



THE PHILADELPHIA BOARD OF EDUCATION LISTENING TOUR



A REPORT TO THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF EDUCATION

June 15, 2018

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>A REPORT TO THE MAYOR’S OFFICE OF EDUCATION</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>THE BASICS OF THE LISTENING TOUR</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>THE DESIGN OF EACH FORUM</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>KEY THEMES, IN BRIEF</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>KEY THEMES, IN DEPTH</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>OTHER INSIGHTS, IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>BACKGROUND ON THE PENN PROJECT FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>REPORTS ON BREAKOUT GROUPS</u>	<u>26</u>



THE BASICS OF THE LISTENING TOUR

The School Board Listening Tour was organized by the Mayor’s Office of Education, with assistance from the staff of the School Reform Commission.

The Mayor’s Office of Education worked closely with SRC staff and the Free Library of Philadelphia to coordinate sites and dates with the availability of school board appointees.

The goal was to spread the five events as broadly across the city as possible. The need to finish the tour - and the report on the tour - before the appointees take office in July narrowed the site options somewhat.

Events were held in North, South, West, Northwest and Northeast Philadelphia in April and May of 2018.

All five forums used the same format, which was designed by the Penn Project for Civic Engagement, working as a consultant to the MOE. Breakout groups at each forum were led by moderators trained by PPCE, assisted by staffers from the District’s Family and Community Engagement Office (FACE).

At least four and sometimes five of the appointees to the new school board attended each session.

April 25, 2018 - Dobbins CTE High School, North Philadelphia



Number of residents participating: 88

School board appointees attending: Joyce Wilkerson, Maria McColgan, Wayne Walker, Angela McIver

May 5, 2018 – South Philadelphia Library



Number of residents participating: 63

School board appointees attending: Mallory Fix Lopez, Chris McGinley, Leticia Egea-Hinton, Maria McColgan

May 10, 2018 – Blackwell Regional Library, West Philadelphia



Number of residents participating: 85

School board appointees attending: Lee Huang, Angela McIver, Leticia Egea-Hinton, Julia Danzy

May 18, 2018 – Coleman Regional Library, Germantown



Number of residents participating: 87

School board appointees attending: Lee Huang, Joyce Wilkerson, Mallory Fix Lopez, Julia Danzy, Wayne Walker

May 25 – Lawncrest Library



Number of residents participating: 101

School board appointees attending: Chris MCGINLEY, LETICIA Egea-Hinton, Maria McColgan, Mallory Fix Lopez

THE DESIGN OF EACH FORUM

Each forum began with Otis Hackney, the city's chief education officer, welcoming residents, explaining the purpose of the session and laying out the basics of the School District's shift to an appointed school board.

Then Chris Satullo and Harris Sokoloff of PPCE explained the flow of the evening and the ground rules for dialogue. Those ground rules were:



- Listen, it's as important as talking
- Make room for other voices. Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Ask each other questions, to understand, not rebut.
- If disagreement arises, don't try to win or resolve it. Explore it.
- Build on what others say.

Then, attendees were divided into whatever number of breakout groups matched the number of school board appointees in attendance. (At the first forum, at Dobbins, a situation arose where we originally had one more breakout group than the number of board appointees present. Residents in that group were quickly redistributed to the groups with appointees.)

The school board appointees usually stuck with one breakout group, mostly listening and taking notes, but occasionally contributing questions or observations. Each then spoke to a plenary session of participants at the end of the forum, highlighting key themes and insights from the night that they would take with them into their service.

Depending on its size, each breakout group was led by either one or two moderators from PPCE's cohort, receiving valuable aid at each event from staffers in the district's FACE offices.



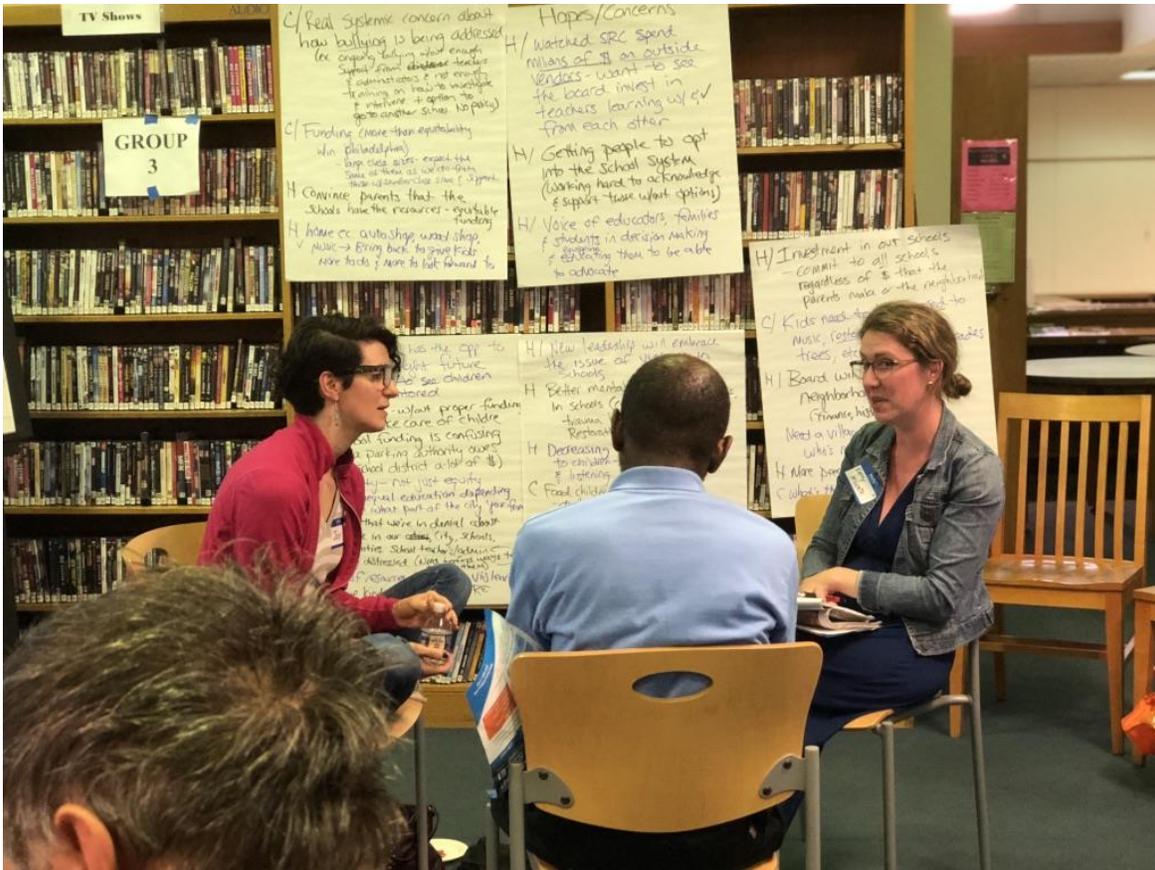
Each moderating team has produced a written report on the yield from their breakout group. All those reports are included as appendices to this main report. Also provided are transcripts of the brief messages to the new school board that attendees were invited to post via sticky notes on message boards stationed around the meeting rooms. At some forums, residents also had a chance to give short video testimonies. These will be shared with the Board of Education members.

In the breakout groups, each participant was asked first to give name, neighborhood and connection(s) to the school district (i.e. parent, student, teacher, volunteer, taxpayer). They were invited to cite one hope or concern for the school system that had led them to attend the night's session.

Once those hopes and concerns were all up on wall, they were grouped into clusters. Then the participants were invited to work in groups of 4-7 people to talk through a particular cluster of concerns, with a focus on specific steps they'd like to see the new school board take around those concerns. (Some moderators and groups adjusted this core process on the fly to suit the particular wishes of the group.)

The full breakout group then worked to create a brief list of the top insights, concerns and suggestions emerging from their discussion, to be shared with everyone in attendance at the concluding plenary.





KEY THEMES, IN BRIEF

Each forum had its own distinctive energy, with topics emerging that related to the particular concerns of the community in which the forum was being held.

That said, certain themes and issues emerged consistently and insistently across all five events.

Here is a rundown of 11 themes that emerged as the most prominent during the content analysis that the PPCE moderating team did on the yield from the five forums:

Transparency (i.e. district-to-public engagement)

Most participants want to see the new school board make a clean break with what they perceive as the School Reform Commission's defensive, opaque way of conducting its business and relating to the public. They want to see new, clear rules on ethics and conflicts of interest, more explanation of decisions, different meeting formats, and strong efforts to hold school board meetings at times and places where more parents and taxpayers can attend.

Accountability

Clearly, this theme is interwoven with Transparency. In frequently citing this term, participants said they want the board to be true to its word. They want the board to be clear about what decisions were made, when they were really made, who made them, how public input was used, who is responsible for executing the decisions and how success will be measured and evaluated.

Community Engagement (i.e. schools to public)

Participants wanted schools to be decidedly more welcoming and respectful to parents - while they also acknowledged that some parents do act disrespectfully to school personnel.

Paired with this theme is the notion that many more community members would volunteer in the schools or be otherwise supportive of teachers, but lack of information, unclear procedures and, sometimes, outright hostility get in the way.



Funding and equity

Just about everyone who attended could cite in vivid detail ways in which resources for city schools are inadequate and lag behind those in suburban schools. Equally infuriating to some were what they perceived as inequitable distribution of resources among district schools.

At the same time, people admitted they have a hard time figuring out how district and school budgets come together, where funding comes from, and whose job it is to find more resources for schools.

Charters

Few topics spurred more difference of opinion. Many voices slammed charters as emblematic of a “corporatization and privatization” of public schools that they find disturbing. Other voices praised what charters have done for their own children and to their sense of having choices as parents. One rare point of consensus is that the system for funding charters is problematic and utterly confusing.

Facilities

A consensus ran across all five forums that crumbling and unhealthy school buildings are unacceptable, demoralizing to students and staff, and pose urgent health and learning risks. Past controversies over school closings and building projects left a bitter aftertaste with some participants. These residents said they simply don’t understand how decisions to close, build or renovate are made from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Climate and culture



Many participants expressed a keen desire for district schools to feel more vibrant, creative and collaborative (as well as safe) – even though individuals varied describing the details of how that ideal climate would look and feel. They saw the new school board as an opportunity to create, through words and deeds, fresh momentum towards that goal.

Many cited school principals as vital in this effort – and wanted school climate to be an explicit goal on which principals are evaluated.

Educational quality and programs

The hope underlying all these conversations was for a city where all neighborhoods have quality schools, where ZIP codes no longer determine educational opportunity, where all students - including those with special needs or challenging backgrounds - graduate prepared for success, whether it be at a trade, the military, a community college or a four-year-college.

Linked to all this was a powerful sense that the outstanding teachers who do work in the district need to be recognized, empowered and supported. People worry that losing great teachers to frustration, bitterness or burnout is far too common.

Behavioral health, discipline and bullying

These topics arose powerfully in some breakout groups, not at all in others. Where they did, many voices called for the district to spread and apply the principles of “trauma-informed care” and “restorative justice” in lieu of a focus on zero-tolerance discipline. Instances were cited where current policies on truancy actually compounded the trauma for victims of bullying.

Special education

Some of the most powerful testimony at the forums came from parents who recounted their struggles in finding appropriate services for special-needs children. Sometimes the problem was lack of resources or official empathy. But often the problem wasn’t that no services were available, but that that parents or guardians lacked the right map to navigate a maze of rules and terminology.

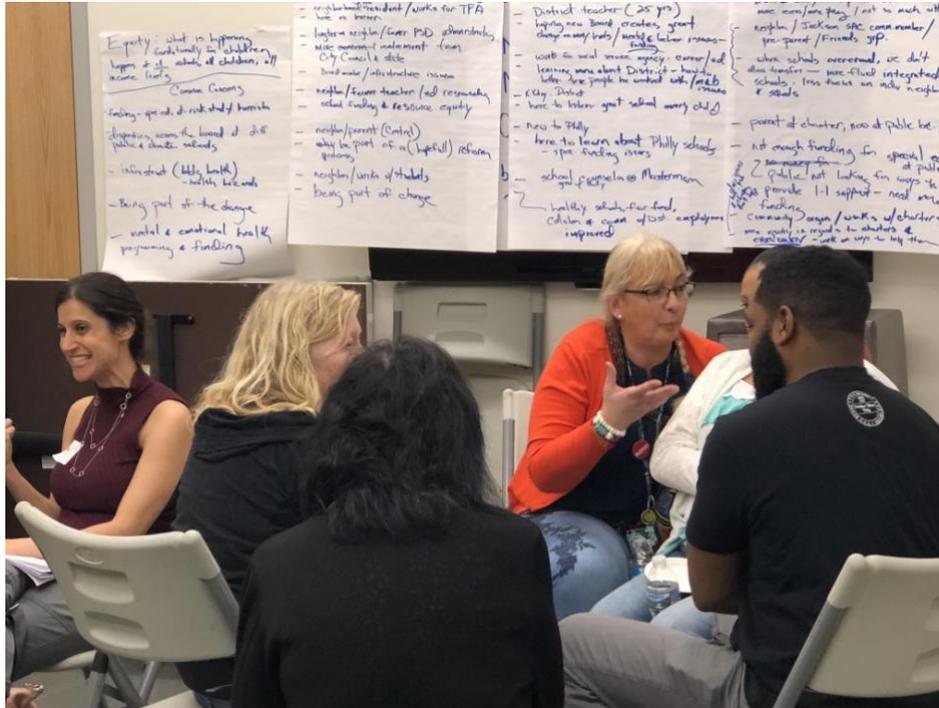
Immigrant communities

The anger and anguish of Mayfair School parents of Chinese descent about the transfer of their young children to another school spilled out powerfully at the Lawncrest forum. Their situation seemed emblematic of challenges faced by immigrant families that were cited at several forums.

These include lapses in cultural competence, outreach, and clear, timely communication on the part of the district.



KEY THEMES, IN DEPTH



As noted above, we have distilled the diverse, impassioned, sometimes pained, sometimes witty, sometimes raucous comments of forum participants into 11 key themes that cut across all five events and 21 breakout groups.

Project staff conducted a content coding analysis of the reports on the breakout groups reports to identify common themes. The report authors also read through all the reports several times to identify ideas, issues and phrases that appeared with greatest frequency and passion, and grouped them into possible themes. After that analysis was distilled into these themes, we shared the list with all the moderators who worked on the project – and worked their input into the report.

Inevitably, this mode of organizing the input involves some overlap and interplay of the material listed under different themes - just as these issues are interwoven in the minds of community members, as well as in the daily life of the school district.

The order in which these themes are presented roughly tracks the frequency and intensity with which they emerged and were discussed during the breakout sessions:

Transparency (i.e. district-to-public engagement)

Over and over, participants indicated that, to them, the School Reform Commission came over time to seem uninterested in hearing from or responding to the public in any meaningful way. Additionally, participants mostly agreed that the process for setting the overall school budget and individual school budgets was maddeningly opaque. This fueled a companion, widely held perception that the SRC's "secret agenda" has been to "privatize and corporatize" the schools, with a goal of letting well-connected vendors make profits while children and teachers go wanting.

Even participants who did not share all those suspicions expressed a profound yearning that the advent of the new school board might open a new era of transparency, clearer policy and high ethical standards.

Getting down to details of what that might mean, most participants favored taking school board meetings "on the road" to different schools, at times when working parents can attend. They favor a new meeting format that allows for meaningful exchanges between public and board, as opposed to the oppositional theater into which many said SRC meetings had deteriorated. Many said they wanted the "listening session" model to continue.

People cited a crying need for a primer on school funding and budgets to address great public confusion. Special education was another area where some said a better flow of information is urgently needed.

Accountability

While "accountability" was often the second part of a call for "transparency and accountability," many participants distinguished between the two.



"Transparency" generally referred to better board meetings and to making vital information about policy and programs available in easy-to-understand formats. "Accountability," a word often appearing on breakout groups' lists of key takeaways from their discussions, referred to how the district, at every level, follows up on what it hears from the public and on what it promises the public it will do.

For example, transparency might mean a board meeting format where resolutions are made available in advance, public input is built in meaningfully, board discussions are public etc. Accountability would begin with board members not being defensive or hostile at the meeting. Then, it would involve the district reporting back in timely ways on: a) how public questions raised at meetings have been researched and acted upon b) on how decisions made at meetings have been executed and c)

on what is being done about initiatives or programs that are falling short. In sum, how will the board show the public that its word is its bond?

