group A

Board members – Dan Storck and Liz Bradsher

Facilitator: Nancy Briggs

Participants:

Ellen Wise, Associated School Librarians of Fairfax County
Mark Kay Downes, Association of Fairfax Professional Educators
Renessa Roten, Bus Drivers & Attendants Advisory Committee
Zena Chapman, Fairfax Alliance of Black School Educators
Jan McKee, Fairfax Association of HS Principals
Leonard Bumbaca, Fairfax Education Association
Idi Duncan, Hispanic Leadership Alliance
Shelli Wayland, Office Personnel Advisory Committee

Group B

Board members – Stu Gibson, Kathy Smith (observer)

Facilitator: Mary Shepherd

Participants:

Kanwaljit Sachdeva, Asian Educators Association
Steve Rorls, Custodial Services Advisory Committee
Melanie Mackin, Fairfax Association of Elementary School Principals
Dan Parris, Fairfax Association of Middle School Principals
Nora Edwards-Joy, Fairfax Association of Social Workers
Dennis Pfennig, Fairfax County Retired Educators, FEA-Retired
Tammy Bochaty, Food & Nutrition Services Advisory Committee
Robyn Lady, High School Directors of Student Services Association
Mary Barham, Support Services Employees Advisory Committee

Comments:

1. What do you perceive the employee's role to be in School Board decision making?
 - Communication is stronger now than ever before with town meetings, web site, surveys, opportunities to make suggestions
 - Retirees feel abolishment of SEBAC limited their opportunity for input and they had restricted access to Board members
 - Employees need to inform SBM what is going on in schools, invite them to observe; SB needs to make repeated visits not just one time

- Guidance directors feel they have not been heard because they took a bigger cut last year
 - Is it the role of the SB to seek out employees or vice versa?
 - SB needs to keep in mind how what they do impacts employees
 - We need to communicate to you what the biggest obstacles to learning are
 - SB needs to speak to those organizations representing retired employees
 - SB needs to realize that staff is part of the community even if they do not reside in Fairfax County
 - Bus drivers do not feel they get communications from the SB
2. What are the pros and cons of the current ways of communicating with the School Board?
- Information for ESOL parents should be provided in their language newspapers, not through their children. Need to provide opportunity for them to communicate their needs
 - Mixed messages about when you can have an honest conversation and when you should just be grateful for a paycheck; not feel that we're all on the same team – confusion about when to step outside the chain of command
 - Not want to undermine other employees when advocating for own group
 - Decisions shouldn't be made on how well one group advocates, need to have all groups heard
 - Need to communicate the process, opportunities, and protocol to talk to the School Board
 - Concern about where the information that is shared goes
 - School Board member could go to school to talk to different groups
 - School Board members have been responsive to e-mails
 - Perception that public comment time at regular meetings is for advocacy groups and that employees are not invited to speak during that time.
 - Employees feel they cannot advocate for themselves
 - Town Hall meetings not effective ways to communicate
3. If you could create the ideal system of communications with the School Board, what would that look like?
- Like to have one or more School Board members attend a meeting twice a year – regular and systematic communication
 - School Board members need to commit time to understand how the employees feel and to help employees understand why a decision was made, although they may not always agree
 - Some organizations have stepped out of the chain of command to make communication happen but would want to know outcomes
 - Principals appreciate their personal relationships with their Board members
 - School Board members contribute to PTA newsletters, attend PTA meetings, could invite themselves to meetings
 - SB members need to make employees feel that their communications have been heard and have impacted decisions

- Retirees don't feel they are heard when letters to SB members are forwarded to the Superintendent
- Low income families' voices get lost as they don't think to write letters
- All employee groups need to be included in conversations
- Employees would like a "guide to communicating with the SB"

4. What do you know about the Board's Strategic Governance process? What additional information do you need to understand it better?

- Sets up goals and Superintendent is judged by how he accomplishes those. The School Board has the responsibility to run the system and they should be more hands on.

Stu - Would it help to provide notice to each particular group when the School Board planned to discuss issues of concern to that group?

- It really does – free and reduced lunch ties in to what food and nutrition employees do

(Stu gave an overview of Strategic Governance)

- Started with 10 targets, now have more measures we're trying to operate on. Think Strategic Governance spreads measures out.
- What is the School Board role for diversity in hiring?
- School system does a fine job in representation of minorities in leadership, but few minority teachers because they are promoted quickly. Minority teachers are good role models for students.

5. Please identify one issue that you think would be appropriate to address in a countywide education summit.

- Who is the audience?
- Very educated community – have to have the discussion so community can help us
- Can't maintain the same level of services on the cheap, can't ask people to do more, with continued loss of personnel; community can't access what they need
- Still not able to reach second language parents – need to help them get involved in their child's education
- Now the quality of education is tied to the robustness of the economy – are we willing to disengage from that?
- John Cook put out a survey which asked if the BOS should give less funding to schools and 71% said yes
- People don't realize what teachers do. They think teachers have an easy job, summers off, going home at 3 p.m. Need to put a face on it
- If it is spelled out clearly to parents what has to go, they will really begin to scream. It needs to hit home
- It needs to include response time, availability for conferences, letter writing – have to spell out the layers of impact

- Are people willing to pay for or understand the cost of keeping someone in the detention center? If a kid has issues and is not connected to school, they will be in the system.
- Wealthy parents don't think it impacts them.

SUMMARY

1. Systematic and regular communication.
 - a. Confusion about how
 - b. Confusion over roles; the chain of command affects communication
 - c. Employees who do communicate are challenged
 - d. Fear and intimidation restrict communication
 - e. Communication with ESOL families in their own language newspapers, flyers
2. Ideal communication
 - a. Need to feel heard
 - b. Want to know how communication was used and whether it was effective
 - c. Prefer smaller meetings with interaction, richer discussion, not large venues such as public hearings with 3 minutes to present (too structured, feel crowded out and pushed aside)
 - d. More relationship building – people like being asked
3. Confusion about Strategic Governance
 - a. Give heads up to impacted organizations or office when SB discussion will focus on issues of concern to them or their program
 - b. Give people ownership
4. Summit should put a face on the budget
 - a. Focused communication to the larger community
 - b. Show how everyone is impacted so community can advocate with those with purse strings
5. 67% of county doesn't have children in schools – what are they getting for their money.