District 200 Community Members,

On behalf of the District 200 Board of Education, I am pleased to present this Engage 200 report to the community. This report represents the culmination of a very significant amount of work by a dedicated citizens’ committee – co-chaired by active community members Liz Corry and Scott Brown – and hundreds of District 200 residents like you who took the time and opportunity to attend meetings and participate in thoughtful discussions centering around what is expected of our school system and strategies that should be used to achieve those goals. We appreciate the effort and time commitment from everyone who participated. Thank you!

Two of the most important roles of a school board are to connect with the community and clarify the community’s vision for their schools. The Engage 200 process provided an invaluable opportunity for two-way communication with all stakeholders in our District. Through the conversations, we confirmed that our residents value and expect solid student achievement in our schools. As a Board, we are committed to doing all we can to see that our District continues to live up to your expectations.

The Board of Education will be discussing and acting on the recommendations in this report as we work with our new superintendent, Dr. Jeff Schuler, to set goals for this year and future years. We also understand that our work in connecting with the District 200 community did not end with the Engage 200 initiative. We will continue to develop strategies needed to keep us moving forward, and we will need guidance as we implement the recommendations in the report. We learned a great deal from the Engage 200 process itself, and we look forward to inviting you to more conversations soon.

Thank you for your interest in District 200 and especially for your support of more than 13,000 students who count on us to prepare them for a very bright future.

Sincerely yours,

Barbara Intihar
President, Board of Education

“Why Engage 200?”

The Board of Education develops annual goals to ensure that we continue to be an exemplary, student-focused school district that is highly regarded for the competence and character of our people, programs and learning environment.

Board Goal 4 states that “We will stay connected with the community to determine its priorities and to foster partnerships.” Engage 200 was a call to action as one avenue for achieving this Board goal.

Further, Engage 200 was intended to:

- Gather community perceptions and priorities;
- Communicate successes and challenges;
- Determine long-term goals in key areas;
- Ascertain steps and resources to achieve these goals; and
- Establish an ongoing communications process.

“All six community engagement sessions were very productive. Our residents were able to have meaningful dialogue with their neighbors regarding District issues, challenges and opportunities.”

Jim Vroman
Board Vice President and Engage 200 Committee
ENGLISH 200 – THE PROCESS

District 200 Involves Entire Community in Planning Effort

Through a series of community workshops, community members had an opportunity to learn about all aspects of the District including areas such as student achievement, curriculum, technology, facilities, finances, and communications. More importantly, District residents were able to provide input and feedback regarding the opportunities and challenges facing the District in these areas. Information gathered from the workshops served as the basis for a summary report that was presented to the Board of Education in July. All residents were invited and encouraged to help chart the future direction of the District.

The engagement effort was led by a Facilitating Team of citizens, students and staff. Co-Chaired by community members Liz Corry and Scott Brown, the team coordinated, hosted and conducted the entire community engagement program. The team assisted staff and other speakers in preparing presentations and work activities, reviewing community responses to work activities, and summarizing statements of recommendation.

Nearly 700 community members attended at least one session. Of those that attended at least one session:

- 57% are parents of current students
- 30% are parents of a future or former student
- 25% are staff members
- 17% are community members

Session topics:
- Session 1: State of the District
- Session 2: Student Achievement
- Session 3: Programs & Services
- Session 4: Facilities
- Session 5: Finance
- Session 6: Summary

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Identified by the Facilitating Team, a few items of an overriding nature came to light during this process that the team believed were of particular importance.

FINANCE: The current level of revenues will not support the implementation of many of the recommendations in this report. According to projections, the District will most likely be in deficit spending as early as next year (2015-16) unless significant cuts are made to programs and services. Additional reduction in programs and services is not consistent with what is reflected in our Statements of Recommendation and the future desired by Engage 200 participants.

STUDENT SUPPORT: In practically every community engagement session, participants repeated that District leadership must improve the level of support to meet the needs of our diverse student population (those struggling, those excelling, and all those in-between). District leadership should also ensure that appropriate co-curricular opportunities are present for all students.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT: Corresponding with the ‘Student Support’ item, staff must be provided the appropriate level of training to deliver instruction in the optimum level possible for the diverse student population in District 200. This item is critical for sustaining and ideally enhancing the level of student achievement enjoyed in our District.

