

Danville District #118

Consumer Research

Prepared for

Danville District #118 School Board

February 12, 2020



Sometimes The Smallest Things Make The Biggest Difference

35 S. Salem • Arlington Heights, IL 60005 • 847.253.8195

How did we approach the research?

Research designed to:

- Explore current strong points and frustrations within the school district
- Gain a better understanding of current feelings and attitudes from administrators, teachers, parents, students
- Gain insight into what the district stands for from the perspective of those on the inside

Goal of informing direction for the district's strategic plan

How did we approach the research?

Focus Groups

- Spoke with administrators, faculty, teachers, students, parents
- Represented all levels in the district
 - Pre-K
 - Grade school
 - Middle school
 - High school
 - Alternative School
 - Administration
 - Boys and Girls Club
- 1 hour 30-minute discussions
 - Current high points of their day, year, overall experience
 - Current low points or frustrations of their day, year, overall experience
 - Concerns for the future
 - Hopes/vision for the future

A word on qualitative research

Qualitative Research is a directional tool:

- While we spoke to a great number of administrators, teachers, students, and parents, we couldn't speak with everyone, and therefore cannot project with absolute certainty, the "right" answers for the district or for the strategic plan that will be developed
- Instead, these findings should be used directionally, and seen as a complementary tool to the current understanding of the district's challenges and to the overall vision for the district going forward

Let's start with the bright spots

There are a lot of positives in the district

Every group had many bright spots to share:

- No matter how long they had been in the district, or whether they were a young student or a seasoned teacher, everyone had similar things to share about the district's strong points
- They weren't sharing these things because they felt they had to, they were sharing them because they truly believed there are many positive aspects in the district

Most wished that the positive aspects were more widely shared/celebrated:

- Most people felt that there was not enough celebrating of/sharing about the bright spots
- There seemed to be a greater focus on the issues, problems, challenges
- They weren't denying that the negative stuff existed, they were suggesting that the positive stuff often gets overlooked or overshadowed

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - all groups:

The Arts

- Every group bragged about the arts in some capacity; most were referring to the music programs
- The arts program was described as being strong, vital, and unique, not only in the area, but also in the nation

Extracurricular Activities

- Most groups were in awe of the extensive extracurricular activities offered district-wide
- Most felt that there was something for everyone; if you wanted to get involved, you could
- However, most also acknowledged that not enough students were taking advantage of all that was offered; a relatively small percentage of students were involved

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - all groups:

Courses and electives

- Adults and students both spoke highly of all that was offered academically at both the lower and upper levels in the district; the high school was particularly highlighted as extraordinary
- There are courses and electives for every type of interest, or career focus
- There are AP classes, dual credit, DACC affiliation, and CTE

“the school (DHS) offers anything the student will need to go forward”

Diversity

- Adults and students both recognized diversity as being an asset
- Not only from a race standpoint, but from an individual standpoint; you can be who you are and fit in with someone here

“this is a very accepting place”

“you are free to be who you are”

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - all groups:

The history

- The teachers and parents who had been a part of the community since they were young, spoke very fondly about the uniqueness of Danville and the high school
 - The community was known for some iconic things that were still relevant today
 - The walls of the high school told a story; most still felt a sense of wonder and pride when walking through
 - The auditorium in the high school was revered for being a unique and treasured attribute, both from within the community and from afar
- Most felt that there was still a strong sense of community in Danville
 - Felt that the majority of the people in Danville are the type of people to step up when needed
 - Felt that the majority of the people in Danville are family-focused
 - Felt that the majority of the people in Danville still hope for Danville to succeed, and still defend it when it comes under attack

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - teachers:

Co-workers

- In most groups, the first thing discussed when asked about “good things about your job” were the co-workers with whom these teachers feel privileged to work
- They couldn’t emphasize strongly enough how much their co-workers meant to them
 - They truly felt like a team
 - They had each other’s backs
 - They made even the worst days bearable
- It was clear when watching their interactions that most of these teachers are more than just co-workers; they behaved, interacted, spoke, like family

“it’s a tough job, and we’re all in the same boat, so we get really close...that’s a great thing”

“the need in this district is so great, you can’t function without each other”

“I couldn’t last without these people”

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - teachers:

Starting salary and benefits

- Most teachers cited the starting salary as a strongpoint of the district; some believed it even rivaled districts in the suburbs of Chicago
- Many spoke about the generous benefit package, and it was believed to be better than most districts in the area, and perhaps, the state

Job security

- Most teachers acknowledged that due to the demands and perceptions of their job, their job would be there for at least the near future
- They realized that compared to jobs in many other industries, or even compared to the same job in other communities, theirs was one that allowed them to plan for a future that would look like what they had hoped and imagined

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - teachers:

PLCs

- Teachers greatly appreciated the PLC time they were given
- Most acknowledged that the time was crucial for them and their team, and understood that not all teachers were given that time
- Some wished they could have more of those PLC times for themselves

Professional Development

- All teachers spoke about their PDs with much appreciation and gratitude
- Not only were they thankful for all of the opportunities, they were also thankful for the encouragement to engage in them

“When I ask about any PD opportunity, I am never told no”

There are a lot of positives in the district

District #118 strong points - parents:

Teachers

- Parents were very grateful for the teachers who have helped to shape their kids
- They acknowledged that some were more exceptional than others, but overall, they felt very strongly about the teachers in the district

"there are dedicated teachers in this district..."

