Update on Research on Community Engagement (11/04/15)

Project Goal and Overview
The goal of this project is to help the D97 board understand successful strategies that districts and boards are undertaking nationally to support, encourage and foster community engagement partnerships. The products of the project will inform the board's understanding of community engagement opportunities and challenges as the board considers its own community engagement activities. As requested by the board, the project focuses on community engagement other than with families currently enrolled in the district's schools. The project components have included the following: 1) initial research in understanding direct and indirect community engagement strategies; 2) identifying districts and boards that are implementing these strategies successfully; and 3) creating case studies based on conversations with the districts and boards in order to gather more information.

Initial Research through Literature Reviews
The initial research was gathered through publically offered information from sources including the Illinois Association of School Boards report, "Connecting with the Community," as well as various publications from the Center for Public Education, Minority Student Achievement Network, and the National School Boards Association. Using these sources, engagement strategies were identified and further research was completed to create a profile of each program. Direct engagements included study circles, focus groups, town meetings, polling and virtual dialogues. Profiles were compiled based on publicly available information and school board and district leaders running these programs were identified.

District and Board Outreach
Since the research compiled was publicly available and based on published studies, it was often limited to a singular piece of an engagement strategy or lacked 'back story' that might help the D97 board best understand the relevance of the strategy for the board's own work. The school boards and districts running selected programs identified in the literature review are being contacted in order to best understand the program components involved in each strategy at a deeper level. The following were goals in creating contact: 1) to create case studies based on successful strategies; 2) to understand the components involved in a successful strategy; 3) the motivations involved in choosing certain strategies; 4) the community shift resulting from strategies; 5) difficulties in implementation.

Connecting with Districts and Boards
   Pivotal Understandings
   The goal of connecting with programs focuses on increasing understanding of these central questions:
   - What are the components of successful community engagement utilized by school boards?
   - What case studies exist of school boards that are doing this well?
   - What are the differences between engaging and investing parents and students versus the larger community? How is this promoted?

- What is the overall climate of the school board? How open and accessible is it according to the greater community? How has the implemented engagement strategy shifted these relationships over time?

Questions for Boards and Districts

Outreach questions for boards and districts include the following via conference call:

1. How did you choose which issues to center your engagement around? What steps did you take to identify these issues?
2. Can you outline briefly for me which engagement practices led to your successful implementation of [named] program?
3. What was the community reception to these engagement strategies? What was the reception, both initially and eventually, of the program?

Next Steps

Next steps include strengthening contacts through relationship building with boards and districts utilizing successful strategies. Further research will be completed to understand whether engagement strategies were task-based and implementation results will be tracked.

By the end of the year, a summary document will be made available presenting case studies synthesizing key common issues and concerns uncovered throughout the initial literature review and subsequent conversations. The document will be presented to the board for review, and follow-up research or other assistance will be completed, if deemed appropriate by the board.