



**Future Focus:  
Community Conversations About Hope and  
Excellence**

***Interviews with Beaverton Community  
Leaders***

**February-March 2013**



*April 2013*

## **Assessing the Beaverton Schools**

Lee Weinstein & Associates, a communications strategy and public affairs firm with deep roots in Oregon, was retained by the Beaverton School District to seek ideas from business and community leaders about how to make the Beaverton school system not only the best in Oregon, but also one of the most successful school systems in the country.

Our central questions are:

1. What should our education system look like for kids?
2. What are our schools doing that is effective in preparing kids to succeed?
3. What could schools do better?
4. What is the role of businesses in helping our schools? Non-profits?  
Community groups?

We conducted interviews by phone with a total of 50 individuals in February and March 2013. We assured each interviewee that findings would be reported in the aggregate only, and no comment would be directly attributed to any one person.

We asked each participant:

1. What are Beaverton schools doing that is working in preparing kids to succeed?
2. What could schools do better?
3. What is the value of public education to the Beaverton community?
4. What would happen if we didn't have public schools?
5. What is the impact of Beaverton schools on your business or organization?

6. What are the things that students need to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school? How can we tell if they have gained those skills?
7. What are the challenges that need to be overcome in getting the schools we want?
8. What is the role of businesses in helping our schools? Non-profits? Community groups?
9. What is your personal experience of schools in Beaverton—have you been in one recently? What did you notice?
10. I'd like to encourage you to think big. What is the "moonshot" for Beaverton schools?

Those who participated for this report included:

- **Randy Acker** - Firm Founder/Managing Attorney, Acker & Associates P.C.
- **Jonae Armstrong** - Senior Property Manager, Washington Square Mall
- **Rich Bader** - President & CEO, EasyStreet
- **Kristine Baggett** - Executive Director, Beaverton Education Foundation
- **Jennifer Berg** - Customer Support D1X Site Manager, ASML, Inc.
- **Frank Biondo** - Insurance Agent, Montgomery & Graham, Inc.
- **Karen Bolin** - Financial Advisor, Edward Jones
- **Justin Brandon** - Office Coordinator, Oregon Department of Transportation
- **Virginia Bruce** - Publisher/Editor, Cedar Mill News
- **Sherre Calouri**, Former School Board Member
- **Bridget Daniel** - Executive Director, HomePlate Youth Services
- **Denny Doyle** - Mayor, City of Beaverton
- **Teresa Dunham** - Communications Manager, Westside Economic Alliance
- **Karen Eubanks** - Public Information Officer, Tualatin Fire and Rescue
- **Mark Fagin** - President, Gaston Sales
- **Vilay Fortner** - Applications Engineer, ASML, Inc.
- **Tom Franklin** - Retired Businessman
- **Parker Fuhrman** - Member, Cedar Mill Oregon Stake, Church of Latter-Day Saints
- **Pat Garrett** - Sheriff, Washington County
- **Herb Grey** - Attorney At Law
- **Mary Grimes** - Business Development Officer, Columbia Community Bank
- **Delaram Hakimian-Adyani** - Owner, Virtues Project TM Consulting
- **David Harrison** - Account Executive, WSC Insurance
- **Karla Hernandez** - Washington County Organizer, Center for Intercultural Organizing,
- **Dawn Holt** - Parents & Teachers Organization, Arts & Communication Magnet Academy,
- **Mark Jockers** - Government & Public Affairs Manager, Clean Water Services,
- **Jerry Jones, Jr.** - Vice President/General Manager, Lanphere Enterprises

