LISTEN AND LEARN: WE ARE ANN ARBOR

January 22, 2014

Jeanice K. Swift, Ph.D. - Superintendent of Schools

A Report to the Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education
and the Ann Arbor Community
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Hello Ann Arbor Community,

It is a great day in Ann Arbor Public Schools as we share the results of what we have heard during the Listen and Learn: We Are Ann Arbor tour. Thank you for participating in the Listen and Learn school events; it has been my honor to meet with you in each of our 34 schools and in various other community locations.

From September through December of this past year, more than 2,000 of you gave of your time to attend these meetings (or responded online) to join in this important conversation about the future of our schools. Around tables in cafeterias, libraries, classrooms, and auditoriums across this city, you came out to share your perspectives and your experiences with our public schools.

I have truly enjoyed this process of getting to meet and learn from you; thank you for such a warm welcome and for the candid responses you provided to help me better understand Ann Arbor Public Schools. We have heard and learned so much from this community dialogue and, while it is impossible to capture every nuance in a report, this analysis is designed to synthesize, to capture the essence of, and to make sense of the whole of what we heard – the major themes, patterns, and sub-texts.

Special thanks to our partners at the University of Michigan School of Education who have completed the data analysis; this team has accomplished the transformation of more than 110,000 words and more than 9,200 phrases into a coherent analysis to inform our work in Ann Arbor. We are thankful to Dean Deborah Ball, Associate Dean Elizabeth Moje, Dr. Tom Drake, and Ph.D Education and Policy students Xavier Monroe and Natalie Davis. We appreciate their partnership and perseverance with this challenging task, and we have much gratitude for your critical contribution to this endeavor.

Listening and learning from the community represents an important first step to extend and enhance the quality for which Ann Arbor Public Schools is already known. The goal of this work is to align our school district work with the pulse of our Ann Arbor community. Over the coming days, we will be organizing numerous next steps informed by this Listen and Learn phase. I am committed to invest our energy in alignment with the direction articulated by the responses from students, parents, and the Ann Arbor community who shared their input.

I invite you to read the report, view the summary Listen and Learn: We Are Ann Arbor video, and please continue your engagement in this ongoing process of improvement. Your partnership and feedback is an important prerequisite to making Ann Arbor Public Schools even better, and is also a critical part of what makes Ann Arbor such a unique and special place. Our children deserve the very best we can offer. I thank you for your support in this important work, and for the opportunity to serve.

Thank You,

Jeanice K. Swift

Jeanice K. Swift
Superintendent, Ann Arbor Public Schools
INTRODUCTION

Everything good in life
- a cool business, a great romance, a powerful social movement —
  begins with a conversation.
Talking with each other, one to one,
is human beings’ most powerful form of attunement.
Conversations help us understand and connect with others
in ways no other species can.

- Daniel H. Pink, 2012
To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others

THE PREMISE AND THE LISTEN & LEARN PROCESS:
The premise of the Listen and Learn: We Are Ann Arbor process is straightforward: No one knows better the strengths and celebrations, the challenges and areas for improvement, dreams, and hopes for the future, than those individuals who live, work, and bring their children to attend Ann Arbor Public Schools every day. The desired outcome of Listen & Learn is to better understand our Ann Arbor community, to align our work with the direction, the needs, and the aspirations of our parents, community, staff, and students.

Between mid-September and mid-December, 2013, we toured each of Ann Arbor’s neighborhood public schools, visiting and engaging with staff, parents, students and community members in each of our 34 schools as well as in various other meetings across the Ann Arbor community. The tour, which began on September 19 and concluded on December 16th, has proven an insightful way to engage face-to-face in meaningful dialogue with our AAPS stakeholders.

In these meetings, we have used a World Cafe approach (worldcafe.com) to facilitate a discussion of four critical questions:

1) What do we celebrate at our school and in Ann Arbor Public Schools?
2) What areas need our attention?
3) What do we dream that Ann Arbor Public Schools will be known for in 10-15 years?
4) What are the top 3 priorities you would like to see the Superintendent address?
In addition to hearing from staff, parents, students and community in discussion of the four questions, we are also coming to understand the individual stories of each of our 34 schools, their unique historical contexts, current challenges, goals and hopes for the future.

The data from these Listen & Learn sessions has been sorted and classified, by a team of University of Michigan, School of Education graduate and doctoral students. They have reviewed and categorized the responses, approximately 110,039 words, and developed a synthesis of the patterns that emerged from this data collection.

This analysis will inform our planning and guide the work to refine direction and vision, goals and aspirations, and inform our immediate next steps to be in alignment with the pulse of our Ann Arbor community.

