

SUPERINTENDENT'S SUMMARY of

# LAB SCHOOL

## COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

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**Lab School Community,**

The Citizens Advisory Council was very pleased to collect input from over 200 parents and teachers in response to the Citizens Advisory Council survey sent to every family and faculty member this fall. The intended purpose of this survey was to solicit feedback on the state of affairs in the Laboratory Schools from three key groups of constituents - parents, faculty, and staff. The open-ended question format provided an opportunity for respondents to freely share whatever was on their mind. The analysis of the collected responses uncovered a variety of important themes in the broad categories of Challenges, Strengths, and Superintendent’s Focus.

The three categories included four distinctive themes: Academics/Course Offerings/Curriculum, Quality of Staff, University Connections, and Technology. Although these four areas were identified as strengths, respondents also recognized the need for continuous monitoring and improvement in each of these very important areas. Four additional themes appeared within the two categories of Challenges and Superintendent’s Focus: Facilities, Funding, Communication, and Employee Concerns. The theme of School Climate is repeated under the categories of Strengths and Superintendent’s Focus. These nine themes could very well be used as the anchors in a strategic planning exercise focused on planning for the future.

As the Citizen Advisory Council discussed these broad themes, it was clear that increased communication and information is needed to help the Lab School community better understand our progress. Other themes may need a more in-depth look at suggestions made via the survey so Lab School faculty and administration can identify strategies for improvement. The Citizens Advisory Council will be looking through the individual suggestions made in each of the nine themes, which will then be considered for our strategic planning process. Below are the nine themes and a brief description of our current progress.

| <i><b>Challenges</b></i>               | <i><b>Strengths</b></i>   | <i><b>Superintendent's Focus</b></i>   |
|--|---|--|
| Facilities**                           | Quality of Staff*   | Academics/Course Offerings/Curriculum* |
| Academics/Course Offerings/Curriculum* | School Climate (high expectations, autonomy, freedom, flexibility, family environment, respect, trust, collaboration)** | Facilities**                           |
| Funding                                | Academics/Course Offerings/Curriculum*  | Communication**                        |
| Quality of Staff*                      | School Size/Class Size  | Funding                                |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Transportation (Drop Off/Pick Up/Parking)                                  | University Connections (Teacher Education, Mission, Support, & Resources)* | School Climate (high expectations, autonomy, freedom, flexibility, family environment, respect, trust, collaboration)** |
| University Connections (Teacher Education, Mission, Support, & Resources)* | Parent Involvement/Support   | Technology*   |
| Technology*  | Range of Opportunities   | Quality of Staff*   |
| Alcohol & Drugs  | Technology*  | Professional Development  |
| Communication**  | Students (quality, motivation, character, effort)                          | University Connections (Teacher Education, Mission, Support, & Resources)*  |
| Employee Concerns (Salaries/Time/Sense of Overload)**                      | Administration/Leadership/Organization                                     | Employee Concerns (Salaries/Time/Sense of Overload)**   |

\* Theme crosses all three categories

\*\* Theme crosses two categories

**Facilities** – Facilities was indicated as both a challenge and focus for the superintendent. While the building of new Lab Schools is a priority for Illinois State University as evidenced by its presence on the master plan, the current funding environment would indicate that it is not reasonable to think that new buildings are in the near future. Our position on the master plan would suggest that we are at a minimum of twenty years away from building new schools and as a result, we continue to make significant facility upgrades in both schools as funding will allow. Examples of our ongoing commitment to providing quality space for teaching, learning, and co-curricular activities at both Metcalf and University High School include electronic door locks, new roofs, renovations of Stroud Auditorium, a new fitness center, the Wroan Technology Center, new locker rooms, and a new Collaboration Room.

**Quality Faculty** – Quality faculty appeared in the survey as a focus, a challenge, and a strength. It is clearly gratifying that our faculty is respected and revered. We continue to support faculty in a number of ways to ensure a strong work environment by providing access to high quality professional development, support for the National Board Certification process, a flexible work environment, and processes which ask for teacher input on any significant decisions. Teacher compensation continues to be a bit below Unit 5 and District 87 but is competitive with the outlying

districts. A salary equity study was completed last year and faculty salaries were adjusted based on that study. Employee Concerns was also listed in the areas of Challenges and Superintendent's Focus. In an effort to address any faculty concerns, we will be analyzing their suggestions as detailed in our survey and follow up with them on if and how the system can address the workload and salary issues in what will be a difficult financial environment.

