

Strategic Planning Steering Committee with Insyte May 22, 2014

Now that this is our 3rd Steering Committee meeting, we are embarking on sacred work and will crystalize what we have learned into bold statements (paragraphs that capture the essence of the future as its emerging). Soft landing means future conversations will take place and continue to refine the plan.

We are now at the bottom of the U where letting go takes place so there is space for the bold statements.

Meeting intent was shared along with the agenda. We need to start to look at how we will put these statements into reality.

- Wish we could get the answers to the questions that were stated in the community meetings.
- How can we reach and help the “middle of the road” students to achieve?
- There’s a lot of energy in the group.
- How do we take a traditional system and turn it into bold?
- Hope the Community pushes the teachers beyond thinking that the only thing is to get the students into college.
- “Trusting” in school leaders is important and know that they know what is best for the children.
- If we let go of the term “achievement gap” and instead think of all student engagement, it would lessen the focus on tests.
- There’s no better time to be a student at Lower Merion School District because of the quality of staff and opportunities given to the students.
- Are we really going to do something bold?
- How do we put this into action, realistically and consistently?
- We should be judged by the actions we take after this process instead of the document we produce. If we’re going to bold, it’s not going to be easy.

Craft the current District system. Focus on students, teachers, content.

Look at your art work and answer these questions:

1. Love/Frustrate:

What do I love in this – what are your sources of energy?

- a. The kids
- b. Supportive parents
- c. Involved community
- d. Resources
- e. Quality of staff
- f. Willingness to change
- g. Awareness of the need to change
- h. High level of achievement
- i. Arts
- j. Engaged students
- k. Diversity of learners
- l. Community investment
- m. Buildings (new)
- n. Potential for dialogue
- o. Diversity of students
- p. Parent involvement
- q. Students at the system center
- r. Facilities
- s. Staff are jewels/sparkling/stand out
- t. K-12 continuum

- u. Opportunities
- v. Time/positive things
- w. Lot to celebrate
- x. Focus on child's development
- y. Collaborative process
- z. Positive vibes: caring
- aa. Kids are at the center (what binds us together)
- bb. Everyone plays a role in our success
- cc. General sense of pride
- dd. Diversity
- ee. Academic success
- ff. Resources – activities
- gg. We are working toward a goal
- hh. We have all stakeholders on the Board
- ii. Focus on students – readiness?
- jj. Resources \$
- kk. Abundance of resources
- ll. People and diversity
- mm. Interest and concern
- nn. Array of colors, shapes, textures
- oo. Opportunity

What frustrates you-what causes you to lose energy?

- a. Stress
- b. Assessment obsession
- c. Current view of success
- d. Wasted energy, resources
- e. Old ideas
- f. Mistrust of teachers' expertise
- g. Inertia
- h. Obstacles
- i. Isolation
- j. State mandates
- k. Imbalance
- l. Poor communication
- m. Flavor of the week, trends
- n. Restrictive schedule(s)
- o. Diversity of experiences (students-family)
- p. Engagement gap
- q. Questions around collaboration and vertical alignment
- r. Barriers between community and school
- s. Separation of content
- t. Testing
- u. Fuzzy communication
- v. School experience (learning) contained in school
- w. Student anxiety/stress/pressure
- x. Kids on the fringe (not connected; don't feel like they belong)
- y. Lock step
- z. Ladder to no where
- aa. State mandates/Federal
- bb. Jumbled communication

- cc. Kids get caught (hide) in the mix
- dd. One more thing....
- ee. Achievement gaps
- ff. Cultural proficiency
- gg. Untapped community
- hh. Exclusive roles / silo effects
- ii. Challenges: teachers frustrated, students not engaged, student stresses
- jj. Define classroom
- kk. Some kids fail (option), we need to hold ourselves accountable
- ll. We are missing students along the way
- mm. Mandates
- nn. Impact of mandates
- oo. Lots of stuff that disconnects us from our mission
- pp. Some students are left out
- qq. No clear recipe
- rr. Limiting
- ss. Barriers
- tt. Two pathways; one positive and one not positive
- uu. Government focus vs. community values
- vv. Homogeny
- ww. Impersonal
- xx. Lack of transparency

