Eliot-Hine Middle 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 Eliot Hine Middle 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 to target resources and 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 Eliot-Hine Middle 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 Eliot-Hine Middle School. During the community feedback session, **45 participants (30 family members, eight staff members, and seven participants 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 guiding discussion questions that was developed in partnership with DCPS, PAVE, and the school principal. The discussion questions can be found in Appendix A.

Survey Methodology

A total of **41 surveys** were collected from the Eliot-Hine Middle School community between January 31, 2019 and February 15, 2019. Surveys were also administered through other various channels, including email and school outreach. Twenty-five surveys were collected at the in-person community feedback session, and 16 were collected online. The majority of the respondents were family members (Figure A). In addition, respondents were associated with students from all grade levels, with the majority of respondents associated with students in 6th grade (Figure B). The survey can be found in Appendix B.
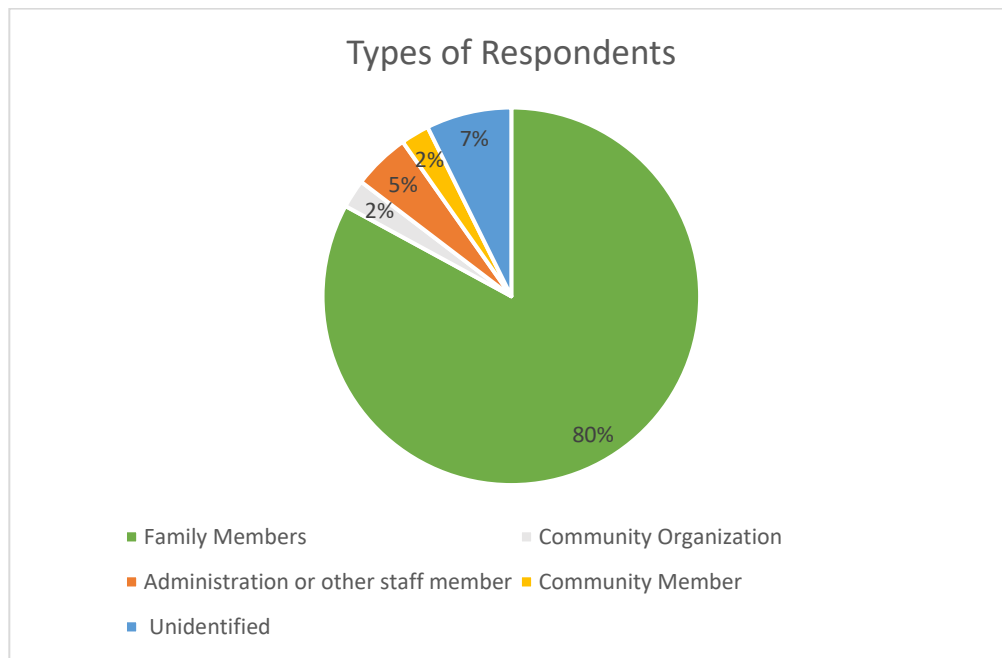
Types of Respondents

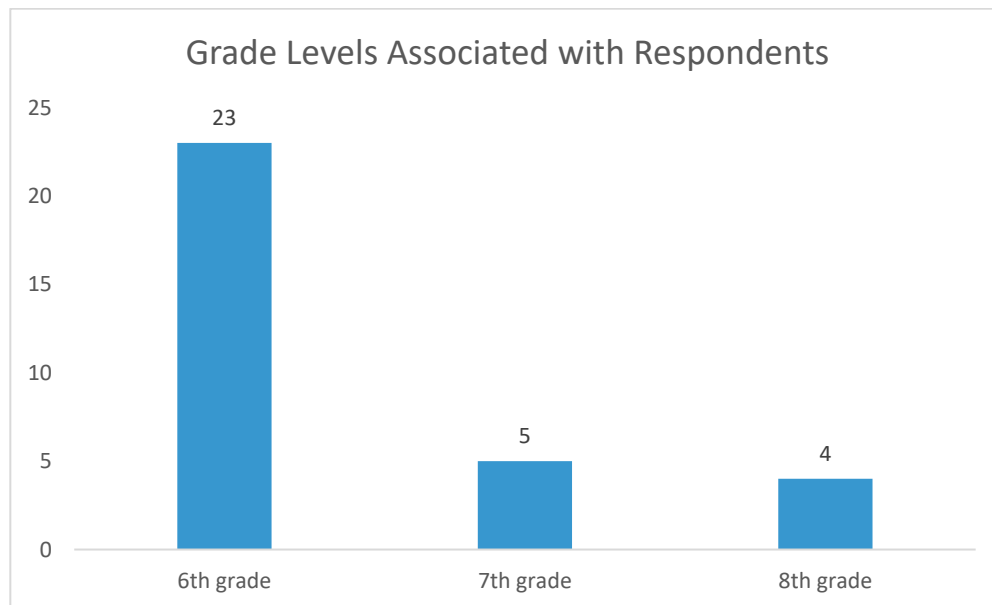Figure A. Types of stakeholders that took Eliot-Hine Middle School's Survey.

