

Planning Our Future Together

Strategic Planning Report and Recommendations

Including the Future of

Arlington High School

to the

Arlington Central School District
Board of Education

September 20, 2005
Frank V. Pepe, Jr.,
Superintendent of Schools

*“A window of opportunity to pursue excellence through growth;
expanding a very good high school into one of unique distinction
in a cost effective manner.”*

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Planning Our Future Together

Strategic Planning Report and Recommendations

September 20, 2005

SECTION ONE: THE PLANNING PROCESS

Background: The Needs of a Growing School District

The Arlington Central School District has experienced consistent, steady, and significant growth since the early 1960's. During this period numerous schools were built followed by the addition of portable, temporary, and prefabricated classrooms in the 1970's and 1980's. Two major expansions were also constructed at Arlington High School; in 1995, the largest of the expansions more than doubled its original size.

Although some capital repairs and renovations were conducted in the schools, keeping pace with the capital needs of aging schools was exceedingly difficult, due to financial constraints and the costs of constantly expanding faculty, staff, transportation, technology, and educational services.

In December 2000, the electorate approved \$44.4 million within a larger referendum to address severe, long standing overcrowding in its elementary and middle schools. The enrollment of students in grades K-8 had grown steadily and predictably with two middle schools at 30% over capacity. Elementary schools (particularly, Beekman and LaGrange Elementary Schools) were so overcrowded that cafeterias, gymnasiums, and libraries were removed from service and transformed into makeshift classrooms. Overcrowding was so severe, in fact, that upon opening the new Union Vale Middle School, the District's three middle schools opened their doors in 2004 at 90% of capacity. Similarly, upon opening the Vail Farm Elementary School, the elementary schools (grades K-5) were also at 90% of capacity.

With the two new schools due to commence operations in September 2004, three major projects became critical during the 2003-2004 school year:

1. Completing the construction and preparation of the two new schools on time and within budget
2. Preparing all necessary resources, including the transfer and employment of Staff, for the two schools
3. Redistribution of students to the new schools and balancing enrollments among the other existing schools.

During this period of intense activity, Arlington High School continued to increase in enrollment. Student population, as predicted in 1995, was quickly approaching 3,300, well over the functional capacity of 2,800 students. Demographic studies, conducted in 2003 to assist in the redistribution of elementary and middle school students and to forward the District's overall planning efforts, confirmed the 1995 forecasts. The study also indicated that high school enrollment would continue to increase to more than 3,600 students, far surpassing the capacity of the expanded building.

Severe Overcrowding at Arlington High School

Arlington High School is experiencing a space crunch unlike anything experienced in the past 10 years. With an opening enrollment at about 3,290 students, it is now at maximum enrollment. The school is overcrowded and approaching gridlock.

Classrooms are unavailable

This year some classes are being conducted in spaces not designed for students and many more classes will soon be taught in substandard spaces unless there is relief. The school has had to convert a physics room to a chemistry room which resulted in physics being moved to a keyboarding room. A science class has been moved to an English classroom, with 'Science on a Cart' (highly unusual for a high school) now being provided for those classes being held in that standard classroom.

One of the computer rooms is being used as a science classroom which has closed the computer room to other classes every period of the day. The library classroom on the second floor has been commandeered as our math learning center because we have insufficient math classrooms. A keyboarding room is also being used as a math classroom. Art and technology are sharing a classroom and study halls are being held in art rooms and in cafeterias, far from suitable circumstances for the study halls and unfortunate for the students who would like to take art in those classrooms.

The school has lost virtually all of its flexibility to add courses and class size is growing. Throughout the entire building only one classroom is available period 1 and period 3 for the first semester and this situation may continue or grow worse later in the year. During period 2, only two classrooms are available in the school and during period 8, not one classroom is available.

Virtually every classroom space has been pressed into service and the demands of the school are increasing. Period 4 is a lunch period and no classrooms are available due to study halls vacating cafeteria spaces and going into separate classrooms. The scheduling now is very tight and getting worse with every additional student.

Due to the tight schedule, many more students traveling from one end of the building to the other for classes, which is something that has been avoided since the building was expanded ten years ago. The school has lost the flexibility that would allow it to avoid this situation.

In physical education, a new curriculum has been developed for freshmen which includes orienteering and Project Adventure. A workable number for this program is about 25 students per teacher. Class size is now at about 45 per teacher in some sections. The negative impact on the program is profound. In the fall and spring, rainy days cause severe difficulties. There might be 120 students in the main gym, 60 or so on each side of the curtain, far more than is safe or manageable. Little effective teaching can occur in such circumstances. At times there are as many as 80 students in the weight room. When physical education space is completely exhausted, there are scores of additional students walking through the building "doing laps" as their form of physical education.

Sports Program Suffering

The interscholastic program is running out of space also. There is no room for expansion of fields within the current footprint. The school conducts 10 interscholastic sports teams and hosts a marching band. Most of the fields are now in poor condition because of over use; the field immediately adjacent to the school which is used for physical education and marching band practices

is a field of stones and gravel that rivals the surface of the moon. One of the soccer teams is forced to practice at the Stringham Road community field. Scheduling has become a nightmare. There is no space for intramurals (programs that should be offered) and there is no space for teams (i.e. baseball, softball, lacrosse) that wish to offer out of season opportunities for interested athletes. The athletic fields have become overused and, despite yeoman efforts by the Maintenance Department, are not adequate. They are often unsafe, and are not of the quality that is expected for sports competition.

Class Size Rising

The most immediate impact of continued growth will be the utilization of more substandard, non-instructional spaces for instruction. Spaces such as the large group instruction room, the cafeteria stage area, the auditorium, the library and computer rooms will all be pressed into service as classrooms. The large lobby areas on both the first and second floors and the lobby outside of the auditorium may need to be partitioned to provide 'classroom space'.

In addition, more students will be added to each classroom and class sizes will grow beyond what Arlington finds acceptable. Indeed, class sizes have already grown to levels beyond what the staff believes to be educationally sound. For example, there are 125 sections of mathematics. The goal for class size maximums is 25 students. Of those 125 sections, 74 (60%) are already at 26 students or more, and, 59 (47%) of those sections are at 28 students or more.

Unpleasant Alternatives

If the referendum fails, the School District will need to consider renting portable classrooms to be placed at strategic points around the school. Although costly, inefficient, and unsightly, temporary classrooms will house students beyond the current walls of this overcrowded facility. The administration of the school, faculty, and the Superintendent are not interested in split sessions because they believe it to be a last ditch effort that is contrary to what is best for youngsters.

As the high school enrollment grows, staff is becoming more concerned with the impact of the dual pressures of program erosion and large class size on all students; especially those students at either end of the performance spectrum. Struggling students and those that need more attention from the teacher will be in large classes where it will be an overwhelming task to provide individualized instruction, special programs, and differentiated approaches to learning. High achieving students, those at the AP level, will also be adversely impacted. Currently AP classes are conducted with as few as 18-20 interested students. As the school continues to run out of space and mandatory courses absorb more classrooms, AP courses will diminish in availability. The school has already felt the pinch; AP Comparative Government was requested by 109 students and the class space allowed only 93. The school also could not accommodate all of the students requesting AP Macro and AP Microeconomics. This situation will worsen as enrollment increases.

Establishing a Planning Process

Upon the conclusion of the redistricting effort in the spring of 2004, the Superintendent and his staff immediately commenced a study of long range strategic planning methodologies. Although the two newest schools resolved the desperate need for immediate space for the K-8 population of students, strategic planning for the next five to ten years was necessary to resolve numerous other critical issues facing the School District.

During the summer months of July and August 2004, the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools considered various strategic planning models and processes. They agreed to engage the

strategic planning effort internally and without outside consultants. The effort would be led by the Superintendent with the support and participation of members of the Board of Education.

Also during the summer months, in preparation for the initiative, the Superintendent with confirmation by the Board of Education identified five broad areas of program and institutional need facing the school district:

- High school enrollment growth
- Future elementary academic programs
- Capital repairs to aging schools
- Inadequate repair and storage facilities for the school bus fleet
- Rental costs for the central administrative offices

These dominant issues were reduced to three (3) planning elements to be presented to the community:

1. Element I: High school enrollment growth
2. Element II: Future potential elementary programs
3. Element III: Operational and capital needs of the District

“Planning Our Future Together” – Engaging Community Dialogue

The second phase of the strategic planning effort was intended to introduce the need for planning to the Arlington community, to introduce the three elements of concern, and to receive ideas, interests, and responses from school district constituents. The initiative was entitled “Planning Our Future Together” in an effort to express the role of all community members in forging the future of their public schools. Soliciting their input was accomplished through a variety of well publicized events, meetings, and opportunities for community dialogue. Open forums were conducted in many of the schools. Presentations were given to faculty, staff and Parent Teacher Association groups. Press releases and local newspaper articles were circulated. The district’s periodical, “The Communicator”, dedicated numerous articles to the planning process. A professional quality fifteen minute video entitled, “Planning our Future Together” was produced by Marist students and presented throughout the community. Letters were sent to the parents of every student inviting them to participate in the planning process. Email, hand mail and voice mail addresses were established for the purpose of receiving and recording public input.

The forums and presentations engaged well over 1,200 participants. Periodicals, news articles, website, and letters reached tens of thousand of residents. In response, the School District received hundreds of comments, suggestions, concerns and recommendations.

SECTION TWO: THE COMMUNITY RESPONDS

Interpreting the Community's Response

On December 7, 2004, the Arlington Central Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools met to begin the process of reviewing, assessing, and understanding comments received from the Arlington community during the period of public input. The Board of Education met through the month of March 2004 to review community comments that had been solicited on the three (3) elements of critical growth. These three elements had evolved into the following more specific questions:

- Element One: High School Enrollment

High School enrollment, currently at about 3,100 students in grades 9 through 12, is anticipated to reach approximately 3,600 students within the next five (5) years. This exceeds the capacity of the school, which has been enlarged twice during its history. The functional capacity of the school is 2,800 students while the maximum capacity is estimated at about 3,300 students. How shall the population of high school students be accommodated?

- Element Two: Elementary Programs

Shall the Arlington School District consider expanding or adapting elementary school facilities to accommodate any or all of the following six (6) programs?

1. Dedicated science rooms
2. Elementary computer labs
3. Standardized grade spans
4. Full Day Kindergarten
5. Lower class sizes
6. International language instruction

- Element Three: District Operations

How shall the District resolve three (3) important operational issues?

1. Long term major capital repairs and renovations of school buildings
2. Outdated and undersized school bus repair facilities
3. Rental of private space for central administrative staff at a cost of \$200,000 per year

Hundreds of comments, opinions, ideas, suggestions, and interests were expressed through public testimony, written correspondence, emails, and recorded telephone voice messages. Each comment was printed, duplicated, and distributed to the members of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools prior to their deliberations.

As was to be expected, given the large volume of varied responses, some of the specific suggestions from parents, students, teachers, and other members of the community were in direct conflict with one another. For example, whereas some people may have suggested that the only appropriate response to the burgeoning high school enrollment was the construction of another independent high school, others suggested the very opposite; namely, another addition to the existing Arlington High School building.

The Board received specific suggestions as having been made in good will and with the intent of offering the Board sound potential options to consider. In fact, many of these more precise suggestions have been included in the proposed implementation plan. In most every case, however, contributors also suggested or identified the deeper interests and values that prompted their specific suggestion. In most cases, these deeper interests reflected the hopes, desires, and expectations for children's' education and safety.

The Board and the Superintendent were particularly keen to understand the deeper interests and expectations of the community. Although all of the suggestions were valued by the Board, the deeper, underlying interests (especially those regarding the quality of and extent of student services) were critical in prioritizing the future of educational programs. Thus, understanding the reasons *WHY* a parent might strongly suggest a new separate high school (such as desiring more personalized high school guidance services for students) were of great importance.

