



Stakeholder Focus Groups for MSD of New Durham Completed by Organizational Development Solutions, Inc. Spring 2016

Executive Summary:

Over 120 people attended and participated in the focus groups facilitated last spring. The following section is a sample of the ideas, thoughts opinions and comments gathered directly from the focus groups. The comments have been summarized by question with 8 key themes emerging. Questions were consistent for all groups but may have been asked a bit differently based on the stakeholder group. Some additional comments lead to additional questions during certain focus groups. Those comments are included in the report as well. When names were mentioned, those names were eliminated and spaces were inserted.

Themes:

Although it is difficult for all participants to think about the future since many of them have gone to school here before or are currently a teacher or student, many offered comments about the current state more than about a three to five year outlook. Many participants wished they might be able to “guess” what the state would do next and most understand that schools are a hostage of the state mandates. The following themes are reoccurring throughout the report. The comments above are a sample of the stakeholder comments but are not comprehensive. The themes from the focus groups are as follows:

1. Attracting and retaining talent. Teacher motivation/teaching styles
2. College and world readiness: guidance, technology, course work, life skills.
3. Extra-curricular- other than sports: Drama and Clubs
4. Teacher/student ratio/discipline.
5. Infrastructure: technology, space, parking lot safety.
6. Communication and Parent Engagement

Significant Comments by Question:

1. **What do you think are the most important skills/abilities that need to be taught to prepare students for the next step? (college, employment, trade school, voc ed.)**
 - A love for learning because it needs to be a lifelong process.
 - I think kids should learn that learning is what life is about and love it.
 - Technological skills to get along in the world
 - To use computers and math and can read and write efficiently
 - To speak well
 - To write complete sentences
 - They need to understand economics.
 - STEM, which include all of those with an “A” for the Arts, Ability to problem solve
 - I see a lot of the hands-on classes are disappearing
 - Let’s teach them life skills.
 - Independent and organized
 - Being held accountable
 - To be at a state-wide academic level

- Being able to self-advocate
- Computer skills
- Math
- Spelling
- Economics, Cooperation, Perseverance, Time management
- I'm in a preparation for college careers class
- On Deck is like a marketing class.
- Collaboration with other schools, dual credits through PNC or the AK Smith Center.
- Simulations
- I think there is an opportunity for the middle school/high school students to receive a little bit more guidance.
- Take those same people who volunteer to do the Reality Store and bring them in to talk specifically to the kids who want to hear.
- Need more than sports: speech and debate, choir, marching band, theater.
- Reading, spelling, writing; our kids struggle a lot with it.
- We need to have a more unified theme from elementary all the way up.
- Communicating with others in an effective way. We struggle with that. Basic math abilities.
- Accountability and deadlines..
- We need to have a more unified theme from elementary all the way up.
- Keyboarding, use of technology, no computer classes
- Attendance; accountability; computer skills; coming on time; coming every day; responsibility.
- Conformity to rules, differing rules depending on which occupation/profession you are in; rules and being able to take direction from your superiors, a boss, professor, or whatever.
- Writing and speaking and communicating in general.
- Any of those interpersonal skills are really lacking.
- Accountability and personal responsibility
- Problem solving
- Citizenship
- Respect of everyone around you.
- Keyboarding, use of technology, no computer classes

2. How well do you think Westville schools are doing in the preparation?

- Collaboration with other schools, dual credits through PNC or the AK Smith Center.
- Simulations
- For a small school, that has always been a struggle to be able to provide a variety of classes for different kinds of interests.
- Need additional funding for computer upgrades. They outdate before they are installed!
- I don't believe that we have sets of computers for each classroom in this building.
- Instead of renting books they rent MacBook's.
- I usually collaborate with the magnet school in Michigan City. They use every single person that they can know in the community.
- I think there is an opportunity for the middle school/high school students to receive a little bit more guidance.
- Take those same people who volunteer to do the Reality Store and bring them in to talk specifically to the kids who want to hear.
- Need more than sports: speech and debate, choir, marching band, theater.

