

AN OVERVIEW OF *SUMMIT 303*

DECEMBER 2008

INTRODUCTION

In its effort to provide the very best education possible to the nearly 14,000 students attending 17 schools, St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 has always worked toward continuous improvement while maintaining itself as a destination District in the Chicagoland area. The Board, administration, instructional staff and parent community would agree that District 303 students receive a strong, enriching education and are well prepared when they leave the District to advance their education and pursue a career choice.



Early in the 2007-08 school year, District 303 found itself at a crossroads with its community. Having hired a new Superintendent, the Board of Education acknowledged that there existed a certain disconnect between the District and the community. Together with its new superintendent, the Board sought to restore the link between the community and the District. To this end the Board initiated efforts to examine the District through a public study and community engagement process entitled ***Summit 303***. This ambitious

project represented an unprecedented planning effort on the part of the Board of Education to initiate a dialogue with the members of its community to learn their desires, interests and visions for the school system. The key component of ***Summit 303*** was to re-engage the community by making District 303 stakeholders active partners in addressing the current and future needs of students and by providing information regarding education in the 21st century.

THE PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In 2007 the Board of Education and administrative staff of St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 began to address several issues that were seen as having the potential to hold the District back from the full achievement of its mission of empowering and inspiring all to:

- Attain excellence,
- Learn with passion, and
- Live with integrity in a changing world.

In a call to action, the Board and the Superintendent requested that a diverse community group be convened to study and give comment to the challenges and opportunities facing District 303. In response, a volunteer-based community engagement program was initiated by the District bringing together members of the community (parents, area residents, staff and students) to study and deliberate over issues important to future planning and decision making.

Meeting monthly since November of 2007 the program known as **Summit 303** has completed its study schedule and submits these materials and documents as a final report to the Board of Education.

This report is a compilation of **Summit 303** materials being presented to the Board; it also represents a primer to the larger community of the District as to the *areas of **General Agreement*** felt to be necessary to maintain its premier status.

All of the information studied and discussed during the engagement process is included in the summary report notebook and on the CD-ROM of collateral materials.



This document is an executive summary of the program's completed work and attempts to provide an overview of the **Summit 303** purpose, participants, process and product.

All Summit 303 information is available online: www.d303.org

THE PURPOSE OF ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Community Engagement, at its core, is intended to solicit the hopes, ideas and thoughtful suggestions of a school District's owner—its public, through meaningful dialogue and discussions. With this in mind, the main focus of the **Summit 303** program was intended to:



- Assist the Board of Education in broadening their understanding of the community's beliefs, aspirations, desires and priorities related to public education and specifically to the needs and interests of District 303;
- Provide an avenue for reaching community consensus on issues concerning growth and resource allocation;
- Invite and involve the community in District planning and decision making;
- Obtain relevant perspectives that build upon, expand and enhance the previous planning initiatives by the District;
- Define priorities and improvement strategies;
- Discover what school facilities and instructional resources will be needed as the District moves toward continuous improvement; and,
- Build an ongoing process for strengthening trust, communication and collaborative efforts with the full community;

To this end, in September 2007, the Board of Education of District 303 issued the following charge:

The Board of Education hereby authorizes the formation of a broad-based coalition of community members and staff. The charge to this group is to make recommendations to the Board of Education regarding a comprehensive plan for improving the performance of the District. To accomplish this goal, the group should determine:

- *Current, accurate and consistent information that reflects the broad base of community perceptions and priorities.*
- *An understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the district.*
- *How district programs and curriculum, in areas such as, but not limited to, dual language, kindergarten, and use of instructional technologies, compares and contrasts to that of other top performing districts.*
- *Long term goals for the district in terms of student opportunities, facilities, and finance.*
- *What steps need to be taken to accomplish those goals in terms of facilities, resources, programs and operation?*
- *What steps should be taken to establish a long-term meaningful and ongoing two-way communication process with the community?*

Following initial meetings and deliberations, the Facilitating Team coordinating the activities of this group should make a report to the Board presenting a timeline for activities including a date for presentation of final recommendations to the Board of Education.

Upon completion of this process, this group should bring forward recommendations to the Board regarding:

- *A comprehensive plan for improving the overall performance of Community Unit School District 303;*
- *Steps to be taken to implement that plan;*
- *Development of an ongoing model for District-community collaboration and communication.*

PARTICIPATION

Community participation in the **Summit 303** process occurred in two separate areas—the work of a **Facilitating Team** (FT) in coordinating and providing leadership to the process and through District-wide **Community Engagement Sessions** (CES).

