THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
PHILADELPHIA

Highlights of Key Findings from the Superintendent's Listening and Learning Tour

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Office of Evaluation, Research, and Accountability

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During his First 100 Days as superintendent, Dr. Watlington held 90 "Listening and Learning" sessions with:

- Students
- Parent/guardians
- Teachers
- School leaders
- School-based staff
- Assistant superintendents
- Central Office staff
- Business and philanthropic leaders
- Advocacy and community groups

In addition to the feedback sessions, all stakeholder groups were invited to participate and/or to share feedback via a survey.

First 100 Days by the Numbers

90 **Listening & Learning Sessions**
with teachers (n=15), school leaders (n=8), students/alumni (n=10), families (n=7), Central Office staff (n=6), school staff (n=2), citywide groups and community-based organizations (n=42)

1,963 **Listening & Learning Session Participants**
with teachers (n=326), school leaders (n=386), students/alumni (n=189), families (n=182), Central Office staff (n=223), school-based staff (n=43), citywide groups and community-based organizations (n=614)

902 **Survey Respondents**

For more information about the survey and listening session participants, visit https://www.philasd.org/era/listening-learning-results-faqs/

What can qualitative data tell us?

Open-ended survey questions (where participants write in their feedback) and listening sessions generate *qualitative* data. Qualitative data can provide information about complexity, context, nuances, and connectedness of issues. It can help us answer "how" and "why" types of questions, rather than the "how much" or "how many" types of questions that quantitative data helps us answer. For this project, we used qualitative data to answer complex questions including:

1. **How do stakeholders understand and experience the School District of Philadelphia?**

2. **Why do they think problems exist? What do they think should we do about them?**

3. **What do they say they need from the School District of Philadelphia?**

Qualitative analysis helps us understand people's experiences and perspectives about what is important to them. It also helps us understand how issues are related to each other. When there is a consensus in the responses, that can be helpful in prioritizing, problem-solving, and decision-making. It can also be helpful to explore how various stakeholder groups experience issues differently.

To read more about how we analyzed feedback from the Listening & Learning survey and sessions, please visit
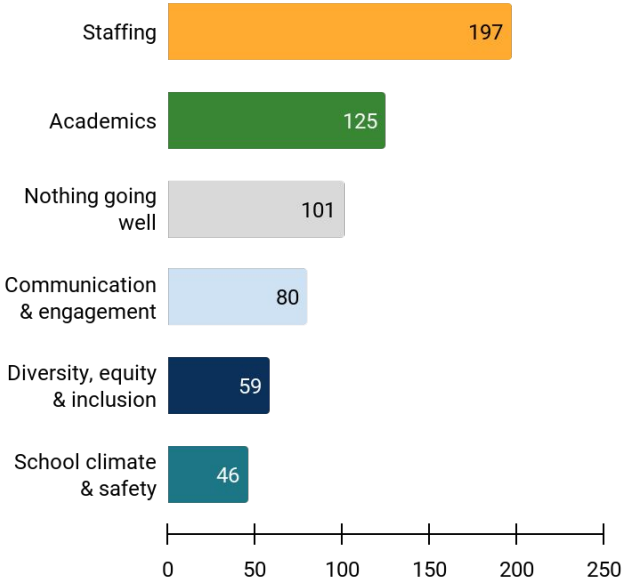https://www.philasd.org/era/listening-learning-results-faqs/

We asked three survey questions…

1. When you think about SDP, what is one thing you think is *going really well?*

2. When you think about SDP, what is one thing that *needs the most improvement?*

3. What do you think Dr. Watlington's *first priority* should be?

Question 1: When you think about SDP, what is one thing you think is *going really well?**

Top Six Survey Topics

(n=829)

Topic	Count
Staffing	197
Academics	125
Nothing going well	101
Communication & engagement	80
Diversity, equity & inclusion	59
School climate & safety	46

