

LRSD Civic Advisory Committee

Final Report



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
List of LRSD CAC Members.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Methodology.....	7
Findings.....	8
An excellent education for all children.....	10
Student realities and life in the schools.....	18
Infrastructure challenges and needs.....	25
Teachers and quality instruction.....	29
Community engagement in education.....	32
Recommendations.....	37
Appendix A: Forum facilitation guide.....	39
Appendix B: Facilities Subcommittee Report.....	41



2015-2016 LRSD CAC Members

Executive Summary

The Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee (LRSD CAC), established by the State Board of Education after the takeover of the Little Rock School District, was commissioned to represent the concerns and ideas of the students, parents, teachers, and community members of the district in the absence of an elected school board. Community forums, surveys, and other activities were undertaken by the LRSD CAC during the spring of 2016.

About 250 stakeholders participated in a total of 33 small group discussions over the course of five forums. Participants discussed a variety of topics ranging from broad concerns about the lack of information and transparency in the school district to specific details of wraparound service needs such as health care and meals. Many of these issues remain relevant in the face of rapid changes in the district, many of which have been concerns for decades. The findings are grouped into five sections. Many themes fit into multiple categories and all topics are interconnected.

The first section explores the barriers and keys to providing a quality education for all children.

Key findings:

- The ongoing challenge of neighborhood schools is that the student bodies become homogenous based on the racial and socioeconomic divisions of Little Rock's neighborhoods.
- The lack of clarity, transparency, and stability in the district is causing families to move their children to other educational institutions.
- Several participants stated that they would support a millage increase, and that if passed it should be allocated to schools with the highest needs.
- Participants pointed out that charter schools perform no better than traditional schools by the numbers, but the perception that charters are superior persists.

The second section focuses on student realities and life in the schools, including literacy, extracurriculars, discipline, class sizes, and ESOL. Key findings:

- A little over one third of groups discussed testing and not one recorded comment was in favor of the current testing regime.
- Participants unanimously agreed that smaller class sizes were needed in the LRSD.
- There was consensus among groups that recess and physical activity need to be increased.
- Participants expressed that the test used to determine the need for services lumps all Latino students together rather than focusing on new immigrants and their language access needs, and that some children with sufficient English skills are being tracked into ESOL programs.

The third section covers infrastructure challenges and needs. Key findings:

- Many comments centered on outrage over stark disparities between newer and older school buildings.
- Putting money into new schools is upsetting to families whose children attend school in older buildings that are not being adequately or safely maintained. Participants felt that all schools should be held to a high standard of health and safety.

- The majority of forum participants were opposed to any school closings, describing the potential impact of closed schools on their neighborhoods, as they have seen previous school closings create a hole in communities nearby.

The fourth section discusses teachers and quality instruction. Key findings:

- There is a clear sentiment that the LRSD needs teachers who are motivated, open minded, inspiring, and content. However, groups discussed at length the reasons that so many teachers are feeling stressed, drained, and hopeless.
- Most teachers at the forums expressed a noted decrease in support.
- Perspectives on Teach For America were negative across the board.

The final section covers community engagement in education. Key findings:

- Participants asked, “Are our voices heard? Do the powers that be pay any attention to us?” Many expressed feeling unheard after putting in the time and effort to give their input.
- Participants suggested that students are the experts on their schools and they should be consulted directly about changes that are needed.
- Administrators described a range of needs that community volunteers could fill, from bringing umbrellas to cover students entering the school on rainy days to providing literacy help to students reading below grade level.
- There was a sense that the business community was responsible for the state takeover and thus should be sponsoring schools in more tangible ways at all levels, not just supporting elementary schools.

Recommendations based on issues with agreement among forum participants include: increased resources for partnership development, wraparound services, extracurriculars, literacy programs, facilities, special education, and distressed schools. The LRSD CAC calls for an end to teacher cuts, continued vocal opposition to charter school expansion from administrators, a reduction in standardized testing, an increase in recess, and regular forums and hearings for public involvement and transparency.

We request that all stakeholders be given access to budget committee findings, written plans for distressed schools, criteria to be used in determining school closures, and information about the roles the state has played in the district since the takeover.

The LRSD should create space for further community discussion around topics that had disagreement, including discipline policies, trades and technology career training, neighborhood schools, technology in the classroom, and attendance zones.

There is more urgency than ever about the need to take stock of the LRSD’s challenges and opportunities, and chart a path forward that allows every child the chance to thrive.

Acknowledgements

The work of the Little Rock School District Civic Advisory Committee (LRSD CAC) has been a collaborative process among dozens of students, school staff, community stakeholders, and various organizations. The members of the 2015-2016 LRSD CAC are listed on the following page.

A major portion of the LRSD CAC's work consisted of planning and implementing community forums that were spearheaded by the Community Engagement Subcommittee of the LRSD CAC: Anika Whitfield-Chair, Gene Levy-Co-chair, Nanette Patino, Dionne Jackson, Alexis Williams, Seketa Ross, and three student representatives. Additionally, the series of community forums would not have been possible without the hundreds of people who came together on a short timeline to provide their time and talent, including Acadia Roher and Jennifer Henderson, who supported the management of this process through the generosity of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and the Arkansas Public Policy Panel.

We are so very grateful to the host sites for the forums: Wakefield Elementary, Centro Cristiano Hispano, Gibbs Magnet Elementary, Saint Mark Baptist Church, and Roberts Elementary. We also appreciate the schools that hosted LRSD CAC meetings over the course of the year. The staff and administrators were a pleasure to work with.

Many thanks to our volunteers: Ashley Bachelder, Diane Vibhakar, Horace Smith, Connie Whitfield, Jenna Greer, Regan Moffitt, Bill Kopsky, Greg Adams, Liz Lucker, Janie Stultz, Meredith Morrison, Jennifer Guzman, Hersch Rothmel, Mary Wolf, Marion Humphrey, Leticia Reta, Merrill Schmidt, Ruth Shepherd, Akaylah Jones, Kymara Seals, Carol Young, Amber Jackson, Hilary Trudell, Helen Grace King, Tamika Edwards, Jerri Derlikowski, Nell Matthews, Alex Handfinger, David Monteith, Amy Johnson, Arjola Limani, Debbie Milam, Ana Phakhin, Connie Whitfield, Cathy Koehler, Sharon Jackson, Sandra Ledbetter, Ti Davis, Kyle Leyenberger, John Wilkerson, Debra Bowers, Beverly Broadnax-Thrasher, Glory Pearsall, Gwendolyn Jones, Amanda Maher, James Szenher, Ashley Moore, Claire Smyth, and Janecia Collins, and several others who pitched in as needed.

Each forum included performances by highly talented LRSD students. Over 150 students performed or served in other volunteer roles. They include:

- McClellan choir
- McClellan DECA, Unitown, and FBLA volunteers
- Baseline cheer and choir
- Hall AVID volunteers
- McDermott Student Council volunteers
- Henderson Diamond Divas volunteers
- Booker Arts orchestra, choir, and drama
- Williams choir and flag line
- Roberts choir and flag line
- Roberts PTSA volunteers

List of LRSD CAC Members

The zone members and philanthropic organizations appointed in 2015 were:

Zone 1

Joy Springer

Zone 2

Anika Whitfield

Zone 3

Peter Gess

Zone 4 and Co-chair

Dionne B. Jackson

Zone 5

John L. Wilkerson

Zone 6

Marq Golden

Zone 7

Brenda "BJ" Wyrick

Co-Chair

Greg Adams

Philanthropic Organizations

Little Rock Public Education Foundation - Eugene Levy
Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance - Kathy Webb

Latino Community Member Representative

Terry Trevino-Richard

Teachers include:

Baseline Elementary School

Deborah Cavener
Latonya Jackson

Updated Teacher Representation at Baseline as of September 7, 2015

Tamika Jordan
Nanette Patino

Cloverdale Middle School

Brooke Sanders
Yasmine Butte

Updated Teacher Representative at Cloverdale
Ritchie Holliman

Henderson Middle School

Sandra Ledbetter
Tiffani Jones

Fair High School

Sharon Jackson
Fred Dickins

Hall High School

Liz Lucker
Tracy Mason

Updated Teacher Representative at Hall
Amanda Warren

McClellan High School

Seketa Ross
Deborah Hansberry

Student Representation

Two students from each of the six academically distressed schools listed above

Introduction

The Civic Advisory Committee, established by the State Board of Education after the takeover of the Little Rock School District, was commissioned to represent the concerns and ideas of the students, parents, teachers, and community members of the district in the absence of an elected school board. The forums, surveys, and other activities undertaken by the LRSD CAC during the spring of 2016 were a key part of their work to reach out to constituents and provide space for discussion, questions, and data gathering. Much has happened in the LRSD since the takeover. The results described in this report represent a snapshot of attitudes before several major changes ensued, including the approval of a major expansion of charter schools in Pulaski County and the appointment of a new Superintendent. Reports on the work of LRSD CAC subcommittees are included in the appendix.

The information gathered at the forums covered a wide array of issues, all of which remain relevant in the face of rapid changes in the district, and many of which have been concerns for decades. Against a backdrop of a shrinking budget, distressed schools, pressure on teachers, the increase of high stakes testing, and a persistent achievement gap, residents of Little Rock came together to hash out their vision for ideal schools, discuss issues, and propose solutions.

There are many incredible success stories and pockets of excellence in the LRSD, but there are also inequities that exist that fall along clear race and class lines. Many forum participants called for a solid plan forward to ensure the success of every school and every child. The larger political environment has made this goal increasingly difficult. There is more urgency than ever about the need to take stock of the LRSD's challenges and opportunities, and chart a path forward that allows every child the chance to thrive.



Image: LRSD CAC Co-chair Dionne Jackson opens the first forum at Wakefield Elementary.

Methodology

The LRSD CAC utilized community forums and surveys to gather data from LRSD stakeholders.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee (“Subcommittee”) held a series of five forums at different locations around Little Rock during February and March of 2016. Each forum lasted two hours and started with a welcome and video on the current state of the LRSD, then moved into small group discussions led by a trained facilitator using a facilitation plan (see Appendix A). The questions guided each focus group, but also allowed for a free-flowing dialogue between the facilitator and participants. Facilitators and/or designated notetakers captured handwritten notes from each table discussion. Participants also co-created images on large sheets of paper to describe their vision for excellent schools in Little Rock. Finally, participants were asked to submit questions on Post-It notes, turn in a commitment card noting their willingness to contribute to improving the schools, and fill out an evaluation of the forum experience. Notes were transcribed for each small group discussion, then used to identify themes. Each set of notes was coded using the major themes to determine the frequency with which different topics were discussed across all forums.

Subcommittee members created the first drafts of the surveys for elementary students, middle and high school students, parents, and school staff, which were then shared with other LRSD CAC members and LRSD staff to gather further input. Survey questions covered school information, experiences at school, perceptions of parent and community involvement, and needs for improvement. Participants were also asked if they would be willing to get involved in efforts to improve their schools. A Spanish language version of each survey was also created for monolingual Spanish speakers. The surveys were administered on paper and online in April 2016. LRSD staff sent surveys to each school to complete. Survey results are not included in this report but will be forthcoming.

The flurry of activity around community input inspired several additional engagement activities, including one teacher who copied the forum’s structure and gathered input from her students at Hall High School.

Findings

Nearly 600 people signed in at the five forums. Of those, about 250 stayed the entire two hours and engaged fully in the small group discussions. The discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that many of those who signed in were family members of students performing or volunteering and were either not aware that the forums were seeking their input or had other family responsibilities. Some participants also left after realizing that the format did not allow for district officials and administrators to answer questions and concerns directly.

