

Notes
Vision Plan for Public Education in Alamance County
Stakeholder Group Meeting
December 5, 2012
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Reading Assignment – Preserving the Public in Public Schools by Phil Boyle and Del Burns

In small, well-mixed groups, stakeholders shared and discussed:

- **How did you read the book, e.g., a chapter every few days, a section each week, the whole book last night?**
Chunks; sections; downloaded on Kindle; jumped around; bits and pieces; longest short book – dense; started it, didn't finish it; didn't read it; read it this week
- **What struck you most, what were your “a-ha’s,” your “take-a-ways?”**
 - + No one solution or right thing
 - + Society is really reflected in public schools
 - + These discussions have been on-going since first public schools
 - + Loved the four value model
 - + Making sure we understand the issue before we try to create a solution using the four values
 - + Exercise (done in 3rd meeting) made the book more understandable
 - + It is very complicated
 - + If the issue only touches one value then there really is no issue
 - + Recognizing the importance of schools in preserving the democratic standpoint of our nation
 - + Similarities between Crestwich and ABSS; ABSS faces many of the same of similar challenges
 - + Does the book provide ways to or reasons for keeping the “public” in public schools?
 - Citizen/parent engagement/participation
 - Can't maintain our democracy without public in public schools
 - Doesn't have the answers, but the framework
 - Need a foundation to have productive discussions
 - + Review Part IV and V; page 185 test for School Boards
 - + Does ABSS self check? Consistent re: public good/democracy
 - + Why are board members serving? For themselves

- **What does your reading of the book suggest for this visioning process?**
 - + Aristotle quote – we must entertain all points of view/values and different dimensions of each without necessarily accepting each
 - + Vision of schools may conflict with personal values
 - + Sets the stage for discussion with public
 - + Need to figure out how to put a plan together that is most workable for our community
 - + The book suggests that we should respect others values and viewpoints, and be open minded
 - + In the political process how people with such a narrow agenda can cause so much change
 - + How do we achieve balance and still meet the goals?
 - + How do we find common ground?
 - + How do we get “politics” out of it?
 - + We have to serve all students
 - + Keeping governance in public schools
 - + Need to keep public in the conversation; keep asking
 - + This needs to be shared by everyone
 - + If we had the time we would collect as much community input as possible
 - + Find where we do agree and focus on that as we tackle those areas where we don’t agree
 - + Leadership is a huge piece
 - + Book is a tool for leaders
 - + Need a vision statement, goals to get buy-in, focus
 - + Don’t want to spin wheels too much focusing on wordsmithing
 - + Public input on target – community/diversity; this is allowing for community effort
 - + Vision to help share that learning is everybody’s responsibility
 - + Prepare kids for real-life-scenarios
 - + Sometimes the “stuff” taught is not helpful or necessary?
 - + Generalize too much

Interview Assignment – Key Visioning Questions

Grouped according to their assigned interview question (5 groups), stakeholders shared and discussed:

- **Who did you interview, what kinds of folks did you talk with?**
 Leadership team; administrators; teachers; parents; business leaders; non-parents; legislator; therapist; students; private school teacher; college professor; human services staff person; retired school teacher; citizens with no children; senior citizens; special needs teachers/parents/grandparents; family and friends; professionals; students; co-workers; retirees with no kids in school; variety of backgrounds

- **How easy or difficult was it to get folks to talk about your question, and what did you do to help them if they had difficulty?**
 - Emailed questions and gave time to return; thoughtful
 - With face-to-face interviews had to help stay on topic
 - Easy to get people to talk but not necessarily about the question
 - Some weren't sure how to answer it
 - More difficult to get feedback when requiring to write it down
 - Basic themes easy, difficulty when getting people to explain the themes

- **What public values did you hear expressed?**
 - Community and Prosperity – seem to be the predominant values expressed, but heard all of them in some way or another.
 - Community – involve parents and others; who should teach? → Community Members; how? → experiential and off campus
 - Liberty – Freedom, Responsibility
 - Equality -- inclusion; Give every student get an opportunity
 - Prosperity – workforce concept; self-sufficiency

Summaries of the key points and messages heard in response to each interview question:

1. Why educate the next generation?

- Next generation of leaders
- We need to educate because they are the future
- So they are able to be self-sustaining; employed
- Supporting the economy
- Concerns expressed about the U.S.'s global position
- Appreciation for the significance of history

2. Why invest in public education?

- Our responsibility; invest in education – impacts future generations
- Evolutionary learning- impacts jobs, global economy
- Invest – what are we willing to invest? “pay it forward”
- Education = hope
- Promote development of responsible, educated empowered citizens capable of contributing positively to community
- Key to success → individual, business, community
- Expands minds so that we do not become a society that depends on government

3. What purposes should public schools serve?

- Prepare children for the future
- Make well-rounded students

- Values; we are all different but all in it together
- Safety
- Provide students with resources they need to be successful
- Work with parents and help parents
- Develop a commitment to life long learning
- Give everybody the attention they need → Middle part of class don't get the proper amount of attention (special programs for top end and lower end, but not the middle); lots of equality issues expressed → Every student get an opportunity

4. What should we teach children, who should teach them, and how?

- What Should We Teach:
 - Good Citizenship
 - Basic Skills
 - Specialized education, broader
 - Things that will make a student prepared for jobs
 - Decision making skills
 - Respect
 - Responsibility
 - Teach kids to want to learn
 - Don't teach to the test
 - Common Sense Classes
- Who Should Teach:
 - Teachers
 - Community member
 - Parents
 - Role-model like teachers
 - Higher level of educated teachers
- How should we teach:
 - Less busy work
 - Hands-on experiences; first hand experiences and outside of school experiences
 - Seeing children's abilities at young age
 - Creatively
 - Knowing how the child learns and teach them that way
 - Teachers understanding students
 - Teachers should develop relationship
 - Don't focus on just testing

5. **What role should public schools play in our children's lives and in our communities?**

- Predominant value expressed → Community → Safety, morals, values, the "basics"
- Some tension around extracurriculars; i.e. sports, wanting a back-to-basics focus

Suggestions for this visioning process based on your interview findings:

- Predominant Value(s) change over time with Prosperity currently getting more emphasis in our society.
- Question: Are there people or perspectives that we've missed? If we thought so and we wanted to collect other opinions, how could we do so?
- By question and as a whole group, can we explore the answers to begin to shape or form the vision?
- "Investing"
 - Education = success; economic, personal, community
 - Village – whole community ownership
 - Price to pay if we do or don't; Invest in +? Invest in - ?
 - Abe Lincoln: "The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next."
- "Purpose"
 - Create a culture of community
 - Support and develop families of students and neighborhoods surrounding schools
 - "Equality"
 - Administration of school needs to be more open to the public
 - Have more discipline; include parents in disciplinary problems
 - Teach the basics (reading, writing, math, etc.)
 - Providing a free education
 - Provide nutrition and basic food needs

Themes/Ideas suggested from across all five groups/questions for the process of creating a vision plan moving forward:

- Value of Community – common across the answers to all five questions
- Value of Prosperity also prominent; perhaps given today's economy and emphasis on schools setting our kids in position to be prosperous; economically successful
- Are there samples of vision plans we could look at? Examples?
- Can we code all the cards and give them back to the stakeholder group?
- Need to create a meaningful and relevant vision plan for the community, students; all groups
- Are there questions the school board wants answered?
- School Board is asking us what we want; where we want to go; to be. Book depicts this very well. The "where" depends on where the community places its values.
- The devil is in the details → how do we define community?
- The five questions lend themselves to community type of answers; not liberty or individual type answers. Should we ask other questions about public education?
- How will/does the school system focus on the middle group of students?

- How to be more open to the community; more public friendly; schools open to the community

+/ Δ What worked well/What could be improved?

+ Worked Well:

- Going out into the community and getting the response → community's involvement

Δ What could be improved?

- Technique for getting response to the questions → allowing the respondents to have time to reflect and respond in writing worked well for some
- Meeting in the morning and not after another meeting; better when we meet first thing in the morning. (Note: the time of this meeting started later in the morning due to another event that several stakeholders were invited to attend.)