Brunswick School Department Strategic Planning Workgroup
Kick-Off Meeting Highlight Notes
September 18, 2015

These notes were taken on the spot by facilitators Craig Freshley and Kerri Sands. They are not a complete reflection of what was discussed and have not been checked for accuracy or approved by the group. This report is organized by topic, not necessarily the order in which things were discussed.

About the Meeting

Objectives

- Understand our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and environment
- Decide and affirm strategic planning process
- Get to know each other as a group and build enthusiasm for our work together

Attendance

- Pender Makin, Assistant Superintendent
- Steve Ciembroniewicz, Principal, Coffin Elementary School
- Rich Ellis - parent, school board member
- Michele Joyce - former school board member, community volunteer
- Steve Perkinson - parent, community member
- Teresa Gillis - parent, school board member
- Ted Wickwire - parent, community member
- Joy Prescott - parent, school board member
- Shanna Crofton, Principal, Brunswick High School
- Amanda Kierman, full time AmeriCorps volunteer with the Brunswick School Department
- Brenda Clough, school board member
- Paul Perzanoski, Superintendent
- Jean Skorapa, Principal, Harriet Beecher Stowe School

- Craig Freshley, Good Group Decisions
- Kerri Sands, Good Group Decisions

Not all attendees were present for the entire meeting.

Ground Rules

- For the Brunswick school system as a whole
- All views heard - Let Craig call on people
- Name issues
- Forward positive outlook
- Flexible agenda
- Neutral facilitation and reporting
- Themes and conclusions as we go

Strategic Planning Process Success Factors

Each participant was invited to complete the sentence, "This process will be a success if _____." The following answers were shared:

- It's inclusive and forward thinking
- We all listen to each other, be open minded and collaborative
- We are able to gather input from diverse voices
- It is inclusive and open minded
- At the end, people who are not at this table with us are not surprised by the results, and are excited about it
- We are going in a positive direction, action results from it
- We leave high-fiving, feeling inspired
- We can work collaboratively, listen, and generate excitement for what we need to do
- At the end, the work we have produced creates actions with positive impact on the system. Not a document that sits on a shelf and does nothing.
- We let each other be honest
- This process WILL be successful, because we are finally actually doing it
- We have an outline to drive us for the next 5-10 years

What We Hope to Accomplish

The group discussed desired outcomes of this process and key issues that the strategic plan should resolve. Together we made a list and refined it on the screen. Participants then used a paper checklist, created on the spot, to indicate which items they thought this strategic planning process should MOST focus on. The following list resulted:

- What we do – about the kids - 4
    - Curriculum and Programming - 3

- o Improving academic performance & closing achievement gaps - 8
- o How to engage the preschool population - 4
- o Consider bold ideas about more diversified and innovative programming - 8
- o International mindedness and programming
- o Partnering with others - 2
- How we get things done – how we do things
  - o Governance/Guidance for making effective, efficient decisions - 6
  - o More effective communication to the community - 6
  - o Increased alignment of our initiatives – reduce redundancies - 4
  - o Improve efficiency - 1
  - o Partnerships with community organizations to help grow our capacity - 1
- Where we do our work – Facilities - 8
  - o Configuration - 5
  - o Class size - 5
  - o Grade distribution - 3
- Who does the work - Workplace of choice
  - o Recruit, retain, and <u>develop</u> staff - 6
- About our process
  - o Good process - 1
    - ▪ Educate the community - 5
    - ▪ Inclusive and collaborative - 7
  - o Action plan embraced by the community - 6
  - o Final plan is:
    - ▪ An informative road map - 3
    - ▪ Highly visible, well known, understood - 6
    - ▪ Transcends fiscal issues - 4
  - o Progress on the plan is measurable and there is accountability - 4

Craig offered the following summary of the top things on which the strategic planning process should focus:

- How to improve academic performance
- Innovative programming
- What to do about the facilities
- How to improve governance and communications
- Staff recruitment, retention, and development

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Environment

The group took stock of the Brunswick Schools' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and environment. Craig explained that strengths and weaknesses are typically things that are current and within our control, opportunities are things to capitalize on, and the environment includes external conditions over which we do not have control, but which we need to be mindful of as we make a plan. Ideas were written on paper and organized on the wall.