"you can tell the teachers care...that's important"

"the teachers want to be here (Northeast)...the smiles on their faces say a lot"

"the teachers are there to welcome kids off the bus at Edison...that's awesome"

School administrators

- The parents in the focus groups felt support from their school administrators
- Believed if they had an issue, they would be heard

"they take the time to listen"

"they seem to care about what I care about"

Let's address the dim spots

There are some frustrations with the district

Every group had some frustrations to share:

- No matter how long they had been in the district, or whether they were a young student or a seasoned teacher, everyone had similar things to share about the district's weaker points
- They weren't sharing these things because they wanted to get someone in trouble or trash the district, they were sharing them because they truly believed there could be change for the better

Most wished that their frustrations could be addressed more regularly:

- Most people felt that there was not enough intentional discussion of "how they're doing," and so things get pent up and that often leads to resentment
- Many wished that an honest discussion wouldn't be viewed as complaining or cause them to be deemed "a problem"
- Most wished for a more inviting atmosphere to air grievances

There are some frustrations with the district

District #118 frustrations: all groups

Discipline

- Most groups felt strongly that discipline is a major issue that affects many aspects of a typical day for anyone in the district
- Most felt that there are many layers to the discipline issue
- The next pages will dig a little deeper into the many aspects of this frustration/concern

There are some frustrations with the district

Discipline

Lack of consistency with the rules and enforcement:

- Many teachers and most parents felt that there does not seem to be a uniform handling of discipline, especially at the middle school level
- Many referred to the OIE handbook, and explained that in their opinion, there was not a consistent adherence to what was laid out in the book
- When there is lack of consistency, there is inevitably less order

"why aren't we going by the handbook?"

"getting the staff on the same page with discipline is really tough"

"I don't feel like there has been teeth in the discipline for many years"

"there is lack of personnel and resources, but there is also simply a lack of consistency"

There are some frustrations with the district

Discipline

Lack of follow-through/students work the system:

- Many teachers and staff (technology, food service) felt that students often got away with more than they should, partly because they had learned how to make the system work to their benefit
- While most acknowledged that it was likely due to sheer volume/too many students to handle, they felt that students were often learning that nothing significant happened when they misbehaved
- Specifically, the idea that a student would be able to return to the classroom too quickly was the most common example of this frustration

“the kids know there are no consequences...no doubt”

“by the time they get to high school, they learn how to work the system...maybe even before that”

“we constantly hear...‘what’s best for the kids?’ that’s a phrase that comes from above, but what about the other 24 in the room?”

There are some frustrations with the district

Discipline

Trauma-based discipline is a bit of a misnomer:

- Many teachers feel that the balance has shifted a bit too far to the compassion side at the expense of the discipline; discipline is not given enough weight
- While they acknowledge the importance of understanding and being empathetic toward a student's "story," most teachers strongly believe that many of the kids are not being held accountable
- Perhaps a simple district-wide refresh regarding the current goals of the trauma-based policies and procedures would be helpful

"we do a great job of loving on the students, but they need discipline"

"we should adopt a practice that enforces accountability with support"

"it sometimes feels like the district uses their (a student's) home life as a crutch – I'm not denying that their home life is an issue, a big issue, but we're not doing them a service"

There are some frustrations in the district

Discipline

Teachers have lost some power:

- Many teachers felt that too often the power was given to the students and/or the parents
- Some cited Senate bill 100 as a major factor
- Some felt a concern about “image management”* was at the heart of it (don’t want to take the most serious action for fear that it will reinforce the negative image in the community)

“these kids don’t trust a word we say...we make promises we don’t keep”

“we honestly deal with discipline every single day”

“there is a tendency to believe the kid over the teachers”

“teachers are having to defend their own referrals”

“more pressure on the parents vs on the teachers for students’ behavior would be welcomed”

“parents honestly have more power than they should”

*The issue of image management was a consistent theme, and will be discussed in more detail

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers, administrators, parents

Image is paramount

- Many teachers and staff identified image management as a strong and shortsighted force that was influencing many district-wide decisions
- They described situations where image management seemed to take precedence over best practices
- The next few pages will dig deeper into how this issue is perceived to manifest in the day-to-day operations in the district

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers and staff

Image is paramount

- Many teachers and staff described situations where image management seemed to take precedence over best practices
 - Often there was a frenzy to get something implemented quickly (a class, a program, etc.) in order to pump up the image of a school or the district as a whole; many times the decisions proved to be shortsighted
 - Sometimes programs are taken away or not implemented for the same reason – image

“we had a pre-algebra class for a while, but now it’s not here because it doesn’t look good”

“sometimes a program is in place that everyone has access to (like vocabulary.com) and it’s flashy/looks good, but not everyone will use it with fidelity”

“I Quest is a computer-based program at middle school, and I think it’s there because it looks impressive”

“we water down AP classes just to get numbers (to look good)”

“upper administration cares about image, so sweeps things under the rug”

“we are often reactive vs. proactive in order to protect the image”

“an accelerated book looks better, so the text books were kept when they shouldn’t have been”

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers and staff

Image is paramount

- Many teachers described situations where image management seemed to take precedence over what was best for students
 - Often students are passed through/moved on when they shouldn't be; it looks better to have "successful students" than to have many who are struggling
 - While it may seem like a good thing (the student gets to move on) the teachers warned it was doing the students a disservice; it was setting them up to fail

"we need more trauma training district-wide...we just pass them on, and pass them anyway...they need extra help"

"we're not taking it seriously enough...should be more to do to be able to take a test over"

"we're worried about saving them as a whole personally, but not doing them a service academically"

"life doesn't have re-takes...many of these kids should've been retained in 1st or 2nd grade"

"there's no penalty for turning stuff in late...and they can re-take things multiple times...we are not setting them up for the real world"

"it's more work to hold them back, AND it looks bad"

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers and staff

Image is paramount

- Many teachers described situations where image management seemed to take precedence over what was best for students (cont'd)
 - As previously discussed, many felt that harsher discipline was often avoided in order to protect the already damaged image of the district (suspensions/expulsions don't look good on state report card from an image management perspective)
 - While this might seem like a good solution in the moment (the student doesn't have to leave school, or gets a second chance) the teachers emphasized that ultimately, it is doing the student a disservice, and it is negatively impacting the rest of the class
 - Again, the kids are learning to work the system, and therefore, the cycle continues; often the same kids are getting into trouble

“the district has a big image problem, and instead of digging in and really trying to address that, and working to solve the problem, they put lipstick on it”

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: administrators

Image is paramount

- Many administrators also understood that this image management was an issue
- Their point of view/perspective was not only from the day-to-day but also from the long view

"instead of owning the community the way it is, they talk about it the way it used to be"

"the board doesn't want that perception, so they don't want to recognize it" (the tough reality, and fact that they need more help/staff)

"to be honest, the focus is on the cosmetic, perception, etc."