- Worries about MS: Like having to get to your class on time, people making fun of you, people spread rumors, bullying is a problem that scares me, picking the wrong friends, certain amount of times to go to the bathroom and get drinks. I've heard a rumor that someone literally passed out and they had to call an ambulance because they passed out from dehydration. The duel credit
- AK Smith Center
- We have 1-2 classes in cooking and balancing your checkbook.
- Teamwork
- All the parents are unhappy about "the transfers" but we need diversity and need to learn to all get along.
- Need to broaden our view here. Stop thinking we are "Mayberry"
- We can't keep living in this bubble. I love the school but we need more classes and opportunities to hear guest speakers.
- No bully problems at high school. If fights are going to happen the teacher and _____ are usually on it before it happens.
- History and Spanish teachers and _____ in Government. They are charismatic. They make jokes. They get you involved. They ask you questions. They always have something planned to do. They give you in-class work and out of class work. They teach you everything they know about it. Not a lot of teachers here do that.
- I think 8th grade prepared us for picking out our high school classes. That's all we've done really.
- Variety and number of classes: We get put in after the high schoolers. We don't always get what we want. Excited about Digital design.
- At our school if you're getting good grades, no one bothers you.
- Junior Achievement. It was a little creepy.
- Feel like you are lost in MS.
- The academic is easy, not challenging.
- We are at a state standard academic level. We don't have a standard here.
- Our students have limited options for courses. Need to have more foreign language options. I am afraid my student will not be able to compete.
- The collaboration with PNC and with AK Smith is great. _____ is always looking for opportunities for our students.
- We need more connections with trade schools.
- Our guidance is weak. If you are not college bound, you get no attention and are not considered worthy of guidance.
- Another thing for preparation, I've had many students come back and say they were not prepared for college writing and the level of course work there.
- The writing is missing. I think we have some issues with some high school students even going off to college and being told that their writing is not up to par. I think that writing is definitely missing.
- I think it starts even with the spelling.
- Phonetics isn't really taught much anymore.
- I think grade 7 should still have PE
- Students don't know how to handle unstructured time.
- Funding to hire enough teachers and enough assistants. We need more adults with children and smaller classroom sizes, so we need more teachers so we can have the smaller classroom sizes.
- Space, we are pretty much at our maximum space, Quiet space to go.
- We have such an increasing amount of students that are highly distractible for whatever reason.
- I think having up to date technology and having enough for your class to use.
- Controlled growth

3. What are the greatest challenges the school is facing in the next 3-5 years? (technology, building, classroom size, lack of funding, communications, qualified teachers) Suggestions?

- Do we have the teachers who can teach different things? More than one topic?
- General business kind of courses
- Shrinking population in Westville (older community)
- Qualified teachers, motivated to do more than expected.
- State funding
- Underprepared graduates
- I've been told by school board that there are more vouchering in than vouchering out.
- How much growth do they think we're going to have in the next five years?
- I think the schools are going to increase in numbers because of the planned subdivisions, etc., that are going in here. People want to come here.
- I believe we are an attractive place to live. Everything being built is occupied.
- Making sure the board is strategic.
- Finding and keeping good teachers.
- Some stability too in the administration: when you know, there is stability in who is running the school, and not just using it to wait for the better job offer.
- I think there are still some kids who fall through the cracks and that we don't provide them with the things they need, and it's not because we don't want to, it's because we're too small.
- We don't have enough teachers.
- Taxes may need to increase to support better education. I always want schools to be better in every community. It's about making the community better.
- Identifying best practices from other places.
- Technology, I think that's one of my biggest frustrations.
- I feel a little limited as far as our usage of technology for PowerSchool. It's widely used in the high school because they use it for projects and those type of things.
- PowerSchool: Go to a newsletter or go to the website, and then go to PowerSchool. I think we make it a little too complicated for people.
- I think it comes from many teachers. When their day is over, they still have so much work to do when they get home, grading papers and tests and things, that to be an extra-curricular advisor for \$100 for a semester, what, no I'm not doing that.
- I see the youngest teachers coming in and you are right, their day ends at 3:15. They don't even want to coach a sport. We could use community people for that. We could have club sponsors be people, and I think we just look at the school staff, and we're limiting ourselves.
- We are in a farming community. Can we do farm to fork here and work with and feed back into our community with our purchases of our food and our school so that we are directly paying it back to the individuals, the local people.
- Try to teach robotics and programming and those types of things through La Porte County Libraries and 3-D printing because those are the skills they need.
- I think the extra-curricular speak to not only skill sets but also keeping our kids involved in things that are healthy.
- I worry that it's such a small school setting that our kids may not be as prepared for school on a bigger scale.
- I would like to see an orientation for 6th graders.
- More communication and preparation of students AND parents between elementary and middle school.

- It's just one hallway but it seems like a whole different world. When you go into 7th grade, it is a lot different. In elementary they kind of coddle you a little bit and it seems like you go into 7th grade and the teachers, here's your homework you don't do it, you don't do it. We don't care. That was a big change.
- Class size: It seems like the teachers are overwhelmed.
- Kindergarten: Every 15 minutes we switched them to something else and I feel like they're not grasping what they need to, and then if you don't have it, then you're done, we're moving on to the next thing. I think that's why a lot of kids get left behind as far as the educational process. It's just so fast.
- I think it's the overall numbers of how many they allow into the school.
- We need a formula to determine who needs aids: let's just say 28 kids per class and it would be kind of standardized across the board, then there will be a full-time aide, but if we hit the 20-22 mark, then there will be a part-time aide,
- We don't have the space
- It seems like there's a lot of over spending on stuff that doesn't need to be spent on, keep up with the Jones's.
- Transportation: Yes, the bus going to Michigan City supposedly has stopped, so maybe that will help some.
- I wish we could go to Ipads completely but understand the cost and not everyone has internet.
- I just got my taxes, and they did go up from .7% to .98%, so they are still asking for the money. Then once again, show us where it's going.
- That's what we're being told that we must have these kids to keep the school running. Let's concentrate on our kids first.
- Drives me insane to come to Art Night and then get roped into a PTO meeting.
- Have technology, but it is outdated or doesn't work all the time.
- Math skills are rushed. If they bomb the test, they don't go back. This is not working.
- They are being taught to memorize for the test, but not learning concepts.
- I think they're being left behind because it's rush, rush, rush, rush, rush all day
- We can't focus on learning and teaching anymore. We are focused on; we need to pass these tests because if we don't then our funds get cut.
- Consider year around school.
- When test scores drop, parents change districts, teachers get laid off.
- Too much time preparing for tests and taking tests.
- PTO is ineffective and not open to new ideas.
- Lack of parking
- Student safety in the parking lot
- Lack of supervision and enforcement of rules in parking lots before and after school
- More teachers and /or aides
- If people want special parking spaces, have a fundraiser where they pay for their spot.
- Little school should not take taxes that should be going to the school. The school is dirty, needs paint, ceiling tiles replaced, carpet repair, and pegs in bathrooms are missing.
- Not any backup with school secretary in elementary.
- Do the funds coming from out of district students cover all the costs of having them here.
- Out of district people need to be at events, support community etc.
- They need to possibly do shared resources with other schools.
- Behavior issues that secretaries are managing when administrators are not available.
- Security officer could be doing more
- The transfer students are not learning the basic areas of respect we teach in the elementary schools. Maybe there should be a program they need to attend and successfully complete to come here.
- Students feel rushed in class to complete work

- Students feel rushed at lunch to finish lunch
- Students feel that there is a lot of competition for teacher attention
- They all feel that they get help when they need it.
- Financial things will be a problem
- Going to have too many students and not enough classrooms.
- Since the school is built on a hill you can't expand or you will need to fix foundation
- If you have more students, you need more food
- Music is boring. We use to have fun. Now we learn notes
- Need a chess club
- Concerned about parking lot safety
- Professional training and not just at the end of the year.
- Time to work on the lessons or how to present it to the children instead of just here you go, now use it in your classroom.
- Support staff that knows it because we don't have time to help each other, so we need to have somebody, a trouble shooter who knows what we're working with.
- Our kids do not know how to use technology. but you take them to the computer lab, they have no idea how to use Microsoft Word, no clue.
- At the lower grades teaching those things, but when you have such a limited amount of technology, you just abandon it because it's too much of a headache because you've got 26 kids and 22 working computers.
- Here's a thought, having a computer teacher would be fantastic.
- We need more classes that teach stuff about the real world: budgeting, cooking etc.
- I think they should have an ROTC program here.
- Very little done with career counseling or career exploration. I feel like I should have a direction by now.
- We are suffering from a lack of additional classes.
- A lot of bigger schools do everything on their computers. They don't even have books really.
- Fegley middle school in Portage has an app called Schoology and she can assign things on there, and the kids can go onto their Ipads and do it.
- Abuse of books
- They are not able to buy new books. I heard teachers say they ran out of paper one year. This school is not that well-funded. I think if we got more funding, it would be better.
- Football, wrestling, improved weight room, drama club, robotics club
- I think our teachers need to switch on to more of a hands-on approach.
- A lot of our teachers just read from a text book or a PowerPoint.
- Right now, if you want to buy some Westville gear, you must go to the office. I think they should have like a separate store like in the concession stand for students during the day and get rid of the vending machines.
- I think we should have snacks in the morning in the concession stand like coffee and donuts.
- There is a school in Chicago and they have a McDonalds and a Subway in the school.
- Success, I'm not going to lie, is like jail. Good concept but its implemented inconsistently
- I think they meant it for students to come and go to teachers to get help. But what I don't get is that when I'm doing my homework and I realize that I need help, you need a pass to get out of your Success to go to a teacher, and you can't get a pass during Success; you must get it before.
- Success should be in the morning. In afternoon, I just want to go home. In the morning, I could finish school work from day before.
- We used to have a thing where you could stay after for an hour and get help or do homework and they had a bus that took you home. They cut that because I think it was too much money for a bus.

- Have kids sign up for when the need ride homes and pay for it. Use the little bus
- They kind of just say they are going to do stuff but they never do (inconsistency) Like with the dress code, it's only enforced on certain people too.
- There are some teachers that could teach a little better.
- Our school is broke: No money for stolen calculators, books, atlases, or band
- I don't think we distribute the money very well because we just put all this money into a new pre-school and there are not even very many kids.
- Same fundraisers every year.
- Bullying is bad around here, bad. People don't even want to come to school anymore.
- People have called CPS about personal home problems to _____ for multiple years and nothing's ever happened about it. Bullying is bad here. It's not just one person. It's everybody. Everybody does it. _____ is good about bullying, but nobody goes to _____. They go to _____. You are supposed to go to the guidance counselor. If you go to _____, she stops it usually. She is very thorough.
- Some of the people in the office are rude. They are mean. They just snap at you.
- Our behavior issues with people in this district are horrible, so bad. People out of district are not the only problem.
- ISS is not well managed and is not considered a "punishment"
- I think we have an identity issue. With changes in administration the focus changes. We need stability
- It has affected the vertical alignment. In administration, not that it has to be facilitated by administration, but you are looking at changing what you're doing every couple of years with a new principal, it's really hard.
- They push for PowerSchool and they want you to look at that PowerSchool, but it's not updated on a regular basis.
- Most of the kids I know don't know how to study at this school. The academic is easy. We need to raise our standards here and teach to those standards. Our classes aren't weighted like classes in other schools.
- The administration does not take charge with what they want. There is a dress code here, but I have yet to hear any kid be sent home.
- There is an 8th grade kid driving a car home every day. Not one administrator has noticed the kid sitting in _class swinging his keys and getting in the car and leaving
- The things the kids are saying back to the teacher and the principals and getting physical, it's out of control.
- More career guidance.
- I feel sorry for the principal. Parents do not discipline at home and she is expected to discipline as well as educate.
- Obviously, they are spoiled. I can miss 4 or 5 days of school and I'll be okay. I'll just sit in ISS for a couple days and make it up. They get away with murder.
- They shouldn't be allowed to make up work for something that they screwed up. You build that responsibility in them so they know they can't mess up otherwise they will be taking this class again next year.
- It's the incentives that come down from the state enforce that.
- In bigger schools, you don't graduate because you didn't do this. Here it is like we are going to hold your hand and walk you out the door.
- The personal responsibility. I've always believed the fact that nobody can fail in our middle school is a big problem. They spend two years learning that they can do nothing, and nothing bad will happen to them. Then they come to the high school with no skills to be able to stick to something.
- The problem we run into is that to assign work to juniors and seniors that would approximate college work would wind up in a large number of failures in class and we have been encouraged not to have a large number of failures in class.
- A teacher recently assigned a one-page ... paper and 50% refused to turn it in, just took a 0, didn't even do it. You are increasing the amount of zeros and hurting yourself as a teacher; you're hurting them by making them fail, and there is no incentive to increase the rigor and to prepare them besides personal pride. Your job could be lost because of a lower graduation rate, a lower score on your RISE, and now you have no raise and two years in a row and you

can be fired. There is no real incentive to increase the rigor. No one is ever going to come in your class and say, it's a little too easy, but there have been many times where people have come in and said you're going to have too many F's, too many zeros, you're grading too hard.

- If I were to try and challenge every kid in my class to write at a college level as a senior, bad things would happen to me. That's sounds horrible to say that. Like I said, personal pride, I should still say this is what I'm doing darn it because I'm a teacher, but I need to feed by family.
- Funding
- Discipline, attendance, getting them to pass standardized tests
- My biggest challenge is being undermined. If parents or others come behind you and tell that kid, oh no, you don't have to do that, which is part of the rigor.
- Space and technology

4. What is the districts greatest strength? Why would people want to send their students here?

- Innovative leaders-Duel credit implemented, quickly!
- School leadership is critical. The team in place now is wonderful. Sometimes the Board gets in the way.
- I don't think one board member should speak for the group!
- Board members need to address things in meetings, not with individuals on the outside.
- The community group that _____ started is great opportunity to meet.
- For our kids to be exposed to people of different nationalities and different cultures, is very important.
- I love the voucher system because I think it provides a little bit more diversity.
- I think they want the best school that they can have for their kids. They are proud of this school. They want to remain proud of this school. I would think that people would be behind a building project if it needed to happen.
- Kindergarten visits to the home.
- I think the staff here is good, overall the administration and the teachers. I just feel I am overall very happy with the teachers my kids have had. I always hear positive things.
- I like all the programs that they offer to the elementary kids.
- Clubs. Are great for working parents. Give kids something to do.
- I think anything they can do to prepare our kids to be competitive with other school districts as far as academics go is a good thing.
- If you listen to _____ talk, she could just make you happy
- We have nice teachers and all the activities we get to do.
- Because we get art and music and gym and library
- Most schools, they have a bunch of drama, and here _____ is always willing to help and get stuff done and she is always helping people, and some schools don't have that.
- Because we are a friendly school and everyone gets along most of the time
- I would say probably having all the clubs
- I think we have a lot of good traditions.
- Parents and even alumni attend events here.
- I feel safe here
- Everybody is welcome here.
- I think everybody is friendly. Everybody's parents know the kids.
- Their parents treat other kids like their kids.
- I feel like the teachers work harder here than other teachers compared to my other school.
- I feel like they care more. It's easier passing because you learn more here. Classes are harder.

- We have a wood shop. There aren't a lot of schools who have a wood shop anymore.
- Our school spirit is good.
- A lot of people graduate from here.
- They are good at helping individually with work. At my old school, they didn't even help us, but here if kids need help and they are struggling, they will help you with it.
- A lot of kids graduate
- National Honor Society, Science, Safety, Tutoring
- Everyone watches out for everyone else.
- Teachers care about kids
- Hometown Olympiad
- Dedicated teachers
- Smaller class size and individual attention
- Support from our principal
- Some parental involvement
- Department size
- We work well as a team and listen to each other.
- Open door of administration is helpful too. They are very accessible and visible and I appreciate that.
- Intimate education
- Teachers that get to know the students really well
- The staff.

5. Describe the Westville culture. What should be preserved and how?

- Mayberry RFD?? Everybody wants that. Right?
- _____ is a solid principal. He has some great ideas. He has some interesting ideas just to get people involved, So, that's what makes the culture. That's what makes parents want to send their kids here and voucher in. I think it's the same for the high school.
- I think diversity helps every socioeconomic level
- Westville High School is too small because we can't, we don't provide kids with everything that they need here, without them going someplace else to school.
- If you're not a jock in this school, you're an outcast.
- What are people worried about? We had the same number of problems before we allowed open enrollment as we do now. It's a few people that don't want it.
- I think there are a few outspoken people who have the greatest influence on the Superintendent.
- People want more classes, more technology but no more kids. How would they suggest this is paid for?
- On our website, it says one of the great things about Westville is the low numbers. But that is not the case now.
- I think we have administrators that want to make this a big school. They talk about, we need the kids, we need the money so we can do this and we can do that.
- We need more kids; we need more money. Why? Why do we need that?
- We are used to a smaller school, not that small, but smaller, the population overall is growing, and how are they going to adjust. And so, for us to better understand what changes they're putting into place for our kids, as we all go through this change.
- Westville is more of a relationship-based school, or it was at one point.
- It's not as cliquey
- You can't just grow the kids. You must grow the staff.

- If we continue to grow the smaller class sizes but increase communication and maybe do meetings like this more often. You want more of an explanation for things and just to keep the parents in the loop as to how things are changing and what's going on
- Small town community
- **How many teachers of those 20 HS teachers do you feel are not motivated to teach?** Answers: 2 or 3; 2 maybe; 4; 3; 4; 3; 5; 3
- Teachers that follow through on their discipline, and not just threaten. They say in class, "I'll send you out" and then they never do.
- Westville was losing a lot of people to South Central and other schools in the area because the academics and stuff, so then they made it open enrollment so other people could come in, so that's how we got like all these new kids because they are trying to make up for the people we have lost. I don't think we should just have open enrollment; I think we should try to fix why the people are leaving.
- I feel like my mom wouldn't hate to pay more tax if she could see the improvement, but I don't feel like much of the money that the school gets makes that much of a difference.
- The priority right now is sports.
- There is some favoritism. If you want your kid in something, go see the superintendent and it gets done.
- Board members tend to advocate for their kids and their neighbors instead of advocating for the whole
- There are a lot of prejudice people in this community. Kids are better behaved than parents sometimes.
- Everyone thinks change is bad.
- People don't understand that if we don't grow, we may not exist. Funding keeps getting cut. How do people here expect to fund these things?
- Last year all the middle school teachers got talked to and yelled at for the amount of homework assigned.
- Kids could care less about what happens to the school. I wish it was different. I think if more felt some connection to the school, they might feel more responsibility to fix some of the other personal responsibility issues that we see.
- It seems like there is a core group of kids who get involved in as many things as they can and then there is a large group of kids that get involved in very little.
- If you want to improve the culture of the school, if you want to exceed in challenging them in the next five years, if you want to have all of these things without changing stuff above and beneath us, it's not going to happen. We are just talking about Band-aids.

6. **What should the parent's role in school be in the future? How would you engage parents in the educational process? How should the school engage teachers?**

- I feel like they could tap the community leaders, especially if they're trying to get different skills.
- All of us have some skills we probably would share, maybe over lunch time, or after school even to just help the students who are interested. They just need to reach out.
- I was very involved in kindergarten through second grade, and once third grade hit, I felt like, that I wasn't welcomed, that we don't need you anymore. I tried to go to the Christmas party and was told, no. I just feel like once my girls got to third grade, I had no relationship with the teacher.
- As the kids get older, there are fewer things parents are asked to help with.
- Parents don't know how to engage at the higher levels.
- List classroom needs on websites.
- Grandparents could and would do a lot more.
- Look for community sponsors, alumni, and grandparents etc. that will assist with classroom costs.
- Tell us what is needed not just, we are trying to raise money because they are going to get more from a donation than the 10 or 20 percent they get off that stuff anyway.
- Maybe they could help in the classroom

- They could help with after school activities.
- No I do not want my parents helping at school
- Parent/teacher conferences and student/teacher conferences.
- You can schedule one but it's got to be on the teacher's time.
- Getting additional help: I think a lot of it is that they live so far away and they already have papers to grade after school or they are helping with a club or something and they just want to get home, so having one more thing on their plate is just a nuisance.
- Need more involvement.
- Just getting parents to access the PowerSchool

7. What 1-2 things could Westville do to increase excellence and quality in the district

- Attract and retain talent
- Assure our students can compete academically and in the work world.
- Utilize more outside resources, partnerships.
- Change AR incentive. Trophies and medals are getting old
- Teacher/student ratio
- They must increase academic standing. We are behind all the surrounding schools.
- I think the culture is great here, but what the problem is, I think it's growing a little bit too fast.
- We need to manage growth
- A volunteer coordinator: assess teachers needs, contact parents or guest speakers as needed and line them up.
- Could also assist with parent engagement and communication.
- Increase engagement with grandparents as well. Maybe they have time and/or money to help.
- Establish criteria (GPA, Attendance) for out of district applicants
- Fewer fundraisers: More family events with a minimal cost instead of selling stuff. Give parents an option to send money or sell stuff.
- Parking lots, traffic patterns. More clubs
- Better transition for students and parents between elementary and middle school
- Improve communication with elementary parents as they transition
- More accountability and time management as they move grade to grade
- I think if we could get more AP classes and more dual credit courses.
- Foreign Language
- Drama and more clubs
- Improve some of the teachers. Many act like they don't care
- Continue dual credit
- More options for people not going to college.
- Discipline enforcement
- The amount of time the teachers teach a lesson because usually they just explain one part of it and give you homework, not enough time instructing.
- More hands-on activities in the classroom.
- I think they should be wiser about putting money towards education, like new books and stuff, instead of useless stuff that doesn't matter to everyone.
- Cleanliness in the building. The same piece of gum was in the same spot on the gym floor in the same spot I sat every week for three weeks.

