

McCleary School District Strategic Plan

Report on Listening Sessions And Survey

April-May 2022

REPORT ON LISTENING SESSIONS AND SURVEY

MCCLEARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Introduction

During the past two years, all school districts have faced unprecedented challenges, and this is certainly true of McCleary. It seems reasonable and prudent for the District to take some time to carefully review its priorities and major functions. This can best be accomplished if all stakeholders collaborate in an atmosphere of trust and transparency. To that purpose, in April 2022, the McCleary School District Board of Directors authorized a series of listening sessions involving staff, parents, and the community. The purpose of the listening sessions was to gather information prior to the development of a strategic plan.

The information gathered was designed to support the district in identifying the educational priorities of the community, the District's strengths, and areas for growth in order to plan for the future. The Board engaged Dr. Paula Akerlund to facilitate the listening sessions.

Between April 21st and May 5th, Dr. Akerlund facilitated ten listening sessions. The listening sessions included four sessions with parents and community members, two sessions in person and two sessions using zoom. In person sessions were conducted for certificated staff in preschool through second grade, third through fifth grade, sixth through eighth grade, district office staff, classified staff, and the principal. The District also provided an opportunity for input through an online survey, which was available for parents, community members, and staff. A total of forty-one individuals participated in the listening sessions and survey: 26 parents/community members, 13 certificated staff members, 2 district office staff members, 1 classified staff member, and 1 administrator. In total, the District collected 515 responses from the sessions and the online survey.

Participants in the listening sessions and survey were asked to respond to the following four questions:

1. What is McCleary School District doing well? What are we proud of?
2. What are some areas in which McCleary School District can continue to grow?
3. What is your vision for the educational opportunities that the school district will be offering in five years?
4. If you could make one recommendation for growth in the school district, what would it be?

The responses from all participants in the listening sessions and survey were listed, issues were identified, put into categories, and totaled.

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Board of Directors and Superintendent deserve credit for their efforts to improve the operation of the District by initiating a strategic planning process.
2. Every person who participated was cordial, collaborative, and responded in a detailed fashion to the listening session questions. Their participation is greatly appreciated.
3. All of the participants used similar language to describe the mission of the school district. Without exception, board members, teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, and community members expressed a commitment to providing McCleary's students with the best possible educational experience.

Listening Sessions and Survey Summary

Question 1: What is McCleary School District doing well? What are we proud of?

The top three positive features of the District identified for question number one are as follows:

Question 1	Number of Responses
Caring and committed teachers and support staff	18
Small size, connection to kids and families	15
Principal	13

Question number one generated a wide variety of responses but the most frequently mentioned response was that McCleary School District teachers and support staff care deeply about and are committed to their students.

Examples of responses:

Caring and committed teachers and support staff

Love the teachers-fantastic
Caring staff, pay attention to kids' needs
Teachers knowing students/Best support them
People here for kids 100%

Small size, connection to kids and families

Love the smallness of it, people know my kids
Everyone knows everyone here, have a history with the families
Family connection is a fantastic support for kids
Teachers knowing students, going extra mile
Teachers helping kids feel safe

Principal

Principal is great
Principal, humor, approachable, follows through
Supportive
Want him to stay
Board priority to retain principal

Question 2: What are some areas in which McCleary School District can continue to grow?

The top three issues identified in question number two are as follows:

Question 2	Number of Responses
Staffing	34
District climate	32
Communication	32

Responses to question number two focused on the difficulties with staffing positions at all levels in the District and issues with the climate and communication.

Examples of Responses:

Staffing

- Need to have consistency in staffing and positions
- Need to hire and keep people
- People doing multiple jobs
- Clarification of job duties
- Have lost EAs, really a problem when EAs have to cover classes

District climate

- Need more attention to positive
- Hold people accountable
- Know a few teachers-don't know that teachers are happy
- Unified staff/staff morale
- Not a unified staff, not working together

Communication

- Consistency in communication
- Educate families and staff about what is happening at the school
- Don't share information very well
- Communication is horrible

Question 3: What is your vision for the educational opportunities that the school district will be offering in five years?

