

Ballou High School: Informing School Transformation Strategies with Family and Community Feedback

Introduction & Methodology

Introduction

This project was undertaken with the purpose of collecting parent and community feedback to inform Ballou High School's *School Transformation Plan*. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), introduced in 2015, requires all states and DC to develop new accountability systems and provide targeted support to under-performing schools. In accordance with ESSA, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has created a framework to identify Comprehensive Support Schools, or schools that fall in the lowest five percent. These schools are eligible for additional resources to plan and implement a tailored School Transformation Plan to improve outcomes for all students. In order to ensure that community voice informed the creation of the School Transformation Plan, DC Public Schools (DCPS) held open forums and administered surveys to collect feedback from the broader school community, including teachers, staff, families, and students regarding the following priority areas:

- Shared leadership
- Engagement
- Culture of Achievement
- Academics
- Equity

Group Discussion Methodology

In order to get robust feedback from the Ballou High School community, DCPS and PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) partnered to conduct a community feedback session in which participants shared their thoughts and hopes for Ballou High School in a group discussion. During the community feedback session, **30 participants (three Ballou Alumni, two teachers, five community members, seven family members, six students, and seven individuals who did not disclose their relationships to the school)** shared their ideas and priorities for how they'd like to see the school improve. The group discussion was centered around a set of discussion points that was developed in partnership with DCPS, PAVE, and the school principal.

Survey Methodology

A total of **17 surveys** were collected from the Ballou High School community between February 13, 2019 and February 22, 2019. Surveys were administered at the community feedback session, as well as through other various channels, including email and school outreach. Eleven surveys were collected at the in-person community feedback session, six were collected online. The majority of the respondents were family members (Figure A). In addition, the respondents were associated with students across a variety of grade levels (Figure B). The survey can be found in Appendix A.

