



System of Great Schools
School District of Philadelphia
Philip H. Sheridan Elementary School
Parent, Family & Community Input Report

December 2019

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Introduction

In fall 2019, Temple University, in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, conducted focus groups and one-to-one interviews with parents as a component of the System of Great Schools review process. This report summarizes findings on perceptions and experiences from the Philip H. Sheridan School. This is the third year Temple's urban education faculty and graduate students participated in the process by gathering and analyzing data on parent and community perceptions. Three schools were involved this year: Add B. Anderson School, Philip H. Sheridan School, and James J. Sullivan. This report focuses on Sheridan Elementary, where we talked with dozens of parents, guardians, and community members during the process. The bulk of this report represents a synopsis of the major themes emerging from those conversations and presents parents' voices in their own words.

Data Collection and Analysis

In October and November 2019, a research team from Temple, led by Professor Will Jordan, gathered interview and focus group data on multiple occasions at Sheridan. Each time, the same interview protocol was used (see appendix). We used the full protocol for focus groups and an abbreviated/modified version for individual interviews. For focus groups, after greetings and introductions of facilitators and participants, and an opening general question about the major strengths of the school, there were five main topics covered: (1) school climate, (2) instruction, (3) leadership, (4) parent & community involvement, and (5) school facilities. We ended the session with a catch all question, inviting participants to comment on any aspect of the school they wished to. The focus group sessions were between one hour and 90 minutes long.

Regarding our research methods, for individual interviews, we asked interviewees to state their connections to the school and asked questions about the school's strengths and challenges in each category. The interviewees were overwhelming parents with children attending the school, however, some were grandparents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings. All conversations were audio-recorded with permission of the interviewees, and professionally transcribed. A total of 47 parents participated in focus groups and interviews at Sheridan, and the audio-files generated 178 pages of transcript data. This data formed the basis of our report.

While the conversations included a range of topics about the school, the focus of the report is on examining the collective perceptions of parents (and caregivers) about their children's actual learning and school engagement experiences. Students' voices are also included, as parents and facilitators gave students who showed up to the events space to discuss their lived experiences at school. It is also worth noting that several of the parents who participated had more than one child currently or previously attending Sheridan, thus giving richer data about the school. Additionally, a handful of parents were alumni who attended Sheridan decades ago and remained in the neighborhood.

The purpose of Temple's role in the project was on public engagement, specifically to understand how parents experienced Sheridan, what they perceived as its strengths and challenges. We were also interested in hearing suggestions for school improvement. Moreover, the Temple team wanted to capture and record parents' hopes, fears and desires in their own words. While we developed a set of interview questions designed to address specific issues, the research team was also open to topics and ideas parents felt were important to them. Professor Jordan personally attended each focus group as lead facilitator and was assisted by Temple graduate students. He also conducted many of the individual interviews, along with research assistants and staff from the System of Great Schools Office. A preliminary summary of the findings here was presented to Sheridan staff, parents, and community members in early December.

The methodology for analyzing interview data involved multiple iterative steps. First, after conducting focus groups and one-on-one interviews, we debriefed about the conversations and insights from parents. Temple researchers then developed a coding strategy to allow us to dig more deeply into key topics and test emerging theories about parents' perspectives and experiences. We then read through transcripts again, making notes about key emergent themes and important takeaway issues. Next, we again refined the coding system, which included such tentative codes as "academics," "general climate," "school safety," "leadership," etc. An informal coding book, with definitions for each code, helped to facilitate consistency across coders. Each transcript was coded, with all data related to a particular topic highlighted, and put into a new document. Coders also inserted written comments aimed at summarizing and interpreting the parents' quotes. Next, the lead researcher for Sheridan re-read the coded data to further examine themes and patterns, compare parents' comments, identify points of agreement and disagreement, and prioritize areas of concern and strengths. Researchers also looked for disconfirming evidence of each theme. It is important to note that there was variability within and between most codes, as parents sometimes made contradictory statements, which is somewhat common during

colloquial conversations. For example, on the topic of school-home communications, some interviewees suggested this was a clear strength of the school, while later on in the conversation took the position that communication could be improved. Rather than attempting to reconcile such issues here, we present data on both sides.

