

**MISSOULA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
January 23, 2020**

Committee Members Present: Rob Watson, Debra Silk, Wilena Old Person, Julie Robitaille, Sharon Sterbis, Dave Rott, Gabriel Sather-Olson, Meg Whicher, Karen Allen, KaCee Ballou, Dale Olinger, Scott Chook, Tricia Owens, Marica Holland, Russ Hendrickson, Nicole Mitchell, Susie Bageant, Pat McHugh, Diane Lorenzen, Elise Guest, Burley McWilliams, Mike Smith, Becky Sorenson, Amy Shattuck, Susan Tower, Kevin Ritchlin, Terrie Shaw, Rae Cooper, Kasey Dirnberger, Sheri Postma, Glenda Weasel, Tom Gallagher, Scott Lemmon, Jennifer Newbold, Tom Benson, Mark Monaco, Heidi Kendall, Christy Wolgamot, Andrea Schlueter, Lisa Jackson, Mike Halligan, Heather Foster, Robin Checota, Lisa Beczkiewicz, Vicki McDonald, Sienna Solberg, Katie Moore, Hatton Littman

Others Present: Shawn Morey, Dave Bell, Nick Salmon, Rob Jensen, Jonathan Neff, Tess Sneeringer, Rebecca Nasgovitz, Neal Massey, Tiffany Hobbs, Ariel Cornelius, Steve Strothman, Erica Ritsema, Jen Malloy, Jeff Lamson, Heather Hunt, Katy Koster

MINUTES

Rob Watson: Thanked everyone for being here. My name is Rob Watson and I am the Superintendent. We have school board members here this evening, so we do have to start this as an official meeting.

Board Chair Marcia Holland: Welcomed all and called the meeting to order. Minutes will not be taken per se, as we would in regular meeting, but we are recording it so we will have a summary of the meeting discussion. We do have a quorum of the Board here tonight so that is why we are making sure to comply with the rules for open meeting law. Debra Silk will be facilitating the meeting with Rob Watson's assistance.

Rob Watson noted that this is a really important process for him and our board. It is something that the board was really passionate about and he appreciates the boards' leadership in this. MCPS wanted a facilitator that had experience in this sort of work before. He introduced Debra Silk who is a member of the Montana School Boards Association and she is here to help facilitate this process. Deb has done this work in a lot of districts around the state and is familiar with working with community groups, so I'm really excited to have her here to help us. In addition, we asked the community to fill out a survey. We had about 2500 responses to that survey. The results will be tabulated and shared at a future meeting to help guide our discussions.

Debra Silk thanked Dr. Watson for allowing her to facilitate this session. She noted that she was an attorney with the Montana School Boards Association and has represented the interests of public schools her entire career. She loves facilitating these types of sessions where stakeholders gather to talk about the mission, vision and direction of any public school. You have to change your mindset, and really think about this as planning strategically, and not just a meeting to develop and look at the mission, vision, goals and strategies, and then be done. Deb noted that we have a committee of core people sitting at the tables, but we also have people in the audience. She invited everybody to introduce their self and their affiliation.

Introductions proceeded around the room.

Debra Silk: welcomed everyone and hopefully all of you will commit to not only tonight, but the next three sessions. It would be phenomenal if we could have all of you back to at least finish this process.

Marcia Holland: because we have a quorum of the board, we usually have a public comment at the beginning every work session. We thought it would be more productive to have group discussions first and provide an opportunity for public comment at the end.

Debra Silk provided an overview of the meeting. A lot of the work that we are going to be doing over the next three sessions is really centered around the work of Jim Collins who is a renowned strategic planner, author of "Good to Great and Built to Last". Deb noted that she was trained under an individual by the name of Glenn Tecker who is a renowned strategic planner/facilitator around the world. It has been a while since MCPS has engaged in long-term strategic planning. This process is not intended to change everything that MCPS is doing. There are some things that this district has accomplished over the past five years, and it is pretty phenomenal.

