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School District Strategic Plan Involves the Whole Community

By Sophie Braccini

Great schools are one of the top reasons families move to Moraga- so when the school district writes a new strategic plan, the whole town pays attention. The new plan, two years in the making, will be released this year.

The process involved a larger number of stakeholders than for previous iterations; parents, teachers, staff, students and the greater community have been asked to contribute their vision. On March 12 the school board will decide on its strategic priorities for the next 3-5 years; in April the implementation steps will be defined; and in May the elements to monitor and measure success will be determined.

"We created a large, 27-member community committee that met twice, for four hours, to debate ideas," said Burns. The committee included members of local service groups, the town council, former students, current parents and staff. "This group was very inclusive of the whole community and very dedicated," said Babs Kavanaugh, the consultant who supported the district in the effort.

Burns decided to include students as well, from grades 4-8. "We met with students by age groups and sites and they took the process very seriously," he said. "Their input was important to us. It was generally in line with what other population groups asked for, but also specific to their point of reference." For example, Burns said that the students asked for strict teachers who nonetheless know how to add some fun to the teaching experience, and they want to be more active participants in the learning process. "The students realized the importance of learning math and English language arts, but also want to learn more practical skills they can apply to a profession, including economics and general business concepts," added Burns.

Multiple meetings were organized at the school sites so parents could offer their input. An online survey was also designed for those who could not attend. One third of district families completed the survey. Classroom teacher assistants, technology instruction and foreign languages in grades K-5 were the three topics ranked as most important by parents for current and future programs.

The few areas where parents registered discontent with the district's performance were the individualization of instruction, the arts program, and the number of challenging opportunities for students. Bullying continues to be a problem, but parents indicated that children mostly feel safe at school.

All of the input is now being analyzed and collated by Burns and his team to take the form of priorities, and will be reviewed by the board in March. "We want to select a smaller number of priorities (than in previous plans), so the goals can be reached without adding strain on staff," said Burns.

The new strategic plan comes as the district prepares to implement the new national Common Core State Standards next year, which will change what is taught and how it is taught. "Our strategic plan will support that significant transition and support our overarching objective to maximize student potential and achievement," concluded Burns.

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