Interviews were also conducted in both English and in Spanish. Because Sheridan has a large Latinx population, each event was staffed with interpreters who provided two-way translations between the facilitators and interviewees. Additionally, Temple graduate students included Spanish-speakers who conducted focus groups and interviews solely in Spanish. These interviews were translated into English and combined with the data from English-speaking participants.

In this report, we discuss findings, summarize data across key issues, and highlight quotes from participants to illustrate the points. It is important to stress that each topic discussed below surfaced at multiple sessions and was voiced by several parents. For each, the team assessed the extent to which parents generally agreed on the issue or whether or not there were opposing perspectives. The sample of parents' voices below are not the only instances of parents speaking on a particular topic. Instead, in most cases, they were chosen because they represent a common perspective with the most clarity, or the quotes summarize complex issues in ways that were nicely put.

Summary of Themes: At a Glance

| | <u>Strengths</u> | <u>Challenges</u> |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Instruction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents reported positive teacher-student relationships The school has strong support for students with specific needs School effectively communicates expectations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents perceived a lack of academic press or low expectations for student achievement Parents perceive a lack of technology available to students Parents believe misbehaving students interfere with learning Parents believe support for English language learners can be strengthened |
| School Climate, Culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents believe student safety at school is prioritized The school has a respectful and nurturing atmosphere The school is responsive to parent and community concerns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullying and student misbehavior are viewed as persistent problems There are worries about food, such as food quality, timing of lunch periods, and conditions of the cafeteria Concerns about kids waiting outside at the start of the school day, during dismissal, recess, and physical education |
| Family & Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing efforts for outreach to parents and community members Humanitarian activities to support the families and the community Perception that parent participation increased over past years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents lead complicated lives that include work and multiple obligations Outreach to newcomers is lacking The school needs more effort in cultivating relationships with local advocates (e.g. businesses) and friends |
| Leadership & Systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionalism Effective communication strategies Responsive to parent & student needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for greater visibility around the school Need to review how policies are implemented and perceived by parents |

Major Areas of Strength

There was a perception among parents that Sheridan staff care deeply about the well-being of students. Many parents suggested that teachers and staff work hard everyday to educate their children. Despite challenges depicted in this report, many believe the school is improving. The efforts by staff to communicate with parents and to find ways to involve them meaningfully in their child's education do not go unnoticed. Still, at Sheridan, children's safety was on the minds of many parents we spoke with, along with the quality of instruction. Safety and security were framed as important issues both inside and outside of the school as parents voiced concerns about neighborhood violence. Additionally, while parents commented favorably on strong positive relationships with staff, some questioned the school's expectancies for academic excellence. The sections below highlight parents' voices regarding the strengths of Sheridan, followed by their view on challenges for the school. We conclude with parents' suggestions for school improvement that emerged during our analysis of the data.

Instruction: Strengths

Themes that emerged as major strengths of the instructional program were: (1) parents reported positive teacher-student relationships; (2) strong support for students with specific needs; and (3) Sheridan effectively communicates expectations.

Voices of the Parents

"Academically, the kids are doing fine; they [the school] alert you on everything. If your child is lagging behind, they help your child get to where they need to be. So that's a good thing..."

"He came a long way. My son has the STS, so he's made major progress as far as behavior, speech, motor skills, and everything. Before, he was rough all the way around. He has ADHD and ODD. The STS services is a major plus with him and his education. His last problem was, he wouldn't read. Now he's reading and trying to read things on his own without help. So, this school, I would say they helped him a lot."

“I like how he [my son] is getting everything so quickly because when he was in his past schools, he wasn’t understanding much. But ever since he came here, he’s learning really quickly and the teachers are understanding him really, really well.”

“If there’s something going on with your child, or they feel like your child has needs extra support, they are definitely quick to contact you about it and to get something scheduled so that you can address it.”

“As long as you’re involved with this school, they will help you the whole way. They will help you out the whole way though.”

“One of my children has an IEP and I like the way they’re [the school] working with him. He was struggling greatly and they are taking the time out. They really care.”

“That’s what I like the most. They [staff] never give up; they want us to do well. They push you through.”

“They [the school] do have different things in place where if a student is struggling or behavior issue. I realize that they try not to isolate the child. They have support for the student, and I do see a lot of that because my daughter had some academic stuff going on.”

“My concern was I realized she’s [my daughter] struggling in math.... So, I text the teacher to get information... I just prefer to be on the same page with the teacher. That way we can help the child overall.”