The 250 full participants included several repeat attendees. One particularly involved parent attended all five forums. An administrator from McClellan High School was present at almost all of the forums and several Civic Advisory Committee members attended most, if not all of the sessions. These folks went above and beyond; the majority of participants attended only one of the forums. Attendance varied by location:

Location	Attendance	VIPS Hours
Wakefield Elementary	112	125.5
Centro Cristiano Hispano	58	101.5
Gibbs Magnet Elementary	108	178.5
Saint Mark Baptist Church	180	270.5
Don R. Roberts Elementary	140	202.5
TOTAL	598	878.5

Facilitators led a total of 33 small group discussions over the course of the five forums. Participants discussed a variety of topics ranging from broad concerns about the lack of information and transparency throughout the school district to specific details of wraparound service needs such as health care and meals. The table below displays the number of groups that discussed each theme, which shows the frequency and can be used to demonstrate the priority of that topic in the minds of the participants. Many of these themes can be seen as subcategories of bigger themes. For example, dental services and nurses commonly came up when groups were discussing the variety of wraparound services needed in each school.

Topic	Number of groups discussed	Percent of groups discussed	Page Number
Facilities	27	81.82%	25
Parent involvement	25	75.76%	34
Equity	25	75.76%	10
Community involvement	24	72.73%	35
District transparency	22	66.67%	33
Budget	22	66.67%	13

Extracurriculars and experiences	22	66.67%	20
Diversity	21	63.64%	12
Closings and consolidations	20	60.61%	26
Forums/input	20	60.61%	33
Teacher morale	19	57.58%	29
School atmosphere	19	57.58%	18
Plan for distressed schools	18	54.55%	15
Busing	17	51.52%	27
Teacher support	16	48.48%	30
Literacy	16	48.48%	19
Wraparound services	14	42.42%	16
Discipline	14	42.42%	21
Technology	14	42.42%	28
Curriculum	14	42.42%	31
Charter schools	13	39.39%	17
Security and safety	13	39.39%	22
Testing	13	39.39%	
Individualized education	12	36.36%	22
Class sizes	11	33.33%	23
Recess/physical activity	11	33.33%	23
Nutrition and meals	11	33.33%	16
Counselors	11	33.33%	16
Teacher pay, benefits, rights	11	33.33%	30
Trades and technology training	9	27.27%	23
Mental health	9	27.27%	16
Qualified teachers	9	27.27%	31
Aftercare	8	24.24%	16
Token engagement	7	21.21%	32
Professional Development	6	18.18%	32
ESOL	6	18.18%	24
Teacher autonomy	5	15.15%	30
Math	5	15.15%	20
Tutoring	5	15.15%	16
Small schools	4	12.12%	18
Life skills	4	12.12%	24
Nurse	4	12.12%	16

Adult education	4	12.12%	36
Special education	4	12.12%	24
Peer learning	3	9.09%	18
Dental	3	9.09%	16
Pre-K	3	9.09%	25

For the remainder of the results section, the above themes have been grouped into categories:

An excellent education for all children..... Page 10
Student realities and life in the schools..... Page 18
Infrastructure challenges and needs..... Page 25
Teachers and quality instruction..... Page 29
Community engagement in education..... Page 32

Many themes fit into multiple categories and all topics are interconnected. Improving education means thinking and acting holistically.

An excellent education for all children

Though our public schools are tasked with providing an excellent education for all children, participants agreed that many students are not served like they should be and that these disparities typically fall along race and class lines. Participants discussed at great length the barriers they see, including inadequate funding, neighborhood segregation, conditions at “distressed” schools, the proliferation of charter schools, and the lack of wraparound services needed to create better conditions for children to learn.

Equity

Twenty-five out of 33 small groups discussed the issues around equity in the Little Rock School District. Inequity was defined by several people as a situation in which students want to learn, but are not afforded equal opportunities, especially if they attend schools without enough books, effective teachers, functional technology, extracurricular activities, or solid facilities. Another participant defined equity as “fairness of treatment” rather than same treatment. Regardless of definition, the overwhelming sentiment was that the district needs to do a better job of helping all children to thrive. Many asked, “Why are there more resources in some schools than others?” There was discussion about tension and inequities that still exist due to unresolved issues dating back to the 1950s and 1960s.

The call to focus more resources on children with greater needs came from many different small group discussions. Participants suggested that support should be extended to the families, not just the individual student in need. Too many students are passed through the system without receiving the necessary resources and attention to ensure their achievement. One participant described the situation as a two-tiered system geared toward the more affluent, White students while failing the majority of Black and Latino students. Don R. Roberts Elementary was suggested several times as having the amenities that every school should provide. Parents from

other elementary schools in the district were surprised to find out about the opportunities provided to Roberts students, such as robotics.

One small group discussed at length their concern that people making decisions for the district do not understand structural oppression and how their decisions affect populations facing systemic injustice. By structural oppression, we mean the sum of all the past and present laws, policies, behaviors, and attitudes which maintain divisions between racial groups and create disadvantaged economic, political, and social living situations for Black and Latino families. An example of how this plays out in policy is the school-to-prison pipeline, which came up as a topic of conversation in several groups. One participant said they have witnessed security personnel targeting students of color for more harsh discipline. Data shows that LRSD decisions like those around discipline do not reflect the realities of the Black majority of the district.

A parent described their experience at one LRSD neighborhood school where they witnessed teachers “teaching toward” White students. Their concern was that their child and many other Black students don’t have the same foundation and are often forgotten. Other participants described a lack of teachers that represent the racial makeup of the student body and a lack of cultural competency among teachers more generally.

There was concern that, in many cases, students cannot afford to participate in extracurriculars even if they are offered. Also, because art, music, and sports are often not standard components of the school experience, many students miss out.

Technology is not equitably distributed among schools and students. Some schools offer take-home laptops to students, but one parent said the \$25 insurance fee is “not acceptable” because it limits which families can access the resource.

One participant articulated a concern that the highest ranked schools attract the best students, rather than having them distributed among the various schools. A student participant from Hall High School suggested that the rankings are skewed due to testing inconsistencies. The student described how test scores at Hall include the scores of students who have recently arrived from Latin America without a firm grasp of the English language in which the tests are given. Additionally, several questions were recorded regarding efforts of the LRSD to address the language and economic barriers faced by Latino students.

The Little Rock School District has a high concentration of students with disabilities and several participants felt that the district is penalized and increasingly burdened because charter schools can avoid enrolling these students.

Students from Hall High School discussed how Hall, McClellan, and Fair (all schools deemed “academically distressed” and with the highest concentrations of students of color) were recently moved from a block schedule with 8 classes to 7 period days. They said this jeopardizes many students’ opportunity to graduate with honors because they do not have time in their schedules to take the extra classes. The new schedule also puts students from these schools at a disadvantage to students at Parkview and Central, which are still on a block schedule and able to take an additional class each year. The change has affected both students and teachers, as before the teachers had more planning time and students had more time to complete homework. The students said that the daily increase in homework as a result of the schedule

change is a challenge for students who have jobs and other responsibilities. “They’re trying to improve our school but they’re making it worse. They’re taking away opportunities instead of giving us opportunities.”

Suggestions and solutions from participants about how to move toward a more equitable school system:

- Ensure that all schools are a similar size with equal distribution of students from a diversity of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds
- Require uniforms at every school so that all students have the same standard of clothing
- Differentiated support for students who are performing below grade level
- Combine four schools into one so that educators can concentrate effort into one school to help struggling children improve
- Create conditions for a better sense of belonging among Latino students, especially new immigrants
- Return block scheduling to all high schools
- Build or expand new schools downtown and in east Little Rock
- White stakeholders should be more vocal about disparities
- Stop social promotion (the practice of promoting a child to the next grade level regardless of skill mastery in the belief that it will promote self-esteem)
- Focus volunteer efforts on students that need it the most
- Focus resources on building up schools in distress rather than building a new school in west Little Rock
- Make sure excellent teachers are evenly distributed throughout the district
- Take more risks in moving non-proficient students up
- Initiate a millage increase to be funneled directly to struggling schools
- Start a program for students who miss greater than a certain number of days

Diversity

The majority of participants described diversity as a desirable trait to have in a school. As one parent put it, “We need to diversify our schools so that kids are prepared for the world.” There is a perception that segregation has worsened since the 1980s.

Participants demonstrated widespread awareness that neighborhood segregation is a major driver of the lack of diversity within the schools. The ongoing challenge of neighborhood schools, or having certain schools follow a community schools model, is that the student bodies are fairly homogenous based on the race and socioeconomic divisions of Little Rock’s neighborhoods. Returning to a system of neighborhood schools essentially locks in segregation. Some feel that we are repeating the same mistakes that caused the state to pay desegregation funds in the first place.

People expressed that because so many White students have left the LRSD for private schools, other school districts, or charter schools, the goal of integration has become more difficult. The focus only on White students as somehow bringing diversity to the schools ignores the fact that our community and the nation are multiethnic. However, the withdrawal of White and affluent students comes with a unique set of challenges. Several White parents expressed concern that if students were spread among the LRSD to increase diversity, their child would end up being one of only a few White students at the school, which they felt would be intimidating. One parent described stark conditions after what they called a “mass exodus of the middle class”

from McDermott Elementary. Race and class often track together because of systemic oppression and students living in poverty have more needs than those whose families can supplement their educations, afford extracurriculars, and regularly volunteer their time.

There was recognition that some tools to promote racial integration such as busing and magnet schools have been more readily available under the desegregation plan, but that these may be in jeopardy once the state desegregation funds stop in the next year. Participants disagreed about whether busing was needed to integrate the schools. Since one of the forums was held at Gibbs Magnet Elementary, the voices of many Gibbs parents were represented. One parent said that the number one reason their family chose Gibbs was because the magnet component helps increase diversity. They suggested that schools with a specific niche, such as the focus on foreign language at Gibbs, are valuable environments that attract students from many different backgrounds. Several parents expressed concern that the combination of school consolidations and lack of desegregation funds would result in a loss of diversity at Gibbs.

Not everyone agreed that integration or diversity was necessary for a good education. As one participant put it: "I'm for neighborhood schools if they are equal." Another pointed out some of the challenges for low income students going to schools where the majority of the student body has a higher standard of living, such as a student from southwest Little Rock attending a school in west Little Rock. "The environment makes a difference in students. The atmosphere, how people talk- it's different. Students are exposed to a different life. When you see what other people have, you realize you've lived poor."

Several Hall High School students described divisions between Black and Latino students at their school, which often came to a head at the bus stop and often erupted in fights. They pointed out that there were problems before the increase in Latino students at the school, but now the district has some buses that are all Latino and the demographic shift may be elevating tensions.

Suggestions and solutions from participants about how to improve diversity:

- Educate high school students about tolerance and diversity
- Expand the school district boundaries or merge with Pulaski County Special School District
- Distribute students in west Little Rock among schools in other areas so that school populations are reflective of the population of the larger city
- Promote community understanding of issues of poverty

Budget

Twenty-two out of 33 small groups discussed issues relating to the LRSD budget or funding. Some people were surprised about the depth of the financial concerns, but most participants were well aware that the district does not have the funds it needs to fully resource its schools. There was added concern because of the current superintendent's laser focus on paring down the budget in the face of possible fiscal distress. Administrators and public officials have talked so much about the money that several small groups expressed concern that there may be a greater interest in the finances than in the students. Participants had more questions than suggestions, which is in part related to the lack of transparency discussed in more detail later in this report. Many small groups expressed an interest in seeing the details of the district's budget and understanding its revenue streams.

One major concern with the budget that came up several times was the fact that as more students leave the LRSD it becomes harder to pass a millage increase. Little Rock voters whose children will not benefit from the millage because they go to private or charter schools are much less likely to vote for the increase, which could lead to budget shortfalls in years to come as costs rise and existing funds cover less and less ground. Several participants stated that they would support a millage increase, and that if passed it should be allocated to schools with the highest needs. One suggested that the LRSD should be returned to local control before requesting a millage increase from voters.

There was concern that in the current climate of budget issues, the district has misplaced priorities. For example, one participant questioned why the LRSD is investing more in personnel to monitor classes than in actual teachers. Another participant expressed concern that only lip service would be paid to the oft-repeated phrase that “cuts will be made away from the classroom.”