2. Hard truths: What are the hard truths that we as a community of leaders are going to face?

- a. We do not require mastery. Education is based on age not development
- b. No child is average.
- c. Kids, teachers, parents and other administrators, etc., receive mixed messages about what matters or what we should be doing.
- d. Scores first – students second
- e. Historically we have been traditional. We have been lucky and complacent.
- f. Achievement scores = property value.
- g. Some things are out of our control.
- h. Real change will be difficult. People are often resistant.
- i. We have to change our teaching.
- j. Textbooks/programs are not teachers.
- k. Technology is a tool.
- l. Students Lack a voice.
- m. Achievement gap – embedded within
- n. Racism
- o. Privilege / spirit of entitlement
- p. Not everyone agrees on same issues
- q. Disbelief in sound research and pedagogical practices.
- r. Helping families conceptualize what success/achievement looks like
- s. Standardized testing/state and federal mandates (reactionary wave)
- t. Expanding District
- u. Cultural shifts
- v. Messages about excellent grades
- w. Accommodating everyone's needs
- x. Can we be excellent for everyone?
- y. Attention is paid to the loudest voice
- z. A singular focus

- aa. Engagement gap
- bb. Fighting the status quo
- cc. Lack of comprehensive conversation about post-secondary opportunities
- dd. Curriculum relevancy
- ee. Drug and alcohol problem
- ff. Anxiety – we’ll be the have-nots
- gg. Pride in our District
- hh. Judgments about certain types of families
- ii. Achievement barriers (not yet identified)
- jj. Community myths
- kk. Learning confined in schools vs. outward looking
- ll. Less holistic focus on student as you go on (K-12)
- mm. Teacher empowerment
- nn. Teaching each student the way they learn; attention to diversity
- oo. There is fear about letting go of testing (connected to traditional reputation for/of success).
- pp. There is not enough diversity among staff
- qq. We don’t mean all students; we don’t share responsibility for all students; we need to look at our delivery of services
- rr. Curriculum and instruction are too traditional / restrictive
- ss. Some teachers don’t want to change
- tt. Initiative fatigue / prioritize – not everything is as important as everything else
- uu. Not every teacher will believe that your child can succeed
- vv. Not every child learns at the same pace
- ww. Grades are ambiguous
- xx. Politics – who is in office
- yy. Differences of direction (teachers, union, administrators)
- zz. Limited resources – unlimited opportunities
- aaa. Disproportionate outcomes
- bbb. Not everyone is getting what they need
- ccc. Current instructional model needs to be re0imaged
- ddd. Resources are finite (time, money)
- eee. Narrow conception /singular conception of success
- fff. L.M. self-constructed “identity” is bound to the very test-centric/singular conception of success we are boldly working against.

3. System Barriers: What are the systemic barriers that lock us into the current state of operating? Including assumptions and beliefs?

- a. Assumption that every student is college-bound
- b. State regulations/mandates
- c. The need to rank, compare, and sort
- d. School schedule
- e. Size of the system
- f. Parameters of local, administrator, and Board negotiated agreements (schools doing business as usual)
- g. Over emphasis on data, which is too often narrowly defined
- h. Federal and state guidelines
- i. Status quo
- j. Teachers are trained a certain way or teach the way they are taught
- k. Fear of change
- l. Definition of failure must change
- m. House values tied to school success
- n. Mandates – control – high expectations – scores are all important
- o. Public school – we educate every child

- p. LMHS and HHS are not equal
- q. Stuck in status quo
- r. Community myths – assumptions
- s. White privilege / haves and have nots
- t. Cultural differences/diversity (race, religion, family, lifestyle, generation households, ELL)
- u. Barriers to access to equal opportunities
- v. Politics/leadership
- w. Teachers’ union
- x. Conflicting agendas among various stakeholders
- y. Traditions, fear of change and the unknown
- z. Children will come to school prepared
- aa. We assume a lack of agency – “I’m not allowed...”
- bb. One size fits all
- cc. We assume that PDE is our Gepetto
- dd. Test scores=success
- ee. Teaching to the test will help
- ff. Failure=BAD
- gg. Scores are good (AYP)
- hh. Belief that achievement gap is being eradicated
- ii. Way we fund programming
- jj. Lack of curriculum (secondary) / curricula that are in place and related professional development
- kk. Fear of unknown, outcomes, lawsuits, open communication
- ll. This is the way we’ve always done it
- mm. Resistance to innovation
- nn. Practice of tracking students; lowered expectations
- oo. Current schedule
- pp. Curriculum – teacher autonomy
- qq. Allocation of resources for athletics/activities (separate)
- rr. Physical spaces
- ss. Transportation
- tt. Needs unaddressed
- uu. SES – trust
- vv. Aspirations
- ww. Definition of success /excellence
- xx. Fear
- yy. Invisible students – perceptions
- zz. Stereotypes – what some students can do/cannot do
- aaa. Big system
- bbb. Fear of consequences of being a problem parent
- ccc. The “man”/state
- ddd. Traditions, family culture, assumptions about students
- eee. Fear of letting go/fear of the unknown
- fff. Frustrated teachers / de-professionalization of profession
- ggg. Trust between community, students, administrators, teachers
- hhh. Assumption that families know how to navigate the system (availability of parents)

4. Ending/beginning:

What is the old that is ending or should end?

