

Friends of Arlington Immersion School Board Candidate Questionnaire Due: Thursday, May 4th at 5pm

Dear School Board Candidates,

Immersion Parents have started a coalition among all four APS Immersion Schools to share ideas and advocate for Immersion programs in Arlington. To help parents better gauge the choices on the ballot on the upcoming firehouse causes, **we kindly ask that you respond to the follow statements with your level of support and how you would implement them as a member of the Arlington School Board.**

Please return this questionnaire to friendsofaringtonimmersion@gmail.com by Thursday, May 4th at 5pm.

1. The need for a full-time Immersion Coordinator. Currently, Immersion is under the World Languages Coordinator who covers FLES and all other language programs in APS. Having a dedicated coordinator would help with continuity between the programs and help better allocate resources.

I would definitely be open to the idea of an Immersion Coordinator. As a new Board member, I would first make sure I have a complete understanding of the existing staff structure, responsibilities, and workload. If responsibilities cannot be reassigned or redistributed to accommodate the specific work of an Immersion Coordinator, then I would work with my Board colleagues and staff to determine how a new position can be funded without sacrificing other key resources.

After identifying the responsibilities and expected workload for a Coordinator, I would perhaps consider an initial part-time position that could develop into a full-time position as needed; or separating the responsibilities of the World Language Coordinator so that one staff person oversees general language programs and one oversees the FLES and Immersion programs.

2. The need to keep one single Middle School program instead of building a 2nd Immersion Middle School. Parents would like to see the single program in a centralized location. This will provide access to North Arlington families.

One of the recommendations I made as a member of the South Arlington Working Group was to build a new K-8 facility for the existing immersion programs at Claremont and Gunston. This would simultaneously address urgent capacity needs at both the elementary and middle school levels. It also would encourage greater participation at the middle school level, as students would not be faced with changing schools.

Currently, there is insufficient enrollment for a second middle school immersion program. As access and interest increase, APS will need to consider ways to provide additional capacity to accommodate more students. We should be thoughtfully encouraging greater participation and preparing to expand capacity to accommodate growth. In doing so, we need to learn why more families are not choosing to continue in the program beyond fifth grade, and identify factors that would make them more likely to stay in the program.

It is likely that location is a contributing factor. Yet, we have not formally researched this issue and do not know the extent to which location is the determining factor versus other reasons. Additionally, the impacts on demand and enrollment at Claremont and Key due to potential changes in admission policies remain to be seen. I would monitor those impacts as we move forward and consider the best plan to accommodate and expand the immersion program.

The decision around the location of the program has to be made within the context of all of our schools and programs and how to best serve our system overall. Every option program would benefit from being centrally located. A recent APS survey indicates that the majority of families prefer neighborhood schools to option programs at the elementary level, and we need to ensure families throughout Arlington have access to both neighborhood and option schools.

As we build new facilities, I believe an inclusive K-8 (or even a K-12) program or campus can be a prudent way to serve the immediate and near-term needs of the Immersion community, while retaining the ability to accommodate other program needs and interests in the community. I would remain open to other possibilities, including relocating the current middle school program to a more accessible location; but we should first develop an overall plan for meeting our growing capacity needs.

3. Parents would like the School Board and APS to start the planning and budgeting for a **third elementary Immersion School** to increase access to more families and help with capacity challenges at Claremont and Key.

The first issue is to provide more space for the current elementary immersion program, and secondarily to increase participation at the middle school level. We should consider all options and not stop with our usual 'go-to' solution of simply adding another school. All the needs of our system as a whole must be taken into consideration, and we have to think more strategically and creatively to solve our problems in general, including this one.

A third elementary program is one option I would consider; however, it has to be balanced with the urgent need for additional neighborhood schools. As I indicated above, the impacts of policy revisions on immersion enrollment and demand remain to be seen. I believe we need to identify the true current demand for a third immersion school first, before we can determine the best plan for moving forward. Immersion is not a program that can simply be fully implemented right away – it requires starting with the earlier grades and matriculating students through until a full program is established.

We need to know why families currently choose – or do *not* choose – immersion; the impacts on the enrollment in our neighborhood schools; and the impacts of the soon-to-be revised admissions policies.

I think a proposal like the one I suggested during the South Arlington Working Group (see above regarding K-8 immersion school) is still worth considering today. By accommodating current demand, providing room for expansion, and strategically encouraging participation through middle school, we do not exert unnecessary competition with the need for more neighborhood schools. Either the Claremont or Key program could be relocated – both would provide additional neighborhood seats in areas with great need.

Again, we should first develop an overall plan for meeting our growing capacity needs – for our system as a whole, including Immersion and other option programs. And, we need to start working with the County Board now to determine how to implement - and finance - that plan.