Essential Community Interests & Priorities

After considerable dialogue and a review of the comments of hundreds of individuals, the Board identified four (4) deep, consistent, and abiding interests that summarized the community's opinions:

1. Enriching High School Experiences

All high school students should be provided with opportunities for personally enriching experiences including but not limited to:

- a. Preserving and expanding excellent academic opportunities for all students.
- b. Providing a wide variety of opportunities for all students to become integrally involved in their high school careers.
- c. Ensuring that every student receives a personalized experience in which there are professionals providing significant and regular individualized guidance, academic counseling, and personal support.

2. Excellent Elementary Opportunities

Elementary students must receive excellent educational opportunities along with high levels of personalization. This should be accomplished through:

- a. Avoiding high class sizes in the early grades.
- b. Planning for expanded, high quality academic programs as annual budgets may allow.
- c. Conducting long term educational program planning for the five to ten year span currently being examined, while also giving consideration to the ten to twenty year period ahead.

3. Safeguard Students & Protect Public Investments

It is essential that the district safeguard students in their school buildings and school busses, and that the district protect the community's investment in all current facilities and equipment.

4. Affordability

The community expects the school district to implement its programs, building expansions, and capital repairs with sensitivity to affordability for taxpayers.

Criteria for Decisions

In addition to identifying these essential interests and in preparation for prioritizing and selecting from the broad array of options and strategies for the future, the Board of Education established four criteria to guide its decision making. These criteria are based upon the essential values and beliefs that were established along with the District Mission Statement in 2003. They also reflect a deep desire to be responsive to the Arlington community.

The Board of Education determined that solutions to the District's long range planning should be:

- A. Consistent with the expressed goals, beliefs, vision, and expectations of the Arlington School District
- B. Guided by the interests and concerns identified by the Arlington community
- C. Cost effective and affordable for Arlington taxpayers
- D. Consistent with educational research in meeting the needs of all students

Particular attention was drawn to the following segments of the District's values and beliefs:

- We believe that all students:
 - Thrive with personal attention
 - Grow through creative, participatory, and challenging experiences
 - Benefit from participation in fine and performing arts
 - Benefit from involvement in co-curricular activities
 - Benefit from physical activity and learn from athletics
- We want our children to:
 - Be recognized for their individual gifts
- Our school district will:
 - Inspire high student achievement that exceeds government standards
 - Provide child-centered instruction appropriate for various learning styles
 - Promote continuity and equity among district schools
- Our district goals include:
 - Accommodating enrollment and institutional growth in a manner that personalizes the educational experience of every student and is consistent with the district mission.

Planning Element One: High School Enrollment

Considerable discussion and deliberation were engaged by the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools in summarizing the priorities of the community as represented by the commentary and suggestions that had been received. There was, however, virtually unanimous agreement from all quarters that the School District must address the enrollment growth of high

school students and the lack of capacity at Arlington High School. Without question, this was the dominant issue raised at each forum and identified in almost all written correspondence.

Three (3) general approaches were identified as potential solutions:

1. Addition to the existing Arlington High School
2. Creation of a second high school within the district
3. Reorganizing grade ranges to remove grade 9 from the existing high school.

Each general approach also had a variety of options and variations.

One approach was immediately and unanimously rejected by the Board of Education, in large measure because the solutions were contradictory to the mission and values of the District and inconsistent with the underlying interests of parents and community members. Without dissent, the Board discarded all options which called for the removal of students in grade nine from the high school and reconfiguration of grades. The four rejected options were:

1. Grade 9 to be removed to LMS (and new middle school to be built)
2. Grade 9 moved to 3 Middle Schools (to include grades 7 – 9)
3. Grade 9 moved to 3 Middle Schools (to include grades 6 – 9)
4. Addition to AHS with Grade 9 segregated in a separate building

Unlike the other models of school organization selected for further review, these four options were considered “not to be child centered.” They were proposed as solutions that were number oriented (in terms of both capacity of schools and costs of construction) and had no redeeming educational orientation. Taking grade 9 out of the high school span, and/or including grade 9 students with middle school students, was not deemed educationally, behaviorally, or developmentally appropriate.

The primary attributes of these proposals were related to the somewhat lower cost of constructing middle schools or elementary schools instead of high school space. The Board of Education along with the Superintendent of Schools perceived no educational benefit or any application of the district’s values to these solutions. In addition, long term savings, if any, were marginal.

Testimony was also provided by District administrators and Board members who were present during the years in which grade nine and portions of grade 10 Arlington students were housed in LaGrange Middle School, which was temporarily renamed “South Campus”. Significant negative results were directly attributed to removing ninth and tenth grade students from the traditional 9-12 span and segregating them to an off campus alternate site. These included:

- Inaccessibility of honors and AP courses
- Absence of student role models from upper grades
- Significant student misbehavior
- Limited perspectives on opportunities for success
- Lack of school identity
- Barriers to participation in high school co-curricular activities and interscholastic sports
- Inappropriate placement of older students in the ninth grade setting due to retention (and multiple year retentions) of those who fail to be promoted to grade 10

It was also noted that New York State academic standards and the federal “No Child Left Behind” academic models consider Grade 9 students to be “high school” students in schools consisting of grades 9 – 12. No research is evident that promotes a modification of the standard four (4) grades of high school.

Testimony was provided to the Board, primarily from middle school administrators and the Superintendent, regarding the inadvisability of moving grade 9 students into middle schools, whether organized in spans of grades 7 through 9 or in spans of grades 6 through 9. These comments included the following observations:

- It is inconsistent with 25 years of middle school research confirming grades 6-8.
- The New York state middle school educational model specifically incorporates grades 5-8 or 6-8.
- Educational, emotional, and developmental differences are quite significant between students in grade 9 and those in grades 6 and 7.
- It is likely to lead to reiteration of academic and behavioral problems inherent in the “South Campus” solution of the past.
- The social maturity of eleven and twelve year olds (grade 6) and repeating ninth graders, who can be fifteen and sixteen years old, or older, is too vast to be bridged effectively in one school setting.

In addition to these grade reconfiguration options, another option (to reuse both LaGrange Middle School AND Arlington Middle School as small 9-12 high schools) was also eliminated from consideration. The Board and the Superintendent concluded that the:

- Cost of facility construction was excessive
- Introduction of two (2) schools of choice was too complex
- Risks involved of successfully and efficiently filling each of three high schools to capacity at this time were too great
- Cost of expanding interscholastic and co-curricular opportunities for students in three (3) high schools exceeded the capacity of near term budgets.

It was noted that in the event that additional high school space is required in the long term future (10 to 20 years); such options may prove to be cost effective and programmatically viable. Also, replacing both Arlington Middle School AND LaGrange Middle School would present favorable opportunities for eliminating the splitting of some elementary fifth grade classes to different middle schools.

Charge to the Superintendent Element One: High School Enrollment

It was the unanimous agreement of the Board that four (4) options for resolution of High School Enrollment should be examined and developed by the Superintendent of Schools for further consideration by the Board of Education.

The four (4) options included:

1. Arlington High School expanded to accommodate the total high school enrollment
2. New High School, newly constructed to accommodate half the total high school enrollment
3. LMS reconstituted as a small high school with AHS accommodating the majority of high school enrollment
4. LMS expanded as a large high school to accommodate half of the total high school enrollment.

Charge to the Superintendent: Elements Two and Three

Public opinion relative to Planning Elements Two and Three was more mixed. In consideration of the issues of program, space for additional elementary programs and the three operational concerns, the Board gave direction to the Superintendent of Schools in the following "charge".

1. Elementary Program Space

Five of the six elementary program space options are to be removed from consideration with respect to facility expansion. These elementary school suggestions are seen to have potential programmatic merit and are to be pursued as requests to the Board of Education over time, with sufficient educational research and planning, and through the process of annual budgetary consideration. The option for full day kindergarten was quite attractive to many families, especially those with two working parents. It was also deemed important by educators who understand that more thorough early childhood intervention provides the best remedy for potential learning deficits. Unlike other elementary programs that can be introduced within existing classroom space, full day kindergarten can not be accommodated without additional classrooms. On the basis of enrollment in September 2005, approximately 14 additional classrooms would be required.

2. Overlook/Titusville Grade Spans

The study, planning, and budgetary preparation for the implementation of consistent grade spans (Kindergarten through grade five) at both Titusville School and Overlook School shall proceed as a potential component of a school building referendum. No further consideration will be given to expanding the grade spans at either Traver Road School or D'Aquanni West Road School. It was determined that community sentiment was strong to maintain the split spans and that Traver Road's lack of playground space would make physical education and recreation there somewhat difficult.

3. School District Operations

All three aspects of planning for District Operations -- school capital repairs, school bus repair facilities, and resolution to the rental of office space for central administrative and office staff -- are to receive continued planning, study, and consideration as a potential component of a school building referendum.

SECTION THREE: FOUR FINAL HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVES

Comparative Costs of Construction

The architectural and engineering firm, Clark Patterson Associates (CPA) was engaged to assist the school district in its planning efforts. Initially, they conducted an analysis of the potential costs of construction, land acquisition, and state aid of the four options chosen by the Board of Education for resolution of high school enrollment growth. An independent study prepared by CPA is attached to this report as Appendix A-4.

Initial estimates for the expansion of the existing high school, without specific information about the programs or specific needs of the school district were in the neighborhood of \$ 40 to \$45 million. State aid was anticipated to be at the maximum level of 66% on the entire cost.

The most expensive option, by far, would be the construction of a new additional high school building on a new site. Initial estimates, without reference to any specific facility or program requirements (which would increase construction costs) were in the range of \$82 - \$87 million. Inclusive of land acquisition costs. For such a project, state aid would be lower than the other options, since state aid is not provided for such costs as land acquisition, non-instructional areas, maintenance and operational areas, etc.

Modification and acquisition of the LaGrange Middle School to become an independent high school had two variations: as a large school accommodating half of Arlington High School's population and as a smaller school housing perhaps 1,000 students. Both scenarios would require the construction of a new middle school to replace LaGrange including the acquisition of appropriate land.

The engineering estimates for these options, including the costs of a new middle school were \$66 to \$71 million for a large high school and \$59 to \$64 million for a small high school.

All of the initial estimates were understood to be used for comparative purposes only with the understanding that each cost estimate would have to be adjusted to accommodate the variety and quality of Arlington's unique programs.

Preliminary Estimates of Four High School Options

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| • New high school, new location serving one half population | \$82 - \$87 million |
| • LMS as a large high school with new middle school | \$66 - \$71 million |
| • LMS as a small high school with new middle school | \$59 - \$64 million |
| • Expansion of existing Arlington High School | \$40 - \$45 million |

Visitations to Select High Schools

Simultaneous to the development of initial cost estimates, a large cadre of community members visited select schools in the nearby New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York State. Ten specific schools were chosen on the basis of their high academic performance, similar to that of Arlington High School. Some of the schools were large, in excess of 3,000 students, and had been expanded during periods of enrollment growth. Others were somewhat smaller occurring in communities that responded to enrollment growth by splitting their high school enrollment and creating a second high school.

The ten high schools visited in this study included:

1. Webster Thomas High School, Webster, NY
2. Webster Schroeder High School, Webster, NY
3. Pittsford Southerland High School Pittsford, NY
4. Pittsford Mendon High School, Pittsford, NY
5. West Windsor Plainsboro High School North, Plainsboro, NJ
6. West Windsor Plainsboro High School South, Plainsboro, NJ
7. Greenwich High School, Greenwich, CT
8. Brockton High School, Brockton, MA
9. Sachem High School, Sachem, NY
10. Benjamin N. Cardozo High School, Bayside, NY

The visitation teams were warmly greeted in each of the schools. Host school administrators and staff were exceedingly generous with their time, information, and candidness. Each of the schools was, as anticipated, highly effective and very proud of their fine reputations.

