

From: [Cohn, Gary](#)
To: [EPS_MailList](#)
Subject: Listening, Hearing, and Deciding
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Dear Colleague,

Last week I invited you to tell us what you think about school technology and school facilities in a quick online survey. It is important to have your perspective among those the school board will use to decide how best to meet student learning and facility needs, without asking you to participate in another lengthy survey.

Directors very much want your thoughts before making such decisions, and deciding when to present the district's technology and building needs for voter approval.

This coming Tuesday, Oct. 27, during a three-hour board work session, the board will consider the perspectives of the 306 staff who responded to last week's survey. They will also consider what hundreds of others in our community have been sharing over the last few months.

How the board has been listening to you, to parents, and to community members – and what they are hearing

1. You may remember last spring's *Fishbowl* discussions – three of them in April and May. Advice we heard in those sessions coalesced into themes the board reviewed last spring and will review again on Oct. 27:
 - About our facilities – *Fishbowl* participants emphasized five areas of importance:
 - Safety and security
 - Equity and access
 - Readiness for current and future growth
 - Importance of welcoming environments that create a sense of community and pride
 - About technology in schools – participants emphasized six areas of importance:
 - Safety and security
 - Equity and access
 - More and better technology
 - Long-range, sustainable planning
 - Training and support for students and staff
 - Training and access for parents and families
2. Two *ThoughtExchange* processes – one last winter, *Talking about Schools*, and one just completed this fall, *Talking about Technology*. Results from both of those processes are [online](#).

Last winter, when *Talking about Schools*, 7,000 people told us they appreciated four things:

- School culture and atmosphere (*Congratulations and thank you for all you do to make that acknowledged and appreciated!*)
- Academics and programming
- Technology for school and academic management
- Communication with teachers and parents and students

They also suggested five areas we should improve:

- Funding and budget (*No surprise, there; we are all watching and talking with our legislators*)
- Class size: individualized attention
- Food program – not enough time for students to eat lunch

- Facilities and infrastructure
 - Academics and programming (*which was also high on the “appreciation” list*)
3. *Talking about Technology* also revealed top areas the community appreciates about how technology can change education and what the community is concerned about:
- The “themes” associated with what people appreciate about the power of technology to improve education are:
 - Preparation for the future
 - Access to information
 - Individualized education
 - Enhanced learning experience
 - Learning environment
 - The “themes” associated with people’s concerns about technology are:
 - Communication, human connection and interaction
 - Learning the basics
 - Access to technology in school
 - Student-teacher interactions
 - Professional development for staff

These 10 “themes” are condensed from the thoughts of nearly 3,000 people who took part in *ThoughtExchange* this fall and the 171,000 “stars” they placed on those thoughts in the process.

The collective and individual perspectives available online in each of the *ThoughtExchange* processes are incredibly deep and rich. This is not quantitative data; it is perceptual insight into our communities’ expectations, hopes, and fears.

- We also asked *ThoughtExchange* participants to rate their overall level of satisfaction with the district on a scale of 1 (highly dissatisfied) to 11 (highly satisfied). The graph showing the results is on the *ThoughtExchange* website and included below. The blue bars show the satisfaction rating of those who responded in the first phase – when they shared their thoughts. The green bars show the satisfaction rating of those who responded in the second phase – when they put stars on theirs and others’ thoughts.

Congratulations and thank you again, for the work you do every day. It is reflected in the greatest number of respondents being on the “satisfied” side of the scale. And thank you in advance for the work we will be doing together to continually improve our work.

All this information, including what you share in the staff survey – will be among the items board members discuss and use to shape their decisions during their Oct. 27, 4:30 p.m. special meeting in the Community Resource Center’s Port Gardner Rooms. If you want to review all of this input yourself, you may see it beginning next Monday morning in the agenda item entitled “[Capital Bond/Levy Development Update](#)” in BoardDocs.

The board will weigh hours of perspectives and thousands of comments as they move toward a mid-to-late November decision about if, what, and when to ask voters to support funding for facilities improvements and educational technology.

The board’s decisions and the public’s responses to them will touch many thousands of students, staff, and parents for decades. The board’s decisions will be lauded by some and criticized by others. The board’s decisions will incorporate the wisdom and best thoughts of those who have joined invitations to engage in this work over the last year.

Thank you for being a part of the work and the thought processes!



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