

Learning Leadership Council meeting – January 30, 2023

Attendees: Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Executive Directors of High School, Middle School and Elementary Level Programs, HR, SPED, SEL, Curriculum and Instruction, DEI, College and Career Readiness, IT, plus key union representatives (certified and classified).

Three high level questions and topics for small group discussion:

- Q1: In what ways have district needs changed since the 2019 Equity and Excellence needs assessment?**
- Q2: Does the district's current prioritization of SIA & HSS spending support the Board Ends: a) Strong Academic Foundation, b) Passion/Purpose/Plan for Future, and c) Wellness, Inclusion and Belonging)? Why or why not?**
- Q3: How would the plan be adjusted in the event of a reduction in funding?**

High Level Summary (general consensus of all respondees)

Q1: In what ways have district needs changed since the 2019 Equity & Excellence needs assessment?

Mental health needs have increased substantially since 2019 (prepandemic). This probably is the most agreed upon theme among all the participants. Stressors to mental health impact both students and staff and cut across all demographics, but is most pronounced among our most vulnerable populations. Key supports the district has provided include employing staff specifically focused on supporting the needs of those struggling with mental health issues (e.g., school counselors) and increasing all staff's competence in addressing mental health needs through professional learning (e.g., Effective and trauma informed behavior management and instructional practices).

Students' belief that school is valuable and that attendance matters took a hit during the pandemic. Part of restoring value to school is investing in programs that add value to school and that students recognize as adding value (e.g., CTE, internships, future centers, school to work connections, etc.). Part of restoring this value requires improving staff professional development and support. Students aren't always wrong when they perceive school as lacking value. Attendance doesn't matter equally for all students. Meaningful learning is not a given in all classes. Everyone understands that academics underlie the purpose of schools. Any students who don't see value and experience success in the classroom, where they spend roughly 80% of every day, are unlikely to value school and see it as important to their future.

Additional commentary and notes

Staff seem to use terms like "mental health" and "SEL" somewhat interchangeably. The lens for this document is that SEL refers to an instruction and support process of sorts and mental health is one outcome supported by SEL processes.

Q2: Does the District's current prioritization of SIA & HSS spending support the Board End: a) Strong Academic Foundation, b) Passion/Purpose/Plan for Future, and c) Wellness, Inclusion and Belonging)? Why or why not?

Participants generally see that currently planned investments, especially among the "big ticket" items (SIA and HSS), support the District's Board Ends.

Q3: How would the plan be adjusted in the event of a reduction in funding?

There was not one dominant theme for this question. About half the groups specifically emphasized mental health and SEL support. The other half of group's comments were geared more generally toward academics.

Additional commentary and notes

Some comments seem to overcompartmentalize the Board Ends. While each Board End has distinct components, there is substantial overlap. Improving academic success (End #1) is an important lever for improving wellness and belonging (End #3). Improving things like relationships, respect, and acceptance in schools is a key to improving academic success. One need only examine the work of Paul Tough, Zaretta Hammond, Doug Lemov, and many others to see how deeply reciprocal the ends are. For example, Geoffrey Cohen, among the foremost experts on "Belonging", describes belonging as "the sense that you're accepted and respected in a domain." In that description, belonging is specific to your environment and is impacted both by how others treat you and your own competence and success within that environment. Viewing each Board Ends as too distinctly different risks promoting impoverished views of them.

Misc comments (these are individual opinions and ideas expressed)

Needs changed?

- More SEL needs community wide. Communication with families - concerns with mode and direction of communication. More community desire for "Real life training" (e.g., Adulting 101 - Personal Finance).
- Pandemic-related struggles. Mental health needs greater. Technology needs. Human connection need. Attendance is down, do students have a reason and connection to come to school? Greater awareness of bias incidents. Capacity building for staff to support students with behavior. Demand for more learning options.
- Demand for more diverse options and formats for learning. Human interaction & relationships. Awareness and response to bias. Mental health for both adults and students. Visibility/normalizing needs and skill development.
- Is class size still a need? Mental health for all. Adult tolerance levels. Systems and skills needed for normalizing behaviors. Spotlight on financial disadvantages (access to education at home). Canvas & virtual (Did pandemic push us to virtual on a semi-permanent basis?) Human connection and relationships. Demand responses and resources (maybe referring to bias?). Full SSC @ MS. All elementary schools have counselors.

- Just wondering (Have staff needs changed as a result of COVID?). Student needs seem fairly similar to 2019. District needs to know the answer to this questions and be able to break down data and how do we track it
- Greater mental health needs. Historically Underserved were hit hardest by the pandemic (food insecurity, digital access, finances, etc.). Attendance - we actively pushed kids and families away and how do we now bring them back?
- Intensity and frequency of high behavioral needs. Growing distrust in the community of schools - greater transparency of what students are learning should be communicated. The level of training of staff has been decreased (teachers, admin, custodial. etc.) and onboarding of new staff is missing. We should pay staff to go to "soft skills" stuff (team building, culture, family nights, etc.) District culture has been to go to these things w/o compensation. How do we support a workforce where resiliency is low?

Prioritization adequate?

- Yes (HS CTE, internship coordinator, extra counseling, TOSAs). No (CTE in MS, more support for Well-being/Inclusion/Belonging, Class size concern in some MS classes).
- Yes
- Yes. Board Ends are very broad.
- Generally yes. Need more Professional Development. Build systems. Not as supported at elementary in counseling. At MS, there is a need for academic acceleration.
- *Idea-don't start SIWs (School Improvement Wednesday – early release) until November, front load 1 full PD day in Sept/Oct. Elementary school counselors in all schools - high need for school separate of social skills program.

Funding adjustments?

- SEL would be the last thing reduced. Trained staff who work with Historically Underserved populations should be prioritized.
- Not answered
- Small adjustments across the board. Eliminate one-time costs (e.g., REALMS facility), "braiding" other funds, move costs into other grants (CTE). World language TOSA?
- Remove one-time \$. Prioritize within each "area" w/ equitable lens in each. HSS. World Languages & Social Studies TOSA. EDCO Internship Coordinator/Future Center. Dual Immersion & ELL staff coordination.
- Train all staff in trauma informed instruction.
- Mental wellness first. Give kids a reason to be at school.