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## COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR INVESTING IN EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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Community Meeting #3  
November 1, 2005  
6:00 – 8:00pm  
John Stanford Center Auditorium

### FORMAT

Committee co-chair Trish Dziko led off the meeting with brief welcoming comments, in which she outlined the make-up of the Committee, the Committee's charter, our overall approach, our comprehensive community engagement plan, and the context and format for the evening's meeting.

Committee member Mary Jean Ryan then led participants through a presentation of the District's financial outlook, including an overview of the projected budget gap (according to committee analysis, the district is facing shortfalls of \$15M in '06-'07, \$25M in '07-'08, and \$41M in '08-'09) and the predominant drivers of the gap (identified by the Committee as a) lack of adequate state funding; b) historical district choices specifically in the areas of transportation, special education and bilingual education; c) excess facilities; and d) the salary escalation clause in the current teacher contract which outpaces the rate of revenue growth). She then outlined the Committee's full scope of work (26 distinct areas of inquiry, divided into two areas – investments and revenues/costs), and then provided a high-level overview of the subset of 8 proposals being reviewed that evening.

Participants then had one hour to walk the room, visiting stations to learn details of several of the Committee's preliminary ideas under consideration. Committee members were available at each table to answer questions, and participants were encouraged to fill out comment cards for each proposal.

The last 15 minutes were reserved for each Committee member to report out to the larger group a brief topline summary of the reaction and feedback each proposal had received. Trish Dziko then closed the meeting by reviewing how the input would be fully processed and analyzed, reminding participants of upcoming ways to participate in the process, and thanking them for their participation.

### PROMOTION

Notice of the Committee's three community meetings and of all other opportunities for the public to provide input to the Committee were publicized through a postcard mailed to all Seattle Public School families (including translated notices to 6,000 bilingual households), approximately 17,000 emails, a media campaign (PI, Times, Weekly, Stranger, NW Asian Weekly, Chinese Post, Seattle Medium, Metro Homemaker; NPR [KUOW], African-America radio [KRIZ, KYIZ, KZIZ], Spanish-language radio [KDDS, KKMO, KXPA]), and the Committee's website.

### GOALS

Prior to the meeting, the committee set specific goals for success:

Target		Actual
100 people in attendance	√+	175+
Diverse representation	√	Gender and geographic balance. Slightly less ethnic diversity than previous two meetings.
High quality/usable feedback	√+	Positive energy, constructive tone, productive

dialogue (all the more noticeable considering the sensational media environment re: school closures the day of the meeting).

## **MATERIALS PROVIDED**

One-page descriptions of each of the 8 proposals under consideration for the evening were made available at each table. These described the proposal, the estimated financial impact of the proposal, the change relative to current policy, and the case for change.

Comment cards were also provided, asking participants for their reaction, whether they would support or oppose such a proposal, and what additional information, if any, would be necessary for them to determine their support or opposition.

## **COMMUNITY INPUT**

There were approximately 100 (+/-) comment cards filled out for each area of deliberation (83 on the low end; 113 on the high end). The comments were overwhelmingly thoughtful, reasoned and showed a tremendous dedication to thinking hard about public education in our city. The number of comments excerpted for each support/oppose/unsure category are roughly in proportion to stated percentages in each area. In sum:

### **ATTRACT AND REWARD GREAT TEACHERS & PRINCIPALS**

*Description:* Place an increased focus on acquiring and retaining top teaching and principal talent through enhanced recruiting, aligned professional development, incentives to high-need schools, and rigorous evaluative tools.

*Reaction:* 90% support; 5% oppose; 5% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “This one’s a no brainer. Schools will never improve, or sustain improvement, without strong teachers and principals at the helm. Talent must be distributed equitably across the district.”
- “I love this idea, but at the moment our SEA contract is built upon a system of seniority, not quality. We have recruited/hired some of the best, just to have them RIF’d the following year. [This is] extremely progressive.”
- “Many teachers do not apply to SPS b/c of their ‘horrible’ hiring timeline. If anything is done, change that!”
- “If a consistent means of providing stable, experienced, committed teachers can be found, it can go a long ways to equalizing schools across the district. This should be a fundamental goal of this proposal.”
- “How about a ‘Teach for Seattle’ program where we recruit our best and brightest youth, pay for their education and require X years of service?”

