Baldwin County Schools
Community Engagement Session

Community Conversation – November 5, 2013
Online Survey – November 5 – November 29, 2013

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To assist the Strategic Planning Team with their work, Baldwin County Schools engaged its community in a process to gauge 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 conversation and an online survey. A genuine effort was made to make the process as inclusive and transparent as possible.

Participants of the community engagement initiative responded to the following questions:

1. To be the best it can be, what should Baldwin County Schools preserve/keep?

2. To be the best it can be, what should Baldwin County Schools change/do differently?

3. As a community, what do we want our public schools to provide for students?

4. What do you think are the top challenges faced by Baldwin County Schools?

5. What do you think are the top challenges faced by the students in Baldwin County Schools?

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 to assist them in developing a plan to move the district forward and one that is reflective of its community.

The Format
Community Forum

During October and November 2013, the district worked to recruit participants to attend the community engagement session. A great deal of effort went into inviting all segments of the community. Notices were distributed in the paper, on the district's website, through school announcements and at meetings throughout the district and community.

At the community forum on November 5 at Baldwin County High School, about 72 participants heard a presentation on the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA)

strategic planning process and a "State of the District" presentation by Geneva Braziel, Baldwin County superintendent. Information included: educational issues, school district achievement data and the process to be followed that evening regarding the small group discussions. Participants were randomly divided into smaller groups to hold their conversation. Volunteer facilitators agreed to lead the discussions, clarify issues, keep each group focused, make sure every person had an opportunity to be heard, and ensure that what was said was properly recorded.

Facilitators did not ascribe any individual's name to comments written in the notes of the small group discussions. At the conclusion of the discussion, facilitators asked participants to prioritize their lists of comments by marking the ideas or comments they thought were most important for each question asked.

GSBA staff transcribed all of the notes. Laura Reilly compiled the report by sorting the comments and using the results of each group's prioritizing activity. Results of the community conversation were synthesized with the results of the online survey.

Online Survey

An online survey using the same questions offered an additional input opportunity. If they desired to do so, participants could provide additional comments on all questions and on the survey as a whole. The choices listed for questions were used only to add structure to the survey and avoid ending up with lists of comments in no order or context. Zoomerang was used as the online survey tool. Open-ended comments were sorted through a manual process. GSBA administered the survey.

The Response

About 72 community members, teachers, students and staff participated in the community forum. There were 143 full responses to the online survey. The largest percentage of respondents to the online survey identified themselves as teachers (42%). The next group with the largest number of participants was the parent group (35%). Attendees of the community forum were not asked to identify themselves.

Reasons to be Proud and Assets to Build Upon

When asked, "To be the best it can be, what should Baldwin County Schools System preserve/keep?" the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and/or community conversation participants:

1) **Fine arts and extracurricular activities** – Stakeholders believe that the fine arts and extracurricular activities (ROTC for example) assist students in becoming well-rounded individuals.

2) **Teachers and staff** – Stakeholders view recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff as a priority.

3) **Safety** –Stakeholders are concerned about the safety of students and staff. They recognize and appreciate what is being done in this regard, but also feel safety needs to remain a focus and priority for all levels of administration.

Other programs and services emerging as ones to keep or preserve:

- Expanding early college opportunities
- Focus on student achievement
- Gifted program

Possibilities for Change and Growth

When asked, "To be the best it can be, what should Baldwin County Schools change or do differently?" the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community conversation participants:

1) **Assessment** – Stakeholders voiced a desire that the assessments used to measure student achievement be changed to include more than standardized tests.

2) **Parental Involvement** – Lack of parental involvement was an issue that surfaced in a number of ways at the community meeting and on the survey. There is a feeling that more needs to be done to address parental apathy where schooling is concerned.

3) **Class sizes** – Stakeholders are concerned about class sizes. They voiced a desire to keep the ratio of teacher to student as low as possible.

4) **Professional Development** – Three groups brought up the need for better professional development for teachers and staff. One comment was, "Teachers need training to understand the student of today."

