USD 497 Community Conversation: Summary

December 14, 2017 | 6:30-8:30pm | Auditorium, Lawrence Public Library | 707 Vermont Street

Background

Lawrence Public Schools USD 497 Board of Education and Interim Superintendent Anna Stubblefield engaged the public in a Community Conversation about supporting student achievement and success.

This meeting provided community members with up-to-date information from Interim Superintendent Anna Stubblefield, an opportunity to provide information on matters of most concern, and an interactive question and answer session with school board members.

The meeting was facilitated by Christina Holt and Jomella Watson-Thompson of the University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development (KU CCHD). KU CCHD staff served as note-takers in each small group.

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Methods

As attendees arrived, they were asked to reflect upon what topics were of most concern to them and that they most wanted to discuss. Attendees were given five post-it notes and a pen, and instructions to jot down one topic per sticky note. The sticky notes were placed on a Technology of Participation blue "sticky wall" and sorted into categories as Interim Superintendent Anna Stubblefield welcomed participants and shared high-level goals, aspirations, and plans.

Participants were invited to join a discussion group in one of the four topic areas that emerged from grouping of the sticky notes:

- Achievement Gap
- Bullying, Safety and Mental Health
- Curriculum and Staff
- Equity

One to two school board members were present in each group, and facilitated the small group conversation. Conversation questions included:

- What concerns you in this area?
- What successes or improvements have you seen?
- What ideas or suggestions do you have?
- What questions do you have?
- What would you like the school board to explore further?

KU Center for Community Health and Development staff captured each group's notes (questions, recommendations, etc.) on a flipchart.

School board members in each of the discussion groups took turns reporting progress, concerns, questions, and recommendations that emerged in their discussion, and engaged in a question and answer dialogue with the full group.

Anna Stubblefield concluded the meeting thanking attendees and sharing that an additional opportunity to engage in conversation would be held in the spring semester.

Following are the notes captured within each of the four small groups.

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Equity

Equity: Issues

- Discipline
- Transparency between school board and community
- Transparency/ communication between school and families about disciplinary actions
- Engagement in fine arts is not proportionate. Costs of private lessons can be prohibitive.
- Consistency. "It's difficult to have continuity throughout the district because the schools operate independently on some issues."

Equity: Successes

- Community involvement/ families of color groups
- Staying engaged in equity conversations
- Advisory boards to promote involvement
- Parent support for families of color
- Looking at changing curriculum and policies, including equity concerns with discipline practices

- Merging CIT3 with equity team
- District provided restorative justice training

Equity: Ideas for improvement

- More teachers of color are needed
- Teacher relationships and communications with marginalized students need to be improved
- There is underrepresentation of minority students in advanced classes/ overrepresentation of minority students in special education classes
- There needs to be use of positive/ restorative programs with student instead of punitive
- There should be a district-wide implementation of a culturally welcoming atmosphere
- Increase coordination with afterschool programs; increase collaboration with after school staff on restorative justice
- Disciplinary routine
- Improve parent communication
- Improve/ change format of courageous conversations
  - Works well for young kids but not older kids. Older kids avoid the conversations, doesn't solve problems/ causes more issues in day-to-day activities.
  - Does the program work better for kids that started the program young?
  - Teachers don't take "courageous conversations" seriously. Teachers are uncomfortable with talking about issues facing minorities. Sessions are sometimes too large to be effective.
  - Board has made training mandatory – teachers must acquire this skill.
- Implement tough policies that reflect equity values
  - Hire more teachers/ staff of color.
  - Retain and develop teachers/ staff of color.
- Have authentic conversations
- Standardize quality and resources and recognition across school zip codes

Participant concerns shared through "sticky notes"

- Treatment of persons of color within schools
- Institutional racism
- Equity in school zip codes
- Equity across schools
- White privilege
- Racial equity and MTSS
- Racial equity in school discipline
- Equity
- Diversity
- White fragility
- Subtle (often unknown by white folks) microaggressions

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- Restorative practices at LMCMS and other schools?
- Research on how the academic achievement gap begins in kindergarten/ early primary years
- Restorative practices
- Discipline
- Restorative practices *(shared on two participants' sticky notes)*
- Restorative justice *(shared on two participants' sticky notes)*

Curriculum and Staff

Curriculum and Staff: Issues

- Don't feel like the teachers have enough help
- Efforts underway to recruit people of color
- Shortage of teachers overall
- Positions shared across schools are of concern (e.g., social workers, gifted facilitation); this is more of an issue for smaller schools
- Gaps in gifted fall on racial and gender lines
- A parent shared it was hard to understand the MAP test
- Questions about purpose of Wednesday early release