THE FACILITATING TEAM

Community Co-Chairs
Jim Keller Sherry Schmidt
Community Members
Glori De Jure Stephanie Golemba John Hoscheit Dr. Dennis Murphy Rev. C. Alfred Patten Betsy Penny Kristen Pozna Ann Richards
Staff Representatives
Sara Omi Pamela Turriff (SCEA)
District Leadership
Dr. Don Schlomann John Baird Ron Knapik
Board of Education
Kathy Hewell Bob Lindahl
Administrative Support
Kathy Bowling Chris Rachford Lynne Schwartz Kathy Whidden
UNICOM•ARC Representatives
Dan Burns Diane Droege John Siemers Dr. Rod Wright

As the name suggests, this group of dedicated community volunteers together with several staff members accepted the Board's charge taking responsibility for "facilitating" the engagement process from its initial session through this final report.

The primary role of this Facilitating Team was to attend to the charge from the Board of Education resulting in specific recommendations representing the desire of the larger community. Secondly, this group provided leadership and coordination throughout the entire process. The group helped with decisions regarding process, strategy and communications and met regularly to develop agendas, review discussion materials and keep the program focused and on task.

The team itself, consisting of approximately 20 individuals, held several planning meetings prior to the first community engagement session. They met at least once between each monthly meeting in an effort to review the work of the previous session and to prepare for subsequent sessions. In addition, the Facilitating Team met in advance of each engagement session to ensure that all of the details and roles were set for the next in a series of community meetings.

Community volunteers provided the leadership for the Facilitating Team and the entire **Summit 303** process. The community co-chairs, selected for their commitment to District 303 and their leadership ability, were Jim Keller and Sherry Schmidt.

Giving guidance to the process, members of the Facilitating Team included, Glori De Jure, Stephanie Golemba, John Hoscheit, Dr. Dennis Murphy, Rev. C. Alfred Patten, Betsy Penny, Kristen Pozna, and Ann Richards. Two members of the Board of Education, Kathleen Hewell and Bob Lindahl sat as participants on the Facilitating Team. District administrative staff, teacher representatives and several advisors were adjunct members of the Facilitating Team.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

Since the Community Engagement Sessions were the central component of the **Summit 303** process, there was tremendous effort prior to the first meeting to communicate with the entire community about this special planning effort. The goal was simply to use every means possible to reach out and encourage all constituents to participate in the process. Examples of this outreach included:

- Press releases were sent to the local media sources and news editors were briefed on the programs goals
- More than 300 letters of invitation were mailed to key community members
- Flyers, school newsletters, and personal telephone calls encouraged parent attendance
- Reminder postcards were sent to all participants prior to each engagement session
- Facilitating Team members reached out to various community groups (Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber, DPTO, faith community, etc.) on a personal, one-to-one basis
- Information was continually posted on the District's website
- Electronic mail was frequently sent to District families
- *ConnectEd* – an all call phone system – was utilized
- Internal District communication to all staff members

Copies of these communication materials are provided on the CD-ROM of collateral materials.



Over 1,110 individuals signed in and participated in **Summit 303** meetings. Meeting attendance ranged from 150 to 500 participants. Participants included parents, community members, business and civic leaders, staff members and students. Members of the Board of Education also attended the engagement sessions as observers and active listeners.

The **Summit 303** program hosted a total of thirteen Community

Engagement Sessions. The subject area of each session was determined at the first CES when participants completed an exercise to identify the study topics felt to be associated with the challenges and opportunities facing the District. In this way the participants helped set the syllabus that would be followed throughout the **Summit 303** process.

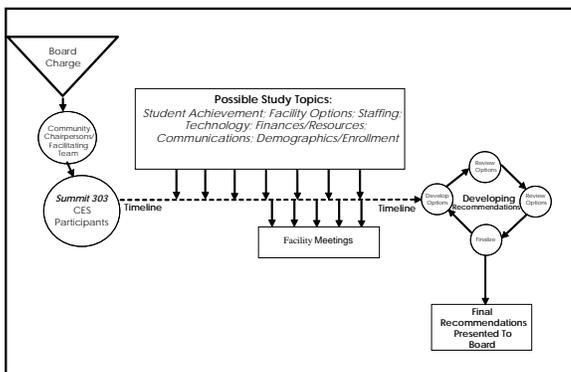
Summit 303 Community Engagement Sessions

