[PUBLIC] 2021
COMMUNITY
SURVEY REPORT

This survey was conducted on behalf of Oxbow Unified Union School District in the communities of Bradford & Newbury, Vermont.

Note: The following version of this report has been edited for release to the public.

Written by Monique Priestley, Independent Consultant
In Collaboration with the OUUSD Strategic Planning Committee:
Carol Cottrell, Bruce Williams, and Timm Judas

Survey Conducted & Summarized February-April 2021
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I. INTRODUCTION

The well-being of public schools is directly linked to the health of the communities of which they serve. They employ residents, connect neighboring towns, impact local housing markets, attract or deter workforce, affect economic development, and influence community development. It is in everyone’s best interest to be invested in local schools, not only through funding, but through awareness and participation.

Oxbow Union Unified School District (OUUSD) encompasses the schools of Bradford and Newbury, Vermont: Bradford Elementary School (BES), Newbury Elementary School (NES), Oxbow High School (OHS) and River Bend Career & Technical Center (RBCTC). Bradford and Newbury are located less than an hour drive north of the major economic/social center of Hanover and Lebanon, New Hampshire and White River Jct, Vermont and serves as the economic center for the immediate region, as the surrounding towns are more rural with smaller village centers. Currently, the district consists of one high school (grades 7th-12th), one career and technical center, and two elementary schools (grades K-6th). OUUSD is a member of the Orange East Supervisory Union (OESU).

As part of initial steps towards starting a strategic planning process, OUUSD sought input from all community members, regardless of their current level of engagement, in order to identify long- and short-term goals, consider how best to allocate resources, and finally, determine a course of action for the next 3-5 years. Input from the entire community was considered to be instrumental in establishing a plan that is relevant to the district’s future direction and priorities.

Monique Priestley, an independent consultant, was brought in to assist with development of the survey, in collaboration with the OUUSD Strategic Planning Committee. Once an initial survey was drafted, the Strategic Planning Committee asked for feedback from 30 community members representing various age and role groups. These community members were sent their own, individual copies of the draft survey in Google Docs to provide private feedback. Once a majority of the group had provided feedback, the Strategic Planning Committee invited those 30 community members to two focus groups via Zoom in order to provide real-time feedback. After feedback from the focus groups was reviewed and implemented, the final survey was recreated in SurveyMonkey in order to reach the highest number of people possible. The Strategic Planning Committee held off on in-person focus groups due to the Covid-19 pandemic and set a goal of collecting 300 survey responses. The survey was posted on February 18, 2021 and was closed with 447 responses on April 1, 2021. As the survey asked respondents to provide the number of people they were representing (e.g. spouses, children), the total number of individuals represented exceeded 854 individuals.

This research report presents findings of a community-wide survey, conducted with the intention of gathering input from a variety of stakeholder groups, spanning all ages and individual roles. The data points curated in this report are represented in a variety of ways. Both qualitative (quotes extracted from open-ended survey questions) and quantitative (graphs and tables) findings are included to paint a comprehensive picture.
This evaluation of the current successes and challenges of schools within the OUUSD provides a unique and exciting opportunity to consider how best to improve the school experience for K-12th grade students within the communities of Bradford and Newbury, Vermont. Students today are navigating a highly complex world. It is time to investigate the best approaches for ensuring the long-term health and strength of the public schools within these communities. The current health crisis has disrupted educational systems across the globe. Although schools have struggled this past year, as they look ahead, they are being presented with the perfect opportunity to rebuild in order to more effectively engage communities and meet the needs of all students. The following report outlines potential for growth, adaptation, and experimentation.

II. EVALUATION

OUUSD elected to conduct a formal evaluation to gather input from all stakeholder categories so as to inform its strategic planning process. Monique Priestley, an independent consultant, was brought in to serve as an external evaluator of the survey, in collaboration with the OUUSD Strategic Planning Committee.

The primary objectives of the evaluation were three-fold: (1) to gather formative feedback from all stakeholders in community; (2) to gather formative feedback relevant to the entire district as a whole in order to guide formation of a district-wide plan; and (3) to gather formative feedback relevant to each individual school in order to guide formation of school-specific plans.

III. METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE SIZE

A variety of data collection methods were used to gather formative feedback. All data was collected into a single SurveyMonkey survey. The survey link was shared through Facebook, local Vital Communities listservs (communication lists for each town and village throughout the Upper Valley region of Vermont and New Hampshire), local Google Groups, email, Facebook Messenger, Infinite Campus (a district-wide communication tool for staff and the families of students), local newspapers (The Journal Opinion and The Bridge Weekly), and mailed postcards to all registered voters in Bradford and Newbury. In the case of Infinite Campus, two messages were sent to all administrator, staff, parent, and student email addresses. Additionally, printed versions of the survey were made available at general stores and libraries in Bradford and Newbury, Vermont.

A total of 447 survey responses were collected, far exceeding the Strategic Planning Committee’s goal of 300. Respondents were asked how many people they were representing (number), including any family members who were present. This revealed that 447 responses accounted for more than 854 individuals, resulting in a median of 1 and an average of 2.

Ages of respondents (multi-selection) were well-distributed across all provided values. Of 447 respondents, 433 disclosed their age group. A majority of respondents, 199 or 45%, were of the age group 33-49. The next highest representation was for the age group 50-65 at 146 respondents, or 33%. Youth were also well represented. Of the age group 0-13 were 97 respondents, or 22% and of the age group 14-18 were 70 respondents, or 16%. The final two age groups were 66+ at 69 respondents, or 15% and 19-32 at 49 respondents or 11%. Note: The total of all percentages for ages and roles exceeds 100% because respondents were able to make multiple selections, depending on the people they were representing.
Similar to age, roles of respondents (multi-selection) were also well-distributed across all provided values. When asked to provide a role, as well as the role of represented family members, the following counts resulted: 211 (47%) parent/guardian, 203 (45%) community member, 91 (20%) student, 84 (19%) former parent/guardian, 68 (15%) teacher, 63 (14%) former student, 44 (10%) business owner, 36 (8%) support staff, 5 (7%) administrator, and 31 (8%) other. The majority of other responses listed ‘former teacher’ and ‘former board member’.
In addition to demographics, questions of engagement were asked on the survey. When asked how often respondents had attended a school board meeting in the last year, 2% always attended, 8% frequently attended, 20% sometimes attended, 20% rarely attended, and 50% never attended. When asked if respondents would attend future school board meetings, 38% would attend via Zoom; 27% would not attend; 18% would attend, regardless of format; and 16% would attend in-person.

![Graph showing attendance frequency]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WEIGHTED AVERAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graph showing future meeting attendance]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes. I would attend via Zoom.</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I would not attend.</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. I would attend, regardless of format.</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. I would attend in-person.</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This (district-wide) report presents overall findings, relevant to the supervisory union (OESU), school district (OUUSD), and all district schools. Findings were broken down into the following sections: impressions; skills, competencies, and evaluation; five-year district direction; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges; communication; OUUSD engagement; and outside district. This report
V. FINDINGS

A. Impressions

Impression of Schools (Q9, n=359). Respondents were asked to provide their overall impressions of each school in the district (6-point scale: excellent, above average, satisfactory, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, not applicable).

Starting with Bradford Elementary School (BES), of the 281 respondents who found this applicable to them, 9% rated it as excellent; 26% rated it as above average; 53% rated it as satisfactory; 11% rated it as needing improvement; and 1% rated it as unsatisfactory.

When responding to Newbury Elementary School (NES), of the 230 respondents who found this applicable to them, 4% rated it as excellent; 25% rated it as above average; 47% rated it as satisfactory; 23% rated it as needing improvement; and 2% rated it as unsatisfactory.

When responding to Oxbow High School (OHS), of those 314 respondents who found this applicable to them, 0% rated it as excellent; 12% rated it as above average; 52% rated it as satisfactory; 24% rated it as needing improvement; and 12% rated it as unsatisfactory.

Finally, when responding to River Bend Career & Technical School (RBCTC), of those 263 respondents who found this applicable to them, 11% rated it as excellent; 38% rated it as above average; 43%
rated it as satisfactory; 7% rated it as needing improvement; and 0% rated it as unsatisfactory.

**B. Skills, Competencies & Evaluation**

**Skills Opportunities (Q5, n=373).** Respondents were asked what skills students should have the opportunity to learn by the time they graduate high school (multi-selection of top 5 priorities). The top five priorities as selected by respondents were:

1. communication skills at 87%;
2. content area knowledge at 78%;
3. financial skills at 77%;
4. vocational and technical skills at 49%; and
5. civic/citizenship skills at 38%.

Closely following the top five priorities were: personal health and mindfulness practices at 31%; art skills at 30%; global/cultural awareness at 29%; and agricultural, outdoor, and nature-based skills at 27%.

