



a Common Vision for Our Future

An initiative of LaPESC

Community Principles and Priorities for Public Education in Lafayette Parish

June 5, 2014

With the election of a new Lafayette Parish School Board just a few months away, we have an opportunity to rally around a common vision for increasing student achievement and preparedness in our community.

Throughout the month of March 2014, a group of community organizations teamed up to host a series of moderated round table discussions in order to listen and learn about the education issues most important to the Lafayette community. As a whole, the opinions expressed by the round table participants revealed a high degree of consistency and consensus on most of the issues discussed. If there was one overarching thread in those discussions, it was the need for all decision makers to continually focus on increasing student achievement and preparedness.

A growing coalition of partner organizations was determined to go further and transform the aspirations of our community into action by developing and advancing a set of principles and priorities for the Lafayette Parish School System. Rather than focusing attention on the small number of issues that are sometimes divisive, we are united in advancing a common vision that is grounded in a strong community consensus and published research.

By embracing and successfully advancing this vision, our community will see many significant short-term and long-term benefits:

- **Fundamental alignment within the School Board:** a common vision to increase student achievement and preparedness for all children
- **More effective governance:** an approach that is vision-driven, respectful, informed by data, accountable for results, and committed to putting students first
- **Faster implementation of community-endorsed programs:** coordinated school health and wellness initiatives, evidence-based instructional programs, meaningful community engagement systems, and critical technology upgrades
- **Enhancements to school facilities:** an actionable strategy for providing an adequate, safe learning environment for our children
- **Improved outcomes for children:** steady growth in student achievement, graduation rates, and preparedness for college and careers

We hope additional organizations, parents, teachers, school administrators, and other citizens will join us in advancing this common vision for our future.



Statement of Belief

The status quo of the Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS) is insufficient to meet both the demands and the aspirations of our community. Positive change requires a commonly shared set of fundamental beliefs. The following principles encapsulate the core beliefs all education decision-makers must hold as inviolable truths:

- **Increasing student achievement and preparedness is possible and paramount**
- **All children can perform at grade level, regardless of their background, with the exception of students with severe learning disabilities**
- **All children must be given the opportunity to perform to their potential, and our schools are a primary vehicle for students achieving their potential**
- **The academic achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups can be substantially narrowed and eventually eliminated**
- **Schools fundamentally affect what children learn and how well and how fast they learn it**
- **LPSS can become a high-performing organization**

Changing the status quo requires a deep and abiding commitment to these principles. Without such a commitment, the Lafayette Parish School Board will lack the constancy of purpose and political will to create an exceptional school system.

Community Priorities

Attaining and sustaining an excellent school system requires a collaborative, respectful school board/superintendent leadership team, united around a common vision for action. The common vision outlined here is a living document that must be refined and evaluated on an ongoing basis with substantial community input. Above all the common vision must continually focus on the primary objective of increasing student achievement and preparedness.

The school board is uniquely placed to provide leadership and oversight for this vision. *School board members must proactively and vigorously pursue the following twelve priorities:*



School System Governance

Highly-effective school systems depend on strong board leadership that is vision-driven, respectful, informed by data, accountable for results, and committed to putting students first.