Anybody can make progress if you just go through the motions, and perception is reality. At the state level we talk a lot about the change in the dynamic from educating students to personalizing education. If you look at personalizing education, it not a new phenomenon in this state. In fact, if you look at our Montana Constitution in 1972, Article 10, Section 1 the goal of the people of this state, was to maximize educational potential of each citizen, and when you talk about K-12 public education, you are talking about kids. When we start talking about a personalized, customized approach to education, I want you to be thinking about that as we go through these three sessions. But this is not a process to change anything. This is where collaboration between the school district and community is really important. You guys are going to set the future direction of this district, and this is important work. You look at what is at stake in terms of the lives of our youth. When you are talking about the impact that all of you have on kids, you know that every time you touch a youth's life, that it changes and there is potential to change the direction of their life. I want you to be thinking about that as we go through. We are not here to change everything that MCPS is doing. In fact, what we are going to be discussing tonight is core ideology, the mission of the district. Vision-based work will be discussed during sessions two and three.

One of the reasons that we take this in three sessions is because there are three natural stopping points when we go through this process. Tonight, we're going to be talking about core ideology - what MCPS stands for and what you value. At your tables, you have a document that describe both the mission and the visions, and the core beliefs that were developed sometime between 2010 and 2013. It is time to revisit those and either affirm that those are still the mission and core beliefs or values, or if those need to be changed. Successful businesses plan strategically. When you are planning it is important to have stakeholders' input by opening up the lines of communication. Stakeholders include MCPS staff, board members and members of the public and open access to information And the last thing is, as you are going through this process, we all know that when talking about the long-term and vision, the future of any organization, there are going to be challenges to overcome. A lot of people don't like to talk about that. They like to talk about it in terms of positive modes of movement, but in honesty we have to look at and anticipate some of the challenges and barriers that will be experienced during this process.

It really boils down to the board's number one job of setting the direction of the district. That is why, as Rob said when we first started, this board feels like that is important. Districts that emphasize and value planning strategically, tend to make progress at a faster pace than districts that don't. The number two job is providing the resources to move in that direction. And when

we're talking about resources, it's not just financial resources, it's human resources. Think about the collective will in this room. It is amazing, in terms of the intellect and where all of you have been from. You all have different perspectives, different opinions, that is important when you're talking about human resources. The third responsibility of any board is oversight and accountability. It means that when the initial plan set in place, who is going to be responsible for seeing that things are actually getting done. At the end of this process we can talk about how to ensure that the district is making progress.

When you talk about making progress on some of the strategies and goals that we identify over the course of these three meetings, it's not just about the quantity, but also about the quality. When talking about quality, you are talking about improving the lives of the children that you are impacting. Keep that in mind as well.

Again, when you're talking about strategic planning by schools and communities, the more people involved, the better off the plan. It is really to commit to this process. None of you would be here unless you really cared about what MCPS was doing, right? Most of you have kids in this school system. Again, please don't think about this as participating in three meetings, but as a beginning of a new era. She encouraged everyone to read the MCPS Five Year report.

Hatton Littman: There are two ways to access the Five Year in Review Report. It is available on the district homepage by scrolling down beyond the big picture. It was presented at the board meeting last week, so a link to the report can be found on the calendar from last week's board meeting.

Debra Silk: So, this is really just to get people to understand the progression of these three meetings. The only thing that we are going to be talking about tonight is the core purpose and core values, which is core ideology. Remember what I said earlier about planting the flag and then stimulating change around everything else? That's what we're going to be doing tonight. Just talking about the current mission of the district. Looking at the core beliefs and having discussions about whether or not those are truisms today. At the February session we will be looking at the long-term envisioned future. Where you want this district to be in about 10 to 15 years? Things such as technology have a huge impact on the way that kids are learning, and the way that teachers are teaching. Next session, we will talk about barriers. Doing an environmental scanning process, because this process is not just about looking internally, myopically, it's also about looking externally. A look at what is going on around you. In the areas of demographics, business and economic climate, science and technology, legislation and regulation, and politics and social values. People always say why just those five categories? Because quite frankly, everything fits within one of those categories. We are going to be looking at that externally and looking at what you anticipate is going to happen in those areas that's going to impact the district's ability to be successful. The third session in March will be discussion characterizes as short-term goals and strategies. Think about how quickly five years goes by. We will be looking at three to five year goals, and one to two year strategies. Another way of looking at this is, there's three phases: Who are we? Where are we going? And how are we going to get there?

