



Southwest Local School District Community Engagement Halftime Report *Spring 2023*

Responses to Questions and Concerns Raised at Spring Town Halls

“How can we as parents help take care of staff and administrators?”

Joining our PTO's and Booster groups is a great place to start! These groups do so much to support our staff in each school – from providing coffee and snacks during trying weeks, to dinners on conference nights. These small and large gestures go a long way with our folks! The best time to join these groups is at the start of the school year. Sign up options are available during open house and on each school's website.

“How do we partner better?”

One big piece that helps with any partnership is actually one of our core values as a school district, and that's TRUST. Trusting that our teachers, support staff, classified staff and administrators are doing their absolute best for every student in our care each day. Providing a safe and secure learning environment where our mission is fully lived out is first and foremost, daily. Please keep this in mind, before rushing to judgment. And when issues do arise, always go directly to the source of the conflict.

“Would it be possible to deliver video content or social media content that allows for small tidbits of information to be shared at a time?”

Currently, we release video content at the end of each quarter where Superintendent Hamstra provides an update to stakeholders on the current state of the schools. Our social media content is pushed out much more frequently. Additionally, each principal updates families on a regular basis through school-wide email blasts. Be sure that your contact information is current in Final Forms so that you are receiving our email and text communications, and be sure you are following our official school and district social media channels so you are sure to get the most up-to-date, factual information.

“When should we expect another levy? How far are we away from SLSD putting an operating levy on the ballot?”

Much of this currently depends on what the state of Ohio does with school funding. We should have a good idea what this will look like by mid-Summer (July 1). Typically, the more a community can shoulder via wealth / tax dollars, the less the state contributes. The property tax dollars contributed by the local community are fixed. Earned income, our school district's other revenue stream, does go up or down, based on the income fluctuations of those that live in our communities. School costs have increased dramatically with inflation, just like each household's. We are doing our absolute best to stay off the ballot for operating revenue. In fact, we have not asked for operating monies for almost 20 years, which is the longest stretch of any district in Hamilton County currently. If the state meets its duty to fairly fund public schools this summer, it is our hope that we will be able to

stay off the ballot for new operating money for the next several years. If the state does not meet their obligation, it would be sooner.

“What is SLSD doing to retain the amazing quality staff that are present in the schools?”

Our 600+ member staff here at SLSD is a tight-knit group. We work diligently each year to hire the best when the need arises, and to keep the folks we have working with our teams in place. Each year, as the world of education becomes more and more challenging, it becomes more difficult. Our wages remain in the top 20% in Hamilton County and our work environments are first class. This is not to say, like every school district or company in Ohio, we do not have our challenges. Colleges of education across the US have seen a nearly 50% drop in enrollment over the last 5 years. This dramatic drop in future educators will come to roost in the very near future here in Ohio, if something doesn't change. The more politicized education becomes, the fewer students we see go into education. Pay, respect, environment and support all matter a great deal. Fortunately, the community here in SLSD fully supports our educators – in both words and action – and that's a major reason why we are able to maintain the continuity we have over the years.

“What is the plan for a new high school? I live in West Haven. My son is 5. I'd love to advocate for the district and a new high school building.”

The *“bricks and mortar”* ballot issue that was passed by our community back in November of 2017 in partnership with the state of Ohio (32 cents on the dollar) allowed for the construction of three new elementary schools and a state of the art junior school. The total cost of this project was nearly \$90M total. We segmented our master construction plan with the state to allow for us to someday come back for a new high school, when the timing was right, and to maintain the state's share of support with 32 cents on the dollar. The original section of the high school was built in 1969, thus nearing 55 years in age. The boilers that heat the facility are aged and we struggle to find parts to keep them functional during the winter. The newer wings - the oldest being to the east side of the school - was built in 1990. The newest section, attached to the skybridge connecting the Activity Center, was built in 1999. Space / capacity / enrollment growth will be the drivers for a new high school. We graduated 260 seniors this spring (2023) and have graduating classes coming up with over 355 – 401 kids. This spring marks our last graduating class of under 341 students. Space is at a premium now, and will be exceeded in the next 3 – 5 years. Add in the multiple housing developments taking place now, this summer, and the future, and to not have a plan that is proactive would hinder our educational outcomes a great deal.

