



Kilgore Community Conversation Summary November 14, 2017

Host(s): Keven Ellis and Donna Bahorich

Participant Description: Approximately 35 participants

The State Board of Education (SBOE), under Texas law, is required to adopt a Long-Range Plan for Public Education. The 18-member steering committee, which is made up of state board members, various stakeholder group representatives and representatives from three state agencies, is leading the process. The steering committee will recommend long-term goals for Texas schools and will identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the system.

To help the board gather public input that will shape the new plan and set long-term goals through the year 2030, community conversations are being held around the state. In each community conversation, participants identify the purpose or desired outcome of public education and give feedback on challenges, strengths, and opportunities in four topics: educator preparation, recruitment, and retention; equity and access; family engagement and empowerment; and student engagement and empowerment.

This document provides a snapshot of the data collected during the Kilgore community conversation and highlights the main concepts captured during small-group conversations. Staff members from the Texas Comprehensive Center at the American Institutes for Research facilitated the community conversations and prepared this summary.

To learn more about the development of the Texas State Board of Education's work on the Long-Range Plan, visit https://tea.texas.gov/SBOE/long-range_plan/.



What is the purpose or desired outcome of public education?

- Accepting of differences and not isolating.
 - Biblical literacy so students can understand western civilization.
 - Develop employable skills, vocational training or prepare for college, career, or military (CCMR).
 - Equipping our students to be tech savvy.
 - It is the foundation of democracy. Path out of poverty.
 - Making connections, gets their attention, gives them purpose.
 - Meet the needs of the whole child.
 - Prepare students to contribute to society and community with positive, meaningful actions.
 - Preparing children to be thinkers and doers.
 - Preparing students to be collaborators with high levels of adaptability.
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- Quality self-governed and controlled lifelong students.
 - Safe place for learning.
 - Socially equip students to exemplify life skills and work well with others.
 - Technology smart in “how-to” and also what “not” to do.
 - To develop an attitude of life-long learning.
 - To educate all (each child reaches their maximum potential).
 - To prepare students with skills and knowledge in their areas of interest so that they can become productive citizens.
 - Vehicle for empowering people to become contributing members of community (productive, patriotic, responsible citizens).
 - Well-rounded education in math, science, social studies, literacy (read/write article at upper level); teach students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.
 - Where American exceptionalism came from and why we value what we do.



Educator Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Career and technical teachers cannot stay in the schools because of the minimal salary compared to what they could make in the field (e.g., nursing, welding, etc.).• College-trained, young students are not generally prepared for real-world school teaching.• It can be difficult to recruit teachers because new teachers cannot afford to pay back loans on the dismal pay scale.• Salaries are not competitive from small to large school districts.• The teacher requirement load is ever-increasing. It is so much for so little pay and benefit.• There are some weak alternative certification programs.• You cannot recruit or retain with cuts to the teacher retirement system and high insurance rates. Teachers need salary increases for longevity.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alternative certification programs can be a great alternative for recruiting teachers. They can help bring real-world experiences to the classroom by allowing teaching candidates to work with seasoned teachers.• Defined retirement benefits are keeping educators. This may change, though, if retirement benefits change.• Mentor programs and new teacher academies help with preparation.• Summer break is a refreshing positive that helps to retain some teachers.• Teachers still make a difference with students.• The variety of alternative certification programs that are accessible helps with recruitment.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create and increase funds to offer incentives to recruit teachers.• Include student teaching before employment to prepare new teachers.• Pairing new teachers with the right mentor-teacher is essential for positive motivation and quality.• To retain teachers, create a master teacher program and bonus pay opportunities, if certain criteria are met.



Equity and Access	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children need help and support and not all schools have access to what kids need.• Current structure prohibits smaller tax base districts from providing equitable services as compared to larger tax base districts.• Students need training towards a career.• The property taxes and school funding system is so complicated that the average citizen does not understand how it works.• There is erosion of local control.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Texas is a wealthy and diverse state; we are growing.• We have efforts for differentiated instruction and reaching students with different types of learning.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All schools should have a vocational focus, not by student population focus. Then all students could benefit such as learning disabled, gifted, college-bound, trades, etc.• Capitalize on the technology students already have available to them.• Expand hours at the school for students for library, internet access, etc., especially for high school students working part-time jobs or with no support at home.• Fix tax structures related to school funding/property tax. State funding needs to be restructured.• Partnering with higher education to increase access to course offerings.• School times need to be expanded to meet students' needs.• We need central facilities instead of each school having their own services. This could increase access to services and staff for all students, especially students with special needs.• We need to educate voters and mobilize.



Family Engagement and Empowerment	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of funding to implement engagement programs, especially for economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners (ELLs), migrant students and homeless students.• Many children are coming from poverty.• Social media can easily be a source of negativity and “airing out” issues.• Some students are not coming to school to learn.• The work ethic has changed. Welfare was once simply not what families sought or accepted.• There are language and cultural barriers.• There is an absence of parental figures, support, and discipline in some homes.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family engagement nights can introduce parents to curriculum and “how to’s” for their children.• Many schools have events for families to attend.• Social media can be used correctly and positively for communication to parents.• Teachers are communicating and reaching out to teachers.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build connections to families. Reach out to families and build on strengths.• Develop school programs to engage and inform parents.• We can use social media and technology to reach parents.• Work to reduce language and cultural barriers to focus on specific needs.



Student Engagement and Empowerment	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability is necessary but benchmarks keep moving. • For some students, the lack of parental support and expectations are a struggle to feeling empowered. Students cannot be successful without a strong, loving parental base. • Many students lack motivation and are apathetic towards school. • Poverty is an issue. Students’ physical needs are not met. • Some older teachers are incompetent with technology and can’t reach students. • Students who do not read at grade level do not feel empowerment. They are constantly struggling to survive. • There is a diversity of values. • Too many TEKS to cover. • Too much testing. We are required to differentiate, yet state testing is “one size fits all.”
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra curricular activities (e.g. football, volleyball, band, cheerleading, ROTC, and technology, etc.) engage students. • Kids that are motivated do well. • There are some great instructional practices. • We have quality teachers and quality lessons.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to have leadership opportunities and volunteer in the community. • Allow teachers and educational professionals to shape assessments away from multiple choice. • Certification programs can help students become career ready. • Compress TEKS, shift from “mile wide, inch thick.” • Individual graduation plans and career pathways—House Bill 5. • Let teachers challenge students to think. • Provide cross curricular courses and opportunities. • Provide extension classes for thinking—innovative courses and flexible curriculum. • Provide mentoring, internships and apprenticeships programs for students. • Teaching technology skills (developing apps) can be engaging student projects. • Variety of cultures, ethnicities, learning abilities and disabilities can be a tool for engagement and enrich learning.