



New Albany for Kids

New Albany – Plain Local School District Strategic Planning Community Forum Summary

Background

New Albany for Kids (NAFK), an independent, volunteer organization committed to improving educational opportunities for the children of our school community, has been concerned by the lack of open dialogue and community engagement by the school district. For nearly a year, the leadership of *New Albany for Kids* has advocated for a comprehensive strategic planning process, including active community dialogue.

We believe that the school district must prepare properly for a strategic planning process. There is a direct correlation between the level of community interest and involvement in the planning process and the level of support and commitment the plan will receive. In order to advance the planning process, *New Albany for Kids* developed a community forum where people could share their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. The forum provided a structured avenue for any interested stakeholder to help articulate the future direction of the culture, academic focus, program delivery, and school district facilities, as well as the district's relationship with the community at large. The community forum program and its content were solely the responsibility of *New Albany for Kids*.

On May 19, 2009, approximately 60 members of the community came together to participate in a forum entitled "Envisioning Academic Excellence In the 21st Century." After an initial program introduction, the group broke into four, random sub-groups. Each sub-group was lead by an NAFK facilitator through the same series of three questions. The first two questions were intended to stimulate thinking and set the discussion for the final question about envisioning a future. The process was designed for brainstorming ideas, not evaluating. This document provides a summary of the most prominent themes identified by each group and an unabridged presentation of the various thoughts generated during the sub-group discussion process.

Analysis of Top Themes Identified by the Groups

The sub-groups generated an impressive list of ideas and the overall commitment to our school district was very clear. After spending considerable time addressing challenges and opportunities, participants were asked to dream about our school district in the next five to seven years. Within this context, participants were asked one final question, “Given what you know about the district’s strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, what should be the district’s top priorities as we move from good to great?” After identifying and clarifying ideas, sub-group members were each given five votes to select “ideas that you believe are most important.” Participants were allowed to spend all votes on one idea, across multiple ideas, or any other combination.

Here are the concepts themes identified by the top themes chosen across all four groups.

- Educational excellence

This theme appears to encompass questions about ways to define academic excellence, what to include within it, and how to attain it. There were common areas about identifying the appropriate measures and benchmarks for success. There is a desire to identify and compare ourselves with top districts across the country, not just locally.

Examples of high ranking concepts within this theme:

- Create and utilize benchmarks to compare and contrast the “top” districts across the country to New Albany (i.e. refer to areas listed in Question 3) (23 votes)
- True academic excellence (comparing college acceptances/destination to specific programs) (7 votes)
- What is a “great” school district? Define it (6 votes)
- Academic excellence (as evidenced by test scores) within a manageable operating budget (5 votes)
- NAPLS should be the best at everything (5 votes)

- Innovative curriculum

This thread touches on the depth and breadth of curriculum, consistency of delivery across teachers and grade levels; identifying the necessary offerings for what our kids will need to succeed in a global economy; and ideas for developing individualized curriculums.

Examples of high ranking concepts within this theme:

- Individualize teaching and learning to assure all students learn to their maximum potential (12 votes)
- Ensuring well rounded students (11 votes)
- Emphasize language arts and foreign language (9 votes)
- Develop a group of diverse minds into tomorrow’s leaders (6 votes)
- Use virtual textbooks with assignments done by email and all students have their own laptop (6 votes)
- More challenging programs in all areas of study (5 votes)

- Early age foreign language and emphasis on the arts (5 votes)
- Student specific curriculum (5 votes)

- Leadership and vision

Possibly closely related to the theme of defining academic excellence, there were several concepts regarding the need to leadership and vision. There appears to be a related desire for both visionary leadership and trust within the community. The issue of re-establishing civil dialogue can be impacted by a trusted leadership.

