Lincoln Public Schools

High School Task Force Recommendations and Findings

April 24, 2018

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Overview

The Lincoln Public Schools Board of Education adopted a goal for the 2017-2018 school year to establish a High School Task Force to investigate community options and priorities for serving high school students and to make recommendations by May 1, 2018.

Superintendent Steve Joel invited community members, LPS staff, and students to join in a conversation about how to serve high school students in Lincoln. Dr. Joel asked Gloria Eddins and Bob Rauner to serve as co-chairs of the task force.

The task force met six times throughout the course of the school year. Each meeting was held at a different high school. To develop further knowledge of the district's current high schools, task force members had the opportunity to tour each school prior to the start of each month's meeting. Several committees took on additional meetings.

Several committees embraced additional work assignments outside of the six meeting format. The City Growth and High School Capacity Needs group took driving tours around the city. The Innovative Delivery and Alternative Program hosted tours of LPS Focus Programs and screened a movie on alternative teaching methods.

Task Force Membership

Gloria Eddins, *Co-Chair*
Bob Rauner, *Co-Chair*
Derek Bartee
*Rita Bennett
Beth Briney
Mary Bruning
Roger Bruning
*Eric Buckwalter
Wanda Caffery
John Cartier
David Cary
Sue Cassata
Thomas Christie
Colin Clare
Tatum Custer
Ayla Duba
*Brendan Evans
Emily Faubel
Pete Ferguson
Sarah Fischbein
Azcia Fleming
Laura Francisco
Sarah Freitag
Jim Frohman
*Renee Geller
Mike Gillotti
Kurt Glathar
Laura Graulty
Jeff Gronewold
Shaun Harner
Rebecca Hiller
Cory Hoagstrom
Karalyn Hoefer
Dan Hohensee
Pat Hunter-Pirtle
Rocio Izaguirre
Steve Joel
Ben Kiser
*Rob Klucas
Dave Knudsen
Mark Larson
Mike Masin
*Richard Meginnis
Marissa Mendez-Santiago
Bill Michener
Hannah Miller
Kali Mills
Helen Moore
Kelly Muthersbaugh
John Neal
Takako Olson
Tanner Penrod
*Keith Prettyman
Vann Price
Savannah Redl
*Cleveland Reeves
Nikki Regan
Liz Ring-Carlson
Vaughn Robertson
Mary Kay Roth
Zein Saleh
Bill Schulenberg
Jerry Sellentin
Emily SoWel
Liz Standish
Jane Stavem
La'Shaundra Swift
Katie Taddeucci
Brent Toalson
Susan Townsend
*Angelina Tran
Wendy Van
Denny Van Horn
Eric Weber
Megan Weber
Catherine Wedin
Bob White
Scott Wieskamp
Erik Witt
Christa Yoakum
Lincoln Zehr

Sub-Committee Co-Chair

Task Force Committees

City Growth and High School Capacity Needs

Richard Meginnis, Committee Co-Chair
Rob Klucas, Committee Co-Chair
Mary Bruning
David Cary
Sue Cassata
Colin Clare
Kurt Glathar
Rebecca Hiller
Karalyn Hoefer
Ben Kiser
Dave Knudsen
Savannah Redl
Vaughn Robertson
Zein Saleh
Jerry Sellentin
Scott Wieskamp

Comprehensive High School

Brendan Evans, Committee Co-Chair
Keith Prettyman, Committee Co-Chair
Ayla Duba
Emily Faubel
Azcia Fleming
Jim Frohman
Mike Gillotti
Laura Graulty
Jeff Gronewold
Rocio Izaguirre
Kali Mills
Takako Olson
Nikki Regan
Bill Schulenberg
La'Shaundra Swift
Katie Taddeucci
Megan Weber
Erik Witt
Lincoln Zehr

Task Force Committees

Innovative Delivery and Alternative Program

Eric Buckwalter, Committee Co-Chair
Cleveland Reeves, Committee Co-Chair
Derek Bartee
Beth Briney
Roger Bruning
Wanda Caffery
John Cartier
Cory Hoagstrom
Dan Hohensee
Pat Hunter-Pirtle
Marissa Mendez-Santiago
Bill Michener
Hannah Miller
Tanner Penrod
Vann Price
Liz Ring-Carlson
Emily SoWel
Denny Van Horn
Bob White