"they let parents get away with stuff because they want things to look good"

"we need to close some buildings, but they are scared of the perception"

- This group also emphasized the "instant gratification/reaction" mindset, and attributed much of it to covering over the more unattractive issues

"they want instant gratification...but things need to run their course"

"we have initiatives, we bring it on, and then let it go...we 'Danvilleize' it"

"we are constantly working in a reactive mode vs. a proactive mode"

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: administrators

Image is paramount

- The administrators are concerned about the priorities in the district, and for the future of those who are choosing to work there

“they are focusing on creating a perception out there when we are struggling in here”

“the perception shouldn’t matter, because reality is reality”

“the upper administration cares about image and they sweep things under the rug...I’m not sure what we stand for anymore”

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: parents

Image is paramount

- Parents are also perceiving the image management
 - Like the teachers, they feel the district sometimes puts their image above what is “best”
 - And, they feel the district isn’t always honest with them
- While they understand and empathize with the district’s challenges in terms of outside perception, they don’t believe it should take precedence over what is the right thing to do

“the district doesn’t want to share information, they want to control it”

“parents have complained about numbers-based grades, but the administration doesn’t care...surveys are done, but nothing comes of it...”

“there should be metal detectors in the high school, but that looks bad...the appearance is more important than what the students have to experience every day”

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers, administrators, parents

Communication

- In many groups the issue of communication came up
- The biggest frustration seemed to be around communication from the very top, down

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: new teachers

Communication

- New teachers don't feel like they had enough information when they started; sort of thrown in and told to "go"
- They explained that no one from the top administration comes to check on them/see how they're doing soon after they start

"1st year teachers are put upon because we want to keep our jobs – we're not going to complain – they know we'll do it" (whatever we're asked)

"we're often thrown stuff – like PBIS...threw a few posters up and it wasn't really implemented well"

"I feel like there needs to be a better mentor program...and, are mentors even trained?"

"I think roles need to be better defined, and more information at the get-go"

"yeah, I so wish we had more information as we start"

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: seasoned teachers

Communication

- Many teachers feel that policies and programs go through without consulting with them
- Not only do they feel they would be better equipped with better communication, but also, they don't always agree with the decision (it is dictated vs. discussed)

"8th grade algebra gets high school credit - that should've been discussed with the math teachers"

"we need to pick the math program and let it run for 7 years...we don't give a program true fidelity, but that is because we're not really consulted...the decision is made, and that is it"

"do our requests even make it to the next level? We really don't know"

"edicts come from the central office, in an email or memo form, and they come with a lack of info"

"sometimes IT (central office) makes decisions without consulting the people who are using it"

"3 science department changes at the curriculum level that the science chair was not aware of"

"there's a nebulous pot of money out there – not sure how it's divvied up – seems very arbitrary"

"bottom line...we need more communication from above, and they need to communicate with each other"

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: alternative school teachers and special ed teachers

Communication

- These teachers, even more than those who teach the gen pop kids, seem to feel very out of the loop and uninformed
- They are dealing with even more needs, and yet feel like they get even less information

“communication is an issue – no staff input and then hear a program has been implemented”

“I don’t know what’s going on in the district”

“there are kids in the building, and we’re told they need to be watched, but they don’t tell us their story”

“we are the odd balls of the district – last to know, and don’t feel like part of the group”

“we don’t have a point person – used to have a special ed coordinator”

“we’re often told, ‘it’s a building thing...you figure it out’”

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: administrators

Communication

- Many administrators felt strongly that communication could be improved
- Felt that some of the issues the district is facing might be helped, a bit, with better communication

“when directors have a meeting, we should be included”

“when the directors get together there should be a schedule handed out prior to the beginning of the year”

“we never meet as a group”

“I feel like we work in silos”

“we’re lacking some systems, some protocols that need to be put into place, which will help with communication/everyone being on the same page”

(what is the one thing that should be implemented in next 5 years?) “put simply, communication needs to increase”

All groups believed it was more of a top down vs. bottom up problem

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers and parents

Standard-based grading

- Many teachers and parents voiced their frustration with this grading system
- Most emphasized that like the lack of discipline, this system is setting the kids up to fail
- Plus, it is a harder transition from grade school to middle school, and it puts the kids at a disadvantage to begin with

“with standards-based grading kids are being pushed through – they can’t fail”

“there’s a certain level of commitment and responsibility that the kids need and don’t understand with this system”

“there are so many excuses with standards-based grading, and then we’re training them that way”

“our grades don’t work – they don’t make sense, and academic accountability would help with discipline”

“we were accused of falsifying the surveys when we said we should go to letter grades”

“standards-based report cards aren’t working...but they dig their heels in, and it doesn’t help the kids”

There are some frustrations in the district

District #118 frustrations: teachers

Paperwork

- Many teachers, most notably special ed teachers, were overwhelmed and discouraged by the amount of paperwork/the time that paperwork occupied in their day-to-day jobs
- Many felt some of the paperwork was due to processes not being streamlined, or systems being outdated/archaic
- They felt that the paperwork took away from valuable time that could be devoted to their students

