

survey results from focus groups of community representatives, parents and students in November 2015. Additional focus groups of teachers and students at both schools were held this spring to provide further context to quantitative data. Focus groups were informed that for any new initiative/change to be considered, it must be financially and logistically feasible, and provide a significant benefit to students.

Limitations

The survey was developed in-house in consultation with a research advisor, principals, curriculum and student services administrators. The online survey was designed to be available to all stakeholder groups (students, staff, parents, community members) in order to identify broad themes to guide focus group conversations regarding curriculum and student wellness. There was not a need to employ a research firm or expert to utilize traditional, scientific representative sampling, which would have come at significant cost.

Potential Student Work/Curriculum Topics

Homework Guidelines/Best Practices – Now that a draft homework policy has been developed, this will help frame a homework guidelines/best practices document. This is intended to address the issues of homework quantity and quality that were identified in the strategic planning survey. There is also a need to review the assignment of homework during certain times during the school year such as winter and spring break.

Grade Reporting and Grade Weighting – Currently, each 9-week quarter accounts for 40% of the semester grade with the final exam comprising 20%. This structure impacts student work and wellness at the end of each quarter as students often have multiple assessments/assignments due when teachers attempt to equalize the work between each quarter. For 2016-17, consideration is being given for weighting each semester at 80% with no artificial 9-week divisions and the final exam remaining at 20%. This is intended to reduce student stress at the end of each quarter and address the quantity of work that often comes at the end of each 9-week quarter.

Final Exams – There is interest in reviewing the role of final exams as we consider other logistical factors such as weighting (currently 20%) and calendar-related considerations.

School Calendar – Past discussions around calendar have centered on school start time and timing of semester breaks. These discussions emerged somewhat during strategic planning focus groups. Other area schools have recently made adjustments to start time and semester breaks.

Coordination of Major Assessments/Projects – Some schools designate days/periods of time by department as to when major assessments/projects can be due. This is an area for exploration as students described sometimes having multiple major assessments/projects occurring on the same day. GBS students reported that the block schedule has been helpful in reducing some of these types of issues.

Potential Student Wellness Topics

Student wellness overlaps significantly with topics identified in the area of curriculum. As described above, some potential changes in the quality/quantity of homework, and better coordination regarding the logistics of the academic program may very well address issues of life balance and emotional well being identified as important in the survey as well as through focus group feedback.

Digital Citizenship – This is an area of focus that overlaps with the three-year Technology Vision. The need for a program that builds on how to be a good digital citizen that goes beyond the “do’s” and “don’ts” of online behavior to address students’ social/emotional development in this context has been identified through student and faculty surveys.

Awareness of School/Community Resources – It became clear through parent/community focus groups that there is a lack of awareness of supports available through the student services departments at both schools and within the community. Greater awareness will lead to better access to and the identification of additional areas needed for intervention and support.

Next Steps

Strategic planning areas of focus fit well with school improvement efforts currently in development under the leadership of two new principals. The alignment with the emerging organizational focus at each school will be critical in advancing district-wide efforts in strategic planning while supporting and complementing building-based areas of focus. As we identify, review, develop and implement changes to practices, procedures, policies and structures district-wide, professional development, as needed, will be coordinated across the district. As initiatives emerge, we must identify measures of success to ensure that any programs or changes provide significant benefit to students.

Appendix

Key Survey Findings - Curriculum & Wellness

- Teachers and parents share similar perceptions of homework quantity*
- Students overwhelmingly feel there is too much homework
- On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely satisfied), 59.5% of respondents rate homework quality a “6” or higher
- Teachers and parents perceptions of homework quality are more closely aligned in comparison to students*
- On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely important) the following curriculum-related topics in order of importance are as follows:
 - Academic Skills (critical thinking, communication, reading, writing and mathematics)
 - Life Skills (leadership, social responsibility and intercultural awareness)
 - Course Offerings
 - Soft Skills (empathy, persistence, reflection, resilience, risk-taking, wonder)
 - Educational Technology
- On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely important) the following wellness-related topics in order of importance are as follows:
 - Emotional Wellbeing (treated fairly, supported, safe)
 - Mental Health (anxiety, depression, school phobia)
 - Life Balance (schoolwork, non-school activities, work, family)
 - Relationships (peer, staff, family)
 - Drugs/Alcohol (awareness, prevention, intervention)
 - Physical Wellbeing (fitness, nutrition)

*Data Follow-up

In response to a question that arose regarding data presented at the February 8, board meeting, responses were disaggregated to distinguish district parents (GBN & GBS) from all parent responses (including middle school parents).

*39.2% of district (GBN & GBS) parents believe the amount of homework assigned to students is too much in comparison 35.8% of all parents surveyed (including middle school parents) believe the amount of homework assigned is too much.

*68.5% of district (GBN & GBS) parents rated the quality of homework a “6” or higher on a scale of 1-10 with “10” being extremely satisfied in comparison 65.1% of all parents surveyed (including middle school parents) rated the quality of homework a “6” or higher.