- **Todd Kimball** - Director & Founder, Mainstreamed Media
- **Cindy Kirk** – Director, Season of Service, Luis Palau Association
- **Sam Ko** - Education Specialist, Oregon Department of Education
- **Martha and Bill Lamarche** - Public Information Manager (Bill), City of Beaverton
- **Dan Larsen** – Pastor, Cedar Mill Bible Church
- **Cade Lawrence** - Operations Manager, Hoffman Construction
- **Larry McMacken** - Chair , Beaverton Rotary
- **Shawn Mitchell** - Executive Director, Catalyst Partnerships
- **Ben Newell** - Investment Advisor, Miller Financial Group
- **Janis Nichols** - Community Relations Manager, PCC Rock Creek
- **Eric Oathes** – Captain, Beaverton Police Department
- **Tom Peekema** - Financial Advisor, SMB Financial Services
- **Cori Poland** - Branch Operations Manager, Rivermark Community Credit Union
- **Tim Roberts** – Captain, Beaverton Police Department
- **Marc San Soucie** - City Councilor, City of Beaverton
- **Sandra Santos** - Juvenile Counselor, Washington County Juvenile Department
- **Geoff Spalding** - Chief of Police, Beaverton Police Department
- **Nancy Spitzer** - Co-Owner, Time 4 Payroll
- **Linda Voldengen** - Small Business & Group Benefit Specialist, Legal Shield
- **Jodi Walder-Biesanz** - Independent College Admission Coach
- **Paul Wandell** – Lieutenant, Beaverton Police Department
- **Bob Wayt** - Director of Communications & Outreach, Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District
- **Ron White** - Head Coach, BESThq
- **Larry Whittlesey** - Executive Director, Luis Palau Association
- **Drew Zagorski** – Principal, Left Brain Right Brain Marketing

Following are the thematic responses from the interview participants.

## What Community & Business Leaders Told Us

### Preparing Kids to Succeed: What's Working

The overall perception of the Beaverton Schools is generally positive. When asked, the majority of participants see the positive steps the schools are taking to prepare kids to succeed.

- "I still think they're doing a great job. And I'll put our school system up against any in the state."
- "Beaverton School District has done a very good job over the years."

When asked to describe how the Beaverton Schools are helping kids succeed, there is a range of positive feedback. Of all the responses, the following are most commonly identified as an important part of the Beaverton Schools' efforts:

#### Specialty/Magnet Schools

- "Magnet schools play to a young person's strength and they can concentrate on a specific area of study."
- "They are providing a rich array of options for kids to decide how and what they learn."

#### Training and Preparation for the Workforce

- "They are doing a good job helping kids find workforce training."
- "By organizing coffee with the Chamber of Commerce or holding mock interviews with high school students...they are great at getting kids out in the real world to interact with adults."

#### Caring, Passionate Educators and Staff

- "The teachers are inspirational and passionate about their work."
- "The positive spirit and efforts of staff are amazing."

The business and community leaders without children in the Beaverton Schools feel that better communication with the broader community is needed. This lack of communication leads these participants to feel overwhelmingly out of touch with the District.

- "What I know about the Beaverton School District comes from the news...and it's not good. There's no way for me to know about what they are doing right."

- “They used to send a newsletter to community members but I haven’t sent one in awhile. It gave me a sense of what their focus was and what they were working on. That was useful.”

### **Preparing Kids to Succeed: Areas for Improvement**

While business and community leaders feel that the Beaverton Schools provide good opportunities to help kids succeed, there is a sense among many respondents that the quality of the schools has declined.

- “The District has slipped somewhat.”
- “Not that long ago, Beaverton schools were looked at as best in state and rivaled as the best in country. I don’t think that’s the case any more.”

Participants consistently suggest the following areas for improvement:

- Increased strategies to address the achievement gap
- Greater engagement with parents
- Stronger vocational focus
- Better alignment of teachers’ skills with the classes they teach
- Improvements to financial literacy education

Participants express both a frustration with what they perceive as the current decline of the District and a strong desire to see the Beaverton Schools turn things around.