- “This idea has to be a priority. Cost-of-living incentives should be part of the package much like military postings where the location impacts costs of living.”
- “This has to happen! It’s going to mean a concerted shift away from the site-based way that things are going now. It means we can’t wait for resignations in August before we act. We need planning – not reacting.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “How can we not support great teachers? But I’m not convinced this is a big area of concern. Focus on bigger problems first.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “The current situation tab appears to indicate that \$ would be moved from professional development to recruiting. If this were the case I would have concerns as professional development keeps good teachers motivated and skilled. It recalls the old adage – it costs less to keep a customer happy than to get a new customer.”

## **REDUCE CLASS SIZE**

*Description:* Reduce class size and/or teacher-student ratios to 1:20 in core classes in K-5 and 1:15 in K-3 in high-need/low-performing schools.

*Reaction:* 80% support; 12% oppose; 9% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “This is perhaps the most significant driver to retaining quality teachers, to improving student performance, and to make learning meaningful. If we don’t do anything else, we must do this.”
- “This is imperative. It is the difference between being able to stay in touch with the real needs of students.”
- “I believe this is truly the way we will close the achievement gap. When children are known and understood, they have the disposition to tackle the high expectations we have for them.”
- “Excellent idea! Class size is [a] strong factor driving parents to choose private schools”
- “This would be awesome for achievement, but seems like pie in the sky. But I love that this is actually under consideration!”
- “All students achieve more with small class size. High expectations for all students is a requirement for success.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “Doesn’t jive well w/the concept of reducing facility size. Sounds like a big reconstruction project if you combine the two ideas. I think you need to look at other draws to Seattle schools, as parents choose quality schools regardless of class size.”
- “Why are you talking about this? Class size does not bear out in research as cost effective and as a strategy to improve academic achieve [sic]. This is about keeping the union happy. As a classroom teacher, I understand how much easier this makes my job – but give me a good principal and good support with discipline and class size does not matter.”
- “I believe the district should maintain current class size limits, yet if a school wants to go smaller let them make the argument based on their status as a high-need/low-performing school and then give additional funding.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “I like small classes better. However, as a parent of students who like school and do well in classes of 30, I would like to consider keeping large class sizes at some schools as a way of saving money to support more academic options – music, art, etc.”
- “Sounds good on paper, but is this the biggest bang for the buck given limited resources?”
- “Prefer adding IAs.”

## **BUILD STRONGER, MORE RIGOROUS HIGH SCHOOLS**

*Description:* Build stronger high schools by funding six periods per day for all high school students and aligning high school graduation requirements with college entry requirements.

*Reaction:* 96% support; 1% oppose; 2% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “Fund a minimum of 6 periods.”
- “It’s essential. I can’t believe it’s not happening already. It’s a must, now.”
- “Excellent. I would vote yes to fund this through a levy if I could.”
- “Across-the-board college prep curriculum seems like a no-brainer. Why is this even a question?”
- “Strongly agree. We must make our high schools competitive. I grew up with 7 periods of high school. It’s a disgrace to have to fight for 6! We need to increase our standards and expectations of our students so they can be competitive in the college and workplace settings.”

- “I’m actually quite shocked that high schools in Seattle are so under funded and lack the rigor required for college entry. I absolutely believe that we need to build stronger, more rigorous high schools.”
- “Highly support this – as was said at the introduction – we need to aim higher to prepare kids for college or job training.”
- “Duh!”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “A 5 period day works just fine. My daughter is an AP students and has a great 5 period day schedule. Let it go – too expensive.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “Many kids will not go on to college. How about vocational programs?”

### **IMPLEMENT RIGOROUS CURRICULUM, CITYWIDE**

*Description:* Place primary emphasis on math, reading, and writing. Then expand to provide system-wide, K-12 science, music, art and dual-language.

*Reaction:* 91% support; 7% oppose; 2% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “Wonderful. Please, please do this.”
- “System-wide consistency would be a tremendous benefit to students, teachers, schools and work places.”
- “To me this is so matter-of-fact, there almost needs to be less discussion and more implementation. This is a no-brainer.”
- “I strongly support implementing a rigorous curriculum, city-wide! There should not be such wide disparities between schools and the level of instruction should be more equal for all subjects.”
- “Music and art are so important. Right now it’s either/or at our neighborhood elementaries. Could we afford for everyone to have both?”
- “I am excited about having curriculum suggested here that allows all different kids of students and learners opportunities to excel! ...More of all of these would make me proud of our district!”
- “Consistent excellence across all schools should be a mandatory factor in all these discussions. This is the first time I’ve heard consistency discussed, and I’m very supportive. This will help lower transportation costs, if families are more comfortable with their reference schools.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “Every school should have a rigorous, effective curriculum aligned with district and state standards, but I strongly disagree that all schools should have the same curriculum.”
- “Sounds like a large expense; I don’t think that all schools need to have equal music and art classes. I think parents would be willing to pay for dual language.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “Be very careful that ‘system-wide consistency’ does not cap or even slow down the high-achievers. It’s very difficult to achieve equality or consistency without hindering those at the top.”

