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SCHOOL DISTRICT OF БЕЛОIT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Shaping the April 1, 2025 Referendum Package

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Executive Summary

In 2024, the School District of Beloit conducted community engagement initiatives to inform and shape the April 1, 2025 referendum package.

Throughout 2024, the district gathered several phases of feedback through six key events, including listening sessions, community meetings, and interactive forums. Attendees included administration, staff, students, families and caregivers, board of education and community leaders, community members, and media representatives. Attendees were invited through digital, social, and traditional promotional methods and media outreach. This report synthesizes sentiments captured in those events, highlighting critical areas such as trust, staff retention, academic achievement challenges, student behavior, and financial transparency. Insights gained offered information to address both District and community-identified needs.

Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report shares several primary community engagement efforts undertaken by the School District of Beloit and the School District of Beloit Board of Education in 2024. It illustrates how these initiatives aided the the design and focus of the April 1, 2025, referendum. The goal of the report is to provide transparency, accountability, and a themed summary of event input.

The report discusses the request for the district to enhance educational programs, address behavior challenges, improve infrastructure, and support staff and student needs within the district. This report addresses critical listening, financial transparency and operational needs, academic achievement, behavioral support, staffing concerns and support, and community trust, to assist district work meeting the concerns and needs of its staff, students, and community.

Methodology

This report is a qualitative study that collects and analyzes non-numerical data, such as interviews, group discussions, open-ended survey responses, and observational notes, to gain insight into participants' experiences with the district and welcome open forum discussions with attendees.

The district employed a variety of engagement methods, including:

- **Listening Sessions:** Facilitated discussions to gather open-ended feedback.
- **Feedback Sessions:** Structured formats for specific input on referendum topics.
- **Ad Hoc Budget Committee Meetings:** Series of meetings to discuss budget reductions.
- **Table Talks:** Interactive in-person forums encouraging open dialogue among stakeholders.
- **Focused Listening Groups:** Quantitative and qualitative data collection tools.

Feedback for this report was gathered through meeting recordings, administrative documentation, surveys, note-taking during individual and group sessions, and digital submissions during events.

The feedback was then analyzed thematically to identify recurring issues, priorities, and actionable insights aligned with the strategic planning response and financial priorities.

These insights were considered to better inform the April 1, 2025, referendum package development conversations with the Board of Education and presented to them. The School District of Beloit intends also to use the gathered feedback for future strategic planning consideration.

Engagement Events Overview

Event	Date	Location	Type
1. Referendum Listening Session	June 2024	Beloit Public Library	Listening Session
2. Failed Referendum Feedback Session	August 2024	Cunningham Intermediate School	Feedback Session
3. Ad Hoc Budget Committee Meetings	July-October 2024	School District	Interactive Forum
4. Table Talks	November 2024	Beloit Public Library	Interactive Forum
5. Community Referendum Listening Session I	December 7, 2024	Kolak Education Center	Listening Session
6. Community Referendum Listening Session II	December 16, 2024	Beloit Public Library	Listening Session

Detailed Event Sections

Event 1: Referendum Listening Session

Date: June 12, 2024

Attendees: 25+ participants, including community members, League of Women Voters members, parents, retired educators, educators, administration, and board members

Focus: Review past referendum questions and gather community perspectives and concerns.

Key Themes and Community Feedback:

- **Theme 1: Financial Transparency**
 - There is ambiguity surrounding the allocation of funds, raising concerns regarding the overall management and accountability of financial resources.
- **Theme 2: Leadership and Staffing Challenges**
 - Previous high turnover within the Superintendent's Office and additional Administrative resource cuts have reduced the continuity of a leadership approach. Additionally, insufficient teaching tools, training, resources, pay for educators, and lack of behavior support staff remain an ongoing concern, potentially affecting staff morale and retention and impacting classroom management and student behavior.
- **Theme 3: Academic Integrity**
 - Questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the current curriculum in fostering academic success. The reliability of performance data was questioned, highlighting a need for more accurate and transparent evaluation metrics and understanding.
- **Theme 4: Student Discipline and Behavior Management**
 - Limited clarity exists regarding how student behavioral issues are addressed, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness and fairness of the current disciplinary processes.
- **Theme 5: Discriminatory Practices**
 - Concerns persist that specific programs, including Grow Your Own and prior policies, may exhibit discriminatory characteristics, underscoring the need for further review and equitable reform opportunities.
- **Theme 6: Community and Parent Engagement**
 - There is a significant need to bolster parental and community involvement to support the teachers and students better, fostering a more collaborative environment.

Detailed Event Sections

Event 2: Failed Referendum Feedback Session

Date: August 1, 2024

Attendees: 15 participants, including community members, board members, and staff

Focus: Deeper dive and response to feedback on specific failed referendum proposals.