Examples of high ranking concepts within this theme:

- Re-establish culture of civility (10 votes)
- Passionate responsive leadership (6 votes)
- Answer state funding issue – analyze other states that have acceptable funding model to understand and replicate it (6 votes)
- Set realistic target for the cost of a quality education and stick to it (compared to other national school districts) (5 votes)
- Re-establish trust between district leadership and constituents (5 votes)
- Recapture single vision for the district (5 votes)
- Stop complaining – volunteer, give (5 votes)

- Facilities and space planning

There was a line of thinking which touched on the need to address facilities and space constraints. It is a desire to ensure appropriate facilities to meet our needs, yet no overly sacrifice student-to-teacher ratios.

Examples of high ranking concepts within this theme:

- Build another school building and maintain small class sizes (12 votes)
- Provide adequate facilities without increasing class size (8 votes)
- Maintain low student/teacher ratio K-2 (7 votes)
- Maintain single campus with necessary expansion to continue excellent tradition (5 votes)

- Broaden views of collaboration and accomplishment

This theme could be considered a component of leadership vision or curriculum, but ultimately we decided it merits its own category. It appears to encompass both internal and external aspects. Internally, there is a desire to consider ways to use the available resources in order to build a stronger school system. Externally, there was a desire to identify opportunities to engage community stakeholders in order to be more efficient and use a wide range of available resources, as well as increase a sense of unity.

Examples of high ranking concepts within this theme:

- More consistency in curriculum and progression from one grade level/building to another (11 votes)
- Increase student pride and unity in their education and personal accomplishments (school pride and community pride) (9 votes)
- More collaboration with broader community (6 votes)

Unabridged Listing of Issues and Ideas Raised by Each Sub-Group

The follow pages contain a complete list of issues and ideas raised by each group during the brainstorming process, including the group voting results for each concept identified for question three.

QUESTION ONE: What do you believe are the most significant challenges facing our school district over the next five years?

- **GROUP ONE:**
 - Growth: handling/managing class size without losing personal touch
 - Competition for federal funding
 - Budgetary constraints due to decreased tax collections and ability to pass future levies pursuant to recent events
 - Keeping/growing business community
 - Space constraints/class sizes
 - Expansion of curriculum/academic excellence
 - Increasing language offerings, AP/honors classes, technology
 - Support of teachers
 - Recognizing/reflecting growing diversity
 - Perceived dissention between board and financial committees?
 - Perceived lack of board to listen to other opinions
 - Fatigue/anger of community's ability to continue to fund operations
 - Salary comparison to surrounding districts
 - Transparency – what do taxes pay for?
 - Keeping up skills-wise in global economy
 - Funding – issue with how language is presented to general public; explain it in layman's terms
 - Rebuilding trust – much divisiveness between board and community
 - Who is the client? Students, parents, teachers, etc.?
 - Meeting state mandates
 - Leadership – question of trust with board and administration will make it difficult to pass future levies
 - Engaging community that doesn't have kids in the district and getting their support

- GROUP TWO:
 - Regaining trust within the community
 - School funding
 - Building classroom space
 - Development of enrichment and intervention programs
 - Student teacher ratios
 - Keeping up with technology as it changes
 - Enrollment growth
 - Recognized as a top school district outside of Franklin County/state
 - Dealing with change
 - Money to cover everything
 - Maintaining academic excellence within a manageable operating budget
 - Identify and remain focused on our mission
 - Fear of dropping standards – OGT/ACT
 - Changes that will come with Strickland plan
 - True communications between administration and families
 - Community outreach
 - Provide services to challenge every child to be the best they can be
 - Making accurate financial and enrollment projections
 - Better recognition/more visible to colleges
 - Feeling among constituents that we have reached a tax threshold
 - Overcoming the attitude that we are “Blue Ribbon” and admit that we are not so good in some areas
 - Undeveloped land within the school district boundaries

