System of Great Schools
School District of Philadelphia
James J. Sullivan School
Parent, Family & Community Input Report

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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 James J. Sullivan School. This is the third year that Temple's urban education faculty and graduate students gathered and analyzed data on parent and community perceptions. Three schools were involved: Add B. Anderson School, Philip H. Sheridan School, and James J. Sullivan. This report focuses on Sullivan Elementary, where we talked with 55 parents, guardians, and community members about challenges facing the school and strengths they observed. The bulk of the 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 Sullivan. 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 the facilitators and participants, and an opening general question about the major strengths of the school, there were five main topics covered:

- School Climate
- Instruction
- Leadership
- Parent & Community Involvement
- Facilities (school building and grounds)

We ended the session with a catch all question, inviting the participants to comment on any aspect of the school they wished to. The focus group sessions were between one hour and 90 minutes long.

For individual interviews, we asked interviewees to state their connections to the school and posed modified questions about the school's strengths and challenges in each category. The interviewees were mostly 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. As mentioned above, a total of 55 parents participated in focus groups and interviews at Sullivan, and this generated 151 pages of transcript data on which this report is based.

While the conversations included a range of topics about the school, the focus of this 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 daily experiences at school. It is also worth noting that several of the parents who participated had more than one child currently or previously attending Sullivan, thus giving richer data about the school. Additionally, a handful of parents were alumni who attended Sullivan decades ago and remained in the neighborhood.

The purpose of Temple's role in the project was facilitating public engagement, specifically to understand how parents experienced and perceived Sullivan, what they saw as its strengths and challenges, and what suggestions they had for its improvement. Moreover, the Temple team wanted to document parents' hopes, fears, and desires in their own words. While we developed a set of interview questions designed to address specific issues, the team was also open to topics and ideas that parents felt were important to them. Will Jordan, Temple's point-person at Sullivan, 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 Sullivan 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 debriefing about the substance of these conversations with 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 tentative codes such 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 included comments aimed at summarizing and interpreting the quotes. Then the lead researcher for Sullivan 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 to the parents. 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 fairly common in colloquial speech. For example, on the topic of school-home communications, some interviewees commented that this was a clear strength of the school, and then later suggested communication could be improved. Rather than attempting to reconcile such issues here, we present data on both sides.

Interviews were conducted in both English and in Spanish. Because Sullivan has a large Latinx population, each event was staffed with interpreters who provided two-way translations between the facilitators and interviewees. Additionally, Temple graduate researchers included Spanish-speakers who conducted interviews solely in Spanish. These interviews were then 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 here 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 opposition perspectives. The sample of parents' voices depicted below in the report are not the only instances of parents speaking on a particular topic. Instead, in almost all cases, they were chosen because they represent parents' common perspectives with the most clarity, or they summarize complex issues in ways that were nicely put.

Summary of Themes: At a Glance

	Strengths	Challenges
Instruction	▪ Parents perceive strong positive relationships between teachers and students, leading to improved learning. ▪ The school does a good job of providing extra help and support for students who need it. ▪ Parents believe the school offers an enlivened curriculum.	▪ Parents worry about a general lack of academic press where children's expectations for learning are low. ▪ The school's overall instructional quality was questioned, specifically whether teachers were up to the task. ▪ Adequate instructional resources, both materials and staffing, are lacking.
School Climate, Culture	▪ The school has a family-like atmosphere. ▪ Overall climate was perceived as steadily improving over past years. ▪ School and community connections were viewed as strong.	▪ Issues of safety and security are constant worry. ▪ Bullying and student misbehavior were viewed as persistent problems. ▪ School yard activities (e.g. drop-off, dismissal, and physical education) were seen as troublesome for parents.
Family & Community	▪ The school's ongoing efforts to involve parents was recognized and appreciated by many.	▪ Parents lead complicated lives, such as long work hours, that impede their availability for school activities. ▪ Finding ways to support parents in constructive engagement in school.
Leadership & Systems	▪ The leadership team communicates effectively. ▪ Leaders cultivate positive relationships with parents.	▪ Need for even greater communications. ▪ Concerns about the execution of general operations procedures.

