

LMSD STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE LAUNCH
MAY 5, 2014

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, May 15th 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

MEETING INTENTIONS

1. **Ground everyone** in the intent and flow of the strategic planning work
2. **Discern the messages behind the input** provided by our students, faculty, parents and community members in response to the three overarching questions represented in the surveys, focus groups and community forums.
3. **Identify driving forces** shaping the world our students will enter when they leave LMSD and impacting our district.
4. **Gain a deeper and richer understanding** of the breadth and themes of community insight around some of the most important questions facing LMSD.
5. **Identify critical questions** we want to explore in our Immersion Experiences and Learning Journeys.
6. **Bring into our sharper focus that which we want to carry forward** into our district's next phase in its evolution and that which we are ready to let go of.
7. **Build relationships** and our collective capacity to see the emerging future of LMSD, our children and our community.

KEY INSIGHTS

WHAT MAKES LMSD GREAT THAT WE WANT TO CARRY INTO THE FUTURE?

Each person brought an artifact with them to the meeting that represented that of LMSD that they cherish most. We began our meeting with a conversation about what of LMSD is important to carry forward as we consider the future of LMSD. The key themes were:

- Relationships are what matter most— the people, not tests and assessments.
- Keep the focus on the learning—what happens between teachers and students in classrooms.
- Maintain and nourish our sense of pride—in everything we do—whether it's athletics, academics or community service.
- Stakeholders working together on behalf of students are key.
- Students must remain the center of everything we do. Every child should be nurtured.
- Addressing the needs of the “whole students” (physical and mental) is a challenge.
- Celebrate Lower Merion—We are a great school district ready to become the greatest school district.
- Children have as much to teach us as we have to teach them. Student voice should be heard.
- Take steps when change is necessary. When change is not necessary, hold steady.
- Go forth to serve – in a global community.

CORE QUESTIONS

After taking a first look at the large volume of data (surveys, focus groups, community forums)—details below—we discussed those “core questions” that we are obliged to answer in the course of our strategic planning work.

Essential questions:

1. **How do we account for learning?** How do we translate authentic learning into metrics and “accounting?” What defines “student success?”
2. What is the **role of the school community for student success**—academically and in relation to social, emotional and physical health?
3. How do we factor in the **political climate** in public education?
4. What does it mean to be a **LMSD graduate**? What is the LMSD “brand promise?”
5. How can we **customize academic experiences for each child**?
6. How can we **redesign the curriculum** so all values are addressed?
7. Once solutions are developed, how can we be sure everyone is doing their part, and how can we **measure the success**?
8. What will the district **sacrifice** (for example, standings in the newspaper) to address other student needs?
9. Can the district put emphasis on **authentic learning vs. preparation for tests**?
10. How do we define **time** with reference to learning? How do we make strategic use of the **clock** and **calendar**?
11. How do we **balance individual requirements vs. requirements for all students**?
12. How do we get **students to buy** into the ideas?
13. How do we **anticipate change** rather than reacting on our heels?
14. How do we best **integrate technology** and how can we help teachers use technology most effectively? How do we think about time for teachers to meet to learn technology integration through professional development?

DRIVING FORCES

In stakeholder groups (students, teachers, education specialists, parents, board members, administrators, community members), we took a look at “driving forces”—those forces shaping the future of LMSD over which we have little or no control. (Details below.)

Key themes across the groups in terms of driving forces are:

1. **Global competition. Global workforce. Global awareness.**
2. **State mandates. Testing pressure. Politics of education.**
3. **Proliferation of technology and the Internet.**
4. **Budgetary pressures and a difficult economic environment.**

HOLISTIC NEEDS OF OUR CHILDREN

In a series of “world café” rounds, we addressed these questions about the holistic needs of our children:

1. *What does success look like for our children?*
2. *What does success look like for each and every child, given the diversity of our children?*
3. *Given that, what does academic success look like and where does it fit in to a balanced view of children's needs?*
4. *What would you have to believe to imagine our schools structured to meet the range of needs of each and every one of our children?*

Insights from the group:

- We need to be explicit in how we define success beyond testing.
- Let's explore extending the school year – not have a gap between June and September. Let's also look at a shorter spring break with gap periods. We can offer low stress enrichment workshops in the summer or interest-based opportunities in the gap periods.
- We have to believe that success is attainable / available to all students. Teachers, parents, etc., have to believe.
- Holistic needs are a hard sell for all kids. Teachers need a lot of support in knowing how to achieve that.
- Trust between students and teachers is at the heart of meaningful learning.
- We have to believe it is possible to redefine success. For "success" to be more than test scores, we need to change the Lower Merion culture.
- Need to "see" every child in front of us and shape our day, week, semester to meet each child's needs.
- We need to see more robust paths and more choices and options after high school for our children. We have to go beyond the few colleges everyone applies to and look at other avenues.
- Resiliency / grit are what carries a student through life after high school and college. That's what we should be cultivating in our children.
- Add multi-inter/cultural concept as a method of assessment for multi/cultural intelligence.
- Success is:
 - Hard to define. Provide kids an environment to reach their own success.
 - A lot of people think success must go beyond standardized tests
 - Success is a process not a product
 - What defines "your" success – experiences you have had, your talents, etc. Success is a drive, perseverance, not giving up what your good at and can be better at

GLOBALIZATION

1. *What is the nature of the world our children are entering?*
2. *What would you have to believe to imagine our children perfectly prepared to enter a globally connected world?*
3. *What openings do we see already to embed a global perspective into our curriculum?*
4. *What questions must we answer about the global world in our Learning Journeys and through this strategic planning work?*

Globalization Insights:

- Some schools, like the Bill Gates model, focus learning on the big questions like health care, poverty, etc. By focusing the curriculum on big questions, you build in the things we care about, such as critical thinking, real world issues and authentic questions. We should look at private schools for insight on this.
- Access to information--people around the globe have access to the same information as us. If you want to find something out, you can. We have an amazing opportunity to connect with those people within our curriculum and today we are competing globally, so we should build those practices.
- Think about not just “competitive” global forces but also collaborative global forces.
- Global issues do not guide our curriculum. Issues like war, strife, and environment are important. Are our children aware? Are we ready to address global issues?
- In our current environment, different “soft” skills seem not as valued. We need to emphasize empathy and ability to take in different information if we are to prepare our children for a different world.
- The purpose of schools should be serving the larger good as opposed to being a credentialing agency. That might influence how we define success.
- Think about nature of experiences all our children have. Establish points of contact for children without those global experiences to have them – to learn problem solving.
- Students are prepared for college but not the real world. Connect students with real world experiences.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

1. *What would it look like and what would it take to make the boundary between school and community more permeable?*
2. *What opportunities present in blended learning – using the best of technology to convey content and test competence, combined with the best of face-to-face teaching?*
3. *What opportunities are there for stronger partnerships between our schools and community partners on behalf of our students?*

Cross Boundaries Responses:

- When we think about crossing the boundary of school and “community” – we need to view community at all levels – global and local.
- It’s important to meet families where they are rather than asking them to come to our schools all the time. Use discussion boards and other opportunities to connect with families.
- Worry about technology being used as a substitute for interacting with students. What if students don’t interact well with online material? They will lose the foundational knowledge.
- Cross-curricular work like what happens in middle school is really powerful and energizing and kids test scores don’t suffer. Let’s look at blended curriculum and cross-curricular beyond to elementary and high school. The common core leans in that direction.
- “Blended” learning can happen in the classroom along with smaller groups, using ipads. Can happen in many ways through curriculum. “Hybrid” is online at home /problem solving in school. Blended is the way you deliver instruction.

- The old model of “school within a school” is like private school. Work is interest based – within the larger school. The only challenge we faced with that was making sure teachers don’t duplicate material, particularly English and Social Studies teachers.
- Connecting with current events is a big opportunity. And let’s bring back literature to bring in Science and Social Studies
- Let’s explore bringing K-12 all together through mentorship, sports, extra-curricular activities, mural events, etc.
- The things that matter are problem-solving, persistence, setting goals. Working with teams of leaders we learned a lot about students (soft skills really impact learning). Lots of opportunity to team up.
- By seizing the global question – we break away from content-specific questions that aren’t helpful. Let’s ask the big questions like health or evolution. The state doesn’t require classes like math and science. We can’t blame everything on the state. We have institutionalized inertia.
- We have a big opportunity to separate and distinguish ourselves, to do blended learning, to decide which areas we really need to focus our teaching and which we don’t.