From the visits and listening, we are coming to better understand the stories of each of our 34 schools, their unique historical contexts, their current challenges, and the goals and the hopes for the future. The individual school stories inform our District work to discover the best pathway for improvement.

This Listen & Learn report presents the data within the structure of the District’s Strategic Plan, organizing the data through the eight strategies and placing the themes gleaned from the data into the eight strategy areas outlined in the District Plan.

When responses and patterns from the listening data depart from any areas of the strategic plan, these will be noted for further exploration. The order of the sharing reflects the order of the plan; hierarchy of strong patterns to sub-themes will also be noted, but the weight of particular patterns is not reflected in the order of the presentation of themes.

Thank you for your participation in this Ann Arbor community dialogue. We are coming together as a community to better understand specific steps we can take to extend and enhance the quality for which Ann Arbor is already well known. I am proud of the extremely high level of engagement in this Listen and Learn process.

Thank you for participating in this community conversation that will illuminate the ways we can grow together. We have important work to accomplish together – after all, our children are counting on us.
1) **What do we celebrate at our school and in Ann Arbor Public Schools?**
WHAT WE HEARD: CELEBRATE

Everyone loves a celebration, and in Ann Arbor Public Schools, there is certainly much cause for celebration. The super theme that emerges in the first category involves a celebration of our people – AAPS staff, the achievement of AAPS students, and the engagement of our parents and community.

Celebrate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Achievement</th>
<th>Relationships/Environment</th>
<th>Outreach/Involvement</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Quality of Personnel</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Enrichment Activities/Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are learning to think – to question – to be creative</td>
<td>High level of respect and trust among staff, students, and parents</td>
<td>Community affirmation for our school/District</td>
<td>Diversity: ethnic, racial, socio-economic</td>
<td>Caliber of staff, proud, strong commitment to AAPS</td>
<td>Technology in the classroom</td>
<td>Art and music programs and library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project based learning, experiential learning</td>
<td>Good relationship/partnership between parents and teachers</td>
<td>Parent involvement, school is a welcoming environment</td>
<td>Community diversity and the teacher &amp; staff effort to include multicultural backgrounds to teach all kids and build a unified community</td>
<td>Our community supports our teachers</td>
<td>Curriculum support to help all students achieve</td>
<td>Field trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are happy, engaged and successful among peer students and districts. Students perform very well beyond high school</td>
<td>Staff goes above &amp; beyond to reach out and help students &amp; families in need</td>
<td>Respect for different family structures</td>
<td>Diversity of programs (ELL, Technology, Read 180, U of M partnership), Resources</td>
<td>Professional and dedicated staff</td>
<td>Field trips, being out in the community a lot</td>
<td>Enrichment Program maintained, not compromising by elimination of Physical Education, Art, Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality core curriculum Proud of special programs, extra-curricular, &amp; athletic offerings</td>
<td>Staff works cooperatively and supports each other</td>
<td>Good communication with parents – elementary and AAPS News are noted</td>
<td>Diversity of Opinions</td>
<td>Principal &amp; teacher quality &amp; communication</td>
<td>Resources – AAPS has more than many school districts</td>
<td>Ability to maintain enrichment, athletics and academic choice in ebb-tide of funding in a balanced way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have maintained a strong emphasis on the arts – quality arts instruction –</td>
<td>Principal knows all the students</td>
<td>Superintendent making effort to reach out to community</td>
<td>Diversity/Cohesiveness of staff/students</td>
<td>We have faith in our teachers</td>
<td>Collaboration with UM initiative, Rising Scholars, Elementary Spanish Language Instruction, Pen Pal programs</td>
<td>Breadth and excellence of supportive programming and extra-curriculars (i.e., USA Hockey, Health Sciences, Trailblazers, PPI, Music, Theater)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These patterns were clear celebrations shared throughout the community conversations:

**CELEBRATION: EXEMPLARY ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT (28%)**

Academic achievement was noted as a point of pride across the community. Ann Arbor students continue to consistently outperform peer districts in all measures.

AAPS students perform well when compared with their peers at both the state and national levels, and in most cases our students achieve post graduation as well.

**CELEBRATION: QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND STAFF (15%)**

Overwhelmingly, Ann Arbor believes in its teachers and school staffs. At each of the 34 school visits, much respect and appreciation was communicated in support for our AAPS school staffs by many session participants. Again and again, I was told how much our parents, students, community, and alumni admire, respect and appreciate the incredible AAPS staff.

**CELEBRATION: RESOURCES (14%)**

Throughout the tour, despite the challenges of reductions in resources over previous years, there exists an awareness, a gratitude among AAPS stakeholders that we maintain resources to provide a quality educational experience. Examples include a Sinking Fund to support physical buildings as well as a Technology Bond for updating technology across schools.