#### **Increased Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap**

- “Every single kid should have access and opportunity to be taught by dedicated teachers and receive a high quality education—that’s not happening now.”
- “There is very uneven education at the schools because of the demographic mix and the money.”
- “Budget cuts seem to affect programs that serve the Latino community—we see less Latino kids graduating high school as a result.”
- “We need more bilingual and bicultural staff at all levels.”

#### **Greater Engagement with Parents**

- “There is a need for schools to proactively communicate with parents regarding their kids’ progress.”

- "Parents need to be welcomed into the system and told they have as much responsibility for kids getting an education as the school system does."
- "I have daily frustrations over the lack of transparency and the lack of timely response to our needs."

#### Stronger Vocational Focus

- "We need to better prepare kids to go into the trades. These jobs are an important part of our economy."
- "Not every kid is cut out to go to college. We can't force everyone down the same path."
- "We need to provide more focus beyond just meeting standards and prepping kids for college."

#### Better Alignment Between Teachers' Skills and the Classes They Teach

- "We're astounded where some of the teachers are teaching subjects or classes they're not trained to do."
- "The schools are placing teachers in positions they aren't qualified for."

#### Improvements to Financial Literacy Education

- "Young adults just don't understand basic personal finance."
- "Schools could do a better job of educating kids about managing a budget in the real world."

### **Improving Beaverton Schools: The Challenges**

The Beaverton Schools face a host of challenges that must be addressed in order to make improvements. While not all of these challenges are in the District's control, they are part of the reality and can get in the way. When asked to identify these challenges, most participants make the distinction between what is and is not within the control of the District.

**Of the challenges identified by participants, the following were the most common:**

#### More Funding, More Efficiency

- "I hate to say it but the biggest challenge is funding."
- "At the core, it all comes down to funding."

- “Funding is our top challenge. Everything else is a subset.”

While participants overwhelmingly recognize that more funding is critical, **some suggest that Beaverton Schools need to accept these realities and demonstrate how the schools are “doing more with less.”**

- “They need to message that they have their funding and expenses under control.”
- “The whining about ‘we don’t have enough money’ is driving me crazy.”
- “There’s question in the community about whether the dollars are being spent as wisely as they should be.”

#### Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) Reform

- “PERS is the single biggest cost driver in the budget from year to year. It jeopardizes our schools. If PERS doesn't get fixed, nothing is going to change.”
- “The PERS thing sickens me every day—that so much money goes to PERS and it doesn’t go to the kids.”
- “The public feels that PERS is where the money goes, and there is some truth to that.”

#### Newer Technology

- “I think every student should have an iPad and forget about hauling around 80 pounds of books every day.”
- “Leveraging technology is the only way we’re going to be able to provide the education that kids need. Catching up to technology should be a priority.”

#### Smaller Class Sizes

- “A first grade class with 40-something kids means the teacher can’t teach. They are managing, not teaching.”
- “Class size is taking away from educational quality.”
- “Class sizes are a disaster.”

#### Addressing Replacement/Retention of Teachers

- “We have to ask ourselves whether tenure is doing what it should in getting the best teachers in front of our kids.”



- “They cut 120 teachers and brought tons of administrators and librarians into the classroom who don’t have the skills they need to be successful.”
- “Accountants get let go, mayors get unelected, it needs to be okay for teachers.”

### Moving Beyond “Teaching to the Middle”

- “High-achieving or low-achieving students don’t get their needs fully met.”
- “My son’s teacher thought he had ADD. After being tested, we learned he was actually 3 years ahead of his grade level. He joined the District’s Talented and Gifted (TAG) program but all they’ve done is give him more worksheets.”
- “Kids in the middle keep their heads down and slide through, while the TAG program hasn’t gotten enough funding.”

## **Value of Public Education**

When asked to describe the value of public education to the Beaverton community, participants consistently identify the following:

### Prepares Our Future Workforce

- “We need a strong workforce coming out of the school system who are ready to fill the jobs that we have.”
- “Public education is very important because it prepares quality workers. It’s the fabric of our community.”