“She really likes her teacher. My little sister, she struggled hard; she has dyslexia. Her teacher makes it really comfortable for her in learning.”

“I do like how the school keep you up to date with what’s going on, and if there’s anything going on with the students, they make sure to tell us. I really like that. I feel like this school is really up on its game when it comes to notifying the parents and guardians.”

“Teachers are great. And, they communicate with each other. Obviously, they’re great with the students and parents.”

“My son really doesn’t like being in school, but he likes his teacher. This is his first year having a new teacher because, for kindergarten and first grade, he had the same

teacher. So, the change was different at first for him, but now he's really liking it. The change is good."

"My son gets his homework every day. He has his spelling words and it's different spelling words. It's actually fun things to do with the spelling that he likes. It's always like, draw a picture or circle vowels in your spelling words. He really likes that he gets the option to pick and choose what he wants to do for homework that day."

"The teacher he has, he had her last year, the third grade, and she got him for fourth grade again. She keeps me updated on everything. The sight words and the math and the projects, everything. She'll write me or text the class schedule. She's a good one."

"I feel very comfortable with my son's teacher. I believe she's new in the school but she's OK."

"That's why I tell you that even if you have books in Spanish at home, learning to read results from the habit of reading. If the child loves to read in Spanish, he will love to read in English."

School Climate, Culture: Strengths

The topic of school culture and climate was discussed early on in the interviews and focus group sessions. The major themes emerging from the data around strengths were: (1) parents believe student safety at school is prioritized; (2) The school has a respectful and nurturing atmosphere; and (3) The school is responsive to parent and community concerns.

Voices of the Parents

"When I pretty much come in the school in the morning, I get greeted warmly every day."

"They keep the kids safe and everything, because it's very hard to even get in to anywhere, without a guide or something. They're doing pretty well with the security. If you even get in the hallway, somebody's stopping you right then and there. Their security is really good."

"I live right around the corner and I can actually say that I feel safe walking my son to the corner and him walking down the street by himself because there's always

somebody outside the school yard waiting for the children and greeting them as they come in.”

“I feel safe sending her [my daughter] here. They got it pretty good. They say when they go out they have her in line and they wait in the numbers. It’s pretty organized so I like it.”

“Everything she [my daughter] does she always tells me about it. She’s always excited for every day [at school] but I think she enjoys everything, simple stuff.”

“They all say... oh, I like your daughter, she’s wonderful. She’s so helpful and she a real good person and everything.”

“Like I told her [my daughter], ‘that person bug you or do something to you, just raise your hands and tell the teacher. If the teacher can’t do nothing, let me know. I’ll got to the office and let them know.’ From this year, I have no complaint, no nothing.”

“She’ll be like, ‘oh, they’re treating me nice now. I’m so happy.’ Because one time, I did come to the school and I reported it [bullying] and they fixed the problem. That was wonderful because I use to have problems with the school.”

“I do ask my daughter every day like, ‘how was the day from one to 10.’ I think she’s coming around. In the beginning, her problem was on fitting in. She was just a lost child. The majority of her classmates been coming since kindergarten, so they’re familiar with the staff, the school.”

“I do have his [my daughter’s teacher’s] personal number where if I have any questions or concerns, I text him.”

“In the beginning, I would drop her off [my daughter] but I was always in my house worrying about her. I mean, sometimes she wakes up just because she doesn’t even want to get up from bed. She’s like, ‘I don’t want to go to school’... But today she was a little bit happy because they’re going to have a literacy parade. She did a little house thing in the classroom, so she was happy because of that.”

“Lots of improvement from last year. He [my son] used to have behavior problems and this year he’s very calm. I saw the teachers, how they adapt to his behavior. So, that’s why he’s doing so good.”

“I learned how to talk to people with a calmer voice when I get mad. But the staff, I don’t have no problem with the staff. I know if I come to them and I address a problem with them, being as they know me, they’ll try to take care of the issue.”

“In prior years, there was a problem with children’s behavior, but I see that this year there is more focus on that. So, I like that.”

“There is a crossing guard... you say ‘good morning’ and she doesn’t say a word. But watch out if a car crosses, because she says... and she takes care of those children, and she would fight with anyone to defend those children. She doesn’t speak but if a car crosses, she then does speak.”

“I will say something about the crossing guard. That lady, she’s so good, both of them are. So, I give it to them. They’re doing their job. They made me a little bit late today but I didn’t mind. And people respect them... Yeah, they’re on point.”