“What happens when the new junior school reaches capacity?”

All four of the new schools (3 elementaries and 1 junior school) were built with the ability to add on, when needed. For the junior school, an addition to the north or toward the loop road would be the option. The potential to add on 12 new classrooms exists. Our junior school classrooms can hold 25 – 27 students each. This would allow for up to 327 more students, which is almost an entire additional grade level of students.

“If safety is a huge concern according to our survey, are modular classrooms really our best option?”

As a district, we have experience with modulares (most recently at Harrison Junior School and Crosby Elementary) and do feel that they are a safe option for our students if enrollment increases dictate that move. While modulares are never a permanent solution, they do allow us

time to work with the community to secure funds to build more permanent structures – which is virtually always our preference. Unfortunately, due to the expense of these more permanent additions, we often don't have the money to cover those costs up front.

“Has there been consideration to move the 5th graders to Whitewater Valley Elementary? I assume the cost is higher for Kindergarten because of midday, morning, and afternoon transportation (4x per day) while 5th grade is only 2x per day.”

The biggest cost in transportation is actually the need for additional buses to take students who are not going to their “home school” for their attendance area, regardless of grade level. Due to the extra time that it takes to get students from all ends of the district to the old WVE (now our Early Childhood Learning Center), we're not able to be as efficient in our routing and end up losing some buses that we could typically access for routing students at subsequent schools. For example, the buses that come to the ECLC would have a larger area to drive in each attendance area to “fill” their route/bus since they are only picking up one grade level of students (which equals more time on a route) and then a longer drive to the ECLC than their neighborhood school (again, adding more time). The same would be true if we chose to “shuttle” students from their home schools to the ECLC as we would have 2-3 buses assigned to that route instead of a new route for their next school.

“How do you get more sports and extra-curricular activities?”

First, there would need to be a demonstrated need. Second, we would need to have an adult that is able to run it and third, we would have to have space (field, gym, classroom, etc.) to operate either the sport or club. Currently, we offer over 55 clubs and 27 sports to our students and this has resulted in just under 89% of our kids being involved in at least one extra-curricular activity this school year!

“How can the lay person (not in education) be educated about how schools are funded and how the funding has to be used?”

A great source of information on school funding can be found on the CUPP report for the State of Ohio. This report compares Ohio Schools so one can easily see where funds are being spent and how that compares with other districts.

Revenue sources for Ohio Schools are mainly derived from 3 sources: local property taxes, local earned income taxes, and state foundation payments. Both local property taxes and earned income are generated through school levies. Ohio funding is set up so most districts must ask the taxpayers for additional funds every 3-7 years depending on many factors such as enrollment, development and earned income growth.

Expenses in schools are primarily driven by personnel, with 75% or more of all expenditures going toward salaries of teachers, bus drivers, student aides, intervention specialists, and many more. Often times spending on these is governed by bargaining agreements and/or state law regarding student to teacher or intervention specialist ratios.

“School Funding – are we going to get a fair share?”

HB33 in Ohio currently has proposed increases that would give Southwest additional resources. However, it is likely that our district will still receive below the state average for state foundation revenue.

“The community needs to hear more about taxes (lack of) from new businesses compared to new homes. People assume new homes equal more property taxes. Need to lead them to more info.”

Although it is true that more homes do equal more property taxes, these property taxes, even when coupled with earned income taxes and more state foundation payments, do not equal the cost to educate a student. In the scenario below a new house would generate \$7,388.36 in revenue based on \$200,000 household income, \$400,000 home value and the state’s share of \$3,088.36 per student. In FY22 Southwest’s cost per student was \$12,055.82 which equates to a loss of \$4,667.46 for each new home built.

Property Taxes (\$400,000 Home)	\$ 2,800.00
Earned Income Taxes (\$200k Household Income)	\$ 1,500.00
State Foundation Payments	\$ 3,088.36
Total Revenue Per New Home	<u>\$ 7,388.36</u>
Cost Per Student	\$ 12,055.82
Net Loss Per Home (1 Student)	\$ (4,667.46)

“How can we help kids with mental health?”