Major Areas of Strength

Before diving into a discussion of specific findings from parents, we first highlight a general observation we noticed across the interviews and focus groups. That is, there was a perception among many interviewees that Sullivan is improving but it has entrenched challenges. By far, children's safety was on the minds of many parents we spoke with. A tragic incident took place during data collection where a Sullivan student was shot just blocks away from the school. Several parents brought up this incident, without being queued, during conversations about school climate. Many of the participants we spoke with viewed the current leadership as being fundamentally different than previous ones. In fact, in responding to the facilitator's questions there was clear discernment between prior to, and since, the current administration.

Instruction: Strengths

Themes that emerged as major strengths of the instructional program were: (1) Parents perceive strong positive relationships between teachers and students, leading to improved learning; (2) The school does a good job of providing extra help and support for students who need it; and (3) Parents believe the school offers an enlivened curriculum. Below are selected comments from parents and students illustrating such strengths. As you will notice, there was a range of perspectives on these issues.

Voices of the Parents

"They got a solid curriculum. They're both [my children] learning pretty good you know what I mean."

"As far as academics and stuff, they're pretty good. The work seems to be challenging, they're getting it and their teachers are pretty good."

"This school year, it definitely has gotten better. He [my son] hasn't had any problems so far, thank God. Like he's been good in school, like everything. He had problems in the beginning with somebody. But when I talked to the teacher, she took care of it. So, everything's like good this year. I just like that."

"She [my daughter] comes home with homework every day. It's written out for the month."

“She [my daughter] improved a lot in reading. So, one of the strengths is that they helped her to improve in reading.”

“We even have, I think, her [the teacher’s] phone number. Whenever there’s a problem for homework or whatever you can talk to her so that’s good.”

“The teachers are involved. They... I guess they try to keep it together for the kids.”

“She’s [my daughter] learning, that’s what we expect for her to do. She’s always telling us what she did in school when she come home. We always help her with her homework and everything.”

“The school, it offers a lot, it offers an afterschool program. Not just one, but various ones. They work as a unit, like a team... That’s how it works. They all take care of how they learn.”

“I think the teachers are very good here. Every teacher that my kids have. Like she’s been here, she’s been here since kindergarten.”

“Every teacher my kids had were amazing.”

“I mean some of them push you harder than others, which, actually, I like.”

“My children have all gone through the same teachers … they seem to be absorbing like sponges.”

“I think it probably gotten better because you know, before my son didn’t really want to be here, he didn’t want to come to school and stuff like that. Now he doesn’t want to come home. He don’t want to miss days. So, I figured that it has something to do with the teachers and the staff. He loves his teacher. He comes home every day talking about this lady [his teacher] and I finally got to meet her and I let her know my son loves you. He talks about you every day.”

Interviewer: *“Thinking about the work that your child receives, how challenging is it for your child?*

Parent: *“It’s different levels. It’s very challenging for the younger one. Yeah, and not as challenging as the older one. She’s a little more academically inclined.”*

Interviewer: *"Does it require much writing, creativity or complex thinking?"*
Parent: *"Yeah, especially for the first grader. She's having difficulty with math. We go over our math a lot."*

Interviewer: *"Is your child assigned projects to complete?"*
Parent: *"Absolutely, yes. Every night, homework. Then outside projects...What's the project that you got to do on the 31st? A book report, right? Yeah. On what?"*

Interviewer: *"Is there anything that you and your son like most about this school?"*
Parent: *"More or less, his teacher because she's been helpful. Unfortunately, he had to be held back a year, but she kept him on, and she's been doing everything possible to help him out in the process of, with his issues. I would probably say in that, he probably would agree with me with that."*

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) The school has a family-like atmosphere; (2) Overall climate was perceived as steadily improving over past years; and (3) School and community connections were viewed as strong. Here are illustrative comments from parents and students:

Voices of the Parents

"I'm a parent and I have students in first grade and fourth grade… There is a family dynamic in the school. Some of the staff members treat me like I am a part of the family, or they are a part of my family, and they do have the best interests of my children."