Participants in several small groups described what they saw as inefficiencies in the budget, such as paying contractors to provide services rather than doing them in house and renting school buildings such as Booker. One parent described how the school her children attend is wasting money on providing them with ESOL services she felt they didn’t need. She said her children are now stuck in the classes and she feels the money could be better spent on students who need the services. Another example is the news that the new STEM school will not have adequate funds for the technology necessary to run its programs.

Participants had questions about:

- The work of the LRSD’s budget committee and how information could be obtained about their recommendations
- Efficiencies in busing that might save the district money
- Projected savings from closing school facilities
- Cost effectiveness of renovating existing facilities versus building new
- Whether LRSD administrators or the state Department of Education have the final say on budget cuts
- How much magnet school funding is tied to desegregation funds
- Whether the magnet program will continue after budget cuts
- How much it takes to run an individual school
- Whether busing cuts will impact where students are allowed to go to school
- Which entity pays for testing and how much it costs
- If the teachers are consulted about purchases made for curriculum resources and if they think those funds are well spent
- The reasoning behind cutbacks in security
- How the loss of \$37 million will be handled
- Other sources of funding that can be sought to replace the funds that will soon be lost

Participants’ suggestions regarding budgeting included:

- Budget cuts should happen at the top administrative levels rather than through school closings
- Stop wasting money on textbooks for elementary students, use computer instruction instead

- Cut the budget in places that don't directly affect student success
- Manage bus system within the LRSD rather than contracting with a third party company
- Raise taxes to send students to well-funded neighborhood schools
- Ask the City of Little Rock to provide resources to assist in school improvement
- Ask more local businesses to get involved in resourcing schools
- No additional cuts to teachers
- Sell some of the district real estate
- Make sustainable investments
- Provide seed money for PTAs

Plan for distressed schools

About half of the small groups discussed the schools in academic distress, for which the LRSD was taken over by the state in 2015. The majority of comments centered around the demand that the state Board of Education come forward with a plan for student performance in the distressed schools. The public has not seen any evidence that there is a clear path forward for the six schools. Because this was the stated reason for the state takeover and there has been no transparency about a plan, several participants called for the state to return the district to local control. One wrote: "What will be the purpose of 'take over' if the testing/performance doesn't show improvement?" One teacher working at a school on the academically distressed list shared his concern that his school is failing students in the same way that it was before the takeover. Another participant questioned whether local control would solve anything, stating that if the state would step up into their responsibility then perhaps they would have more resources to bring to the table.

Some have expressed confusion that the focus seems to be on the financial situation of the district when the schools in academic distress were the stated reason for the takeover. Others expressed anger and frustration under the circumstances. People want to be involved and provide feedback, but as one participant put it, "It's hard to comment on a plan that you don't know."

Baseline Academy, one of the original distressed schools that has since been removed from the list, was lifted up by several participants as a model for others. Baseline was given freedom and resources to meet the needs of students in nontraditional ways.

In addition to the schools on the distressed list, there are 22 schools with D or F ratings. Some participants wanted to know more about how the schools got to this point, what triggers a classification on the list

The lack of clarity, transparency, and stability in the district is causing families to move their children to other educational institutions. Several participants also mentioned the stigma that comes with being given a label like "academically distressed." The official labels often spark non-official labels that discourage prospective students and give current students a bad name. Discussion occurred in several small groups about the perceptions of McClellan and Fair. Teachers are leaving both schools and substitutes are loath to accept work at these schools.

A major challenge to moving schools off of the distressed list is the fact that testing has changed every year for the past three years. If there is no baseline to which the district can compare scores from previous years, the designation remains.

Potential solutions suggested by participants included:

- Move stronger teachers and staff to distressed schools
- Create special programs at distressed schools to get more students interested in attending
- LRSD should make a plan to address student achievement in the distressed schools rather than continuing to wait for the State Board of Education or the Department of Education

Wraparound services

Many LRSD students, especially those in the distressed schools, have concerns outside of the classroom that must be addressed so they can thrive. Fourteen out of 33 groups discussed the need for wraparound services and specific examples of the kinds of services that should be provided. One participant stated their belief that it is the school's responsibility to reach out into the community to gather resources and assistance for the various necessary programs. Others suggested the LRSD administration should put comprehensive programs in place across all schools.

Wraparound services include:

- Food and nutrition
- Clothing and personal supplies
- Dental and vision
- Mental health and counseling
- Nurse or other health care provider
- Connection with outside services and resources such as SNAP benefits (food stamps) and the public library
- Aftercare

Nutrition and meals can make a huge difference for students coming to school hungry or malnourished. Several participants shared the success some schools have had offering breakfast in the classroom. Many called for more fresh food options in school meals. Others discussed the larger issues of food insecurity, including the lack of food availability once students go home at the end of the day, on the weekend, and over the summer. Some also advocated for extending the time allotted for lunch and improving the connections between school gardens and meals.

Mental health is an often overlooked but essential service that was suggested by several participants. Determining the root problems of a student that acts out can help them get treatment, cope, or heal rather than being labeled with behavior issues and facing disciplinary action. Many students need a place to discuss their issues, and some would benefit from the attention of a social worker or psychologist. Teachers at the forums described the difficulties of children who are grieving, caring for siblings, facing bullying, or dealing with troubling situations at home. One teacher said, "PTSD seems to be a rule and not an exception for a lot of children in the LRSD and there are no resources in place to help teachers." Another participant suggested that every school needed a social worker or parent resource staff member trained in trauma informed care. Baseline Academy has a youth specialist that serves in some of these capacities.

Additional counseling is needed in high schools to ensure that students understand career and college options. Counselors are currently stretched too thin and many students do not get the benefit of their assistance.

Physical health can sometimes be an overriding concern both for students and their families. One participant mentioned a successful dental clinic at Wakefield Elementary that could be replicated elsewhere. Another used the example of a charter school in Houston that has an urgent care facility on campus. Others suggested that every school should have a full time nurse.

Affordable, active aftercare is an unmet need for many families with working parents. The care provided after school hours currently is not free. And as one participant said, not all schools offer care. Some Meadowcliff students go home to an empty house each afternoon. Participants suggested that free aftercare programs could provide tutoring and counseling.

Tutoring is a larger need across the district than the schools currently have the capacity to provide. Participant suggestions for increased tutoring services included having “duty” teachers work with students who need help with gap skills, offering tutoring during lunch, and after school tutoring.

Charter schools

One third of the small groups discussed the issue of charter schools in Little Rock. Participants pointed out that the charter schools perform no better than traditional schools by the numbers, but the perception that charters are superior persists. One participant expressed concern about the apparent increase in the rate of business involvement and privatization of the schools since the state takeover.

One parent wanted to know what strategies the charter schools claim to use to influence achievement that are different from LRSD schools.

The forums took place prior to a 3,000 seat charter school expansion approval by the State Board of Education. At the time, Superintendent Kurrus had already gone on record opposing the expansion because of the strain it would place on the LRSD. Several participants encouraged the Superintendent’s defense of the district and were glad to see him stepping up. In their discussions, forum participants pointed out some of the problems with charters that have an impact on the district:

- Charters can avoid enrolling students with disabilities, thus concentrating those students with higher support needs within the LRSD
- Charters are less restricted on multiple levels than the LRSD thanks to waivers
- Parents who might send their children to certain schools within the district see charter schools as the next best option if they are not accepted to their top choices
- Charter school accountability is unclear
- LISA Academy and eStem attract and retain mostly high performing, well-resourced students and thus have a disproportionate number of White and Asian students when compared to LRSD demographics, leaving low income students of color and students with special needs and disabilities concentrated in the LRSD

Some participants viewed the expansion of charter schools as inevitable and instead asked questions such as, “how are we partnering with charter schools to make sure southwest Little Rock students are served even if schools are closed?” Other participants wanted to know what the school district could do to attract families back to the traditional public schools. Still others were skeptical that the LRSD can improve with the threat from charter expansion. One participant said that people they know view the LRSD as a lost cause due to the charter schools and the constant attacks from the legislature and other public officials. They pointed out that even our local public university, UALR, is teaming up with a charter school rather than the LRSD.

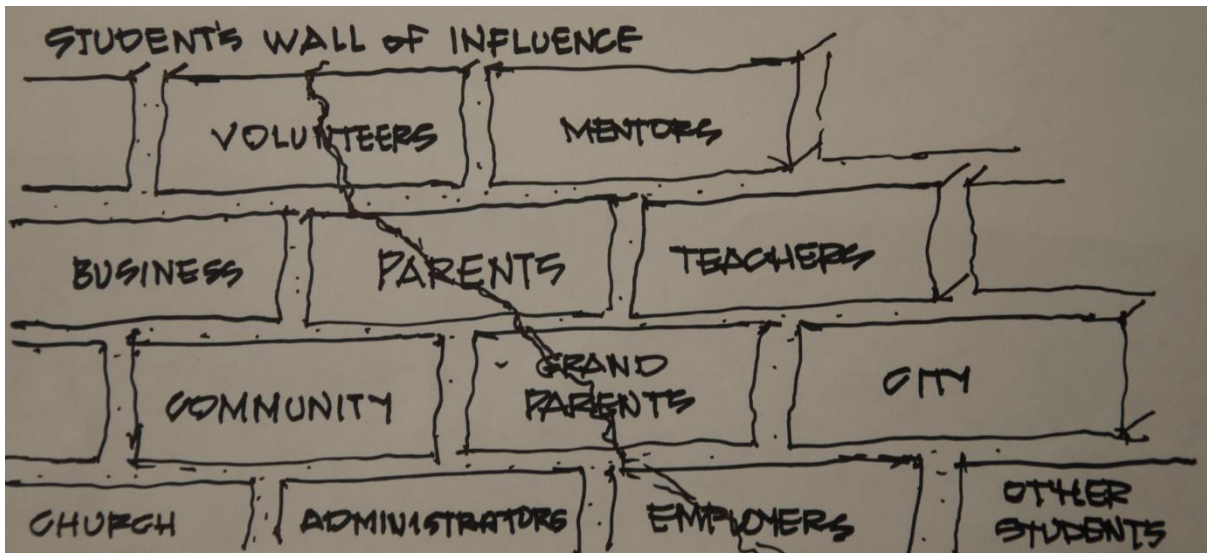


Image: Participant artwork from the small group visioning activity.

Student realities and life in the schools

During the forums, participants were asked to envision the ideal school setting, since schools are often the heart of a neighborhood. Many groups visualized this by drawing or writing on large sheets of paper. Clear similarities emerged between drawings and among the notes from each group’s discussion.

Stakeholders want schools with:

- Small, caring communities and classrooms that connect and embrace every child
- Compassionate communication between students and teachers
- Rapid response to bullying, ensuring that bullied children are safe
- One-on-one attention for all students
- “Second home” feel
- More creativity, less stress
- Activities that spark curiosity and joy
- Strong work ethic at all levels, from students up to administrators
- Peer support and learning
- No labels on children
- Welcoming environments that facilitate inclusion for children with many different needs
- Stability and safety
- Unique, not cookie cutter, programs and specialized schools

- Friendly faces
- Technology infused
- School pride
- Cooperation among teachers
- Solid infrastructure, such as internet
- Celebration of progress and achievement
- Better understanding of student differences
- No favoritism or preferential treatment
- Qualified, accountable administration
- Welcoming atmosphere for parents, families, and community members
- Older children mentoring younger children

One participant suggested a system they witnessed elsewhere, in which every adult in the school works with 4 to 10 students grouped by ability level each day for one hour to address gaps. This system has made a difference in student confidence and in needs met.

Several groups discussed the need for better publicity about success stories in the schools. Some believe this would help to change false perceptions about the schools. One participant noted that the higher performing schools like Horace Mann and Pulaski Heights do not seem to have any trouble getting their stories out, but schools like Henderson have excellent stories as well that should be shared.

Disagreement was noted among several groups when discussing the possibility of extending the school day or year. Several participants made the case for more instruction and intervention time, as well as the need for more recess and exposure to subjects and experiences outside of the core curriculum. Others disagreed and felt that the school day was too long for their children.