A pertinent example: Transparency for the Listening Tour would entail publishing all the yield and findings. Accountability would involve the board deciding appropriate next steps for following up on the input, making those next steps public, and giving the public periodic reports on progress.

Community Engagement (i.e. schools to public)

The desire for schools to be more welcoming to community involvement -- and for communities to be more energetic and committed about finding ways to help overwhelmed teachers and principals -- was universal among groups.

What varied was the judgment of how much blame schools should bear for coming across as hostile to parents or community members. While participants universally recommended boosting parental involvement, that goal was sometimes paired with recognition of factors that can make it challenging to achieve e.g. neighborhood incarceration rates or parents' attitudes stemming from their own difficult school experiences.

No more signs in schools saying, 'Parents can't pass this point. It's our right to be there. We understand there have to be rules, but not as 'Don't do this,' but as 'Here's how to do this.'

Most groups stressed that engagement must extend beyond parents of current students to the whole community. A strong sense emerged that potential partnerships, volunteer cohorts and resources were being left on the table because of lack of outreach or public confusion as to how to offer help to the schools.

A key subtheme in this topic is the vital importance of bringing more African-American role models, particularly males, into schools with predominantly A-A student bodies. Related to this also was a repeated wish that more be done to support and reward the male A-A teachers whom the district does employ. (Other minority groups e.g., Chinese-Americans, expressed a similar desire for more representative role models for their children.)

At Dobbins in particular, participants stressed the need for more effective partnerships to connect CTE students to mentors, internships and job opportunities.



Funding and equity

Participants were united in their perception that city schools are grievously underfunded – and in their righteous anger about that fact.

This quote from one person speaks for hundreds who attended:

“Literally and metaphorically, we’ve become accustomed to placing a bucket to catch leaks. Just because you’ve become used to inadequacy doesn’t make it OK.”

That said, many participants admitted (or, at least, demonstrated) a shaky grasp of how city schools are funded e.g. not knowing that the city funds a portion of the school budget or that City Council sets the relevant tax rates.

Charter funding baffles even attentive citizens. PILOTs were a particular point of attention, but few people were aware of how state and case law limits the district’s options there.

Some participants confessed that, given how baffling find the school funding system and how hard it is tell whether the new school board changes the equation, they don’t quite know where to address their anger about inadequate resources. They are looking for leadership and guidance from the new board on this point. As one participant put it,

“We’d like the board to realize that they’re the last line of defense to protect the interests and integrity of the children.”

A point of general agreement about finances, related to the Transparency theme above, was that the board should take a fresh, hard look at past practices related to outside vendors and should approve strong, clear conflict of interest rules.



Turning to lack of equity, most forum attendees saw this situation operating on two dimensions. One is what one person termed the “ridiculous comparison” between resources for city and suburban schools. The persistence of this inequity fosters outrage in some, cynicism in others. People admitted, with frustration, that they had few practical ideas – short of revolution in Harrisburg - on how to fix this.

Of equal concern to almost all participants was the

perception that the district’s limited resources get distributed very unequally across neighborhoods, schools and types of schools (i.e. charters vs. traditional neighborhood vs. magnets). Even worse, to citizens, this seems to occur through a veiled process with no public input.

More than one participant noted that the rise of “Friends of ...” organizations that raise money for individual schools, while laudable in many ways, tends to make worse the existing inequities between middle-class and impoverished neighborhoods.

Charters

This topic earns its own heading as probably the most divisive issue among participants. Some lauded lauding charters and the idea of “choice” as a boon to their children. Meanwhile, a majority of voices claimed instead that charters exemplify the ills they associate with the SRC era: privatization and corporatization, lack of transparency, conflicts of interest, lack of understanding of education as a public good, etc.

It’s worth noting, while trying to avoid any judgment or opinion, that a number of those who criticized charters rejected any observation that they are in fact “public” schools. Some charter critics were reluctant to acknowledge that many charter operators are nonprofits, rather than for-profit corporations.

My child went to [a charter school] for a while, but the overall corporate feel left a sour taste in my mouth.

Not every child is the same. If charters give my child the choice he needs, then I want charters

On the other side, parents happy with a charter their child attended tended to be less aware of the fiscal, legal and academic problems some city charters have experienced.

Charter foes and advocates did find one point of agreement: The system for funding charters is baffling and just adds fuel to the controversy.

For the new board, this all suggests that, whatever charter policy ends up being pursued, it needs to be explained clearly, carefully and repeatedly – because it will immediately bump up against deeply held, emotion-laden viewpoints on both sides of the debate.

Facilities

Most participants did not need the newspaper series that was published in the middle of the Listening Tour to be aware that many city schools pose environmental health hazards to children and staff.

References to first-hand experience with mold, lead and asbestos in school buildings were frequent.

Beyond that, the point was made repeatedly that substandard buildings are demoralizing to staff (who now sometimes are forced to buy cleaning as well as educational supplies). People also noted that these hazards can affect children's neural networks and ability to learn.

Finally, they said schools' often sad state of repair sends a message to children, particularly children of color, that neither they nor their educational opportunity are valued by society,

Also, many participants expressed frustration and a lack of understanding about how past facilities decisions have been made – why one area got a new school built, another got its school remodeled, and a third saw its neighborhood school closed.



Many place a high, visceral value on the ideal of the “neighborhood school” and the wounds from school closings earlier this decade remain fresh. A feeling that neighborhood views about proposed closings were neither solicited nor valued worsens the memory. Resentment also lingers about some situations where school buildings were closed and sold for private development e.g. Bok.

Hopes were high among participants that the new school board could foster a more transparent, community-oriented and productive conversation about what to do about schools that are crumbling, outdated, unsafe or even toxic.

Climate and culture

Participants spoke frequently of “culture and climate” at the district and individual school level. At the district level, participants expect the incoming school board to address those goals by establishing and communicating a vision for improved school climate around the District.

They believe the board has the opportunity to set the tone for the district and the city, a tone that welcomes continuous community collaboration.

Many believe that the Board’s vision for where it wants to go should be informed by residents, and that this vision – which they saw as something distinct from any given superintendent’s strategic plan – is a chance to help the city heal from past traumas.

They said this vision then must filter down to climate and culture at the school level – creating an environment in each school that is conducive to learning. Participants asked ...

How do we get ‘vibrant’ schools – not just adequate schools – for all children?

Some wanted to make vibrancy of the school community an explicit goal that building principals know they will be evaluated on. People talked about a culture and climate in schools where teachers and students alike can thrive, “follow their passion,” and be creative partners in teaching/learning.

Many participants noted that restorative justice strategies can contribute to this kind of overall school culture. And they noted that students can play important roles in improving the climate in their schools.

Educational quality and programs

The hope underlying all these conversations was for a city where all neighborhoods had quality schools, where ZIP codes would no longer determine educational opportunity, where all students graduate prepared for success, whether it be at a trade, the military, a community college or a four-year-college.

At the same time, participants recognize that resources for students are lacking and needs are great – for children with special needs, for English language learners, immigrants and other newcomers, for returning students.

That is why so many are so focused on teacher quality as the key ingredient to success even (or particularly) when other resources may be lacking. Some participants fretted about the loss of “amazing teachers” and conditions (e.g., inadequate support and lack of resources) that contribute to low teacher morale, burnout and turnover.

440 is thought of as the enemy. They don’t understand what goes on in classrooms.

Many agreed on this: The district and community should cooperate to provide the supports (from aides to volunteers to guidance counselors to social services supports) that help great teachers focus on what they do best, without having to solve a host of societal ills every day



People also talked supportively about programs that they perceive have been regarded as optional and available to the budget knife (e.g., arts, music, CTE, athletics etc.). These were described as vital both to keeping some students in school and educating the whole person, not just the taker of tests.

And participants pointed to the challenges involved in aligning actual programs and policies within individual schools with stated district policies, as well as the challenges of adapting teaching models to meet the needs of the diverse populations flowing into neighborhood schools.

Behavioral health, discipline and bullying

Many participants understood that their hope for a “vibrant school climate” faces a key obstacle in this set of problems. When classes are disrupted by students who are bringing behavioral health or family problems into the classroom, learning is compromised. Even worse, when students and even teachers are fearful about what might happen in class on any given day, learning ceases.

That said, some voices also felt that “zero tolerance” discipline policies fell short and sometimes prove counterproductive, particularly when resources for alternative programs or direct services for children with disciplinary issues are limited.

Bullying struck some participants as a fit area for a new focus on community engagement, on bringing outside resources into schools to train and/or assist school staff.

At Lawncrest in particular, a strong call emerged for the district to train around and apply the developing practice of “trauma-informed care” to understand how really to help students having or causing trouble in school.

There needs to be more support for student mental health, including trauma-informed teachers, more partnerships with city mental health resources, more emotional support staff and strategies.

Some parents also noted pointedly that district policies against bullying and truancy are not aligned. In other words, sometimes it’s a bullied child who is missing school out of justified fear and anxiety. Yet, in some cases, some voices contended, schools miss that point and end up punishing a victim.

Some recommended that the schools borrow from the “restorative justice” techniques being developed around adult crime, to enlist students in helping improve their own school climate while giving them skills that will be useful in adult life.

Special education

Several concerns intermingled here. In many groups, special education got cited as a particular area where resources fall short of the need. Some parents questioned whether the practice of including children receiving special services in regular classrooms was being executed in a way that was fair both to those children and the others in a class. A few voices noted that gifted children are also entitled under law to individualized education plans and special services. They questioned whether that ever happens outside of magnet schools.

Most of the discussion that occurred in breakout groups, however, involved parents of special needs children huddling together to trade tips on how to navigate the maze of rules and procedures that must be mastered to get and sustain services for a special-needs child. A striking number of participants said they were the parent or guardian of a child who is on the autism spectrum. Some parents of older children reassured parents newer to the challenge that good school settings and services can be found in the district, but that it takes tireless research and relentless advocacy to obtain them.

Immigrant communities

Philadelphia is a complex, ever-changing mosaic. Nowhere is that diversity more vivid than in the city's public schools. The mosaic's potential benefits were embodied by the immigrant parents who attended the forums to convey their passionate dedication to education, neighborhood and the futures of their children.

The conversation about serving immigrant communities was most intense in two of the forum sites – Blackwell in West Philadelphia and Lawncrest in the Northeast. The dialogue at Blackwell was mostly about the West African immigrant community. In Lawncrest, a just-dawning controversy at Mayfair School generated a huge turnout by Chinese-American parents and grandparents.

Different communities, different neighborhood contexts – but a few themes held true in both places. The classroom challenges faced by schools with a large and varied contingent of ESL learners are well-known. At the forums, the district seemed to get a pretty good grade on how it handles those.

Three other points were stressed: 1) Being attentive in hiring and staffing decisions to providing immigrant children with adult role models with whom they can identify. 2) Making sure schools try to know and teach about the history and culture of the community's country or region of origin. 3) Increasing the cultural competence of staff so that can effectively listen to, understand and communicate with families from different cultures.

The downsides of failing to do these things were apparent in the shock, pain and anger of the Chinese-American parents who packed the meetings rooms at Lawncrest. They came to protest what they regarded as a belated, ill-conceived, poorly explained decision to switch their elementary-grade children to another school to allow for renovations at Mayfair School.



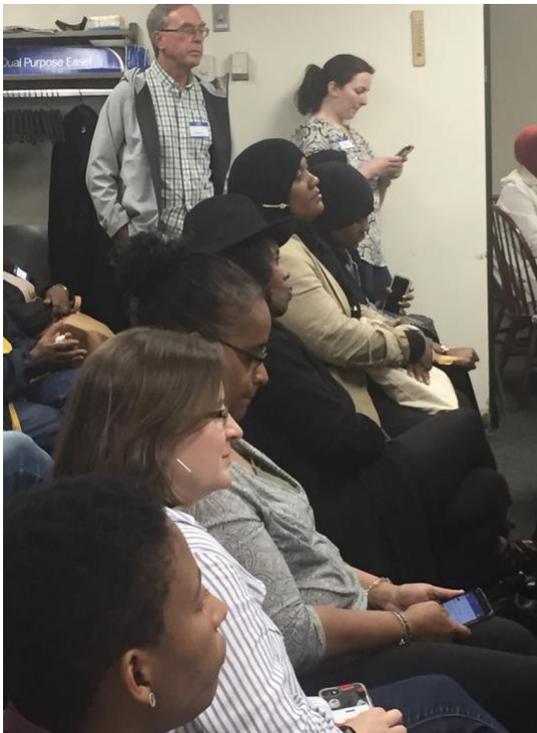
Here's one example (among several that emerged) of how cultural competence could improve the way decisions are made and communicated: A key point for the unhappy families at Lawncrest is that the school to which the children are being switched is more than a mile away. Many of the Chinese-American households affected are multigenerational, with grandparents living in the home who do not know how to drive, but who are relied upon by working parents to pick up the children at the end of the school day. These families felt strongly that the transfer decision was made without any grasp of this factor, which upset them hugely.

Other insights, ideas and suggestions

Gather more than 400 impassioned parents, students, educators, advocates and taxpayers for more than 10 hours of dialogue about public education in the city where they live, raise children and make a living – and you’ll hear more interesting comments than can be packed into any short summary.

To get the full flavor of the forums, and how they varied from site to site based on events and concerns rooted in the particularities of Philadelphia neighborhoods, we recommend scanning all 21 moderators’ reports, one on each breakout group.

But let’s highlight here some other moments and insights from the forums that didn’t rise to the level of grand theme, but still should be noted as intriguing.



The “Undercover Boss” approach - A breakout group at Dobbins High dug into a veteran teacher’s observation that planned visits by district officials rarely capture the stressful day-to-day realities faced by teachers and other staff in a building. This group ended up recommending that school board members borrow a page from a popular reality TV program and show up unannounced and unheralded at school buildings to get a feel for what really is going down at, say, 10:17 a.m. on an average day.

It’s about education, so let’s have a primer – A group at Blackwell Library was struggling with what to do about inequitable funding, both at the system and school-to-school level. The residents concluded none of those present really knew enough about how school budgets come together, either on the revenue or spending sides, to make smart recommendations. That led them to this higher-level suggestion: The new school board should create a simple, clear, (perhaps) multimedia primer for the

public on what goes into making a school budget e.g. how much from the state vs. the city, what taxes or involved, what is or is not allowed in creating a balanced school budget.

Remember the first ground rule: Listen - A moderator who led several breakout sessions noted the frequency with which parents said they felt neither invited nor respected nor heard when dealing with school staffs. On top of that, she cited a couple of occasions where district personnel taking part in forums behaved in a very defensive manner. This led her to suggest that in-service training in listening and civil dialogue might be useful.

Useful in Seattle? - As noted in the top themes, a frequent concern cited was unequal resources from school to school. Several people noted that “Friends of ...” organizations that are good at raising funds for a given school, while well-meaning, tend to exacerbate inequities rooted in the uneven distribution of wealth

among city neighborhoods. One person suggested the school board take a look at a Seattle program that pools all the money raised through such parental/community efforts, then redistributes it citywide according to need.

Bars to engagement - One insight offered at Blackwell Regional was that school leaders need to be aware of the impact of incarceration rates in a neighborhood. When a comparatively high percentage of adult males in a catchment are imprisoned, it will affect parent participation and volunteering rates. In those cases, a strategy for connecting with nonprofits that recruit community members to do mentoring and other forms service might be wise.

Feed body and mind - In more than one breakout group, at least one participant was adamant that nutrition is an underappreciated part of educational success – both the nutritional quality of the food served to children and the information they receive about good nutrition.



Create reasons to stay – Many were insistent that “soft,” “not-tested” subjects such as arts, music, theater, auto shop, along with extracurriculars, are what keep some students coming to school. So, they argued, it’s foolish to cut them out to focus resources solely on tested subjects. In the same vein, many argued for boosting externships and work study opportunities for high schoolers.

Sample the city – Linked to the idea above, people observed that many students rarely venture out of the neighborhoods where they live. So, if the schools are preparing students for work and life in their big, diverse, lively city, why not do more to get them out to different work and cultural venues around Philadelphia?

Sample the city – Linked to the idea above, people observed that many

311 for schools - Given all the problems with crumbling and unhealthy schools, citizens suggested creating a 311 system for the schools similar to the city government’s citizen complaint line.

Weave a new narrative – Plenty of great things happen in city schools, some insisted. More than a few teachers and students show pluck, smarts, persistence and creativity. The district cannot count on the city’s shrinking legacy media to tell those stories; and it’s not the media’s job to meld such stories into a persuasive narrative of progress. The school district should do this work itself, some participants suggested.

