



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Engagement Themes

INTRODUCTION

In March 2021, Lakeview Local School District elected to partner with The Impact Group (IGPR), a communications firm located in Hudson, Ohio, to assist in a community engagement project. Lakeview Local School District permitted The Impact Group to seek feedback from a diverse set of community stakeholders, including parents, business leaders, civic and service leaders, Board Members and members of the administration, in an effort to better understand the district's challenges and standing within the community.

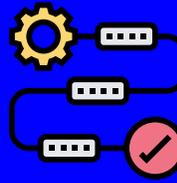
The project centered its focus on several goals:

- ✓ Discovery of items the school district is perceived to be doing well.
- ✓ Discovery of perceived areas of opportunity and challenges the school district is facing.
- ✓ As the community experienced a division due to COVID, to understand how to launch and conduct a successful 2021-2022 school year.
- ✓ Discover the community's sentiment regarding the district's communication.
- ✓ Enhanced quality of experience for students, families and community members served by the Lakeview Local School District.





METHODOLOGY



The Impact Group utilized focus groups, individual interviews and online surveys to gather data. Over 750 data points were received throughout this effort.

- *Five individual resident interviews*
- *Interviews with all five Board Members*
- *K-8 PTO (Focus Group)*
- *Band Boosters (Focus Group)*
- *Athletic Boosters (Focus Group)*
- *General Community/Parents (Focus Group)*
- *District Senior Administrative Leaders (Initial Meeting)*
- *Online surveys (674 responses)*

The focus groups and individual interviews followed a similar format. Five basic questions were asked.

1. *What is the school district doing well?*
2. *What are things you would brag about regarding the district?*
3. *What are areas for improvement?*
4. *What are some things the school district should START doing to address the challenges?*
5. *What are some things the school district should STOP doing to address the challenges?*

As is often the case, certain questions elicited a greater emotional response from focus group participants, resulting in extended and more thorough feedback. It is important to note that there were no instances where a question went unanswered. All focus group participants remained professional and respectful throughout the interview process.

The online community survey was focused primarily on district communication, yet the survey had an opportunity for respondents to comment on any school related topic.

For a breakdown of online community survey data, please refer to the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this Executive Summary.

The Impact Group analyzed the data obtained from these engagement tools and developed the following themes.

THEMES

What is going well?



- ✓ Preparing students well for trades, college and life after high school.
- ✓ Solid student achievement in the arts, academics and athletics.
- ✓ Schools did well during the COVID-19 situation.
- ✓ It's a great community with great kids.
- ✓ Teaching staff has been exceptional with much enthusiasm.
- ✓ Teaching staff and district really care for the students.
- ✓ Staff has gone above and beyond during COVID. They continued every program that they could.
- ✓ Day-to day-operation of the schools is excellent.
- ✓ Community groups and community businesses have traditionally been quite supportive of the school district with financial contributions and overall support.
- ✓ The school district does a good job being the unifier of the two local political entities (City and Township).
- ✓ A strong administrative team and a unified board.
- ✓ Principals and Vice Principals take an interest in students, know students by name and are invested in the students.
- ✓ One call communication system works well.
- ✓ The district demonstrates fiscal responsibility.
- ✓ K-8 Building is state-of the art. Very nice. Much thought has been put into it.
- ✓ Staff was very responsive and caring throughout COVID.



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Communication

Overall, communication issues were the top point of concern among those interviewed and surveyed.

The main points of concern were:

- ✓ *Too many mediums for parents*
- ✓ *Inconsistent communication*
- ✓ *Website quality*
- ✓ *Need to communicate the value of the school district to the greater community*
- ✓ *The School District needs a dedicated communications individual or entity to push out information. The superintendent should not be tasked with directing all district communications.*



Too Many Mediums

A consistent concern was the perceived use of too many different communication mediums. There was a reoccurring theme that parents are forced to hunt for information. There is also the perception that the information is not consistent across platforms.

It must be noted that many parents expressed that they appreciated the intent of the various communication efforts, but the actual impact was frustrating.

