

# Glendale Education Association Listening Tour Executive Summary

## **Introduction:**

During November and December of 2013, the Glendale Education Association, with funding, training, and support from the Arizona Education Association listened to 165 Glendale Elementary School District staff members in order to better understand the teaching and learning environment as experienced by the teachers and support staff who work most closely with the district's students. Five trained GEA leaders (Listening Tour Guides) conducted small group and one-on-one conversations with employees from throughout the district and provided written summaries of these conversations.

This summary will serve as the source of baseline findings for GEA leaders to develop and implement an all-staff survey in January of 2014. GEA leaders will provide an opportunity for all staff to take the confidential on line survey. In addition, GEA leaders will meet with the District's Administrative Leadership Team and individual School Board members to share this summary and solicit their views about the working and learning conditions in the Glendale Elementary School District. Additionally, This summary will be provided to the GEA/Principals Relationship Task Force consisting of three GEA members and three Principals for their consideration as they develop a strategy to enhance the working relationships among Principals and GEA leaders.

On February 4, 2014 GEA will host a "Transformation Summit." All Glendale Elementary District certified and classified staff will be invited to attend and GEA has set a goal of 100 participants. The summit will review the findings from the listening tour, survey, and various meetings to set goals and develop strategies and action plans to accomplish them.

GEA leaders hope to provide a transformational opportunity for staff in the district. The purpose of these efforts are:

- 1) To identify what matters most to teachers and staff.
- 2) Create goals that focus on what matters most.
- 3) Engage the resources and efforts of GEA on specific actions to accomplish the goals.
- 4) Create opportunities for new leaders to step forward and help build a strong effective professional organization.

## **Methodology:**

All GEA members were provided an opportunity to apply to become a Listening Tour Guide. Upon review of applications, the GEA Executive Board selected six guides who were trained on techniques to conduct small group and one-on-one intentional conversations. The conversation techniques used open ended questions to provide opportunities for staff to share their aspirations, describe their challenges, and consider their own role in making things better for the profession and their students. Listening Tour Guides worked on their

own, and with GEA Site Leaders to host a number of small group meetings and one-on-one conversations throughout the district.

**GEA Listening Tour Conversation Summary**

<b>Type of Conversation</b>	<b>Participant Description</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Location</b>
Small Group	School Staff	2	Challenger School
Small Group	School Staff	3	Discovery School
Small Group	Achievement Advisors	8	Pedro’s Restaurant
Small Group	Close Reading	2	In-Service
Small Group	School Staff	3	Discovery School
Small Group	School Staff	3	Jack School
Small Group	School Staff	4	Jack School
Small Group	School Staff	8	Jack School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Jack School
Small Group	School Staff	4	Mensendick School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Mensendick School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Mensendick School
Small Group	School Staff	3	Mensendick School
Small Group	School Staff	4	Mensendick School
Small Group	School Staff	6	Glendale Success Academy
Small Group	School Staff	5	Sine School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Sine School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Sine School
Small Group	School Staff	4	Sine School
Small Group	School Staff	3	Sunset Vista
One-on-One	New Teachers	19	Phone – Various Schools
Small Group	School Staff	15	Burton School
Small Group	School Staff	11	Coyote Ridge School
Small Group	School Staff	4	Coyote Ridge School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Coyote Ridge
One-on-one	New Teacher	1	Coyote Ridge
Small Group	School Staff	2	Smith School
Small Group	School Staff	3	Smith School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Imes School
Small Group	School Staff	2	Imes School
Small Group	School Staff	4	Desert Garden
Small Group	Mixed Schools Staff	7	Restaurant (Landmark, Discovery)
Small Group	Mixed Schools Staff	6	Restaurant (American, Sunset, Garden)
Small Group	Mixed School Staff	5	Landmark (w/GSA Staff)
Totals		165	From 14 Schools

## **Key Findings:**

### **Aspirations:**

In almost every setting both teachers and non-teaching staff clearly expressed excitement and passion about working together to see students succeed. Most staff mentioned student growth, working with our students, and working with colleagues as what excited them when coming to work.

A few staff members also expressed passion for their subject matter or particular work assignment, but the overwhelming consensus among staff is that their students and their colleagues are what they find satisfying about working in the district.

### **Concerns:**

#### Students

TAT was mentioned as a process that needs to be improved because as is, it is not benefiting students.

Several teachers believe charter schools are creating a disadvantage for Glendale Elementary students by segregating our schools along racial and socioeconomic lines. Since research demonstrates that desegregated schools create higher achieving schools, these teachers believe the charters in the area, who have advantages in funding, are actually hurting all students in the community.

Another concern raised by a few teachers was raised about the difficulty teachers are having balancing the need for differentiated instruction with the necessity for whole group instruction and identified this as an appropriate subject for professional development.

#### Student Learning Expectations

A common concern that came up in conversations dealt with increasing pressure related to student learning expectations. This is a particular concern when one considers that the staff has indicated that seeing students succeed is what excites them. One teacher summed up what may others expressed by saying, "our student test scores are low even though we are doing everything we can."

Several staff members expressed discouragement with a trend that continues to focus all the district's attention on test scores. This, coupled with a drive for ever increasing results causes teachers to feel pressure to move forward to cover content even when it appears many students are not ready to move on.

It is important to note that of the 165 staff members who participated in the conversations, there was not one report that indicated a belief that Glendale students are not capable of achieving, even under all the pressure to demonstrate higher student test scores.

#### Professional Growth, Evaluation, and Support for Instructional Improvement

Teacher evaluations were mentioned during some conversations, but were not mentioned as often as work load and student expectations. Most employees who discussed evaluations were concerned about the lack of consistency among their evaluators creating a sense of apprehension and in some cases fear that they would not be treated fairly. This issue was more prevalent on some campuses than others.

It is also interesting to note that when asked about GEA's goals, the goal to ensure that the evaluation system is supported by staff and is legal was widely supported. Although, a few cautioned that it would be unwise to make too many changes to the system before giving it a chance to work, first.

Most conversations included comments about the site based and district wide professional development days. Opinions about these days varied widely. The vast majority of new teachers appreciate professional development and are glad it occurs during the workday. They saw these days as relevant and useful.

There were a number of staff who said the professional development days were not relevant or useful. They saw the time as wasted and thought the time would be better spent preparing for lessons or working with students. There was more criticism of the site based professional development than the district professional development and some suggested that some quality control of site offered professional development was needed.

The level of concern over time spent in professional development meetings also seemed to correspond to how the school managed the amount of time spent in other meetings and how the school managed other performance and work load expectations.

As a result, there were some sites where the staff was satisfied with professional development meetings.

Most new teachers found the induction program and the access to mentor and achievement advisors as beneficial. There was some concern that, as new teachers, they had many resources but were unsure how to use them.

#### Workload

Workload was by far the most consistent concern of employees. There were only two conversations that did not reflect a concern about work load. While the level of concern about this issue did fluctuate from site to site, it was a concern at every site.

The word "overwhelmed" was used by many staff members during conversations. In some cases, a sense of being overwhelmed is causing employees to consider leaving the district or choosing a new profession.

The workload discussions seemed to indicate two causes of this concern. The first revolves around time. For instance, special education teachers who do not have the time to complete a large number of IEPs or classroom teachers who cannot find the time to spend in their classroom preparing lessons, analyzing student work, or contacting parents.

The other cause seems to be that the support systems and resources needed to successfully manage the work is limited. Examples include larger class sizes, lack of or often interrupted preparation time, too many meetings, and confusion about how to access other services.

#### Compensation:

There is a significant concern about the ability of staff, especially younger teachers and classified staff, and their ability to continue to support themselves and/or their families with the compensation package offered by the district. Many younger teachers referred to plans to leave the district to increase their salary by teaching elsewhere or leaving the profession.

### **The Glendale Elementary District**

Many conversations included a discussion about the district and several common themes emerged.

#### Lack of Strategy and Focus

Most employees used one or more of the following phrases when the district was discussed: changing priorities, new ideas that come and go, good ideas that are introduced but are not sustainable, a lack of focus, and no clear vision. Few, if any, mentioned the new work being done on the district's strategic plan.

#### Consistency and Accountability

Many staff are frustrated by a perception that there is little accountability in the system. This was expressed as a problem of little follow through up and down the hierarchy and among peers. Descriptions included schools who seemed to be held to different standards, principals who were not held to account for their actions, and employees who are not being held accountable for following through with their commitments and responsibilities.

#### Direction of the District

There were a significant minority of employees who believe the district is getting better and making improvements. And most staff members, when asked, said the district is moving in the right direction. There was more noticeable support for the direction and effort in the area of teacher evaluation and professional development than any other district function. Some employees mentioned that "things are better than they used to be," after discussing an area of concern with the district. Some mentioned appreciation that some initiatives were being intentionally dropped and the district was becoming more narrow and focused in its strategy.

Many conversations did include a sense of hopelessness. Some believe we are not ever going to get where we need to be and discussed a continuing need to fight against and internal urge to give up or just ride out the situation.

Finally, a few conversations included some fear of repercussions for speaking out on issues. This seemed to be a site level condition on a few campuses.

## **Glendale Education Association**

### GEA Goals

These four specific GEA goals were shared during every conversation. In general all four GEA goals were supported and most staff believed the goals were important and relevant. Most staff thought all four goals were attainable.

The most enthusiastic support was expressed for achieving a manageable work load and improving the relationships with Principals, but some saw the workload issue as the most difficult to achieve. Many employees were unaware of the GEA goals and wondered why they do not hear much about what GEA does or is doing.

### Direction of GEA

While most employees said they liked the direction of the GEA, some believed GEA needs to be stronger and communicate more with staff in order to be effective. Some had no opinion about GEA because they did not know much about GEA. Some experienced employees have seen a change in GEA and believe it is now headed in a new direction. Most of these employees said the new direction will be more effective.

At a few schools, staff said GEA had a poor reputation. When probed, they said that their Principal or an experienced staff person discouraged them from getting involved in the Association and that GEA had no visibility at the school. Some were told that engaging in GEA would hinder their career path.

There were also some employees who were strong GEA supporters and questioned why more of their peers were not involved. And finally, at some schools GEA was seen as a strong voice for the staff and very confident in its leaders.