“you should see the process for completing a purchase order - it is pretty comical”

“there are like 4 hours of paperwork if there is an issue with a kid because of Senate bill 100”

“all of us are downing in paperwork”

“(because of all the paperwork) I’m not as good of a teacher as I could be because I don’t have as much prep time for classes”

Let's address some of the needs

There are some needs in the district

District #118 needs:

- Most groups also discussed some pressing needs in the district
- While frustrations seemed to be more about issues that were ongoing and perceived as being ignored or minimized, needs were more about agreed upon issues that hadn't been addressed, mainly due to lack of funding
- Interestingly, like the frustrations, the needs being discussed were often the same from group to group

There are some needs in the district

Social/emotional support

- The biggest need, across all schools, seemed to be in the area of social & emotional support
- Most teachers felt strongly that with the “new normal” of their current student population (students coming from challenging homes/backgrounds, and/or experiencing trauma at a heightened level) the need for additional support in this area was critical
- Most cited stats that seemed a bit shocking given the current need
 - Only 2 social workers
 - Only one male counselor in Danville
 - Psychologist in building only one day/week or only available on Saturdays (which is hard from a logistics/transportation standpoint)
 - They explained that according to the state, the district doesn't have the ratio that is needed for more support, but most administrators don't agree with that conclusion

“the board doesn't want that perception (of great need) so they don't recognize it”

*“we are pushed to the max here, other districts who deal with what we do have a lot more support”
(staff in those social/emotional support roles)*

There are some needs in the district

Social/emotional support

- Many teachers mentioned lack of social/emotional support as the most important need they are currently experiencing

"my social worker is carrying a load!"

"the psychologist is in the building just one day a week"

"we simply have to make up for lack of parenting, they need more help"

"only those in crisis get social/emotional help, the gen pop needs it, too"

- This need was even more apparent in the special ed and alternative school environment

"we don't do enough for our autistic kids...and the room was taken away for the speech teacher"

"we need more mental health support...we need the mental health piece AND the alt ed piece"

"we need more certified counselors here...we are partners with cross point, but they're not always here"

There are some needs in the district

Social/emotional support

- Some teachers felt that in addition to the social workers and psychologists, there should be positions created to solely focus on discipline
- Because the discipline problem had become all-consuming, they believed creating additional positions to focus on that alone would be extremely beneficial

“there are really no resources for teachers to deal with discipline...we need a full-time disciplinary position”

“there are currently only 2 deans at the high school – we need 4 – one per grade level”

“discipline cases should be given at least 10 minutes, and they’re given 2, because of volume”

There are some needs in the district

Staff retention

- The teacher groups were very cognizant of the growing issue with teacher retention
- Many felt the issue was a combination of things, most of which could be addressed
 - Starting teachers are offered very attractive salaries and benefits, including a \$1,000 incentive for classroom needs, but experienced teachers are not given consistent raises or incentives
 - The discipline issue causes many to burn out/leave, especially if they did not grow up in Danville (aren't used to the culture, challenges, and don't have strong ties to/family in the community)

"what is the district doing to keep teachers here who have been here 10, 11 years?"

"we absolutely need to figure out why 1st years teachers are leaving and do something about it"

"it is overwhelming for young teachers because of the behavior issues...I understand why some leave"

"every day I feel like a failure...it is mentally taxing...I can see how some might think it's not worth it"

"after 5 years, they know they have you, so they don't really do anything to keep you"

There are some needs in the district

Parent involvement

Teachers, administrators and parents who attended groups agreed that lack of parent involvement is a huge concern in the district:

- Unlike like other frustrations and needs, this need did not seem to present an obvious solution
- However, many had ideas, and all felt strongly that it was a need that cannot be ignored

A few ideas that were discussed:

Classes for parents – many felt that some parents need classes for basic parenting challenges, as they likely did not come from a home where they had good role models or practices in place

Transportation for parents – many times the issue is lack of a way to get to the school or an event; perhaps the transportation options could be expanded

Incentives for parents – while that may sound absurd at first, many of the parents with the highest need are simply trying to survive and some help in areas of need may encourage them to get more involved

Social/emotional support – it's not only the kids who need support in this area, their parents do, too. Perhaps coming alongside a struggling parent may not only provide the help, but could also begin to build the needed trust

There are some needs in the district

Parent involvement

When the parents are involved, the difference is profound

- The parents who chose to participate in this research were involved, invested, and their students had a better experience because of it
- The next pages will highlight insights from those parents who chose to show up

There are some needs in the district

Parent involvement

Northeast parents

- Parents at Northeast showed up in big numbers, and had many thoughts and questions to share with the group
- It was obvious that their kids were not only doing well in school, but were enjoying school to the fullest; much of that seemed to be due to the parents' engagement
- While these parents felt very positive currently, they were concerned about the future; they strongly voiced their desire for Northeast to be extended into 8th grade, not only because Northeast had provided an amazing experience, but also because they had fears around their kids attending NRMS

"I'm so pleased with the education here – there is a higher standard here and higher expectations"

"the teachers want to be here – they have smiles on their faces and good energy"

"you get to know parents through activities – that has been great"

"I'll be honest, I have a lot of fears around NRMS– things aren't handled there like they are here"

"please convey for us that we want this to go through 8th grade!"