- Would love to see teachers who love their jobs, get there early, stand outside and smile and greet the students. Students notice when teachers are not happy and this attitude is getting passed on.
- There are nice kids here. Some coming from a different school system, my son loves it here. The kids are awesome. If your kid's awesome, your parent's awesome.
- I would like to have graduation on Friday.
- PTO, as I favor this and I've spoken to _____ about it. _____ has even brought it up that I think that would just draw people, parents in. If it's the same 10 people. Trying to get the 40 that are not involved, if we get their child involved, then I think that's kind of the battle.
- Graduation outside.
- Maybe have a buddy to help student transition from elementary to middle school to high school.
- With the engagement stuff, the one thing I admire highly about New Prairie system is that engagement with their senior citizens.
- The elementary end is wonderful. They send that stuff home every week. They hit this hallway and it's non-existent. There is nothing. They don't send anything home to the parents. They're not accountable. I understand; you're middle school and you need to start learning to do this stuff, but they are still our children, they live in our home.
- Technology.
- We've got to have smaller class sizes.
- We need our aides back. Classroom management is overwhelming
- We need time for professional development.
- The students who do well, their parents are involved. The students who don't have and since we were just talking about culture of that part of the culture of the school, the education on the street is more important than the education in the classroom. You can't change that culture in a school, so to reach them, it's a lot more different and they aren't going to care about an app or Facebook. They won't even come and meet you. The ones you need to meet aren't the ones you see.
- How about we just change, we're not the enemy? We aren't sitting here twisting our mustaches saying, how can I screw your kid over? Calling home is terrible.
- We need a better discipline system
- Recess: One thing I talk about with some teachers is that I think that they need to do something with letting students have recess, but I think they need to have some time where they can go outside. Later start time
- There is too much gray area regarding discipline
- More participation on the side of parents
- We don't function as a true middle school. We function as a junior high, which puts more expectations on those kids to handle it on their own but they aren't ready or mature enough for that.
- The Little School is a good thing.
- We need summer school for MS
- We need to be cohesive so that we all know who is teaching what.
- Summer school would help the middle school kids. If they knew there was a consequence, but there is nothing. Those kids that don't play sports, right now the only consequence is we have for failing a class, is you can't play a sport.
- More funding
- Trying to be more of a cohesive unit.
- More conversations about professional development
- Assistance in the classrooms
- Support from parents.

- I would like to see some of those half days, where we would actually meet. I get that the school wants teachers to do professional development because the more we know, the more new techniques we can give to our kids, but honestly, I would like to see us to have time in the day to talk with the 6th grade teachers and actually know, where did you get to so far in your school year?

Although communications was not a FG question, many comments were made:

- Terrible. One of my biggest concerns is there were a lot of surveys sent out to out-of-district students. In district, we've not received one survey. I went to the last school board meeting. They said surveys have been sent out to everyone. Why haven't we gotten them?
- I like the communication coming from _____. I like the newsletters and the email alerts and the phone calls sometimes are a little much, but I'll say on the part of the teachers I get a little concerned.
- Conferences: I would like that opportunity to communicate with the teachers
- Some teachers respond immediately, some respond in a week, some don't respond at all.
- Let us know why we need this money.
- Just so we understand, like what is coming from the school and what is coming from the state because their hands are tied. You hear about it daily. There is so much going on in the state of Indiana, so we want to know, are you causing this or are you doing just what you're told so we understand.
- As far as communicating, there are probably more people here than there is at the school board meetings.
- There is a program at Liberty Elementary posted through an App on your phone even that you can communicate with the teachers, and they can post classroom pictures? It's daily. Maybe on their lunch hour, they are required to post maybe five minutes of this blog of their classroom so the parents get home and be like, what did you do today? And you know because you saw the blog for the day. I thought that would be nice because it's quick and it's easy for the teachers as well.
- It's nice to see the people who want to help, and they do help, but they need to know. I think communication all the way around the whole school, teachers, administration, everything needs to be better.
- 4th and 5th grade students are confused in this area if they should take problems to the teacher, to their parent, if their parent should talk to the teacher, if the teacher should talk to the parent.
- My parents hate how our school communicates. They feel like they aren't warned ahead of time or properly. For sports, especially, our schedules get messed up.
- Snow communication needs to be more than 1 hour before school starts.
- They push for PowerSchool and they want you to look at that PowerSchool, but it's not updated on a regular basis.
- I think there should be some reporting that kicks out to administration that say lets them know when a teacher hasn't updated his/her grades in more than a week or whatever. That should be somehow tied to their merit increases.

Again, the focus group participants were not asked to identify ways to "fix" the issues, although some people offer ideas. It is apparent that all focus group participants have the schools best interest at heart and would like to see the school improve. The information provided will be used to assist with the strategic planning process and overall school improvement.