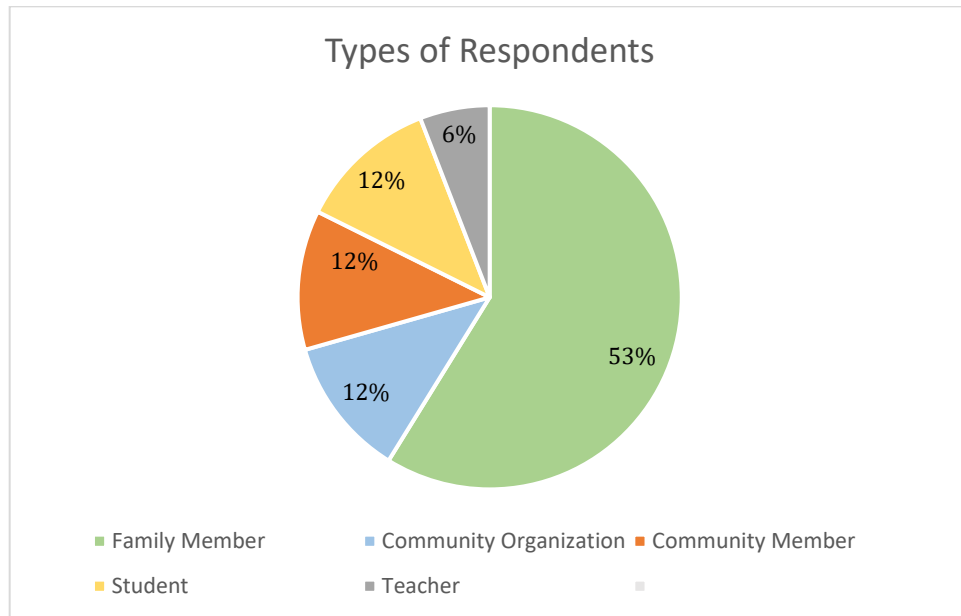


Figure A. Types of Stakeholders that took Ballou High School's Survey

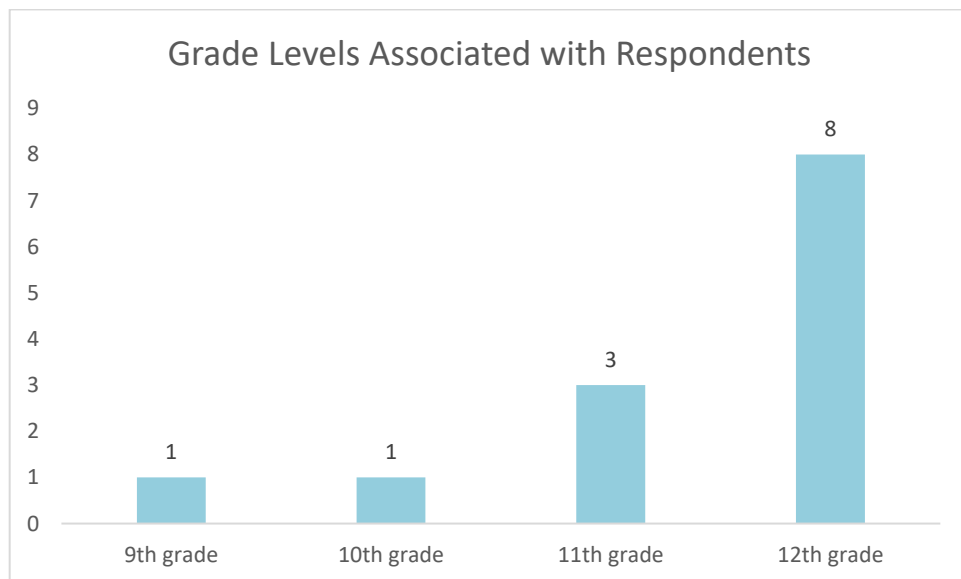


Figure B. Student Grade Levels associated with Survey Respondents

Report Note

More information about survey responses and data trends can be found in Appendix B. Quotes under the Community Voices section are direct quotes from the group discussion or responses from the open-ended questions on the survey.

Key Findings

Academics were a top priority area for Ballou High School. Stakeholders would like to see a focus on expanding the diversity of course offerings, including AP and CTE courses. Stakeholders would also like for teacher recruitment and retainment practices to improve.

Under culture of achievement and equity, stakeholders would like to see a bigger focus on mental health supports including trauma-informed training and social-emotional learning.

Stakeholders would like to see improved communication between the school and families and communities.

Survey and Group Discussion Detailed Findings

Shared Leadership:

Survey Responses (n=17)

- The responses regarding shared leadership at Ballou High School varied.
- A third of respondents (33.3%) agreed that the school includes the voices of students, families, teachers, and staff in decision making. No respondents strongly agreed (Figure C).
- 50% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the school includes the voices of students, families, teachers, and staff in decision making (Figure C).

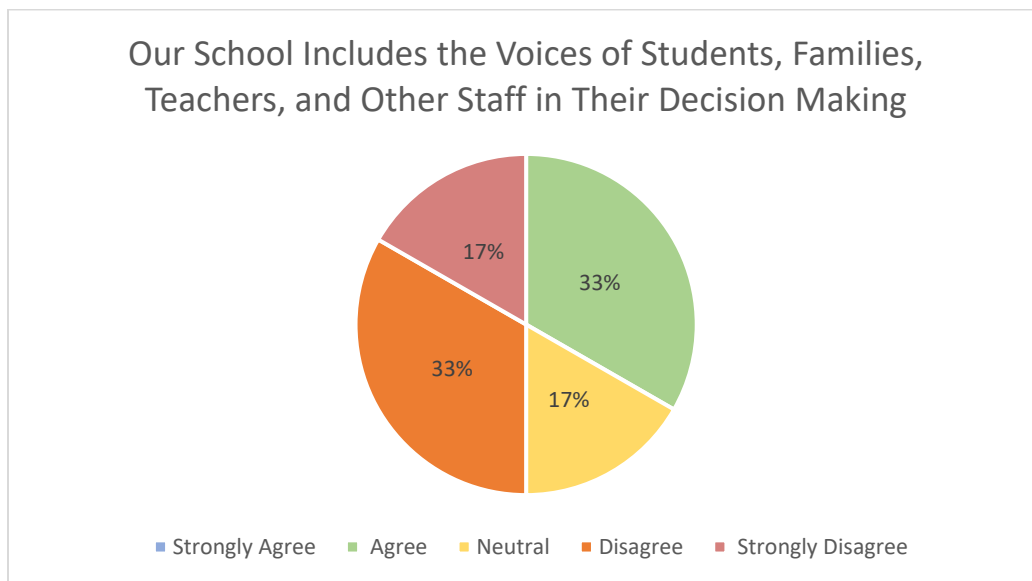


Figure C. Responses regarding Shared Leadership at Ballou High School.