### **INSIST ON SYSTEM-WIDE ACCOUNTABILITY**

*Description:* Build a system based on earned autonomy and quality control by establishing common success metrics for schools, guiding schools through an annual assessment process, and implementing improvements as necessary.

*Reaction:* 82% support; 7% oppose; 11% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “Great. Site-based management has gone nuts with principals acting on their own with little district oversight. We need them to be accountable.”
- “Fabulous – agree with earned autonomy – with the caution that accountability measures do not negatively impact ingenuity – i.e., standardized testing can minimize creative quality education and development of alternative approaches.”
- “Good. Earned autonomy – what a great concept. That will let each school/staff find their own ways to succeed.”
- “Autonomy has proven very successful for some schools, but unsuccessful for others. Some measurement for school success must be developed and intervention is critical for low-performing schools. However, intervention should not mean a school is not allowed to try something innovative that might just work for them. ...I value decentralization, but quality control, assessments and interventions must be a very real presence.”
- “I can’t believe this isn’t already in place!”
- “Wasn’t the implementation of school choice supposed to provide accountability through market forces? Better schools would attract pupils while struggling schools would be closed/transformed. The problem as I perceive it is that there are no consequences for under-performing schools.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “Maybe some schools with poor scores have lower income students and different struggles. They need more support, not wrist slapping.”
- “This proposal includes no accountability provisions for the district central administration. Currently, the various departments function as fiefdoms, supported by federal dollars. These departments are not accountable to the Superintendent, but they should. Micro-management and patronage by members of the board further complicates the problem.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “Support it in theory but [I would] need to know how you define high & low performing schools; only test scores? Then no.”
- “This is dicey...as each school district faces such manifestly different problems/challenges around our country and our state, each school within our system has its set of realities that affect its ability to meet the needs of its students.”
- “Ambivalent. The basic idea seems good. I would prefer to think less in terms of prescriptive improvement protocols and more in terms of what support we can offer to struggling schools. In particular I think it would be effective to place a very strong, experienced principal as a mentor to the principal.”

## **OPTIMIZE MANAGEMENT OF REAL ESTATE ASSETS**

*Description:* Generate a new, ongoing revenue stream to support academic strategies through improved stewardship of SPS’ vast real estate holdings (non-school buildings).

*Reaction:* 83% support; 8% oppose; 9% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “This is a no-brainer. Any business operates in this way. The District should not be any different. Tangible assets like real estate should be put to work.”
- “Good idea, as long as the implementation is contracted out. Don’t make SPS staff spend their time and energy on this, except for oversight.”
- “I am encouraged by the progressive thinking here, and see this as a good way to bring in some revenue and deal with underutilized and vacant spaces. But...you need to bring on a real estate developer/consultant to perform this job.”
- “Critical! Current beneficiaries might object but this would allow schools to improve performance of core mission.”
- “I like it. How about using some property for housing? Developed by some generous donor and used as bait for great new teachers.”
- “Great. Make sure the District holds onto the properties and negotiates a savvy lease. And only for properties unused as schools.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “In general I am against this idea. I am not in favor of selling public land and property for private use. I am in favor of leasing to private entities at maximum market rate. I would grandfather/mother in existing not for profit tenants and continue at below market rates.”
- “Very concerned successful schools will be in jeopardy because of their real estate potential.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- This needs to be done very carefully. Real estate development is a business that even experts miss on sometimes.”
- “In the past the district has found that buildings can not be used for schools once they are used for other things – ensure a wide range of future choices before capitalizing on real estate.”

### **ALIGN SCHOOL BUILDING CAPACITY WITH STUDENT POPULATION**

*Description:* Re-size the District’s physical capacity to accurately fit current student enrollment and projected future enrollment through a) developing sensible school closure criteria and a decision-making process that supports academic goals and reflects community priorities and then b) reduce the overall facilities footprint by 1.0 – 1.5M square feet to eliminate underutilized space.