### Cultivates Engaged Citizens

- “We need an educated population to have an informed citizenry and a working democracy.”
- “Public education helps equip kids to be active citizens of the community.”

### Creates A Strong Economy

- “To have a healthy, strong, vibrant economy, we have to have healthy, strong, vibrant education system.”
- “The schools are critical to fostering job creating and creating a vibrant city.”

### Attracts New Businesses

- “We need to have an educated workforce so business will come to our area and employ our youth.”
- “Our workforce attracts businesses from around the world. If we let that slip, we’re going to regret it.”

### **A Community Without Public Schools**

When asked what would happen if there were no public schools, the consistency among responses is striking. The majority of participants clearly understand the connections between public education and individual prosperity, the health of our economy and public safety.

### Only the Affluent Would Be Educated

- “Only prosperous kids will have private education. The rest would be left in the cold.”
- “The divide would increase between families who can afford education and families who can’t.”

### Employers and Jobs Would Leave Our Community

- “Without public school, our workforce would not be adequate, businesses would suffer, we’d pay the consequences as a community”
- “If businesses start leaving our area, property values will decline, crime will go up.”

### Crime Rates and Homelessness Would Increase

- “For some kids, school is the only safe haven they have where they eat the best meal they’ll have all day. If we didn’t have schools I can’t imagine what would happen to these children.”
- “We’d see a huge increase in the crime rate.”
- “Our homeless population would spike.”

## **Impact on Participants' Businesses & Organizations**

### *Many are Unclear About Direct Impact*

While participants understand the value of the Beaverton Schools, about half are unsure how their particular business or organization is affected.

- "I don't see a direct impact—but again, good schools bring good businesses into the community"
- "Public education as a whole is vital to our business because that's what gets good companies to come. But for my businesses specifically, there's not a huge tie."

### *Business Leaders Recognize the Importance of Workforce Development*

Some participants from the business sector recognize the impact the Beaverton Schools have on their pool of potential employees.

- "We've started looking for applicants that are bilingual, particularly in Spanish. We need folks that speak different languages".
- "The quality of education provided in the Beaverton Schools affects the quality of our employees."
- "Beaverton schools give kids basic skills to succeed at my business. They also teach them to self-motivate and self-manage."

### *Non-Profits Are Seeing A Rise in Demand*

Some participants from the non-profit sector indicate that the demand for their services has increased as they help close the gaps between what used to be and what is currently offered by the schools.

- "My organization helps parents be more engaged so their kids can succeed. If the school system better met the needs of parents, our jobs would be a lot easier."
- "People are leaning on our program more due to the class sizes in the Beaverton Schools."

## **Student Learning: Measurement and Assessment**

When asked to define what students need to know or be able to do by the time they graduate from high school, most participants identify both hard skills and soft skills as two critical tracks of learning.

### Hard Skills: Reading, Writing, and Math

- “They have to know how to read and write. Basic things that they understand from curriculum.”
- “Basic math skills and basic reading skills are very important.”

Most participants feel that hard skills can be defined and measured using tests. Others question whether tests are the best indicator for student learning.

- “I don’t believe standardized testing is the right way to test the skillset for a student.”
- “Proving what you know is not a paper-and-pencil test skill for all students.”

### Soft Skills: Complementary and Equally Important

- “Math, reading, writing, and history are important. But life skills are also invaluable.”
- “They need to learn interpersonal skills and problem solving skills, plus have the ability to work in teams.”

In addition, all participants agree that measuring soft skills is more complicated than simply issuing a test.

- “No test can capture the competence it takes to live in society.”
- “We spend so much time on teaching to the test, when we need to be teaching kids how to be successful adults.”

Some suggestions for determining whether kids have acquired these skills include:

- Conduct senior projects where students must draw on their soft skills and present to both their peers and community members.
- Participate in real-life exercises and receive a grade on their performance.
- Establish benchmarks that measure the percentage of students who are employed or go on to college.