Current industry best practices indicate that education messaging should utilize the district and school websites as a central hub of communication, offering a standard information source that is recognizable and accessible to all students, parents, faculty and staff. Additional marketing avenues are recommended to increase the reach and frequency of the desired message. These tactics can include email, social media, building or district newsletters, text messaging, mobile app alerts and automated robocalls.

It is paramount to note that all messaging must be consistent on all platforms that are utilized. Ideally, the original message would be posted in its entirety on the district and/or school website, and all auxiliary messages can offer the headline and highlights and refer to the website for more information.

A campaign of these varied marketing tactics, combined with the establishment of the website as the base of information for the district, will ensure messages are received by the maximum target audience and are fully understood with the necessary details and contact information readily available online.



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Specific mediums discussed were:

Drund – Although a few individuals stated or wrote in the survey that they liked Drund, the vast majority of respondents stated that they did not like Drund and that it was a cause of irritation. Reasons cited were:

- ✓ *It does not allow individuals to send messages to teachers. (It was noted that one must use Google Classroom to send messages to teachers.)*
- ✓ *Locking users out is a problem and they cannot get info without logging in.*
- ✓ *Not user friendly. It's difficult to refer back to a post that you've previously viewed.*
- ✓ *Extremely arduous to use.*
- ✓ *It doesn't allow interested community members or grandparents access to information.*

Class Dojo – There were many positive mentions of Class Dojo. Individuals seemed to understand it's functionality and appreciate the tool.

Facebook – Respondents mentioned Facebook as a medium for school information, but it was a mixed bag. Some felt it was essential while others expressed that they did not want to have school info posted on such an accessible social media platform.

Google Classroom – Google Classroom was mentioned as a convenient medium for interacting with teachers.



Inconsistent Communication

Although the methods of communication were common themes, the perceived inconsistency of communication across channels was a cause of greater frustration. The perception exists that this reflects poorly on the organization of the district.

It was stated on several occasions that the number of mediums, while difficult to navigate, was not the primary issue. It was mentioned by these individuals that the primary issue is the lack of a unified and consistent message.



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A Dedicated Communications Resource

A recurring theme was the School District's need for a dedicated communications individual or partner entity to push out information. Respondents felt that this would encourage the consistency and frequency of communication that is needed. It was also frequently stated that the superintendent has many responsibilities and should not be tasked with directing all district communications.



Branding

Individuals repeatedly mentioned their desire that the district do a better job of branding itself to the community and beyond. This included clearly communicating the goals of the district in education and shaping students for their future. Community members mentioned that Lakeview needs to solidify their "identity" within the community, extending beyond "just being a school." Members would like to see that the district has a plan for students who graduate, but also a goal for those who are younger and are looking for guidance on how to best exemplify the district's ideals.

Schools must do a better job of clearly communicating their value proposition to the greater community and this must be a part of the branding effort.



Website Quality

A frequent topic of conversation was the poor quality of the website. It is not presently viewed as a reliable or useful method to obtain information. Comments repeatedly stated were:

- ✓ *Difficulty of navigation*
- ✓ *Outdated information*
- ✓ *The need for permission to email a staff member seems purposely obstructive*
- ✓ *Information is not consistent with other forms of communication*
- ✓ *A desire that the website be the central hub of information.*



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Long Term Planning

Families and community members agreed that long-term planning is necessary in moving the district forward. Many said they would like to see expectations for students who will graduate from the district, suggesting a set of characteristics they could strive for that make a Lakeview student unique.

It was also suggested that a long-term plan must be in place to address the district's facility and infrastructure needs.



Communicating the Value of the District to the Greater Community

Another consistent topic of conversation was the necessity of communicating the value of the district to community members who do not have a child presently in the school district. The majority of community members do not have a direct affiliation with the school district and a purposeful effort must be made to communicate to them and to excite them about the schools.

To bridge this gap, methods to connect the students to the community were suggested, including student service hours and youth programs with older individuals.

Both the East Side and the West Side must be included in the overall discussion. There is a perception that the West Side has been traditionally less supportive. An effort must be made to engage the West Side.

Effective two-way communication between the school and the community must be created and encouraged. It is perceived previous administrations did not want to reach out to the community for their input.

