

EMID Community Input Session

on

Strategic Plan Options

9/14/11

Overview of Content Organization

Comments, questions and ideas put forward at the Community Session are grouped into four major areas and then further organized by similar topics within each area. Major areas are:

1. EMID's Unique Learning Environment
2. Strategic Planning Process
3. Deciding Amongst Options
4. Options

1. EMID's Unique Learning Environment

- Parents want you to know how important the schools are to them and their children/youth. EMID schools treat kids equal and as individuals.
- These are unique students served by unique services
 - o Not all the kids 'here' fit into the urban district models. They are getting here (Crosswinds/Harambee) the 'fit to the nitch' they needed.
 - o Integration and support leads to success for all students (even those who don't succeed in traditional settings).
 - o Remember these are kids not just #s and \$s.
 - o Not just a school – a way of life!
 - o The relationships that students and teachers have in Crosswinds and Harambee are able to close the gaps where in regular 'public schools' the sizes of classes doesn't allow for that.
- Staff (strong leaders/talented/innovative) trained in multicultural
- We (parents) value integration for our kids! More than numbers
- EMID Parents are more concerned with community, values, relationships, and respect than academics
- Chose to send children to Harambee because of the philosophy
 - o Difference between desegregation and integration

- Community values and relationships
- Celebrate differences
- Community, values, relationships, and respect of environment more important to parents than academics
- Dr. Cassellius vision was inspiring for staff
- Advantages to these schools:
 - it is so much more than integration
 - Small class sizes
 - IB Program
 - Those that once felt like outcasts are 'blooming'
 - Beyond what can be seen on paper these kids are flourishing in achievement, in actions, in attitude, in personal inner strength
 - We like the open space
 - Crosswinds/Harambee continue to be models of integration.
 - Year round good for education (although measured achievement gap is influenced by attendance year).
- EMID Strengths and why to keep open:
 - Students and teacher retention rate
 - Student attendance rate is high
 - Address all learners at their learning level
 - District of choice for parents and students
 - Strong focus on academics and relationships
 - Student centered philosophy
 - Everyone is accepted for who they are
 - Freedom to discover who they are
 - Kids with special need served IN classrooms, not pulled out
 - Doing some innovative things
 - Understanding that integration is beyond ethnicity
 - Multicultural education so much broader than just integration; family, cultural, beyond race
 - Integration is more than desegregation. Staff works at many levels/training. Not taught from perspective of dominant culture. Students get to know kids from different race/ethnicity in safe environment. Celebrating difference NOT tolerance.
 - Teach students to be independent life-long learners
 - Strong passionate parents and teachers
 - Parents that sought something different
 - Collaborate with teachers from member districts i.e. IB, TERI, Responsive Classroom, and developmental designs
 - Developed reading intervention program between Harambee/Crosswinds and member districts
 - Informal collaborations
 - Able to have conversations about race gender, gender preference, religion that are organic
 - Integration is the air we breathe not something we try

- Need to publicize strengths – if areas need improvement, make stronger. Fight for it, don't give up!
- Parents/staff chose these schools on purpose. Not an accident students are here
 - Parents, students, teachers have value as role models
 - Integration and community building – collaboration
 - Students have value, self-esteem, perspective and others
 - Our kids get the help and support they need at Harambee
 - That the standard school districts do not provide what all kids need
 - EMID looks at my children first and then how to make them succeed to meet expectations
 - Students come back 10 grade, thanks
 - Students come back, thanks for the community
 - Summer kindergarten camp in Harambee – 4 member districts
 - Kids kept accountable
 - High achievers kept high standards
 - Actions of respect v. just words
 - Not only cultural diversity but content diversity – educational style diversity
- A student's perspective; hi, I'm a student at Crosswinds and I've gone to Harambee since kindergarten and am currently in 8th grade at Crosswinds. I just want to give a non-political view on this all. These schools are great. Seriously. The music department, etc. . . . the teachers don't just teach facts, they teach life values and care. You don't generally see that in traditional schools. It would be a shame to shut the schools.
- Student perspective - We have many diverse students with many talents who are very smart. Sadly, because of the 'style' of some of our students, they aren't normally accepted at other schools. They don't feel safe.
- North St. Paul students kept coming...value experience. How many new district 622 students have joined?

