



Comments from the Group: Meeting 1 on Excellence and Equity December 1, 2009, Newark High School

First Comments:

- Early childhood education should start at birth. The District should consider Early Head Start.
- It is equally important to do parent education and parent training starting at birth
- We need early education centers—starting before third grade
- We should teach a second language early on
- We need a challenging curriculum at all levels
- We should set high expectations, clearly spelled out, and with consequences
- We should lift students up instead of “dumbing down”
- Instead of comparing our students to state and national data, we should be comparing them to students in the rest of the world
- We need to improve the school building environment—the physical plant

Early Student Comments:

- We need more extracurricular activities
- We want cleaner hallways, more respect for the school building, newer desks, better food—create a school environment that you can respect and that is a place to learn
- Teachers are too laid back—they need to crack down on the rules more. Teachers that do that have higher pass rates, and kids learn more
- Smaller class sizes—how can one teacher take care of that many students and be expected to keep kids under control?
- We should utilize our buildings better—utilize the unused court yard, have more of a sense of freedom. Cafeteria is too crowded.

Continuing Discussion:

- For special education students, we could raise academic levels by focusing on learning styles of students.
- Special education students are talented in a variety of ways—parents are looking for environments where they can excel (example: Cab Calloway School of the Arts).



- It should be mandatory that every student have a Student Success Plan that tracks their education success from 8th grade on.
- Parents may be choosing other schools because of a lack of rigor and opportunities that exist at other schools.
- It is completely unacceptable that a student could leave high school without doing any laboratory science.
- Why aren't we preparing students better for their SAT prep? This should be part of the coursework.
- We need to focus on the higher education piece and what kids need to succeed in college.
- We should hold all Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings in September, and then again in January so we are looking at every child every 5 months.
- Not every teacher reads a students' IEP—more engagement by the teachers is needed.
- Parent engagement should start at the early childhood level. Parent meetings should be scheduled when parents are not working.
- Every child should have a book to take home—especially children with IEPs.
- The district could pool resources by creating early childhood education programs—centers, wings of buildings—and could combine students from different programs (DAP, special ed, regular ed).
- We need equity in the high schools—offer the same programs in all three high schools. If Honors courses are at one school, they should be at all three.
- Teachers are not given the tools to have control over the classroom; teachers have no recourse.
- Disruptive students or students who are behind take time away from other students, and those other students suffer. They are bored, and it is not a good learning experience.
- Block scheduling is a downfall. Teachers can't use it properly—90 minutes is not used for sustained teaching.
- Without block scheduling we would have time for more art, more gym, more elective courses. Teachers need to learn to use this time more efficiently.
- When you read the district newsletter, Christiana High School soars in extracurricular activities. Whatever they are doing, we should bring their strategies to other schools.



- Create magnet schools—music and art? Science and technology? Create high schools as learning centers to keep students from going to other schools.
- Block scheduling—is it working? Rotating schedules seem to be a good idea. Need to examine the effectiveness.
- Need to hold guidance counselors to quality standards for all students twice a year.
- Newark Charter School “phases” (grouping by ability level) allowed students to achieve at the right level. Highly motivated students could work at higher levels, and students who weren’t as motivated could choose not to. Newark High School needs something between Honors and Cambridge.
- Block scheduling is good—if classes are too short, time is not used as effectively. Students need time to engage in the conversation or topic.
- Should identify what tools teachers need to have control over the classroom and stress decorum.
- The amount we are spending per student shows that we are not starved, but are we spending wisely? We should find out what high-achieving schools are doing.
- Don’t use free and reduced lunch (percentages) as an excuse.
- Keep on top of what is happening in the marketplace. For example, the animal science program at NHS is excellent, but the equine program has been cut. Have we done market research on equine-related jobs in the region? Who is making decisions about these programs, and do they know what they are doing?
- Sarah Pyle Academy is doing a great job—how do we prevent more 9th and 10th graders from dropping out?
- What about vocational skills for special education students? Not every student will be college-bound. How well will we be preparing them?
- Our current economic situation provides a narrow window when students may be returning from private school to public school. We need to do something different, and address those students and parents during this time.
- There is a legacy from desegregation that we are still dealing with.
- We should hold focus groups with students—both “good” and “bad”—to get their ideas.
- Private schools make it a requirement to participate in some extracurricular activity. This should start at the elementary level.



- We need to get competitive—with our curriculum, our vocational opportunities, our outstanding academics, and our acceptance rate at the University of Delaware. It is a shame that the district in walking distance of UD might not be providing that opportunity.
- We need to accentuate the positive—examples: the program at Douglass School is the best in the state; our transportation department does a fantastic job.
- Teachers are our most important element—we need to find the best and keep them, and for those who are not successful, we should provide retraining or new placements where they will be more successful.
- Our teachers are really trying hard, but may not always be prepared. We need ongoing, systematic professional development for all teachers.
- We should survey students about what makes a good teacher and what doesn't.
- Some teachers are not engaging the entire class. Too many students are not engaged and are not being removed from classes where they are disruptive. This affects students' learning.