



SCARSDALE FORUM

June 29, 2017

SCARSDALE FORUM, INC.

**Report of the Education Committee
On
School Topics Survey**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
The Survey	4
Design and Distribution	4
Limitations	5
Demographics	6
Topic Priority	7
Respondents' Comments	9
Communication With and From the School	9
Critical Thinking	10
Curriculum Changes and Comparison	11
Diversity	13
Facilities	14
Political Bias	16
Private School Lessons	16
Project Based Learning	16
School Bus	17
Special Needs	18
State Testing	18
Student Networking	18
Student Participation	18
Survey Design	18
Taxes	19
Teaching Trends and Tenure	19
Conclusion	21
Appendix Question #7 School Topics	22



Executive Summary

Traditionally, the Education Committee members¹ of the Scarsdale Forum choose matters of interest in Scarsdale for research, study, and discussion, in a public forum. At a meeting on May 2, 2017, the Education Committee decided to create a survey to distribute not only to the Education Committee but also to the broader Scarsdale community in order to research and write reports that will be of interest to all of Scarsdale.

The members of the Education Committee chose 12 topics² that they believe would be of most interest and then created a survey which was sent to all members of the Scarsdale Forum and which was distributed widely to the broader Scarsdale community several times through Scarsdale based social media sites, neighborhood associations, local Scarsdale media, and personal email distribution lists.

Respondents from all five neighborhoods ranked the 12 topics in order of their priority. The Need for a Long-Term Financial Plan and Program Evaluation Process and Metrics ranked 1 and 2, respectively. Over 30% of all respondents ranked the previously mentioned topics as their first choice, and 20% of the respondents had those two topics as their second choice. Financial Literacy and Community Design Initiative: Involving All Stakeholder in Designing Education Goals tied for third place. Less than 15% of the respondents chose any other topic as their top choice.

Respondents ranked how additional minutes added to the curriculum should be utilized as their fourth priority. That topic scored just a few points below the third choice topics. Market trends in teacher recruitment ranked fifth. The topic of least interest to respondents answering the survey were the new rules on residency requirements.

¹ The members of the Education Committee are from different neighborhoods throughout Scarsdale; there is a mix of residents who have children in pre-school, in elementary, middle and high schools, and whose children graduated from Scarsdale schools. They represent a wide range of professional backgrounds such as banking, consulting, education, finance, law, real estate, and technology. Two members are former were previously on the Scarsdale Board of Education.

² Please see the Appendix .



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Scarsdale Moms, Scarsdale Social, Old Scarsdale Neighborhood Association, and Scarsdale Republicans³.

A number of Forum members sent a link to the survey to their personal distribution lists which covered all five school districts. The link to the survey also appeared in The Scarsdale Inquirer, Scarsdale Hamlet Hub, Scarsdale Patch, and Scarsdale10583.com.

The committee used Bitlinks in order to track how often the survey link was opened. The survey was clicked 539 times. 20% of the clicks came from local Scarsdale Facebook sites, while 80% came from the other methods of survey distribution.

126 individuals filled out the survey. It is not possible to track whether some respondents clicked the survey link more than once before actually filling it out. If we assume that individuals clicked on the link once and completed filling out the survey, this would mean that 23% of individuals clicking the link responded. This response rate is higher than the typical external online survey response of 10-15%⁴.

Limitations

Any survey will have limitations. The Education Committee is comprised of volunteers with a diversity of personal and professional commitments. The Committee does not have professionals trained in survey design and distribution. Also, the Education Committee does not have access to the email address of all Scarsdale residents to insure that all of them received the survey. The Education Committee deems this survey and its results as informal. Hence, the Education Committee does not interpret the results as being 100% representative of what the entire Scarsdale community would rank as a school topic research priority.

³ There is no Scarsdale Democrats Facebook page.

⁴ <https://www.surveymoz.com/survey-blog/survey-response-rates/>



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Demographics

64% of the respondents were female and 36% were male. 80% of the respondents were not members of the Education Committee.⁵

56% of respondents have children in Scarsdale schools, and 44% do not have children enrolled in Scarsdale. Of the respondents who stated that they did not have children in the school districts, the majority had children who graduated from Scarsdale schools, and a smaller group had children either in pre-school or in private school. Of the respondents who have children in schools, 72% had at least one child in an elementary school, 32% had at least one child in the middle school, and 31% had at least one child in the high school.