- a. All kids must be on the Board! Must be included in the circle!
- b. Rigid notion of tradition
- c. Our outdated- no longer standard-based curriculum
- d. Autonomy must end – should be collaboration
- e. Lack of communication (so that we can breed a greater sense of trust)
- f. Fear-based decision making
- g. Deficit-based mindsets/frameworks that are often unspoken
- h. Fixed mindsets (students, teachers, Board) related to institution change
- i. Racism
- j. One end point
- k. Perfectionism (the concept of the best)
- l. Anxiety
- m. Entitlement
- n. One expectation for all kids
- o. Allowing children to not learn (fail)
- p. High stakes testing
- q. Path(s) as is
- r. Focus on data to improve scores
- s. Emphasis on test prep
- t. Barriers around how kids access teachers/programs
- u. Wasted hope
- v. Decisions based on politics
- w. Fear of the unknown
- x. Barriers
- y. Failure is negative
- z. Superficial notions of success
- aa. Top down decisions
- bb. Lock-step curricular programs – traditional curriculum
- cc. Cynicism
- dd. Mixed up/missed communication
- ee. Jumping through hoops
- ff. Achievement gaps/barriers
- gg. Students getting lost
- hh. One more thing
- ii. Fuzzy communication
- jj. Rigidity, standardization
- kk. Isolated content
- ll. Teacher isolation
- mm. Emphasis on standardized assessments

What is the new wanting to be born, to emerge?

- a. Community
- b. True empathy
- c. Trust
- d. Resilience – building and valuing
- e. Real world learning experiences
- f. Individuality (expectations, needs, learning styles)
- g. Authentic assess
- h. Fluidity of movement of students
- i. Global education

- j. School-within-a-school opportunities for all
- k. Resources
- l. Appreciation / support of arts
- m. Teams that function well
- n. Expanded understanding of data and more focus on holistic measures and students
- o. Etiquette/responsible use of technology as a tool for learning
- p. Return to literature
- q. Focus on student growth
- r. Failing is an opportunity
- s. Teacher autonomy
- t. Meaningful action and systematic follow through
- u. K-12 fluidity
- v. PLCs
- w. Greater flexibility regarding learning
- x. Student focused learning
- y. Teacher empowerment
- z. Global access/focus to learning
- aa. Better communication
- bb. STEM Academy (K-12)
- cc. Clear, face-to-face open communication
- dd. Consistent content
- ee. Flexible delivery
- ff. Collaboration (between teachers and parents; between school and community)
- gg. Effective technology integration
- hh. Healthy pressure (instead of text anxiety)

Pictures were taken of the sculptures.

Bold Statement Regarding SUCCESS:

LMSD embraces its own unique definition of success which embodies creativity, critical thinking, love of learning, and innovation to encourage globally diversified and engaged students. We are raising the bar beyond standardized test scores and embrace the many ways students can demonstrate their individual growth.

Essential Elements

1. Different conception of success
2. Building on strengths
3. Systematic revisiting, questioning and improvement of programs, professional learning, and students' understanding
4. Move towards standards-based grading
5. Multifaceted
6. Each facet is equally valued and needed
7. Is not singular (i.e. college)
8. Involves opportunities/options
9. Valuing resilience/failure
10. Not one measure of success
11. Engagement
12. Many routes to success
13. Growth mindset (include qualitative data)
14. Eliminating barriers
15. Choice
16. Technology/digital responsibility

17. Lifelong learners
18. Nurturing whole child (arts, interests, social/emotional)
19. Achievement
20. Balance
21. Love of learning
22. Happiness
23. Family/community connections

Essence of the Data

1. The heart of the matter is what do we put on the table to help students be successful?
2. Success is measured in multiple ways
3. Should be/will be; achieved (process) in multiple ways
4. Growth mindset; foster it to it can change and improve
5. Make room for student voice
6. Definition of success change over time
7. Identify targets/roadmap so we know where we are going
8. How successful are we (teachers, parents, administrators) at helping students to define their success?
9. Competency vs. mastery, physical, emotional, social; eliminate assessments?; emotional competence = define success
10. State/federal government defines success for students and teachers
11. Are we offering opportunity equally to all students?
12. What are the consequences if we put Lower Merion's way first and not the state's? What would happen? Use our own metric?
13. How far can we go?
14. How is success demonstrated? Path can look very different (the process).

