

Oyster River Citizens' Voice Project

Report to the School Board and Community

Background

On April 8, 2004, a group of citizens from the communities that comprise the Oyster River School District met at Oyster River Middle School to participate in the NH Citizens' Voice Project. This is a grassroots effort coordinated by diverse groups who all share one common interest: the education of the children of New Hampshire. In the year since its inception, the NH Citizens Voice Project (NHCVP) has held over 50 facilitated discussions, involving more than 450 citizens in six locations across the state. A local Steering Committee of residents organized the event and posted flyers, sent invitations and made personal contacts in order to ensure a broad spectrum of individuals were represented. Over 60 people participated in the discussion including parents, grandparents, business people, and educators.

The Oyster River Citizens' Voice Project (CVP) forum was different from the previous six CVP events. Rather than address two questions, one related to results and one to quality, the State CVP Steering Committee decided that Oyster River residents should focus on those components necessary to achieve results. This decision was made because the results outlined by the other six forums have been consistently aligned with the current state statutory definition of adequacy as outlined in RSA 193:E . Feedback from previous forums has indicated that participants wanted more time for a deeper discussion. As a result, the format was changed for the Oyster River CVP.

Methods

Participants began in a large group session in which the results data from the initial six forums and RSA 193:E were shared, (see attached handout). A brief discussion was held about these results. Participants were then divided into 4 groups, each with a facilitator.

The groups' task was to discuss the following question:

What are the building blocks or components necessary to achieve the results that have been identified?

Each group spent at least 30 minutes brainstorming and sharing ideas. They were then encouraged to ask questions for clarification or speak in support of any idea that had been listed. After this dialogue period, each individual was asked to rate his/her top five priorities. The small groups reconvened and posted their results on the walls. Facilitators reported out the top priorities and reviewed the general themes of the discussions.

Themes

The following themes were reflected in at least two of the four groups, and in many cases in all groups. Flip chart notes are attached to this document so the reader can see all ideas presented in each group.

Instruction – All groups discussed the need for good instructional practices as a component of a quality education. Specifically, several groups mentioned the need for instruction to motivate students, to be challenging to each student according to his/her abilities. Several groups discussed the need for individualized instruction and smaller class sizes.

Curriculum – While groups did not focus specifically on content areas, several groups chose a priority the need for schools to teach students to appreciate the arts and to understand and accept others. In addition, at least one group discussed the need for a more diverse curriculum that includes choices for students that will meet their individual needs and interests.

Teachers – All four groups chose as one of their priorities some aspect of support for teachers. In some cases it was a desire to reward teachers adequately, in others it is the need for qualified, effective teachers. One group focused on providing time for teachers to collaborate and be creative.

School/Parent/Community Partnerships – Three of the four groups chose community engagement as one of their priorities. They expressed the belief that community members, businesses, parents and teachers need to work together in order to achieve quality.

School Climate/Culture – Several groups chose to focus on a school climate that supports and respects children and values those things that cannot be measured, as a priority for achieving quality. One group suggested the addition of a person to act as ombudsman to resolve conflicts. The issue of class size could also be included in this theme as at least one group mentioned it as a means of developing relationships and mitigating discipline issues.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the forum was held on Maundy Thursday, a major religious holiday, approximately 75 diverse residents of Durham, Lee and Madbury came together on April 8, 2004 to share ideas about the components necessary for quality schools. Their thoughts and concerns will provide valuable information to the Oyster River School Board as they begin a planning process. In addition, the results of this Citizens Voice Forum will be combined with the other six forums to create valuable information for policy makers in state government.

Local Steering Committee Recommendations

The steering committee recognizes that the district is constantly working toward improving instruction, curriculum and toward many or all of the goals expressed in the “themes” sections in this report. This committee has chosen to highlight the following three themes, which were discussed in several of the small groups (see flip chart notes). These ideas are also represented in the “school/parent/community partnerships” section of the theme notes. These three ideas stood out to the steering committee as strong community desires which the school board could “make real”, in somewhat measurable terms.

1) Increased community use of facilities

By offering classes and **the use of the schools as a meeting place for community organizations to plan activities and events which encourage the participation of interested students**, the district will create a sense of pride and ownership among taxpayers, **strengthen the innate interconnections between school and community**, and at the same time, it will allow taxpayers to reap the benefits of their own monetary contributions.

2) Increased student involvement in community

Students who do community service are more likely to develop a sense of pride in their own community. Creating more opportunities for students to use their skills to benefit community businesses/organizations is a win-win situation (i.e. already in the works: students doing web design for local businesses and organizations is a great idea!)

3) Better communication to the whole community about what is going on in our schools

Increased and more creative communication between the school district and the community would enhance the relationship between the taxpayers and the schools. Advertising events, classes and forums effectively would increase participation. Reporting achievements and news from the schools to a broader audience in an interesting manner would raise so called “approval ratings” of the school board and the district as a whole.

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ATTACHMENTS

Priorities

(This is a listing of priorities derived from flip chart notes of small group discussions.)

