



BaB

Baldwinsville Central School District

29 East Genesee Street
Baldwinsville, NY 13027

Project Based Learning Community Café Session Findings

Prepared for:

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Community Café


Monday, March 25, 2024

6 to 8 p.m.

C.W. Baker High School
Cafeteria

Topics: Project Based Learning
Experiences

SHARING IDEAS &
PERSPECTIVES ON IMPORTANT
TOPICS IMPACTING OUR
SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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Registration Required
Link available on www.bville.org



Ask. Listen. Solve.

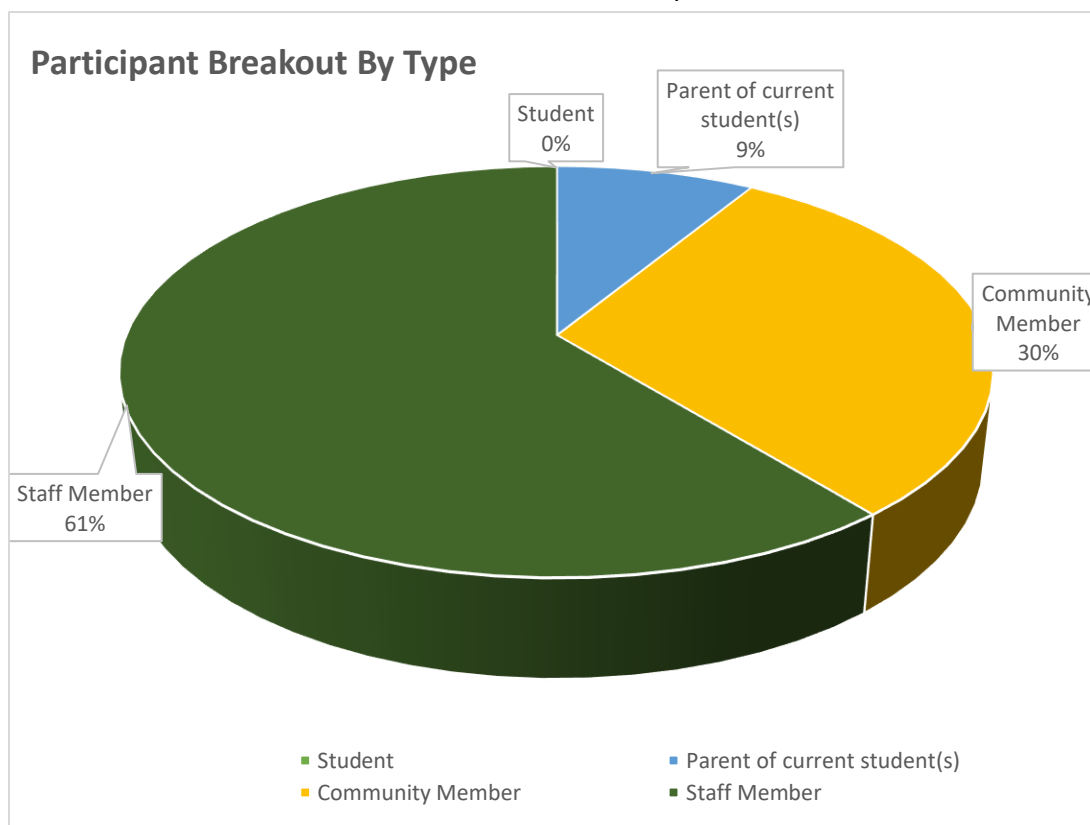


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Executive Summary

On Monday evening, March 25, 2024, the Baldwinsville Central School District (BCSD) held a town hall-style discussion group regarding its Project Based Learning (PBL) teaching model initiative and shared the findings from recent area employer research (In-depth interviews/IDI) regarding desired employee and high school graduate core skill sets. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a platform for the community-at-large to share its thoughts regarding PBL as well as react to the latest employer IDI research. The discussion was broken into sections and was interactive using the District’s online tool, “ThoughtExchange.” Participants responded to survey questions and were able to react to and rate other participants’ thoughts and responses. The event was modestly attended with 23 individuals representing the community, parents, and BCSD staff participating. The discussion session lasted two (2) hours and there was healthy engagement and discussion. A Moderator’s Guide was used to direct the discussion topics. The Guide is included as an attachment to this report.



This discussion forum was one of several held by the BCSD as it engages the community with implementing its 2023 – 2024 District-wide Strategic Plan.

The BCSD administrative project team (Danielle Nahorney, Director of Academic Services and Accountability, and Superintendent Joseph DeBarbieri) met with RMS in advance of the session

and assisted with the development of the Moderator’s Guide and the ThoughtExchange participation questions utilized. Ultimately the Guide was broken down into: (1) Understanding the participant’s perception regarding project-based learning; (2) Sharing key findings from the recently completed area employer in-depth interview (IDI) research; (3) Highlighting key components of the PBL teaching model; and (4) Brainstorming what can be done within the Baldwinsville community to optimize awareness and implementation of the PBL approach within the District.

The BCSD is committed to building and maintaining a strong learning environment. The District’s mission is to *“Foster an environment to educate and empower all students today to become global citizens of tomorrow.”* That means providing students with the skills to become successful adults.

Questions regarding this report and the primary research can be directed to Patrick Fiorenza, Director of Research Analytics, at PatrickF@rmsresults.com or Mark Dengler, President, at MarkD@RMSresults.com.