"My son actually loves this school. He doesn't want to leave. We're in the process of moving, but he doesn't want to leave this school. So, I'm going to let him stay."

"I've never had a problem. I don't feel disrespected or anything like that. It's been good."

"I must say that, when it comes to calming the kids down a little bit, I would give that the biggest strength. My son has a little bit of a behavioral issue as well as ADHD, so some of the staff here, I'm just saying, is really great with that."

Interviewer: *"What would you say are the school's biggest strengths?"*
Parent: *"I know it has changed a lot in the years. Like last year, he used to get bullied a lot. I mean, last year was probably one of his worst years. They had bullying. But this year has gotten way better. His teacher that he has now is so much better."*

"Staff actually keeps ahead on the bullying and any problems that he has so he's actually doing much better this year and I actually feel better him coming to school this year."

"I like that they communicate with the parents. If there's problems, the teacher will contact you personally. If you don't get back to them, they'll contact you again."

"This school, I love this school. People can say what they want, but when something happens to a child in this community… There was an incident where a child was shot in the head and staff had an assembly and made cards. They contacted the parents, they had it like an assembly for the child [who was shot]. I feel like most schools wouldn't have cared that much, and I feel like they [Sullivan] really did… I think they did a great thing. At least they come together for their children."

"The teachers are very respectful, because every time I talk with my child's teacher, they give me the response I need to hear. So, I get treated good here. And the kids too, by the adults and stuff. They don't have any problems."

"The teachers respect the parents, don't get me wrong, the teachers always listen to the parents if the parents have something to say, but it's the students. If a student is being picked on and a mom does not like it, she won't come up to the school and say something. She will make her kids fight the other kid. They are not all like that, but I have seen it. It has nothing to do with the staff, honestly. It's the parents… And you can't really change that."

Interviewer: *"Would you say your child is getting a good education here?"*
Parent: *"Yes, definitely. He's been here for five years total already, and we're only directly across the street. So that's one of the major things that helps out a lot with him attending the school. But for the most part, his entire five years here, never really had any major issues, any major problems besides maybe him, like difficulty with keeping up with his grades or certain friends maybe that he's keeping around and things like that. But other than that, I've never really had a bad, bad situation here with the*

school with any other parents or the principal or anything like that. If I feel like I ever had a concern or there was a concern, they'll bring it to my attention or I would come here, at the time I might be picking him up or early dismissal or something like that, if I feel like I have any concerns or anything I talk to them about, then they're always willing and free to speak with me and things like that. So, I've never really had any issues the entire five years he's been here."

Interviewer: "Is this school a place where people respect each other?"
Parent: "I feel like it does. I mean I never had any run ins or any wild outbreaks. I mean everything that I've encountered was all positive and from my understanding, I've heard about some irrational acts - - but I've never encountered it."

"I was going to transfer them somewhere closer to home, my child wanted to stay here."

"The teachers here seem ... like they care about their students."

"The strengths I see are some of the teachers that do try and try hard to obtain the composure and deal with misbehaved kids… because it's hard."

Family & Community: Strengths

One clear strength emerged from the data regarding family and community resources at the school, that the school's ongoing efforts to involve parents was recognized and appreciated by many.

Voices of the Parents

"I feel like they try a lot to get the parents involved, and I feel like they really try to give us as much information as we need. I think that's one of their strong points, they really tried to get us involved."

"It's like a neighborhood school. I kind of got to meet these kids. They know each other, they all from the same neighborhood. So, my son makes his business for me to know that this is such a such as mom."