OpenSchoolData.edu - People yearned for the district to put all school data on scores, climate and finances together on one platform, with user-friendly directions on how to find and use the information. Then use the district’s varied communication channels to remind parents over and over that it’s there.

THE PENN PROJECT FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Mayor's Office on Education decided that it would be wise to seek outside assistance in planning, conducting and distilling the yield from such an ambitious "listening tour" on such a tight timetable.

It brought in the nonprofit Penn Project for Civic Engagement as a consultant to help plan, design and facilitate the sequence of five forums.

The Penn Project for Civic Engagement was founded in 2006 as a program of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. It is dedicated to helping the regional Philadelphia community hold productive dialogues on difficult issues, in a way that builds community connection, civic trust, useful guidance to leaders, and productive solutions.

It was founded and is still co-directed by Dr. Harris Sokoloff of Penn GSE and journalist Chris Satullo, now a consultant to the Committee of Seventy.

Among the Philadelphia civic projects for which PPCE has served as civic engagement lead are: the Civic Vision for the Delaware Riverfront that led to successes such as Race Street Pier and Spruce Harbor Park; the Inquirer's Great Expectations project on the 2007 city elections; the work of the city Zoning Reform Commission; the redesign of Commonwealth Plaza inside the Kimmel Center; the search process that led to the hiring of current schools Superintendent William Hite; and the 2009 city budget workshops that helped the Nutter Administration navigate the effects of the global economic crisis.



Over its 11 years, PPCE has built a diverse team of experienced moderators, many of whom agreed to serve during the Listening Tour.

The moderating team was: *Brian Armstead, Ted Enoch, Ellen Greenberg, Cassandra Georges, Lauren Hirshon, Germaine Ingram, Serrano LeGrand, Lisa Santer, Chris Satullo, Harris Sokoloff, Roz Spigel and Josh Warner.*

Linda Breitstein served as PPCE's project manager for the Listening Tour, working with the MOE and the host sites on outreach, logistics, registration and event-night services.

REPORTS ON BREAKOUT GROUPS

- DOBBINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL - APRIL 25, 2018
- SOUTH PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY - MAY 5, 2018
- COLEMAN NORTHWEST REGIONAL LIBRARY - MAY 18, 2018
- BLACKWELL WEST PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL LIBRARY - MAY 10, 2018
- LAWNCREST LIBRARY - MAY 23, 2018

During the breakout group discussions at each forum, PPCE moderators as well as FACE staffers took notes on what was being said.

After the forums, the lead moderator distilled those real-time notes from the dialogue into a written report.

Reports from all 21 breakout groups over five events are presented below. Also included are transcripts of the messages to the school board that participants posted via sticky note onto message boards by the registration table. We have records of those messages for four of the five forums, Lawncrest being the exception.

DOBBINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL

APRIL 25, 2018

Moderator: Chris Satullo

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of nearly 30 participants included people who identified as school activists, a half-dozen educators and a number of Dobbins alumni who were concerned about the current functioning of the school.

Concerns or hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Want to hear how the new school board will have accountability for success and redirecting spending policies.
- Improve the physical condition of the schools
- Ensure even quality of schools regardless of ZIP code.
- Do more to support black male educators, who are so important as role models for the students
- Hope new school board will let people's views be heard *before* decisions are made, when there's still time for input to have an impact
- More effort to teach kids how to improve their personal hygiene
- Bolster art and music
- Maintain consistently high expectations for all kids
- Concerned about lack of resources – both people and materials – to support kids' education. Two others echoed lack of resources theme.
- Want to see more accountability for teachers
- Want to recruit more grassroots men and woman to serve as volunteers in schools, mentors, tutors, role models
- Want board members to make unannounced visits to schools to see the reality of what we as teachers experience every day in terms of challenges – planned visits don't get at the reality.
- Concerned because my daughter was an A-student in high school, did everything asked of her, got admitted to college and discovered she was not at all prepared to do the college work

- From a student – It’s not at all clear to me how school learning applies to what I’m going to be doing in the outside world
- Need more mental health support for students
- Much more time needs to be spent by the board debating, sifting and prioritizing goals, then measuring progress towards those goals. We’ve heard tonight about a lot of decisions and things being done in schools that don’t do a thing to move us towards the goals we say we have. Our actual day to day priorities are not aligned with what we think our goals are.
- A Dobbins student said he would like to see more creativity in teaching and more allowance for students to express and pursue their own creativity. He made the memorable comment that “I could miss 60 percent of my classes and still get an A. We’re not being challenged by high expectations.”
- Would like to see more “results-oriented” goals – linking back to the other parent’s concern about lack of college readiness – so that kids know what they need to do to be successful in life.
- Don’t want to see extracurriculars cut – they keep kids engaged in school and present to learn.
- More connection for Dobbins and another CTE students to the internships and co-op opportunities that set them to be get jobs after graduation. If they can see how they can use what they learn in real work settings, that’ll address the concern about not seeing the connection between what they learn in school and what the world will want out of them.
- More men in schools – both teachers and volunteers – to give young men more self-esteem, mentors and advocates.
- Have more than one counselor per school.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- More volunteers, mentors and support for black male teachers
- More alignment of what goes on in CTE with real-world goals of employment
- More transparency, accountability and openness to public input from the new board

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group’s work:

- “Undercover Boss” model - Board members should make regular, unannounced visits to schools to see their unvarnished reality and spend enough time to engage meaningfully with building staff to learn why things are the way they are and how they could be improved.
- More vigilance and analysis to notice when policy or practice is not aligned with the supposed goals of a school. Example from Dobbins was cited of loose enforcement of admissions criteria to the cosmetology program, which leads to a rate of dropout or

incompletes that now threatens the schools federal funding. Listen to teachers about what works and what doesn't work for students who come from difficult situations.

- Recruit more community members, and black males in particular, to come into the school as mentors, tutors and guides to how things are done in the working world. Ask teachers how they would like to be supported and helped by such outside volunteers.

DOBBINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL

APRIL 25, 2018

Moderators: Lisa Santer and Josh Warner

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 20 participants included people who identified as parents, Philly schools alumni, residents, former teachers, people who work for the district, activists and a teacher's union leader.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- What is the power of the new school board?
- How board operates
- What is the process for citizen engagement?
- Curious about changes from SRC to school board
- Listen
- Welcome and get to know fresh board
- parents more involved in decision making and choice
- Very hopeful for change, given my knowledge of one new board member, who is a very solid choice
- Strong school governance on behalf of all kids
- Accountability across the board
- Kids get fair and equal education to kids in suburban districts
- Teachers get every material they need. Teachers' workplaces are students' learning environments

- Outsourcing for professional development and other needed services rather than using qualified professionals within the district
 - This will save money and use insiders' skills and talents
- Influence of outside money (philanthropy) on district policies
- "Parent & family concerns," how to get parents more engaged
- To support my daughter
- Soak up knowledge to help parents get more active to stop violence and bullying.
 - I want to start an organization/movement
- Literacy.
 - How can I help kids read better?
- Can I come in to school to tutor kids for a while? Closure/phase out/slow death of Strawberry Mansion HS
- Funding for special ed students who are an increasing portion of the population
- Schools aren't preparing kids for life
- New policy for admitting students to CTE schools, how to set kids up for success

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Bullying/violence in schools
- CTE and preparing students
- Parent/community engagement, including how they could help
- Accountability and autonomy

Key Learnings from the small group discussions:

Bullying: Policies, programs, and accountability:

- We need to hold parents accountable (2 votes)
- School district's overall policy on Bullying needs to be fully evaluated and fixed/improved, from top to bottom
- Too many gaps in the tools and programs that are in place to handle and prevent bullying
- No accountability

- We need to get more parent and community volunteers involved
- The Welfare to Work parents are a great source of opportunity here
- They could easily be more involved in schools and child wellbeing (many opportunities!)
- The new Board has a role. Creativity is needed in improving policies & systems around bullying
- Integrate these ideas!!!

Community Engagement (*broadly speaking*)

Engagement with schools and with the new board was brought up in several different places of the conversation. The two main topics were “Parent and Family Engagement” and “Regular Meetings and Engagement Sessions.”

Parent and Family Engagement:

- Schools and school district can partner with local businesses
- Area businesses can provide incentives (like gift cards) for local parents that are involved in the schools
 - This should be a new Board policy
- Perhaps tie in volunteering and parental involvement as part of the child’s grades?
 - Kids should get involved too!
- Volunteering with a parent will give positive results
- Sets a great example for the kids, and kids set an example for their peers
- Positive reinforcement
 - *<Contrasting Point:>* It should be more like the Head Start program
- Where volunteering is a requirement for parents

Regular Meetings and Engagement Sessions:

- The school board and district should do more of these, more often
- Doing engagement by school, or doing engagement on a certain topic, like bullying

- These should be 3-4 times per year, at least
- Reading or other tutoring assistants, in class
 - Also, broaden ways that community members can meaningfully participate in the schools <undertone: difference between “engagement” and “participation”>
- Reading or other tutoring assistants, in class
- Monitors for school grounds or hallways
- Again, the Welfare-to-Work parents could be really impactful here

C.T.E.

- There are opportunities to combine school credits and diplomas with work certifications and achievements
- Parents need to know about these opportunities, the 3-year commitment required, and other program details
- C.T.E. and other forms of work-based learning are really critical
- Do not outsource these! C.T.E. should be in-house.
 - Recognition that many are run as public-private partnerships, but this is not ideal
- C.T.E. selection criteria and operational policies need to be evaluated and updated
 - The testing is difficult
 - Further, kids may do well in C.T.E. but still lack the math & English abilities to get a job after graduating
 - Funding for C.T.E. is too piecemeal
 - Programs often depend on external grants, but grants come with strings attached, and they eventually run out
- What about school image? C.T.E. schools still have the biases about vocations or that dumb kids or problem kids attend.
- Doing C.T.E. placement tests for very young children is a problem
 - Are we “profiling” these kids from an early age?

School Grounds policies

- There is frustrating overlap between school grounds policies and bullying, truancy, and police involvement

- Kids being marked truant or absent, when in fact they have just been locked out after school has started
 - For kids that are fearful of bullies, this makes them appear to have a bad record
- There is no way to give meaningful impact about the effects of policies like this

Culturally Appropriate Education and Educators

- We need to hire more teachers of color
- The community must be a part of the working group that considers new policies and new hiring.

Questions/concerns about the School Board’s role, or how they can accomplish changes or address concerns:

- The busing system. Who is ultimately accountable for school bus policy?
- Who holds the new school board accountable?
 - Discussions about merits of elected vs. appointed
- Monitoring hasn’t been working well for many years
 - Board should be monitoring Superintendent
 - Superintendent should be monitoring schools
 - And so on
 - But this hasn’t worked or achieved positive results

Key ideas that emerged from the entire group:

- Bullying policies, tools, and programs need a full re-evaluation
 - Gaps plugged and accountability in fixes
- More parent, family, and community engagement
- C.T.E. criteria re: selection and operation

**DOBBINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL
APRIL 25, 2018**

Moderator: Cassandra Georges

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 21 participants included people who identified as connected to Dobbins either as alums or parents.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

Effective family and community engagement

- Hope the Board sees that one of Dr. Hite's pillars is missing - Family engagement
- Want open communication with the Board to address needs
- Maintain longevity of partnership
- Figure out how we can help our students meet their basic needs, including hunger
- See needs of community to uplift our students and their guardians
- Children need stability. They need to know nothing is going to change. There are limits to what can be done.
- Put focus on how the children are doing
- Need mental health facilities and mental health professionals in schools
- Address attendance problems
- Make parents accountable
- Bring personal hygiene back in schools
- Get our youth out of privatization/criminal system
- Figure out how to support families who are/have been involved with the system
- Educate the parents so they can better support the students
- Support immigrant students/small groups (Remember that diversity/inclusion should go beyond African Americans. Need to include Latino, Asian Americans, etc.)

Focus on children's personal growth and academic development

- Too many low-income students are not getting quality education. District is failing our children and community. Need to move our children further than where they are right now.
- Doing the same things might not be effective. Something completely different has to be considered. Make academic changes to improve quality.
- All children want to feel loved (understand emotional development)
- Need to focus on how children develop and learn. Consider children's developmental stages.
- There is too much teaching to the tests and it is too rigid. We need to teach more interactively and hands-on because it develops their brain.
- Get more resources for Special Education students
- Reconsider inclusion of special education students in non-special education classes. This set up might not be best for students.
- There are not enough resources to help children learn language.
- Would like to see more trades come back to our schools

School safety and climate control in classroom

- Focus on climate control in classrooms. Teachers spend too much time on getting order in the classroom and not enough on teaching.
 - Children need to feel safe and secure.
 - Address bullying
 - Uniform policy is not enforced
 - Students don't feel the love when schools have been allowed to deteriorate.
 - Figure out how to support teachers who get cursed out by parents. It impacts teaching.
 - Need to develop safety plans and share with schools
 - Hope to improve school climate. Involve the community and cultivate humility
- Stability of staff and programs
- We look at too many products. We have too much outsourcing. There is no coherence.
 - Traditional public schools are being phased out and more charters are being seen. Parents and community demands not being heard when schools are phased out.
 - Our students can learn. We need to provide for them (not another program from a corporation). Need teachers who can instill love. Technology is not the same as a teacher.
 - Teaching profession has been deprofessionalized. (Teach for America). Before you put Teach for America in our schools, make sure they know our community
 - Schools used to have stable staff. Now there are too many substitutes
 - Schools have been denied of teachers they need- want programs back (e.g. Strawberry Mansion)
 - Need PD for teachers to address concerns/needs
 - Mental health is a big issue in our schools. Are teachers trained to handle such issues?
 - Education is not about managers. Establish trust levels
 - Need principals who know how to be instructional leaders
 - Too many principals are not from Philly
 - Consider capacity building. Don't reinvent wheel.
 - Set up programs in our high school to teach them to become teachers and partners with universities so we "grow our own"
 - Community schools need to be more connected to local schools (campus model)
 - Address the management and financial components of the district. Philadelphia School District is not a corporation.
 - Need financial operations person back in schools so the principal can spend more time in classrooms

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

Conduct meetings in a different way than the SRC.

- It needs to be transparent. Have discussion before votes. Make sure everyone in the room knows what is being voted on. Vote on each item instead of blocks of items.
- Hold meetings at local schools in our communities, instead of at headquarters. Schedule meetings with times/dates that working parents/public can actually attend.

- Listen and actually act on what they hear.

Support programs that work

- Bring everything to the community to support our school. Bring back things/programs that used to work (connect with alumni to identify the successful programs from the past. There is no need to recreate the wheel. If it worked once, it can work again.
- Follow the Urban School District Model (or develop our own). Can't assume that what schools in Chicago, Baltimore, New York, etc. will work in Philly. Allow school community to identify its specific needs and implement/revise plan as needed.
- Bring back the parent/family ombudsman and community staff for every school. Is power shared between principals and teachers and parents
- Think about bringing back resources centers in the community, identifying which schools work, & opening up more schools
- Secure financial resources from District. Budget should allocate and distribute money equally throughout the city

Focus on accountability and quality

- Hold all adults accountable for students' learning, whether a custodian or principal
- Increase consistency. There are too many changes, too many new plans, too many changing principals/teachers. Don't repurpose schools. Work to bring improvement and good changes.
- Remember to recruit. Hire professionals as principals and teachers. Hire from within the city/within our community.
- Build connections with local universities/colleges and partner with prospective teachers
- Provide professional development. Use coaching to improve teachers. Call upon retired principals and teachers (the good ones) to mentor present staff and provide support
- Hold Dr. Hite accountable for connecting with parents and community
- Success would involve improving the school environment, capturing teacher/parent/student feedback, and actually listening and acting on what is heard

Address safety and climate control

- Provide stability and resources to allow teachers to teach (PD/ mentorship)
- Recruit more volunteers for schools. Community once volunteered as safety monitors for elementary school.
- Visit schools throughout the District to experience a regular day in the life of local students. Don't just go to Central and Masterman.

