

# SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON DISTRICT OF INNOVATION

*January 2017*



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# SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON A DISTRICT OF INNOVATION

## BACKGROUND

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K12 *Insight* conducted focus groups on behalf of Keller ISD to gauge satisfaction with the district overall, gather feedback to inform improvement planning, and identify opportunities for growth. Focus group participants represented a wide variety of district stakeholders. Participants included District of Innovation Committee members, parents of current Keller ISD students, parents of Keller ISD graduates, parents of students outside of the district, Keller ISD staff members, university partners, and business partners. A total of 62 stakeholders participated in seven focus group sessions.

The focus group sessions were held Jan. 3–5. Each discussion lasted approximately 90 minutes. K12 *Insight* moderators trained in qualitative inquiry guided the discussions, using a structured format to ensure all participants could respond to the same questions.

The discussions were designed to learn how stakeholders measure student success, understand their perceptions of the Portrait of a Graduate and School District Strategic Plan documents, hear their reactions to trending topics across the state, and identify their long term goals for Keller ISD.

Following the sessions, K12 *Insight* moderators compiled the notes and analyzed the feedback to identify common themes. The findings from these discussions will be shared with leadership to inform decision making as district leaders plan for Keller ISD's future.

The key findings in this summary report should not be generalized to all Keller ISD stakeholders. Rather, these findings should serve as a foundation for a broader conversation with district leadership and staff, as well as community members.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

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Following the sessions, the K12 *Insight* moderators used the constant comparative analysis (CCA) technique to analyze the feedback and identify common themes. CCA is an analytical approach where all units of data are compared with all other units to discover properties and dimensions in the data (O'Connor et. al, 2008). This technique allows researchers to develop categories and themes.

# PARTICIPANTS

Sixty-two stakeholders participated in the focus groups.

K12 *Insight* facilitated the participant recruitment and selection process. On Nov. 28, the district posted a public access link to a registration form and sent emails to District of Innovation committee members. Reminders were sent by K12 *Insight* on Nov. 2. Once registration closed, K12 *Insight* randomly selected participants. The selected participants were notified Dec. 15. Participants were reminded about the focus groups on Dec. 27, and Jan. 3 and 4.

	Registered	Hybrid Selection	Participants who attended
Participants	277	106	62

# FINDINGS

## Measuring Success

Participants said that success for a Keller ISD graduate meant being independent and ready for life after high school, whether that’s post-secondary education, CTE/vocational training, or beginning a career. They felt students should be aware of all future options and understand their strengths so they can make informed decisions about which path to choose. That said, some participants voiced concerns about identifying career or extracurricular paths too soon, feeling this could limit students from exploring other areas.

Participants also said that successful graduates are active, productive members of society who are well-rounded.

Participants also identified the essential skills they believe students need to accomplish these goals. Many participants mentioned socio-emotional skills (e.g., communication and interpersonal skills), soft skills (e.g., collaboration, time and task management, organization), life skills (e.g., financial literacy), and critical thinking and problem solving skills. Participants said these should be taught as early as elementary school — at an age-appropriate level — and then reinforced as students transition to intermediate, middle, and high school.

## Portrait of a Graduate

A copy of the Portrait of a Graduate document was given to participants to review. They were then asked to identify what the district does well and where it could improve, based on the stated goals. One important finding from this discussion is that most participants were already familiar with the document, especially teachers at all school levels and parents of secondary students.

Participants in most sessions identified the following Portrait of a Graduate goals as district strengths:

- **Success in college/further study and employment in global society:** Understand world issues and current events
- **Demonstrate social awareness:** Know and appreciate cultural and linguistic diversity; students exhibit an appreciation of the arts and humanities (*Some participants called for an increased focus on developing linguistic diversity*)
- **Exhibit strong personal qualities:** Identify personal goals; demonstrate value of self
- **Communicate effectively:** Work in collaboration with others
- **Use technology as a tool**

Participants were also asked to suggest improvements and other areas Keller ISD should consider including in the document and identify anything that was confusing or unclear. Areas for improvement include:

- Expanding student appreciation for linguistic diversity
- Increasing student understanding and engagement in balanced intellectual, physical, and emotional activities
- Emphasizing students' understanding of when technology is appropriate and what tool they should use.

Some participants suggested including citizenship goals (e.g., digital citizenship and community service) in the Portrait of a Graduate. Lastly, participants discussed the need for consistency across teachers, grade levels, and campuses in supporting the goals in a way that builds from one year to the next.

## School District Strategic Plan

Participants were also given the Keller ISD strategic plan document to review. Moderators asked participants to highlight what Keller ISD was doing well, areas for improvement, confusing or unclear items, as well as suggestions for additional items. Participants were told these documents would be collected for analysis.

The strategic priority areas that garnered the most positive responses were excellence in financial stewardship (**Priority 5**); followed by employee excellence and organizational improvement (**Priority 4**); excellence in student, parent, and community relationships (**Priority 2**); and increase student achievement (**Priority 1**). Excellence in processes and systems (**Priority 3**) did not receive as much attention.

The most prevalent strength discussed for Priority 5 was the district’s financial transparency and education of the public on school finance (Guiding Strategy 5A). Discussion about Priority 4 was also mostly positive for both goals regarding a well-qualified, innovative staff and a positive work environment. The positive work environment was echoed in the feedback about the process/end measure items about employee health and morale.

For Priority 2, participants had a positive perception of the district’s ability to listen and respond to the voices of its customer groups (Guiding Strategy 2B) and to create opportunities to partner with students, families, and the community in defining effective, innovative educational practices (Guiding Strategy D). Some participants felt that timely feedback and communication between teachers/campuses and parents about student progress, school news, etc. were inconsistent from campus to campus.