*Reaction:* 70% support; 15% oppose; 14% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “Why do we keep ignoring the biggest elephant in the room? Nobody wants to do this, but we need to! All of our schools are special, all are the center of the immediate community, but the building doesn’t make the school special, the people do.”
- “I am not opposed to consolidation or even moving successful school communities to a larger facility where they can serve more students. I want to see it presented as a win/win situation – especially for students. If you take a group of 5 schools and offer them a high level of services if you consolidate to 3 facilities, I think most parents would jump at the chance.”
- “I would support if it was accompanied by a comprehensive plan to improve all schools and maintain choice. Most importantly, successful schools should not be closed!”
- “Good idea. We need to move forward on this despite the strong emotional reactions this creates. Criteria for decision-making [is critical, as is] how a school community can be maintained despite building changes.”
- “Necessary. Resources are always limited. They should be used to fulfill the schools; core mission. Leadership needs to be able to take heat.”

- “Have to do it. And there’s no way to avoid making some group of parents unhappy about losing their neighborhood school. District and community leaders/electeds need to present a united front in making the case for school closures (and ensuring they are distributed equitably across the district). Political cover is key! [I would need] assurance that the community has been consulted (which you’re doing now – kudos!) and evidence that district/local leaders stick with decisions they make after gathering input. Have the courage to make and carry out a decision!”
- “I totally agree. The Superintendent and School Board need to stand firm and together on this. Realism, not emotion, needs to rule.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “This does not seem to jive well with the idea of reducing class size.”
- “Rather than close neighborhood schools, sublet unused space.”
- “I think it is important to use existing space in a new or newly renovated school but let us not do that at the expense of smaller, successful schools nearby.”
- “Metric seems off. Should be looking at comparable cities not regional, e.g. San Diego.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “Any such re-sizing should be balanced with support for current schools that have outstanding existing programs.”
- “Again a great idea on the surface, but these figures from 1960 need to be adjusted with the class size figures in order to be statistically valid. This would have to go hand in hand with serious improved accountability that has enforceability.”
- “There seems to be potential for this to conflict with the goal of reducing transportation costs. Closing schools means some kids will need to travel further. What is the tradeoff in dollars?”

## **ALIGN TRANSPORTATION SERVICES WITH ALLOCATIONS**

*Description:* Reduce or eliminate the gap between transportation services provided by Seattle Public Schools and transportation funding allocated by the state through either a) providing free transportation to those who meet income eligibility requirements and establishing a fee-based system for all others; b) providing free transportation to each students’ neighborhood school and charging the differential for transportation to other schools (FRL and some SpEd exempted); or c) putting high school students on Metro.

*Reaction:* 85% support; 10% oppose; 5% unsure. Please note that while representative of participant reaction, this is not a scientific sample.

*Verbatim:* A sampling of comments from those in favor included:

- “Transportation must change! It makes me crazy that money is going to buses instead of into the classroom!”
- “Great idea – fairly applied to high & low income families. Special programs might also need to be considered – should parents have to pay for transportation for a specific program of interest? (I’m on the fence on this one.)”
- “Fee-based transportation makes sense, especially if choice isn’t limited.”
- “No strong reaction. It seems fair and I would be willing to see some cuts here as long as low-income families could be accommodated.”
- “Pretty good. We should definitely try to move forward on moving high school students to Metro.”
- “Completely reasonable and necessary to afford other desirable items.”
- “This appears to be a good plan to recoup transportation dollars and maintain some level of choice.”

A sampling of comments from those opposed included:

- “Clearly the problem needs to be addressed, since Seattle’s transportation cost per student is so high compared to other districts. But the costs are a symptom of other problems. Improving all schools consistently will reduce the need to commute to distant schools by making the reference school more attractive.”
- “I like the fact that choice remains under this proposal, but I don’t think it saves enough money to make up for the fact that some people will feel limited by the proposed fees.”
- “Do not discontinue the school choice program that current exists and is supported by transportation.”

A sampling of comments from those unsure included:

- “Seems controversial and will it change the diversity?”
- “In theory – great. In practice, as a south-end parent with low quality school choice – very worried. If all schools were great now when my children attend, I’d be fully supportive of these ideas.”

## **NEXT STEPS**

The input received at this event is being actively reviewed by the Committee and considered in the context of the broad range of input we are receiving through all four city-wide community meetings, focus groups, a large sample telephone survey (n=800), the Committee’s website, the mail, and Neighborhood Meet-Up Day (scheduled for January 14; details to be announced in December).

An initial summary of this meeting was presented to the full committee on Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>. A full summary was shared today, November 7, 2005.

A great thanks to everyone who dedicated his or her time, energy and passion to this effort. Please attend the Committee's next city-wide public meeting:

Tuesday, January 10, 2006  
6:00 – 8:00pm  
John Stanford Center Auditorium

**This meeting will provide community members an opportunity to offer feedback on the full set of recommendations the Committee is preparing to deliver to the Superintendent on February 10, 2006.**

THANK YOU!