

## **Magnet Review Focus Group with School Based Personnel (89 participants)**

March 15, April 13 & 19, May 1, 4 & 15

### **1) Do current magnet program objectives align with system goals?**

- Inherent conflict in System student assignment goals and magnet objectives. How can we commit to proximity to home and also, for some schools decrease poverty?
- Magnet Objective about utilization of schools seems archaic when we are fighting to find all the seats we can
- There is no specific magnet objective about student achievement like there is in system goals
- Magnets are in alignment with the student assignment goal to provide parents with clear choices in calendar and programs
- Not about system. Now about community.

### **2) What do you think the role of magnets should be in the district?**

- Magnets were created to prevent high concentrations of poverty and now diversity is out of student assignment process. No system goal to reduce racial isolation and high concentrations of poverty anymore. Impact on the greater Raleigh community could be huge – separating children and creating segregation in schools is a return to the past. Part of the educational process is to learn about other people. Magnet schools are an instrument to achieve system-wide equity.
- Should align with goals of MSAP grant
- Coordinators believe that all three principles should remain. The first point is the most important principle which drives the others.
- Need to differentiate magnet schools from other others. Public needs to know what they will get in a magnet school versus what they will get at the other schools (non-magnet schools).
- There is a concern about the continuation of themes K-12 which leads to the questions as to which is the most important principle to emphasize.
- Principle one and two must be key and put to the forefront in order to maintain diversity. If this is lost, we lose something vital to the magnet schools. Magnet families realize the sacrifices of enrolling students in a magnet program (time, busing, etc.)
- Should expand opportunities and magnet courses should not be allowed in other schools to keep magnets attractive. Non-magnet STEM and Global Network Schools have made it harder to “expand educational opportunities.” It makes it harder to sell magnets.
- Promote diversity, be a source of innovation and serve as a vehicle for social justice and innovation. Magnets need to be relevant and viable with a new and fresh approach.
- To serve as an instrument for the district to maintain a system-wide healthy schools formula
- I support the current objectives
- Fill under enrolled schools
- Support the current magnet objectives
- Provide a healthy balance at all schools – a healthy population of students at magnet and non-magnet

- With the expansion of the global and STEM schools – the public will be highly confused about what is a magnet
- Providing expanded educational opportunities is especially important in Eastern Wake. It's important to the families in Eastern Wake to have these opportunities available and this objective is more important than maximizing school facilities.
- Ongoing evaluations as to which schools need to be magnet schools and some magnets now have a wealthier population and may not meet the reduction of high concentrations of poverty objective.
- Supporting diverse populations is an important objective.
- Tinkering with the % of magnet seats at downtown magnet schools may prevent magnet schools from meeting the first objective – reducing high concentrations of poverty
- What does “Diverse” mean? – define this.
- At many magnet schools, even the magnet students are F&R. We make assumptions that magnet applicants reduce high concentrations of poverty when it can actually raise it depending on the applicant pool and the selection process criteria.
- Reduce High Concentrations of Poverty/Maximize use of School Facilities/Provide Expanded Educational Opportunities. Agree with all of these
- Provide students (and families) with a variety of learning choices that would be different from a traditional school or calendar
- Magnets need to position themselves to look at 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
- How does Wake County define their magnets? I am a magnet principal and I can't answer that anymore. Historically we were clear about what we are and what we do. But now what is the point of having magnets?
- Need to protect unique curriculum because magnets have stronger curriculum
- I think magnet schools have the role of teaching students what they want to specialize in their adult lives and helping them discover their career paths
- Diverse schools
- Support the different arts, leadership
- Students should be able to excel in the beginning so expectations should be laid out
- To maintain quality education for all students.
- Specialized programs at some schools allow for higher quality programs in those areas and should continue to be in places to help students in those areas have a chance for success and integrated socio-economically for better education
- Student achievement is important but currently poorly measured
- The roles of magnets should be to provide an equal education for all students and to encourage success to everyone
- Magnet schools bring together a plethora of students that all contribute to the diversity and success of the school
- Magnet programs should include a wide variety of electives so that students can enrich themselves with a diverse schedule to learn what interests them

**3) Is it important to include student achievement explicitly in the magnet objectives? If so, is there any one particular measure of student achievement that is important?**

- You can become high achieving by expanding opportunities. Magnets expand opportunities and traditional schools only focus on high achievement. Magnets give

world class learning. Learning in a diverse environment is just as valuable as a test score and is linked to student achievement.