- GROUP THREE:
 - Adequate space
 - Financing
 - Additional resources to help with financing
 - Defining and “operationalizing” a world class education
 - Willingness of majority to listen to the minority
 - Class size
 - Adequate space with fiscal responsibility
 - Community attitudes and apathy
 - Hiring top educated teachers
 - Financing for space to lower class size
 - Creativity and focus on education
 - Potential extension of school year for worldwide challenges
 - Curriculum education
 - Attracting/maintaining quality educators and ensuring resources

- More effective measurements of results
 - Redefine educational priorities
 - Planning for alternative careers
 - Revisit budget based on current economic conditions
 - Having a plan for preparing students/ our mission statement
 - Learn mandarin/relevant languages earlier
 - Amount of taxes
 - More programming opportunities
 - Need strong/effective leadership and administration
 - Communication/on-going and professional dialogue
 - More student/community interaction
 - Transparency in leadership
 - Community service
 - More teachers living in community – affordability
- GROUP FOUR:
 - Space for classrooms to deal with growth
 - Student/teacher ratio
 - Community growth
 - Capacity
 - Additional resources for ESL, students receiving free and reduced price lunch
 - Divided and polarized community will make it impossible to pass levies
 - Maintaining academic excellence for all students
 - Academic standards high enough/tough enough so best students qualify for best colleges
 - Economic downturn
 - How often will we have to go to voters in next five years?
 - Controlling urban growth so school district is economically viable
 - How to sustain economic packages for staff without compromising education and quality of teachers
 - Affordability for families
 - Meeting new state mandates such as all day kindergarten
 - Facilities for students – 5th graders will have to go outside for specials
 - Making specials work in CJDS facility
 - Buses to keep up with enrollment growth and bus schedule impact on scheduling
 - Maintaining quality of staff due to higher student/teacher ratios – attrition
 - Currently no continuity or consistency of curriculum especially at the elementary level
 - Disappointment with district's performance compared to other districts especially as it compares to cost
 - Students prepared to compete in global economy – science, math and foreign language
 - Improve communication between parents/teachers – don't just put things in backpacks

- Zoning issues that cause enrollment growth without the incremental taxes to pay for resulting students
- Increase educational standards at the lower grades so students can compete globally (foreign languages, music)
- Allocation of resources with fiscal accountability
- Devaluation of vocational education in particular as it relates to special ed students
- Maintain K-12 central campus
- Make sure that information is available on all options for students (voc. ed, college)
- Increase educational standards without increasing money required
- Maintain greater consistency/quality among teachers and grade levels - example: use of portals
- Maintain sensitivity to all forms of diversity (issues, race, religion, etc.)
- Longer school year/day
- Community transparency, civility, respect
- Parents need to be more involved
- Prioritize values – Should we have school uniforms to take emphasis off brand name clothing?
- Healthier school lunch options – less fast food
- Charitable foundation to benefit students

QUESTION TWO: Based on what you know about the community, the state, the country and the world, what are the major opportunities for our school district over the next five years?

- GROUP ONE:
 - Develop world class school system – What are the characteristics of a great system?
 - Become green campus with zero carbon footprint
 - Opportunity to expand career center programming to include more vocational as an alternative to college experience
 - Take advantage of growth and diversity of community; aesthetics so not mean excellence; critical thinking is a step in the right direction
 - Find a happy medium between school and community
 - Use technology to improve/expand curriculum
 - Be collaborative (school and community) – truly listen rather than rolling out the same “stories” used in the past
 - Community service to support less fortunate
 - Perception of New Albany (schools, great place to live) can help attract more/better teachers and diversity
 - Improved communication from/about school district
 - Opportunities – ways we can improve in critical thinking, math, technology
 - “Out of the box” thinking – lecture classes, funding, virtual classroom, languages – pair up with other districts to offer new languages or through distance learning
 - Talk with/collaborate with business community to understand what business needs and then build into curriculum