So now we're going to get into the work and take this in two segments. First of all, you are going to be looking at the mission statement in front of you. and either confirm that it is in fact, and states very articulately the reason that this district exists. And if it doesn't, you need to identify concepts that you think need to be in there. And remember, when you are talking about mission or core purpose, and it is not a goal. The core purpose of any organization is their fundamental reason for being. I want you to have a discussion at your table. Each table will be given chart paper and markers to record ideas. One person needs to summarily record the discussion, and someone else can report out the work of your table. Reporting is important for everybody in the room to hear the thought process and ideas of other people.

The second exercise is looking at the core beliefs on the flip side of that page. In fact, look for headlines. If somebody is looking at enrolling their children in MCPS, would they know what the district stands for? Would they know what this district values? School district values should be aligned with the same as community values. It is important to make sure that the community can say there is no better education that any of the kids in our communities are going to get other than right here in this school system. Again, when looking at core values, do not look at how it is worked, but look at conceptually, whether those values and beliefs that are on that paper are a truism, or if there are things that could be removed, or values that need to be added.

Twenty minutes was allowed for group discussion.

Debra Silk: Asked that a person from each table give an overview of what was discuss in their group.

Group 1: In general, we initially just sort of liked it. There was nothing there that was glaringly bad or awkward. We did embrace the idea of citizenship. It's not stated there. The first thing we talked about the future citizens being kids, they are going to be in our community. We talked about responsibility and future citizenship we liked, we pulled out the things we really liked in terms of small core pieces and full potential. Then we got into a discussion about what does that signal. What does that really say? Is that communicating something clearly or should it be made more, specific about what we mean by that. We kind of took it to mean, that every single kid is going to have a different ability or potential, but no matter what that is, education is going to tap into that. It is an ongoing approach to moving toward full potential. We are suggesting perhaps cultivating and adding language about that.

Group 2: In looking at the mission and core beliefs we talked about how it is important to have equal access and equity too. We also thought about citizenship and what is the goal of education. The mission is to produce productive and successful citizens. It is important to find students strengths. Are students finding their strengths and what do they feel like they are really good at. We talked about a well-rounded education and a holistic child and how do we empower our students. We brought up the point that there are no students in the room tonight and how do we give our students voice and ownership. We also talked about increasing self-worth, sense of belonging, pride, connection and building the confidence of a child. We talked about exposing our children to a lot of different things to find their strength and doing that at an early age so that they can find their passion. And then we talked about how really important it is to build relationships and build community that buy in from parents and the community. How do we engage parents to feel like they also belong?

Group 3: At the risk of being brief, we did bring up some of the things that have already been discussed. We noticed that learning is not in the mission. Some form of learning or continuum of learning needs to be evident in there. We also talked about achieving full potential. It seemed to be a time sensitive thing and one of the groups brought up by 12th grade and then what? We talked about not necessarily achieving potential but growing the desire in the student to achieve potential as opposed to just presenting it to them. You have now reached your potential. Congratulations and we are done with you. We do not want to do that. We did note the words "his and her full potential" and would like to maybe see it more gender neutral, a more up to date reference there. We did discuss the phrase "that every student" and feel it addresses every student and discussed "regardless of circumstance and ability". We talked about encouraging strengths as opposed to maybe pointing out or pointing in the other direction. We also talked about being inclusive of not just the school but the whole community because it is Missoula County

Public Schools and we think that we want to include families, communities and others if they are in there.

Group 4: We also discussed changing the “his and her” to “their” to make it more inclusive and using the words “student engagement” somewhere in there, and we landed on the adult responsibility piece. We did like “student achieves”, and the word “circumstance”. It opens the door for more opportunities and not stopping at the 12th grade. The equity of education. Citizenship was also discussed. We did like the mission statement although that it was pretty concise. We talked a lot about some mission statements getting to lengthy and liked that this was pretty core and to the point.

Group 5: Our discussion was pretty much a reiteration of what people have said. We talked about changing the gender language from “his or her” and then we talked about what we like about the district currently and what that speaks to what is in that statement. Talked about how education is expanding from just academics into physical health, mental health and the whole child and whether or not that is being met by that sentence. Ultimately, we liked how broad the statement was and did a little wordsmith – “to ensure every student achieves their full potential” as it implies regardless of circumstance.

Group 6: Our group was not a fan of the mission statement. We would like to see more of a process oriented mission statement. Change it more to goal setting language where the students could have ownership of their own mission and goals they are setting. Keep it simple, but broad enough to be able to relate back to the statement. We suggest not calling it a mission statement because everybody calls it a mission statement. We used a hashtag “#BIGSLOGAN” or “#BIGGOAL”. We talked about setting a goal like Disney – “just make people happy” so we can look back on it in a hundred years - just do what is best for kids.

