

# And the Survey SAID ...

In 2013, the Toms River Board of Education commissioned the independent firm of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates to issue a community needs survey as part of a comprehensive search for a new superintendent and to assess the needs of a struggling school system. The project polled taxpayers, administrators, and teachers through a series of eight public meetings and surveys at a time when the district faced several challenges including public trust, crucial budget decisions, and the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. The feedback was harsh but clear:

## Challenges, Issues and Priorities for the Future

- Address challenges of a large Special Needs population
  - Build upon the great strengths of the district while also moving forward in a planned manner
  - Engage and represent the school community in decisions
- Facility investment
- Find a Superintendent who has a strong record of experience in putting students first
  - Rebuild and heal a community ravaged by Hurricane Sandy and other recent events
- Perceptions of nepotism, favoritism, and an under investment in academic programs must be addressed
  - Provide a Curriculum Audit to respond to frequent questions and significant concerns
- Recruit and retain the best teachers, administrators, and leaders
- Restore public trust
- Strive for better achievement for all students
- Technology needs to be updated
  - The need to insure equity among all schools in terms of resources
- Transparent data and reports about progress of students, programs as well as fiscal health

## COMMENTS FROM STAKEHOLDER THROUGH MEETINGS/SURVEY

ASTERISKS ARE FOR COMMENTS MADE FIVE OR MORE TIMES

—\*Buildings getting very old, mechanical systems are failing-need to sell to taxpayers the need for building renovations

—\*Technology improvements

—Technology non-existent, computers 20 years old

—To continue revenue sources

\*Trust

Trust level is low related to finances

Buildings are falling apart

—\*Buildings are in disrepair throughout the district

—Schools have no wireless, for the most part a huge need

— AP scores have gone down

Need a strategic plan

\*Need accurate data on how our schools are doing

Need direction

— Need to capitalize on strengths of staff PD

—\*We used to be a strong district with great reputation but now that seems to be lost

## SEVEN YEARS LATER,

it's worth exploring if and how Toms River Regional Schools has responded ...



## 1. Special Services

Increased partnerships with Monmouth University and Ocean County College to promote professional development in the field of autism; cohort of local specialists have included consultants for reading and dyslexia, deaf education, augmentative communication, autism, and speech pathology, and have provided services direct to students and educators; district now hosts annual Autism Summit which includes leaders from throughout the county and state

Need met? 

## 2. Facilities Upgrades

Rebuilding Our Schools Initiative and its voter-approved referendum continues to generate some \$147 million in facilities upgrades including new turf fields, boiler rooms, playgrounds, paved lots, and much more; Energy Savings Improvement Program (ESIP) providing \$17.8 in cost-neutral improvements; increased security cameras, the identification and elimination of potential environmental hazards, and Raptor technology-based school check-in procedures have increased security in buildings and made the district Alyssa's Law compliant

Need met? 

## 3. Student-First Superintendent

District Vision: "Toms River Regional Schools are, above all, student centered. We recognize the classroom as a place where all students feel safe to learn, work together, and express themselves respectfully; are encouraged to discover and develop their interests and abilities, no matter what their present level of performance; are offered experiences in new and wider fields of knowledge that can make life richer and more satisfying."

Need met? 

## 4. Perceptions of Favoritism

Human Resources director hired; revised and refined more than 3,000 policy regulations to make current and applicable; of the nearly 900 staff hired since 2014, more than 94% have been local to Ocean County, and 100% have been highly qualified, a product of a robust and extensive series of interviews, background checks, and references

Need met? 

## 5. Recruiting, Retaining the Best Teachers

East Dover fifth-grade teacher Kelly Wilbert won the National University System-Sanford Teacher Award for New Jersey; Special education teacher Nicole Foy was recognized by 100.1 WRJZ as a Teacher Who Rocks; Christine Girtain named 2019 NJ STEM Pathways NJ STEM Teacher of the Year; Teacher Angela Germano and Supervisor JoAnn Nocera each had books published; Tami Pagano recognized by NJ's 10th Legislative District for Excellence in Education; Lillian Stulich published in *NJEA Review*; Amber Hull invited to present at National Council of Teachers of English in Houston, TX; and on and on and on ...

Need met? 

## 8. Technology Upgrades

Purchased 11,000 Chromebooks; created a wireless network with over 950 wifi access points; created and maintain 18,000 Google Apps for Education accounts; upgraded available Internet bandwidth 2,000% (100MB to 2G); upgraded all district network equipment; started competitive robotics teams at all three high schools; grant-funded advanced computer science and coding programs have brought nearly \$1 million in tech resources and training; fully prepared to enact enhanced virtual learning plan in response to 2020 Covid-19 pandemic

Need met? 

## 6. Restore Public Trust

Recognized as a "high-performing district" by the NJDOE in 2017 and 2020 following comprehensive quality assessments; consistently lowest among all large NJ public school districts in cost per pupil and administrative costs; named "Distinguished Organization of the Year" by the Greater Toms River Chamber of Commerce in 2017; awarded for excellence in financial reporting; transparency surrounding S2 and its effects on the district and others throughout NJ- has earned public's support in this effort

Need met? 

## 7. Student Achievement

District named to College Board's 9th Annual AP District Honor Roll; rising AP participation numbers while maintaining steady scores of 3 or higher; decreasing chronic absenteeism and suspension rates; graduation rate has increased more than 1.5 percent since 2013; numerous student awards and recognitions for academic achievement, character, publishing in prestigious scientific journals, and much more

Need met? 

## 9. Equality of Resources

The district's 19 learning locations maintain their own identities while serving as part of a cohesive and equitable district system. Grants and alternative revenue is sought for all buildings; existing resources are shared; referendum work is taking place equitably at every building; each school is promoted on the district website and through social media; and every building operates under the unified #WeAreTRschools mantra

Need met? 

## 10. Transparent Fiscal Reporting

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) has awarded the district the Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting (COE) for six consecutive years; fourth lowest per-pupil costs among all NJ districts with 3,500+ students; among lowest admin costs in state according to Taxpayer's Guide to Spending

Need met? 