DATE	TOPIC
November 8, 2007	State of the District
December 6, 2007	Who We Serve
January 10, 2008	The Issue of Class Size
February 19, 2008	Demographics
March 13, 2008	School Facilities (part 1)
April 17, 2008	Staffing Our Schools
May 15, 2008	Choice Programs
June 12, 2008	Early Intervention; Special Services
August 14, 2008	Technology
September 11, 2008 September 25, 2008	School Facilities (part 2) School Facilities (part 3)
October 9, 2008	Finance
November 19, 2008	Final Recommendations
December 8, 2008	Report to the Board of Education

In addition to these Community Engagement Sessions, **Summit 303**, in cooperation with ATS&R (the District’s architectural firm), hosted a series of building level meetings to allow members of each school’s community to comment on the physical condition of their school building. These meetings provided valuable input into a comprehensive study of facilities needs and contributed greatly to the general agreements reached by **Summit 303** participants.

THE PROCESS

The process, designed and governed by the Facilitating Team, was one that attempted to invite and involve members of the community into meaningful discussions about their school District. The flow chart below provides an illustration of the **Summit 303** process and should be viewed from left to right.



The process began as the Board of Education made the decision to move forward with the planning initiative and adopted a resolution and charge statement. This set the direction and parameters for the planning effort.

The next step was to invite key individuals to join together as a Facilitating Team providing the leadership and guidance for the entire process. An explanation of the role of the Facilitating Team and a description of its membership is provided earlier in this overview.

A third step in initiating the process was to encourage the *full* community of District 303 to participate in the **Summit 303** program. The approach was two-fold—recruitment of key individuals and, secondly an “all call” to anyone who desired to participate.

The recruitment effort included creating a database of specific names and addresses of potential individuals who would receive a special invitation to participate. The list included parent leadership groups, civic and business membership lists, religious leaders, realtors and other public lists that could be generated. As noted earlier, a large number of District constituents on this master database received personal letters announcing the process and inviting them to participate. Importantly, school principals contacted parents with a personal invitation to attend **Summit 303** meetings and helped promote the process in their schools.



The process was given an official name (**Summit 303**) and a project logo. The name and the logo icon were used on all communication items in an effort to provide branding to the program and a sense of community ownership. To

promote and provide continual communication support throughout the project, the District used several communications vehicles including invitation letters mailed to an extensive database of District constituents, press releases, e-mails, school newsletters, the District's website, flyers, postcards, letters, and personal phone calls.

After this comprehensive effort of inviting the public to participate in the **Summit 303** program, the engagement and planning effort began. The timeline for the program was set by the Board of Education requesting that the process begin in September 2007 and conclude with a report to the Board no later than December of 2008. Based on that parameter, a schedule was developed that would allow an appropriate amount of time between meetings to adequately prepare informational presentations and time for the Facilitating Team to process and digest the information and discussions.



The first of the thirteen District-wide meetings was held on November 8, 2007. More than 500 members of the community participated. The purpose of this first meeting was to provide a thorough orientation to the process and give participants a "State of the District" report comparing District 303 against some progressive and high performing school districts.

A small group work activity followed the presentation and asked for input and direction from participants regarding the major issues that should be studied during the process. Feedback from participants at that meeting was tabulated and summarized and used as a guide for determining the

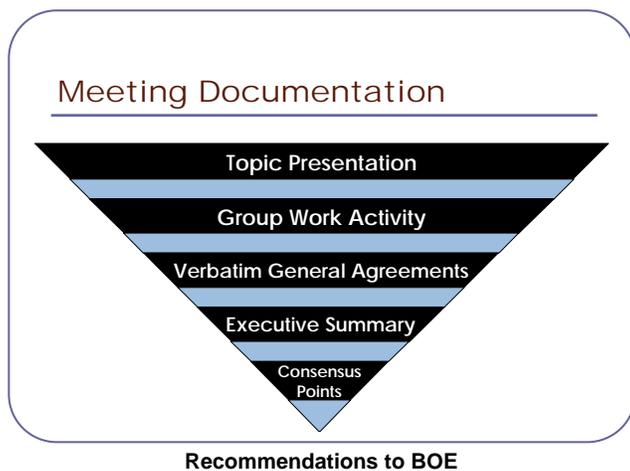
content of subsequent meetings. The topics chosen by the community and studied by **Summit 303** are listed earlier in this overview.

