

Augusta School Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Future Search

November 18-19, 2016



The Guiding Question for our Future Search

Recognizing all of the challenges and opportunities that exist, how do we build a school system that is responsive to the current and future needs of our students?

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A MESSAGE FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD

What is a Future Search? Why did we have one? What happens now? These are three good questions that have probably been asked by members of our community related to our recent Future Search event. Let's start with answering the "Why?".

In 2015, during our annual Goal Setting Workshop, discussion began to develop about the vision & direction of our schools. It was felt that, so often, our schools are required to react and respond to various changes, including educational practice, Federal/State mandates, and budget constraints. As a result, our schools have begun to lose focus on a, once unified, vision. In addition, in a busy, technology-based world, we wondered if we really knew, and understood, what our community wanted for our schools and students. Realizing that it had been over 10 years since the Augusta School Department really examined its guiding beliefs and vision, the process of holding a Future Search was started.

So what, exactly, is a Future Search? A Future Search is a gathering of a wide representation of people within our community, focused on creating a vision of what we want education to be in our city. For Augusta, it was an opportunity for the School Board to listen to the needs, concerns, ideas, and dreams of the people who make up the Augusta community. With the help of a skilled facilitator, approximately 90 people, representing parents, teachers, students, business leaders, community leaders, and more, came together for 2 days of interactive discussion. We examined the history of our city and schools, celebrated our successes, acknowledged our failures, and worked together to build a picture of what we hope for going forward. It was an opportunity for everyone to be heard, gave many people a better understanding of our school system, created meaningful connections between community members who may not otherwise interact, allowed people from all perspectives to find common purpose & common ground, and, most importantly, helped develop a shared vision for the Augusta School Department.

Of course, the biggest question: What happens now? This Executive Summary is just a start. As we share with you what we have learned in this process, we trust that the beliefs, ideas, and expectations in this document reflect a shared vision for our schools and community. Moving forward, the Guiding Beliefs and Vision, will become a baseline for our planning and decision-making. As opportunities arise, we hope that members of our community will join with us in making this vision a reality for our students. Augusta is a city that values its schools. Working together to find creative solutions to current and future concerns, as well as building on the great things that are already happening!

The mission of the Augusta School Department is to provide all students with challenging, high quality educational programs in academic skills, life skills, career preparation, and citizenship.

OUR HISTORY

We need to remember as we plan our future:

- Changing demographics, diversity & culture
 - Augusta has seen a declining population and a shrinking middle class, with a recent increase in our immigrant population. The tone within our community reflects a decline in civility and basic social values.
- Economy & Funding
 - A decline of funding sources combined the rising need for school-based social services, has resulted in an increased tax burden for Augusta residents, as well as program cuts & school closures.
- Rapidly changing technology
 - There is an increased dependence on technology in our schools and community. Social media and other technologies are having both positive & negative impacts on our students
- Social issues
 - Augusta has seen a rise in drug use, addiction, and related social issues, while also experiencing decreasing availability of mental health services.
- School violence and safety
 - There has been a change in societal tolerance for bullying, as well as an increase in awareness of potential threats of school violence, as incidents have occurred in communities similar to ours.



OUR PROUDS

As we plan for the future, we want to celebrate our:

- Educational programming
 - The Augusta School Department (ASD) has a variety of excellent programs and educational opportunities focused on helping students reach their academic and personal growth potential.
- Teachers and Staff
 - The ASD has dedicated, committed, and caring faculty and staff who work collaboratively to meet the varied needs of all students.
- Facilities
 - The ASD, and our community, takes pride in our safe, clean, and well-maintained Buildings & Grounds.
- Diversity and Community
 - The ASD maintains a welcoming culture and acceptance of diversity, encouraging involvement of parents, business, and community members.
- Extra & Co-Curricular Offerings & School Pride
 - The ASD provides all students with a spectrum of Extra & Co-Curricular opportunities that encourage a strong sense of school pride and tradition.



OUR SORRIES

As we plan for the future, we recognize:

- Educational Programming
 - Due to increased demands, reduced funding, and Federal/State mandates, it is difficult to meet the programming needs of all of our students all of the time.
- Teachers and Staff
 - Increased demands on our faculty and staff result in increased stress, illness, low morale, apathy, and dissatisfaction in their role as educators.
- Funding
 - Decreased Federal/State funding results in increasing pressure on the local tax payer and/or the School Board having to make difficult decisions that negatively impact education.
- Changing demographics & challenges in the student population
 - Students are not coming to school ready, and able, to learn.
- Public Relations & Communication
 - There is a negative perception regarding teaching and learning in the Augusta School Department due to a breakdown in communication between the schools and the community.



FUTURE TRENDS & INFLUENCES

As our community changes, we need to focus on:

- Funding
 - As traditional Federal/State funding sources continue to change, there will be a need to identify, and increase, alternative funding mechanisms while developing sustainable funding models.
- Civility
 - Given the current cultural shift evidenced by a notable decrease in civility with a corresponding increase in the sense of entitlement, our schools are now tasked with teaching & modeling civility within our community.
- Technology
 - Technology changes rapidly and we should remain vigilant for opportunities to reduce workload, increase communication, and deliver an education experience tailored to the needs of the population.
- Basic Life Skills
 - As society has changed, there is the perception that students in the quest for learning are losing basic life skills.
- Health & Wellness
 - There is an increase in families in crisis, students with identified early trauma, and lowered physical health among the student population.
- Demographics & Diversity
 - As new populations are assimilated into the school system, there will need to be an increased awareness of the differences in traditions and customs.



OUR GUIDING BELIEFS

We Believe that:

- Learning needs to be flexible, individualized, and focused on enabling students to develop lifelong learning skills.
- All students are unique and capable of learning, and it is necessary to embrace and foster individual learning styles.
- Faculty and staff are expected to provide equal opportunity for all students to learn and succeed.
- The Augusta School Department has a responsibility to provide an environment that is safe, orderly, welcoming, and accepting.
- Learning requires respect of the profession by community, parents, and students.



OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Remembering that every decision should answer the question “How does this benefit the students?”, the Augusta School department will:

- Deliver an all encompassing, individualized curriculum that tailors instruction, challenges students, provides flexibility and maintains rigor, while expanding experiential learning and creating mindful students who are prepared to be functioning members of a global society.
- Foster creativity while developing and implementing programs that engage students for a changing world, enhance curriculum, and leverage the power of technology for learning and life.
- Create a safe and secure school community where behaviors and actions are held accountable for students, staff, and parents, while fostering a culture of acceptance and support for all, as well as respect and empathy for our school and community.
- Value open, transparent and mutually respectful communication which includes active listening to promote positive collaboration between staff, students, parents and community. We expect strong and successful communication skills to be taught, modeled, and utilized by all.
- In order to increase social, physical, emotional and mental well-being, we support opportunities for students and staff to learn and practice strategies for healthy lifestyles.



NEXT STEPS

- Future Search Participant Open House
 - Present Executive Summary
 - Encourage discussion of practical ways to implement
- Public Rollout
 - ASD website/Facebook
 - Kennebec Journal
 - Presentation to City Council
- Form a Working Group responsible for providing the Board, through the Education Committee, with recommended goals that align with this Executive Summary.
- Review twice annually in the Education & Curriculum Committee to identify progress toward incorporating the Guiding Beliefs and Vision in decision-making and planning.



Acknowledgement & Appreciation

The Augusta School Board would like to acknowledge the hard work that went in to organizing and carrying out this Future Search event. It is with sincere gratitude that we thank:

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Donna Madore, Assistant Superintendent

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All documents and data created during the Future Search process are available for review at the Augusta School Department Central Office.