

El Paso Community Conversation Summary November 2, 2017

Host(s): Georgina Pérez and Donna Bahorich

Participant Description: Approximately 60 participants

The State Board of Education (SBOE), under Texas law, is required to adopt a Long-Range Plan for Public Education. The 18-member steering committee, which is made up of state board members, various stakeholder group representatives and representatives from three state agencies, is leading the process. The steering committee will recommend long-term goals for Texas schools and will identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the system.

To help the board gather public input that will shape the new plan and set long-term goals through the year 2030, community conversations are being held around the state. In each community conversation, participants identify the purpose or desired outcome of public education and give feedback on challenges, strengths, and opportunities in four topics: educator preparation, recruitment, and retention; equity and access; family engagement and empowerment; and student engagement and empowerment.

This document provides a snapshot of the data collected during the El Paso community conversation and highlights the main concepts captured during small-group conversations. Staff members from the Texas Comprehensive Center at the American Institutes for Research facilitated the community conversations and prepared this summary.

To learn more about the development of the Texas State Board of Education's work on the Long-Range Plan, visit https://tea.texas.gov/SBOE/long-range_plan/.

What is the purpose or desired outcome of public education?

- Create global educated citizens.
 - Create life-long learners.
 - Create opportunities for all citizens and push them to their full potential.
 - Develop a well-rounded person, tap into every area, and bring out each child's value (independent, creative thinkers).
 - Educate students to go into the real world, be successful, and give back to their community.
 - Education like math and science is important, but respect and responsibility are also important.
 - Empower people with knowledge and improve lives.
 - Not to prioritize standardized testing.
 - Prepare students for the real world.
 - Produce young men and women who are responsible, independent, and educated citizens.
 - Provide education and equal opportunity for people to communicate with global community.
 - Provide level playing field for all kids despite beginnings (e.g., ELL, poverty). Education is the great equalizer.
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- Provide safe place for students to explore opportunities, find themselves by expressing who they are, and eventually live a life full of happiness.
 - Teach inclusivity. Teaching students to be able to interact with people different from them.
 - Teach students with disabilities to be more independent and social.
 - Teach them the academics for the future.
 - Teaching life skills, ethics, morals, communication skills—not just content.
 - Teaching students to be critical thinkers, not just creative test-takers.
 - To help all children, including those with disabilities, to be productive and functional community members.
 - To prepare kids to run country and community. Be a productive citizen. Prepare and have everybody be a part, every part is important.



Educator Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of funding to support the needs of new teachers, such as mentors and longer student-teaching assignments.• Need higher salaries and greater appreciation.• Teachers are missing out on opportunities to integrate technology.• Teachers need to know how to challenge students in their instruction.• Testing pressures places extra demand on teachers.• There is a disconnect between college preparation and actual teaching. Universities need to address this.• Unprepared to teach children with disabilities or social-emotional needs.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avenues through technology to pair up teachers to great mentors across district.• Campus administrators and leadership teams available to assist educators.• Education service centers (ESCs) are willing to help districts recruit.• Teachers are trained and accept data.• Teachers receive encouragement and work together in professional learning communities (PLCs).
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building collaboration between districts and university / prep programs to better prepare teachers.• Creating different avenues for all types of learners (Twitter chat, online classrooms, online community).• Give potential teachers more exposure to teaching.• Give new teachers the support they need, like a mentor teacher or PLCs.• Recruit alternative teachers.



Equity and Access	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to healthcare, nutritious food, counselors. • Discrepancies between districts’ abilities to pass bonds. Some districts cannot get bonds and revenues passed, but other districts can. • Funding is still so low, same weights as 1984. • Funding needed for career and tech opportunities. • Laws that regulate how money can be used. • Need business partnerships—city council, parents, schools. • Teacher preparation in early literacy (especially in Spanish). • Technology—staying current. Need Wi-Fi access at home. • There are no Advanced Placement (AP) classes in my community. Need funding to support teachers and technology so my students can have access to more classes. • Very little for English Language Learners (ELLs), special education (SPED), gifted and talented. Assist all students. Some programs and clubs are English only. • Zip code predicts lifespan. Some areas have more needs than others—equality vs equity.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast for everybody. • Community resilience for struggling communities with student access, progress; communities aren’t giving up. • Dual credit courses are being offered outside the early colleges. • Ed justice site (educators, principals, teachers involved in conversation). • Emphasis on universal Pre-kindergarten. • Marketing across districts for professional development to allow to provide opportunities for all. • Our community makeup such as Ft. Bliss, Juarez. The changing demographic is allowing for our students to gain insight to different ways of thinking. • Teachers love job; kids love to be there.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to work across districts to support some of the smaller districts (share teachers’ salary, resources, labs). • Bigger districts supporting smaller/rural districts. • Create mentor programs within the student body (e.g., big brother/sister). • Creating consortiums. • Reduce burden of legislation, red tape, toxic testing coming from state. • Student councils—diverse but also differentiated by needs and interests. • Training teachers to be aware of bias (anti-bias training).



Family Engagement and Empowerment	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Money influencing education.• Lack of communication between schools and families. How do schools make a parent feel welcome?• Language and cultural differences that aren't being addressed.• Parents without framework of school system/educational model and what they can do to help their child.• Too much homework given to students that decreases quality family time. Too much emphasis on academics and testing.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic parent-teacher teams. This empowers parents with the knowledge and understanding to assist in their children's education. Goes beyond regular teacher-parent conferences.• One school in our area went from one of the lowest schools to becoming a blue ribbon school.• Parent liaisons. Parents have a stronger voice.• There has been a lot of improvement in this area in some schools and districts.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classes for parents on weekends while students are in tutoring.• Community events that involve students and parents led by schools.• Funding to provide necessary classes to support parents (transportation, English classes).• Guide parents to understand where their children are academically.• Host culturally relevant activities.• Incentives for parents.• Reach out to parents by first building relationships with them.• Use social media to keep parents informed as to what is going on.



Student Engagement and Empowerment	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of social capital. Is there help at home, access to other materials at home?• Need one-on-one connections with students to administration. Schools are over populated and we must find a way to help every student.• Students do not feel empowered. Lack of care from educators, lack of emotional care.• Students need real life experiences and culturally responsive teaching/textbooks.• Students need to have voices, learn critical thinking.• Students that struggle with academics.• They need skills to navigate system.• We are dealing with human beings. Education should be simpler. I need to be able to build relationships and make connections to help students be confident. Students do not need another test.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exposure to college and career.• Having teachers going out to places and gaining experience, to bring back to the classroom.• Programs and resources which allow students to become more involved.• School districts becoming more creative with students on things they're interested in doing in life. With magnet schools, CTE, STEM.• Some students are really tech savvy.• Some teachers establish relationships with students.• Students believe that education prepares them for a variety of opportunities.• Teachers knowing the stress that more work/classwork puts on their students.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connecting students to community members or real employers.• Engage students in the community and take ownership.• Having hands-on learning, preparing them with real-world engagement.