



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

STRATEGIC PLAN REFLECTING AND REFINING 2022 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



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GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR





LETTER FROM THE CHANCELLOR JANUARY 2023

Greetings DC Public Schools Community,

Each school year marks a new chapter in a child's educational journey—time to forge new friendships, deepen personal interests, and take another step toward graduation and beyond. Students are doing so as our nation continues to grapple with the impacts of the pandemic, racial injustice, gun violence, and so much more.

It is our commitment to emerge from these generation-defining moments stronger than before. Together with our supportive families, an engaged community, and the talented DC Public Schools (DCPS) team, we are making progress. Our commitment to accelerating progress is grounded in our five-year strategic plans that center community voices to help guide our vision as a school district.

The Capital Commitment Strategic Plan, first launched in 2012 and refined in 2017, declared DCPS' earnest efforts to become a school system centered around educational equity and student achievement.

In August 2022, DCPS started a year-long journey of reflection and refinement to produce the next iteration of our strategic plan. Throughout the fall, DCPS hosted an engagement listening series, including opportunities for staff, students, families, and community members to reflect on our strengths and where we must grow.

Specifically, we asked for feedback around four main questions:

1. What does a welcoming and affirming school community look like for all students, families, and staff?
2. What can we do to ensure equitable programming and policies across all of DCPS?
3. What do our students need academically, socially, and emotionally to reach their full potential?
4. What resources do our staff, families, and students need to ensure all students thrive?

I am excited to share key takeaways and themes that emerged from the listening sessions.

Through this new strategic plan, DCPS will continue to relentlessly charge forward toward our goals of educational equity and student achievement. This spring, we will share our draft strategic plan ideas with the public and finalize the new strategic plan in summer 2023.

In partnership,

Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.
Chancellor



REFINING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Our engagement goal is to ensure all DCPS stakeholders are informed of and engaged in shaping the next five-year DCPS Strategic Plan that builds on current successes and embeds equity at every turn. The strategic planning process is organized in the following four phases:



"No matter where you come from, what you look like, you need to find a community that doesn't judge."

- Student, Cardozo Education Campus Session

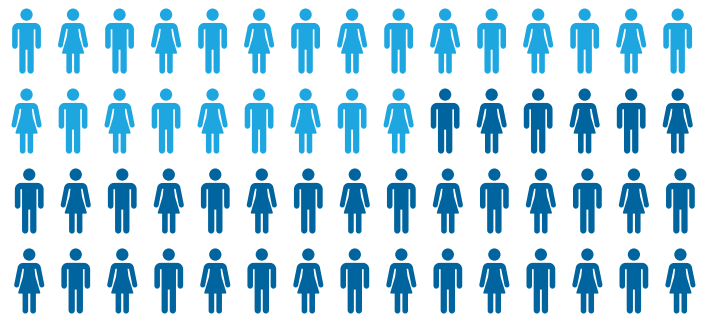
WHO WE HEARD FROM

During the Engage phase, DCPS hosted six family and community listening sessions, four student listening sessions, 21 staff listening sessions, a DCPS principal session, and a community block party to gather qualitative input for the engagement process. DCPS staff included Central Services, school campus leadership, and teachers. We engaged participants representing a cross-section of every ward in the District, with significant participation from family and community members.

As part of our listening session activities, attendees participated in a gallery walk and a small-group feedback session. During these exercises, attendees were asked to share their feedback around four main topical questions.

These questions were developed at the onset of our engagement process and were asked at every listening session. We received nearly 600 feedback-driven Post-It notes from over 400 families, community members, students, and staff attendees during the gallery walk portion of our listening sessions.

Post-It Comments from Gallery Walk:



- Families/Community Members
- Students

of Attendees by Group:



- Families/Community Members
- Students
- Staff

Note: Each character denotes ten (10) post-it comments or attendees.



"Resources that target retaining our qualified staff members... There should be more done to determine why and how we can retain them."
 - DCPS Staff Session

ENGAGEMENT THEMES

Below is a synthesis of major themes that arose during the engagement phase, with particular focus on the four key questions asked of all stakeholders. Each set of themes is organized according to what was heard from key stakeholder groups as they contributed their thoughts and feedback to each question.