TOPIC	*Common themes*
Staffing	● Participants spoke about the dedication and hard work that staff, particularly teachers, have demonstrated over the past year, and praised staff as going above and beyond to meet the needs of their students under difficult circumstances. ● Some praised teachers for being compassionate, caring, and possessing expertise. Others talked about having supportive school leaders, and a few specifically mentioned nurses, counselors, and support staff. ● Some commented positively about how staff collaborate and support each other. Others discussed the recent emphasis on Common Planning Time.
Academics	● Participants commented that they think the new academic framework and ELA and Math curricula are improvements, and are heading in the right direction. ● Some especially appreciated that the new curricula was developed in collaboration with District teachers and is more culturally responsive and engaging compared to previous curricula. ● Some highlighted that there are pockets of good teaching happening in some schools. ● Some commented about recent professional development opportunities.
Nothing Going Well	● Responses such as "Nothing is going well," "I can't think of anything," or "I'm not sure" were counted under this category. CONTINUED ON NEXT SLIDE

*Counts reflect survey data captured from June 16, 2022 to September 13, 2022. The sample is not representative of the District overall.

What is going really well: Top Six Survey Topics (cont.)

TOPIC	Common themes
Communication & Engagement	● Many participants appreciated recent SDP efforts to solicit stakeholder feedback, including Dr. Watlington's listening sessions, saying that it is a good start, and that they hope to have similar opportunities in the future. ● Many responses were about schools' and educators' individual efforts to engage parents and build positive relationships and school communities. ● Some recognized improvements in using technology to communicate with staff, parents/guardians, or the broader public, as well as efforts to provide working internet connections. Some specifically mentioned Class Dojo, email lists, and other communication methods. ● A few participants felt that communication from the District is "starting to get better."
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	● Participants commented about the District's increased focus on and commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Some responses appreciated that "a conversation has been started," while also recognizing that more work is needed. ● Some specifically mentioned efforts to ensure a more inclusive curriculum. ● Others mentioned diversity in staff and student populations as being a strength, as well inclusion practices. ● A few specifically mentioned the work of the Equity Coalition and the establishment of a DEI office.
School Climate & Safety	● Some participants highlighted the recent emphasis on mental health supports, trauma-informed approaches, and socioemotional learning, including morning meetings and additional counselors and mental health professionals. ● Others mentioned recent efforts to replace more punitive measures with restorative practices, and build positive relationships between school police and students. ● Some mentioned the fact that their schools ensure that students have access to free breakfast and lunch, as well as free food distributions and school gardens. ● A few mentioned how schools are working with community organizations to better meet families' needs.

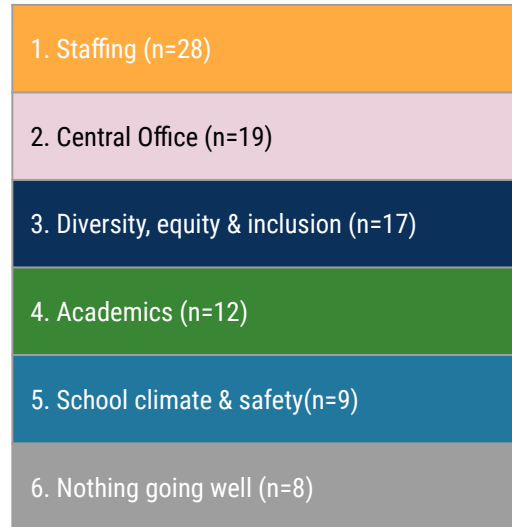Summary bullets reflect data captured from the surveys (n=829).