There are some needs in the district

Parent involvement

Hispanic parents

- Hispanic parents showed up in big numbers; they were clearly invested in their kids' school experience
- Overall, these parents felt very positive; they were grateful for the time and care the teachers had poured into their kids, and they were grateful for all that the district had to offer

"my son can come to school and get the education he needs despite not being a native"

"I have felt included and comfortable here" (in this district)

"the district has so many different things to offer...lots of classes and extra curricular options"

"I'm so happy because my daughter is having issues with learning, and she is getting help after school with Project Success"

There are some needs in the district

Parent involvement

Hispanic parents (cont'd)

- These parents had two big concerns: the language barrier and the violence (their word) at NRMS
 - They found it challenging to communicate with teachers; many wished for an adult English class, but understood scheduling a time that works for everyone would be a challenge
 - Many believed the violence issue was twofold – the kids causing problems need harsher punishment AND the teachers need more support in the classroom

“we need support because many teachers don’t speak the language”

“there are no programs in place for transition from other countries”

“I think maybe a 2nd person in the classroom could help...it’s just too much”

“are teachers getting the support they need?” (it doesn’t seem to be the case)

“you can tell that the teachers are frustrated – some take it out on the kids with a lot of yelling”

There are some needs in the district

Parent involvement

Music Booster parents

- These parents were clearly involved in their kids' experience; in fact, we met during a break as they were busy preparing for the fundraiser at NRMS
- Overall, these parents felt very positive, and saw the benefit of getting involved
- Their biggest concerns were around communication
 - They wish for more transparency from the district (highest level administrators)
 - They believe there needs to be more communication/coordination between Southview and NRMS
 - They want better communication between the school district and the bus garage
 - They want to believe their opinion does matter vs. feeling like it is heard but ignored (again, referring to the highest level administrators)

"The extra curricular programs are the reason we moved here"

"you get whatever you put into it"

"the higher up you go, the less effective your voice is"

"parents have complained about numbers-based grading, surveys were done, but nothing came of the surveys...that's just wasted work"

There are some needs in the district

Training

- Many teachers and administrators agreed that additional training is needed in some areas in the district
- The new teachers were begging for it; felt their experience would have been much better with additional training (and as was previously discussed, they want more communication from the start)
- The TAs also felt they needed additional training

“felt like I was kind of thrown into a position (as a TA)...we really need more training”

“when there is early dismissal, the TAs are just put in the room with the teachers”

“there needs to be more definition and training around jobs for TAs”

“they assume we’re supposed to know things” (as new teachers)

There are some needs in the district

Facilities

- Many groups spoke about facility needs; most thought the attention to facilities has been lax
- Administrators spoke of the need to focus on facilities; they strongly believed it was time to reassess the schools in the district in order to consolidate and/or repurpose them
- The teachers understand that an upgrade to a facility can make a world of difference, not only to the way they're able to teach, but also to the overall attitude of the students

There are some needs in the district

Facilities

High school

- Science labs and equipment are decades out of date – last updated in the 1970's
- Basement area in need of deep cleaning (mold, bugs, etc.)
- Library hasn't been updated for many years – needs to be relevant for 2020

KDBA

- Small space for lots of kids and higher needs
- Gym is also the lunchroom
- No room for competitive sports
- Not enough space for additional kids; not only gen pop but most notably, special ed

Garfield and other, older schools

- In need of rehab or possibly shut down
- Schools should be consolidated (some have 100 students) or repurposed

There are some needs in the district

Facilities

Pre-K centers

- Many teachers wished for additional space for kids, birth-5 years
- Those at Southwest wished they could be moved to a more centrally-located, more convenient building, to make it easier for parents
- Ideally, there would be a new space solely purposed for the youngest of kids

There are some needs in the district

NRMS

- This school gets its own slide because there seemed to be many needs here
 - Overall, there seemed to be a lot of disruption, disrespect, and disengagement
 - When it came to day-to-day instruction, homework is not assessed, PE is not assessed, there are endless retakes on tests
 - When it came to extracurricular options, there are no competitive sports, no feeder for show choir
- Teachers were well aware of the need for change, but many felt overwhelmed with the gravity of it all
 - Most agreed that a good starting place was a refocus on discipline and accountability (which will be discussed in greater detail later in the report)
 - As previously discussed, many Northeast parents were concerned about sending their kids to NRMS

Findings from 30,000 feet

The best strategic plans start with an inspiring vision

A vision that looks beyond current reality with hope

First, there must be a clear vision of current reality

Right now there is a vision problem

The district's most critical assets don't feel seen

Let's talk about the teachers

Teachers are invaluable assets to the district

Teachers are people who start things they never see finished, and for which they never get thanks until it is too late.

— **Max Forman**

Teachers, I believe, are the most responsible and important members of society because their professional efforts affect the fate of the earth.

— **Helen Caldicott**

If kids come to educators and teachers from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job easier. If they do not come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job more important.

— **Barbara Colorose**

❖ **However, their value is not always recognized...**

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

These teachers are dedicated and exhausted:

- They are putting in very long hours, well beyond the hours in a typical school day
 - Often there are kids who need extra help/extra time
 - Sometimes there are parents who need extra attention
 - Add to that meetings, school events, and extra curricular activities
- Because of this, most of them admit to often feeling physically and emotionally spent
 - Many also admit there are days they aren't sure they can keep going
 - There are many days they feel like a failure

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

These teachers are caring and concerned:

- When asked what keeps them coming back when they feel exhausted, the answer, to a person, is “the kids need me”
 - They understand the kids need them for reasons far beyond the next math or English lesson
 - They understand they might be the only positive, caring voice a kid might hear that day
 - Most said the reason they chose to come to District #118 was because they knew it would be about more than teaching – it would be about having a tangible impact in a kids’ life
- They are dealing with some heavy issues, well beyond the normal expectation of teaching
 - Many kids come from challenging backgrounds/home life
 - Many kids have uninvolved, uninterested parents
 - Many days involve dealing with fights or other forms of confrontational behavior

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

These teachers are caring and concerned:

- They also understand that empathy must be balanced by accountability
- While they care deeply about these kids and their stories, they also realize that if they don't enforce appropriate discipline, they are ultimately doing a disservice to all kids
 - The ones who are causing trouble will not learn that bad choices will not lead to success in life
 - The ones who are not causing trouble will constantly have their learning disrupted, which will also not lead to success in life

