

News release



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For more information:

[Mary Waggoner](#), Director of Communications, 425-385-4040

District gathers insight about schools and district

Thoughtexchange makes it easy to share your thoughts and see what others have to say



What are your concerns; what do you appreciate; and what else would you like to say? These are the three questions students, families, staff and community are invited to answer when the district launches an online conversation in mid-January.

Anyone with an email address is invited to the conversation. [Thoughtexchange](#) is the company hosting the conversation

and collecting email addresses. All participant emails will remain confidential.

Those who sign up with an email address will have the option to answer those three questions about a specific school, multiple schools and about the district overall.

“When we wrote the district’s strategic plan, hundreds of people came together over two years to help with that,” explained School Board President Pam LeSesne. “The *Thoughtexchange* process brings thousands of people together more quickly to answer open-ended questions about schools and the district. We are looking forward to hearing from more people than ever before and to sharing what people think in a way we’ve never been able to do before.”

Hearing from so many people and being able to *share* what those people think intrigues other board members and district leaders. Board Vice President Ted Wenta compares the online conversation to group activities that involve sticky dots. “Many of us have worked in groups where ideas listed on a flip chart are ‘weighted’ by participants putting sticky dots on the ideas they consider most important. *Thoughtexchange* gathers people’s thoughts then merges those ideas onto cyber flip charts. All those in the

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original conversation get a set of virtual 'stars' to put on the thoughts. That way, everyone gets to see their own ideas and ideas of others, learn from those different perspectives and assign their stars to the ones they feel most strongly about."

"We are launching this to get insight and rich data about what is really important to people, what to keep doing because it works and what we need to improve," explained Everett Public Schools Superintendent Gary Cohn. "This large collection of public opinion will identify patterns, telling us what people care about the most."

Participant identities remain confidential throughout all three phases of each *Thoughtexchange* conversation.

In phase one, *Thoughtexchange* collects email addresses through Saturday, Jan. 17. *Thoughtexchange* then sends an email invitation out on that day to take part in the conversation; which will be open until Jan. 27, 2015.

"It's important that people watch for these invitations from *Thoughtexchange*," emphasized Wentz. "The invitations will not come from the district, nor do the comments of anyone who participates go to the district. The responses go directly to *Thoughtexchange* for the next phase in the process."

Phase two begins two to three weeks after the first online conversation closes (around Feb. 9). *Thoughtexchange* sends another email invitation to the original conversation group so they can see what others thought, and then apply *stars* to the comments they like or agree with the most.

"Everyone sees their own comments alongside others' comments," explained LeSesne. "I might think what someone else wrote is a better idea than mine, or it might give me a new perspective on something. I can put a star on my own comment or on someone else's – depending upon what I like or agree with the most."

Phase three begins two to three weeks after phase two (around March 11). In phase three, the most common, most agreed-upon thoughts and comments appear on a *Thoughtexchange* website. The website shows what people spoke about and agreed on most often for each school and for the district.

Cohn explains, "In phase three, the conversation topics are available for everyone. The district and the schools will have a clearer picture of what people like, what they suggest should be changed, and what else is on their minds. It has been three years since we did all of the strategic plan community engagement work; this process will once again bring people together in a conversation about our schools, and it will do it in a way that was not possible before this technology was available."

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Director of Communications Mary Waggoner added, “One of the greatest strengths of gathering people’s opinions using this tool is the reach – we hope to hear from thousands of people that are connected in one way or another to Everett Public Schools.” Waggoner points out too that the *Thoughtexchange* conversation will be available in Spanish for the first time in January. “We are pleased to be one of the first school districts in the country to have this kind of engagement tool available to Spanish speakers. *Thoughtexchange* is planning to offer other languages in the future.”

Several other Washington school districts have engaged their communities using *Thoughtexchange*, including Marysville, Central Valley and Spokane.

Want to share your thoughts? We are listening. Go to http://bit.ly/EPS_Texchange to join the conversation.

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