Strengths

- Many involved parents
- Opportunities to be involved
- Community Support + interest (momentum)
- Timing
- Positive momentum
- Caring, involved community members/parents
- Support for education
- Strong support (at least potentially) for education in this town
- Caring and devoted parents and community
- Community commit. to fiscal resourcing

- Human capital
- Passionate Teachers
- High Quality Staff/Administration
- Many terrific teachers and staff
- Seasoned/Experienced Staff
- Experience of teachers
- Staff - Well educated/experienced, caring
- People - Teachers, Staff, Students, Community
- Cohesive, well-working Board

- Great educational programming
- "Traditional Curriculum"
- Excellent college preparedness - for those who come prepared
- Prep for college

- Elementary/Middle Schools "in town"
- Our physical landscape
- New facility – HBS

- Innovative culture
- Music + Arts + STEM - all strong and awesome

Weaknesses

- Marginalized and under-represented families need more voice
- Diverse opportunities for diverse learners
- Curriculum and programs for students "outside the traditional"
- Meet needs of high and average learners…but need more for at-risk
- Not addressing needs of all our students (especially low income, but others too)
- Broad gap (income is too predictive of outcome)
- Diversity of expectations
- Trying to make things equitable for all makes for inequality

- Failing buildings (but with great things happening in them)
- Major facilities needs
- Facilities
  - Some
- Facilities
- Perfect storm on Facility Needs
- $ for general maintenance
- Buildings in need of repair
  - Coffin
  - BJHS

- Community misconceptions
- Ineffective communication
- Transparency and communication

- Lack of creative thinking
- Some pedagogical approaches seem stuck in the past
- Reactive instead of proactive

- Services for social/behavioral issues
  - More $
  - Increasing need
- Need more mental health supports

- Disconnect among and within grades
- K-12 alignment
- Financial constraints (competing needs)
- Not enough resourcing/time for staff development

- Technology

- Website

- Parents not seen as partners in kids education

- Transportation (lack of)

- No pre-school

Opportunities

- Community resources
- Wealth of opportunities in community - use our existing resources
- Bowdoin (they should do more for local schools)
- Potential collaboration with Bowdoin
    - And others, but Bowdoin especially
- Bowdoin College partnerships
- Local businesses, agencies etc.
- Forming solid, easily accessible relationships with area resources - There's so many!
- Collaborate with partners
- Community involvement
- Take advantage of what is available to us

- Chance to be innovative
- New staff, New ideas, New energy
- Listening to our teachers ideas
- To think out of the box

- Major facilities needs = chance to design facilities to match our hopes
- Potential new building create structural opp.

- Define how extra and co-curricular activities support teaching and learning
- Extension of learning opportunities
    - "Outside the walls"
    - Experiential learning

- Great student mentors
    - Giving kids
- Schools within schools

- We could be the heart of Brunswick

- Free/Reduced lunch could accurately reflect reality = increased $

- Timing (well-timed)

- Globalization

- Natural resources - ex. coastline

- New media allows for better communication

Environment

- Remarkably diverse (in socio-economic terms) population
- Homeless/underprivileged
- Shifting demographics
- Bipolar economic distribution - growing poverty
- Demographics are divided - education, income, geography, from here/away
- Poverty

- Waning fiscal resources - Local/Fed/State
- Significant pressures on town budgets
- Reduced state and federal funding
- Budget
- "Fixed" year over year tax increase
    o Where will funding come from?
- Economic uncertainty

- Skepticism in town regarding past school planning
    o Often misinformed
    o Mistrust
- Community divided between tradition and innovation
- Loudest voices are heard
    o Concern @ silent/disconnected
- Lack of faith in public education
    o Based on false information/misinformation

- Increased state and federal mandates
- Mandates
- Emphasis on testing that defines "success"

- Time, pace, pressure

- Increased mental illness

- Lots of recent change

- Community inertia

- Ongoing configuration debate

- Charter schools

The following comments were made to further explain some of the ideas put forth:

- Charter schools affect funding and also change the way the community relates to schools - there is a choice
- There is danger in assuming that the loudest community voices are minority positions. We should strive for ways to continually assess what the community view is.
- The schools are the "heart of Brunswick" - like the library, a place that everybody sees as their own, has something for everybody
- Globalization and international perspectives - we lost a lot with the base closure - we need to reach out and bring that in
- Transportation - how do students get transportation to get to programs, and families too? For those who live way out of town this is a barrier to family involvement.

