

HILLSBORO COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT: SUMMARY REPORT OF FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

FEBRUARY 17, 2017

SUBMITTED TO:

Hillsboro Community School District
1311 Vandalia Road
Hillsboro, IL 62049

SUBMITTED BY:

Dr. Robin Largue
Studer Education
850-346-6665
robin.largue@studereducation.com

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Executive Summary

In December 2016 the Hillsboro Community School District began discussions for the development of a strategic plan that would be a three-year plan beginning in June 2017 and completing 2019-2020 school year. A steering committee to do the work of developing the plan was identified by the superintendent in consultation with the board. To begin the process, the steering committee decided to gather input through stakeholder surveys and focus group discussions. This report provides a summary of the outcomes of the focus group sessions.

Hillsboro Community School District invited stakeholder groups to participate in focus group sessions to provide valuable insight and information regarding the future expectations and challenges of the school district. These focus groups were 45 minute sessions scheduled for January 30 and 31 at a district location. An additional community group was scheduled for March 1 and was held virtually. The following stakeholder groups participated in this information gathering phase of the development of a strategic plan for Hillsboro Community School District.

- Students
 - High school
 - Junior High
 - Elementary
- Cooks
- Teachers
- Community Group (anyone)
- Transportation—bus drivers/mechanic
- Administrative Team
- Custodial Crew
- Secretaries/Aides
- Parents
- Imagine Hillsboro Education Committee
- School Board
- Imagine Hillsboro Technology Committee

Each of the groups were asked the same questions and were asked to share responses as a group. The questions asked were

- What does the district do well and should continue to do?
- What challenges does the district currently face and will face in the next three years?
- What solutions do you suggest for the district to meet these challenges?

The verbatim responses from each of the stakeholder groups is provided in the appendix 1 of this report.

The Studer Education team analyzed the responses from all fourteen focus groups and identified themes to be considered by the steering committee. The following are the themes that emerged.

- The values and beliefs of the district are not visible to create an identifiable image that will attract new families to the district (brand)
- Replacing or renovating the high school is a dividing point in the community. The district must explain the why, what and how to secure community support

- Athletic programs of the district schools are recognized as excellent by regional competitors, parents, community
- There are dedicated teachers and staff who work tirelessly for all students
- Hillsboro Community School District enjoys great support from the community with the expectation that the district will take necessary action to recruit more students to the district
- Invite and welcome parents into our schools
- Explore alternative delivery systems for class offerings and create more partnerships with other educational institutions, businesses, non-profits to reduce the drain on resources
- Continue and expand vocational program opportunities for students
- Develop and support an emerging technology plan for the district to provide students with the right tools for success
- Recruit, re-recruit and retain quality staff in the district
- To attract families to Hillsboro and to the school district, the academic program offered must produce student achievement at the highest levels in comparison to the top performing districts in the state and region

The themes from the conversations in the focus groups will be used to guide the development of the strategic plan for Hillsboro Community School District, Hillsboro 2021. The strategic plan should be used for preparing the school district for the future by setting goals supported by strategic actions. The goals are based on the mission and values of the Hillsboro Community School District. Hillsboro 2021 will set the path for the future of the school district.

A timeline for completion of the strategic plan can be found in appendix 2.

Appendix 1

Focus Group Comments

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:

What is going well and should be continued?

- Passionate teachers who spend personal time helping students
- Facilities hinder certain teaching learning activities but teachers have learned to work around
- Accepting new ideas—programs, classes, delivery
- Small district is welcoming for new students
- It is welcoming to all because everyone knows everyone else
- Teachers committed to every student graduating
- Teacher accessibility—answer emails in a timely way
- Daily plans posted on the internet for students to access and plan and prepare accordingly
- Music programs actively participate in the happenings of the community
- Activities at the school bring students back to the building and provide opportunities to be engaged in a positive way
- Staff and students are non-judgmental (welcoming)
- Based on discussions math and science departments are strong

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Decline in enrollment
- Older not well maintained facilities to draw more families and students to our schools
- Technology and the infrastructure for technology to allow more and better integration in the classroom
- HVAC -- managing the old system—noise and wrong temperature detract from the positive learning environment
- Expanding course options (#of languages offered, advanced courses, the number of options for college prep)
- Fixing classroom appearance—hole in the wall of a classroom
- Provide information to seniors about professions that could be successful and allow people to live in Hillsboro (near and nearby travel)
- Expand athletic teams and opportunities for students
- Replace and maintain athletic equipment and fields/courts
- More opportunities for true student leadership in the school (student council)

- More academic clubs to allow for competition and recognition for students and the school
- In some classes needed supplies are not available without individual teacher fund raising
- Science and safety equipment needs to be updated (eye wash and safety shower) (water goes to front office and floods)
- Outdated textbooks not used by teachers

What solutions would you suggest?