Family and Community: Strengths

Regarding family and community connections, the parents we spoke with appreciated personal regard shown to them by school staff. The specific themes emerging as strengths included: (1) Ongoing efforts for outreach to parents and community members; (2) humanitarian activities to support the families and the community; and (3) perception that parent participation increased over past years.

Voices of the Parents

“I like it because every time they got an activity or something happening with my child, they [the school] call me and tell me. Like how we’ll have to get here to participate and all that stuff from the school... two weeks ago they [the kids] got this book. It was like a [literacy] parade.”

“They include parents in lots of meetings, and if anything’s wrong with the school or something happens, they give information right away.”

“I think it’s getting better because I come to as many [parent & community events] as I can. The past couple of years it was a couple of parents. I would say the max, five parents. But this year, ... there was a lot of parents, it was packed.”

Interviewer: "What helps bring parents out to events?"

Parent: "I want to see how the school is interacting with the kids, how they do it, how they make them feel about everything... They want to find different ways to show him how to learn, about how to play, everything. I love that."

"Ms. D came up to the school at the end of the school year and gave out book bags and stuff to the kids, so they have it for next year. So, staff members in here will do things beyond what they supposed to do. They try, they try. They truly try. I don't have no problems with them."

Leadership and Systems: Strengths

Three themes emerged from the interview data analysis in the category of strengths of school leadership and systems: (1) professionalism; (2) effective communication strategies; and (3) responsive to parent & students' needs.

Voices of the Parents

"The strength is that they [school leaders] know how to get information [to parents]. I needed a couple resources and they were able to provide me the information to get the resources."

"I think the biggest strength that they got is how fast they communicate. It's wonderful how fast they communicate."

"I met the principal and everything, and I think she's a good leader of the school. Everything about the school is a good thing."

"I've worked close to the principal before. I have an autistic son and he's low function... They always send me something home with what he did in school, what he learned, how was his behavior, and what did he eat."

"There have been certain situations with my son and [the leadership team] did not allow the situation to escalate, to become more difficult. But they intervened at the right moment and tended to the situation. They don't allow it to escalate but look for a solution. That's what I have seen... That is also valuable."

“There is a lady [in the Main Office] always there to help everyone. Maybe she has not helped some of you, but that lady is always there. My son always had problems with other kids... She helps us more than anything with our language, when she translates... The teachers have always been nice with me. The principal, I see her, and she greets me nicely.”

“This is my first year here. The lady welcomed me very nicely, a lot of politeness in the office. I had problems with the vaccinations because he [my son] came from my country and did not bring all his records and they requested a doctor’s appointment.”

Challenges and Major Areas of Concern

As mentioned above, while some parents perceived an uptick in academic quality at Sheridan, there was a perception of lingering challenges as well. However, many of the focus groups and interviews were dominated by worries about safety and security. Below, we again highlight parents’ voices within each of the major categories: instruction; school climate, culture; family & community; and leadership & systems.

Instruction: Challenges

Themes that emerged in conversations about challenges and areas of concern about instruction were: (1) Parents perceived a lack of academic press or low expectations for student achievement; (2) parents perceive a lack of technology available to students; (3) parents believe misbehaving students interfere with learning; and (4) parents believe support English language learners can strengthened.

Voices of the Parents

“I think she [my daughter] could be challenged more because the homework that she’s getting... she’s like, ‘oh mom, this is baby work.’”

“But as far as the academics, as far as what they’re learning in the school, I think that can be improved.”

“They don’t have like a computer lab, or like a computer class, or they don’t have computers for all of the children and things of that nature. Since technology plays such a big part these days in our children’s growth and development, I mean let’s face it...”

“My child has a lot of slow learning. She doesn’t know how to read, she’s in 3rd grade... My question is if my daughter doesn’t know how to read, mathematics is hard for me with her, they are asking her to do multiplication and she doesn’t know how to add or subtract.”

“I think they focus on a lot of the bad students, that takes away in the classroom, the teacher, you know, learning. You got a bad apple in the bunch and that takes away from the teacher learning. She got to deal with this student. Things like that.”

“My boy is in second grade and his homework is in English. I don’t speak English and he doesn’t either because he just arrived.”