Figure B. Student grade levels associated with survey respondents.

Report Note

More information about survey responses and data trends can be found in Appendix C. 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

At Eliot-Hine, stakeholders felt positively about engagement practices used by the school. Specifically, they reported feeling welcome and connected to the school community. In addition to existing engagement practices, stakeholders would like to see new methods for engagement that involve more families, specifically families of color.

Culture of achievement was ranked as the top priority area for the school. Stakeholders also noted improvements in making students feel loved and connected.

Under academics, stakeholders would like to see students challenged more regularly.

Survey and Group Discussion Detailed Findings

Shared Leadership:

Survey Responses (n=41)

- There were more respondents who felt positively about how Eliot-Hine Middle School shares leadership with community members than those who felt negatively.
- Half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school includes the voices of students, families, teachers, and other staff in their decision making.
- 44.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school asks about their opinions regarding decisions made at the school. 27.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure C).
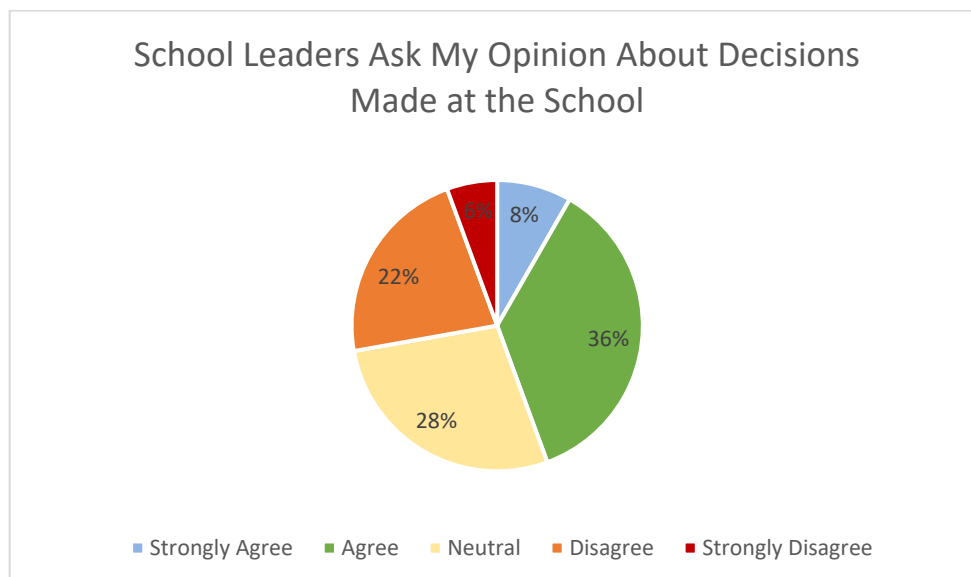

Figure C. Responses regarding shared leadership at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- Parents want to be partners with the school leadership to make decisions, but there needs to be more communication in order for that to happen.
- The school community does not always feel heard. More transparency is needed in the decision-making process so that parents can understand the final decisions and how their input was used.
- There was concern around equity of voice and lack of representation from communities of color.