**Competencies (Q6, n=370).** Respondents were asked what students should be able to do by the time they graduate (multi-selection of top 5 priorities). The top five priorities as selected by respondents were:
1. locate information, discern accuracy, and use it appropriately at 72%;
2. set, organized, prioritize goals, and manage time at 69%;
3. think creatively and critically at 69%;
4. self-motivate to investigate and continue mastery of skills at 65%; and
5. be engaged citizens at 57%.

Closely following the top five priorities was: resolve conflicts at 39%.

Evaluation (Q7, n=367). Respondents were asked what evidence they use to evaluate the quality of education in our schools and technical center (multi-selection of top 5 priorities). The top five priorities as selected by respondents were:

1. how well students perform in high school at 66%;
2. the morale in each school at 48%;
3. the number of quality and special programs available at 44%;
4. the types of support and programming for students with special/exceptional needs at 39%; and
5. the amount of community involvement in school and student activities at 31%.

Closely following the top five priorities were: state and national test scores at 26%; individual students grades/report card assessments at 26%; and comparisons to the results other school districts receive at 26%.
C. Five-Year District Direction

Five-Year District Challenges (Q4, n=373). Respondents were asked what they see as the greatest challenges the district has to address over the next five years in order to provide quality education for all students (multi-selection of top 5 priorities). The top five priorities as selected by respondents were:

1. hire and retain quality educators at 70%;
2. support the social and emotional needs of students at 51%;
3. provide equitable student programs and services at 44%;
4. meet the broadening academic needs of an increasingly diverse student population at 41%; and
5. balance affordability (per student costs) with expanding needs/wants at 40%.

Closely following the top five priorities were: maintain facilities, buildings, and grounds at 32%; meet the needs of students with special learning considerations at 32%; keep up-to-date with media and technology at 30%; meet, maintain, and exceed state test expectations at 29%; and provide a range of co-/extra-curricular activities/athletics to meet the interests of the student body at 29%.
Five-Year Financial Priorities (Q8, n=368). Respondents were asked what they see as the top financial priorities of the district over the next five years (multi-selection of top 5 priorities). The top five priorities as selected by respondents were:

1. attract and retain quality staff at 64%;
2. maintain clean, safe, and well-repaired buildings at 51%;
3. be good stewards of taxpayer money at 49%;
4. maintain and improve current instructional programs at 47%; and
5. increase opportunities for students to connect with technical, trades, and financial education at 45%.

Closely following the top five priorities were: keep resources updated at 39%; keep salary and benefits competitive at 38%; and explore possibilities with other high schools for collaborative arrangements (magnet schools) at 32%.
D. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Challenges

**Strengths (Q12, n=286).** Respondents were asked what they see as the district’s greatest strengths as well as advantages. A few trends that emerged included: strong community support, small class sizes, and dedicated teachers.

**Weaknesses (Q13, n=286).** Respondents were asked what they see as the district’s greatest weaknesses as well as criticisms and complaints. A few trends that emerged included: high costs/taxes, lack of communication, lack of community engagement, limited academic options, and academic standards.

**Opportunities (Q14, n=286).** Respondents were asked what they see as the district’s greatest opportunities as well as greatest missed opportunities. A few trends that emerged included: increased communication, celebrating successes, community engagement, better utilization of River Bend, and collaboration between schools.

**Challenges (Q15, n=286).** Respondents were asked what they see as the district’s greatest challenges. A few trends that emerged included: community perception, balancing costs with quality education, enrollment count, supporting staff, holding staff accountable and expecting
professionalism, community relationship and distrust, being a rural district with lack of financial support, finding and retaining quality staff, communication, and leadership.

