

Saskatoon Public Schools

Refreshing Our Strategic Direction

Report on Stakeholder Engagement Sessions

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Executive Summary

Saskatoon Public Schools (SPS) annually refreshes its Strategic Plan. This year, the Board engaged key stakeholders in a dialogue of its strategic direction, goals and learning priorities. In January and February 2011, SPS held meetings with the School Community Council Assembly (SCC), Okicīyapi Partnership, students and the community to gather input. This report provides a summary of the sessions.

Common Themes

Literacy for Life

Literacy for Life is “definitely” on the right track. Stakeholders in every group are supportive of the initiative and impressed with the progress to date. Without detracting from this success, however, most also recognize that there’s more work to do. A point raised in each stakeholder dialogue was the increase in the number of students in the lowest stanine on standardized reading tests – this is something stakeholders would like to see addressed.

The general consensus among stakeholders is that Literacy for Life should be expanded to include math, science and technology literacy.

Stakeholders also suggest expanding the program beyond its current parameters to include all elementary school and high school students. In essence, Literacy for Life should begin when children are first learning to read and extend all the way through their public school experience.

Collegiate Renewal

The general consensus is that the Collegiate Renewal initiative is on the right track. Interestingly, while stakeholders would like to see Literacy for Life extend into high schools, they would like Collegiate Renewal to extend into elementary schools. All agree that creating a sense of belonging and helping students understand their choices can greatly improve the transition to high school.

There is still work to do to address the gap between the performance of students in community schools and the rest of SPS schools. Cultural responsiveness has an important role to play both in understanding and addressing the gap.

Stakeholders want to see a continued focus on “belonging”. They want SPS to continue to reach out to all students, “strong, weak, in-between”. This is a recurrent theme throughout the groups – engagement must include everyone: students at all levels of learning, parents, teachers and community members.

Top Five Priorities

The different stakeholder groups offer different perspective on strategic priorities, but there is consensus on the following:

- Cultural responsiveness
- Hands-on learning
- Literacy – reading, writing, verbal, math, science, technology
- Wellness – physical, nutritional, emotional, spiritual, mental
- Transition to high school

Top Five Skills

Collectively, stakeholders agree on the following as the top five skills SPS needs to develop in our students to prepare them better for the future:

- Literacy – language, math, financial, technology, science
- Critical thinking/problem solving/decision-making
- Communication skills (written, oral, presentation, cooperation, teamwork)
- Sense of identity
- Values/ethics/principles

School Community Council Assembly

On January 27, 2011, Saskatoon Public Schools engaged key stakeholders from the School Community Council Assembly (SCC) in a dialogue on school priorities and SPS strategic priorities, including the Literacy for Life and Collegiate Renewal initiatives. The following section highlights the outcome of stakeholders' discussions.

Priorities Within The SPS Strategic Direction

After a brief presentation, SCC stakeholders launched into a discussion of school and SPS strategic priorities. Because of the limited time available, participants were given a questionnaire ahead of time and asked to provide their input as “pre-work”. This input has been integrated into the overall discussion.

What are the priorities in your school strategic plan, and how are the SCC's initiatives and activities contributing toward supporting these priorities?

Cultural responsiveness is a key priority. SCC members are staging events and developing initiatives to support diversity in their school, from hosting multicultural nights to staging music festivals to organizing Indigenous games and more. All are designed to reach beyond the school and to bring the community together.

Some SCC stakeholders are intertwining cultural responsiveness with literacy – using various events to promote reading and learning about other cultures. Volunteerism and community engagement are ways to promote cultural responsiveness while building character and values in students.

Literacy for Life is a key priority among SCC stakeholders, one they support in many different ways. Parents mentioned “book and bagel days” to book exchanges, book fairs, family literacy days, student writing, library renewal, storytelling and more.

For many schools, literacy includes math, communication and technology. One school holds a technology night to teach parents how to use parent portals, other schools have organized “math fun nights” and other events to encourage students to get engaged in math and science classes.

