

Verbatim Responses

Recorded on worksheets as a result of the small group work activity
 Community Engagement Session #1 • Jan. 25, 2022

On Jan. 25, 2022 Vision Forward held a small-group work session to discuss the State of the District. After a presentation on the topic, participants divided themselves among 22 tables and prepared responses to the following activity and tasks:

Table #3

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - # of students & staff loss

Biggest Concern - A lack of academic achievement

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
District exit interview data		Where do staff and students go?
District resources		What resources do we have and how are they divided?
Technology		
		Where did the 1,000 students go? Out of district, private, homeschool
		What have the two districts beside us (Savannah & Mid Buc) compare with enrollment?
		How do we reintroduce leveled learning?
		What is the ratio of administrators to teachers & the trend? More teachers vs. admin
		Want to implement a policy to retain kids not at grade level
		Resources and the way we teach correlate with why people are leaving

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Table #4

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - # of languages spoken, empty seats 70% on free

Biggest Concern - Facilities, realignment, socio-economics

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Empty seats		How do we realign to better fit student needs?
Middle school disparity		How do we, in realigning, bring about better unanimity in middle school?
Facility inadequacy (poor condition)		Noting aging in facilities. What/how do we address this?
Demographics partisanship		Is it possible to build two high schools, same time, and not offend population?
Socioeconomics		New schools, better facilities, qualified staff, increase in class offering?
Lack of trust Lack of transparency		What really happened in 2015? Come clean. Up to \$40m according to auditor

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Table #6

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - 70% free/reduced, staff ratio, graduation rate, attendance rate

Biggest Concern - facilities being addressed? meals, do kids feel safe, when we return to in class, are we going? what are we doing to foster the community to bring people into grow schools, community entities (MWSU; other colleges are partnered but not the one in our town?)

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Community Relationships	Medium	What are we (SJSD) doing to foster a relationship with MWSU? Employment/businesses moving in etc.
Graduation Rate	High	79.6%: Why is it so low? Why is dropout rate so high? What are we doing to motivate students?
Attendance	High	75.10% What was the attendance rate pre-COVID and how big of a factor was COVID? Compared to other districts our size?
ACT	Low	Is a cumulative ACT score that is driving the ACT composite higher?
Middle School	High	6-8 compared to 7-8. Why aren't we all there? What would it take to have grades aligned across district?
Boundary lines	High	Why can't we look into this. Make buildings/grade levels more equitable?
Staff/Services	High	Are there additional services and supports that would help aid in retaining students through HS & graduating in their earlier years of their schooling?

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Table #9

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Drop out rate & Decrease in enrollment

Biggest Concern - Middle School Inequity

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Middle School Inequity	1	Educational opportunities are not the same. Teachers not given same professional development
Unequal High School capacities	2	Enough empty seats to fill an entire high school? Creates unequal opportunities for students
Placing ESOL students in Center Schools	4	Consolidating ESOL students and educators? Center Schools!
Alternative Education (even at Middle School)	3	Are there other paths besides credit recovery or retention? Work studies at Middle/High schools? Volunteer opportunities?

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Table #10

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate

Biggest Concern - Teacher Retention

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Behavior; mental health of students	High	Daily behavior disruptions - How does this affect daily operations?
Teacher Retention	High	Support - What can we do to increase salary? What incentives keep teachers?
School facility	Medium	Reducing Up keep

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Table #11 & 26 (combined)

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Multiple languages, Low attendance, low graduation rate, staff turnover

Biggest Concern - (Left blank)

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Staff Turnover	High	Does this impact graduation rate? What are we learning from exit interviews?
Enrollment	High	Is there a linear correlation between population decrease and enrollment decline
What are people looking for in deciding to go to school here?	Medium	
Community Engagement	Medium	Are there obstacles to parent involvement (security) Are parents perhaps more apathetic After school engagement
Grammar, Syntax, Spelling, Basic Math	High	These skills have decreased globally: Why?
Academics	High	Why do we promote students who are clearly failing How is it determined if a student is held back
Discipline	High	

