

**PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Comments/Feedback from Public Forum #2**  
*November 30, 2016*

Over 75 parents, school staff, district leadership, and community members participated in the second community forum regarding the future of the Pittsgrove Township School District.

The forum participants were divided into 11 groups. The groups were asked to provide input on a number of questions that involved the District's strategic direction.

The first exercise involved revisiting the District's Mission, Vision, and Values. The groups were given a copy of the current Mission and Vision statements, and were provided with guidance on the definitions of those three terms.

The groups offered the following comments during the first exercise:

- Agreed with the current Mission and Vision, but wanted a greater emphasis on targeted communication with students (i.e. more engagement with guidance counselors).
- In terms of Vision, wanted a stronger relationship between the community and the District. There should be a commitment to creating one district with Elmer.
- The Mission should focus on communication and the services that are available. The Mission should reflect that every child should be prepared for his/her own future (need an individualized approach).
- The District should provide more extracurricular activities at the middle school.
- In terms of values, one group liked the use of the word "pride" in regard to the school and community, but the word as a whole did not resonate with the group. Perhaps the word "pride" should be changed to "spirit." The group did agree with the reference to respect, especially in the context of anti-bullying. The group also wanted to reference innovation, as well as diversity and inclusiveness in school programs and in the community. Finally, the group felt that excellence should be a part of the Vision.
- In terms of the Mission, one group did not like the word "rigorous." There should, however, be diversity in programs to help prepare each child for his/her own future and dreams.
- In terms of the Vision, one group recommended changes that focus more on inclusiveness (including academics) and communication to alert the community of new programs and services. This group liked the word "rigor" since it means that children are being challenged. They also thought that children need to be well-rounded and prepared for the challenges of life. Finally, the group would like to see references to excellence and empathy included in the statement.

- The Vision should reference character-building through school programs. The group also thought that the Vision should include using technology to prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. The technology could be paid for by reexamining district finances and increasing enrollment.
- The purpose of the schools should be to align with each student's life goals, including Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.
- The District should consider saving dollars by consolidating school buildings down to three.
- The District should focus on building teacher/parent/school/community partnerships. The District should also focus on providing CTE programs and real-world experiences through internships.
- Skills are central as each student should have 21<sup>st</sup> Century life and academic skills. Need teamwork and collaboration. All children can benefit from a well-rounded education including these life skills.
- In terms of the Mission, partnerships are important and the Mission should reflect different types of relationships and organizations—parents, teachers, leadership, and community. The group indicated that the schools should serve as the central hub of the community—for example, through a community library. The group indicated that we should better align school schedules, including transportation. The District should also promote inclusiveness. Finally, the group stated that STEM careers are in high demand and students need to be prepared for them, including hands-on jobs. The CTE programs should articulate with the workforce needs of the community.
- The District should focus on the implications of the changing demographics in the community. For example, how can the schools support families in need and where can these families obtain needed resources and services that may be available in the community? All students should be treated with dignity and respect and be included in activities and classes.
- STEM programs are critical for student success, especially at the secondary level. Parents should be acknowledged as the number one resource for children, and this philosophy should be reflected in the schools and classrooms throughout the District.
- Critical-thinking skills are imperative to our children's future.

The groups were then asked to provide guiding principles for developing future initiatives for the District. Each group was asked to write down 3-5 answers to the following questions: Over the next five years, on what should the District focus to better serve children or be more efficient? What is the desired future position of the schools?

The groups provided the following responses to the second exercise:

1. What are the top priorities on which the District should focus over the next five years?
  - Communication
  - Collaboration
  - Coordination of services with parents, the community, and with other agencies
  - Need to add more clarity to student, school, and community “pride.”
  - More diversity and breadth of opportunity in the schools that is supported by activities in the community. The District’s Vision and Mission should be aligned with this priority.
  - The District should provide transportation home from after-school events.
  - In order to accomplish all of these priorities, the District will need to identify new resources.
  - Continue to use PowerSchool as parents now feel as if they are partners in their child’s education by having, in real time, constructive conversations with teachers and staff.
  - The District should partner with businesses to provide technology and/or resources to schools.
  - The community should understand that education is the most important thing that society does.
  - The District should focus on implementing the input received throughout the strategic planning process.
  - Communication is key for all stakeholders centered around developing learning goals for each individual student that can be tracked throughout his/her school career.
  - Number one priority is finances. Shared services are important. For example, the best resources for the community are technology and libraries. Maybe we could charge a small fee to cover user costs for these services.
  - Ensure that Elmer has representation on the Pittsgrove Township Board of Education.
  - Take steps to stabilize enrollments as declining enrollment will lead to a decline in funding.
  - Advocate for change in the Interdistrict School Choice Program at the State level. The Interdistrict School Choice Program could generate more revenue, but over the past few years, it has been capped at current levels.

2. What is the desired future position of the schools? (What should be the guiding principles for strategic objectives and goals?)
- Increase diverse learning opportunities; increase partnerships with professionals in the community for internships; have smaller class sizes and more extracurricular activities.
  - Efficiency in finances and operations is important, which requires balancing resources to ensure that the needs of all students are met.
  - Improve facilities to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education. Consider building consolidation. Focus on providing greater tiered services of intervention for struggling learners.
  - Less emphasis on testing overall. Ensure the efficient use of required tests. Establish more inclusive classrooms, but still have smaller specialized classes for students who need it. Focus on traditional practices that have led to a quality education in the past, but should be linked to educational innovation. Establish a process to continue the community dialogue following the conclusion of strategic planning, and make it a welcoming environment.
  - The District must focus on providing a diversity of opportunities for students. Identify resources to support students and families that are available outside of the immediate community. The District should identify clubs and activities that will allow students to explore and discover outside of the classroom.
  - The District should be more aggressive in identifying non-traditional revenues, such as grants, and should hire a grant writer to accomplish this.