Members of the Arlington visitation teams were diverse and represented many of the school community's constituents. Participation was unrestricted; individual participants varied slightly from trip to trip. Representatives included:

- Members of the Board of Education
- Superintendent of Schools
- Assistant Superintendents
- High School Principal
- High School Assistant Principals
- High School Coordinators
- Teachers
- Parents
- PTA Leaders
- Guidance Personnel

Lessons Learned from Visitations to Other High Schools

The members of the visitation teams offered twenty four (24) "lessons" that they believed were learned from the school districts visited that were appropriate to the planning for Arlington:

1. Arlington High School is a successful school with an engaged community that is unique and different in many ways from each of the schools visited. Arlington's size and growth need to be addressed in a unique manner as well.
2. All options solving high school enrollment growth present significant challenges which will require attention, resources, and community commitment to resolve.

3. Once committed to a solution to high school enrollment, successful school communities rally around the decision and ensure that its implementation and serves the unique interests of their students.
4. School spirit can be developed and promoted among students even within very large high schools and divided high schools. This high level of school spirit is reflected in attendance at sports, music, and arts events and appears to be a very important element in enriching the high school experience for students. Efforts to promote high school participation, engagement, and school spirit should begin in the middle school grades.
5. Each of the schools that were visited to date has community oriented physical plant enhancements lacking at Arlington (e.g. pools, artificial field turf, lighted outdoor sports facilities, community sized theatre style auditoriums).
6. A high school could potentially offer unique supplementary educational opportunities for younger students in the district that they would not otherwise have available to them.
7. Activities at high school facilities for elementary and middle school students can develop district-wide identity and spirit as well as provide opportunities for younger students to work with older students and become familiar with the high school.
8. Student support services can be provided in an assortment of ways by people in a variety of roles (e.g., college office, career center, deans).
9. A house administrative structure is one way, but not the only way, to personalize a child's educational experience in a large high school.
10. Some additional sports, arts, and co-curricular opportunities can be added to the already large array of opportunities currently available at AHS if the school remains as one.
11. Successful guidance ratios, even in small high schools, are in the low 200 to 1 ratio of students to counselors.
12. Highly successful small high schools have a student to administrator ratio as low as 300:1.
13. Often, the definition of a "small high school" is that there exists an administrator who knows and provides proactive guidance to each student.
14. Little evidence is available to determine if the cost of dividing a large district into two high schools has a more beneficial impact on a majority of students than adding more and diverse opportunities to a single high school.
15. The cost of operating multiple high schools will be greater than the cost of operating a single school, even after it is enlarged and services to students are expanded.
16. Unless a school district is able to sustain the cost of multiple high school staff and operations, students may in fact have fewer opportunities available if budget cuts require program or service reductions.
17. The added costs of creating and operating a second high school (that duplicates all programs and services) may be so great as to postpone the improvement of direct services to students

(such as guidance counselors) far longer than would have been possible had the school been kept whole.

18. Even if Arlington High School were to be divided equally into two schools, both reconfigured schools will remain among the largest high schools in New York State and would likely continue to implement "small school" initiatives to improve the personalization of the high school experience for every student.
19. School districts that have recently created two distinct high schools commit a significant amount of awareness, energy, and resources to ensuring that programs and services are nearly "identical" at both schools.
20. School districts that have created two distinct high schools in the past (20-30 years) are more relaxed about the differences between schools and appear to foster unique cultures as long as both are perceived to have similar, suitable resources.
21. Dividing high school enrollments into two distinct schools is best accomplished over time as a "transition" rather than abruptly as a "split".
22. Districts that have created multiple high schools retain many joint student activities and programs and interschool support efforts in order to promote a sense of a single, unified school district community.
23. Having multiple schools undoubtedly increases the number of competitive, elite opportunities for students in such areas as:
 - Participation and leadership in team sports that are limited in size
 - Participation in elective positions in organizations that are limited in size
 - Student Government
 - Yearbook
 - Newspaper
 - National Honor Society
 - Leads in plays, musicals

Some student activities (e.g. marching band) have decreased participation as other opportunities for student involvement increase.

24. Anecdotal reports suggest that multiple high schools also engage more students in other school activities and programs than large single high schools. However, the difference in the rate of student participation as well as the depth and benefit of that participation is difficult if not impossible to measure.

Consistent Themes in Recently Divided High Schools

Members of the visitation teams noted consistent themes evident, to one degree or another, in each of the school districts in which a large single growing high school was divided into two high schools. Despite the effectiveness and success of each school, an enormous amount of time, money, effort and school district resources were expended in the attempt to make the old and new schools "exactly" equivalent in programs, services, and public perception. In most cases, some degree of tension existed in the schools and within the community because the old and new schools were in fact not perceived as being equivalent.

The older of the two schools (often far more threadbare and “well used”) might have been seen as the stepchild of the district, left behind in the promotion of the new state-of-the-art facility. Also, the division of students into two high schools had the potential of a somewhat negative, divisive impact on those communities that had previously enjoyed a unitary history, legacy, and common identity. In some situations, the differences in social class and ethnicity of students were accentuated and provided an additional element of potential division in the community.

The strong consensus of the school visitation team members was that division of Arlington High School would encounter similar challenges and risks that would not be beneficial to the students or the Arlington community. The cost in terms of actual funds and misdirected human capital seemed far too great to the visiting team members than the nominal gains achieved by the bifurcation of the high school population.

An Effective, Personalized Large High School

Of particular interest to the visitation team was Greenwich High School, Greenwich, Connecticut. This large school (enrollment approximately 3,000 students in grades 9-12) enjoyed an excellent reputation for high academic achievement, strong school spirit and community support and a significant level of student engagement and personalization. The school was organized around five (5) internal divisions (“Houses”) each containing students in grade 9-12. Each house contained administrators, guidance counselors, and other support personnel that remained attached to students and parents for the entire four year high school career of students. These divisions also provided a singular point of contact and a single permanent location for parents and students guidance, assistance, and support.

At Greenwich, very little academic instruction was conducted within the “house”, virtually none beyond the sophomore year. However, students with unique educational needs were scheduled more often within the house to maximize dialogue and planning among teachers.

Greenwich’s success at personalizing the educational experience seemed due in part by a very favorable ratio of students to guidance counselors (less than 200 to 1), a “College and Career Center”, decentralized “House” administrative centers, and the active engagement of students in the activities of the school.

SECTION FOUR: CONSIDERING EXPANSION OF AHS

Board of Education Deliberations

As the Board of Education received cost comparison data from Clark Patterson Associates (CPA) and anecdotal reports after each school visitation, it began to discuss and evaluate the four options it had identified for the resolution of the overcrowding at Arlington High School. It became apparent to the members of the Board and the Superintendent of Schools that the costs of creating a second high school were not just limited to initial construction. A second high school would also be very costly in terms of annual operations, the divisive impact on the community, and the potential of diminished services to students.

Presented with the information provided by the architects and engineers from Clark Patterson Associated and the comments and “lessons” learned from the scores of individuals participating in the visitation of other school districts, the Board of Education unanimously issued a Directive to the Superintendent of Schools on March 22, 2005 that reflected their strong tendency to pursue the expansion of the existing Arlington High School:

March 22, 2005 – Directive to Superintendent of Schools

The Superintendent of Schools is directed to further investigate the option of expanding Arlington High School to accommodate increased student enrollment, and to bring forth to the Board a comprehensive proposal including:

- Construction Costs
- Expansion Alternatives
- Administrative Structure
- Operational Costs

The proposal must address the following issues:

- Sufficient space to accommodate student enrollment for the next 10 years
- Organizational structure to promote a small school environment, and personalized educational experiences for Arlington students
- Services to students that are individualized, consistent, comprehensive and personalized
- An environment where all students may be engaged in significant, meaningful activities that promote leadership and other life skills
- Comprehensive course offerings that exceed the existing offerings
- Community-oriented offerings that will connect Arlington with its constituent towns
- Options for dealing with additional growth beyond the 10-year period

The proposal should be presented to the Board of Education by fall of 2005.

SECTION FIVE: EXCELLENCE THROUGH GROWTH

The Superintendent's Response

A Window of Opportunity

Arlington High School has for many years been regarded as an excellent institution. It has, along with its companion elementary and middle schools, become a magnet for families moving to the area who are desirous of a superior education for their children. In addition to anecdotal evidence and the testimony of students and their parents, New York State Regents test scores, College Board scores, Advanced Placement achievements, national rankings, and other independent measures confirm the well deserved excellent reputation.

Nevertheless, any institution and every human endeavor can be improved. Such improvement is all the more relevant as the school continues to grow. In the case of Arlington High School, this should be seen as transitioning from an already good school to one of unique distinction. The increase in enrollment at the school, along with the concomitant expansion of facilities, provides a unique opportunity to pursue further excellence. A window of opportunity exists to

- accommodate increased enrollment AND
- increase the
 - Personalization
 - Participation, and
 - Success of students

The Superintendent is convinced that this can be accomplished efficiently, effectively and at a fraction of the cost of creating a second high school. These intentions are also very much in accordance with the School District's credo of being "Committed to the success of each child" and the expressed values and beliefs of the community.

An expansion of physical space is critically necessary to accommodate all of the students now at Arlington High School as well as those that will be arriving shortly. Not only is additional space needed to accommodate more children, but also to maintain the academic offerings required by the State of New York and expected by the students and families of the Arlington community.

Additional space alone, however, is insufficient to deliver the qualitative programs and services that have been the historical hallmark of the school. The large and growing enrollment of the school could become a significant barrier to the provision of a meaningful, personalized, and successful educational experience. Rather, with careful and intentional planning, the administration, and faculty intend to capitalize on the growth of the student body and expand and improve services.

Better Than Two Schools

A frequent query in the study of the current popularity of small schools (commonly defined as approximately 500 students in grades 9 through 12) is whether they will be able to provide the quality and array of academic opportunities as might be available in a large school. Similarly, questions are raised as to whether a small school can offer the co-curricular and interscholastic opportunities so valuable for personal growth and leadership development that are critical to the maturation of adolescent young men and women. The large school, not the small school, is the standard against which these questions are raised

It is the strong belief of this writer, his administrative team, and high school faculty, that a reorganization of the structure of the school, along with a modest expansion of services, will yield an environment far superior to that of a small school. The opportunities and programs offered at Arlington High School can be delivered in a far more cost efficient and effective manner than could ever be provided in smaller schools.

Some have suggested that Arlington High School is already too big and that an additional high school should be built. The enormous additional costs for construction and the staggering additional annual costs of operation would exacerbate the local tax base and would likely run the risk of being unsustainable in the future. The impact of such an expensive plan (as has been witnessed in other communities) would most likely cause the elimination of academic courses and the reduction of student programs that are credited for the strong reputation of the school.

And, the construction of an additional high school would still not yield small high schools by any definition of the term. Dividing the high school population into two equal divisions would still yield two high schools of 1,800 students. This is far beyond the model definition of small schools and would yield questionable direct benefit to students that could not be delivered within the larger school. Some may look to the duplication of sports teams and other elite positions of leadership and recognition that would accrue to having two high schools (such as two basketball teams, two valedictorians, etc.) as reason enough to pursue the bifurcation of the existing school. However the number of children impacted by such a change is so very small given the current high levels of participation in activities that it would be inconceivable to justify the cost of another high school on these opportunities alone.

Additionally, it is the intent of the strategic plan for the high school to increase opportunities for students (including elite opportunities in athletics and recognitions), and to implement systems that strongly encourage more of them to engage in meaningful activities. If successful in this endeavor, and in the increased personalization of services, there is little doubt that an enlarged Arlington High School will be far better for students and taxpayers than two independent high schools.

Twin high schools would also become divisive for students, families, and neighbors. Operating three middle schools would require at least one of them to send some children to the old school and others to the new high school. Such divisions, loss of a sense of caring, and the intense comparisons of schools (which can not be avoided as students enter middle schools from some of Arlington's elementary schools) can be avoided by a singular high school.

Economic Advantage

In addition to being the best alternative for students and the community, adding to the current high school is far more advantageous for Arlington taxpayers. Cost estimates of new construction and land acquisition for an additional new high school far exceed the costs of any other solution, pegged at between \$90 and \$100 million. These costs exceed the expansion proposal by approximately \$45 million. This additional cost would impact taxpayers for the anticipated 30 year life of the debt service, potentially limiting the community's ability to raise future funds for capital repairs, building replacements, or future expansion.