Curriculum and Staff: Successes

- The school district has hosted workshops on culturally relevant curriculum. There are examples of culturally relevant coursework, but it is not everywhere.
- Culturally relevant curriculum has evolved over 2-3 years
- There is concern about homeroom teachers having the skills and knowledge and standard curriculum for children with IEPs and special education needs
- Lack of or over-including children with IEPs and special education needs
- An after-thought population
- Lots of turnover
- Equity across zip codes
- Questions about funding to different schools
- Differences in parent engagement

Curriculum and Staff: Ideas for improvement

- Maintain high standards for all
- Recognize institutionalized racism

Curriculum and Staff: Participant concerns shared through "sticky notes"

- Culturally responsive curriculum and teaching
- Equity of materials presented to students to be culturally relevant
- Is there support for DACA and undocumented students?
- Success of students with different situations
- How much history of the African American experience is being taught?
- Leveled core classes for gifted and talented middle school students
- Hiring persons of color
- Lack of paraeducators/ support
- Need more racial diversity of staff
- Meaningful recruitment and retention of teachers of color
- Recruiting, vetting, developing and retaining teachers of color
- [We need] teachers of color in our schools
- Separate gifted program from special education. More color in gifted program.
- School gifted
- Community reach out to parents of 0-3 years with early parent education
- The expansion of gifted programs in elementary schools
- Accountability
- Identify more kids of color for gifted education
- Wednesday early release PD time for teachers
- Coherent SPED services K-12

Bullying, Safety and Mental Health
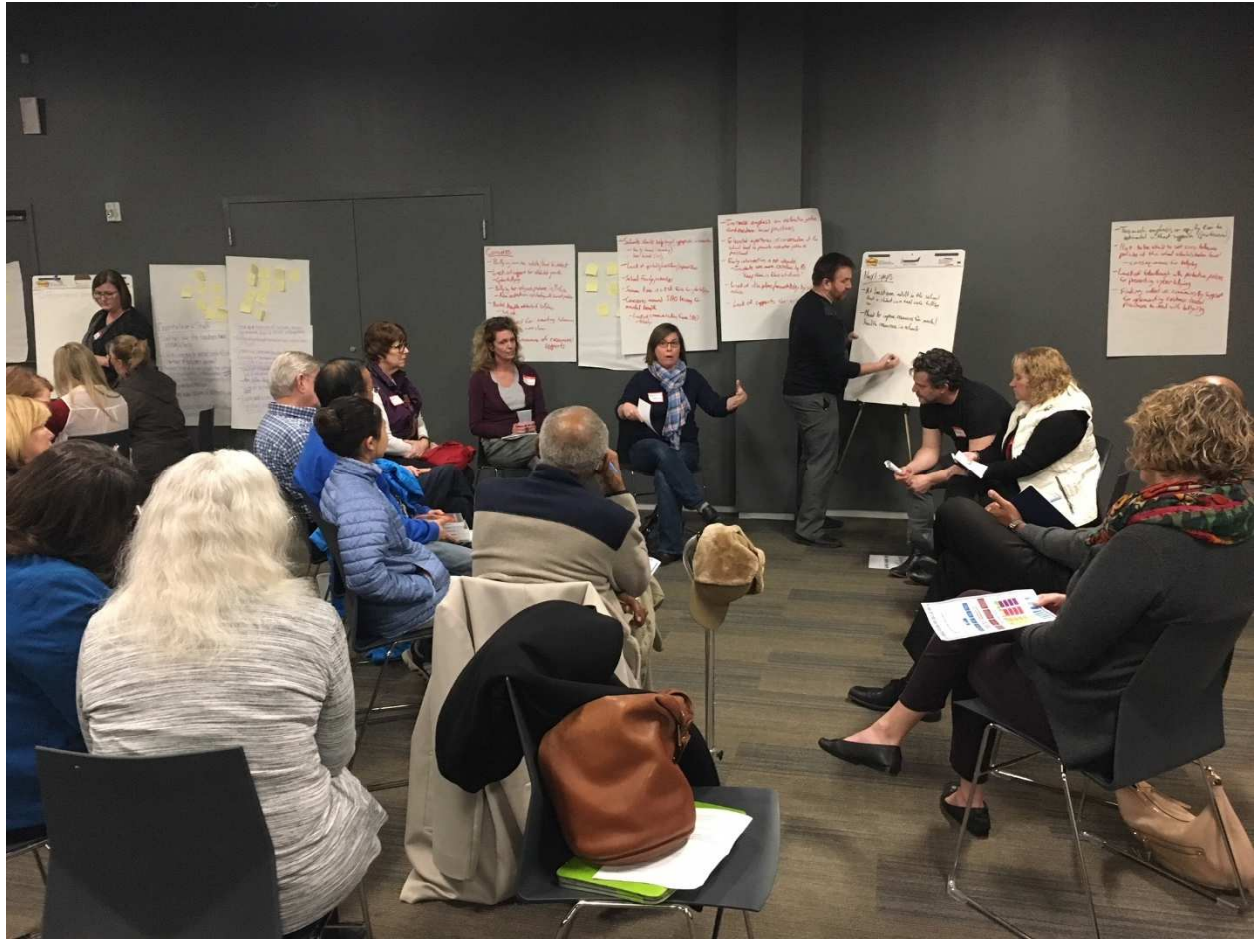
Bullying, Safety and Mental Health: Issues