Findings

The Community Café was moderated by RMS staff, following a pre-approved script (see Appendix). RMS leveraged the “ThoughtExchange” tool to make the sessions more interactive and engaging. The Community Café had two questioning sessions supported by the BCSD’s ThoughtExchange platform. RMS then used prompts and guided the discussion to explore themes, trends, and ideas as they emerged from the discussion. Overall, the participants seemed to enjoy using the ThoughtExchange tool, and it clearly enhanced the richness of the conversation. The key findings are presented in the order of the discussion guide.

ThoughtExchange – Activity 1: Background & Introduction of PBL

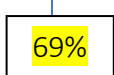
The first activity helped develop a baseline of the participants’ understanding regarding PBL and further learn individuals’ perceptions of skill sets necessary for high school graduates to be successful in the workplace. This helped the moderator to better understand participants and more appropriately guide the discussion.

■ Awareness of Project Based Learning (PBL)

Please rate your familiarity with the teaching method known as Project Based Learning (PBL)

Not At All				Very
1	2	3	4	5
14%	14%	41%	13%	18%

MEAN: 3.09



- ✓ Overall, there was a general awareness of PBL by the community attendees. However, this awareness was not robust. Many indicated that they had heard the term but were not familiar with the specifics as to what it involved in PBL.
- ✓ A couple of instructional staff members in attendance were very familiar with PBL, indicating that they had worked with the program in the past at other districts, had attended conferences, toured schools in the mid-west that used PBL, and/or were formally trained in the PBL teaching style.
- ✓ Parents and community members had the lowest awareness with most providing an awareness level of 1 or 2 on a scale from 1= “not at all,” to 5= “very” aware. (i.e., “This is the first time I am hearing about this.”)
- ✓ One individual said that she was formally trained by BOCES (Professional Development Session) in the method and had experience with using it with students from grades 9 through 12.
- ✓ Those with high awareness ratings indicated that they believed that, “kids loved it”, and it made the learning experience so much better, very hands on. The students liked

working with friends, it helped with listening, and overall students took more away from the learning experience.”

- ✓ One instructor stated that PBL is difficult to implement with certain school-day scheduling and getting full engagement across subject areas. They further added that they were not aware of the best way to implement it at this broad a level (Grades K through 12).
- ✓ The more knowledgeable attendees stated that there are various forms and methods for implementing PBL and that it is not a new concept. It has been around for a number of years across the country. It is a proven teaching approach.

■ **Skill Sets Needed for Graduating Student Job Success**

How important do you feel it is for students to have:

	Not at All					Very	
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Rank
→ Good Communication Skills – can share thoughts and ideas						4.83	1
→ Problem Solving – demonstrating “critical thinking”						4.68	3
Ability to adjust to a changed environment and find new solutions						4.55	5
→ A Strong Work Ethic						4.73	2
The ability to work independently						4.27	7
Demonstrate Teamwork						4.41	6
→ Maintain a Positive Attitude						4.68	3

- ✓ The most important skill set, according to the participants, is for students to have good communication skills; followed by a good work ethic; and then jointly, having strong problem-solving skills and maintaining a positive attitude.
- ✓ Additional skills participants thought were important to instill in graduating seniors include:
 - Being able to receive constructive criticism and use it proactively. A couple of participants spoke about the need to teach students how to receive and give feedback in a helpful way.
 - The ability to prioritize activities and manage their time. Several indicated that time management is a critical skill set that students need to learn.
 - It was also shared that participants need to learn what is an appropriate “work-life” balance. One of the participants called this “work-life harmony.”
 - Students need to understand debt, interest, and be financially literate.
 - Students need to have a better understanding of ever-changing technology.

- Several stated that it is important to build self-awareness, understanding their aptitudes, knowing their skills and their limits. Students need to know that it is okay to fail, however they need to try. “Life is not a straight line.” It was stated that many people learn from failure.
- Some suggested that the BCSD could focus on making students aware of showing empathy to others. It will allow for better tolerance of others with different thought processes.
- Additional skills include ensuring that students are able to read, do simple math, and “can articulate clear, productive and respectful communication.”
- It was also suggested that there needs to be some coaching with students so that they learn how to weave all their skill sets together into a complete package and recognize when to use a particular skill.

What is the most important thing the BCSD can do to make sure students are “job ready” upon graduation?

- ✓ It was suggested that students be exposed to career paths that don’t involve going directly to college. This way they can have a better understanding of what is available in the job market.
- ✓ Participants suggested that the School District speak with employers to see what current students are lacking when they enter the workforce. Further, it was thought that area employers can share “real life” career and work situations that students can relate to. It was suggested that the curriculum materials be published so that employers can comment on their relevance. (An individual stated that they felt very little information about the curriculum is shared with the community).
- ✓ It is important to incorporate real world connections and opportunities to learn from different people. Several thought that this will help keep the learning relevant.
- ✓ It was suggested that the BCSD find ways to expose lots of various career opportunities to students before graduation. This will allow students to explore career options that interest them and help them find their passion.
- ✓ Students need to learn how to present themselves positively and show confidence and understanding. The participants felt students needed to work on resume and interviewing skills. Job skills training is needed to provide students with the opportunities to identify and brainstorm solutions to real life problems.
- ✓ Some want the District to provide opportunities for student internships or volunteer out in the community exposing students to real job settings.
- ✓ The District needs to emphasize work ethic skills. Several participants stated that this is most important for career growth and job stability.
- ✓ “Make sure students are able to be ‘out-of-the-box’ thinkers and problem solvers.”