Wellness is an important initiative. It has a broad focus, encompassing physical, emotional, nutritional, spiritual and mental health. It integrates cultural responsiveness by teaching students about respect, for themselves and others. It can include initiatives that address bullying, Internet safety, street smarts, dealing with peer pressure, dealing with classroom pressures, and more.

Physical activity is a focus for many schools, as staff members try to integrate activities that get students moving throughout the day.

Literacy for Life

Our overall goal for this initiative is to have all students K-12 reading at or above grade level.

Are we on the right track?

Literacy for Life is definitely on the right track, say SCC stakeholders. Without detracting from the success of the initiative, they also say there's more work to do. "Reading is great, but we also need to look at math, finance, science and so on," is a common refrain. The other is that the initiative needs to reach out to older students and extend all the way through elementary and high school.

The only "but" is the apparent increase in the number of students in the lowest stanine of reading; this worries stakeholders.

"We're missing something and we need to go back and find out why we're losing those kids."

What are we missing or what should we add?

Broadening the Literacy for Life program to include math, science and technology literacy is important to stakeholders. They believe literacy in all these areas is essential to student success.

"Literacy is about development of the whole person."

Stakeholders also suggest expanding the program beyond its current parameters to include all elementary school and high school students. In essence, Literacy for Life should begin when children are first learning to read and extend all the way through their public school experience.

Some suggest expanding the initiative to involve more parents, others wonder about opportunities to engage and/or partner with the community.

"What about focusing on family literacy? If the kids are struggling, they have parents that are struggling, too."

What should we do next; expand, enrich, deepen?

The same themes emerge in the discussion of what next: expand Literacy for Life to encompass the entire school experience and broaden the focus to include math, science and technology literacy, in addition to the reading and writing literacy skills that have been a focus to this point.

Collegiate Renewal

Our overall goal for this initiative is that all collegiate students will be engaged in their learning so that they will graduate as active participants in their life-long learning and as responsible and caring citizens in the community, nation and world.

Are we on the right track?

The response of SCC stakeholders regarding Collegiate Renewal is overwhelmingly positive. SPS is “definitely” on the right track. “The longer-term relationships with teachers are great,” says one stakeholder. Most believe the data demonstrates the initiative is having a positive impact. While most agree there is still work to do, SCC stakeholders are largely supportive.

What are we missing? What should we do next?

Many SCC stakeholders would like SPS to expand the Collegiate Renewal initiative into the elementary schools. “Is there a way for younger students in grades seven and eight to connect? Engaging kids at a younger age would help them make the transition to high school.”

Helping elementary students make a successful transition to high school is an important focus for many SCC stakeholders, and they view Collegiate Renewal as a means to that end. Several also point out that the program does not greatly impact French immersion students in that their choices are fewer.

“Collegiate Renewal feels specific to English stream students. If students are in French immersion, their choices to be engaged are limited to three high schools.”

Stakeholders would like to see more coordination with other agencies to help students expand their horizons. Several suggest that more access to mental health resources would be helpful. More information for parents is another key. SCC stakeholders suggest providing parents with more information on how their children are evaluated and assessed, and how marks are given. One suggestion was to create space on the school web page for parents to comment on various issues. This opens the door to two-way communication with parents who may not have time to attend meetings.

“If the education system sees itself as a partner in employment, then what they produce will be more valuable. Students need to understand that what they learn in school is applicable to employment.”

More opportunities for hands-on learning is an important addition. This varies from teaching students to using math for things like balancing a budget or filling out a tax return, to career-based programming. Schools could also provide opportunities by reaching out to external resources and developing more community connections.

What should we do next; expand, enrich, deepen?

Stakeholders focus on two directions for Collegiate Renewal. First, they would like to see SPS deepen the cultural responsiveness aspect and create more personnel connections with other cultures. This could open the door to new hands-on learning opportunities. It could also integrate communication skills, technology skills, healthy living, and more.

Second, they would like to see the program expanded beyond high school into elementary schools, starting with grades seven and eight, but eventually permeating the entire system. This will help students make a successful transition to high school, which in turn will help improve graduation and educational attainment rates. Students will have a better of idea of what to expect, not only academically, but socially.