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group's work:

- Group focused on the following four themes-
- Effective family and community engagement
- Focus on children's personal growth and academic development
- School safety and climate control in classroom
- Stability of staff and programs

DOBBINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL

APRIL 25, 2018

Moderator: Ellen Greenberg

Description of Group:

This group of 16 participants included people who identified as current and retired teachers, parents, the interim Inspector General, residents of the area, former students of Dobbins, someone from the County Assistance Office, and members of various nonprofit organizations.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

- Fairness to female population in school district (feel like they are discriminated against)
- What's ensuring our children receive proper education and can transition beyond the Philadelphia School District
- In interacting with neighborhood children - they're not growing, can't write an essay or answer questions. Used to have criteria to enter and graduate from school
- Resources for students are lacking, need to support youth interested in Vocational Technology School
- Quality of teachers - would like the School Board to pay attention to teachers
- Teachers welfare - they do a lot with very little
- During site selection, whether a teacher is new or experienced, it shouldn't impact the budget
- Lack of funding for basic resources (students, teachers, activities, etc.)
- Equity - Libraries (restoration of functioning libraries)
- Issues around children with special needs - need to know what to look for
- Low test scores
- Selection process - almost impossible (love charter schools but kids have been wait-listed)
- How can we revamp/expand catchment area? Information/transparency regarding how decisions are made (How do you come to conclusions?)
- More options, more transparency

Hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

- The new board can honestly look at how things are - start from ground zero
- Change the story and the culture - focus on positivity, build on improvements
- Find ways to support kids who want to do Vocational Technology
- Schools motivate kids to higher standards - support the teachers
- Option of the school district for my children - that the school district becomes competitive
- Resources (monetary and non-monetary)
 - Increase quality of the food
 - Improve the curriculum (better and more competitive)
 - Improve the environment (liven it up)
 - Increase the preparation of teachers
- Look at admission policy
- Positive changes in the culture of the School District
- Create promotion and graduation standards (functional test for graduation - upgrade the quality of graduates)

Key concerns/themes/ideas:

- **Community Engagement**
 - Helping teachers, principals, etc. to contact parents when they do something positive (become partners in raising children)
 - Community engagement - School District should value who and what is in the community (build community engagement)
 - Creating standardization -holding everyone accountable
 - Will increase job growth, engagement and mentorship within the community
- **Resources**
 - Resources that will support children and teachers (look at ways to get more resources)
 - Socialization requirements of teachers is overwhelming - increase the number of counselors and parent engagement
- **Transparency and Equity**
 - Catchment areas are tricky - how are the lines drawn, what are they based on, can they be clarified or revisited?
 - School selection
 - Equity across schools - each school does or doesn't have the ability to raise money. There should be ways for the schools who have the ability to help those that don't

COMMENT BOARD

DOBBINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL

APRIL 25, 2018

Post a message or Idea for the School Board

- Concerned about money budgeted for digital curriculum and data management. Students need human staff, educators/counselors/librarians/ nurses etc. to be budget priorities
- Equity across the system with regards to resources and policies – Please
- High quality education for low-income students!
- Accountability for children’s learning
- A welcoming center for immigrant families to transition and understand the USA Educational system.

How would you like the new board to connect with the public?

- Have one monthly meeting to discuss resolutions and another to vote.
- Have a meeting to discuss issues (used to have SPP meetings but they disappeared) with time for Q & A from participants.
- Send out newsletters each month and have monthly meetings to discuss issues concerning the education of our children.
- Keep community informed
- Would like to see more activists, like Tonya Bah, on this school board
- Want the new Board to be sensitive to the needs of the schools and be willing to address their needs
- Black male educators are scarce! They only represent 2% of teachers in the US although Philadelphia percent is higher. What will you do to support hiring and supporting black male educators?
- Please visit schools unannounced monthly so you can see how hard it is to provide quality education with limited resources, and so many children in a class.
- End the PSSA!
- End the PSSA’s.

- Treat the people in with the same interest as someone they'll want to sponsor them. Call if you need an explanation, ...
- Make sure you listen to parents, students and staff. Please make it a priority to serve!!
- Listen to kids. Trauma informed principal office. Be aware of bullying at school, on bus, at bus stops, etc.
- Use social media wisely! Polling, sharing info/events, etc.
- Use of email as well as text options for parents/students
- I second this(above) Have 2 listening sessions a year. Welcome feedback
- Make resolutions available to the public well in advance of meetings. Visit schools and speak with students. – Open meetings – answer questions at board meetings.
- How does the history of Dobbins and Randolph (separate, together, separate) reflect historical instability in Philly schools?
- Smaller classes. Involved teachers. Supportive principal, admin, mandatory parent involvement
- Need to have same number of school board members present as there are number of groups
- School and educational issues can be very complex and nuanced. How can we prevail the new board and the community from being manipulated by huge political and corporate interests?

SOUTH PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY

MAY 5, 2018

Moderators: Ted Enoch, with support from Beth Dougherty

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 20 participants included people who identified as parents, current and former Philadelphia School District (PSD) educators and administrators, community organizers, community based organization representatives, and others.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour community forum:

- Crumbling infrastructure in our school buildings, parent in Southwark
- Here as a learner today, new neighborhood residents who works for TFA
- Like to see more involvement advocating with the state and city council, long-term neighbor and former PSD administrator
- The infrastructure issues are also very important to me, new school board member
- Improving equity for school funding and resource sharing, neighbor, former teacher and education researcher
- I want to be part of a helpful reform process, neighbor and parent of a high schooler at Central
- I want to be part of a change, neighbor who works with students
- I want to see PSD get better with outreach and connections to community organizations, community partner who works at Dobbins to support family decision making options
- I want to see a more fair system for charter contract renewals, S. Philly parent with a child at Mastery Charter
- Excited to see new Board create great change on many levels, including funding for mental and behavioral issues, PSD teacher of 25 years
- Here to learn more about the District and to improve how we see and work with students with mental and behavioral issues.
- I'm here to listen, but I want to see a great school for every child, PSD employee
- Here to learn about Philly schools, especially funding issues, a new Philadelphia resident
- I'd love to see healthy schools that a fairly funded, but I especially want to see PSD collaborate and communicate with the PSD employees, a PSD counselor who grew up in Philly

- I'd like to see PSD incorporate new research on brain/body development -- to see more recess and play and less time sitting, a neighbor with a son to enter Jackson in fall
- It's important for me to see PSD become more integrated and see better balance of resources between schools. Why don't we allow transfers when schools are overcrowded? -- Neighbor of a child soon to come to Jackson
- There's not enough funding for special education in PSD, we need 1-1 supports and resources, a parent at a charter because of the increased resources available there
- Equity for our children is what motivates me, a community organizer who works with Charters

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- **Equity:** How can we meet the needs for ALL children, at ALL schools, at ALL income levels?
- **Funding issues and inequities.** Of particular concern funding for special education needs students, at-risk students. How to we better engage Harrisburg?
 - Mental and emotional health programming and funding
- **Physical Infrastructure.** The health and state of our buildings and related health hazards and teaching/learning impediments
- **Community members want to be part of the positive change,** and related
- **Establishing a collaborative relationship with the new school board** and all of PSD

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- *Community members expect the incoming school board to help to (1.) establish and communicate a vision and priorities for the Philadelphia School District (PSD) that elevates equity as key principle and (2.) that values and welcomes community collaboration continually.* Far too many community members and educators felt the School Reform Commission (SRC) had an adversarial tone and practice. Community members and educators want to be partners in positive change and positive practice.
- Achieving equity and reducing inequities is vitally important to this group
- Community members want to see new improved engagement and communication practices by the school board. Many are willing to get involved, volunteer, serve on committees, and more.

Equity related issues and questions:

- **Funding inadequacies contribute to school performance inequity**

- Why is there an inequity in the way funding is distributed between public and charter schools?
 - Can something be done about huge salaries for Charter School CEOs?
 - Can Board put pressure on Harrisburg for more/fair funding?
 - Will Board support market EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit?) for community partners?
 - Will Board advocate for PILOTs (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) for the city's largest non-profits?
 - The number of counselors per school is dwindling. Why are counselors getting cut?
- **Management of funds and resources is a related key issue. How bad is our waste?**
 - What is principal's role in managing resources? School Board? Superintendent?
 - Are we neglecting practices that promote evidence-based curriculum?
 - Wasteful example -- curriculum geared towards test-taking
 - Missed opportunity -- evidence-based practices like more free play time and recreation for young students that is supported by evidence that it promotes learning?
 - Can we do better with same amount or similar amount of resources?
 - Buildings get to crisis point before action takes place, which is more expensive and more disruptive to teaching and learning. Why can't we be better with preventative maintenance and investments?
 - Can we utilize collaborations between public and charter schools that is more helpful? That promotes sharing of innovative and best practices?
 - Counselors caseloads are too high. If we want better outcomes for students, we need more counselors.
 - **Diversity of students, community segregation, and connected school inequities, is a key issue.**
 - How do we address this? Can we look to NYC for a model?
 - Distressed teaching and learning environments lead to higher teacher turnover. How can we connect school equity, learning environments, and teacher retention in a proactive, supportive system?
 - How can we support teacher retention?
 - Why do some schools have multiple "specials" and other schools have little or none?
 - We need to look at which schools have access to extra resources and funding -- like outside groups and strong PTA fundraising.
 - What is role of school board in fighting for equity in Harrisburg?
 - How do we implement most culturally competent education?

How can we be assured Board is listening and responding to community and teacher input?

- How will we know how Board responds to our feedback?
- What methods of transparency and communication will be used?
 - Posting/sharing agendas in advance
 - Posting/sharing meeting notes and action steps
- Public sharing of priorities and plan of the new Board
- Will Board have committees that include various stakeholders? How else can priorities be informed by multiple stakeholders?
 - Will Board help facilitate greater communication with PSD staff and employees?
 - Will Board and PSD not just take information, but use it. How can we make sure staff and people on ground working with students are heard, responded to, and supported?
 - How do we achieve inclusive participation by the many stakeholders -- staff, providers, STUDENTS, parents, community?
 - Voices that need to be heard often aren't heard. Need to engage parents, students, and others who can't easily participate in limited opportunities like this listening session
 - Can we achieve collaboration instead of creating adversarial roles of Board, PSD, parents, and others?

SOUTH PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY

MAY 5, 2018

Moderator: Brian Armstead

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 15 participants included people who identified as parents and students, school district employees, and as advocates and community volunteers.

What's one main concern about the school district and the school board that brought you here this evening?

- No guns in schools (*two agreed*)
- Sex Ed (*moderator comment: a lot of people agreed with this and the group returned to the topic several times during the conversation. The topic was introduced by one of the students.*)
 - Should begin at puberty
 - One school did a very popular session on "consent"

- Parent/community engagement
 - Especially governance issues
 - Constituent services (like elected officials)
 - Parents should be able to meet with board members to discuss issues that aren't being resolved
- Transparency
- Immigrant services (*two agreed*)
- More counselors at High Schools (*several people agreed*)
- Social Studies (need more classes and priority) (*several people agreed*)
 - The subject is often forgotten because it is not tested
 - “we need to reprioritize civics and government”
- High school students should be able to select a school anywhere in the city
 - Student should not be limited by geography
- School closings (*six or seven people agreed*)
 - Especially compared to prison openings
- Tax abatements
- Affordable housing
- SRC meetings
 - Better meeting times
 - When issues affect teachers, meeting time should be 4:00 pm
 - When affecting students, meeting time should be 3:00pm
 - For the general public, it should be later.
 - Better notification
- Site selection -- better access and timing
- School facilities (*about half the group agreed with this*)
 - Unsafe and falling apart
- Class size (currently too large)
- School size
- Improve the counselor ratio
- More nurses
- More arts programs

- Teachers that don't have clearances (parent alleges that this happened at a Mastery Charter school)
- More school resource officers (school police)
- Safety -- Getting to school
- Students should have more input into how to improve the climate in their schools
 - Don't just leave it up to school police
- Special needs
 - K-2 teachers spend too much time on behavior management caused by kids with special needs that should be receiving more appropriate services.
- Restorative Justice

How would you like to see the school system, under this new board, work on your concern?

- Direct Engagement
- Lack of social media
- Forums like these should be posted on the SDP homepage (*comment: participants said this MOE forum was not on the SDP homepage*)
- Better advertising, posting flyers
- Safety/Health/Lead in schools
- Would like to see the Board make a "real commitment"
- More conversation from the Board about school facilities, health and safety
 - (instead of just hearing things being driven by the press)
- "How do we know which buildings were checked?"
- Students and teacher should be able to upload pictures and videos of safety issues.
- Create a 311 system for schools.
- Standardized tests (*half the participants agreed with this*)
- Teaching to the tests is a problem
- Change the timing of the tests, especially if it is not required by Keystone
- Concerns over the vendors that make the tests
- Develop a curriculum for parents to help their child(ren) at home.
- Traditional testing is really bad in non-traditional schools
 - (*Student comment: e.g. at the U-School, people are thrown off by having to use paper and pen for the tests because they don't use them in school.*)
- Parent Engagement/Student engagement
- Board should commit to this
- Class size
- Create and publicize a list of School Board priorities (*two agreed with this*)
- Include measurables and timelines

- What is the new School Board’s mandate and how is it different that the SRC’s mandate, responsibilities and powers? (several people agreed with this)
- Curriculum
- Include teachers and students in developing the curriculum
- More teacher involvement in decisions (*almost all of the participants agreed with this*)
- E.g. the District rolls out new computer systems every year, but they don’t seem to check with teachers to see how they work.
- Money (\$\$) going to vendors on programs that aren’t tested and validated.
- Better budgets for teachers (*several people agreed with this*)
- Teachers spend too much from their own pockets for class supplies
- Student School Choice
- Good at the high school level
- Bad idea for elementary and middle school level. They should have good schools in their neighborhoods so they don’t have to travel.
- Distribute resources more fairly to the neighborhood schools
- This includes money raised by home and school associations.
- In Seattle, they redistribute money raised by the PTA so that a portion of the money raised by a PTA goes into a general fund. (several people agreed with this idea)
- SAC at each school
- School Board make sure there are SAC teams at each school
- School Board should check in with SAC teams

What key ideas, cross cutting themes, and/or issues have emerged in our discussion tonight?

- Direct community engagement
- All of the stakeholders should be more involved in decisions
- Facilities
- Curriculum
- Students/teachers involved in developing curriculum
- Financial equity across the District
- Keep public schools open
- Don’t close more district schools
- Stop opening new charter schools
- Improve school climate and safety
- This has to be a multi-faceted approach, including
 - More school police
 - NTA’s
 - Restorative justice
 - Student involvement in each school to help create and implement plans to improve school climate

SOUTH PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY

MAY 5, 2018

Moderators: Lisa Santer and Germaine Ingram

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 13 participants included people who identified as retired School District educator/administrator parents of children in traditional public schools and charter schools, providers of services to schools and seniors, and people who work/volunteer in schools or as advocates.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Budget cuts and unfairness—want same amount spent per student in all schools
- esp. students of color & English language learners
- Teacher retention—losing amazing teachers; **poor facilities** bring down morale. Teachers are spending their own money on cleaning supplies as well as instructional supplies
- More funding, safety
- Proper **budget** to make **facilities** safe & hospitable
- Rich universities, like Penn, should give more money to school district
- Look at environmental hazards in schools—BIG. Stakeholders know about these, and schools need their input for improvement.
- Facility safety, lead poisoning happening. We can't ignore this.
- Safety in buses and schools – increase seat belts, AC
- School climate & safety—have no handle on overall climate and school culture, schools just deal with incidents
- Making sure every child gets equitable education

- How schools & **libraries** can work together, especially improving **inclusion and diversity**
Stats on 153 lowest performing schools—poor reading and math. He can solve learning problems through his technology program. Schools/School District have/has resisted his overtures.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Equity in funding and services—overarching concern and thread running thru all other issues
- Safety & condition of facilities
- School climate and culture

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- How do we get vibrant schools? Adequacy is not enough, and money isn't the only factor.
- Board has the opportunity to set the tone for the district, and for the city
- Accessible times for meetings
- Encourage public input
- Regular, deep, long-form engagement like this listening session
- Discussion of whether this very large district should be divided into school clusters, each with own school/student support system. (Clusters were a key part of the District's reform agenda in the 1990s.)
- Many job vacancies is a sign of an issue within schools—low pay and poorly-maintained facilities are part of the retention challenge.
- Equity/Quality
- Literally and metaphorically, we've become accustomed to placing a bucket to catch leaks. Just because you're used to inadequacy doesn't make it ok.

