

McNear Town Hall Synopsis

Revised 04.03.2011

The five prevailing themes generated by the breakout groups of the Town Hall meeting on Feb 9, 2011 were parent involvement, communication, school environment, student academic achievement, and social/emotional growth. Following is an aggregated list of the breakout groups' notes broken into those five themes. Note that the notes are not prioritized in order of importance or popularity. Also, the bold headlines are intended as grouping mechanisms only, i.e. they were not supplied by our TH brainstorm session.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents should:

As a McNear parent

- Be your child's educational advocate and take an active interest in knowing what she is/is not learning at McNear
- Reach out to kids to hear about their day; extend students' interests with real world activities
- Be our school's advocate in the broader community

As member of learning community

- Support your teachers
- Participate actively in education and socialization by volunteering on and off campus – parents want to help but don't always know how to get involved – direct requests from teachers are helpful – parents need to be creative and seek ways to help in/out of classroom – volunteering helps to connect with kids and creates a vested interest
- Be a helping hand – do your part and be accountable – share the load
- Be a resource to the school in terms of shared knowledge and expertise (i.e. computer lab, garden)
- Forge balanced partnership with teachers/mentors/other parents to support education/academics/social issues at home and in classroom in tandem
- Parents learn more about teaching and how kids learn (brain research)

As a member of whole school community

- Welcome new and get to know other parents and children
- Encourage all-family participation
- Be responsible for all students not just their own
- Be a role in the community - parent, mentor, teacher, nurturer
- Make an effort to know children's names
- Be aware of all the kids, not just your own family - "They are all our kids!" – parents helping parents with watchful eyes and speaking up
- Increase participation in school activities

As a role model

- Express/model good citizenship/responsibility/respect/compassion/ awareness at home
- Pay attention to what's happening at school
- Model active listening and respect

As a decision maker/influencer

- Join PTA and contribute to those decisions
- Make financial contributions

COMMUNICATION

Overall message is that improvement is needed, including:

- Increased, efficient, consistent and reciprocal communication between teachers, parents and office
- Better coordination of needs between classrooms and families
- Clarity with organized events – who is sponsoring and who to talk to

General

- Less paper, more email and use of website – especially important for parents working outside home
- Willingness to make changes as needed, willing to listen, be flexible
- Partnership = Teacher – School – Child – Home – Community (value and continue working

Between parents/volunteer community/staff

- Need community board that gives event info
- Need feedback vehicle and assurance that comments are being heard
- Strengthen communication coming from school around parent involvement – tell parents what is needed and call upon their talents and expertise (i.e. computer lab, garden)
- Be more aggressive with reaching out to parents for their particular involvement – revisit the choice involvement form at beginning of year – things change in the home as does volunteer availability
- Transparency in fundraising - where the \$ is allotted

Between parents/teachers

- Daily program info needs to be available to parents from teachers – how else can there be a joint home/school effort
- Parents and teachers need to work more effectively together – let parents ‘in’
- Parents need to be responsible for reading letters sent home (check-in via letter, email, feedback)
- Parents need to be alerted when social/guidance intervention is needed no matter how small (friendship circle) – not good for parent to hear through the grapevine

Other

- Solution based, look at the long term goals
- Better follow thru with tangible action

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Our physical environment should/should be:

- Safe and healthy, both physically and socially
- Comfortable, inviting, warm, pleasant/happy, cozy
- Organized, clean, tidy (have clean, tidier, safer bathrooms)
- Thriving, inspiring, vital, alive
- 'Green' – practice and teach sustainability (recycling, low water use, turn off lights, garden, etc)
- Follow safety rules at school
- Enforce signing in at the office when going on and off campus

Our philosophical environment should:

Foster a sense of community

- Allow child to feel connected
- Encourage older students to look out for younger students (buddy classes, Kinder check-out, reading buddies, Recess Renaissance)
- Promote neighborhood friendships and expand the concept of community beyond campus – encourage kids to be active participants in the greater community, outside of the classroom
- Embrace and celebrate diversity – ethnic, religious, etc. – in ages of adults (grandparents, elders, etc.)
- Be open/inclusive
- No child left out at recess

Include the following attributes:

- Respect – encourage people showing respect for others (reciprocal between children/students/adults/teachers) – zero-tolerance for disrespect – make sure all kids understand what constitutes disrespect at McNear
 - Good sportsmanship
 - Responsibility – allow children to feel ownership of their school
 - Open-mindedness and acceptance/tolerance toward new ideas
 - Genuine caring of children and compassion for others
 - Balance – throughout day – free 'play' time vs. curriculum
 - Independence (we know what our children need)
 - Individuality – create individual relationships between teachers and each student – we see you (the child) as an individual – say 'hi' to 10 children every day
 - "Nice matters" catch'em being good (i.e. Falcon Feathers)
-
- Good health – promote good physical health through exercise, snack, and curriculum

Encourage extra curricular activities

- Offer parents learning workshops/speakers
- Present more opportunities for all-inclusive community events that balance social and academic – both in the school day and outside of
- Offer more/different extra-curricular, after-school activities

STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Academic goals

- Instill a lifelong love of learning; feed curiosity; maintain excitement for learning
- Quality of education is strong academic performance with a well-rounded approach; the basics “+”
- Build critical thinking skills through creative problem solving; strong educational base leads to problem solving with confidence
- Form passionate readers
- Exposure to different areas of study
- Awesome Kindergarten sets the stage for learning
- Independence (we know what our children need) – strong community bolsters strong academics

Classroom curriculum/tactics

- Stimulate rigorous, active learning – push to excel
- Have more learning-based projects (less worksheets/busy work)
- Allow for academic enrichment programs to challenge students at their individual level
- Bring more art/music into the classroom – non-textbook learning is critical to development
- Offer more support for difficult classes
- Get more text books
- Support good teachers – allow for autonomy/flexibility for teachers (rather than top down)
- Effect tighter classroom management
- Revisit how to responsibly assemble classrooms prior to the start of school year
- Pinpoint areas of difficulty for students and talk to teachers or counselors about finding support or a suitable program for students
- More child-driven and community driven curriculum similar to Kindergarten model
- Flexible grouping of students with other grade-level teachers
- Demand more consistency of consequences across grades and teachers
- More experiential and interactive learning at all grade levels – whole child learning
- Teachers encourage students to “think about their learning”
- Teachers “meet kids where they are” to help them learn

Competition

- Encourage/create more healthy academic challenge and competition
- Reward high achievers of *all kinds* with recognition at assemblies, bulletin board, newsletters, etc.
- Use high achievers as example to encourage competitive learning
- Differentiate and celebrate academic excellence and achievement – outstanding academic recognition is healthy and inspirational
- Student of the Month

Extra curricular opportunities

- Expanded performing arts
- Foreign language programs

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL GROWTH

Social/emotional goals for students to carry into the future include:

- Happy, well-adjusted, hopeful outlook – can be in the now and savor the moment – innocence
- Self-confidence, independence, high self-esteem, grounded, empowered
- Initiator, self-motivation
- Strong sense of equality and moral code, good judgment

- Lifelong love of learning, focus on smartness, willingness to ask questions
- Critical thinkers
- Good study habits
- Embracing of responsibility, strong work ethic, perseverance, accountability

- Ability to work well with others, adaptable
- Ability to effectively communicate with others – children can be individuals with their own voice
- Strong interpersonal skills, including respect (for adults, each other, and self), caring, kindness, empathy, compassion (for those with special needs), tolerance

- Understanding and participating in ‘community’ – feeling of inclusion
- Learning/practicing social responsibility and good citizenship

- Whole child-centered approach
- Kid-focused school culture
- Don’t want child lost in shuffle (whole child + test scores)

- Teachers instill confidence and offer ways to make children shine

• PARKING LOT

1. Value teachers more
2. No child left out of extracurricular activities (i.e., performing arts, poetry slam, etc.)
3. Meeting for teachers and parents to develop communication guidelines (routine, content, parameters)
4. Connect children's learning to the outside environment—projects/learning with older grades
5. Summer is a good time to organize- enlist help
6. New family welcoming committee
7. K is a great starting point - Reggio Emilia Program
8. Maintain experienced, passionate staff
9. Lucy - Custodian, Nancy, - office?, Mr. Adam** - Student Advisor, Ms. Urgubian, Ms. Busse (not sure what the context is for this list of staff)
10. Full-time counselor