■ **Employer Research Findings Sharing**

The moderator shared results from recent local employer in-depth interviews (IDIs). The research focused on speaking with area employers regarding the desired core competency skill sets that they are looking for from their new hires (particularly those in positions that are open to recent high school graduates). We spoke with twelve area employers covering industry segments including manufacturing, healthcare, construction, energy, and automotive. Participating companies included: McLane Northeast, Gypsum Express, Giovanni Foods, McHarrie Life, Syracuse Orthopedic Specialists, a Horan Financial/Wealth Management, and Lou’s Car Care. The employee size of these companies ranged from 7 to 780 employees.

Employer Key Findings:

- a. The vast majority of those we spoke with say that they are having a difficult time finding employees to fill their available positions. This includes entry level positions.
- b. Further, several stated that when they find a candidate, that individual does not always work out because their expectations are misaligned. Employers stated that new entry level candidates often have unrealistic expectations regarding pay, the pace of advancement, and the work effort required.
- c. Employers are looking for high school graduates who can demonstrate strong basic values such as “willingness to learn,” “active listening,” “genuine interest in a position (enthusiasm),” “positive attitude,” and “engagement.” Moreover, they stated that they are looking for emotional aptitudes from individuals tied to empathy, kindness, humility, self-motivation, and confidence.
- d. Employers also want graduates with adequate financial literacy, basic math and computer skills.
- e. Employees need to understand logic, protocol, and process. Employers need employees who will be fully present while on the job – unplugged from their phones.

The moderator also shared the employer responses to the importance rating of skill sets that the employers are looking for. This series of questions was exactly the same as those asked in the ThoughtExchange session with the Community Café participants. The results of the findings among the two segments are listed in the chart below.

Skill Set Specified	Employer		Participant	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Good Communication Skills – can share thoughts and ideas	4.7	3	4.8	1
Problem Solving – demonstrating “critical thinking”	3.8	6	4.6	3
Ability to adjust to a changed environment and find new solutions	4.0	5	4.5	5

A Strong Work Ethic	5.0	1	4.7	2
The ability to work independently	3.6	7	4.3	7
Demonstrate Teamwork	4.7	3	4.4	6
Maintain a Positive Attitude	4.8	2	4.6	3

- ✓ Overall, the Café participants rated all the skills questioned as being important, even more so than the employers. In reality, many employers stated that they can typically teach job specifics, but cannot teach soft skills such as work ethic, positive attitude, good communication skills, and teamwork.
- ✓ Employers felt that the School District should play an important role in reiterating the soft skills and then expose students to “real world” situations that they will encounter in the workplace. This will give them real world experiences. Someone spoke of the need for BCSD to teach students how they can “manage life.” There was a perception that graduating students are not entering the workforce with realistic expectations.
- ✓ Employers did not feel that new employees/graduated high school students had to be proficient in key technical skills like computer programming, working independently, or demonstrating critical thinking. Rather, they want to be sure that they can write professionally, communicate effectively, and work with others in teams.
- ✓ It was shared that the employer research indicated that sometimes there is a negative perception of those careers (and skill sets) that do not require college degrees; that they are “lesser” and, therefore, less desirable. Employers stated that there should be an emphasis to show how important these types of skills are and how skills related to a trade are very important and can lead to very lucrative and fulfilling careers.
- ✓ Participants in the Community Café felt that it was very important to expose all graduating students to many different types of employment and career opportunities that exist. It was felt that students need to be exposed to what real-world work environments are like.

■ **Project Based Learning Overview**

The moderator provided a preliminary review of the core components of the PBL model based upon the website, www.PBLWorks.org. The overview included the definition of the teaching method and identifying the seven essential elements of PBL.

It was further shared that PBL is incorporated into curriculums across all grade levels (elementary school -- middle school -- high school). Students demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation for a real audience. PBL is becoming widely used in schools and other educational settings across the country.

PBL is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex

question, problem or challenge. Skills taught through PBL include: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication skills (all traits that employers are looking for in the workplace).

After the PBL overview, Community Café participants were asked what they thought about the concept. They were asked to share reactive “words” or “phrases” regarding the program. The goal was to understand whether participants felt that the program was a good or bad thing. Were they positive, neutral or negative to the concept?

Overwhelmingly, participants liked the PBL concept and felt that the program should help enhance learning and help develop the skill sets in students that will help them be successful. Several stated that implementing this teaching method helps keep the BCSD ahead of the game. Someone said, “It makes us competitive and innovative, right where we want to be.”

Some typically mentioned words or phrases associated with PBL included: “*Sounds great*”; “*Good*”; “*It puts learning all together for kids*”; “*Helps kids think outside the box*”; “*It involves engagement – not just what’s in a textbook*”; “*Home is where it should start*”; “*Engagement*”; “*Combines learning*”; “*It helps the students better engage – not be bored.*”

Participants were asked to rate to what extent they thought PBL (as introduced and explained) would enhance student learning within the BCSD? Overall, the mean rating on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very”, the mean rating was a 4.35, with over 70% of the participants providing a rating between 4 or 5.

