



FOREST HILLS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

May 22, 2014
Case for Support - Advancement Campaign

Destination: Innovation
Equipping Teachers to Transform Learning

Introduction

Forest Hills Public Schools is at the top of its game right now. It is one of the best school systems in Michigan in terms of test scores, graduation rates, student accomplishment and more.

But progress can't stop here. Nor can the district rest on its accomplishments. The world is changing rapidly, and the district must anticipate the needs of the future before they become reality. The district's mission is to produce opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to build meaningful and productive lives. It is time for the Forest Hills Public Schools Foundation, in conjunction with the district, to create and model exciting innovations that will strengthen that leadership position.

Our Vision for the Future

The vision of Forest Hills Public Schools is to create a new model of education which equips each student with the 21st-century skills they need to be successful. What does that mean?

- Achieving objectives. There is still a set of core educational standards that must be mastered in order for a student to graduate. There's also a set of best practices that have been proven to work. These two elements must be part of the vision for the future.
- Project-based learning. Students will still need to learn facts and theories. But rather than spending each day in 5-7 discrete "hours" of subject matter lectures, students will also apply their knowledge to projects and modern-day problems that require integrated skills from many different subject areas.
- Mass customization. Teachers need a sophisticated analysis tool to know exactly which ideas or concepts have been mastered by each student. Then they need to customize a learning plan for each one. Technology must play a central role in evaluating, tracking and charting student progress so that teachers can customize the learning experience for each student in real time.
- Advanced training. Just as it takes time for students to learn to work collaboratively, it also takes time and practice for teachers to deliver content this way. The system cannot change if teachers are not given the opportunity to make it work.

This is exciting, fulfilling, and leading-edge work. However, it bears a much stronger resemblance to research and development than it does to traditional education. The district must seek out hypotheses about how to help students learn more effectively, just as if they were running a massive laboratory. They must implement those ideas, track the measurements, and then evaluate the results.

This is not a case of simply "building a better mousetrap." It is a case of innovating solutions that will propel Forest Hills students to a lifetime of success.

The Role of the Foundation

True innovation means to create something new; something that does not yet exist. Significant innovation requires research and development, which in turn requires funding. Companies such as Apple, Microsoft and Google, who are known for their innovative excellence, spend billions each year on R&D.

Forest Hills Public Schools does not have an Apple budget. Innovation requires investment on a scale that can't be drawn from general operating funds. If Forest Hills truly wants to maintain its leadership position in the decades to come, then the community must step up and invest in the future success of students and the district.

The Forest Hills Public Schools Foundation has an important role in all of this. Their job is to attract investment funds that create opportunities for innovation. The Foundation will provide the capital needed to fund the research and development of innovations that can lead to new levels of excellence. Once those innovations have been tested and proven, the Foundation can then provide the funds to scale them to the entire district.

To this end, the Foundation is embarking upon a \$500,000 "Destination: Innovation" advancement campaign that will fund exploration of new learning methods, structures and ideas. These funds will enrich teachers with essential resources - such as time, training and technology - so they can deliver a new type of learning in a new way. Exciting concepts keep emerging from both students and faculty as they embrace the concept of educational innovation. This campaign will allow both teachers and students to test and explore the most intriguing paths for research.

Imagine how it would have felt to own Apple stock when the iPhone changed the world! That excitement, that energy, that sense of amazement...this is what Forest Hills will create through an infusion of exploratory capital. And the community can be a partner in this work.

The First Step

As noted earlier, one important element of fulfilling our vision is advanced teacher training. We want to re-inspire teachers with new tools and capabilities, so that they continue to build a culture of authentic and purposeful learning. This kind of training will expand learning networks for students, and elevate opportunities for them to be curious in the classroom.

Advanced teacher training will provide the time and the resources so teachers can learn and practice delivering project-based instruction rather than subject-based instruction. They will also have tools to assess their own skills, and chart a course for development. And through that development, they will learn new technologies, skills, techniques and approaches for engaging students at every moment of every day.

Conclusion

The school district exists for the benefit of its students. Ultimately the goal of the district is to equip students for success in their future careers and lives. In today's world, it's not enough to churn out students who can recite facts. Success is about molding and shaping students who can analyze, engage, communicate, collaborate, create and adapt. Students who receive the benefit of a kaleidoscopic education are better equipped to succeed in a world that looks very different than it did just one generation ago.

School is not the place where innovation typically happens. In order for FHPS to invent a new model, there must be funding for, encouragement of, and time allowed for trial and error. Changing an educational model is not like flipping a light switch. Forest Hills will not be in a different place next month, or even next year. However, the district must set a direction that encourages innovation.

Teachers need to retain best practices while finding new ways to help students achieve excellence. And when something works, the district must have the funding to achieve critical mass and spread it throughout the system.

Innovation cannot happen without an infusion of capital for research and development. This work is the equivalent of the Forest Hills' "moon shot." It's never been done before. Many people think it can't be done. And yet, once it is accomplished, everyone will look back and realize that this intense focus on successful innovation is what kept Forest Hills at the top of its game.