- Fund raising focused on the athletic program
- Covered walkway to provide better access during inclement weather
- Cleanliness of the building—some is due to the age of the building
- Bathrooms need to be maintained and have doors on stalls
- Handicap accessibility must be improved for future
- Provide opportunities to join clubs that focus on leadership and preparation for higher education
- Explore a more flexible schedule

HILLSBORO JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS:

What is going well and should be continued?

- Teachers are fun and participate with us—it is about relationships
- Principals talk with you to provide support in dealing with issues
- Good preparation for high school from 8th grade
- Teachers are open and explain more and provide time for individual help
- Students receive breakfast and lunch
- Chrome books available at times for class work
- Hands on learning experiences and application of learning
- Music program opens up opportunities (high school program is going to New Orleans)
- Clubs build leadership (art/builders club)
- Fund raisers equalize the playing field for students

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Getting to know people new to the school is difficult
- Increase enrollment
- High school building is not up to date (technology, AC, power, infrastructure)
- Consistency of discipline from teacher to teacher

- Public perception of schools and school environment affects enrollment
- Bullying

What solutions do you suggest?

- Providing for student needs
- Opportunities for students to share input and ideas (especially in groups)
- Extend time for specific topics to help students reach mastery
- Increase availability of Chromebooks/personal device
- Additional time with teachers to learn difficult concepts
- Rotation of encore classes so students can try different classes
- Need for advanced classes
- Student input into schedules

BECKMEYER ELEMENTARY:

What is working well and should be continued?

- Caught with Character recognizes students for doing the right thing
- Music program provides students opportunities to participate in functions in the community
- STAR student each month with recognition
- Selection of teachers who help us learn and care about us
- Recognitions for doing the right think

What challenges will be faced in the next five years?

- Hire teachers that relate to students and teach in a fun way
- Better transition from 5th to 6th grade
- Repair student bathrooms
- Cleaner and better maintenance of facilities and grounds
- HVAC not adequate
- Cafeteria food and the food preparation
- Provide additional tutoring to students during study hall
- Facilities may not be adequate for class size
- Chromebooks and iPads for every student
- Uniforms to stop some of the disagreements among students

COFFEN ELEMENTARY:

What is working well and should be continued?

- Teachers help you learn
- This will assist with future jobs
- Teachers are nice and spend time with you to help you with assigned work
- Teacher help you read better, they challenge you, and tolerate students and give extra chances to students
- Archived past students in pictures and use for displays in the school
- Meeting with friends and meeting new friends
- Go to the library to read
- Computers that are in the library
- People follow rules here
- Rewarded for character acts and activities
- Gymnasium for space for activity

What challenges will be faced in the next five years?

- Some kids don't follow the rules but get Cubs Cash
- Not enough reading time and not enough free time to draw
- Need more room to add pictures of graduates
- Recess is not long enough
- When there is a short week there is more homework on Friday

What recommendations do you have?

- More time for recess
- More hands on activities for learning
- Extra time for students who struggle academically
- Students could volunteer and help the cooks
- Older students could tutor the younger students

COOKS:

What does Hillsboro do well and should continue to do?

- Salary and job
- Attempt to communicate and engage employees from district to school and within the school (more at the elementary)
- Wonderful teachers who help students
- Students love support staff—lunch ladies and bus drivers
- Employees can request/recommend a special teacher for their child (elementary)
- Employee's children can attend Hillsboro schools without living in the district

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Accurate communication from leadership in the district (tax cost of last referendum was misleading and that is why the referendum did not pass)
- Overall spending process or budget process reviewed to ensure teaching positions are maintained
- Utilize service agreements with warrantied equipment
- Use preventative maintenance with kitchen equipment rather than reacting to equipment down
- Need for a new high school within 5 years
- One maintenance person for the entire district
- Many maintenance needs and one person cannot meet the needs
- State and local budget process for secure funds

What solutions would you suggest?

- Add more maintenance positions
- Change state structure concerning funding—redistribution based on population
- Share employment of teachers in high need areas
- Alternative calendar

TEACHER GROUP:

What is working well in the district and should be continued?