Most participants like the comprehensiveness of the model and how it integrated learning with a real life situations that the students tackled as a team.

Further, most believed that it was vitally important for the District to make the community aware of this PBL learning model. One PBL knowledgeable participant stated that implementation of PBL is most effective when all the stakeholders are engaged.

The participants identified several other stakeholder groups that need to be involved. These included: 1. current student families, parents, and care givers (support needs to come from home); 2. area employers; 3. community organizations; 4. military representatives; 5. athletic coaches and 6. the students themselves. A general consensus was that there needs to be more collaboration among all stakeholders who impact student lives. “*Experiences like this (the Community Café) aren’t done enough.*” It was believed that more stakeholder engagement would improve PBL’s implementation into the District’s strategic plan and curriculum as well as help ensure PBL’s effectiveness.

A five-point Likert scale was used to ask participants how important it is that the BCSD community be made aware of the PBL learning model. The mean rating was 4.43, indicating that participants felt it was important that the community be made aware of PBL.

How important is it that the BCSD community be made aware of the Project Based Learning (PBL) model?

Not At All				Very
1	2	3	4	5
0%	4%	9%	26%	61%

MEAN: **4.43**

It was clear that the participants felt BCSD needs to engage the community in understanding what PBL is and how it can help better prepare graduating students with lifelong skills.

Suggestions for the District to help with this engagement include:

- ✓ Creating a group of individuals who are very knowledgeable about PBL and developing a group of “early adopters” who can serve as resources for the community-at-large. Once launched, BCSD should create partnerships with those in the community who can further help promote the initiative.
- ✓ Share success stories related to PBL with the community. Offer “show and tell” style sessions and case studies. Highlight other districts that are using PBL. Continuously talk about the value of PBL and how it is making a difference. When possible, use student testimonials and have the students talk about this teaching model.
- ✓ Train the School District staff members on how to implement PBL with fidelity within their classrooms and then give them a forum to identify “best practices.” Some instructional staff stated that implementing PBL may be difficult at BCSD due to the current scheduling structure that is in place.
- ✓ It was suggested that more community cafés need to be held with the stakeholders. It was suggested that these meetings be held at the building level – elementary, middle, and secondary level.
- ✓ The District should speak with Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Chamber, etc. to get the message about this model of teaching/learning out. This would be a type of “road show” that the District administrative team can take out to the community.
- ✓ Create a short video summarizing the model and highlighting some student projects. This should be posted on the website and shared widely. This PBL unit should highlight what the BCSD is doing and how it is beneficial to students.
- ✓ Create bridges with area businesses to be able to better connect what students are learning in the classroom with what businesses do and what their needs are. There is a need to build employer support and involvement.
- ✓ Conduct more community-wide surveys as a means to help educate and engage the community in what the District is doing, particularly around PBL.

The session closed with asking participants to think ten years into the future about what the local job market will look like. The ThoughtExchange was utilized to better gather feedback. All participants felt that there are going to be significant changes to the workplace over the next

ten years. This is primarily driven by the adoption and growth of artificial intelligence. It was further discussed that technology will continuously change how we work. These advances will continue to be rapid and have broad reaching impacts. Key impact areas, shared by the participants, needing to be watched and focused on include:

1. **Artificial Intelligence.** This is a game-changer based upon participant remarks. “There will be AI applications that we can’t even fathom.” The District needs to stay abreast of AI and the best methods for introducing this into the classroom.
2. **Advanced Technology.** It is believed that technology automation will continue to be part of the workplace. These technologies drive efficiencies and businesses will continue to look to implement them where they can. Automation will require workers to bring a “human aspect” to the job place, empathy and communication skills will be very important.
3. **Micron.** Most stated that Micron moving into the area will have a significant impact on the area. With their market entry as well as other advanced technology manufacturing, workforce needs are going to change. We will need to produce a more technologically educated workforce. It is also believed that Micron will increase local business opportunities, creating even more jobs.
4. **Labor Shortage.** There is concern that the addition of Micron and other technology-focused companies coming into the area will put a big strain on the local economy and steal workers from other industries.
5. **Higher Taxes = Exodus of Population.** It was suggested that the next ten years will bring high taxes. This will drive people from the State.
6. **Climate Change.** This will have a negative impact overall. There will be global warming. However, CNY may see a boon because people will be moving back due to less impactful climate conditions within the region.
7. **More Business Over Internet.** The traditional job market as we know it will change. People will work from home, and from anywhere.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based upon the insights and findings from the discussion session. Some of these recommendations may already be in place or underway at BCSD; if so, BCSD should feel confident that their efforts and strategies are valid as it is reflected in the data findings. RMS is providing these recommendations to encourage BCSD to act on items as appropriate and leverage the data from this study to work toward building an effective launch of its PBL program.

1. Continue to Engage with Area Businesses and Build Partnerships

Building partnerships and creating opportunities for area businesses to collaborate with the School District and educators should be encouraged. This activity will help ensure that there are ample opportunities for students to be exposed to various work environments and internships. It will further build a strong alliance between the District and being connected to learning the skills employers are looking for from employees.

2. Create a PBL Implementation Taskforce to Develop Community Engagement Strategies

BCSD should build a PBL Implementation Taskforce that can manage, guide, and assess the activities being employed as the District-wide rollout takes place. This taskforce can serve as the primary resource for all stakeholders.