Community Voices

"There are a lot of white parents here and our school is primarily African American. We are only hearing some voices at this meeting and those are not at all representative of our school. We are not hearing the voices of some of our most vulnerable families. If we make decisions based on the conversations here today we will continue to harm our black and brown students at the expense of everything else." – Eliot-Hine parent

"Having meetings like this, avenues for a lot of feedback for what people want but I'm not the decider for the school and it's not the role of parents to be the decider – that's the school admin. There has to be space for admin to hear us but then run through all of the budgeting considerations; there's a lot that we don't have a lens in but making sure we feel heard and we communicate what we see and need and that's what you will hear everywhere and that's a mechanism to be a part of the discussion that leads to the decision." - Eliot-Hine Parent

Engagement:

Survey Responses (n=41)

- The majority of respondents felt positively about Eliot-Hine Middle School's engagement practices.
- 52.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school engages regularly with all members of its community, including staff, families, and students.
- In addition, 69.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt welcomed and connected to the school community (Figure D).

Our School has Made Me Feel Welcome and Connected to Our School Community
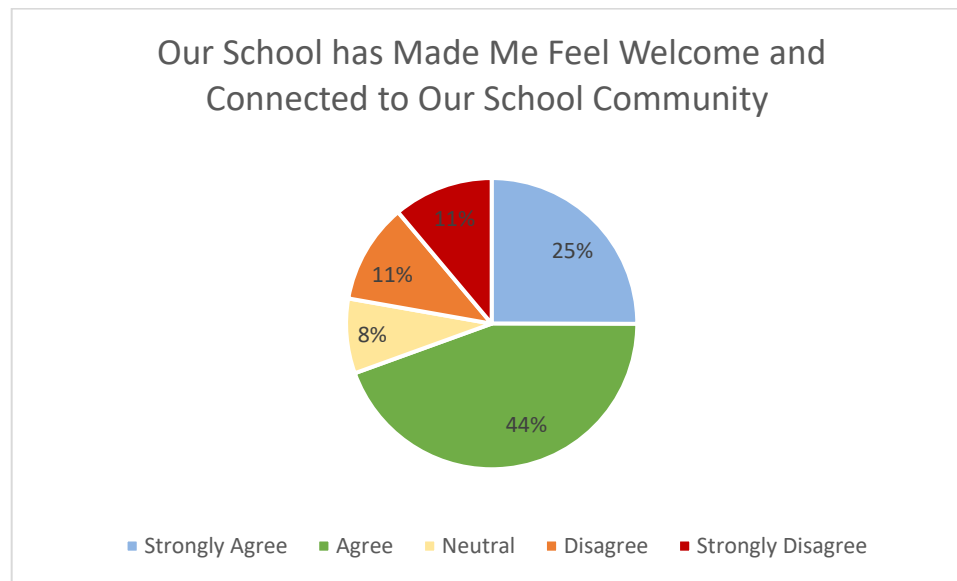

Figure D. Responses regarding engagement at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- Clear expectations of communication between school staff/teachers and parents are needed and should include multiple communication channels.
- Not all teachers communicate well with parents and there is a wide range of responsiveness to email or questions.
- There needs to be more emphasis on how to engage families of color.

Community Voices

"[We need] different methods of communication – APTT is a required thing so it's one mechanism, but class list servs are good in some ways and but also become self-selective; could be in-person after school , you find where people are – other types of outreach; if the teacher has to reach out – having regular communication just about how the day was for kids." – Eliot-Hine Parent

It's really hard to get emails back from teachers-though some better than others; it should be more uniform—if parent emails a teacher about a problem, it shouldn't take 3 weeks to get a response or none at all." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"This room is not representative of our school, we need to crack the code of how to engage our black families, our families at the margin, our most vulnerable population." – Eliot-Hine Parent

Culture of Achievement:

Survey Responses (n=41)