Top Priorities

Considering the Ministry’s Continuous Improvement Framework and the skills we want to develop in our students, what do your SCC members believe should be the Board’s priorities for the next 3-4 years?

Stakeholder discussions of SPS Board priorities reflect the general themes raised by the previous questions; namely, cultural responsiveness and literacy. Stakeholders expand the boundaries of both to encompass a broader, richer viewpoint. For example, SCC members see cultural responsiveness as a means of enhancing students’ social awareness. They see literacy as a means to develop not only reading and writing skills, but also storytelling (verbal) skills, math skills and technology skills.

“Technology has dramatically altered the communication style of the upcoming generation. Unfortunately, there needs to be more opportunity for them to learn and refine these skills, which are imperative.”

SPS Board Priorities

Cultural responsiveness
Literacy – reading, writing, verbal, math, science, technology
Transition from elementary to high school
Developing life-long learners
Communication skills (including written, oral, presentation skills)
More education options (not focus on university only)
Curriculum for modified learners, special programming
Supports for students with mental health issues
Physical activity/education
Start EAL programs younger

Top Skills

SCC stakeholders discussed the skills they think SPS needs to develop in students to prepare them for the future. They also provided input through a questionnaire filled out prior to the session. The results are presented in the following table, with the most frequently cited skills in the left hand column, and “soft skills” in the right hand column.

Literacy/language skills and math/financial literacy rank high in the SCC stakeholder discussion. Critical thinking/problem-solving, technology skills and communication skills round out the top five skills.

As the list of skills develops, however, stakeholders begin to discuss things like personal growth/development, values and principles, citizenship, teamwork –skills they believe will help students succeed in life, not just in school or career. This is reflected in the long list of soft skills identified in the various groups (presented alphabetically).

Most Often Cited Skills	Soft Skills
Literacy/language skills	Accountability
Math/financial literacy	Adaptability
Critical thinking/problem solving	Confidence
Technology skills	Conflict resolution
Communication skills	Creativity
Personal growth/development skills	Cultural respect/responsiveness
Values/ethics/principles	Engagement (want to learn)
Citizenship/social skills	Independence
Life skills	Perseverance
Coping skills	Respect
Cooperation/teamwork skills	Responsibility
	Wellness (physical and mental health)

Okicīyapi Partnership

On February 9, 2011, Saskatoon Public Schools engaged key stakeholders from the Okicīyapi Partnership in a dialogue of SPS strategic priorities, specifically Literacy for Life and Collegiate Renewal. The following section highlights the outcome of stakeholders' table discussions.

Literacy for Life

Our overall goal for this initiative is to have all students K-12 reading at or above grade level.

The general consensus among members of the Okicīyapi Partnership is that SPS is on the right track with Literacy for Life. They see improvements in reading test scores overall and in community schools, but they also see some children in the lowest stanine group falling behind. They want to be assured that those children are not being left behind.

“What about the kids who are not doing well? Are they being tracked? Where are those children, because we still have a huge learning gap.”

Cultural responsiveness is seen as an important means of addressing this gap. “When I was kid, I didn’t read as much but I had storytelling. I had the power of thought and figuring out. No TV, no Googling, no texting. But I had and have values. We need to give our children the best of both worlds – all cultures. How can we do that so that no child is left behind?”

This led to a discussion of the different ways of learning and the different levels of knowing. Does SPS take these into account when assessing children? If a student’s reading skills are poor, but they have oral proficiency – is this considered in their marks? “There are so many things we could look at: storytelling, art, street smarts. The test and the bell curve only speaks to one.”

“Aboriginal people learned our language orally. I learned by having my mother and father telling me, until I started school and started learning English. I didn’t know I had to learn English by reading. We are visual learners, so it was hard.”

The consensus is that schools need to work harder to find and recognize the individual gifts within each child, so that a poor reader does not feel labeled but valued for his/her street smarts or leadership or problem-solving abilities.

“How do we infuse more First Nations and Métis culture into the tests?”

