

Summary of First 3 Small Group LearningLEAF Meetings
October 12, 2017

As part of the Board Goal for Budget Sustainability, the superintendent has scheduled 12 small group meetings, lasting approximately 1 hour, and centering around a couple of intentions:

1. Engaging community members in determining what the district should continue doing, what the district should stop doing, and what the district should start doing.
2. Each participant is also supplied with a packet of information related to financial history— including revenues and expenses trends; information related to special education costs and reimbursements, tax rate information, demographic changes, and other comparative statistical information. It is hoped that this packet provides factual information that may be shared across the community.
3. The primary objective of the meeting itself is to allow for an open sharing of concerns, questions, and feedback. Perhaps the packet of objective information helps inform decisions about community positions, but thus far it has served to open some opportunities for awareness.
4. Thus far our attendance at the meetings have been as follows: 1 person, 3 people, 6 people.
5. Here is a quick summary of what has been shared thus far:
 - a. Questions about what we are preparing our students “for”? There was some discussion that we focus too narrowly on college prep OR vocational, and others were concerned that students do not know for sure what they want to do in life at such a young age and they need to be exposed to many different experiences— both academic and vocational.
 - b. We should look at how the Food Service Dept operates and how we can turn it into a profit center.
 - c. We should do more linking of adults with children when parents are uninvolved.
 - d. We need more social worker/counselor assistance in situations where children are living in divorced parent households.
 - e. Great value in having a wide variety of opportunities for students: from gymnastics to music to athletics to AP courses and a full vocational offering. Little interest in making reductions.
 - f. Make sure that there is something for every student.
 - g. We should increase collaboration with other entities— taxing and non-taxing entities.
 - h. We need to stop deficit spending.
 - i. We need to educate the community on all of the different foundations and charitable organizations and help align philanthropy for specific priorities.
 - j. We need to be more involved with the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce for marketing opportunities.
 - k. We can improve the Workforce Development opportunities.
 - l. We should improve the Co-op, work program for students. Too easy to just keep your current job, which may be unrelated to your future career.

- m. A referendum at this time would be “deplorable”, the timing with construction projects would be confusing and not well received. Especially since we are not growing enrollment right now.
- n. We need more collaborative communication, especially related to fundraising.
- o. The City of Geneseo’s tax increase and increase would negatively impact the school’s interest in raising revenues.
- p. Continue to grow the Band, Choir, Arts
- q. We should change the grading scale to 90-80-70-60.
- r. We need more technology courses.
- s. We need life skills courses for all students— how to do taxes, home/personal budgeting.
- t. We need to maintain strong elementary art & music. Young learners need hands on opportunities in visual arts, not just iPads and worksheets.
- u. We need to retain top teachers and administrators, and find a way to reward and recognize the best teachers.
- v. We need to continue our quality website, important to “out of towners” curious about our district.
- w. We need to increase parental & community involvement.
- x. We need to constructively resist standards-based education trends like Common Core.
- y. We need to restore class ranks and not eliminate valedictorian and salutatorian.
- z. We need to stop hiring mediocre early career teachers.
- aa. We need to look more critically at opportunities to get more performance out of local shared and state special education resources. These cost a premium, are they worth a premium?
- bb. We need to stop township restrictions on school board seats and have an at-large ballot. Geneseo Township occupies more than half the total district EAV.
- cc. We need to stop trying to be everything to everybody.
- dd. We need to allow Geneseo Donut Shop peanut free donuts on to the safe snack list.
- ee. We need to consider developing a capital giving program to permanently fund or endow discretionary pursuits like fine arts teachers and seats per pupil (a more affordable amount).
- ff. We need more use of Not for Profit-public/private educational partnerships like Junior Achievement; the old building trades program.
- gg. We need to evaluate more “pay for play” options.
- hh. We need to support efforts to weaken the inflexibility of teachers’ unions and their benefits (especially post-retirement) and the burden to the taxpayer.
- ii. We need to carefully craft any message to the community on any potential tax increase. Be wary and emphasize student needs. Taxpayers will be sensitive to an argument, simply that our rate is competitively low. This is not a compelling argument. Emphasize the drive towards educational excellence, especially on academics, not just on more narrowly targeted special activities.

- jj. Board needs to hold out for the very best candidate for the next superintendent.
An all star superintendent.
 - kk. We need to expand vocational offerings.
 - ll. We need to be sure we are aligned with what colleges are seeking.
 - mm. We need to be able to answer how important is it that a student going to technical school takes a foreign language.
6. We will be conducting 9 more small group sessions and while the attendance has not been great, the conversations have been of high quality. In general, the most recurring theme is that the majority of those involved believe we need to reinstitute participation fees, at some level, for all athletic, arts, activities like clubs, etc. This was the sentiment, even if these revenues do not move the needle very much in reducing the deficit. It would at least cause some investment in the programs from all involved. Generally, there was also great concern and discussion related to the deficits created by the nature of the special education system.

Respectfully submitted,
Scott D. Kuffel