Key Themes and Community Feedback:

- **Theme 1: Academic Performance**
 - Continued discussion with the administration intent to present available reading and math achievement data and insights into student performance to inform ongoing instructional strategies in November 2024 and as state-based review tools become available.
- **Theme 2: Fiscal Accountability**
 - Preliminary information was shared from the 2023–24 unaudited fiscal year. The 2024–25 preliminary budget was provided and reviewed, projected financial reviews and expectations were shared, and the Ad Hoc Committee's intent to further collaborate was made.

Event 3: Ad Hoc Committee Meetings

Date: July - October, 2024

Attendees: Committee members, board members, administration, community members, parents

Focus: The Ad Hoc Finance Budget Committee suggests budget reductions and financial considerations.

Key Themes and Community Feedback:

- **Theme 1: Financial Transparency**
 - Additional transparency is needed to maintain trust and credibility and guide informed decisions that align resources with school district priorities.
- **Theme 2: Budget Cut Recommendations**
 - In September, the committee presented recommendations to cut \$4 million in expenses, which included reducing assistant principal positions, school psychologist and counselor roles, and overall school administration by 25%.

Detailed Event Sections

Event 4: Table Talks

Date: November 21, 2024

Attendees: 40+ participants, including parents, teachers, administrators, media and community leaders, and board members

Focus: Participants were encouraged to converse openly and unguided with School District of Beloit leaders and Board of Education members available for listening.

Key Themes and Community Feedback:

- **Theme 1: Transparency**
 - Participants emphasized the need for more transparent communication and greater openness in the Board of Education’s decision-making processes, including providing timely and accurate information to stakeholders. Misinformation spread from outside groups poses a challenge.
- **Theme 2: Personnel**
 - Concerns were raised regarding hiring procedures, specifically regarding the validity of credentials, reliance on emergency licensing, and thoroughness of the interview process to ensure that all staff are appropriately qualified and adequately prepared.
- **Theme 3: Grow Your Own**
 - The discussion also touched on the “Grow Your Own” program, which aims to develop homegrown talent. Stakeholders examined its goals, implementation strategies, and effectiveness in meeting the program needs.

Detailed Event Sections

Event 5: Community Referendum Listening Session I

Date: December 7, 2024

Attendees: 75 participants, including parents, teachers, administrators, media and community leaders, and members

Focus: To address community concerns about a proposed 2025 referendum package and gather comprehensive feedback to help shape it.

Key Themes and Community Feedback:

1. Communication and Trust Issues

- Lack of clear understanding between the District, Board of Education, and the community.
- Negative perceptions and ineffective inter-departmental communication.
- There is a need for transparent budget communication and better access to student services.

2. Staff Recruitment and Retention

- Challenges in staff retention and recruitment, including high turnover rates.
- Insufficient compensation for paraprofessionals and overall staff benefits.
- Necessity for leadership consistency and recruitment incentives.

3. Student Behavior and Discipline

- Ongoing discipline problems and insufficient behavioral and mental health support.
- Lack of effective communication between administration and teachers on discipline.
- Greater need for responsibility and effective behavior management strategies.

4. Academic Achievement and Learning Support

- Concerns over student retention and academic performance.
- Need for early and effective reading and math interventions and enhanced special education support.
- Issues with large class sizes affecting learning and space utilization.

5. Community and Family Engagement

- Improvements for family engagement reflecting district demographics.
- Misinformation restricting community understanding of public education needs.
- A proactive mindset is required for meeting urgent staff and student needs.
- Immediate need to bridge community differences to support staff, student, and family needs.

Detailed Event Sections

Event 5: Community Referendum Listening Session I

Key Themes and Community Feedback Continued:

6. Financial Concerns and Budget Transparency

- Strained finances and concerns over funding and unfunded mandates.
- It is essential to align the budget with district goals and ensure fiscal responsibility.

7. Inclusivity and Diversity

- Addressing racism and promoting inclusivity within the district.
- Enhancing practices for the Latino community and increasing bilingual staff.

8. Strategic Planning and Focus

- An overabundance of priorities in the strategic plan necessitates a narrowed focus.
- Ongoing review of the strategic plan's effectiveness and alignment with current needs.

9. Infrastructure and Resources

- Transportation issues and the need for better school-city partnerships.
- Housing availability impacts community stability.
- Addressing facility and technology barriers and consolidating early education focus.

10. Perception and Reputation

- Negative mindsets about students and staff impact community perception.
- Visibility of district work goes unseen and addressing past actions like school closures.

11. Additional Concerns

- Issues related to eminent domain and confusion and disconnection with community partners.
- Concerns over tax increases and impact from referendum requests.

Detailed Event Sections

Event 6: Community Referendum Listening Session II

Date: December 16, 2024

Attendees: 70 participants, including students, administration, school board members, parents, teachers, counselors, media, and community members

Focus: Discuss support mechanisms for students and staff, identify academic and behavioral needs, and strengthen community trust and involvement.

