

A Conversation with the Community – April 18, 2009

Question 1: What is needed to educate for success in a global society?

Overview:

- Critical Thinking Applied to Content and Life Experiences
 - Creativity
 - Innovation
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Adaptability
- Communication Skills
 - Teamwork
 - Collaboration
 - Interpersonal skills
- Language Skills
 - Written and oral communication
 - Bilingual
- Responsible member of the Global Community
 - Cultural literacy
 - World Languages
- Technology
 - Integration of technology
- Ethical Responsibility
- Real World Experience
 - Relevance
 - Connectedness
- Personalization

Table 1:

- Personalization: interest, spirit, culture, and instilling initiative
- Collaboration: leadership, learning from one another: students, staff and community
- Learning/Curriculum: creative approaches, character education, and critical thought

Table 2:

- What do we want as an “end product”?
 - Must define our goals
 - Awareness of what a global society looks like
- Encourage “inquisitiveness”
- Foster organic critical thinking and application of these skills
- Integrate content areas
- “Connectedness” – encouragement to be a contributing member of the global society
- Having teachers who can do all of this for all students

Table 3:

- How do we define “success”?
- Rigors of learning
- Teachers are thinkers in global way – “How we educate”
- Versatility, tolerance (critical terms)
- Making students college ready
 - Alternate paths to education

Tables 4 & 5:

- Deeper cultural awareness and understanding
- “Critical Thinking” – ability to synthesize information in appropriate instruction to lead children to strengths
- Communication across contents
 - Uniqueness of contribution
 - Schools
 - Families
 - Communities
 - Background, readiness, interest
 - Maximizing participation for each student
- Defining minimal knowledge base
 - Expanding all the time
 - What/how skill development
- Interpersonal skills
 - E.Q. v I.Q.
 - Communication (again)
 - Social skills
 - Teamwork
 - Critical thinking
 - Objectives/outcomes
 - Ethics
- Teamwork – “Orchestral” metaphor
 - Individual talent/skills – what do you bring to the table?
 - Maximizing each potential
 - Creating harmony – working as a team
 - Cooperation
 - Listening
 - Leading/following
 - Responsibilities – each individual is essential
 - Practice, accountability, and trust
 - Common goal and outcomes

Table 6:

- Communication
 - Math – universal language
 - Social Studies – avoid history repeating itself
 - Language Arts – all languages
 - Technology as a tool
 - Internet safety
- Research skills
 - Quality – not Wikipedia

Table 7:

- An understanding that they (students) are part of the global community
- They are responsible for their part in the global community
- Cultural literacy
- Teachers and students thinking outside the box

Table 8:

- World is becoming smaller everyday; U.S. must keep pace with the impact that education, economics, politics, trade relations, and technology have on the global economy
- Center our education on the fundamentals of economics in order to develop long term understanding of our place in the world
- Students must see where their place is in the world, beyond Mercer County, NJ and USA, but the whole world
- Expose students to skills of:
 - Critical thinking
 - Effective communication
 - Economics
 - Business skills
 - Language skills
 - Personal finance
 - Ethics

Table 9:

- Language Skills
 - Mandatory World Language opportunities, not just Romance languages
 - International students are taught content in another world language
 - Bilingual benefits for thinking
 - Bilingual education research shows people who are bilingual are able to focus more
 - TESOL Conference – not “1” for English – “International English”
- Attitude
 - Open-mindedness – There is diversity (knowledge, people) – ability to work together in a real world
 - Multicultural approach/enrichment
 - Offer options to develop broader perspectives
 - Swap a class with another
 - Foundations/basics are essential
 - We cannot predict what is needed in the future
 - How to learn is essential
 - Process and content

Table 10:

- Integration of technology needs to be seamless, tools for learning
- Active learning – reach outside the classroom, make connections
- Relevant curriculum
- Teacher training – time for collaboration; give teachers, students, administration a voice
- Skills – problem solving, critical thinking, analyze, evaluate, ask questions, question outcomes
- Know our history/different cultures

Table 11:

- 9th grade – lack of interaction/exposure to all students
- Exploration is limited due to scheduling (courses are so prescribed)
- Expanded school day – additional options (college courses)
- Provide more experience earlier (HS is too late)
- Greater flexibility
- Maximize exposures to make informed decisions
- Enhance creative writing
- Internships and hands-on experiences
- Develop character
- Study of World Language and culture

Table 12:

- New skills, creativity, innovative, entrepreneurial, flexibility
- Teachers as well as students
- Multisensory
- Knowledge about technology
 - Learning styles addressed
 - How do we apply and use it?
 - Web applications – globally
- Job readiness
 - Global benchmarks and standards to be able to move up
 - Multicultural
 - Raise level of academic skills
 - Increase expectation at a younger age
 - Helping students know where they want to go

Table 13:

- Awareness of critical thinking needs in school and implication for student's future
- Learning is “year-round” process – consider community and school collaboration during the summer
- Teacher communications within the schools to align delivery of curriculum
- World language awareness
- Learning a language is critical thinking

Table 14:

- Valuing critical thinking
- Written and oral communication skills that can be integrated to all areas of learning and applied to all disciplines
- Relevant real-world experiences

Table 15:

- Synthesize
- Reach all students
- Focus on “thinking” process
- Reflection
- Basics
- Programs of student interest
- Collaboration (interpersonal relationships)

Question 2: How could this inform what we do at Lawrence Township Public Schools?

Overview:

- Meet the Needs of All Children
 - Life-long learners
- Involve/Engage Community
 - Community resources
 - Think/Re-think and recruit
- Value Cultural Diversity
 - Be global
 - Be bilingual
 - International partnerships
- Shift the Focus from Teaching to Learning
 - Understand how we learn
 - Let Me Learn®
- Full Utilization of Resources
 - No empty buildings
 - Year-round use/evenings and weekends
 - Adult school
 - Breakdown large schools in small schools
- Teaching
 - Interdisciplinary
 - Collaborative
 - Real world experiences
 - Importance of professional development
- Integrate Technology and the Arts
- Accountability
- Sustainability
 - Green schools and education

Table 1:

- Teach students to think: authentic learning, portfolios, and testing students to think
- Mentors in the community to encourage common collaboration to foster two-way learning
- Use of student's interest in the arts to recognize "kid" culture
- Creation of advisory/morning meeting to personalize learning relationships

Table 2:

- Skills for all students (every child gets what is needed)
- Breakdown of schools into "houses" – all students feel like they are leaders and team players
- Teachers being comfortable enough to not know all the answers in order to foster critical thinking skills (encourage inquiry)
- International partnerships
- Technology – embrace it, don't work against it
- "Real-life" skills (basic knowledge of practical, daily activities)
- Community engagement – working towards goals

Table 3:

- District practice
 - Interview/hiring of new teachers
- Training of staff (professional development – shift)
- Need to initiate something so we can “dialogue” to define “success”
- Integrated process
- Students have ability to define “success” (each individual)
- Must provide opportunity to become “Lifetime Learners”

Tables 4 & 5:

- What we teach; how we teach; to whom
- Integration of content across the curriculum – K-12
- Awareness of curricula at all levels by all schools
- Prepare for changes in entering students in Kindergarten: How will this inform grade 12?
- Understanding of student’s needs, levels, strengths
- Peer support in all classes and subjects
- Competition vs. Cooperation
- Common goals
 - Consistent effort to recognize and address cultural differences
 - Incorporate and celebrate diversity
- Fostering student leadership – less teacher, more student
- Scientific thinking
 - Risk taking
 - Open to new ideas
 - Adapting to change
 - Perseverance
 - Willingness to work
 - Resiliency
 - Try new things
- Expecting all students to achieve at high standards

Table 6:

- Ongoing curriculum work
 - Rethink the process
- Intensive research preparation
- Balance between printed and electronic word
- Equality of access

Table 7:

- Social skills and acceptance taught across all curriculum areas
- Taking advantage of our own cultural diversity
- The community needs to be a part of the solution
- Independent thinking by the student

Table 8:

- Actual banking activities by students, facilitated through the skills found within the school
- Integrate what is learned in the classroom to the real world through deliberate connections
- Global currencies and metric system exposure to be prepared to be engaged in discussion beyond their community
- Integrating cross-curricular lessons that build the educational experience for every student
- Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance lessons for students across the curriculum
- Mandatory four years of World Language instruction

