

Sousa 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 Sousa 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 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 Sousa 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 Sousa Middle School in a group discussion. During the community feedback session, **11 participants (one family member, five teachers, five staff)** shared their ideas and priorities for how they'd like to see the school improve. The group discussion was guided by a set of questions that was developed in partnership with DCPS, PAVE, and the school principal (Appendix A), and as well as questions centered on the types of supports Sousa Middle School would need in order to make improvements.

Survey Methodology

A total of **23 surveys** were collected from the Sousa Middle School community between January 30, 2019 and February 15, 2019. Surveys were administered at the community feedback session, as well as through other various channels, including email and school outreach. Four surveys were collected at the in-person community feedback session and nineteen 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 B.

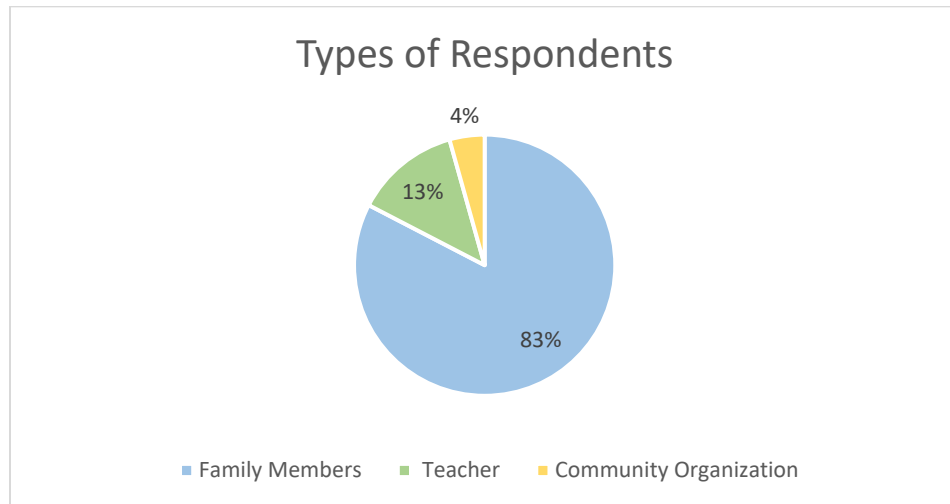


Figure A. Types of Stakeholders that took Sousa Middle School's Survey

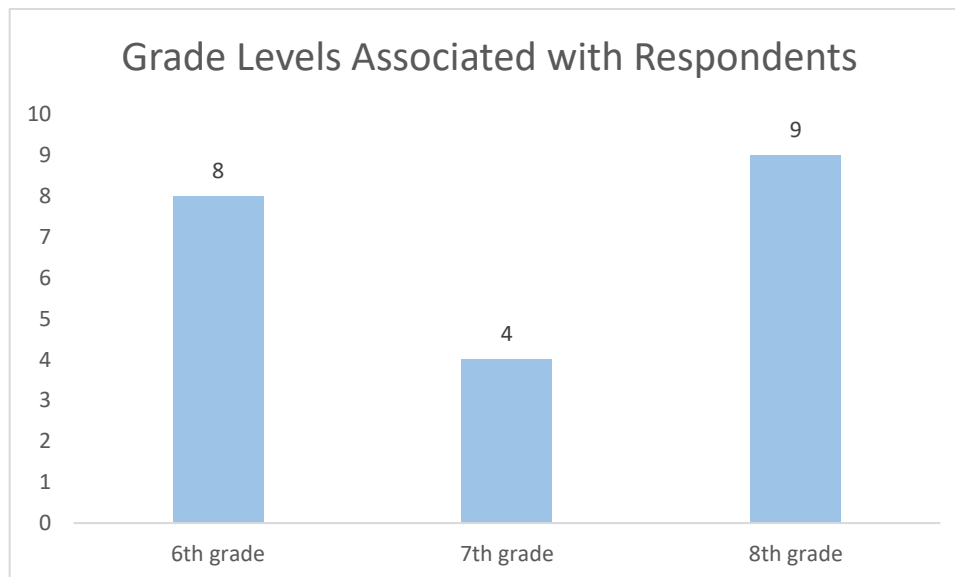


Figure B. Student Grade Levels associated with Survey Respondents

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. Due to the nature of the Sousa's community feedback session, participants did not provide feedback on shared leadership. The group discussion responses and community voices segment are omitted for shared leadership in this report.