Literacy

Reading and literacy were discussed among small groups as the foundation of all learning and school success. There is awareness that many children are being passed through the system without reading on grade level. One participant stated that the average middle schooler in the LRSD reads on a 3rd grade level. There is a general concern that the LRSD does not take literacy seriously. Several participants asked some version of the question, “Does the district have a reading program?”

One group discussed the importance of literacy in the ability to structure sentences and write a sound paper later in life. Many college students cannot compose a paper, which one participant believes is due to laziness made possible by tools such as auto-correct on the computer.

Participants in at least seven small groups called specifically for the intervention program Reading Recovery to return to the district. One participant suggested that the program be implemented in more than just elementary schools.

Suggestions from participants included:

- Core curriculum should go from 4 to 5 courses, with reading as the 5th to improve scores all around
- Avoid race to the bottom of progressing all students at a lower reading level

- Schools should model Booker, which hosts evening meetings for families with food where literacy packets are distributed
- Host honors night in conjunction with literacy night
- Teach more grammar and spelling phonics
- Reinstate parent nights for literacy and math at all elementary, middle, and high schools
- LRSD should allow time for programs to work before they buy another program
- Emphasize comprehension, reading, and writing throughout the curriculum
- Return cursive to the curriculum
- Give kids more books to take home and keep

Math

To a lesser extent, forum participants described the need for a focus on math in addition to literacy. One participant shared that scores have gone down since the new math curriculum was put in place because the program did not fit the students. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education was a central focus for several who noted its growing importance in the global economy. Some suggested that schools should have math specialists (similar to the reading specialists) and host more math nights.

Extracurriculars and experiences

Education is not confined to the classroom. Children also learn through outside experiences they may not have at home. Many participants believe extracurriculars should be front and center for all LRSD students starting in pre-K. Suggested extracurricular activities included clubs of all kinds, field trips, shadowing, arts, foreign language, theme weeks like Dr. Seuss Week, music, hands-on science experiments, EAST lab, the Love Your School gardens and cooking classes, and culture fairs.

One participant suggested that these activities should be expanded and codified directly into all levels of the curriculum to achieve more holistic learning rather than viewing them as extracurriculars. The benefits of experiential and hands-on learning at all levels was discussed by multiple groups.

Many groups discussed the cuts to art and music programs and said they need to be reinstated, especially at the elementary level. One participant shared the concern that these subjects are often viewed as enrichment, but not as realistic future careers and livelihoods.

Gibbs Magnet Elementary was used as an example several times to show that more elementary students should have access to opportunities such as plays, Model UN, and foreign languages.

Another example of a successful program shared by a participant was the Aviators summer program, which brought diverse children together to engage in creative, inspiring, hands-on application and reinforcement of classroom concepts. A student from Hall High School shared that she chose Hall over Parkview because of the AVID program and all that it has helped her to accomplish.

Sports are a major part of many students' school experiences, but a few participants shared that not all sports are invested in equally. One student described how the soccer team at her school, which is popular among Latino students, is not as well funded as basketball and football.

The soccer team wears old uniforms, does not get pep rallies, and does not always have their wins announced at school.

Several groups discussed religious education, with some participants arguing for more study of the Bible and religion in school and others pointing out that the law does not allow this to be a required part of the public school curriculum. There was discussion about the need for student-driven clubs around religious identities.

Discipline

Discipline was one of few topics that had real disagreement among forum participants. Some parents and teachers felt that lack of discipline was holding schools back and should be more strict, while others expressed their concern that discipline was too harsh.

Those who wanted stricter discipline said that teachers do not always take action when needed. They also said schools should better enforce student handbook rules like those around sagging and that consequences for bullying should be high because it puts victims in dangerous situations. Several participants said it is the school's responsibility to step up because many children do not face consequences for their behavior at home. One participant drew a causal relationship between distressed schools and lack of discipline. At Henderson, for example, teachers reportedly spent 20 minutes of a 45 minute class dealing with behavior issues. Teachers may be loath to respond to violations out of fear of facing backlash for the perception that they responded too harshly.

Others felt that discipline should be less strict or should be reformed in other ways. One participant described witnessing smart but disruptive children being diverted from the classroom because there were no effective programs to serve them in the schools they attended. Several small groups discussed the concern that many children are labeled as having behavior problems when unmet needs under the surface may be causing the behavior. Those problems may need to be addressed with counseling, meals, or other services rather than detention and suspension. Another participant said that if the student handbook was truly enforced, it would put 40% of students on the street. One suggestion focused on the conscious discipline and loving guidance method promoted by Dr. Becky Bailey. Another participant suggested that schools implement conflict management strategies.

As discussed in the equity section above, discipline practices and policies can have disparate effects on children with different race and class identities. Several participants noted that schools sometimes feel like prisons and that security personnel are abusive and should be retrained. The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects students of color.

An issue raised in several groups was the fact that charter schools do not have to follow the same rules about accepting or rehabilitating disruptive students. They can expel and punish students in ways that send them back to the traditional public schools where they are under obligation to keep the students in the system. One participant also said that charters have been known to push students out to lower dropout rates, which is something that the LRSD cannot do and thus puts them at a disadvantage when looking at the numbers.

One group discussed at length the possibility that compulsory schooling is to blame for classroom disruptions. They noted that students who do not want to be in school are required

to be there and that there's nothing individual teachers can do to overcome the struggles these students face in the larger system. They concluded that retaining students against their will can cause behavior problems.

Security and safety

Some groups discussed security and safety in connection to discipline issues. There are concerns for student and staff safety within the schools, as well as concerns about protection from harm coming from outside the school.

The majority of discussions around security and safety led to calls for increased security in the schools. Participants cited assaults and fights at school, issues on buses, tensions that may arise between groups of students if schools are consolidated. Some were concerned about cuts to the security force in the face of new security threats nationally, such as gun violence. Several parents shared that they feel more confident with the added security measures in recent years, including the requirement that visitors show an ID and that individuals must be on a special list in order to check a student out of school.

A few participants argued the opposite, that the LRSD should have more "open space" campuses to create a more welcoming environment for community volunteers and parents. One parent said that it worries them to see so much security at their child's school. For those who believe security is overemphasized, they pointed to the mesh backpacks and locked doors as examples of how schools have gone overboard.

Testing

A little over one third of groups discussed testing and not one recorded comment was in favor of the current testing regime. Many participants agreed that there should be some form of assessment for students, but that it needed to be more holistic and strategic than the standardized testing that is currently in place.

Participants described the testing as restrictive and stressful for teachers as well as students. Teachers need more freedom to teach and students lose valuable instruction time by being pulled out of the classroom for multiple tests each year. The results are rarely received in time to reassess what's needed for particular groups of students. Stressed teachers leave the profession under the unique pressure that testing has added in the past decade.

Other testing concerns brought up by participants included testing costs and the state's constant decision to change the type of testing given each year, which complicates the ability to accurately gauge student progress. One parent suggested that testing costs could be cut rather than teacher benefits.

Individualized education

Because each child learns differently, about a third of the groups discussed the need for individualized attention and diverse teaching tools and styles. Opinions were split about whether it is better to have many different proficiency levels in one classroom or if students are better served by grouping students into classes based on achievement. One participant said that instruction should be influenced by the students so that a teacher can teach toward their interests rather than presenting content in a top-down way. Parents with high performing and low performing students both expressed concern that their students on either end of the

spectrum were not getting the attention they needed. One parent was concerned that high performers are being held back because more focus is going toward students with more academic needs. They suggested that schools embrace a GT (Gifted and Talented) strategy for all students that would allow for more differentiated instruction.

Class sizes

One way to get more individualized attention for students is to decrease class sizes. One third of small groups discussed this topic and unanimously agreed that smaller class sizes were needed in the LRSD. Because classes are too large, teachers don't have time to work with students who are below grade level and classroom management is more of a challenge. The two suggested strategies were to either decrease the number of students in each classroom or move toward co-teaching models with more than one instructor in each class. One parent said that 20 students per class should be the limit.

Recess and physical activity

There was consensus among groups that recess and physical activity needs to be increased. Participants described a shift toward less and less recess, which means that children are sitting and writing for the vast majority of their day. Increased physical activity has been linked to better focus in children. Some children simply need to get energy out so they can be better engaged in the classroom. One participant described the troubling trend of limiting recess as a disciplinary action, which often leads to increased disruptions and behavior issues.

Unstructured lunch and recess time was described by several participants as essential time for students to socialize, learn teamwork, and settle disagreements.

Suggestions from participants about how to increase recess and physical activity included:

- Incorporate movement into learning
- Have students do work while standing at desks or walking
- Extend the school day in order to increase lunch and recess time
- Experiment with adding more recess to the day in the distressed schools to see if it impacts academic assessments
- Have recess before lunch

Trades and technology training

Not all students want to or can attend college. Nine out of 33 groups discussed other alternatives for students who want to work in trades or the tech industry in jobs that do not require degrees. Participants discussed the fact that many schools no longer offer classes like shop, carpentry, small engine, automotive, and plumbing. LRSD students who want to go into these careers can attend Metropolitan, but participants were unsure how many spots are available there and how an interested student can gain entry. Several small groups wondered whether work study is still allowed in the schools. One small group discussed how powerful it could be to have professional mentors involved with a class, such as licensed plumbers working with student apprentices.

Several small groups discussed the challenge that "tracking" is now illegal. It is important to provide options for a variety of possible futures, but locking students into certain paths is not something participants wanted to see happen.

One concern was that non-college-bound students face stigmas about their choices and/or realities. In the face of the current economy in which a college degree no longer guarantees solid work, the focus on college prep is potentially dangerous. One small group called for the need to destigmatize the option of going into trades or the tech industry.

In today's world, technology is a growing sector and several small groups discussed the need for classes in coding, web design, and robotics.

One participant also discussed the possibility of offering courses that could lead to an associate's degree or allow a student to gain college credit, especially for students who do not plan to attend a 4-year college.

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

Six groups, including the majority of groups at the Spanish-language forum, discussed the need for changes in the district's ESOL program.

Several participants told stories about children being tracked into ESOL programs who do not need the program and would do better by staying in the classroom. Others said that the test used to determine the need for services is unfair and often lumps all Latinos in together rather than focusing on new immigrants and their language access needs.

Two parents at different forums described having their children placed in ESOL classes that they did not need, then getting stuck in the program. Other parents and students described the need for all teachers to receive training in working with ESOL students. The goal, they said, is to help students progress and then integrate into the regular curriculum, not keep them segregated indefinitely.

Some schools seem to be doing a better job than others. A Hall High School student said that the programs offered at her school through the Newcomer Center are well utilized and very helpful for Latino students she knows who do not speak much English. She also pointed out that the students needing ESOL at Hall are not just Latinos, but include new immigrants from many places including the Philippines and India.

Life skills

A missing link discussed in four groups was the lack of life skills instruction. Some participants felt that programs about money management should start as early as pre-K. Others felt that high school was the most necessary. They advocated for classes in personal finance, wellness, and general life preparedness similar to what Louisiana schools have implemented.

Special education

Serious concerns were brought to light about special education in the LRSD. Participants were troubled by the lack of organizing and planning for special education, as well as the ongoing poor treatment of special needs students despite the district's awareness of the issues. Several groups wanted to know how much funding is allotted to special education and whether the LRSD has a comprehensive plan for serving special needs children. One parent in particular expressed concern that their autistic child will not be college ready, but has no opportunity to explore other options for the future at their current school.

Solutions offered by participants included:

- Develop inclusive communities by ensuring that school buildings, lighting, and the general environment are conducive for students with special needs
- Promote early diagnosis of learning disabilities so that children get the assistance they need as soon as possible
- Improve the assessment used to diagnose dyslexia, which does not currently assess children adequately

Pre-K

Kindergarten readiness was viewed by a few participants as key to future academic success. Ideas included making preschool mandatory, opening more early childhood centers, and offering home visits in addition to quality pre-K programs.

