



ann arbor youth senate

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT
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March 2003, Report to School Board: Student Priorities for School Improvement and a Possible Third High School Results of Focus Groups (12/2002) And Surveys (1/2003)

Introduction:

This effort, planned, conducted, and analyzed by the Ann Arbor Youth Senate, was a district-wide endeavor to document the priorities of students, for school improvement and their vision of what a new high school should look like. By running Focus Groups in December, 2002, hundreds of issues were raised concerning those issues. Out of these hundreds, the top twenty categories were put into the follow-up surveys, and distributed in January 2003, to rank the issues in order of importance. Between these efforts the Senate reached a total of 2,041 students, or 38% of the Ann Arbor Public High School population. Their input, compiled below, is a revealing look at the current high school experience in the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Major Themes in the Focus Groups (Conducted in December, 2002)

Based on questions suggested by School Board Members, the Superintendent, and student input, the Focus Group questions were created and facilitated in classrooms at Pioneer, Huron, and Community, by high school and college student volunteers. Specific emphasis was placed on reaching a cross-section of the high school population in terms of grade level, course difficulty, and student interests.

Total number of classrooms reached: 34

Total number of students reached: 765 [14%]

*See attached: list of the Focus Group questions; and the Focus Group Data for more specific results.

Policy

“Unfair” Rules and Student Involvement:

- Increase the roles and responsibilities of Student Council, the Senate, and other student organizations

- Re-evaluate with student input the Attendance, Tardy, Electronics and Hat policies
- Integrate students into the policy-making process as well as publicizing ways to join school committees.
- Involve students in all things that effect them, like what is often done with hiring.

Scheduling Options:

- Evaluate the possibility of having a later start, block scheduling, one lunch, an open campus and forums.
- Find out what is the most effective about assembly or activity schedules, and how the timing could be improved.

Quality of Education

Quality of Staff

Variety of Classes

Smaller Classes

The emergence of these categories as priorities shows that students emphasize the positive nature of a personalized education.

Facilities

Parking:

- Evaluate possibilities to increase parking at the high schools, or find creative solutions to reduce the need, such as carpooling, public transportation, or something along those lines.

Cleanliness:

- The state of the hallways, classrooms, parking lots, and most gruesomely the bathrooms, is appalling and students share a large part of the blame for these problems. There has to be a way to change the attitude of the student body to reduce this mess.
- Involving students in the school improvement process and projects does much to further the above aim and improves other aspects of the school environment.
- Increasing funding and focus could build upon many of the current positive efforts.
- Increased custodial and maintenance staff is necessary.

Climate Control:

- Freezing or burning seems to be the two settings for most classrooms; there has to be a way to fix this problem, and local control would do much to improve this.
 - ❖ Note that this category was very important in the focus groups, but did not show up as strongly in the survey. Part of this can be attributed to the confusion about the naming. Many students reported that they thought this category in the survey was in relation to the “climate” between students, staff and administrators.

Student Activities

Sports:

- While the sports teams are generally very successful, the number of opportunities is low. Intramural sports or an increased number of club sports would be much appreciated by the student body.

Clubs:

- As with sports, club involvement is a proven way to increase academic achievement. Students think clubs should be a priority. It would be helpful to inform students on how to form clubs, and encourage freshmen to join.

School Spirit:

- This brings the student body closer together and discourages negative behavior. If a new high school is built, student choices for the colors and mascot could create an encouraging start. At the current schools, continue the current traditions, and continue to find new ways to unite the student body.

Special Days:

- Dances, assemblies, activity periods, pep rallies, etc, are generally liked. Continued refinement and student involvement in this process can continue this tradition.

Summary

While most of the problems seem solvable in the current high schools, a few problems require significant changes. These include smaller classes, more parking, greater opportunity for involvement in extracurricular activities, and reduced overcrowding.

Results from the Follow-up Survey
(Conducted in January, 2003)

The survey categories are a result of the top twenty issues from the focus groups, and from a body of questions relating to a possible third high school created by input from members of School Board. See attached survey used and graphs for results.

Total number of students surveyed: 1276

Percent of the high school student body surveyed: 24%

For more information please contact the Youth Empowerment Office and our Advisor, Ebba Hierta, Youth Empowerment Project Co-President at 761-3003 or sent an email to ebba@youthempowerment.com