- Collaborate with New Albany Community Foundation
- Collaboration to improve continuity between NA schools Example: transition and continuity of offerings and expectations between K-1 a 2-5 ... each principal runs their own school with their own agenda
- GROUP TWO:
 - Strategic planning
 - Reduce residential growth/ focus on better balance of commercial growth to provide a more balanced tax base for the schools
 - Lead by example and do more with less
 - Use funding more appropriately for technology/global learning
 - Video conferencing/partner with OSU to teach classes
 - Strengthen the view of NAHS to colleges using local alums
 - Encourage a one world view
 - Strengthen math and science curriculum as well as foreign language offerings/broaden course offerings
 - Promote a performance culture in the classroom/ not everyone should get a ribbon
 - Increase number of National Merit scholars
 - Use community resources within the classroom like authors, musicians, international families, NA Historical Society
 - Look outside of Franklin County, Ohio, USA to see how we are preparing our students to compete and perform in a global environment
 - Honestly and completely report comparison of our district to others
 - Foreign exchange opportunities
 - Continue to encourage professional development and continuing education beyond what is expected for state licensing
 - Secure and maintain a world class staff
 - Alternative funding (besides real estate taxes) for school funding
 - An opportunity to get the entire community involved in the school district – use email to communicate
 - International Baccalaureate program
 - More ESL teachers
 - Nutrition program for students, particularly at younger students – offer more fresh fruits and vegetables in classrooms as well as cafeteria (instead of pizza parties, ice cream parties, rewards from candy jar)
 - More post-secondary options and college credit classes
 - Support performing arts
 - Become Ohio's #1 school district
 - Evaluate students individually
- GROUP THREE:

- More outreach/community involvement
 - Collaboration across campus and colleges
 - Use area resources like OSU, Batelle, corporations, businesses
 - Daunting opportunities
 - Better communication
 - Leverage diversity especially religion
 - Create ideas/alternatives together
 - Leverage economies of scale
 - Work study/ collaboration with businesses
 - Attract and retain talented and diverse educators
 - More business involvement (ex. tutors, supplies)
 - Better/more use of existing facilities
 - Educate about strategic plan
 - New Albany grads should have an external focus
 - Community service beyond our community
 - Global issues increase need for early foreign language education
 - Year round school with staggered classes
 - Use facilities throughout the day/week outside of normal school hours
 - Tap local talents and resources
 - More community discussion and changes in leadership and ideas
 - Broaden our minds
 - Career day(s)
 - Pre-K education
- **GROUP FOUR:**
 - Improve community dialogue (it's free)
 - Be prepared for life- long learning
 - Political unification behind an achievable vision
 - Pursue creative funding solutions such as an education foundation
 - Expand commercial development
 - Develop a consortium of NA businesses to support multiple initiatives and seek improves atmosphere
 - Have resources available to meet the challenges at the end of five years – effective district – excellent compared to other top 5% of Ohio's public, private and charter schools
 - International exchange/study opportunities
 - Create a sense of ownership in students
 - Student mentors to run study groups – students helping other students
 - Raise “global kids” using teachers from other countries and exposing students to other countries
 - Increased expectations and standards especially at lower grades
 - “Get our vision back” by looking at other districts (national and international) who are at the top
 - Seek out more grant opportunities like SAIL using a self-supporting grant development person



- Involve all students in physical activities after school (Columbus Academy requires all students to be involved in one sport each season)
- “Go green” and seek funding for green initiatives
- Teach all kids to communicate clearly, debate without emotion, public speaking
- Consider gender separation (especially in math) to improve academic achievement
- Consider uniforms to promote equality (Abercrombie uniforms?!)

QUESTION THREE: Dream about our school district in the next five to seven years. Think about the culture, academic and co-curricular focus, program delivery, facilities, finances and the district’s relationship with the larger community. Given what you know about the district’s strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, what should be the district’s top priorities as we move from good to great?