Table 9:

- Basics
- Critical thinking
- Learner responsibility
- Professional development
 - Content
 - Process – focusing on how to help students learn and how to develop critical thinking skills
- Teacher accountability

Table 10:

- Think, rethink how we use resources
 - Facilities, time, money, people
 - BE BIG AND BRAVE
 - Change is good
- Recruiting community resources
- Use community resources
- Connect curriculums
- Share/embrace cultural experiences
- Include every learner

Table 11:

- Students need to collaborate on the teaching and learning process
- Modeling of communication at all levels
- Collaboration/exposure to all students
- Provide experiences that will enrich students
- Social skills training/character education
- Adults need to model and take a stronger stance on informing students of inappropriate behaviors
- Employability skills
- Code of conduct (community statement) contract
- Bridge the gap between home and school

Table 12:

- Shared vision of things that are needed for success
- Best practices
- Accountability – everyone, sustainability
- Tap into our international community
- Build goals beyond that of State assessments
- Paradigm shift from teaching to learning
- Mentorship for the children
- Parent-teacher-school partnership
- More direct community involvement
- Integration of technology

Table 13:

- Is the community willing to support through volunteering, taxes, etc., creative and critical thinking skills?
- Establish a learning environment (all year) that encourages closer connections between community and school
- Continual learning – rethinking educational academic opportunity in the summer (weekends)
- Move from practice to product (demonstrate application of knowledge)
- Work study for credit opportunity
- Adult school opportunities (anyone in community)
 - Reflective community interest
 - Language
 - Math/Science
 - Retraining

Table 14:

- Schedule that supports inter-disciplinary teaching and collaboration
- Greater opportunities for real-world experiences

Table 15:

- Understanding of how we learn
- Have students and teachers be responsible for integrating “Let Me Learn”
- Focus on collaboration
- Integrated technology
- Textbooks?
- Green schools
- Challenging courses
- Engaging teachers (role models)
- Bring community into schools

Question 3: What issues/questions does this raise for us?

Overview:

- How do we provide appropriate professional development?
- How do we create a balance?
 - Fitting it all in
 - Ensuring we continue to offer co-curricular, balanced opportunities
- How will we fund this?
 - How will we ensure funding is invested in things that work?
 - How will we set priorities?
 - What are we willing to give up?
- How will we ensure cultural “awareness,” “sensitivity,” and “relevance”?
- How do we ensure community buy-in and engagement?
 - How do we overcome the eight out of 14 factors affecting student success that are not under the schools control?
- How do we promote accountability for teachers, programs, and outcomes?
- How do we ensure consistency and sustainability?

Table 1:

- Implementation: embedded professional development, procedures, scheduling, and authentic physical learning environments
- Use of public facilities, i.e. Rider, better use of our own facilities
- How do we bridge home and school?
- How do we get more community involvement?
- Realistic expectations
- Interdisciplinary learning

Table 2:

- “Fitting it all in” during the time allotted
- Training for teachers parents (cooperative)
- What will the future teachers, parents, and community look like?
- How do we integrate co-curricular activities (music, arts, etc.)?
- Help students balance school responsibilities and outside interests with communication skills
- What are we willing to give up? Pay for?
- Teachers outside of the school
- Relevance/meaning for the student
- Connecting dots
- Methods to solve problems

Table 3:

- Educate/re-educate new/old professional staff
- Revise and review hiring practice
- How do we instill in all students to succeed?
- Must identify right change (catalyst that works)
- MUST INVOLVE everyone (top/down)
- Provide students opportunities to do things
- Must attend to fiscal support by district

Tables 4 & 5:

- Decrease in face-to-face communication while using technology
- Communication and teamwork is vital – how does technology diminish these face to face skills while allowing communication with people in other far away places?
- What is the balance? (talking/texting)
- How can we be consistent?
- Cross curricular instruction?
- How do we address student developmental levels in curricula?
- How do we keep students interested in what they began interested in?
- How can teachers look into their student’s needs and strengths?
- How can teachers keep up with technology changes in order to engage students in taking charge of their learning?
- How can teachers engage in critical conversation to understand student experiences?
- How can we capitalize on instant information and communication our students use?
- How do our perceptions interfere with student learning?