Key Findings

At Sousa, stakeholders felt positively about the engagement and shared leadership practices used by the school. In particular, they reported feeling connected and welcomed to the school, as well as included in the decision-making process. In addition to existing practices, stakeholders would like to see an emphasis on engagement with sixth grade families to ease the transition between elementary and middle school. Some stakeholders also suggested offering supports for family and community literacy.

Academics was ranked as the top priority area for the school. Stakeholders noted that they would like to see technology integrated into classrooms and the curriculum, more differentiated supports and resources for students who are struggling academically, and a focus on high-quality teacher recruitment in order to consistently provide classrooms with co-teachers.

Consider continuing to collect community, parent, and student feedback to inform the school decision-making process and ensure that a diverse set of stakeholder voices are included.

Survey and Group Discussion Detailed Findings

Shared Leadership:

Survey Responses (n=23)

- The majority of respondents felt positively about shared leadership at Sousa Middle School.
- 81.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Sousa Middle School included the voices of students, families, and staff in their decision making. 9.1% of respondents strongly disagreed (Figure C).
- 78.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that school leaders ask their opinions about decisions made at the school. 17.4% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

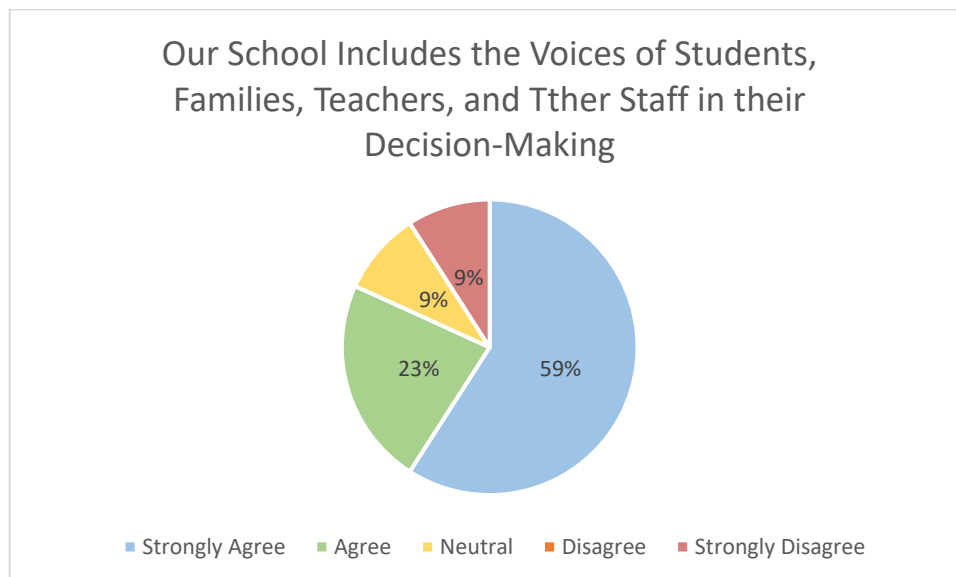


Figure C. Responses regarding shared leadership at Sousa Middle School.

Engagement:

Survey Responses (n=23)

- The responses regarding engagement at Sousa Middle School were positive.
- 91.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school made them feel welcomed and connected to the school community (Figure D).
- 77.3% of agreed or strongly agreed that Sousa Middle School engaged regularly with all members of its community, including staff, students, and families. Only 4.5% strongly disagreed.