2. Strategic Planning Process

- o General Strategic Planning
 - o What was impetus for consultant/strategic planning? Member districts reassess value of participation, NSP and Mahtomedi pulled out, legislative rethinking integration funding?
 - o Want to know if the strategic planning is mission driven v. monetary driven? Strategic planning should to be mission driven
 - o Is integration funding really the problem?
 - o Purpose for EMID integration? OEI?
 - o What is the community vision? Don't hear community vision coming from parents
 - o Who was the consulting firm? What did the board ask the firm to do?
 - o Who asked DMC what to do?
 - o What was the question that the board had in mind when they hired the DMC?
 - o Why did they choose the DMC?

- What were 3 options? 2 listed in presentation
- When will we see the answers to all the questions?
- Who do we talk to for help with strategic process, parents, etc?
- Parents can be a resource to EMID board members and collaborative districts board members to help info policy discussions and debates about integration (cultural competency) and the achievement gap (EMID is innovative)
- What's next and what is the process?

- Data Analysis
 - Would like to see research and analysis from strategic planning
 - Teacher, parent & superintendent
 - Survey online
 - Need more info on location
 - Was there a comparison between students pre-EMID attendance, grades, test scores and growth, v. current EMID performance?
 - Are we looking at progress of how students are achieving from before they came to EMID until after they have been here?
 - Please consider more than #s (scores, \$, etc).
 - Test scores are not the only measure of success
 - Crosswinds is challenging to kids!!
 - The integration/achievement marriage that has taken place in our schools – statewide has to GET A DIVORCE!!
 - District management council looked at achievement gap and finances
 - How measure cultural awareness/understanding, getting along?

- Parent and Student Input
 - Can our voice truly make a difference?
 - It is vital for you to consider the voices of the children/students who are affected by this decision
 - We believe students' and families' voices should be considered when discussing the future of EMID (students & families from the two schools and from the other member districts)
 - Parent Meeting
 - Why is the parent input meeting so late in the process?
 - Why did EMID board wait for parents SOS to push before they had this input session? Why did they not ask up front?
 - Student Input
 - Listen to students
 - Will you be surveying the students?
 - When will you get STUDENT input?
 - What process are you going to use in order to get students input?
 - Is there input from students about how they feel about themselves, the school, teachers etc? Who past or current students?
 - Does a student's opinion matter, why?

- Have student/board member meetings
 - No students included in survey
 - Why did they not involve students in decision making?
 - Why can't students give input?
 - Can students take the survey?
 - Will board have a meeting with children if decide to close? They are the ones who are most impacted.
- Need more family/staff/board contact
- Need parent's value integration.
- If board members are at tables to listen, when answer questions? It was indicated that the board will post a FAQ section online.
- Only opportunity for input is tonight? If parents not here tonight, how give input? Noted that there will be other opportunities for input and a parent can always email board members.
- Have a Q & A session
- Online sounding board
- Interpreter Services
 - Will EMID provide interpreters for these forums – so parents who don't speak English can feel welcome and participate?
 - What has been outreach to families who speak languages other than English?
 - How will we get real input from all families (e.g. Meetings in their preferred language)
- Member district parents
 - We need to share this with member districts
 - Provide families of member districts with survey about how they want integration revenue used
 - Are parents of non-members districts represented on EMID Board? If not, then how are they being included?
 - How can we work with parents from home school?
- Follow up with post Crosswinds students (attitudes toward race, test scores, self-confidence/esteem)
- Survey
 - How come no one hardly knew about the survey?
 - Survey families for additional input
 - Details on how survey was done? It was noted that they survey was done using a random selection methodology. 115 were completed.
 - How did people know there was a survey?
 - Crosswind staff concern: Concern so much unknown about survey. When filled out unaware it was a large chunk of strategic planning process. It was not clear what point of view should have used.
 - Statistically insignificant survey?
 - Crosswinds staff concern: Making decisions what parents & staff want yet hard seeing that you understand staff and parent needs based on minimal numbers