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Table #12

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Empty Seats, Enrollment

Biggest Concern - Staff Member Retention/Morale

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Staffing	High	How are we recruiting? How do we make teachers want to stay?
Enrollment	High	Where have the students gone to? Why are they leaving? How do their new opportunities compare to what we offered them here?
Facilities	High	What are we doing about the open seats in the district? The facilities don't promote 21st century learning. What are we going to do to change this?
Middle Schools Facilities 2.0	High	Why are we still using a split system in the school district? ½ are 7 & 8 and ½ are 6, 7, 8. How are students supposed to learn with falling apart buildings?
Academics	High	What is the district's average ACT score?
Teacher Pay	High	Are teachers, strong teachers leaving the district to get better pay elsewhere? Community members shocked with low teacher pay.
Morale	High	Why do we have so many staff members and students leaving? How do we boost morale with all stakeholders in the district?
Graduation Rate	High	Why do we have so many students dropping out of school?
Attendance	High	Why aren't students showing up for school?
		Do they still do exit interviews when teachers leave?
		How many staff members are going elsewhere or leaving education in general?

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Table #13

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - 70% free & reduced lunch

Biggest Concern - Academic outcomes

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Ways to improve academic achieve	1	
Causes of current low scores		
Why is our gifted % so low		
How would more efficient use of facilities improve academics	2	Access to programs are they good
How do we shift pride to education/ academics (culture)	3	More information about 3-D
		More about Grow Our Own program

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Table #14

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Empty Seats, Dropout rate

Biggest Concern - Dropout rate, Student attendance, Turnover rate staff , Loss of students & staff

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Revisiting and learning more about boundaries and seated in building	Medium	How do boundaries affect open seats in buildings?
Learn more about staff turnover rate and the cause for it	High	What is causing staff and educator to leave?
Learn more about the cause of loss of students/empty seats	High	Why are families moving an leaving?
Cost upkeep facilities/building vs. just replacing	Medium	Cost of upkeep versus just replacing buildings
Competing/extra curricular activities & facilities	Medium	What measures can we take to make our community more appealing?
Attendance & tardiness Accountability	High	How do we hold adults accountable to get students to school?

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Table #18

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Loss of total staff and students - staff turnover, empty seats, students leaving loss of total employees

Biggest Concern - Consequences of losing staff and students. Fewer opportunities for students

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Facilities	High	Breakdown - optimal # and size of buildings and enrollment to give the best opportunities to all
Communication	Medium	How to communicate to families about courses (dual credit, AP, Project Lead the Way. Difference between dual credit and AP.
Student Achievement	High	How to improve student achievement.

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Table #19 & 20 (combined)

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - The amount of languages spoken

Biggest Concern - The drop in enrollment nearly 10% over 5 years

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Curriculum	High	What is necessary in order to change curriculum? What effort has been done to determine root cause of low scoring
Retention	High	Is there exit interview data of why people are leaving?
Demographics	Medium	What is St. Joe's demographics age, How do we reach and engage the top groups?
Finance	Medium	How do our finances compare to larger districts, smaller districts, private schools? Per student spending
Unity	Medium	How is this type of meeting being publicized in all cultures of our district?

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Table #21

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Open seating; student to teacher ratio

Biggest Concern - Families leaving district; middle school mode; social aspect of middle school model; attendance

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Salary for staff	High	What is the district doing to remain competitive w/ other districts?
Support from community	High	What is the perception of our community? (St. Joe is poverty ridden)
Communication (Negativity narrative)	High	Have a better relationship with newspaper? Need a positive media showing
Facilities	High	How much spent to keep older building running? How have we not progressed w/the technology, buildings in this day in age
Attendance	High	
Technical School	Med	What is the potential for Hillyard? What is the potential for our buildings to evolve?

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Table #22

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Grad rate, ACT scores increase/Varied program opportunities

Biggest Concern - Attendance

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Attendance	High	What is the root cause of absenteeism? How do we shift cultural or fixed mindset? How do we motivate students to want to attend? How do we create a sense of urgency?
Teacher Base Salary	Medium	2017-2021 only 2,000 increase Why?
Teacher Retainment Loss of Veteran Teachers	High	How can we retain our experienced staff?
Graduation Rate	High	What is the cause? What can we do regarding early intervention and reading to increase this?
Facilities/Grade Configuration	High	How do we provide consistent opportunities for all students?
Innovative Instructional Methods	Want to learn more	
Parent Tech skills	Want to learn more	How can our parents become more tech savvy?

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Table #24

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - The number of empty seats in schools, while many classrooms are overcrowded
Biggest Concern - Attendance issues and the effect on academics

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
What are the underlying reasons for the decrease in student enrollment?		Where are they going?
What are the underlying reasons for low attendance?		
How do we manage or mitigate the decrease in staffing (certified and support)		
What influences kids' decision to come to school or not?		

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Table #25

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Attendance, Dropout Rate, Grad. Rate

Biggest Concern - Enrollment decline, ESOL Grad Attendance & Dropout rates

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Waste in facilities with empty seats	Medium	How can we best optimize facilities?
Graduation Rate	Medium	
Teacher Retention Keep good teachers, support teachers (salary and discipline, parental support)	High	What do teachers need to stay? How can we best support our teachers?

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Table #27

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Inequities/School, languages, attendance/avg, turnover, salary comparison
Biggest Concern - Blank

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Facilities	High	Upkeep of current facility not necessarily building new
Staff Turnover	High	How compare to state/areas Why leaving?
Attendance/Drop-out	High	
School Inequities	High	
Demographic Comparisons	High	
Discipline Issues	High	

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Table #30

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Dropout/Graduation Rate, all students had to take ACT at one point

Biggest Concern - Teacher Retention, Attendance, Academic achievement of students, teacher salaries, Lack of tax base (what's it going to take to get all corners of this town to get together.

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Facilities	High	What is the long term plan for current facilities if new facilities are not built
Tax base		

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Table #31

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Attendance, Capacity @ schools, most dominant language, Truman MS being a hospital
Biggest Concern - Salary, Turnover rate of staff (500 less faculty)

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Curriculum	High	Look @ courses we offer
Staff Retention	High	
Discipline	High	Is staff retention related to discipline
High Quality Instruction	High	
After School Program	Medium	
Location of Schools - neighborhood schools		

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Table (No table # listed)

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Attendance, ranking in Missouri, languages, ACT, Grad rate

Biggest Concern - Graduation Rate

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Student Success		What year do students dropout? Attendance by grade? Schools offer different programs
High School Graduation	High	
Buy-in from the community		
Build trust of community		
Teacher buy-in and support	High	
Demographic Division		
Promote what district is good at.		

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Table (No table # listed)

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Blank

Biggest Concern - Blank

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Number of facilities and numbers in facilities	High	What's it going to look like in 5 yrs if our enrollment continues to decline?
Concern: Number of students and teachers leaving each year		
Continuity - Elem K-5 & K-6 must be the same	High	Is it based solely upon the capacity of the facilities or something else?
Learn more about the financials if we reduced the # of facilities		Would we then be able to hire more teachers, staff, etc. for the limited facilities
What needs to happen to pay teachers and subs more		Attracting talent

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Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Drop-out Rates (Due to COVID? Other factors) Grad Rates, # of Languages (demands of ESOL), Academic Performance, Math test scores

Biggest Concern - Declining enrollment (multiple impacts including budget)

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Attracting & Retaining Talent (teachers, staff, etc)	High	How do we get better teachers? salary issues, how do we keep local grads in St J. turnover
Academic Performance	High	How do we increase test scores (e.g. Math)
Public Funding	High	Levy declining & ending - what's next

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Table (No table # listed)

Task 1:

Biggest Surprise - Graduation /Dropout Rates

Biggest Concern - Graduation/Dropout Rates, Teacher Retention (losing veteran, quality teachers)

Task 2:

Topic	Ranking	Key Questions
Advanced educational opportunities	High	Will funding be available? (i.e. bringing back IB) Can resources be shared between schools (i.e. if a class is available at Central could Benton and Lafayette students join virtually?)
Staff retention	High	How can we keep salaries competitive with other districts?
Communication	High	How can it be improved with families in the community? How can be address consistently as families move from elementary to middle to high school.