"They do have a lot of programs, but I don't know if the parents really attend them. I mean I would say that the parents who are most motivated are going to go. They'll

probably have the most successful kids, but probably overall it may not be doing what it needs to be done. What needs to be done."

"They [the school] always have like something going on and they always like, you know, be like 'the parents can come.' They were of pretty good in that part."

"They used to come up to me and hug me. You be like this, okay, they'll be here. They'll be hugging you. I fell in love with each and every one of the kids, whether they had trouble, whether they didn't. Even the baddest of the bad. There was a kid, and I still remember him to this day, I don't know what school he's going to, but he was in 304 and that was considered a special class for kids that had behavioral problems. And no one was able to sit this boy down to talk to him."

Leadership & Systems: Strengths

The current school leadership was perceived by most participants as a strength. There was some discernment made between the quality and conditions at Sullivan before and after the new principal's arrival. In fact, when asking questions about school leadership, participants sometimes asked for clarity on whether the facilitator was referring to "then" or "now." Our interview protocol contained just one all-encompassing item for leadership which participants answered from different angles. The themes emerging in this category were: (1) The leadership team communicates effectively; and (2) Leaders cultivate positive relationships with parents.

Voices of the Parents

"The communication, overall, I feel was good."

"I like her [the principal]. I think she's like, she's way different than the one that we had last year. I feel like she's more responsible and I feel like she's more, like more communication, more in contact with the students and I like that. I feel like she wants the students to be more excited about learning. I like that. When we went back to school night, I felt like she was more involved, and I like that."

"I think they have good leadership around here, I do."

"I would say the biggest strength is the assistant principal. She is very patient about the children, about teaching and learning, to quote her, and about staff trying to learn classroom management, trying to keep the children safe in order to teach them."

Challenges and Major Areas of Concern

As mentioned above, while some parents perceived an uptick in academic quality at Sullivan, 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 worry about a general lack of academic press where children's expectations for learning are low; (2) The school's overall instructional quality was questioned, specifically whether teachers were up to the task; (3) Adequate instructional resources, both materials and staffing, are lacking.

Voices of the Parents

"The work is not challenging. The work seems to cater to children. For example, my fourth grader receives maybe probably second grade instruction."

"I almost never know what is going on. I just officially seen her homework yesterday."

"It's not many academic challenges for them. She's above her level, and she's right at her level, so..."

"We should be supplementing what they teach, not coming up with our own whole lessons for children, because if they're not getting it here... I just felt like the unprofessionalism, the mediocrity of the teachers… a lot of them don't want to be here. They think they want to be in the suburbs, but the suburbs aren't going to take you because you can't teach. The district keeps bringing them back to these types of schools."

“We need better teachers. We need to allow more... We need textbooks in here. Children should be able to bring home textbooks. I don’t care about their heavy bags. We all have heavy bags. Kids need books. All the suburban kids get them. Why can’t we, why aren’t they allowed to bring home tangible things that they can see? Not little package of highlight and copy paper that you can barely make out the print, because the toner is running out.”

“My son is going to speech therapy. I can barely understand my son. And I try to read with him and do as much as I can with him, but he’s not really getting that much attention that he need in school, I think, in the classroom.”

“Many of these kids really need individual TSS workers to assess them, to deal with them, to work with them. I was in this school last year … I guarantee these kids respect me ...because I don’t play with kids, but also know how to interact with children. You can’t get angry at a kid and talk to them any kind of way and they think you’re going to respond to you. It’s not going to work like that. You can’t do that with children.”

“They really need good staff here. You can’t get good staff and then take them away. And then before, they used to have some assistants in the classrooms. My thing is, they still need it. You taking them out of the classroom is not any help, like whatever happened to the assistants in the past when you have a teacher with almost, what, 30 students now? They needed an assistant.”

“My kids don’t know nothing at all, and it’s sad. Like my daughter she’s in third, my other daughter she’s in second grade, and my son, he’s in third grade and my daughter. She’s a straight A student and my son don’t even know how to spell cat, dog, Mom, and he’s eight. He’s about to be nine. That’s sad. That’s very sad.”

