

Business Partner Focus Group

Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) wants to ensure that we are providing the best educational opportunities for our students, a collaborative and welcoming culture for our parents and business community, and a positive, productive work environment for our employees. To further the growth and improvement of the school division, we continually collect input from students, families, staff, and the business community about a broad range of topics. In previous years, input from the business community was collected using a survey. While this gave us valuable information, the concern was that we were only receiving comments from a few businesses (12.3% response rate in 2014, 11.8% response rate in 2012) and that the information only scratched the surface of the interactions between the business community and HCPS.

To gain a richer depth of feedback from the business community, in 2016, Research and Planning conducted three focus groups with 23 business partners. These sessions were used to solicit the partners' perspectives and opinions on HCPS' Strategic Plan, the quality of HCPS' educational program, and the business partnerships between HCPS and the business community. Focus group participants were asked questions in an interactive setting and were encouraged to discuss thoughts freely with other participants. The open forum discussions generated ideas that provided a wealth of information from the business community's perspective.

Process Overview

Two hundred forty business partners were invited to participate in the focus group that occurred on April 19, 2016 at Hermitage High School from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Business partners were invited by letter and/or email and an open invitation was posted on social media. Dinner was provided by the Hermitage ACE Center, and after a brief overview of the strategic plan, the participants separated into three focus groups that were led by HCPS staff members. Focus group data, which included participants' experiences, attitudes, and interesting stories were compiled and common themes and patterns emerged. Attached is a summary of the information collected.

STRATEGIC PLAN KNOWLEDGE

| GENERAL |
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| Parent survey part of process? |
| Build cultural understanding with staff. |
| Include language about embracing diversity and other cultures as county is changing. |
| Include language regarding technology. |
| Easy to ignore mailed survey. Small group makes you feel as though you can make a difference. |
| Utilize PTA's. |
| Start with parents to get the message out. |
| Work ethic needs to be developed early and at home. |
| Kids need to see they are rewarded for their interests and talents. |
| HS kids get out of school too late to allow training time on the job. Offer early release for school credit. Employers might even agree to pay student. |
| Not aware that HCPS has a strategic plan. |
| Social media/cells are an obstacle to getting students to intern. |
| Not getting licenses so missing safety training aspect. Bad driving records impact student's ability to get jobs that include driving. |
| Use WRVA and other local radio stations to inform business community. |
| Share strategic plan page with business partners. Does the page go home with students? |
| 3 of 9 are aware of strategic plan. |
| Staff should be active in community organizations. |
| Provide speakers to groups. |
| Email list of "opportunities" to close gaps. Someone can look at list and see what they can provide. Include contact names so interested parties can advise what they have available to offer. |

| STUDENT SAFETY |
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| Ties into bullying; can't expect high performance if student feels unsafe or misunderstood. |
| Foundational safety and emotional safety. |
| Is safety new to list? Good to start early as employers want staff that is safety aware, not simply threat related. |
| Protocol for entry varies significantly between schools. |
| Lack of consistency for entry into buildings and exiting parking areas. Do buses or child care vans leave first? |
| Child care companies need strict guidelines to ensure student safety due to high driver turnover. |
| Students are now more afraid of personal & weather related safety. |
| Safety awareness should be taught in homerooms. |
| Drug addiction now part of safety issue. |

ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Order of strands has safety first and academics second!

CLOSING GAPS

East Vs. West differences breaking down due to increased diversity in West End.

Try to absorb trends and deal with challenges.

Address inequalities.

Liked video reference to ATTITUDE gap. All should embrace differences.

How you feel about YOURSELF can close gaps.

Tendency towards "cookie cutter students". Should focus on directing students to trades without making them feel like an outcast. College is not for everyone.

Schools push higher education but trades have great earning potential. Create career path beginning in middle school that continues through high school.

Open up internship program. Businesses appreciate employees who come to them fresh from graduation as they are not "adulterated" by another company's policies.

Raise expectations.

Explain to students what it takes to succeed in workforce: interview skills, professional behavior, clear definition of what employer expects.

RELATIONSHIPS

Encourage businesses to sponsor family engagement opportunities; i.e., provide dinner to get parents in to meet teachers.

Family engagement lacking at secondary level at a time when students are under a great deal of stress.

Embrace "melting pot" of diversity.

Notify businesses where needs are.

Large number of students challenging for HCPS.

Businesses can assist by mentoring during lunch, Watchdog Dads, volunteering. Benefits participants even more than the kids.

Students need comfortable environment that includes adults who will listen. Familiar, caring faces. Have volunteers greet students as they get off the bus.

What happens outside of school affects behaviors and attitudes *inside* school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

1a) How does HCPS provide students with a high quality education?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| Henrico does a good job of educating students. |
| Graduates are far ahead of college classmates. |
| Challenging as ALL students need to be taught; even those with mental, physical and health issues. |

1b) Do you have any suggestions for areas of improvement?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| College not for everyone. Students need to be offered technical trade training. |
| Attitudes need to change so that tech/trade training is an option. Begin informing students earlier. |
| Maybe there are business partners who can go to middle schools? |
| Advertise this option to millennials in a different way. |
| When advising, guidance should provide practical job outlooks for degree student wants to pursue. |
| Need to help kids discover their passion. |
| Encourage students to try classes that are of interest; however, no down time to be able to do that! |
| More value needs to be placed on the WHOLE person. |
| More parental involvement needed. |
| Engage varied businesses to speak to classes at other times besides career day. PTA could coordinator by bringing in MANY careers. |
| Locate businesses willing to offer performance rewards/incentives. |
| "For profit" businesses encounter roadblocks when attempting to offer programs at schools. Facilities are not available. |
| Kids can only dream based on what they know. Exposure to multiple businesses/career paths generates interest in new and varied opportunities students may then want to pursue. |