The initiative also has to make room for students who are not fluent in English, or who do not have reading materials or opportunities at home. “We need to fill that gap, make these students feel they belong. Residential schools made kids leave their culture and language at the door, now we have a generation who is lost. We can teach them to become proficient in English, but also bring back Aboriginal languages, as well.”

Collegiate Renewal

According to Okiciyapi stakeholders, belonging is not only the key to Collegiate Renewal, it is the key to student engagement and success in school. “It all comes back to belonging: creating a place for all children at school, whatever their skills and gifts.”

“That’s how we would be going in the right direction, if those on the extreme [of the bell curve] are not failing or left behind. We can do that by bringing a sense of belonging: no lines, no differences, let the strong and the weak all blend together.”

In this sense, Collegiate Renewal does not start in grade nine, it begins when the student first arrives in elementary school and continues throughout his/her school career. This sparks a discussion on keeping students in the SPS system, so that they are getting a consistent education. Test results show this has a dramatic impact on achievement levels, the question is how to do it? “School is one element of society; how do we work in partnership with others to ensure kids aren’t jumping from school to school?”

“I would wish that what we experience here today, our kids could experience every day – honouring different world views, opening our hearts and minds to that.”

Top Skills

Stakeholders are asked to identify the top skills they think SPS needs to develop in students to prepare them for the future. The interesting thing about this list is that it is entirely focused on “soft skills”, things that relate to an individual’s emotional intelligence.

Top Skills
Self-esteem
Sense of identity
Sense of pride
Life-long learning/curiosity
Social responsibility
Adaptability
Confidence
Hope
Open-mindedness
Love
Recognize choices

Student Voice

On February 9, 2011, Saskatoon Public Schools engaged high school and middle years students in an interactive dialogue to help identify their learning priorities and desired skills. The following section highlights the outcome of their discussions.

Brainstorming: Learning Priorities

In a brainstorming session, students identified their learning priorities in several key areas.

Hands-on Learning

Hands-on learning is an important priority in students' minds. They enjoy the hands-on learning opportunities already available in their schools and want more of them. This includes being able to learn outside the school, whether through field trips, organized activities or initiatives with community/industry-based partners.

Student skills that relate to the real world – this is an important element in their vision of hands-on learning. For some, this means more career specific classes. At the same time, however, students recognize that what interests one student might not interest another, so they suggest more diversity in choice of classes.

SPS students not only want to understand what they are learning, they want to understand why they are learning it – why is math important, what's the point of history, how does science impact their lives? Relevance to the real world is key to hands-on learning.

“More hands-on learning opportunities that help us to understand what and why we are learning and how it is relevant to us.”

Technology

SPS students recognize the importance of technology, both in their learning and in their future success. As a learning tool, they believe technology provides access to more choices. They would like more computers in their schools and more access to the latest innovations.

They caution, however, that new technology must come with an understanding of how to use it, otherwise students could feel overwhelmed or intimidated when offered new choices, tools or learning methods.

Physical Activity

Integrating more physical activity in the school day could help students stay focused while in the classroom. Students expand the concept to include healthier snack and/or lunch options.

“Physical activity everyday so we are able to focus more on what is happening in class.”

Teacher/Student Ratio

One-on-one student-teacher contact is a priority for SPS students. They like being able to talk with their teacher about a mark, and assignment or a subject they’re having trouble with. They would like to see more teachers per student, and suggest using teacher assistants in classes such as math, using two teachers for larger classes or having more school-based tutors.

“Having more teachers with smaller classes, or normal to large sized classes with two teachers can help students excel in their learning.”

Multicultural Understanding

Students recognize the need for cultural understanding in their schools. They suggest more multicultural class projects so students can develop an understanding of the diversity in their own communities and even their own school, not just around the world. Some would like to see more First Nations, Inuit and Métis studies in school; others want to see more language options.

“More First Nations, Inuit and Métis Studies programs.”

Assessment

More flexibility in how students are assessed is a key priority for SPS students. For example, in group work (which students would like to do more of), students would like their “soft skills” recognized. An interesting example was offered: if a student takes an intellectual risk on a project that challenges them to grow in a personal way, this risk-taking should be recognized in the project mark.