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

These teachers are caring and concerned:

- Most teachers, at the middle school level and below, feel strongly that the discipline protocol needs to be revamped
 - The punishment often does not match the crime
 - There is a reluctance to suspend kids
 - The kids have too much power
- Most teachers, at all levels, believe that if the discipline issue could be improved, many good things would follow; many feel it is the most important issue facing the district right now
 - Teacher retention would increase
 - Job applications would increase
 - Student attendance would improve

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

These teachers are grateful and becoming resentful:

- The teachers felt lucky to have the opportunities afforded to them in the district
 - The starting salaries were believed to be the best in the area, maybe in the state
 - The PD time, and the resources connected with it, was appreciated and considered to be unique
 - The PLCs were appreciated, and believed to be a benefit
- The teachers felt lucky to be a part of a district that valued extra curricular programs
 - They bragged about the music programs
 - They believed that if a student tried, they would be able to find something “for them”; something that would not only enrich them but also help them to feel like they belonged
- The teachers felt lucky to work alongside an amazing and supportive staff
 - They spoke of their coworkers like family
 - They knew they could count on them and never have to feel alone

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

These teachers are grateful and becoming resentful:

- The most tension, in all groups, came from the underlying feeling that these teachers do not feel supported/seen/valued by those at the top
 - Most felt tremendous support from their building principals
 - However, when it came to those "in the Jackson building," including the school board, most felt a tremendous disconnect

The next few pages will attempt to flush out the reasons why these feelings exist...

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

Those at the top rarely show up:

- They don't come to the buildings to *experience* a classroom or a teacher, they come to the building to *evaluate* a classroom or a teacher
- They don't often show up to school events, sporting or otherwise
- They don't often show up to significant life events, like funerals or awards ceremonies

**These teachers are feeling so burdened already ---
feeling burdened *and* alone in it, is worse**

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

Those at the top disregard their opinions:

- They spoke of many times when their opinion was solicited, only to be disregarded at decision time
- They spoke of many time when programs or curriculum was implemented without their consent
- They spoke of many times when a parent's point of view was honored above theirs

They have grown to believe that they have no voice

Teachers are on the brink of burn out

Those at the top belittle their opinions:

- They spoke of times when they have been yelled at in a meeting, or made to feel small (like they “just don’t get it”)
- They spoke of being afraid to voice their opinion as it often resulted in being reprimanded vs. being regarded as important
- Many in the focus group meetings were reluctant to be honest, as they wondered if it would be used against them

They have grown to believe that they are not valued

What teachers need is fairly simple

Teachers want to feel valued:

- Show up out of curiosity and interest vs. admonition or judgment
- Listen and take their opinion to heart; show you care with your actions
- Trust them to run their classroom, their school, their curriculum; they know the students better than anyone, and they want their students to succeed more than anyone
- Support them with enough staff, enough discipline, enough mental health professionals
- Recognize their hard work and loyalty; give them raises, bonuses, plaques, whatever it takes, to show them you appreciate their work

"show me you care, and I'll want to be here for you as long as I can"

Make them feel like a critical part of the team and not like equipment managers

There is a vision problem at the student level, too

**Many of the district's most precious assets
have no vision**

Let's talk about the students

Many students have a clouded vision

Many of these students see school as irrelevant:

- They don't see a value in going to school
- They don't have role models at home who can help them see the value
- Instead, they see school as a hassle, and a place where they are constantly in trouble

Many students have a clouded vision

They need a vision of a future beyond the school walls:

- Perhaps more emphasis on CTE
- Perhaps more opportunities, through seminars, meet & greets, etc., to hear from “people like them” (those who have grown up in similar situations *and* have found success in life)

They need to be given a more relevant vision

Many students have a clouded vision

They need a vision of how they can make a difference, now and in the future:

- Perhaps volunteer opportunities where they can feel needed and that their presence matters
- Perhaps being a part of a program like Crime Stoppers where they are rewarded for “reporting” bad behavior; eventually they’ll feel better being on the good side, vs. the bad side, of the equation
- Perhaps peer mediation could be initiated – they would be asked to be part of the solution vs. only being told why they are part of the problem

If these students can begin to feel more ownership, perhaps they’ll become more engaged

Many students have a clouded vision

While their stories and struggles are serious, so is the need to get them on the right track:

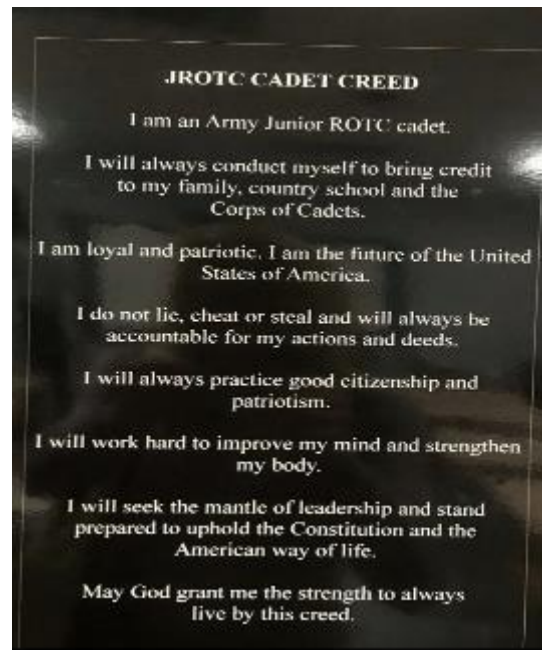
- They need love and understanding, but it's the consequences and accountability that will ultimately break the cycle
- They are so used to making excuses and getting by that it has become a way of life
- They need to see how that way of life will only lead to more struggles and hardship
- They need to feel pain for their poor behavior and decisions