2) Have you hired a HCPS student or graduate? Were they prepared?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| Positive experience with recent graduates hired; great communication skills. |
| Center based students do excellent job working with businesses' special needs students. |
| Students well prepared to attend college. |
| Students instilled with values to serve; confident, well spoken. |
| Disappointingly, transportation became an issue for one student hired so have not hired others. |
| Challenging to get foot in HCPS door to hire an apprentice. Received no response to opening. |
| Any relationship with Science Museum? Science component would be a good option. |

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| Lots of students don't have job interview skills, etiquette. This training could be provided by business partners providing positive role models. |
| Employ several during school year and more in summer. Until students are 16, they "volunteer" to assist with summer programs. This interaction allows business to "weed out" before hiring. Attitude determines who eventually gets hired. |
| HFCU provides financial literacy training. Student's later work during seasonal times and/or summers. Some now work FULL time. |
| Many lack maturity and social skills. Communicate the same to buddies as they do to visitors/parents. |
| A few years ago, huge push began to get students to work in groups in order to simulate business world. By utilizing technology, most groups never even meet face to face. Now students don't know how to work ALONE! |
| More group efforts than individual. Only one out of that small group of five gets hired. |
| Do area business have projects kids could assist with? |

3) Where are students primarily learning 21st century skills? How can HCPS better equip students with these skills?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| HCPS does a good job. Kids very computer literate. |
| Parent who was a private school graduate happy to utilize public education for his children as 21st Century skill training is available for free. |
| Work ethic will be learned on the job. |
| Work ethic <i>should</i> be learned at home. It's the parent's job, NOT the school's responsibility. |
| Kids who work at my business get an A+; they are taking care of IT problems and website issues. |
| Internship opportunities would allow interaction/communication with counselor as to students' work habits. |
| PARENT COUNSELING NEEDED! They need to be more open minded as to their kids pursuing other career paths. Pushing towards a college path can, in many cases, cause the student to fail. |
| At any new job, you have to learn the skills <i>there</i> . |
| Our kids are technically sound but still have to learn the actual job. |
| One has hired students, graduates, college students – it's a matter of attitude. |
| The employer weeds out the bad ones. |
| Community service is effective in changing attitudes of students. |
| Assign in-school service projects to give real world experience; project based learning with outside entities would provide 21st Century skills across disciplines. |
| Expand the service in action program; i.e. provide internship like experience. |
| Offer community service opportunities. |
| Businesses could offer programs to at risk schools which would enforce the importance of education. |

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

1) How does HCPS communicate to Henrico Businesses? Are you aware of the opportunities for business involvement? If yes, how did you know? If no, how can we make you aware?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| So many emails. |
| We reached out to the school. Back 21 years ago, schools reached out to us. Now hit all ES we pick up from. Because we work with children, it is easy to connect but harder for males to FIND a connection. Contact PTA person at schools you are closest to. They should be going into community and seeking businesses to participate. |
| Businesses would appreciate being contacted to participate which gets them that much closer to staying involved. |
| Please just tell us what we can do; use your website to divide the plan into four parts and let us know how we can help; technology upgrades has caused HCPS emails to go into spam. Get a resource center on the website. Also, put up a list of the partners on the website so teachers can easily access the business partners. |
| Find something like Survey Genius to get a way to sign up to coordinate a program. |
| Most are not aware that business partnerships are available. |
| Put section on website on business partners. |
| We started as a partner because we wanted to rent space so we became a business partner. |
| Do we have a person dedicated to working with business partners? |

2) If you are a business partner, what activities are taking place in your partnership?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| Daycare uses space for summer camps. |
| Mentoring in the schools, providing books to each student in a couple of schools. |
| Students run sports camps. Students are hired. We get students who are getting trained by their coach. Come see us play. And younger students like watching and that increases interest. Give money to fund programs at the schools. Drugs, alcohol, sex, self-harm; teach kids how to deal with stress in healthy ways. |
| Hermitage calls when they need something. (church) |
| Works on bullying programs and self-control but all guidance teams handle this issue differently. After school enrichment programs. Be there for spring carnival. |
| Partnership reaching out knowing there will be a trade-off and it goes from there. |
| All businesses see what's in it for me? Desire to give back but there is an incentive because you get more business in return. |
| Leverage graduates? Capture information when students graduate in order to stay in touch. |

3) Do you find it easy to partner with your local school? Why or why not?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| Not easy. Have given business card to principal but have not heard back. |
| One has had a great relationship. |
| Some have problems because they are nonprofits. |
| Has not heard from the school teachers, only Mac Beaton. |
| One wants to expose students to solar projects not just during a CTE class, but could also be an accounting or science class. |
| Could not take students on all expense paid trip to Montpelier- too much red tape. |
| Depends on school. Some are more resistant. |
| Not really because teachers and students are so busy. |
| Would like to look at the last 7 weeks of school, after AP and SOL testing, as a good time to work with project learning. |

4) What are the benefits from partnering with HCPS for the business and for the school?

| ITEM DETAILS |
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| Mac and I (participant) are trying to create a floor covering installation program. Would include full education. Private training currently provided but hires often don't work out. Potentially could feed entire industry. |
| Motivates students and businesses, help bridge the gaps, help with the disparity between the east end and west end. |