Group 7: We also looked at the pronouns. We really thought that the mission statement missed some kind of inspiration when read. We suggested using the word “inspire” needs to be in there or something like that. The statement is also phrased as a requirement by saying to ensure every public student achieves his or her full potential. The scenario was if you were in a classroom and the teacher says you will achieve your full potential while you're in this classroom. Some kids would really rise to that and they say, “This is awesome, I love this guy”, and other kids say, “Oh yeah, I'll show you how I cannot achieve my full potential.” Just having that inspiration in there helps kids find their own voice and find their own strengths and interest. The statement is missing citizenry, kind of thinking informed, productive, participatory citizenry.

Group 8: Similar conversations, and we had great feedback. We thought the overall statement was very helpful. We discussed the specificity to full potential as a lot of you have commented every student is going to be different. How do we measure this or define what is full potential as every student is different. We know that the process is to provide an opportunity for students to realize their full potential, and then what is next? It is a lifelong process as a lot of you have mentioned, and we really wanted to focus on that, just being a launching pad for that. We criticized number six and the core purpose. This may not have been part of the exercise overall but could be greeted with enthusiasm rather than cynicism by a broad base of people in district. If you have a child that might be struggling or is failing walk through that school door there is going to be some cynicism, there and so really cannot make it encompassing overall.

Group 9: I am really encouraged being a parent and a member of this community, the community aspect really. Our group talked about that a lot and how the school just breathes into the

community and the community breathes back into it, whether it be after school or during the summer. The big thing is the lifelong learner aspect and mentoring partners within the community. We talked about a lot of things already mentioned. We talked about social responsibility and family. Help parents to be more engaged by keeping that voice and communication moving forward. We would like to see this reflected in the mission statement.

Group 9 Speaker 2: We recognize that there are almost 10,000 students and more than a thousand employees. We do not want the statement to be just a student centric mission, but something that is expressive of everybody achieving their potential.

Debra Silk: Nice job everyone. Now we need to review the core beliefs on the flip side of the page. Please do not look at all of the words on that page but look at the bold headliners when you talk about core values. We all have values. Work to articulate and identify what are the core values, the tenants, the beliefs, the behaviors exhibited each and every day. How people behave and your expectations for behavior. Core value of community, core value of district. People always ask the question, are core values goals? No. Can there be room for improvement in core values that you state? Absolutely. You have about 12 minutes to have those discussions and we can come back and revisit this in February. And again, somebody scribe on the chart paper. Then we will report out preliminary discussions. I will collect all of the work you have done tonight, try to synthesize the information and you will have another opportunity to report out in February.

Table 1: Very strategic. We actually went through bullets one and two. Our main takeaway was some of the words within could be changed. The wording to “engaged and inspired” rather than “challenged”. Overall need to change the tone of the statement.

Table 2: Nothing to report out.

Table 3: It is missing the student centered language. Bullet point number two is very muddy and hard to follow and a choppy choice of words overall. We discussed not using terms like “insist,” that seems somewhat combative. Actually, the overall statement has that sort of vibe. Would like to incorporate “foster or support” and not insisting on things. Overall it is missing personal and professional growth and competency seems to promote the minimum standard. If we talk about not being competent in something that just denotes the minimum standard, we are not striving for excellence.

Table 4: We kind of like the idea of the first one, but say it in six words, “Every child deserves some challenge.” That is a powerful statement. I’m just putting that out there and then we can talk about the rest.

Table 5: Number two is a grammatical mess. We liked the idea of professional staff basically driving the system and we need to support them. We liked the idea of number two, but it needs to be re-worked. Number three uses language “newer learning, continually evolved” and “up to date”. Newer is not always better. Use terms like “inviting, flexible or adaptive”. We liked the description of number four, but what is the implication of the word “strong”? Suggest using words such as reflect, reflective, in a role, foundational, fundamental component of this strong community, etc.

Table 6: We looked at number one and did not like the word “child”. We have high school students in our district and many of them are not children. Overall, the core beliefs all lack some sort of

inspiration. We discussed use of different words. In number one add access-so students or schools provide access. In number two add opportunity-so that students can be agents of their own life. In number three schools have the universals, be safe, be respectful, be kind, be responsible, be a leader. So why is that not in the core beliefs. And then number four we recommend community partnerships instead of strong communities.