What the Community Wants the District to Provide Students

Several themes emerged from the respondents of the online survey and the participants at the community conversation:

1) **Highly qualified teachers** – Numerous participants of the survey said they want to provide students "highly qualified teachers who are held accountable and rewarded accordingly."

2) **Fine arts** – Survey participants and one group at the community meeting chose the fine arts as a priority for what to provide students.

3) **Safety and Security** – Providing a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff is important.

4) **Curriculum** – Three curriculum models emerged as important to stakeholders:
   - A curriculum that prepares students for college or the workforce, and one that includes a robust technical education program
   - A curriculum that focuses on the basics of math, science and language arts
   - Participants of the community meeting and the survey in larger numbers said that they want schools to provide students a curriculum that includes training on life skills such as personal finance, character education and leadership.

Top Challenges Faced by the School District

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

1) **Negative Perception of District/Shared Decision Making** – A number of groups at the community meeting brought up this issue. They indicated the challenge presented in getting positive stories shared and the need for a public relations program. Along with this, stakeholders identified the challenge for the district in finding ways to include stakeholders in the decision making process.

2) **Funding** - Stakeholders recognize the financial and funding challenges the district faces. The comment, "Doing more with less," summed up the spirit of these comments.

3) **Poverty/Apathy Towards Education** – Participants of survey and the community meeting cited the challenge of a community mired in poverty and the low support for public education that exists in Baldwin County. There were related comments about the need to forge a stronger relationship between the district and the college.

4) **Parental Involvement** – Stakeholders recognize the challenge the district has in cultivating parental involvement.

5) **Recruiting and Retaining Highly Qualified Teachers and Staff** – Stakeholders identified the challenge the district has in retaining and hiring highly qualified employees.

Top Challenges Faced by the Students

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

1) **Parental involvement/breakdown in the family** – Overwhelmingly, stakeholders are concerned for students because of the perceived lack of parental involvement and a breakdown in the family. Comments included ones about parental apathy and a lack of positive adult role models.

2) **Student Apathy** – There is also a perceived apathy on the part of students regarding their education.

3) **Poverty and the economy** – The effects of poverty on students are a concern, as well as the general poor state of the economy and the jobs outlook.

Vision System Components	Preserve/ Keep Doing	Change/ Improve	Want to provide students	Top Challenges - District	Top Challenges - Students
Early Learning and Student Success					
Focus on early learning	3		14		
Teaching and Learning					
Communities in Schools program	2, 3				
Expand early college opportunities for students; joint enrollment	3, 2, 2				
College/career programs	6				
"OE" program; open for all demographics	6	2			
Summer program, STEM feeder programs in summer		4, 2			
Student centered learning; one fits all approach			2		5
Night school program			2		
Outdoor education			2		
Graduation rate			10	3	
Labeling students					3, 3
Current focus on student achievement	16, 16	10			
Curriculum and assessment issues					
Fine arts. Band; all grades; all schools	3, 6, 5, 5		3, 16, 22		
Gifted program	5, 4, 3				
ROTC program; extracurricular activities	2, 17				
Provide a variety of academic and cultural activities (on and off campus)			2		
Need transitional program at all levels; students not ready for next grade		2			3
Broaden assessment beyond standardized tests; improve assessments		2, 13, 14			
Alternative paths to college "citizenship"		3			
Restore exploratories in middle school		3			
Offer life skills, leadership courses (for parents too); teach character education		2	8, 2, 2, 23, 19		
Rigorous curriculum - meaningful, exploratory, real world			4		
Equipping students to enter college or workforce in 21st century; curriculum with robust technical education program			2, 12, 19		
Opportunities for self discovery to make learning more relevant; help explore strengths			2, 3		
Opportunities to problem solve for all students			4, 3		