3. Create a PBL Page on the Bville.org Website

The District should create a distinct web page on the District's website to highlight PBL. The page could layout the timeline overview, current projects, and success stories. Moreover, national performance statistics and links to other district's PBL websites can be shared. Like the taskforce, the web page will become a key resources for all stakeholder groups.

4. Establish a Listening Session

Sponsor a listening session for junior & senior high school instructional staff, where they can listen to the needs, thoughts, and comments from area employers.

5. PBL Symposium

Hold a symposium on PBL within the region, inviting other schools to come and present their experiences with PBL. The symposium should be promoted and open to all, encouraging the community-at-large to attend. It would also help position BCSD as being a leader locally on this learning model.

6. Create a Student PBL Engagement Team

BCSD should develop a student PBL engagement team to help discuss and brainstorm activities around Baldwinsville's PBL implementation. This group of students could help

both the recommended BCSD PBL Taskforce as well as District administration with providing real time feedback and suggestions.

7. PBL Presentation Package

The BCSD needs to put together a PBL presentation package for the general public and then schedule presentations throughout the community to discuss the learning model. Additionally, community engagement could be obtained by asking community associations and organizations for pertinent project topic ideas that can be integrated into the PBL curriculum.

8. Create and Share Case Studies

Create case studies at each grade level sharing how PBL was incorporated and what the student performance outcomes were. These case studies can be shared as appropriate in the BCSD's information distribution, on its website, and as part of the "road show" presentation.

Overall, these recommendations present an opportunity for the District to build on its work with employers and launch its PBL program.

Appendix

Baldwinsville Central School District – Project Based Learning #3025
Discussion Guide
03/25/2024 – FINAL

Focus Group Overview:

Date	Location	Time
Monday, March 25, 2024	C.W. Baker High School - Cafeteria	Session 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Participant Qualifications:

- This work is part of an ongoing series of community forums (Community Café) whereby students, staff, parents, and community members are invited to discuss topics impacting the Baldwinsville Central School District.
- This session’s topic is **Project/Problem Based Learning & Employer IDI Key Findings**.
- BCSD requests that registration for each forum is completed in advance.
- As of 3/25/24 Count Estimate – 23 Individuals:
 - 0 students
 - 12 Instructors/staff – BOE - Administration
 - 11 Parents/Community Members

Research Objective:

- Obtain key stakeholder perceptions and opinions regarding the pertinent topic [For this session DEI will be discussed].
- Incorporate the fieldwork findings into the district’s overall planning process.
- Advancing Project Based Learning is a key initiative of the BCSD 2023-2024 District Goals.
- Create a forum for dialogue and exchange of ideas and knowledge with the community at large. RMS will utilize the BCSD’s **ThoughtExchange** software.
- Prepare summary report with key findings and themes.

Breakdown of Content:

- We will focus on the following content areas:
 - Understanding participant’s perceptions regarding project-based learning.
 - Share key findings from the recently completed area employer in-depth interviews (IDIs)
 - Highlight overview of Project-Based Learning (PBL)
 - Discussion regarding BCSD’s project-based learning initiatives to date
- “Open Mike” allowing participants to add their thoughts or comments regarding the topic

Duration: Approximately 2.0 hours (120-minutes)

1	Introduction	10 Minutes	6:00 PM	Till: 6:10 PM
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A. Welcome and Approach

- Welcome everyone and thank them for joining us tonight. Introduce Pat Fiorenza, Research Director, and self as the moderator. Explain that today's session is known as a general discussion group and will be held in a "community forum" or "town hall" style meeting format. Everyone will be given an opportunity to share their thoughts. As the moderator I will introduce and oversee the discussion topics. This work is *qualitative* research (versus quantitative research), done to gather opinions and perceptions from attendees. There is no such thing as a wrong answer.
- Introduce Joe and Danielle and any other BCSD staff in attendance.
- Tonight's meeting will focus on the topic of "Project Based Learning," often referred to as PBL.
- Pat and I work for a local, Baldwinsville-based market research firm, Research & Marketing Strategies, Inc. (RMS). Our firm has been hired by the Baldwinsville Central School District to conduct/moderate tonight's discussion session and gather your feedback. We will be summarizing everyone's comments and preparing an aggregate report that will be shared with the BCSD administrative team. We work with several area school districts as well as national organizations across the county.
- The report findings are summarized in aggregate, meaning your individual responses will remain anonymous and your name won't be tied to anything we discuss. Please speak freely about your thoughts and opinions.
- As you may know, this meeting is one of several community café forums that have been held, beginning this past fall, to help engage the community in collaborative discussions and is a key component of building and implementing the district's strategic plan. You may recall that we did a similar town meeting/community forum on the topic of Diversity, Equity, and inclusion (DEI) this past December.
- Explain that the information collected through this process will be used to:
 - Obtain input regarding core skill sets that graduating high school students need to be successful.
 - Share feedback from employer market research conducted in February '24.
 - Understand the community's perceptions of PBL {Project Based Learning}
 - Brainstorm what can be done to optimize PBL approach here within the local Bville community.
- No one will try to sell or sign you up for anything; tonight's discussion is for research purposes only.
- Please turn off cell phones or place on vibrate/silent mode.
- Use the bathroom if necessary before we start. (Review any other general logistics, drinks, food, etc. as appropriate)