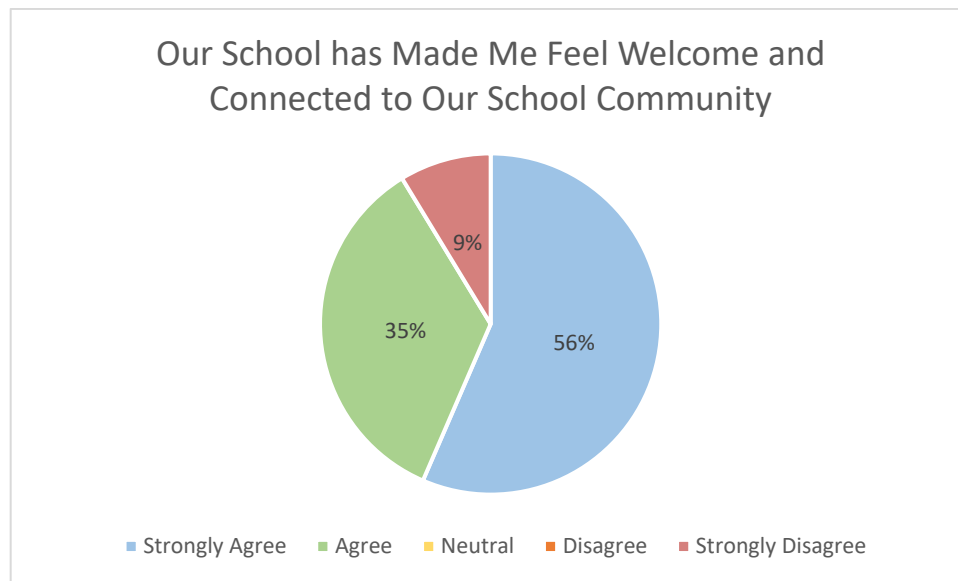


Figure D. Responses regarding engagement at Sousa Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- A parent engagement liaison or parent coordinator would increase parent engagement and help the Parent Teacher Organization have more impact.
- Establish programs to encourage adult literacy which will help parents be more involved in the school.

Community Voices

"I know libraries use a certain program for adults that are learning to read, and I think we could use it in our schools...like, a Parent Academy, to get parents more involved." -Sousa Staff Member

"We spend as much time educating a sixth grader as we do their parents about middle school [and the changes] from elementary school. [Having] a parent liaison in the building [can] help relationships with parents and the learning going." -Sousa Principal

Culture of Achievement:

Survey Responses (n=23)

- The majority of respondents felt positively about Sousa Middle School's culture of achievement.
- 82.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students and staff have strong relationships at Sousa Middle School. Only 4.3% strongly disagreed.
- In addition, 78.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students, families, and staff take pride in Sousa Middle School. Only 4.3% strongly disagreed (Figure E).

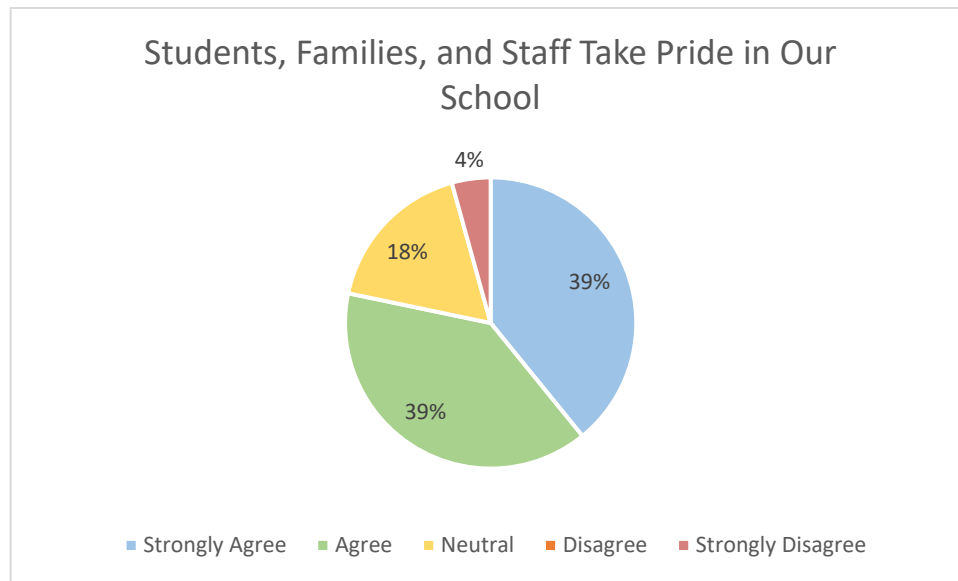


Figure E. Responses regarding culture of achievement Sousa Middle School.

Groups Discussion Responses

- Students take a lot of pride in Sousa Middle School.
- Sousa Middle School needs facilities improvements, which can impact student motivation.

Community Voices

"It's common for students to say, 'Schools in Northwest don't look like [ours].'" -Sousa Staff

"Our students have a lot of pride in our school, and it speaks to their resilience." -Sousa Principal

"We need a lot of aesthetic improvements...this all affects the culture and climate of the school and can make a student feel safe or unhappy." -Sousa Teacher

Academics:

Survey Responses (n=23)

- The majority of respondents felt positively about academics at Sousa Middle School.
- 69.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students at the school had appropriate supports for learning. 26.1% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure F).
- 77.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students at Sousa Middle School were regularly challenged. Only 4.3% of respondents strongly disagreed (Figure G).
- 69.6% agreed or strongly agreed that students at the school were excited about learning. Only 4.3% strongly disagreed; 26.1% indicated that they felt neutral.