What does a welcoming and affirming school community look like for all students, families, and staff?

Family/Community:

- Promote a staff culture that has welcoming and trusting relationships with students.
- Increasing communication between families and school leadership, and more transparency from school leaders.
- Foster a school community that embraces the diversity of students and acts to be more inclusive.
- Promote more clubs and extracurricular activities.

Staff/Teachers:

- Foster a community where staff feel appreciated, welcomed, and supported.
- Provide staff with the resources and training they need to meet expectations.
- Have realistic expectations and set attainable goals.
- Include staff in decision-making processes.

Students:

- Provide clean and well-maintained spaces for learning.
- Encourage respect between staff and students.
- Recognize students' needs and address them.
- Create more trust between staff and students.

Principals:

- Ensure the physical buildings are up to par with DCPS standards.
- Prioritize staff greeting students positively as soon as they enter the school building.
- Promote inclusivity and recognize different cultures, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds.
- Consistently reevaluate school policies and practices, asking if they serve all students' needs.

What can we do to ensure equitable programming and policies across DCPS?

Family/Community:

- Provide transparency on budgets, data, and what is happening within schools.
- Foster a safe environment.
- Promote teacher retention.

"Continue professional development on diversity, equity, and inclusion and invite the parent community to participate if there are resources available."

- Family/Community Member,
Virtual Session

Staff/Teachers:

- Ensure our teachers experience equitable support and affirmation.
- Integrate our schools and community.
- Cultivate more intentional learning in the classrooms.

Students:

- Ensure equity among all eight wards.
- Broadcast more announcements through a variety of communication channels.
- Ensure all students feel heard and represented.
- Have specific staff members dedicated to college and career planning.
- Provide all students with necessary college and career planning resources.

Principals:

- Develop and fund more before- and after-school programming for students.
- Workshop what equity means for DCPS and create systems to implement it.
- Focus limited school budgets on students' needs.
- Effectively manage staffing needs for schools across the district.

What do our students need academically, socially, and emotionally to reach their full potential?

Family/Community:

- Create more enrichment opportunities to teach students essential life skills.
- Provide a variety of programs to address students' interests.
- Recognize and celebrate successful students.
- Provide mental health support to students.

Staff/Teachers:

- Equip teachers with the resources to meet their students' needs.
- Invest in social work to help the communities of students.
- Provide more funding for the development of better mental health support.
- Promote curricula that develop students holistically.
- Create more out-of-school enrichment opportunities.

Students:

- Provide helpful and encouraging teachers.
- Foster a safe space for students to communicate openly.

- Allow for more enrichment programs outside of school.
- Cultivate engaging programming that connects with students' interests.
- Amplify student voices.

Principals:

- Identify core reasons why families leave DCPS to attend charter schools.
- Provide plenty of language resources for students.
- Bolster mental health support systems in our schools for both students and staff.
- Ensure school funding is aligned with school planning and goals.

What resources do our staff, families, and students need to ensure all students thrive?

Family/Community:

- Create opportunities for community and family engagement.
- Provide access to secure transportation.
- Host continued ongoing listening sessions to provide feedback and transparency among the community.
- Celebrate diversity of all backgrounds and abilities.

Staff/Teachers:

- Improve staff recruitment and retention efforts.
- Provide financial resources to support teachers.
- Prioritize staff and teachers' voices.
- Provide greater access to mental health providers for staff, students, and families.

Students:

- Increase access to school supplies and technology.
- Allocate more funding for sports and extracurricular activities.
- Create a community within the school.
- Foster more student engagement.
- Rethink the traditional 5-day school week.
- Conduct an equitable review of current religious observance days.

Principals:

- Provide more resources for training teachers and staff.
- Increase staff recruitment and retention efforts.
- Celebrate student cultures and gender identities.
- Develop more mental health resources and counseling for students.





LISTENING SESSION SUMMARY

Family and Community

DCPS hosted a variety of in-person and virtual sessions with educators, families, and other community members. **Common themes that emerged from this conversation centered around issues of school safety, family engagement, and equity.**

Creating a safe and welcoming school environment starts by making sure that the spaces inside and around the school are clean and well maintained. In addition to clean spaces, a committed faculty with strong connections to students adds to an increased sense of safety. Having a space to be proud of and a network of people who care about students beyond their education, specifically around safety and happiness, helps to create an environment where family and community engagement is cultivated, nurtured, and sustained.