“That’s why I tell you that even if you have books in Spanish at home, learning to read results from the habit of reading. If the child loves to read in Spanish, he will love to read in English. Have books around the house in English and in Spanish and the child will use the same technique he uses to read in Spanish to read English with your help.”

School Climate, Culture: Challenges

There were also several areas of concern about school culture and climate at Sheridan. Specific themes that emerged included the following: (1) Bullying and student misbehavior are persistent problems; (2) there are several worries about food, such as food quality, timing of lunch periods, and conditions of the cafeteria; and (3) concerns about kids waiting outside at the start of the school day, during dismissal, recess, and physical education.

Voices of the Parents

“Bullying is taking place in this school. My child was one of them. But when we approached teach teacher about it, she handled the situation, we never heard anything else about.”

“Bullying is definitely an issue. My daughter, she’s covered, she has the whole hijab on, and she wears a khimar. They want to mess with her, ‘why you got that, why you got that?’ So there’s days that she don’t feel comfortable being her religion, like herself. And that frustrates me, for one.”

“To tell you the truth, when I come up to pick my child up from school during the let out, I see a lot of disrespect... the children are disrespectful. I blame that on the parents. I don’t blame that on the staff. Because, my children know better.”

“I have a daughter here in fourth grade. Since she started here, she has always been bullied. She has been threatened with scissors, they have thrown chairs at her and when I always came, she would tell me that she could not suspend the boy. Last year, a girl was threatening her and she would tell me that they could not suspend her because there was a lawsuit against the school. I was then at a point where my daughter did not want to come to school any longer. Even more, she was scared. Then, if I let her stay home, I am at fault. I am the one getting in trouble. I want to know why they don’t suspend or escalate, and the principal would never meet with me, she always referred me to the dean.”

“Only thing I want to change is the way they open the doors and dismiss them. It’s cold. They shouldn’t have to stand in the school yard, wait until all the classes come out.”

“The only stuff that I don’t like, when it rains, the kids wait outside.”

“The only thing I really don’t like about this school is about, when they took the kids out, like dismissal, when it’s raining. That’s the only time I don’t approve. That we had to stand there on the rain, no matter what we got, umbrella or not. They all can get... [it’s]easy to get sick and all that. A lot of parents don’t have a car.”

“I just feel like I was just leaving her - - and the parent can’t go up with them. I’m just dropping her off at the front. I used to pray, I pray every morning. I just felt never safe towards the beginning. I still don’t.”

“I’m pleased with everything else besides the basement looking cafeteria.”

“My daughter is in 3rd grade and is told that they have to wait until 1 pm to eat. I don’t know if they say the same thing to yours. Their turn is at 1 pm. You know, from 8:30 in the morning until 1 pm. No one can wait this long.”

“I’m like what’s the whole point of me giving you lunch if they’re already making you throw it away. She said that she could never finish her lunch.”

“I also fill up my daughter’s lunch box and she brings in her sandwiches, fruit, juice and water because I don’t know when she eats all that. She comes home with an empty lunch box.”

“I also have problems with my son. He leaves school in pain. Yesterday, he said they went out on a trip and he raised his hand because he needed to go to the bathroom. They don’t pay attention when he wants to go to the bathroom, and this is not the first time. It’s happened, he’s told me, many times.”

Family and Community: Challenges

Several themes regarding areas in need of improvement also arose in our discussions about family and community issues. According to the parents, these included the following: (1) Parents lead complicated lives that include work and multiple obligations; (2) outreach to newcomers is lacking; (3) need more effort in cultivating relationships with local advocates (e.g. businesses) and friends.

Voices of Parents

“People [parents] aren’t able to make it out, and unfortunately money does drive most people.”

“I will say in that part, I’m a little guilty because I work so I cannot participate in all the activities that the school offers.”

“I wouldn’t really know about community involved, because I’m new to the community. I live on a block where they sell at the corner. I don’t know my neighbors. Nobody said hi or nothing. Everybody stays to themselves. Yup I do too. I stay to myself. I stay to myself. And I kind of like that. My porch is a closed porch, which I kind of love that in a sense that my house is a closed porch. I wouldn’t really want an open porch anyways. If they say hi, I’ll say hi back.”

“They’re working on bringing in neighboring businesses or resources that are in the community, that they could be able to connect with and maybe further help them in the process.”

“They need a support team to do some footwork for them and go around and shop the school to these businesses and stuff like that. Because if I can get businesses to sign off for the school and help out...”