Infrastructure challenges and needs

Issues relating to physical infrastructure of buildings and equipment were some of the most frequently discussed across the forums. Participants shared concerns that LRSD administrators discuss buildings more often than students, but most also recognized that infrastructure affects student learning and behavior, as well as student retention in the LRSD. A report from the Facilities Subcommittee of the LRSD CAC can be viewed in Appendix B.

Facilities

Facilities was the most discussed theme of all the forums with over 80% of groups touching on the topic from a variety of angles. Many comments centered on outrage over stark disparities between newer and older school buildings.

Putting money into new schools is upsetting to families whose children attend school in older buildings that are not being adequately or safely maintained. Staff from several schools said that their requests for maintenance are routinely ignored. One teacher shared, “we used to have pride in the building, but it’s hard when it’s raining.” Students in some older schools attend class in portable trailers that are a direct result of the lack of investment in the facilities, overcrowding, and underutilization of schools not filled to capacity. Participants felt that all schools should be held to a high standard of health and safety.

Maintenance issues described by participants from their experiences in older school buildings included:

- Caving ceilings
- Leaking roofs
- Uncomfortable and outdated furniture
- Graffiti
- Mold

Some participants expressed concerns that money is not being spent wisely in school facilities. At one school, a parent was happy with new water fountains but felt that ceiling issues should have been the first priority.

Amenities that participants felt should be available at every school included:

- Gym and indoor recess space
- Multipurpose space
- Library
- Pre-K library in elementary schools
- Functional temperature controls in each classroom
- Classrooms large enough for the number of students and curriculum activities
- Art studio
- Adequate restroom facilities for the number and needs of students
- Science labs
- EAST lab
- Music room well stocked with instruments
- Vegetable garden

Ideally, every school should have facilities with inviting colors, sounds, smells, and nooks and crannies to suit different personalities. One participant noted that having a nice facility is an attraction to parents, who will feel more confident dropping their children off in front of a well maintained building. Facilities can also make a difference in how kids learn and are motivated, though new schools alone do not create better students. It can also be difficult to attract quality teachers and administrators to work in substandard facilities.

Closings and consolidations

Local media has reported extensively about plans to build new schools and close or consolidate others. There was a great deal of anxiety among participants about the uncertainty of which schools will close, where new schools will be opened, and whose children will be most heavily affected by the changes. Participants were concerned that public input has not been sought by administrators making these decisions. The fear and anxiety around not knowing who will be affected is compounded by the rapid change in superintendents over the past year. One example shared at the forums was Dr. Suggs' promise that magnet programs would be continued, but it remains unclear whether the new leadership will honor that commitment.

The majority of forum participants were opposed to any school closings. "When you close schools, you send a message that students there are not important," one person said. Others described the potential impact of closed schools on their neighborhoods, as they have seen previous school closings create a hole in communities nearby. A few participants seemed resigned to school closings as a reality, with one participant suggesting that larger school facilities are possible if the campus is designed to create a manageable learning community. One participant speculated that consolidations could be positive if they result in better use of funds and more targeted focus on students with low academic success. At the very least, said one participant, "be aware that school closures will cause sadness. Don't discount that sadness, but actively address it by wisely providing clear evidence-based services quickly to displaced students (such as modern facilities)."

Several groups called for clarity around the criteria being used to determine which schools could be closed or consolidated. The assumption was that the LRSD was taking a business approach and looking strictly at the numbers, rather than considering the myriad ways to measure the value of schools. Closing certain schools, especially magnets, could exacerbate racial segregation in the city, some participants warned, as more middle class families would likely

seek other options or choose to move to other neighborhoods to benefit from favorable attendance zones. Other factors that participants believe should be taken into account include the impact on busing, health concerns such as stress and depression that can result from upheaval, the emotional connection of residents to their neighborhood schools, impacts on students who thrive in smaller school environments, and relative investment in various schools over the decades. One participant foresaw family time being compromised by the consolidation of schools and expected longer bus routes. Another participant called for a credible person to explain the consequences of closing schools with a focus on the impacts to low income and working class communities.

Parents from east Little Rock schools are skeptical of what building a new school in west Little Rock would accomplish. "I'd rather have \$37.4 million in more teachers than more buildings," one parent stated. Several people called for better joint use of existing buildings, such as opening schools at night for adult education programs. A related issue was questions about what would be done with facilities no longer in use. Would neighborhoods be able to use them? Would they be torn down?

Several Gibbs parents and staff said they knew that the older building has its challenges, but hoped that the structural issues would not spell the end of the excellent school. There was general consensus that older facilities should be replaced with modern schools or heavily renovated, but not at the cost of closing neighborhood or magnet schools. "Before we build new schools out west, we need to take care of the facilities we have" was a common refrain. Others suggested that schools downtown should expand rather than contribute to the city's westward expansion. Stakeholders from the eastern part of the city expressed the belief that the LRSD should be investing more in schools that have not received needed attention, rather than spending extra funds to build schools in areas of town with more affluent, White students that typically have more supports available due to their race and class privilege. West Little Rock parents felt differently. Several expressed the feeling of having no good public school options for middle and high school, which would force them to look outside of the LRSD.

One participant suggested redrawing attendance zones to even enrollment among the schools and ensure that surrounding communities are a part of each school, rather than moving forward with closings, consolidations, and new campuses. Another alternative idea was to shutter the myriad offsite buildings owned and operated by the LRSD rather than shutting schools.

Busing

Transportation was discussed by a little over half of the 33 small groups. Many participants responded to comments made in the video shown prior to the small group discussions, which described challenges with busing and its burden on the budget.

Some participants argued for a cut to busing costs and hassle by returning to a system of neighborhood schools, with the well-known caveat that this would likely lead to segregated student bodies. They pointed out that attendance zone boundaries have changed a great deal over the years and students are now bussed all over the city but the success has been minimal. Some disagreed with the current trend of busing students to different schools based on behavioral problems or academic challenges.

Others disagreed, citing the need for integrated, diverse schools that will likely only be achieved through busing due to the current context of neighborhood segregation and White flight from the LRSD. Situations such as the location of the new southwest Little Rock high school will likely require busing since the site is not nestled within an existing neighborhood. Transportation is something that several participants did not want to see on the chopping block, as it is essential for the accessibility of free public education to families that cannot transport their children to school.

Some small groups discussed the intersection of this issue with school closings and consolidations, which will inevitably lead to longer bus rides for some children. Black children on the east side of the city would be disproportionately affected, which led to suggestions that White students be bussed to eastern schools rather than busing Black students to western schools. One participant was concerned that longer bus rides would drive more truancy, which could snowball out of control.

Other concerns included pickup times that were too early, children arriving at school much earlier than necessary, unresponsiveness of the bus company, the long distances immigrant students must travel to attend a school with adequate ESOL programs, and lack of adequate safety for students during bus rides.

Those who advocated no changes in attendance zones or the amount of busing still had changes to suggest, which included:

- Add more routes and smaller buses so that students have shorter ride times
- Create more efficient and reliable routes
- Improve driver training
- Drop children off at school closer to the time that school begins
- Have the LRSD manage its own buses rather than contracting out
- Utilize the existing public transit infrastructure to transport children to school

Technology

Education in the 21st century is facilitated via smart boards, tablets, and even drones and robots in some places. Fourteen out of 33 groups discussed technology in the schools.

Participants described challenges in the older schools, where technology has not been adequately upgraded and internet service is slow.

Participants shared their reflections on the breadth of technology that is now used in the schools. Technical devices such as laptops, tablets, and computers in each classroom are utilized daily. Media equipment such as video cameras and digital cameras are more readily available. Technology for robotics programs includes electronic moveable parts and chips to write code whereby students are aided, assisted, and entertained. Some LRSD schools have access to more and better equipment than others. Several participants called for more integration of technology in the schools in general. Chromebooks have also been helpful for students to complete assignments and access instruction at home.

Not all were sold on the value of technology in the classroom. One participant expressed the concern that these devices would replace real teachers. Another said that electronics can get in the way of human-to-human connection and should be put down more. One participant

expressed a perception that students learn less in front of computers. Additionally, all technology requires skilled upkeep and ongoing repair, which sometimes comes with a high price tag.

Teachers and quality instruction

LRSD teachers are under a great deal of pressure, from high stakes testing to salary cuts to the recent announcement that Teach For America would begin placements in Little Rock schools. Forum participants discussed the rights and responsibilities of teachers on many levels.

Teacher morale

The uncertainty of school closures, budget cuts, and changing leadership, among other things, have a profound effect on the morale of those on the front lines of educating our children on a daily basis: teachers. Nineteen out of 33 groups discussed teacher morale. There is a clear sentiment that the LRSD needs teachers who are motivated, open minded, inspiring, and content. However, groups mostly discussed the reasons that so many teachers are feeling stressed, drained, and hopeless.

Some of the reasons that participants, many of whom were teachers themselves, shared about the reasons for low morale were:

- Pay and benefits were cut without input from teachers
- Testing stress
- Teaching in schools labeled “academically distressed”
- State takeover
- Constant negative news about new district challenges reported in the media
- Higher expectations with less support
- Perception in some schools that the administrators do not trust the teachers
- Punished for giving students grades that are earned rather than inflating grades and producing disciplinary actions
- Planning and training hours cut, which means teachers will have to do those necessary activities on their own time

These blows often lead to teachers leaving the district or wanting to leave. In one case, a teacher reported that a M.Ed. student said she had been told to stay away from the LRSD for employment.

Suggested solutions included:

- Better rewards and recognition for teachers who go above and beyond
- Reduce testing and allow teachers more freedom in the classroom
- An open, energetic administration at each school that incentivizes teachers’ creativity
- Avoid labeling schools
- Require administrators and policymakers to spend time in the classroom
- Allow for greater collaboration between teachers who can support each other
- Remove personal and political agendas that determine hiring and firing decisions

Teacher support

A little under half of the small groups discussed the need for more support mechanisms for teachers, especially in the face of growing demands and increasing cutbacks. One teacher said there is much discussion from administrators about improvements underway in support and collaboration with teachers, but many people on the ground are not seeing the changes. She gave an example of having students in her class who do not speak English, yet the request she made for Rosetta Stone six weeks prior had not been answered. She shared other stories of teachers who waited upwards of 8 weeks for functional smartboards and others who needed computers in their classrooms but were still waiting. In addition to teachers lacking necessary equipment, there is sometimes inadequate training on equipment that is provided. One parent shared the story of science kits that went unused because the teacher was not prepared to utilize the resource.

In fact, what most teachers at the forums expressed was a noted decrease in support. A major blow was having planning time in distressed schools cut by 180 minutes, which has negative effects on academics because teachers are essentially forced to prep without compensation. Teachers need adequate planning time, especially for teachers who teach multiple levels and classes. Another example of the decrease in support is cutbacks of paraprofessionals, specialists, coaches, and other support staff.

Teacher support varies across the district. One teacher from Dunbar described their anger when watching students on television designing their ideal school and their own classroom lacks windows and supplies. Teachers often purchase their own supplies, including food and other student needs. Lack of teacher storage was an issue raised in one small group discussion.

A potential solution would be for administrators to encourage cross-curriculum team building and collaboration. Team teaching can reduce the burden on individual teachers.

Teacher autonomy

Teacher autonomy was often discussed in direct opposition to high stakes testing, which restricts the choices that teachers have in their classrooms. Multiple small groups called for more autonomy and flexibility for teachers. One participant called for the end to the Common Core to allow for more freedom. Flexibility and creativity in the classroom ensures that teachers stay energized and the varied learning styles of different children are addressed.

Teacher pay, benefits, and rights

One contributor to low morale is the cuts to teacher insurance and pay. In the video shown at each forum, the Superintendent extended his gratitude to teachers for making the sacrifice of a pay cut. Several teachers at the forums bristled at this idea and pushed back on the notion that they willingly accepted the cuts. The changes will have consequences for drawing new teaching talent to the LRSD, which now faces competition from charter schools and expanding school districts in areas like Benton.

Several parents were also clear that they wanted their children's teachers to be paid well. One participant said, "The sacrifices seem unfair when educators already aren't paid enough." Another said they wanted teachers to feel secure, which means fair pay, full insurance, and all the trainings and support they might need.

