



**Honoring History • Involving Community • Refining Vision**

**Summary of Responses to Activity #2**  
**"What questions do we need be asking as we work to refine**  
**the District's mission, vision and core values?"**  
**Kick Off Meeting • Feb. 15, 2012**

A total of 175 lines were filled in on the cards turned in by respondents for Activity #2 at the February 15, 2012 Kick-off meeting. Most participants wrote one question per line, although a handful added a follow-up question on the same line.

When analyzing the results of a qualitative exercise like this, the object is to identify the themes that surface frequently throughout the responses. The identification of these themes provides a clearer understanding of the most common thoughts, questions and concerns expressed by those in attendance at the meeting – which helps to guide the development of the quantitative research tools (online survey of parents, and community telephone survey) that will be used in this process.

The themes that were identified from the cards submitted by Kick-off meeting participants were as follows: (All verbatim comments are presented exactly as written by the respondents)

**Acknowledging what's working and changing what's not**

A number of respondents asked questions and offered comments that suggested the need to honestly assess what aspects of the current Mission, Vision and Core Values statements may remain viable today, before making changes. The views were a blending of respect for the accomplishments of the past – which have helped the District achieve its lofty position – with an acknowledgement that some ideas expressed in the current statements might need to be refreshed.

*Sample questions/comments:*

What if the guiding principles still apply?

How can we keep our strong sense of diversity from our past, while working on challenges for the future?

Are we satisfied with what the district has accomplished to date? That answer may help us guide the District in the future.

What has, and is, working?

How do we continue to build on our successes?

How does the time spent on this make the educational experience better?

What is different now than when the last Mission, Vision and Core Values statements were developed?

What is it about our current Mission, Vision and Values that make us feel we need to change something? I see nothing in our current Mission that I would delete or change. Would we ever not educate all students, for instance?

What is going well already? What are our strengths?

Who are our benchmark educational institutions and how do we choose those benchmarks?

Can we be honest about what is broken, and have the wherewithal to fix it?

## **Maintaining the commitment to excellence while effectively serving students of all skill levels**

Meeting participants were vocal (in writing) in their concerns about this topic, expressing the hope that the district would not lose its focus on turning out true scholars, while also acknowledging that not all students will be able to achieve at such a level. It seemed clear that the comments were coming both from households that have high-performing students, and from those whose students achieve at a more average level.

*Sample questions/comments:*

How do you address the problems facing lower achieving groups without sacrificing excellence?

How can the district continue to offer the best possible educational opportunities for each individual student?

Only high achievers are represented, to the 100% exclusion of average and struggling students.

What does “best practices” mean for every student, and how do we give students authentic learning experiences?

Educational opportunity is not identical opportunity. How do we maximize opportunities for learners and community, students and teachers?

Balance should be considered. Always pushing and adding and striving doesn't necessarily lead to a healthy child/adult.

How to teach to individual students – differentiation. How to push strong students harder to accomplish their full potential.

How do we effectively teach to all levels of students?

## **Balancing budget challenges with district needs**

There was much conversation within the questions about the difficulty facing the district in maintaining its standard of excellence in light of the ongoing budget challenges faced by The School District of Clayton, and by other school districts across the state. While these concerns may or may not fit with the Mission, Vision and Core Values statement evolution process, they are clearly on the minds of the patrons.

*Sample questions/comments:*

How can we trim the fat from the budget so we can afford to do things?

How do we segment our priorities – with our money, our instruction – since we can't have it all?

How do we continue to hire and retain the most excellent teachers?

How will we marry the realities of the budget to the Mission, Vision and Values?

Since resources are limited, what do we not value as much?

How do we maintain the quality of our education, while being fiscally responsible?

Are the sources of funding education in Clayton adequate and secure?

What do we do best? How can we focus our resources to continue doing what we do best?

## **Recognizing and addressing the impact of changes in society on how the district prepares students for their futures**

Many respondents discussed the need for the district to find ways to stay current with the changing world – and the impact of those changes on the district's ability to prepare students to succeed. Their observations were mostly general, rather than specific, meaning that they simply wanted the District to make certain it was constantly evaluating ways to better equip students.

*Sample questions/comments:*

Are we preparing students for life, not just academics?

What changes are challenging the Mission, Vision and Core Values?

What do we know to be true now that impacts the lives and learning abilities of our students? Think mega-trends: obesity, inability to focus (electronics).

Change happening in the world today is geometric. How do we generate critical thinkers who can help guide and flow with this change?

How to reflect upon the changes in society and the world as you explore this process; does that change your view?

What will be the greatest challenges for our students in the future?

How can the district keep up with changing/expanding social needs?

Are we helping students for what lies ahead – in the real world?

## **Addressing the issues of growth and increasing diversity**

This topic surfaced in a variety of ways, as some participants struggled with the idea of how to maintain the excellence of Clayton while dealing with growth, and also dealing with any challenges associated with a more diverse student population. Respondents seemed to value diversity – because it provides a more real-world experience for students – while also stating the idea that, with diversity, can come some challenges.

*Sample questions/comments:*

What are the objectives of the voluntary student transfer program? What are the goals?

Do we want the district to grow, or do we want to limit it?

How can we value diversity and keep a program like voluntary transfer students?

How do we maintain our diverse population? Do we want to maintain our diverse population?

What plans are in place for the end of the VT program?

What is the optimal size of the district in light of the facilities, the finances and the resources (the Turner case)?

How can we keep our strong sense of diversity from the past while working on challenges for the future?

## **Effectively engaging the community**

A number of respondents discussed the importance of securing more involvement by the community in the life of the school district. The ideas expressed in the comments were two-fold: That the district should seek opportunities for more active community engagement, and that the community should be making an effort to get more involved.

*Sample questions/comments:*

How do we motivate the community to get more involved?

Is the school district a reflection of the community, or is the community a reflection of the district? How do they lead/inform each other?

How is service to our wider community and the world a part of our educational experience?

How can we involve the community – residents of the surrounding neighborhoods who have no direct links to the schools, but just live here – into the goings-on of the school district?

What can we do to make CHS students feel more a part of the Clayton community (not just high school)?

Community being key, how do we build that for those not in the district? (VTS, non-residents)

How to involve the community and have a steady stream of ideas coming in to improve education?