Equity, Diversity, and Community

Renee Geller, Committee Co-Chair
Angelina Tran, Committee Co-Chair
Rita Bennett, Committee Co-Chair
Thomas Christie
Tatum Custer
Pete Ferguson
Sarah Fischbein
Sarah Freitag
Shaun Harner
Mark Larson
Mike Masin
Helen Moore
Kelly Muthersbaugh
Brent Toalson
Susan Townsend
Wendy Van
Catherine Wedin
Christa Yoakum

Process

At the first meeting, the task force engaged in an open-ended brainstorming activity to identify topics that task force members wanted to discuss. The topics submitted by task force members for discussion were categorized and assigned to one of four committees. Each committee was assigned a co-chair team.

City Growth and High School Capacity Needs:
Rob Klucas and Richard Meginnis

Comprehensive High School:
Brendan Evans and Keith Prettyman

Innovative Delivery and Alternate Programming:
Eric Buckwalter and Cleve Reeves

Equity, Diversity, and Community:
Renee Geller, Angelina Tran, and Rita Bennett

The four meetings following the initial brainstorming session were spent predominately on committee work. Committees requested information from LPS staff and planned purposeful experiences for task force members to promote conversations. Each committee was asked to develop a list of findings and recommendations to articulate key observations throughout the dialogue.

At the final meeting of the task force, the membership divided into small groups with representation from each committee. The small groups reviewed all of the findings and recommendations. The activity promoted cross-committee dialogue. Task force members had the opportunity to ask questions of each other and discuss the recommendations across committees.

Following the final task force meeting, the committee chairs met to share suggestions from the small group activity. The group added suggestions that garnered consensus and fine-tuned the final findings and recommendations.

The task force chairs prepared findings and recommendations to present to Dr. Steve Joel at the Board of Education meeting on April 24, 2018.

City Growth and High School Capacity Needs

The committee studied the historic and projected population growth trends and changing demographics in Lincoln. The study included presentations from city staff and school district staff, tours of the city, and reviews of current and projected enrollment.

Findings

- Overall, high schools in Lincoln Public Schools are currently at 106% enrollment capacity. Four of the six high schools are each serving over 2,000 students.
- LPS currently serves 12,136 students in grades 9-12. By 2023, that number is projected to increase by 1,388 students, totaling 13,524 students in grades 9-12.
- Considering growth and historical enrollment trends, LPS can expect serve over 14,000 students at the high school level, an increase of almost 2,000 students, over the next ten years.
- Additional high school capacity is currently available to serve the equivalent of 500-800 students for a portion of their day at The Career Academy and the Focus Programs.
- Population growth is occurring in all four quadrants of the city. The highest growth area is expected to be in the east-southeast quadrant due to the expansion of housing availability along Stevens Creek and along Yankee Hill Road. The northwest quadrant of the city is growing due to new housing growth throughout the quadrant and the increasing density of housing in the core of the city.
- High school choice impacts enrollment trends. The shifts in student population appear to balance out overall.

Recommendations

- Plan long-range to serve students in 2025, 2030, and beyond in high schools near an optimal capacity of 1,850-2,000. Construct and/or acquire high school space(s) to serve 2,000 to 2,500 students.
- Consider a combination of comprehensive high school space and various alternatives for high school program space.
- Maximize current capacity at The Career Academy and Focus Programs.
- Consider alternate grade level and/or program configurations.
- Study high school boundaries and the impact of open high school selection on enrollment with respect to choice of new high school location(s).
- Based on the needs to balance capacity, make all efforts to maintain the high school selection process for students to choose which high school and program they attend citywide.
- Consider all geographic areas of the city to ensure the whole student population has equitable access to programming throughout the city.
- Consider new high school facility location(s) that promote diversity, specifically socioeconomic diversity, as much as possible. Promote diversity of student population throughout the city, in all current and new school(s).
- Select school location(s) that are serviceable by the city in the desired timeline to reduce the burden on taxpayers.
- Plan high school space and location(s) to meet current and future needs, considering long-range needs and plan for high schools number 7, 8, and 9.