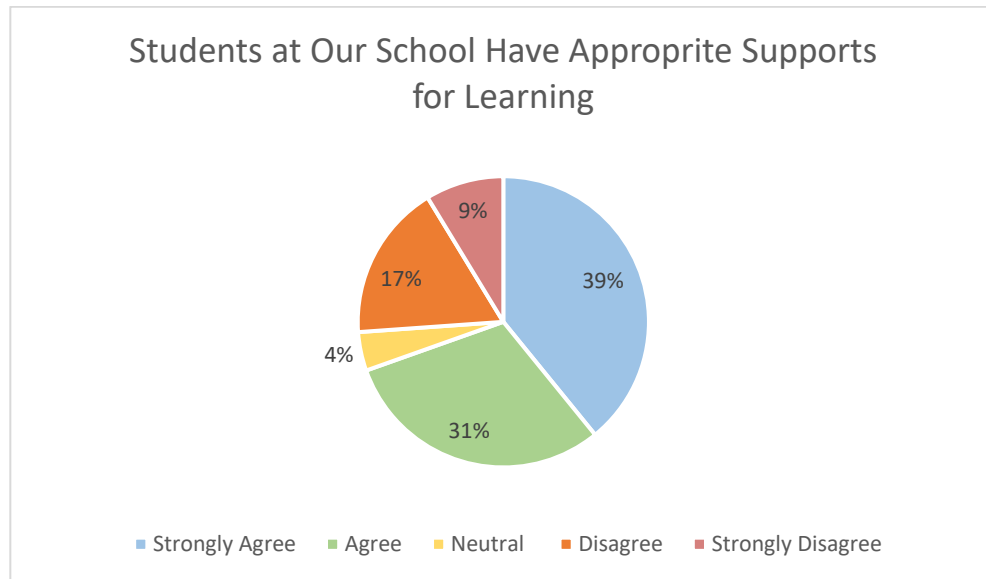


Figure F. Responses regarding academics at Sousa Middle School.

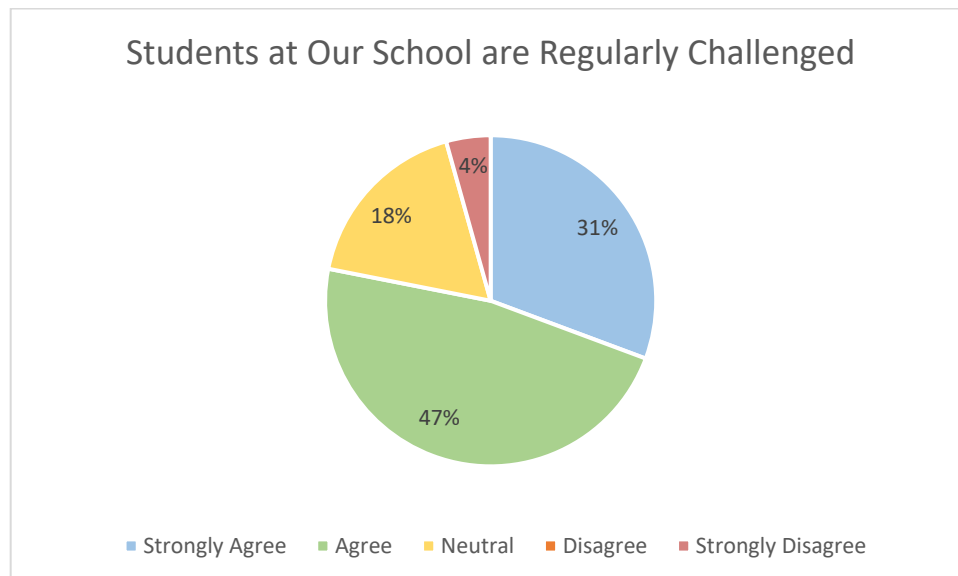


Figure G. Responses regarding academics at Sousa Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- There is a need for improved differentiation to meet students where they are.
- There is a need for remediation resource classes for students who are below grade level.
- Teachers need help setting effective and achievable goals for Special Education students.
- Students, especially in higher grades, need writing supports.
- There is a need for more access to technology in classrooms.

Community Voices

“Why not have a math resource class rather than sticking [together] five students who need math specialists to get up to grade levels and five students who are advanced.” -Sousa Teacher

“We need a highly effective writing program for our school...Right now, our 8th graders are having such a hard time writing essays. We need a thoughtful, scripted writing program for our students.” -Sousa Staff

Equity:

Survey Responses (n=23)

- Responses regarding equity at Sousa Middle School were positive.
- 70.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Sousa Middle School prepared all students for success later in life, both for college and careers. Only 8.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure H).
- 65.2% agreed or strongly agreed that the school prioritized students who were the farthest from opportunities.

