

Oconee County Schools: Community Engagement Report

October 2018

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As a component of its strategic planning process, Oconee County Schools (OCS), with the Georgia School Boards Association, conducted both an online survey and a community engagement meeting open to the Oconee County community in the fall of 2018. This report summarizes the results of both data collection efforts. The OCS strategic planning team will use these results to inform the development of the strategic plan.

Survey respondents and community engagement meeting participants all answered the following four questions:

1. What are your observed strengths of the Oconee County Schools?
2. What are your observed areas in need of improvement for OCS?
3. What opportunities do you see ahead for OCS?
4. What challenges do you see ahead for OCS?

For each of these four questions, survey respondents were asked to select their first and second choices from a set of possible answers or to specify a different response.

Two hundred sixty-seven Oconee County community members participated in the online survey. Of those, almost three quarters (73.4%) were parents of OCS students. **Table 1** shows the respondents' relationships to OCS.

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Relationship to OCS¹

Relationship to OCS	Percentage	Number
<i>Parent/Guardian</i>	73.4%	196
<i>Teacher</i>	7.5%	20
<i>School Employee (with children in the district)</i>	7.5%	20
<i>Community Member</i>	6.0%	16
<i>Student</i>	3.8%	10
<i>School Employee (no children in the district)</i>	3.4%	9
<i>Other, please specify or provide comments</i>	3.0%	8
<i>Business/Civic Leader</i>	1.5%	4
<i>School Administrator</i>	0.4%	1

Three hundred eighty-five community members attended the community engagement meeting. In response to each of the four questions listed above,

¹ Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple responses were possible.

these participants generated a set of responses which were recorded and posted in the meeting. They voted for their top three choices on each question by placing stickers next to each choice.

Question 1

What are your observed strengths of the Oconee County Schools?

Survey respondents' first choices for this question were **the level of quality instruction** (24.0%), **the level of focus on student achievement** (21.7%), and **the level of parental support in the district** (19.1%). When asked to choose a second choice, these same three answers dominated the responses, with 25.2% selecting the level of quality instruction, 14.5% selecting the level of parental support in the district, and 14.1% selecting the level of focus on student achievement.

Community engagement meeting participants cast 495 votes on the strengths of OCS. Their responses also related to quality instruction; 33% of the votes referenced **teacher quality**, with 30 votes for "great teachers" and 28 for "staff/teacher quality." **Administrators and other staff** were also identified as a strength of OCS (17.2%), with 15 votes for "high quality staff." Again, participants acknowledged the importance of **parental support** (13.7%), with 27 votes for "parent support."

Question 2

What are your observed areas in need of improvement for OCS?

Survey respondents selected **the methods used to assess student achievement** (21.0%) and **the level of support services available to students** (11.6%) as their first choices for areas needing improvement. Their second choices included the methods used to assess student achievement (12.3%) and **the communication practices being used** (8.3%).

In the community engagement meeting, this question brought in many more responses than the first question, with 1,223 total votes spread over a wide variety of responses. The most common topic was **the fine arts** (8.0%), primarily the facilities available. Forty respondents agreed that OCS should "expand the fine arts facilities for classroom teaching/instructional Space (NOHS) and create/provide at OCHS." Twenty participants requested "more updated equipment for theater production." The second most popular topic was

technology, with 25 participants concerned about “aging infrastructure” and 25 selecting “bandwidth.”

Question 3

What opportunities do you see ahead for OCS?

The top three opportunities survey respondents saw were **hiring and keeping quality teachers and staff** (44.2%), **raising community support for the district** (10.5%), and **getting parents involved with the district** (10.1%). Second choice responses included **funding (state, federal)** with 18.9% of respondents, raising community support for the district (17.7%), and hiring and keeping quality teachers and staff (17.3%).

Community engagement meeting participants again focused on **technology** (84 out of a total of 550 votes, 15.3%), asking OCS to “increase bandwidth - fix it quick” (52 votes) and to “strengthen [the] broadband capacity [in] the county” (18 votes). Fourteen percent of the votes related to **career, technical, and agricultural education** – with 28 votes for internships or apprenticeships. Another area of opportunity participants voted for was **partnerships with local higher educational institutions** (9.3%), with 25 votes for building partnerships with technical schools.

Question 4

What challenges do you see ahead for OCS?

Over one third of survey respondents (38.2%) selected **the constantly changing population** of Oconee county as the primary challenge ahead for OCS, followed by **the political environment** (27.3%) and **funding (state, federal)** (11.2%). These same three challenges were the most common second choice responses, with 24.2% selecting the political environment, the same number selecting funding, and 18.2% selecting the constantly changing population.

At the community engagement meeting, 797 votes were recorded for this question, with the most votes for responses referencing **stress, mental health, and social skills** (14.6%). Thirty-nine participants voted for “student stress/mental health with pressures of high achieving environment” as a challenge for OCS, and 30 voted for “lack of social/life skills due to technology.” **Teacher compensation** received the second highest percentage of the votes (10.3%), with 37 participants voting for “providing competitive

salaries” and 16 for the “ability to retain top talent through compensation.” Like survey respondents, participants are concerned about changes in the county, with 6.8% voting for responses concerning **growth**. Seventeen participants agreed that OCS is “growing too fast and bragging about our accomplishments,” and 11 were concerned that OCS “can't keep up with [the] growth of [the] population.”