To help encourage family engagement, schools can host events such as back-to-school nights or summer open houses to give families opportunities to interact with faculty and staff and form stronger networks of trust. Opportunities such as curriculum nights were discontinued due to pandemic concerns, and parents and families are interested in reviving these events to better equip them for helping students at home. Community members also hope that academic

teams and associated activities can resume to pre-pandemic levels.

In discussing the equity of policies and programming in DCPS, community members felt that efforts should begin by addressing schools and resources east of the Anacostia River. Community members who do not reside east of the river described issues of equity in resource distribution among schools. Suggestions for addressing inequities include increased budget transparency around how funds are allocated, and the creation of a taskforce charged with identifying ways to improve equity across DCPS.

Staff and Teachers

The unique perspectives of DCPS staff members were gathered through both virtual and in-person conversations. **The themes that arose from the staff listening sessions—inclusive of school-based and Central Services feedback—regarded authenticity, equity, and prioritization of resources.**

Staff members shared that a space for authentic appreciation and consistency is vitally conducive to a healthy and strong environment for staff and students. After weathering the uncertainties created by pandemic-related school closures,

returning to a regular schedule is positive for staff. Additionally, there was an emphasis on involving and informing school-based staff early around any Central Services and DCPS leadership priority shifts to appropriately adjust capacity.

Staff expressed an expectation that all students receive the best education possible. Staff also shared the desire for DCPS to examine its resource allocations to identify strategies that improve equity across the school district. Suggestions from staff include reflecting annually on policies and practices to ensure they effectively reach all students. For example, staff shared that schools can be encouraged to share best practices with other schools for raising additional funds, with an aim to make more funds available in all DCPS schools. Staff welcome more opportunities to share their experiences and perspectives around equity with DCPS.

Students

In addition to a virtual session, student focus groups were convened at three locations: School Without Walls High School, Cardozo Education Campus, and Anacostia High School (with Kramer Middle School Students).

Students shared the importance of feeling respected and cared for by their community, a desire for more equitable programming and policies across DCPS, and they highlighted a desire for DCPS to support them and reduce barriers to their success.

Students expressed a desire to build trusting relationships with their teachers and feel supported in their efforts to grow as young people. Students noted they face many challenges outside of school and that they would appreciate acknowledgement of their hard work and progress. Greater access to mental health professionals at school to help meet their needs would be welcomed by students and would help cultivate an affirming environment.

Ensuring equitable policies (and their implementation) throughout DCPS was a consistent theme in student feedback. Many students mentioned dress code concerns, such as uniform requirements and hair style or perfume/

deodorant restrictions, and the ways such requirements have the potential to infringe upon a student's culture or background. Standardized practices across the system may help to alleviate these issues. Students also expressed interest in a platform for sharing their feedback and insights with principals and DCPS leadership more regularly in a way that is safe and accessible.

Students asked DCPS to look for ways to support the transition from middle to high school, such as information or orientation days prior to the start of school. Students also expressed needing help accessing the supplies and resources necessary to successfully complete their school projects. When problems arise, students are interested in restorative justice options that address issues rather than punishment-driven consequences.

As they approach graduation, students would welcome more support and encouragement as they consider and explore their options after high school. For students planning to attend a college or university, more preparation for college and career opportunities, including campus tours or support resources for applications, would be helpful. Some students expressed bolstering their school's college and career planning services and pointed out disparities in the number of resources some schools receive over others. Some offered that the resource gap is systemic within schools east of the Anacostia River.

"[A] welcoming community [is] with people that understand me as a person — not just a student. I am human and I have feelings and emotions that I can't submit on an assignment."