The two alternates to building a new high school that were contemplated by the school Board (transforming an existing middle school into a high school and building a new middle school) do lower the initial construction costs by a small margin. However, they too remain quite expensive, have larger annual operational costs, and deemed unnecessary given the choice of expanding the current building.

Annual operating costs for two high schools would also be exceedingly and unnecessarily expensive. Although it is true that many teachers would transfer from the old high school to the new high school, many new professional and support staff positions would be required in order to operate two independent schools. The great advantage of economic efficiency would be lost.

The loss of financial efficiency occurs due to the duplication of critical services that cannot be transferred or divided: two libraries, two attendance services, two nursing suites, two sets of security personnel, maintenance, grounds, switchboard, etc. Some estimates of additional operating costs necessary to run a second high school have been assembled on the basis of our recent experience of opening our two large new schools. The annual and start up costs to operate a second high school would include:

Selected Costs of Operating a Second High School

Second Library --

<i>Ongoing personnel</i>	<i>3 Staff</i>	<i>\$ 140,000</i>
<i>Initial acquisitions</i>		
<i>Initial equipment</i>		
<i>Ongoing book replacement/budget</i>		<i>\$ 30,000</i>
		<i>\$ 170,000</i>

Building Support -- \$1,000,000

<i>Insurance</i>		<i>\$ 50,000</i>
<i>Electricity</i>		<i>150,000</i>
<i>Fuel Oil</i>		<i>150,000</i>
<i>Custodial Staff (11)</i>		<i>410,000</i>
<i>Maintenance Staff (1)</i>		<i>40,000</i>
<i>Groundskeepers (2)</i>		<i>15,000</i>
<i>Cleaning & Repair, Supplies/Services</i>		<i>100,000</i>
<i>Refuse</i>		<i>25,000</i>

Educational & Student Programs -- \$ 1,630,000

<i>Net increase Faculty (10% = 17)</i>		<i>\$ 1,020,000</i>
<i>(after distribution)</i>		
<i>Technology & Tech Crew Operations</i>		<i>60,000</i>
<i>Duplication of Co-Curricular (75%)</i>		<i>190,000</i>
<i>Duplication of Interscholastic (75%)</i>		<i>360,000</i>

Miscellaneous -- \$210,000

<i>Security/Monitors (5)</i>		<i>\$ 95,000</i>
<i>Secretaries (2)</i>		<i>60,000</i>
<i>Additional equipment rental</i>		<i>25,000</i>
<i>Other contractual expenses</i>		<i>30,000</i>

GRAND TOTAL Estimated annual additional cost of second high school \$ 3,010, 000.00

Start-up costs for initial materials, supplies, equipment are not included in the figures above. Library acquisitions alone, for example, could easily total \$ 450,000 based upon recent expenses for the new Union Vale Middle School library; high school library books, reference materials and periodicals should be approximately \$350,000 and initial equipment and computerization, another \$100,000.

Operating a second high school that educates half of Arlington's students could cost the district and taxpayers up to \$3 million more each year than expanding the existing school. Even at less than \$ 3 million additional per year, the educational improvements for students, if any at all, would be exceedingly difficult to justify given the marginal extra costs of the alternative of expanding the existing school.

These additional costs, both in initial construction and annual operational expenses, are deemed to have little, if any, positive impact on students and the quality of education provided that staffing the expanded school is implemented as scheduled.

Nevertheless, if for some reason the community preferred to open and operate a second high school serving half of the population, the existing school would then possess perhaps 100,000 square feet of unused vacant space. Even if some of this space were utilized as a permanent central office, this would account for only 15,000 to 20,000 square feet, leaving a vast area still vacant and unused. The School District will have overbuilt to meet its current and foreseeable needs.

Another economic advantage exists for the expansion of the existing school as opposed to the opening of a second high school in terms of the optional and incremental costs of future additional staff. As with the opening of Vail Farm and Union Vale Middle School, the preponderance of additional costs hit the 2004-2005 operating budget. An enormous increase, all at once, was the inevitable outcome of opening two new schools on September 1, 2004. The expansion plan provides some flexibility in budgeting that the opening of a new school does not provide. If financial conditions do not support the full implementation of the proposed staffing, the building and program could continue without major setbacks. This can not be said for the opening of a new school which must be fully operational and equitable on day one.

Sound Decision for Future Generations

All of the demographic information and forecasts of student enrollment obtained by the School District reflect, at best, a ten year period of enrollment. The Bishop study (Appendix B-3) indicates that the most probable Arlington High School enrollment will reach 3,600 within the ten year period 2004–2005 through 2013–2014. The forecasts under this “high” scenario of projection appear accurate in that both the 2004–2005 and the 2005–2006 actual enrollments have been at or above Bishop’s “high” projections for the high school population. In fact, actual enrollment in the 2005–2006 school year are very close to the maximum capacity of the school leaving no room and no scheduling flexibility in future years. There is then a high level of confidence that the forecasts are generally accurate for the ten year period. Appendices C and D reflect Bishop’s three enrollment forecasts in graphic form and the 2005-2006 actual enrollment is compared to Bishop’s projections in chart form, respectively.

Nevertheless, given the growth history of the School District and Dutchess County, the question arises, “How will the school district handle high school enrollment if it exceeds the 3,600 projected through 2013- 2014?” Conversely, one might also ask what if economic and demographic conditions change and the enrollment at the high school drops well below the 3,600? Both are reasonable questions. Naturally, future generations of Arlington community members will have to decide how to handle these conditions if in fact they arise. However, as we look forward today, sound planning

requires potential answers to these questions to assure voters that the School District has invested wisely in the expansion of its largest school facility.

What if Enrollment Exceeds Forecasts?

In the event that the high school enrollment exceeds the projected 3,600 students, a number of alternative measures and actions can be considered. The success of the educational program over the next ten years within an expanded AHS may be a critical variable in how the community decides to proceed. Nevertheless, if faced with that dilemma today, several viable options could be considered.

The current expansion proposed for the high school establishes a **functional** capacity of 3,600 students, the number of children anticipated. The functional capacity of a facility is a nationwide standard that allows for reasonable class size, a good array of subject matter offerings, and flexibility in scheduling to meet the predominance of student needs and requests. Functional capacity is traditionally 85% of maximum capacity of a school building. At maximum capacity class sizes become larger, subject matter offerings become more difficult to offer, and scheduling students becomes highly problematic. Nevertheless, with maximum capacity of 4,235 (100% of capacity) there would be room for up to 635 students before academic gridlock reoccurs. If the additional growth in enrollment is in the neighborhood of 400 students or so (total 4,000 or about 95% of capacity), the school can operate as it has in the past few years - crowded but operational.

Three Potential Future Options:

1. Another Expansion

In the event that student enrollment far exceeds current forecasts, which may conceivably occur 15 to 20 years into the future, the School District will have at least three potential options. As mentioned earlier, the success of the proposed 2005 addition to the high school in terms of student academic success, increased participation in school activities, and personalization will be a significant factor in any consideration to expand the facility yet again. If necessary and advisable, however, the facility could be expanded yet again.

The school is land locked on the west by wet lands, the south by highway route 55 giving no possible room for expansion. On the north and east however there are real possibilities for growth. North of the high school lies the Baird State Park, owned and operated by the New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic preservation. Some possibility of land acquisition from the state might be remotely possible if the need were marginal, used for common recreational purposes, and if wet lands were not intruded. Given the fine array of existing sports fields at the high school, little additional land would probably be required. This assumes that the community would not wish to sacrifice sports fields for another building addition on owned land, which would be possible but would clearly begin to alter the suburban nature of the school campus.

More likely is expansion to the east. There is a narrow but suitable strip of land between the east wing of the school and the quickly rising hill that borders the Taconic Parkway that would be quite suitable for expansion of the school. This would require the acquisition of at least two (2) parcels of land and two (2) residences. This option becomes far more viable if the entrance to the school is moved to be opposite Stringham Road. This initiative, considered by the LaGrange community, would require the acquisition of three (3) to four (4) parcels of land and two (2) buildings in the same general area that the school could be expanded. A simple drawing of this area and the acquisitions required for a new entrance are included in this report.

The nature of the expansion could take many forms; an independent building of classrooms, a connected wing, or perhaps an auxiliary facility for which there is no room on the original campus.

2. An Additional Small High School

Early in the consideration of the current expansion, ideas were floated to create one or two additional small high schools within Arlington. These could be accomplished by reverting Arlington Middle School to its original function of a high school. Although enrollment there would need to be small, say 500 to 600 students, it could be highly effective in drawing off sufficient students to relieve overcrowding at the current facility.

The physical constraints and advantages of the AMS building and site would have to be considered in establishing a program for the school. With only one major sports field, athletic opportunities (even if renovated with artificial turf and night lights) would be also be limited. However, the presence of a fine stage, large industrial arts shops, and a rich tradition in arts education could guide the District in establishing a school of choice with offerings and a small environment that would be highly attractive to many families.

A similar or competing proposal could be made for the LaGrange Middle School building. Either option would then require the construction of a new middle school on the scale and scope of the new Union Vale Middle School. Also, some consideration could be given to operating an “Alternative High School” for students struggling in the normal academic setting.

Consideration of these alternatives in 2005 was abandoned due to the costs of both construction and transportation and the concern that insufficient students would be interested in attending a different high school. In the future, however, with the potential of an even larger population of high school age students, there could be a critical mass of students that would make this option viable.

3. Construction of a new small high school

The community could again consider the possibility of constructing a new high school on a new campus. Enrollment projections at that time would determine the size of such a facility. Irrespective of the enrollment capacity of a new building (a smaller new high school might leave sufficient students in the existing building to justify its continued sole use as a high school) the existing high school building is large enough to easily divide it into two (2) distinct and separate schools. (This concept is again mentioned in the discussion of enrollments that fall dramatically.) Thus, if Arlington should ever grow to enroll 5,000 high school students, a new facility for 2,500 (or fewer) students could be constructed and 2,500 students could remain at the existing facility. The remaining capacity could easily be recreated as a separate middle school, elementary school, or alternative school. The extra space could also be used to expand offerings in the areas of vocational preparation which require expansive space for shops, kitchens, and laboratories.

What if Future Enrollment Decreases?

Given the history of the School District and the vast areas of open land not yet developed, it is difficult to believe that school enrollments will drop dramatically in the long term. No one can adequately anticipate future economic and demographic conditions such as birth rates, housing costs, world stability, etc. for school construction purposes. However, circumstances could conceivably create a downturn in residential growth, family size, and enrollment of school age children in Dutchess County.

The questions then become, “Has the School District overbuilt at the high school?” and “How would such space be used if the enrollment drops?” As stated, the enrollment of the high school is

projected to slightly exceed 3,600 students within the next few years. If the proposed addition is constructed, the functional capacity will be 3,600 students. If the enrollment some day falls below that figure, how drastic an enrollment decline would spur the community to judge that the building is then too large?

Common experience leads one to anticipate that small to moderate enrollment declines would not be cause to rethink the utility of the high school building. If say, the enrollment drops by 10% or 360 students (a rather significant decline) the school would still serve 3,240 students; Bishop's "low" enrollment projection. This is still a rather healthy population of adolescents. Room use could be used for expanded programs and/or to lower class size. In the current expansion, as in the previous 1995 expansion, many requests from faculty, parents, and students could not be accommodated. With a slight or moderate decline in population such program considerations become possible. These might include expanded occupational training opportunities such as culinary arts, engineering, child care, nursing, and others.

It is difficult to imagine a drop in enrollment of high school students in the range of 25% to 50%. At these levels of enrollment (perhaps a generation or two into the future) some reconsideration of the high school space would be in order. Even if this were to occur, however, the School District will be secure in its investment in the enlarged building.