Lastly, positive feedback for Priority 1 included recognizing the strength of the process/end measures for student engagement and innovative education practices. Engaging all students in co-curricular or extracurricular activities (Guiding Strategy 1D) was also recognized. Participants suggested to the district could better facilitate individualized, student-driven learning (Guiding Strategy 1A).

In a few sessions, participants discussed equitable versus equal allocation of resources. Some participants wanted to tailor support to the needs of each campus, but others felt it was important to ensure that all campuses had access to the same resources. Although participants agreed that Keller ISD has high-quality teachers, participants in several sessions discussed the lack of diversity among staff. Some participants were confused by the mention of Baldrige processes, which staff members said had not been emphasized in recent years, as well as the achievement gap listed as a progress/end measure for Priority 1. In addition, participants in some sessions also discussed how the district was differentiating to meet the needs of students with special needs, students identified as gifted, and those “in the middle.”

### **Trending Topics**

Seven trending topics in public education, particularly in Texas, were posted for participants to review: School choice, specialized academies, competency-based education, dual-language, blended learning, PBIS, and restorative discipline. Participants shared which topics stood out to them and why.

Several topics were discussed across all sessions, but participants most often discussed school choice, both in the context of open-enrollment within the district and using public funds to attend schools outside of Keller ISD through vouchers. Discussions about transferring between district schools revealed a mixed response; participants felt that students could benefit from going to schools that had programs and courses that match their interests, but there were also concerns about creating flagship schools and lessening students’ experiences with a diverse student body. Participants did not support a voucher system that would allow for open enrollment outside of the district.

Some participants would like the district to offer dual-language programs at an early age because of the academic benefits of language acquisition and the opportunity for students to gain cultural awareness.

Discussions about competency-based education mostly focused on understanding what this type of education entails (e.g., no grades, progressing based on skill mastery, etc.).

Conversations about PBIS, restorative discipline, and blended-learning mostly entailed participants discussing definitions. Participants liked the positive approach to discipline with PBIS, and they were interested in learning more about restorative discipline as a way to help students and staff become proactive instead of reactive by getting to root causes of behavior. Blended-learning was perceived as a method to differentiate instruction.

### **Long-term Goals for Keller ISD**

Each session ended with the question, “In 10 years, what would you enjoy being able to say about Keller ISD?” Participants said they hoped to say that Keller ISD prepared students for their chosen path, and that graduates became active and contributing members of society. Participants also said they hoped staff members still enjoy working for Keller ISD and continue to take a student-centered approach. Additionally, participants hoped that Keller ISD would have a reputation as a leading school district both within Texas and nationwide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants were grateful for the opportunity to provide candid feedback for district leaders to consider as they plan for Keller ISD's future. Overall, participants feel that Keller ISD is a high-performing district that offers a variety of opportunities for students, and that financial transparency is one of its greatest strengths. Based on these findings and the improvement areas identified by participants, *K12 Insight* recommends the following:

- Consider the following modifications or additions to the district's guiding documents (e.g., Profile of a Graduate and/or the strategic plan):
  - Place greater emphasis on students' cultural awareness and understanding; this should also include a focus on hiring a more diverse staff
  - Increase citizenship education and service opportunities for students
  - Prioritize individualized learning plans and provide opportunities for student-driven learning
  - Integrate life skills and soft skills, such as critical-thinking and problem solving, with academic skills
- Increase opportunities for students to explore their interests, identify their strengths, and tailor their secondary educational experience to those interests as they prepare for life after high school. Balance those opportunities with providing students a varied and well-rounded educational experience.
- Consider the following opportunities for stakeholder input:
  - Conduct satisfaction surveys for parents with children in the special education program and/or gifted program
  - Add questions about school communication, including timely feedback on student progress, to the annual campus surveys
  - Conduct an annual student engagement survey that measures both cognitive and social and emotional engagement
  - Use a two-pronged approach to gathering feedback from Keller ISD graduates — a survey of graduating seniors and alumni focus groups with recent graduates to understand their views of how Keller ISD prepared them for life after high school

### Next Steps

- Share this report or an executive summary with focus group participants
- Share this report with district leadership
- Discuss the implications of the findings on strategic planning



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Discussion guides informed each focus group session.

### Measuring Success

1. What does success look like for Keller ISD graduates? Or if you are a parent, specifically for your child?
2. In order to accomplish these goals, what skills do you feel are important for students to have as they complete:
  - a. Elementary School?
  - b. Intermediate School?
  - c. Middle School?
  - d. High School?

### Portrait of a Graduate:

3. Which of these areas of the Portrait of a Graduate do you feel is a strength for Keller ISD?
4. In which areas do you feel the district needs to improve?
5. What else should KISD consider including?
  - a. How will we know students have successfully achieved those?
6. Are there any confusing/unclear items on the Portrait of a Graduate?

### School District Strategic Plan:

7. Which areas did you identify that Keller ISD is doing well?
8. Which areas you feel KISD could improve upon?
9. Are there any confusing/unclear items?
10. What other things should Keller ISD consider?

**Trending Topics Across the State:**

11. Which of these topics stand out to you and why?

- a. School choice
- b. Specialized academies
- c. Competency-based education
- d. Dual-language programs
- e. Blended learning
- f. PBIS
- g. Restorative discipline

**Long-Term Goals for Keller ISD:**

12. In 10 years, what would you enjoy being able to say about Keller ISD?



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