They need to be held to a higher standard or they will never realize their own potential

For some, the vision was becoming more clear

An example of how this approach can work was evident with the ROTC students:

- In this classroom, there was much respect, and much engagement
- Students seemed to care about doing well; their comments centered around how to succeed, not around how much they disliked school
- It seemed that their focus on discipline and expectations was paying off; they seemed to be trusted, but they had earned it



A clearer vision of (many) students' profound needs might help

Many of the students who walk through the school doors have struggles and stories that are beyond most teachers' experience:

- They come to school tired and unprepared
- They don't show respect to those above them, partly because they don't see it modeled in their home lives
- They leave home, where they often feel like a failure, and enter school, where that feeling is reinforced
- They have needs beyond what a teacher should be expected to meet

These students' needs can only be met by professionals who are equipped to handle them

A clearer vision of all students' simple needs might help

Students just want to feel valued:

- They want to be understood for who they are, not just for what they do
 - ✓ that doesn't mean hold off on discipline, but it means try to come alongside them and be in their corner (many teachers try very hard to embrace this, but students feel there are still many teachers who don't)
- They want to be trusted
 - ✓ perhaps allow them to have phone time during lunch, or award them phone time if earned
- They want to succeed but don't know how to succeed
 - ✓ perhaps give them rewards for small things with the goal that they will eventually accomplish big things

If these students can begin to feel more valued, perhaps they will become more engaged

Students with less needs have better vision

These students have a desire to succeed:

- The students who are in more “normal” situations at home, and who have less obstacles in their way are taking advantage of all the district has to offer
- They feel lucky to have all the programs and extra curricular options
- They come to school eager to learn and hopeful about the future they are working toward

“I love the freedom we get - we get to choose what we do on projects!”

“there are lots of clubs to join”

“when the teacher is patient with me, (vs. yelling at me) it gives me freedom to experiment with the way I write or how I learn”

“if I think a teacher is mad at me, I don’t want to come to school”

(what would you tell a student who doesn’t seem to care/do well?) ‘I’d tell them to stop being lazy, because to be successful later, you have to pay attention now”

These thriving students also need to be seen more clearly

Their sense of value might be more healthy compared to the other students, but their need to be seen clearly is still important:

- They, too, want to be trusted
 - They would love more of a say in their schedule/coursework
 - They wish they weren't punished along with the "problem kids" (group punishment)
 - They wish teachers were more understanding, given the situation (they, too, are learning to manage within the chaos and disruptions in the classrooms)

"I wish we could have afterschool activities for what you wanted to pursue in life"

"I wish we could choose our Impact course work, or at least have a voice in the decision"

"I wish there was more flexibility with switching classes - I'm not asking for the wrong reasons"

"we often have to compromise because of a bad kid's behavior"

"because we don't trust some kids with backpacks, we all can't carry backpacks"

"you know what – sometimes we're just having a bad day - there is a lot going on here, and yelling at us just makes us feel stupid"

These thriving students also need to be seen more clearly

They, too, want to be trusted (cont'd)

- Being trusted also meant not being treated like they are younger than they are
 - Some spoke of wanting more autonomy; they wanted more group projects and more time to work on assignments with friends
 - They understood the “no phones” rule, but they wished it could be loosened at lunch time, even if they only got that privilege by earning it
 - Some spoke of teachers yelling a lot, which only made them feel younger than they are; instead, they wish there could be another approach
 - Some spoke of wishing there was a bit more leniency with the dress code

“I wish they didn’t treat us like we’re in Kindergarten”

“what if we got phones when our work was done, or at least during our lunch hour”

“if your jeans are ripped just a little bit that’s a lot different than your jeans having a huge hole in the butt or something”

Trust me and treat me like a young adult, and if I mess up, I will face the consequences

All students long to have an inspiring vision of their school

The students realized there were a lot of issues to deal with, but they honestly just wanted to have more to look forward to at school:

- Many students wished they could go on field trips; they wanted to experience things outside of Danville
- Many wished there were more school-wide events or activities; the more involved students wished there was more school spirit
- Some wanted to see more out-of-the-box, but relevant, classes being offered (Mandarin, coding, sign language, agriculture)
- Some wished for more creative avenues to learning; they believed hands-on learning and group projects positively impacted not only their engagement, but also their ability to learn
- Most of all, many wished for rewards for good behavior

“maybe schedule some fun days in the gym, you know, art, dance, things like that”

“we do have spirit week, but I wish there were more fun activities”

“I wish there were even more activities that more kids would be interested in - like debate team, dance team, skating team - we have an ice rink!”

“we have this awesome lounge on the first floor, but it never gets used for fun”

At the administrative level, the problem is double vision

Let's talk about the administrators

Administrators feel helpless and torn

This group can be likened to the sandwich generation:

- They are caring for those under them (the teachers), as they are trying to give them the tools to excel in ways beyond their greatest hope
- They are also managing those above them with tenderness and strength; not wanting to rock the boat and lose their trust, but wishing they could say what they're truly feeling and thinking
- And the whole time, they are feeling responsible for the happiness and well-being of both; therefore, they are often conflicted

This group is in a difficult situation:

- They have a lot of empathy for those under them, but they are limited in what they can do
 - They have so much on their plate and honestly need more help at their level to do the job they're expected to do
 - Like the teachers, they don't always feel heard or respected by those above them, so as much as they would like to make changes, they often feel they are better served to go with the flow (meaning, do what is asked without complaining)

Administrators feel helpless and torn

Similar to the teachers, what the administrators need is pretty simple:

- Find them more help and more resources; it is extremely difficult to do what they do on their own, and with what they currently have
- Listen and take their opinion to heart; show you care with your actions
- Trust them to run their area, and allow them to have the final word on what programs they choose or what curriculum they implement; if they are doing it while listening to those below them, they will make the right decision – they have the best intentions

How do you begin to solve a vision problem?

