

Arlington School Committee – School Committee Retreat
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 26, 2022 – 4:15 p.m.

Arlington High School
869 Massachusetts Avenue, 6th Floor
School Committee Room
Arlington, MA 02476

4:30 p.m. The Chair called the meeting to order and confirmed the following School Committee Members were present: J. Morgan, yes, K. Allison-Ampe, yes, B. Hayner, yes, P. Schlichtman, yes, B. Hayner, yes, L. Kardon, yes, J. Thielman, yes, L. Exton, yes. Also in attendance, Superintendent Homan and facilitator, A. Ravenelle, William James College.

The Retreat Meeting started with Members getting their dinner and joining a circle at the tables. Ms. Exton spoke briefly, reflecting on the first year with the new Superintendent and introduced the facilitator of the meeting, Mr. Andre Ravenelle from William James College. Mr. Ravenelle spoke briefly on his background. He is currently working at William James College teaching superintendent/school committee relations.

Mr. Ravenelle began the retreat reviewing his agenda and presented a slide showing what he expected as the tone of the meeting; respect confidentiality, listen for a quiet voice, balance advocacy and inquiry and lean into discomfort.

The first item on the agenda - Breaking the Ice – Mr. Ravenelle asked Members to share something about themselves that maybe they don't already know and members shared. This was an exercise to learn something different about colleagues and their work together.

The next agenda item was a slide which reflected the results of a survey he conducted with the Members prior to the in-person meeting. The results were discussed with the Members and discussion on the information took form. Mr. Ravenelle commented that the results of this survey reflected a very highly functioning School Committee, especially when the Mental Health of Leadership has suffered so much over the past two years.

A number of questions in the survey were graphed and presented in slide format so that Members could view and discuss the results. Mr. Ravenelle commented that the results of these questions indicate that the School Committee is solid as to where it could be given the challenges of this past two years. 100% of the Members agreed that the Superintendent informs the Committee of major issues and personnel decisions in a timely manner and that the Committee and the Superintendent treat each other with mutual respect and professionalism in public and in private. Mr. Ravenelle again commented that the unity shown is astounding.

School Committee Members shared why they ran for office with the consensus being for the best of the children. The Members and the Superintendent were asked to write a few words of understanding of what education should be. Some of the responses included: fun and equality at all levels, a pathway to all students to reach their full potential, have knowledge and social skills, have access to the tools they need to grow.

Mr. Ravanelle discussed perspective and the difficult conversations that happen when there are conflicting perceptions, values and interpretations. An exercise in perception followed which showed that two people can look at the same picture but see something different and how being right might be a matter of perspective.

Another conversation discussed the strategies to avoid a stalemate. Members shared systems in place that are helpful (e.g., set of norms at the first meeting on the year, subcommittee meetings for longer discussions when things cannot be done in the very structured School Committee Meeting, the importance of clarity and a deliberate process so the community trusts the process). Other helpful suggestions included opportunities to slow down and take more time, being clear of the desired outcome early on --with a consensus. Timing – who gets to decide what's long enough, how much time to make a decision is a decision in itself. Create conditions that the stalemate is specifically named so the individuals can have productive interaction.

Key issues, difficulties and resolutions and the most proud and more challenging moments this past year were discussed before the meeting ended. The next retreat will be held on August 9.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elizabeth M. Diggins

Administrative Assistant to the

Arlington School Committee