

2025 Forum February 2, 2016

As part of the Gateway 2025 Future Planning Process, community members, staff, and students were invited to a forum at the main complex. The forum was advertised on the district's webpage, in press releases, in the "Superintendent's Corner", in the district's electronic newsletter "Breaking News", and through an all-call. Through the Gateway Educational Foundation's generous donation, the district was able to provide dinner to all participants and childcare for families at the event.

After a brief overview of the process, participants broke into groups by schools (which they chose during the registration process) to answer a common set of questions. Parent facilitators had been chosen to keep the process on track. In addition, administrators were assigned as recorders to capture the ideas that participants generated. After approximately 40 minutes, the initial groups reported out their top three items of interest. After this reporting session, participants were then reorganized into groups by specific topic areas. Again, after approximately 40 minutes, the groups reported out their top three items of interest.

After the event concluded, all of the recorded data was collected and collated into a spreadsheet. This data was then sorted by topic and is displayed in this report. While there is still much work to be done to turn the information from both the 2025 survey and this forum into specific recommendations and goals, there is much that can be learned by reviewing the results of both of these processes.

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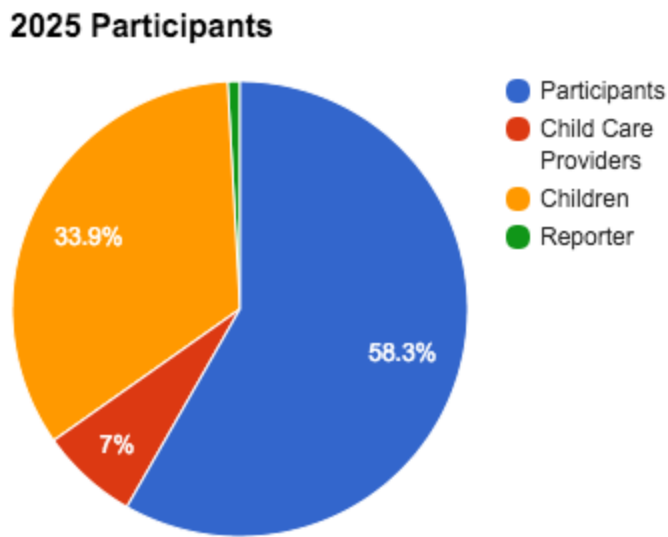
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People in attendance:

- | | |
|------------------------|----|
| ● Participants | 52 |
| ● Child Care Providers | 8 |
| ● Facilitators | 6 |
| ● Recorders/Admin | 9 |
| ● Children | 39 |
| ● Reporter | 1 |

Chart 1: Participants



Questions and Discussion Topics

First Group (by schools) questions:

1. What's really good about what's happening in this school (district) right now and what makes us stand out as "Above Average"?

- a. Do respondents know what "21st century skills" (often defined as communication, collaboration, problem solving, creativity) and the "whole child" (often defined as the non-essential, non-core subjects and activities, i.e., the arts - fine and performing, student clubs, athletics, health, P.E., etc.) entail and what we sacrifice as a result of focussing on these?
- b. Are 21st Century Skills and adhering to the 'whole child' philosophy appropriate and how are we providing these items now?

2. What could we add to this list that would make it even better?

- a. In what areas is it most important to expand our curriculum?
 - i. As a small district, we have a hard time competing with larger districts in terms of offerings. The more we cut the budget, the less likely we are to compete with other districts. Are there ways to change this dynamic? What do we wish to see moving forward? What are our options?
- b. Why do we have student apathy (lack of effort, work, desire to learn, low engagement)?
 - i. If we see this as widespread, what should we do with curriculum, course offerings, skills and personal

- motivation/gumption, athletics, student activities, etc.?
- ii. If this isn't wide spread, how do we improve personalization of education and improve engagement?
3. **What does this school (district) do to encourage parents and volunteers to support children's education?**
 4. **What could this school (district) do to make this even better?**
 5. **What are the positives about this school's (district's) infrastructure? (e.g. technology, facilities, staffing, etc.)**
 6. **How could that change over the next ten years to improve education and student engagement?**
 - a. A vision for Gateway 2025 hopefully has a strong emphasis on technology used in manufacturing. The success of our economy and Gateway's graduates futures will depend greatly on how they are able to assimilate into a more technical oriented work force. Our students need to be familiar with the culture, skills, and the ability to adapt to new markets and processes.
 - i. The Pioneer Valley will be looking to court new industries and employers into the area. The government and state are interested in finding ways to make our workforce more competitive with the acquisition of 21st century skills. Many government programs are offering grants and assistance to educate the future workforce to fill the void in the current aging workers. It would be our hope that Gateway's long range planning process includes the programs to help students meet these demands.
 - ii. We have a facility that would allow the introduction of new manufacturing cells. Existing programs (Welding Program and the newer Wood Technology Programs) are a good baseline for expansions into new areas of study. The manufacturing / technology cells would introduce student to machine programming, 3D modeling utilizing a 3D printing technology, units on product and process technologies, programmable controls, drones, and computer aided design to name a few. The goal would be to better prepare students for 21st century career opportunities and assist them in becoming highly skilled desired candidates for the workforce and technical training institutions.

