



WILLIAMSTOWN-LANESBOUROUGH SCHOOL UNION 71
LANESBOROUGH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Long Range Planning Focus Group Feedback
October 19 and 20, 2009

NOTE: There were a total of eight focus groups (48 participants) over two nights comprised of teachers, parents, administrators, school committee, community members and town officials. Each group had a facilitator (teachers, administrators and school committee) who assisted in the discussions and took notes. The groups met in separate areas for approximately 45 minutes, then returned to the larger group to report out each groups responses to the following five questions.

1. What do you believe will be key challenges and future conditions your child(ren) will face after finishing their formal schooling?

When asked to share key challenges and future conditions the feedback from the eight focus groups was consistent. Comments centered on the concern for fewer jobs and fewer economic opportunities and the need for their children to be able to adapt to change, possess a higher level of skills well beyond the basics, including strong communication/social skills. The participants felt that students needed to be competent and prepared to function in a global, digital/electronic world. The groups voiced a strong need for their children to be well-versed in world languages. Other challenges in the future included a concern for growing environmental issues, increased special education students, the need for sensitivity to ethnic diversity and the loss of the middle class. A final overarching concern was whether or not the current education system we provide will be relevant or adequate in the future.

2. From your perspective what do you consider to be the major strengths of our school?

1. ***A quality teaching staff.*** Many participants expressed strong support and satisfaction with the staff. The current art and music program was highlighted in a number of the groups and the special education department's ability to identify students early, to provide interventions and assimilation into regular educations was considered an asset. The emerging teacher-based English/Language Arts Committee and administrative efforts to support professional development are considered strengths.
2. ***A strong sense of community.*** This was referenced in almost every group. Feedback identified LES as a friendly, open school that provides a safe environment for children. The size of the school and small class sizes are considered strengths. Groups also referenced the "three Rs" program (respect, responsible and ready) as successful and actively supported by the principal and staff. Communication internally and externally with the community was considered good; however, in another group there was the suggestion to broaden communication.

3. **Strong support from many parents and the community-at-large.** Many parents work closely with teachers. Participants referenced the PTO as active and helpful and cited their efforts to provide school community events. Parents are involved in the school and in the education of their children.
4. **The new school building.** The building is considered a major strength. It is well-maintained and inviting. Some participants noted that the budget hasn't had costly expenditures on building maintenance, but it will in the future as the building ages.

Also the superintendent and principal were mentioned as strengths.

3. From your perspective what do you consider to be the major weakness of our school?

1. **Technology.** Overwhelmingly, all groups cited the lack of updated technology to support learning as a major weakness. This includes a need to replace obsolete hardware, increase the use of software to support curriculum and to provide much-needed technology training for staff.
2. **Limitations of the Budget.** Another strongly voiced deficit is the limitations imposed by the budget resulting in a lack of funding to support materials/programs and the return of reduced staff.
3. **Consistent Educational/Curriculum Programs Across Grades.** Alignment with state standards, enrichment opportunities, more materials/resources for non-special education students and environmental education were considered inconsistent or lacking. Inconsistency in assigned homework was mentioned.
4. **Opportunities for Advanced Students.** The need to increase opportunities for advanced students was cited multiple times in groups.
5. **Professional Development Opportunities/Collaboration.** A need for increased professional development opportunities was underscored by some groups including training in Response to Intervention (RTI). Having common planning time for teachers to collaborate between and across grades on whole school assessment/curriculum goals was lacking.
6. **Additional Areas Mentioned:** Some individuals reported a difference between LES and WES in the level of preparedness for attending MGRHS as a weakness resulting in inadequate integration of students at the MS/HS level. To a lesser degree the following weaknesses were mentioned – challenges to communication to all across the school and paid instrumental lessons after school.

4. Please identify three or four long term goals that our school district ought to pursue over the next three to five year.

A major goal recommended was to improve technology including increasing staff professional development in technology, update hardware, and purchase integrated software for curriculum (math and science). Additional goals included expanding revenue opportunities (grant writing), increasing environmental awareness, offering world languages and planning for maintenance of the building. Some consensus included a recommendation to unify LES, WES and MGRHS, improve the differences in music programming between LES and WES (specifically the instrumental strings) and better coordination of sped services. Other goals mentioned were programming for advanced students (gifted and talented) exploring a different school calendar configuration and class schedules to provide more efficient use of the school day. Stretch the curriculum with an interdisciplinary approach and consider service learning

5. If budgetary constraints were not an issue, what programming would you like to see added to our school?

There was strong consensus to provide programming for advanced learners (gifted and talented), upgrading technology (laptops and data management) and offering a language. Other wishes included full-time programs in art, including instrumental music, after school programming and field trips to enhance learning. Increasing staff was mentioned, as well as offering more environmental education, PK for every LES child, Special Olympics and more nutrition/exercise.

Thank you to all our Focus Group participants for your openness and insights.

Focus Group Data Collated by Rose Ellis, Ellen Boshe and Bernadette McMahon, October 30, 2009