Conclusion

Across these four questions, several consistent themes emerged. First, OCS community members recognize that the strength of their schools rests in high quality teachers, administrators, and staff, as well as with the high level of parental involvement already present. Community members see opportunities ahead for OCS through finding new funding sources and using community resources such as institutions of higher education to increase offerings at the schools, including more CTAE options. They are concerned about current methods of assessing student performance and see a need for greater support services to help with mental health, stress, and social skills issues. There is also room for improvement in fine arts facilities and in technology infrastructure.

Appendix 1: Survey Results

Question 1: Which one of the following statements best describes you?

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Parent/Guardian</i>	73.4%	196
<i>Teacher</i>	7.5%	20
<i>School Employee (with children in the district)</i>	7.5%	20
<i>Community Member</i>	6.0%	16
<i>Student</i>	3.8%	10
<i>School Employee (no children in the district)</i>	3.4%	9
<i>Other, please specify or provide comments</i>	3.0%	8
<i>Business/Civic Leader</i>	1.5%	4
<i>School Administrator</i>	0.4%	1
TOTAL		267

Question 2: What are your observed strengths of Oconee County Schools (OCS)? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Level of quality instruction</i>	23.97%	64
<i>Level of focus on student achievement</i>	21.72%	58
<i>Level of parental support in the district</i>	19.10%	51
<i>Dual Enrollment opportunities</i>	4.49%	12
<i>Level of technology accessible to students</i>	4.12%	11
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	4.12%	11
<i>Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment</i>	3.75%	10
<i>Curriculum currently in place</i>	3.37%	9
<i>Level of extracurricular activities available to students</i>	3.00%	8
<i>Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers</i>	3.00%	8
<i>Level of support services available to students</i>	2.62%	7
<i>Communication practices being used</i>	1.87%	5
<i>Facilities available to students and staff</i>	1.87%	5
<i>Methods used to assess student achievement</i>	1.12%	3
<i>Financial management of the district</i>	0.75%	2
<i>Policies and organizational structure of the district</i>	0.75%	2
<i>School Choice opportunities</i>	0.37%	1
TOTAL		267

Question 3: What are your observed strengths of Oconee County Schools (OCS)? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Level of quality instruction</i>	25.19%	66
<i>Level of parental support in the district</i>	14.50%	38
<i>Level of focus on student achievement</i>	14.12%	37
<i>Level of technology accessible to students</i>	7.63%	20
<i>Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment</i>	7.25%	19
<i>Dual Enrollment opportunities</i>	4.58%	12
<i>Level of extracurricular activities available to students</i>	4.20%	11
<i>Curriculum currently in place</i>	3.44%	9
<i>Level of support services available to students</i>	3.44%	9
<i>Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers</i>	3.05%	8
<i>Communication practices being used</i>	2.67%	7
<i>Methods used to assess student achievement</i>	2.29%	6
<i>Facilities available to students and staff</i>	2.29%	6
<i>Financial management of the district</i>	1.53%	4
<i>Policies and organizational structure of the district</i>	1.53%	4
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	1.53%	4
<i>School Choice opportunities</i>	0.76%	2
TOTAL		262

Question 4: What are your observed areas in need of improvement? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	21.72%	58
<i>Methods used to assess student achievement</i>	20.97%	56
<i>Level of support services available to students</i>	11.61%	31
<i>Communication practices being used</i>	7.49%	20
<i>Curriculum currently in place</i>	6.74%	18
<i>Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers</i>	5.24%	14
<i>Facilities available to students and staff</i>	5.24%	14
<i>Level of technology accessible to students</i>	3.00%	8
<i>Level of extracurricular activities available to students</i>	3.00%	8
<i>Policies and organizational structure of the district</i>	3.00%	8
<i>Level of focus on student achievement</i>	2.62%	7
<i>Level of quality instruction</i>	2.25%	6
<i>Financial management of the district</i>	2.25%	6
<i>Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment</i>	2.25%	6
<i>School Choice opportunities</i>	1.87%	5
<i>Dual Enrollment opportunities</i>	0.37%	1
<i>Level of parental support in the district</i>	0.37%	1
TOTAL		267

Question 5: What are your observed areas in need of improvement? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Methods used to assess student achievement</i>	12.30%	31
<i>Communication practices being used</i>	8.33%	21
<i>Level of support services available to students</i>	7.14%	18
<i>Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers</i>	7.14%	18
<i>Policies and organizational structure of the district</i>	7.14%	18
<i>Facilities available to students and staff</i>	6.75%	17
<i>Level of focus on student achievement</i>	5.95%	15
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	5.95%	15
<i>Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment</i>	5.56%	14
<i>Curriculum currently in place</i>	4.76%	12
<i>Level of extracurricular activities available to students</i>	4.76%	12
<i>Level of quality instruction</i>	2.38%	6
<i>Level of technology accessible to students</i>	2.38%	6
<i>School Choice opportunities</i>	1.98%	5
<i>Financial management of the district</i>	1.98%	5
<i>Level of parental support in the district</i>	1.59%	4
<i>Dual Enrollment opportunities</i>	1.19%	3
TOTAL		252