- Support for the arts is strong and important
- Colleagues work well together and collaborate for the good of students
- Grade level teams work well together
- District comes to together in times of crisis
- Community support
- Principals support field trips
- Technology resources are good at the district –based on size and budget
- Administrators share success by teachers at board meetings—share good news with the board
- Good communication among buildings
- The work ethic of teachers
- Local newspaper and media is supportive of school events
- Great administrators
- Teaching cuts have been minimized

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- The state has been 18 months with no budget and the state funds for schools is shrinking
- High school building and facilities are a challenge
- Declining enrollment
- Increase in poverty levels of students and understanding what that means for learning
- Meeting technology needs with support services for maintenance and training
- Technology PD would assist in integrating technology into the curriculum
- Many changes in standards and assessments
- Technology is not available for teachers/students at the high school and the infrastructure to support it
- Retirements of long term employees creates anxiety about the change
- Re-recruit and retain high quality employees to create best opportunities for students
- Entry and exit safety of buildings
- Expectations and the process for entry and exit of buildings
- Public perception of the value of education is less because of the ability of outsiders to enter buildings and classrooms at will
- Not a welcoming place for parents—providing more invitations in to parents

- Mobility rate increases as poverty rate increases
- Music teacher schedules are not balanced with regard to the number of students per class
- Community is reluctant to change what has been and is –is good
- Takes too long for IT to close work orders
- Maintenance work orders are not completed through the summer months

What solutions would you suggest?

- Offer parent workshops
- Create a plan for securing the buildings and classrooms
- Develop home visit plan that would benefit parents, students, educators
- Use internal personnel to recognize and teach best practices (PD)
- Have training, application and debrief for best adult learning
- Communicate with the community regarding changes to student population and implications for teaching and learning
- Have early out day for all levels
- Involve stakeholders in decisions that affect them
- Have parent conferences in spring to foster better relationships
- Substitute training to help them be successful in classrooms

COMMUNITY GROUP:

What is working well and we should continue to do?

- Re-recruit and retain high performers in teaching and as leaders
- Hear the voice of teachers
- Appreciate the good start to offer accelerated courses
- Importance of vocational training for some students (distance of current solution)
- Successful athletic programs that are recognized
- Staff knows individual students and know about them
- Administrators live in the community and are vested in the educational system
- School district cooperation between businesses and the educational system
- Elementary schools have chrome books for student use

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Enhance advanced courses and offer gifted classes
- Enhance partnerships to conserve resources—other districts, businesses, community members
- Prepare students for being career ready and/or success at the next level
- Ensure graduates have skills to be employed out of high school in the community
- Graduates of Hillsboro Community School District are successful at the next level
- Loss of vocational classes
- Changing state standards and the target for teachers and students is shifting all the time
- Parents not understanding Common Core and struggling to help students
- Communication to parents at secondary level must be improved
- Review evaluation system for all who work for the district
- Focus should be on teaching the child not the subject or standards
- Review the number of students who are homeschooled each year

What solutions would you suggest?

- Integrate available technology into coursework
- Get parents involved in schools as a resource
- Offer adult education courses at the school sites
- Use 4-H club as a resource
- Review evaluation of coaches
- Be consistent and reliable with regard to treatment of parents and students
- Explore alternative delivery models for instruction

TRANSPORTATION—BUS DRIVERS/MECHANIC:

What is working well and should be continued?

- Value the job they have with the district
- Sports program is recognized as one of the best
- Strong focus on student success
- Transportation to and from school are on time and safe
- Buses are well maintained by internal staff
- Supervisor provides access and open door policy
- Transportation provided for Pre-K is a reason for large enrollment
- Special education students are offered and provided opportunities to be out in the community

- FFA fund raising event to benefit agriculture students
- Excellence music program in the schools

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Increase in teen pregnancy
- Increase in negative student behaviors focus on respect for authority
- Student behavior—dress code is not enforced
- State and local budgets and funding decreasing
- Consistent academic and social support from Pre-k through 12th
- Stronger enforcement of the bullying policy
- Bad behavior by some students negatively affects other students
- Seemingly no parental support for good behavior on the bus

What solutions would you suggest for the district?

- Provide an alternative school for students with continual behavior issues
- Additional student support services to students with emotional and behavior issues
- Parking lots and entries for buses need repaving to prevent some maintenance issues
- Enforcement of traffic violations for bus safety and communication back to the personal who originally reported
- Add more vocational course options
- More back to basics rather than Common Core
- Parent orientation and explain expected student behavior on buses

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM:

What is working well and should be continued?