- One participant commented that the aim should be “vibrant” schools.
- Transparency and Engagement are both important, connected, and not the same thing
 - Transparency:
 - While SAC reportedly has individual data on climate, budget, tardiness, budget for parent involvement on website, many engaged participants weren’t aware of that, or said it varies widely from school to school, or only a very few participate in SAC for various reasons.
 - Requests for wider distribution of info, perhaps in school year starter package that gets sent home.
 - Specific requests for public access to individual school budgets and for return-on-investment analysis of various programs, particularly ones related to behavioral health.
 - Suggestions for other modes of sharing info and engaging community—infomercials, college acceptance parade again, day with a principal. Regular principal robocalls appreciated
 - More clarity and regularity of process for non-profits to engage with schools

Engagement:

- Currently, public impression is cynical and resigned
- Schools as community hubs
- Connect with libraries, Dept. of Recreation
- Open schools in evenings for recreation
- Schools are very uneven in their openness to community engagement. Principals at Powell and Carver were mentioned as examples of school leaders who know how to engage with their school community.
- To close digital divide, kids need internet access after school, not just computer devices.
- Many head start teachers started as parents in the program

- Need to organize people all over city to push for education improvement. An example of a success story for parent activism: parents got together and pushed for hydration stations on every floor of the school.
- School safety must include restorative justice strategies that build overall school culture, rather than isolated reactions to incidents.

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group’s work:

- How do we get “vibrant,” not just adequate, schools for all children?
- Transparency
- Engagement
- Schools connecting with the full breadth and depth of community resources
- School safety—health and climate. Restorative justice must be part of the approach

SOUTH PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY

MAY 5, 2018

Moderator: Harris Sokoloff and Josh Warner

Moderator’s description of the group:

This group of 12 participants included people who identified parents, school and community advocates, taxpayers, educators, and activists.

Hopes & Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

Hopes:

- Return to cohesive education program in neighborhoods
- Get to a place where we can focus on equity and excellence
- New board will turn district around, get it closer to right
- True transparency, involvement and listening

- Continue listening
- Take a more aggressive stance with the business community (ask them for more)
- S.D.P. can figure out how to get out of its own way to identify problems, develop solutions and then implement those solutions

Concerns:

- Lack of democratic accountability
- Accountability to parents
- We don't have a healthy school system (for healthy cities)
- Substitutes need more information on who is in the class or the needs of each student
- Want an elected, not appointed, board
- Need adequate money and resources (including human resources)
- We spend too much money on outsourcing
- Parents not included
- Lack of outreach in all languages
- So many concerns that it's difficult to prioritize for immediate action
- Vast inequities across schools and neighborhoods
- Impact of gentrification

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

Group 1 did not attempt to group the hopes or concerns, but several themes came out in the ice-breaker and the initial points of the mini-group discussions:

- Professional development for teachers
- Charter schools
- Degree of outsourcing and outside contracts is high
- Transparency, engagement, and accountability
- Elected vs. appointed board; oversight
- School conditions
- Budgets; funding

Key Learnings from the small group discussions:

District needs a more robust approach to Professional Development

- This should be built-in to teacher contracts
- More funding for trainings and learning
- And better overall support for prof. development (from district staff, principals, etc.)
- Professional development is also needed and important for support staff:
 - Nurses, Counselors, etc.
- We need an actual “infrastructure” for this

Access to greater and deeper information

This Key Learning brought topics of transparency, information sharing, and accountability all together

- Involve the City Controller in District activities
 - Not only auditing the district budget, but looking specifically about other aspects of schools and education
 - Environmental issues (in buildings)
 - Health
 - Special needs programs or students
- Need a 311-type system for greater accountability
- *Quote:* “We’re all ‘siloe out.’ We have many different parents that are concerned or involved, across many different schools, yet we can’t coordinate or help each other out!”
- There is so much information out there, but sharing is difficult
- District and the New Board need to set policies around information sharing and reporting.
 - Tell us:
 - What’s working
 - Why it is working
 - How it is being replicated to other schools

- Also, tell us what is bad or what isn't working
 - And how it is being fixed or stopped at particular schools
- Charter Transparency
 - The public can see the dollars that go to a charter school, but have no ability to see how those dollars are being used
 - Can't see the \$ details!
 - Need to have an "open books" policy for ALL school types with public dollars
 - The default should be open / public / accessible (re: budgets and school spending)

The System imposes an Adversarial Role on advocates that are only trying to help or problem solve

- Parents or teachers that speak up to solve a problem are often treated as nuisances
 - A "customer service" approach is missing
- We need to re-establish "coordinator" positions that gather, manage, and consolidate information (and problems and solutions).
 - They link advocates and parents to each other, and to the school board
 - Examples: Special Needs coordinators, Budget and funding coordinators, health, buildings, etc.

Accessibility and Transparency for the New Board

- Oversight is important
- More and greater opportunities for engagement, feedback, and partnerships or working groups

Questions/concerns about the School Board's role, or how they can accomplish changes or address concerns:

- Not sure how the new board will create or ensure "deeper and greater" information sharing
 - Many different ways (and preferences) that people receive information
 - Translations and notifications in multiple languages is important
- Unsure how the new board should or could be involved in increasing schools funding

- Funding comes from many different sources; how should the board advocate for more? And to whom?
 - Federal?
 - Harrisburg?

COMMENT BOARD
SOUTH PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY
MAY 5, 2018

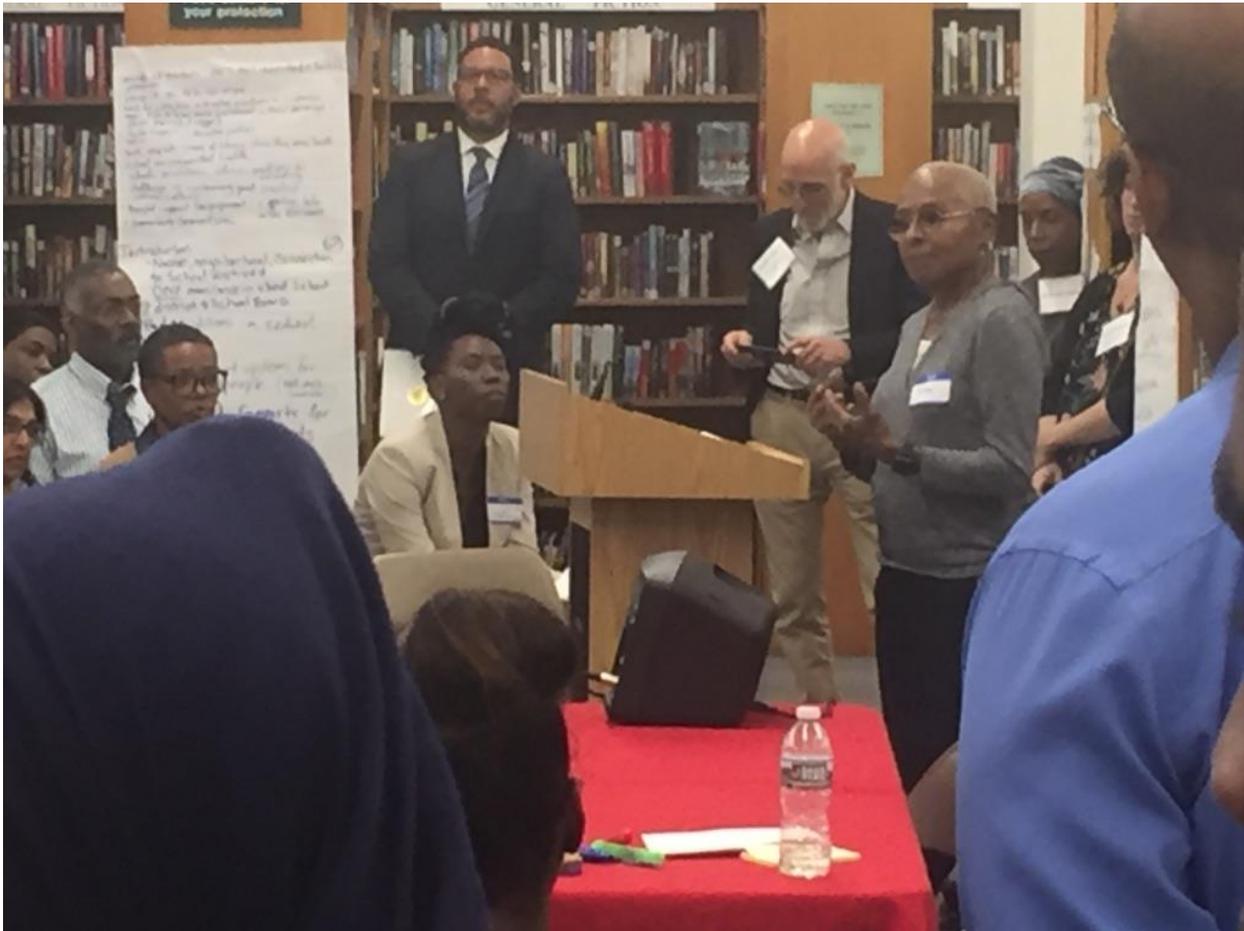
Post a message or Idea for the School Board

- Concerned about money budgeted for digital curriculum and data management. Students need human staff, educators/counselors/librarians/ nurses etc. to be budget priorities
- Equity across the system with regards to resources and policies – Please
- High quality education for low-income students!
- Accountability for children’s learning
- A welcoming center for immigrant families to transition and understand the USA Educational system.

How would you like the new board to connect with the public?

- Have one monthly meeting to discuss resolutions and another to vote.
- Have a meeting to discuss issues (used to have SPP meetings but they disappeared) with time for Q & A from participants.
- Send out newsletters each month and have monthly meetings to discuss issues concerning the education of our children.
- Keep community informed
- Would like to see more activists, like Tonya Bah, on this school board
- Want the new Board to be sensitive to the needs of the schools and be willing to address their needs
- Black male educators are scarce! They only represent 2% of teachers in the US although Philadelphia percent is higher. What will you do to support hiring and supporting black male educators?

- Please visit schools unannounced monthly so you can see how hard it is to provide quality education with limited resources, and so many children in a class.
- End the PSSA!
- End the PSSA's.
- Treat the people in with the same interest as someone they'll want to sponsor them. Call if you need an explanation, ...
- Make sure you listen to parents, students and staff. Please make it a priority to serve!!
- Listen to kids. Trauma informed principal office. Be aware of bullying at school, on bus, at bus stops, etc.
- Use social media wisely! Polling, sharing info/events, etc.
- Use of email as well as text options for parents/students
- I second this (above) Have 2 listening sessions a year. Welcome feedback
- Make resolutions available to the public well in advance of meetings. Visit schools and speak with students. – Open meetings – answer questions at board meetings.
- How does the history of Dobbins and Randolph (separate, together, separate) reflect historical instability in Philly schools?
- Smaller classes. Involved teachers. Supportive principal, admin, mandatory parent involvement
- Need to have same number of school board members present as there are number of groups
- School and educational issues can be very complex and nuanced. How can we prevail the new board and the community from being manipulated by huge political and corporate interests?



BLACKWELL WEST PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL LIBRARY

MAY 10, 2018

Moderator: Brian Armstead and Chris Satullo

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 20 participants included people who identified as parents, teachers, community partners, education activists, taxpayers, uncles, librarians, charter advocates, school police officer, special education advocates and Girls High alumna.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Have no sense of the big picture of how this new structure will work, what will the organizational chart look like, what's the plan for public meetings etc.
- Don't feel that the district has been operating with a competent problem statement for several decades.
- Want to see more supports for special needs children to be included in classrooms (and special needs goes beyond just autistic children).
- Low quality of facilities; it's clear things are not going well with maintenance. (This meeting was held before the Inquirer series on this topic.)
- Pained by a lack of vision for the schools; it seems like we have been talking about the same issues and having the same arguments for 20 years.
- "Don't just keep rehabbing the old car; design an entirely new car."
- Make access to quality more equitable; should be able to find it in each neighborhood, not only by roaming the city.
- My concern is "lottery" schools; under this system, my child could be left out through no fault of his own.
- We seem to have a two-tiered education system – publics vs. charters.
- A big piece of equity is every school having a library (A number of people endorsed this statement)
- Need clarity on what role the board plays in getting school funding.
- Would like to see more vo-tech schools and programs.
- Urgent need to increase parent involvement.
- While understanding the importance of special education, would like to see a school district where every kid is recognized and treated as a "special kid/"
- Need to increase transparency out of the school district; shouldn't have to file FOIA request after FOIA request to get information.
- Want more information about the Eli Broad managerial pipeline and how that is influencing the district.
- Concerned about school discipline and particular the disparities re: treatment of black girls.
- Worried about the food they feed the kids – want more nutritional school meals as well as more nutrition education, teaching kids that "health is wealth."

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- School board transparency and accountability
- Parent involvement
- Rework special ed programs and policies

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- Ideas about school board transparency and accountability: Many in the group had a strong perception that under the School Reform Commission, decisions about charter authorization or individual school management were made not out of concern for what was best for students, but a “privatization ideology” or, worse, a desire to enrich friends and associates. While not all took that tack, most applauded one woman’s articulation that the new school board needed to set a clear “integrity” policy that all decision had to be made with student interests, not private interests, as paramount, linked to a clear “conflict of interest” policy for board members when it came to charter authorizations. Linked to this discussion were suggestions that the board set a document explaining to the public in understandable language precisely what it can and cannot do. Also related were calls for a primer for the public on how to read and understand school budgets, and a call for board meetings to be held at times and places more accessible to the public.
- Increasing parental involvement was another huge theme for this group. Big applause for a woman who said, repeatedly: “No more signs in schools saying, ‘Parents can’t pass this point.’ It’s our right to be there. We understand there have to be rules, but not as ‘Don’t do this,’ but as ‘Here’s how to do what is your right.’” The group advocated making parental involvement a key goal and metric for evaluating principals, as well “the health of the school community.” This goal was also described as creating a “school culture that cultivates the ‘village’ that raises a child.”
- The group favored a more trauma-informed approach to children whose behavioral health issues lead to discipline issues i.e. more “resource rooms.”

BLACKWELL WEST PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL LIBRARY
MAY 10, 2018

Moderator: [Ellen Greenberg](#)

Moderator’s description of the group:

This group of 21 participants included people who identified as community members, parents, a pastor, someone from the Wynnefield Cultural Center, educators (retired and current), Temple students, an Education Coordinator through the library, and people who work in various nonprofit organizations.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Have kids using our local center, want to know what’s going on in the after school program and in the school

- Not enough parent volunteers
- Seems like things are moving away from Education -I Development of the whole individuals. Now teaching to the test
- How principals and teachers are hired - how decisions are made
- Unevenness of teacher performance (How to deal as a parent)
- Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (concern about loss of focus - uneven)
- Lack of motivation and lack of parent participation (communicate and involve) feels like it's us vs them, generational differences
- More money for teachers to work with
- Lack of counselors and lack of college prep (Chemistry and Biology)
- Problems with staff, teachers and principal - nasty attitude towards kids
- Equitable funding formula (look at Education Law Center, PCCY)
- Parent voice on all levels
- Environmental health in schools (lead, asbestos, still water)
- Special Education and true inclusion for kids - standardized tests for grade level (they're not prepared and should do away with them). It's a fairness issue
- Process of enrolling special needs children (process, communication, response)
- Disproportionate amount of failing students in certain areas - offer academic opportunities for kids who excel
- No environment conducive to learning
 - No consistent teachers for critical subjects
 - Violence

Hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

- Resources distributed equally across schools (based on needs)
- Money for art, language, space, nurses (lack of nurses is a safety issue)
- Make sure every school is a great school (equity and access)
- Making sure that the portion of money received matters to the community (fill in the gaps)
- Staff in the school that supports community building
- More school/community partnerships
- Strong job advocating for money and resources equitably distributed
- Give people who want to go back to school the education
- Transparency
 - Donations shouldn't be anonymous
 - Holding Pilots accountable
- That this isn't the last time parents/communities have a voice.

- New board holding themselves accountable and a way for us to hold them accountable
- School board anticipate problems and have solutions ready
- Avenues for parents to advocate for their children
 - Teach people how to do it
 - Currently, people have issues and don't know what to do or where to go
 - Accountability

Key concerns/themes/ideas:

Politics out - community in (Community involvement/engagement)

- Grassroots building of curriculum and environment standards (people who go to the school, live in the community)
- Corporations out - don't influence decisions/set standards
- Official processes (open house the first day of school)
- More student activities inside and outside the school - after school programs, volunteers to help students

Greater Transparency

- Where is the money going
- Clarity on strategy and participation and community involvement

Equity for schools

- Resources
- Balance
- Overwhelmed teachers
- Impact of mass incarceration in West Philadelphia (parents can't volunteer)
- Lack of counselors, receptionists, cleaning/environmental services, health
- Top heavy money - teachers
 - Even things out so teachers want to come to Philadelphia
- Recruiting and supporting teachers of color (especially men)
- Turnover rate
- Different schools can raise different amounts of money - should be distributed across the system

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MAY 10, 2018

Moderator: Serrano LeGrand and Melanie Oeun-Greenhalgh

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 16 participants included people who identified as grandparents, parents, concerned citizens, educators and spouses of educators and education activists.

