

Effingham County School System

Community Engagement Session

Community Focus Group – September 17, 2015

Online Survey – September 2015

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To assist the Strategic Planning Team with their work, the Effingham County School System engaged its community in a process to assess the thoughts, feelings and perceptions that stakeholders hold regarding the district – before the plan was developed. The engagement initiative, designed and implemented by the Georgia School Boards Association, included a community focus group exercise and an online survey. A genuine effort was made to make the process as inclusive and transparent as possible.

Participants of the community focus group and the online survey responded to the following questions:

1. To become the best school system in the country, what should the Effingham County School System preserve or keep?
2. To become the best school system in the country, what should the Effingham County School System change or do differently?
3. What do you think are the top challenges faced by the Effingham County School System?
4. What do you think are the top challenges faced by the students in the Effingham County School System?
5. As a community, what do we want our public schools to provide for our students?

The intention of this report is to provide a collection of the best thinking of school and community members regarding the five questions presented. The information gathered is qualitative and seeks to focus attention on those areas that generated the most energy. Members of the strategic planning team will use the input of the community to assist them in developing a plan to move the district forward.

The Response

About **31** parents, community members, teachers and staff participated in the community focus group exercise. There were 311 responses to the online survey. Over 81% of the respondents to the online survey identified themselves as parents/*grandparents*/guardians. The second largest respondents were teachers (7%) and school system employees with children in school were the third largest group (5.8%).

NOTE: *BLUE TEXT REPRESENTS THE ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS.*
BLACK TEXT REPRESENTS THE FOCUS GROUP RESULTS.
A *COMBINATION* MEANS THE RESULTS ARE *REFLECTIVE OF BOTH.*

Reasons to be Proud and Assets to Build Upon

When asked, “To become the best school system in the country, what should the Effingham County School System preserve or keep?” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community focus group participants:

- **Commitment** to hiring and retaining well-trained, **high quality teachers**
- **Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment**
- **Current class sizes**
- Stakeholder involvement in funding/obtaining technology and keeping technology updated
- Parental involvement opportunities; focus on involving parents at all levels
- Emphasis on success for all students, college-bound and vocational training opportunities
- Diversity in curriculum
- Balance between academics and athletics
- Communication from schools – email notices, remind 101, etc...

Possibilities for Change and Growth

When asked, “To become the best school system in the country, what should the Effingham County School System change or do differently?” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among stakeholders:

- **The curriculum currently in place**
- **The current methods to assess student achievement**
- **Reduce** Class sizes
- Identify children with learning gaps early, i.e. Reading Recovery, Preschool intervention
- Offer Drivers Education
- Additional funding

Top Challenges Faced by the School District

The following are issues that surfaced most often through the online survey and the community focus group:

- **Funding for programs, facilities, etc.**
- **Getting parents and community involved with the school system**
- Growth/Diversity
- Teacher Accountability, **Keeping quality teachers and staff**
- Standardized Testing - Concerned with “Teaching to the test.” **Strengthen Academics**
- Technology - Balance use in classrooms. Too much and inter-personal skills are lacking.

Top Challenges Faced by the Students in the School District

The following are issues that surfaced most often through the online survey and the community focus group:

- Work Ethic (lack of parent role modeling; life skills) - [Lack of motivation to achieve in school](#)
- [Lack of parental supervision](#)
- [Being ready for college](#)
- Personal Needs (effect of poverty, nutrition, learning disabilities, etc.)
- Stifling factors (Government control, dress code punishment, etc.)
- Environment (lack of career choices, [community activities](#), summer camp opportunities, clubs and other programs)

What the Community Wants the District to Provide Students

Several themes emerged from the respondents of the online survey and the participants in the community focus group:

- [An educational program that includes life skills such as personal finance, health, professional etiquette, civic responsibility](#)
- [Quality curriculum that focuses on the basics: math science and language arts](#)
- [Quality curriculum that includes opportunities for technical and career programs](#)
- [Safe environment](#) for learning
- [Technology](#) resources, including calculators, Internet access, etc.
- Universal access to Pre-K opportunities rather than lottery-based
- Tutorial resources, for course work and also for challenges with technology

Areas of concern

The following themes emerged in multiple ways through the community focus group and the online survey as ones to take note of:

- Recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers
- Class sizes / Growth
- Parental involvement
- Providing a safe learning environment
- Student achievement
- Technology Resources
- Communication Issues
- Work ethic / motivation

Effingham County Schools Strategic Improvement Planning Community Engagement / Focus Group

Legend: The **Black** text and stars represent a topic chosen during the focus group meeting.

Blue numbers represent number of responses on the online survey out of the 311 total participants. Two numbers (when shown) represent first and second choices.

Responses	Preserve / Keep	Change/Do Differently	Top Challenge System	Top Challenge Students	Provide for Students
Assessment / Instructional Issues					
Current methods to assess student achievement		59, 62			
Identify children w/learning gaps early, i.e. Reading Recovery, Preschool Intervention		*			
Strengthen Academics - Do not "teach to the test" - Standardized Testing		*	*		
Curriculum / Quality Education					
Current Curriculum		60, 40			
Strengthen academics			39		
Being ready for college				37	
An educational program that includes life skills such as personal finance, health, professional etiquette, civic responsibility					97
Quality curriculum that focuses on the basics: math science and language arts					56
Quality curriculum that includes opportunities for technical and career programs					42
Diversity in curriculum	*				
Communications / Public Perception					
Communication from schools – email notices, remind 101, etc...	*				
Improve Communication		*			
Community / Parental Involvement					
Getting parents and community involved with the school system			41		
Lack of parental supervision				43	
Parental involvement opportunities; focus on involving parents at all levels	*				
Leadership / Governance					
Current class sizes	35, 40	40,21 *			
Growth/Diversity			*		
Human Resources / Development					
Commitment to hiring and retaining well-trained, high quality teachers	105, 56 *		37 *		
Quality teachers/staff who are held accountable for results and rewarded accordingly			*		42
Safety / Health / Student Behavior					
Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment	41				24 *
Lack of motivation to achieve in school				44 *	
Student Resources / Development					
Emphasis on success for all students, college-bound and vocational training opportunities	*				
Offer Drivers' Education		*			
Environment (lack of career choices, community activities, summer camp, clubs etc.)				*	

Effingham County Schools Strategic Improvement Planning Community Engagement / Focus Group

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Personal Needs (effect of poverty, nutrition, learning disabilities, etc.)				*	
Universal access to Pre-K opportunities rather than lottery-based					*
Tutorial resources, for course work and also for challenges with technology					*
Finance					
Funding for programs, facilities, etc. Additional Funding		*	53		
Stakeholder involvement in funding/obtaining technology & keeping technology updated	*				*