Each community engagement session followed a specific, timed agenda developed by the Facilitating Team. Each session began with a brief recap of the preceding meeting and a review of the materials in the agenda packet. Following these explanations was an informational PowerPoint presentation on the designated topic(s) for the evening. Professionals and experts in each topic area gave the presentations. A copy of each of these presentations is provided on the CD-ROM.



Each formal presentation was followed by a specific work activity. Participants worked in small groups to complete the activity. Individuals were randomly assigned to a small group as they arrived for the session. The intent was to create an opportunity for participants to meet new people each time and hear different perspectives.

Each small group selected its own recorder and spokesperson. The recorder was instructed to complete the worksheet based on the consensus or general agreement of the group. Following the small group work the spokesperson from each group was invited to share the main ideas from the group with all the participants at the session. The work activity form was then collected from each table for documentation. Each **Summit 303** session concluded with a preview of the topic for the next session.



Following each meeting, specific reports were produced for distribution to participants as well as the full community. These reports provided documentation of the topic information presented during the meeting as well as a summary of the small group discussions. The reports included: Verbatim Responses (table-by-table comments from small group work) and an Executive Summary of the small group work (all tables). All of these documents are included on the CD-ROM.

As the engagement meetings progressed, the Facilitating Team was continually evaluating the process and listening to the input of participants. The first agenda item at all Facilitating Team meetings included three questions—“How are we doing?”... “What can we do to improve the process and effectiveness of the **Summit 303** effort?”...and, “What are we learning from those participating in the process?”

The final section of the chart is the recommendation phase. Following the community sessions, the Facilitating Team proceeded to develop the “general agreements” as outlined in the next section of this report.

PRODUCT

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The final product of the **Summit 303** program is a set of recommendations, or *General Agreements*, as they have been called by the Facilitating Team. The recommendations that follow represent a compilation of the discussions, feedback and consensus points that were produced during the small group work activities hosted at each of the thirteen **Summit 303** community sessions.

General Agreement #1

Explore all opportunities to improve the overall quality of education provided students of District 303.

The District should look seriously at all opportunities available that might help to strengthen the quality of its educational program and move the District steadily to an even higher level of overall performance. These opportunities include:

- The gradual yet steady lowering of class sizes (particularly in early elementary grades) to a level that allows teachers to maximize instruction, evaluate student performance and have a positive impact on academic achievement;
- The recruitment, hiring, and retention of a highly qualified and experienced instructional staff;
- The certainty of an in-depth, rigorous and integrated curriculum necessary to prepare students for success beyond their graduation from District 303;
- The continued exploration, development and implementation of additional services that support strong academics including all-day kindergarten, English Language Learners (ELL), gifted education and programs that serve students with special learning needs;
- The development of an elementary and middle school foreign language program;
- A commitment to stay ahead of advancing instructional technologies for students and staff and to integrate these technologies with curriculum offerings; and,
- The cautious yet comprehensive study of program choice, such as foreign language, technology, fine arts and gifted education, etc., as a method of curriculum enrichment and encouraging a high level of parental involvement.

General Agreement #2

Set forward a plan to respond to enrollment trends brought about by changes in the demographic patterns of the District 303 community.

Changing demographic patterns throughout the community of District 303 must be carefully studied and the impacts successfully dealt with as to not put in jeopardy the excellence of the District's educational program. Participants in the **Summit 303** process would urge the following...

- A "second opinion" to reinforce the accuracy of enrollment projections provided by the recently completed demographic study including projections detailing each school and its growth patterns and possibilities;
- A review of the potential impact of housing starts in areas such as Campton Hills, Elgin and South Elgin where open land remains available to residential development; and,
- A comprehensive look at the current conditions of crowding including how the District might eliminate the use of temporary portable classrooms.

General Agreement #3

Evaluate and plan for comprehensive improvements to school facilities throughout the District in order to present an optimal teaching-learning environment for students and staff.

There is strong agreement among the participants in **Summit 303** that a continued effort to study and improve school facilities should be considered among the District's highest priorities and that such improvements must be considered equitable among elementary and secondary schools. **Summit 303** participants valued:

- The need to make improvements to existing school facilities as a fundamental step in providing optimal conditions for learning;
- Placing safety and security of school buildings and campus areas as a top priority as facilities are evaluated and improved;
- Achieving the highest standards of indoor air quality with a priority to include air-conditioning; not just for comfort, but more importantly as a component of security
- Responding to the accessibility needs of disabled students and citizens;
- Evaluating the need for additional classroom space to handle a number of related issues such as overcrowding, accommodating lower class sizes, instructional flexibility and to remedy a lack of space for programs such as all-day kindergarten;
- Converting existing spaces as may be necessary to support and optimize instructional processes including classroom size (sq. feet) and the actual number of classrooms available to students;

- Upgrading all school buildings to accommodate the demand for new instructional technologies; and,
- Replacing buildings on existing properties when renovation and repair cost exceed industry standards when compared to the total cost to rebuild.

General Agreement #4

Invest District resources in areas that have shown through solid educational research to boost student performance and increase achievement.

Education research has demonstrated that several factors contribute significantly to an increase in academic achievement among students. These factors also work to support the recruitment and retention of an experienced and highly qualified instructional staff. **Summit 303** participants would encourage the Board of Education to:

- Enhance and fund a structured professional development program that provides frequent and ongoing skill development for teachers;
- Maintain a highly competitive salary plan for teachers coupled with high standards and accountabilities;
- Plan for and provide meaningful recognitions for outstanding performance, professional development, and accomplishments by staff;
- Support strong parenting practices by encouraging communications and activities that promote family-school partnerships.

General Agreement #5

Continue to improve special services and related educational support programs.

Participants in the **Summit 303** process are committed to those students who, due to their physical, educational, emotional or behavioral needs, require prevention, intervention and/or special education services. To this end, they would advocate that the Board of Education:

- Streamline and expedite the referral and evaluation process for students experiencing disability.
- Provide a more comprehensive and efficient range of prevention and intervention services within regular education programs as part of the District’s “Response to Intervention” system (RTI);
- Provide for additional staff to support students with special needs (e.g.; special education teachers, psychologists, social workers and counselors);

- Provide more comprehensive mental health supports for students experiencing emotional and/or behavioral difficulties;
- Provide additional training for regular classroom and special educators as well as for adult assistants as they work to support all students;
- Improve communications with parents as to the needs of their children;

Reaffirming the General Agreements

At its final engagement session, participants in the **Summit 303** process were asked to validate and reaffirm their consensus recommendations. Through an individually administered written survey and a valuing exercise, the 400+ participants attending the final community engagement session were able to review each of the recommendations and indicate their individual preference as to whether or not they were to be included in the final report to the Board.

In addition, three important issues having large financial impact on the District were examined closely by those in attendance. Final opinions related to these issues were brought forward that specifically addressed the District’s facility needs, the issue of all-day kindergarten and to a desire to lower class sizes.

GENERAL AGREEMENTS: In an effort to confirm the expressed opinion of Summit participants, a survey instrument was developed and administered during the final CES (attached). Each participant was asked to complete the questionnaire providing their individual opinion as to each recommendation and its inclusion in the final report to the Board of Education. 407 surveys were completed and scored. The following data points highlight the results of that survey process:

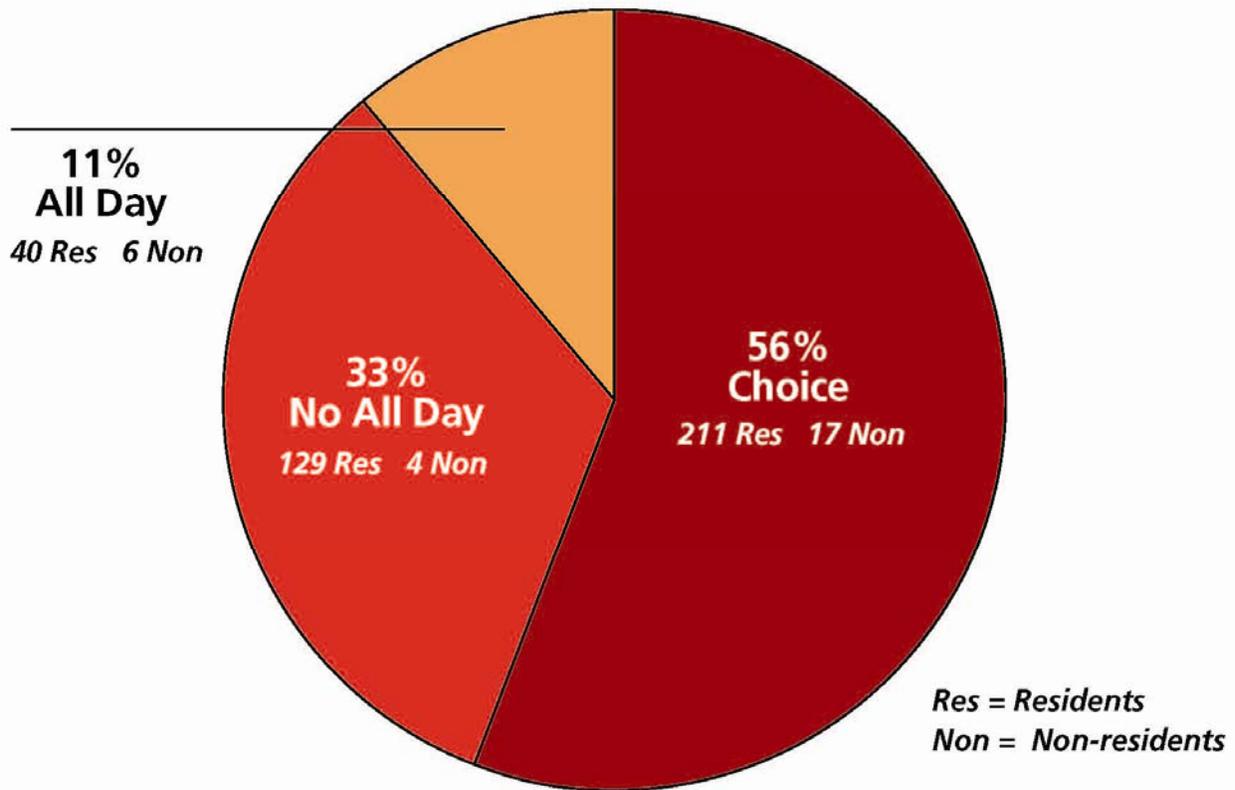
		%
1. Program choice	Yes, proceed	87.9%
	No, do not include	11.0%
	No response	1.1%
		%
1a. Elementary and Middle School Foreign Language	Yes, develop	81.7%
	No, I don't believe	16.5%
	No response	1.8%
		%
1b. Gifted "choice" program	Pursue	66.3%
	Do not pursue	28.8%
	No response	4.9%

		%
1c. International Baccalaureate "choice" program	Pursue	38.3%
	Do not pursue	56.3%
	No response	5.4%
		%
1d. Technology "choice" program	Pursue	53.0%
	Do not pursue	42.2%
	No response	4.9%
		%
1e. Fine Arts "choice" program	Pursue	54.8%
	Do not pursue	39.8%
	No response	5.4%
		%
1f. Career Academy "choice" program	Pursue	49.4%
	Do not pursue	45.0%
	No response	5.7%
		%
2. Prevention and Intervention Services	Yes, DISTRICT 303 should provide...	66.8%
	No, additional resource/staff are not needed	29.3%
	No response	3.9%
		%
3. Special services and education support programs	Yes, DISTRICT 303 should fund	64.5%
	Current referral and evaluation process meets the needs...	31.1%
	No response	4.3%
		%
4. Mental health supports and services	Fund and provide more comprehensive mental health supports.	54.9%
	Current supports/services needs needs...	41.0%
	No response	4.1%
		%
5. Professional development for instructional staff	Yes, DISTRICT 303 should strengthen professional development program	76.2%
	No, current program is sufficient	22.7%
	No response	1.1%

		%
6. Recruitment and retention of professional staff	Yes, DISTRICT 303 should strengthen recruitment program for staff...	71.2%
	No, current recruitment/retention programs are sufficient	27.0%
	No response	1.8%
		%
7. Technology	Yes, DISTRICT 303 should advanced instructional technology...	78.3%
	No, current technology is sufficient	19.0%
	No response	2.7%
		%
Please check all that might apply to you...	I am a resident of DISTRICT 303	86.3%
	I am employed by DISTRICT 303	29.1%
	I am a parent of a child(ren) attending DISTRICT 303	54.7%
	I have no children attending DISTRICT 303 schools	20.1%
	I am a student at a DISTRICT 303 school	14.9%
	This is the first SUMMIT 303 meeting that I've been to	33.2%
	I have attended previous SUMMIT I303 meetings	59.7%
	No response	1.1%

ALL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: All-day kindergarten was an issue that Summit participants held in high value and one that was considered at various times throughout the engagement process. In the end however, **Summit 303** participants affirmed their position of providing all day kindergarten only “where and when space allowed” and with the additional half-day cost borne by parents who might choose to participate. During their valuing exercise, 67% of those participating wanted some option presenting a program of all-day kindergarten. Of those, 83% thought the program should be a parental “choice” option.

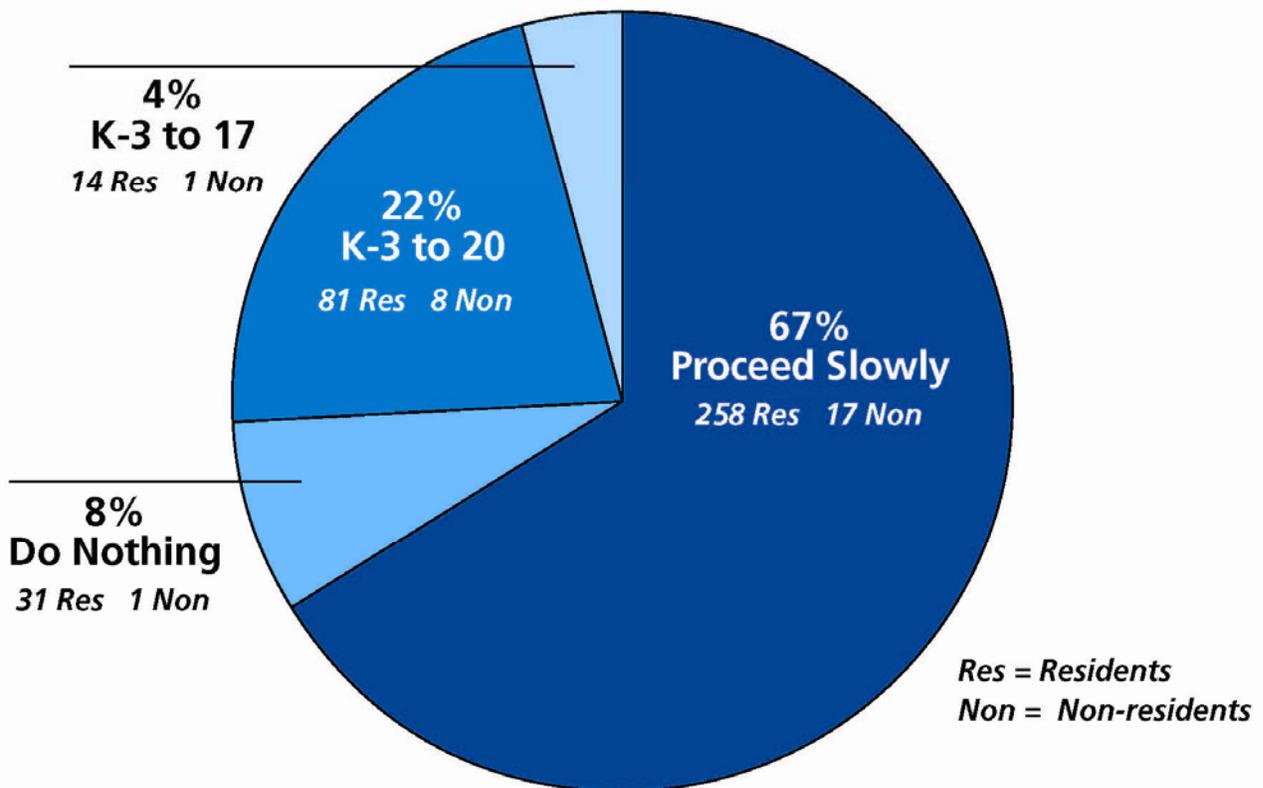
Kindergarten Choices



SMALLER CLASS SIZES: The issue of creating small class sizes particularly in grades 1 through 3 was of high value to **Summit 303** participants. However, when closely examining the actual costs associated with decreasing class sizes down from existing levels, nearly two-thirds of Summit participants would instruct the District to proceed slowly in this area and only when budgets and available space would allow.

Class Size Options

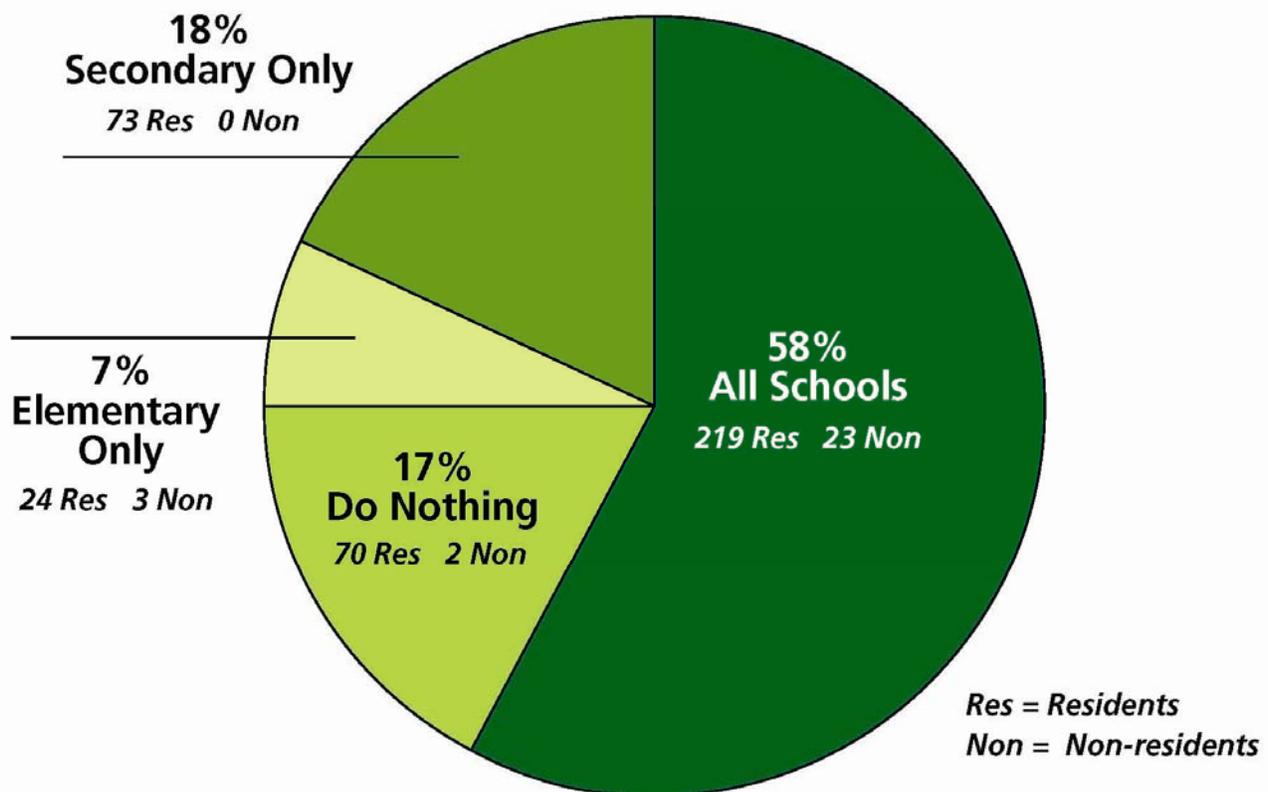
**Totals might not add to 100% – Rounding errors*



SCHOOL FACILITIES: Based on a comprehensive long range study of District 303 buildings by the District's architectural firm, participants weighed a variety of options to bring the physical facilities mechanically and instructionally up-to-date. More than 80% of those at the final CES agreed that some form of improvements to school buildings were needed and should be a priority. Of those that value doing some type of building improvement, close to 70% indicated that they would urge the District to:

- Adopt the Comprehensive Long Range Facilities Plan for District 303
- Complete all of the projects cited in the architect's comprehensive facilities study...at both the elementary and secondary level. This includes replacing buildings at four locations: Wasco, Wild Rose, Munhall, and Davis while also providing space for all day kindergarten at these four replacement schools.
- Accept the standards that were identified by our architectural firm including: accessibility issues, air quality, class size, program needs, safety and security and site improvements.
- Pursue placing a referendum question to address these needs on the April 2009 ballot.

Facility Options



Conclusion

The **Summit 303** engagement project was a great success and a large step toward the District's ongoing self discovery and improvement effort. In representing the interests of Summit participants the Facilitating Team prepared the final recommendations first and foremost with students in mind. It is hoped that these few but significant recommendations, once fully implemented, will foster improvements in the overall quality of education that St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 provides its students.

Likewise, the Facilitating Team anticipates that the Board of Education will accept this report and provide the leadership to embrace these recommendations and seek the appropriate resources to make the community's vision a reality.

What began more than a year ago as a charge from the Board of Education to **Summit 303**, now culminates in **Summit 303's** recommendation to the Board of Education — that you study, consider, refine and implement the vision for the future as suggested by the District 303 community.

The Facilitating Team thanks the Board of Education for its support and encouragement during this process.