E. Communication

Level of Communication (Q11, n=359). Respondents were asked how they feel with regard to communication between entities and their households (3-point scale: satisfied, dissatisfied, not applicable). Starting with Bradford Elementary School, of the 145 respondents who found this applicable to them, 83% felt satisfied and 17% felt dissatisfied. When rating Newbury Elementary School, of the 107 respondents who found this applicable to them, 70% felt satisfied and 30% felt dissatisfied. When rating Oxbow High School, of the 198 respondents who found this applicable to them, 60% felt satisfied and 40% felt dissatisfied. When rating River Bend Career & Technical Center, of the 127 respondents who found this applicable to them, 84% felt satisfied and 16% felt dissatisfied. When rating the district (OUUSD), of the 252 respondents who found this applicable to them, 69% felt satisfied and 31% felt dissatisfied. Finally, when rating the supervisory union (OESU), of the 249 respondents who found this applicable to them, 58% felt satisfied and 42% felt dissatisfied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BES</td>
<td>83% 120</td>
<td>17% 25</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES</td>
<td>70% 75</td>
<td>30% 32</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHS</td>
<td>60% 119</td>
<td>40% 79</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBCTC</td>
<td>84% 107</td>
<td>16% 20</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUUSD</td>
<td>69% 174</td>
<td>31% 78</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OESU</td>
<td>58% 144</td>
<td>42% 105</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method of Communication (Q17, n=263). Respondents were asked for their preferred method(s) of communication from schools, the district, and supervisory union (multi-selection). The top five methods as selected by respondents were:
1. email at 58%;
2. local newspapers at 52%;
3. Facebook Pages at 38%;
4. local Vital Communities listservs at 33%; and
5. school websites at 32%.

Closely following the top five methods were: robocall at 24%; parent newsletter at 24%; and postal mail at 23%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Newspapers (e.g., Journal Opinion, Bridge Weekly)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Page</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Listserv (e.g., Bradford, Newbury, West Newbury)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Websites</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robocall</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Newsletter</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal Mail</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Website</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Dedicated School-Community Listserv</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Porch Forum</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Forums (Zoom/In-Person)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio (WYKR)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Respondents: 263                               |           |

**Comfort with Reaching Out (Q20, n=263).** Respondents were asked how comfortable they feel in reaching out to someone at the district/schools when they have concerns, ideas, and questions (5-point scale: extremely comfortable, comfortable, I’m not sure, uncomfortable, and very comfortable). When it came to respondents’ level of comfort, 16% felt extremely comfortable; 41% felt comfortable; 26% weren’t sure; 10% felt uncomfortable; and 6% feel very uncomfortable.
F. OUUSD Engagement

**Meeting Attendance (Q18 & Q19, n=263).** Respondents were asked how often they have attended school board meetings in the past as well as whether or not they would attend school board meetings in the future if they were made available (Q18 5-point scale: always, frequently, sometimes, rarely, never; Q19 multiple choice: yes in-person; yes via Zoom; yes any format; no). To past attendance, 2% of respondents selected always; 8% selected frequently; 20% selected sometimes; 20% selected rarely, and 50% selected never. To future attendance, 38% would attend via Zoom; 27% would not attend, regardless of format; 18% would attend, regardless of format; and 16% would attend in person.
G. Outside District

Outside District Considerations (Q10, n=359). Respondents were asked if they have ever considered sending their children to a school outside of the district (multiple choice: yes, no, not applicable). Of the 228 respondents who found this question applicable to them, 58% responded yes and 42% responded no. Of those who responded, 122 provided written comments. A majority of comments explained that these decisions were made at the middle and high school levels. This report recognizes that this question is highly subjective to individual circumstances. That said, the yes/no data does unequivocally show that respondents would prefer to send their student(s) to another school, with Thetford Academy and St. Johnsbury Academy regularly noted in open-ended responses.
VI. TRENDS

In addition to outlining clear priorities in the areas of skills, competencies, finances, and overall direction, several trends emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative data.

The first trend that emerged was all facets of leadership. This includes: the relationship between the supervisory union/district and its teachers; the relationship between principals and their teachers; issues with turnover and instability; the lack of presence of leadership in the community (superintendent, school board, and school administrators); the lack of a unified, long-term vision for the school district; low morale at every level (OESU, OUUSD, schools) and in every relationship structure; the lack of support for teachers dealing with student needs; the lack of support for the social emotional needs of students; and a feeling of top-down mandates rather than constructive inclusivity.

The second trend that emerged was teacher quality and pay. Hiring and retaining high quality educators not only rose to the top of what respondents consider the greatest challenges the district faces (70% of 373 respondents), but it was also a repeated trend in many of the survey’s open ended response questions. Similarly, teacher pay also trended in many of the survey’s open ended response questions. Respondent feedback highlighted these factors as ones that not only provide the best education to students, but also ones that keep the schools competitive in relation to those in other districts.

