

**SD27J – Quality School Initiative Committee  
December 19, 2013**

**DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY**

Members of the School District 27J's Quality School Initiative (QSI) Committee convened for their first meeting (*please see appendix A for list of attendees.*). The purpose of the meeting was: to become familiar with each other; gain a mutual understanding of the school district's history and capacity needs now and growing (definition of the problem); and to develop agreement on how the committee will work together (approve committee operating protocols).

Jody Erikson and Niki Koszalka from JSE Associates provided neutral facilitation to the committee, ensuring all voices were heard and discussion remained on topic and moving forward. They will continue to provide facilitation throughout the process

Dr. Chris Fielder, SD27J Superintendent, welcomed everyone and thanked members for their commitment and involvement in the QSI Committee over the next 5 months. Dr. Fiedler also affirmed SD27J's commitment to building consensus solutions to address capacity issues facing the school district.

**I. DISCUSS AND APPROVE: OPERATING PROTOCOLS**

QSI committee reviewed and approved the committee's draft operating protocols including the committee's purpose and discussion principles to guide their work. There were no changes suggested to the draft.

**II. BRAINSTORM: IMAGINE A GREAT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Participants started to brainstorm elements that a great school district would include as a large group. Then, to gather as many ideas as possible, members wrote down ideas on post-it notes. The following is a brief summary of the ideas generated (see appendix B for a more detailed list):

- Quality involvement from the community and parents – helping the district succeed
- Facilities that are safe and support learning
- Communication and interaction – consistent and transparent
- Continuous growth and learning mindset – looking for improvements; sharing learning, strengths and weaknesses regionally and internationally
- High quality teachers and staff
- Opportunities for students to excel – from bored to excited; from behind to capable – teach beyond the lowest common denominator
- Inclusive of all types of students
- Technological – keep pace with needs and societal use
- Common values, principles and goals for all – administration, schools, teachers, parents, students & community

### III. PRESENTATION: BASIC DATA ON SCHOOL DISTRICT 27 JOINT (HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS)

Terry Lucero, SD27J presented basic data on SD27J: boundaries; history of growth (and unusual boundaries); number of students and schools; and demographics.

**Key points** (below are only a few highlights; please see presentation for more information):

- Boundaries changed and grew with the times resulting in the seemingly random boundaries – for example boundaries adjusted to include near-by parcels of farms as requested, and removal of a section for DIA, leaving an island section in Aurora
- Started as Brighton School District #27. Statewide school district consolidation joined 15 independent school districts into the current district boundary configuration. The “J” in 27J means that the district spans two counties (Adams and Weld).
- Student population has nearly tripled in 13 years to 16,734, and is diverse (51% Hispanic and non-white, 49% white); speaks over 30 languages; and 38% get free & reduced lunch
- 27J consists of five municipalities and 3 counties - considered the entirety of the District, rather than one community of interest over another.

#### Questions/Answers/Comments

- *Q: Did the state create the district?*  
*A: In the late 1950's the school district consolidation idea came from the government/legislators, but the idea was approved/decided by local property owners.*
- *Q: How many schools were built since passing the 2006 bond initiative?*  
*A: Since the passing of the 2006 bond, two middle schools, two elementary schools and the first phase of Brantner elementary were built.*
- *Q: The last mill levy override was passed in 2000 for \$750,000 (or \$280 per student). Is this the lowest mill levy in the Front Range?*  
*A: Yes, and now provides about \$46 per student.*
- *Q: How do the children in the southeast section (Aurora) get to school?*  
*A: Most attend High Point Academy. For those who choose to attend a different school in the district, transportation is provided. 27J is guided by state rules.*
- *Q: How do people in that area pay for school and how is High Point Academy funded?*  
*A: Residents in the area pay a mill and/or bond to 27J, as do all property owners within the boundaries of the District. High Point Academy receives funding from the state. Funding comes from the same source as public schools.*
- *Q: Do we have representation from Aurora on QSI? If not, QSI should have someone.*  
*A: We do not, but will work to identify and invite someone from the Aurora section and/or Adams County.*  
**ACTION:** Jody Erikson, JSE Associates and Terry Lucero, SD27J will find Aurora/Adams County representation for the group.