Table 7: We identified that the four core beliefs seem to match, the first one being students, the second one being about staff, the third one being about the place and the fourth being about the larger community. In number one we would like to add in a citizenship component for the students because that seems to be coming up a lot. We agree that number two is a grammatical nightmare. It talks about the environment right up front but does not really speak specifically to facilities and both inside and out playground and school. And we thought that, that should be included in there more explicitly. We all basically liked the community one but suggest changing to engage the larger community.

Table 8: We talked about communication being a big important component of the whole big picture between students, between teachers and district staff but that is not outlined anywhere, and we recommended it be included. We talked about both equity and/or consistency across the district not being articulated and should be addressed in a core value. Students and staff and parents can expect similar standards at all schools, and similar experiences and educational outcomes.

Table 9: There were several comments about the word “equipped” from our group. We need to think about bigger concepts than the child and that the community as a whole are the learners with the school district. We are preparing them for life in school and outside of school. Integration with their school and communities not just starting and ending at school, but a continuous continuum of that. Equal access to innovative programs was a hot topic in our group. A safe learning environment is super important. Partnership and collaboration are to be part of the success, not just the teachers and staff. We finished by talking about how do we fit into the core beliefs; equity, diversity, inclusivity and about well-being. The health well-being and physical well-being of all our students, staff, parents, families and everybody involved with the schools.

Table 10: We kind of started out in very similar discussion going through the four values, and then felt super overwhelmed because how do you get to a core value. We talked about why do we believe that education is compulsory, or should it be? We believe in public schools in general should be the core value. We talked about respect and the last core value just did not seem to fit. Less is more prioritizing safety and the environment, both emotional and physical safety. Engagement was a big one that came up, motivation, self-advocacy skills. How do we build a child but also give them responsibility and build citizenship? Relationship building is humongous. We also recommend continuous learning be a core value.

Table 11: We had a lot of the same discussions that other tables have mentioned. We agree that the values need more inspiration. We agreed that the second one just does not make sense. We liked the idea of communities and school system. It needs to be both ways, not just one creating the other. They need to work hand in hand. Collaboration that it was mentioned, and that is very important.

Table 12: We had a lot of similar sentiments. We felt like “challenged” was combative and expressed struggling. We liked “inspired again” and “prepared for life beyond school”, and the use of “equipped” was odd. We agree with the universal dislike of the second statement. We talked about valuing and supporting innovative, committed, creative leaders. We do not need to

specifically list individual leaders as we all should all be leaders. Learning environments continually evolve, and we wanted to add the equitable part to that. We thought engaging, safe and up to date was pretty standard, but we did feel like the equitable part was something we really need to address in our district. We felt like the last one saying that community starts with the school was again one sided and that it is a partnership. We want schools to be a part of our community and engaging with that community. There were a lot of words just felt very combative and punitive. We want it to feel more inspiring.

Debra Silk: Appreciated everyone's time tonight and knows that going through this process and two exercises tend to be exhausting. So, you can see why we actually divvy this up in the three different meetings. Remember our next meeting is February 25th from 6:00 – 8:00 PM.

Hatton Littman: If individuals would like to make public comment our rules are that we limit it to about three minutes. We would like you to say and spell your name if it's unique. Board members do not respond to public comment. Please provide your name and contact details on a sign-in sheet at the podium so that we can stay in touch with you throughout the process.

Public Comment:

Rob Jensen: Therapy dogs are not allowed in the Missoula County Public Schools. In the early 2000s he had a certified therapy dog, which is different from a service dog. A service dog is trained for handicapped mobility, blind mobility, that kind of thing. Owners of a certified therapy dog pass an exam together as an evaluated team for obedience and discipline. Seven years ago, the school board changed the policy and said, "No therapy dogs, service dogs only". After having had a certified therapy dog in his classroom for seven years, he was not able to bring it to school, and it is a real shame. Little kids would read to a dog and special ed kids would stop in his classroom to just touch the dog without saying a word and then leave. He would love to see therapy dogs in the schools, and he has information available in support of therapy dogs in schools that he would be glad to share.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Transcribed and edited from MCAT YouTube video.