
World Café Summary Report

St. Louis Park Public Schools

Prepared by:



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Introduction and Background

The St. Louis Park School District is reviewing and recommitting to its strategic plan for the long term future and success of the district. As part of the process, the district held a World Café on January 29, 2009. The purpose of the World Café was to engage students, staff, parents and the larger school community, giving them an opportunity to share their thoughts on what the district should strive to achieve, changes that may be needed, what was really valued and what people wanted to see retained as the future is planned.

Approximately 400 individuals (staff, parents, and community members) attended one of three World Cafés where they were asked to discuss four questions:

1. What would you want the students of St. Louis Park to thank the school district for 5 years after they graduate?
2. What are your biggest concerns about our schools and what would you want to see changed as we plan our future?
3. What changes in practice would the St. Louis Park School District need to make in order to achieve what you just described?
4. What do you really value about our schools that you would want to see retained as we plan our future?

It is important to recognize that each person had the opportunity to give multiple responses to each question. Notes recorded on table-top paper were also included in the analysis. Major themes emerged in the responses to each question, and they, along with un-coded responses are reported in the summary of findings. Themes are presented in the order of magnitude. Rounding is used in the display of percentages, so totals may fall within +/- 1% of 100.

The district also intends to conduct focus groups, using these same questions. Focus groups will be conducted by community volunteers and will attempt to incorporate the voices of groups under-represented in the World Café. An electronic survey will also be distributed, allowing broad access to the entire community. Data from these two additional procedures will be added, as an addendum, as they become available.

All of these data will be included in the district's Baseline Data Book, which will be given to each member of the Core Planning Team prior to the strategic planning meeting in the spring of 2009.

Summary of Findings

Question one asked the participants what they thought students should thank the district for 5 years after they graduate. Eight themes emerged from a total of 857 responses. Less than 1% of the 857 responses were not categorized into a theme.

Teaching important life skills	22%
Providing an environment that was diverse, safe & full of friends	20%
Adults who guided & supported students	17%
Challenging academic courses & programs	17%
Enrichment opportunities, programs in the arts & extra-curricular activities	12%
Preparation for college	5%
A well-run district	3%
Recommendations for change	3%
Un-coded	<1%

Verbatim examples of the responses to each question follow.

Teaching important life skills

- ✧ Confidence to pursue what I want to do...college...job...be comfortable w/self...be successful.
- ✧ Prepared for real world socially & academically.
- ✧ Contribute & care about others—taught me to live with integrity--serve others.
- ✧ Life: confidence, Presentation/speaking.
- ✧ Being able to appreciate multiple perspectives.
- ✧ Self confidence to apply for a job & be able to live up to the expectations teachers had for them.

Providing an environment that was diverse, safe & full of friends

- ✧ Thank us for having fun during the journey, make learning fun & a lifelong process.
- ✧ Have friends on sports team—different from friends during the school day.
- ✧ Mattered—felt valued in the school.
- ✧ Diversity—not overlooking children of color in the schools.
- ✧ A place I felt safe.

Adults who guided & supported students

- ✧ Felt good at something; find their “spark”—not just academics—could be anything.
- ✧ Teachers & other staff & counselor care about us and want to help better.

- ✧ Nice teachers who really invest in the students.
- ✧ “I was treated w respect.”
- ✧ We’re not left behind.

Challenging academic courses & programs

- ✧ Academically prepared...esp. for student in courses other the AP/IB.
- ✧ All kids be educated.
- ✧ All kids be educated & academically successful regardless of what courses they take—all kids challenged.
- ✧ AP and IB classes.
- ✧ A love of reading.

Enrichment opportunities, programs in the arts & extra-curricular activities

- ✧ Expanding their interests—their sense of possibilities.
- ✧ Self discipline, rich set of experiences (art, music, plays, etc.).
- ✧ Experiential learning (outside school).
- ✧ Social stuff that encourages community like high participation in dances.

Preparation for college

- ✧ Admission Possible—prep for college!!!
- ✧ Exciting to know I’m prepared for college—it’s scary to think about applying but I know there are people who will help.
- ✧ SLP schools give you skills for college (any post-secondary), but more importantly, LIFE.

A well-run district

- ✧ School funding.
- ✧ Had good discipline.
- ✧ Provide a stable education—not too many problems, offerings are consistent, can count on district.

