

VISION SPOKANE

A Community Research Project

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Developed By



SAINT

GEORGE'S

SCHOOL

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Introduction

During 2008, St. George's School of Spokane, Washington embarked on a strategic planning and positioning process. In an effort to gather the most germane data to inform their planning and positioning efforts, the school collected information not only from internal constituencies, typical to most independent school strategic planning processes, but also from external constituencies. The intent of this data gathering from external constituencies was designed to inform the school regarding trends and forces that seem to be shaping the educational and career landscape of Spokane, Washington, and the Pacific Northwest.

An interesting methodology was developed in order to collect this data. Administrative leaders and members of the board of trustees at St. George's School developed both qualitative and quantitative data collection components to their strategic planning process. This methodology allowed the school to collect data from a small circle of highly informed and well-connected members of the community in order to establish broad stroke themes about the current and future status of Spokane. Those themes were then tested against a larger and broader sample of the Spokane business community through a web-based survey instrument.

On the qualitative research front, the school identified a small, yet highly informed group of individuals in the broader Spokane community. These community leaders were identified by industry, thus providing breadth and depth to the process. In addition, these community members had no personal or business affiliation with the school, providing an objective and independent perspective on the educational and business landscape of Spokane. Two members of the St. George's school community identified twenty community leaders, communicated with them, and scheduled personal, on site interviews of 30 minutes to one hour with each respondent. The interviews were recorded, and general themes regarding their responses were transcribed. Most importantly, the questions that the St. George's school research team asked of each respondent dealt with high-level issues associated with education, career preparation, and the economic and demographic climate of Spokane. The questions did not, at any point, pursue perceptions or opinions regarding specific schools in Spokane, including St. George's.

Once complete, the general themes of each of these interviews were compiled, seeking common thematic responses. These themes then formed the foundation for a quantitative survey instrument, seeking to test common concepts and themes to a broader yet informed business community. During the spring and summer of 2008, a quantitative survey instrument was launched via the web to a broader group of leaders in the Spokane community. St. George's school elected to utilize members of both the Leadership Spokane initiative as well as current members of the Chamber of Commerce. The survey

gleaned 156 unique responses from community leaders in a broad-based sample of the Spokane business community.

This report is intended to summarize the main themes that were developed during these two research components of our local community. We hope and intend that this research will not only inform your strategic planning efforts, but, as important, inform other organizations seeking to understand the context of our local community and future trends and forces shaping a future vision of Spokane. We hope that this report will benefit both you and your organization.

Community Leader Research Summary

The following pages summarize the commentary provided by local Spokane community and opinion leaders regarding trends and forces shaping Spokane. These leaders were engaged in personal interviews with members of the Saint George's School community during the months of March through May 2008. We identified the following themes shared by twenty opinion leaders in the interview sessions.

Generally, community leaders are optimistic regarding the future of the city and region. They expressed general agreement in the following areas:

- Spokane will likely continue to grow in a healthy, incremental way which will place some real challenges in balancing growth with healthy living;
- Growth will require improved urban infrastructure in an environment that has been somewhat insular in thinking, tax averse in funding, and has witnessed a lack of collaboration in the past;
- There is a need for enhanced educational opportunities in science, mathematics, and technology and to position the region as a leader in these areas;
- A collaborative and visionary attitude about the future will help propel the region forward.

General trends shaping Spokane in the next five years cited by leaders included:

- Moderate and incremental growth of the local economy;
- Growth of ethnic minorities;
- A need for improved infrastructure for a growing population;
- Reinvestment and reurbanization of the downtown area;
- An increase for high demand occupations emerging out the science, technology, and math disciplines;
- Higher demand for culture and the arts;

- A growing divide between the rich and poor;
- A growing concern about poverty;
- A greater connection to world trends, such as globalism, technology, sustainability, and sciences;
- The belief that Spokane will continue to be a destination city for unmatched quality of life.

The vision of the city of Spokane in twenty years shared by leaders included:

- The city serving as a hub for high quality living;
- Focusing on sustainable and green living;
- Well-developed science, math, technology, and health sectors;
- Growing dependence on the local economy for better human capital development;
- Noted as a research center for the inland Northwest region;
- Successfully made the necessary investments in urban infrastructure to support high quality of life and to attract bright, educated people to the region.

The ideal vision of Spokane in twenty years included the following themes:

- The city continuing to be a destination city for high quality living;
- A diversified work force that possesses industry leading people capable of fueling growth in the region;
- A safe living environment with low crime rate;

- Healthy and carefully monitored population growth;
- A city where people collaborate to solve problems;
- A solution to improved transportation systems will be successfully implemented.