Respondents	%
Gender	
Female	64
Male	36
Are you a member of the Forum's Education Committee?	
Yes	20
No	80
Do you have children in the school district?	
Yes	56
No	44
What school do your children attend?	
Elementary schools	72
Middle School	32
High School	31

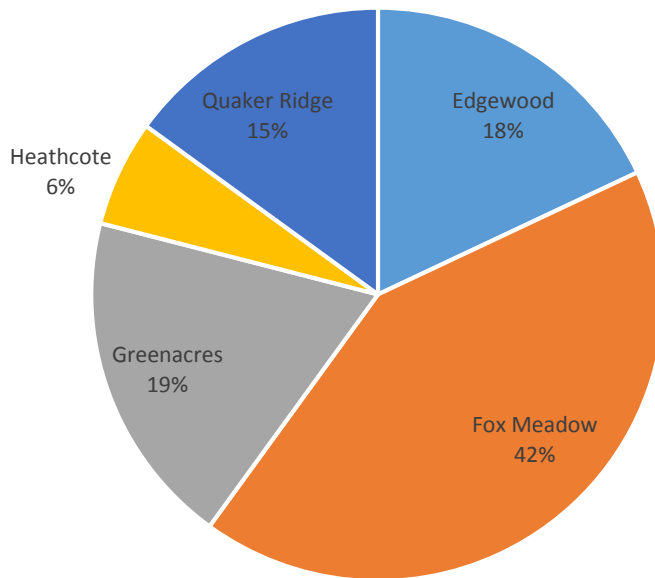
⁵ 45% of the Education Committee responded to the survey.



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The largest percent of the respondents was from Fox Meadow⁶ (42%), and the smallest number of respondents was from Heathcote (6%).

Respondents by Neighborhood



Topic Priority

Each topic was scored on a weighted average basis based on how respondents prioritized all twelve topics. The need for a long-term financial plan ranked as the top priority, followed closely by program evaluation process and metrics. Financial Literacy and Community Design Initiative tied as ranking 3rd.

- The Need for a Long-Term Financial Plan (10.80)
- Program Evaluation Process and Metrics (10.64)
- Financial Literacy (8.39)

⁶ One of the co-chairs of the Education Committee is from Fox Meadow. She sent the survey to parents whom she knows at Fox Meadow and also to the Old Scarsdale Neighborhood Association which is in Fox Meadow. Additionally, many members of the Scarsdale Forum's Board of Directors are from Fox Meadow.



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- Community Design Initiative:
 - How can all stakeholders in Scarsdale participate jointly in designing important education goals and objectives (8.39)
- How should additional minutes added to the curriculum be utilized (8.09)
- Teacher recruitment market trends and strategies (7.90)
- Indirect (not in the classroom) vs. Direct(classroom) staff evolution and trends (7.88)
- Ties between the Village and School (7.60)
- Facilities usage for non-education community initiatives (6.76)
- Pushing the junior and senior year curriculum to begin with equal rigor earlier in high school (6.34)
- Should the school consider developing how to create effective online and blended courses (5.85)
- New rules on residency requirements (2.0)

When the data were analyzed by the percent of respondents who ranked the choices 1-12, the two topics that over 30% of respondents ranked as their first choice were the need for a school district long-term financial plan(34%) and program evaluation process and metrics (33%). 15% or less of the respondents chose any other topic as their top choice.

20% of the respondents had long-term financial planning as their second choice; 21% had program evaluation process and metrics as their second choice.



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% of Respondents by Topic Ranking

Answer Options, % of Respondents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
The need for a school district long-term financial plan	34	20	14	8	5	9	3	2	2	1	1	2
Program evaluation process and metrics	33	21	7	8	10	9	4	2	3	1	1	1
Community Design Initiative	10	11	11	12	10	6	15	7	4	5	5	4
Financial literacy in school courses	2	12	12	19	12	7	10	7	7	1	7	4
Indirect(Not in the Classroom) vs Direct (Classroom) staff evolution & trends	1	5	12	11	18	10	8	17	12	2	4	1
Facilities usage for non-education community activities	5	5	6	9	8	9	7	16	8	8	10	9
Teacher recruitment market trends and strategies	2	7	14	11	10	14	10	8	8	11	3	2
New rules on residency requirements	1	6	10	6	8	4	4	4	16	11	13	16
Pushing the junior and senior year curriculum to begin with equal rigor earlier in high school	5	3	6	9	6	6	8	7	8	19	15	8
How should additional minutes added to the curriculum be utilized?	11	12	13	3	7	8	8	10	10	2	11	4
Ties between the Village and School	7	15	3	5	10	9	12	10	3	12	10	4
Should the school consider developing how to create Effective Online and Blended Courses?	8	1	7	7	3	9	5	5	7	13	5	30