Recommendations for change

- ✧ More choices—would like more.
- ✧ Modern education system is too competitive on academic—would like what learned instead of how well you compete in what you’re learning. If you don’t do well in this academic competition—you may not do well after school.

Question two asked participants to share their biggest concerns about the schools and what would they want to see changed as St. Louis Park planned its future. Seven themes emerged from a total of 689 responses. Two percent of the 689 responses were not categorized into a theme.

Core academic programs & instructional resources	29%
Elective programs & instructional resources	16%
Funding	16%
Effective security & strong discipline	14%
Good relationships between students, parents & teachers	8%
Quality faculty & staff	8%
Strong leadership, accountability & community support	7%
Un-coded	2%

Verbatim examples of the responses to each question follow.

Core academic programs & instructional resources

- ✧ More science and math requirements
- ✧ Closing achievement gap
- ✧ Smaller classes.
- ✧ So many extra things added w/IB, no child left behind, MCA prep, etc, that teachers don't have the time to teach at all.
- ✧ Look at expanding PSI or other programs if demand is there.
- ✧ Focus on technology
- ✧ Focus on differentiation of instruction to both high ability/low ability students.

Elective programs & instructional resources

- ✧ Lack of music & art.
- ✧ Reduction of gym time.
- ✧ Parents are struggling to have their kids learning English as their primary language
- ✧ More choices in extracurricular (arts)

Funding

- ✧ More funding towards sports!
- ✧ Funding of schools; Increase revenue; Attract more students.
- ✧ Starting foundation to contribute and excel education.
- ✧ Transparency to see where tax dollars are going.
- ✧ Money distribution—how come \$ isn't making it to the classroom?

Effective security & strong discipline

- ✧ Parents should not have to pick up phone if taken away by teacher.
- ✧ Off campus passes for juniors and seniors.
- ✧ Better hall monitors/more security—needs to be safer.
- ✧ Equal treatment (fair) for all students
- ✧ Better security—a lot of people pay attention to it, generally feel safe.

Good relationships between students, parents & teachers

- ✧ Resolve tension between PSI and rest of district - every school should celebrate it's uniqueness
- ✧ Increasing sense of community between all the social entities in the city.
- ✧ Wanting a K-6 option – kids at same school.
- ✧ Training with diversity.
- ✧ Redistribution of equity in schools i.e. 50%of student at Aquila get reduced lunch
- ✧ More community participation & communication—diverse & have more than just the same group.

Quality faculty & staff

- ✧ Too many admin tasks placed on teaching staff.
- ✧ Hiring personnel of color.
- ✧ Quality of teaching.
- ✧ Training staff to work with colored students
- ✧ Teaching with learning styles.

Strong leadership, accountability & community support

- ✧ Coordinators in each major area, Director of Curriculum – someone with a bird's eye view of what's going on throughout the District
- ✧ Bring more communication & transparency to the community at large from district more so than just reading/math scores, but other happenings & positives=a liaison needed.
- ✧ Concern about growth of private, charter and home schooling.

Question three asked participants what changes in practice the St. Louis Park School District would need to make in order to achieve what they had just described. Six themes emerged from a total of 514 responses. Less than one percent of the 514 responses were not categorized into a theme.

Program options, technology & how resources are used	30%
Inclusive parent & community involvement	21%
Leadership, accountability & discipline	16%
Building & grade configurations, school day and year	13%
Staffing, quality of teachers	11%
Funding & costs	10%
Un-coded	<1%

Verbatim examples of the responses to each question follow.

Program options, technology & how resources are used

- ✧ Support for gifted and talented.
- ✧ Integration of new technologies (SMART boards).
- ✧ Think about more than just math & reading—don't forget about arts, music, Phys Ed.
- ✧ Offer alternative ways of learning.
- ✧ Increase number of sports—especially for girls—i.e. volleyball.
- ✧ Need for more tutoring from more teachers outside of classroom learning.
- ✧ Need more choices and more classes in AP and IB i.e. pre med, science, chemistry, art, photography.
- ✧ Keep the counseling center.

Inclusive parent & community involvement

- ✧ Long range plans reviewed annually by community.
- ✧ Find creative ways to support gifted and talented, arts, phys ED. By spending less money, using volunteers and using outside resources.
- ✧ School—more a focal point of the community (school plays and games a bigger part of community life).
- ✧ Increase volunteer program—recruit business.
- ✧ A solid group of parent volunteers.

