

**Educational Values and Interests
Executive Summary
January 2010**

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With the support of the Superintendent of Schools, the School Committees, parents and staff, a study group was commissioned in the Spring of 2008 to examine some emerging perceptions regarding changes in expectations, and/or competing goals. The study group was created to identify the values and educational goals of the community and its implications for curricular changes and budget.

Tying in the views from the Summer 2009 Leadership Institute, the study group built on those initiatives and had several thought provoking discussions about values, common ground, differences, and disagreements with respect to another's perspective, etc. Race and ethnicity were important factors to discuss and catapulted discussions with many of the readings, including, "The New White Flight". (Hwang, Suein. "The New White Flight." The Wall Street Journal 19 Nov 2005 A1.)

Surveys in the community and schools were done. We recognized that most of us who participated on this task force were not statisticians, but educators. Our emphasis was on dialogue and trying to reach consensus by respecting differences and finding common ground.

Hypotheses were examined as they emerged from the data. Did people in our community have a different cultural experience and different value system? Were those factors impacted by being educated outside of the United States? Or were those factors primarily due to professional career choice and therefore, like most parents, they wanted and expected to have their children follow a similar standard of high expectations?

The majority of parents agree that standardized testing is important with greater variation in responses that international comparisons are important. 47% of parent/guardian respondents believe that standards at Acton and Acton-Boxborough are getting too high. Over 60% of respondents were concerned about their child being competitive in being admitted to a top tier college. Yet, 70% of our parents/guardians were concerned about the mental health of our students. 95% of parents want to be sure that our students emerge as critical thinkers. Athletics, performing and fine arts and extracurricular programs play a role in shaping the student's overall potential, a result from almost 80% of parents.

For the purposes of this first public presentation, study group members chose some data points that are cause for thought and disaggregated the data from this perspective: type of educational system experienced, race and ethnicity, and length of residency in Acton or Boxborough. Many discussions have been held about the data. It appears that if parents received their training outside the US and were not residents of the Town for an extended period of time, their levels of expectations were different from those who had been trained in the US or were residents for a longer period of time in Acton. This area is rich for discussion.

Faculty input and its comparison to parent and guardian input are presently being studied and will yield complementary yet vital discussions around expectations, high standards, extra curricular, and homework assignments.

From the results of our surveys and interactive processes, there is a lot of useful information. To some, it may be frustrating not to have "answers", or "solutions". The study group needs time and patience to grapple with additional data points and hopes for school committee representation in the study group going forward.

Naming the challenges that emerge from this report are important. These include:

- Navigating change
- The natural tendency to stereotype
- Varied perspectives
- Moving beyond stereotypes to enhance conversation

The primary question for all interested parties to grapple with is how do we move beyond these challenges and make them pragmatic for the schools? We respond by prioritizing our objectives and breaking down barriers through continued conversation, developing a common vocabulary for future discussions, identifying data points for further study, considering student input through the survey process, and preparing for a longitudinal study of the data. Study group members believe that the opportunity to talk in constructive ways about educational values and interests – in the context of race and ethnicity - is a gift. Regardless of the survey, people often talk about this topic behind closed doors. The study group highlights the importance of providing structured opportunities to talk about multiple perspectives and promoting understanding by sharing commonalities in open forums.

We would be remiss if we did not make mention of the numerous comments stating strong satisfaction with our schools. Even where suggestions for improvement were offered, comments shared spoke to the expansion of programs and services for students (going from "great" to "even better than great") rather than eliminating current practices. Because of this recognition, it is acknowledged that there is no sense of urgency at this time.

In conclusion, this dialogue is the beginning of a multi-dimensional, multi-year project of increasing awareness and facilitating dialogue on the following:

- What are the opportunities and challenges that are emerging with our community's demographic shifts?
- What are the effects of the values and interests expressed by respondents on how we examine the practices in our schools?
- How do we engage and facilitate in constructive dialogue for deeper understanding of varying perspectives?

As we move forward with benchmarks every six months, we anticipate sharing summaries of our discussion themes, how they connect with the data, how our themes and data influence change and consensus, what recommendations emerge from them, and how our vision is enhanced with diligence towards our fiduciary responsibilities.

Thank you.

