

The Innovative Options Committee

Final Committee Report

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Introduction

The Innovative Options committee members gathered under the "Other Ideas" sign at the initial 2020 Vision kickoff meeting. We felt that the other topics did not address our concerns, or that our concerns cut across numerous topics. We wanted to be part of a group with a broader vision. This vision includes:

- A broad and holistic way of assessing learning, using more than test scores to measure progress and fostering growth physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually.

- Schools where curiosity and excitement are encouraged so that children become life-long learners.
- Schools that are developmentally appropriate for each age group while responding to individual learning styles.
- Schools that address the needs of each individual child regardless of economic status, race, gender, or ethnic or cultural background.
- Schools that are integrally connected to the community in a continual process of feedback and involvement.
- A school system that offers its teachers time and support to learn, plan and explore innovative options.

Our committee recognizes the work that the Fayette County Public School District is doing to address many aspects of the vision described above. However, it is a difficult task, and, as the entire 2020 Vision process acknowledged, there is still work to be done.

The Innovative Options committee felt it was necessary to ask questions about why and how our local schools are falling short of our vision as part of the process of discovering how our schools can be improved. For example, why do some boys turn off to school? Why is there increasing obesity among young children? Why are successful programs like Quest available to only a few? How can we meet the needs of “at risk” kids? Is it problematic to define kids as “at risk?” How can we serve children at differing levels of development within a classroom? How can we engage all students regardless of learning style? Do test scores adequately measure “success”? How should we define success? How can we model good communication skills? How do we help kids develop emotionally? How can we foster a lifelong love of learning in all our students? How can we engage the community as full partners in educating our students? How can we support and reward innovation in the classroom?

We discussed several model programs from around the country that address many of these questions. Based on the committee’s preliminary research, we are suggesting the district pilot two model programs shown to embrace characteristics of successful schools.

- Learning is project-based
- The curriculum addresses real-life problems
- The instructional program offers child-directed, cooperative learning, provides interdisciplinary approaches, and recognizes that students learn in a variety of ways.

The committee also developed a *Successful Schools and Ideas* list (see Appendix A) that contains a number of other exciting options. This is not offered as a comprehensive list because there are a number of successful models around the country. We needed further time to evaluate other

possibilities. This leads to our last proposal, which involves establishing an ongoing committee to research and seek out other innovative models and ideas.

This document is the product of a group of passionate people who care deeply about our children and their education.

Group Recommendation #1

Specific Recommendation:

Fayette County Public Schools should select a minimum of five (5) schools (3 elementary, 1 middle and 1 high) to pilot the use of the environment as an integrating context for learning (EIC). The concept, if proven successful in Fayette County's pilot schools, should be expanded to other schools within the district.

Environmentalism as an integrating context for learning defines a framework for interdisciplinary, collaborative, student-centered, hands-on and engaged learning. EIC emphasizes using a school's surrounding and community as a comprehensive focus and framework for learning in all areas.

This framework compliments the Green Cities Initiative currently underway in Lexington. Just as the Green City Initiative in Louisville partners with the school system down to the classroom level (See Appendix B), Lexington can also maximize the learning opportunities presented by the Green Cities process.

Research rationale for how this change will help kids:

Using the environment as an integrating context for learning (EIC) has proven to be an effective way to improve test scores, increase student engagement, improve critical thinking skills, improve interpersonal skills and increase teacher satisfaction.

According to "Closing the Achievement Gap: Using the Environment as an Integrating Context for Learning" published by the State Education and Environment Roundtable as supported by the Pew Charitable Trust, all 14 participant schools demonstrated quantitative improvements in academic achievement due to EIC. Data from this study showed that students involved in EIC program academically outperformed their peers in traditional programs both overall and in specific subject areas. Specific subject areas studied included: language arts, math, science and social studies. Examples of subject specific improvements included:

- 93% of students demonstrated improved development of language arts skills
- 92% of students demonstrated improved mastery of math skills
- 99% of students demonstrated increased knowledge and understanding of science content, concepts, processes, and principles
- 97% of students demonstrated more advanced skills in applying civic processes to real-life situations