The three most frequently identified educational opportunities that should be offered in the District in five years are as follows:

Question 3	Number of Responses
Opportunities for enrichment (music, art, library)	29
Community engagement/family support	20
Middle school program development	12

Examples of responses:

Opportunities for enrichment (music, art, library)

- Music
- STEAM important
- All academic-need opportunities for kids outside of academics
- Enrichment needed
- Music, art, library, technology
- Sports
- After school program (enrichment)
- CTE at middle school
- Elective choice/multiple choices
- Pre-K to Grade 8 music and arts

Community engagement/family support

- District understands the community
- District and community partners
- Need broad input from the community
- Appreciate school board soliciting information
- Before and after school care, Y care
- Early childhood-preschool
- Preschool with family-centered approach

Middle school program development

- Middle school-have separate capacity, more of a middle school experience, transition from elementary to high school
- Need a separate school
- Would like to see a separate middle school program
- Differentiate elementary and middle school
- 5 year plan needs good focus on what we do for middle school
- Middle school electives

Question 4: If you could make one recommendation for growth in the school district, what would it be?

When participants were asked to provide one recommendation for growth in the school district, the most frequent responses were as follows:

Question 4	Number of Responses
Community engagement/Communication	17
Student achievement and success	6
Culture and climate	5

Examples of responses:

Community engagement/Communication

More transparency, let people know what is going on

Community needs to engage with the school

Let everyone know about the levy

Communication/Consistent

Community engagement

Social media, Website

Image (culture, structure, transparency, community involvement, quality teachers, educational standards)

Communication-accessible, in multiple formats, timely

Student achievement and success

Curriculum, STEAM arts involved

Early childhood programs

Bring music and arts back in but middle school issues are a priority

Need to separate middle school to set up for transition to high school

Better educational opportunities (improved test scores, extracurricular activities, including families in class activities, more classes and diverse opportunities, hands-on experiences)

Social-emotional needs of students met-counseling

Extracurricular, community service, whole student

Technology improvement (security, limit, educational training, awareness)

Culture and climate

Culture and climate

Staff training

Everybody needs to be on the same page

Leadership

Sufficient resources for people to do their jobs

Rebuild confidence and trust

Fully staffed

Create an environment in the District so that people will want to stay

In addition to the information provided above, it is important to note that the following areas were also frequently mentioned as a concern by listening session and survey participants:

1. School district operations: playground safety, including supervision and condition of the equipment, food services, grounds and facilities maintenance, and transportation
2. Implementation and resources for programs such as highly capable, special education, English Language Learners, early childhood
3. Electives such as music, library, and technology
4. Before and after school programs

Recommendations for Strategic Planning

During the next few months, the Board and superintendent will use the information gathered through the listening sessions and online survey to implement a strategic planning process. The process typically involves a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of a five-year plan that includes the District's mission statement, vision statement, and objectives. The objectives are measurable and include the person(s) responsible, the timeline, and any funding that may be required.

Based on the results of the listening sessions and online survey it is recommended that the District consider developing strategic planning goals and objectives in the following areas:

Goal 1: Student Success

During the past two years, the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in school closures and remote learning, which have had a significant effect on student learning state-wide. It is difficult to fully assess the effects on McCleary's students, but it is likely that the pandemic has resulted in both academic and non-academic challenges.

Many participants in the listening sessions voiced their concerns for the academic and overall well-being of their students. All participants noted that the success and welfare of students is their highest priority.

Analysis of student assessment results show that there is a high need for organized and integrated implementation of the District's many programs and initiatives to support student learning and well-being.

