



Washoe County  
School District

# Incline Schools Focus Groups Notes

**Group:** Middle school teachers

**Date:** 3.23.2011

**Facilitator:** Calli Fisher

**Scribe:** Jessica Garcia

---

Summary Comments / Notes:

## 1. Are you satisfied with the level of education students are receiving?

One member returned to teaching after being self-employed in writing curriculum. This member said WCSD curriculum is inadequate and feels the leadership is lacking to provide proper curriculum, adding what is now being offered is poorly worded and politicized.

Members also said education now being offered does not meet needs of students because they don't have basic skills to perform at current grade level. One member said the material "covers a mile wide but only an inch deep." Group believes students lack problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Another member said they miss having longer blocks of time for instruction.

**Consensus:** No. Members feel challenged by students coming to the classroom with extreme behavior issues and poor academic skills.

## 2. Do you believe you/your children are actively engaged and enjoy the learning process at school?

Members agreed there must be a cultural change, starting in the home with parents supporting education and encouraging their children to care about learning. The group worries there is no backing from the parents to motivate the students.

One member said politicians need to consider having people enter particular fields and encouraging more funding to provide education that meets the career demands of the future and the state.

**Consensus:** Only some students are truly engaged and enjoy it. Members said every few years, it seems society takes "another step off the cliff" and students lose more passion to work hard and learn. Education is no longer valued.

## 3. If you could change one thing in Incline school to improve student learning, what would that be?

Members had varying ideas on what to change. One member said getting families on board should be a priority, adding the "elephant in the room" is children don't have a cultural background and hardly any exposure to diversity.

One member said having teachers open themselves up to parents can help parents see the teachers as allies, whether it means holding an occasional potluck lunch or adjusting work schedules for visits.

Members discussed having the District pay more attention to the Incline community. Incline is viewed as the "stepchild" of the district as it is often "out of sight, out of mind." Administrators don't truly understand what is happening in Incline because visits are canceled frequently due to weather or other reasons.

Residents in Incline are said to have developed the mindset that they must tackle issues on their own and not raise a stink about it. Members concurred it's hard not to get resentful.

Conversation turned to International Baccalaureate. Members said the way IB has been handled has not been done well. They said it's dragged the town down and has left a bitter taste in their mouths. They feel administrators have backtracked in their relationship with the schools. They said communication is a two-way street.

4. How important is it to have a challenging learning environment? What does this mean to you?

Members said they would not be teaching if they couldn't provide a challenging environment.

One member said it is difficult when students fall back and they try to push them and challenge them to do better. Mentally and physically, if anything is too difficult, students feel uncomfortable and don't want to try. Member said they hear students say "my brain hurts" and display a lack of passion to figure anything out on their own. Even when playing computer games, member said they observe students using cheats because they don't want to challenge themselves.

**Consensus:** Students want success without the work and they feel it's disarming, especially if parents don't support their efforts.

5. Respondents to the recent survey identified instruction in science as critically important.

What are your thoughts on that?

Member said physics and chemistry are everything and these science classes are not valued enough in the curriculum.

Group said parents have an agenda. Students can't do science unless they know how to read and write, which trickles down from the parents' lack of basic or advanced education.

Teaching integrated units with science would give students depth of knowledge. One positive aspect of International Baccalaureate is that it did emphasize integration.

Teachers are displeased with high school curriculum for science.

The District needs to identify a long-range vision to help students and teachers. The split between those who oppose and those who favor IB has damaged the Incline community, members said.

6. Respondents to the recent survey identified instruction in innovation/technology as critically important.

What are your thoughts on that?

The group agreed students need to be tech-savvy, but they added the District continues to cut allocations for computers and teaching technology. They would like to see the technology that is employed in the classroom to be maintained better.

Using technology in the classroom helps students to see the bigger picture of what they're learning.

There needs to be more due diligence with Infinite Campus; teachers feel it's not being used enough.

7. How important is it to have a vertically aligned curriculum among the three Incline schools?

Teachers feel their time could be better spent in faculty and PLC meetings to address alignment through the three schools.

Teachers said they feel burnt out and as though they're made out to be the villains as they teach their own classes because they get blamed if students are not well-prepared.

One member said teachers get criticized if they leave right after school lets out, even if that teacher is coaching sports, teaching drama or helping with other student activities.

**Consensus:** It's extremely important. Time needs to be devoted to helping the schools, along with someone who can write the proper curriculum.

8. As you know, the Incline Great Schools committee is focused on making Incline Schools great. Do you have any closing thoughts on this?

Members said they want WCSD to reevaluate how Wednesdays are spent for professional development.

They would like to see more offerings of Spanish beyond middle and high school. They said this could be a great way to chip at the cultural gap that exists in Incline.

They said some students still don't know how to read at their current level.

The District needs more arts and to bring students up to a level where they exceed expectations.

Members said real programs should be created, not a political game among legislators and the community.

Teachers need a bigger voice in school.