What is going really well: Top Six Topics by Respondent Group

Responses about what is going well varied widely. Below are the topics under which responses were most frequently categorized for each respondent group. Please note that some responses were coded to more than one topic.
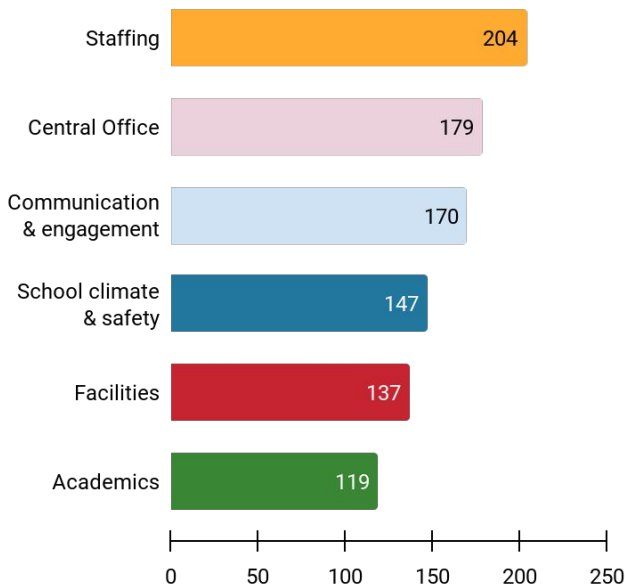
School-based staff (n=566)

1. Staffing (n=131)
2. Academics (n=97)
3. Nothing going well (n=53)
4. Communication & engagement (n=48)
5. School climate & safety (n=29)
6. Diversity, equity & inclusion (n=28)

Central office staff (n=127)

1. Staffing (n=28)
2. Central Office (n=19)
3. Diversity, equity & inclusion (n=17)
4. Academics (n=12)
5. School climate & safety(n=9)
6. Nothing going well (n=8)

Students, parents/guardians, and community members (n=218)

1. Nothing going well (n=41)
2. Staffing (n=39)
3. Communication & engagement (n=29)
4. Covid response (n=20)
5. Academics (n=17)
6. Diversity, equity & inclusion (n=14)

Question 2: When you think about SDP, what is one thing that *needs the most improvement?*

Top Six Survey Topics
(n=892)

Topic	Count
Staffing	204
Central Office	179
Communication & engagement	170
School climate & safety	147
Facilities	137
Academics	119

TOPIC	Common themes
Staffing	● Responses to this question about staffing were generally about not having enough staff, as well as challenges in hiring and retaining staff. ● There were many comments about needing to increase staffing levels, increase staff-to-student ratios, or decrease class sizes. ● Participants said that insufficient staffing is a challenge for all major SDP priorities. School staff explained the negative impacts for students when they have too little time to plan and collaborate, or when their workloads/caseloads reach unmanageable levels. ● Participants explained that the "leveling" process disrupts key relationships. ● Participants offered a variety of perspectives about what causes poor morale, and what might help retain good teachers. Some mentioned salaries, benefits, and feeling respected or valued by their leaders. ● A few specifically named certain school and district leaders, as well as offices/departments that are struggling to retain their staff or have poor morale.
Central Office	● Comments about Central Office in response to this question generally were about how decisions get made, and a lack of accountability. ● Participants felt decisions were abrupt and are often made without collecting stakeholder input first, contributing to a sense of "disconnect" to schools. ● Participants felt Central Office is too siloed and its organizational structure is unclear, resulting in mixed messages from different offices. Some comments were about how offices seem not to coordinate or collaborate well. ● Participants felt that Central office lacks accountability mechanisms.

*Counts reflect survey data captured from June 16, 2022 to September 13, 2022. The sample is not representative of the District overall.

What needs the most improvement: Top Six Survey Topics (cont.)

