

A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON DISTRICT-WIDE SCHOOL REDESIGN

June 12, 2017

Small Group Exercise

What Makes a Great School? Detailed Participant Feedback

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	<i>Disagree</i>	Abstained	Varies
CARING ADULT	Students have personal relationships with caring adults who want to help them succeed.	121	30	6	

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Theory vs. practice

A lot of extra teachers taking extra time; note that culture of a school depends on specific caring adults

Need to care for adults too!

Get people from community to engage i.e. store owners, etc.

More structure, student expectations, no accountability, many kids left out, need professional development/teachers!

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	<i>Disagree</i>	Abstained	Varies
ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY	Students have the opportunity to use technology in their learning.	69	70		

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Paid IT internships; make sure better tech all over district

Lack of resources

Need support to update technology/inventory what each school has, prioritize and fund non-negotiable

A problem

Depends on school access, support, training, current

Varied

Clearly define technology; no tech plan for District; Magnet schools have more techs.

Students need to be able to use it effectively (and professional development (teachers) and better course work to prepare students and to use it well

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	<i>Disagree</i>	Abstained	Varies
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	Students are actively involved in the learning and encouraged to participate.	70	81		

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Sports; after school activities; teachers stay after to help; make effort to know students.

Need more teachers aids/extra help.

Allow students to be more active in learning process; create various ways to engage based on learning styles

Inconsistent

Students and parents representation on every committee; no leveraging of, out of school resources - opportunity for leveraging - both ways inside schools/outside schools

Very uneven

Students have too few course choices, so not engaged (and extra-curricular choices are few); more personalized options/instruction

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	<i>Disagree</i>	Abstained	Varies
TEACHER COLLABORATION	Teachers work together and collaborate in planning and implementing learning activities.	70	78	7	

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Magnets focus on process, organization structure does not support collaboration

What you do with information afterwards

Not enough

Not enough time; need intentionally (planned); poor staff attendance; need PLC's; need coaches as support

Between teachers and schools not just within school

In some schools it has improved

Varies school to school; lack of resources

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	The teachers know their material and teach it well.	57	85		

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

More money better results; better teach prep; recruit within Hartford

No consistency

Don't have enough support; quality of education; teacher demands/skills/abilities assessment; large class size; teacher retention

Lack of mentoring

Many are

Teachers are influenced by Unions and don't do what they should do. Teachers are also not supported by Central. Teachers are overwhelmed due to unrealistic expectations.

Are they being evaluated?

Classroom management/school classroom culture inhabits standard achievement

Wide range if teachers and skill levels. Different themes at schools require different skills. Limited resources cause changes in teaching areas not familiar.

Same materials; limit changes in curriculum; streamline PD; teacher with similar background to youth; alignment with PD and goals; knowledge vs. methodology

Not using evaluations effectively to improve performance

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP	The principals and other school administrators are effective.	56	89		3

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

More people of color as administrators; less administration/more teaching

Some schools are working better than others in the district. Take out the Unions.

Changes in Leadership; neighborhood impact; disconnect between CO and schools

Train Principals better - whole team be held accountable for all students to be global. Hands tied - teachers and principals do not equal Central Office. Let Principals be advocates.

Missed out on good person (prior teacher; Sullivan)

Dialogue and consistency in thought.

Not consistent.

Some great, some awful; level of support for leadership needs focus (mentors).

Tension between teachers and principals; school climate; Principals that share culture of youth; need trust in school and District.
 Administrators have not worked in classroom; decisions coming from BOE; some don't have school governance council.
 No effective criteria for judging leadership.

