



Knox County Schools

Strategic Plan: Emerging Themes

January, 2014

Excellence for All Children

Knox Schools 2020

- Knox County Schools' current 5-year strategic plan, *Excellence for All Children*, is now in its 5th year.
- KCS began development of our next 5-year strategic plan in the fall of 2013.
- Through community meetings (“Insight Sessions”), surveys, small group discussions, and interviews, KCS has collected input from thousands of stakeholders.
- This document presents the broad themes that have begun to emerge from this comprehensive effort, known as **KnoxSchools2020**.

What's Good

(what's working well)

Themes	What We Heard
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong and timely communication to parents from schools and central office (i.e. parent portal, emails, phone calls)
Increased Rigor and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are held to higher academic standards • Students are provided more opportunities to enroll in dual-credit, IB, and AP classes • Increased focus on deeper and more critical thinking associated with Common Core State Standards
Teachers and Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent teachers and teaching • Hard-working teachers who care about students
Student Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student outcomes have increased based on multiple measurements (i.e. TCAP, EOC, graduation rates, State Report Card)

What's Good

(what's working well)

Themes	What We Heard
Teacher Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in PD and increased availability • Content supervisors, instructional coaches, and lead, mentor & master teachers can help improve teacher practice
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased presence of technology in schools • Piloting personalized learning in 11 schools through the School Technology Challenge
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many opportunities for stakeholder input (i.e. Insight Sessions, Teacher Talks, town halls, Feeder Group meetings, surveys)
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of an armed security guard at every school and installation of buzzer security systems at every school • Safety and security are priorities in our school system
Performance Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many stakeholders appreciate the emphasis on rewarding our most effective educators • Focus on encouraging teacher instructional leadership at schools

What's Not

(what can be improved)

Themes	What We Heard
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Internal:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inconsistent, untimely, and excessive emails coming from Central Office ○ Central Office staff do not have a consistently unified perspective, which prevents shared understanding regarding protocols and the ability to speak “with one voice” • <u>External:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KCS is not adequately providing proactive information to the public in anticipation of likely questions and concerns; also not effectively addressing misinformation
Too Much, Too Fast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New initiatives are coming too quickly and without adequate emphasis on implementation strategies • Not enough teacher and staff capacity at schools and central office; workloads have increased significantly

What's Not

(what can be improved)

Themes	What We Heard
Culture and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers, principals and staff often feel overwhelmed, undervalued, and unsupported in the work • Overemphasis on “a culture of accountability” that focuses too heavily on data
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources for our schools (i.e. money, technology, instructional materials) • Perception that resources are not equitably distributed among schools • Insufficient time for teachers, principals, and staff to complete their work
Inconsistent and Inadequate Rigor and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a universally high bar for all students, discrepancies within and amongst schools • Not sufficiently meeting the needs of our highest-performing students and providing challenging learning opportunities

What's Not

(what can be improved)

Themes	What We Heard
Lack of Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers, principals, and staff feel restricted in using their professional judgment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers often feel they can't use their creativity and discretion while teaching ○ Principals cite an inadequate level of site-based autonomy ○ Central Office staff feel unauthorized to make decisions or present new processes
Assessment and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation processes (both at schools and in the central office) are too "one size fits all" • Too much testing in schools and tests that are not always seen as developmentally appropriate for students or valuable for teachers
Performance Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements to receive the incentive as too narrowly structured • Some feel as if the incentive is calculated unfairly (individual value-added data vs. school-wide data) and not transparently

What's Next

(what should we focus on for the future)

Themes	What We Heard
Invest in Our People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide our teachers and staff with the tools, resources, time, and support necessary to do their important job effectively• Increase compensation for teachers and other staff to a professionally competitive level• Offer timely, relevant, and differentiated professional development• Recognize and value our teachers and school leaders as professionals and provide them the autonomy to exercise professional judgment• Engage our teachers, leaders and staff more fully in providing input into the decision-making process; make sure we're listening• Explore ways to enhance assessment, evaluation, and strategic compensation to maximize alignment with student success• Enhance recruitment and selection function to identify and hire the next generation of great teachers and school leaders

What's Next

(what should we focus on for the future)

Themes	What We Heard
Invest in Our Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider significant enhancements to existing facilities and/or new school facilities (Adrian-Burnett ES, Gibbs MS, Hardin Valley MS, etc.) • Ensure appropriate instructional tools and materials are available in the classroom • Maintain a safe, healthy, inviting learning environment for all children
Invest in Personalized Learning for Our Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate instruction, supports, and academic structures to meet the individual needs of each of our students • Utilize technology to support effective, innovative, and differentiated instruction • Continue to increase and enhance multiple pathways to student success

What's Next

(what should we focus on for the future)

Themes	What We Heard
Maintain Universally High Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to embrace high expectations and standards for our students, teachers, staff and leadership • Facilitate academic rigor at all levels • Accelerate our academic progress and ensure that academic success is universal (increase achievement and close gaps)
Engage Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more opportunities for parent, teacher, principal, student and community stakeholder voice and input in strategic direction and decisions • Focus additional energy and effort on the important area of Family and Community Engagement • Develop a Community Relations effort that will enhance the stakeholder experience, embrace proactive strategic two-way communication, and encourage employee ambassadorship

What's Next

(what should we focus on for the future)

Themes	What We Heard
Enhance Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on successes identified in “What’s Good” perspectives about communication • Increase capacity to engage in proactive strategic communication • Provide timely, relevant, concise information tailored to various constituencies
Explore Innovative Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the feasibility of a “balanced calendar” school year • Enhance options and strategies to address significant elementary school-level behavioral issues • Seek to expand the School Technology Challenge comprehensive instructional technology initiative to more, potentially all, schools