Group Discussion Responses

- Having more community town hall meetings would give families and the community the opportunity to give feedback.
- Empowering students to lead community meetings can help ensure that students' needs are being met.

Community Voices

“The information for today’s meeting was just released...I only found out two days ago, and I’m the ANC Commissioner! No wonder there aren’t a lot of parents here. But if they knew, they would come!” -Ward 8 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner

Engagement:

Survey Responses (n=17)

- The responses regarding engagement at Ballou High School varied.
- Almost half (47%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school regularly engages with all members of its community, whereas 33.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure D).
- Over a third (33.3%) of respondents agreed that Ballou High School made them feel welcome and connected to the school community. No respondents strongly agreed. 33.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

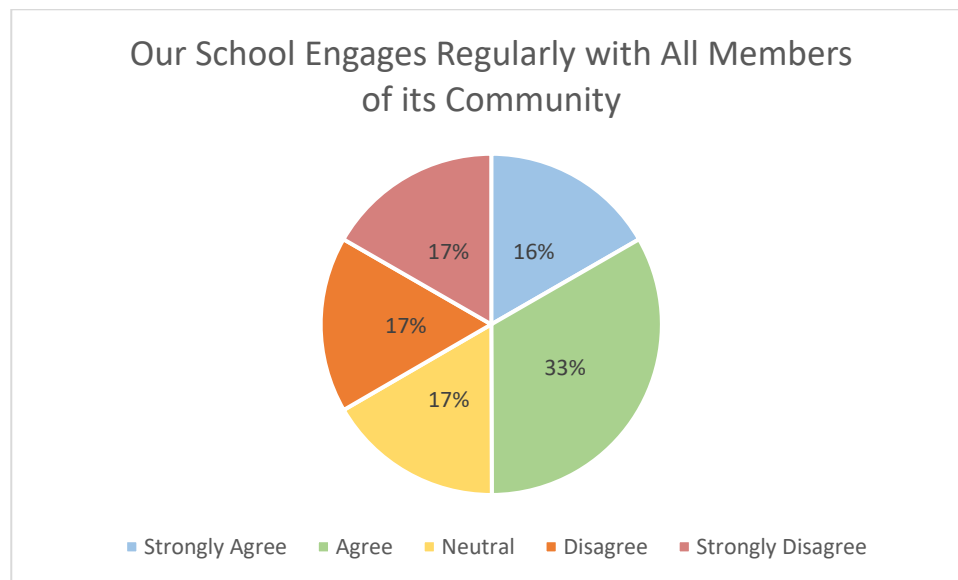


Figure D. Responses regarding engagement at Ballou High School.

Group Discussion Responses

- Uniform streams of communication between the school and families/community members would increase family engagement.

Community Voices

“Ballou has improved in engaging parents. However, need to find creative ways of engaging students possibly incentive based programs to increase student participation.” – Ballou High School Parent

“We need to stop pointing fingers. We have a strong community at Ballou, and your voice is your power. Use it!” -Ward 8 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner

Culture of Achievement:

Survey Responses (n=17)

- The majority of respondents felt positively about Ballou High School's culture of achievement.
- 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students and staff have strong relationships at the school, and 33.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- In addition, a large majority of respondents (83.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that students, families, and staff take pride in Ballou High School. Only 16.7% of respondents strongly disagreed (Figure E).