DETAILED NOTES

OPENING

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Marseille at approximately 8:30 a.m.

Dr. Marseille welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. Dr. Marseille briefly summarized the following:

Strategic Plan Process: “If you want to go fast – go alone. If you want to go far – go with others.” African proverb.

Strategic Plan Structure: Leadership Team and Steering Committee

Strategic Plan Purpose: Simplicity, Clarity and Focus -- Mission, Vision, Values of District

Liz Solms of Insyte Partners, introduced herself, her partner Marie McCormick and briefly detailed their function in the Strategic Planning Process. She expressed their enthusiasm and welcomed all stakeholders (Teachers, Education Specialists, Students, Community Members, Parents, Board Members and Administrators) to participate to the fullest extent.

Liz further explained the Theory U and the “Tools” for perception beyond analytics: Open Mind, Open Heart and Open Will.

The participants were seated in mixed groups of 8 people. Each table was asked to select one artifact representing that which made LMSD great that we should carry into the future.

Artifacts presented were:

- Note from Teacher- teachers knowing and invested
- Grade Book- Knowing the kids

- Travel to Honduras- Life changing experience opportunities available
- Quote- Resiliency development- connections risk taking humiliation avoidance
- Tee-shirt Build On- District motto- Serving to Go out in the World and Connecting school leaders to foster growth
- Student Work and voices: Realms of two worlds of in school and out of school joining
- Sports/ Organization- Building/ Children- Everything we do is because of kids
- LMSD Logo- “Enter to learn, Go forth to serve”. Important to everyone because everyone is a lifelong learner. I am excited to be here!
- “Passion” we bring to district
- It doesn’t feel like school, it feels like camp or something else
- 1965 Kindergarten student/ lifelong member of the community/ Biracial child/Biracial/ Lot of work w/ district on many issues
- Picture MLK Rally/ Community service event symbolizes district
- Parent, 2 kids, teacher, PhD, Private and public experience
- Recognizing each individual student has a voice we value. (creativity)
- The Brick
- Reader’s Notebook
- Picture of Children
- Beret
- Quotes around strategy process
- Computer (1 to 1)
- ID badge
- Letter home from teacher
- Foundation
- Old meets new
- Change
- What makes vs great
- Interdisciplinary programs
- Opportunities for student leadership
- Honoring history
- The arts
- Embrace Technology
- Willingness to explore challenging topics, exploring in depth
- Access to resources, providing array of opportunities to students
- Global viewpoints
- Embracing multiple perspective
- Tech Integration Project/ Teachers capturing learning/ Students learning
- Tech resources and integration
- The First 300 Years of L.M.- Bold history
- Wooden Eagle- what the animal represents
- Attitude- looking at what we have and not what we don’t
- Senior Prom photo
- Values of academics/ parent diversity directory

- ID badges/ represents 20 yrs and LM, professional
- Parent/walk to school group photo/ intergenerational exercise/ Community and school connection
- 6,8 at WV/ 10th at HH/ a circle charm “I Love you” symbolizes love, learning and family
- 3rd grade teacher/ brought porter of Einstein, with quote, reminder about freedom thinking and critical thinking
- Gifted support/ Neuron Chadeter that students made- represents big picture. Neuron help us feel and think, social connections and belonging
- Parent and former student/ photo of child when he was in 5th grade/participating in a non-profit/ values learning to work together/ diversity
- Photo of 2 former students represents connectedness who faced different challenges, represents impact on RAS
- LMHS Grad/ College Access Counselor
- T shirt from 1996 Championship/ given by Paul Patrillo/ t shirt from HHS “POWER” group
- Counselor at Merion/ Business card (2nd year)/ Partnership with Bryn Mawr- international sts (Bryn Mawr Buddies)/ thank you notes from students
- Learning Support at Penn Valley/ STEM group for African America sts
- Dr. Director of Policy and Programs/ sustainability of programs (environmental, etc.)
- HHS and Penn Valley Parent/ syllabus for IB “Theory of Knowledge” class/ Critical thinkers- question confidence critical thinking
- Cynwyd Principal/ Basketball/ teamwork, community, voices brought in across LMSD to “play the game”
- PW and BC parent/ BC teacher/ Son’s art and student photo of rainbows- hope embedded in our schools
- Resiliency wheel- bring issues of district into a visual

MAKING SENSE OF THE SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP DATA

Liz then instructed everyone to dive into the data that was provided to them. Each table had specific data from one of the groups listed below and were asked to agree on the key messages. Data sets included:

- Faculty and Staff surveys and focus group data
- Student surveys and focus groups
- Parent surveys and focus groups
- Community Forum Data
- All others (i.e. Wellness Council, Community Groups, etc.) focus groups and surveys

After forty minutes of data review, the groups shared the general themes/messages they identified.