Students would also like fewer tests and more focus on assignments throughout the year. They suggest a post-finals review day as a chance to sit down with their teacher and discuss their results.

Finally, students would like to see more flexibility with exams and assignments so that students can improve their marks. For example, students suggested increased opportunities for “draft” assignments which would allow them to improve upon their final assignment and grade. Instead of telling the students they’ll do better “next time”, this opens the door to letting the students improve their mark (and their learning) “this time”.

“Because assignments are so varied, it will be more effective if students could take a teacher’s feedback, understand where they could make more improvements and redo the assignment with better skills and a better understanding of what the teacher expected.”

Curriculum

Up-to-date curriculum is an important priority. When students use the term, however, they are largely referring to their learning materials. They find it jarring to find out-of-date references in their textbooks, for example, and would like to see these resources kept up-to-date so they feel a connection between what they are learning in class and what is happening in the world. This ties in with students’ desire for more hands-on learning.

“Help us see connections within our world. Like connections from school work to real life experience.”

Connecting the Dots

Students were asked to review a list of 22 suggestions for improving their learning. The list included suggestions drawn from an SPS student survey conducted three years previous. Each student was asked to rank their five most important suggestions by placing a coloured dot beside it. The top five suggestions were as follows:

Learning would improve if we...

- #1** Had more chances to work with our peers/classmates in solving problems and creating products.
- #2** Had more opportunities for “hands-on” learning.
- #3** Had more career education opportunities.
- #4** Were provided more opportunities to work with and in the wider community (e.g., supporting charity work).
- #5** (tie) Were provided with more choices in how to show our learning.
Ensured that we were physically active every day.

“I think we should do more group work so that we can socialize more with our peers and get more communication skills, while involving each other in education studies.”

Students also added three of their own suggestions to the list:

- Had courses that were more specifically directed towards our post-secondary endeavours
- Expand social groups to organize clubs and programs
- Had more opportunities for one-on-one conferences with teachers.

The Skills Students Want

SPS students are looking forward to the future. They want skills that will help them make good decisions about career opportunities and the post-secondary education and/or training they need to achieve their goals. This is evident in their collective list of top three skills: time management/study skills, critical thinking/problem-solving/decision-making skills and employability skills.

But students also want the skills and confidence to make good decisions in their lives, not just about career and school, but about their social networks and how they can make an impact on the community. This is evident in their desire to develop their social/people/communication skills and life skills.

Finally, SPS students want to succeed in the world. This is reflected in their desire for skills in literacy/language, financial/budgeting, technology, teamwork and leadership.

Skills Students Want

Time management/study skills

Critical thinking/problem-solving/decision-making skills

Employability skills

Social/people/communication skills

Life skills

Literacy/language skills

Financial/budgeting skills

Technology skills

Teamwork skills

Leadership skills

Saskatoon Community

On February 17, 2011, Saskatoon Public Schools engaged key stakeholders from the Saskatoon community in a dialogue on SPS strategic priorities, with a focus on the Literacy for Life and Collegiate Renewal initiatives. The following section highlights the outcome of stakeholders' discussions.

Literacy for Life

Our overall goal for this initiative is to have all students K-12 reading at or above grade level.

Are we on the right track?

Stakeholders agree that SPS is on the right track with its Literacy for Life initiative. There is a concern that while the “bell curve” from the Canadian Achievement Test shows positive improvement overall, there appears to be a growing number of students in the lowest performing category. This concerns stakeholders. They fear that a child could be “left behind”. They want appropriate learning interventions to assist these students in their learning.

This is of particular concern to Aboriginal stakeholders, who offer a different perspective of those on the lower end of the bell curve.

“When we make an ultimate rain lodge, we lay out the poles on the ground. It is the smallest pole, the runt, that we use to build the lodge. That pole is the key, it combines with the stronger poles to make a lodge that can withstand the wind and rain and elements. And that little pole is pretty proud because it is contributing.”

“Community Schools are not doing as well, but maybe that child just needs a nutritious lunch or breakfast to get going in the morning.”

