

A Public Report:

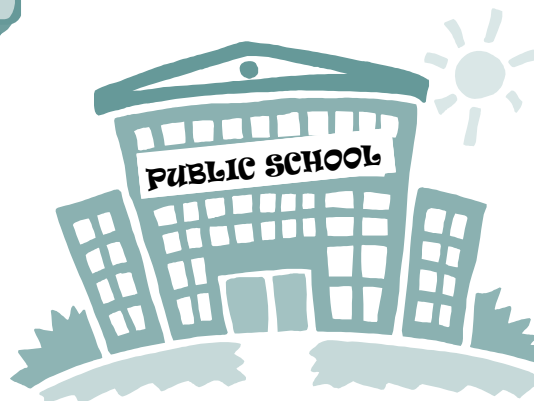
From a community meeting
with Dr. Carl Cohn,
Superintendent of the
Long Beach Unified
School District

March 1, 2001

This report summarizes the
March 1st discussion on the
leadership, relationships and
partnerships needed to
support the transformation of
Akron's Schools.



The Future of Akron



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A Community Meeting Report

Background:

On March 1st, 2001, a meeting, co-sponsored by Summit Education Initiative and Akron Public Schools, was held in the cafeteria at Central Hower High School from 7:00pm-9:00pm. This community meeting was convened so interested community members and educators would have the opportunity to hear from a highly successful superintendent from a large urban district that is involved in systemic change and experiencing positive results. Dr. Carl Cohn, superintendent of Long Beach Unified School District, who was not a candidate for superintendent for the APS school district, was invited to come to Akron at the request of the APS board and SEI to discuss the work that is going on in Long Beach and explore its application to our community.



Michael Douglas, Associate Editor of The Beacon Journal, moderated a panel of stakeholders: Cynthia Blake, parent representative; Dan Colantone, president, ARDB; Reverend Ron Fowler, faith-based community leader; Linda Kersker, president, Akron Board of Education; Mayor Don Plusquellic; and Bill Siegfert, president, Akron Education Association as they questioned and responded to Dr. Cohn regarding the reform that is occurring in his district and its community. After the panel discussion, The audience had the opportunity to pose written questions to Dr. Cohn read by the moderator. The final part of the community meeting was devoted to listening to the audience's feedback on the following questions:

- **What overall themes appear to have contributed to Long Beach's school district transformation?**
- **What kind of leadership, relationships and partnerships do we think we will need locally to support the transformation of Akron's schools?**



Approximately 125 citizens, including parents, students, educators, business, government, Akron Public School Board members (5 of 7) and foundation people, were in attendance at this meeting.

The agenda for the meeting was as follows:

- I. Viewing of Education Partnership video from Long Beach California
- II. Brief overview from Dr. Carl Cohn, Long Beach Superintendent's approach to successful School improvement.
- III. Panel Dialogue
- IV. Q&A with audience
- V. Facilitated Audience Reflections

Evaluation Feedback from meeting participants overwhelmingly indicated that this meeting increased their understanding of a school improvement agenda, leadership qualities, relationships and partnerships needed to support that agenda and helped inform them about the qualities they would like to see in the next superintendent.

This report was mailed to:

- All who signed the community meeting attendance sheets
- The panelist
- The Akron Public School Board
- Dr. Viering, consultant to the APS board superintendent search
- Local Newspaper and radio stations
- Dr. Carl Cohn
- Summit Education Initiative Advisory Board & Board of Trustees
- The Education Transformation Network

This report is also available on our website at:
http://www.seisummit.org/current_events.htm

This meeting was video taped by the Akron Public Schools and placed on cable channel 15 for two consecutive weeks, March 5th-March 16th. Summit Education Initiative has a copy of this tape and it is available on loan from their lending library.

Summary of Long Beach Video

The Long Beach Partnership video focused on the creation of a seamless quality education for all students in Long Beach that extended from *kindergarten* all the way *through college*. This partnership involves a commitment of both time and resources by a number of the major stakeholders (school system, universities, business community, unions) that focus on the quality of student learning conditions at all levels. There is an agreement on a cohesive long-range view as to how education should be. A number of agreements were articulated among the major stakeholders that spelled out the kind of relationships that it would take and the roles that the various stakeholders need to play.

Dr. Cohn's Opening Remarks:

Dr. Cohn emphasized that all stakeholders must be willing to stand shoulder to shoulder to get at the tough issues. This willingness requires hard work on all stakeholders' parts and a common agreement about how and what needs to be done, by whom.

He enumerated five key components that are essential to the reform agenda in Long Beach. They are:

1. A unanimous board of education that is focused on improving our schools. The decisions that they make need to be driven by a reform agenda. This intense focus and unanimity allows a superintendent to be freed from dealing with board tensions and instead work on the district's reform agenda.
2. A high quality executive staff of educational leaders as a high priority for the district. The administrators immediately below the superintendent need to be outstanding educational leaders. A superintendent alone cannot do this work; it takes an outstanding executive staff to drive the critical changes within a system.
3. Strong union leadership that partners with the school system on a school reform agenda. Both union leadership and superintendent need to be committed to forming a strong partnership with each other.
4. Collaboration with the city to address areas of concerns with schools and to develop strong partnerships.
5. Key staff that force people to get together, stay on task and away from territorial issues or personal agendas and keeps the focus on student achievement. (A staff that supports and drives the partnerships' agenda.)