**IV. PRESENTATION: CURRENT AND FUTURE ENROLLMENT GROWTH (CAPACITY NEEDS)**

Joy Gerdom, SD27J, presented basic information on the growth of the district by grade, showing the capacity needs as students move from kindergarten into high school.

**Key Points** (more data was presented, below is only a few highlights; please see presentation for more information)

- Enrollment has nearly tripled in the past 13 years from 5,643 students to over 16,000 students, with lower increases during weaker economic years (2009-2013)
- Based on growth projections, by 2014 there will be a shortage of seat needs in:
  - o 1 elementary (total elementary seat shortage 139); by 2018 the forecast is shortages in 5 of 11 elementary schools (total 976 seat shortage)
  - o 1 middle school (12 seat shortage); by 2018 the forecast is shortages in all 4 middle schools (total 900 seat shortage)
  - o Both high schools will have a shortages (155 seat shortage); by 2018 the forecast is a shortage total of 1366 seats
- Growth is coming from increased development - housing growth is expected to be 10-15% of all of the Denver Metro area growth over the next 10 years, with Adams County being a leader in affordable housing development (based on Metrostudy Housing growth study)
- Ultimately, 70,000 potential homes could be built in the district (potential, as yet no permits issued) – seats needs are cautiously based on this growth projection (as not to over estimate)
- Seat shortages are also attributable to ever larger grade sizes matriculating to succeeding grades.

**Questions and Answers and Comments**

- *Q: Are the 70,000 homes mentioned single family home permits?*  
*A: Single, attached town homes and multifamily units are included.*
- *Q: Do the results indicate enrollment numbers are the going down?*  
*A: No, enrollment continues to increase.*
- *Q: Are the charter schools are included? What is capacity with the Charter schools?*  
*A: Charters are included in enrollment projections; their capacity decreases the total seat need number. Their were not included in the presentation. Charter schools are assumed to accept enrollment up to their capacity, but not exceed capacity, as reported by charter school administrators.*
- *Q: Landmark school is considering year-round schooling. Is the district actively having discussions with them?*  
*A: 27J administration spoke with them earlier in the month. Landmark is currently conducting a survey of parents' opinions on year-round schooling.*
- *Q: How was the size/seat capacity of a potential new school structure decided – school board, best practice? (e.g., a new elementary school structure would be for approximately 675, a middle school-850 seats, a high school-1800 seats)*  
*A: About five years ago a subcommittee of the Facility Planning Advisory Committee took on the charge of evaluating and recommending optimal school sizes for District 27J.*

The result is what is being recommended today. The subcommittee considered ultimate growth and feeder patterns as well as best practices.

- *Q: Is there flexibility in the grade level groupings of a school structure or must it be grouped by: K-5, 6-8, 9-12? Is there flexibility to change the school structure or look for other options?*

A: The District has implemented flexible grade configurations in the past, such as K-6 and K-8 elementary schools; and, grades 7-11 within the newest high school. The K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 is the standard that has been adopted by past Boards of Education. Additionally, QSI Committee may also consider year round or split schedules.

Comment: The question is not whether, but when structures are needed.

- *Q: How would the ultimate build out (for 50,000 students) be phased?*

A: Colorado school districts are required to serve all students that reside within their boundaries, whether adequate space exists within schools or not. District voters decide whether to fund school facilities through property taxes. The number of schools that could be constructed is limited by the district's bonding capacity. New schools will be built as needed and as afforded, using portable classrooms to provide supplemental space, and other measures to accommodate growth in the meantime. Understanding the most likely ultimate size of district enrollment, and the growth curve prevents the district from overbuilding facilities, or building them in the wrong location.