Some stakeholders recognize that cultural responsiveness is key to literacy success. They suggest that SPS could bring in more cultural perspectives – First Nation, Métis and immigrant – and make more cultural resources available in schools.

There appears to be some interest in seeing how grade four and grade eight students today are doing compared to students 10 and 15 years ago. Stakeholders suggest this broader perspective would provide a better idea of how SPS students are doing compared to past generations. “It’s

good we brag about success, but we can do so much more, add on to this success by looking at it from different perspectives.”

What are we missing or what should we add?

There is some discussion of the test scores and how accurately, perhaps even fairly, they measure students.

“Are the test scores an accurate representation of what students are learning? Are they truly an accurate reflection of students’ achievement. Do they do their best?”

Some suggest the test may not be relevant to all students, that some might not understand it. This leads stakeholders to more discussion of the importance of cultural responsiveness in our schools and in the classroom.

“There is a gap between the models used in instruction and how students are being tested – the Aboriginal way of knowing isn’t reflected on tests.”

The general consensus is that the focus of literacy needs to be expanded to include other literacies such as math literacy, financial literacy, science literacy, technological literacy, and workplace literacy. Stakeholders consider all these areas important components of “literacy for life”. Some push the definition of literacy even further to encompass skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, valuing knowledge and more.

“The broad strokes of literacy need to be expanded to include all kinds of literacy.”

Stakeholders also suggest expanding the Literacy for Life initiative beyond the current grade levels, starting even younger and reaching through high school.

What should we do next; expand, enrich, deepen?

Addressing the gap between the performance of students in SPS community schools and those in mainstream schools is an important focus. Stakeholders see this gap as “unacceptable”. They believe that the improved reading scores demonstrated at community schools over the past two years indicate that SPS can achieve more. Enhancing cultural responsiveness and respect for other ways of learning and knowing, along with sound instruction, will be essential if SPS is to close the gap.

Finding ways to deal with keeping students in the school system from the earliest grades is a priority, as statistics show marked improvement in test scores for students when they are consistently enrolled in the system.

Many feel a child's environment or family situation is the key determinant, not only in keeping them enrolled, but also in how the child will perform in school. Trouble at home, coming to school hungry, frequent moves – these are things the school cannot control, but neither can they remain isolated from the impact they have on children. Some suggest creating access points for parents and involving the school in social programming such as nutrition.

Collegiate Renewal

Our overall goal for this initiative is that all collegiate students will be engaged in their learning so that they will graduate as active participants in their life-long learning and as responsible and caring citizens in the community, nation and world.

Are we on the right track?

The general consensus among community stakeholders is that SPS is “definitely on the right track” with Collegiate Renewal. They see evidence in improved retention rates, innovative programming, more ties between school and industry/work, and greater student maturity.

Several SPS high school students participating in the community session had positive insights to share. “As students, we’re experiencing Collegiate Renewal every day. In the four years I’ve been in school, there have already been significant changes.” Another student notes that “the feedback – from teachers, other students, everybody – is one of the most important things.”

“High school students are living the experience rather than just reacting to it.”

The concept of belonging resonates with students. They like the idea of being together from the start and having access to the same advisor (as well as advisory resources). Another student believes the knowledge that “you are supported in grade nine provides a bit of a confidence boost, a bit of hope that you will get through.” Students also believe that report cards that focus on feedback and how to improve performance are better than report cards that only focus on marks. “Instead of having to worry about the mark, the focus is on improving.”

“The best thing, for me, is being able to experience hands-on learning in the classroom and also outside the school day. That’s great; it gives you some idea of what you might have a passion for in the future.”

These opinions are generally reflected by community members, but there are some concerns. The first is buy-in. “Collegiate Renewal represents a major shift in philosophy. Those within the system are excited by it, but the philosophy is best understood in the central building, less so in the schools, then less so in the community and in families. How do we get an understanding of

Collegiate Renewal into the mainstream? How do we reach out to engage teachers, parents, community members?”