Leverage Points (Actionable)

1. Nurture the whole child
 - a. Emotionally safe
 - b. Failure is safe (learning experience)
 - c. Breaking down barriers
 - d. Individual learning styles (needs)
2. Flexible
 - a. Groups
 - b. Schedules
 - c. Learning center / styles

Bold Statement Regarding CURRICULUM

LMSD Envisions a revolutionary interdisciplinary curriculum that is student focused and fosters innovation and risk taking. It transcends standards, is inquiry-based, and centers on real world problem solving. The curriculum promotes global awareness through culturally responsive teaching and learning K-12. This dynamic, adaptable curriculum incorporates elements of STEAM and provides vertically and horizontally aligned curricular experiences for every student.

Essential Elements

1. Curriculum revolution that meets the needs of a 21st century learner
 - a. Non-linear
 - b. Technology (dated)
 - c. Digital age
 - d. Digitization of learning (e.g. online)

2. Teaching and Learning Curriculum
 - a. Global awareness
 - b. Culturally proficient
 - c. Authentic real world learning
 - d. Interdisciplinary
 - e. Inquiry-based learning
 - f. K-12 continuum – connected
3. Student Engagement
 - a. Problem-based learning
 - b. Differentiated assessment
 - c. Interdisciplinary
 - d. Process and product equally valued / redefine success and failure
 - e. Learning from mistakes
 - f. Risk taking
 - g. Real world, student centered
4. Aligned Curriculum
 - a. Interdisciplinary
 - b. Real world meaning
 - c. Vertically and horizontally curricular experiences
 - d. Articulated curriculum is strength not deficit based
5. Openness
 - a. Open curriculum (differentiated)
 - b. Multiple paths in and out
 - c. Communication
 - d. Relationships with school, home
 - e. Professional learning
 - f. Vertical intervention (students advance when ready)
6. Time
 - a. Rethink use of time in
 - i. Scheduling
 - ii. Instructional
 - iii. Meeting holistic needs
7. Global access/focused learning
 - a. Reaching out beyond walls of school
 - b. Student focused
8. K-12 STEM Academy
 - a. Ensuring STEM learning at all levels of education
 - b. Teach STEM including programming
 - c. Mentoring HS>MS, MS>ES

Essence of the Data

1. This is a bold change = revolutionize the curriculum
2. Move away from textbooks
3. “Cover” or “move through” curriculum
4. Traditional curriculum vs. “just in time”
5. Problem based learning
6. Interdisciplinary
7. Standards need to teach to something
8. Global, cultural proficient
9. Rigorous
10. Project based
11. Organic/dynamic

12. Foster innovation
13. STEM Academy; STEAM Academy
14. Students mentoring one another through the curriculum
15. Too many assessments; 37-54 in 4th grade

Leverage Points (Actionable)

1. Curriculum realignment
 2. H.S. interdisciplinary programs
 3. K-12 STEM Academy: implement and fund STEM Academy (plan, implement, improve)
 4. We are purposeful
 - a. Instructional decisions match need and interest
 - b. Instruction is delivered to meet students of all learning styles
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Bold Statement Regarding OUR COMMUNITY

LMSD takes pride at being in the center of the community. We value the diverse, dynamic talents of our citizens and their enduring support for public education. We believe we must honor this spirit through greater outreach and building stronger more meaningful relationships to promote real-world learning opportunities, ongoing service and engagement that will strengthen and support the student experience during their years in LMSD and beyond.

Essential Elements

1. Value our resources in the community
2. Leveraging resources e.g. parental expertise
3. Bidirectional relationships
4. Real world learning
5. Build trust
6. Cultural proficiency for entire community
7. Connectedness
 - a. Across disciplines
 - b. Between students, teachers, parents, community
 - c. Between academics and extracurricular activities
 - d. Strategic plan steering committee

Essence of the Data

1. A sharable experience of community
2. Give-and-take between school and community
3. Enhance community partnerships to benefit students
4. How can we ensure that current and former students can get access to information
5. Life-long connections
6. Real world opportunities to learn in the community
7. Go Forth to Serve

Leverage Points (Actionable)

1. Community partnerships – global access/focused learning
 2. Cultural proficiency for entire community
 - a. Professional development opportunities with community members, teachers, staff, etc.
 3. Improve school-community communications
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Bold Statement Regarding TEACHERS

LMSD is a community that values educators and the critical role they play in ensuring our students' success. We value the expertise of our professionals, and seek to support their perpetual growth and development. We are committed to providing professional learning opportunities that:

- Allow teachers to collaborate and learn from each other
- Afford teachers opportunities to elect self-directed learning experiences
- Empower teachers to innovate, apply and adapt strategies effectively

We recognize that there is a need for specific resources to support quality professional learning:

- Regularly scheduled time for collaboration for inter and intradisciplinary teams
- Administrative/supervisory support for teacher collaboration
- Opportunities for collaboration vertically and horizontally

We value the potential for our teachers and parents to learn from and support each other in our shared efforts to ensure the learning for each student.