Today's oldest school buildings will be nearing 100 years old (Arthur S. May), 90 years old (Arlington Middle School) and 85 years old (Traver Road). Despite annual maintenance and periodic capital investment, an assessment will eventually be made as to whether schools that old will continue to be cost effective to remain on line. Two of the schools are multi-storied and without an elevator for handicap accessibility; one of these, the Arthur S. May School, the oldest in the District, has had numerous additions over time and none are on the same level. Without complete reconstruction, this school will always be inaccessible to students, teachers, and parents with physical disabilities. In addition, the District continues to use dozens of portable, prefabricated, and temporary classrooms, many of which will have long surpassed their useful lives. This is particularly true of the units at the Beekman School. At this point in history, serious consideration should be given to abandoning these high maintenance classrooms, all of which operate on electric heat.

If enrollment at the expanded high school drops precipitously and permanently, the school could very easily be divided into two completely separate facilities. The physical layout would enable two schools to operate each with their own complete cafeterias, offices, stages, gymnasiums, and classrooms. The excess space, if available, could find a highly valuable use replacing some of the old temporary classrooms or perhaps the oldest school buildings.

SECTION SIX: GATHERING THE BEST IDEAS FOR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

Considering Every Proposal, Listening to Every Voice

In order to assure that the planning of an expanded AHS considered every positive and useful idea and to ensure that the voice of every constituent group had been heard, a brainstorming process was engaged to receive, record, and coordinate suggestions. The project was managed by the Superintendent of Schools; the Principal of Arlington High School, Mr. Brooks; and Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Robert Markarian. A facilitator, Mr. George Cohen, was engaged to conduct the brainstorming sessions and interact directly with the participants.

Fourteen Questions Posed

The Superintendent posed fourteen critical questions to spark conversation and promote the generation of creative, usable ideas:

As the enrollment of AHS expands:

1. How do we increase the personalization of the overall educational experience for each student such that it meets or exceeds that which would have been received in a small school?
2. How do we expand interscholastic athletic opportunities for all students, especially at the varsity level for juniors and seniors?
3. How do we expand co-curricular experiences in order to involve more students for longer periods, and to engage them in significant leadership opportunities?
4. How might we expand academic course offerings and opportunities beyond what is currently provided?
5. How do we promote greater academic achievement at every grade?
6. How do we structure administrative and support services in order to personalize the educational experience and meet the needs of the “whole child”?
7. How do we provide a smoother, more successful transition for eighth graders into the high school?
8. How and when do we identify students who may be at risk for academic, behavioral, or emotional trouble? Who will intercede?
9. How do we engage more students in the life and spirit of the school?
10. How might we provide the parents of each child with a single, accessible, consistent point of contact with a professional who provides personalized oversight of the education of their child?
11. How might we expand, restructure, and redefine guidance services that become even more proactive, comprehensive, and effective and are also more manageable?
12. How might we create “small learning environments” for those students who would benefit from greater cross discipline dialogue among their teachers?
13. How do we establish AHS as the center of the “community” and create more public oriented offerings for Arlington residents?
14. How do we make AHS a familiar place that is the center of the educational community for students and families from Kindergarten through grade 8?

Three district study committees were assembled, each containing:

- AHS House Principal
- Academic Coordinator

- Three High School Teachers
- Seven Parents
 - Three with high school age students
 - Three with elementary age students
 - One with middle school age student
- Three high school students

The three study groups drew their participants from the geographic boundaries of the school district's three middle schools. Five members of each study group were also members of the "Core Committee" which acted as a direct liaison to the Superintendent and the project management team.

The large study groups each met on two occasions and brainstormed literally scores of suggestions and ideas for the expansion of services, programs, and facilities at AHS. The "Core Committee" met on numerous occasions to consolidate and prioritize recommendations. More than 45 community members from each geographic area and constituency within the school system participated in the activity.

In addition to this formal, organized effort, every member of the school district was invited to participate by sending their ideas to the Superintendent of Schools via email, land mail, or telephone voice mail.

The entire list of consolidated recommendations is attached as Appendix C, "Study Group Common Themes." The contributions and suggestions from the groups were organized around four (4) major outcomes:

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Creating a Personalized Environment | |
| a. Unanimous agreement | 8 contributions |
| b. Partial agreement | 6 contributions |
| c. Single responses | 24 contributions |
| 2. Expanding Interscholastic Athletic & Co-Curricular Activities | |
| a. Partial Agreement | 14 contributions |
| b. Single responses | 7 contributions |
| 3. Enhancing the Academic Experience | |
| a. Unanimous agreement | 24 contributions |
| b. Partial agreement | 13 contributions |
| c. Single responses | 18 contributions |
| 4. Involving the Entire Arlington Community | |
| a. Unanimous agreement | 16 contributions |
| b. Partial agreement | 9 contributions |
| c. Single responses | 24 contributions |
| 5. Topics that "Need Further Study" | 18 contributions |

The creativity, thoroughness, and productivity of the Study Groups exceeded the expectations of the management team. Their time, effort and commitment yielded scores of valuable and interesting suggestions that should be seriously considered and implemented.

The precise specificity of some of the recommendations makes them difficult to include and pursue in the scope of a major recommendation to the Board of Education by the Superintendent of Schools. In order to carry forward the indented outcomes and expectations of many of these more precise recommendations, the Superintendent has attempted to propose reforms and program expansions that are broad, systemic improvements, well suited to pursue more specific actions.

For example, six contributions were included under the outcome of “Creating a Personalized Environment” including:

- 1.3 *Changes in Freshman Orientation*
 - 1.3.1.1 *Take place in Spring or Fall (not summer)*
 - 1.3.1.2 *As part of the school day*
 - 1.3.1.3 *Implement a night program for parents and incoming freshman earlier in the year*
- 2.3 *More elementary and middle school activities at the High School*
- 3.16 *Early AHS orientation to middle school and Elementary students*

In response to these common ideas the Superintendent has recommended a systemic expansion through the creation of an office of “Freshman Transition Coordinator”. The intention is to provide specific attention to this need through the review of ideas presented by the Study Groups as well as those that may arise in the future from students, parents, and faculty.

Similar systemic responses have been made in the form of the Activities Engagement Director, guidance expansion and decentralization, and the decentralization of school administration.

What do Students think?

Survey of Arlington High School Student Attitudes

In addition to soliciting specific ideas and suggestions for the expansion and improvement of programs at AHS, the Superintendent also wished to obtain direct feedback from the current student body at the school.

In order to reach beyond our individual views of student satisfaction (based on our day to day interactions) and in order to develop a deeper understanding about the attitudes of all students an opinion survey instrument was developed and implemented. The survey attempted to measure the attitudes and views of the entire student body about their experiences at Arlington High School such that the collective voice of the student body might assist the community in planning for the future of their school.

The generally expressed concern about a large high school is that students may not receive the personalization that is essential for sound adolescent development or have opportunities to participate in significant activities that often define a high quality secondary school experience. Parental worries about students “falling through the cracks” or being “lost in the crowd” suggest that the School District’s focus on a “Commitment to the Success of Each Child” and its efforts to improve the personalization of school experiences are consistent with community interests and expectations.

Since most of the adults in the community appear to have graduated from high schools much smaller than Arlington High School, it is understandable that we perceive our own positive high school experiences as the best model for our children. Attending smaller schools enabled many adults to participate in the popular, traditional activities of high school life that we have come to think are the primary hallmarks of a successful experience. Playing on the football team, being a cheerleader,

president of the student government or National Honor Society are such premier opportunities that may be more difficult to achieve in a large high school which offers only one of each of these types of group activities.

Judging current high school students' experiences and opportunities through the lenses of our own past experiences may blind us to the benefits of a larger high school and may limit our vision of how to create even new opportunities for students that are far more valuable and meaningful than those that might have ever been possible in a small school.

Despite the fact that high school administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors have significant positive interaction with many students on a daily basis these interactions are often with the students who have taken productive leadership roles within the school. Student representatives of the sports association, student council, and club presidents are excellent and articulate spokesmen for their respective groups and they do play a direct role in providing information about student interests and concerns. But these students are a small fraction of the overall student body and quite naturally are among the most involved, positive, and successful students within the school.

The survey was conducted on June 2, 2005 during period three from 9:20 a.m. to 10:05 a.m. at the High School. This time was selected as the period in which the greatest number of students would be available to participate. The survey instrument was designed with input and guidance from faculty of Vassar College, Marist College, Arlington High School teachers, students and administrators and members of the Superintendent's Cabinet. Survey responses were anonymous. It was composed of twenty three questions. The first five were informational:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Gender | (male, female) |
| 2. Current Grade | (9,10,11,12) |
| 3. Participation in varsity sports | (yes, no) |
| 4. Participation in extracurricular activities | (yes, no) |
| 5. Employment outside of school | (yes, no) |

Survey of Arlington High School Student Attitudes

General Information Responses

1. Gender	<u>Male</u> 49%	<u>Female</u> 51%
2. Current Grade	Grade 9	30%
	Grade 10	29%
	Grade 11	26%
	Grade 12	16%
3. Participation in Sports	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
	All	66%
	Male	62%
	Female	69%
	Grade 9	66%
	Grade 10	61%
	Grade 11	68%
	Grade 12	71%

4. Participation in Activities	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
All	50%	50%
Male	42%	58%
Female	59%	41%
Grade 9	49 %	51%
Grade 10	47%	53%
Grade 11	55%	45%
Grade 12	51%	49%
5. Work Outside of School	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
All	48%	52%
Male	52%	48%
Female	45%	55%
Grade 9	30 %	70%
Grade 10	40%	60%
Grade 11	60%	40%
Grade 12	79%	21%

The eighteen remaining survey items (questions 6–23) required a response on a five point Likert scale in which response one (1) represented the lowest value, response five (5) represented the highest value, and a response of three (3) was described as “medium”. The response scale was presented on the continuum below:

Student Survey Scale

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Low		Medium		High

The eighteen survey questions were intended to discern student attitudes and opinions about their sense of satisfaction, safety, involvement, and opportunities within the school:

6. How much you feel personally accepted at AHS
7. How much you feel a part of the AHS community
8. How well you believe AHS has met your needs this year
9. How pleased you are with your experiences at AHS
10. Level of spirit throughout the school
11. Your individual level of school spirit
12. How safe you feel at AHS
13. The importance of AHS in your life
14. How well your teachers know you
15. How well your guidance counselor knows you
16. How well the school administration knows you
17. How positive the social climate is at AHS
18. Level of respect you receive from the adults at AHS
19. How highly would you recommend AHS to other students
20. How well the academic programs at AHS meet your expectations
21. How satisfied are you with opportunities to play varsity sports

22. How satisfied you are with opportunities to participate in after school clubs, organizations, and activities
23. Your overall average for academic grades in all courses

Response Rate

On June 2, 2005 the total student enrollment at the High School was 3,014. On that day, approximately 377 students were not available to take the survey due to absence, tardy to school, class examinations, etc. The total potential student body available to participate in the study was 2,657. "Valid" surveys, (completed, undamaged, filled in correctly, etc.) were received from 2,438 students; 219 students either did not respond, did not follow instructions, or were unable or unwilling to complete the survey. Thus, 2,438 participant responses represent 81% of the total student body of 3,014 and 92% of the students available to participate in the survey on June 2nd.

The survey instrument was locally constructed. No effort was given to determine statistical validation of validity or reliability of survey items. And, there is no national or regional baseline for responses that enable inter school comparisons. Nevertheless, the results of the survey are deemed highly valuable in providing a broad view of the general interests, ideas, and concerns of students. These general trends can provide invaluable guidance to the school district in its plans for the expansion and improvement of services to students and may be a valuable tool to be used in the future in measuring the benefit of new initiatives.

Although the survey was intended to provide an independent assessment of student perception, survey responses suggest general trends that appear to be consistent with anecdotal views of student needs and interests. In some cases student responses are consistent with data collected independently such as rates of activity participation and academic grades. In general, Arlington High School students seem to have honestly expressed their opinions about the high school and their high school experiences.

AHS Meets Needs:

- **Students Pleased with Experience,**
- **Feel Personally Accepted,**
- **Participation Relates to Sense of Belonging**

Analysis of responses suggest the overall student body believes that the high school has "met their needs" (question #8) during the past year. A full 80% of students found that the school met their needs at level 3 (medium) or higher with 45% of the students responding that the school has met their needs at a high level of 4 or 5. Only 8% of the entire student body (about 200 respondents) responded with the lowest score value of one (1).