Comprehensive High School

The committee discussed and considered issues related to what a comprehensive high school of the future should include in its physical structure. The committee determined that a comprehensive high school of the future should be safe, secure, flexible, accessible, provide multiple opportunities for students based on interests, planned with regard to future instructional delivery, and modern with an eye for the future.

Findings

- Future comprehensive high schools should include consistent components throughout the city.
- High schools should have core facilities to support 2,000 students and include square footage similar to other schools or have the elements to expand to similar square footage in the future.
- Serving students in a larger school is more cost effective than smaller schools. If the district pursues smaller schools, consider design elements that allow for expansion to a 2,000-student school in the future.

Recommendations

- Design comprehensive high schools with agile spaces (classrooms, core spaces, learning areas, commons areas) to accommodate student and staff collaboration.
- Design comprehensive high schools to provide accessibility for a variety of student and community needs (student/family needs, restroom considerations, community partners, mental health, full-service – community agencies).
- Design comprehensive high schools to provide multiple opportunities for engagement and extracurricular activities (arts, athletics, technology, computer science, STEAM) based on current student interests identified through further study and student surveys.
- Design comprehensive high schools to support innovative delivery of instruction and future learning methods/arrangements/needs (blended, online, diverse, personalized, self-paced).
- Design comprehensive high schools to provide modernized security and safety features with flexibility.
- Seek further feedback from students, parents, community, and community organizations that use LPS facilities about the interests, usage, activities, design, and type of school desired.
- Design comprehensive high schools to provide modernized technical, utility, logistical, and environmentally friendly infrastructure.
- Conduct further study of the following topics: childcare facilities in schools (specifically, does school choice serve this need), open versus closed high school campuses, environmental considerations.
- Establish plans to equalize all high school facilities in the future, bringing all high schools to the level established by the new school designs.

Innovative Delivery and Alternative Program

The committee studied the existing focus programs, the growing populations of students, and the needs of the community for workforce development and economic growth. The committee also considered the possibilities that are now available with online learning, access to technology, and the need for flexibility of schedules and program delivery options.

Findings

- We value the diversity that our existing programs offer students in terms of choice and diversity of students from across the city.
- We want to continue allowing for program choice while preserving what the community values regarding the ability to attend where you want, when you want.
- We encourage the ability for a student to explore multiple interest paths within the high school course progression while staying on track for graduation.
- We acknowledge the need to consider multiple paths to a high school diploma, including different credit requirements to be career/college/life ready, broaden individualized options, and consider flexibility of curriculum rules.
- We encourage more skill exposure opportunities for students to discover interests and aptitudes.
- We value considering choices for high school programs that also benefit the community as a whole, rather than traditional territorial norms.
- We value equitable access to specialized programming for students throughout the district.
- We learned that state regulations limit the district's ability to offer online and distance learning as a singular offering for students. In addition, graduation requirements have an impact on course offerings.
- We learned that Nebraska law prohibits placement of a school within 150 feet of an establishment that holds a liquor license.

Recommendations

- Create alternate options to completing high school credit requirements with a focus on career skills, college readiness, and civic-life readiness.
- Allow for flexibility between paths without impacting credit and completion.
- Provide flexibility within traditional and nontraditional settings to allow for student interests and aptitudes.
- Design choice options for differentiated student schedules (non-traditional hours, weekends, shortened, intersession).
- Define the distinct purpose and intent of focus programs to clarify student benefits and intended outcomes.
- Define a clearer distinction between career-ready and college-ready, in any additional program developments.
- Develop systems for sharing information and communication strategies to inform program choice selection.
- Continue to create a strong sense of community within programs that enhance the students' sense of belonging and purpose.
- Enhance existing programs to add more diversity and choice options to account for multiple layers of participation (skills exposure, skill development, certification, etc.).
- Review student qualifications for program applications to allow for increased diversity while providing supports for student needs (special education, ELL).