In addition to the ideas above, Pender and Amanda shared the following data about the Brunswick schools community:

- According to a survey of kids who had dropped out of Brunswick schools, the primary reason they had dropped out was to work. They needed to work either to support their household or so other people in their household could stop working and take care of family members.
- Brunswick has more families who are working but still in poverty than other nearby towns. Brunswick kids who are hungry are more likely to have parents who are working.
- Brunswick's spending on administration and spending per child is lower than other similar districts yet Brunswick students are performing higher than the state average.
- Brunswick teachers have a higher education level than teachers in similar towns. The Brunswick School Department also has a higher teacher retention rate than other towns.

Facilities Discussion

Because "facilities" is a broad topic, the group named specific facilities issues that a strategic plan might potentially help resolve.

- We are out of capacity at the K-5 grade levels and this is going to get worse
- High risk infrastructure - old buildings
    - In particular, the Junior High and Coffin Elementary
- Safety risks
    - In particular, at the Junior High and Coffin Elementary
    - High school has only one access road
- Ongoing maintenance - do not have financial capacity
- Significant facilities that appear to the community to not be used for school purposes
    - Hawthorne and Jordan Acres
    - Need to address role of underused buildings
- Region Ten Building needs $10 million of capital investment
    - We are not alone in that building
    - RSU 5, SAD 75 and Brunswick are responsible for it together

There were some cautions about balancing the focus of this strategic planning process between facilities and other important topics.

Stakeholder Input Gathering

We discussed how to gather input from stakeholders. The following themes emerged:

- Eight public meetings in eight different parts of town
    - Organize meetings not by topic, but vary places, times, and days of the week to maximize participation
    - Mostly not at school buildings
    - Potential locations:
        - People Plus
        - Perryman Village Community Center
        - Thornton Oaks Community Room
        - Curtis Library
        - Region Ten Technical High School
        - Seeds of Independence
    - First one is a kick-off meeting
- Also have a meeting among teachers, and meetings among students
    - Organized and facilitated by the School Department, not Good Group Decisions
    - Perhaps participants are selected, more like true focus groups
- Ask the same questions consistently throughout the meetings

- o Ideas for questions
  - ▪ Facilities
    - • What about our buildings do you most value?
      - o Efficiency
      - o Safety
      - o Aesthetics
      - o State-of-art technology
      - o Location
      - o Newness
    - • Figure out a way to distinguish between buildings
    - • Level of financial support for repairing existing buildings or building new facilities
      - o Would you support a new school, locally funded?
      - o How important is it that we replace or replace our buildings in the next five years?
  - ▪ Validate sense of priorities
    - • What about the Brunswick Schools do we most want to keep?
      - o What do you value?
      - o Provide a list and ask people to prioritize
        - ▪ Buildings vs. operations
  - ▪ If you could change or add one thing?
    - • How could we better serve the community?
    - • How could we make the schools "the heart of Brunswick?"
  - ▪ What do you want people to think about Brunswick Schools?
    - • What should we be known for?
  - ▪ How can the department do better at communicating with and engaging the community?
  - ▪ How could we better serve ALL students?
- • The Superintendent already has a task force working on ideas for diversified, innovative programming; that is how we will address the topic of innovative programs
- • In each public meeting
  - o Share basic data about the Brunswick schools
  - o Use different techniques to ask different types of questions
    - ▪ Such as
      - • Green sticky wall
      - • Facilitation of individual comments
- • Proactively collect input from underrepresented populations
  - o At public meetings, gather demographic data so we know who we have and haven't reached
  - o After the meetings, Amanda gather input at the household level, asking the same questions that were asked in the meetings
- • Use a variety of strategies
  - o Some type of online input
  - o Perhaps like the "10 Questions in 10 Days" recently used by the library

Scope of Work and Final Product

The group discussed and generally agreed on the following:

- No significant changes to the Scope of Work Steps as proposed by Good Group Decisions (see attached at end of this report)
- Timeframe
    - Public, teacher, and student meetings to take place in late October and early November
        - Perhaps the 10 Questions in 10 Days happens earlier, to help build enthusiasm
    - Amanda collect additional data from underrepresented constituents in mid November - all data gathered by Thanksgiving at the latest
    - Craig and Kerri analyze all data received and prepare a report of findings in early December
    - Strategic Planning Workgroup meets December 11, 1-5 pm, to review findings
- The strategic plan document resulting from this work will
    - Stay on the high ground
        - Potentially modeled after the Montgomery County Public Schools
            - Strategic Framework/Strategic Roadmap
            - Core strategies
            - Focus areas under each core strategies
    - Be a 10-page document with a 1-page summary, approximately
    - Contain baseline data about the Brunswick schools
        - Written by Department staff
    - Contain the results of today's SWOE analysis
    - Be a public document