Suggested items included printing a Superintendent's column in the Cortland News and distributing a community newsletter.



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Local Organizations and Businesses Financial Support

Community members mentioned that local businesses and organizations are sometimes “bombarded” with requests for donations to multiple school programs. While sure to say these local entities are very supportive, an idea set forth was a simple one-time “ask” by the school and then a disbursement of funds raised. This request aligns with suggested communication efforts within the community and how the school could coordinate its efforts with community organizations in better providing support for school groups.



Attracting Excellent Educators

Many community members and families understand it is a very competitive job market but would like to see the district do what it can to attract higher quality educators. Some understand the constraints of pay and wonder what other incentives would entice teachers to work for Lakeview. Parents don’t want the Lakeview district to be a springboard for teachers to later seek employment elsewhere.



High School Facilities

The high school is dated, and many would like the high school and its facilities updated to reflect 21st century learning. There were concerns about whether or not the community and families would have input on the order of importance for certain areas of the facilities (i.e., gymnasium, computer labs, library, etc.).

As previously stated, a long-term plan is desired so the community may anticipate next steps regarding this need.

It was also suggested that a long-term plan must be in place to address the district’s facility and infrastructure needs.



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Community and Parent Input

There is a perception from the community that their opinions do not matter, that they are not heard and that they “do not have a say.” They feel this in conjunction with a feeling of not being “needed” nor “wanted” in the schools. Parents who want to be involved in school activities feel as though there are not enough avenues to accomplish that. Parents need to feel wanted and welcome, and many are willing to be more involved. This could also include volunteering for field trips, which they feel are important, but are lacking at Lakeview Schools.

There is a perception that “what happens in the buildings is a big secret.”

There was overwhelming interest in creating “parent input” groups who would be available to provide their input on certain aspects of school operations, including transportation, nutrition, finance, sports and curriculum.



Better Communication from Coaches Regarding their Needs

Groups supporting the coaches and Lakeview teams do not feel as though they are communicated to by the coaches, and they sometimes feel “used,” as though the coaches only come to them when the coaches need them. This is the sentiment among parents of athletes and booster groups. It is felt that if the coaches provided better all-around communication regarding what they need, the groups (parents and boosters) supporting athletics would be more motivated to do so.



Superintendent Community Visibility

Parents also felt as though Superintendent Taylor was not “present” enough throughout the district, including sporting events and other extra-curricular activities. Many respect Superintendent Taylor and would “like to get to know her more.” They would like to see her become more of a face of the schools within the community.



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Board Transparency

A perception exists that the Lakeview Board of Education operates away from public view, and this perception is underscored by actions deemed by many meant to deter participation from families and community members. These actions include board members not answering emails, agendas for board meetings containing few, if any, details about meetings and issues voted on, board meetings not being accessible via the internet, and limited seating in certain board meetings making it uncomfortable for many attendees.

It was frequently mentioned that it is difficult to understand district issues due to the nature of the board meetings. As an example, it was frequently stated that at the board meetings items are voted on without discussion. As mentioned, it was discussed that the board agendas do not contain any details that make it useful to an outside observer. It was suggested that a more robust agenda would be helpful.

There seems to be a genuine desire to be a part of the board's process (read: meetings and voting) and to better understand district operations. This includes providing the community and families with a better understanding of district finances and how money is allocated.



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COVID-19 Response

In light of the political divide in the U.S. and varying opinions on how to handle the COVID response, members of the community laid more concern onto how the district managed communications.

Some felt communication came late, with parents complaining that they learned more from the

news or social media before hearing anything from the school. Messaging seemed convoluted and complicated without any clear indication of the district's intent throughout the process. Parents remarked that they contacted the Board of Education and received no response. Many parents also felt a survey at the beginning to gauge family/community thoughts on closing schools would have been warranted, echoing many previous complaints of feeling as though family input is unwelcomed in the district.

Many members of the community felt the students should have come back sooner, while others expressed their appreciation to the district for being cautious and for making safety their primary concern. Opinions on both poles were deeply felt and rigorously stated.

It was stated by parents that the schools themselves did a good job communicating the complexities of the Covid situation regarding specific school issues, it was district-wide communication that was lacking.

