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Jan. 6, 2012

NEWS RELEASE

Strategic planning kicks off with community input

The first week of school in 2012 for students meant a return to classes and for secondary students, preparation for final exams. However, for the staff and community of Comal ISD, the first week of January carried a much stronger impact: it's the beginning of strategic planning.

And as Dr. Marc Walker, superintendent of Comal ISD, explained during the recent community awareness summits, strategic planning is nothing new for school districts. But this effort has a different flavor for Comal ISD.

“When I first arrived here seven years ago, we began strategic planning to address some urgent needs of the district, namely finance and facilities,” he said. “That planning process was very important and we’re still working under that five-year plan.”

However, the strategic planning from 2007 was much more school-board driven, he said.

“This is different because it’s community driven,” he said. “We are looking for input from you, the community. We want to hear what your aspirations are for our students.”

And so, with the aid of consultants from Cambridge Strategics, the process was introduced to campus principals and administrators and school board, followed by two community awareness summits. Three more summits are scheduled for Jan. 16 and 17.

“Strategic planning is the means by which human organizations continuously create ourselves to serve extraordinary purposes,” Lindsey Gunn, a consultant with Cambridge Strategics, explained. “It is the opportunity to create yourselves in a fresh way. And to do that requires change.”

He explained that one of the primary differences between strategic planning and long-range planning is that strategic planning is “not trying to perpetuate the system. It’s creating a new system for a noble purpose. And that’s our students. It’s not the organization that’s noble, it’s the purpose that’s noble.”

And it is imperative that school districts, as organizations, continuously create themselves, particularly in the context of such a rapidly changing education environment, brought on by the revolution of technology and digital learning.

“A rigid organization in a changing context is doomed to obsolescence,” he said. “Strategic planning helps an organization remain relevant and meaningful in this changing context.”

Approximately 40 parents, teachers, staff and members of the community attended the first community awareness summit. Another 20-plus attended the second summit that

evening. As a group they explored their beliefs and opinions surrounding the following questions:

- What are your hopes for students at the end of this school year?
- If your children have already graduated, what do you wish they would have learned that maybe they didn't?
- How has the context of learning changed?
- In what ways does learning need to be transformed for the future, and why?
- What is the role of the teacher in the new learning environment?

Joanne Huebner, facilitator of the summits, listed trends in education that could have a major impact on students and teachers.

“Collaboration among students and teachers is one of the trends,” she said. “Teachers no longer have to be the keeper of all of the knowledge in their classrooms.”

Today’s and tomorrow’s employers will be placing additional emphasis on developing critical thinking and analysis capabilities skills, she said.

Input gathered at these community awareness summits will be shared with the district’s Strategic Planning Team in early February. The 25-member team will mirror the community, comprising parents, community members, teachers, students and staff. The team will meet on Feb. 6, 7 and 8 to form the district’s mission, beliefs, parameters, objectives and strategies, which become the goals of the strategic plan.

Each strategy, which range in number from four to seven, will be developed by separate action teams—anywhere from 10 to 20 members of staff and community

participate on an action team—that meet regularly over a period of about four months and develop action plans to address the strategy.

In all, more than 150 members of the Comal ISD staff and community have an opportunity to participate in the Strategic Planning Team or one of the action teams.

The school board will be presented with a draft strategic plan in the early fall of 2012.

The next three summits will be:

- Jan. 16, 6 p.m., Mountain Valley Middle School
- Jan. 17, 1 p.m., Spring Branch Middle School
- Jan. 17, 6 p.m., Smithson Valley Middle School

If you are interested in participating in Comal ISD strategic planning, please attend at least one of the summits. You will have opportunities there to express your willingness to participate further.

A link for strategic planning has been placed on the homepage of the district website, www.comalisd.org. If you have any questions, please contact Julie Jerome, 830.221.2621, julie.jerome@comalisd.org.

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