Next Steps

We agreed on the following next steps:

- Craig and Pender will work on:
    - Refined public input question list and draft agenda for input meetings
    - Adjusting the input meeting questions for use in a survey such as "10 Questions in 10 Days"
    - Proposed meeting schedule and location
    - Meeting schedule, location, and questions will not be finalized until this Workgroup has had a chance to review and comment
- The "outreach and messaging subcommittee" (Rich, Joy and Pender) will meet to determine specific ways to describe and promote this process to others and will bring a recommendation to the full Workgroup

Closing Comments

Each person had an opportunity to make a closing comment, such as a reflection on the meeting or a specific hope or concern going forward.

- Thank you
- Liked the balance shown by the SWOE activity - it's not all Pollyanna, but it's not doom and gloom
- It will be important and helpful to hear from the wider community
- I am feeling confident that we are not going to get derailed
- Great facilitation
- Feeling the momentum of hopefulness
- Thanks for having me here
- As we consider questions to ask at input meetings, let's loop back to this SWOE, to make sure there's nothing we have overlooked
- It's been great - this team works well together
- It's great to be doing this - I am really optimistic

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Brunswick School Department

Strategic Planning Scope of Work Steps

September 18, 2015
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The following steps were proposed on May 29, 2015 by Craig Freshley and Kerri Sands of Good Group Decisions. These steps are a starting place for revision and refinements.

1. **Process Kick-Off Meeting**
   - We will plan, facilitate, and document a 4-hour "kick-off" meeting of the Strategic Planning Workgroup, to:
     - Discuss and finalize the scope of work
     - Review the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Environment (SWOE) Analysis and identify revisions to be made to a summary for use in stakeholder focus groups
     - Discuss and decide details of stakeholder focus groups
       - Types of stakeholders to include
       - Invitation language and outreach strategies
       - Number of groups to conduct
       - Specific questions to ask
   - After the meeting we will provide Highlight Notes with a written scope of work, conclusions about the focus groups, and a revised summary of the SWOE analysis for use in the focus groups.

2. **Stakeholder Focus Groups**
   - We will plan agendas for, facilitate, and document eight focus groups of community stakeholders. Each group meeting is expected to last 1.5 hours.
   - We will work with the Strategic Planning Workgroup to refine invitation language and outreach strategies. We expect that the Strategic Planning Workgroup or school department staff will take responsibility for identifying and inviting specific individuals, implementing outreach strategies, and arranging venue logistics including scheduling and refreshments.
   - During each focus group we will explain the group's purpose, establish ground rules and create a neutral environment for discussion. We will encourage participation and reflect back to participants what we hear.
   - After the focus groups we will prepare a well-organized Report of Findings, which will include a summary of themes (common and key outliers), discussion comments as captured during the focus groups, and other details as appropriate. We will provide a draft report and give you a chance to suggest a round of edits which we will incorporate into a final version for you, suitable for publication.

3. **Findings and Strategic Direction Meeting**
   - We will plan, facilitate, and document a 4-hour meeting of the Strategic Planning Workgroup, in which we will:
     - o Hear and discuss findings from the stakeholder focus groups
     - o Discuss and come to some initial conclusions on general strategic direction
     - o Discuss ideas for actionable items as a result of the stakeholder input themes
   - After the meeting we will provide Highlight Notes of themes and conclusions from the meeting

4. **Written Objectives and Strategies**
   - We will prepare a document outlining objectives, strategies, other conclusions resulting from stakeholder input themes, and other conclusions of the Strategic Planning Workgroup.
     - o Objectives and strategies will be measurable, with timeframes and lead responsibilities.

5. **Objectives and Strategies Finalization Meeting**
   - We will plan, facilitate, and document a 3-hour meeting of the Strategic Planning Workgroup, in which we will:
     - o Review and refine written objectives and strategies
     - o Resolve any other related outstanding issues
     - o Discuss plans to circulate objectives and strategies for additional feedback and/or circulate final products
   - After the meeting we will provide an updated objectives and strategies document. We will provide a draft and give you a chance to suggest a round of edits which we will incorporate into a final version for you, suitable for publication.