The third trend that emerged was communication and public relations. This includes: highlighting positive stories of current students and staff as well as alumni; consistency in delivery of communication across all channels; professionalism of presentation (people would like to see updates come from an official source, rather than the personal accounts of individuals); a lack of transparency; weak communication; and general interest from the community to know what is going on. This trend, also though it can come across as harsh, felt like one of the most hopeful pieces of the feedback. The data overwhelmingly showed that respondents want to be engaged, want to be informed, want to participate, and want to celebrate successes of the district, schools, teachers, and students. Respondents mentioned over and over that they would like to know what alumni are doing post-graduation. This report highlighted that there is a general sense of a lack of transparency and weak communication, most likely driven by a lack of consistent, professional communication from the district and schools.

The fourth trend that emerged was financial, technical, and civic skill development. The quantitative data showed that technical, vocational, trade, and financial educational opportunities rose to the top five ranking of both financial priorities of the district (45% of 368 respondents) as well as skills students should have the opportunity to learn by the time they graduate (77% of 373 respondents for financial, 49% of 373 respondents for vocational and technical). Other priorities that rose to the top five ranking of skills students should learn by the time they graduate included communication skills (87% of 373 respondents) and civic/citizenship skills (38% of 373 respondents). Similarly, “be engaged citizens” rose to the top five ranking of what students should be able to do by the time they graduate (57% of 370 respondents). This trend was echoed again in qualitative feedback with respondents expressing a need for financial education, an underutilization of River Bend Career & Technical Center, and a desire for students to interact with local business leaders as well as the broader community.

The fifth trend that emerged was community engagement. The data showed that respondents want to engage with the district, with the schools, and more specifically, with students. Community
members want to invest their time, skills, and resources into local schools and local students. This includes: parents, grandparents, alumni, local businesses, and general community members. As highlighted by the report, the community would like to receive communication about ways to engage, but would also like to provide opportunities for students to further their education, learn new skills, and gain job experience. Respondents also illustrated they would like to help students feel a sense of ownership and belonging to the community so they will invest in and return after they graduate college. When asked what evidence respondents use to evaluate the quality of education, 31% of 367 respondents ranked “the amount of community involvement in school and student activities” as a top five priority.

VII. CONCLUSION

The survey distributed by the Strategic Planning Committee was highly successful at collecting feedback from the community. In addition to multi-selection responses, respondents went above and beyond in the level of content that they provided to open ended question types. Coupled with multi-selection responses, these open ended responses isolated clear trends and highlighted many possible directions for next steps. Perhaps the most hopeful message that came out of this report is that respondents at all levels want to be involved, updated, and leaned on as resources. When a plan with vision and goals is established, the community should be kept updated on progress as they are eager to celebrate achievements.

The data from this widespread community survey illustrates both the strengths of OUUSD and associated schools as well as areas of concern. This data can be used to assist school and district administrators in establishing clear goals and objectives as to how best to strengthen their school communities. In order to achieve this level of specificity school specific data has been extracted from this full report.

Potential Next Steps. The following recommendations are being posed as potential next steps:

1. Share this data with the stakeholders of each school community. Concerns of transparency and communication pose both a threat as well as an opportunity. A modified version of this report was created for sharing with the general public.
2. Publicly acknowledge and celebrate the successes of each school community.
3. Review areas of concern and determine a prioritized list of concerns to address that are both imperative and attainable
4. Develop a district-wide vision and strategic plan using the prioritized list of concerns as a guide. Ensure that the plan establishes clear timelines, benchmarks, roles/responsibilities, and accountability measures. The vision and strategic plan should pay special attention to the top five identified trends:
   a. all facets of leadership;
   b. teacher quality and pay;
   c. communication and public relations;
   d. financial, technical, and civic skill development; and
   e. community engagement.
5. Use the strategic planning process to revisit this community survey, conduct follow-up surveys, and keep the community updated on progress towards goals.

When addressing school-specific next steps, it recommended that the district and school administrators look into sharing resources that would benefit all schools as several trends were
present in multiple institutions. For example, if an outside consultant was hired to help address culture/climate, all schools would benefit from participating in that work.

As a closing note, according to online school ranking systems, our schools struggle to achieve above average ranking, which is one of the factors that led the district to beginning the strategic planning process. This report does not include these external ranking results as they use limited and disparate data to produce their results. Schools have unique strengths and weaknesses that cannot be compressed into a single number; the quality of a child’s educational experience depends tremendously on the fit between student and school; and any set of measures, particularly if they are narrowly defined, can be inaccurate. This report was more comprehensive and provides a solid foundation for the district’s strategic planning process.

*The Strategic Planning Committee would like to thank all respondents for dedicating their time to providing thoughtful and thorough information.*