## **V. DISCUSSION: IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS**

Participants began thinking and talking about the issues by breaking into small groups (allowing more dialogue at one time). Each group had a facilitator from the school district with a worksheet of questions to ask and record the answers. Questions included: what is the impact of the potential capacity needs; what are possible solutions (without evaluation); and what additional data is needed to make informed decisions.

Below is a brief summary of the small groups (from facilitator worksheets):

### ***What does this mean/what are the impacts?***

- Increase dropout rate
- Students lost in the shuffle
- Class size too large (hard for educators to manage learning)
- Overcrowded (need more classrooms)
- Fewer resources for students: extracurricular activities, honors courses, intervention, physical resources (non-traditional spaces have become classrooms)
- Teacher burnout - brain drain; not attracting professionals
- Less learning occurring - loss of creativity, increase conformity
- Lose sight of individual needs
- Increase in discipline issues – more time spent on discipline issues and administrative tasks
- Too much resource focus on growth issues
- Inability of student to get classes, leading to too much time off
- Stress on entire system
- Fear of split schedule
- Space concerns impacting academic success
- Safety, law/legal issues
- Truancy
- Boundary changes
- Cohort challenges
- Lack of economic development

**What are the possible solutions for those impacts?**

- Online academic options
- Campus style (inter change the purpose)
- Flexible spaces and floor plans that serve variety of needs (moveable walls)
- Partnership with developers
- Grade configurations; concurrent enrollment
- Internships
- Year round school; split schedule
- Fees to cover full cost of non-core classes
- Build more schools
- Hire more teachers
- Eliminate TABOR

**VI. POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL DATA**

Below is a summary of the list of possible additional data participants felt might be useful, from small and large group discussions:

- Funding
  - Non-traditional funding sources
  - Current contribution from developers
  - 27J funding
  - How much and how does TABOR impact school funding
  - Can schools be funded via income tax?
- Costs
  - Operational vs. capital
  - Cost to build a school: naked vs. outfitted
- Alternate options
  - Existing space environments that could be re-purposed
- Construction
  - Meet or discuss with outside groups (i.e. construction)
  - What is the balance between quality and facilities? What are the factors?
  - How to balance the space with staff?
- Staff
  - Attrition rate of professionals: losing quality, gaining quantity
  - What lead to the bond and mill passing?
  - Point at which change in staffing ratio
- Comparison with other School Districts
  - Demographics
  - Mill levy and bond debt
  - Growth Comparison
- Future growth
  - City Growth Plans
  - City Economic Development teams speak on topics
- Enrollment
  - Dropout rate over 10 years
  - Charter School enrollment/seats

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- Number of kids outside of school district
- Household (registered voters): numbers with and without children
- Survey to understand where are people with the district (concerns were raised about the purpose, time to get significant results compared to QSI timeframe)
  - Their experience in the classroom (student, teacher)
  - How do people who do not have children in the district perceive the district
  - Do we have survey data in the district that is already completed that could help this group with some of the information? TELL Survey (Colorado TELL Data – teaching conditions; Center teaching and education).

***ACTION:*** Jody Erikson will work with Chris Fielder, Terry Lucero, and Joy Gerdom to consider the purpose, cost and time needed to complete a statistically valid survey results and report back to the group.

### **V. NEXT STEPS**

- January 16, 2013 meeting at Prairie View High School
- Facilitator and SD27J staff will:
  - Identify an additional member to represents the Aurora/Adams County perspective
  - Discuss the viability and possibility of creating a survey - if possible in timeframe, how it might be useful, if cost effective – for discussion at the next meeting

**APPENDIX A: Attendance**

**QSIC MEMBERS:**

- Flora Aguirre-Diaz
- Johanna Brown
- Christy Dowling
- Valerie Escatel
- Barb Fasbender
- Chris Fiedler
- Lynne Fox
- Nate Golich
- Stephanie Happ
- Ed Harshbarger
- Natalia Ledezma-Rollins
- Jason McEldowney
- Susan McCauley
- Dick McLean
- Paul Natale
- Ben Ploeger
- Brian Pritchard
- Rodger Quist
- Penny Rigsby
- Melanie Sheehan
- Christine Shock
- Chaz Tedesco
- Howard Thomas
- Karen Vaughn
- Chris Wahrle
- Amy Werpy
- Troy Whitmore
- Sean Woytek
- Marla Wynn