The following programs and initiatives, some of which the District has in place, support student learning and emotional well-being and should be considered for inclusion in the strategic plan under a goal for student success:

- Re-establish the curriculum adoption cycle and use of a curriculum adoption committee. Instructional materials that are many years out-of-date need to be discarded and replaced with appropriate learning materials as soon as possible
- Implement a Multi-Tiered Student Support Team (MTSS), which involves a tiered intervention model
- Consistent implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Strengthen the Professional Learning Communities to improve instructional effectiveness, student learning, and increase understanding of the importance of student data collection in learning improvement decision-making
- Additional instructional time before and/or after school
- Title 1, LAP, ELL programs and Summer Learning Recovery
- Social-emotional learning and mental health supports
- Instructional coaching for literacy and math, K-8

- Common Assessments
- Mastery Learning/Project-Based Learning
- Early Learning Support (Pre-K - 4 literacy)
- Strengthen math interventions
- Extend and strengthen STEAM
- Expand and enhance preschool programming
- Add electives/enrichment opportunities, P-8, that may include music, art, library, technology
- Develop before and after school programs
- Create equitable learning environments for the District's most vulnerable students. This will benefit all students.

The need for regularly scheduled professional development for teachers, paraeducators, and administrators was noted. Professional development for food services, transportation, and other personnel was also identified as a need. It is critical to increase the capacity of teachers, administrators, paraeducators, and other support staff (ESA certified) to effectively improve student achievement. The District should develop and implement a comprehensive professional learning plan based on the student assessment data gathered and input from teachers, support staff, paraeducators, and administrators.

Participants in all listening groups and survey respondents strongly advocated for students to have access to electives or enrichment that included music (general music, band, choir), art, library, and technology. There was also interest expressed in strengthening and enhancing STEAM.

The District should consider establishing a task force to study middle school programming. The task force would serve in an advisory capacity to the Board and would identify and recommend opportunities for improvement in the middle school program. The task force should include teachers, administrators, parents/community members, and support staff. The task force should listen to the needs of students, their families, teachers, staff, and administrators. The task force should examine all aspects of middle school education, including:

- a. staffing
- b. assessment, instruction, and curriculum
- c. electives and enrichment
- d. daily schedule
- e. facilities
- f. student and family support

Goal 2: Staff Effectiveness

As with many school districts, McCleary is hard pressed to find adequate staffing for many positions. This is true for administrative and teaching positions, as well as positions such as bus driver, paraeducator, and substitutes.

Practices to consider for inclusion in the strategic plan include:

- Develop strategies to streamline the recruitment of new staff.
- Develop a human resources recruitment and retention plan to focus on positions that are difficult to fill. It may also include strategies to “grow your own” teachers and other staff.
- Identify and implement strategies that have been proven to be effective in retaining staff.
- As mentioned under the Student Success Goal, develop a Professional Development Plan that supports all staff in acquiring advanced skills.
- Develop an “onboarding” plan to provide all new employees with the information, resources, mentoring, and support needed to be successful in the job.
- Provide new employees with a mentor who can support them in learning about District policies, procedures, processes, and their role.
- Ensure that staff members have adequate and necessary resources to successfully fulfill their job duties.
- Identify opportunities to recognize and celebrate employees’ contributions and achievements.
- Ensure that administrators who are responsible for staff evaluations have adequate training, are familiar with the evaluation requirements in the union contracts, and have an understanding of the Washington State Code of Professional Conduct for Education Practitioners.

Goal 3: Culture and Climate

Culture and climate are significant issues for McCleary School District. It is critical to restore confidence, trust, and collaboration throughout the District and the community. The District leadership should be visible, accessible, and make systematic efforts to increase communication between the District office, administrators, and staff.

Suggestions to be considered for inclusion in the strategic plan:

- The superintendent and Board should establish a Citizen’s Advisory Committee to gather input from the community, share information on important school-related topics, and to build collaboration and support for schools.
- Another strategy for building trust and relationships is to hold community forums so that stakeholders can discuss concerns and be informed about what is going on in the District.
- Develop opportunities for meaningful parent involvement-volunteering, committees, events, educational opportunities, and fun activities for students and families.
- Ensure a safe, orderly, positive, culturally responsive learning environment.
- Provide support for social-emotional growth for all members of the educational community.
- The superintendent should schedule regular meetings with the leadership of the McCleary Education Association and the Public School Employees. These

meetings can be instrumental in increasing trust, building collaboration, and establishing shared priorities. It also provides an opportunity to discuss and resolve issues before they escalate and create unnecessary conflict.