Comparative analyses of behavioral data showed that students who are in EIC programs performed better than their peers in traditional programs on these measures as well. Educators involved in EIC studies reported that their students demonstrated increased ability to think creatively, greater proficiency in solving problems and thinking strategically and better application of systems thinking. These educators also reported that their students demonstrated stronger communication skills, showed an improved ability to work in group settings and acted with greater civility towards others. Teachers participating in EIC stated they had an increased enthusiasm and commitment toward teaching, better working relationships with their students and colleagues, and more frequent occasions to use innovative instructional strategies.

Implementation Steps for Recommendation #1

Implementation Steps for Recommendation #1	Person Responsible for Completing Steps	Possible Resources
*Identify participant pilot schools (3 elementary, 1 middle, 1 high) based on their interest, past involvement with environmental education, and diversity of student body	Superintendent	KY Environmental Education Council (KEEC), Jefferson Co. Public Schools
Identify potential partners for these schools- for training, projects, resources	Vision Committee Support Staff	Bluegrass PRIDE, UK's Cooperative Extension, LFUCG/UK Arboretum, Fayette Co. Conservation District, Living Arts and Science Center, state agencies
Provide professional development for administration and staff	Vision Committee Support Staff and Partner Organizations	Same as above plus KY Association for Environmental Education
Implementation Steps for Recommendation #1	Person Responsible for Completing Steps	Possible Resources
***Provide resources- materials and money for other PD, field trips, different supplies	Superintendent and Partner Organizations	Bluegrass PRIDE, Cooperative Extension, Conservation District have free materials- loan or give-a-way; business partners an option for financial support (Toyota)
Hold an open meeting for parents of students at participating schools	Principals	

****Conduct a mid-year evaluation of efforts, additional PD	Vision Committee Support Staff, Principal and Partner Organizations	KEEC, North American Assoc. for Environment Education (NAAEE)
Provide parents with mid-year evaluation results	Principal and Teachers	
Conduct a year end audit	Vision Committee Support Staff, Principal and Partner Organizations	KEEC, NAAEE
Provide parents with results	Principals and Teachers	
Ongoing PD relating to using the environment as an integrating context		Same as other PD

Notes for Implementation Steps for Recommendation #1

*Pilot should last for at least 3 years

- **See Recommendation 3

*** Costs average \$3,000 per teacher in the first year, assuming participation of 15-20 teachers per school. The above estimates include:

- Eight to ten days of release time for participating teachers;
- Five days of professional development time;
- Fifteen days of ongoing technical assistance;
- Program development materials.

Costs decrease by approximately 25% in the second and third years of implementation.

Costs all years could be reduced through use of partners. A lot of materials are already available. Many organizations are willing to offer PD at little to no cost.

- **** Provide pre and post tests to students based on learning objectives for the year- possibly give same pre and post tests to students at similar school using the “traditional” model;

- Look at improvement of test scores within school;
- Look at test scores compared to a similar school;
- Compare avg days of student absence to previous years;
- Compare # of discipline actions to previous years
- Get feedback from students, teachers, and parents

Group Recommendation # 2

Specific Recommendation:

The Fayette County Public School System is urged to identify target schools and implement a model program based on that of the Duke School established in 1947 (becoming independent in 1984).

Research rationale for how this change will help kids:

The Duke School model emphasizes a child-centered, integrated and project-based approach to learning. The stated goal of the program is "to help children become confident, independent learners who solve real-life problems, work cooperatively with others, and develop their personal talents, character and ambitions". Importantly, the Duke School recognizes that: learning requires the active participation of the learners; students learn in a variety of ways and at different rates; and learning is an individual and a social process.

The program also employs authentic assessment. Duke School educators provide special training to assist in the successful implementation of the program in schools nationwide. Visiting educators from around the country are encouraged to come to observe and learn each year. Moreover, this innovative program has been honored as exemplary and ranked first among math programs by the US Board of Education, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics.