ENGAGE 200 FACILITATING TEAM

Liz Corry
Co-Chair (Wheaton)
Scott Brown
Co-Chair (Wheaton)
Chris Crabtree
(Winthstield)
Judith Zapf
(Carol Stream)
Scott MacKay
(Wheaton)
Harold Lons
(Winthstield)
Eleanor McNear
(Wheaton)
Bob Hupp
(Warrenville)
Steve Johnson
(Wheaton)
Charlie McKenna
(Wheaton)
Jeff Brassel
(Wheaton)
Jenny Sterba
(Wheaton)
Jon Stehlik
Student, Wheaton Warrenville South High School
Leah Schwartz
Student, Wheaton North High School
Tom Grace
Executive Board, Wheaton Warrenville Education Association (WWEA)
Penny Coyle
Co-President of the Classified Education Association (CEA)
Dr. Brian Harris
Former Superintendent
Faith Dahlquist
Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services
Bill Farley
Assistant Superintendent for Business Operations
Erica Loiacono
Director of Public Relations
Dr. Brian Turyna
Principal of Wiesbrook Elementary
Jim Vroman
Vice President of the Board of Education
Brad Paulsen
Secretary of the Board of Education
FACILITIES: The Board of Education needs to authorize a comprehensive study of District facilities and create a Facilities Master Plan with an appropriate timeline to address current facility inadequacies and ensure facilities meet both the 21st century curricular and co-curricular needs of the future.

COMMUNICATION: The Engage 200 process has provided a good model for two-way communication and dialogue in District 200. There must be a continuation in building trust and confidence among District 200 constituents by enhancing two-way communication efforts. District 200 residents should believe they understand and appreciate the success occurring in the District as well as the challenges faced to sustain that level and move our District to an even higher level.

★ KEY POINTS OF CELEBRATION ★

- Academic achievement is high, even with changing demographics that include multiple languages, high mobility among students, varying income levels and limited District financial resources.
- District 200 has a high-quality teaching staff supported by the community.
- District 200 embraces diversity.
- A history of positive community involvement exists in District 200 and the community views itself as caring and collaborative.
- There is recognition of the high performance of students who attend District 200 schools for their entire education from Early Childhood through Grade 12.

★ OBSTACLES TO BE ADDRESSED ★

- It is important to note and understand that funding for the following recommendations may not currently be available.
- The level and allocation of District revenues must be evaluated to provide the funding necessary to improve student performance and sustain the current level of programs and services to meet the needs of all students.
- While participants recognized that diversity is a unique and positive aspect of the District, it requires an extra measure of investment of time, energy and resources in the area of support for interventions and staff development and training.
- As the District strives to ensure it is meeting the needs of all students, a district-wide review and assessment of the appropriateness of technology, curricular and co-curricular space is needed.
The following Statements of Recommendation express the general agreement of Engage 200 participants to be considered when conducting long-range planning for District 200. The recommendations below are not listed in priority order.

**Student Achievement**

Student achievement was listed as the most important of all topics for the community. It is important to meet the needs of all students – those struggling, those excelling, and all those in-between. The community questions whether an appropriate level of resources and staff training are being applied to move all students to their full potential and remain competitive among our benchmark districts. It is important that funding and efforts be allocated to maintain and continuously improve student achievement. The Board should ensure that the tools and resources are in place to meet the individual needs of all students to achieve growth and success.

1.1 **Provide additional training and professional opportunities** for staff in the area of differentiated instruction to more effectively meet the needs of a diverse student population (academics, backgrounds, interests, etc.).

1.2 **Provide additional support to schools**, such as intervention teachers, to more effectively respond to the individual needs of students, including those with language challenges.

1.3 **Continue to explore and implement best practices in providing instruction and interventions** for all students.

1.4 **Use parent liaisons to more effectively involve parents** of non-English speaking students.

1.5 Examine the appropriateness of **providing 1:1 technology devices**.
Programs & Services

District 200 provides a variety of programs and services for its students. Engage 200 examined three areas: Special Education, English Language Learners (ELL) and Co-Curricular Programs. Several common themes emerged from the discussion about these program areas – the need for appropriate space (facilities), appropriate funding, more parent involvement, more student involvement, equity/parity among schools, and partnerships/volunteers. It is not implied that volunteers can replace professional staff.

2.1 Provide the quantity and quality of staff, staff support (development/training) and resources to ensure these programs are operating at an effective level.

2.2 Add research-based programs and materials for students with special education needs. Provide general education teachers, as well as specialists, additional training and development in order to collaboratively meet the needs of special populations.

