

# Brunswick Schools Strategic Planning Stakeholder Input Report

## Themes

March 4, 2016

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Good Group Decisions

## CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The Brunswick School Department (BSD) serves a student population of about 2,350. BSD has about 370 employees and an operating budget of roughly \$36.5 million per year.

BSD is conducting a strategic planning process to provide direction for the future and to help address the following issues:

- How to improve academic performance
- Innovative programming
- How to address facility needs
- How to improve governance and communications
- Staff recruitment, retention, and development

The process is being overseen by a Strategic Planning Workgroup consisting of BSD administrators, building leaders, parents, community members, and school board members. The BSD school board, administration, and Strategic Planning Workgroup felt that it was important to gather substantial stakeholder input during the strategic planning process. The input process included a series of meetings with community members, BSD staff, and students. Two online surveys of the community and an online student survey were also conducted. Good Group Decisions of Brunswick was hired to assist with input gathering, working closely with BSD administrators and the Strategic Planning Workgroup.

Input was gathered in the following ways:

- 6 facilitated **community input meetings** were held at
  - Thornton Oaks on October 27, 2015
  - Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority on November 2, 2015
  - The BSD Central Office on November 12, 2015
  - Region 10 Technical School (R10 Tech) on November 13, 2015
  - Curtis Memorial Library on November 19, 2015
  - Perryman Drive Community Center on November 19, 2015

A total of 72 participants attended the meetings, including parents, students, community members, and school staff and volunteers. Discussion questions were designed by BSD administration, the Strategic Planning Workgroup, and Good Group Decisions. Meetings were facilitated by Craig Freshley of Good Group Decisions. Results of the discussions were tabulated and analyzed by Kerri Sands of Good Group Decisions and Amanda Kierman, an AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer with Goodwill of Northern New England.

- In addition to facilitated discussions at the 6 community meetings, participants also filled out **paper “tabletop” surveys** during the meetings. Written surveys were tabulated and analyzed by Kerri Sands and Amanda Kierman.

- An input **meeting for teaching staff** was held on October 9, 2015. Discussion questions were designed by BSD administration, based on other stakeholder input questions designed by the Strategic Planning Workgroup and Good Group Decisions. Results of the discussions were tabulated and analyzed by Amanda Kierman.
- **Student meetings** were held at Coffin School and Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School during December 2015. Discussion questions were designed by BSD administration, based on other stakeholder input questions designed by the Strategic Planning Workgroup and Good Group Decisions. The meetings were facilitated by teachers and in some cases students wrote or even drew their ideas. Results of the discussions were tabulated and analyzed by Amanda Kierman.
- An **online student survey** was offered to students in grades 6-12 in December 2015. Discussion questions were designed by BSD administration, based on other stakeholder input questions designed by the Strategic Planning Workgroup and Good Group Decisions. The survey questions were as follows:

1. What makes Brunswick Schools great?
2. How could Brunswick Schools better meet your needs?
3. What would you like our schools to be known for 5 or 10 years from now?

As of the survey's close, there were 652 responses. Results were tabulated and analyzed by Amanda Kierman.

- Two **online community surveys** were open on the BSD website between October 27, 2015 and January 26, 2016.

In the first survey, three "Questions of the Week" were released one at a time during October and November. Survey questions were designed by BSD administration, based on other stakeholder input questions designed by the Strategic Planning Workgroup and Good Group Decisions. The survey questions were as follows:

1. What do you most value about Brunswick's public schools?
2. How can Brunswick schools better meet the needs of our students?
3. What would you like Brunswick schools to be known for in 5-10 years?

As of the survey's close, there were 54 responses to Question 1, 32 responses to Question 2, and 17 responses to Question 3. Results were tabulated and analyzed by Amanda Kierman. In December and January, all three questions were combined into one survey and re-released. There were 5 responses to this survey.

# SUMMARY OF THEMES

## Community Input Meetings

### What the Brunswick Schools Should Be Known For in 5-10 Years

- Meeting the needs of every student
- Diverse, well-rounded curriculum
- Healthy and safe environment
- A leading district in the state, academically
  - Particularly among comparable districts
- Collaboration with the community
- Excellent education
- Innovation
- Happy students, staff, and families

### How Brunswick Schools Can Better Serve All Students

- Support teachers
  - Recruit the best
  - Provide training and teaching assistants
  - Atmosphere of inspiration, encouragement, and the time and freedom to innovate and collaborate
- Individualized learning for students
  - Multiple pathways
  - Balance high standards and aspirations with appropriate expectations
  - Offer diverse ways to demonstrate knowledge
- Involve students in the community and involve the community in the schools
  - Internships, job shadowing
  - Community service
  - Experiential education
  - Partner with local businesses and institutions
  - Mentorship
  - Career exposure
  - Especially partner with local retirees
- Safe facilities that meet student needs
- Innovate - think outside the box
- Support students with social, behavioral, or emotional issues
- Inclusive, welcoming culture
- Equitable opportunities for all students
- Identify and support students' needs early
  - Early intervention

