

case study

Cultivating a Community of Trust and Good Thinking

Exceptional⁺

ANN ARBOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Recap/Key Points

- District capacity building with TregoED tools has changed the culture and prepared leaders for challenges to come
- Collaboration with diverse stakeholders creates a community of transparency, mutual trust and understanding that will benefit the district for years to come
- The best recommendations are based on a shared vision and focused critical thinking

District Information

Ann Arbor Public Schools (AAPS) is located 40 miles outside of Detroit. The district's 32 schools serve more than 18,000 pre-K to 12th grade students. In 2016-17, one in ten children had special needs requiring an IEP, one in four came from homes impacted by poverty, and one in ten lived in homes where English was not the first language spoken.



Left to right: C. Stead (Board President), J. Swift (Superintendent), D. Linden, M. Colligan, J. Bacolor, K. Blackburn. Missing: R. Bailey

Problem/Challenge

In 2015, Ann Arbor voters approved a \$33 million bond referendum for spending in certain facility areas that needed upgrading. The challenge, set forth by Superintendent Jeanice K. Swift, was to involve the community—stakeholders from inside and outside the school district—and bring forward recommendations on how to best spend the money. Doing this would require a collaborative approach and systematic mapped-out pathways to help collect data, establish goals and expectations, and identify other districts with similar facility improvements.



Solution

Dr. Swift appointed four district leaders as Bond Advisory Committee (BAC) facilitators to manage stakeholder involvement in each of several focal areas for the recommendations process. The BAC facilitators created a process for making expenditure recommendations to the superintendent. The process, which revolved around several TregoED tools, Situation Appraisal, Decision Analysis and Potential Problem Analysis allowed each group to:

- Get the best thinking of stakeholders
- Gather input and organize data
- Review current conditions
- Develop a long-term vision for each area
- Look at exemplars from other districts
- Review standards and best practices
- Prioritize recommendations and make data-driven decisions
- Communicate and share a coherent and transparent methodology
- Create common criteria and vision

Results

Previous to this administration, advisory committees had faced criticism regarding their process and recommendations. Dr. Jeanice Swift sought to avoid these pitfalls by developing a process that would be both transparent and include stakeholders as valuable resources. The district needed to help participants understand the financial and legal limitations of the bond funds, maintain a sustained commitment, and work quickly to begin implementation within a reasonable timeframe.

Using TregoED tools to guide their decision making and planning, they were able to develop and implement a process that resulted in:

- **Improved communication practices:** After the kick-off meeting, BAC facilitators met at least monthly with their committees. The facilitators provided updates to the superintendent, on the district website, and at three Board of Education meetings.
- **Gathering the best thinking of AAPS leadership and community members:** Other AAPS leaders embraced the idea of transparent, meaningful community engagement for making significant decisions. The district's 70 community members and staff became champions for the process.
- **Transparent and defensible spending recommendations based on set criteria and district vision:** Within six months, the BACs for Athletic Fields/Facilities, Auditoriums, Musical Instruments, and Classroom Furniture had completed their recommendations. The Playgrounds BAC had developed a set of criteria and resource information for elementary building committees to use to choose playground upgrades at the building level.
- **Replicable procedures:** AAPS now has a model, tools, and staff capacity to use this process in systems change work for years to come.

“The outcome of this endeavor is that we are refreshing and renewing the learning environment across our 32 schools to enhance the learning experience for every student, yet we are also transforming our organizational capacity to listen and engage meaningfully with students, staff, parents, and community to build trust and work toward shared decisions that lead to durable and sustainable progress in our Ann Arbor community.”

**Jeanice K. Swift, Superintendent
Ann Arbor Public Schools**

