

## April 13 Community Education Meeting

### What We Heard!

On April 13, 2023, Charleston Shared Future and The Charleston Forum with the help of 13 churches and non-profit event partners registered more than 200 parents, students, educators and community leaders from across the tri-county area to discuss the future of education in our region. With only a brief introduction to recent technological advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) those who participated spent nearly two hours in small table facilitated discussions on “What School Could Be” and what they believe to be the most important issues confronting school boards in the immediate future and what should be done about them.

Here's what they and those who registered had to say...

#### A. What School Could Be!

The most important skills and mindsets we believe our children should be taught in school, in addition to basic math and reading are:

***Critical thinking...The ability to adapt to change – especially technology...Distinguishing ‘truth’ from social media fiction...Collaboration and team-working...Financial literacy...Compassion and empathy...Problem-solving...Entrepreneurialism...Communication***

For many, teaching ‘trade’ skills (CTE) should be a high priority, however advances in AI and machine learning (“scary”, “confusing”, “eye-opening”) cast doubt on what trades will continue to exist once AI enters the World of Work. Our public education system is not designed to teach and test these skills but rather to teach what is easier to test... information retention in many cases now readily available on the web.

School could and should be the place where 21st century skills, mindsets are taught and tested. It could and should be the place where a child’s natural curiosity and imagination are nurtured and developed.

#### **Solutions:**

- Engage and empower parents, students and educators, especially in high poverty neighborhoods to determine what their school(s) and feeder patterns could and should be, and...
- Make available all models proven to work (“Community schools”, traditional models, charters, public/private models) for their assessment
- Expand use of the Schools of Innovation Law to provide the means for school autonomy, reconstitution and innovation.
- Provide access for teachers to experts in low-cost/no cost school innovative methods (**whatschoolcouldbe.org**) for them to assess and try
- Utilize the Low Country Education Consortium to explore how AI can ‘personalize’ remote and hybrid learning

## **B. The Most Immediate Issues that Require School Board Attention**

There was broad consensus in the room that our school boards today are not sufficiently focused on what children need from school to be successful but rather distract themselves with ‘adult’ issues (politics, meeting protocols) and with second-guessing educators on curriculum content and teacher responsibilities.

These are the most important issues on the minds of parents, students and educators in the room that warrant school board attention and action. These issues and their solutions should be visible, measured and monitored at every school board meeting

### **1. Teachers!**

There was broad consensus across the room that insufficient pay and support for teachers is at a crisis moment in our region and beyond. We need educators in sufficient numbers and with sufficient time and professional development to address individual student needs as well as ‘re-think’ teaching and learning for a 21<sup>st</sup> century digital world.

#### **Solutions:**

- Increase teacher pay linked to the national average, plus merit-based increases and incentives for challenging assignments
- To support certified teachers: hire ‘alternative-certified’ personnel; start a para-professional program (Union County NC school district)
- Scholarships for professional development; loan forgiveness for service

### **2. Disparity**

The achievement gap that separates child success on the basis of color and poverty and that has plagued our region for hundreds of years requires urgent attention. Technology advances will obsolete many lower-level jobs and those without basic reading and math skills and the skills and mindsets needed for the next century will continue to be left behind.

#### **Solutions:**

- Make 3k/4k pre-school accessible to all
- 2 teachers in early grades classrooms in high poverty schools
- Incentive pay to attract and retain experienced teachers/principals to high poverty schools
- Flex the school day/school year and offer after-school remedial support
- Implement with fidelity and stick with curricula that work

### 3. Child Safety and Security

Schools need to be safe spaces, physically and emotionally, and they need to ‘feel’ safe to children in order for them to learn. For the foreseeable future many of our schools will need to support the basic needs (food, health) of these children as well

#### **Solutions:**

- SEL programs are needed in all high poverty neighborhood schools
- Restorative justice practices need to be implemented with fidelity
- Cultural competence training for teachers
- More mental health supports in schools
- Continued efforts to welcome and engage parents in school life

### 4. School & the “Real’ World

Across the room, there was a strong message that as early as middle school, children need greater exposure to what they will need for their own wellbeing and success in a changing world. Whether to encourage college aspirations or to learn about trades, it is very clear that these pathways are about to change...’the trades’ of today will not necessarily be available tomorrow

#### **Solutions:**

- Invite business and community leaders to teach skills, not just trades, and what changes in their industry will require of graduates
- Equip students to be financially literate and adaptive

### 5. Parent & Caregiver Support

“Parental Rights” has become a popular and politicized term in public education. Whether a ‘Right’ or a responsibility, too many parents however and for multiple reasons are challenged to engage in their child’s education or with their school.

#### **Solutions:**

- Schools can do more to be ‘welcoming’ places for parents and caregivers both during and after hours.
- Programs that offer support for students and their parents simultaneously (2Gen) are available, both in-person and on line, and have proven effective.
- Particular attention must be paid to the Hispanic community for supports specific to their needs

There were many other issues raised during the course of the evening that reflect individual concerns or were specific to individual districts and that merit mention. These include students with special needs, prayer in schools, the importance of maintaining the EL curriculum (CCSD), School Choice, Vouchers, more effective use of School Improvement Councils or their equivalent, and greater attention earlier to Languages, the Arts, and Black History. Whatever their importance they did not yield a consensus view.

There was, in addition, broad recognition that many of the issues schools confront have their roots in other ‘systems’ and their inequities: housing, economic inequality, health, and criminal justice to name a few. While an unfortunate reality, it does not relieve public education of the responsibility to address them.

### C. Paying for it!

Beginning a process of reform can involve a variety of no-cost/low-cost methods worth pursuing. Everything else, including a greater shift of existing resources toward those students and schools where the need is greatest will cost someone something.

#### **Solutions:**

- Reforming South Carolina’s school funding structure is a long-term proposition; its advocacy should be a priority for school boards and the Low Country Delegation.
- School boards are the governing body for determining millage rates for commercial and non-residential property taxes. Districts operating below their caps may approve additional tax revenues by majority vote. Regional surveys have repeatedly shown support for increasing taxes that serve public education reform.
- Discretionary funds including Title I funds and remaining ESSER funds can be re-purposed
- School boards and the Low Country Delegation should both act and advocate for additional funds from the State.
- School boards should act to ensure any incremental revenues as well as existing budgeted discretionary funds are distributed equitably i.e., on the basis of where the need is greatest.

### D. Engagement

Charleston Shared Future and The Charleston Forum have taken pains to ensure with this summary that we heard what people had to say and will now make certain to inform those same people as to the districts’ responses. Based on their past experience these people have serious doubts as to whether we can and will follow through.

#### **Solution:**

- Do not repeat past failures in your efforts to secure parental engagement by failing to inform them directly of what became of their input.

**Charleston Shared Future**

**The Charleston Forum**