Respondents' Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to answer Question 8, which was open ended. Question #8 asked respondents “do you have any other topic suggestions that were not included in Question 7?” 46% of the respondents answered question #8 with additional comments or recommendations about topics ranging from “communication with the school administration” to “teaching trends.”

All the comments of anyone who responded are listed below verbatim by topics. In topics where more than one person responded, those responses are listed individually in no order of priority.

Communication With and From the School

#1 Place/people/ways to make it easier for parents to make suggestions /leave feedback about the school /PTA/etc?



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#2 Recommending to the Administration and BOE that it allow residents to speak more than 3 minutes at the microphone. Administration needs to answer at least a few questions at meetings from residents. The Administration and BOE need to meet more frequently with community groups and answer our questions.

#3 What mechanisms are other Westchester communities using to enable effective communications between District and community organizations, including civic groups? While I'm not sure a liaison is best route, it would help to know what others do, and why and how.

#4 Provide parents of younger students an overview of the entire education plan from elementary school to high school. New residents in Scarsdale with little knowledge about the local school system will appreciate these new and useful information.

Critical Thinking

#1 First, as an employer, we have observed a sad decline in ability to think critically and intelligently. We hire from Ivy League and other top colleges, so this is not a problem of lower tier colleges; it's endemic. We find that while grads have good quantitative skills, their ability to think clearly, assess information and arrive at conclusions independently has deteriorated significantly over the last five years. Our recent hires have far less ability to problem solve and reach conclusions without handholding and lots of supervision. We ask all applicants for written work and when I ask them how they conducted their analysis and reached conclusions, nearly every one says that the professor defined the project or it was based on limited available information. They can't think and they can't defend their positions. While I always give them a lot of room because they are interviewing for a job, it's really discouraging. This lack of critical thinking is reflected in their written work. Because our output is written material, our senior staff has to spend an inordinate time supervising research preparation. My guess is that this starts in middle school and continues through high school. Are students told by teachers that they must have certain opinions to get acceptable grades? The second point is that one major subject that has lost ground is American history. How can you be a



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full participant in our democratic republic if you don't know our Constitution and history? There is too much class time devoted to projects and activities that should be extracurricular. For example, several years ago, Scarsdale devoted a unit to Chad. Why?

#2 Social and physiological development of the students beside academic development Developing leadership qualities, independent, problem solving qualities in students

Curriculum Changes and Comparison

#1 Certain additions to the current curriculum for early grades...such as civics, penmanship, geography. Some of these may already be there but I have not seen the current curricula.

#2 I'd love to see the concept of positive psychology introduced into the school curriculum. Take a look at Dr Martin Seligman's work out of the University of Pennsylvania. Their program is now mandatory for the US military and has begun to proliferate across education systems as well.

#3 I am very interested in discussing several items: 1. I am aware that many residents are concerned about how science is taught. I want to understand how well our schools fare at the international level. Are there any national or international competitions in physics/math/biology/chemistry etc. where our students do well? If not, have we discussed why not? Another example: when we talk about STEM, the "science" part becomes rather diluted. A lot of people educated abroad are concerned about how fundamentals of science are overlooked and instead there is more focus on Technology and Engineering, which are based on science. 2. I am not against the use of technology in education, but it has significant downsides. Have we as a community reviewed serious research on the subject? It is good to be informed. Our schools are trying to follow the technology standards of the ISTE, which is a lobbying organization. What are the advantages of the "online" or "cloud-based" courses? When I wrote to the Inquirer on the subject of digital



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education, some local teachers reached out to me and emphasized their concern about jumping head first into the technology-based learning. 3. World languages can be a touchy subject. We are a multinational community (French, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Jews, Ukrainians, etc.) living in a society with historically established educational processes. I believe it is important to dispassionately inquire about preferences of the community while also reviewing the roots of the established practices.