Essential Elements:

1. Teacher empowerment
2. Better communication
3. Expertise Trusted
4. Autonomy
5. Teachers need time to collaborate
6. Teachers need differentiated professional development
7. Teachers need to take ownership of their craft

Essence of the Data

1. There needs to be accountability
2. Value of professional expertise – balance holistic needs
3. Professional Learning Communities and interdisciplinary team
4. Differentiated professional learning
5. Time for PLCs and teams
6. Teacher = anyone that touches a child's life
7. Let teachers choose; teacher-driven professional learning; encourage teacher creativity and innovation (i.e. Fedex Day)
8. More dialogue between teachers and administrators
9. Empower teachers to make their own interdisciplinary connections
10. The expectations for special education are very different
11. Communication between teachers and parents (expand on current format for communication)
12. Scheduling changes will better support curriculum and professional learning. Having time for teachers to collaborate vertically.

Leverage Points (Actionable)

1. Teacher empowerment
 - a. Open forum process
 - b. No agenda
 - c. Build from there
 - d. Better listening
2. Improved communications
 - a. Teacher to teacher
 - b. Teacher to administration
 - c. Teacher to parent
 - d. Teacher to student
 - e. Open, honest
 - f. Remove fear
 - g. Pro-active

- h. Transparent
 - i. Authentic
3. Culture of collaboration vs. competition
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Bold Statement Regarding STUDENT-DRIVEN

We believe every student must sit in the driver's seat in navigating their learning and growth, guided by experts who act to enhance that experience by facilitating creativity, inquiry, and engagement. We believe students are more than data points.

Essential Elements:

1. Balance
 - a. Assessments
 - b. Goals (not just college)
 - c. School, home, leisure
 - d. Hopes and fears
 - e. Life skills and academics
 - f. Time
2. Opportunity access and equity
 - a. All students strength-based
 - b. High expectations
 - c. Schedule flexibility
3. Engagement of every child
 - a. Elimination of engagement gap
 - b. Meaningful curricular alignment
 - c. Recognizing the humanity of all students, parents, and educators
4. Small group/individual learning centers that replace traditional classroom model (based on student needs and levels.
5. Child Centered
 - a. Trust judgment of teacher, student, and parent
 - b. Authentic assessment that gives information that we really need
 - c. Holistic
 - d. Every child has potential
6. Student Driven
 - a. Facilitating student voices
 - b. Opportunities for choice
 - c. Customized learning opportunities

Essence of the Data

1. Holistic needs of students; whole child; student in the center
2. Goals is student engagement
3. Students' is the voice that matters
4. Develop a system that meets the needs of every child, includes all learning styles, full engagement and true success
5. Purposeful engagement
6. Goal is the same, but process is different
7. Were we not doing this before? What makes this different? Is it ok if we were doing this before? How bold?
8. Bold is EVERY student.
9. Improved experience for students, not just test scores, is difference between student driven and data driven
10. Let this be an anchor for us
11. Students should define their own success; teachers can help to facilitate

12. What is the district's value / definition of success?
13. Student-educator collaboration and empowerment
14. Don't give data a bad name; not all data is bad
15. Need to use data properly
16. Need to revolutionize curriculum and move to interdisciplinary approach
17. Thread together ideas so we don't lose anything (connected)
18. Focus on students; achievement or opportunity gap; students with specialized needs, students from low socioeconomic status
19. How do we filter our bold statement to reach every student? Student driven is the part that is bold.
 - a. Students would take part in decision making in the classroom
 - b. Focus on strengths, not on deficits
 - c. Problem-based
 - d. What is to be learned is thrown at students
 - e. Asking students what they want to learn
 - f. Balance student driven with teacher direction (state standards); fuse the two
 - g. Expand student voice (i.e. on school Board); help student find their voice
20. What is the definition of success?
21. If we're not meeting the needs of every child, than what are we doing to respond?
22. Different ways (i.e. learning communities) to meet different students' needs
23. Stay in the present; not only working toward what students will become
24. Expectations for success; do we define for all student or for individual students?
25. Infuse growth mindset into all our students (not fixed)
26. Students should be happy and feel like they belong