Group 1

1. Motivate all students
2. a. Reward excellence for students, teachers, administrators
b. School community work together
3. How to live, use and appreciate the things – art, poetry, beauty, relationships, joy of..stimulating broad spectrum of interests
4. Pay teachers adequately
5. a. Consider school culture – physical and emotional
b. Parents and teachers support and respect teachers

Group 2

- 1 Smaller class sizes – leads to relationships that mitigate discipline issues
2. Effective teaching
3. Children need to be more challenged. Children need high, appropriate expectations. Children rise to the expectations.
4. Place value on things that are not easily measured
5. a. Quality facilities
b. Consideration for age and developmentally appropriate schedule – flexible, brain research, bussing considerations

Group 3

1. Create/Attract/Support “the best” teachers, bright, stimulated, passionate about learning, re-think what the day looks like
2. Trust that parents, teachers, administrators are all working in the child’s best interest
3. Citizenship: comprehensive guidance
Develop an acceptance and respect for others, ie, different family values, different ways of being on the playground
4. A mediator/ombudsman – someone who can see/support both sides of an issue, neutral party
5. a. A school that understands/respects/appreciates a child’s view
b. Community involvement/collaboration
PTO support Volunteer opportunities (well publicized)
Business
Teaching – learning
c. System should reflect/support children’s developmental needs
Girls at 5/6 ready to start before boys
d. Diversify the high school curriculum more options for older students – teachers might move to different schools

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Group 4

1. Entire community part of education
2. Individualized programs for each kid
3. Broader variety of curriculum offerings that meet interests/learning style/relevance
4. a. Small class size in all grades (1:15)
b. Students learning social skills/community building
5. Teachers who have time to collaborate and be creative

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Flip Chart Notes:

(The following are the flip chart notes from each small group session. The numbers in () represent the priority of the item as voted on by group members)

Group1

Hire good teachers
Pay them (teachers) adequately (4)
Retrain/redirect inadequate teachers
Keeping teachers motivated
Parent involvement (2)
Stimulate curiosity (2)
Reward excellence for students, teachers, administrators (6)
Provide adequate textbooks/supplies, materials
Exploit resources of community (2)
Teach to different learning styles, don't categorize (1)
Students have involvement and ownership in school system (3)
System modified (2)
Consider school culture – physical and emotional (3)
Consider framework – time
School community work together (6)
Mandatory volunteerism
Community participation
Internships in community engagement practical application (check book, laws, rights)
How to live, use and appreciate the things – art, poetry, beauty, relationships, joy
of..stimulating broad spectrum of interests (5)
Integrating subjects (2)
Capture what they are interested in
Desire or passion to problem solve (2)
Talented, gifted track programming options
Individualized programs
Full year school
Full day kindergarten
Reconfigure schedules/days
Passionate teachers (2)
Parents and teachers support and respect teachers (3)
Parents have a responsibility to support learning and schools (1)
A variety of activities for students (1)
Independent study projects- family/community/schools
Motivate the average student, middle of the road student
Motivate all students (8)
Facilities/building/grounds
Endowment fund (1)
Web listed teacher needs, community members donate
Community outreach (1)

Group 2

Effective teaching (7)
Reasonable discipline, effective support system by administration for teachers (2)
Enthusiastic teachers (1)
Teachers supported by administration and community, not just financially (2)
Inter & intra communication within school and class. Dover template (1)
Knowledgeable and warm teachers
Engaging teachers
Adequate professional development opportunities – central clearinghouse for PD
Children need to be more challenged. Children need high, appropriate expectations.
Children rise to the expectations. (5)
Feeding and keeping alive a desire for learning
Asking children what they want to learn
Finding areas of curriculum that have cross-curriculum opportunities that can be brought together
Integrated studies/interdisciplinary
Making curriculum applications to real life/real world examples where appropriate with child's needs. Imaginative needs vs. real world applications (1)
Whenever feasible, encourage leadership opportunities, family and core values (3)
How does school make tolerance and other shared values operational? Respectful school culture.
Finding methods for having balanced discourse
Higher value for the arts (2)
Quality facilities (3)
Teacher evaluations and selectivity (2)
Safe schools: to take risks in learning, drug free environment, environmental safety (3)
People's opinions are respected
Special education – balanced solution
Consideration for age and developmentally appropriate schedule – flexible, brain research, bussing considerations (3)
Meaningful homework, how do we fit everything in?
Encouraging students to stay within the district
More extra-curricular enrichment activities built into school schedule (2)
Smaller class sizes – leads to relationships that mitigate discipline issues (8)
Consistent, reliable source of funding
More local control of curriculum decisions
Place value on things that are not easily measured (4)

Group 3

Citizenship: comprehensive guidance (8)
 Develop an acceptance and respect for others, ie, different family values, different ways of being on the playground
A culture in the school that embraces/supports diversity (2)

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- Discussions
- Expectations in the classroom
- Zero tolerance
- Anger management
- Mediation
- Empower the children

A school that understands/respects/appreciates a child's view (6)

Learning should be fun

Community involvement/collaboration (6)

- PTO support Volunteer opportunities (well publicized)

- Business

- Teaching – learning

Essential conversation – connection with teachers and their students parents/guardians