- Overall respondents felt mostly positive about the culture of achievement at Eliot-Hine Middle School.
- 62.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students and staff have strong relationships at the school.
- 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students, staff and families took pride in Eliot-Hine Middle School, while 31.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure E).
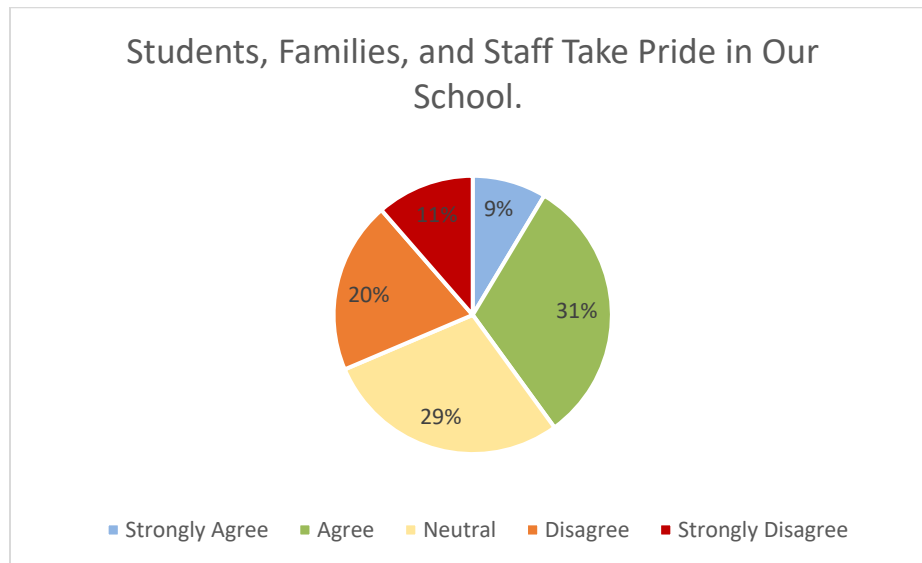

Figure E. Responses regarding culture of achievement at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Groups Discussion Responses

- School leadership has done well this past year of making students feel loved and connected.
- Student behavior impacts classroom culture and can create a negative learning environment if not controlled by the teacher.
- More staff are needed to provide the support and enrichment opportunities students need.
- Teacher and school leader turnover has caused a great deal of concern for families.
- More robust structures for homework and after school enrichment opportunities are needed.

Community Voices

"For 6th grade, there was Science Olympiad, Model UN, Embassy Adoption that kids really [liked.] This was lost when the teachers who were leading those left. More academic enrichment outside of the classroom like this is desired." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"They need a good reward system when improvements made in their behaviors- they will be more proud." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"I think the relationship between the staff and students varies. My student is happy enough at Eliot but there are some things that he sees (in older grades) that probably dim the pride- as well as lack of resources compared to other schools." – Eliot-Hine Parent

Academics:

Survey Responses (n=41)

- Overall, the majority of respondents felt negatively about academics at Eliot-Hine Middle School.
- 57.1% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that students at the school have appropriate supports for learning, while only 25.7% agreed. No respondents strongly agreed (Figure F).
- 45.7% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that students are regularly challenged at school 42.9% of respondents were neutral and 11.4% percent agreed (Figure G).
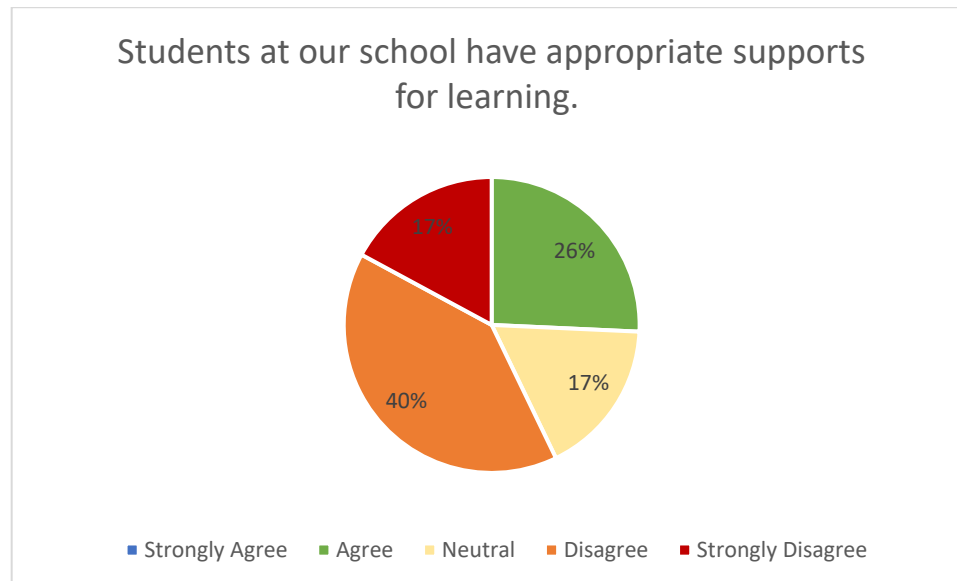- 41.2% of respondents agreed that students are excited about learning. 29.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

