

The logo for the State Public Policy Group (SPPG) features the letters 'SPPG' in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. A green stylized figure, resembling a person with arms and legs outstretched, is positioned behind the letters, partially obscured by them. The figure is composed of several green lines of varying thicknesses.

State Public Policy Group

**West Des Moines
Community Education
Report on the Community**

Report Presentation
September 20, 2010

Report Summary

- Methodology
- Participant demographics
- Community strengths and needs
- Unique stakeholder issues
- Focus group themes
- Next steps

ID	Stakeholder Group	Date	Method of Recruitment
4	Young Adults, no Children (19-30 years of age)	July 8, 2010	Voter file by date of birth
8	“Retirees” (60-69 years of age)	July 8, 2010	Voter file by date of birth
3	High School Youth	July 20, 2010	Infinite Campus
6	School-Age Families	July 20, 2010	Infinite Campus
2	Latinos	July 22, 2010	Invitation letter from West Des Moines School District family liaison
9	“Seniors” (71+ years of age)	July 22, 2010	Voter file by date of birth
5	Preschool Families	July 27, 2010	Infinite Campus
7	“Empty Nesters” (45-59 years of age)	July 27, 2010	Voter file by date of birth
10	West Des Moines District Non-Residents	July 29, 2010	Infinite Campus and voter file by city of residence
1	Human Services Clients	July 29, 2010	Invitation letter from West Des Moines Human Services staff

Participant Demographics

106 West Des Moines community residents engaged in 10 focus groups

- Majority of participants from West Des Moines
- 77% white (89% in general pop.)
- 70% female
- Income distribution representative of general population
- 50% employed full-time (76% in gen. pop.)
- 30% Bachelor's Degree (33% in gen. pop.)

Additional Demographics

- 62% own their home (66% gen. pop.)
- 33% have at least one student in West Des Moines Schools, 33% do not have any school-age children
- 63% have lived in the West Des Moines Schools community over 10 years
- More people work and live in the same city (35%) than those who commute to work (24%)

Community Strengths

- Exceptional schools
- Low crime rates
- Watchful, attentive neighborhoods
- Good value for cost of living
- Safe, clean parks
- Well maintained walking and biking trails
- Well-utilized public libraries
- Convenience

Areas in Need of Improvement

- Public transportation
- Volunteer opportunities
- Centralized information on programs, services, and activities
- Maintenance of older infrastructure and neighborhoods
- Transparency of decision-making in high growth areas

Unique Issues – Human Services Clients

- Value on the cleanliness and safety of West Des Moines
- Like human services programs, but noted a need for greater investment because of increased demand
- Need for expanded bus service and more shelters at existing stops

Unique Issues – Latinos

- Child care is a primary priority, but access is currently very limited
- Latino students don't graduate from high school in some cases because post-graduate educational options are limited
- Education was viewed very highly by this group – not only the importance of education, but also in regards to the quality of education their children receive from West Des Moines schools.

Unique Issues – High School Youth

- Most information on activities and programs is received through the school or friends, and many of the current activities they participate in are school-related
- Volunteerism was important to them
- Had a more skeptical view of the western growth in West Des Moines
- No one thought they would live in West Des Moines as adults

Unique Issues – Young Adults

- Recreation a priority – expansion of trails and parks a need
- Most were currently living with their parents and had grown up in the West Des Moines district
- Believed community was growing younger and was a good community to be a young adult. Entertainment and recreation options were identified as important to attracting young adults to the community.

Unique Issues – Preschool Families

- It is highly competitive to get children into West Des Moines enrichment programs; seems to be “in the know” group that shares information about programs.
- Very happy with the West Des Moines school district as a community in which to live and raise families
- Most were mothers who did not work or worked part-time outside home
- Library and Safety Town received rave reviews

Unique Issues – School-Age Families

- Affordability creates gaps in opportunities between students whose families can't afford programs and those who can
- Many mentioned volunteerism and its importance, especially for students
- The community has most of the resources it needs, such as hospitals, grocery stores, parks, and shops, but lacks affordable housing

Unique Issues – Empty Nesters

- A need is the opportunity for youth in their early teens to have safe places to hang out after school
- Parks, schools, library, and trails system all highlighted as strengths of the community

Unique Issues – Retirees

- Noted the need for schools to communicate with community members in addition to parents
- Noted the need for attention to students falling in the middle of the academic achievement spectrum
- It was hard for kids not excelling in sports to receive encouragement for their achievements in the arts and music

Unique Issues – Seniors

- Civic leader accountability very important – need to feel listened to and that local leaders were acting to their benefit
- Noted the need for more senior centers in West Des Moines and that the current center is crowded

Unique Issues – West Des Moines Non-Residents

- Community services viewed very highly
- Saw the western suburbs (Urbandale, West Des Moines, Clive, et. al.) as having similar values and culture
- Noted that redevelopment in the eastern areas of West Des Moines and Urbandale needed to be an area of focus – empty commercial buildings were a concern.

Analysis – Theme 1

Community identity is strongly rooted in people and the schools.

- *“West Des Moines is like a family. Everyone gets along and knows each other.”* [Human Services Client]
- *“People think that the West Des Moines schools are very interconnected with the city.”* [Young Adult]

Analysis – Theme 2

A sign of strength of the West Des Moines Schools community, growth, can put other identified community strengths such as good schools, low crime, nice parks, and strong neighborhood cohesiveness at risk.

- *“The law enforcement officers used to come around more often and you knew who they were. Now you don’t know who they are.”* [School-Age Parent]
- *“The locally-owned businesses are going away because of the chain stores coming to West Des Moines. We are losing our community character and becoming generic.”* [Empty Nester]

Analysis – Theme 3

There is agreement that current services to residents throughout the community are provided well, but there is a growing concern regarding services to middle-income families, individuals with disabilities, and aging residents.

- *“We need activities that are affordable for the middle class.”*
[Young Adult]
- *“There should be an accessible system of transportation. The bus doesn’t run at certain times and needs to address the aging population.”* [Empty Nester]

Analysis – Theme 4

Expanding opportunities for all residents to be civically engaged is important.

- *“Getting more volunteer opportunities such as Silver Cord. They need to use it more. Silver Cord is a cord that graduates have that show that they have volunteered 200 hours. It is underutilized, and I hope they use it more.” [School-Age Parent]*
- *“I would get younger elementary kids more involved in a wide plethora of activities such as volunteering. They are the future of this community and need to start volunteering at a younger age.” [High School Youth]*

Analysis – Theme 5

Transparency of decision-making and engaging community members in the decision-making process is important to residents in the high-growth community of West Des Moines.

- *“We live right on the edge of West Des Moines. The people building aren’t talking to the residents and meeting our needs.”*
[Preschool Parent]
- *“Having more input sessions [and] being able to meet with other community members [is good]. It would be nice to be able to participate and be part of the bigger picture here.”* [Latino]

Analysis – Theme 6

Preferred methods for receiving information on community programs, services, or activities differ based on factors including involvement with the schools, primary language, culture, age, and interest.

- *“The book distributed by the city is good but needs to be more clear and expanded.”* [Human Services Client]
- *“Not everyone uses a computer.”* [Retiree]

Next Steps

- Share 2010 community report findings widely and regularly
- Utilize findings to develop messages to potential residents and businesses reflecting shared priorities and values of West Des Moines Schools community members
- Elicit additional feedback from stakeholders on specific programs and services participants suggested be changed, improved, expanded, or created
- Continue tradition of engaging West Des Moines Schools community members every five years for comprehensive community assessment

Questions?

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