## Organized By Topic

### **1. Academics and Instruction**

- The Mission should reflect that every child should be prepared for his/her own future—need an individualized approach.
- The District should provide more extracurricular activities at the middle school.
- The group wanted to reference innovation, as well as diversity and inclusiveness in school programs and in the community. Excellence should be part of the Vision.
- In terms of the Mission, one group did not like the word “rigorous.”
- Another group liked the word “rigor” since it means that children are being challenged.
- The group thought that children need to be well-rounded and prepared for the challenges of life. The group would like to see references to excellence and empathy.
- The purpose of the schools should be aligned with each student’s life goals, including CTE programs.
- Skills are central as each student should have 21<sup>st</sup> Century life and academic skills. Need teamwork and collaboration. All children can benefit from a well-rounded education, including these life skills.
- The group indicated that STEM careers are in high demand and that students must be prepared for them, including hands-on jobs. The CTE programs should articulate with the workforce needs of the community.
- STEM programs are critical for student success, especially at the secondary level. Parents should be acknowledged as the number one resource for children, and this philosophy should be reflected in the schools and classrooms throughout the District.
- Critical-thinking skills are imperative to our children’s future.
- Top priorities: Continue to use PowerSchool, as parents now feel as if they are partners in their child’s education by having, in real time, constructive conversations with teachers and staff.
- Guiding principles: Increase diverse learning opportunities; increase partnerships with community professionals for internships; have smaller class sizes and more extracurricular activities.
- Guiding principles: Less emphasis on testing overall, and ensure the efficient use of tests that are required. Need to focus on traditional practices that have led to a quality education in the past, but now should be linked to educational innovation.
- Guiding principles: The District should identify clubs and activities that will allow students to explore and discover outside of the classroom.
- There should be diversity in programs to help prepare each child for his/her own future and dreams.
- Guiding principles: The District must focus on providing a diversity of opportunities for students.
- The District should also focus on providing CTE programs and real-world experiences through internships.

## **2. Special Education**

- Guiding principles: Establish more inclusive classrooms, but still have smaller specialized classes for students who need it.

## **3. Community Engagement**

- In terms of Vision, the group wanted a stronger relationship between the community and the District. There should be a commitment to create one district with Elmer.
- The District should focus on building teacher/parent/school/community partnerships.
- In terms of the Mission, partnerships are important.
- The Mission should reflect different types of relationships and organizations—parents, teachers, leadership, and the community. The group indicated that the schools should serve as the central hub of the community—for example, through a community library.
- The District should focus on the implications of the changing demographics in the community. For example, how can the schools support families in need and where can these families obtain needed resources and services that may be available in the community?
- Top priorities: Collaboration
- Top priorities: Coordination of services with parents, the community, and with other agencies.
- Top priorities: Need to add more clarity to student, school, and community pride.
- Top priorities: More diversity and breadth of opportunities in the schools that are supported by activities in the community. The District's Vision and Mission statements should be aligned with this priority.
- Top priorities: The District should provide transportation home from after-school events.
- Top priorities: The community should understand that education is the most important thing that society does.
- Top priorities: The District should focus on implementing the input received throughout the strategic planning process.
- Top priorities: Ensure that Elmer has representation on the Pittsgrove Township Board of Education.
- Guiding principles: Establish a process to continue the community dialogue following the conclusion of strategic planning, and make it a welcoming environment.
- Guiding principles: Identify resources to support students and families that are available outside of the immediate community.

#### **4. School Culture**

- In terms of values, one group liked the idea of referencing “pride” in the school and community, but the word as a whole did not resonate with the group. Perhaps the word “pride” should be “spirit.” The group did agree with the reference to respect, especially in the context of anti-bullying.
- The Vision should reference character-building through school programs.

#### **5. Communication**

- The group agreed with the current Mission and Vision, but wanted more emphasis on targeted communication with students (i.e. more engagement with guidance counselors).
- The Mission should focus on communication and services that are available through the schools.
- Top priorities: Communication in terms of alerting the community to new programs and services.
- Top priorities: Communication
- Top priorities: Communication is key for all stakeholders centered on developing learning goals for each individual student that can be tracked throughout his/her school career.

#### **6. Efficiency**

- The District should consider saving dollars by consolidating school buildings down to three.
- The group indicated that we should better align school schedules, including transportation.
- Top priorities: To accomplish all of these priorities, the District will need to identify new resources.
- Top priorities: The number one priority is finances. Shared services are important. For example, the best resources for the community are technology and libraries. The District should consider charging a small fee to cover user costs for these services.
- Top priorities: Take steps to stabilize enrollments, as declining enrollment will lead to a decline in funding.
- Top priorities: Advocate for change in the Interdistrict School Choice Program at the State level. The Interdistrict School Choice Program could generate more revenue, but over the past few years it has been capped at current levels.
- Guiding principles: Efficiency in finances and operations is important, which requires balancing resources to ensure that the needs of all students are met.

- Guiding principles: Improve facilities to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education; consider building consolidation, and focus on providing greater tiered services of intervention for struggling learners.
- Guiding principles: The District should be more aggressive in identifying non-traditional revenues, such as grants. The District should hire a grant writer to accomplish this.

## **7. Diversity and Equity**

- The District should promote inclusiveness.
- In terms of the Vision, one group recommended changes to focus more on inclusiveness, including in academics.
- All students should be treated with dignity and respect and be included in activities and classes.

## **8. Technology**

- The group thought that the Vision should reference using technology to prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. The technology could be paid for by reexamining District finances and increasing enrollments.
- Top priorities: The District should partner with businesses to provide technology or other resources to schools.