- Student, School Without Walls High School Session

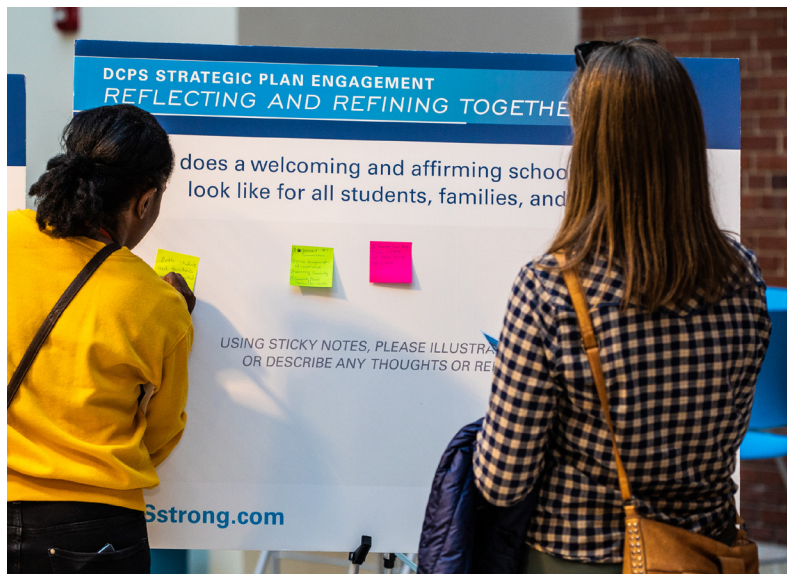
Principals

A critical step in our engagement efforts was gathering feedback from DCPS school leadership. **Core themes that emerged throughout these sessions included inclusivity, school staffing, and mental health services.**

DCPS school leaders shared substantive feedback around equity and inclusion within our school communities. Many agreed that improving access to mental health resources, specifically in school counseling areas, is critical to meet holistic student needs. School leadership acknowledged that the pandemic continues to be a time of uncertainty for families, teachers, staff, and students, and many students only have access to resources through their school communities.

As DCPS made the transition from virtual back to fully in-person instruction, school leaders overwhelmingly shared that prioritizing a positive school environment by practicing mindfulness, kindness, and positivity was important to student success. School leadership further elaborated that students should be greeted by staff with positivity and kindness as soon as they enter school campuses, improving the bonds between students, families, community, and staff within our schools.

When the focus of the conversation shifted to staff, school leaders expressed the importance of school staffing. In recent years, as is the case for many school districts, staff retention has been a challenge for DCPS. Staff retention has also created challenges for current staff, resulting in additional responsibilities. Ensuring improved staff retention and coordinated hiring efforts would allow for more staff support to address student needs and appropriately balance capacity.



"Resources that capture the essence of the students... Creating a homebase for the students that want to reflect on their past without being judged."

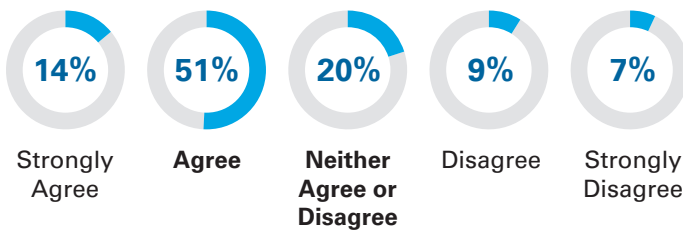
- Family/Community Member, Ron Brown High School Session



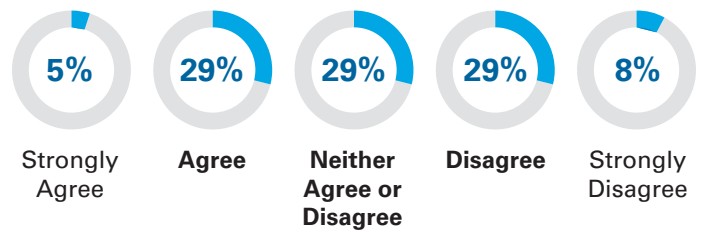
DCPS STRATEGIC PLAN SURVEY DATA

DCPS distributed an online survey regarding strategic planning priorities to provide an additional way for stakeholders to share their feedback with the district. The survey was distributed via social media channels and DCPS digital platforms, including email and web. Below is a summary of the data collected from that survey, which was largely completed by parents.

