

Ludlow-Taylor School Community Meeting

Tue. March 18, 2008

SUMMARY OF TABLE DISCUSSIONS

I. What do you most like about Ludlow-Taylor that should be maintained into the future?

A. General Comments

1. Family atmosphere, exceptional teachers, and comprehensive programs.
2. The school has made a solid beginning - keep what there is and improve on it.
3. Staff and programs that they have for children and how L-T supports the community
4. Uniforms
5. General comments: very happy with the program; feeling/spirit of unity, school has always been a part of the community
6. Benefits for all children.
7. The fact that this is a neighborhood school with long-standing roots in the community. *(N.B. this didn't include any discussion about the fact that a significant number of the students are from out of boundaries. I didn't get a sense that there was any objection to the number of out of boundaries students.)*
8. The kids here now should stay here
9. Congenial, supportive atmosphere for specialized students with significant disabilities
10. Pride in the school, including program for three year olds
11. School spirit
12. The school spirit was shown during the DCPS clean-up day. A FoLT mentioned working to clean up the area around the school to make it safer for the kids. They discussed what needed to be done to make the streets safer as well

B. Academic Programs & Student Achievement

1. Curriculum is stimulating without being overwhelming
2. Continue academic gains
3. Improving academics. The high scores on the academic yearly performance tests
4. LT offers good education to the students
5. Attention to detail in regards to parents/student need.
6. Head Start-Early Childhood Programs
7. Special Education
8. Computer Lab-Library
9. Library

C. Teachers, Staff & Administration

1. Diverse staff and the children.
2. Staff who do their jobs-dedication
3. Small classroom, such as 3-4 year olds having a 15-2/3 ratio of students to teachers
4. Teachers
5. Teachers who know long-term families are more willing to work with a student's problems instead of getting them out of the class or suspending them
6. Teachers worked well with the parents when there were problems with the students. *(This was a good sign to this person that the teachers really cared about the students. Several nodded their heads in agreement regarding caring teachers.)*
7. Principal's leadership; is hands-on with the children

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D. Out-of-School Time & Extracurricular Programs

1. After-school program
2. There is an active, planned after school program which includes a community service component every month.

E. Parent Engagement & Community Involvement

1. Families send their children to L-T for generations
2. Participation by "legacy" families important
3. Community-oriented; has a tradition of incorporating the new into the community
4. Location is ideal; moved our family here to be able to attend
5. Good communication between parents and school; they address problems before they got too big
6. Robo-calls from the principal keeping parents informed
7. PTA/Community meetings
8. Relationships with community, for example the support from Mr. Fox

F. Buildings & Grounds

1. Building has been well-kept
2. Renovations to grounds and ballfield

II. What about Ludlow-Taylor is good, but should be improved to be even better as we move forward?

A. General Comments

1. Increase school enrollment
2. More diversity to make L-T more representative of DC's population as a whole. *(One participant said that his perception was because L-T's student population was almost entirely African-American that white parents in the area might be reluctant to send their children there.)*
1. There was some talk about education to help students learn to communicate better and not get emotionally invested when disagreements arise. *(I asked if they were thinking about a conflict resolution program, but it seemed that this was seen more as something that would be part of a life skills class.)*

B. Academic Programs & Student Achievement

2. Academic standards and performance
3. A diverse, challenging curriculum. Language and computer classes were mentioned as subjects that could be improved.
4. Figure out ways to get students' attention and make education relevant to their interests.
5. More field trips and reading classes . . . More field trips for children
6. Exposure to and education in arts (esp. music).
3. A 3 year old program.
7. Integrate library utilization into the curriculum (e.g. research & storytelling).
8. New library needs books and more access for students
9. More computers for students

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C. Teachers, Staff, and Administration

1. Staff absences (substitute pool needed).

D. Out-of-School Time & Extracurricular Activities

2. More activities for kids at the school. Things like a school festival (a teacher dunking booth was mentioned with nostalgia), but also year-round activities such as sports, clubs, etc.
3. Extracurricular activities: cheerleading, basketball team, school trips, cultural and fine arts programs.
4. Afterschool activities for the children
5. After school care.
6. Network to get community programs involved in the school.
7. A teacher had been at LT for 10 years and is proud of the school and its involvement in the community. She runs an afterschool program and reaches out regularly to the neighbors asking for their support, particularly help with fundraising. She is disappointed with how few neighbors have supported this initiative. Help with finances for extra-curricula activities seemed to be the emphasis here. (*Ms. Brown mentioned that a neighbor, a Mr. Fox, should be approached for funding. He has generously given to the school in prior years.*)