Regarding instruction during Covid, there were many varying opinions. Many expressed gratitude to the teachers and staff for going "above and beyond" regarding efforts to assist students during this challenging time.

A few expressed concerns over a perceived "gap" in learning due to the pandemic and want to know the district's plan to help students catch up.

Some also expressed a concern that online learning was not effective, and as a result their children fell behind. Many also expressed a concern regarding the social and emotional health of the students as a consequence of remote learning.

Community members are looking forward to post COVID so relationships may be restored.

School district did a great job with remote learning during COVID and in providing food to students that needed it while overcoming technology barriers.



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Communication of the “Don’t Yet Know” is Okay

A consistent suggestion was that the school district communicate even if it does not yet have all the information. An example was COVID. The situation was fluid and residents understood that. They also understood that communication is difficult with so many unknowns. They requested however in this example to be told “We know these five things. We do not yet know these three things. When we do learn about these three things, we will communicate them to you.”

**Specifically COVID-19 related*



Snacks

It is perceived that the policy on snacks does not make sense. There is an understanding that COVID caused issues which necessitated safety precautions, though many families felt that a creative solution could have been found as students were going from 8:30 – 1:00 without food. They repeated the claim that the district and schools did not seek ideas or suggestions from families and students. It was also stated that parents sought resolution of this issue through the chain of command, but they did not get results.

**Specifically COVID-19 related*



Bring Back the Fun

There is a concern that students’ social and emotional health has suffered due to the isolation necessitated by COVID.

There is a desire to see events such as Fall Festival, Santa’s Shop and Art Show next year. A return to “normalcy” was widely desired by respondents and parents again expressed their willingness and desire to help make these events successful.

**Specifically COVID-19 related*



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Teaching Staff Self-Awareness

While this does not apply to all teachers, it was stated that some teachers may not have an appreciation of the strong impact their attitudes and demeanors have upon students. The point of the discussion was recognizing that teachers need self-awareness regarding the manner in which they present themselves with tone and body language.

Some wondered if the stresses of COVID and teaching were having an effect and the teachers were unaware of their influence.

**Specifically COVID-19 related*



Kindergarten Meeting of the Teachers

There is a strong desire that there be a “Meet the Teacher” opportunity for new kindergarten parents. Some parents felt this would help them feel more engaged in their students’ education while also working as an introduction to the district. Long-term, many hoped this idea would lead to parents having the confidence to continue their involvement.

There was anxiety expressed about “leaving your child for the first time...with a stranger.” An opportunity to meet teachers in advance would go a long way in easing this concern.

It was also suggested that Kindergarten registration notifications should be “fun and celebratory” to get parents excited.

**Specifically COVID-19 related*



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Diversity

Although African Americans only represent 1% of the population they should still be represented. There is a perceived disparity of care and general treatment of students from different backgrounds.



True Value of Grades

There is some concern about the relative value of grades being a true representation of effort. As an example, a student who gets a “A” in an “easy” class appears to be doing better than a student that gets a “B” in a difficult class.



High School Course Options

It was stated that it is great that CCP and TCTC numbers are high, but ALL high school students must understand the options that are available to them. There was a concern that the students “in the middle” may not have compelling opportunities.

It was suggested that the high school should offer challenging courses other than CCP and provide more opportunities for average students.

“Life skills” classes were frequently suggested. Instruction centered on personal finance was the most requested topic.



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Teaching the Whole Child

References were made that Lakeview Local Schools need to teach to the whole child with the mindset that education is more than academics. The perception is that there is an overwhelming focus on testing.

It was also suggested that a long-term plan must be in place to address the district's facility and infrastructure needs.



Going Back Too Early

Some felt going back to school in the middle of August was too early and preferred a school year set to the Labor Day through Memorial Day model.



Lunch Menus

There is an overall feeling that, many times, lunch menus are posted "last minute," not giving families or students time to prepare. There was an idea that publishing lunch menus for the month would be more helpful, echoing the previous point of doing "what other schools" are doing.



Thankful

Many expressed that they were thankful for the Lakeview students and community.