B. Community Forum Logistics and Rules

- The discussion will be broken down into general topical areas that we will guide you through. We'll also be using an online tool called ThoughtExchange.
- Explain that Patrick will assist with note taking and addressing any issues that may arise, including making sure you can access the online activities and questions about this Community Cafe. Feel free to flag him down if you have any questions or need assistance.
- I ask that you speak loudly and clearly and try not to interrupt when someone is talking. Remind folks that we will be summarizing the discussion into general themes. The final report is prepared from findings summarized in aggregate, meaning your individual responses will remain anonymous and you won't be tied to anything we discuss. Please speak freely about your thoughts and opinions.
- With a discussion group there are no wrong answers. I'll look forward to hearing from everyone in the group. If you hear something and you agree, please let me know that. Also, should you disagree, let me know that too.

- Explain that we will be doing both individual and small group discussion tonight. We may be asking someone at your table to report back on the general discussion topic.
- This group should take approximately **120 minutes (2 hours)**. As we move through sections of the discussion, we will use a software platform known as ThoughtExchange. Some of you may already be familiar with this (as it was used in the earlier Community Café and other school activities).

C. Voluntary Participation

- There is no guarantee that anything we discuss today will be implemented. However, we are looking to understand your thoughts and perceptions related to PBL. Ideas, suggestions, and recommendations are all welcome.
- We are audio recording tonight’s discussion so that we can go back and listen to the discussion. Please be assured that the audio tape will be destroyed once the research report has been prepared.
- Participation in this discussion group is strictly voluntary. If you feel the need to cease participation in the session, you may leave. However, we ask that once our discussion begins you stay until its completion. Your feedback is important to us.

2	Participant Warm-up	15 Minutes	6:10 PM
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Till: 6:20 PM

PP

RMS Moderator (Mark) I’d like to do a very quick warm-up as well as learn a bit more about why you have joined us this evening. Can you tell me, why did you come tonight? What are you looking to learn or share? Moderator will board the responses.

RMS to have printed Young maiden/Older woman image on tables. Ask participants to review the Young maiden/Older woman image. What do attendees see? {Reinforce that there are “no wrong answers.”}

Moderator: Go around the room and see if anyone has any questions. The Moderator will make clear that there is no such thing as a wrong answer in a focus group.

Ensure that there are no additional questions before moving to the next section of the discussion.

*	Thought Exchange Exercise	5 Minutes	6:20 PM
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Till: 6:25 PM

PP

Explain the ThoughtExchange activity and have attendees take a few minutes and answer Questions 1 through 3.

Introduce Danielle and have her walk through the logistics of getting on the ThoughtExchange and then answering the questions. These questions are:

2. Please rate using a scale from 1 to 5, with “1” being “not at all” and “5” being “very,” your familiarity with the teaching method known as Project Based Learning (PBL).

Not at All				Very
1	2	3	4	5

2. Ask participants to review the list of seven core skill sets on the ThoughtExchange platform and have them rate the importance of these skills for graduating high school students to be effective in the work environment.

How important do you feel it is for students to have:

		Not at all Very				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Good communication skills – can share thoughts and ideas	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Problem solving – demonstrating “critical thinking”	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Ability to adjust to a changed environment and find new solutions	1	2	3	4	5
4.	A strong work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The ability to work independently	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Demonstrates teamwork	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Maintains a positive attitude	1	2	3	4	5

3. What is the most important thing the BCSD can do to make sure students are “job ready” upon graduation?

Explain to attendees that we will be reviewing the Thought Exchange responses as we go through various sections of tonight’s discussion.

There will be one more time during the discussion when we ask you to use the ThoughtExchange platform and answer some additional questions.

3	Background – Awareness of PBL	15 Minutes	6:25 PM
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Till: 6:40 PM

As was mentioned earlier, the Baldwinsville Central School District is committed to building and maintaining a strong learning environment. The district’s mission is *to foster an environment to educate and empower all students today to become global citizens of tomorrow*. That means providing students with the skills to become successful adults.

To begin our discussion, I’d like to do our first activity using **ThoughtExchange**. Please scan the QR Code for Activity 1 and share your thoughts. If you are not able to access the site, please let Pat know and he can assist.

Please be honest and forthright with your responses.

Discussion Prompts: Thought Exchange – ACTIVITY 1

QUESTION 1:

Please rate using a scale from 1 to 5, with “1” being “not at all” and “5” being “very,” your familiarity with the teaching method known as Project Based Learning (PBL).

Not at All				Very
1	2	3	4	5

DISPLAY the **ThoughtExchange** responses.

Look at the MEAN. Is it over 3.0?

Ask for a show of hands of anyone who rated their familiarity a 4 or 5? Probe as to why? Where have they gained their knowledge/familiarity? Identify resources that were used? Do these individuals represent a cross section of the community or are they primarily an individual stakeholder group (e.g. instructional staff)?

For those with ratings of 1 or 2, Inquire as to whether they have ever heard of project-based learning (PBL)? If so where? Probe to ask what they know about PBL. Gauge knowledge level.

Objective is to understand the participant awareness and knowledge.