**CELEBRATION: QUALITY CORE CURRICULUM & ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES (14%)**

A strong core curriculum is another area where many pointed to a celebration; several parents stated that in Ann Arbor, the focus is for a broader educational experience. Ann Arbor has resisted the narrowing of offerings that has occurred in many districts across the country.

Also, parents, students and community members overwhelmingly point to the quality enrichment programs Ann Arbor offers. They are grateful that we have retained, despite years of budget reductions, robust offering in the world-class arts, extra-curricular, athletics, and rec & ed programming. Ann Arbor parents and staff highly value these rich offerings as an important part of the Ann Arbor 'brand.'

**CELEBRATION: OUTREACH & INVOLVEMENT, PARTNERSHIPS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT (10%)**

They also are proud of the high levels of partnerships, both internal and external to the organization. The community engagement and support for Ann Arbor Public Schools – PTOs and numerous partnerships were the most-often mentioned examples of this community involvement with our schools.

Although AAPS has experienced many reductions over recent years, stakeholders are grateful, partly due to strong partnerships, that there remains a level of quality and resources have been leveraged to maintain a strong commitment to the arts, rich offerings of electives, extra-curricular activities, and athletics.

**CELEBRATION: DIVERSITY (8%)**

In addition, diversity was communicated as a celebration and is considered a strength – a celebration of Ann Arbor.

Parents and staff point to diversity - socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic - as a strength that other districts
don't always offer. Parents articulate a firm commitment to have their children experience the rich diversity of Ann Arbor Public Schools. Parents also expressed that the strength of our diverse community is reflected throughout our schools and this is an important characteristic that makes AAPS desirable. They cited examples of multicultural celebrations as one way they come together to appreciate the diverse community. Parents report that in attending Ann Arbor schools, our children learn to work together with all kinds of students – our schools reflect the world at large, and this is an Ann Arbor celebration.

CELEBRATION: POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS & A RICH ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING (11%)

Finally, in the celebrate category, participants in the Listen & Learn sessions expressed that positive relationships and a rich environment for learning, characterized by high levels of respect and trust are additional elements that make AAPS strong and that we celebrate.

Celebrations are an excellent place to begin working toward improvement. In Ann Arbor, it is common for stakeholders to share generations of involvement with the schools, and many staff exhibit pride as alumni of Ann Arbor Public Schools. Beginning from a position of strength to extend and enhance the positive 'brand' of Ann Arbor provides insight in tackling our areas for improvement.
2) **What areas need our attention?**
WHAT WE HEARD: REFLECT

“Please pay attention to the morale, health, and well-being of staff. There is a ‘fraying of the fabric’ here.”

All strong organizations regularly take a look at opportunities to improve and use stakeholder input to support the direction for organizational improvement. Reflection is a very important step to enact positive change. The responses to this question illuminated the areas where AAPS has opportunities to grow.

### Reflections - Table of Examples - Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase/Redirect Funding</th>
<th>Equity issues Resources/Curriculum</th>
<th>Student Support/Development</th>
<th>Staff Support/Development</th>
<th>Partnerships/Communication</th>
<th>Expectations/Direction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class sizes have steadily increased</td>
<td>Reduce racial/socioeconomic disparities</td>
<td>Special education needs restructuring, including more early intervention</td>
<td>Need personnel and teacher training</td>
<td>Build trust between Board, Administration, families, school, community</td>
<td>AAPS should have a voice, be a leader, in driving policy in Lansing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Budget – equitable distribution across schools – Add pressure on Lansing</td>
<td>Beware of disproportionality – over-identification of minorities, boys, ELL and Title I in special education</td>
<td>Streamline ability to get students the necessary supports they need (SIS)</td>
<td>Professional Development needs to be more meaningful and tailored to specific buildings and departments</td>
<td>Budget priorities – creative partnerships (UofM and other organizations)</td>
<td>Ask people/stakeholders involved, for input when making decisions, (e.g., secretaries – copy machines; teachers – textbooks, supplies, etc.) this is actually fiscally responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better use of funds, smarter budgeting</td>
<td>Discrepancy of disciplinary actions taken against involving students of color vs. students not of color</td>
<td>More support for emotional health</td>
<td>Use of technology in curriculum Need to better integrate technology with teaching &amp; learning Teachers need more technology training</td>
<td>Inform greater community (i.e., people without school-aged children) of positives and needs of district (will help, for example, with support of millage votes)</td>
<td>Board meetings – need to consider all schools, not just those in attendance or those with the loudest contingency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing resources on children – on education</td>
<td>Equity issues regarding resources, i.e. computer access, ability to purchase supplies needed – especially at high school level</td>
<td>Need to provide better support to families of low-achieving students</td>
<td>Relevant professional development – time to implement initiatives (eSuite)</td>
<td>Collaborative engagement in the District, not top down</td>
<td>Excessive testing is an issue that needs to be addressed, i.e. NWEA, MEAP, SRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating mechanism for input into budgeting priorities</td>
<td>Disparities in performance at middle school – students notice differences along racial and socio-economic lines. More emphasis on leveling the playing field in elementary</td>
<td>More support for struggling learners at all grade levels – better bridging at transition times: Elem to MS, MS to High</td>
<td>Tapping into human capital, help teachers to become better teachers and leaders</td>
<td>Better use of parents/other volunteers</td>
<td>Common Core/Common Curriculum – Where are we going with this?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ann Arbor community has communicated a number of areas in which there exist opportunities for growth. The community demonstrates a culture of high expectations and expects that we will confront and work through the present challenges.