Concerns/Hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Hope: That parents can stop worrying about education for children
- Concern: There is no transparency from the school district and school board
- Hope: There is an authentic way for the school board to listen to the public
- Hope: Money is not funneled to the charter schools and instead goes back to the public.
- Hope: The city of Philadelphia unite as a big school district and public schools.
- Hope: As a board, they be accessible to the public.
- Hope: The state of Pennsylvania make kindergarten mandatory.
- Hope: The school board have a sense of urgency; learn from what has worked before.
- Hope: There are better schools for all children and should not matter about district or zip-code.
- Hope: Quality schools district-wide
- Concern: We need resources back in our schools (for example, mental health). The focus should always be on all schools, not just achieving schools.
- Hope: obtain adequate funding and have a healthy skepticism about charter school practices
- Concern: school buildings and property are horrendous
- Hope: The school board talk to smart people to help with making decisions and fixing our facilities
- Hope: Don't move on to something new without looking at what is already working. The school board ought to expand on what works to other schools and make it bigger and better.
- Hope: No more cuts to literacy or to libraries or school programs like music and arts.
- Concern: There is a disconnect with literacy. The district ought to stop just passing students along.
- Hope: The school board ought to find ways to make students want to stay in school, provide them with job training and allow for the opportunity for strong relationships with parents and teachers to be built.
- Concern: It's not okay that we have the best schools and the worst schools. There needs to be more equality so all schools are good.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Mental health awareness: there need to be more resources for families and schools. This could include having professional teams and staff dedicated to just this in every school
- Considering exposure activities: extracurricular activities that give students access to different venues in Philadelphia (Philly Pop)
- Freedom writers: find commonality, through the use of journaling as an activity to start the day and validate feelings
- Mental health awareness and resources
- Make middle schools a viable option (reconsider the limitations of a structure such as K-8. What works for elementary schools does not work for middle schools)
- look at grade structure of schools and incorporate different education models into teaching
- Money/funding: we don't have enough. Classrooms need at least 2 staff per room.
- teaching models can be shifted and innovated around
- all schools and resources should be equally distributed
- every child should get the same \$ allocation (statewide)
- Make focused improvements (start with schools physical plans)
- keep schools small and local; students ought to live close to schools so they can travel to them
- schools need to utilize community resources (i.e. library)
- Transparency and accountability process for parents and community members to communicate with the school board
- Find ways to have fair budgets for all schools
- equality for all students
- stability of teachers
- district needs to implementing new plans for schools
- nutritional meals in school need to be a focus: there is a huge discrepancy in the "satellite lunches" versus "full kitchen"
- A lot of responsibilities falls on the schools, they need more supports for families at home
- Partner with co-op to get healthy foods to parents
- Boards should have committees to get input from community members who have experiences with education instead of outsourcing
- Board meetings should be held at various locations and days and times
- Give educational programs time to work; they change too frequently

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

Here you can include key ideas from cross group discussion – ideas that came up in one group that also came up in other groups. When appropriate, indicate the concern that motivated the idea. When possible, also discuss the energy, importance, or sense of urgency that the group exhibited around an idea.

- The role of checks and balances is really important (for families, teachers, schools)
- Equity and equal distribution of resources (all schools should be equal); there is an uneven balance between the best schools and schools that are failing
- Integrating community resources
- transparency and accountability
- healthy school buildings

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group’s work (with a sense of how important this is to the group):

- What do we mean by equity and equality?
- How are the voices and concerns being fully captured in this listening session?
- Was there some thinking around the structure of the new board members roles?
- Will the by-laws written for the new board members be shared out with the public?
- Will the public be allowed to provide any input and feedback about the by-laws?

BLACKWELL WEST PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL LIBRARY

MAY 10, 2018

Moderator: [Germaine Ingram](#)

Moderator’s description of the group:

This group of 19 participants included people who identified as parents of kids in either traditional schools or charter schools, current and retired school district employees, community activists, one person who runs a local youth counseling center and community members interested in public education.

Concerns and hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour.

- Conditions at the Bryant school—need for facilities improvements; need for the school to expand learning opportunities in areas such as urban agriculture. The School Board needs to come to the school.
- The deficits in instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs), especially those in middle and high school. Their lack of English proficiency makes it impossible for them to succeed.
- The need for there to be instruction in Haitian Kreyol (Creole), both to allow students to access course material and to help them hold onto their native language.
- Education opportunities for newcomer students.
- Lack of adequacy and equity in school funding.
- Top-down decision making in the School District
- Equity in resources across schools within the district.
- Need to teach African American history and culture.
- Need to emphasize to students and parents the importance of education. (This comment came from an African immigrant elder.)
- The link between content/process knowledge and behavioral health.
- The need for communities to work together to support good education.
- School District should help immigrant parents learn English so that they can be better support for their children.
- A wish that there would be an intentional web of support for instruction that encourages curiosity and emotional intelligence.
- Physical and emotional safety in schools. This comment embraced concerns about lead, asbestos, and other toxins in schools; it incorporated support for “trauma-informed” practices in schools, as well as the need for workshops to prepare school communities for what to do in “lockdowns”.
- Charter school accountability.
- Equitable funding/resources and education opportunities among schools within the district and among school districts.

- School grade configurations—this participant feels that the K-8 organization is “a problem”.
- The need for cultural and sensitivity training for teachers
- One participant complained about the non-renewal of the charter for the charter school that her children attend. She said that what she wants is “real choice” in schools for her children. She feels that she shouldn’t have to choose charter schools just because the traditional school in her neighborhood is so poor or unsafe.
- Privatization of education services—participant is opposed to outsourcing of education services to private companies.
- Education policies and practices need to reflect understanding of the whole child.
- “440 is thought of as the enemy. They don’t understand what goes on in classrooms.”
- The new board has to understand the needs of schools.
- Inadequate resources and programs for kids with special needs. This parent was particularly concerned about support for autistic children.
- There should be no more school closings.
- The board has to have capacity for adaptive change. Things change so often and quickly. The board needs to know how to respond to and anticipate change.
- Concern about how demoralized teachers are.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Certain common themes emerged from many of the comments:
- Concern about equity—among schools within the district, and between Philadelphia schools and schools in suburban districts.
- Language instruction for ELLs and newcomers—one person emphasized instruction for middle and high school students, while others said this is an issue across all grades.

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- Equity is a banner concern. The district/board must address inconsistencies in staffing levels among schools. Schools must be fully staffed to meet student needs.

- ELLs must be helped to attain competency in English, and also hold onto their native language and culture. When students lose facility in their home language and culture, they lose connections to their family and community. This is a concern across all grades, but especially in middle and high school. Retired ESOL teachers might be a source of support for meeting this need.
- Transparency regarding funding is a key concern. Participants want to know how school budgets are built and why some schools seem to have more staff and resources than others. They want to know how charter school funding compares with funding for traditional schools. They want a more accessible conversation with the board and district officials about how funding and spending decisions are made, and they want to have meaningful input into those decisions. They want to know that decisions are based on relevant data, and that spending priorities are clear.
- The District needs to do a better job of providing special education services.

If people wonder whether something that was discussed is really the school board’s job, or how the board might accomplish that, indicate what and the flow of the conversation:

The group did not address this question specifically. They made no distinction between the School Board and the District as a whole in terms of responsibility for addressing the issues they raised.

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group’s work:

The key ideas/demands from this group are:

- Funding transparency
- Resource equity
- Address the instructional needs of ELLs and newcomer students/families
- Address the needs of Special Education students.

Moderator’s observations, for whatever it’s worth.

- Although I don’t think we want to encourage venting—as suggested by a couple of the participants—it’s clear that there are participants who come with frustrations that they need to unload. I don’t know how we might respond to this need within the current structure other than, perhaps, doing more to encourage people to offer a video message to the School Board.

- At the two sessions I've moderated thus far, the worst listeners have been people who are current or retired School District employees. They are either defensive about the District's programs and procedures, or they have their preconceived analysis of the problems, and have trouble hearing other views, even when they have allies. It might be worth a conversation with the Mayor's Education Office about the possibility of training in active listening for some key positions in the District.

COMMENT BOARD

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Post a message or Idea for the School Board

- Fund trauma informed practices/programs
- Every new big developer fund our schools
- Arts and culture with city support after school programs
- Our City our Schools funding proposal
- Please deal w/asbestos and lead in our schools
- Increase knowledge of programs that work in charter that public can use.
- Allow every voice, student, parent, community member to be heard and have input or decisions
- Increase number of community schools
- How will you hold our city's wealthiest institutions accountable to supporting our city's children? I.e.-Penn paying property taxes in pilots
- Environmental justice
- Please ensure equitable funding for all
- Restore counselors, librarians, school support staff, music and art curricula we lost through massive budget cuts
- Come up with a vision for equitable funding that pushes big corporations and wealthy institutions to pay more. Push for PILOTS.
- Tracking follow though of commitments made by Dr. Hite in a way is transparent
- Please put a moratorium on charter extensions and new charters as well as renaissance charters
- Stop authorizing charter schools because the boards has no control
- Fair funding formula! Equity\$ Ed Law Center Research
- Stop Keystone testing
- Lack of oversight/accountability, of school policing/ security
- Holistic approach that every kid has multiple adults safely supporting them

- Security cameras that work guys a doors system that's reliable ...please
- Environmental health in schools
- Change operation
- Help Special education

How would you like the new board to connect with the public?

- Listen to people and go out and meet people. Visit all schools.
- Interact with us on social media
- Neighborhood councils with high quorum of parents who make direct recommendations to BOE
- Student specific forums similar to these listening sessions
- Locally led group up councils with schools and neighborhoods
- Listen, improve, survey before major change
- Stay simple!
- Improve right to know in parents and environmental concerns.

COLEMAN NORTHWEST REGIONAL LIBRARY

MAY 18, 2018

Moderator: Cassandra Georges

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 17 participants included people who identified as former and current employees of the school district and others.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Improve the Classroom.
- Many participants stated that they want quality education for students.
- Change current teaching methods to address persistent gaps in proficiency.
- There are not enough schools so students have to be bussed all over.
- Educators need to be informed.
- Improve availability of supplies.
- Address health issues.
- Create afterschool programs.
- Change Board operations.
- Find funding sources and ways to supplement/replace money for schools.
- Change leadership. There were concerns about leadership/the people making decisions.
- Change structure of board meetings.
- Listen at meetings and provide attendees answers/info.
- Address ongoing segregation.
- Focus on communication structures.
- Update policies about school infrastructure.
- Address resources for charter schools.

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- Completely redesign and restructure Board meetings.
 - Reevaluate who participates.

- People with answers and authority should be present at every meeting. Group did acknowledge that such participants are unpaid for meetings.
- Incorporate administrators into board meetings.
- Consider locations that will be convenient for all school families, no matter the neighborhood. Participant noted that the District didn't host any forums east of Broad Street, including her neighborhood in North Philly.
- Restructure board operating procedures.
- Educate and inform parents about process.
- Be consistent with format and process.
- Strike an actual balance between being interactive and being efficient.
- Allow attendee comments that are not restricted to 3-minute monologues with no responses.
- Make sure there is a question and answer portion so that info flows both ways.
- Structure can include reserving spots to ask questions.
- Reevaluate policies and priorities.
- Remember to have a comprehensive approach (not one size fits all).
- Maintain accountability and information.
- Increase transparency and communication.
- Be transparent about policies, health and safety, referrals, etc.
- Consider the intention vs. impact of policies.
- Establish fair funding.
- Create practical and transparent funding formula for individual schools.
- Leverage private funding through local corporations like Comcast. Make changes so that companies with big tax breaks start to contribute to the community. Remove barriers to corporate partnerships.
- Set minimum building safety standards. There are reports of environmental issues like asbestos, lead in water, etc. Board needs to be transparent about potential health hazards and concerns.
- Remember that diversity is a strength.
- Close the digital divide.

- Address the lack of supplies or improper managing of inventory. Why are some supplies going unused in closets? Children/families should not be required to provide items like toilet paper and paper towels.
- Conduct transparent inventory of what schools lack and need.
- Provide more fruit and veggies at lunch.
- Fix the academic problems with schools and their structures.
- Initiate immediate intervention program for underperforming schools. For example, identify programs that are not working and the staff responsible for them and replace them with people and programs that have proven to be effective.
- Close underperforming schools (considered as a last resort).
- Extend school hours.
- Charter schools are public schools. Board should oversee charter schools. Charter schools have been more lenient about things like certification, so Board should follow up and ensure quality/compliance.
- There should be better collaboration between neighborhoods and charter schools. Good experiences with New Media and Lincoln were mentioned.
- Support the Students.
- Care for the overall health of students in terms of physical (including nutrition and exercise), mental, development(IEP).
- Place nurses in every school.
- Be prepared to deal with trauma (PBIS).
- Be more proactive with support, especially for African American boys.
- Host afterschool activities for children.
- Ensure quality and compliance of Special Education programs.
- Special education children are not always receiving the proper services. For example, student that is working on social skills according to their IEP should not be working or on detention during lunch.
- Have accountability with special education teachers. Roles should be defined. Aides are not always managing students as planned.
- Be clear about process of IEP and steps
- Streamline processes so there are easier transitions.

- Have parents involved in network/IEP.
- Improve communication and connections to engage the greater community.
- Reimagine schools as community centers. What changes could happen if school functioned as community centers? Schools could be connected to families, companies, and community.
- Offer workshops for parents and adults.
- Strengthen relations between departments/potential partners like Parks & Recreation (the afterschool programs), CBH/Behavioral professionals, and health department.
- Identify a coordinator to connect with these departments to create smoother transitions of information/people.
- Build partnerships with the business community.
- Leverage volunteers and parental participation. Make it easier for people to help.
- Open up to volunteers from community and identify a coordinator. Encourage community engagement and parental support.
- Commit to ongoing outreach to families. There are not always explanations provided. Parents are not always informed.
- Reestablish Parent Teacher Association and School Advisory Council.
- Use media platforms to communicate with parents and community members.
- Make a centralized hotline for educational resources (like calling 411 or 211).

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group’s work:

- The group seemed to gravitate towards a few central ideas-
- Provide a quality, well-rounded education for students that cares for their minds, bodies, emotions, mental health, etc.
- Fix funding and the impact on resources and supplies.
- Overhaul approach/tone of board meetings to ensure two-way exchange of info.
- Maintain transparency and communication.
- Review Special Education programs, charter schools, environmental concerns, and nutrition
- schools as community centers.
- Get everyone involved as supporters/donors/volunteers, including companies, departmental partners, and families.
- Establish point people/contacts for these groups to act as liaisons and facilitate this communication.

COLEMAN NORTHWEST REGIONAL LIBRARY

MAY 18, 2018

Moderator: Germaine Ingram

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 16 participants included people who identified as parents, grandparents, teachers (in both traditional and charter schools), retired teachers, a contract substitute teacher, and interested citizens. Some people identified with organized education reform organizations.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Equity in education
- Addressing the climate of fear that exists in the schools—this has to do with school safety and also the condition of school facilities.
- The toxins and other environmental dangers that exist in schools—there were specific references to peeling lead paint and asbestos.
- Adequate funding
- School discipline—Standards for student conduct need to be higher and consistently enforced. There needs to be a culture and climate in schools where teachers can thrive, “follow their passion”, and be creative partners in teaching/learning. Too many teachers are demoralized and fearful of speaking their minds about working conditions.
- “Stop the rhetoric. People in the district need to do what they say they’re going to do.” (From a senior gentleman in the group.)
- “Go back to ‘basics’.” Teachers have been forced into becoming paper pushers. They are fearful for their safety and for their jobs.
- “Choice” can’t be the driving value for decision-making in education. Education is a public good, and should be recognized as a collective benefit.