- The superintendent should establish an administrative leadership team that meets on a regular basis to support and facilitate the vision, mission, and goals of the school district. This team should operate within a structure that encourages trusting relationships, shared expertise, an open exchange of ideas, and collaborative decision-making.
- It is important that administrators and staff members establish a culture of inclusion and support. This is especially critical when new employees join the District. A welcoming, structured orientation/onboarding process should be developed for newcomers to the District, regardless of their role in the organization.
- The superintendent should meet regularly with the lead staff in Facilities, Grounds, and Maintenance, Technology, Food Services, and Transportation to share information and receive updates regarding needs and concerns in those areas of District operations.

Goal 4: Communication and Community Engagement

Many participants in the listening sessions, regardless of their positions in the district, emphasized the need for clarity and direction regarding communication and changes to programs and operations. They also expressed a significant need for improvement in relationships and a high need to increase trust and communication within the District.

Suggestions for strategies to include in the strategic plan:

- The District should develop efficient and effective methods for sharing information throughout the schools and community. Information should be widely shared in a timely manner. Provide access to information in multiple languages. The District should consider development of a comprehensive communication plan to support these efforts. Capital Region ESD 113's Communications Department is an excellent resource for creating such a plan.
- Use the website, Facebook, and other forms of social media to provide positive news and information about what is happening in the District.
- Encourage a culture of trust by transparently sharing District information, decision-making and processes in a timely manner.
- Administrators and staff should be involved in the decision-making process when their positions or workloads may be affected, or when instituting procedural changes.
- Not all decisions warrant or require the participation of small or large groups of staff, students, or citizens. It is important, however, to let stakeholders know which types of decisions will be made collaboratively, and to actively seek the participation and input of appropriate groups and individuals. It is also important to let individuals and/or groups know, in advance, whether they are being asked

to actually make a decision or to provide input and advice to the party or parties who will make the decision.

- District leadership should be as transparent as possible in decision-making and provide the rationale for decisions on matters important to staff and community.
- Develop an effective means by which to provide staff, parents, and community members opportunities to provide input and feedback on District decision-making.
- Form a committee to review examples of strong communication structures in other school districts and communities. Survey parents regarding the favored means of communication. Use the information to develop and enhance existing McCleary School District in-district communication and communication with the community.
- Provide updates on the strategic plan to the staff and community on a regular basis.

Goal 5: Effective Operations

Numerous participants in both the listening sessions and the online survey mentioned issues related to District operations such as maintenance, grounds, food services, and transportation. It was acknowledged that operations have an impact on student learning, safety, and the image, culture, and climate of the District. Participants in the listening sessions and survey stated the need for the following:

- clean, safe, and welcoming facilities
- consistent transportation
- more nutritious meals
- increased maintenance of facilities and playground equipment
- more frequent and consistent care of the school grounds and track

Suggestions for possible inclusion in the strategic plan include:

The District should consider establishing a committee to develop a plan to strengthen operations involving facilities, maintenance, grounds, custodial, food services, and transportation. The committee should identify the issues in each area of operations and develop an action plan for improvement. This plan should incorporate both short and long-term goals and measurable objectives. It should also include considerations of staffing levels, regular training for employees working in operations, costs involved in implementing the plan, and clarifying the processes and procedures by which each area of operations functions. The plan should include progress monitoring and strategies for communicating with District administrators, staff, and other stakeholders.

Participants also mentioned concerns about the condition of playground equipment. It is strongly recommended that playground equipment be inspected on a regular basis. Reports of unsafe playground equipment should be promptly investigated and addressed.

Conclusion

Like many small, rural school districts, McCleary is the heart of the community. A number of staff members were born and raised in the District. There are generations of residents who attended McCleary schools and remained in or returned to the area to raise and educate their own children. Many residents are employed by the school district as teachers, assistants, and support staff members. All are committed to the success of their children and demonstrate great pride in their school. It has been a privilege to visit and meet with many dedicated, supportive employees and residents