“I think it’s fine, but it still needs a lot of build work. Because a lot of parents don’t take you seriously. They don’t come to the meetings or they don’t come when they’re called.”

“For sure, I’m sure if parents knew there were pizza down here right now, they would be down here just for pizza, nothing else.”

Leadership: Challenges

After a thorough analysis of the transcripts, we found few significant criticisms of the Sheridan’s leadership team. However, two discernable themes emerged as challenges: (1) Need for greater visibility around the school; and (2) reviewing how policies are implemented and perceived by parenting.

Voices of Parents

“The principal, I barely see her. The assistant principal. I don’t even think I know what she looks like. Unless I did see her, and not know that was the assistant principal. I know a lot of faces, so I might’ve met her.”

“I don’t really know her so she should be out more, introducing himself to parents. She should be the one showing her face.”

“I see the principal. She’s very hard to reach. There was a back to school, like an opening before school started. I never even met her. I got to meet her through Google, I searched her. That’s how I saw the principal, through a picture. And the first time I saw the principal was the first day of school, but that’s because I came in and was looking for her.”

“I’ve had my run ins with her and the vice principal. The vice principal, he gave me his back. Literally, he turned himself around. I didn’t have a good first impression at school at all. You know how you can google a school and there’s some ratings and some comments. I was freaked out when I started reading the comments that were left about the school. I’m like, well I hope it’s not like this but then it started unfolding and I was thinking what they were right.”

“I had a teacher mistreat my daughter, and I came in to speak with a counselor or somebody. They were like, no, you just go to fill this out - - it’s a complaint form. I’m like, no ... no I want to talk to somebody. No one was listening to you. I couldn’t write what I wanted to express in words and they only gave me three lines. Well, this is the school’s policy. The principal is going to go look through it [the complaint form] and then we’ll give it to your teacher and have them look through it and maybe we could do a meeting. And, that’s when we had the meeting. When the counselor came down, she was like, ‘well, what is it about?’ But my situation was with the teacher. ‘Oh, if it’s with the teacher, you got to write this down.’ So, I said, ‘if it’s with a school, I can speak with someone?’ I don’t know why she couldn’t give me some of her time... I feel like she just left the paper on the desk.”

Parent and Community Suggestions for Improvement

Each focus group and interview concluded with an opportunity for parents and community members to share ideas that were not addressed above and/or to make suggestions for school improvement. Many of the responses pertained to improving facilities, along with the quality of meals. Below are a couple of closing thoughts.

Voices of Parents

“More people to watch the kids. Because usually the fighting happens during recess or in the bathroom.”

“I think that they could possibly use some funding for some creative form of arts type of things, like if they had like a choir, or maybe some sports teams even, whether it be football, basketball, cheerleading.”

APPENDIX – FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Focus Group Questionnaire

Intro talking points

- I am part of the Temple team who is working at each of the schools in this process. I am here to collect feedback about your experiences with the school so that your voice is included in how the school is supported.
- I do not make any evaluations or decisions. My job is simply to gather your ideas about the school and get them to the decision-makers. *I can respond to your questions about the SGS process (for example, timeline and reporting), but not about actions the district might or might not take.*
- I will audiotape our conversation because it is the most accurate way to document your feedback. However, your comments will be anonymous and the district or school do not get these recordings. They will be transcribed and comments combined together.
- You have knowledge no one else has about this school and this neighborhood. This is important information in this process.
- Let's make sure everyone's voice is heard this evening. *[Review norms on the poster]*

Instructions for facilitator

Thank everyone for coming. Give overview of how focus group will work: we will cover parents' views on how it feels to be at the school, what their children are learning, the school leadership, family and community engagement and the school building.

Let parents know that the principal and other staff members have been asked not to attend so that parents feel they can speak freely. If district representatives are present, introduce them and let parents know that they are not affiliated with the school and that should feel free to speak openly and honestly and that their comments will remain confidential.

Then we will save time—maybe the last ten minutes—for other things it is important for the district to know about that were not covered. We have a lot to talk about and want to make sure everyone gets heard. We are recording the meeting to make sure we represent the conversation as accurately as possible. These meetings are confidential—there will be no names in anything shared with the district.

Note: When appropriate, after several people have made similar points ask: Do other people feel similarly? Do other people feel differently? We can ask for a show of hands on each and then (depending on size) ask a few to share.

