

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS DECLINING ENROLLMENT COMMITTEE

Update 9.5.23

The Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee continues to meet to address declining enrollment in the district at the elementary level. The committee convened in consecutive weeks in August, holding meetings on both August 14 and August 22.

To open meeting #8, Dr. Hill grounded the committee in our charge and expectations for the potential consolidation/closure process. The committee was reminded that we are responsible for evaluating the rationale for consolidation/closure as a viable pathway to addressing declining enrollment - including the pros and cons, finalizing potential criteria, making recommendations for guiding principals in naming schools, and the process for community engagement. Dr. Hill reminded the committee of the importance of adhering to our established working agreements, namely "Listen for Understanding" and "Solution Orientation: Systems Thinking." These particular agreements were highlighted as we collectively sought consensus in finalizing the criteria for potential consolidation/closure during this meeting.

Dr. Hill delivered a detailed overview of the surveys conducted by the committee thus far. The overview began with a discussion of the original tiered system, which the committee collectively moved away from, opting instead for weighted ranks for each criteria component.

After the completion of meeting #7, the committee received Survey 3.0, which asked committee members where they stood on the recommended seven criteria. During this meeting, the committee collectively evaluated the ranking and comments tied to Survey 3.0. Notably, 33.3% of survey respondents supported these final seven criteria, while the remaining 66.7% indicated a lack of support. The lack of support for the 7 proposed criteria mainly stemmed from a lack of support for one of the seven criteria, in particular. Comments submitted during this survey encompassed a variety of perspectives. Concerns were raised regarding the subjectivity and reliability of certain criteria, as well as challenges posed by factors that exhibit significant fluctuations within a short period of time or are dependent on leadership.

Dr. Hill encouraged committee members to engage in discussions with their respective groups. The aim was to share insights gleaned from the survey results, including the findings and comments. Committee members then rotated among different tables, sharing the discussions from their prior groups to elicit fresh perspectives from the group as a collective whole.

Dr. Hill then presented various potential proposals for how the group could move forward: maintaining the initial seven criteria and allowing flexibility for the district to not use certain criteria if the data isn't available, or, alternatively, omitting certain criteria and proceeding with only six criteria instead. The group also addressed the potential of putting criteria back into a tiered system, with certain criteria being weighted higher and lower based on the value it carries.

The meeting concluded with Dr. Hill inquiring about where the committee stood on the final criteria. The committee did agree to remove one criteria and reduce the total number of proposed criteria to six. As the deliberations progressed, it became evident that the committee was encountering challenges in reaching a unanimous decision on the remaining six criteria. In light of this, the committee expressed the need to conduct an additional survey regarding the proposed criteria. The intention of this survey would be to assess the level of consensus regarding each criteria and the specific weight each should be given. Survey 4.0 was sent to the committee following meeting #8.

On August 22, the committee reconvened for meeting #9, picking up the discussion from the week prior on final criteria.

Once again, Dr. Hill opened the meeting by providing an overview of the prior meetings and the comprehensive survey activities the committee has completed, along with a quick overview of the compilation of results and comments from Survey 4.0.

He urged the committee to strive for a consensus during the current session so the group could begin to facilitate a transition into discussions surrounding the "why" and "how" related to remaining pathways #2 - #5. Following these discussions, deliberation focused on the six criteria, and the committee reached a consensus on the finalized criteria and weight.

After the long process of gathering consensus on consolidation/closure criteria, the committee transitioned its attention to addressing the "why" and "how" of the four remaining pathways: "Mill Levy," "Robust & Aligned Options," "Subsidize and Provide Flexible Support Through Possible Increases in Per-Pupil Funding," and "Ongoing Evaluation of Central Office Staffing & Programs Through Cost-Benefit Analysis/Program Evaluation." Members were asked to move around the room, sharing their input using sticky notes designated for each pathway. This process involved engaging in discussions with fellow committee members to gather valuable input and feedback regarding the strategies and execution/implementation of the range of alternative pathways needed to address declining enrollment. This feedback will be compiled and will play a pivotal role in generating content for the final recommendation report for the Board of Education.

As we approach the conclusion of the work of this committee and the deadline for Superintendent Dr. Hill to submit the final committee report to the Board of Education concerning the district's approach to addressing declining enrollment, a final EDEC meeting is scheduled for September 12. During that meeting, the EDEC Core Committee will present a comprehensive final recommendation report that encapsulates the culmination of our collective efforts. This report will outline the diverse pathways that have surfaced throughout this process, offering viable solutions for the Board of Education to consider in addressing the issue of declining enrollment in District 51 at the elementary level. The goal is to present this report to the Board of Education at the Business Meeting on Sept. 19. It is important to note that this presentation and report will not mention any schools for possible closure. With regards to closures/consolidations the report will only outline the work of the committee and the final criteria recommended by the committee. If/when the Board of Education accepts the findings within the report and the recommendations from the committee, those final criteria would need to be applied to schools before any closure/consolidation candidates would be recommended to the Board at a later date.

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#### More Information :

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