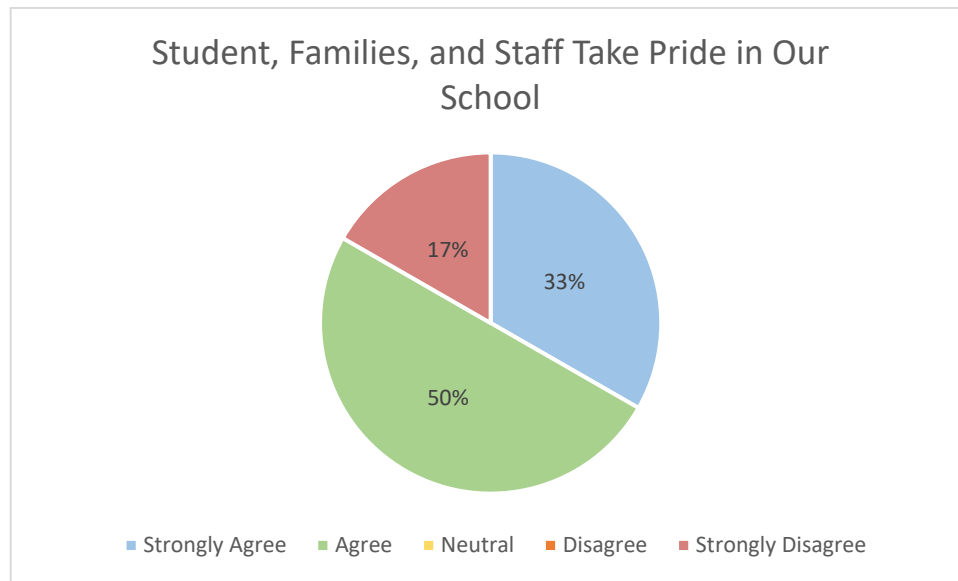


Figure E. Responses regarding culture of achievement at Ballou High School.

Groups Discussion Responses

- There are teachers and staff that really care about their students.
- Teacher retention is low.
- In order for teachers to help students be their best, there needs to be a strong emphasis on trauma-informed training.

Community Voices

"We've come a long way, but have a long way to go. We've had some big changes in school. Culture and achievement...but, I think we need to start looking at teacher retention. We have a lot of students who have experienced trauma, and teachers aren't trauma-informed. We cannot leave our baggage at the door and just sit for 80 minutes. We gotta talk to our students and see what they need. On top of that, we have a lot of folks who come in here once or twice in a suit for good looks. I can't see you just one time, you gotta come back...We have trust issues here because we've all experienced trauma." -Ballou Student

"It looks like each student here has been suspended twice in a year. Per 100 students, there are 243 suspensions. That is alarming!" -Ballou Community Member

Academics:

Survey Responses (n=17)

- The majority of respondents felt positively about academics at Ballou High School.
- 66.7% of respondents agreed that students were regularly challenged. 33% felt neutral. No respondents indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure F).
- 66.7% of respondents agreed that students were excited about learning. 33% felt neutral. No respondents indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- 66.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students had the appropriate supports for learning and only 16.7% disagreed.

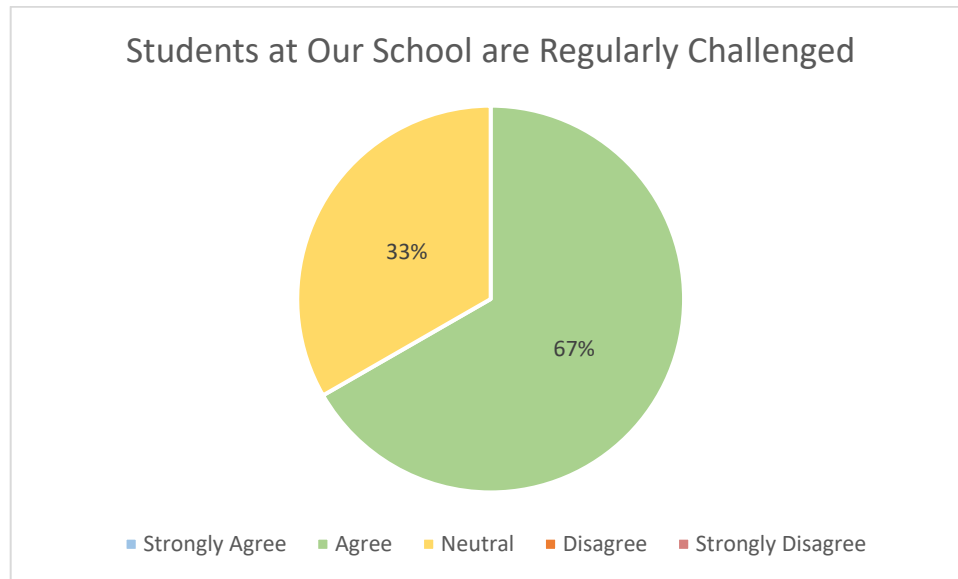


Figure F. Responses regarding academics at Ballou High School.

