

## **Magnet Review Focus Group with Central Services (21 participants)**

March 28 & April 23

### **1. What do you think the roles (objectives) of magnets should be in the district?**

- Questions raised about definition and measurement of poverty and diversity
- Maximizing use of school facilities still apply as well as expanding opportunities. Don't know how poverty will work with new choice plan
- Maybe use expanding opportunities to enhance student achievement
- Understand that purpose of magnets is to reduce concentrations of poverty. The other two the schools can manage
- Concerns about differential effects of magnets on base and magnet.
- Importance of magnet pathways based on theme continuation – maybe add as a sub-bullet to the last objective – to provide continuity
- Role of magnet should be to try new things, be innovative then, if they work move them to non-magnets
- What about role to diversity schools, reduce poverty, bring kids together?
- Yes, all think yes and that needs to continue
- If choice creates racially identified schools, then we will commit to make it a magnet and prevent racially identifiable schools.
- Even if racial identification is Caucasian – YES
- All are important, and should be considered when placing a magnet
- Are they really, currently, reducing high concentrations of poverty? Is that a reality? Will it be true in the future? Not sure that is a principle that will happen in the new choice assignment. Student assignment created high poverty base assignment. I like support diverse populations but not sure you can say it will reduce the high concentration of poverty.
- Putting more kids in school changes % but does it make sure that there is actual interaction between students? Will we develop a way to measure how much students interact or how much it changes the instruction. Not sure that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> are limited to magnets. If we are trying to make it perfect – not sure that 3<sup>rd</sup> is limited to magnets because of what we are doing in other schools.
- Question is are the targets (%Magnet and %Proximity) right?
- In the past, there were some controls. Might not hold true in new assignment plan. Looked at number of schools that are under-chosen. Will new people be funneled to those schools and what will they look like? Magnets have to dovetail with new choice plan. Based on term magnet –what are you doing to attract people?
- Sounds like magnets are the only way to deal with those issues and they are not

- Might make the same argument... all schools should be focused on student achievement counters “creating all schools to be attractive”
- So...what should a magnet be?
- Question is how do you differentiate from other stuff the district is doing?
- When magnets were created, other schools could not offer magnet stuff
- Magnets sometimes were incubator then, as programs spread, magnets had to elevate themselves
- Think it was the intent but did not expand opportunities to other schools. Magnets were protected. Non-magnets had to be careful not to infringe on magnet programs
- Is part of the reason why we have issues is because of limiting programs and families believing they were disadvantaged because they were not in the magnet? When people believe that the icing should be the cupcake.
- I see value in magnets but now that the district is encouraging all schools to be unique the only thing that is important is the socio-economic
- Did you evaluate the school programs before you created questions? Example – playing an instrument in elementary is limited to magnet. We have forgotten the power of the schedule in elementary to provide some opportunities for students.
- We found that only 40% of students in our school took part in magnet because of location. So we tried to create an academy but were told it could not impact Enloe. Programming is important but it has to be about student achievement. Not necessarily should magnet be the focus but the focus needs to be about whether students are achieving.
- Magnets must have something unique to attract students. Need to think about what makes magnets unique opportunity
- See contradiction between a magnet school and nonmagnet school in the same proximity area. I’m trying to help the nonmagnet be creative to compete with the magnet. This is just as valid as helping magnets become more unique.
- Some magnets were created to keep base
- Should identify schools for magnet based on student achievement
- Deciding what theme should be informed by student achievement needs
- Student achievement should be a driver for location and be held accountable
- Expanding STEM/GLOBAL. What impact does that have on magnet applications?

**2. Do you think that student achievement should be explicitly stated in the magnet objectives?**

- All say YES

- Should be stated b/c no matter what theme is, the importance is are students achieving
- Cannot lose sight of student achievement. We all believe that is important. With high concentrations of poverty and the correlation with student achievement. Can lessen poverty while increasing achievement
- There are two levels of achievement – one at school level and one at student level. At magnets – made it healthier by bringing in other students but that does not help individual students. Two dimensions that need to be addressed
- Should not just be about performance but about growth
- If school is not being successful with all students, maybe we need to see if magnet is working there. Magnet should make sure all students are being successful. If we see negative trend, need to decide if magnet needs to be there. Either it's not working or goal of what we are trying to achieve is something other than student achievement
- You can see same trend at another school that is not a magnet, it might not be the magnet. It could be something else so don't want it to be all grouped on magnet program. There are other things that need to be reviewed. Magnet is not placed solely to help student achievement but whole of student achievement cannot be about magnet
- Recognized negative trend has other impacts but need to acknowledge that magnets could be negatively impacting achievement
- On one hand everything should be focused on student achievement so should magnets be any different? Magnets were never explicitly intended for student achievement. Should it start with district goals and how to support that?
- They should have enhanced standards
- Enhanced...as in held to a higher standard. In considering that, we must think what is attractive and then ...is there a need to support student achievement and will the magnets accomplish that.
- Are the magnets also helping the school reduce concentrations of poverty
- Developed leadership academies to provide more opportunities for those disenfranchised students to raise student achievement
- There is a conflict right now – magnets have been offering something so unique that people will travel to a school to get this program. If this is not the purpose anymore then we need to be explicit. They used to draw people to areas with low enrollment. Had to be unique to pull students. Something unique that is appealing and pulls a certain group. Student Achievement should be part of goal and it should be that it continues to increase.
- Magnet system has not kept up with changing real estate. Some magnets could now be sustained with new growth in areas

- Not as clear as in the past when magnets were unique, everybody else was normal. Now we are telling principals they have to compete and be creative.
- Principals have been replicating magnet programs because no one was watching and telling them no. One thing that has come out...too many magnet themes. Should be just GT, AG, IB and creative arts to narrow the focus and take them out of competition with so many themes.