Student support and increasing/redirec ting funding are the two dominant themes that most dramatically emerge from responses to the opportunities for improvement question.

**AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: STUDENT SUPPORT IN DEVELOPING AND CHALLENGING ALL LEARNERS & MEETING THE INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS (26%)**

“We don’t always do well in Ann Arbor at the margins, with those students who perform at very high levels and those who struggle. We need to improve our effectiveness at the margins.”

“Want to ‘seal the cracks’ and get to students at-risk earlier, and we want to be sure that students don’t get ‘deleted’ when they make a mistake. They need to learn from their mistakes.”

Ensure that we attend to the **individual needs of students**, including those performing beyond grade level, those with special needs, and those who require additional support to be successful while also attending to the needs of all those other students who are learning at levels somewhere in-between.

Within this theme is a strong belief that Ann Arbor Public Schools has an established record of success for high-performing, college-bound students, but that resources need to be leveraged better to **ensure a full continuum to prepare more non-traditional students**, those students who wish to go directly into career or non-college options and/or who have not been successful in a traditional school. Creating, within Ann Arbor Public schools, secondary opportunities that feature multiple pathways to success – career connections – and **more alternative pathways to graduation** was a theme that resonated across the District.

Improving the responsiveness, service, consistency, and follow-up with parents, staff, and students in providing for **special education needs** is a pattern that emerged within this theme from both staff and community as well.

There is a concern that **assessments** drive a significant portion of instructional time, particularly in the fall semester. Consensus is that AAPS should **evaluate District assessment practices and coordinate a more streamlined plan in AAPS**. Perhaps consider ways where students with more demonstrated need are assessed more frequently, and those who are performing at or above grade level experience less frequent monitoring. Ensure that ‘standardized’ assessments to clearly understand and monitor student progress are well balanced with the quality observations of a master teacher in evaluating overall student performance. Ann Arbor staff and parents want to ensure that as a District, we steer away from a system of excessive assessment that can result in an out-of-balance approach to quality teaching and learning.
AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: DISTRICT FUNDING, BUDGETING, TRANSPARENCY, AND FORWARD-PLANNING FOR FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY (25%)

“I worry that sometimes our budget issues may be partly related to our inability as a system to make the hard decisions.”

The most prominent reflection theme was around funding: increasing — reinstating funding that has been lost at the state level, redirecting what funds are available to better resonate with community priorities, and achieving equity in the allocation of financial resources across district schools and levels.

The community would like more collaboration and engagement in the budgeting process; opportunities to weigh in on budget reductions in advance of decision-making, and more advance communication once decisions have been made.

The community is clearly weary of the many years of incremental cuts that have directly impacted the classrooms and services. We heard clearly during the tour that the pattern of continued cuts needs to be replaced with a more efficient, collaborative forward thinking plan-of-action that maintains transparency and accountability across our school system.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: EXPECTATIONS, DIRECTION, LEADERSHIP (18%)

Ann Arbor Public Schools constituents repeatedly stated the need for strong, consistent, collaborative, and effective leadership at the District level. Articulating a direction, receiving input from stakeholders, communicating regularly, advocating at the state and national levels, and leading the charge for efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and innovation were patterns within this theme area.

A minor, yet audible theme in this leadership area exists around teacher and staff effectiveness within the AAPS organization. While the Ann Arbor community deeply respects and appreciates its quality teachers, there exists concern when teachers and other staff members who are known to be less effective are allowed to continue in their roles without improvement. The strong statement in this Listen & Learn data is that leaders across the organization must become more consistent and more effective in addressing, supporting, and when needed, moving to termination with non-performing staff members. Allowing underperforming employees to continue without improvement is stated as a blemish on the Ann Arbor reputation for quality.

