

Charleston Shared Future

What Should Happen

The Charleston Shared Future Scenario Team

Over the course of our work together to create four scenarios of what could happen, we became a team. We are no less diverse as individuals now than when we started and we don't see the future in exactly the same way. But in debating all that has happened in and to CCSD and what now could happen to this generation of our children and the next we found ourselves in agreement on a few fundamental points...

A fundamental belief we share based on our individual and collective experience is that every child can learn and that they are entitled to more than a "minimally adequate" education. It is abundantly clear that Charleston and the state of South Carolina have deprived too many children of this right, especially minority and children in poverty.

Whatever "could" happen, we are of one mind as to what now *should* happen.

1. Available resources should be redistributed and based on need.

When we consider the resources that are available to support the education of our children, we must recognize that many of our children through their families have access to financial and social capital that many other families mostly in poverty or of color do not. We believe the district, the county, and the state must restructure how schools are funded, both in terms of increasing funding and the equitable distribution of money, teachers, guidance counselors, rigorous courses and experienced principals to those students and schools where the need in this broader sense is greatest.

The equitable distribution of resources does not mean an equal distribution, rather an assurance that each child receives the amount of resources needed to meet his or her needs, in order to assure equal opportunity for all.

2. Every child should be taught by highly qualified teachers led by highly qualified instructional leaders.

While the failures of public education may be complex, the first steps toward a solution are simple and involve its most important assets – teachers and principals. Talent development has not been a priority in the district and the consequences are found in teacher shortages and high turnover, with the greatest impact felt by children in our most challenged schools.

There is no discernible track for aspiring principals to be trained and ready for school instructional leadership. Promising teachers new to the profession that teach in Title I schools are inadequately prepared to teach effectively because of the challenges associated with high poverty. This most often results in promising teachers transferring to other schools or opting to leave to pursue other professions, leaving the Title I school

with no option but to hire other inexperienced teachers. It is a cycle that constantly repeats itself. Sitting principals who have demonstrated high skills in instructional leadership are not granted sufficient autonomy to do their jobs. Much but not all of this limitation is linked to the state's restrictions on autonomy that can be granted to individual schools and should be changed. Additionally, the limitation in state and local funding forces principals to be a combination of instructional leaders, building managers, and business experts and must be addressed.

We believe that highly qualified teachers of under-resourced children should be experienced, culturally competent, well-compensated, mentored and as much as possible look like the children they teach. District practices must be laser-focused on a Talent Development Strategy that makes this happen.

3. District Governance should be efficient, effective and focused on kids.

We, collectively have attended hundreds of CCSD School Board meetings and are respectful of the challenges these trustees confront in providing oversight to a complex organization.

The School Board's public agenda should focus more on the means by which equity is brought to accomplishing student growth and achievement. The board can encourage and support efforts to bring evidence-based creative solutions and innovative practices to schools confronting the greatest challenges. They can and should monitor charter schools and magnet schools more closely to ensure diversity and performance.

We believe the AdvancEd and Clemson Study recommendations that map the appropriate course for governance effectiveness provide the correct approaches and they have our full support. In particular, we find the Constituent Board structure, a vestige of segregation, to be a major impediment to the board's efficiency and effectiveness and believe that steps should be taken with the legislature and the courts to see them removed.

4. Acknowledging the active role of racism in Charleston, every student now should be afforded equal opportunity regardless of race, socio-economic class, religion, region or culture.

We came to consensus on this conclusion – that the legacy of racism of 1835 continues to harm our community today – with all of the pain and tears that such a conclusion can convey. The inequality we see in the education of our children is at its source the result of continuing racial bias – whether implicit, explicit or institutional – in many of our schools. That most of them are either predominantly white or black results from many factors, but one of them is the way attendance zones are drawn. That Title I and rural schools offer far less opportunity for a quality education than urban and suburban white schools is undeniable.

It is insufficient to expect the School Board and Superintendent alone to shoulder this responsibility; rather it is for the community as a whole to acknowledge the active role that racism plays in preventing high quality, inclusive education in our county. With that acknowledgement, we can move forward on the road to equal opportunity.

What can you do?

If what should happen is to happen, it must be owned by the community as a whole. The timing is right for the citizens of Charleston County to transform our education system. We, The Charleston Shared Future Scenario Team, are committed to moving from scenario planning to action and to building a movement to make equal opportunity a reality for all children. Making this future a reality can only occur if parents, students, educators, grassroots movements, faith leaders, and others of high moral values across the county view it as a necessity.

- Join the movement at www.charlestonsharedfuture.org
- Learn more about how the current system is failing too many of our children. Read the Clemson Study, the *Minimally Adequate* series, the AdvancEd Report, the 1998 Willie Report and scenarios of what could happen; all available on this site
- Advocate for change and hold those in power accountable for making it happen.

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