Educational Values and Interests

Acton Public School Committee
Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee

Presentation

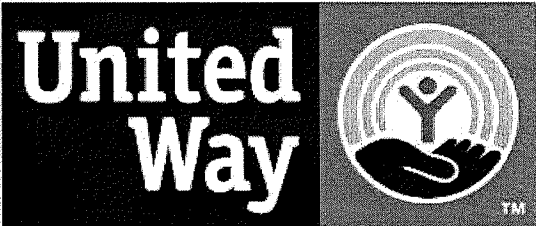
January 28, 2010

78 slides/posted separately
3 of 7

Summary of Questions Highlighted in Educational Values and Interests Presentation

Presentation highlighted the following questions overall and by time in AB, educational background, and race and ethnicity.

- Question # 35: I consider standardized test scores to be very important for measuring the academic success of the students and of the school's efforts to educate students. (Agreement)
- Question # 39: The school district should use international comparisons when reviewing the district's performance and priorities. (Agreement)
- Question # 40: I am most concerned with my child's ability to be competitive in being admitted into a top tier college or university. (Agreement)
- Question # 42: Our schools have had a long history of success and achievement, and we should not make any significant changes. (Agreement)
- Question # 43: Our community (parents, teachers, students) has become too concerned with grades and academic performance at the cost of creating a balanced development (social health, emotional wellness) of our students. (Agreement)
- Question # 44: It is important for the school district to increase its emphasis on high academic performance. (Agreement)
- Question # 45: Athletics can play as important a role as academics in positively shaping a student's potential. (Agreement)
- Question # 46: Performing and fine arts can play as important a role as academics in positively shaping a student's potential. (Agreement)
- Question # 47: Extracurricular programs can play as important a role as academics in positively shaping a student's potential. (Agreement)
- Question # 53: I am concerned that the standards of "excellence" at AB have gone so high that students who would be considered very strong in other districts are viewed as mediocre. (Agreement)
- Question # 61: Development of social and relational skills (peer relationships, self esteem, self expression). I consider this feature to be: (Importance)
- Question # 77: Focusing curriculum on high academic success through increased homework, I consider this feature to be: (Importance)



**Acton-Boxborough
United Way**



ABUW COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JUNE 2015



**Local Dollars for
Local Impact**



*25 slides
posted separately
5 of 7*

**Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
Parent Survey Study Committee**

The group agreed that we would like to have a core set of questions that assess attitudes and values that will be used in repeated surveys every 3-5 years

At this point, the study committee identified the following domains of interest:

Academic Achievement/Rigor

- Diversity – Racial/Ethnic, Economic
- Mental Health/Wellness
- Extracurricular Activities
- Testing
- Parental Roles and Responsibility
- Communication with parents on key policy concerns/changes

For the next survey, we thought questions might talk about mental health and wellness versus academic achievement/rigor. Some particular areas of policy interest are:

- Change in start time (Jr and Sr High starting later and elementary starting earlier)
- Decreasing homework
- Other strategies the schools and parents might employ to address mental health and wellness.

For Academic Achievement/Rigor we brainstormed the following sub-topics:

Issue of students in the middle not getting enough attention/service focused on them

- High school course levels
- Homework amount
- Students who are mediocre at AB would be considered strong in other districts
- Culture of high performance – pressure from parents, pressure from peers (or self-perceived pressure from peers)
- Community/Parent expectation of school and their students' outcomes

For Diversity – Racial/Ethnic, Economic – we noted that In the past survey, many parents answered race/ethnicity for themselves but not for each individual child; the new survey could probably be simplified to just ask about the family and allow multi-racial/ethnic responses

We did not brainstorm subtopics for other areas of interest as we did not know if that would be helpful for Rebecca and her team and it was time consuming.

