

**100 DAYS OF LISTENING
JULY 1 – OCTOBER 8, 2009
EMERGING THEMES**

**REPORT TO THE BOARD
November 10, 2009**

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SUPERINTENDENT**

From my first day of work on July 1st for 100 days ending October 8th, I met with community members representing a myriad of perspectives on the Juneau School District's strengths and challenges. Conversations with both individuals and small groups involved more than 200 stakeholders in our district. Some conversations were initiated by my office, but many were initiated by others. Although the conversations are continuing, this report is intended to begin identifying the core themes emerging from this listening.

I approached each conversation from two general dimensions. For some, the conversation started with a topic they brought to the meeting. For others, we started with the three basic questions below and then moved to their specific thoughts. I found each conversation to be informative to our work and found each patron to be deeply invested in the success of students. The three questions I posed with each group were:

- What should I know about Juneau and/or its schools?
- What strengths and challenges do you see with our school district?
- Who else do you think I should talk to?

The themes that emerged (so far) from this simple conversation are:

Share the big picture. Let the community know the big picture goals and the specific strategies planned for achieving those goals.

Reach out to the community. Give them opportunities to participate, provide input, and help students succeed.

Communicate frequently with parents, students and other community stakeholders. Keep our public informed of upcoming initiatives and provide opportunities for feedback prior to making major changes.

Appreciate widespread pride for athletic programs in the community. This was almost always accompanied by the hope that more students would be able to participate in athletics with two high schools offering programs or a concern that the teams might be less competitive with two programs. This was accompanied by a simultaneous pride for how the community of Juneau has supported youth

activities and a desire for additional facilities to meet the community's widespread interest in recreation.

Continue to build on the momentum of partnering with the University of Alaska Southeast. There is support for expanding seamless learning opportunities for students with career technology and advanced study interests.

Provide update on the work of the Equity Committee. The community is aware of the existence of the Equity Committee, but feels uninformed about the specific steps that are being planned or implemented.

Create a long-term facility plan. The two key interests here include 1) people's interest in knowing the plan and 2) ensuring that we stabilize the tax implications for local citizens.

Continue studying alternative programs. There are seemingly competing interests here. Some are interested in possibly expanding alternative programs, while others are concerned that alternative programs compete for resources with existing programs and may be less representative of the student demographics in Juneau.

Expand the number of Native Alaskan teachers in Juneau Schools. There is substantial interest in this strategy – using successful role models for Native students – for ensuring that all students have an opportunity to experience the culture of our region and succeed.

Work with teachers so that every teacher is effective in the classroom. There were many supportive comments for teachers in general and high praise for specific teachers. There was also a significant number of people who wanted to see excellence in every classroom – instructionally, in communication with families, and in engagement with students.

Raise the bar. Develop specific curriculum and instruction that ensures every student is ready to enter and succeed in college or the workplace.

Increase the support for paraprofessionals, especially in the area of professional development. These non-licensed staff represent a significant proportion of the school district's workforce and should be developed to their potential.

Increase financial transparency. Help the community understand the sources from which the school district gets its revenue and the manner in which it is distributed. The most common thread in this theme is people's interest in seeing how money and other resources flow to schools in an equitable manner.

Deliver on the promise of the smaller schools. Individuals – including those who were supportive of opening a second comprehensive high school – felt that the

first year had a number of stumbling blocks. They are eager to see the personalized and successful learning opportunities promised in the Next Generation Plan. A thread within this feedback was to be sure schedules were built on students' needs, not just their "wants".

Clearly define the academic programs at each high school. This feedback frequently included an interest in seeing the respective academies at each high school defined and the opportunity for incoming freshmen to develop a long term learning plan based on predictable availability of classes.

Get a handle on the drug issue, specifically the ways in which substance abuse issues in the community impact students, the school learning environment, and safe athletic competition.

Increase the graduation rate, for all students, but especially as it relates to Native Alaskan students.

Increase staffing at schools. Individuals (and some groups) were interested in seeing more specialists in our schools, ranging from librarians (media specialists) to math teachers to science.

Develop a system to enhance parent and community involvement. Individuals were interested in having an overarching system for engaging parents and other volunteers in supporting classroom instruction. Others were interested in developing business/agency partnership to enhance relevance in the curriculum, especially at the secondary level.

Develop a comprehensive instructional technology plan. There is a fairly common belief that the District has limited instructional technology and lacks a plan or support to implement an effective strategy.

Bring some parameters to site-based decision making. Some advocated for more site-based autonomy, while others hoped to see less. Both wanted to see greater clarity for schools and site councils regarding what they have the authority to decide.

Review the new school start times. The time change has been a difficult adjustment. From high school student job opportunities to daycare for younger students, families (and some staff) have struggled to make the adjustment to the change. In general, people recognized there is a research base that supports the change, but report they are negatively impacted.

Help every school become a welcoming place for students, parents and others in the community. Individuals shared examples of schools where they feel very welcome and others where they feel unwelcome and – in some cases – disrespected. End all forms of bullying.

In short, there are many pride points for Juneau and the Juneau School District. The community is supportive of the work we are doing *and* wants to see us do much better. People would like to see our plans for raising the level of student success, clarity in how our organizational structures and initiatives will accomplish that, and transparency in our work – especially as it relates to budget and resource allocations.

In closing, it is important to note that these themes only represent my initial one hundred days. This report is not intended to signal an end to the listening. The superintendent's office remains open to members of the public who wish to share their perspectives about the successes and challenges of our school district. Juneau residents, including District staff, can schedule appointments by calling the office directly at 523-1702. In addition, scheduled communication sessions with our three employee groups will occur monthly throughout the school year.

As the superintendent of Juneau School District, I am very thankful to the individuals and groups who took the time and made the commitment to provide this invaluable feedback. It provides us with outstanding information upon which we can push toward excellence for every student. That's our work each day and with every student.