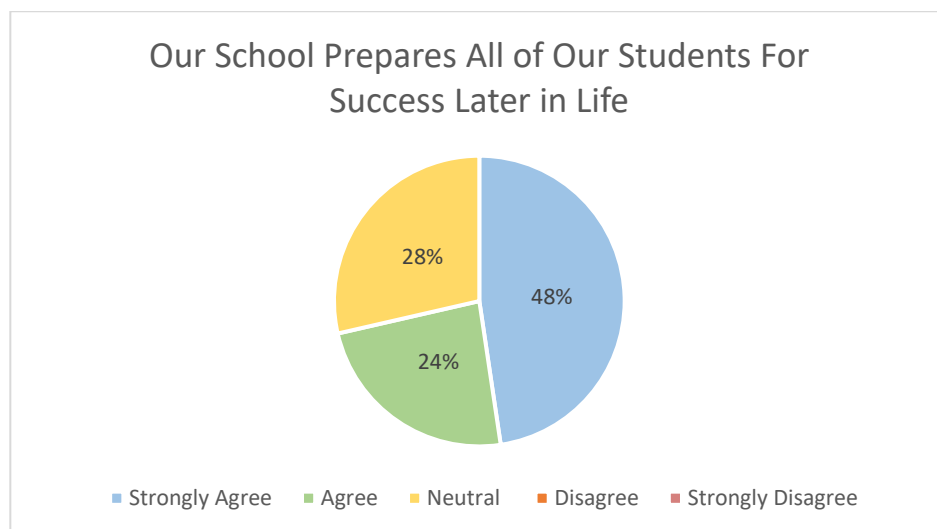


Figure H. Responses regarding equity at Sousa Middle School.

Group Discussion Responses

- The school needs more resources in order to get every child the resources they need to be successful.
- Teachers want co-teachers and more supports to successfully help students at different levels.

Community Voices

“Equity doesn’t look the same across schools. We can’t have the same goals as a school that is outperforming...If students need certain resources, it’s not fair. Don’t put [just] me in there, I can’t juggle three IEPs, and six kids that are over-performing, and six kids that need special supports.” -Sousa Teacher

Appendix A

Sousa 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!

- **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?
- **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? (List of examples)
 - If you were to attend this school for a day, what would you want to experience? To see? To hear?
- **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?
 - What improvements in school culture would you like to see?
 - Are there opportunities, programs, or initiatives that are successful? What others would you like us to consider?
- **Academics:**
 - What does a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) Middle School mean to you? What makes it different from a traditional Middle School model?
 - What are the benefits of having art integrated into classroom instruction? Are there any downsides that should be considered?
 - What do you like about instruction at our school? What else what would you like to see? Is the small group format working for your student?
 - 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.
- **Equity**
 - How is your child being set up for success later in life? Why or why not?
 - How are your child's unique needs being met?
- **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 other family member ☐ Administrator or other school staff member ☐ Community Organization
☐ Student ☐ Teacher ☐ Community Member

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	12.5%	12.5%	25%	12.5%	37.5%
Engagement	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	0%	12.5%
Culture of Achievement	0%	37.5%	25%	37.5%	0%
Academics	62.5%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
Equity	12.5%	12.5%	0%	37.5%	37.5%

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.	59.1%	22.7%	9.1%	0%	9.1%
School leaders ask my opinion about decisions made at the school.	47.3%	30.4%	4.3%	8.7%	8.7%
ENGAGEMENT: STATEMENTS					
Our school has made me feel welcome and connected to our school community.	56.5%	34.8%	0%	0%	8.7%
Our school engages regularly with all members of its community including staff, students, and families.	50%	27.3%	18.2%	0%	4.5%
CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT: STATEMENTS					
Students and staff have strong relationships at our school.	47.8%	34.8%	13%	0%	4.3%
Students, families, and staff take pride in our school.	39.1%	39.1%	17.4%	0%	4.3%
ACADEMICS: STATEMENTS					
Students at our school have appropriate supports for learning.	39.1%	30.4%	4.3%	17.4%	8.7%
Students at our school are regularly challenged.	30.4%	47.3%	17.4%	0%	4.3%
Students at our school are excited about learning.	26.1%	43.5%	26.1%	0%	4.3%
EQUITY: STATEMENTS					
Our school prepares all of our students for success later in life, in both college and careers.	43.5%	21.7%	26.1%	4.3%	4.3%
Our school prioritizes the students that are the furthest from opportunities.	43.5%	21.7%	26.1%	4.3%	4.3%