Section	Domain	Definition	Example Item
Demographics	Gender	Identified gender	What gender do you identify with?
	Race/Ethnicity	Identified race/ethnicity	What race/ethnicity do you most identify with?
	Primary Language	Language spoken at home	What language is most often spoken at home?
	Number of Children	Children in the public school system	How many children do you have that currently attend school in the Acton-Boxborough district?
	Grade(s) of Child(ren)	Logic flow based on # of children	What grade is Child #1 in?
	School(s) of Child(ren)	Logic flow based on # of children	What school does Child #1 attend?
	Length of Residency	Time living in Acton	How long have you lived in Acton or Boxborough?
Attitudes and Values	Academic Achievement/Rigor	Attitudes and values parents have about the academic achievement and rigor.	"I expect a great deal of my child [academically]." "I think a child should be encouraged to do things better than others" (Wentzel, 1998). It is important that my child be in a school setting that has rigorous academic standards.
	Mental Health	Attitudes and values parents have regarding student mental health, within a school context.	It is important that my child be in school setting that fosters his/her mental health and well-being
	Extracurricular Activities	Attitudes and values of parents regarding extracurricular activities, within a school context.	It is important that my child be in school that provides a range of extracurricular activities.
	Roles and Responsibilities as Parents	Parents beliefs about their roles and responsibilities within the district.	It my responsibility as a parent to help make my child's school a better place.
	Aspirations and Expectations of Child(ren)	The educational aspirations and expectations parents have for their child(ren).	"What is the highest degree you expect your child to receive?" (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). "What is the highest degree you <i>hope</i> your child will receive?"
	Beliefs about Ability	Parents' beliefs about the nature of ability.	"My child's math [verbal] ability is innate and will never change," "My child can always improve his/her math [verbal] ability, no matter how old he/she is" (Muenks, Miele, Ramani, Stapleton, & Rowe, 2015).
	Beliefs about District Change	Parents' beliefs about their ability to influence changes within the school district.	As a parent, I can influence important policies and decisions in my child's school.
Current Practices and Policies	Mental Health and Wellness	District practices and policies to support the mental health and wellness of its students.	I feel that the district provides sufficient supports and services to respond to the mental health and wellness of my child.
	Extracurricular Activities	District practices and policies around extracurricular activities for students.	I believe that the district provides opportunities for extracurricular activities for students.
	Testing	District practices and policies around standardized testing.	I consider standardized test scores to be very important for measuring the academic success of the students and of the school's efforts to educate students (A-B 2009)
	Roles and Responsibilities as Parents	District practices and policies regarding the role and responsibilities of parents.	The principal at this school seeks and uses parents and community members' ideas and suggestions to improve the school (EPSC)
	Communication with Parents	District practices and policies about communicating with students' parents/guardians.	What are the top 2 most COMMON WAYS your child's teacher or school communicates with you about your child's education? What are the top 2 BEST WAYS you prefer that your child's teacher or school communicate with you about your child's education? (EPSC)
	Students in Middle not getting Attention/Services	District practices and policies regarding students in the "middle"	
	High School Course Levels	Perceptions about levels of coursework at the high-school	(If child is in high-school) My child benefits from different levels of classes in multiple subjects.
	Amount of Homework	District practices and policies regarding homework.	I believe my child is assigned too much homework.
Culture of High Performance	Perceptions about school culture and performance.		
Community/Parent Expectations of School	District practices and policies relating to community and parent expectations of the school district.	Our community (parents, teachers, students) has become too concerned with grades and academic performance at the cost of creating a balanced development (social health, emotional wellness) of our student (A-B 2009)	
District Policies	Changes in Start Time	Potential changes in school start times.	
	Decreasing Homework	Potential changes in amount of homework.	
	Strategies to Address Mental Health Concerns	Potential changes in strategies to address student mental health concerns.	
Family Involvement	Nature of Interactions with School	The nature of students' families interactions with the school and district.	I am involved in making the important decisions in my child's school (EPSC)
	Extent of Feeling Empowered	The extent students' families feel empowered in their children's learning.	I have opportunities to influence what happens at the school (EPSC)
	Extent to the School is Responsive to Concerns	The extent to which families feel the school and district are responsive to their concerns.	I feel confident in my ability to make sure my child's school meets my child's learning needs (EPSC)
	Parental Efficacy	The extent to which you feel that anything you do as a parent can result in a change in how things are done	"I know how to help my child do well in school" (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Muenks, Miele, Ramani, Stapleton, & Rowe, 2015). "Parents do not have a powerful influence on children's achievement when all factors are considered" (Wentzel, 1998).

A-B 2009 = Acton-Boxborough Demographic Change Survey
EPSC = The Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project