Interestingly, some of the same elements of a described vision for Spokane also emerged as challenges or obstacles in achieving that vision. **Some future obstacles outlined by leaders** included the following themes:

- The continued need for better urban infrastructure;
- Growing our resource base to fund necessary investments;
- A lack of willingness by the local community to embrace and support change;
- A need for a long term solution for better, more efficient transportation;
- A need for more educational training in science, technology, and mathematics;
- A lack of historical collaborative problem-solving;
- Excellent leadership that will attract high quality leaders that have vision and will get things done;
- Public schools will need to upgrade their curriculum in order to provide a stronger and more prepared labor force.

Opinion leaders described the status of education in Spokane in fairly favorable terms, with occasional exceptions. Most leaders believed the system was fairly strong, but contained some fairly significant omissions in the following areas:

- Effective use of both written and oral forms of communication;

- Higher level of exposure needed to foreign cultures and a relevant foreign language;
- A need for better focus on technology, sciences, and mathematics as a core part of the curriculum that cannot be perceived as optional by students.

Finally, opinion leaders offered their perspective on **core competencies of the successful student and graduate of tomorrow**. Some of these competencies included the following:

- Well-rounded thinkers resulting from broad-based preparation;
- The ability to deal effectively with the diversity that Spokane does not currently offer;
- A presumption of fundamental skills, such as writing, communicating, languages, math, and sciences;
- Civic and community-mindedness where students must be willing to give back;
- Adaptability with languages and culture shifts, acknowledging that change is the currency of the future;
- Collaboration and team building skills which are critically important;
- Green stewardship that teaches students to be an excellent steward of our precious resources and develop sustainable strategies;
- Intercultural communication skills beyond just foreign languages, which are very important, but expanding citizenship beyond the local community and into the global community;
- Math, sciences, and technology expertise;

The next section of our report details responses for our quantitative survey research with Spokane business and community leaders.

Quantitative Research Summary

The following pages outlined themes discovered in our web-based quantitative survey instrument of business and community leaders in Spokane. Using themes from our qualitative community leader research, we were able to develop questions that tested the efficacy of each of the themes discovered from prior research. The following pages outline – in bullet point format – the key findings from this research.

- **Population growth** -- Roughly 90% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that Spokane will likely continue to grow in a healthy, incremental way which will play some challenges in balancing population growth and healthy living.
- **Urban infrastructure** -- Over 82% of respondents agreed or highly agreed the new population growth will require improved urban infrastructure in an environment that has been somewhat tax averse in funding and not particularly collaborative in problem solving.
- **Math, science, technology** -- Over 95% of all respondents agreed or highly agreed that there is a need for improved educational opportunities in all Spokane in the areas of science, math, and technology if the city desires to position itself as a leader in these areas.
- **Collaboration and vision** -- Over 82% of all respondents agreed or highly agreed that Spokane needs a collaborative and visionary attitude about the opportunity the city has in the future.
- **Growth in ethnic minorities** -- Only 37% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that Spokane will witness substantial growth in ethnic minorities in the future. 35% of respondents were neutral to the statement, while 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.
- **Improved infrastructure** -- Over 94% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that Spokane will witness the need for improved infrastructure for a growing population.
- **Revitalization of downtown** -- 60% of respondents indicated that Spokane would continue to see a revitalization and reinvestment in the downtown area.
- **High demand occupations** -- Nearly 70% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that there will be an increase in high demand occupations emerging out of the sciences, mathematics, and technological disciplines. 22% were neutral to the statement, while another 5% disagreed with the statement.

- **Arts and entertainment** – Roughly 67% of respondents indicated that there would be an increase in demand for cultural entertainment in the arts in the future, while 25% were neutral to the statement and another 7% disagreed with the statement.
- **Economic divide** – Roughly 66% of respondents indicated that Spokane will witness a growing divide between the rich and the poor in the future. Another 20% of respondents were neutral to the statement while another 10% disagreed with the statement.
- **Poverty** – Roughly 64% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that poverty will emerge as an even higher priority social concern in the future for Spokane. Another 23% more neutral to the statement, while another 10% disagreed with the statement.
- **Connection to global trends** - Roughly 70% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that Spokane will witness a greater connection to world trends, such as globalism, technology, sustainability, and science cultivation. Another 21% were neutral to the statement, while another 8% disagreed with the statement
- **Quality of life** – Approximately 65% of respondents indicated that Spokane would continue to be a destination city for an unmatched quality of life. Another 28% of respondents were neutral to the statement, while 6.5% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Another in 70% of respondents agreed or highly agreed that Spokane would be seen as a hub for high quality of living, while nearly one quarter of respondents were neutral to the statement. Another 6% disagreed with the statement.
- **Diversified workforce** -- Roughly 50% of respondents indicated that Spokane will have a diversified workforce that possesses industry-leading people capable of fueling growth in the region. Interestingly, nearly 30% of respondents were neutral to the statement, while another 13% disagreed with the statement.
- **Crime** -- Roughly 50% of respondents indicated that Spokane will be a safe city with a low crime rate in the future. Nearly 30% of respondents were neutral to the statement while nearly another 20% disagreed with the statement.