#4 I'm not sure I understand what they all mean, but I would certainly place preparation for life on a rapidly changing planet as a high priority.

#5 We need to compare our high school to the best ones in our area in science and math tracking. Our kids are behind as far as science courses completed.

#6 Possibly suggest an option covering more effective writing or a writing program - beyond the standard papers required of students in the various subjects (e.g., English, History, etc..)

#7 World language program; Use of technology in classroom;

#8 Incorporating more practical science & STEM courses and/or engineering focused curriculum in the elementary schools.

#9 Create a community Manifesto. Focus on a standard of excellence that includes our athletic programs and after school activities.

#10

- a) Consider ways to use updated teaching methods for various subjects. For example, there is a lot of research which shows that the traditional methods



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of teaching math are not effective for many kids but Scarsdale still uses very traditional teaching methods.

- b) Ways to Use parents to supplement education. Scarsdale parents are extremely well educated but they rarely participate in helping educate students. High School could effectively use parents as "adjunct teachers" for various courses such as personal finance, law, art history, economics, computer programming and entrepreneurship. Offering electives to students where parent teach the course could be very useful for students considering various college degrees and careers.

#11 Transparency in math tracking. The students are overwhelmingly tracked in middle school (first regular or advanced, then regular / advanced / honors). Placement exams are offered at the high school, but the test is literally a secret - parents are not allowed to see it after the fact and it does NOT conform to the listed topics. Math placement should be based on transparent, objective criteria.

#12 Elimination of the flawed house system in middle school or at least bringing consistency and making sure all houses follow whatever is determined to be best practices.

#13 Chinese language starting in elementary school

#14 Homework, Wellness

Diversity

#1 What are other districts doing to incorporate diversity, inclusion and equity concepts into the curriculum and into quality of student life? How can Scarsdale be a leader in this area?

#2 How to increase diversity in the schools.



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Facilities

#1 Please discuss working with the facilities/construction organizing in the school system to research the connection between a healthier, cleaner school environment and learning objectives and emotional, mental and physical wellness of our children. For example, is natural light and clean air present in the classrooms? Can window AC units be installed in the classrooms? Please note: a recent Scarsdale Moms online forum contained a story about how a 100 year-old Bronx school has been refitted with central AC. Why not here? Perhaps this isn't the right forum, but I believe there is an important connection between environment and optimal learning. Kids can't pay attention when the class is over 100 degrees inside. How about an AC unit (at the least!) to turn on in the 5-10 extremely hot days so the children can learn efficiently? How about more consistent HVAC duct cleaning to ensure that the air in the building isn't filled with dust that everyone in the building is breathing? How about plants in the classrooms? Any composting and recycling initiatives to be improved? How about the encouragement of "zero-trash" snacks and lunches (reusable containers, less packaging and so on) to help implement healthy habits and practices, as well as help our children focus on the future and their environmental impact?

#2 Air condition and filtration

#3 How does Scarsdale plan to deal with really old infrastructure that in a few cases is clearly beyond its useful life? The community needs to start thinking about the necessary investment to address them for the next 50 years.

#4 Yes - discussing Scarsdale school district's brand. It appears to me that there has been a lack of vision on the direction we want the school district to be moving in. Namely, I've been sorely disappointed at the lack of leadership going on in dealing with the future of Greenacres school. The latest proposal from BBS seems to be the real estate equivalent to adding a few minutes a day to the high school day. What are we trying to accomplish by adding a few minutes to the school day? What are we trying to do by giving each school kitchens, cubbies, and storage space and renovating a 100 year old school with many systems in use already beyond their



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predicted lifespan? Why aren't we taking opportunities to continue our reputation as being innovators and a top educational school district? We should also discuss what spending tax money wisely actually means to this district. As a school district that is ranked in the top richest of the country, people are paying top taxes to send their kids to Scarsdale schools. Let's stop pretending that we need to pinch pennies. What we need to do is to spend wisely and invest for the future. Otherwise, we lose the Scarsdale brand for education.