One dissenter suggested that teachers are really driven by the paycheck and that benefits such as paid leave should be cut.

Curriculum

Fourteen of the 33 groups discussed curriculum concerns and ideas. Several participants wondered if teachers are consulted about curriculum resources the district purchases. Do teachers think they are effective?

Ideas offered by participants:

- Create transitional classrooms that utilize retired teachers and parents to work with newcomers and children who are behind in their studies
- Integrate curriculum that teaches principles, morals, and connection to spirituality.
- Build collaborations between different schools to expand students' horizons and social interactions
- Ensure developmentally appropriate instruction and practice
- Stop wasting money on textbooks for elementary students and use online resources instead
- Implement aligned curriculum and integrated instruction that connects silos and makes schooling more relevant
- Ensure that pedagogy matches the realities that students face in their daily lives
- Add reading to the core curriculum in all grades
- Take the time to gather reliable data to determine if curriculum and programs are working (5-10 years)
- Support for "flipping the classroom" (a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed. Short video lectures are viewed by students at home before the class session, while in-class time is devoted to exercises, projects, or discussions)
- Creativity with parent centers
- Research-based curriculum
- More scaffolding in grades

Qualified teachers

Nine groups discussed the need for qualified teachers, an issue that has gained momentum since the LRSD's announcement that Teach For America (TFA) teachers would be placed in the schools. Several participants said that National Board Certified teachers should be valued because every student deserves it. Participants argued that the highest qualified teachers should be incentivized to teach in struggling schools, and that teachers should specialize in the areas they have the greatest proficiency.

Perspectives on Teach For America were negative across the board. One teacher shared their frustration about being told there was a hiring freeze and then reading in the newspaper that the district would be hiring 60 TFA teachers. Participants discussed problems including the fact that TFA teachers are usually thrown into distressed schools without knowing pedagogy or how to teach children with special needs, crumble under stress and leave their placements prematurely, and have a "change the world" mentality that is short term.

Further concern was raised about the fact that the TFA placements would be in academically distressed schools, the very environments that need the most experienced, committed, and

highly qualified teachers. Forum participants wanted to know how parents would be informed if their children would be taught by an uncertified teacher.

Professional development

Six small groups discussed the need for quality professional development. One teacher said that professional development is typically focused on how to complete paperwork, rather than imparting teaching tools. Another teacher said that quality professional development is shut out and that it “takes an act of Congress” for teachers to get worthwhile training. Several teachers expressed concern about the fact that professional development hours were cut for the upcoming school year.

Community engagement in education

Parent and community involvement were two of the top most discussed topics at the forums, with district transparency coming in close behind. The phrase “it takes a village” was repeated throughout the forums. Many people know that everyone in our community has a stake in ensuring our public schools are excellent, but barriers to this involvement persist.

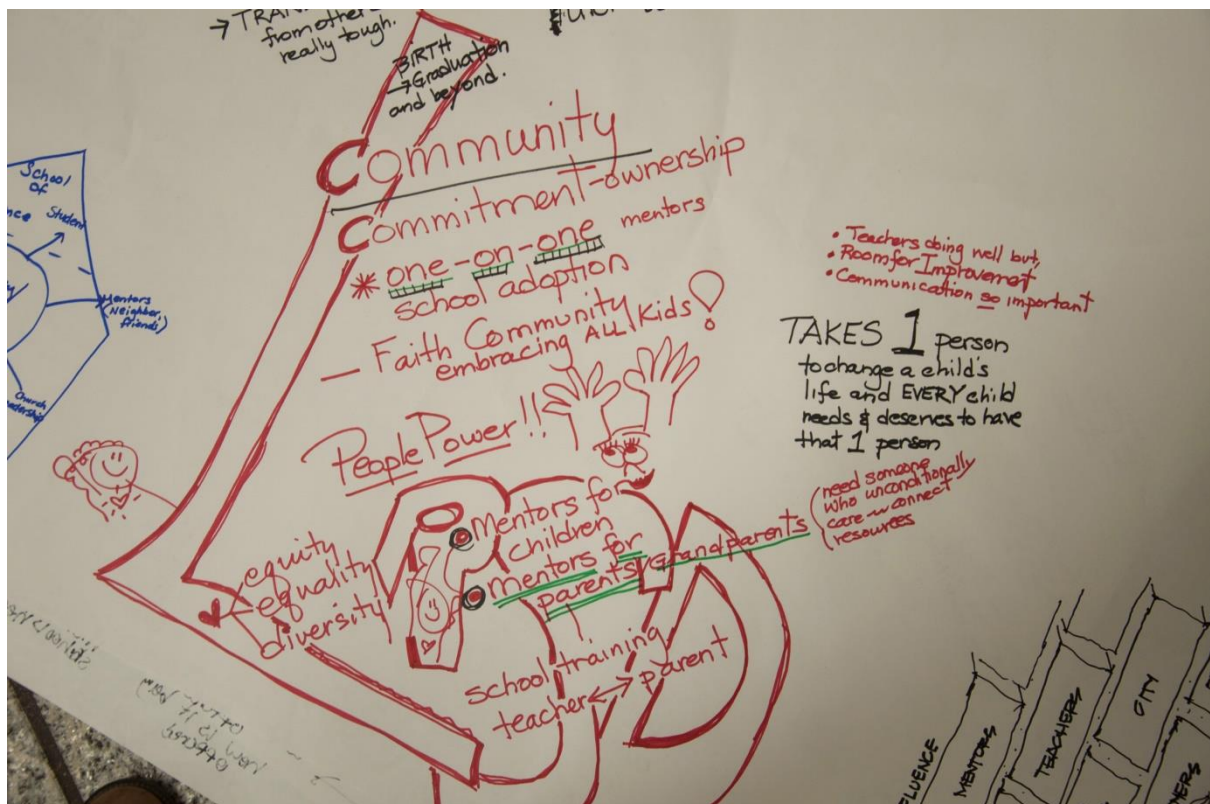


Image: Participant artwork from the small group visioning activity.

Token engagement

“Are our voices heard? Do the powers that be pay any attention to us?” Versions of this question were posed in multiple small group discussions. Many participants were skeptical that the time they were spending providing input would amount to much, yet they remained engaged. One participant felt sure that others would get involved if they thought they could

have a real influence in the decision making process. Yet so much trust has been lost among the LRSD's stakeholders that events like the Community Forums are viewed as a form of pacification rather than an opportunity to provide feedback that will amount to anything. "Suggestions have been made for years but nobody listens," one participant said. Participants have had the experience of spending their time listening and responding, only to have their input enter a black hole with no response.

Forums and input

While some participants felt that the forums were too polite and would never lead to true community involvement in decision making, others found value in the forums. Some participants shared that they gained new information and appreciated the opportunity to hear from other people who also had concerns. One person said the forums should be continued because they were "somewhat therapeutic."

Several participants were motivated to find out more about how the district was operating in the absence of a school board and tease out the different ways to influence the district. One suggestion was that forums be continued in a different format, as a monthly event led by the Superintendent to openly discuss and field questions about the budget, status of school construction and closings, among other issues. Another suggestion centered on student input: "We should ask students what they are proud of in their schools and promote that, and what they are frustrated with and fix that. They know what's going on." Yet another suggestion was that the district host regular forums where parents from very different schools could build relationships and discuss specific topics.

Most people agree that community input should be a central part of major decisions like new school construction or closures. Many participants genuinely wanted to know the avenues available to them to pressure decision makers, especially in the context of confusion about how stakeholders can communicate with the district in the absence of a school board. The real test, some said, will be whether administrators actually follow through on community suggestions and demands.

District transparency

Lack of transparency drives much of the confusion and distrust expressed in the forums. Twenty-two out of 33 groups discussed transparency.

The variety of comments made on this topic suggest that participants would define transparency as a two-way street that involves administrators being open and forthcoming, while also listening to the public and being accountable to community interests and demands. Transparency starts with sharing thorough information and communicating regularly with stakeholders before decisions are made. One participant shared their concern that "administrators are using the takeover as an excuse to hide from people." The lack of representation and direct control has led to a situation in which even district employees have to read the paper to find out what's going on. Several questions were posed asking who is really running the show in the LRSD since lines of responsibility and power are murky.

Participant suggestions on how to improve transparency:

- Return the district to local control

- Require the Superintendent to be present at community forums and engage with participants
- Establish a clear point of contact within the district for parents to approach with concerns
- Revamp the LRSD website to help stakeholders access information quickly
- LRSD administration should release regular reports to the public
- Start a blog and/or listserv to keep interested parties updated

Parent involvement

Parent involvement was the second most popular topic, with 25 groups weighing in.

Several barriers to parental involvement were discussed, including the lack of accountability to parent concerns and suggestions, which discourages those who would otherwise be very involved. Multiple groups mentioned more tangible barriers, such as demanding work schedules, multiple jobs, lack of transportation, and bad experiences the parents have had, either in their own schooling or at their children's school. When it comes to children needing mental health care or other wraparound services, family involvement becomes more of an immediate need, but is not always an option due to economic pressure, shame, etc. A teacher described dealing with parents who did not seem to care that their children were skipping classes or getting into trouble at school and had other priorities like partying. One participant noted that the most involved parents are often those of the high achieving kids, some of which is linked to the economic ability to be present and volunteer one's time. Another commonly described problem was that parents do not always understand the homework their children are bringing home and so cannot assist them with it. In some cases this is due to a language barrier or low education level of the parent.

Many parents are reluctant to sign up for volunteering in the schools because their lives are already hectic and over-committed. One participant noted that parents tend to back off from involvement in the schools at the secondary level, but that they should be encouraged to sustain their engagement through their child's graduation.

The LRSD has some successful avenues for parent involvement, such as Dads of Great Students at Horace Mann and Booker and Watch Dog Dads at Gibbs and Watson. Another example was how Mabelvale returned student test scores to parents at an open house event and then provided specific materials to parents to help their children. They learned that more parents will come to a parent-teacher conference or school event if that's where test scores will be distributed. One school found that events held before school often had the best parent attendance. Another strategy is advocating for parents to come to school for positive reasons to watch their child perform, receive an award, or participate in a fun program. One administrator said that sometimes getting people in the building is half the battle and the burden is on school staff to "show we are not judging."

Participants' ideas around improving parent involvement include:

- Having parents in classrooms to act as caregivers so the teacher can focus on teaching
- Have active parents personally invite other parents to come out and volunteer or attend events
- Provide food at all parent meetings
- Make parents feel welcome so they are not intimidated by coming to school

- Define what parent involvement truly is and make sure there is a menu of things to participate in
- Provide parent mentors for support and enrichment
- Provide clear instruction to parents about how to help their students by checking to make sure homework is done, attending parent-teacher conferences, etc.
- Re-install parents' nights at community schools
- Recruit parent volunteers at school registration days
- Engage parents in programs with incentives such as prizes and gift cards
- Require parents to volunteer a certain number of hours each year
- Provide community support for working parents and single parents
- Help parents earn their GED and learn languages so they can better help their students and improve the family's economic situation
- Offer parenting classes through partners such as the Center for Youth and Families
- Offer wraparound services for students and parents
- Meet parents where they are at their churches and other gatherings
- Train parents in financial literacy

Community involvement

In addition to the need for parent involvement, an overwhelming number of forum participants described the need for engagement from the larger community, whether that be the neighborhoods around schools, businesses that call Little Rock home, or tutors who do not have children in the school district. Engagement from more than school staff and parents will demonstrate to students that they matter and that the larger society cares about their success.

One participant pointed out the importance of having volunteers in the school that students can relate to, for example in age and race. Several small groups discussed the need for more volunteers to be directed to schools with lower parent involvement and resources.

Reaching out to neighborhoods should be the responsibility of individual schools as well as district staff. Many neighborhoods have seniors and others with extra time who could help out if asked. Administrators described a range of needs that community volunteers could fill, from bringing umbrellas to cover students entering the school on rainy days to providing literacy help to students reading below grade level. Schools should keep communities updated through email listservs, newsletters, and brochures.