Responsiveness and creating a welcoming, warm culture in every corner of the district was a theme that echoed across the district. Although warm relationships were celebrated, there were notable statements that, in some cases, this is an area for improvement. One individual shared on this topic about the need to, “build a culture of welcome into every interaction” in Ann Arbor Public Schools.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: STAFF DEVELOPMENT (17%)

Providing more consistent, predictable, relevant and higher-quality staff development opportunities for staff is a theme echoed across the District. There exists concern among staff that the loss in funding has resulted in a stark, less diverse offering in professional development. Several recalled previous days when there was a Professional Development department that coordinated wider offerings; they worry that current Department Chairs, who are part-time in their roles, are ‘spread too thin’ to be able to do their jobs as they would like.
AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: COMMUNICATION AND PARTNERSHIPS (8%)
And finally, communication – improving communication internally with district staff, with parents and stakeholders across our community, and advocating at the state level are primary areas where we need to prioritize and make positive change.

Increasing the number and quality of partnerships and working to improve relationships between and among students, staff, parents and the community is an accompanying theme here.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: EQUITY ISSUES (6%)
At almost every meeting, individuals spoke with passion about the need to improve outcomes for historically underperforming populations. Concern about the achievement gap for students from poverty, students of color, and students impacted by second language issues form a strong pattern in this Listen & Learn data.

Deploying tools to get at this achievement divide is a priority. Several mentioned a worry that we have seen this data continue over many years. Some are anxious to author a new narrative in this area, citing the terms ‘achievement gap’ and ‘at-risk’ as labels that fail to serve quality work toward improvement.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING UPKEEP, CLEANLINESS, AND CURB APPEAL
Ensuring our buildings are clean, attractive environments that are safe, warm and welcoming places for students, staff, and community. Caring more attentively to our physical buildings and cultivating the appearance of our buildings – curb appeal and comfort of classrooms - as a point of pride in the community is an area where we will need to focus some additional resources. An echo in this data was a need to support the facilities team at times with their ability to provide a more prompt response when there are school maintenance issues that require attention.
3) What do we dream that Ann Arbor Public Schools will be known for in 10-15 years?
WHAT WE HEARD: ASPIRATIONS

“My dream is that I want my child to love school – just as much as he did in kindergarten – all through his school years. This year, he is a first grader, and on the first day, I was so afraid that he might not love it. I asked him, ‘How did you like school today?’ I was so relieved when he responded enthusiastically, ‘I love school!’ I want him to feel that way every year, all the way to graduation.”

When we dream of what we can become in Ann Arbor Public Schools, the dreams are not merely the sum of our reflections. Our dreams suggest transformation in so many areas, and they paint a picture of worthy aspirations for AAPS. These aspirations really do take us above and beyond the present reality to describe a future of an enhanced school system, featuring improved opportunities for our students that build on the strong legacy of excellence. A pattern among this data describes preparing our students well for the world they will face, as opposed to preparing them for the world we have already experienced. It’s a new day in education and the aspirations data reveals that we, as a community, understand the need for innovation, for change, for confronting our challenges in new ways.

There is a strong desire for more consistent quality of education in our schools no matter what school a student attends. Our community clearly wants all our Ann Arbor Public Schools to be ‘top-shelf’ places for students to learn.

There is a pattern in our dreams that calls for us to coordinate a more comprehensive staff development program for teachers to support their professional growth to ensure ongoing improvements in the delivery of education to meet the needs of all students. This desire for more quality professional development was also voiced through the educational assistants and office professional staff as well.

The community articulated a dream that we will offer a comprehensive program that prepares all students for their future, academically and socially. The desire is to see our students as not only high-performing academically, but also as problem-solvers, globally aware, and responsible world citizens – the dream is to develop the “Whole Child.”

Additionally, the dream is to ensure all AAPS schools- the infrastructure and operational needs both inside and outside our buildings are all in the best shape possible and allow our students, staff and the community access to beautifully maintained buildings that we can be proud of as a community resource.