E. Parent Engagement & Community Involvement

1. Parent involvement and community outreach.
2. More outreach to parents, both to get them involved in the school and also to help them be better parents to their children.
3. Better outreach in terms of communication—flyers, notes sent home, etc.
4. Communication between parents and principal
5. Parent education - both academic and also parenting and life skills classes. There was talk about partnering with local universities or community organizations to provide classes. This was seen as not only being a benefit to the community in itself, but also that the increased traffic at the school would discourage undesirable elements from hanging out there after hours.
6. Growing community involvement at the school
7. Neighborhood involvement in the school.
8. Growing community support for the school
9. Open up to community support - school, staff, parents all working for the kids, don't want to feel that this is outsourced
10. Friends of Ludlow-Taylor change their communication model
11. A mother of a toddler and a five month old described where she lived and stated that she, and other parents on her block, planned to send her children to LT. As a founding member FoLT, she wanted the school to be the best it could be and have the resources it needed. She confirmed that she and other members of FoLT lived in the neighborhood and participated in a number of LT activities including health screenings. They wanted more contact with the school. She said that she felt that the principal did not want her to participate in LT activities or have her children attend LT.

F. Buildings & Grounds

1. Use of large facility with good outdoor space
2. Better maintenance; fresh paint, overall physical environment needs to be better.
3. Fix up the stage

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III. What (if anything) about Ludlow-Taylor do we need to discard as we move forward into the future?

A. General Comments

1. Nothing - overwhelmingly the response was that all of L-T's programs were good and worth keeping. Add, not subtract.
2. However, there was an acknowledgment in the discussion on B. that there were problems in the area of L-T that weren't related to L-T's programs or policies.
3. Racial stuff that was exhibited in the meeting this evening - hostility towards white people
4. Principal told one white parent that "you don't want to send your white child to this school"
5. Enrollment needs to increase
6. Too many special needs students for the population of school
7. There was concern that individuals hang out at L-T on evenings/weekends, which is undesirable in itself and also that they leave trash that is not only unsightly but potentially dangerous - bottles, syringes, etc..
8. There was consensus on the importance of changing this situation. Discussion on better security at all times, including when school is not in session; get the local police more involved. Have ANC/Community/PTA meetings to mobilize resources to address this problem.

B. Academic Programs & Student Achievement

1. Not enough emphasis on high academics

C. Teachers, Staff, and Administration

1. Having a new principal is good
2. Increase number of teachers for special education
3. Staff is fueling the discord; they should look at how to move on

D. Out-of-School Time & Extracurricular Activities

1. Lack of improved community relationships with aftercare kids
2. Lack of improved safety around the school at night and on weekends

E. Parent Engagement & Community Involvement

1. Myths . . . miscommunication . . . misconceptions . . . distrust
2. It seemed that there was an issue of miscommunication that was very problematic amongst those present, and this miscommunication also fueled passions. For example, Ms. Brown (mother of eight) said she had gotten a letter in the mail stating that Friends of LT wanted to close the school to current students and change it into some other kind of school.
3. Open lines of communication
4. Lack of communication between community and school
5. Lack of transparency; eliminate misinformation
6. There was also a recognition that communication had become dysfunctional with various interest groups and also that sitting down in meetings such as this one were genuinely helpful in improving understanding and helping the groups to focus on their common

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goals. There was some discussion about having members of the Friends of L-T group meet with other members of the school and community to build better understanding.

7. Closed PTA meetings which do not allow all members to attend.
8. Ms. Brown was surprised to hear that Shahna Gooneratne had been excluded from the PTA meeting. There was a letter that stated schools were to be closed which was circulated and not identified. So, it was unclear who was perpetuating the miscommunication. There has been lots of misinformation.
9. People without kids in the school saying what they want - they need to know what the parents want and to enroll their own kids
10. Mediate to resolve differences between: Friends of Ludlow, parents of in-boundary students and out-of-boundary students
11. Bad relationship with FoLT
12. Lack of welcoming feeling towards FoLT families
13. Nothing done behind the back of the PTA/school administration. Even if positive, i.e., additional funding search; believe a meeting was held between FoLT and school board without the knowledge of the PTA
14. A teacher commented that there was a breakdown in communication with FoLT in November. The PTA learned that FoLT had applied for a grant and or asked for a meeting with the City Councilmember for that Ward, and with the Chancellor, Ms. Rhee, without notifying the PTA. This caused a lot of resentment and mistrust of FoLT by the teachers and PTA because a year ago there had been an agreement between the PTA and FoLT to always do things together to increase transparency and prevent surprises no matter how good the intentions.
15. One neighbor admitted he knew very little about what was going on inside the school. He did "want to see the school taken care of at night and on weekends." He does not like what he sees going on at that time and wants to protect the children from it.
16. Too many committees and too much talk, too little action

F. Buildings & Grounds

1. Broken windows

Note: Someone asked how many out of boundary students attended; 80% was quietly noted.