- Commitment to RTI by campuses has led to fewer special education referrals
- Based on board commitment to teacher assistants has helped meet the needs of struggling students
- Expectations of specific behaviors are conveyed and enforced consistently
- Support from community and board for the work of the district is evident
- Administrative support for the child care program allows for success
- Consistency of administrative teams leads to success and supports partnerships with other groups

- Managing of resources efficiently
- When a need is requested, it is provided
- Accessibility to top administrators and supportive of campus leaders
- Administrators in the district work as a team and are supportive of one another
- Maintenance department is responsive to requests and anticipates needed maintenance
- Elementary/Junior high buildings have been renovated and well maintained

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- More support from the technology support department
- Number and types of technology courses should be increased
- Move closer to 1 to 1 devices and provide greater access to all students in all buildings
- Technology at the high school is limited by infrastructure (electrical, etc)
- Need for counselor position at the elementary school
- Partnership is needed with health department to provide wrap around services
- Expand vocational course offerings
- Increase participation in breakfast and lunch program
- High school facility needs to be rebuilt
- Re-recruitment/retention of high performers

What solutions would you suggest?

- Individuals trained at each building to make adjustments/corrections in technology in the building
- Variety of courses for advanced level students
- Additional support for struggling students who do not qualify for special services
- More parent involvement

CUSTODIAL CREW:

What is working well in the district and should be continued?

- Jr. High principal takes on all types of duties to be certain students have all of the opportunities—
“he is a crusader for kids”
- Elementary principals do all that is possible to ensure all students have opportunities for success
- Teachers working late and working together—dedicated
- Overall appearance of buildings is positive

- Safety grants have provided the district with funds for upgrades

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Update infrastructure in all buildings—electrical to accommodate technology
- Continue to enhance the appearance of all buildings
- Loss of jobs in the community, loss of population and then loss of enrollment
- Unknown of the state budget creates anxiety over what is real
- Increase in the number and the needs of special students
- Balancing inclusion with providing a good learning experience for all students

What solutions would you suggest?

- Increase community involvement/support
- City and school district work together in plans for the future of the high school
- Consolidation
- Increase in sales tax

SECRETARIES/AIDES:

What is working well in the district and should be continued?

- Strong administrators who support people and allow people to do their job
- Dedicated elementary teachers who spend long hours, after hours, preparing for students
- Elementary music program is excellent due to the work of the music teacher. She works with students before and after school
- The special education department of the district meets the needs of those students
- All employees have a heart for children
- The district values support staff and involves them in decision discussions
- Support staff is recognized by staff with lunches and special events
- Cafeteria staff and custodial staff helpful and always care for children
- Administrators are open and helpful

What challenges will the district face in the next five years?

- Safety issues in all district buildings-no secure entrances, processes for sign in not followed, lock down procedures are not practiced
- Budget issues based on finances of the state and local governments

- Expectations from building to building vary—not consistent or cohesive
- Difficulties for struggling families—this creates struggling students with little or no support at home
- The community needs more jobs to help the economy and the families of our community
- The district must provide more accelerated opportunities for students
- How to turn around low enrollment/low graduation number
- There is an increase in the dropout rate and the mobility rate of students
- Truancy has steadily increased with no solution options offered
- The community, district, families, students must all be on the same page with regard to education
- Providing quality substitutes

What solutions would you recommend?

- Need a truancy officer from the community to help develop relationships to solve the problem
- Home visits to help parents and care givers and create relationships
- Repair or rebuild high school facility
- Help the community come into our schools and be a part of us
- Re-recruit and retain high quality employees
- Ensure students are prepared for career and college
- Need a law enforcement presence on campuses

PARENT GROUP:

What does the district do well and should continue to do?

- Teachers have patience with students at the elementary level
- Teachers are easily accessed by parents
- Daily class agendas encourage daily communication between parents and teachers
- Teachers do a great job with limited resources (often spend their money for resources)
- The Skyward system is a timely way to check student grades and provides parents with information needed
- High school Spanish/English teacher has prepared students for college, exceeds expectations
- Having the vocational courses off site is effective
- Bus drivers have clear communication with parents, much appreciated
- School staff know parents and parents know school staff (small town feel)
- A typical day is safe for our children

What challenges does the school district face in the next five years?

- The budget of the state of Illinois and reduced funding (state and local) continues to be a problem
- Determine if the Common Core curriculum is working and helping students be more successful
- Families are moving out of Illinois because of a dwindling jobs
- There appears to be a large number of students in upper grades (high school) which may cause over crowding
- The use of cell phones in schools is increasing but there is no internet access
- There is a need for iPads at all levels
- Is the infrastructure capable of handling more technology? If not, what do we do?
- Home schooling of students is on the rise, why and what can we do to encourage them to stay in the system?
- There has been a lack of communication with parents regarding technology in general
- There does not appear to be enough books for all students to have one-- they are sharing text books
- Some students being transported have very long routes

What solutions would you suggest?