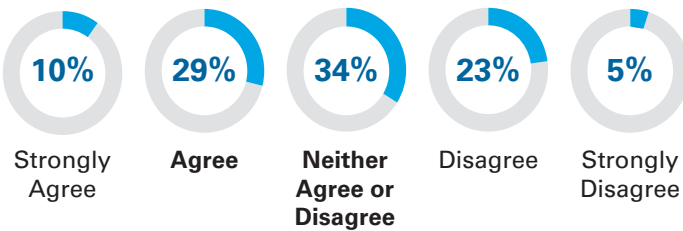
DCPS is a welcoming and affirming school community for all students, families, and staff.



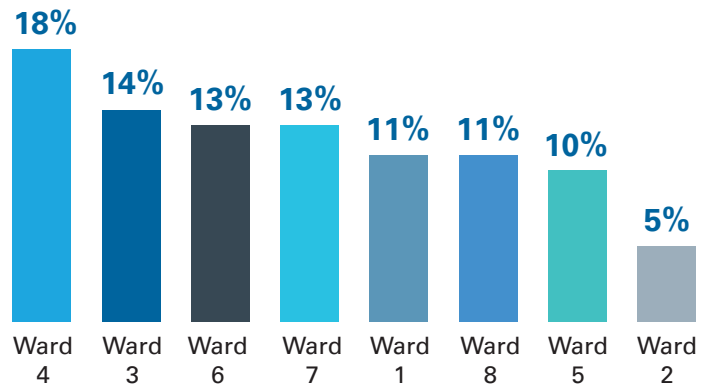
DCPS provides resources that staff, families, and students need to ensure all students thrive.



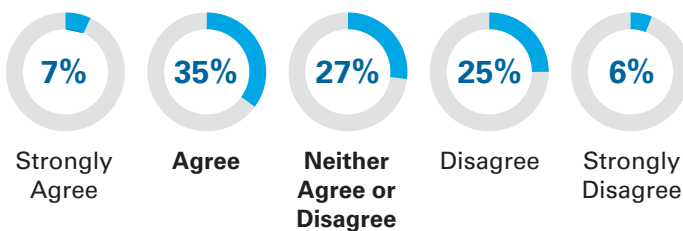
DCPS ensures equitable programming and policies across all of DCPS.



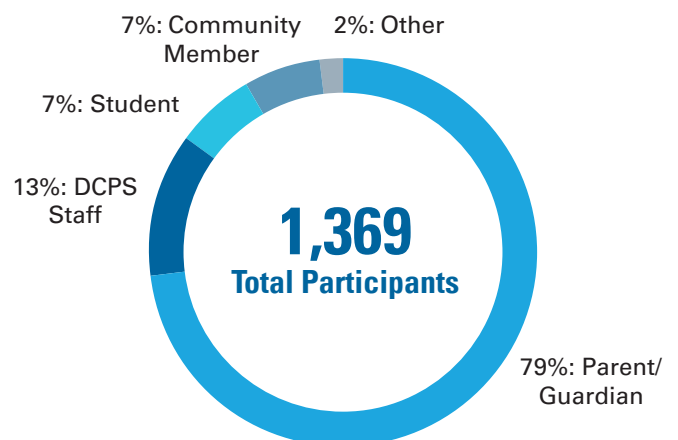
Demographic Highlights



DCPS supports students' needs academically, socially, and emotionally in reaching their full potential.



Survey Participants



The majority of survey respondents were affiliated with the following schools:

- Jackson-Reed High School
- Deal Middle School
- Maury Elementary School
- Whittier Elementary School
- Columbia Heights Education Campus
- Duke Ellington School of the Arts
- Banneker High School
- Hardy Middle School
- Lafayette Elementary School

"To ensure all students thrive we need teachers, therapists, and once again people/adults to listen to students' voices and to make them feel heard and valued what we as students say."

- Student, Anacostia High School /
Kramer Middle School Session

WHAT'S NEXT?

Closing the feedback loop is an important step of our strategic plan process, and it is critical to carrying out our engagement goals. Our engagement with stakeholders provided us with several examples of concrete, actionable feedback. Much of what we heard from stakeholders during the engagement phase and shared with you through this report will help to inform the direction of the Strategic Plan. As we conclude the engagement phase and transition to crafting and drafting, we can assure the DCPS community that the next phase has been designed to continue with engagement opportunities that strengthen our connection with stakeholders.





**Thank you for your
commitment and
participation!**



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