January 2018 *Community Conversations* Overall Summary

Series Summary: During the month of January 2018 the School Board and administration engaged members of the Swallow School community to celebrate great things happening in the district, ensure understanding of challenges the district faces, and to receive community feedback about the following:

> *Changing Needs - What do you think our curriculum, programming, and services need to include to meet changing societal/workforce demands?*

> *Next Steps: What do you feel Swallow should do to meet your recommended changes to curriculum, programming, and services?*

> *Support for Next Steps: What would YOU support to fund your suggestions—in other words, how should the district PAY for known maintenance needs and your suggestions?*

Participation: Ten *Community Conversations* were held for all stakeholders and participation included:

- Thirty students in grades 3-8 (one session)
- Forty Swallow staff members (one session)
- Approximately sixty parents/residents which is 10% of current Swallow parents/residents and an overall resident participation rate of close to 3% (eight sessions)

Feedback in the Focus Areas: Feedback gained through this process showcases a strong representation of what the Swallow School community values related to a recognition of changing needs, next steps to meet these changing needs, and support for the identified next steps. While the main themes that arose within each question area are summarized herein, the School Board and administration will use all of the data in future planning efforts.

The number by a line or section header indicates the number of dots expended to prioritize this area by participants.

Changing Needs

Five main themes arose related to changing needs. Descriptions are below:

Curriculum: (343)

While traditional curricular offerings can provide a solid educational foundation, stakeholders value innovative and challenging curricular programming to grow students' skills for jobs, which in many cases have yet to be created, are aware of different cultures, and have experience as members of a global community of learners.

A firm foundation in reading/communicative arts is of paramount importance as students must be even better communicators in a society where information flows freely and co-workers come from all corners of the planet. Stakeholders value varied offerings and integrated curricular programming to ensure the highest levels of proficiency in this curricular area, especially in the upper grades.

The community wants to recognize the unique needs of both the world in which we live and each learner by suggesting increased elective offerings. Electives which allow for student choice across various career-cluster areas rather than currently required music, art, and language offerings were requested. While a background in a World Language is viewed as essential, offerings beyond Spanish were recommended.

Stakeholders specifically emphasized the opportunity for stronger partnerships with local businesses to provide middle school students with service learning opportunities, internships, job shadowing, and training in areas we do not currently offer. This feedback was coupled with suggestions to emphasize Financial Literacy throughout the curriculum at Swallow.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math are the clear areas of identified changing needs for Swallow students. All stakeholders identified the need to continue to expand programming in these areas and suggested their integration will lead to the best outcomes and preparedness for students in the long term. Computer programming, coding, and beginning to consider how artificial intelligence can be used in the educational process were among the areas of greatest prioritization with the understanding that Swallow's technology infrastructure is up to date and supports these curricular demands.

General Suggestions: (145)

The community values Swallow's mission and made several general suggestions to address changing societal needs to ensure that students leave here with a firm foundation in learning how to learn. Life skills such as leadership, working with others in a team, being flexible and adaptable, and the ability to 'dig deep' to persevere were emphasized as well as healthy living.

Some questions about the district's assessment, feedback, and grading system were also provided.

Talent Management: (79)

Stakeholders acknowledge that student needs, and therefore staff learning needs, have changed over time. To address these changing needs attention needs to be paid to specialized teachers and support staff who can support each child's growth over time. Participants value the investment in high quality professional development for staff to provide evidence-based instructional approaches and programming for students.

Building: (50)

As societal and workforce needs change, so do the demands on the building to support new programming and advances in instructional approaches. Stakeholders would like to address the building's infrastructure, furnishings, learning spaces, and storage needs to ensure desired programming and learning can be maximized.

Social and Emotional Learning and Support: (40)

Stakeholders value personnel and programming that assists students in learning peer-peer problem-solving skills, development of emotional intelligence, and helps make sense of the digital world which is inescapable.

Next Steps

Three main themes arose related to next steps. Descriptions are below:

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: (234)

The Swallow community values instructional approaches which personalize the learning experience coupled with hands-on immersive learning opportunities to ensure students get a true sense of the content they are expected to know and showcase through varied skill-based assessments. Stakeholders would like to see next steps taken to increase elective offerings for middle school students, STEM programming with an emphasis on coding and technology, and more involvement with businesses to support career exploration. To support these changes, suggestions were made about class length and scheduling as well as what is valued in the current curriculum upon which to build.

Talent Management: (108)

Stakeholders agree that the people are what makes Swallow a very special place to learn and grow. A variety of next steps related to Talent Management were suggested including a focus on refining health insurance benefit processing to reimagining the current salary schedule for teachers and ensuring professional development to support adult learning and growth for the benefit of students in this ever-changing fast-paced world. Stakeholders also want to make sure that student needs are met through the district's staffing model, in particular that there are ample specialists to work with diverse learning styles and needs.

Facilities/Furnishings: (80)

Swallow community members realize that facilities and furniture greatly impact the learning environment. Stakeholders recognize the need to keep up with maintenance to ensure the overall health and safety of building occupants and protect the community's investment therein. Additionally, the opportunity to reimagine some of the spaces within the building to support advances with curriculum and instructional approaches is also evident in feedback through the *Community Conversations* series.

Support for Next Steps

Four main suggestions to provide financial support for next steps and changing needs emerged and are described below. Because not all stakeholders can provide financial support in the same ways, prioritized ways to *Support Next Steps* are broken out by stakeholder group at the request of the district's Facilities Advisory Committee and School Board to assist in future planning.

Donations/Fundraising/Sponsorships: (194 overall— Parents/Residents 87, Students 101, and Staff 6)

Overall, stakeholders suggested that donations, fundraising and sponsorships are among the best ways the district can support its next steps and changing needs. Suggested kinds of donations include general solicitations, commencing a Capital Campaign, asking taxpayers to donate tax refunds to Swallow, formalizing corporate sponsorships, and fundraising in general.

Referendum: (121 overall— Parents/Residents 112, Students 0, and Staff 9*)

Parents/residents have general support for going to referendum, with some conditions and varying opinions about what should be included on a referendum versus paid for in other ways. Their feedback ranged from supporting any referendum, only going to referendum if their taxes would remain steady, combining a Capital Campaign with a referendum, seeking an operational referendum to support staffing levels, and going to referendum for known maintenance needs. Participants provided additional insights about communications efforts and ways to share the district's needs and case for the passage of a referendum.

Staffing: (113 overall— Parents/Residents 12, Students 0, Staff 101*)

Swallow staff and parents/residents want to ensure that staffing levels and expertise provide support for changing needs and the realization of desired next steps as identified through the *Community Conversations* series.

Increase Service Fees: (80 overall— Parents/Residents 6, Students 77, Staff 0)

Largely suggested by students, another alternative was increasing service fees to help the district support next steps. Ideas ranged from creating new offerings which community members would pay for to increasing fees for already-provided services.

*Swallow staff placed nine dots on post its specifying referenda and one hundred and one that suggested staffing levels could be supported by the district's fund balance or an operational referendum. Because of the way the feedback was provided, the majority of their feedback is within the Staffing category above rather than referendum.