Community Group

- Communication and importance of hearing student voices
- Teaching goes beyond testing: problem solving, self-advocacy, critical thinking, authentic time management and applying learning to the real world
- Listening to all students: re: sleep, nutrition, resiliency, physical activity
- Keeping Technology current
- Balance between academic learning and developing healthy adults who can contribute to the world

Community Forums—missing one group's data

- How to measure success. We should be less traditional.
- Role of testing
- Value of non-traditional skills (ex. emotional well-being of students)

Parent Surveys/Focus Groups (CARE, ISC, etc.)—missing one group's data

- More quantitative multicultural experiences
- Concerns re: testing results
- Over value of standardized tests
- The value of balance and partnerships
- Students – global awareness and critical thinking

Student Focus Groups/Surveys—missing one group's data

- Students' contributions to the community
- Student stress: maintain level of satisfaction while addressing stress/balance
- The need to address balance between grades and extracurricular activities
- Characteristics of a LMSD graduate
- What do students value and what traditions do they want to keep
- Need outlets for stress
- Want to “prepare for the world”
- Cultural awareness for all
- Active in Technology

Teachers Focus Groups/Surveys—missing one group

- Authentic learning / authentic teaching
- Focus on “things” important to the Learner
- Make certain all teachers are provided professional development
- Consider the student's happiness and welfare
- Cultural awareness
- Love of Learning
- Achievement Gap

Alumni Association / Township

- Need for collaboration between school and community
- Consider the whole child: balance between value and academic standards
- Classroom opportunities
- High standards of testing – balance with other skills
- Autonomy – teachers in classroom

DRIVING FORCES

Each individual returned to their “stakeholder” specific table and were asked to identify “what are some of the driving forces, coming from the outside, over which we have no control, but are extremely important to factor into shaping and planning for the future of our students and the district? ”

Parent Group

- The pace of technology
- The Economy (re: funding education and budget constraints)

- Pressures on students – academics/sports college
- Global work force
- Standardized testing mandates
- Pressure of other schools (i.e. Charter)
- Speed of life increasing

Teachers

- Politics (Federal, State Local, PDE)
- Group standards that teachers have to teach
- Transition (Leadership)
- Professional Development
- Role Effectiveness/Administration
- Technology
- Global competition
- Diversity of students and family expectations
- Teacher Evaluation

Education Specialists

- Legal mandates
- Security of Students
- Employer expectations

Administrators

- Meeting the needs of all children (holistic, academic)
- Continued community support
- Economic and Financial Climate (Budget constraints)
- Internet and access to information
- Technology – proliferation and effective use
- State mandates

Board Members

- State Mandates
- Teacher Evaluations
- Enrollment Growth
- Global Competition

Students

- Success – Grades/Tests
- College
- Global Awareness

PREP FOR MAY 15TH MEETING

As the end of the day-long session approached, Liz and Marie of Insyte Partners invited all steering committee members to sign up for both an Immersion Experience as well as a Learning Journey.

Immersion Experiences are opportunities to get insight into a population or a “system” by immersing ourselves among populations, in “bright spots” and at the “edges” of the system. Four immersion experiences are offered in LMSD schools the week of May 12th.

Learning Journeys are visits to places very different from the current context to get a fresh perspective on the trickiest questions facing us. Several are being offered at our next meeting on May 15th and were discussed.

In closing, it was related to the committee that conversations must not stop; they must continue. Extensive data will be posted on the “Base Camp” for all members to view.

Comments from the Steering Committee members:

- It is a great opportunity and responsibility to be a member of the Steering Committee.
- The first meeting of the Steering Committee was an awesome beginning of defining the district's future.
- By all members being together today in an energy-filled room and many visions/ideas/answers, it is important and critical for this work to happen/continue. T
- The valuable discussions that took place may have caused members to think differently than when the day began.
- The focus was certainly a team effort--among all stakeholders.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Reynolds