- We are currently partnering with Best Point Behavioral Health to provide a wide variety of services such as individual therapy, group therapy, care coordination (home therapy), and medication management.
- We are adding mental health professionals to our staff in order to better support students who do not qualify for Best Point services due to insurance barriers.
- We are adopting a new Social Emotional Learning curriculum that will be implemented for all students with or without an identified mental health need.
- Parents can help the schools by continuing to push the four core values - Trust, Respect, Ownership and Leadership - at home. When students know that their school team and their home team are on the same page, they feel more supported in all aspects of life. This can lessen stress by providing predictability and structure to their day. Students should be able to identify at least one adult within the school building that they can trust. Parents can also help by supporting the district’s goal of participating in extra-curricular activities. The more connected students feel to peers and staff members outside of the normal school day, the better chance they will develop a support system to help them work through any mental health issues they may experience.

“Gifted services for elementary students are a must.”

We agree 100%! This comes at a significant cost, however. In order to serve our gifted population appropriately, we would need to hire 8 Gifted Intervention Specialists. We are investigating funding options currently, but this may be one service that will not be possible to add and sustain without community financial support.

“How do we create options for elementary gifted. i.e. how do other public school districts work to fund/provide creatively without state funding to support?”

Assistant Superintendent Corinne Hayes did a survey last fall of 15 other local school districts to inquire about their gifted supports. The majority are using the same model as us, with cluster groups in general education classrooms, grades 2-8 (or 3-8), and Advanced level courses and Advanced Placement courses at the high school level. Most had multiple Gifted Intervention Specialists on staff to either support the teachers in providing cluster group services or in offering pull-out services (primarily in elementary school). Some are serving only students identified with Superior Cognitive abilities, but that is not something we're willing to consider, as it goes against the Ohio Department of Education's Gifted Operating Standards and would also serve only a small percentage of our entire gifted identified population (55 of our 823 identified students have a Superior Cognitive identification).

We have implemented several initiatives over the past couple of years to better prepare our teachers to serve gifted students. Teachers of gifted students are required to obtain a minimum of 60 hours of high quality professional development in gifted education, provide appropriate instruction to gifted learners, and then are required to maintain their professional learning by earning a minimum of 3 hours annually once their initial 60 hour requirement is complete. We've hosted a multitude of book studies and in-house professional learning series with the help of our Gifted Consultant from the Hamilton County Education Service Center. Our Math Consultant from HCESC has worked with our elementary staff over the past 2 years to develop a menu of enrichment options for Math by grade level, and has modeled for staff how to implement various strategies in their classrooms. We also have an Instructional Coach in-house who is a Gifted Intervention Specialist and who works with our elementary teachers. We agree we need to do more, but it all comes down to funding solutions.

“We need a consolidated platform for curriculum, assignments and communication.”

Our IT department is working with staff on this right now. We are looking to streamline all communications from teachers to parents using one single communication tool. More to come on this for the 23-24 school year!

Abre is our student/teacher/parent portal that houses single sign-on links to all digital curriculum, student plans (IEPs, WEPs, RIMPs, Graduation Plans, etc.), attendance, grades, discipline, assessment results, contact information, and behavior.

“Different things occur at different schools i.e. homework for all grades is different for each elementary (quantity and amount). Curriculum night at one school but not all, surveys sent out to families frequently in regards to overall impression and satisfaction in everything from academics to bullying, but this isn't sent at all schools. These are two things I feel would be beneficial at all schools.”

Each school has an Open House - that's standard across the district. One important thing to remember, especially regarding our three elementary schools, is that two of the three are Title I buildings and have requirements for family engagement that are specific to those schools. Therefore, additional surveys and events like "Curriculum Night" or "Family Fun Night" are held in those schools to meet the Title I obligations. There are also additional curricular programs in place that are funded by Title I and are not allowed to be used in non-Title I buildings.

The district sends out an annual survey that is consistent across all schools. Additional surveys sent out by buildings are often done so by the principals and/or building leadership teams of those buildings to improve upon certain items that came up in the all-district survey as a follow-up. We can definitely do a better job at streamlining this process, but we also want to allow each building the autonomy to work with their own parent community on continuous improvement. What's needed at Harrison Elementary may not be an issue at Crosby, and vice-versa.

Homework by grade level is an item for discussion at our next Inservice meeting, when the three schools will come together to meet by grade level. It will be addressed at that time.