Leadership, accountability & discipline

- ✧ Communication vehicle for idea proposals for improvement for district/school consideration.
- ✧ Make sure to follow thru with this effort and achieve or show results.
- ✧ Allow for more site control @ schools.
- ✧ Make courageous and heartfelt decisions, regardless of decision's popularity.
- ✧ District needs process for change.

Building & grade configurations, school day and year

- ✧ Consolidate buildings to save money, create more opportunities with that money.
- ✧ Move to k-5 middle 6-8 then high school format
- ✧ Create magnet schools with special focus
- ✧ Go down to 4 elementary, expand PSI

Staffing, quality of teachers

- ✧ Hire a nutritionist.
- ✧ Staff reflect the diversity of student population.
- ✧ Keep hiring good people.
- ✧ More teacher professional development, continued opportunities—team opportunities to observe other professionals.
- ✧ Teachers try harder to help kids—don't just wait for kids to ask for help.

Funding & costs

- ✧ Activity fees=set them higher-increase revenue, where does the scholarship money come from? Fund raisers.
- ✧ Really know where money is going (for community) know where schools want to look like to balance the education process.
- ✧ Get information out about resource distribution/budget transparency of schools—especially between the 5 elementary schools, more than on-line newsletters—mostly concerning PSI and Peter Hobart/Aquila.
- ✧ More fundraisers, donations.

Question four asked participants what they really valued about St. Louis Park schools that they would want to see retained as the school community planned for the future. Eight themes emerged from a total of 591 responses. Two percent of the 591 responses were not categorized into a theme.

Rigorous academic programs	22%
Strong elective & extra-curricular programs	19%
An inclusive, friendly & well resourced environment	13%
A caring & dedicated staff	11%
Strong parental & community involvement	10%
Adequate support systems & resources	9%
Attention to diversity	9%
Early childhood & community education services	5%
Un-coded	2%

Verbatim examples of the responses to each question follow.

Rigorous academic programs

- ✧ Curricular offerings for total population (IB, AP classes, vocational), broad range of offering to meet many needs—special education & advanced students.
- ✧ Retain science/computer labs.
- ✧ Higher standards for achievements.
- ✧ Academic rigor—activity variety.
- ✧ IB to the primary centers—would like to expand to the Jr. High.
- ✧ Better identification of reading issues on the primary grades—kids in the “gap” due to lack of ability.
- ✧ Academic opportunity—challenging classes.

Strong elective & extra-curricular programs

- ✧ Value art & music.
- ✧ Art classes, elective classes—give us creativity and options.
- ✧ Language classes—choices in classes you take, like having electives.
- ✧ Wide variety of programs—photography, phys ed.
- ✧ Get students art more—field trips & talk to community resources (i.e. civil rights movement, people who participated).
- ✧ Athletics—gym, extracurricular.

An inclusive, friendly & well resourced environment

- ✧ Community connection to school district—continue to explore funding from community businesses and community members.
- ✧ Involvement between city & school.

- ✧ Opportunities to be w/someone you know in class.
- ✧ Welcoming, easy to assimilate, can maintain connection—good life.

A caring & dedicated staff

- ✧ Teacher cohesiveness/team teaching—ability grouping.
- ✧ Maintain teacher quality.
- ✧ Strong, effective teaching staff “best & brightest” teachers.
- ✧ Research based teaching.
- ✧ Excellent teachers to inspire attract and retain dynamic staff.
- ✧ Efforts of educators to be part of the community.

Strong parental & community involvement

- ✧ Parents feel involved in elementary
- ✧ Good community support for athletics & other events—good and fair for everyone.
- ✧ Parent’s involvement.
- ✧ Continue student involvement in planning process.
- ✧ Incorporate community & would like to see more.

Adequate support systems & resources

- ✧ Small class size.
- ✧ Before and after school academic help.
- ✧ Friendship being connected to other kids.
- ✧ Having additional support—admission possible.
- ✧ Focus on Asset Building—increase.

Attention to diversity

- ✧ School pushes for equality & making school less discriminatory.
- ✧ Diversity—how teachers embrace this.
- ✧ Diversity in the student body.
- ✧ District equality team—show to close student achievement gaps—i.e. staff diversity practices.
- ✧ Keep teaching kids diversity how to embrace and leverage it.

Early childhood & community education services

- ✧ Value community education and lifelong learning (infant—seniors).
- ✧ Programs for senior citizens.
- ✧ Adult learning opportunities—continue and expand. Evening language classes.
- ✧ Lifelong learning—“womb to tomb.”