TOPIC	Common themes
Communication & Engagement	● Past efforts to elicit stakeholder feedback have often felt like "lip service." Participants did not know how feedback was used to inform decisions. ● Participants felt that District communications were unclear and not timely. Past experiences with the District contributed to their distrust. ● Participants reported that Central Office was not always responsive to families and school-based staff. ● District staff indicated that finding out important information from the news feels disrespectful and prevents staff from being able to answer families' questions and concerns.
School Climate & Safety	● Many comments simply said "safety," "student well-being," "student behavior," or "bullying" needed improvement. ● Participants communicated that there are insufficient staff to meet students' mental health and socioemotional needs, especially given trauma related to COVID, addiction, and violence in neighborhoods. ● Participants felt there is an urgent need for more security measures, such as doors that lock from the inside, keys made available to all teachers who use a classroom, and working cameras. Others specifically mentioned safety to and from school. ● Some expressed frustration by a lack of alternatives to suspensions to ensure students have appropriate consequences for behavioral issues. ● Others expressed concern that students' basic needs are not always met (e.g., housing and food insecurity, trauma, poverty).
Facilities	● Many comments simply said "facilities," "old buildings," "infrastructure," "building condition," or "air conditioning." ● Participants expressed concern about the slow remediation of asbestos and lead, as well as the age of buildings (e.g., old electrical systems that cannot handle air conditioning upgrades). A few mentioned needing upgraded or modernized classrooms, playgrounds, gymnasiums. ● Others were more concerned about cleanliness and hygiene, noting that bathrooms often lack basic supplies and more pest control is needed.
Academics	● Comments varied. Some talked about teaching and learning. Others discussed SEL, social studies/civics, STEM, vocational education, too many assessments, the need for a consistent curriculum, equity, special education, and instructional materials, books, and libraries. ● Some comments were vague: "better education," "academic achievement for all students," "academic performance," or "quality of education."

Summary bullets reflect data captured from the surveys (n=892).

What needs the most improvement: Top Six Topics by Respondent Group

Responses about what needs improvement varied widely. Below are the topics under which responses were most frequently categorized for each respondent group. Please note that some responses were coded to more than one topic.

School-based staff (n=566)

1. Staffing (n=138)
2. Communication & engagement (n=116)
3. School climate & safety (n=105)
4. Central Office (102)
5. Facilities (n=87)
6. Academics (n=76)

Central office staff (n=127)

1. Central Office (n=61)
2. Staffing (n=44)
3. Communication & engagement (n=27)
4. Diversity, equity & inclusion (n=9)
5. Academics (n=8)
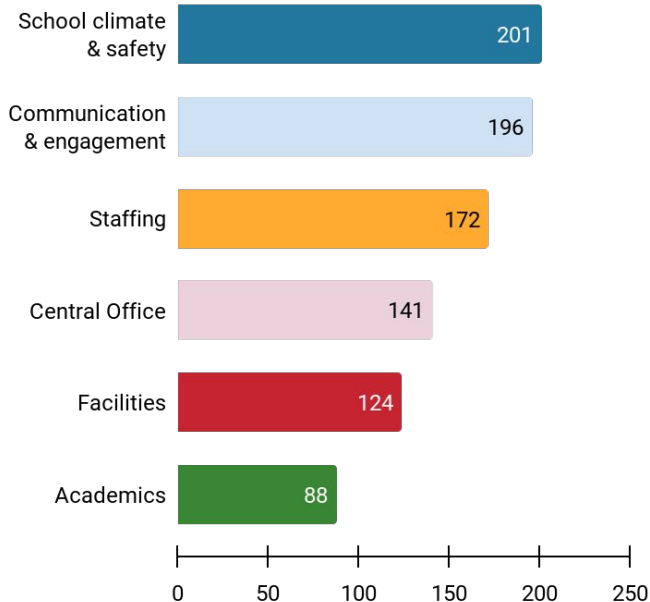6. School climate & safety (n=7)

Students, parents/guardians and community members (n=218)

1. Facilities (n=43)
2. School climate & safety (n=37)
3. Academics (n=34)
4. Communication & engagement (n=27)
5. Staffing (n=23)
6. Funding & resource distribution (n=23)

Question 3: What do you think Dr. Watlington's *first priority* should be?*

Top Six Survey Topics

(n=877)

School climate & safety: 201
Communication & engagement: 196
Staffing: 172
Central Office: 141
Facilities: 124
Academics: 88

(x-axis: 0, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250)