Group Discussion Responses

- More Advanced Placement (AP) courses are needed to cater to a wide range of student interests.
- Reading and writing intervention programs like “Bean Stalks” are important for students who are below grade level.
- Trauma is a barrier to learning for students at Ballou High School.
- There needs to be more of an emphasis on preparing students for when they leave high school.

Community Voices

“I want to go into computer science, and I want resources that support me, like AP Math, within the walls of my school. We need to increase the types of AP classes we can get.” -Ballou Student

“If our teachers aren’t trauma-informed, how are they gonna help? We need caring teachers that care about where [these kids] come from and what they’re going through.” -Ballou Parent

Equity:

Survey Responses (n=17)

- 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Ballou High School prioritized students who were the farthest from opportunity. 40% indicated that they felt neutral. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Half (50%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school prepares all students for success later in life, both in college and career. 16.7% disagreed, and 33.3% indicated that they felt neutral. No respondents strongly disagreed (Figure G).

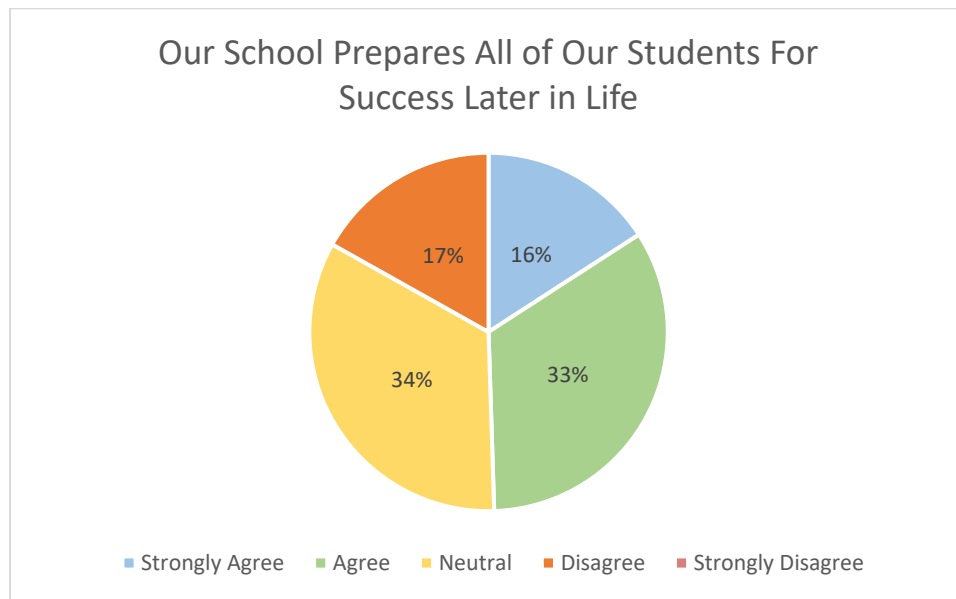


Figure G. Responses regarding equity at Ballou High School.

Group Discussion Responses

- The school needs more resources to meet all of its students' needs and does not have the capacity to fundraise from parents or have access to private funding.
- Improving teacher recruitment and retention would benefit students and staff.
- Proper training and resources are needed to support students who have experienced trauma.

Community Voices

"Teacher recruitment is very difficult here. And how can we get good teachers here, and how can we retain them?" -Ballou Teacher

"I want all the schools to get the same resources. This is a DCPS problem. Ward 3 is over-resourced, the PTO basically runs the school...Ward 3 teachers get gift cards from their parents because they raised money. Those parents are involved...we gotta bring that equity here." -Ward 8 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner

Appendix A

Community Feedback Session Survey

School: _____

Rank the following improvement focus areas from most important to you to least important to you (**1—most important, 5—least important**).