Technology, integrated to serve instruction, better and healthier food choices such as the lunches served to our students, are all areas that our community dreams and hopes will be given positive attention to ensure the long-range sustainability of our district.
Listen and Learn: We Are Ann Arbor

These patterns were reported as areas that hold our dreams, our aspirations for the future:

![DREAM Diagram]

**Aspirations: Table of Examples, Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operations</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Student Development</th>
<th>Community/Outreach</th>
<th>District Goals</th>
<th>Infrastructural Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More healthy food choices; real food</td>
<td>More professional development to support social-emotional needs and aspects of learning for students</td>
<td>Re-define what achievement is, more holistic, not just academic; value all parts of the child</td>
<td>Develop partnerships with businesses and universities</td>
<td>Maintain high national standard and reputation of AAPS</td>
<td>Improve facilities – heat, AC, toilets that flush, clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better transportation</td>
<td>Increase professional development to cultivate child-centered; relationships based learning; more affirmation of that as part of the art of teaching</td>
<td>Environment where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and themselves at all grade levels and throughout district</td>
<td>U of M / EMU</td>
<td>Every school be a &quot;green school&quot;</td>
<td>iPad for every child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned how to interact with all types of kids respectfully. Embrace diversity</td>
<td>Seeing more action research in the classroom (partner with U of M?)</td>
<td>all students empowered regardless of racial, ethnic, economic ability, learning style to be effective – global citizens</td>
<td>Community workshops</td>
<td>Feature quality in each and every school - No matter what school you end up at in the district, you'll get a good education</td>
<td>Schools are allocated resources based on need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability in our upper level leadership</td>
<td>Professional development: discipline specific, administration listening to what teachers need to grow</td>
<td>Graduates should have personal &amp; civic responsibility, encouraged with parent involvement as well</td>
<td>Community is fully invested in the public schools</td>
<td>Bring programming to underutilized, underserved areas</td>
<td>Curriculum and hardware to support 21st century learning skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lunch program / free &amp; reduced made more healthy</td>
<td>Teachers who teach area subjects</td>
<td>Vocational trades – partnerships vs. all college bound</td>
<td>Open communication with the administration</td>
<td>Tenure reform / weed out under performing or ineffective teachers/ principals</td>
<td>Instructional resources that are readily available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) What are the top 3 priorities you would like to see the Superintendent address?
WHAT WE HEARD: PRIORITIES

“To what extent is our District Strategic Plan on a collision course with our budget? We want to get smarter about the way we approach this challenge.”

Ann Arbor stakeholders articulated clearly defined opinions as to the priorities for next steps for AAPS.

More than 60% of responses indicate clear priorities around the core areas of student learning, development and funding/resource utilization. What emerged from the data was an emphasis on the importance of funding, resource utilization and in particular, discovering a better way to balance the district’s budget without continuing the cuts and reductions to staff and programs. Especially, the community hopes not to see additional layoffs of teachers, even if other difficult decisions must be made.

A major theme with priorities from throughout the Listen & Learn process is maintaining ‘reasonable’ class sizes. Although many in the community understand that class size increases have been an outcome of reduced funding from the state, they establish class size as a top priority and believe that for many it remains a clear indicator of instructional quality in a school system. They believe the work of teachers has been strained by the expansion in class sizes over recent years.

Additionally, stakeholders want more class selections, more language options and more equity across our schools, which translates into a better balance in socio-economics and diversity in our schools achieved by developing and infusing programs that better prepare our students.

Within resource utilization, the theme of ensuring that schools are equitably resourced is key. An area observed where resources sometimes are skewed in distribution is across the funding for ‘extras’ at school. Field trips and special events are often referenced as an area where inequity exists in AAPS.

Staff morale, relationships and communication both internal and external to the organization, are also consistently important priorities that need to be addressed to strengthen our district.
As an organization dedicated to educational improvement, we have a lot of work to do and we will only accomplish this work by working together.
It is important to view the *Listen & Learn* data through the lens of the AAPS Strategic Plan. Following are the patterns shared within the format of the eight Ann Arbor Public Schools’ Strategies.

**AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy 1:**
*We will create a complete educational program, featuring personalized learning that realizes student aspirations and meets international standards.*

**ANN ARBOR VALUES NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS**

An overarching pattern emerging in the Listen and Learn conversations is the tremendous value our Ann Arbor community places on strong, quality neighborhood schools - this theme was reiterated in every school. In Ann Arbor, there is a fervent desire to ensure quality educational programming within every neighborhood, and for every child. In neighborhood schools, there exist strong connections to history, to generations that have attended, graduated, and returned to Ann Arbor, even to their local neighborhoods, to raise children. Ann Arbor residents express amazing pride in sharing stories about the role of schools as the neighborhood ‘hub.’ Parents may deliberately choose housing based on school location, local PTOs are a vibrant connector within the school community, and numerous connections - such as partnerships to enrich learning, remain strong. Ann Arbor residents pride themselves that we have maintained the quality neighborhood elementary school as other districts have implemented a ‘bigger box’ approach to schooling. Value for quality neighborhood schools is in the DNA of the Ann Arbor Public Schools community.