**SD27J Staff**

- Kelly Corbett
- Joy Gerdom
- Terry Lucero
- Kerrie Monti
- Will Pierce

**Facilitation Team: JSE Associates**

- Jody Erikson
- Niki Koszalka

## APPENDIX B:

### Post-It Note Exercise: "Great School District Includes...."

Participants were asked to complete the sentence or idea of "a great school district includes....". First this was done as a large group discussion, then quickly moved to a written exercise by all – writing one idea per post-it note and putting them on a board for all to see and review during a break.

#### TANGIBLE ELEMENTS INCLUDED IN A GREAT SCHOOL DISTRICT

- **Curriculum** – meets all needs at all levels; provides opportunities for all students to engage and succeed at every level; such as:
  - Full day kindergarten for all parents who want it
  - Enrichment courses (art/music/PE etc.)
  - School choice (S.T.E.M, Arts, Dual-language)
  - Strong science education
  - Comprehensive offerings
  - Post-secondary options to all students
  - Teach critical thinking – teach kids to think not just learn
  - Actualize on existing work on the Thinking Classroom
  - Community Style learning
  - Early concentration on keeping kids in school
- **Extra-Curricular activities** – for all grades; academic, athletic and clubs; arts, music, theater; Student groups that allow everyone to find their place to belong
- **Quality Teachers** – people who care and genuinely want to be with the district; equal to the diverse make up of the community; able to learn and understand parent needs and desires for their children;
  - High knowledge content in the subject being taught (especially high school)
  - Utilization of high quality teachers and administrators to improve low performing teachers and administrators
  - Provides individual instruction
  - Lower attrition rates
  - Time for staff to collaborate meaningfully and effectively
  - Considerate treatment of all staff and students
- **Facilities** – that are safe; adequate for all students/capacity; encourages learning at all levels; technologically connected/up-to-date; geographically reasonable; maximizes space (especially for short-term); and specifics such as:
  - Science facilities (chemistry/medical)
  - Technology labs
- **Technology** – one-to-one ratio (student to technology); latest and relevant for all; providing 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (technology, math/science); global communication opportunities
- **Class Size** - small/limited
- **Involved/Engaged Parents**
  - Parent academy
  - More time for communication and collaboration with parents
  - Opportunities for parents to support the school
- **Communications to parents and general public** – clear, concise, and more; tell success stories
- **Measurement system to gage success** – own criteria and ways to compare with other districts

**INTANGIBLES or THINGS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE TANGIBLES**

- **Resources** – adequate resources to reach the “ideal”, not just the minimum; utilization of non-traditional resources; funding equally through the district
- **Leadership** – from experts, teachers, parents, student, administration and community
- **Common Intention/Goals** - all employees, families, students aware of/understand and working towards the goals (intention) of the district
- **Clear priorities** - each person needs to know and spend the majority of their time focused on their most critical jobs
- **Holistic Systems Thinking/Coordination** – every aspect (communication, management, growth); understand each piece/role and how it supports the whole
- **Common values or principles**
  - Willingness to grow, change and try; not afraid of failure
  - Inclusive and welcoming to all schools in the district
  - Respect for each other and what they do/represent
  - Strive for the “ideal”, beyond academic mediocrity
  - Value for each employee’s individual role in the system
  - Sense of community, belonging and ownership at school level and across district
- **Community Support** – actual and financial; values educating children (even if not their own)
  - Opportunities for involvement
  - Open to community
  - Civic engagement for students, teachers, and school district

**KEEP IN MIND**

- Money is not the problem
- Bigger is not always better