For neighborhoods in which schools may be closed, several participants brought up the idea of neighborhood residents or associations managing the former school buildings as community centers. Others lamented the loss in families, pride, and neighborhood identity that could result from school closures since neighborhood schools are often the heart of a neighborhood. Regardless of school closures, participants agreed that neighborhood involvement was an essential component of a thriving school. One participant suggested that neighborhoods should have a direct hand in governing schools within their boundaries, not just increasing volunteer capacity.

Participants mentioned several barriers to community involvement such as background checks and lack of follow up from the district with potential volunteers. While most people agreed that potential volunteers should be screened, there was also a sense that too much bureaucracy and red tape stood in the way.

Community institutions like libraries are sometimes where children on suspension or out of school for other reasons end up in the middle of the day. The LRSD could partner with the public libraries to catch those students and ensure they remain engaged. Another participant suggested bringing back neighborhood homework centers, perhaps utilizing the space at Neighborhood Resource Centers.

The LRSD has a Partners in Education program to facilitate relationships with businesses, non-profits, and other community institutions. Several people were aware of this program, but suggested that it should be expanded. Three different small groups expressed disappointment that UALR was partnering with eStem rather than the LRSD. Other ideas for formalized collaborations included community gardens, nearby colleges, and businesses located near schools.

Business support was discussed many times by groups that dealt with the topic of community involvement. Participants noted that businesses tend to support certain elementary schools, but that there is not consistent support across the board or in secondary schools. There was a sense that the business community was responsible for the state takeover and thus should be sponsoring schools in more tangible ways if they want to see them change.

Many groups also discussed the incredible capacity that churches, as the center of many residents' lives, could bring to serving students in their areas. Some churches are already involved, such as a downtown church that adopted Booker and brings lunches and flowers to teachers, displays student art at their church, among other things. Participants mentioned a Presbyterian church that adopted Bale Elementary

Several participants directed comments at their fellow forum attendees, imploring them to stay informed and be active in the schools as volunteers, mentors, tutors, and advocates.

Adult education

A tangible way to get parents and community members into the schools is to have joint use agreements so that parents and neighborhood residents can benefit from school amenities and space for classes and trainings. After hours and in the summer, most schools are closed to the public, but several groups discussed possibilities for enhancing opportunities for adults through fitness programs, GED training, and continuing education. This kind of exchange could be a win-win for students, parents, and the community as a whole. One participant mentioned that there was previously funding for these ideas under a 21st Century grant, but the funding was not renewed despite community petitions.



Images: Small group discussions at the fourth community forum.

Recommendations

The community feedback provided in this report includes dozens of detailed suggestions and proposals from a diverse range of stakeholders. We ask that decision makers give the findings section a thorough reading. The views expressed here are not exhaustive of the views of all LRSD stakeholders, and many of the ideas and suggestions put forth are contradictory though some consensus emerged among forum participants on certain topics. Our recommendations are broken into three categories based on the wide variety of responses collected through this community engagement process.

First, several themes garnered unanimous agreement. Recommendations based on those agreements are:

- Initiate a millage increase to be funneled directly to struggling schools. Provide these schools with dedicated volunteers, teacher incentives, and wraparound services extended to families and students.
- Allocate more staff resources to improving LRSD partnerships with businesses, city departments, non-profits to ensure schools have adequate funding, capacity, and community investment.
- No additional cuts to teachers' salaries, benefits, or rights.
- Extend comprehensive wraparound services to all schools, including free breakfast and lunch, a full time nurse, dental and vision clinics, mental health services, free aftercare, and referrals to outside services such as SNAP and ARKids.
- Continue to vocally oppose the expansion of charter schools in Pulaski County.
- Publicize written plans for each distressed school and seek public comment.
- Increase publicity and communications about LRSD success stories and points of pride.
- Reinstate Reading Recovery in elementary and middle schools.
- Reinstate extracurriculars such as music, art, and foreign languages.
- Reduce standardized testing at all levels.
- Decrease class sizes by hiring more teachers or moving toward co-teaching models.
- Increase recess time by at least 15 minutes across the district.
- Reform the screening process for ESOL students and the process by which students are reintegrated into regular classrooms.
- Advocate for more state funding for special education, pre-K, and mental health services.
- Ensure commensurate facilities and amenities at all schools, including a gym and indoor recess space, library, art studio, adequate restrooms, music room, and school garden.
- Hold public hearings about school closings and consolidations before decisions are made.
- Reform maintenance request and response process to ensure facilities are well maintained and issues are remedied in a timely manner.
- Create a stakeholder committee to study and spread the best practices in LRSD schools noted throughout the findings section of this report.
- Hold monthly community forums led by LRSD administrators to discuss and field questions about the budget, student achievement, school closings, facilities improvements, and other concerns.

Second, several themes had more questions than suggestions. In the interest of transparency and data-driven decisions, we request that all LRSD stakeholders be given access to:

- All packets, meeting minutes, and recommendations of the budget committee
- Comprehensive written plans for each academically distressed school
- Criteria that will be used to determine which schools will be closed or consolidated
- List of the roles Commissioner Key, the Department of Education, and the State Board of Education have played in the LRSD subsequent to the takeover

Finally, disagreement around several topics suggest that the LRSD should create spaces for further community discussion to understand the varying viewpoints and make more informed decisions. Those topics include:

- Extending the school day and/or year
- Discipline techniques, safety, and security
- Training for trades and technology careers in the schools
- Neighborhood schools
- Technology in the classroom
- Attendance zones



Image: Forum participants view a video update from Superintendent Kurrus.

Appendix A: Forum facilitation guide

Welcome, Background and Overview of Forums

Video

Guidelines for Discussion

Introductions

- Facilitators BRIEFLY introduce themselves
 - Ask if participants have questions about the guidelines for discussion
- Ask participants to introduce themselves with their name and whether they are a parent, student, teacher, community member, etc.

Response to video

- What stood out to you? Surprised you?
- What's missing?
- What questions do you still have?
 - Have participants write their remaining questions on Post-It notes and turn into facilitator to put in "parking lot." We are collecting these questions to get answered later.

Visioning

- Think back. What was school like for you? What did you like or dislike?
 - How is school different now from when you went to school?
- Have your group draw or write together on a large sheet of paper.
 - Picture a school where everyone is focused on making sure that every child receives an excellent education. What are the things you would want for your child, the children you teach, the school you and your peers attend (depending who is at the table)?
 - Physically draw or describe it. Possible probes:
 - What do you see? What are people doing? What images, colors, feelings, sounds are there? What does it look like in the classrooms, in the cafeteria, in the hallways? What does it feel like to go to school here? How do the teachers interact with the students? How are the students learning? What are the students learning?
 - What are the talents, gifts, and experiences that people are bringing?
 - Who else is involved in the school? Who needs to be involved? What are all the different things that go into ensuring a student's success in school?

Discussion

"Now we are going to move into specifics about your experiences and ideas for the schools."

- What did we draw or write earlier that is already being done in our schools?
- What should be different -- what needs a change? What's already going on but needs to be expanded or altered to better fit your needs?
 - Facilitator can reference vision drawing and pull out discussion on specific points.
- What are other ways we can we make the schools great?

- What would you like to see happening at your school? What would help you to be more involved in building schools of excellence?
- We all have very busy lives. How can we support each other to make sure we can stay involved in these efforts?

Commitment

- Based on the discussion today what will you do in your school/community?
 - If people are stuck: this can be as simple as a parent saying they commit to staying informed about progress in their kid's school, but if people want to make bigger commitments that's great too!
 - Have participants fill out the commitment card.
- What do you need to successfully carry out that commitment? (Resources? Information? Assistance?)
- Collect commitment cards.
- Pass out the evaluation sheets at your table.

Report Backs

Appendix B: Facilities Subcommittee Report

Commissioned in October 2015, the Facilities Subcommittee was formed to review criteria for sustaining facilities in the Little Rock School District. This report provides initial criteria for review of facilities and the committee's position to better accommodate the population within the Little Rock School System. The information provided supports the notion that the Little Rock School District cannot support 48 facilities; therefore, it must adjust to its projected population.

The committee recommends a careful examination by the District to properly plan for the adjustment of school facilities and alignment. This examination (table 1) should include facility usage, facility conditions, school radius within one mile, economic and racial diversity, along with school performance. This may also require rezoning and transportation realignments. This process should be planned immediately with time to phase in aspects for parental concerns.

The committee is also supportive of development for new school facilities, which shall improve the quality of educational resources. This effort will require consolidation and new alignment of zones. Kathy Webb, co-chair of the facilities sub-committee, and Cathy Koehler, Little Rock Education Association President, served on the LRSD committee as non-employees to review architects for the middle school project in West Little Rock and the high school project in Southwest Little Rock.

The committee met for six hours on each of two consecutive days. Each architecture firm made a presentation, followed by questions from the committee. Each firm was scored on questions provided to us for consistency. Two firms were awarded the bids for the projects.

In April, the committee reconvened to select construction management firms for the two projects. The committee met for 5 hours, and followed the same format and scoring procedures. The construction management firms will be announced in early May.

In review of facilities, the committee reviewed several reports, which were consolidated into a single document. This document provided a snapshot of school capacity, conditions, locations, and school performance. The committee found a number of schools do not meet capacity and a number are within a one-mile radius. However, we recognize that most of the Little Rock Schools are not in a failing status and many facilities are in fair condition. Therefore, we recommend addressing the most immediate concerns first. This should involve facilities in the worst condition and those within the one-mile radius.

Below we have identified schools for review:

- Hamilton (poor use of capacity; should be reconstituted; students moved to Metropolitan)
- McClellan
- Cloverdale
- Booker
- Dodd
- Woodruff (move pre-k)
- Fair
- Geyer Springs

Wilson
Watson

The committee recognizes a critical need to make adjustments, which will improve and sustain the Little Rock School District. The committee also reflects the feelings of the community the decisions must be fair to all citizens and in the best interest of students and parents. The recommendations of the committee and the community input should be considered in the final decisions of the Little Rock School District.