Almost identical responses were registered when asked if students were "pleased with their experiences at AHS" (#9). Again, only 8% responded with a low score of one (1) and a full 82% judged the experience to be at level three (3) or higher. A majority of AHS students, 52%, indicated that they were very pleased scoring at the highest levels four (4) or five (5).

Students indicated that they feel personally accepted (#6) in the school; 89% of the students responded with scores of medium (3) or higher, with an incredible 58% indicating the highest levels of acceptance with scores of four (4) or five (5). only 5% responded at the lowest level one (1) with an additional 6% responding with the low level of two (2). Thus, They also feel safe (#12) at every grade level (87% scoring level 3 or higher and 63% scoring at levels 4 or 5) with little difference in responses by gender.

Participation in activities beyond the classroom appears to be a major factor in students' sense of belonging. Whereas 80% of students who engage in sports or after school activities scored level three (3) or higher in response to the question of their "feeling a part of the AHS community (#7) only 55% of the students who do not participate in after school programs scored in this range. In fact, nearly half of inactive students responded with low scores at level one (1) and two (2).

School Climate:

Positive, with Room for Improvement in School Spirit

Students responded to the question of a positive school climate (#17) with generally positive scores; 77% scoring level three (3) or higher with the majority of students judging a "medium" (42%). Responses took the appearance of the normal Bell curve with about as many scoring at the lowest level (8%) as those scoring at the highest level (9%). Although there is no comparative data for adolescents in other schools (it may just be the nature of developing young adults to view their social climate with some degree of struggle), with 23% of students scoring at low levels of one (1) or two (2), this seems to be an area where improvement may be possible. Students' perception of school climate also appears to decline slightly but steadily from grades 9 to 12.

Slightly more positive responses were given to the importance of AHS in the lives of students (#13) than school climate. The majority (71%) scored this item at level three (3) or higher with 42% of the students indicating high levels of importance at levels four (4) or five (5). Similar to the reaction to school climate, 29% of the students responded with low levels of one (1) or two (2) to the importance of AHS in their lives.

Similar responses were also received about the level of school spirit in the school (#10) with 74% scoring at medium or higher levels. Again about 26% scored this in the low range of one (1) or two (2). Students reported that their own level of school spirit (#11) was quite a bit lower than their perception of the level of spirit throughout the school. Only 60% scored at medium or higher levels leaving 40% scoring at levels one (1) or two (2).

Participation in school activities also appears to be a significant factor in the perception of school spirit. Although students that participate in either sports or after school activities scored spirit in the school (#10) higher (about 78% scoring at level 3 or higher) than those that do not participate, they judged their own levels of school spirit (#11) far higher than those that are not as well involved in the life of the school. Whereas 72% of active students judged their school spirit at levels three (3) or higher, only 40% of nonparticipating students scored in this high range.

Active Students:

Higher on All Measures of Engagement, Satisfaction, Success

Participation rates in student activities are very high for Arlington High School. Fifty percent of the student respondents indicated that they are engaged in co curricular activities and 34% indicated that they are involved in the interscholastic sports program. These high rates appear to be equivalent in fact to the participation rates in school districts that have bifurcated one large high school into two independent schools. Rates are so high that one wonders if the addition of other sports or activities will actually encourage additional students to participate or will have the effect of diminishing participation in existing activities. Approximately one third of the respondents, about 870 students, indicated that they did not participate in either sports or co-curricular activities. Both active and inactive students indicated that they were engaged in employment outside of the school. Surprisingly, 55% of active students indicated that they had jobs as compared to 46% of inactive students, perhaps debunking the myth that students are inactive because they are engaged in employment outside the school.

The comparison of responses of students who are active in the life of the school by participating in the varsity sports program or co curricular activities (such as the marching band, clubs, or service organizations) confirms the long held belief that active students are more successful than their less involved peers. Active students responded more favorably to every survey question regarding engagement and personal satisfaction. Although some differences were more dramatic than others, the consistent trend suggests that inactive students are in fact less satisfied and less successful than their active peers.

Active Students Respond More Favorably

Survey Item	Active Students	Inactive Students	Difference
	<i>% of Scores at Level 3 "Medium" or Higher</i>		
No. 6 Personal Acceptance	93%	83%	10%
No. 7 Feeling Part of AHS	80%	55%	25%
No. 8 AHS Meets Needs	85%	71%	14%
No. 9 Pleased with AHS	89%	71%	18%
No. 10 Spirit in School	78%	66%	12%
No. 11 Individual Spirit	72%	40%	32%
No. 12 Feeling Safe	89%	83%	6%
No. 13 Importance of AHS	78%	59%	19%
No. 17 Positive School Climate	81%	71%	10%
No. 18 Respect	76%	68%	8%
No. 19 Recommend AHS	87%	71%	16%
No. 20 Meets Academic Needs	88%	74%	14%
No. 21 Satisfied Sports Opportunities	72%	50%	22%
No. 22 Satisfied Activity Opportunities	91%	67%	24%
No. 23 Academic Average	92%	81%	11%

Of particular concern and interest are student responses to their academic achievement. Although the entire student body reports about 88% at level three (3) or higher and 66% of active students report academic averages at the high levels of four (4) and five (5), inactive students report only 37% achieving at these high levels. This suggests that academic achievement as well as general satisfaction with the school experience may be enhanced through greater participation in school activities.

Given these comparisons, and the apparent positive impact on students of participation in out of classroom experiences, the District may wish to consider a formal Policy that requires or strongly encourages participation in some after school endeavors.

Although not measured in this survey of student attitude, it has been suggested that many children with learning disabilities and formal Individual Educational Plans are less inclined to participate in interscholastic sports or extracurricular activities. This may be due to social shyness or cognitive ability. Personal invitations and encouragement to participate in a wider variety of intramural sports and other extracurricular activities may be the key to higher levels of student success and self fulfillment.

Do You Know Me?

Teachers Stand Out – They Know Their Students

Survey Questions fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen were intended to determine the degree to which students felt that they were known by their teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators. Clearly, the ability of staff to know their students well will be affected by the number of children for

which they are responsible. A long tradition of the Arlington Central School District is its fiscal conservatism. It has ranked for many years as the lowest cost per pupil among the thirteen school districts in Dutchess County and among the lowest in the lower Hudson Valley. Although many elements contribute to this historical trend, large class size and high ratios of students to administrators and guidance counselors are a significant factor. For example, in the 2002 -2003 school year the ratio of Arlington High School students to guidance counselors was 360 to 1. At that time one principal and five assistant principals managed the entire student body of nearly 3,000 students; a ratio of 500 students per administrator. Most suburban schools visited during the winter of 2005 in preparation of this study reported ratios of 200 to 1 or fewer in guidance and about 300 - 350 to one for administration. One would come to expect that the lower the ratio of students to staff, the greater the opportunity for students to feel well known by the adults that supervise them. The results of the student survey appear to confirm these expectations.

How Well Students Feel Known

	Low (1)	(2)	Medium (3)	(4)	High (5)
How Well Does My Teacher Know Me?	9%	13%	31%	36%	17%
How Well Does My Guidance Counselor Know Me?	21%	20%	24%	18%	16%
How Well Do My Administrators Know Me?	48%	23%	16%	7%	7%

The responses from active students and inactive students were virtually identical for administrators and guidance counselors. Inactive students also reflected about the same high level of relationships with their teachers as the general population.

Focus Group Interviews

In an additional effort to ensure that the voice of students who are not regularly involved in leadership activities was heard, Mr. George Cohen, the Consultant who conducted the brain storming sessions with the large study groups, was also engaged to meet with such students and engaged them in dialogue on these planning issues. Mr. Cohen met with 15 students who reported generally positive feelings about the school and understood the existing wide array of activities that were available. These students mentioned “no overwhelming problems” but did offer the following observations:

- Concern about overcrowding
- Need for additional time between classes
- An additional cafeteria to reduce time standing in line
- Need for a pool for swim teams and physical education

Survey Conclusions and Planning Responses

The results of the student survey and conclusions drawn from it may best come from an understanding of the broad trends of student responses rather than the examination of specific items and precise numerical comparisons. Although the responses tend to suggest students with a high

average perception of their school and school experience, without baseline data from other schools, it is also impossible to gauge any comparison to other schools or school environments. Trusting, however, that students have been honest in their responses, as we believe they have been, their collective voice leads us to the following general conclusions:

1. Student Participation:

a. Conclusion

Active students, those that participate in sports, clubs, and co-curricular activities, scored higher than non-active students on every measure of satisfaction: belonging, spirit, and academic success. This suggests confirmation that the traditional encouragement to become involved in school activities does in fact lead to a more productive and successful high school experience.

b. Planning Response

Despite the already high levels of student participation in sports and co-curricular activities, it appears that the school district should:

1. Encourage or require all students to become engaged in the life of the school in the hopes that they too will become more successful and more satisfied. This may include a Policy requirement established by the Board of Education.
2. Create additional opportunities for student engagement including additional sports and co-curricular activities
3. Establish administrative services to identify, engage, and assist students who are not presently active in the life of the school.

2. Personalization:

a. Conclusion

Students clearly report relatively low levels of feeling that their guidance counselors and administrators know them as individuals. These relationships appear weak across the board for active as well as inactive students and may be a key component to the degree to which students and their families feel a close and successful bond to the high school. Fortunately, despite relative high average class size, teachers have been able to successfully develop relationships with their students that reflect a sense of personalization.

b. Planning Response

Every effort should be made to improve student guidance ratios by employing additional guidance counselors, expanding their roles to become more proactive and interactive in the lives of students and families, and to deploy the guidance staff in such a way that further supports and enhances these relationships. Serious consideration should also be given to increasing the number and deployment of the adults that supervise students and administer the high school. The restructuring initiative to create "House Principals" in order to provide greater personalization and continuity should be continued and expanded in order to ensure that administrative staff members get to know each of the students within their charge.

SECTION SEVEN: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EXPANDED AHS

I. Program Recommendations

A. Increasing Personalization

1. *Administrative Organization*

The administrative reorganization of the school should continue with the establishment of four “Houses”. Each house will be organized around the class year cohort of students, (such as the class of 2009). Each house will continue to be led by a House Principal and will be attached to the class for the full four years of their high school careers.

- a. Intensified efforts will be made to increase the visibility of House administrators among students and parents and to increase interaction with students.
- b. An additional adult professional should be added to the house team, perhaps, a “Dean of Students” to provide additional assistance with student discipline and managing student affairs of those students who are at high risk of behavioral, emotional and academic failure. This addition (4 school wide) would reduce student ratios from 450 to 1 to about 300 to 1, the desired ratio promoted in other large schools. Deans will be added incrementally over four years.
- c. The “House” will function as the primary location for student assistance, guidance, academic advisement, and discipline. It will become the main point of contact for parents and students for all services and problem solving.
- d. The organizational staffing of each house will include:
 - 1 House Principal
 - 1 House Assistant Principal
 - 1 Dean of Students
 - 5 Guidance Counselors
 - 1 Psychologist
 - 3 Secretarial support/Clerical assistance
- e. The four “Houses” (each serving a current class cohort) will be located in one contiguous office suite designed to promote dialogue among educational professionals serving the same population of students and to provide easy access for students and parents to any/all services that may be necessary.
- f. The four “Houses” offices shall be distributed throughout the high school building in such a manner that will provide disbursed administrative presence through the school and yet also be easily accessible to parents. The House offices will be in permanent locations; the House-class cohort will change once every four years (i.e., upon the graduation of one class, the House team will attach to the next incoming class of freshman and continue to serve the group for four years.

2. *Guidance Services*

Guidance services will be expanded (in scope and number to reflect student/counselor ratios of 200 to 1 or better. Guidance services will be broadened and become more personalized and more proactive.

- a. Five counselors will be assigned to each House serving 900 students.

