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## **Hamburg Board of Education**

### **Strategic Planning Update #1**

#### **Outcomes of the First Community Strategic Planning Session**

On the evening of September 19, members of the Hamburg School community came together to initiate Strategic Planning for the school district at the invitation of Superintendent Dr. Kimberly Sigman and the Hamburg Board of Education.

The Hamburg school board intends to approve a five-year Strategic Plan this fall, which will guide the Board's and Administration's decisions over the next five years. It is the desire of the Board and Dr. Sigman that the plan be formed with community participation. Thus, the school announced and advertised that *all* Hamburg Elementary School stakeholders are welcome to join in the process, which will be accomplished over three 90-minute meetings starting at 6:30pm in the school cafeteria on September 19, September 26, and October 3; with educational leadership consultant Kathleen Helewa facilitating. As a result, sixteen people from different cross-sections of the community attended the first meeting, including teachers, educational professionals, three Hamburg school board members, a number of parents, and the Mayor and a member of the Hamburg Borough Council.

We began the first session with an overview of the concept of a Strategic Plan and the process for creating one. By following a Strategic Plan, the Board and Administration will be able to allocate its resources to support the community's aspirations for the students of Hamburg.

In order to create a Plan that is forward-thinking and can be aligned with the realities of the District, Hamburg's strategic planning process will address three questions:

1. What is the present state of the school district?
2. What is our vision for the future of the district?
3. What goals and objectives could we accomplish over the next five years to achieve our vision?

We focused on the first question during our first meeting. Dr. Sigman gave remarks about the state of the District, citing increased test scores, a reduction in pupils enrolling in schools elsewhere, and a very healthy school culture and climate. Ms. Helewa iterated to the participants the Hamburg Board of Education's Mission Statement and Educational Philosophy, and highlights from Hamburg School's School / Parent Compact. It was noted that this small, hometown District strives for rich parental involvement and inclusion for all students, including those from traditionally underserved or marginalized subpopulations.

All participants then completed individual SWOT analyses of the school district. Participants completed the four sections of a **SWOT** in two-minute intervals for each category: **Strengths**, internal factors that have a positive outcome for the student experience and are completely under the District's control; **Weaknesses**, factors that could be improved to have a better outcome for the student experience and are wholly under the District's control; **Opportunities**, conditions which are coming from outside of the District but have or may have a positive impact on our students; and **Threats**, external factors and conditions over which the District has no control but which may harm our school or the students' experience in the District.



All participants save Dr. Sigman and Ms. Helewa then split into two groups to share their individual analyses and to come up with a collective SWOT analysis for the group, coming to consensus on up to five bullet points for each category.

The following are the two groups' SWOTs, verbatim:

## **First Group**

### **Strengths:**

- Arts programs and extra-curricular activities
- Communication / Administration
- Staff (teachers, secretaries, paras, CST, custodians, cafeteria, RN)
- Safety / Practice drills
- Extra support (RTI, OT, PT, Speech)

### **Weaknesses:**

- Facilities ([physical]classroom sizes)
- Situational communication between teachers and parents
- Interpersonal relationships / interaction is limited
- Class involvement for parents
- Qualifications for paras

### **Opportunities:**

- Community agencies and services
- Town athletics
- State funds for academic programs
- NJ mental health
- Parent availability

### **Threats:**

- Transportation
- Choice schools
- State budget cuts
- Pushing to teach for good test scores
- Safety risks

## **Second Group**

### **Strengths:**

- Small class sizes
- School to parent communication (Week Ahead, Class Tag, etc.)
- Multiple programs offered
- Including parents
- Dedicated staff



## Weaknesses:

- Parent engagement [should be greater]
- Keeping students in Hamburg [rather than] charter, private schools

## Opportunities:

- Local business involvement
- Parent career day
- Walking district
- PTA/ Local sports teams

## Threats:

- Social media
- Student home life
- Funding

After the small groups presented their work, Dr. Sigman shared her SWOT analysis with the large group. She identified Strengths as increased test scores; a caring, visible staff; visibility; transparency; a dedicated BOE; facility maintenance; programming; course selection; and communication. Weaknesses, in Dr. Sigman's view, are a website which could be more inclusive, lower-than-desired parent involvement, insufficient showcasing of student work, and PTA connections. Opportunities listed were community relations and shared services; Threats Dr. Sigman identified were funding, charter & choice attendance, and mandated testing dates.

Discussion on the SWOTs noted that funding is the most crucial challenge facing the District—without adequate funding budgeting, the educational program and new initiatives are at risk. Safety was discussed as well; the Borough strongly desires optimal staffing for crossing guards, but filling those positions is extremely challenging. Also discussed was that Hamburg, a small-town walking school district, has unique abilities to form and foster student / community connections which other school communities do not.

Our work for the evening concluded with thanks to Dr. Sigman and the Board for this opportunity to engage in purposeful, direct, and robust conversation about our school. The team will continue the work at our next session on September 26, during which we will delineate our long-term aspirations for our students. Interested participants from all sectors of the school community who were not able to attend our first meeting are eagerly invited to join us at our second and third Strategic Planning sessions. Meetings begin in the cafeteria at 6:30 pm and finish at 8pm. Light refreshments will be served. Thanks to all our school stakeholders for your dedication to the Hamburg School District! We are looking forward to an exciting second session of Strategic Planning.

**Come join us on Tuesday, September 26, 6:30—8pm, Hamburg School Cafeteria!**