Second Group Questions/Topics (grouped by question/topic)

1. **How do you see the District & Towns working together to provide an educational infrastructure currently and how could this be enhanced in the next ten years (Internet accessibility - particularly Broadband in the communities which could change the face of education; opportunities for work study/community service; civic participation/knowledge; others)?**
 - a. How do we further discuss educational quality related to educational offerings/quality to address the successes of our students both at Gateway and as graduates?
 - b. How does the district move forward with expanding student options while

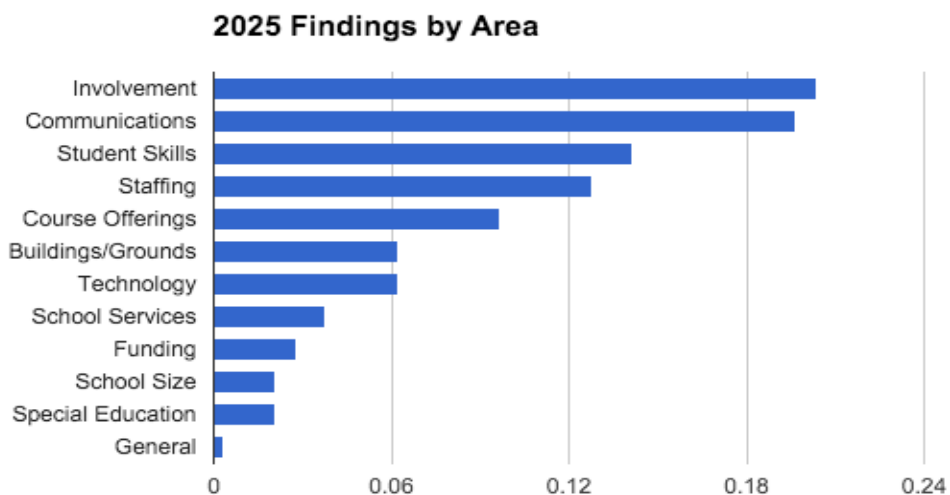
facing a decline in student enrollment and towns wishing to decrease the amount of town resources spent on education; i.e., how to we ensure educational equity and the distribution of resources between school systems and locations in Massachusetts?

- 2. How is the district supporting students in developing 21st Century Skills of communication/collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving and how could this be strengthened in the future?**
 - a. How are the schools including “Social Skills and Work Ethic; Emotional Health” in our activities?
 - b. What should we do to improve in these areas?
 - c. Is technology is essential to student success in society?
- 3. Where do you currently get most of your information about the district, and how should that change over the next ten years?**
- 4. How can the district/schools encourage parents and community members to support school and student activities? (such as attending concerts, plays, athletic events, etc.)**
- 5. How can the district/schools support parent and community involvement in the areas of leadership & governance in both education and the towns? (e.g. school councils, school committee, town officials/committees/volunteers)**
 - a. How do the towns and the school district move forward to ensure that appropriate educational resources are available so that our children have the same opportunities in a small rural district that are provided to children attending schools located in an affluent suburban area?
 - b. The question of equitable distribution of resources within the state
 - c. How do we address issues surrounding teaching and staff compensation in light of educational equity, operational needs based upon state and federal requirements, and the distribution of resources based upon district size and location?

General Findings:

The following information provides an overview of the number of responses by broad topic areas and consists of all responses captured during the forum whether in the first or second group sessions.