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
DATA-INFORMED DECISIONS	Decisions about the school and the classroom are based on data and facts.	55	89	9	

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Process difference between teachers/parents; different priorities-don't match; relevant
 No data
 Prioritize data; how meaningful is the data
 Don't depend on at expense of individual children
 Could do a better job
 Listen more to teachers; really used the data; trust teacher instincts/intuition; not easily quantified
 But excited about future
 Too much emphasis whole system
 A lot of data available - not sure decisions made on it
 Facts mulled to support opinion; matter of interpreting better
 Not informing the decisions

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT	Students and their families feel safe and secure.	48	93	2	1

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Want children to feel safe (needed); feeling safe on the bus: feels unwelcoming not safe
 Not effective enough
 After 5th grade - no
 Students need to feel welcome
 Facilities are rundown; people are not treated well; teachers are harsh "culture fear"; need more teachers culturally competent
 Set president that everyone should welcome every family member
 Policies/practices are not parent friendly
 Depending on school

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
STANDARDS-BASED PRACTICES	The principals and other school administrators are effective. What is taught, how it is taught and how learning is measured meet the standards set by the state.	45	96	5	3

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Test biased for Caucasians; get students tools needed

Change curriculum too often

Environment makes it difficult; lack of implementation

Multiple learning styles (school culture) don't work (classroom management) one standard "test"; soc studies/science "standards" not get students; improve tech/resources not at standard "tests" dumbed down

Standards too restrictive; standards need to determine non-negotiable

Spanish teacher had no standards for teaching course. Lack of funding negatively impacts consistency.

How learning is measured.

Varies from school to school. Not everyone understands the standards, connect assessment to action.

What is the objective; standards based report cards; educate whole child; make kid friendly; trust kids; too many curricula/strategy; parents never taught what kids should learn; Science not a focus

Parents had to file grievance; not enough support for special needs

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	Parents and other family members are involved and help their children succeed.	43	105	7	2

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Kids in different schools, schedule, culture, transportation; parents not able to support/educate

Discipline not handled appropriately

No representative

Consistency

Meet parents where they're at; creating multiple supports in families - needs/financial/personal

More parents and community stakeholder involved; ensure education

It's working but not enough

Improve translation services

Needs improvement; parent not available

Open school for fun; after parents get off work

Much better; a lot to do

More opportunity; same people always there

Ltd opportunities (parent unavailable in time slots), better communication about parent role, not always welcomed

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
HIGH EXPECTATIONS	Students are expected to do well in school and extra help is provided to help them succeed.	38	111		

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

No social promotion

High performance kids get a lot of attention; not kids that struggle.

Lack of resources; inconsistency

Declining

Need the extra help from District follow state mandate for research-based instruction training in behavior interventions (ADHD, Spectrum)

What do we expect every student to have, opportunities; but do we provide help when students don't meet them?

Some schools have higher expectations than others, can't help every student with needs.

Inconsistent inequity

Inconsistent; bias and assumptions getting in the way of expectations; resourceful parents send kids to school with high expectations.

Varies by age, race, gender, school; suggestion -look at successful models

Teacher turnover; teacher are inexperienced; starting skills/exp lower; lack of training; District is a learning ground

Need resources for extra help; teachers need help; teachers have too many students; need support for teachers (coaches)

"50" Policy: not good; no enforcement (e.g. attendance) of rules/standards

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE TEACHING	The school staff and teachers appreciate the many cultures in the school and teach in ways that are appropriate in our multi-cultural schools.	32	119		

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

White teachers have lower expectations; teachers do not know how students live

Cultural competency training

Many teachers aren't responsive need training; trauma informed training

Not consistent

Curriculum does not include multicultural perspective. Teachers are not taught how to teach in a multicultural way. Some teachers don't care about multicultural.

Teachers need to take time and gain knowledge

Lack of proper cultural training; not adapting teaching to cultural

Mixed; need more work

Hire more black and Latino men to teach; all cultures/history equally

Understanding each other

Train ALL staff re: cultural differences

Need professional development! More effort!

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	Disagree	Abstained	Varies
COHERENCE/ALIGNMENT	Everyone understands and works toward the same priorities.	17	130	3	

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Operates in vacuum; disconnect with central office and schools.

Include parents in the process. Teachers need to be involved. Get to know student's specific needs.