“My son, he’s IEP, I ask him every day, did you go to special help all last year? He says no. The lady says I’m going to a meeting and I don’t want to do it right now and sends him back to class. They know my son. He’ll tell you if he did something and he told me no. He don’t lie to me. I said, so you didn’t get special help today? No, because they [his teachers] were in meetings or I feel like they, they forget thinking about kids.

“My daughter tells me that this year alone she sat at a table and she has to figure the work out. There’s no instruction, sometimes the teacher has to go off and deal with another student. And she’ll be there and stuck on that subject that she can’t teach her class.”

School Climate, Culture: Challenges

There were also several areas of concern about school culture and climate at Sullivan. Specific themes that emerged included the following: (1) Issues of safety and security are constant worry; (2) Bullying and student misbehavior were viewed as a persistent problem; and (3) School yard activities (e.g. drop-off, dismissal, and physical education) were seen as troublesome for parents. Regarding the issue of safety and security, below we include a subsection devoted to parents' concerns. In addition to their perceptions are examples of events and incidents in the school that they, or their children, experienced first-hand.

Voices of the Parents

"*I'm not sure that the children know what the word respect means. This school, the children do not respect each other. This is not a safe place for children. I believe it goes for the same for adults. I've seen children assault adults. I've seen adults assault children, whether it be verbally. I've seen a lot in my visits to the school."*

"The weakness of the school is the other children that distract the children that want to get their education because they have things that's bothering them that they can't talk, but they act it out. So that's been the major situation with this school."

"It's a lot of bullying, and I have had a problem with bullying. But the teacher did try to resolve it. She let me know that this was happening, and she wanted me to come in so we could talk, both parents."

"Probably try to coach more parents into being more involved at home. That's a big determining factor of a young child's success. I think the teachers, they're overburdened with the responsibility. Obviously, they have to teach but you got to work the home. The work at home is also a big contributor to a child's success, in my opinion."

"The staff doesn't even respect the administration. I'm talking as a parent and an employee, who had seen it when I was a parent volunteer… They're very rude and disrespectful to the whole entire community. They blatantly just do whatever they want to do."

“They [suburban parents] would never allow their children to be in a school like this, to be taught by people like them. They would be up there in a split-second advocating for them and saying, “Get that teacher out of here.” They don’t get homework. My kids don’t get homework. They don’t give anything. They take tests. Of course, they’re going to fail.”

“I’m trying to think of some good words without sounding so harsh or speaking negatively, but the school needs a lot. It needs a hug. It needs someone that loves children, and someone that cares. It needs serious supports. The climate, it’s like a wild zoo in here, there’s kids everywhere. No kid is really where they should be. The good kids are being lost to the wayside, so they straight A kid in the corner won’t get any attention, because someone just flipped over a railing war, someone is being hung.”

“As many days that I come pick up my children early, because I’m afraid of what may happen during lunch. There is no real support in the lunchroom. They can’t even hear. I stand here for hours waiting for early dismissals, because they can’t hear in a cafeteria. It’s just, I’m looking for a better school with good atmosphere for learning, because I don’t know what kind of environment this is.”

“What would I change? For example, when I was driving by for recess or it was gym, I’m not even sure, they had the kids sitting on the ground and that kind of bothered me… They outside and it’s kind of cool. And there’s little girls with skirts, you know, they could get cut, hurt, there’s glass outside. So that was a big concern.”

“Knowing from my experience, because I went to this school as a kid, it’s always been the same. I would say they definitely should rebuild the school and make it a little bit better, but they are making progress because they are starting to rebuild the kindergarten through second grade classes, so they are kind of trying to make the school look a little better.”