**Academic Course Offerings** – The curriculum at both Metcalf and University High School was seen as a strength, a challenge, and the top focus for the superintendent. Many suggestions were made to improve this area such as offering Chinese or implementing an International Baccalaureate program. Clearly the Lab Schools must continue the annual review of course offerings and curriculum standards at each grade level to ensure that our students are challenged and our ISU students experience best practices in terms of curriculum. Your suggestions in this area will be analyzed by the CAC and will be part of our improvement discussions.

**University Connections/Teacher Education** – The Lab Schools are an integral part of the College of Education and Illinois State University. Our work in teacher education is ongoing and shapes what we do on a daily basis. As an essential part of our mission, the connection to Illinois State University is ongoing. What we might be able to do better is bring this interaction to the attention of others so everyone understands how this connection occurs daily at the Lab Schools. Together both Metcalf and U-High host thousands of clinical experiences and observation hours each year where ISU students receive training from Lab School faculty associates to ensure they understand the strategies needed to be effective with our students. In addition, ISU students serve to support Lab School students who need extra attention. University faculty from a variety of departments use the Lab Schools for research and each school has a process for considering and conducting research. The CAC and Lab School administration will review your suggestions in this area and develop concrete steps to investigate ways in which we can build on an already strong connection between the Lab Schools and the rest of the University.

**Funding** – Any school at this time in the state's history will list funding as an ongoing concern. We are fortunate that part of Dr. Dean's legacy is a healthy reserve fund that will assist us in maintaining current operations for the next three years. The Lab Schools are funded primarily through four sources: general state aid (65%), Board of Higher Education dollars for clinical experiences (20%), fees (10%), and grants (5%). Over the past two years, general state aid has decreased a total of 11%. This drop in general state aid has meant that the Lab Schools will need to draw from reserves for this fiscal year. Current speculation on general state aid is not optimistic with the possibility of losing another 9%. These challenging economic times mean we will need to identify areas where we can increase efficiency as well as seek additional funding to ensure programs can be maintained until general state aid returns to full funding.

**Technology** – Technology was also identified in all three categories, indicating that while this is an area of strength, we must continue to integrate technology in an effort to engage our students, demonstrate best practices, and make our operations more efficient. This year marks the completion of the third year for the one-to-one initiative at University High School while Metcalf continues to add age-appropriate technology that enriches our students learning environment. Both schools are currently involved with a technology planning process which evaluates how

current technology is being utilized and to determine what might be needed as we look to the future.

**School Climate** – The Lab School climate has always been a mix of challenging our students with personal responsibility and freedom within an environment of shared decision-making. Occasionally our principles are in direct conflict with what we need to do to ensure safe learning environments whether physical or online. We know through our graduates that the balance of freedom and responsibility our students experience prepare them for higher education. Continuing to provide this freedom and responsibility for all Lab School students will be an important topic of discussion as we define this at every grade level.

**Communication** – Communication is an area in which we have already taken steps to improve. This fall we created a newsletter, “Life in the Lab Schools”, which will be sent out three times per year to update our community on Lab School students and faculty accomplishments along with school improvements. The first issue of “A Living Laboratory” will also be distributed to College of Education employees and ISU Deans, Directors, and Department Heads. The focus of this correspondence will be to inform the campus on how we are engaging our mission; what is happening in teacher education, outreach to area schools, and what key innovations we are currently piloting. We will review your suggestions for better internal communications as part of this process and discuss your suggestions with the administration and faculty at Metcalf and University High School.

**Next Steps** – Our next step in the process will be to get feedback from our students, and once collected, have our CAC members identify strategies in the areas of importance that have been identified. Once that information is gathered we will be working with administration and faculty from both schools to determine what strategies are feasible, taking into account our current funding environment. We hope to have strategies identified by the January CAC meeting. By the March CAC meeting we hope to have a rough draft of a planning document that outlines our priorities for improvement. We will schedule a time for the plan to be presented to the Lab School community once the rough draft has been reviewed and finalized.

Thank you again for your participation in the process!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey W. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

Jeffrey W. Hill, Ed.D.

Superintendent

The Lab Schools at Illinois State University