- Staff need to have a voice and be consulted regarding decisions in schools and the district
- There is a need to either renovate or replace the high school
- Increase the sales tax in the county and provide additional funding
- Provide professional development opportunities for all teachers
- Provide parents with an update regarding Common Core and curriculum
- Provide training for Common Core

IMAGINE HILLSBORO EDUCATION COMMITTEE:

What is working well in the district and should be continued?

- A brand has been established for the district that makes people want to return to the community
- The educational experience prepares students for college
- Staff are caring and compassionate in their work
- The district web site is very good
- The district administration pushes the use of technology
- Phenomenal special education staff that meets the needs of students

- Teachers and administrators are accessible
- The budget and funding is going well
- The district may be losing their brand
- There is a transient community
- Community members care about the community and the future of the community
- Community participates in school activities

What challenges does the district face or will face in five years?

- Budget and funding for the schools and district continue to be a problem
- Starting to lose the Hillsboro brand
- There is a challenge to get the entire community to see value in education
- There is a substitute crisis for teachers
- Dealing with underperforming teachers needs to be addressed
- Home schooling is on the rise, why?
- Some parents do not think their children need or should go to school beyond the high school experience—need to change the conversation

What solutions would you suggest?

- Coffeen school could adopt a college
- Recommend all grades talk with students about future post high school opportunities
- Incorporate a PBIS program and implement
- Initiate a problem solving committee
- Create a steering committee to discuss curriculum, incentives, social and emotional and learning
- Create a new hire structure to support employees (onboarding process with mentoring)

SCHOOL BOARD:

What does the district do well and should continue to do?

- There is a nurturing environment in the school district
- Students feel safe and valued
- Administration works well with employees and listens to their needs
- Administration takes care of problems and resolves them in a timely way
- The Pre-K program in the district is excellent

- Junior and High school teachers go above and beyond
- The Hillsboro community is close knit
- Vocational programming is successful at the alternate location
- Graduates of Hillsboro return to work in the community
- The Education Foundation is strong and continues to receive donations, ex. Music program
- Scholarship program continues to be strong (currently 35)
- The administration is fiscally responsible
- There is a good dual credit offering through Lincoln Land Community College

What challenges does the district face in the next five years?

- State and Federal funding is uncertain from year to year
- Health care premiums for employees continue to rise
- There is a need for a new high school
- Enrollment in the district continues to decline
- The population of Hillsboro continues to decline
- Retirements are coming, need to recruit quality staff for replacements and re-recruit high performers
- Living in the community and coming back to a small community is not attractive
- Academic offerings have been reduced over the years
- Poverty among citizens is increasing because of the bleak economic outlook

What solutions would you suggest?

- Consolidate district administration and operational services by partnering with other districts
- Administration should attend recruitment fairs to secure teaching staff
- Review data for first year college students who graduated from Hillsboro Community School District, are they successful?
- Review what other like districts have done to be academically successful
- Implement a tutor/mentor program at all levels using retired employees or community members with strong skill sets in specific areas (Imagine Hillsboro)
- Create, expand and improve interagency service to students through collaborative agreements

Appendix 2

Strategic Planning Timeline

Date	Task	Person Responsibility
January 4	Conference call <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish process for focus group identification Communicate process to all leaders 	Robin/Steve/David
January 5	Contact specific people to participate in focus groups Parent, student, teacher, staff, board, Imagine Hillsboro	Leadership Team/Superintendent
January 13	All individuals have been invited and this week	Leadership Team/Superintendent
January 16 to 27	Administer employee engagement survey	Robin/Steve
January 18	All focus group members/ reps are contacted	Leadership Team/Superintendent
January 27	All focus group members/ reps are contacted by phone	Leadership Team/Superintendent
January 30, 31	Focus Group Sessions with Studer Education	Steve/Robin
February 21, 22	Site Visit Review results of focus groups Review results of stakeholder surveys Develop mission Identify core values Goals for success	Steering Committee/Robin/Steve
March 21	Site visit Complete first draft of strategic plan Plan for feedback from all employees	Steering Committee/Robin/Steve
May 30	Virtual meeting Review feedback survey results Discuss recommended adjustments to draft strategic plan	Steering Committee/Robin/Steve
July Board Meeting	Present the strategic plan to the board	Superintendent/Steering Committee
August	Plan for roll out to all employees Communication from superintendent—why, what, how	Superintendent/Steering Committee/Steve/Robin



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