- Pre-K

## How Brunswick Schools Can Better Serve the Community as a Whole

- Promote community use of facilities
  - Current buildings
  - Consider community needs when designing new buildings
- “Tell the story”
  - Keep community informed of successes
  - Let community know about challenges
  - Invite the community into the schools to see all that is happening - and to see the reality of facilities
- Make the case for good schools
  - As an economic driver
  - As part of a vibrant community
  - To everyone, not just parents
  - All year, not just at budget time
- Engage community mentors and volunteers
  - Especially retirees
- Partner with Bowdoin College
- Volunteer coordination - compile and advertise opportunities

## One More Piece of Advice for the Brunswick Schools as They Plan for the Future

- Keep reaching out like this
- Ask student and staff opinions
- Provide transparency re: facility planning and other planning
- Support teachers
- Be innovative and proactive
- Communicate the positive energy
- Educate the community about the schools’ needs

# Tabletop Surveys

## Most Valued Brunswick Schools Programs and Services

Of a list of 14 options, participants ranked the following 5 programs and services as most valuable:

1. Academic Programming/Curriculum
2. Dedicated support for students in need of educational aid in literacy, reading or math
3. Special Education Programs
4. Vocation/Technical Education (R10)
5. Nursing/Health Services

## Most Valued About Our School Buildings

Of a list of 10 building features, participants ranked the following 4 as the ones they most value:

1. Safety
2. Energy Efficiency
3. Location
4. Flexibility or Versatility

## Repair or Build New?

When asked, “In the next five years, do you think Brunswick should repair existing facilities or build a new facility?” 37 participants responded “Build New” and 13 responded “Repair”.

## Support for a Locally Funded New School

When asked, “Would you support a new school, locally funded, in the next five to ten years?” 53 participants responded “Yes” and 1 responded “No”.

## How the Brunswick School Department Can Better Communicate with the Community

Top themes:

- Better use of media, press and online
  - Newspapers, TV
  - Website updates and announcements
- More in person meetings and forums
- Transparency in planning and decision-making
- Share stories: celebrate successes and explain challenges
- Engage community leaders and volunteers
- Use a variety of channels - don't rely on only one or two

## **Teacher Input**

### What do you most value about the Brunswick School Department?

Top themes:

- Staff (caring, positive, collaborative)
- Sense of community (includes families, staff, administration, students, community members)
- Student-centric (desire to meet needs of all students)
- Staff (hard working and dedicated)

### What do you see as being the challenges in our district?

Top themes:

- Meeting needs of more diverse student backgrounds/needs
- Funding/budget/limited resources
- Formalities/mandates standing in the way of initiatives/teaching (external regulations)
- Facilities
- Managing proficiency-based learning
- Creating stronger communication between teachers and schools (K-12)

## What do you want the Brunswick School Department to be known for in 5-10 years?

Top themes:

- Inclusive education, meeting diverse student needs
- Excellence in education, meeting needs of all students
- An education that is well rounded and innovative (teaches the “whole student”) / hands-on learning
- A community that supports teachers
- Students who are lifelong learners and have skills to succeed in life
- Building strong community around education

## **Student Input**

### ***Grades 5 and Younger***

#### What Brunswick Schools Should be Known For

Top themes:

- Teachers
- Learning/Academics/Education
- Kind, caring people
- Good food
- Fitness and health
- Activities outside the classroom
- Friends
- Help and support for students

#### Most Liked and Valued About Brunswick Schools

Top themes:

- Learning
- Teachers
- Friends
- Support
- Recess/Outdoors



## Brunswick Schools Could Better Serve Our Students By...

Top themes:

- More rewards for students
- More activity during the day
- Kindness and respect towards students
- More choice
- Better transportation
- Healthier lunch options with more variety
- Monitoring hallways and behavior between classes

## Brunswick Schools Could Better Serve Our Community By...

Top themes:

- More volunteers in schools
- More field trips
- Fundraiser events
- Give to those in need
- School plays/events for all
- Nursing homes
- Better lunches
- Take care of the environment

## As I Grow Up, Some Ways School Can Help Me Are...

Top themes:

- Teach kindness, safety, responsibility, honesty, and stamina
- Become better at writing, reading, and math
- Learn the calendar
- Teamwork/sportsmanship building
- Teachers help me
- Helps me grow my brain/become smarter

## **Grades 6-12**

### What makes Brunswick Schools great?

Top themes:

- Athletics
- The town/community of Brunswick
- The teachers

### How could Brunswick Schools better meet your needs?

Top themes:

- More understanding around excessive homework assignments and deadlines
- Longer Lunch/Breaks
- More support from teachers (examples included hiring teachers who like their job, bringing less personal stress into their teaching, validating students' questions/opinions)
- Later start time at high school (Even one day a week)
- Better food & more options in cafeteria
- More emotional/social support

### What would you like our schools to be known for 5 or 10 years from now?

- Athletics
- Quality academics
- Producing "real world ready" students
- Accepting/diverse school climate
- High quality and supportive teachers

## Online Community Survey: Questions of the Week

### What do you most value about Brunswick's public schools?

Top theme:

- Teachers

Other themes:

- Diverse learning opportunities/ programs (performing arts, music, etc.)
- High quality academics

### How can Brunswick schools better meet the needs of our students?

Top theme:

- Diversity in teaching (STEM, special ed, passions)

Other themes:

- Reconfiguration (smaller schools, K-5)
- Sense of community across schools

### What would you like Brunswick schools to be known for in 5-10 years?

Top themes:

- Meeting needs of all learners
- Community feel at schools