QUESTION 2:

Ask participants to review the list of seven core skill sets on the ThoughtExchange platform and have them rate the importance of these skills for graduating high school students to be effective in the work environment.

How important do you feel it is for students to have:

		Not at all Very				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	communication skills – can share thoughts and ideas	1	2	3	4	5
2.	problem solving – demonstrating “critical thinking”	1	2	3	4	5
3.	ability to adjust to a changed environment and find new solutions	1	2	3	4	5
4.	strong work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
5.	ability to work independently	1	2	3	4	5
6.	demonstrates teamwork	1	2	3	4	5
7.	maintains a positive attitude	1	2	3	4	5

DISPLAY the ThoughtExchange responses.

Note those skill sets that rank the highest?

Are there any other skill sets that are critical for students to have before they graduate? Which one(s)? {Moderator will list all skills noted}

If not raised, probe on (a) financial literacy; (b) social/emotional learning/perception; (c) computer software knowledge – Microsoft Office®; and (d) Computer programming.

Thank respondents for their responses. Explain that we will be going back to revisit these responses again in just a few minutes.

4	Area Employer Research	30 Minutes	6:40 PM
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Till: 7:10 PM

Explain that we are moving into a new area of discussion. In this next section we will be sharing results from some recent research we conducted with local employers.

This research focused on speaking with twelve area employers regarding the desired core competency skill sets that they are looking for from their new hires (particularly those in positions that are open to recent high school graduates). We spoke with twelve area employers covering industry segments like manufacturing, healthcare, construction, energy, and automotive. Companies included: McLane Northeast, Gypsum Express, Giovanni Foods, McHarrie Life, SOS, financial/wealth management, and Lou’s Car Care. The employee size of these companies ranged from 7 to 780 employees.

I’d like to take a minute and share some of the results from this research. The district is looking to learn what employers are looking for to ensure that its educational curriculum is aligned to achieve its mission and help ensure career success for high school graduates.

Moderator will share some slides highlighting the findings from the employer research.

Employer Key Findings:

- a. The vast majority of those we spoke with say that they are having a difficult time finding employees to fill their available positions. This includes entry level positions.
- b. Further several stated that when they find a candidate, that individual does not always work out because their expectations are misaligned. Employers stated that new entry level candidates often have unrealistic expectations regarding pay, the pace of advancement, and the work effort required.
- c. Employers are looking for high school graduates who can demonstrate strong basic values such as “willingness to learn,” “active Listening,” “genuine interest in a position (enthusiasm),” “positive attitude,” and “engagement.” Moreover, they stated that they are looking for emotional aptitudes from individuals tied to empathy, kindness, humility, self-motivation, and confidence.
- d. Employers also want graduates with adequate financial literacy, basic math and computer skills.
- e. Employees need to understand logic, protocol, and process. They need employees who will be fully present while on the job – unplug from their phones.

Match the participant responses to **ThoughtExchange** Question 2 to the employer responses. Explain that IDI employer interviewees were asked the very same question. Review the importance rating of skill sets that the employers are looking for. How does this rating compare to what the participants indicated? Are these similar? How so?

Employers are looking for:

Skill Set Specified	Rating from 1 to 5
Strong Work Ethic	5.0
Maintains a Positive Attitude	4.8
Good Communication Skills – can share thoughts and ideas	4.7
Demonstrates Teamwork	4.7
Ability to Adjust and Find New Solutions	4.0
Problem Solving (Critical Thinking)	3.8
Ability to Work Independently	3.6

How can the Baldwinsville Central School District instill these skills in its graduating students? What types of curriculum courses must be offered? Moderator will chart these on the board. Does anyone else share this responsibility for instilling these skills in the students? If so, who?

We’d like to close this section by having you answer Question 3 in **ThoughtExchange**



QUESTION 3:

What is the most important thing the BCSD can do to make sure students are “job ready” upon graduation?

The Moderator will review responses. What are the top responses? Review and discuss as a group. Share the IDI employer participants responses to this same question.

The employer responses to this question are:

- ✓ The majority of employers want the BCSD to expose high school students to “what the real world is like.” Create a forum or platform for students to experience what the workplace is like while they are still in high school.
- ✓ Teach courses in “work readiness,” making this coursework required of all students.
- ✓ Work on changing the negative perception that exists around those students who do not go directly on to college and begin their careers by getting a job.

Is there a difference between the participants and the employers suggestions? If so, what is the difference? State that the BCSD leadership team and Board are planning to take all this information into consideration as it implements its strategic plan for District operations.

5	Project-based Learning	30 Minutes	7:10 PM
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Till: 7:45 PM

For this section of the discussion, we want to focus on sharing with you an introduction to project-based learning or PBL.

Let’s begin with the definition of Project Based Learning. Based upon www.PBLWorks.org, *Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects.* It is incorporated into curriculums across all grade levels {*elementary school – Tiny House Project; middle school – March through Nashville; high school – the Water Quality Project*}. Students demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation for a real audience. PBL is becoming widely used in schools and other educational settings across the country.

PBL is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge.

