

Focus 203: State of the District

Future Focus, designed to facilitate meaningful dialogue and discussion to shape the future direction for all stakeholders in our learning community, continued to gather information from parents and the community in meetings this fall.

A total of 54 parents, school, and community participants attended one of two different sessions held September 17 and 18. Presenters included Superintendent Dan Bridges, Chief Academic Officer Jennifer Hester, and Chief Financial Officer Brad Cauffman. Parents and guests then were invited to work in small groups to identify what they felt were the greatest celebrations and greatest opportunities in the district. Groups also were asked to prioritize topics for future Focus 203 sessions as well as identify concepts, issues and questions related to each study topic.

Task #1:

Identify the Greatest Celebrations and Greatest Opportunities for the district.

Sifting through the small group responses from participants, several themes emerged:

Greatest Celebrations:

- The achievements of the students, teachers and staff as well as recognition as a top-notch district.
- Good fiscal management, particularly in the face of changing state funding.
- The ability to “have a voice” in the district through open communication avenues between parents and the schools/administration.
- Forward-looking new curriculums for math and English and especially science.

Greatest Opportunities:

- Studying and managing district finances while implementing a rigorous curriculum in line with Common Core.
- Embracing technology in the curriculum, particularly through devices available to all students. Exploring online learning opportunities as well as supporting teachers so they can embrace the technology in their classrooms.
- Ensuring K-12 support and resources to students, parents and teachers, particularly as they balance increased academic rigor with the social/emotional needs of students.

Task #2

Develop and prioritize Study Topics for future Focus 203 sessions, providing details on concepts, issues, opportunities and questions for each topic.

It should be noted the small groups did not coalesce around one or two top priorities in their discussions. Several common topics surfaced, though they were assigned differing priorities by the groups.

Possible Study Topics with details, when provided:

- Pursuing online and blended learning, with an eye to developing and implementing online/blended learning for all students at all levels. *Details:* There should be a focus on rapid development of a timeline for online learning, with expanded options available for summer school.
- Putting a fresh focus on teachers, support for their efforts and evaluation of their work. Teachers should be encouraged to pursue continuing education opportunities. They should have a clear understanding of district priorities in/for their classrooms though should not “teach to the test.” *Details:* Fair and valid criteria should be developed to evaluate teachers; there should be “wariness” about tying test scores to teacher evaluations.
- Developing a long-term STEM education plan in response to the changing job market. *Details:* Vocational and teacher training in STEM fields is needed, so that these careers can be promoted by teachers to students. Younger grades should be exposed to STEM as well.
- Growing communication and community relations to build and promote business partnerships and foster school/community relationships. *Details:* District needs to use technology to keep students and families informed and involved; daily school announcements should be included in communications.
- Continuing Common Core implementation. *Details:* Research is needed to implement Common Core “for ourselves,” and “to be pioneers in the process.”
- Teaching to the needs of each child, with an emphasis on social and emotional needs and well-being. *Details:* Parents are looking for support and SEL resources to help their children; programs are needed for students to evaluate their own mental health.