- 1 Focusing on systemic vision, district goals, and policymaking, with the aim of increasing student achievement and preparedness, while avoiding interference in the daily management and operations of the district.** Broad consensus exists in the education policy literature that school boards should focus on establishing direction, reviewing outcomes, and providing oversight that guarantees the integrity of management systems without influencing management decisions. In short, they must steer, not row.
- 2 Empowering and supporting the superintendent as CEO of the system with full authority to administer district affairs and policies, including but not limited to personnel decisions and other operational and procedural duties.** In addition to management, education policy literature identifies the superintendent as an essential part of the governance team who provides information and develops policy and budget recommendations based on the needs of the district. Ultimately, this arrangement allows the school board to hold the superintendent accountable for achieving established goals.
- 3 Maintaining a high standard of professionalism, including engaging in professional development and team training.** Case studies reveal many high-achieving districts implement formal, deliberate training for new school board members. Board members in these districts often gather to discuss specific topics. Studies also highlight the need for board members to base decisions on sound research, best practices, relevant data, and established policies, while clearly articulating to the public how those decisions align with district goals.
- 4 Endorsing and providing accountability for a performance plan developed with the superintendent, which clearly defines measurable goals for student and school performance and effectiveness.** Case studies confirm setting performance goals and a culture of accountability is a necessary precondition for successful implementation of strategies to increase student achievement. The goal setting process can also serve as a consensus-building exercise between board members and the superintendent, defining a path to gains in student achievement and preparedness.
- 5 Annually reviewing and evaluating the district's current standing and progress relative to the performance plan.** An objective, data-driven review of outcomes allows the school board/superintendent leadership team to continually focus on student achievement and make high-level adjustments where necessary.
- 6 Establishing a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.** Research identifies community engagement as an integral part of any reform effort. The most high-functioning school boards pursue innovative ways to build support among the community and seek feedback on the progress of efforts to increase student achievement.



A Path Forward: “100% In. 100% Out.” Plan

The community-developed “100% In. 100% Out.” Plan offers a comprehensive statement of community preferences for specific initiatives and focus areas needed to improve the school system. The Plan’s recommendations were developed by multiple task forces that included teachers, administrators, academic researchers, and other community leaders. Adopted by the School Board in 2012, it remains the primary strategy of LPSS.

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Advancing and supporting coordinated school health and wellness initiatives that provide increased access to trained healthcare and social workers. Research demonstrates that the physical and mental health of children is inherently linked with student performance. Increasing the ratio of students to healthcare and social workers is a proven way to increase student achievement, particularly among lower-income populations.

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Striving for increased student achievement for all students and all schools by funding and supporting evidence-based instructional programs, including but not limited to early childhood education that will provide universal pre-K for at risk four-year-olds. The last few decades have seen an exponential increase in research aimed at identifying what works in instruction. The individual academic task forces of the “100% In. 100% Out.” Plan, along with the superintendent and administration, continue to work to provide the most relevant recommendations and options for improving academic opportunities and increasing student performance. The role of the school board must be to focus scarce resources (including leadership and funding) on initiatives that are most likely to generate the greatest impact.

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Creating systems that provide for meaningful community engagement in the development of systemic vision, goals, and policymaking, and separately ensuring appropriate and respectful protocols and staff resources for constituent complaints. Any broadly successful reform effort will require the school board/superintendent team to build public trust and confidence as leading community advocates for children. Aggressively establishing partnerships with parents, community organizations, and the private sector offers opportunities for involvement, while fulfilling student needs.

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Providing adequate, modern technology that meets state requirements and ensures students are ready for the demands of a 21st century economy. Beyond state mandates, there is no doubt that our students will need a high level of technological proficiency to succeed after graduating from high school. A rapidly changing technology environment necessitates consistent and timely updates.



Facilities

The average Lafayette Parish public school building is more than 47 years old, significantly exceeding the national average. Many community stakeholders, however, lack a clear understanding of the current and impending facility needs.

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Working with the Superintendent to develop a short-term and long-term strategy for ensuring adequate, safe facilities and building support among members of the public for implementation of that strategy. Many empirical studies find the condition of school buildings has a sizeable and measurable influence on student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic and other factors.

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Working with stakeholders to develop a shared knowledge base and public commitment for any facilities improvement effort. Experts identify school board leadership as vital to creating awareness and urgency among community members on specific issues, particularly where significant public trust is required in order to reach a solution.

The Vision in Action

These principles and priorities represent a common vision for increasing student achievement and preparedness in the Lafayette Parish School System. While the election of a new Lafayette Parish School Board is a critically important opportunity for progress in our community, realizing our common vision will require sustained commitment by all stakeholders, not just our School Board members, over the next four years and beyond.

Nevertheless, the School Board is the duly elected champion of our community’s vision and is primarily responsible for its implementation. To the extent that additional tactics are needed, the School Board should evaluate those options based on their potential to improve student achievement and preparedness. Our decision-makers must never waiver from relentlessly pursuing this goal in order to secure a brighter future for all children in our community.