### **3. Is there a need to create more magnet schools?**

- Do global and stem have their own category or are they magnets? If innovative schools or curriculum enhancements and magnets are innovative, then maybe they need to be combined? To parents it is confusing.
- Not sure we need more but need more innovation in the ones we have.
- Need to analyze the number we have and do we need something different? And are they in the right places?
- In times of limited resources not the time to think of expanding
- Magnets could offer expensive programs in certain areas instead of trying to offer everything at every school
- If we could afford it, I would agree to have more magnet themes and foci. Worked in district where all High Schools had a magnet theme so kids went all over depending on interests.
- If we could go back to role of magnets and tighten that, that would determine if we could expand. There are some schools that could be magnetized but are there enough AG kids to feed three middle schools
- Hard to see additional magnet schools when we are in a tight budget. If we do add, we need to be strategic about where in the district and what programs. Sometimes we look at magnet as a quick band-aid - it should be strategic according to whatever objectives.
- Location of school is important
- Wake County is large; in the past we used magnets to make downtown schools healthy. Now we have needs on the rim and in the southern part of the county. If we put a magnet at EWHS... will they go? Looked at other places to help but then that muddied the water. Magnets inside the beltline and serving sections of the county have worked. Geographically how can you bring people in? Look at Carroll – in prime area. But look at Weatherstone which is severely under-enrolled and not in the easiest area to get to.
- When we throw in location, when you have 2 or 3 viable options it becomes political. Will really be a political issue. When you have principles to measure against it makes it easier to measure. The questions are not as important as guiding principles.
- Looking at do existing magnets meet existing principles

- But now looking at it with new lenses. Need a review every year or two
- All principals were told this year to beef up their websites and attract people. So if you are telling principals to attract people – that means we have now created a new assignment plan that is a new playing field
- Until we make some decisions about what is innovative, what's magnet, we will keep ignoring the elephant in the room. Telling schools to market but there is no plan. We need to go back to principles about what magnets should accomplish and what will board support. Does the board stand for diversity in race/FRL...until we do that...
- The board will have conversation about policy 6200 that will be coming. They say they will be looking at targets. That discussion needs to precede what we do with magnets
- Our priorities have shifted and we cannot align until we know board's focus
- Report from Brookings Institute will throw fuel on that fire
- There is another report that says exactly the opposite. Report shows economically disadvantaged do better in schools with high needs. We are having D&A look at that.
- Before magnets were used to “create healthy schools throughout the county” not just downtown
- Was there a report that magnets did worse with base students?
- At what point did the district violate its own policy?

#### **4. What factors should be considered in identifying new magnet schools?**

- location of school, community around it
- Maybe some need to be on the rim.
- If we take a school with High Poverty students and put in Low Poverty students we need enhanced support for classroom teachers
- If we really look at proper implementation of common core do we really need magnets because Common Core addresses all of those areas? Or how do magnets support common core?

#### **5. What factors should be considered in removing themes/program from magnet schools?**

- If there is a creation of more innovative schools – Leadership Academies, STEM/Global – is that a threat to magnets? Are we not as committed to revamping magnets because we are so focused on new types of schools? Are we losing momentum with magnets?
- So why didn't we make them magnets or increase the program at magnets? Why wasn't that done along side magnets? We have now created a separate process. We could have done same thing in magnets. We have some decisions to make as a district. Are we

committed to magnets as a district? Even to parents, the more innovative schools we create the less parents look at magnets.

- If we feel that the program is hindering student success.
- Location should be factor if is not attractive
- Number of applicants
- Capacity of school – if it limits parents who live in the neighborhood from getting in. Not unreasonable to assume that neighborhood has returned because of magnet. This happens when you create magnets to keep base. When it works then you take magnet away.
- But then will parents want to stay once the magnet is gone?
- Originally to attract a healthy population. But now, if base comes back, does it matter what the base looks like.
- Used to be that downtown was poor and black. When magnet started you had Halifax court. On other end you had Walnut Terrace. But now those complexes are gone. That is where magnets were to bring suburban kids to downtown and bused those kids out to the suburbs.
- Places like Bugg and Carnage are still in low income areas. Although some neighborhoods have changed.
- In the past, the district closed some schools couple of years prior to magnet schools.
- Magnets began so we would not close any more schools
- There is timing issue - need to apply for grant next spring. Also need consistency from board. Wish we could get stuff from board before the magnet review
- Need to agree on strategic plan to get all other things in line.
- Some magnets have less technology than non-magnets so... are the themes really doing something? Over the years some magnets become less and less in programming?

**6. Historically, WCPSS has spent approximately 1% of its annual budget on magnet programs. Do you think there is a balance between this cost and the benefit to the system?**

- Have to say what is our commitment to innovation budget? Have to look at whole. Must also look at theme. The amount may need to go up some.
- Part is setting up training that is sustainable
- Magnets are not using a huge pot of gold even though there is a perception. Magnet grants have helped magnets survive. Must align with that grant to get money and they are about reducing minority group isolation.
- Grant leads people to think there is a lot of money. But it is only for 3-4 schools for 3 years.
- Part of innovative is trying to pull in private dollars.

**7. Do the three groups of magnets (Tier 1, II and III) still align with the magnet objectives, and if not, what adjustments need to be made?**

- Current structure makes sense
- Because they are located in different areas, grouping them makes sense
- What have principals said – some very concerned with going to too many proximity students, some are happy because it is more than they currently have.
- Would be important to get feedback from all principals. Could do it with division.

**8. Other comments**

- If you have tight alignment, do magnets belong under office of transformation to ensure that trains/tracks align? Or does innovation belong under school performance. But both belong together
- What is our process to learn from private/charter and then implement them in our schools?