- of surveys. Noted that the process included more than just a survey, there were interviews, etc. Also collecting other input, such as from this meeting
 - Parent commented: Don't jump to conclusion that survey results are negative even if you were not personally involved
 - Can we do another survey?
 - Provide additional/same survey again
 - Could there be more surveys sent to parents, students?
 - Families want to provide more input for the purpose of strategic planning
- Communication Needs to be Improved
 - More honest communication!!
 - Morale/timing concern– why on 1st day told schools what is going to happen? Heard on 1st day of school heard on MPR on my way to school. On last day of school told we had 2 years left.

3. Deciding Amongst Options

- How Will Make Decision Between Options?
 - What are major deciding factors when deciding the 3 possible plans?
 - What would lead you down each of the 3 roads?
 - How balance value for all kids across districts v. kids @ EMID schools?
 - As a parent, I am extremely uncomfortable with session because parents are not thinking about the 120,000 students, only EMID students.
 - What, as parents, can we do?
 - What can we do as a school/community to change the mind of stakeholders?
- Motivation of Member Districts and Value From EMID
 - If member districts pull out how do we keep the schools open?
 - If the member districts goal is integration – what has changed to make them reconsider?
 - Concerns as we listened to presentation: comes down to \$, want \$ back for member districts, schools being punished for districts not feeling included, OEI giving value
 - What do the districts expect and want from EMID? If they are expecting more why are they not participating more?
 - How can we spread the value of integration to our member districts so they value membership in EMID collaborative?
 - What would you need from EMID to make it beneficial? How do you know what you need?
 - What are member school districts looking for? What cost/benefits?
 - How can we build cultural competency among all students in the EMID districts and create a win-win
 - Could we help home districts include the EMID activities and schools as part of their budget?

- What benefits the member districts are expecting and how does this compare to what parents are seeing as benefits?
- Why is the information/collaboration not working in other schools?
- Using students as ambassadors for the schools and EMID mission
- Student perspective - doesn't seem to be any reason to close other than, you want our money. We got our half of the funds and they got theirs. They spent theirs and we saved ours, now they want it.
- How EMID serves all the families in member district, how to sell it to home districts?
- Study 622, why they left, what impact of getting \$ back and why current 622 students stay
- Why did Forest Lake and Spring Lake Park come to EMID?
- You have invested in EMID, take advantage of us
- How can the schools prove their value?
- Our purposes are not misaligned and not opposing. You will be at a loss without EMID
- Might be a place for all our districts to embrace

- Board Member Responsibilities and Motivation
 - Does the board really want EMID schools to stay open?
 - Are they open to options other than closing schools?
 - How often do board members come to schools?
 - Does the board represent EMID or home district?
 - Board commitment?
 - Isn't your primary duty to your home district? What is your obligation to do what is BEST for EMID? What is your fiduciary responsibility and LEGAL obligation?
 - Is there a conflict of interest by having the school board members from the connecting districts be making the decisions?
 - Conflict of interest – board should be community members not from members districts. Lack of community leaders. NOT AN ELECTED BOARD
 - Can EMID have its own board member?
 - There is distrust of boards stated focus on students
 - What are board members educational backgrounds or are they business focused?
 - Who is the voice for the people here in EMID? Who is our advocate?
 - Fundamental problem with process is that our interim superintendent is not representing us!