- b. The addition of clerical assistance for all guidance counselors sufficient to eliminate data entry, clerical, and non-professional duties. This could be a ratio of one clerical assistant for each team of five counselors.
- c. Significant dispersion and delegation of senior year “recommendation” responsibilities from guidance counselors to other professional staff. This may include engaging other faculty members as advisors and reference writers. These individuals may be identified as early as the freshman or sophomore year. The intent is to eliminate the senior year overload of responsibilities for the guidance counselors in order for them to focus more proactively on freshman, sophomore, and junior year services and contact with parents.
- d. Expanding the roles, expectations and effectiveness of the guidance counselors. Guidance counselors become far more engaged in the life and career of their students. Every effort will be made to give them the time that is necessary to be the primary contact for families, even before they begin their first day of high school. This will include:
 - Regular proactive contact with parents and guardians and meetings with students
 - Regular review and dialogue with students and families regarding course selections, a four year schedule of course planning, review of attendance, review of discipline, review of participation in their scholastic or activities, and an awareness of the general level of engagement and satisfaction and success of the students.

These expectations will be codified in an expanded job description.

- e. Consider modifying and expanding the title of the guidance counselors to more genuinely reflect the role that they shall play in the lives of high school students. The title such as “student advocate” will reflect the expanded proactive role of being the singular professional point of contact for parents.
- f. In order to eliminate significant disruption in the guidance services provided to children in the four year period, a significant transition schedule is proposed which over the course of two, three or four years, as we engage additional staff members, secretarial and clerical support such that we minimize the change of guidance counselors for students during their four year career.

1. School year 2006-2007

- Five additional guidance counselors employed (to new total of 16.5)
- Five counselors attached to the Class/House of 2010 and serve the 900+ students of this class for four years
- Remaining counselors (11.5) continue to serve students they have counseled in past (alphabetically assigned) who now are in grades 10, 11, and 12

2. School year 2007-2008

- Five final additional guidance counselors are employed (to new total of 21.5, full complement)
- Five counselors are attached to the new class/House of 2011 and serve the 900+ students of this class for four years
- Remaining counselors (11.5) continue to serve same students they may have counseled in past (alphabetically assigned) who are now in grades 11 and 12

3. School year 2008-2009

- No additional counselors
- Five of the original group (11.5) break off from senior students and attach to 900+ new students in class/House of 2012 and serve them for four years
- Five remaining counselors serve the last students alphabetically assigned in their freshman year who are now in their senior year. Approximately 200 students in the class/House of 2009.
- One remaining counselor installed as “College & Career Counselor” serving juniors and seniors
- Remaining 0.5 position resource has been distributed to assist in coordination of guidance services in the four Houses.

4. School year 2009–2010

- Counselors serving class/House 2009 now attach to 900+ new students entering as freshman in class/House 2013
- All others remain with class/House

3. Psychological & Social Services

Slight adjustments should be made in the number of school psychologists and social workers as the population increases. One psychologist shall be attached to each house and two social workers will serve the full population of the high school (among Houses as may be needed).

1.2 psychologists to be added by 2008-2009 along with 1.5 social worker(s).

4. College & Career Counseling

A College & Career Counseling Center will be instituted in the 2008-2009 school year. Led by an experienced guidance counselor, with clerical support, the Center will provide assistance to school juniors and seniors in selecting, applying, and choosing colleges, and in selecting career paths.

5. Other Potential Initiatives

Additional concepts will be pursued including:

- a. Additional assistance to juniors and seniors in the college application and reference process
- b. Increased passing time between classes

- c. Additional academic period in the high school schedule (time added to the day)

B. Raising Academic Achievement & Expanding Offerings

1. Teaching Staff

The scope and variety of course offerings in any high school are dependent upon at least two variables: the availability of faculty and space.

High school enrollment in a building operating at functional capacity with a reasonable number of available faculty, can offer a wide array of academic course offerings. As enrollment has climbed towards the maximum capacity of the school facility, class sizes have risen and classrooms have become filled with required, mandatory courses. It becomes difficult to find the space for a wide variety of courses and faculty become more engaged with mandatory basic courses. When schools become severely overcrowded, this dilemma deepens. The simple addition of classrooms and teachers create an environment in which a broader variety of courses can be considered and class size can be limited.

The enrollment growth at AHS has demanded additional teachers. With few rooms available in which they can teach, faculty growth has been restrained. (This restraint has also been forced by the redirection of financial resources to open the District's two newest schools).

Assuming that the school's array of courses and class sizes were optimal when the school enrollment was at 2,800 or functional capacity (about 2002) and it is assumed that the school should again be operated at functional capacity when it reaches 3,600 students. The increase in 800 students would require approximately 32 teachers (about 1 teacher for each 25 students). Approximately 8 teachers have been added to staff during this period, 24 additional staff are deemed to be needed now.

Another way of looking at this is establishing a base line of program adequacy at 3,000 students in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. An increase of 600 students, to 3,600, would also yield 24 faculty; i.e., about 25 per teacher

The new faculty teaching positions are required to serve the growing population of Arlington High School students. These staff members are necessary irrespective of how many physical school buildings house the students. The costs for these staff increases are not attributed to the decision to expand AHS but rather a response to the size of high school enrollment. If a second high school were to be operated instead of an expansion, these positions and many others would be required.

Additions to Regular Education Teaching Faculty

a. 2006-2007

Science	2
Social Studies	2
Mathematics	2
English	2
Other subjects	<u>0</u>

TOTAL 8

b. 2007-2008	
Science	2
Social Studies	2
Mathematics	2
English	2
Other subjects	0
	—
TOTAL	8
c. 2008-2009	
Science	1
Social Studies	1
Mathematics	1
English	1
Other Subjects	4
	—
TOTAL	8

2. Other Academic Initiatives

Additional initiatives under consideration that may improve academic achievement and expand course variety will require study and assessment and will be pursued over time and will be monitored in the Superintendent’s project management system. These include:

- a. International Baccalaureate Program
- b. Block scheduling
- c. Additional AP/Honors courses
- d. Increasing local minimum credit requirement for graduation
- e. “Team teaching” for selected students
- f. Student / Teacher advisory relationships
- g. Modified “homerooms” meeting sporadically throughout year
- h. Reserve Officer Military Training
- i. Senior Project or “Thesis” requirement for graduation

C. Student Engagement and Participation

1. Freshman Transition

In order to insure a positive smooth and productive transition into high school from eighth grade, a “Freshman Transition Coordinator” will be employed to assist the high school principal. This non-certified staff position, with some degree of secretarial support, shall coordinate activities, orientation programs, and other efforts among and between Arlington’s three middle schools and the High School.

Generally, the Transition Coordinator’s efforts will be directed toward eighth grade students from January to June and remain involved in insuring their transition through the summer, fall, and early winter of their ninth grade year.

Numerous preliminary activities have been suggested to expand and improve the present transition process. Some suggestions include:

- Early visitations to AHS
- Student council joint activities
- Eighth grade attendance at AHS Activity & Recruitment Fairs
- Presentations to parents and students
- Comprehensive summer acclimation camps
- Grade 8 participation in AHS events such as
 - Homecoming parade
 - Marching band/Football game performances
 - Junior marching band for community events
 - Pep bands for winter sports
 - Early leadership training (prior to 9th grade)
 - Mixers and events at AHS for Grade 8

2. Student Participation

The survey of student attitude given in the spring of 2005 confirms that active students perform better in academic achievement and have a more positive, rewarding high school experience. A “Student Activities Engagement Director” position will be created (non-certified) with some degree of secretarial support for the purpose of increasing the number of students who participate in school activities and ensuring the quality of those engagements. Modest budgetary increases will be sufficient to further expand existing student opportunities.

3. Varsity Sports Opportunities

Although a relatively high level of students participate in interscholastic sports, many students fall out of the current elite programs at the varsity level. An intense effort will be engaged to create two varsity level teams in those sports that might have sufficient interest. Preliminary meetings with Ms. Nina Van Erk, Executive Director of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, prove very promising.

Currently, under consideration are second varsity teams, participating at the “AA” level in Athletic Section 9, or participation in levels “A” (or “AA”) in Section 1.

Potential sports which would appear most likely to succeed are those which field a small number of varsity participants out of a very large population of interested students. These might include:

- Varsity basketball – Boys and Girls
- Varsity baseball – Boys
- Varsity soccer – Boys and Girls
- Varsity softball – Girls
- Bowling
- Golf – Girls
- Nordic Skiing
- Alpine Skiing
- Rifle Marksmanship (in conjunction with West Point)

Modest budgetary increases will be sufficient to further expand existing student opportunities.

4. *Class/House Enhancements*

Each House Principal will establish a committee of parents, students, faculty, and community members to explore ways to make the educational experience at each grade level more personal. These committees were up and operating in 2004-2005 and the membership have been established for 2005-2006. A number of projects including newsletters, letters home to parents of struggling students, a community service component to senior year and a number of student recognition efforts including Outstanding Admirals and Most Improved Admirals have been initiated. Additional activities and recognition initiatives are being explored for next school year.

5. *Other Potential Initiatives:*

- a. BOE Policy requiring community service as a requirement for graduation
- b. Codifying the strong expectation that students must participate in some aspect of the co-curricular/interscholastic life of the school outside of the classroom
- c. Expanding the scope and variety of employment opportunities within the high school similar to the hourly paid positions in the tech crew. Such might include:
 1. Science lab technicians
 2. Food service interns
 3. Maintenance assistants
 4. "Associate" teaching assistants
 5. Computer repairs / maintenance
 6. Administrative interns at central office or in elementary schools
- d. Expanding the variety, scope, and intensity of intramural sports. This might include the provision of:
 - Uniforms
 - Coaches
 - Transportation to other schools for competition
- e. Expand existing clubs, honors, and service organizations such as:
 1. Developing multiple sections within the National Honor Society in order foster greater manageability of the very large group and conduct induction in the Junior year in order to provide a full year of service opportunities
 2. Reinforced relationships with community clubs such as Rotary, Lions, etc., to ensure support and continuity of clubs
 3. Develop contact with agricultural and environmental support groups already existing in Dutchess County
 4. Develop student liaisons with local community governments, fire districts and other services

- f. Include otherwise inactive students in the class/"house" small school initiative.

D. Expanding Community Use and Family Familiarity

Concerns that Arlington High School is too large often come from families and individuals who have no connection to the school and have little interaction with its students. Some elementary families do not even know where the high school is located and have never been on its campus. Additional actions can be taken to familiarize younger students and their families with the high school, thus reducing their apprehensions about its size. Similar activities can be engaged, beyond those currently in effect, to create a greater sense of ownership, utility, and pride in the high school by the rest of the community.

1. Create a special K-8 Science Center in the High School to conduct experiments and lessons that cannot be duplicated in the elementary schools. This requires an additional science teaching specialists and a laboratory sized classroom.
2. Created a "hands on" Arlington History Center staffed by a social studies teacher in order to created greater recognition and pride in the history of the Arlington, Dutchess County, New York State and the United Sates of America. Historical expeditions can also be easily coordinated with facilities adjacent to the high school including the original LaGrange Grange Hall and the red one room school house both of which are on Dr. Fink Road.
3. Create room in the expansion of the cafeteria that is suitable for community use after school hours. This could accommodate small meetings of service organizations, the Parent Teacher Association, and other community groups.
4. Create a tiered lecture hall (seating 30-40) in the new construction for special daytime school functions and for community lectures, presentations, town meetings, and special community events in the evening and on weekends.
5. Initiate a new concerted effort to ensure that the Arlington High School becomes to an even greater degree the center for community events and becomes a recognized and familiar place for elementary children before they enter the ninth grade. Such activities would require a minor degree of coordination but could include:
 - a. New Year's Eve "first Night" for families with young children,
 - b. Summer camps for elementary age students,
 - c. Greater use of theater, stage, and black box for "summer stock" for students and community members,
 - d. Special sporting events for K-8 students,
 - e. Additional activities involving students and senior citizens or elementary students and high school students,
 - f. Consideration of reducing the building use fee structure for civic and local community organizations.

II. Physical Expansion recommendations

A. Classrooms

An expansion to Arlington High School should include approximately 38 classrooms. This number has been independently arrived at by the Architect in his assessment of the school's capacity, the Principal's description of programmatic needs, and the Superintendent's

calculation of maximum capacity (which follows). A schematic drawing of the architectural plan to enlarge the High School is attached as Appendix A-1 and A-2.

The current facility has a functional capacity of 2,800 students which is 85% of the absolute maximum enrollment capacity of 3,300. Assuming the District wishes to operate the school at a capacity that is optimal for students, functional capacity should be established at 3,600 for the number of students soon to arrive. The maximum capacity of the school thus becomes 4,235, and increase in capacity of 935 classroom seats. Taking a conservative and simple approach, dividing the 935 seats by 25 students per class yields approximately 38 additional classrooms. Two additional gymnasium areas and the utility of one existing area into a dance studio are also necessary to accommodate the requirements of physical education. Some current regular classrooms which have been pressed into special service for such courses as Television, Communications, and Radio should be returned to regular use and new appropriate rooms be constructed.

B. Other Educational Spaces

Other educational spaces are needed in order to continue the programs and courses traditionally offered at Arlington. The auditorium, which has never been expanded since the construction of the original building (and enrollment capacity well under 2,000 students) should be modified to increase seating. A maximum of 1,500 seats may be possible, although a number slightly below that may be operational and physically more suitable. Construction of the auditorium auxiliary rooms that will be removed in order to expand the space will need to be replaced. The lobby, small even for the original population, should be expanded where possible. Additional modifications in the building must also be made to accommodate the enrollment growth including lunch room space, the expansion of the nursing suite, etc.

C. Designation of Administrative Areas

The current staff of Class "House" principals should be distributed strategically through the expanded building in areas that are easily accessible to students and their parents. These office areas should be large enough to house the decentralized staff of guidance counselors as well as psychological personnel and support staff. Some current office areas may be suitable for expansion for this purpose.

D. Alternative Optional Additions

Serious consideration has been given to three major alternative optional additions to the High School. These items arose out of an interest to better serve the community at large and to reinforce Arlington High School as the center of the community. Similar facilities were seen in operation at many of the other schools that were visited during the winter of 2004 – 2005 and suggested for consideration by visitation team members.

These options included a:

- a. Swimming pool
- b. Large enclosed athletic Field House
- c. New additional auditorium with seating up to 1,500

Unfortunately, the costs of construction for these items, and in the case of the swimming pool the cost of operations, were extremely high and not deemed to be affordable to

Arlington taxpayers. The Superintendent and his administration, working in concert with parents, will pursue alternate means to addressing the need for the swimming pool. Construction alternatives for the Field House and additional auditorium are included in the renovation and expansion plans for the High School.

E. Route 55 Traffic

Automotive traffic along Route 55 outside of Arlington High School is highly congested and snarled during rush hours. Although the severity of this condition may be primarily caused by the closing of numerous crossings of the Taconic Parkway by the State of New York, without adequate understanding of the negative impact on local communities, many assume that traffic associated with the school adds to the gridlock.

A proposal has been floated to remove the existing traffic light at the entrance of the High School and reroute it to be directly opposite Stringham Road where another traffic light already exists. This suggestion has also been seen as a component to the Town of LaGrange plan to develop a town center along route 55 near the school and is seen to be a partial resolution to the traffic problems.

Any plan to reorganize the high school campus and realign the existing driveway to be aligned to Stringham Road would be very expensive. Three private properties would need to be purchased, roadways built, and exiting medians and traffic patterns completely redesigned.

If such a project is ever deemed essential, one would expect that all levels of government should participate in the costs associated with resolution. Arlington School taxpayers should not be expected to shoulder the full burden of such changes. Therefore, the Superintendent suggests no action be taken.

SECTION EIGHT: THE FUTURE OF ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS AND DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Planning Elements Two and Three

Elementary Programs

As indicated above (page 10), five of the six elementary program space options were removed from consideration for the near future. These included additional space for:

1. Dedicated science rooms
2. Elementary computer labs
3. Full day kindergarten
4. Lower class sizes
5. International language instruction

District-wide full day kindergarten will not be pursued since additional classroom space is required and not available. Lower class sizes in the elementary grades also will not be pursued through the addition of additional classrooms. If enrollment trends drop, and if the school budget can accommodate existing staff, elementary class size, on average, may decline slightly.

International language instruction, if authorized by the Board of Education, may be introduced in the elementary grades, as budgets may allow, as a “push in” program in existing regular classrooms, conducted by traveling specialists.

Somewhat similarly, elementary wireless computer labs and specialized instructors may be introduced in the future, if approved and funded within annual budgets. This approach can also be followed with specialized science, however, the addition of a K-8 science laboratory at Arlington High School will permit lab experiments, engineering lessons and demonstrations not possible in regular elementary classrooms. This could also prepare students in earlier grades for pre-engineering (in the form of early technology skills).

The last remaining elementary consideration was the transition of four split span schools into schools containing each grade, Kindergarten through grade five. Acceding to local community requests, only the Overlook and Titusville Schools will be included in the referendum for grade expansion. Traver Road School and D'Aquanni West Road Schools will not change grade structure.

School District Operations

1. Transportation Garage

The need for an expanded transportation repair garage and school bus service area has been well documented. The current main facility was constructed in 1954 and is exceedingly small, overcrowded and inadequate for the maintenance of modern school busses. The school bus fleet has nearly doubled in size in the last twelve years, now totaling more than 200 vehicles. The population of the school district has also shifted from a concentration on the western side to a more even distribution to the south and west. Thus, the current main site at Arlington Middle School is poorly situated for all transportation routes. A search for suitable land has begun and preliminary designs have been proposed. Budget and tax impact studies have also commenced with early estimates of only about \$9.00 per average homeowner per year.

However, the long lead time for land acquisition and environmental approvals preclude this project from being considered in a public referendum at this time. Future consideration will be given after the proposed 2005 referendum.

2. Rented Central Offices

An excellent case has also been made to build an independent office for school district central staff on land owned by the school district. The current area is 18,000 square feet and is currently costing \$200,520 each year. Initial estimates indicate significant long term savings; rent payments would be diverted to mortgage payments in the early years of a 30 year debt with savings of between \$2.0 and \$2.8 million by the end of this period.

The annual debt service for the building is estimated to be a flat \$250,000 per year – similar or less than future rent payments. No impact on local taxes would be anticipated.

Nevertheless, as with the school bus transportation garage, the long lead time of land acquisition and environmental reviews precludes this project from inclusion in the proposed 2005 referendum. Consideration will be given at a later date.

3. Capital Repairs to Existing Schools

The Arlington School District currently operates thirteen schools including its newest two schools, Vail Farm Elementary School and Union Vale Middle School. The older eleven schools are in need of significant capital repairs. These schools range in age from 35 to 80 years old. Typical renovation items include windows, doors, roofs, heating, electrical, plumbing systems, fire/service alarms, public address systems, parking lot repairs and curbing, and sidewalk repairs.

In addition to repairs to each of the older buildings, the older schools suffer significant inequities compared to the two new schools opened in the 2004-2005 school year. Such features as handicap accessibility, wireless computer access, library classrooms, air conditioned cafeteria/auditoriums, should be considered in the future in order to provide equal educational experiences and opportunities to all of Arlington's students.

The Superintendent recommends consideration of repairs to be included in the 2005 referendum. A plan should then be developed to conduct those projects not included in the referendum over an extended (perhaps ten year) period.

SECTION NINE: CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Conclusion

Overcrowding at Arlington High School must be resolved. The current enrollment far exceeds the functional capacity of 2,800 students at the school and the number of students will soon exceed 3,600. Although numerous options exist to resolve this overcrowding, expanding the existing school is deemed to be the best alternative for students, the community at large, and taxpayers. The quality of the current school, along with excellent models of other large schools, provides sufficient basis for enlarging the school and increasing the personalization of services as opposed to the construction a new high school. The construction and operation of a second high school of any size would be exceedingly and unnecessarily expensive in a community in which financial resources are precious. Any benefit to students of creating an additional school would be hard to justify financially since many if not most services could be provided in the larger school with sufficient planning, reorganization, and staffing. Dividing the high school population in any manner is deemed to be counterproductive to students or community interest. Proposed additions to staff are essential to meet the growing number of high school students irrespective of how the overcrowding is resolved.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Expand Arlington High School

Arlington High School should be expanded both in physical structure and programs. All other reasonable options, at this point in time and given the history of the school, are exceedingly expensive and yield little or no genuine benefit to students that cannot be reached through good planning and program development. The physical expansion should include sufficient classrooms to accommodate future students as well as program enhancement. A referendum for this purpose should be presented to the electorate as soon as possible.

2. Continue Administrative Reorganization

The initiative to reorganize the administrative component of the school (which has already commenced, and that is now finally staffed) should be maintained and reinforced. The program provides for a division of the school's administrative services into four "Houses" that correspond to the natural division in every high school of the class cohort. As funds permit, the addition of one "Dean" per house will complete the team and provide greater personalization.

3. Add Guidance Counselors and Support Services

Guidance and support services should be expanded as rapidly as possible to provide personalization, student assistance, and direct communication with students and parents. Role expectations should be expanded and additional personnel should be distributed within the Class "House" administrative teams in order to provide seamless services and a single point of contact and support for each student during the four years of high school.

4. Encourage Participation and Positive Transition

Every effort should be made to identify students who do not participate in the broader life of the school and to engage them in activities and events with the expectation that their

academic achievement and overall success in the school improves. This can be done with modest additions to staff and budget and should include interscholastic, co- curricular, and on campus work opportunities. Similar efforts should be engaged to prepare younger students, particularly eighth graders, for their transition to the high school.

5. Support Avenues for Academic Advancement

In addition to the construction of sufficient classrooms, additional teachers must be employed to allow for reasonable class size and a wide variety of course offerings. The district should also support and monitor the long term study of programs, methodologies, and systems that will enhance the academic achievement of all Arlington students.

6. Conduct School Repairs

Older elementary and middle schools need significant capital repairs. As many as possible should be included in the 2005 referendum. All others should be scheduled for completion within a ten (10) year period.

AHS STAFF EXPANSION PLAN*

2006-2007 School Year

	5	Guidance Counselors (5 of 10)
	1	Secretarial Support - Guidance
	1	Freshman Transition Coordinator
	1	Secretarial Support – Transition
	8	Teachers Regular
	<u>1</u>	Special Ed. Support
<i>Total</i>	15 & 2	

2007-2008 School Year

	5	Guidance Counselors (10 of 10)
	1	Secretarial Support – Guidance
	1	Activities Engagement Director
	1	Secretarial Support - Engagement
	8	Teachers Regular
	<u>1</u>	Special Ed Support
<i>Total</i>	15 & 2	

2008-2009 School Year

	1.2	School Psychologists
	1	Secretarial Support/Psychologist, Social Services
	1.5	Social Worker
	3	House Dean (3 of 4)
	8	Teachers Regular
	<u>1</u>	Special Education
<i>Total</i>	14.7 & 1	Support

2009-2010 School Year

	1	House Dean (4 of 4)
	1	Special Education
	1	Secretarial support – telephones/switchboard
	<u>2</u>	Secretarial support – class/houses
<i>Total</i>	2 & 2	Support

* These staff additions will be necessary to address enrollment growth and to improve services under any configuration of high school buildings. These positions are not caused by an expansion of the building but by the increase of students and services.

Anticipated Expansion Construction & Bonding Time Line

2006-2007 School Year *Bond Anticipation Notes – No Tax Impact*

- *Construction Drawings & Bidding Documents Prepared*
- *State Review and Approval Granted*
- *Bids Let and Contracts Awarded*

2007-2008 School Year *Bond Anticipation Notes – No Tax Impact*

- *Construction Commences*

2008-2009 School Year *Initial Tax Impact – Partial Year*

- *Construction Continues*
- *Concludes, mid or late in academic year*

2009-2010 School Year *Final Tax Impact – No Additional Increases*

- *New Construction Fully Completed, operational & occupied*