Table 6:

- Issues with technology programs (My Access)
 - Depersonalizes the relationship between teacher and writer
 - To use it as a tool before handing it in
- Smaller class size, e.g., 29 in French
- House system – hinders socialization

Table 7:

- Are we ready as a society, community, school district to make the commitment to change?
- What actions will be taken and how quickly?
- Set internal standards higher than the State
- Allow for “teachable moments”
- Higher accountability for teachers and administrators

Table 8:

- Relevancy of content to application in world outside the school
- Cost of implementing special programs
- Mandated curriculum (state) vs. room to include new programs (paradox of public education having to cater to every student’s special interests)
- Focus on educating students on basics/fundamentals:
 - Speaking effectively
 - Personal finance
 - Business skills
 - Technology skills
 - Life skills/thinking skills
 - Understanding importance of our connection to the world and world economy
- Content vs. educational skills

Table 9:

- How to:
 - Synthesize/integrate content
 - Integrate across content areas
 - Foster teacher collaboration
 - Develop emotional intelligence and empathy
 - Develop learning and application strategies
 - Develop an atmosphere in which it is desirable, “cool” to excel
 - Overcome eight out of 14 factors that are out of school control
 - Involve families

Table 10:

- Patience and persistence
- Willingness to fail
- Is a year enough time?
- Who will be responsible and how will they know?

Table 11:

- How does the school take the community’s concerns? (Reflect & Shape?)
- How does the district provide the community with opportunities to discuss concerns/questions?
- Are students flexible enough to adapt to what they will be presented with in the future?
- How do we balance a creative educational approach with state testing/graduation requirements?
- How do you teach critical thinking?
- How do we relate what is learned in school to what is needed in life?

Table 12:

- What are our barriers and figure out how to solve
- Community education – ELL, outreach, cultural
- Reasonable timeframes
- Public acceptance
- Re-training
- Funding – stop using for resources that “don’t work”
- Setting priorities – “Return on investment”
- Dig in deeper!

Table 13:

- Is the community willing to support what is necessary (taxes, time) to make this happen?
 - Community readiness
- Teachers should encourage and provide “challenging” learning opportunities for all students
 - Maybe a teacher training issue
 - Apply the question “Why?” in school
- Parent should be “in the loop” – ongoing communication about “the system” as well as their own child
- Cultural awareness
 - Implications for school interactions
 - Foods – social behaviors
 - Summer exposure to other cultures

Table 14:

- How do we get the community to embrace the goals?
- How do we change the structure so we can support these goals?

Table 15:

- Global approach (How do we do it?)
- Emotional component of learning (holistic approach)
- Create excitement for learning (sustain)
- Relevant learning
- Teacher quality (passion)
- Effectiveness of educational system (How do we measure?)
- Key factors

Additional suggestions from community member not able to attend on April 18:

- Teach children **REAL LIFE** skills – UNFORTUNATELY not always taught by parents:
 - How to apply for financial aid
 - How to apply for college
 - How to create good resumes
 - How to interview and apply for a job – every aspect: interview questions, appropriate clothes, hair, jewelry and make-up, etc.
 - Teach skills on starting your own business, business plans, financing, etc.
 - Teach them about real estate, information they will need to purchase a home
 - Teach them about taxes – and the consequence of not paying your taxes
 - Teach about credit scores and how they affect every part of your life
 - Teach them about general safety – internet, travel, drugs, driving, texting while driving, driving while drinking, tattoos, piercings, etc.
 - Teach them about the law; if they commit crimes they will be held accountable
 - Teach them about nutrition and fitness; show the effects of poor nutrition and fitness
 - Teach them psychology, how to cope with life in general and where and how to ask for help if they need it
 - Teach children that for every problem that may develop in their life there is a solution, and sometimes they may just need help finding it, and all they need to do is ask someone for help
- If even a few of these skills were taught and understood it would make a huge difference in the **WORLD**, not just in Lawrence Township Schools.