“Well, because they’re low on staff members, it’s not run properly the way it’s supposed to be. I think it’s disgusting. I really do. I feel like I don’t even want my son to come here because what I experienced last year, like my son, he was the only in kindergarten right and he was missing. I dropped him off at school. I come to get four of my kids and there’s only three. You’re telling me you don’t know where my son’s at? Yeah, the crossing guard crossed him over Harbison Avenue, by himself. So, then the police brought him back to the school.”

“The school needs teachers who reflect what this community is, which is mostly Hispanic and African American. Muslim and Christian. We have certain values and a lot of times it’s disrespected. Teachers don’t understand our culture, they don’t understand. They think we can’t read. They’ve said these things to us before. Yeah, they think that we’re just low-class bumbling idiots. And, it’s reflected in how they teach our children. My children have greatly suffered because of it, and I’m not the only parent in here.”

“There’s no discipline… They think pulling them in the office or pulling them somewhere, yelling at them, whatever they’re doing, is working but it’s not working.”

“I feel that some of these children don’t get enough discipline for what their actions are. My daughter, she’s an honor roll student, and last year my daughter came home with bruises on her face. They jumped her inside the school - - and it was children that come to this school. The girl was from fourth grade, my daughter was from second at the time. Mind you, my daughter doesn’t get with anybody, well-respected, everybody loves her in the school. And she got jumped.”

“Some of the kids in this school, when I come in the morning, the way they talk and the way they act, I would think I was on a corner with a bunch of teenagers, like grown men. Just very foul and disrespectful.”

“Yup, the rain, snow, sleet, they don’t care, they let them stand out there. It’s like I said, some kids, they don’t barely have coats on. Some of them kids, they be out there with skirts and no stockings. Some parents, like I said, they don’t have it like that. Some kids be out there don’t have coats and stuff on. I mean I asked them, "Do you all care about these kids?" You know they can get sick. So, it’s like they don’t care in this school, they don’t.”

Parents Voices and Experience Regarding School Safety

“I feel like the security is a bigger thing. Like yesterday, I picked up my son… and he just walked up and walked out the door with me. I feel like that’s a little bit of a problem because if some random person decides to come up, being as we’ve had a lot of abductions in this area, and take my son out the door.”

“They definitely need more security. My son, he has issues with bullying and there wasn’t enough staff members around to help him.”

"Safety. The children, I feel like no matter what age it is, they're still children. And because it's an unsafe area, most of Philadelphia's unsafe with the shooting, as you see what just happened."

"You can't have children inside of the school and not have security guards and these children are off in here running buck wild with a small amount of staff and then you have volunteers here and the only thing you did is you're passing a background check. You can pass a background check, you can meet all qualifications, but you're not trained to deal with children. Mind you, some of these kids have IEPs. They need adequate staff to deal with children with those terms."

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, such as long work hours, that impede their availability for school activities; and (2) The need to find ways to support parents in constructive engagement in school.

Voices of Parents

"My personal opinion is there's a lot of parents that's just caught up in their life and they're not very concerned about the wellbeing of their child's education. They can be fed well, they could be dressed well, but the commitment to school and their child and the communication between the school and the parent is poor."

"They always offer for parents to come here and participate but they don't. And, that's the indicator that how much interest that they are involved in their child's success and education."

"I feel like the parents try to be involved, you know, it depends on people's schedule. People work a lot of times. The last parent meeting I came out to, it was a lot of parents that came. I feel like they want to be here, we can't always be here. But we try, and I mean to say it was a good turn out the last time I was here. I think it's gotten better over time."

"The parents are involved in the school, but they are also very aggressive. They fight each other, they argue with the teachers, but you also have those certain parents that want to go on field trips with the kids, they want to go to parent teacher meetings and stuff like that. It's like fifty-fifty.."

"Most parents are just pure ignorant. If you don't want to participate in your child's education and wellbeing and you can't say, 'oh you work.' Parents have more than one meeting that can attended and you still don't show up at all. Or, most parents don't care what you say."