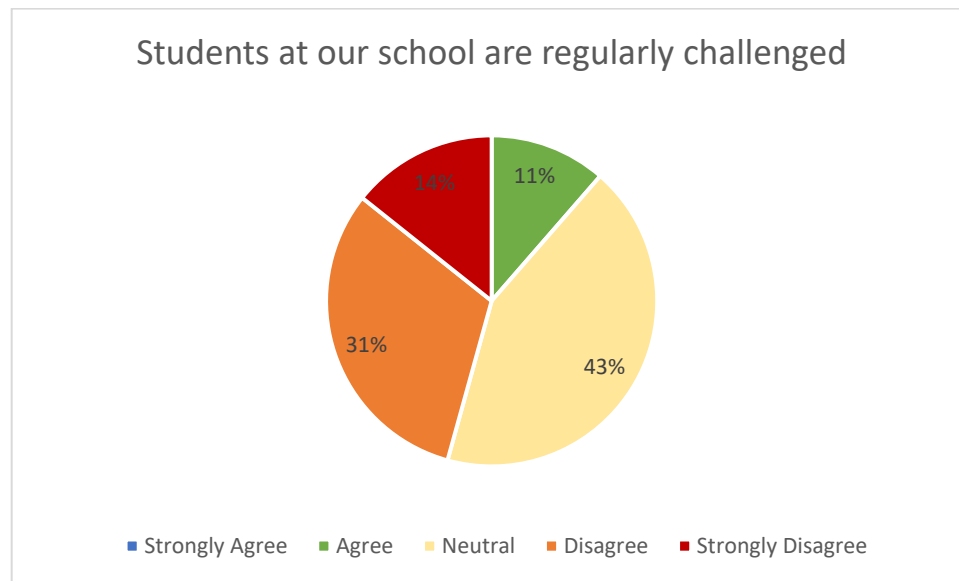Figure F. Responses regarding academics at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Figure G. Responses regarding academics at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- There is a significant need for improved supports for struggling students. This includes meeting students where they are, instilling confidence, and providing behavior interventions and extra tutoring.
- Parents want to see more project-based learning and interdisciplinary projects as well as an increased focus on critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Currently, a lack of choice in curriculum decreases enthusiasm for learning.

Community Voices

"We don't have enough staff to teach the wide range of student levels. We don't do IB with fidelity." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"Difficulty meeting the needs of those who require much more support and those who need more is a challenge." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"Our community identified IB as something that was important, but we have not had fidelity in the program. We have not been staffed for IB. We should have 2 world languages here, but 6th graders have not had that opportunity. I want to see the IB learner traits: reflective, principled, student ownership in the learning process, kids to think outside themselves, compare the challenges you see in class to the real world. That is the benefit of a true IB school." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"Project-based learning allows kids to approach a topic in ways that interests them. For example, if you're not great at writing, you can get the point across through art or other ways." – Eliot-Hine Parent

Equity:

Survey Responses (n=41)

- Overall, the majority of respondents felt negatively about equity at Eliot-Hine Middle School.
- 39.4% of respondents were neutral when asked if the school prioritized students that are the farthest from opportunity, 36.4% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 24.2% agreed (Figure H).
- 53.2% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Eliot-Hine Middle School prepares all students for success later in life (Figure I).

Our school prioritizes the students that are farthest from opportunities.