- **Collaboration** -- Is collaboration important in the future? Roughly 55% of respondents indicated that Spokane will be a city where people collaborate to solve common or shared problems. Another 26% were neutral to the statement, while 15% disagreed with the statement.

- **Regional transportation** -- Transportation seems to be an important priority and issue in the growing Spokane region. Only 40% of respondents indicated that Spokane will have developed and implemented improved transportation systems in the near future. 35% were neutral to the statement while nearly one quarter of respondents disagreed with the statement.

- **Science, math, and technology sectors** -- Roughly 55% of respondents indicated that Spokane will have developed strong science, math, and technology sectors in the future. Roughly 40% of respondents were neutral to the statement while another 8% disagreed with the statement.

- **Human capital** -- The development of human capital appears to be an important trend in the future vision in Spokane. Roughly 67% -- or one third – indicated that Spokane will have a growing dependence on the local economy for the development of human capital. 21% were neutral to the statement while nearly 5% disagreed with the statement.

- **Necessary investment** --Some skepticism surrounded the investment that respondents perceive Spokane will make in its future. Roughly 47% of respondents indicated that Spokane would have made the necessary investments in urban infrastructure to support high quality of life and attract bright, educated people to the region. Another 30% were neutral to the statement while over 20% disagreed with the statement.

- **Spokane as a research center** -- Will Spokane continue its growth as a research center for the Northwest region? Roughly 68% of respondents indicated as such while nearly 25% were neutral to the statement. Another 5% disagreed with this concept.

- **Sustainability trends** -- How important is sustainability and future planning efforts for Spokane? Roughly 48% of respondents indicated the sustainability, local, and green living will be a primary priority in the near future. 36% of respondents were neutral to the statement while another 15% disagreed with the statement.

- **Bandwidth for change** -- How difficult is the concept of change for the Spokane community? Roughly 88% of respondents indicated that Spokane does not embrace change very well and will need to

embrace and support change in order to achieve this vision. Another 15% were neutral to the statement, while 5% disagreed with the statement.

- **Leadership** -- It would appear the leadership is inherent and central to achieving the vision the business leaders forecast for Spokane. Roughly 95% of all respondents believe that leadership will need to be exceptional at the city and regional level in order to attract high-quality people who have a vision and can get things done for the city.
- **Quality of education** -- How important is the quality of education in the community and its relevance to changing trends? Roughly 80% of respondents indicated that Spokane public schools will need to upgrade their curriculum in order to provide a stronger and more prepared workforce in order to achieve a vibrant vision. 13% were neutral to this concept while another 5% disagreed.
- **Status of education** -- What is the status of education in Spokane? 82% of respondents indicated that Spokane has a strong educational system, with good public schools, several private school options, and quality higher education options available locally. Roughly 10% were neutral to the statement, while another 6% disagreed with the statement.
- **Fundamental skills** -- Essential or fundamental skills often taught within school systems appear to continue in their importance to the community and business leaders in Spokane. Roughly 85% of respondents indicated that elementary and secondary schools in Spokane must improve the ability of their graduates to write, speak, and communicate effectively in the future. 10% were neutral to the statement.
- **International exposure** -- How important is international exposure in the educational process? Roughly 80% of respondents indicated the Spokane schools must increase their level of exposure to foreign cultures and relevant foreign languages if they are to compete in a global world. Another 13% were neutral to the statement, while 6% disagreed with the statement.
- **Technology, science, and math training** -- Is the future educational training of technology, sciences, and mathematics critical for schools of the future? Nearly 90% of respondents indicated that Spokane schools must enhance the focus on technology, sciences, and mathematics as a core part of the curriculum that cannot be perceived as optional by students. Another 7% were neutral to the statement.

- Finally, respondents were asked to rank order the fundamental skills and core competencies of a successful graduate. Interestingly, fundamental skills led the responses by community leaders. Roughly 65% of respondents indicated that fundamental skills, such as writing, communicating, relevant foreign languages, math, and sciences, are among the first or second most important core competencies of a successful graduate. The importance of critical thinking ranks second among respondents, as roughly 57% of respondents indicated that the students of tomorrow will need to be well-rounded thinkers that only results from a broad-based preparation in school. Respondents ranked the concept of green or sustainability and intercultural communication near the bottom of our list of 10 core competencies.

Final Thoughts

We hope and trust that this report has been useful to both you and your organization. Please keep in mind that the intent of this report was to provide St. George's school, an independent college preparatory school in Spokane, relevant information regarding trends and forces that are shaping the greater Spokane area. The school believes that the information gleaned in its study for strategic planning purposes would be useful in sharing with the broader community. We hope you agree.

For more information about this report, findings, and information regarding methodology, please contact St. George's school directly at 509 – 466 – 1636 or visit the school on the web at www.sgs.org.