- Why the Rush?
 - If there is funding for 2 years, why would we close in 1 year?
 - Timing about board decision process? 2/15/12 report back on 'repurposing' funding to legislature. It was noted that the decision to move forward on strategic planning was based on our district's needs.
 - Can't we wait for the state?
 - More time! We need to explore more options
 - Keep schools open minimum of 2 years while task force finds a way to keep these schools open long-term

- \$\$\$ available for 2-3 years why close in one year?
 - General fund could sustain longer than 1 year
 - Put 'brakes' on until legislature makes a decision
 - There is no rush. There is money and time to find the answer and DO THE RIGHT THING!!
 - Decide carefully – don't rush the decision
 - Why decide by November 16?
 - We like this school! What's the rush?
 - Why be closed in a year? If funding for two years
 - Legal authority to close schools?
 - Why the rush?
 - Stop making impulsive decisions. Give our families TIME!! Tell us beforehand about the plans.
 - Why exactly are 'we' rushing making the decisions?
 - Why is EMID moving on a quicker timeline than legislature in re: to integration funding – why the rush to close?
 - In light of integration \$ recommendation in February and large fund balance, why decide now? Timing urgency to decide before task force? Feel rushing decision.
 - Need to take time to let process at state level occur. It will effect what our option are.
 - Wait until February decision is made before making decisions about future
 - Say complicated but yet making decision in 2 mo.
- State Level Decisions/Impact
- How much does the state legislation decision (delay ed. Funds) impact school boards & Superintendents decisions related to EMID?
 - Where does the state and the commissioner of education stand on the issues about EMID?
 - Impact of legislative decision
 - Can we share more information about integration policy decision
 - Is integration funding really the problem?
 - If the recommendation is to close and integration funding is approved will we still close?
 - After the parent meeting in May, where the legislators ever invited to come to the schools – walk through. Have board members done school walk through?
 - Legislature campaign to keep funding
 - If legislature does not think important parents still think important
 - How can schools continue to keep integration in the forefront?

4. Options

- If EMID Continues to Operate Schools...
 - What does 'strengthen schools' mean?
 - How can we strengthen our schools? 'lab' school/showcase

- Achievement gap concern is newer than integration, slow to respond due to lack of leadership.
 - Strengthening the school, in terms of closing the achievement gap, has already started – MCAII's (88% passed). That surpassed the state %s!!. You can't argue with data.
 - Programs are on the brink of taking off---teachers exchange, online programs, teacher/students relationship lab
 - If decide to stay open will the district continue to focus on K-10 or will they want to change focus to K-8 or possibly add 11-12?
 - Where does 5K go if EMID closes? Will it go back to integration program?
 - What will EMID do if these schools don't close?
 - Is there discussion about a 6 class schedule v. 7 or other options being discussed?
 - Have us be a lab for SEED that goes out
 - Expanding the program (EMID schools) to online learning, especially considering integration funding was to focus on innovation
 - How can we use the skills and successes from the EMID schools and curriculum and share with our home districts – it's a missed opportunity to not share the lessons learned.
 - Invest in the small labs (of EMID) and share with our home districts schools.
 - How can we (parents & community members) share the lessons learned around integration strategies (again lab concepts)?
 - Can we bring teachers from collaborative district into our schools to learn from their peers (or create a teacher swap/admin swap)?
 - Student exchange with member districts?
 - Would like to know how the great ideas/curriculum/skills from EMID would be used in their home districts for similar purposes
 - We could also consider bringing our EMID environment and integration program to the home districts, e.g. academic triathlon.
- If EMID Transfers Operation of Schools...
 - How can we keep the schools open? We need suggestions?
 - Would like the help from EMID Board and EMID home districts to transition the fiscal operations of our schools if the board decides to dissolve the joint powers agreement
 - If some other governing body takes over – what happens with transportation?
 - Perpich school--- how serious are they considering taking over? They have a similar mission so don't think they would change Harambee and Crosswinds.
 - Perpich take over governance (Sue Machert)?
 - Are Perpich schools interested?
 - Explore the Perpich idea with them assuming us under their umbrella
 - Charter v. state agency
 - Charter school? Options?
 - What would it take to follow other options? Perpich is one, other charter, business, etc?
 - What will happen to our buildings?