- 24% (Agree)
- 39% (Neutral)
- 21% (Disagree)
- 15% (Strongly Disagree)

Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree
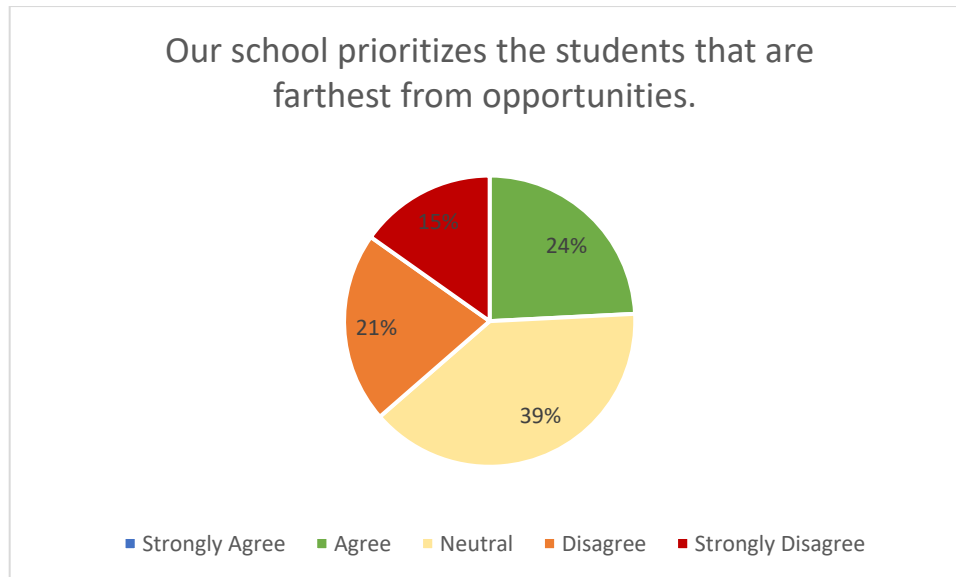
Figure H. Responses regarding equity at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

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

- 19% (Agree)
- 28% (Neutral)
- 34% (Disagree)
- 19% (Strongly Disagree)

Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree
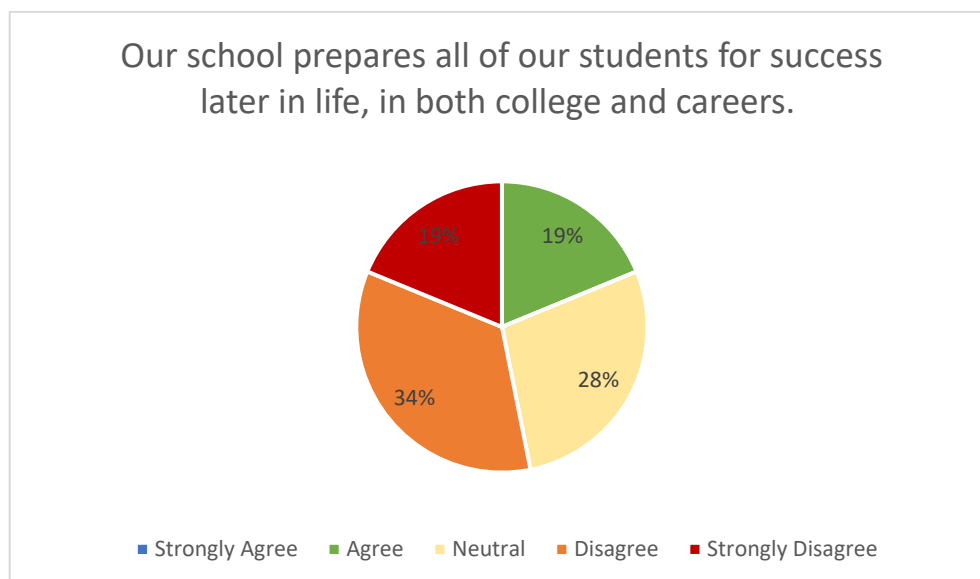
Figure I. Responses regarding equity at Eliot-Hine Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- Teacher turnover creates a lack of community which impacts equity among students, in particular students of color.

- Creating events for students throughout the year will promote unity among parents and students.