Implementation Steps for Recommendation Above :

- Contact the Duke School program to assist in the identification of participant FCPS schools with consideration given to needs to be addressed, size, diversity, etc.

- Provide paid sabbaticals to Duke School for educators (identified through a competitive process of selection) wishing to learn about and implement the program in their schools.
- Provide PD to other school administrators and staff to learn about the program from the trained educator.
- Implement the program with a biannual evaluation of the success.

Group Recommendation Number 3

Specific Recommendation:

The Innovative Options Committee is proposing the establishment of an on-going committee, “The Vision Committee,” composed of educators, administrators, parents, students and community members charged with conducting on-going research and development in the school system. The hope is that this committee would be developing a culture of innovation in our school system so that we are always asking the tough questions about how we can do better. The presence of this committee would send a message to everyone that the Fayette County Schools are committed to an atmosphere that values innovation and an open dialogue with all members of the community.

The district would assign at least 2 staff members to work with this group. The duties of this committee would include:

1. Actively and continually soliciting feedback from the community, faculty, parents and students by collecting data from focus groups, surveys, exit interviews, school visits and student interviews and communicating the results to the community and school administration and board. Simply put, we want to institutionalize listening and asking.

2. Identifying issues and problems that need to be addressed. For example, which types of kids are not being served? When students leave the public school system, why are they leaving? Why do some boys tend to “turn off” to school? How can the needs of “at risk” kids be addressed? How can we serve varying levels of development within a classroom?

3. Researching effective, innovative programs around the country and proposing ways to try these concepts in our schools. The idea is that the Fayette County Schools invest in a continual process of “brain-storming” so that we are always growing.

4. Monitoring implementation of new programs by continuing to collect data to evaluate effectiveness. Recommending adjustments if needed.

Appendix A

Successful Schools and Ideas

1. Kathy Ferguson Academy (in Detroit)
2. Fayette Cooperating Nursery School and Kindergarten (in Lexington) – great
on emotional intelligence and communication skills –
www.coopschool.org
3. The Smaller School movement – information all over the web on this
4. George Szekeley, Art Education professor at The University of Kentucky –
his ideas about teaching art are very different than how we currently teach art.
5. A recent documentary on KET about a school district in Manhattan that
increased their teacher professional development budget from 1% to 11% of the school budget. (Superintendent: Tony Alvarado). Be seriously committed to helping develop teachers.
6. The Orchard School in Indianapolis – www.orchard.org
7. The Big Picture School
8. George Lucas' Utopia School
9. Performance-based grading (Jessamine East High School)

Appendix B

Support Information for Recommendation #1

Research

- “Closing the Achievement Gap: Using the Environmental as an Integrating Context for Learning”
- “California Student Assessment Project”
- “The Educational Efficacy of Environmental Education”
- “Pieces of a Puzzle: An Overview of the Status of Environmental Education in the US”
 - a. all of the above are included in this appendix and can be found at www.seer.org/pages/research.html
- Environmental Education Research a journal published 5 times/ year by the Taylor and Francis Group of Carfax Publishing
- “Environment as an Integrated Context for Learning” found at www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/18/63/1863.htm

Programs and Resources

- “Environmental Education: The Keystone for Green City Initiatives” found in Sustain, Spring/Summer 2005
 - b. the above article is included in this appendix
- Environmental Education Toolbox Series- developed by the University of Michigan available through naaee.org/pages/publications/pubdescriptions.html
- “Volunteers Teaching Children: A Guide to Establishing VINE Ecology Education Programs” available through naaee.org/pages/publications/pubdescriptions.html

Appendix C

Research for Recommendation # 2

- <http://www.dukeschool.org/>
- Performance based assessment; Jones et al, 1994.
- Authentic Assessment Toolbox; Jon Mueller

Appendix D

Research for Recommendation #3

Garvin, David A., Learning in Action: A Guide to Putting the Learning Organization to Work

DiBella, Anthony J. and Nevis, Edwin C., How Organizations Learn

Gorelida, Carol, Milton, Nick and April, Kurt, Performance Through Learning: Knowledge Management in Practice