As a leader (superintendent), it is important to **listen well, follow through on what you hear,** and **act on what you learn.**

Dr. Cohn also discussed the key components of a student achievement agenda:

1. Invest in high quality professional development for all educators.
2. Develop core academic standards that create a common and clear focus.

Other support strategies for Long Beach's reform agenda:

- Develop strong relationships with partners that are built on trust. There is a critical need for strong partnerships in order to get at the complex issues surrounding urban education problems.
- Develop and implement new instructional strategies and materials that recognize the diverse needs of students.
- Create quality coaching and mentoring experiences for new teachers so they have the opportunity to succeed.
- Develop creative strategies (i.e., innovative school day, reconstitution of schools and incentive pay for teachers/administrators assignments to more difficult schools).
- Focus reform efforts on improving the learning conditions for all students in the classroom. As John Stanford, the late superintendent of the Seattle schools said about school reform, "Victory is in the classroom."



Summary of Panel Dialogue with Dr. Cohn

Dr. Cohn was asked how Long Beach engages parents and promotes greater accountability for their children's educations. He responded with the following example: Parents were engaged early in the discussion to end social promotion. The idea of ending social promotions of 8th grade students with multiple F's and placing them in a mandatory prep school for a year prior to the start of high school was discussed with parents before this program was implemented. Parents recognized the value of what they were attempting to do and are supportive of the effort.

When asked about the reasonable amount of time to expect reform efforts to take root and actually make a difference in the lives of children, Dr. Cohn responded that it usually takes 3-5 years to start noting substantial differences. He emphasized that some immediate changes (i.e., school uniforms, dress codes, discipline codes and/or alternative schools) can be built in to help prepare the community for long term reform. In Long Beach school uniforms provided a sense of renewal and also reflected some important community and parental values. He shared that Long Beach works on providing parents with a variety of options and alternatives for their child's education that better align with their values.

Dr. Cohn stressed that it's important for a vision to focus on a community's strengths *rather than its weaknesses*. There is too much focus on what is wrong.

In order for reforms to impact all aspects of the system, Long Beach is working to:

1. Redefine the role of counselor in schools so they are utilized more effectively.
2. Develop a more thorough and comprehensive teacher evaluation process, including the use of peers, in order to impact improvement in the classroom.
3. Utilize a variety of strategies to improve the quality and quantity of available professional development, especially with regard to time issues. (Ex., use of substitutes, weekend and after school times built into the schedule.)
4. Involve the private sector in a number of ways:
 - a. Boeing personnel
 - b. Malcolm Baldrige process implemented
 - c. Provide resources, employees and financial support
 - d. Administrators on loan for a year
 - e. Principal for a Day program with business executives
5. Assist low achieving schools by creating incentives for teachers and administrators to work in those schools.
6. Support building principals as an integral part of the management team.
7. Develop a pluralistic agenda that benefits many groups. (The focus is not on providing solutions for each of the diverse groups of students, but rather to provide multiple options for all students.)

Summary of Audience Reflections

Below is audience feedback regarding the **overall themes** that appear to have contributed to the transformation of Long Beach’s school district.

LBU\$D Themes

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stability and Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Rewarding teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Board and Union collaboration and similar focus <input type="checkbox"/> Accountability <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to input <input type="checkbox"/> Everyone on same page <input type="checkbox"/> High Expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Refused to be bogged down <input type="checkbox"/> Risk takers <input type="checkbox"/> Strong relationships built <input type="checkbox"/> Major business partnerships <input type="checkbox"/> Exceptional support of the Superintendent <input type="checkbox"/> Just do it <input type="checkbox"/> Developed understanding of the total vision <input type="checkbox"/> Use of Baldrige systemic & Alignment <input type="checkbox"/> Use common sense <input type="checkbox"/> Use of buildings in after-school programming <input type="checkbox"/> Long-term Superintendent leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Respect of each group and all the stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Emphasis on staff development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stay basic <input type="checkbox"/> Parental Involvement <input type="checkbox"/> Implementations of Reforms <input type="checkbox"/> Experimentation <input type="checkbox"/> Refusing Turf Issues and personal agendas <input type="checkbox"/> High priority of coaching new teachers and professionals <input type="checkbox"/> Look at standards in businesses to use in education <input type="checkbox"/> Principal viewed as an Instructional leader <input type="checkbox"/> Business leaders as principals <input type="checkbox"/> Level of quality system to system <input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Student Focused Agenda <input type="checkbox"/> Valuing teachers <input type="checkbox"/> Listening <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Courage (suggested afterwards) <input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships with PTA (suggested afterwards) <input type="checkbox"/> Everyone’s focus the same = KID\$ |
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The audience was asked to reflect on the kinds of **leadership, relationships** and **partnerships** needed locally to support the transformation of Akron’s Schools.