Recommendations *(continued)*

- Redesign a district choice model that transitions the concept of a single pathway to a wheel model, implying more opportunities for pursuing areas of interest, taking a variety of courses, and making connections to career and college opportunities.
- Emphasize that new program opportunities do not, necessarily, equate with new places or buildings.
- When looking at the "where" of additional options, consider locations - geographic, demographic, or site specific to program emphasis.
- Consider options to pilot new opportunities and determine feasibility and long-term viability.
- Provide transportation to specialized programs to ensure equitable access for students.

Equity, Diversity & Community Sub-Committee

The committee brainstormed the meanings of equity, diversity, and community and discussed the significance of equity, diversity, and community in the future planning for the needs at the high school level. The committee identified issues related to these concepts that would be particularly relevant to the work of each of the other sub-committees. The committee advanced the top three or four issues in alignment with the work of each sub-committee to consider in drafting recommendations.

Lincoln Public Schools has remained committed to the concept that all means all. Our committee included perspectives from different races, ethnicities, and cultures. We investigated the topics of equity, diversity, and community and held collaborative conversations that led to these findings and recommendations.

Findings

- It is important to define equity, diversity, and community so that these concepts can be reflected in the work of the Task Force specifically and in the district future planning in general. The definitions should be revised periodically.
- Each Task Force committee is responding to equity, diversity, and community issues in their recommendations, based on the feedback our group provided to each sub-committee.
- Universal recommendations beyond those included in the three committees must be considered as well.

Recommendations

- Continue to provide transportation to focus programs and The Career Academy to ensure programs are accessible to all students. Should additional specialized programs be developed, transportation should be provided and be equitable for all programs.
- Collaborate with the city to provide transportation and promote accessibility to new schools.
- Develop a full-service community school in our comprehensive high schools with space for mental health and other student and family services.
- Include expressive spaces in high school design where the culture of students and the community can be reflected, expressed, and honored.
- Incorporate a diverse and multicultural curriculum.

Equity, Diversity, and Community Committee Defining Concepts

Equity

- Same opportunities for all
- Meeting the needs of each student at their level
- Providing the need to advance their education in fair, just, and unbiased manner
- Not a one-¬size-¬fits-¬all approach (personalized)
- Should be inclusive to identified diversity groups
- All services should be readily accessible to all students
- Should not use a dominant culture perspective; however, should incorporate and emphasize a cultural proficiency viewpoint
- Should be practiced fluidly and be able to be adjusted as needed

Diversity

- Cultural proficiency/culturally proficient
- A variety of human and phenomena characteristics
- Embracing a positive curiosity of others
- The purposeful inclusion of all diverse characteristics including race, gender, ability, social income status, language, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, etc.
- Inclusiveness - it is especially important in engaging students who may feel disconnected from the school

Community

The committee recognized that community can be viewed in ways related to the school itself (internal), as well as in ways related to the surrounding community (external).

Internal

- Students and staff are working toward commonly identified goals
- A sense of communal pride, shared purpose, and shared identity as a school or program among students and staff
- A common mission and vision is important in developing a strong sense of community
- Include multi-generational relationships
- A school or program must be a safe place where mutual trust and respect is created and nurtured
- Facilities should include diverse murals, sculptures, or other design elements that are reflective of and welcoming to all (“expressive spaces”)
- Should reflect a sense of working together while preserving individual identity
- Careful consideration should be given to logistics such as locker arrangements that will foster positive interactions as well as foster and maintain a strong sense of community

External

- Boundaries are fluid—not a “closed” community

Both Internal and External

- Shared resources, responsibility, and power
- The school community should include parents, students, staff, and businesses and neighbors in the surrounding area
- There should be a willingness to allocate and use resources to help everyone thrive
- A school or program should incorporate vibrant wireless access and infrastructure that supports growth and change in technology that will support current and future needs

Acknowledgments

The High School Task Force would like to express sincere gratitude to all who participated in and supported this effort with a special thanks to Superintendent Steve Joel for his commitment to community engagement.

The Task Force membership, comprised of community members, teachers, administrators, and students, dedicated a great deal of time and focus to the development of these recommendations. In addition, support staff assisted our work at all Task Force meetings. The work of the collective group is represented in this report. The tremendous commitment of our community to engage in the study of data, robust discussion, and thorough investigation of ideas was demonstrated in each Task Force meeting.