Community Voices

"We don't have a facility to bring people together… [We should have] staggered events throughout the year, maybe a valentine's day or St Patty's day something…definitely opportunity to do something afterschool or Saturday morning." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"I feel that the administration could do a better job in preparing the students for next level of learning and be more understanding in each students' learning abilities and not assume that everyone learns on the same level. I think that the mentor/tutoring programs should be that of a fun learning environment instead of restrictions on how the student should concept the material." – Eliot-Hine Parent

"Year after year we have turnover, there are no relationships built because teachers leave, and we start all over. Another issue is that we have punished and suspended our students instead of rewarded them, and I'm talking about our black and brown students. I'm not surprised why families aren't here. They have distrust with the school." – Eliot-Hine Parent

Appendix A

Eliot-Hine Middle School
Community Feedback Session Discussion Questions

Directions: The questions below are intended to start a conversation and to help us get input on the five focus areas of school transformation. There are no right or wrong answers - we want to know what you believe will move us forward as a school community!

- **Engagement:**
    - *When do you feel most welcomed or connected to the school? Is there a person who makes you feel that way? A program?*
    - *What does strong engagement between the parents and teachers look like to you?*
    - *What partnerships or programs at the school are successful?*
- **Shared Leadership:**
    - *How has your school asked for your thoughts or opinions about school decisions? What came out of that conversation? How was your input included?*
    - *When do you feel most heard? Who do you trust to listen to and act on your concerns?*
    - *How would you like to be engaged in decision-making at the school as we work together to make changes?*
- **Culture of Achievement**
    - *Describe your school in two words. What are they, and why?*
    - *When is your child most excited about or proud of the school? What makes you love a school? Why?*
    - *Are there opportunities, programs, or initiatives that are successful? What others would you like us to consider?*
    - *If you were to attend this school for a day, what would you want to experience? To see? To hear?*
- **Academics:**
    - *When is learning the most fun for your child?*
    - *What areas is your child doing well in, and what is the reason they are able to succeed in that area? This could be a particular class, a skill, a character trait, etc.*
    - *What do you like about instruction at our school? What else what would you like to see?*
    - *How important is it to you that Eliot-Hine is an International Baccalaureate school? If it is very important, why? What do you expect to see at the school?*
- **Equity**
    - *How is your child is being set up for success later in life? Why or why not?*
    - *How are your child's unique needs being met?*
    - *How do we create a true community at Eliot Hine to ensure all families and students are heard and represented? What role can you play in that process?*
- **Overall**
    - *All of these areas are important. Which do you think is the MOST important to prioritize? Which focus area do you think will allow your school to see the biggest gains?*

Appendix B

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

Appendix C

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	8%	16%	8%	28%	40%
Engagement	4%	8%	48%	20%	20%
Culture of Achievement	36%	32%	4%	16%	12%
Academics	36%	36%	12%	16%	0%
Equity	16%	8%	28%	20%	28%

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.	16.7%	44.4%	25%	8.3%	16.7%
School leaders ask my opinion about decisions made at the school.	8.3%	36.1%	27.8%	22.2%	5.6%
ENGAGEMENT: STATEMENTS					
Our school has made me feel welcome and connected to our school community.	25%	44.4%	8.3%	11.1%	11.1%
Our school engages regularly with all members of its community including staff, students, and families.	5.6%	47.2%	13.9%	27.8%	5.6%
CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT: STATEMENTS					
Students and staff have strong relationships at our school.	17.1%	45.7%	17.1%	11.4%	8.6%
Students, families, and staff take pride in our school.	8.6%	31.4%	28.6%	20%	11.4%
ACADEMICS: STATEMENTS					
Students at our school have appropriate supports for learning.	0%	25.7%	17.1%	40%	17.1%
Students at our school are regularly challenged.	0%	11.4%	42.9%	31.4%	14.3%
Students at our school are excited about learning.	0%	41.2%	29.4%	17.6%	11.8%
EQUITY: STATEMENTS					
Our school prepares all of our students for success later in life, in both college and careers.	0%	18.8%	28.1%	34.4%	18.8%
Our school prioritizes the students that are the furthest from opportunities.	0%	24.2%	39.4%	21.2%	15.2%