2.3 Determine and implement additional strategies to utilize volunteers and partnerships to enhance these programs where appropriate.

Facilities

Participants generally agreed there was a need to continuously update technology, as well as modernize curricular and co-curricular learning environments. All early childhood learning environments, including Jefferson Early Childhood Center, were acknowledged as areas in need of improvement.

3.1 Identify and prioritize district-wide facility and technology needs for the delivery of instruction and co-curricular programming based on 21st century best practices and develop a Facilities Master Plan to address them.

3.2 Ensure that the Facilities Master Plan includes a solution to address early childhood education facility needs and implement a plan to address these needs in the District. The solution should consider:

- the specific inadequacies of the current facilities in terms of impairing effective care and instruction of students of this age; and
- samples of how benchmark districts have responded and provided leadership in optimizing the learning environment for early childhood education.

3.3 Sustain the District’s technology infrastructure at an appropriate level to support future needs of students and staff and the devices they will employ.
**Finances**

Levels and allocation of funding were mentioned frequently as obstacles to be addressed by the District. The community is aware that continued reductions in State and Federal funding are anticipated, but also reinforced the need to maintain quality staff and programs. As a result, the status quo is not an option. The Board will be required to make difficult decisions, such as staff reductions, in the coming years. Specific areas for the Board to address are included below.

*When providing regular financial updates to the community:*

4.1 Provide **comparative data from benchmark school districts.**
4.2 Include **current and projected status of the pension systems** and the potential impact to the financial well-being of the District.
4.3 Describe **efficiencies gained** by implementing energy conservation measures, outsourcing of particular District functions, utilizing online resources, etc.

*When considering potential reductions, consider the following:*

4.4 Continue to foster a balance of quality staff (experienced and new) while still optimizing instructional excellence and fiscal management.
4.5 Continue to review and negotiate all contracts to ensure maximum quality at minimal cost.
4.6 Continue to explore opportunities to collaborate with other agencies to reduce or restrict spending – business partnerships, park districts, the buying power of multiple districts purchasing, etc.
4.7 Continue to review budgetary efficiencies to ensure the leanest operation possible.

*When considering future streams of revenue, consider the following:*

4.8 Encourage local city governments to increase commercial development within District boundaries.
4.9 Continue to seek additional meaningful and sustainable private funding sources – businesses in the community, competitive grants, corporate sponsorships/partnerships, estate planning, private money from citizens/groups and alumni, and naming rights to facilities/stadiums.
4.10 Consider an increase of fees – student activity fees, registration fees, fees for extra-curricular activities and events.
4.11 Consider a referendum (tax increase) for operations.

**Communications & Community Engagement**

Participants expressed the need for establishing a long-term meaningful and ongoing communication process with the residents of the District. There should also be separate communications that increase public awareness and understanding of early childhood education. Participants also recognize the importance of effective communications and transparency. It is important to meaningfully engage the broader community in key decisions that impact the future of the District.

5.1 **Develop a plan for communicating** Engage 200 recommendations to the District community.
5.2 **Host community-wide sessions** like those modeled in the Engage 200 program to promote a two-way communication process regarding key decisions that impact the future of the District.
5.3 **Review areas of community “surprise”** identified through the Engage 200 process, and tailor specific communications to promote understanding.
5.4 **Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan** to increase public awareness of the need for and merits of an effective early childhood education program. The communication plan should include educational research that supports the importance of early childhood education and its impact on student achievement.
District 200 Community Members,

I hope you found the recommendations contained in the Engage 200 report to be thought-provoking and responsive to the challenges our school district is confronting. The recommendations come from the participation of many committed community members and months of work on the part of our facilitating team. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important process and thank you for taking the time to read and learn about our school district.

I, along with my fellow Board Member, Brad Paulsen, had the privilege of serving on the Engage 200 Facilitating Team. The Team worked hard to make sure the recommendations contained in this report were consistent with the consensus reached at our community engagement sessions regarding the actions that should be taken to address the challenges we face.

We remain committed to our Board Goals of ensuring communication and engagement between our Board, our District and the communities we serve. In the coming months, you can expect to hear from us often about our future plans to implement the recommendations contained in this report. Stay tuned...

Sincerely,

Jim Vroman
Vice President, Board of Education
Engage 200 Facilitating Team

★ STAY CONNECTED WITH US ★

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