Key Themes and Community Feedback:

1. Support and Staffing

- More counselors and behavior specialists are needed in the schools.
- Support for teachers in classrooms and at home is lacking.
- Smaller class sizes remain a concern (reopen schools if needed).
- Paras for 4K-5K are needed.
- Retention of staff is troubling.
- Diversifying staff should be a priority.
- Having enough staff remains challenging.

2. Academic and Behavioral Support

- Smaller class sizes to enhance learning environments, particularly in reading and math.
- ELI/DLI support is needed.
- Creation of separate spaces for students with behavioral issues.
- Ensuring academic achievement guides referendum priorities.

3. Community and Family Engagement

- Increased parent involvement helps.
- Family mentoring programs is needed in some cases.
- Create parenting skills/classes to address family dynamics holistically.
- Kids need more support from home/community (find out what other districts are doing).

4. Mental Health and Safety

- Enhance mental health support for both students and staff.
- Safe spaces and additional support are needed to manage discipline effectively.
- Addressing homelessness and its impact on student well-being.

Detailed Event Sections

Event 6: Community Referendum Listening Session II

Key Themes and Community Feedback Continued:

5. Facilities and Fiscal Responsibility

- There is a necessity for increased district funding to update facilities and sustain the upkeep of buildings.
- Emphasis on fiscal responsibility and transparency in spending, including fund balance concerns.
- Focus on return on facility investment and improvements and determining specific priority needs.

6. Strategic Messaging and Referendum Support

- Passing the referendum and preparing a strong message early is vital for community understanding.
- Avoiding delays in communicating.

7. Curriculum and Stability

- Maintaining a stable curriculum to ensure consistent academic standards, especially in literacy and math.

8. Policy and Accountability

- Reinforcing the Code of Conduct and ensuring behavior accountability at all levels.

9. Infrastructure and Resources

- Learning from other districts to enhance staff and student support mechanisms.

Synthesis of Community Feedback

Common Themes Across All Events:

- **Communication and Trust:** Improve trust, clear communication, and stronger collaboration between the Administration, Board of Education, and the community.
- **Staffing Challenges:** Ongoing staff recruitment, retention, and compensation concerns.
- **Academic, Attendance, and Behavioral Support:** Strong emphasis on improving academic outcomes, specifically in math and reading, attendance increases, and addressing student behavior and school safety resources.
- **Financial Transparency:** General understanding of how public school funding works and how cuts, budgeting, and spending align with the district's ability to meet strategic goals and the urgency of referendum needs.
- **Student and Family/Caregiver Engagement:** Enhance family and community involvement to support the district's dual role in education and providing students with essential services. Strengthen partnerships with parents and caregivers to address the diverse needs of the student population and ensure the community positively recognizes the district's comprehensive support for students and families beyond academic instruction.

Divergent Views and Opinions:

- Need for specific programs, such as ELI/DLI support and safe behavior spaces.
- Varied opinions on the extent of infrastructure improvements needed versus curriculum and staff stability.

Repetitive Themes:

- **Enhanced Needs:** Increased focus on addressing behavior management, counseling, staffing retention, general fund balance concerns, and tools to improve and track academic programs in literacy and math.
- **Strategic Communication:** Development of transparent communication strategies to rebuild trust between Administration, Board of Education, and the Beloit community.
- **Targeted Academic and Behavior Initiatives:** Implement specialized support programs for staff and students.
- **Community Partnership Programs:** Initiatives to strengthen family and community engagement through mentoring and inclusive learning practices.

Conclusion

Summary of Engagement Outcomes

The 2024 community engagement efforts identified critical areas needing attention, including communication, staffing, academic and behavior support, and financial transparency. The 2024 session feedback provided in this report is a useful tool for attracting a more inclusive, well-performing, transparent school district. The community feedback and engagement was found valuable.

Listening Lessons Learned

- **Importance of Diverse Engagement Methods:** Utilizing various formats like listening sessions and interactive forums ensures comprehensive feedback.
- **Need for Continuous Communication:** Ongoing dialogue is essential to maintain trust, listen and collect feedback, and address evolving concerns.
- **Value of Structured Feedback Analysis:** Thematic feedback analysis provides actionable insights for strategic planning and decision making.

Actions for Future Engagement

- **Enhance Digital Engagement Platforms:** Utilize online tools to reach a broader audience.
- **Focus on Transparency:** Regular updates on budget and policy changes to build trust.
- **Tailor Programs to Community Needs:** Develop targeted initiatives based on specific feedback from diverse demographic groups.
- **Metrics and Evaluation:** Outline the success metrics and the processes used to refine them in the future.
- **Feedback Loop:** Clearly define and communicate how community input will be collected, analyzed, and acted upon, as well as how outcomes and updates will be communicated.



SCAN FOR
REFERENDUM
INFORMATION

Thank you for your
engagement with the
School District of Beloit.

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This report is provided by the School District of Beloit to provide a summary of information on community feedback and considerations received.