#5 Health and welfare of students and our future society vis a vis the school system as it relates to social, academic, and physical variables including the school building and utilities itself, the environment created within the school community, and curricular endeavors/methodology and workload. Are these schools role modeling and promoting resilient, happy, healthy and socially responsible and able individuals? Is the very construction of the buildings and utility usages, as well as the curriculum itself, engaging students to effectively perpetuate these objectives? A thoughtful mapping from these overarching goals to the actual curriculum and facility is overdue.

#6 Comparison of facilities with comparable school districts

#7 Facilities upgrades especially the elementary schools that have no A/C or lunchrooms.

#8 Facilities - add Indoor swimming pool

#9 The future of Scarsdale schools and what the physical plants should be. Does the plan for the Greenacres school make sense? Should we build a new school instead?

#10 Getting the schools to a shape where the kids can learn and not have facilities that are less than other schools. Helping to progress the decisions of the board of ed.



#11 Greenacres

Political Bias

Correcting political bias in the classroom. This was present in Middle and High School a few years ago, and now may be increased. For a small example, a teacher announced a prize for the student who correctly guessed the Presidential election winner, and who best predicted the electoral vote count. Only one student did guess the Republican winner, but the classroom contest was canceled.

Private School Lessons

As the parent of a middle schooler in private school, I believe there are lessons to be learned in the way private schools operate that could translate to and enhance the Scarsdale schools (and without added expenses). We private school parents are the minority here, but many of us moved our (non-special needs) kids out of the public school system for particular reasons that had to do with real or perceived shortcomings of the public system. This is a diffuse resource, but one that might be worth tapping.

Project Based Learning

Commitment to Project Based Learning (more opportunities for projects like Capstone - Grade 5 and Civil War Museum - Grade 7) Arts Integration - the focus of STEAM is always on the STEM. It isn't STEAM without ART! More opportunities for drama, dance and visual art in the elementary and middle school levels.



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School Bus

#1 School bus in certain neighborhoods. The current school bus coverage does have some blind spots.

#2 "School bus monitor topic". School bus is well known #1 places for bully behavior in this country since all different ages of kids mix together with only one adult-a busy driver. I received quite some parents complained bad behaviors in school buses. One long term residents said "My kids have been off the SMS bus for years, but there were many, many stories of kids behaving very badly. Bus drivers trying to discipline Parents complained. Nothing was done". We know schools here are always trying to deal this kind issue promptly after it happened. However, if no systematic approach and fundamental change, the same issue can happen again and again without any improvement. So kids still get hurt and parents continued to complain every semester and every year. research shows there are 30% kids report bully happening somewhere including the school buses, and also two thirds cases are never reported. <https://www.usnews.com/.../07/09/school-buses-breed-bullying>. So actually it means more than 50% kids can be bothered by bad behaviors sometimes during their 12 years school experience. This is just simply cannot be ignored or covered by any excuse.

Majority families here in Scarsdale sooner or later need to use school buses for kids during their 12 years school education. No house can be walking distance to all elementary, middle and high schools. So this topic is related to majority families here. Just googled in the internet, there are some public schools already installing video and audio monitoring system which is a progress. see <http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/.../the-case-for-audio...> Boston public schools actually already start to hire bus monitors, see ads from their official website. <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/214>. Although extra staff monitor in the school buses especially state wise has not been implemented mainly due to cost. However, only \$15/per hour(also googled online and tons ads to hire) to hire bus monitor. This is a trivial amount since majority school funding of scarasdale is from property taxes(extra \$200K cost compared more than \$100M tax per year). This is quite different from most other public schools of this country whose funding is primarily from state government which needs senators to pass a bill to support. Another way is to use high school students or parents as volunteers.



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Special Needs

#1 The entire special education system / process. How best to identify, plan for, and provide services, both in district and out, to children with needs.

#2 Providing effective and appropriate support for students with learning differences/disabilities or chronic illnesses, many of whom may be "double classified" -- as in smart kids with learning differences -- but are currently closed out of advanced classes.

State Testing

How is the State testing for grades 3-8 affecting the curriculum and how reading/writing is taught? Is the focus on learning to master multiple choice tests adversely affecting language development and writing ability?

Student Networking

Set the networking opportunity for Scarsdale High school current students to connect alumni of Scarsdale High School which might help knowing con and pro of residing at Scarsdale.