Vision can always be improved with hope

Hope can improve the vision

In most cases, with most groups, and most problems, hope can begin to improve the vision:

- When speaking with most people, no matter how bad they felt about a situation, no matter how discouraged or tired or frustrated they were, they still had hope for the district and for Danville
- However, for many, they didn't know how to turn their feelings of hope into action – how could they get from believing in the district to seeing changes that would confirm their beliefs?

The following slides will explore ways to potentially actualize hope...

Hope can improve the vision

To put hope into action, the needs and frustrations outlined in this report must begin to be addressed:

- Even if the needs and frustrations cannot be solved or changed right now, addressing them/giving them validity will still go a long way
- Addressing them looks like not only listening, but also putting a plan into place
- Those who have voiced their concerns will feel heard
- It will allow them to feel like they are a part of the team (they'll see that their concerns are valid and that their opinions matter)

Hope can improve the vision

In order to put hope into action, a sense of ownership must be instilled:

- Teachers and administrators need to own the District #118 brand – what it stands for, what it means to them and to the community
- They can get there by appreciating the past, but embracing the current
- There were a lot of great things back then, but there are a lot of great things today

“I think everyone wants to be grounded, realistically, in the present, with a hopeful eye on what could be”

Hope can improve the vision

In order to put hope into action, a sense of ownership must be instilled (cont'd):

- Students need to own their school brand – what it means to be a Viking, a Ridgerunner, etc.
 - If they can begin to feel like they are a part of something, they might begin to feel like showing up
 - If they can begin to feel like showing up, they can begin to see that *not* showing up doesn't feel good (which means they have to stay "on good terms" in order for that to happen)
- Students also need to own their future – what it could be and how they could get there
 - As previously discussed, seeing people who are more like them and have succeeded can help
 - For those students who aren't college bound, being exposed to things like CTE or Home EC, can help them envision other options instead of feeling discouraged by the options that feel unattainable (like post-high school education)

Hope can improve the vision

In order to put hope into action, a sense of ownership must be instilled (cont'd):

- If teachers and administrators can feel a sense of *ownership of the brand*, they will also begin to feel a sense of *pride in the brand*; with pride comes strength and resolve
- If students can feel a sense of *ownership for the brand* (their school), they too, can begin to feel a sense of *pride*, and a sense of belonging with others (i.e., “we are all Vikings”)
- If students can begin to feel a sense of *ownership for themselves*, they will begin to feel a sense of *control*; with control comes more peace and more cooperation
- If students can begin to also feel a sense of *ownership for their future*, perhaps they’ll be more *engaged* in their present

Ownership can unleash hope

Hope can improve the vision

In order to put hope into action, remind everyone of the hope that currently exists:

- In all groups, there were conversations about the things in the district that should be applauded – things that give everyone hope
 - There is so much talent and passion in the district – all groups recognized and celebrated this
 - There is a beautiful amount of diversity in the district – all groups recognized this and felt it not only provided a richer experience, it is also more representative of the real world
 - Many spoke of being able to work in a place where it felt like it was about more than teaching; it was about fulfilling a purpose and changing lives
 - Ms. Cherry – many people, in many different groups, specifically mentioned Ms. Cherry and the changes and progress she is making in a very short time at the high school
 - Many principals were mentioned, by name, for working tirelessly and making a difference – many students, teachers, and parents felt that their principal had their back
 - The community as a whole – there were more positive vs. negative things discussed about the people who make up the community; most agreed that most people in Danville will do anything for anyone and they have much pride in living there

Hope breeds more hope

Final thoughts

Some final thoughts

Much can be accomplished by the simple act of listening:

- Administrators, teachers, and students alike, simply want to know they're being heard
 - They want assurance that what they say matters, that it won't be held against them, and that there is enough trust in them to know they are saying it for helpful vs. harmful purposes
 - They want assurance that what they say will be fully considered, even if the answer is no or not at this time, or what if we tweak that idea a bit?
 - They want assurance that they are being heard and not being managed – they can quickly discern the difference
- Administrators and teachers seemed eager to have more group sessions in the future
 - They appreciated feeling free to discuss current frustrations with someone who is not connected to anyone or anything in the district – someone whose only job was to listen
 - They seemed encouraged when they were able to brainstorm some plausible solutions with someone who was simply listening vs reminding them why their solutions might not work
 - To be clear, this person doesn't have to be me, but I would encourage this type of activity to be continued more regularly in the future

Eddie Johnson



Some final thoughts

Everyone is on the same team:

- At the end of the day, it's important to remember that everyone, to a person, desired to create (or be the recipient of) the best possible experience for the students. Period.
- No one waived on that, and no one believed it wasn't possible
- Perhaps reminding each other that that is what you all are here for is paramount; sometimes being down in the weeds can cause the greater vision to get lost

There are some great vision casters on this team:

- I would tap into those teachers or administrators who have a knack for casting a vision and getting people excited
- There is enough doom and gloom and skepticism to go around; you need cheerleaders, not naysayers, to be the ones who have the loudest voices and biggest platforms

Some final thoughts

Grant more ownership, not less:

- The more people on your team who feel a sense of ownership for the District #118 brand, the more people on your team who will give you all they've got
- It will also cause more pride in what they are doing if they feel a sense of ownership for everything they do

A strong team is hard to defeat:

- I have a deep love for this district, and now I have a renewed hope for it as well, because I believe in and see potential in each person I spoke with
- And I believe when everyone comes together and puts their agendas, their hurts, their egos aside, and works toward that greater vision, the possibilities are limitless
- Everyone is more invested in something they have a hand in creating

Together, you will be able to do great things

Some concluding thoughts

A strong team is hard to defeat:

