

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES COLLABORATIVE COMMISSION
MEETING NOTES – NOVEMBER 8, 2023
CHARLES HOUSTON RECREATION CENTER

ATTENDANCE

Amanda Ruff	J-Lynn Van Pelt (Virtual)	Marwa Naqshbandi	Zahra Rahimi
Catherine Clinger	Julie Murphy	Meredith Forbes	
Christine Raino	Kate Garvey	Mike Mackey	
Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins	Katie Greenway	Nicole Davi	
Dan Edwards	Laura Durham	Sara Waskowicz	
Jacinta Greene	Marcia Jackson	Ursula Rocha	

Excused Absent

Councilwoman Sarah Bagley	Ingrid Bynum
Abel-Rahman Einoubi	Jessy Cuddy
Angela Green	Rose Dawson
Christina Sherlock	

Staff

Barbara Paulson
Noraine Buttar
Richard Daley

Speakers:

Adriana Schellas, Casa Chirilagua
Evelyn Urrutia, Tenants and Workers United
Pierrette Finney, Alexandria City Public Schools

WELCOME

Catherine welcomed all members to the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There were no public comments.

PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION: ACPS, CASA CHIRILAGUA, TENANTS AND WORKERS UNITED, FOCUSING ON ISSUES AFFECTING LATINO YOUTH

The CYFCC heard from three organizations, ACPS, Casa Chirilagua, and Tenants and Workers United at their November 8th full Commission meeting, with the focus being on supporting Hispanic youth here in Alexandria. Of particular concern to the Commission is the underrepresentation of Hispanic students – particularly current EL students – attaining scores of 40% or higher on the MAP language arts and math assessments. In the academic year 2022-2023, Only 18% of current EL students attained a score of 40% or higher on the MAP language

arts assessment, and only 20% of current EL students attained a score of 40% or higher on the MAP math assessment.

Dr. Pierrette Finney first explained that ACPS is following a best practices approach with regard to EL academic instruction, including targeted language instruction and a tiered support model. Dr. Marcia Jackson, chief of the Department of Student Services and Equity, then described the multi-tiered system of counseling and behavioral support available for students, ranging from universal to targeted to intensive. She mentioned that ACPS has services that focus on EL students such as targeted workshops through partnering with FACE (Family and Community Engagement).

Ms. Adriana Gomez Schellhaas then described the work that Casa Chirilagua is doing to serve families in Arlandria. CC currently serves 66 families (91 students). They provide after-school programming tailored to specific age groups. Ms. Gomez Schellhaas stressed the importance of relationships, celebrating together, and establishing trust. Casa Chirilagua's focus on building relationships has resulted in an attendance rate of 76% at its monthly parent meetings. The concerns expressed by parents at these meetings include safety, violence, bullying, drugs and insecurity. One issue identified was that an estimated 1 in 4 of Casa Chirilagua's parents is illiterate (in all written languages), so navigating ACPS or any city system is challenging. WhatsApp, through which recorded oral messages can be sent, has been a very important method of communication.

Evelyn Urrutia, Executive Director of Tenants and Workers United, then spoke on her organization's work with Hispanic youth. She said TWU sought to create opportunities for leadership and advocacy for youth through its middle school and high school youth group. Ms. Urrutia stressed that the students that she works with do not feel connected to school personnel or programs, so they miss out on opportunities designed to support them. She said that these students are the majority of students who are not the overachieving superstars or the students engaged in serious risk-taking behaviors. These "average" students feel left out and disconnected. She also said that older students – 16 and 17– need to work, and that activities designed to appeal to them must consider the economic needs of their families. Ms. Urrutia reinforced Ms. Gomez Schellhaas' focus on connection with caring adults as being the key issue that positively influences the lives of youth, and that the youth she knows do not feel connected to school. Ms. Urrutia also stressed the importance of program evaluation. All presenters agreed that creating opportunities for meaningful, supportive interaction between adults and children and youth is critically important. Mentoring was mentioned as the "gold standard" for such interaction. CYFCC members suggested that providing opportunities for more students to participate on teams (such as the proposal for more middle school teams introduced by James Parker, athletic director at ACPS), might allow youth to experience that interaction with coaches and other involved adults.

All three groups expressed the desire to work collaboratively with each other and with other community partners, sharing information, data, best practices, etc. Dr. Jackson proposed holding summits with community partners and the public to examine pressing issues and share ideas.

BUDGET LETTER TO SCHOOL BOARD

Members reviewed the letter and provided feedback. Commissioners voted to approve the letter. The revised letter will be sent to the School Board.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcements will be shared via email.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.