- How do we maintain the integrity of the school? the class sizes? the program?
 - Our member districts don't benefit by sending kids to Crosswinds or Harambee but if an umbrella with Perpich did occur it would eliminate the 'conflict of interest'. Also, if this new governance did occur we could look at the issues with 11-12 grades at Crosswinds again?
 - Woodbury School District take over middle school and St. Paul or Roseville take over Harambee?
 - Alternatives? Perpich center, TERI project (U of M), charter
 - Where could we go with U of M project? Teri at co-teaching and teach project
 - Explore other charter options or funding plans
 - Can we stay open? We don't want to leave
 - Would lunch price go up with no integration money?
 - If only had per pupil funding, would schools look different? Need to define what this would include
 - Funding questions; 51% of integration \$ supplement state funding/student so could operate without integration \$?
 - What percentage of the budget is spent on staff-teachers, janitorial, etc?
- If EMID Schools Close...
- Closing should not be an option!
 - 11 million from per pupil and taxes (federal) with only \$3 million from integration, why is closing schools in the decision process?
 - Do we have enough money to survive this year and next?
 - What will happen then . . . are kids going to be forced back into standard districts or other options given?
 - Need transitional year (after annual allocated funds discontinued) using reserve \$\$
 - Ask for our reserve to go to operating schools for transition
 - What happens to the fund balance if we close this year?
 - What happens to the fund balance?
 - How many years would current fund balance allow schools to continue? It was noted that if just schools, no equity and integration services to member districts, 2-3 years
 - Does the board assume students will go to home school districts?
 - Where EMID families would go if schools closed? 'cuz it's about \$ for home districts
 - Can we ask parents what they will do with students if EMID closes?
 - The assumption that kids would go back to their home district seems to be false
 - As a parent – came from Woodbury – good opportunity doesn't exist for my child in home district
 - My kids will not go back to home district!
 - Where do kids go that don't fit in to regular schools?
 - What do you expect students to do when these schools close if they don't want to return to the schools in their areas?
 - What are the member districts going to do with integration funding?
 - If home districts take \$ back for integration, what will they do with it?
 - How will your district spend the \$ that goes back to your district?

- What plans do the joint powers board have for the remaining funds at EMID if the decision is made to close the schools?
- How will integration revenues that are 'removed' be reflected in the programming of member districts?
- Who benefits from EMID closing?
- If you're going to close the two schools, what are you planning to do with the EMID OEI?
- If the two schools are closing, how will this affect EMID in general (its other components, family groups; OEI, its image, etc)?
- How will we know that our member districts will address **our** concerns about integration?
- What will my local district do to meet my student's needs?
- Where does 5K go if EMID closes? Will it go back to integration program?
- Parents legal options?
- If they decide to close too quickly, parents will consider legal options.
- What happens to the teachers if these schools close?

- Other Options
 - How will other options be defined? When?
 - If integration legislation transformed to 'innovation funding' want EMID board to apply for funding for transportation – innovation @ arts and year around. Needed for eco diversity.
 - Can EMID expand into its own district?
 - Apply for Innovation funding (BUS \$\$)
 - What do we have to do to be self-reliant? How can we replace integration \$\$? (1.9M)
 - other oversight bodies (non-profit, university, companies, etc)
 - our own entity
 - could we change budget to use just per pupil \$
 - How does WMEP do it?
 - What are other creative ways to solve the financial problems (raise EMID funds)?
 - Buildings? Bonding?
 - How can we resolve the financial issues?
 - Can we grow our way out of this problem and expand our enrollment?
 - Find funding from other districts
 - Have fundraisers
 - Why not work on getting and conserving funds rather than just shutting down the schools? Cut energy usage.
 - Why doesn't St. Paul pay integration \$\$ per student?
 - Can we get St. Paul to pay integration \$ per student?
 - Could we get integration \$ from St. Paul?
 - Can EMID block alternative sources of funding or governance?

- Miscellaneous Comment
 - Why is Crosswinds enrollment low this year? Why not advertise more?