AAPS stakeholders celebrate that in Ann Arbor the educational ‘package’ that we deliver is top-quality as is evidenced by strong student achievement outcomes, a staff that is highly educated and highly-effective, and that K-12 education in Ann Arbor features the ‘whole package’ - rigorous academics, wide variety of arts, technology, and other enhanced programming. Arts, athletics, and many ‘extras’ are an important point of pride that was mentioned in every school and community meeting.

Another celebration is the legacy of excellence that extends across generations, that many in Ann Arbor are graduates who have returned to Ann Arbor so their children will benefit from the same high quality education.

Stakeholders are proud of the high level of student achievement, as is evidenced by both scores and the many awards gained by our students.

They are proud of our wide offering of programs, and are especially proud of the strong arts programming that exists in the District; they are proud that, while other districts across the state have had to cut many programs, for the most part, Ann Arbor has been able to keep the cuts away from valued programs.

Stakeholders across AAPS stated clearly **areas where they believe we should add and/or enhance, update, extend our programming**, in order to make our ‘educational program’ more complete.

- Alternative offerings – create more pathways to success
- Career pathway offerings
- Languages, across all grades, with particular interest in two areas:
  - Adding more comprehensive language study in elementary (K-5)
• Extending language offerings to include: Japanese, Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic – languages other than Spanish, French, German

➢ International Baccalaureate
• Primary Years, Middle Years, & Diploma Years Program
➢ STEAM programming (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, & Math)
➢ More K-8 opportunities & more variety in high school offerings

**AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy 2:**
We will develop and implement a personalized learning plan for each student.

There exist many patterns and sub-patterns in the Listen & Learn data around meeting the individual learning needs of each student, yet what is clear is that parents believe this is an important priority for the District.

• Need to challenge student at all points along the achievement spectrum, including offering more challenge for high-performing students, ensuring that all students are prepared for the ‘next step’ beyond high school, and offering relevant and valuable alternative pathways to graduation and career.
• Within this theme was a strong feeling that, “One size does not fit all,” and a deep commitment that we need to do better at meeting the individual needs of learners across the achievement continuum.

**AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy #3:**
We will actualize the potential for excellence in all students through inspiration and support.

“Besides wanting my child to graduate with strong academics, I also want him to be a good, well-rounded person.”

• In this area, there was a pattern of the need to educate the whole child, which manifested in a number of statements, including the desire to work with all facets of student development, not just academics.

**AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy #4:**
We will ensure meaningful learning through effective instruction.

• Attract, retain, support, and develop teachers who perform well.
• Do the work to effectively support teacher improvement.
• Support teachers who need development; when progress is not achieved and it is appropriate, terminate underperforming teachers.
• Pay attention to class size and maintain reasonably-sized classes so that teaching and learning is effective.
AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy #5:  
We will enhance the district’s professional learning system in order to provide relevant learning experiences and support for all staff in order to continually improve academic and social achievement for all students.

- Staff is firm on their desire for more consistent, better quality, and more relevant professional development opportunities; choice is key.  
- This desire for development extends beyond teachers; office professionals and others also expressed this need.  
- Parents and community reinforced the commitment for highly trained teachers with current, up-to-date techniques and professional skills.

AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy #6:  
We will engage and inform our constituents to engender trust and support to accomplish our mission and objectives.

- Develop a consistent, quality, proactive approach to communication within staff and across the AAPS system.  
- Work closely with the media – make Ann Arbor look better in the public eye.  
- Communicate at the state level, as an advocate for Ann Arbor and for public schools.

AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy #7:  
We will create and maintain physical learning environments that enable us to fulfill our mission.

- Clean, well-maintained, updated buildings remain a priority for our community.  
- Desire for AAPS buildings to be sustainable; green.  
- AAPS buildings to offer integrated technology.

AAPS Strategic Plan, Strategy #8:  
Ensuring resources adequate to accomplish our mission and vision.

- The community is seeking innovation in programming to stem the tide of financial uncertainty.  
- Ann Arbor Public Schools’ stakeholders have reiterated their expectation that District budget processes and decisions are ones vetted through numerous opportunities for community input and feedback.  
- Both staff and parents are fatigued from multiple years of significant back-to-back reductions. Staff and parents recognize that dramatic reductions in funding at the state level have made the task of funding local schools increasingly challenging.
• Respondents share that, however difficult the decisions, they want strong leadership to be accountable, communicate, innovate, and make courageous decisions with regard to budget.

• The desire is that Ann Arbor will become better situated to achieve an overall sound fiscal approach, balancing short-term needs, while preserving a quality educational experience, and achieving long-term sustainability.