Better definition (common) about school alignment; no consistency across the board; tiered system doesn't allow coherence/alignment.

Lack of vivacity; negative stigma; inconsistent performance

Strong stance that we are a network of schools and remove autonomy

Not everybody on same page. Disconnect between Central Office and schools. Unions working for themselves

Board of Education needs to support Superintendent.

Top down consistency from the District

Consistency of narrative over longer time. Increased communication to community school and staff. Proactively engage everyone in priorities and goals.

Would agree but not for District; priorities keep changing??

Uneven system - lack agreed to standards; principals have different priorities; kids without pre-school in classes with kids with pre-school; don't see people working towards alignment.

Continue this kind of discussion; realign school types/less autonomy per building.

Lack of coherence no vision from leadership; no priorities or clear; what are expectations? Trust lacking; educate whole child.

Different kinds of schools; teachers don't look like students; teachers/parents not working together.

Work in progress; understanding but no movement; support insufficient for students; changing priorities

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	<i>Disagree</i>	Abstained	Varies
NEEDS-BASED RESOURCES	Decisions about funding, staffing and support are based on where they are most needed.	15	119	2	1

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Lack of transparency - need more details; lack of accountability; no input into the budget; lack of communication

Connect to outside source; tiered/more equitable resources

Right size - proportional

Equity and equality; more ready schools = more resources; funding for students don't follow timely - budget impact on schools. Magnet school resources need to be transparent. More open

Some decisions not school based; union rules remove good teachers

Special Education, Soc. W., Family Resource Center bare minimum support staff, ESLL enrichment programs (too much paring down)

More research re: needs and action; making it happen

Yearly SGC training; out of school control - student based budget; misconceptions about resources at each school magnets vs. community schools; depends on school size; aligning funding to student: where is money going?; lack of clarity on SGC for budget; no place for science in K-5th, science needs to start early

Best teachers need to be in the neediest schools' based on number kids in school, not on need; based on geography and number kids

Needs of special education or L.E.P. are never met; resources aren't going to where they need to be

Trying to move there

Characteristic	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT	Agree	<i>Disagree</i>	Abstained	Varies
SCHOOL SIZE	The size of schools is designed so that resources can be distributed in ways that support effective learning.	9	127		

Comments recorded on flip charts by facilitators:

Enrollment cap; designs of school are outdated

Consolidation

Low enrollment schools need more resources; but fully enrolled schools also suffer

Some schools too small student population for the facility; lottery system denying access; too many schools under enrolled too many magnets; seats aren't adequately filled

Any high school that has less than 300 students should be closed; need effective middle schools; lack of sports, too many high schools, tremendous variance in A.P. courses

Have too many schools - no resources; half-empty schools; staff implication seats not filled

Neighborhood access to schools - even magnet schools; aligning resources to need; Sheff vs. O'Neill has damaged

Resources not distributed equitably

Class size too big - 3 people agree with this statement

Too small (many)

Additional comments:

Want additional meetings to collect more family and community input.

Would like different methods of including various perspectives.

Survey Monkey

Anonymous email box

Survey boxes/comment boxes in schools

High expectations should not be too high (military style) with little supports. - Student

Teachers should receive community tours and cultural training.

Consolidation should have consideration for longer period of time.

Configuration of schools K-5 North and South (Coherence and alignment - to achieve harmony)

Eliminate transitions

School and academic performance

Anchor considerations in the quality of great schools

Composition of Student Body

High concentration of students with special needs base in one school building

Whatever decisions are made it needs to fit with a vision for the district. Configurations are random.

Cultural considerations and awareness must be included in any future redesign of the student population.

Good discussion, lots of passionate and strong feelings

Did not like how they first found out about school consolidating.

They want to be able to individually assess vs. school wide.

Transportation: what makes sense by community

Principals need to be included in conversation

High number of disagreements

Changes in leadership

Not on the list: student voice, trauma-informed practices, and community partnerships