QUESTIONS

1. Introductions: first names only, connection with school, child's age/grade?
2. What do you see as the strengths of this school? What aspects do you and your child like most?
3. What do kids at this school need?
4. ABOUT THE SCHOOL CLIMATE: Let's start with the school in general. I'm interested in your thoughts on how the school feels to you, how people treat each other, how the kids behave, and how the school handles it. What are your thoughts about these things?
 - a. *Do you think your child feels respected in this school?*
 - b. *Do you feel respected?*
 - c. *How would you describe students' behavior here?*
 - d. *Do you think discipline here is fair and effective?*
 - e. *What are things the school could improve on here? What are the biggest problems?*
5. ABOUT INSTRUCTION: Now let's talk about what happens in the classroom. In general, would you say your child is getting a good education here? Why or why not?
 - a. *What would you say have been some of your child's best learning experiences? [probe for subjects, projects, teachers, etc.]*
 - b. *Thinking about the work that your child receives, how challenging is it for your child? Does it require much writing, creativity, or complex thinking? Is your child assigned projects to complete? If so, what kind?*
 - c. *What about some of the worst learning experiences? [careful about probing here] What made these difficult experiences?*
 - d. *Besides report cards, how do you know how your child is doing in school? Does this information help you?*
 - e. *What kinds of support does your child receive if they are struggling? For example, does the school offer tutoring or one-to-one help?*
 - f. *How do you feel about your child's relationship with his or her teacher(s)?*
 - g. *How is your relationship with your child's teacher(s)?*
 - h. *What do you think could make teaching and learning for your child stronger?*
6. ABOUT LEADERSHIP: School leaders (principals, assistant principals, and others) are really important to how effective a school is. What would you say are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of this school's leadership team?
7. PARENT & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: How would you describe parent and community involvement in the school? What suggestions do you have for making it better?
 - a. *What kinds of events does the school invite families to? Do a lot of families attend?*
 - b. *How does the school keep in touch and keep you updated? Do you like this? Why or why not?*
 - c. *Does the school have a SAC (if the focus group is not held during a SAC meeting)? What do you know about it? Is anyone here involved? What can you tell us about the SAC?*
 - d. *Does the school have a Home and School? What do you know about it? Is anyone here involved? What can you tell us about the Home and School?*

8. FACILITIES: The actual physical space of a school matters a lot. How would you describe the school building?
 - a. Does the school seem well-maintained? Are there areas of the building you think are especially well- or poorly-maintained?
 - b. What about the classrooms?
 - c. What suggestions would you have for improving the school building?
9. CATCH ALL: What else is important to say about the school and your child's experiences I have not asked about?
 - a. *What are your hopes and fears for this process?*
 - b. *Final things you really want the district to know about this school or how to make it better?*

Parent/Family Interview Questionnaire

Purpose: This question protocol is for one-on-one parent/family interviews.

Context to provide

- The school will be receiving additional funding and support next school year.
- We'd like to get your feedback on school strengths, challenges and ways to improve.
- Is it ok if we record the conversation to make sure we don't miss anything? No one's name is being used as we collect feedback.

Questions

1. INTRODUCTION: What's your connection to the school? If you have students here, what grade(s) are they in?
2. STRENGTHS: What do you see as the strengths of this school? What aspects do you and your child like most?
3. WAYS TO IMPROVE: What do kids at this school need? What is something you would change that you believe would help the school improve?
4. SCHOOL CLIMATE: Is this school a place where people respect each other? Why or why not? Do you feel safe? Why or why not?
5. STUDENT CLIMATE: Do you and your student feel a strong connection to the school? Why or why not? What types of opportunities do students have to explore their interests and talents here?
6. INSTRUCTION: In general, would you say your child is getting a good education here? Why or why not?
 - a. Thinking about the work that your child receives, how challenging is it for your child? Does it require much writing, creativity, or complex thinking? Is your child assigned projects to complete? If so, what kind?
7. LEADERSHIP: What would you say are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of this school's leadership?
8. PARENT & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: How would you describe parent and community involvement in the school? What suggestions do you have for making it better? What kinds of events does the school invite families to? Do a lot of families attend?
9. SCHOOL BUILDING: What do you think of the physical school building? What do you like? What things about the building could be improved to help students learn?
10. CATCH ALL: Anything else you would like to add that I didn't ask about?