IMPLEMENTING A POSTURE AND STRUCTURES FOR CHANGE:

• Change process must feature ongoing structures for face-to-face interaction, incorporating input, feedback from staff, parents, and community so that mid-course supports and improvements are incorporated in an ‘as we go’ approach.

• Implement in a phased approach to build for sustainability, featuring action plans implemented with performance benchmarks over 1 – 3 - 5 years. The goal is that customized support and problem-solving can be incorporated over time during the course of implementation.

• Frequent communication and reporting mechanisms are consistently in place for initiatives.

• Formation of Advisory and Task Force Groups: Staff, parent, and community participation on advisory committees helps build understanding and involve community in improving targeted areas of our organization. We have begun this process with the Blue Ribbon Advisory Group and the Assessment Advisory Group and will initiate a Communication Advisory Group.

NEXT STEPS:

1) Assessment Advisory Board
   Without delay in January, we will post an online request for applications for prospective members (staff, parents, community members) to join an Ann Arbor Assessment Advisory Group whose task will be to examine current assessment practices, understand state requirements which are currently changing, clarify thinking, and bring forward proposals to the Superintendent to inform an amended Assessment Plan for 2014-2015.

2) Project Sparkle
   We are emphasizing, beginning over winter break, the importance of achieving sparkling, clean, well-cared-for learning environments in every school. Staffs are investing extra time over this winter to more thoroughly clean 'bathrooms and corners' so that our Ann Arbor pride shines through in the cleanliness of every building.

3) Share Listen and Learn Report, Feedback, and Further Analysis
   We will be sharing the Listen and Learn report and next steps with the community beginning on January 22, 2014. We will coordinate meetings across the community during February as well as share via video and online mechanisms so that all have the opportunity to experience what we have learned from this process.
We will be embarking on a follow-up tour of the community during late January and February to share the Listen and Learn findings in a series of meetings (please check the AAPS website for schedule of times and locations) and to receive feedback and input for next steps. We remain in ongoing communication with our research partners from the University of Michigan who are prepared to drive into the response data for answers to further questions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOARD CONSIDERATION, 2014-2015:**

- **K-8 STEAM Campus featuring 1:1 Technology**
  - Locate at current Northside Elementary
- **Pathways to Success Campus**
  - Improve continuum of services and offerings for alternative students
  - Co-locate Roberto Clemente, A2Tech, GED & Options Program, and Adult Education to Stone School location
- **A² Virtual* Academy**
  - Features a lab classroom in each of our comprehensive high schools, Community, and Pathways to Success Campus
- **Early Childhood Education**
  - A combined Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)/Tuition model
  - Features preschool classrooms at Allen and Thurston for 2014-2015
  - Potential expansion to preschool locations in each cluster for 2015-2016
- **1:1 Technology Initiatives**
  - Bryant and Pittsfield Elementary K-1 Classrooms
  - K-8 STEAM
  - Pathways to Success
  - Explore Bring-Your-Own-Devices in one middle and one high school location
- **Expansion of Young 5’s Program**
- **Expand World Languages to select Elementary Schools**
  - To include Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Sign Language, Arabic, and Japanese

4) **Blue Ribbon Advisory Board**

We have begun initial work together with community leaders from across all sectors including partners from business, nonprofit, higher education, and municipal entities. This Blue Ribbon Advisory Board will weigh in on our Listen and Learn findings, and will meet from November to June of this year to explore, advise, and challenge the work. The Blue Ribbon Advisory Board serves AAPS and the Superintendent as a community-based advisory, a think tank, and a sounding board.

5) **Infusing of Rich Programming into Buildings with Available Capacity**

Distinct demand for particular programming emerged during the Listen & Learn meetings; infusing rich educational programs and opportunities into schools with available capacity is viewed by the community as far preferable to the wholesale redrawing of attendance boundaries.
6) **Ensure an open, collaborative, and clearly defined budgeting process**
   Beginning in February, stakeholders will be informed of a variety of structures – face-to-face meetings and online opportunities for community engagement and communication in the FY 15 budget process.

7) **Communicate, communicate, communicate**
   Consistent and ongoing communication, both internal and external to the school system, is a top priority, and will continue to be enhanced.

**Conclusion:**

We are coming together, as a community, to better understand the specific steps we can take to extend and enhance the quality for which Ann Arbor is already well known. We are proud of the extremely high level of engagement in this *Listen & Learn: We Are Ann Arbor* process. This community conversation is illuminating our path forward, the ways we can grow together. We will continue face-to-face community engagement as an ongoing cornerstone of our leadership in Ann Arbor. Please check in on the AAPS website for ongoing opportunities to join in, to partner with us. We have important work to accomplish together. Our children are counting on us.