Create/Attract/Support “the best” teachers, bright, stimulated, passionate about learning, re-think what the day looks like (13)

Professional support/development for teachers and school (2)

Students feel respected by their teacher (1)

Children are challenged example - tracking (4)

More parental input/feedback regarding teachers performance ex. evaluations (5)

System should reflect/support children's developmental needs (6)

- Girls at 5/6 ready to start before boys

Better support for teachers (5)

- 1:20 difficult to meet individual needs without support/volunteers/peer mentoring

Clear consistent policy/expectations across the school, feedback

Communication – information/issues flow to appropriate place to be, resolved, not “brushed off”

A mediator/ombudsman – someone who can see/support both sides of an issue, neutral party (7)

Trust that parents, teachers, administrators are all working in the child's best interest (9)

Parent support – mentors for parents

State minimum standards (take only 25% of the time)

Full day kindergarten with updated/advanced curriculum

Diversity the high school curriculum more options for older students – teachers might move to different schools (6)

Group 4

Teachers who have time to collaborate and be creative (5)

Longer school day

Teachers who manage time better

Teachers should not be doing tasks not a part of education (2)

Tap into volunteers, others to take administrative tasks from teachers

Volunteer coordinator

Teachers who collaborate/team teach

Individualized programs for each kid (8)

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Giving kids choice within parameters (1)

School/community partnerships that are community building

Mandatory community service (2)

High quality teacher in-service

Multi-lingual education starting in elementary school (world languages) (4)

Parenting training for parents (2)

Preparation in written and oral communication (3)

Small class size in all grades 1:15 (6)

Teachers who are role models for dealing with others (1)

Teachers who are part of/interested in their community engagement

Students learning social skills/community building (6)

Broader variety of curriculum offerings that meet interests/learning style/relevance (7)

Encouragement to take risks (1)

Safe, supportive, inclusive environment in class (3)

Opportunities for relationships with adults that are meaningful (1)

Entire community part of education (10)

Opportunities for school/community partnerships that support high quality education/standards (2)



The NH Citizens Voice Project

In the year since its inception, the NH Citizens Voice Project (NHCVP) has held over 50 facilitated discussions, involving more than 450 citizens in six locations across the state. These six communities were chosen to represent economic and geographic diversity. They are: Lincoln/Woodstock, Claremont, Chichester, Raymond, Rochester and Fall Mountain. Forum participants have included parents, students, graduates, business leaders, senior citizens, elected officials, grandparents, teachers, administrators, school board members, members of the faith community, and other community members.

At the close of each forum, the local Steering Committee has reported on the results. Full reports are accessible on the NHCVP website, www.nhcvp.org.

While every forum was different, a clear consensus emerges from the reports. Participants said schools need to:

- ✓ develop students' desire for learning
- ✓ create a sense of citizenship among graduates
- ✓ prepare students for further education, careers, and life.

On the other side of this page you will find the state statute that defines education results. We would like you to spend the next few hours discussing what are the components necessary to achieve these results? What do schools, communities and the state need to meet this goal? Please be as specific as you can be.

We encourage you to speak your mind, listen to others and engage in a dialogue that could effect the lives of children across our state. We thank you for your participation.

The NHCVP Steering Committee

**TITLE XV
EDUCATION
CHAPTER 193-E
ADEQUATE PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Section 193-E:1

193-E:1 Policy and Purpose. –

I. It is the policy of the state of New Hampshire that public elementary and secondary education shall provide all students with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare them for successful participation in the social, economic, scientific, technological, and political systems of a free government, now and in the years to come; an education that is consistent with the curriculum and student proficiency standards specified in state school approval rules and New Hampshire curriculum frameworks.

II. Respecting New Hampshire's long tradition of community involvement, it is the purpose of this chapter to ensure that appropriate means are established to provide an adequate education through an integrated system of shared responsibility between state and local government. In this system, the state establishes, through school approval and student proficiency standards and curriculum guidelines, the framework for the delivery of educational services at the local level. School districts then have flexibility in implementing diverse educational approaches tailored to meet student needs.

Source. 1998, 389:1, eff. Oct. 1, 1998.

Section 193-E:2

193-E:2 Criteria for an Adequate Education. – An adequate education shall provide all students with the opportunity to acquire:

I. Skill in reading, writing, and speaking English to enable them to communicate effectively and think creatively and critically.

II. Skill in mathematics and familiarity with methods of science to enable them to analyze information, solve problems, and make rational decisions.

III. Knowledge of the biological, physical, and earth sciences to enable them to understand and appreciate the world around them.

IV. Knowledge of civics and government, economics, geography, and history to enable them to participate in the democratic process and to make informed choices as responsible citizens.

V. Grounding in the arts, languages, and literature to enable them to appreciate our cultural heritage and develop lifelong interests and involvement in these areas.

VI. Sound wellness and environmental practices to enable them to enhance their own well-being, as well as that of others.

VII. Skills for lifelong learning, including interpersonal and technological skills, to enable them to learn, work, and participate effectively in a changing society.

Source. 1998, 389:1, eff. Oct. 1, 1998.

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