Question 6: What opportunities do you see ahead for OCS? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Hiring/ Keeping quality teachers and staff</i>	44.19%	118
<i>Raising community support for district</i>	10.49%	28
<i>Getting parents involved with the district</i>	10.11%	27
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	10.11%	27
<i>New Businesses</i>	9.74%	26
<i>Funding (State, Federal)</i>	9.36%	25
<i>Legislation</i>	5.99%	16
TOTAL		267

Question 7: What opportunities do you see ahead for OCS? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Funding (State, Federal)</i>	18.90%	48
<i>Raising community support for district</i>	17.72%	45
<i>Hiring/ Keeping quality teachers and staff</i>	17.32%	44
<i>Getting parents involved with the district</i>	12.99%	33
<i>New Businesses</i>	11.42%	29
<i>Legislation</i>	11.02%	28
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	10.63%	27
TOTAL		254

Question 8: What challenges do you see ahead for OCS? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Constantly changing population</i>	38.20%	102
<i>Political environment</i>	27.34%	73
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	17.60%	47
<i>Funding (State, Federal)</i>	11.24%	30
<i>Effects of poverty on the community</i>	5.62%	15
TOTAL		267

Question 9: What challenges do you see ahead for OCS? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Percentage	Number
<i>Funding (State, Federal)</i>	24.19%	60
<i>Political environment</i>	24.19%	60
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	19.35%	48
<i>Constantly changing population</i>	18.15%	45
<i>Effects of poverty on the community</i>	14.11%	35
TOTAL		248

**Appendix 2:
Community
Engagement
Meeting Results**

Question 1: What are your observed strengths of Oconee County Schools (OCS)? (495 responses)

Responses	Percentage	Number
<i>Teacher Quality</i>	163	32.9%
<i>Administration/Other Staff</i>	85	17.2%
<i>Parent Involvement</i>	68	13.7%
<i>Class size</i>	62	12.5%
<i>Rigor and Curriculum</i>	39	7.9%
<i>Community Involvement</i>	36	7.3%
<i>Dual Enrollment/Connections with Local Higher Education Institutions</i>	17	3.4%
<i>Support for the Arts</i>	12	2.4%
<i>Afterschool</i>	10	2.0%
<i>Tech</i>	9	1.8%
<i>Safety</i>	8	1.6%
<i>Facilities</i>	8	1.6%
<i>Communication</i>	7	1.4%
<i>Resources</i>	6	1.2%

Question 2: What are your observed areas in need of improvement for OCS? (1,223 responses)

Responses	Percentage	Number
<i>Fine arts</i>	98	8.0%
<i>Technology</i>	94	7.7%
<i>Vocational/CTAE</i>	83	6.8%
<i>Mental health/ social emotional needs</i>	83	6.8%
<i>Student/ teacher ratio and class size</i>	79	6.5%
<i>Overemphasis on testing</i>	77	6.3%
<i>Foreign language</i>	75	6.1%
<i>Serving children with disabilities</i>	61	5.0%
<i>Overuse of technology</i>	53	4.3%
<i>Support for non-college bound students</i>	52	4.3%
<i>Other facility issues</i>	51	4.2%
<i>Recess/ PE</i>	50	4.1%
<i>Calendar</i>	35	2.9%
<i>Security</i>	33	2.7%
<i>Diversity/ Cultural awareness</i>	26	2.1%
<i>Growth</i>	18	1.5%
<i>Life skills</i>	15	1.2%
<i>Communication/ Transparency</i>	15	1.2%
<i>Nutrition</i>	15	1.2%
<i>Hard Copy Textbooks</i>	11	0.9%
<i>Transportation</i>	8	0.7%

Question 3: What opportunities do you see ahead for OCS? (550 responses)

Responses	Percentage	Number
<i>Technology</i>	84	15.3%
<i>Vocational, technical, career education</i>	77	14.0%
<i>Partnerships with local higher education institutions</i>	51	9.3%
<i>Arts education</i>	46	8.4%
<i>Growth</i>	43	7.8%
<i>Overemphasis on testing</i>	42	7.6%
<i>Foreign language</i>	38	6.9%
<i>Diversity</i>	37	6.7%
<i>Higher pay for support staff</i>	20	3.6%
<i>Funding</i>	14	2.5%

Question 4: What challenges do you see ahead for OCS? (797 responses)

Responses	Percentage	Number
<i>Stress/mental health, social skills</i>	116	14.6%
<i>Teacher compensation</i>	82	10.3%
<i>Growth</i>	54	6.8%
<i>Non-college bound students</i>	47	5.9%
<i>Diversity</i>	46	5.8%
<i>Technology</i>	40	5.0%
<i>Overuse of technology</i>	39	4.9%
<i>Life skills</i>	31	3.9%
<i>Teachers paying tuition</i>	31	3.9%
<i>Class size</i>	23	2.9%