- There needs to be a vision and strategy for cooperation between the District and charter schools.
- Schools/the District should be places to demonstrate the power of citizenship, rather than an ethic of consumerism. People should be encouraged and motivated to have civic engagement with public education, and not be treated like consumers deciding among private choices. Schools are being asked to do more with less. There needs to be a holistic approach to educating, where the needs of the whole child are considered and addressed.
- Schools should be run like a community, not a business. Because of the atmosphere in schools, people are retiring before they want to. More school-based educators should be making decisions, rather than having them made by central office.
- The School Board must be accountable to the community, and respond to community voices.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Recurring concerns were: Equity, adequacy and safety in school facilities; Student conduct and school discipline; and Teacher morale, agency, and retention.

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- There needs to be more support for student mental health—including trauma-informed teachers, more partnerships with city mental health resources, more counselors to address the rampant mental health issues in schools, more emotional support staff and strategies.
- One participant summed up impressions of the schools as “chaos, deprivation, and inequity”. (Nobody rushed to counter that statement.) She said that the Board needs to get out to schools and talk with teachers and students. Too many people are afraid to speak honestly about their concerns.
- Need for greater accountability and transparency: Some of the issues where they feel that transparency is lacking is with respect to hiring and staffing decisions; facilities, including standards for building upkeep and maintenance; and spending priorities.
- There must be greater willingness on the part of the district to collaborate and partner. There is the sense of a bunker mentality within district administration.

- There is great concern about school culture, student conduct, and discipline. This concern incorporates a number of factors, including setting clear and consistent standards for student conduct that apply across schools; decreasing class sizes; increasing resources for behavioral health, mental health, and counseling
- Feeling that communities themselves are having to find solutions for things that should be the basic responsibilities of the District, e.g., providing adequate books, materials and supplies. Schools have to appeal to charities and businesses to provide for their students—this leads to inequities.
- The impact of obvious inequities in facilities in different communities. An example that was offered was the fact that Lincoln High School (in the N.E.) has a new building, while Randolph (in North Philadelphia) was built in 1935—it's been renovated, but has no auditorium or gym. What do these differences say to students about how they are valued? Also, criticism of Bok being sold and turned into places for private businesses, including a roof-top bar.
- The Parent & Community Advisory Council should be convened more frequently.

If people wonder whether something that was discussed is really the school board's job, or how the board might accomplish that, indicate what and the flow of the conversation:

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group's work:

- The District/Board must demonstrate accountability to citizens
- Transparency
- More partnering and collaboration
- The need for a sense that the District, informed by citizens, has a vision for where it wants to go and a plan for how it aims to get there.

Moderator's Note: This group was another demonstration of the need for citizens to have a better understanding of where accountability lies and where funding comes from. For example, some in the group thought that all education funding comes from the state; there were questions about how charter schools are funded and how their funding differs from funding for traditional public schools; and no one is familiar with the complex state formulae that determine the amount of state reimbursement the District can get for facilities maintenance, upgrades, and replacements. How can the District/School Board/Mayor give citizens enough relevant information for them to feel capable of offering informed recommendations?

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MAY 18, 2018

Moderator: Ellen Greenberg

Moderator's description of the group:

Description of Group:

This group of 16 participants included people who identified parents, grandparents, teachers (past and present), a lawyer with the Education Law Center, someone working for the HYPE program, a public school nurse, someone who works in a Germantown nonprofit, the Director of Civic Engagement at Temple University and others who identified as concerned citizens/taxpayers.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

- Real systemic concern about how bullying is being addressed (example: ongoing bullying without enough support from teachers and administrators and not enough training on how to investigate and intervene. Plus an option to go to another school. Currently no policy. (others agreed with this concern)
- Funding (more than equitability within Philadelphia
 - Large class sizes - expect the same of them as we do from those with smaller class sizes and support
- The food children are fed
 - Don't have time to eat and the food available is not healthy
 - Schools aren't supportive of teen mothers coming back to school and being able to pump
- Kids need to be exposed to music, restorative practices, trees, etc. Bring back the building trades
- Need a village to raise a kid - who's raising the village?
- What's the alternative to the alternative school?
- Funding - without proper funding, can't take care of children
- School funding is confusing (e.g. Philadelphia Parking Authority owes the school district a lot of money. What's happening with that?)
- Equality - not just equity
 - Unequal education depending on what part of the city you're from

- Appears that we're in denial about the violence in our city, schools and communities. School teachers and administration are deeply distressed (need to find ways to support them)
- Lack of resources to address violence

Hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

- Watched SRC spend millions of dollars on outside vendors - wants to see the board invest in teachers learning with and from each other (others agreed with this hope)
- Getting people to opt into the school system (working hard to acknowledge and support those without options)
- Voice of educators, families and students in decision making and equipping/educating them to be able to advocate
- Convince parents that the schools have the resources - equitable funding (others supported this hope)
- Bring back classes like Home Economics, Auto shop, Wood shop, Music, etc. - bring back to give kids more to do and more to look forward to (others supported this hope)
- New leadership will embrace the issue of violence in schools
- Better mental health support in schools (Counselors, Social Workers, Trauma informed care and Restorative Justice)
- Decreasing punitive responses to children - giving them support and listening
- Change the narrative about what our schools are - "Can't send your kids to the neighborhood school." Include the great things that are happening
- Investment in our schools
 - Commit to ALL schools regardless of the money that the parents make or is available in the neighborhood
- Board will tour the different neighborhoods (finance, history and law)
- More peer to peer resolution of issues that occur in schools
- Every child has the opportunity to have a bright future
- Better mentors for our children
- Some kind of assessment regarding violence in schools (related to a concern about schools that are under-reporting the violence that occurs within their school)

Key concerns/themes/ideas:

- **Funding**
 - Reconsidering the ways the budget is drained (by the SRC)
 - Would like the board to see themselves as advocates to Harrisburg

- Evaluate the district budgeting so that schools have stable discretionary money over time
 - Accountability and transparency (same information is available for all people equally) for the money that was spent
 - Cultural shift that evens out the power dynamic (everyone is protecting something and that interferes with being honest) and allows everyone to have a voice and be on the playing field
 - Re-evaluate the salaries of the top leadership within the school district
 - State took over and so did standardized testing
 - Became all about the money.
 - Vendors made billions of dollars.
 - Was a manipulation to shut down public schools
 - Transparency: getting information and then using it to make changes (instead of people getting defensive)
 - The way the budget is set up/cycle if the school hasn't reached quota then a teacher can be taken and reassigned (that shouldn't happen, it's hard on the teachers and difficult for children to adjust to the change)
- **School Environment**
 - Mental health and violence
 - Need to change the current climate
 - Testing
 - Food
 - Restorative practices
 - Ways to resolve conflict (i.e. a peace garden where students are in charge of a living thing as opposed to being suspended)
 - Would like the board to realize that they're the last line of defense to protect the interests and integrity of the children
 - **Community Engagement**
 - Establish subcommittees of the board that includes groups of parents to provide insight and support (from the community)
 - Keep conversations like these going
 - Make sure that there are some students on the board/have a seat at the table/have a voice
 - Commitment from the board to critically engage - not be a rubber stamp - be transparent with the community and vice versa.
 - There was a lack of transparency from the SRC regarding Charter Schools

COLEMAN NORTHWEST REGIONAL LIBRARY

MAY 18, 2018

Moderator: Chris Satullo

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 20 participants, most of who identified as parents, with a significant segment of folks with special needs children (particularly with autism spectrum disorders).

Concerns or hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Hope that kids from low-income areas can get equal opportunities.
- I'm a social worker whose clients are young adults with disabilities; I'd like to see the people who become my clients get the resources they need while in school.
- Concerned about special ed services for children like my 5-year-old.
- I don't want charters, period.
- I'm concerned that I see children getting promoted to the next grade without the skills they should have gotten in the previous grade.
- More equitable funding from school to school, plus all schools need more special ed dollars
- Class size in elementary school is too big given the behavior problems and special needs so many kids have. We need to offer more supports to the teachers of those kids.
- (From a very happy Mastery Charter parent) My hope is that this school board will give charter renewals. We also need more safety in the schools.
- The comparison with what's invested in our schools vs. suburban schools is ridiculous
- I'm the parent of a couple of public school graduates, but I just see the district shrinking and shrinking and shrinking. All those schools closing, it's terrible.
- Everything is "go to college." Not everyone is intended to go to college.
- There's a lack of encouragement to parents to be involved.
- My wife and I want to buy a home here [rents in East Falls] but we need to see stability, infrastructure and stability.
- I have three grandchildren in SPD. I want to see good options for them in OUR neighborhood, not having to run all over the city to find them.
- Classes are overcrowded; I'd like to volunteer to help but it's not clear how to.
- We need affordable after-school options for working parents.
- I want school choice. Not every child is the same. If charters give my child the choice he

needs, then I want charters.

- My child went to Mastery for a while, but the overall corporate feel left a sour taste in my mouth.
- Bus service for students who go to Saul is just terrible, and the situation where they have to walk from the bus top to the school across Henry is unsafe.
- Schools have poor websites, with no information.
- There's a huge decline in the percentage of students who have any knowledge or ability on how to handle situations where their emotions come into play. What can we as a community do to support teachers who have to deal with so many of these kids?
- There's too much testing. [From a teacher.]
- We simply need more adults in the building; these kids need more one on one attention from adults.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Funding - both overall, in comparison with suburbs, and equitable funding among individual schools
- Charters – strong views both pro and con
- Parental involvement – framed by this group as largely about how to support teachers coping with large classes full of kids with special needs or behavioral issues
- Accountability – this group saw and agreed about a lot of problems they'd like to see addressed, but from overall funding to boosting parental involvement, they said they had no clear idea whose responsibility it was to take care of those concerns.

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

- Funding - The group that discussed this issue mostly lamented the disparities the participants saw from neighborhood to neighborhood in city schools, and the stark comparison with suburban riches. Asked to come up with ideas to improve the situation, the group in response asked for a primer on where the money to fund the schools comes from and who is it who makes those decisions? They were somewhat surprised but pleased to learn that City Council in the end approves the school budget, as they saw this as a venue where they could make their voices heard.
- Special education - A number of members of the group wanted to discuss special ed, but the discussion understandably focused on parents of special needs kids trading tips and information on how to get their kids services. The agreement was that the system of services is far too hard to decipher and access.
- Charters - This group had a lively but civil disagreement. Several participants who were there both as parents of special needs children and as union public school teachers were

vociferous in their criticism of charters as leeches on the system that don't do right by special needs students. Other charter parents were equally firm that charters had given their children a good educational option that otherwise was not available in their neighborhood and wanted to see charters maintained. The anti-charter participants were either not aware or unwilling to accept that charters are public schools. They used language about corporations and privatization throughout the discussion. No conclusions or new ideas emerged, but perhaps each side got a slightly better understanding of the other side's viewpoint.

- Community involvement – This group wanted to see schools linked up more effectively with service organizations that organize and train groups such as senior citizens and retired executives to do non-profit volunteer service. The group was emphatic that teachers need more support and willing hands to help, and more energy should be invested in getting not just parents, but a whole range of interested community members more involved in helping the schools.

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group's work:

- The charter debate inside this group showed how potent and emotion-laden terms such as “corporate,” “privatize” and “choice” are, and how difficult it can become once positions get entrenched it can be to introduce key background or pertinent facts into the argument. e.g. The statement was made, and affirmed by others, that there are no neighborhood public schools left in Northwest Philadelphia i.e. everything is charters and magnets.
- In contrast to some other groups' discussions about parental involvement, this group seemed to partake of no anger about parents being excluded or disrespected. The focus was on a yearning to do more to help overwhelmed teachers, linked to confusion about how to go about it.
- The struggles of the funding subgroup to get their arms around their issue underlined a point made in other breakout groups during the course of the project – creating an accessible, understandable, multimedia primer on budget and funding issues would be useful.

COLEMAN NORTHWEST REGIONAL LIBRARY

MAY 18, 2018

Moderator: Serrano LeGrand and Melanie Oeun-Greenhalgh

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 16 participants included people who identified as grandparents, parents, concerned citizens, educators and spouses of educators and education activists.

Concerns/Hopes people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Hope: That parents can stop worrying about education for children
- Concern: There is no transparency from the school district and school board
- Hope: There is an authentic way for the school board to listen to the public
- Hope: Money is not funneled to the charter schools and instead goes back to the public.
- Hope: The city of Philadelphia unite as a big school district and public schools.
- Hope: As a board, they be accessible to the public.
- Hope: The state of Pennsylvania make kindergarten mandatory.
- Hope: The school board have a sense of urgency; learn from what has worked before.
- Hope: There are better schools for all children and should not matter about district or zip-code.
- Hope: Quality schools district-wide
- Concern: We need resources back in our schools (for example, mental health). The focus should always be on all schools, not just achieving schools.
- Hope: obtain adequate funding and have a healthy skepticism about charter school practices
- Concern: school buildings and property are horrendous
- Hope: The school board talk to smart people to help with making decisions and fixing our facilities
- Hope: Don't move on to something new without looking at what is already working. The school board ought to expand on what works to other schools and make it bigger and

better.

- Hope: No more cuts to literacy or to libraries or school programs like music and arts.
- Concern: There is a disconnect with literacy. The district ought to stop just passing students along.
- Hope: The school board ought to find ways to make students want to stay in school, provide them with job training and allow for the opportunity for strong relationships with parents and teachers to be built.
- Concern: It's not okay that we have the best schools and the worst schools. There needs to be more equality so all schools are good.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Mental health awareness: there need to be more resources for families and schools. This could include having professional teams and staff dedicated to just this in every school
- Considering exposure activities: extracurricular activities that give students access to different venues in Philadelphia (Philly Pop)
- Freedom writers: find commonality, through the use of journaling as an activity to start the day and validate feelings
- Mental health awareness and resources
- Make middle schools a viable option (reconsider the limitations of a structure such as K-8. What works for elementary schools does not work for middle schools)
- look at grade structure of schools and incorporate different education models into teaching
- Money/funding: we don't have enough. Classrooms need at least 2 staff per room.
- teaching models can be shifted and innovated around
- all schools and resources should be equally distributed
- every child should get the same \$ allocation (statewide)
- Make focused improvements (start with schools physical plans)
- keep schools small and local; students ought to live close to schools so they can travel to them
- schools need to utilize community resources (i.e library)
- Transparency and accountability process for parents and community members to communicate with the school board
- Find ways to have fair budgets for all schools
- equality for all students
- stability of teachers
- district needs to implementing new plans for schools

- nutritional meals in school need to be a focus: there is a huge discrepancy in the “satellite lunches” versus “full kitchen”
- A lot of responsibilities falls on the schools, they need more supports for families at home
- Partner with co-op to get healthy foods to parents
- Boards should have committees to get input from community members who have experiences with education instead of outsourcing
- Board meetings should be held at various locations and days and times
- Give educational programs time to work; they change too frequently

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

Here you can include key ideas from cross group discussion – ideas that came up in one group that also came up in other groups. When appropriate, indicate the concern that motivated the idea. When possible, also discuss the energy, importance, or sense of urgency that the group exhibited around an idea.

- The role of checks and balances is really important (for families, teachers, schools)
- Equity and equal distribution of resources (all schools should be equal); there is an uneven balance between the best schools and schools that are failing
- Integrating community resources
- transparency and accountability
- healthy school buildings

Key ideas, insights or questions that emerged in this group’s work (with a sense of how important this is to the group):

- What do we mean by equity and equality?
- How are the voices and concerns being fully captured in this listening session?
- Was there some thinking around the structure of the new board members roles?
- Will the by-laws written for the new board members be shared out with the public?
- Will the public be allowed to provide any input and feedback about the by-laws?

COMMENT BOARD

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MAY 18, 2018

Post a message or Idea for the School Board. How would you like the new board to connect with the public?

- Since we have lost the school board, have we retained the same or increased funding for our school district?
- What plans are in place to replace these funds?
- What new ideas do you have to bring in funding?
- Review the principal and assistant principal hiring process. Presently there is a young woman with no educational background who oversees the process. It seems that the process favors young people under 40.
- Fair hiring.
- Revisiting/Reinvesting/Reopening schools that were closed down. When you close a school, you disable a community.
- Rotate meetings to different neighborhoods. As many as possible (not one of these talks were East of Broad Street!)
- Enable teachers and parents to let you know their concerns in local meetings.
- Charter school review. Depleting much needed funds from public schools.
- Facilities, Facilities, Facilities
- Hire more black teachers
- Answer questions when asked a question at meeting
- Schools need libraries and librarians
- Work on engaging families and have an “Open Door” policy. Support special needs children across the District.
- Advocate for full funding- no new charters.
- Explain budget. Why doesn't Phila. parking Authority fulfill its obligation to fund schools?
- Please come up with comprehensive plan to update school bldgs. In city to better serve our children
- Create a parent advisory committee of public school parents so you know what's going on in the schools.
- Building better partnerships with businesses and universities to fund schools i.e. Comcast, university of Penn, Temple, etc.
- Instead of spending millions on outside, corporate vendors, build the capacity of teachers and their leadership. Invest in teacher networks (e.g. Phila. Writing Project)
- them, not in “drive by” professional development and expensive curricula.