____ Shared Leadership ____ Engagement ____ Culture of Achievement ____ Academics ____ Equity

Please choose the best answer for each of the following questions.

Shared Leadership:

Our school includes the voices of students, families, teachers, and other staff in their decision-making.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

School leaders ask my opinion about decisions made at the school.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Is there anything else you'd like us to know about how our school **shares leadership** and decision-making?

Engagement

Our school has made me feel welcome and connected to our school community.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Our school engages regularly with all members of its community, including staff, students, and families.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Is there anything else you'd like us to know about **engagement** at our school?

Culture of Achievement:

Students and staff have strong relationships at our school.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Students, families, and staff take pride in our school.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Is there anything else you'd like us to know about our **Culture of Achievement**?

Please choose the best answer for each of the following questions.

Academics:

Students at our school have appropriate supports for learning.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Students at our school are regularly challenged.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Students at our school are excited about learning.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Please indicate anything else you'd like us to know about **academics** at our school.

Equity:

Our school prepares all of our students for success later in life, in both college and careers.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Our school prioritizes the students that are farthest from opportunities.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Please indicate anything else you'd like us to know about **equity** at our school.

Is there anything else we should consider for **our school transformation plan**?

What is the best way for our school to communicate with you?

To provide updates and information (check all that apply):

☐ Email ☐ Call ☐ Text ☐ Paper Flyer ☐ Other

To provide feedback (check all that apply):

☐ Online survey ☐ Paper survey ☐ Focus group/meeting

Are you a:

☐ Parent or Guardian ☐ Grandparent or other family member ☐ Administrator or other school staff member ☐ Community Organization
☐ Student ☐ Teacher ☐ Community Member

Appendix B

Rank the following improvement focus areas from most important to least important. Respondents ranked 1-5 (1=high, 5=low).

| Topic | Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5 |
|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Shared Leadership | 14.29% | 0% | 14.29% | 28.57% | 42.86% |
| Engagement | 0% | 28.57% | 28.57% | 42.86% | 0% |
| Culture of Achievement | 14.29% | 14.29% | 28.57% | 0% | 42.86% |
| Academics | 71.43% | 0% | 14.29% | 0% | 14.29% |
| Equity | 0% | 57.14% | 14.29% | 28.57% | 0% |

Community Satisfaction

| SHARED LEADERSHIP: STATEMENTS | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Our school includes the voices of students, families, teachers, and other staff in their decision making. | 11.8% | 29.4% | 35.3% | 17.6% | 5.9% |
| School leaders ask my opinion about decisions made at the school. | 5.9% | 29.4% | 47.1% | 11.8% | 5.9% |
| ENGAGEMENT: STATEMENTS | | | | | |
| Our school has made me feel welcome and connected to our school community. | 29.4% | 35.3% | 23.5% | 5.9% | 5.9% |
| Our school engages regularly with all members of its community including staff, students, and families. | 29.4% | 29.4% | 29.4% | 5.9% | 5.9% |
| CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT: STATEMENTS | | | | | |
| Students and staff have strong relationships at our school. | 11.8% | 52.9% | 23.5% | 5.9% | 5.9% |
| Students, families, and staff take pride in our school. | 35.3% | 29.4% | 23.5% | 5.9% | 5.9% |
| ACADEMICS: STATEMENTS | | | | | |
| Students at our school have appropriate supports for learning. | 5.9% | 35.3% | 35.3% | 17.6% | 5.9% |
| Students at our school are regularly challenged. | 5.9% | 35.3% | 52.9% | 0% | 5.9% |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Students at our school are excited about learning. | 11.8% | 29.4% | 47.1% | 11.8% | 0% |
| EQUITY: STATEMENTS | | | | | |
| Our school prepares all of our students for success later in life, in both college and careers. | 12.5% | 31.3% | 31.3% | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Our school prioritizes the students that are the furthest from opportunities. | 20% | 26.7% | 40% | 6.7% | 6.7% |