- Since student achievement is already in system objectives, does it need to be a magnet objective? It is inherent that student achievement is there already. It is an overlay of system goals. All schools are about high student achievement
- Have a bullet that says magnets will follow all rules of mission, vision and core beliefs of system.
- Emphasis should be on growth/academic change and not proficiency
- In what way is student achievement defined? As growth?
- Students are not tested based on the magnet theme implementation: integrated arts for example. There is a disconnect between some magnet themes and the way the system assesses achievement. There is no assessment tool for a magnet theme. e.g. There is no assessment component for Leadership – student achievement should not be tied to theme.
- Achievement by district standards means testing. If we use achievement, then we need to broaden the definition of achievement to reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
- Student achievement should not be specified because it would tie our hands. Objectives not met would be reasons to minimize or eliminate magnets schools.
- All schools should be emphasizing student achievement. Magnet schools would be expected to perform miracles if student achievement is included.
- It is understood (county-wide) that every school can meet the academic needs of students and should not be explicitly just for magnets.
- There should be consistency, district wide regarding student academic achievement.
- Magnet schools should not be held any more accountable than other schools.
- Enrichment (various experiences - music, art, various electives, fieldtrips, etc.) account for student growth.
- Student achievement is dependent upon theme which determines your day (number of electives that can be offered etc,) and ultimately impacts student achievement
- Magnet programs are used to attract students to the schools, and often these students are higher level. Proficiency and growth, as measured by WCPSS, does not always measure the higher achieving students. Challenge for magnets is hitting goals for proficiency as opposed to growth. The higher achieving students are not reflected in the school data, they get lost and parents see low growth and achievement and pull students out of the magnet school.
- Achievement in relation to theme not test scores. The general public does not understand student achievement.
- Using achievement to measure magnet students' performance to maintain magnet status. (disagreement among group with this idea – creates a school within a school).
- Magnet theme, funds, staff provide enriching experiences (background experiences) to students who don't have this. How is that measured?
- In today's climate magnet themes are secondary to maximizing student growth
- Public perception expects magnets to achieve at a higher level. We must take that into account and should start with student achievement and find a way to disseminate that. Politically we must show that we are about student achievement
- If it will hurt us without it then put it in. If it is not there it will sink magnets. Yes it is fine to have achievement included.

- The ability of families to have innovative programs to choose from at varying levels is a strength of the magnet programs and the feeder patterns mean that most 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade seats are already filled with pre-assigned students so there is very little choice left except in Kindergarten.
- Theme essentials should be included in our measure of achievement and then show data that all students have access to those theme essentials (ex. Arts)
- I think that this objective indirectly speaks to student achievement: Reduce high concentrations of poverty and support diverse populations. You could possibly add to this by saying to reduce high concentrations of poverty and support diverse populations to provide equal educational opportunities and raise student achievement.
- To me this is no different than other schools in Wake County
- No. Student achievement is part of the school board objectives. Student achievement is also part of the student assignment committee policy.
- No. That should be a goal of all schools, not just magnet
- Yes.
- Magnet objectives should define achievement more broadly than district definition. I would love to see the system develop a 21<sup>st</sup> century measure of achievement and not just tests from the state. Student surveys? Satisfaction? Magnets are that extra piece that you cannot measure. How can something like Pieces of Gold be used to measure magnet schools?
- What has really mattered in the past was magnets being used to create healthy diverse schools and not necessarily that student achievement will increase. Very few schools nationally with high concentrations of poverty are successful.

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

- Some Level 2 and 3 magnets have high demand but no seats due to the lower percent magnet allowed at their schools in the new plan
- Being a group 3 magnet, I do not think we meet the magnet objectives. We only get money and resources and we should be about more. Group 2 and 3 magnets are not reducing high concentrations of poverty.
- What is a healthy school in Wake County anymore? I don't know what that is anymore. What is the definition and what are the goals?
- What happens if your school does not keep up with the magnet percentages for your group? The school could become unbalanced with a much higher F & R than currently at the school.
- What were the rules for configuring proximity especially group 1 magnets?
- All magnets are defined differently, we have muddled our own waters
- I am not familiar with the various tiers
- No
- Don't know