Skills taught through PBL include: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication skills {all traits that employers are looking for in the workplace}

There are seven essential Project Design Elements with PBL:

1. **A Challenging Problem or Questions:** The project is framed by a meaningful problem to be solved or a question to answer, at the appropriate level of challenge.
2. **Sustained Inquiry:** Students engage in a rigorous, extended process of posing questions, finding resources, and applying information.
3. **Authenticity:** The project involves real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact, or the project speaks to personal concerns, interests, and issues in the student’s lives.
4. **Student Voice & Choice:** Students make some decisions about the project, including how they work and what they create, and express their own ideas in their own voice.
5. **Reflection:** Students and teachers reflect on the learning, the effectiveness of their inquiry and project activities, the quality of student work, and obstacles that arise and strategies for overcoming them.

6. **Critique & Revision:** Students give, receive, and apply feedback to improve their process and products.
7. **Public Product:** Students make their project work public by sharing it with and explaining or presenting it to people beyond the classroom.

The teaching practices used by the instructional staff include:

1. Design & Plan;
2. Align to Standards;
3. Build the Culture;
4. Manage Activities;
5. Scaffold Student Learning;
6. Assess Student Learning; and
7. Engage & Coach.

Ask participants what they think about the concept? Ask for reactive “words” or “phrases.” Moderator will note responses- Are these comments generally positive, negative, or neutral? Why do they feel this way?

What types of skills will PBL help students with mastering? If need be ask: will it help with (a) decision-making abilities; (b) engagement; (c) deeper learning / love for learning; (d) success skills: work responsibility, communication, problem solving, team-work; and (e) creativity and technology. The moderator will board the responses.

*	Thought Exchange Exercise	5 Minutes	7:40 PM
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Till: 7:45 PM



Explain the ThoughtExchange activity and have attendees take a few minutes and answer Questions 4 through 7.

These questions are all related to Project-based Learning and the Districts implementation of this program into its curriculum.

4. Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “*not at all*” and 5 being “*very*,” to what extent do you think that PBL (as explained) will enhance student learning within the BCSD?
5. Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “*not at all*” and 5 being “*very*,” how important is it that the BCSD community be made aware of the PBL learning model?
6. Based on tonight’s discussions, what PBL related awareness building activities should the district do next?
7. **What changes do you think will take place over the next ten years that will affect the local job market?**

Once participants have completed this, we can begin to review the responses.

QUESTION 4:



Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “*not at all*” and 5 being “*very*,” to what extent do you think that PBL (as explained) will enhance student learning within the BCSD?

Not at All				Very
1	2	3	4	5

DISPLAY the **ThoughtExchange** responses.

Review the responses and discuss with participants their expectations regarding PBL. Moderator will Board the key concepts, thoughts, and feedback. The goal is to probe as to whether participants believe that this approach will enhance student learning and help them be successful later in life.

QUESTION 5:

➔ Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very,” how important is it that the BCSD community be made aware of the PBL learning model?

Not at All				Very
1	2	3	4	5

DISPLAY the **ThoughtExchange** responses.

Review the responses. What is the MEAN rating? If greater than 3.0, what is the best way to inform the community about the learning model? Are there particular sub-stakeholder groups that need to be more engaged than others? If so, which ones? {For example, parents of students, and/or area employers}

Moderator will Board the key concepts, thoughts and feedback. The goal is to probe as to whether participants believe that this approach will enhance student learning and help them be successful later in life. Why do they feel this way?

- Are there any unique features here within the Baldwinsville community that the district needs to be mindful of? If so, what are these?
- Do participants feel that the BCSD is ahead of the game (better than other districts); about the same; or behind what other districts are doing regarding PBL? For each response, probe as to why they feel this way.
- What responsibilities do parents and the general community have regarding PBL?

Now, let’s move toward completing one more **ThoughtExchange activity**. Please scan the QR Code to share your comments, and let Pat know if you have trouble accessing.

QUESTION 6:

➔ Based on tonight’s discussions, what PBL related awareness building activities should the district do next?

DISPLAY the **ThoughtExchange** responses.

Using **ThoughtExchange** responses as the main reference point, the Moderator will dive a bit deeper in the discussion. Looking at the top response, what are the key activities that the District should do next to advance PBL? Are there any barriers? If so, what are these?

6	Conclusion and “Open Mike”	15 Minutes	7:45 PM
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Till: 8:00 PM

For this last section of the discussion, we want to offer an “Open Mike” format. This means that participants can offer their thoughts regarding the district and PBL unprompted. They can share experiences, expectations, observations, etc. The idea here is to capture what is on the community’s mind regarding the topic of PBL. How relevant is this topic? What is the obligation of the BCSD?

Turn the floor over to the participants and ask them to share their thoughts.

Wrap up the evening by asking one final ThoughtExchange question.

QUESTION 7:

 **What changes do you think will take place over the next ten years that will affect the local job market?**

DISPLAY the ThoughtExchange responses.

Explain that the interviewed employers were asked this same question. Review the employer interviewee responses. Do these align? Explain that the one thing that is certain is that change and demands on employee skill sets will continue to change and evolve. New technologies will emerge. The BCSD will need to stay abreast of all that is happening.

As this sections wraps up, thank participants for their time and participation. Explain that they have done a wonderful job and have shared a great deal of information for the BCSD Team to review and ponder.

Conclusion:

1. Ask participants to reflect on their experience providing feedback today? Did the session meet their expectations?
2. Invite Joe and/or Daniel to wrap-up and say thank you.

THANK YOU!

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Certified by: Mark Dengler

Mark Dengler
President
Research & Marketing Strategies, Inc.

Date: 1/18/2024