### **Role of Businesses, Non-Profits and Community Groups**

Participants agree overall that there is a role for businesses, non-profits and community groups to play in helping the Beaverton Schools. Assessments are split on what that role should be.

Some argue forcefully that businesses can and should do more.

### Offer Internship Opportunities

Participants indicate internships help kids translate what they learn in an educational setting into real life workplaces and provide opportunities to explore different careers.

- “Kids don’t get the relationship between what they’re learning in class and how it applies. Businesses of all sizes have got to give kids the opportunities to try things on.”
- “Companies are saying they can’t find qualified people here—we need them to give our top students internships at those companies.”
- “Businesses and non-profit organizations alike: Offer job experience & mentoring.”

### Provide Programs and Resources

Participants identify mentoring and workshops as resources businesses should continue to offer in the schools.

- “The schools always ask for money when we need to be asking for time and commitment.”
- “Schools can’t just look at the business support as a checkbook. They should work collaboratively to also provide opportunities and programs.”

Others indicate that businesses, non-profits and community groups in the schools are doing enough and that more coordination and communication is needed on behalf of the Beaverton School District.

### Establish True Community Partnerships

- “It’s not just give and take—what is the Beaverton School District willing to give?”
- “The District needs to show the effort and build a bridge—have an honest conversation about what it’s going to take.”
- “In the last several years, the district has told the community what to do rather than listening to what they hold to be true. That’s not a partnership, it’s one-sided.”

### Improve Communication to Better Meet Industry Demands

- “We need to connect the dots between education offered and what businesses are looking for in a workforce.”

- "The District should talk to area businesses about what exactly they need and then tailor education to that for next five years."
- "Beaverton School District has such a large emphasis on technology because Intel is so integrated into the school district. We need more of that across the board."

#### Increase Coordination with Non-profits and Community Groups

- "A rotary group is great but a church of 5,000 is more powerful."
- "Non-profits and community groups alike should offer learning service hours."
- "Non-profit organizations help a lot of families in need. It's good exposure for kids to know and understand how these groups serve people in our community."

### **Observations**

When asked what they noticed last time they visited a Beaverton school, participants had mostly positive observations to share. The following were mentioned most frequently:

#### Caring Environment

- "Staff knew who my kids were. I was really surprised."
- "It felt like a positive place to be."
- "I noticed a very vibrant environment, tons of energy, the principal said hi, very friendly, outgoing staff in a student body with a ton of energy."

#### Facilities in Good Shape

- "I was impressed by how orderly and organized things were."
- "It's good to see our schools are being well-maintained."

#### Classes Too Big

- "Class sizes were huge. They were literally overflowing. Kids were sitting on the side of the room along the walls. There wasn't enough chairs for all of the kids."
- "I noticed a lot of kids in the rooms with class sizes that I would have considered unimaginable."

### Lack of Security

While it's not the sentiment among the majority of participants, a few feel that security at the Beaverton Schools is not adequate.

- "You can just walk into school and no one will stop you."
- "The last time I entered my son's school, my ID was not checked, I just signed in. There was no security whatsoever."

### **The Moonshot for Beaverton Schools**

#### All Kids Have A Plan

Many participants feel that all kids need to graduate high school with a plan—whether that's trade school, a professional track, or entering the workforce.

- "Not all students need to go to 4-year college, but all need to have a plan for what they're going to do next."
- "Prepare every student for a successful life, no matter where that takes them."
- "Every child has an educational plan that leads them to a career."

#### Year-Round School Year

- "I think the idea of year-round schools is a fantastic idea."
- "I feel strongly about getting rid of summer break."
- "We need a year-long program with more school days."

#### Robust Arts Programs

- "Arts education is crucial to social development."
- "The more you know about the world and art and music and history and literature and science, the more you can engage in your world. It prepares people to engage with their world at a higher level."