- Bullying can be subtle/ hard to detect
- Lack of support for affected youth
- Cyberbullying
- Bullying for religions practices (i.e., Muslim)
- Mental health effects of bullying
    - Suicide
- Students unaware of resources/ supports
- Schools should help target appropriate interventions
    - Family-based (elementary)
    - Peer-based (high school)
- Lack of spirituality/ mindfulness/ purposefulness
- Screen time is a risk factor for cyber bullying
- Concerns around school resource officer training for mental health
    - Lack of timely communication from school resource officer

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- Early intervention is not adequate
- Incidents are more extreme by high school; teachers are told to "keep them in class at all costs"
- Lack of discipline/ accountability by school administrators
- Lack of supports for victims
- Too much emphasis on equity can be detrimental without supports (professional)
- Lack of follow through with protective policies for preventing cyber bullying

Bullying, Safety and Mental Health: Ideas for improvement

- Increase emphasis on restorative justice and evidence-based practices
- Teach tolerance within the curriculum
- School-family partnerships
- Conversation at the school level to promote restorative justice vs. punishment
- Don't be afraid to set zero tolerance policies at the school administration level; implement consequences for bullying
- Find collective community support for implementing evidence-based practices to deal with bullying
- Have at least one adult in the school that a student can feel safe talking to.
- Need to improve resources for mental health resources in schools. Kansas CAN.
- Increase parental involvement.

Bullying, Safety and Mental Health: Participant concerns shared through "sticky notes"

- Bullying
- Increased mental health rources
- Increased time with counselors in all schools
- Effective and consistent bully programs in schools (especially middle school)
- Bullying religious ESL student
- Prevention of school bullying
- Mental health – students, elementary
- Student and staff safety
- Peace of mind, safety, security in our schools
- Roles of SRO officers

Achievement Gap

Achievement Gap: Issues

- Size of gap for African American students
- Persistence of the gap
- Research around class/ school size
- Early education intervention (e.g., SLPs)
- Utilization of staff resources (e.g., staff rations is strategic areas)
- Teaching/ instructional/ opportunity gaps (beyond academic performance)
- Need to have high expectations; build teacher-student relationships
- Graduation rates (stories behind data)
- Paradox in access to AP classes; criteria eliminates students that might be well-served

Achievement Gap: Successes

- Strengthening student-teacher relationships; supports
- Trauma-informed policies
- Youth voice

Achievement Gap: Questions

- Timeline for expansion of pilot program for restorative justice and trauma-informed care?

Achievement Gap: Suggestions

- Connections between parents and schools are essential; increase parent engagement. Schools need to communicate better with parents
- Help empower parents to engage with children; share tools for success
- Judicious use of support staff
- Strengthen relationships with afterschool programs
- More engaging instructional design (get students excited, get parents involved)
- Detracking can be effective
- Better methods for evaluating students' abilities (exams don't always allow students to show what they know)
- Reduced workload for teachers to allow focused activities/ efforts
- Building students' competence and self-confidence (growth mindset) as well as non-cognitive skills such as collaborative problem-solving and problem-based learning; tapping into students' creativity, talents, interests (e.g., AVID "Advancement Via Individual Determination" program can be game-changer for marginalized groups)
- Diversity in AP classes

Achievement Gap: Participant concerns shared through "sticky notes"

- Legislation of school budget. Education needs stronger lobbyists.
- Superintendent
- Renaming of South Middle School
- Measure early education to graduation rates
- Curriculum for ALL children
- Student engagement
- Preparation for life after graduation, especially for those NOT attending 4-year college
- Afterschool activities
- County/ district-=wide limited tech time for non-educational use
- Early education quality and access focus to closer equity playout life of person
- Racial achievement gap
- Disability and special education equity in teacher professional development and student programming quality improvements
- Continue to increase graduation rate