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MAY 23, 2018

Moderator: Chris Satullo, Serrano LeGrand and Melanie Oeun-Greenhalgh

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 15 participants, all of whom were Mandarin speakers who relied on a translator throughout the conversation, included people who identified as teachers, parents, grandparents and family members of students who were currently enrolled in Mayfair Elementary.

Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Relocation of Mayfair students with a very short amount of notice to parents
- The new school students are being relocated to have an issue with quality of water
- Relocation of students and the safety concerns that come along with this change
- School funding and quality of water
- Relocation of children is causing anxiety to family
- There was no input from families about the move
- There was no explanation about why students are getting moved
- The distance between the proposed school and place of residence for parents is far and unfeasible
- Parents have multiple children going to different buildings who are all around the same age
- One grandfather who takes care of his grandchildren and is responsible for bringing them to school won't be able to transport the kids with the new distance
- School district ought to keep in mind grandparents who help take care of the children when their parents work during the day
- The physical appearance and structure of the school buildings ought to be addressed
- Schools are overcrowded and have students and people coming in that are not necessarily from the neighborhood
- District ought to invest money in neighborhood schools
- Integration of younger aged students with older students has caused anxiety
- Access to students in different buildings

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

Here you can include key ideas from cross group discussion – ideas that came up in one group that also came up in other groups. When appropriate, indicate the concern that motivated the idea. When possible, also discuss the energy, importance, or sense of urgency that the group exhibited around an idea.

- Parents do not want their children to get moved
- The school district should consider setting up portable classrooms so that the school building

can get expanded or get a location that is closer to Mayfield

- The board needs to consider pushing the district on hiring more bi-lingual staff (especially ones that speak Mandarin)
- Communication with families need to improve, especially the timeliness of correspondence that comes from the school district
- Phone calls and letters sent home in native languages are best means of communication for this particular group of concerned parents
- There needs to be more activities for students to engage in after-school (music classes, dance classes, martial arts, etc.)
- Parents bought houses in particular neighborhoods so that their children can attend particular schools

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MAY 23, 2018

Moderator: Germaine Ingram and Lauren Hirshon

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 31 participants included people who identified as current and retired School District teachers/employees, parents of children in traditional and charter schools in the District, people who are prospective District parents, grandparents, school activists, a graduate student, a contingent from the Mayfair School, and two high school students who are shadowing School Board member Maria McColgan.

Hopes and concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour

- Hope for revitalized music programs.
- School Board must maintain an attitude of positivity toward their mission.
- Hope that the District ensures good schools and quality education for all children.
- Hope that there is a smooth transition for the new School Board.
- Hope that there is a moratorium on new charter schools until such time as regular district schools are in good condition.
- Hope for transparency and fiscal responsibility.
- Hope that the new board takes time to talk with parents, teachers and students; address the needs of the most vulnerable students.
- Hope for more mental health education and services.

- A concern that too many education services are being contracted out, and many of the service providers are not racially/ethnically diverse—students don't see people that look like them in the delivery of these services. The same outfits get the contracts again and again.
- The particular needs of each school must be considered and addressed.
- There needs to be fair funding from Harrisburg for the Philadelphia District. The District should be taking the fight to Harrisburg for more funding. Funding needs to be better than "adequate"—it should be "outstanding."
- Lack of transparency, and too much privatization of school services.
- Hope that public education is seen as a common good—quality education serves everyone.
- Hope for equity in education opportunity for every child, especially for kids with special needs. (District should stop spending money on high-priced law firms to fight parents on demands for special education services.)
- Hope for expansion of CTE programs.
- The District must support parents so that they can better support their children.
- A contingent of 5-6 people expressed their opposition to the transfer of kindergarten and first grade classes from Mayfair School to Meehan. They feel that Meehan will not be a safe environment for their children, it will be inconvenient for parents, and will separate siblings. They said that the change will affect about 400 children. They are also upset that the District did not consult parents about the decision. They believe that an appropriate solution is to put the classes in trailers at the Mayfair site.
- Teachers should have adequate materials and supplies. They should not have to "beg on Facebook" for money to equip their classrooms.
- The poor physical condition of schools is a major concern.
- End high-stakes testing.
- The School Board needs to fight for the schools our children deserve. There should be an end to 10-year tax abatements in order to provide more support for schools.
- Hope for appropriate transition services for special education students.
- Invest in traditional public schools rather than adding more charters.
- Philadelphia should be a "trauma-informed" district.
- Hope for coordination of child-serving programs across City departments and other sectors, with emphasis on ensuring that all children have a supportive social/emotional environment.
- Hope that Philly will prove that it is the right place for her to raise and educate her kids.
- Hope for funding and support for mentally-gifted kids, available in schools throughout the District.

If people grouped concerns, identified similarities of concerns, identify those groupings here:

- Recurring hopes/concerns were fair and equitable funding
- Transparency
- Addressing the Mayfair/Meehan controversy
- Public schools as a common good
- Prioritizing improvements in programs and facilities of traditional public schools over more charter schools
- tax abatements
- privatization of school services.

Key learnings from the small group discussions:

Transparency and engagement

Recommendations included:

- Hold School Board meetings at times that are convenient for parents and advertise them widely;
- Hold School Board meetings in locations throughout the city;
- Provide access to and contact information for school leaders;
- Provide more time for meetings;
- After the School Board takes office, they should hold follow-up meetings and a report to the public after the first 100 days.
- Give more advance notice of issues and proposals, and make sure communications are language-accessible.
- Provide accessible information on District funding streams and spending.

Make the District trauma-informed and provide more mental health services

Recommendations included:

- Review and implement recommendations from 2008 report of Blue Ribbon Commission on Children’s Behavioral Health
- Increase the counselor/student ratio
- Provide emotionally supportive programs for staff as well as students
- Meditation programs in schools
- School-based programs in conflict resolution
- Address drug issues
- Increase arts programs at all grade levels
-

Equity in resources across the District

- Eliminate/modify special admission process

- Stop reduction/increase availability of CTE programs

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MAY 23, 2018

Moderator: Josh Warner and Roz Spigel

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 26 participants included people who identified as parents, grandparents, school and community advocates, teachers, taxpayers, volunteers, district employees, and activists.

Hopes & Concerns people have about the district or school board that brought them to the Listening Tour:

Hopes:

- Meet people where they live – more transparent
- See opportunities for parents to be more engaged
- Quality options for student
- Try innovative approaches to therapy/trauma
- Transparency – community needs to be heard and respected
- All resources returned to schools so children get the education they are missing now
- Lacking resources from elementary into middle and high school for special education, supports for students and teachers
- We transform the school system from one of pain to one of strength, with hope to move forward
- New school board pay attention to earliest learners
- School raises healthy successful child
- Board puts children's best interest forward for both public and charter schools
- Violence prevention
- School district work more closely with library
- Leveraging community
- Teaching civic engagement
- School repair – can schools prepare students to help restore school buildings

Concerns:

- Personalized education, training,
- “Schools without walls”
- How school board and district governs itself , process not properly democratic
- Is the mayor going to have any control over the school board?
- Transparency – process that lead up to this school board was opaque
- Accountability
- Low morale in schools
- Children have to transfer due to crowding
 - Moving little ones to a different school
 - **** this was mentioned three times*
- Language access for parents and children
 - *** this was mentioned twice*
- Safe conditions – building and climate
- Board to be involved and concerned about charter schools work on renewals
- Schools prepare students for vocational as well as college
- Trauma and emotional learning part of public school experience
- School district says it will get better and it doesn’t, example Meehan(?) moving children
- Transfer of students – hardship for parents and caregivers, too far to go

Key Learnings from the small group discussions:

The Lack of Resources in the District vs. Resources available in the Community

- District and SRC often say “we don’t have the resources”
- But communities have a lot of resources in them
 - Local businesses, corporations, colleges & universities, non-profits, city institutions (libraries, etc.)
- The New Board should be a “matchmaker” with these organizations to secure funds and resources
- Parents are critical in this role too:

- Raising resources for individual classrooms, grades, or schools
- Educating the community about needs or issues
- Giving feedback to the board
- We also need to rally at City Council to secure funds that were earmarked for schools and students
 - These \$ are sitting unused
 - New Board needs to directly engage with City Council to get these funds (from on-street parking ticketing revenues)
 - COUNCIL BILL #160844

Trauma in Students and Schools & Trauma Informed Education

- Parents, students, teachers, and staff need training on trauma care and understanding
- The New Board should mandate these trainings
 - Do trainings on Teacher “in-service” days
 - But also train students at the same time
 - Or make these half-days with student training in the morning
 - Partner organizations should be involved here too
 - They can conduct the trainings and/or support in other ways
 - *Here, the participants referenced the employees from CHOP and United Way and other non-profits that were contributing in the group*
- The small kids being moved from Meehan school is creating traumas right now!
 - For young children
 - For parents and grandparents
 - For the older kids in the destination building
- The New Board needs to drastically slow-down this “Meehan Move” process
 - There needs to be more inquiry, and the proper time for this
 - Board needs to hear from families to determine the hardships and potential traumas that students and families will go through

- Slowing down the process and doing more engagement will lead to Informed Decisions

Be Disruptive! The data and tracking and technology possibilities mean the Board can do more with less resources

- We can identify and track the development and skills of individual students
 - Therefore, we can better allocate resources and programs
 - A “customer service” approach is missing
- Don’t forget teachers and staff in these possibilities too
 - Better teacher pay
 - Think of providing teacher housing
- Experimenting with “schools without walls”

There is a big disconnect between ESL classes and the regular classes and schoolwork for students (and families) without English mastery

- NE Philly is very, very diverse – many languages and backgrounds
- Children take ESL classes, but then the majority of their work in other subjects and classes assumes proficiency in English
 - This sets kids up for failure
 - Makes it difficult for parents to volunteer, be involved, or help kids with homework
- The kids don’t have enough English to do well in their other subjects!
- ALSO RELATED: the issue of the Meehan school move
 - Parents and grandparents are very concerned with this, but the language barrier is huge
 - Notifications, meetings, and policies in English
 - How can parents even fully understand the issue or protest?

Implement “Culturally Relevant Therapeutic Strategies” to deal with Trauma in schools

- For example: “hip hop therapy”
 - This involves “speaking the kids’ own language”

- *Here it was pointed out that the district and MOE send notices in Mandarin or Spanish so that families will understand what is going on; so why not do the same for students that speak hip hop?*

Need for the New Board to engage more with the public to establish a core set of priorities

- This should be one of the main roles for the board
 - It helps guide spending
 - Determine environmental, building/facility, and health issues
 - Trauma treatment
- Doing all of this through regular engagement and reporting ensures transparency
 - (not the closed-door SRC style)

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MAY 23, 2018

Moderator: Harris Sokoloff and Brian Armstead

Moderator's description of the group:

This group of 18 participants, all of whom were Mandarin speakers and relied on a translator throughout the conversation, included people who identified as parents, a high school student, a grandmother, a community organizer and one senior executive of a Chinese social service agency.

What's one main concern or hope about the school district and the new school board that brought you here this evening?

**According to the participants, the School District recently decided that children that would normally attend Mayfair Elementary School will have to attend Austin Meehan Middle School, which is approximately 1 mile away.*

Concerns about the Mayfair/Meehan schools:

- Meehan looks like a prison
- Meehan has mold
- Poor air quality at Meehan
- Poor water quality at Meehan

- Roof leaks at Meehan
- Heating system at Meehan is bad
- Cooling/air conditioning system at Meehan is bad
- Meehan has a very bad smell.
- Meehan is too crowded
- A parent recently visited the schools and “left feeling terrible.”
 - She also said, “If you don’t believe me, you should go visit.”
- They will be sending very young children (Kindergarten and 1st graders) to Meehan.
 - It will be unsafe because there will be bigger kids there.
 - Also, the facilities are meant for bigger kids.
- Parents bought homes in the neighborhood to send their kids to Mayfair.
 - Children should go to a school in their community (especially young children)
 - They feel Mayfair is a “good school” and Meehan is not
 - Mayfair has a lot of services for Chinese population and is very welcoming. They feel Meehan is not set up for their population.
 - They would not have made the decision to move into that neighborhood had they known the Mayfair school would not be an option and that their children would be sent to Meehan
- Many of the families have elderly grandparents that drop-off/pick-up the children. The added distance to Meehan will be very far for elderly people to walk.
- Lincoln High School is next door to Meehan. There have been gunshots near Lincoln. Participants are concerned about the safety for their children and the grandparents going to and from Meehan.
- Kids quarrel and fight at Meehan school
 - Participants are concerned about the safety of the environment and interactions in the school
 - They are especially concerned about this because their children are younger and would be unable to defend themselves
 - They also don’t want their young children to see this type of environment. (Worried they will learn bad behaviors)
- They were informed after the School District made its decision
- Unfair to pay taxes and not have a say in school decisions.
 - “Where does the money come to renovate Meehan? Mayfair taxes help pay for this. We should have a say.”

- Mayfair school is also used by the community.
- The SRC is still in power until June 30th. Even though the new Board members have been on this listening tour, will the plans for Mayfair/Meehan still move forward because the SRC is still in charge?

Other concerns:

- The Mayfair school playground is used by people from number of neighborhoods because there is no city playground nearby.
- Air cooling at Northeast high school is a problem.
- Masterman High School has a high % of Asian students. Mandarin should be one of the language options.
- If a school has > 20% Asian students, mandarins should be offered as a language option
- Mandarin is not (but should be) offered at Mayfair school, too.
- There is a growing population in the Northeast. The District should be adding capacity in schools.
- The School District checks ID to enter the headquarters for a meeting. Many people in the Chinese community do not feel comfortable going to a building where they have to show ID.
- Need more tutoring and ESL programs for Chinese immigrants
- Need more programs for gifted students in Mayfair
- The overall ratings for the School District is very low.
- Need more mental health/psychiatric/behavioral therapy that can work with the Chinese community
 - Therapists need to understand immigrants' issues
 - Therapists need to speak Mandarin

Hopes:

- The new board is a big hope
- The listening sessions have been great
- The SDP will host summer camps or summer trips for kids.
 - Parents will pay for this
 - It would also help if SDP can help let parents know what other opportunities are offered by other organizations.

- Need better communication with the Chinese community, including people that do NOT have children in school, yet.
 - Especially with the Board and with the central School District office.

Recommendations:

- SDP transportation costs to send kids to Meehan will be very high. Use that money to expand Mayfair instead.
- The new board should hold some meetings in the community instead of always downtown.
- They would like more access to schools for Chinese community members/groups to use after school and weekends.
- Utilize Chinese organizations to help translate and communicate to the Chinese community.

Group M-1 Key Ideas:

- The participants do NOT want to send their children to Meehan
- Concerns over the health and safety at Meehan
 - Air & water quality; facilities damages; heating and cooling problems
 - Environmental concerns: fighting, school built for bigger kids; school will have older kids in same building.
- Lack of safety and convenience for young children and elderly walking to the new school. (Also, due to neighborhood safety issues since Meehan is near Lincoln)
- They felt blindsided by the decision and were not consulted or informed prior to a decision being made
- There were several concerns around services needed for immigrant children, including tutoring, ESL, and Chinese/immigrant sensitive MH therapy

A final note from the PPCE team

The team at the Penn Project for Civic Engagement would like to thank the Mayor's Office of Education for inviting us to be part of this inspiring initiative in practical civic listening.

In working with us, the MOE team members were consistently responsive, collaborative and effective. The MOE team was clearly inspired by a senses of serving the public good.

They made it possible for us to do the best work we could inside a challenging timeline.

We also want to praise every resident who showed up for the forums (some of them multiple times).

We were inspired by their passion for the welfare of the city's children, their candor, their good will, and their stubborn hopefulness, despite past disappointments and current challenges.

Finally, we want to thank the school board appointees for their flexible willingness to try something new, their purposeful listening at the forums, and their eloquence in reporting back to the participants on what they'd heard and learned at the forums.

This all strikes us as grounds for hope.

Chris Satullo

Dr. Harris Sokoloff

Linda Breistein