Student Participation

Including student participation in decision and planning

Survey Design

I don't like the leading way in which these questions above are asked. I do not believe in micro managing the school. I think we should stick to communicating



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community goals with the district and opening lines of communication. Long term planning is part of this as it should result from values.

Taxes

Scarsdale taxes are way too high because residents support schools that are like fancy private ones. This is a great deal for people who have children in the schools, but an outrageous burden for those who don't.

Teaching Trends and Tenure

#1 There is no need for the director of the Teacher Institute to be paid a full teacher's salary plus salary for summer work without carrying a .5 FTE teaching load. The Director of the Institute is responsible for reviewing class offerings without coming in contact with students in the Scarsdale system. Among other responsibilities, the Director should be required to sit on at least one session of each class that is offered by the Institute. I would also review the amount of money Edgemont pays to participate in the institute (is it a fair share or are they getting a cut rate to keep Institute participation robust). In the past administrators have received salaries for teaching classes at the Institute. Their administrative salaries should over any teacher training. Also - explore the idea of a contractual agreement for new teachers to take required classes at the Institute for one or two years in order to enhance their learning and acculturate them to Scarsdale. This should be done at little or no cost (and no credit toward their next step) that can be defrayed by a slight increase of the cost of Institute classes for teachers who have been in the system for more than one or two years.

#2 Tenure and how to resolve issues with teachers who should no longer be in the classroom.

#3 What are the trends (last ten years) of the average years of teaching experience in the faculty of the middle schools and high school. If the trends are (as I suspect)



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declining, while the salary budget keeps increasing, then we have a very serious situation: declining experience (quality?) and increasing cost. The population cannot be expected to support continually rising budgets ("but it's only x.y%") which, when compounded, drive taxpayers and businesses out of the Village. It's already happening. There has to be a plan that thoughtfully REDUCES the school budget slowly but surely.

#4 Effectively collect both positive/negative feedbacks on teachers from parents and students and improve the teaching quality.

#5 Wide range of quality outcome amongst teachers at Scarsdale. A focus on how to improve best practice and in classroom outcome will be important.

#6 We also pay attention to how to evaluate tenured teachers. If the tenured teacher can't reach the curriculum request, is there any training program or re-location choice? Scarsdale teachers really receive high level salary which mainly come from local tax. The community should have more right to supervise school finance plan/budget to keep our district at high level and financial balance.

#7 Teacher Re-Assignment

#8 How do Scarsdale student outcomes compare with students in socioeconomically comparable districts?

#9 Teacher evaluation: a high school teacher is said by several sources to be biased (against certain gender etc) (inc. ratemyteachers). How can this be corrected?

#10 Re-examine the tenure process and status for teachers.



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Conclusion

The Education Committee found the quantitative and qualitative responses of the Education Survey useful in guiding it to choose research topics for 2017-2018. The Education Committee will be exploring the Scarsdale community's education values and priorities in more depth via focus groups on September 13, 2017 at a public Scarsdale Forum event. The Forum's Program and Communication Committees will be assisting the Education Committee in widely marketing this event in order to tap into the broad and diverse views of the Scarsdale community.

Respectfully submitted by the Co-Chairs of the Education Committee,

Mayra Kirkendall-Rodríguez

Carlos Ramírez



SCARSDALE FORUM

Appendix Question #7 School Topics

Question #7 What topics should the Scarsdale Forum's Education Committee research? Please rank them in order of preference.

- The need for a school district long-term financial plan
- Program evaluation process and metrics
 - In light of not having AP courses, how do we measure success of our schools?
 - Do numbers lead to more accountability of the school administration and teachers?
 - Three examples that could be used would be World Languages, Advanced Topics (AT), and STEAM
- Community Design Initiative
 - How can all stakeholders in Scarsdale participate jointly in designing important education goals and objectives?
- Financial literacy in school courses
- Indirect(Not in the Classroom) vs. Direct (Classroom) staff evolution & trends
- Facilities usage for non-education community activities
- Teacher recruitment market trends and strategies
- New rules on residency requirements
- Pushing the junior and senior year curriculum to begin with equal rigor earlier in high school



SCARSDALE FORUM

- How should additional minutes added to the curriculum be utilized?
- Ties between the Village and School
 - Major Village initiatives impact Scarsdale schools' finances and long-term planning
- Should the school consider developing how to create Effective Online and Blended Courses?