"Well that's the biggest group I've seen since I've been here [today's SAC meeting]. I haven't really made a lot of meetings because I never really knew about the meetings. So, if I come in the school yard and they say, "Oh, it's a meeting today," then maybe I'll wait. So, if I'm not informed then I can't come."

"I was just writing this on social media for the parents at Sullivan, 'we need to come together as a voice for our children.' Because my daughter, she's 12 years old, loving, quiet, humble, loves to do her work, tells the teacher, 'you need to challenge me.' And, she is being bullied. They make fun of her big feet, as she says the kids say this to her 'oh you got a big brain because you got a big head.' Stuff like that. And, she does not want to go to school… But like I told my children, sometimes you have to work through that and just block what people are saying."

Leadership: Challenges

After a thorough analysis of the transcripts, we found few significant criticisms of the Sullivan's leadership team. However, two discernable themes emerged as challenges: (1) The need for even greater communications; and (2) Concerns about the execution of general operations procedures.

Voices of Parents

"I don't have an issue with the principal. I don't really have an issue with the staff. They are just unorganized. There is a lot of schools that are unorganized, it's not just Sullivan. And like I said, it's mainly the parents that make the school and the children that made the school what it is."

"I would say honestly sometimes communication with the parents. It's some stuff that will go on, and I won't even know about it until my child either comes home, will tell me, or if I get a call from one of the caring staff. I would not hear about it. And, then also the approach sometimes. When you come to talk to them, sometimes it's just a little too aggressive for my liking. I don't care for it."

"Unfortunately, the new leadership here took away something that was helpful to my son. His teacher had a tutor come in. She would do it I think free of cost or so, or reduced cost, and she would work with the kids that needed the extra help. Now, that helped him improve a little bit last year, but this year apparently the new principal told her that she's not allowed to come back here and if she do allow her to come back here, she wouldn't be able to work with her class. So, I felt like now that's hindering my son's education because he needs the extra help."

"I think that it could be tightened up more. I think the principal herself is professional."

"In this school, one time with my kid, I had a situation with my kid and felt as though the way they handled it, wasn't handled correctly. They should have handled it better as the school system… But the way, when I spoke to the office, the way they handled it, I wasn't like, I didn't like the way they handled it."

"As far as like when you're a parent and you're, you're upset because your kid got hurt. I think, you know, they should've handled that like the situation better."

"Because my daughter got jumped and she was in the classroom with two girls that jumped seven people in seven different classes. I asked, 'can y'all just separate these two children? Oh, we can't,' I'm told. 'Well, why can't you, why you can't just put one of the kids with a different class and break them up?' So, I didn't see nothing from no principal, I didn't see nothing from the assistant principal, I didn't see nothing from nobody."

Parent and Community Suggestions for Improvement

Each of the focus groups 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. Most of the responses pertained to improving facilities (air conditioning & heating), along with the quality of meals. Below is a couple of closing thoughts.

Voices of Parents

"Overall happy with the school. Maybe some more class trips and stuff like that to keep the kids interested."

Interviewer: "What do you think the kids at this school need?"
Parent: "I would probably say a little bit more intervention services. I noticed a lot of kids here... I know sometimes if they have bad experiences and stuff, that that becomes a problem when a kid really needs services, and then they're pushed back for a long time to receive them.

"I think that one [problem I see] would be the classroom doors. They don't code any security. They don't keep children in, and they don't keep anyone out either. There are beautiful things being done in the building. I like the murals I've seen on some of the floors when I'm visiting, and things like that. But the bathroom is disgusting…The building is not clean. One of my good friends used to volunteer here, last year, she used to clean it herself as a parent for free, because she wanted to see her children go to a better space. I would speak to cleanliness, and those type of things. And there are a lot of repairs that need to be made, like dangerous repairs that should be made, which should have been made."

Appendix – Focus Group and Interview Protocols

Focus Group Question Protocol

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 <u>not</u> 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 Question Protocol

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. INTRODUCTIONS: 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?