Chart 2: Findings by Area

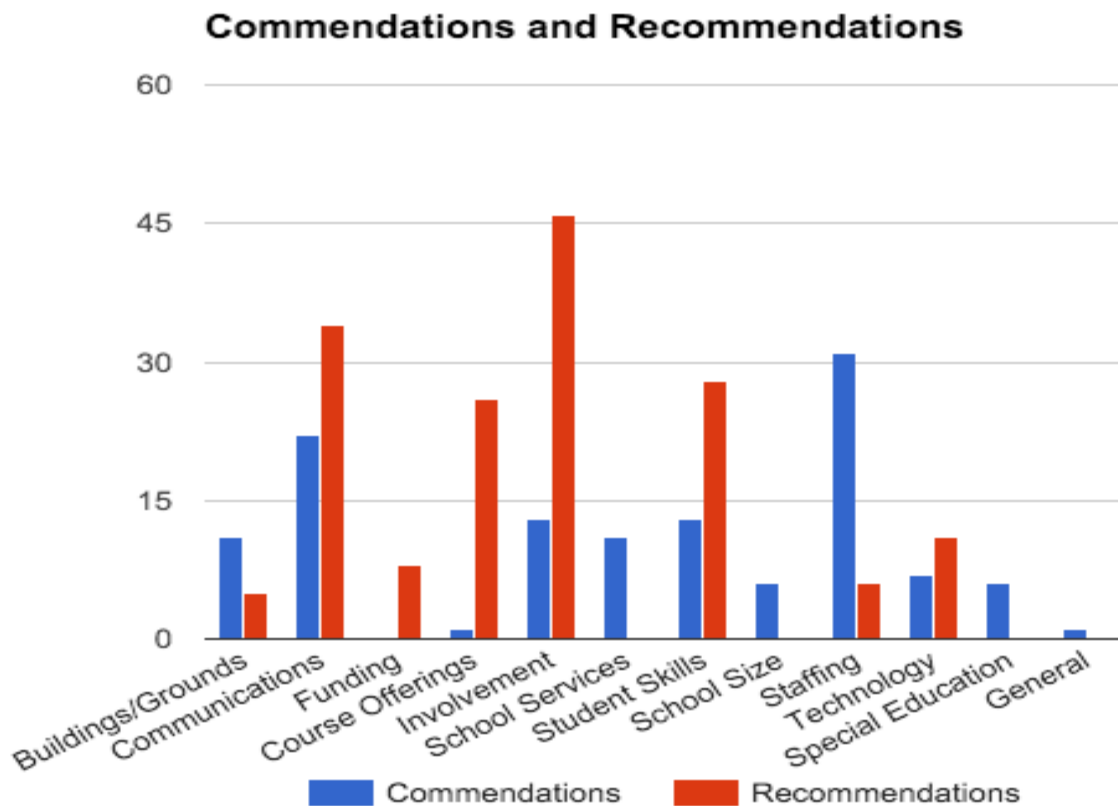


The responses were then broken down into whether they were commending something already occurring in the district or whether they were recommending changes to district activities. In total this provides some interesting information of what the attendees saw as positives as well as indicating where attendees thought additional resources should be allocated. Overall the responses were positive and forward looking whether they were commendations or recommendations.

Chart 3: Commendations and Recommendations Tally

	Total	Commendations	Recommendations
Community & Parent Involvement	59	13	46
Communication	57	23	34
Student Skills	41	13	28
Staffing	37	31	6
Course Offerings	27	1	26
Buildings/Grounds	18	11	7
Technology	18	7	11
School Services	11	11	0
Funding	8	0	8
Size of School/District	6	6	0
Special Education	6	6	0
General	1	1	0

Chart 5: Comparisons Number of Commendations/Recommendations by Area



Commendations by Type

The following information provides more specific information/responses for commendations made by all groups.

Community Involvement/Events

Community element: we all know each other, but new people also feel very welcome,
 Volunteer opportunities and PTO
 Field day - assemblies - presentations - 2025 - open houses (8)
 Continue to make school an asset to all: community, sports, adult educ, etc.

Technology Education

Arts/technology "super awesome" here; knows of other schools that share 1 laptop cart, bring own devices; need to market more - Chromebooks/iPads - Up to date technology

Soft Skills/21st Century Skills

Progressive as a district: current and up-to-date with curriculum, trends and 21st Century Skills
 *Collaboration (seen in rubrics for projects)
 *Interpersonal skills (see in assignments)
 *now Band-collaboration.
 "Whole Child" focused, not just test scores; 21st Century Skills
 Recognition that "non-academic" courses can really support "core" subjects:
 - Positive experience of children in band, art, etc.

-Agreement on the need for students to practice practical, "common-sense"
problem solving for college & careers

Communications

Easy to access resources/find the right person

We can call out from classroom phones & multiple ways to communicate; call from email too

Red folders at elementary level

Facebook pages : district, school, individual programs, Parents of Gateway

Gateway page in the Country Journal

All calls are a great way to reach people

Breaking News

Superintendent's Corner

Teacher communication - online Grade book

School Services

Sense of community services: kids not isolated (Health services,e.g. dental care, etc.)

Summer program and afterschool program (4)

Small, but offer a lot: ski, band, etc.

PreK programs build good foundation for learning

Full Time Kindergarten

Mini-courses in elementary schools

Buildings/Grounds

Facilities are beautiful: clean, impressive, taken care of, Buildings and grounds are maintained

Safety/security

Excellent facilities: sports, GPAC, maintenance, grounds

Distance Learning Center

Auditorium, gym, health center: community use too

New/well-maintained/updated facility and technology

Staffing

Numerous grant-funded programs a tribute to grant writer

Quality Teachers: collaborative, welcoming, know students, professional

Staff that are invested

Positive culture among staff

Welcoming atmosphere

Individualized academic attention

Run really well, clean, great crew and staff

Secretaries are great, very personal interactions

Staffing/services/small class sizes

Personal relationships between teachers and students

Nurses - we love Jodi!

Guidance Counselor

Paraprofessional positive interaction

Special Education

Special education program is strong compared to schools in the region.

- professionalism and respect for parents

- well-written IEPs and thorough process

- see progress in children/students

Inclusiveness of students

Recommendations by Type

The following information provides more specific information/responses for recommendations made by all groups.

Community Involvement/Events

- 2025-type events, concerts, reaching out to parents
 - Add food/social aspects to event (3)
 - How to get more parents to come to meetings with the items focused for parents early
 - Duplicate event times
 - Young child friendly: child care? (2)
 - Start time: after work hours? Before 6:30 p.m.? (3)
 - Make easy/available
- Authentic audiences: elders, people in the community
 - Invite elderly to events through Council on Aging
- Additional parent/teacher conferences
- Parent training on Common Core and access to web-based lessons
- Partner with local businesses for internships (9)
 - Partnering with local businesses, police department, fire department
 - Database of community engagement
- PTO for all age levels, so there's a smooth transition (4)
- Expand Community Service time for seniors, to include a partnership with the local community.
 - Students could volunteer and even rotate between area small businesses, town libraries, fire department, etc. (with longer description)
- Actively market to incoming parents to district to answer ?s, see school, find out what it's about so they don't go to another district
- Political action
 - There's other meetings to go to: finance committees, task force
 - State level help
 - Teacher/student presentations at town meetings. Not playing defense--but being proactive
 - Increase parental involvement at meeting to vote
 - Build a better understanding between district and towns
 - Need for more community involvement

Technology Education

- Technology use: facilitating learning in other areas
 - *increase computer programming and graphic arts, C.A.D. offering, even if not at full vocational level
 - *use strength (technology) to enrich curriculum
 - More technology at elementary level (struggle with typing for PARCC)
- Digital citizenship: balance of it all
- Struggle in many towns to access or even allow Internet: will this be resolved in 10 years? Will have to so we can keep up with changing world; may still be a struggle in 10 years; Need to consider when making mandatory district items/assignments.
 - *extend into homes in the future

Soft Skills/21st Century Skills

- Focus on 21st Century skills & whole child
 - Sacrifices: closing of local schools; not really giving up educationally; potentially lower success on standardized tests because these
 - Agreement on the need for students to practice practical, "common-sense" problem solving for college & careers
 - Noted disagreement with/concern about common core and state oversight

- Focus more on skills; mention of support by GEF of robotics lessons/activities
- Never heard "whole child" phrase: needs more marketing
- At HS, not as consistent: program/class needed for teachers in collaborative grouping and problem/conflict resolution within groups: some kids left out (JR/Sr year collaboration becomes competition) (seconded by another member)
- Soft skills/interpersonal relationship skills: voice, body language
- More opportunities for older students to participate in outside environment activities
- More opportunities for practical learning: checkbook, cooking
- Keyboarding skills
- Project-based with industry/business involvement
- Some of the 21st century skills are lost in high school because of content needs and credits; should be offered
- Expand on projects and incorporate social skills into the content classes

Communications

- Red folder (elementary): need something similar in MS/HS
- Suggestion of more blogs, newsletters from teachers
- Phone updates/email updates
- More positive PR to bring in more students/families
- Individual classroom update letters
- Posted information on teacher web pages
- Lack of individual communication
 - *Medical
 - *Theft
- Centralized way to communicate need
- A more Interactive Website: can answer or ask questions, similar to college sites
 - Parent forum on website
 - Online Forums for class:
 - 1 Central location/website for forum and all information
- Data base to survey all parents
 - ex. we are looking for ____ to come in
 - Find out the priorities: survey: find ways to get more input (online survey done well)
- Include parents more in homework situation: get feedback from them, ex. what's a good night...
- Better communication about conflicting schedules between school events & town meetings
- More communication at the state level
- Building more on the positives and advertising those strengths.
- Identifying our positives
 - Change the negative perception of the district. The school is an asset to the towns
 - Success stories: where are they now? Print media
 - Marketing: website, email, country journal; district sign should move to 112
 - Draw more positive attention somehow instead of focusing on negative: frustrating school committee and town meetings, painful

Buildings/Grounds

- Larger parking lot
- Playground structure upgrade
- Pest Control (ticks)
- Transportation for community service opportunities and jobs

Staffing

- Mandated Paras - K/1
- Student apathy
- We are short staffed, need to be aware of teachers schedules, number of classes taught - has an impact on students

Funding

Prioritize what's currently important to students and parents (identify) and the towns. Spend financial resources in those areas first. What's the most important? Spend the money on that.
Need revenue vs. many towns don't want new business: how do you balance it?
What will parents ask? class size, curriculum, quality of staff
Bake sales, parent involvement as social events in a form that is organized and you can collaborate
100% Regional Transportation Reimbursement
What are revenues can you support

Course Offerings

Concern about students leaving for arts or sciences if these offerings are reduced
Foreign language offerings
Concern about loss of students to vocational schools:
*should look to expand existing programs
Reduced standardized test preparation
Longer lunch (too quick for any social time)
More real life people in to come in and work with students
More education around social media, technology
More high school requirements to college
Enough openings in courses
STEM (Intro in HS to build on in college)
Keep college-oriented goal without taking away from learning itself (need to understand material, not just complete assignments)
More AP classes (history? math/science? suggestion: get consensus from students on what they'd like to take)
More art/band/music classes (specifically, band #s depleting due to schedule; we have now but needs to grow)
Coding
More whole child offerings (art, PE more than 1x week)
Real world classes (coding, typing, economics, business)
More online opportunities
Language classes at elementary/middle school levels/more offerings at the upper level
Gifted programs
Have sports count towards PE requirements, to free up time for more electives
Need an articulated curriculum - vertically and horizontally; with a digital literacy program that grows with each school years (benchmarking)

Top Items

Each group in both sessions was tasked with coming up with the three most important items they had raised/discussed during that time period. What follows are the items that groups placed in the top and that were reported out to the entire forum.

MCAS/PARCC Level 1 ranking for entire district, with proactive approach with early grades
Maintain small and community school atmosphere/culture
Communication:*Homework updates, *Common core training, *parent-to-parent, *web based/in-person, *weekly lesson updates
Response to parent requests to know what's going on in classes
Suggestions of more blogs, newsletters from teachers
Marketing our strengths: small community feel, great staff, beautiful facilities
Teacher communication
Building more on the positives and advertising those strengths

Change the negative perception of the district. The school is an asset to the towns.
Would like to see interactive website, forum style
We like red folders: very effective
Marketing: communication with families, public, elderly & retirees; sign moved to route 112; website; survey
More positive: ex. school committee, etc.
Find out priorities of parents, community and meet it within our financial constraints - work with the State
Transportation: late buses; practices right after school, afterschool program; afterschool lounge (upper level)
Notice more apathy in parents; lack of focus on education
Increase/support reading and other programs that bring parents into the schools
Court new industries to make area more desirable
Community
Partnerships with local businesses
Partnering with local businesses, police department, fire department
PTO in the upper levels
Make events child friendly: child care with toys, timing, focus on ages 0-4, playground
More opportunity for all players like this (2025) and draw more
Whole Child: continue and broaden (outdoor education, band, art, STEM)
Bring back vocational/real life skills classes (financial literacy, keyboarding, economics, STEM
Project-Based Learning
Project-based - outreach to business, parents, community, local resources - integrated into curriculum
Teach core career/work skill sets here, so students are ready for opportunities outside when available
Willingness of faculty & staff to list to parental concerns/input (open houses, meetings, SPED)
Experience
Technology expand and enhance
Digital literacy curriculum - access without content curriculum
Issue of Internet access

Next Steps

We now have information from both the survey of the community (with 211 responses and completed in late 2015) and the information from the forum as presented in this report. The next step in the process is to correlate similar data points from these two events in order to establish a set of potential recommendations to study in more detail, determine any missing information, and to develop drafts of future options for the district.

We may also wish to follow the suggestions of several participants from the 2025 forum that recommended ongoing opportunities to continue these discussions, provide feedback as items are implemented, and continue efforts to reach more individuals including 'peer to peer' networking.