Stakeholders see evidence both of teacher engagement and lack of engagement. Those who see teacher engagement, including a number of student stakeholders, point to more personal interactions and a more hands-on approach to teaching.

“Teachers are more personal; they know us by name.”

The few who do not think Collegiate Renewal is on the right track want to see more hard data. They want to see more diversity in schools, more recognition of different types of learning and knowing, more recognition of different activities such as swimming, babysitting, parenting.

The majority, however, see the initiative as a success. They want to see a continued focus on “belonging” and continued attempts to reach out to all students: “strong, weak, in-between” to ensure no child is left behind.

What are we missing or what should we add?

Integrating cultural responsiveness into Collegiate Renewal is essential. A number of stakeholders believe this needs to be more of a focus, as it is First Nations and Métis students who are struggling to find success. This leads to a variety of table discussions on making learning more relevant (while recognizing SPS has made great strides).

“We need immersion programs, creative ways to learn from each other, do more in groups, have more relevancy in our learning.”

A number of stakeholders would also like to see more work done to engage students in math and science. Are there different teaching methods that would be more relevant? How do you reach out to disengaged students and make math and science more relevant? Some suggest going smaller – smaller classes, study groups, schools. There are various suggestions for making the learning environment more personal for students.

“Don’t give up on the rebels. Say hi to them even when they don’t say hi back, get to know them even if they get annoyed. Rebels don’t feel a sense of belonging, so it’s better if teachers bug them than if you leave them alone.”

Stakeholders understand that engaging all students, at all levels, is an ongoing challenge. The general consensus, however, is that total engagement is the goal: learning must accommodate all students, whatever their interests or abilities.

A point echoed in other stakeholder sessions was the need to extend Collegiate Renewal into elementary school. For example, in order for more emphasis on math and science in high school to be successful, students need to come out of elementary school with better math and science skills.

“Flexibility – learning should be able to move to the learners’ needs.”

While math and science are seen as important, most stakeholders emphasize character development when discussing Collegiate Renewal. They want to ensure kids have rich experiences and learn to care for others, as this will help them build the kind of social skills they need to succeed in the future.

What should we do next; expand, enrich, deepen?

Stakeholders agree that it is vital to provide “real life” experiences to students. This includes opportunities to learn about the workforce, about different kinds of careers and about different educational opportunities after high school. This means encouraging students to pursue the path that best suits their career goals, not focusing solely on post-secondary education at university and college, but also encouraging trades training.

“What are we doing to connect school to real life?”

Stakeholders would like to see more teacher development. This is a key focus, as it directly impacts student engagement, sense of belonging, the relationship – all the things Collegiate Renewal is about.

Character development is vital, according to stakeholders. Helping students develop into engaged citizens is something that benefits the community as a whole. There is support for expanding, enriching and deepening feedback to students – through report cards, teachers, advisory meetings, and so on. Some want to see more student input: “The more the better! The student forums were an amazing opportunity.”

“Teachers need to get more personal with students; that’s where students get their motivation – from teachers.”

Stakeholders would also like to see more language classes offered in school, more health care resources and more access to mental health resources. A number want more focus on academic supports. Another suggestion is that each high school develop its own theme (e.g. sports, skills/trades, drumming/dancing, science, etc.) to attract different types of learners.

Top Skills

Community stakeholders were asked to identify the top five skills they think SPS needs to develop in students to prepare them for the future. Since most responded with more than five, the table below lists the most commonly and frequently cited skills in the left hand column, with less often cited soft skills and other skills listed in the right hand column.

Most Often Cited Skills	Soft Skills
Communication skills	Confidence
Problem-solving/critical thinking	Courage
Respect (for self and others)	Curiosity
Sense of identity	Happiness
Sense of responsibility (for self and others)	Humility
Sustainability perspectives	Passion
Values/ethics/principles	Positivity/optimism
Frequently Cited Skills	Additional Skills
Life-long learning	Collaboration
Numeracy skills	Creativity
Perseverance/patience	Cultural Competency
Reading skills	Financial skills
Sense of justice	Humanitarian ethic
Socialization skills	Prioritization skills
Technological skills	Research skills
Work ethic	