Leadership

- Proper interviewing techniques
- Educational institutions to take ownership of change
- Leadership of alternative schools
- Political savvy in creating partnerships
- Determine where supervision needed and only strengthen where needed
- Clear vision – roadmap
- Well informed – top to bottom
- Listen
- Insightful
- Well-informed
- Assessment skills

Partnerships

- Seamless education
- Social services agencies and organizations
- Early childhood segment
- City
- Community organizations such as the Boys/Girls Club
- School board

Relationships

- Ways to engage poverty level
- Savvy in creating relationships
- Develop relationships with students to hear the student voice
- Board of Education with Union and City



Audience Questions

Below are all written audience-member questions. Time that evening did not allow for them to all be addressed.



1. How many school buildings in Long Beach District? Can you explain the size and scope of the Edison project & its relationship to the district at large, impact and success?
2. The video mentions tutoring programs in high school that are initiated by the college. Are these funded tutors or do they come as peer tutors? Is there programming to train parents with tutoring at home? What kinds of parent accountability programs or mandates are there for attendance?
3. Please talk about the Academic Performance Index. Describe it and also share the rate of progress to the point where you are now with 70 percent of your schools meeting the Academic Performance Index. Who decides to reconstitute a school? What are the criteria for reconstitution? How was the teacher's union involved with this?
4. Does your school offer pre-school for special needs children, as well as non-special needs children?
5. What are your average classroom sizes at the high school level? What accountability tool do you have in effect to ensure teachers are teaching the curriculum and not just "doing their own thing?"
6. With a seamless educational system, now was it possible to ensure the quality of service from point of origin to end-user? How many providers in the distributions chain?
7. What percentage of teachers has masters in their field? What kind of support is given to veteran teachers to bridge the digital divide? Would you speak to disbelievers that all children can learn?
8. Will you please comment on why there is no panel representative from Higher Education? What can be done to get them "here?"
9. How important is building leadership in the principal to the success of the ability of children to learn what they need?
10. What was the biggest obstacle to opening up the school buildings for public use? Does the Long Beach community support schools more as a result?
11. Is there a plan to incorporate Head Start or Early Start or Early Start programs in your partnership with the college and university? Is your programming affected by charter schools?
12. How many hours and how many weeks do the teacher's work? Does the district provide paid planning and training time? If so, how much?
13. On NPR, there was a story about students in Lakewood H.S., who responded to anti-smoking campaigns that involve billboards that picture teenagers strung-out on cigarettes – "Welcome to Loserville: Population You." The students responded to the ad campaign by paying for a billboard which reads "Welcome to Reality – Most Teenagers don't abuse drugs." These students rallied together and paid for the ad by giving up their Christmas fund. Please comment on our role as adults in listening to Youth, and supporting social action efforts.
14. Do you have multicultural education in district K-12? If so, how is the program working? Are resources divided equally among schools? What do you think about high stakes testing?
15. Curriculum, is it standardized throughout the school system by grade level – K-12/K-8? Speak more about after-school programs.



Written Evaluation of Community Meeting with Dr. Carl Cohn

35 evaluations were completed out of approximately 120 in attendance, equating to a healthy 30% return rate.

Participants were asked if their understanding in the areas below had increased: **a lot, somewhat, did not change** or, **they were not sure**.

Successful School Agenda:

- **19** respondents indicated their understanding **increased a lot**;
- **16** respondents reported their understand **increased somewhat**.

Leadership Qualities for School Improvement leader(s)

- **15** respondents marked that their understanding **increased a lot**;
- **18** respondents indicated that their understanding **increased somewhat**;
- **2** respondents felt their knowledge of those qualities **did not change**.

Relationships needed to support school improvement:

- **16** respondents felt their understanding **increased a lot**;
- **16** respondents believed that their understanding **increased somewhat**;
- **2** respondents indicating their understanding **did not change**;
- **1** respondent was **not sure**.

Partnerships needed to support school improvement:

- **14** respondents indicated their understanding increased **a lot**;
- **14** respondents indicated their understanding **increased somewhat**;
- **4** respondents felt their understanding **did not change**;
- **1** respondent was **unsure**
- **2** respondents **did not indicate a choice**.

93% of persons responding to these questions felt the community meeting increased their understanding of a school improvement agenda and the leadership qualities, relationships and partnership needed to support that agenda.

Participants were asked to indicate if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, strongly disagreed, somewhat disagreed, or didn't know if **the discussion helped inform people about the qualities they would like to see in the next superintendent**

- **17** respondents indicated that they **strongly agreed** with this statement
- **16** respondents **somewhat agreed**;
- **1** respondent **strongly disagreed**;
- **1** person **did not respond**.

94% of the respondents thought this discussion helped inform them about the qualities they would like to see in the next superintendent.