• **GROUP ONE TOP PRIORITIES:**

1. Create and utilize benchmarks to compare and contrast the “top” districts across the country to New Albany (i.e. refer to areas listed in Question 3) (23 votes)
2. True academic excellence (comparing college acceptances/destination to specific programs) (7 votes)
3. Answer state funding issue – analyze other states that have acceptable funding model to understand and replicate it (6 votes)
4. Use virtual textbooks with assignments done by email and all students have their own laptop (6 votes)
5. What is a “great” school district? Define it (6 votes)
6. Develop a group of diverse minds into tomorrow’s leaders (6 votes)

OTHER IDEAS:

- Do we offer a true variety of life skills, what kids would like (television production, entrepreneurship, etc.) (4 votes)
- Students should be challenged by teachers and have a wide range of opportunities for classes (3 votes)
- Global languages – what languages are appropriate, what age to start, which ones should we offer? (3 votes)
- Clarify and prioritize Board objectives and communicate them in a collaborative way to the community

• **GROUP TWO TOP PRIORITIES:**

1. Build another school building and maintain small class sizes (12 votes)
2. Individualize teaching and learning to assure all students learn to their maximum potential (12 votes)
3. Set realistic target for the cost of a quality education and stick to it (compared to other national school districts) (5 votes)

4. More challenging programs in all areas of study (5 votes)
5. Re-establish trust between district leadership and constituents (5 votes)
6. Academic excellence (as evidenced by test scores) within a manageable operating budget (5 votes)

OTHER IDEAS:

- Leadership team should be focused on strategy - out of micromanagement into bigger picture (4 votes)
 - Move away from physical location based on school building towards a digital, electronic, cyberspace based school system (4 votes)
 - Engage township and village officials to attain out goals of going from good to great (3 votes)
 - Less reliance on individual property taxes as our main funding source (2 votes)
 - Connect with community members – we are always going to have ballot issues so we need to ensure understanding by voters (1 vote)
 - Create a more positive feeling about the schools throughout the community
 - Fiscal communications to increase community support
- GROUP THREE TOP PRIORITIES:
 1. Ensuring well rounded students (11 votes)
 2. Emphasize language arts and foreign language (9 votes)
 3. More collaboration with broader community (6 votes)
 4. Passionate responsive leadership (6 votes)
 5. Stop complaining – volunteer, give (5 votes)
 6. NAPLS should be the best at everything (5 votes)
 7. Student specific curriculum (5 votes)

OTHER IDEAS:

- Teach life skills (3 votes)
- Community use of recreation facilities (3 votes)
- Professional /adult education classes – night classes, certifications (2 votes)
- Free standing rec center (1 vote)
- Teach financial literacy (1 vote)
- Develop passion for everything (1 vote)
- Don't just focus on testing (1 vote)
- Re-engage past students
- More emphasis on basics
- More nurturing environment especially for students with disabilities
- Middle school
- Make it easier to volunteer – find ideas/needs



- GROUP FOUR TOP PRIORITIES:

1. More consistency in curriculum and progression from one grade level/building to another (11 votes)
2. Re-establish culture of civility (10 votes)
3. Increase student pride and unity in their education and personal accomplishments (school pride and community pride) (9 votes)
4. Provide adequate facilities without increasing class size (8 votes)
5. Maintain low student/teacher ratio K-2 (7 votes)
6. Early age foreign language and emphasis on the arts (5 votes)
7. Maintain single campus with necessary expansion to continue excellent tradition (5 votes)
8. Recapture single vision for the district (5 votes)

OTHER IDEAS:

- Acquire and keep the best teachers (4 votes)
- Make facilities available to community – expanded educational opportunities (2 votes)
- Students need to be included in mission oriented activities (1 vote)
- Clear communication with community district should provide a central source for all information
- Increase community pride in schools “We’re from NA!”
- Improve our comparison to excellent schools nationally but maintain one campus
- Students should be taught state standards but expected to go beyond – allow teacher creativity within a set framework
- More accountability from politicians
- More parent involvement
- Each student meets individual mastery