AS WE MOVE FORWARD OVER THE NEXT 3 YEARS,
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1. Would you like to see an academic focus or specialized teaching approach?

- a. Teaching strong academics – reading, math – not so much interested in specialized focus
- b. Yes, but not necessarily one that would draw from other parts of DC
- c. Perhaps diversity could be a focus – at Thompson, where one parent's children are enrolled, the programs focus on arts, academics and diversity.
- d. Yes, a school for the fine arts: visual arts, music, dance, and photography
- e. Perhaps a language immersion program
- f. Add foreign language to the curriculum
- g. Better library resources, and have a trained librarian
- h. Install computer labs and hire IT instructors
- i. Students need to do book reports
- j. More field trips

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2. Would you like to see a 3 year-old program open to all students?

- a. Yes with fees based on sliding income scale; with before and after care
- b. More advertisement of the school's 3 year old feeder program.
- c. Yes: Would like a foreign language offered

3. What out-of-school time and extracurricular programs would you like to see?

- a. Yes – one run by teachers, not Parks and Rec; sports, music, debate; language
- b. More of the same, now we have a baseball team, girl scouts, fun day.
- c. Have had programs that we'd like to see again: African program, sports teams, academic programs.
- d. Programs that are constructive and keep the kids busy.
- e. Community support, parental involvement are important: sharing expertise with kids, tutoring, and donating goods.
- f. More recreation programs (Children do not have enough time to run and play and exercise their muscles and relieve stress.); exercise, more team sports;
- g. Fine arts programs –photography, robotics
- h. Increased arts, p.e., and music programs (in school and after school); legitimate p.e. classes with the students in p.e. uniforms, not street clothes

4. What are the concerns with enrollment, feeder patterns, and losing 6th graders?

- a. Newer families don't choose L-T
- b. Worried about declining enrollment
- c. No one (very few) in neighborhood sending children to L-T – lots of out-of-boundary.
- d. Concerned about attracting more kids to the school.
- e. Idea: Field trips that include children in the neighborhood, whether or not they attend L-T; get businesses in the community to fund/support

5. How should parent and community involvement be encouraged and used?

- a. All parents and community members should be welcomed, starting from the top;
- b. See different aspects of community;
- c. Involve parents and community as valuable not threatening;
- d. Involve parents and community in gardening and other activities – using other schools as examples
- e. Having a proper transition plan for parents and staff that supports the mission and vision of the school.
- f. A Ludlow-Taylor website/ Flyers sent home with students.
- g. Newsletter, and partnering with Universities.
- h. Fundraising to pay for the website and Newsletter distribution.
- i. Parents and community must be involved - have to communicate with each other, be inclusive and work for the students, their parents, staff and teachers.
- j. Would like to see community involved in Fun Day and Back to School Night, which they are not.
- k. Need for more dialogue focused on the needs of kids; meetings open to everyone; talk about things the community can do to as a community and things the community can do to support the school
- l. Don't rely on electronic media for communication with parents. Hand out paper.

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- m. Don't assume everyone is computer literate.
- n. A PTA that is attractive to more/new parents; more frequent meetings

6. In selecting a new principal, what are the key qualities and skills needed?

- a. Welcoming . . . strong academic focus . . . good teaching record . . . excellent negotiation skills . . . values diversity
- b. He or she would need patience . . . an open door policy . . . good communication . . . be active and knowledgeable of the student population.
- c. New principal should be a good listener . . . someone who can motivate people . . . approachable (not standoffish) . . . works well with the with children, faculty and parents . . . experience in DCPS (not an outsider who doesn't know our system)

7. What other issues are important in planning Ludlow-Taylor's future?

- a. General Comments: Programs and activities are compelling to lots of people
- b. Too early to be designing program – need more discussions like this and opportunities for building communication and trust before getting to more difficult issues of focus, etc.
- c. Increased teaching staff with qualified teachers
- d. More tutors available; recruit mentors from the outside
- e. Salary increases for paraprofessionals
- f. Use in-school suspension . . . in-school detention/after-school detentions, instead of suspensions
- g. Use Friends of L-T to add extra help for suspended students.
- h. Improve physical environment: grounds & exterior, classrooms & interior
- i. Increase clean-up staff . . . hire more custodians – two is not enough