**5) Is there a need to create more magnet schools?**

- Not until we define our purpose. We need to differentiate magnet from non-magnet. We need to re-implement the ecosystem of the past.
- If you create more then you reduce the magnetic field.
- Invest in the magnet schools that already exist. If magnet applications are down – then why would we create more magnets? It will dilute what we have. Make our current magnets very enticing before we create more magnets. The ones that exist should be very appealing.
- Using the original magnet model (under-enrolled schools) then yes, there are schools that would fall into this category to become magnets.
- Not really
- I think we have a good amount of magnet schools. It is just a matter of getting funding for the schools we have.
- We need more magnet schools – evaluating where the populations are not balanced to bring balance to those schools.
- Some magnet programs though are more costly to implement than others – more funds should be available to keep the current magnet schools healthy than thinning the pot of \$ spread over more magnet schools.
- Better support the magnet schools we have now before adding more – (the whole group nods in agreement with this). There are teachers that haven't been to training at our current schools. The current magnet schools are being spread so thin.
- If we were taking care of our whole system – than only the schools that absolutely need additional resources and students would need a magnet status.
- There needs to be more magnet schools due to system growth – but we need to take care of all our system schools.
- Are all magnet schools full....goes back to principle 1 and the goals/purposes of creating magnets.
- One participant hesitates saying we need more magnet schools. By creating magnets all over the county, demagnetizes everybody – a few nod in agreement with this.
- Must be true to original objectives more than ever. We are watering down what we have by adding STEM and Global schools all over the county
- Magnet schools should be distinct. Eventually, there is going to be a lot of competition anyway.
- Name new magnet schools that strengthen the pathway. Importance of program pathway – some don't have a HS feed in their magnet pathway (Eastern Wake). Needs to provide families program continuity k-12.
- We should intensify the leadership, technology and arts programs
- There is a need for more magnets in areas outside the city where there are growing low economic populations (some concentrated Latino areas)
- Leadership magnets and arts magnets seem to be the most successful programs as they inspire creativity and training for the future world
- There should be more magnet schools in the county. If such schools were identified, they should be put in areas that wouldn't typically attract driven students.
- Programs that specialize in the arts or sports would motivate more students to attend magnets despite location.
- Maybe.

- No because the magnet schools should attract many people interested in the arts because many students are not interested in the arts

#### **6) What factors should be considered in identifying new magnet schools?**

- Use the same objectives currently in place to define new magnets.
- Is what leadership academies morphed to. . . is that healthy? What makes a school healthy? Need to define that to determine location and programming.
- Strategic plan already identifies by low performance/low growth/high direction so could use that to magnetize and demagnetize.
- What is the mission of new magnets?
- I think the focus should be on enhancement and maintenance of current magnets not creating new ones
- The above objectives
- Best practices and models of “how to” have a successful magnet program. Wake County has many of these.
- Pathway – which pathways need strengthening and to meet public demand
- Calendar continuity
- Population changes in neighborhood – over time there are population changes.
- Popularity of the theme – some magnets have large waitlists
- Based on location – case by case basis instead of a blanket policy of determining the % of proximity and % magnet
- If there is a non-magnet in a community that is dying not attracting families then magnet programs revitalize the community but not at the expense of other magnet schools.
- Location – downtown. Socioeconomic given higher poverty rates downtown
- Underserved and under-enrolled areas of the county (mostly downtown and rural)
- Maximizing the capacity of the facility...
- Dependent upon the program and whether they are able to handle to objectives of the program. There have been schools built specifically for certain themes, e.g. GT.

#### **7) What factors should be considered in removing themes/programs from magnet schools?**

- If they are no longer meeting present magnet objectives
- When a magnet is successful (full and high achieving) you need to ask what will the school look like several years out if you demagnetize it.
- What are the objectives of the STEM, Global and Leadership Academies and what will be the measure of whether their programs will be removed?
- If schools are being frequently magnetized and demagnetized then magnets are not stable and magnet feeder patterns are not stable because there is a domino effect of demagnetizing a school.
- Money
- Student demand. Community needs.
- Standardized test scores should not be considered as to whether a school will become a magnet school.
- Proximity piece has changed the dynamics of magnet programs which they (parents) have no control over.