	School Population				Zoning and Building Utilization			Full Time Staff			Operating Cost		Fanny Howing Summary				ADE School Scores and Grades			of Schools Approximately 1 Mile Radius
	TOTAL Oct 2015	% SPED	%FREE AND REDUCE D	%ELL	Students In Attendance Zone	Bldg Utilization	Actual % of School Pop in Zone	Admin	Teachers	Aides	Operating Cost Per Pupil	Total Operating Cost 2015-16	Facility Condition Index (0 - 1, 0=Best)	Educational Adequacy Score (5 Perfect)	Security Score (5 Perfect)	Condition 2014 Fanny Howing	School Score ADE (2014-15)	School Grade ADE (2014-15)	Status	
HIGH SCHOOLS																				
CENTRAL	2485	5.4%	46.8%	5.2%	2048	109.2%	69.6%	7	163.85	4.4	\$ 6,836.95	\$ 6,989,829	0.23	2.00	2.00	Fair	252	B	Focused	
FAIR	910	15.4%	71.5%	5.6%	1491	75.8%	74.0%	4	73.07	6	\$ 8,846.97	\$ 8,050,739	0.13	2.00	3.00	Good	173	F	Distressed	
HALL	1158	15.1%	79.5%	22.3%	1310	66.0%	57.8%	5	106	10	\$ 10,356.38	\$ 11,992,689	0.22	3.00	3.00	Fair	174	F	Distressed	
MCCLELLAN	819	15.4%	92.3%	5.4%	1242	56.9%	82.0%	4	69.55	7	\$ 10,345.50	\$ 8,472,967	0.40	2.00	2.00	Poor	210	C	Distressed	
PARKVIEW	1086	4.8%	47.4%	12.5%		90.5%		5	83	0	\$ 8,364.99	\$ 9,084,376	0.16	2.00	3.00	Fair	265	B		
ACC**	99	0.0%	0.0%	13.1%				1	13.5	16			0.25			Fair				
HAMILTON-	138	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%				4	33.43	2			0.24			Fair				
ALT.AGENCIES-	10	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%																
SUB TOTAL	6468	11.2%	67.5%	10.2%	6091	79.7%	70.9%	30	542.4	45.4	\$ 8,440.11	\$ 54,590,600	0.24	2.20	2.60		214.8	C		
MIDDLE SCHOOLS																				
CLOVERDALE	592	11.5%	103.5%	22.3%	881	66.9%	85.3%	5	52.9	2	\$ 11,220.40	\$ 6,642,477	0.71	2.00	1.00	Critical	157	F	Distressed	
DUNBAR	688	11.9%	82.7%	9.4%	565	77.5%	57.4%	4	60.13	1	\$ 9,588.67	\$ 6,597,006	0.13	2.00	3.00	Good	181	D	Focused	
FOREST HEIGHTS*	710	7.5%	69.6%	6.8%		91.0%		3	57	9	\$ 8,614.53	\$ 6,116,318	0.23	5.00	5.00	Fair	157	F		
HENDERSON	772	15.7%	84.1%	10.8%	1300	80.4%	93.8%	5	65.07	4	\$ 9,415.27	\$ 7,268,585	0.30	2.00	2.00	Poor	158	F	Distressed	
MABELVALE	638	12.9%	92.2%	13.9%	823	93.7%	88.9%	4	56.9	4	\$ 10,088.76	\$ 6,436,626	0.19	2.00	1.00	Fair	178	F	Focused	
MANN	815	9.3%	59.8%	15.5%		90.6%		4	63	8	\$ 8,563.56	\$ 6,979,298	0.14	3.00	3.00	Good	197	D		
PULASKI HEIGHTS	807	11.5%	48.3%	1.9%	868	94.1%	88.0%	5	61.6	3	\$ 8,350.21	\$ 6,738,622	0.43	3.00	2.00	Poor	205	D	Focused	
HAMILTON-		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%																
ALT.AGENCIES-	15	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%																
SUB TOTAL	5037	11.5%	82.0%	13.1%	4437	84.9%	82.7%	30	416.6	31	\$ 9,287.06	\$ 46,778,932	0.30	2.71	2.43		176.1	F		
		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%																
		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%																
ELEMENTARY																				
BALE	376	15.2%	79.8%	13.0%	621	77.0%	74.2%	1	26.8	9	\$ 8,047.74	\$ 3,025,950	0.35	2.00	2.00	Poor	228	C	Focused	
BASELINE	302	14.6%	100.0%	48.7%	437	83.9%	91.1%	2	32.93	1	\$ 14,522.18	\$ 4,385,697	0.39	2.00	2.00	Poor	197	D	Distressed	
BOOKER	475	14.3%	87.6%	15.8%		73.6%		2	39	6.94	\$ 8,599.09	\$ 4,084,570	0.14	2.00	1.00	Good	190	D		
BRADY	447	8.9%	80.1%	9.4%	743	84.7%	81.9%	1	32	9	\$ 7,384.50	\$ 3,300,871	0.06	2.00	2.00	Good	240	B	Focused	
CARVER	322	15.2%	83.5%	8.1%		57.9%		1	29.93	7	\$ 9,781.70	\$ 3,149,709	0.26	3.00	1.00	Poor	277	A		
CHICOT	784	8.3%	100.8%	24.5%	561	104.7%	32.5%	3	51.3	9	\$ 6,940.44	\$ 5,441,306	0.09	2.00	3.00	Good	188	D	Focused	
DODD	359	7.5%	88.3%	30.6%	433	132.5%	77.4%	1	26.73	5	\$ 7,782.45	\$ 2,793,899	0.34	1.00	2.00	Poor	231	C		
FAIR PARK	178	0.0%	39.3%	0.0%		58.6%		1	9	13	\$ 8,337.27	\$ 1,484,034	0.08	2.00	3.00	Poor				
FOREST PARK	440	5.0%	18.6%	4.5%	460	110.0%	95.0%	1	30.8	4	\$ 7,021.00	\$ 3,089,239	0.24	3.00	4.00	Poor	300	A		
FRANKLIN	350	15.1%	94.9%	3.7%	483	65.8%	71.4%	1	28.24	8	\$ 9,968.60	\$ 3,489,009	0.13	2.00	2.00	Poor	213	C	Focused	
FULBRIGHT	618	12.5%	35.0%	6.3%	610	109.4%	74.9%	2	40.9	16.87	\$ 7,182.25	\$ 4,438,630	0.45	2.00	3.00	Fair	231	C		
GEYER SPRINGS	223	4.9%	111.2%	10.8%		62.3%		2	20.65	2	\$ 9,160.51	\$ 2,042,794	0.25	2.00	2.00	Poor	172	F		
GHBS	302	6.0%	46.4%	3.3%		64.0%		1	26.03	3	\$ 9,329.81	\$ 2,817,604	0.34	2.00	2.00	Poor	253	B		
JEFFERSON	381	9.2%	31.5%	1.8%	359	80.9%	78.7%	1	29.7	7.87	\$ 8,955.87	\$ 3,412,185	0.34	2.00	2.00	Fair	266	B		
KING	462	15.4%	97.6%	0.2%	422	64.6%	62.3%	2	34.4	8	\$ 9,054.18	\$ 4,183,031	0.12	4.00	2.00	Poor	183	D	Focused	
MABELVALE	547	11.9%	90.9%	20.1%	618	123.5%	80.4%	2	34	8	\$ 7,101.66	\$ 3,884,609	0.60	2.00	2.00	Poor	236	C		
MCDERMOTT	377	14.1%	94.2%	9.5%	501	83.2%	80.9%	1	29.1	5	\$ 8,811.18	\$ 3,321,816	0.19	2.00	2.00	Fair	197	D		
MEADOWCLIFF	349	10.6%	96.0%	14.0%	454	97.5%	81.1%	1	25.6	5	\$ 7,613.02	\$ 2,656,945	0.28	2.00	2.00	Poor	197	D		
OTTER CREEK	543	11.0%	83.4%	22.3%	679	101.1%	90.6%	2	33.4	9	\$ 6,806.70	\$ 3,696,038	0.35	3.00	4.00	Fair	236	C		
PULASKI HEIGHTS	320	11.3%	59.4%	3.1%	407	91.4%	89.1%	1	22.5	3.73	\$ 8,093.38	\$ 2,589,880	0.14	2.00	1.00	Poor	211	C	Focused	
ROBERTS	892	9.9%	26.1%	12.4%	997	99.7%	95.4%	3	58.93	15	\$ 6,888.07	\$ 6,144,156	0.17	5.00	5.00	Good	289	A		
ROCKEFELLER	422	10.0%	84.4%	1.9%		87.7%		2	34.2	8	\$ 9,442.25	\$ 3,984,628	0.14	1.00	2.00	Good	186	D		
ROMINE	316	22.2%	103.8%	14.2%	384	62.3%	72.5%	1	27.5	8.4	\$ 9,919.46	\$ 3,134,548	0.38	3.00	4.00	Poor	177	F		
STEPHENS	365	13.4%	101.9%	2.2%	429	56.5%	78.6%	1	29.5	7	\$ 9,152.68	\$ 3,340,728	0.18	4.00	4.00	Fair	200	D		
TERRY	466	11.6%	75.8%	11.8%	571	81.0%	75.5%	1.5	31	14.1	\$ 8,173.06	\$ 3,808,646	0.27	2.00	2.00	Poor	290	A		
WAKEFIELD	590	6.1%	92.5%	27.1%	595	97.2%	80.0%	2	37	3.8	\$ 6,437.43	\$ 3,798,083	0.24	4.00	4.00	Fair	228	C	Focused	
WASHINGTON	487	19.9%	90.3%	1.8%	598	58.3%	77.0%	2	41	13	\$ 9,904.53	\$ 4,823,504	0.27	4.00	1.00	Poor	201	D	Focused	
WATSON	415	11.6%	88.7%	33.0%	914	70.2%	58.6%	1.5	30	7	\$ 7,791.58	\$ 3,233,504	0.47	3.00	2.00	Poor			Focused	
WESTERN HILLS	270	15.9%	80.7%	11.1%	235	84.4%	55.6%	1	21.96	5	\$ 9,068.21	\$ 2,448,416	0.47	3.00	3.00	Poor	192	D	Focused	
WILLIAMS	438	7.5%	40.9%	11.2%		74.9%		1	30.93	5.67	\$ 7,356.32	\$ 3,222,069	0.18	4.00	5.00	Fair	265	B		
WILSON	345	19.7%	77.1%	16.5%	449	101.5%	71.0%	1	24.9	10	\$ 8,788.11	\$ 3,031,898	0.38	3.00	3.00	Poor	217	C	Focused	
WOODRUFF	156	0.0%	76.3%	0.0%	156	97.5%	1.3%	1	9	13	\$ 7,442.74	\$ 1,161,067	0.35	3.00	1.00	Poor				
ALT.AGENCIES	7	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%																
SUB TOTAL	13324	11.2%	76.8%	12.3%	13116	84.3%	73.1%	47	978.93	250.38	\$ 8,464.31	\$ 109,419,063	0.27	2.59	2.50		223.8	C		
Students w/out Attendance Zone		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	945															
GRAND TOTAL	24829	11.3%	75.4%	11.9%	24889	83.0%	75.5%	77	1372.53	115.37	\$ 210,788,595		0.27	2.67	2.45	Fair				

Critical
Poor
Fair
Good

May 12, 2016

From: Joy Springer
Re: Facilities Report

Here are my comments regarding the report:

- 1) I have not seen sufficient evidence to show that the LRSD cannot support 48 facilities;
- 2) Agree that the District should carefully examine and properly plan for its facilities and utilize objective, nondiscriminatory criteria in doing so;
- 3) Agree that the District should include the community, in particular parents, whose children attend the schools being targeted, in making these type of decisions;
- 4) Agree that there is a need for new facilities in the district, especially those schools located southwest of the district, particularly, Cloverdale and McClellan;
- 5) Not aware of the findings of the facilities subcommittee and their charge; how does it become a part of this report? What about the budget committee findings as well?;
- 6) Do not agree that 1) facility capacity and 2) one mile radius should be guiding criteria utilized by the District or any one for determining closure and/or consolidation of schools¹;
- 7) The District failed to look at the big picture or it has not shared, at least during the meetings where I have been in attendance and I have only missed one (April 2016), other cost savings measures that don't effect students and neighborhoods. Several examples: why would the District continue to spend millions of dollars on programs that have not been effective in addressing student achievement and millions of dollars on reports stating that programs are not being implemented with fidelity. This has been communicated to the District years ago, yet the District continues to spend millions on these efforts with no new findings –millions of dollars not being used wisely. Continued waste of millions of dollars that could be used to keep a school open that has 300 students or less where the school has shown growth in literacy and math skills. Another example, administrative costs need to be addressed. Why would the District spend over \$100,000 a year for another superintendent position (assistant to the superintendent) when it already has a deputy superintendent, superintendent for accountability, chief academic officer (another name for superintendent) superintendent for secondary schools, superintendent for elementary schools, and the list goes on... The costs associated one of the positions could keep one of those achieving, one mile radius elementary school open and running;

¹ . There have been no **benefit cost analysis** shared with this committee to demonstrate that schools with smaller populations and within one mile radius of each are not cost justified. Data show just the opposite. Those schools have more than 50% of its students who are proficient in reading and math. In addition, those schools help to make the community where they are located more viable. The District cannot and should not be allowed to continue discriminating against the students and patrons of Zone 1 by closing its schools.

- 8) Feedback from patrons during the community forums regarding facilities has not been shared and are not a part of their report;
- 9) Need feedback from the LRSD budget committee that was convened to address cost savings measures for the district that don't directly impact students and communities; and
- 10) It appears that the committee is being rushed to come up with a report when it is obvious that additional data needs to be discussed and reviewed. **An example would be the manpower reports for every school in the district.**

I emphasize that 1) facility capacity and 2) one mile radius should not be guiding criteria utilized by the District or any one for determining closure and/or consolidation of schools.

I believe that these criteria are discriminatory.