

MEMORANDUM

TO : Board of Education
cc: Superintendent Craig Cooke and Assistant Superintendent Gail Dahling-Hench

FROM : Board of Education Executive Committee

DATE : October 25, 2022

RE : Report on September 27, 2022 Board Retreat

The purpose of this Memo is to report back to the board and the public on the outcome of the Board Retreat on September 27, 2022. The main objectives of the Retreat were to reinforce board unity by coalescing around some priorities for next-level board work in planning and budgeting. The intended deliverable was for the board to utilize the identified priorities in developing a Budget Assumptions or similar document to help inform the budget process.

Board Vice Chair Galen Cawley and Board Secretary Emily Rosenthal worked collaboratively with Superintendent Craig Cooke, PhD and Assistant Superintendent Gail Dahling-Hench to produce the Agenda and program for the evening. The Board enjoyed some socialization over a nice light dinner that was supplied by our Chartwells food services vendor. Chairman Klaskin opened the Agenda with a brief address. He thanked the folks who planned the program and thanked all the members of the Board for their dedication and nonpartisanship. He thanked the members for offering their wide array of backgrounds and skill sets, and for maintaining the common temperament to make this a successful board. He concluded that this unusual and fortuitous combination of factors will allow the Board to strive for “next-level work.”

Vice Chairman Cawley and Secretary Rosenthal took over and introduced the program before handing off to Assistant Superintendent Gail Dahling-Hench. Ms. Dahling-Hench facilitated a three-step process designed to produce a ranking of priorities within and among three topical areas: **Academics, Projections, and Social-Emotional**. Data was supplied by category and board members’ comments were reviewed and categorized. Repeated comments helped to focus the discussion around areas of interest held in common among board members. Those priorities were captured on a poster. Board members were given five sticky dots to place on the poster, indicating their individual priority rankings. At the end of the exercise, it was surprising and gratifying to see that four areas had earned priority rankings from large pluralities of board members. The priorities are as follows:

- 1) Priorities for Academics:
 - a. Construct thinking to compare the marginal benefits to the associated marginal cost of test familiarity. Provide students the opportunity to “show what they know” in a testing platform by teaching test mechanics, administering the test later in the testing window on the academic calendar, and imparting school spirit and pride in group performance.
 - b. Curate other indicators that can help us to understand what our students know and can do.
 - c. Focus on “right-sizing” the five Profile of a Graduate columns for better distribution and opportunities for growth.
- 2) Priorities for Projections:
 - a. Develop opportunities to increase student diversity
 - b. Create a budget that reflects reasonable expectations with room for supporting priorities.
- 3) Priorities for Social-Emotional:

- a. The severity of anxiety and depression of all student groups is a crisis that requires our attention.
- b. Foster a strong, positive culture of students who will promote inclusion and respectful discourse. Such a school climate would provide an environment for all students to develop a sense of self, with opportunities for active student voice.
- c. Selection of materials and curriculum should promote alternate perspectives and self-awareness, including advocacy and “upstanders” (bystanders who speak up in defense of marginalized students).

Based on the vote counts of the top priorities, it appears there is broad-based support for the items listed above.

The evening ended with the Big Reveal that introduced us to our largely shared set of priorities. Members completed evaluation forms, but all agreed openly that the evening was indeed a success. The data from the evaluation forms matched the tenor of the positive comments expressed in person. In particular, there was shared appreciation for Ms. Dahling-Hench’s skill in bringing focus to the task and for her ability to drive consensus through the exercise. There was equal appreciation for the time and effort expended by Mr. Cawley, Ms. Rosenthal, and Superintendent Cooke.

End of report.