Numbers in black = the number of votes received in each group

Numbers in red = how many times mentioned on online survey

Vision System Components	Preserve/ Keep Doing	Change/ Improve	Want to provide students	Top Challenges - District	Top Challenges - Students
Intensive reading program			5		
Focus on STEM skill development; increase STEM curriculum in all classes			2, 4		
Gap between high school and middle school test scores				2	
Test taking skills					5
Sex education					2
Curriculum currently in place	10	11			
Current programs for at risk students	13				
Curriculum focusing on basics: math, science and language arts			32, 26		
Parental Involvement					
Parent connect	3				
Need parent involvement (workshops); lack of positive relationships with adults		10, 20		9, 3, 4	7, 5, 5, 4, 22, 16
Home environment				5	3
Instructional Issues					
More individualized instruction	4			8	
Promotion/retention policy in elementary school		2			
General Issues					
Motivation to learn				4	2, 7, 35
Caring, compassionate teachers				3	
Knowledge of how to ask for help					3
Support system at home and school					3
Classroom environment inconsistencies					2
Lack of empowerment and incentive to achieve					2
Teaching and Learning Resources					
Professional Development for teachers and staff					
Better professional development; teachers need profound understanding of concepts; use evaluation to build professional development		2 2, 2, 5			
Cultural training for teachers				2	
Preparing students for today's student				2	
Support for Teaching					
At least one day a month for planning (no students)		3			
Extend school day		2			

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Vision System Components	Preserve/ Keep Doing	Change/ Improve	Want to provide students	Top Challenges - District	Top Challenges - Students
Instructional resources; up-to-date resources		3	2		
Technology					
Effective use of technology for instruction		2			
Technology rich environment			4, 4		
More access to technology off campus				5	
Counseling Issues					
Need more information on careers					2
Resources for students					
Nutrition program - feeding all students	5				
Tutoring program		2			3
Recess		2			
After school programs for middle school				2	
Human and Organizational Capital					
Teachers and Staff					
Recruit and retain highly qualified teachers (based on student achievement); prioritize staff for instruction	4, 6, 4, 33, 13	2	3, 15, 10	5, 12	
Keep good leadership teams at schools	4				
Proper management of administration		4			
Finding more male teachers				2	
Positions Needed					
Behavior specialists		3			
teachers' assistants			2		
School nurses				3	
Not enough staff to get the job done - all areas				2	
Governance, Leadership, and Accountability					
Need openness of Board		3			
Accountability of the Board			2		
Changing times and venues of Board meetings			2		
Mandates from state				3	
Policies and organizational structure of district		12			
Fiscal management of district		12			
Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy					
Community Support/Unity					

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Vision System Components	Preserve/ Keep Doing	Change/ Improve	Want to provide students	Top Challenges - District	Top Challenges - Students
Negative perception of district; cultural memory - old stereotype of public schools; better pr			3	7, 2, 3	
Use input from community in decision making process; collaborate with community; get community experts involved, use community resources		2, 2		8, 2, 4	
Build awareness of issues so stakeholders are equipped to act				2	
Poverty; socio-economic climate; latchkey kids who take care of siblings				2, 2, 14	3, 21
Low support for education (community and parents)				3, 5, 28	6
Community mental health issues					3	2
high unemployment; fewer high paying jobs				2	11
Divided community				2	
Few community opportunities for kids; unaware of opportunities that do exist				5, 5	
Workplace Climate and Culture					
Proactive meetings with teachers			2		
Communications Issues/Customer Service					
An environment of listening - hearing and responding; communications			3	2	
Safety/Health/Discipline					
Discipline and consequences; "restorative" student discipline		4		5	
Need alternative school		4, 5			
Eliminate bullying		2			6
Safe environment	11, 13		3, 12, 17		
Transportation; traffic management				3, 3	
Facilities Management					
Need another elementary school and middle school		2			
Clean bathrooms		3, 3			
Playground facilities			3		
Aging facilities				3	
Financial Resources					

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Numbers in red = how many times mentioned on online survey

Vision System Components	Preserve/ Keep Doing	Change/ Improve	Want to provide students	Top Challenges - District	Top Challenges - Students
Preserve small class sizes/decrease class sizes/large class sizes	10,	2, 4, 3, 2, 6, 53, 18	5, 2		6
General Funding Issues					
Find alternative sources of funding		2			
Allocate more funds toward instruction		5			
Doing more with less; funding				2, 5, 5, 38	
Don't allow lack of funds to prevent success				2	

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