- Data can be various things....a measurable demonstration of value. How do we find data to support magnets....not just standardized test scores? Qualitative data versus quantitative data (differences when it comes to magnets).
- Whole group doesn't like that magnet schools that become healthy overtime are penalized for being healthy for turning the school around and then are demagnetized. How do we determine if a school can sustain being healthy?
- If there is not interest in the school – but need to determine is it the theme or the pathway that parents aren't committing to? What theme type interests parents most?
- Under the new plan, former magnet families are now proximity families (e.g. Millbrook HS) – which hurts magnet #'s. Group is cautious to use interest or lack thereof as a factor in demagnetizing.
- If you look at demagnetizing because you think your proximity is going to support your school but magnets can't guarantee their proximity folks are going to come and stay over time – Conn for example. Downtown magnets are fragile no guarantee that proximity parents will come to make school healthy for a long time.
- One participant said, if all 3 objectives are not being met at a magnet school, then it should not be a magnet school. Use data to look at objectives aligning with a school and/or theme over a long period of time.
- Is the school reducing concentrations of poverty? Is the majority of space in their facility being used? Are students at the school taking advantage of the unique courses not offered at traditional schools? Another strong consideration should be the facilities at many current magnet schools that have been upgraded and updated with unique learning spaces. These spaces would go to waste if a school with these upgrades is demagnetized.
- Impact on school culture/learning opportunities
- Effectiveness of the programs, support within the school and continued best practices
- Amount of kids involved
- Support of school
- Are they beneficial
- Cost effective
- If magnet programs cease to meet the need of aiding students of different backgrounds and economic levels as they were established for, they should lose their magnet status
- Who would the removal affect and how?
- Would the removal of the programs hurt or harm the students?
- A big factor in removing programs from magnet schools should be based on the amount of kids that sign up for certain classes

**9) Historically, WCPSS has spent approximately 1% of its annual budget on magnet programs. Is this a warranted expenditure for the benefits to the system as a whole?**

- Small price to pay for reducing high concentrations of poverty, expanding educational opportunities and nationally recognized magnet schools.
- If you are going to remain a premier magnet, it will require FUNDING. WCPSS has been doing it on the 1% cheap and been getting a big bang for its buck. Moving forward we are going to have to allocate more resources to keep up with growth and demand.
- Are we just going to make everyone a magnet? Where is the money for that?
- No. I think more should be spent.

- I think 1% is an extremely small amount and is well worth it
- Yes. I think there is a benefit to this allotted budget amount and would be open to increasing this if we have additional magnets or to align our current magnet to successful programs and models
- Yes. Big bang for the Buck. It offers choice, fills under-enrolled schools, increases diversity, provides needed programs for students who would not be able to access those programs at their base schools
- Yes.
- What does the board use to determine the benefit of magnets based on the budget?
- If resources are not provided, they may not be able to provide various programs because of numbers of students in certain course (low enrollment courses).
- There must be a way for every school to capture the benefit of magnet programs ---which must be developed.
- One percent seems very small for the benefits that it is reaping (\$30,000 per school?) depended also on the program and theme costs which can be more expensive.
- 1% sounds like nothing – and it's clearly not enough because current magnet schools are not getting training
- Group feels that overall their program needs have been met.
- Put your \$ where your mouth is – you have to support magnet programs – and they serve the whole community. Then 1% is nothing.
- As we add more magnets – concerned about diluting the 1% and spreading it too thin
- We have a reputable county and magnet schools have contributed to the overall health with nationally recognized schools (attracting businesses, families, etc.)
- If we are having magnet schools we need to support them adequately.

**10) Please share with us any other comments about magnet programs in WCPSS.**

- I have worked in magnet and non-magnet schools. I enjoy working in both. Magnet schools offer students the opportunity to excel in areas of talent and interest. Also, magnet schools provide students with diversity in the school setting. Non-magnet schools provide kids a community school with solid programs and community peers.
- Continue magnet programs as they are.
- Although there are theme-alike schools, schools are still very different. Reduce magnet schools to 4 choices of programs (GT, Creative Arts & Science, IB, Leadership) – pathways and groups more aligned programmatically.
- Be careful surveying parents and using their comments to drive decisions. Parents don't always understand the system and are misinformed before filling out the survey. Parents don't understand the whole picture.
- Informing parents is more important than getting information from them.
- Are magnet schools effective? How is that being defined? Purposes for magnet need to be defined. 1% of budget in magnet schools and some of them are not doing any better than schools that don't cost as much.
- Need to consider dedicated magnets (for Montessori) where all families apply. Big difference for families that get to choose and those that have limited choice and end up at a magnet school

- When supporting a magnet theme across the county – look at bell schedule and professional development opportunities – need to be on same bell schedule
- Fuller and Hunter need criteria to select AG identified students at 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades.
- With the new choice plan, potentially there will be no openings for upper-grade students to come into a magnet school. In the future, there will be only kindergarten seats. Magnet schools would like to have seats available at all grades and rely on this to meet public demand for programs.
- Each magnet school is an ecosystem and interdependent and what affects one schools affects the other (dependent and inter-related).
- Magnet principals must be given a template to begin data collection (regarding success). Guidance and help is needed to accomplish this (development of tools, guidelines, to collect data)
- No outside evaluation team has been ever been used, but needs to be established and researched.