TOPIC	Common themes
School Climate & Safety	• Many responses simply said "safety," "security" and "student well-being." • Understaffing was raised as a factor undermining schools' abilities to maintain order and security and meet the mental and socioemotional need of students. • Some responses emphasized the urgent need for cameras, locks, doors, and keys. • Some discussed the need to better address students' disruptive behavior. • Responses also highlighted the need to address student trauma, particularly following COVID or in response to violence in their communities.
Communication & Engagement	• Many responses said Dr. Watlington's first priority should be to visit every school (many specified that visits should be unannounced), talk to and learn from stakeholders, and get to know students, teachers, and the larger Philadelphia community. • Other responses expressed appreciation for being given the opportunity to be heard and noted that the Listening and Learning project was a "great start." • Many comments spoke about the need for Central Office leadership to seek input and feedback from schools before making decisions. • Some responses that received this code were brief and included one or two key terms like "rebuilding trust," "transparency," and "honesty." • Participants want timeliness and clarity in communications, especially about changes to school logistics (e.g., bell schedules, transportation, school selection processes), which requires decisions to be made earlier.

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What should the first priority be: Top Six Survey Topics (cont.)

TOPIC	Common themes
Staffing	- Many responses highlighted a need for SDP to prioritize retention and/or take steps to minimize burnout and attrition. In particular, work-related stress and the continual introduction of new initiatives/responsibilities were mentioned as drivers of burnout. - Participants emphasized the urgent need to increase staffing levels in schools. Some framed this in terms of reducing class sizes or increasing staff-to-student ratios for certain positions. Some noted the need to recruit more educators of color. - Staff want to be more respected and valued; they mentioned the need for professional autonomy and time to collaborate with colleagues.
Central Office	- Participants want accountability systems for Central Office employees and departments that mirror accountability systems that are already in place for school leaders and teachers. Ineffective leaders should be identified and removed. - Many responses highlighted that building and/or repairing trust and eliminating the "disconnect" was a top priority. - Responses indicated that more support, consistency, and clarity in communications from Central Office to schools and families is needed. - Many responses were about needing more collaboration, communication, and coordination among departments, and fewer "silos."
Facilities	- Participants want upgrades to remediate asbestos and lead problems, and upgrades to HVAC systems and air conditioning. - Responses described the age of buildings and how this impacts both the condition of the building and specific physical spaces (e.g., no designated gym, classrooms still have chalkboards on the walls, etc.). - Overall, participants described a lack of cleanliness, basic sanitation supplies and services, and building maintenance; they noted the impact that unclean and/or poorly maintained schools has on students and staff and the message that it sends to them.
Academics	- Responses varied in this category. Some felt more attention needs to be paid to instruction, curricular development, equity, access to high-quality materials, and providing various resources and support for academics, including libraries. - Some responses were more vague, such as "holding students accountable," "literacy," "teaching and learning," and "student's education." - Other responses talked about extracurriculars, English Learners, standardized testing, cursive writing, and specific curricula.

Summary bullets reflect data captured from the surveys (n=877).

What should the first priority be: Top Six Topics by Respondent Group

Responses about the first priority varied widely. Below are the topics under which responses were most frequently categorized for each respondent group. Please note that some responses were coded to more than one topic.

School-based staff (n=566)

1. Communication & engagement (n=141)
2. School climate & safety (n=136)
3. Staffing (n=119)
4. Central Office (n=89)
5. Facilities (n=81)
6. Academics (n=58)

Central office staff (n=127)

1. Central Office (n=42)
2. Communication & engagement (n=29)
3. Staffing (n=27)
4. School climate & safety (n=16)
5. Facilities (n=9)
6. Academics (n=7)

Students, parents/guardians and community members (n=218)

1. School climate & safety (n=50)
2. Facilities (n=35)
3. Communication & engagement (n=27)
4. School selection, pathways & options (n=27)
5. Staffing (n=26)
6. Funding & resource distribution (n=25)

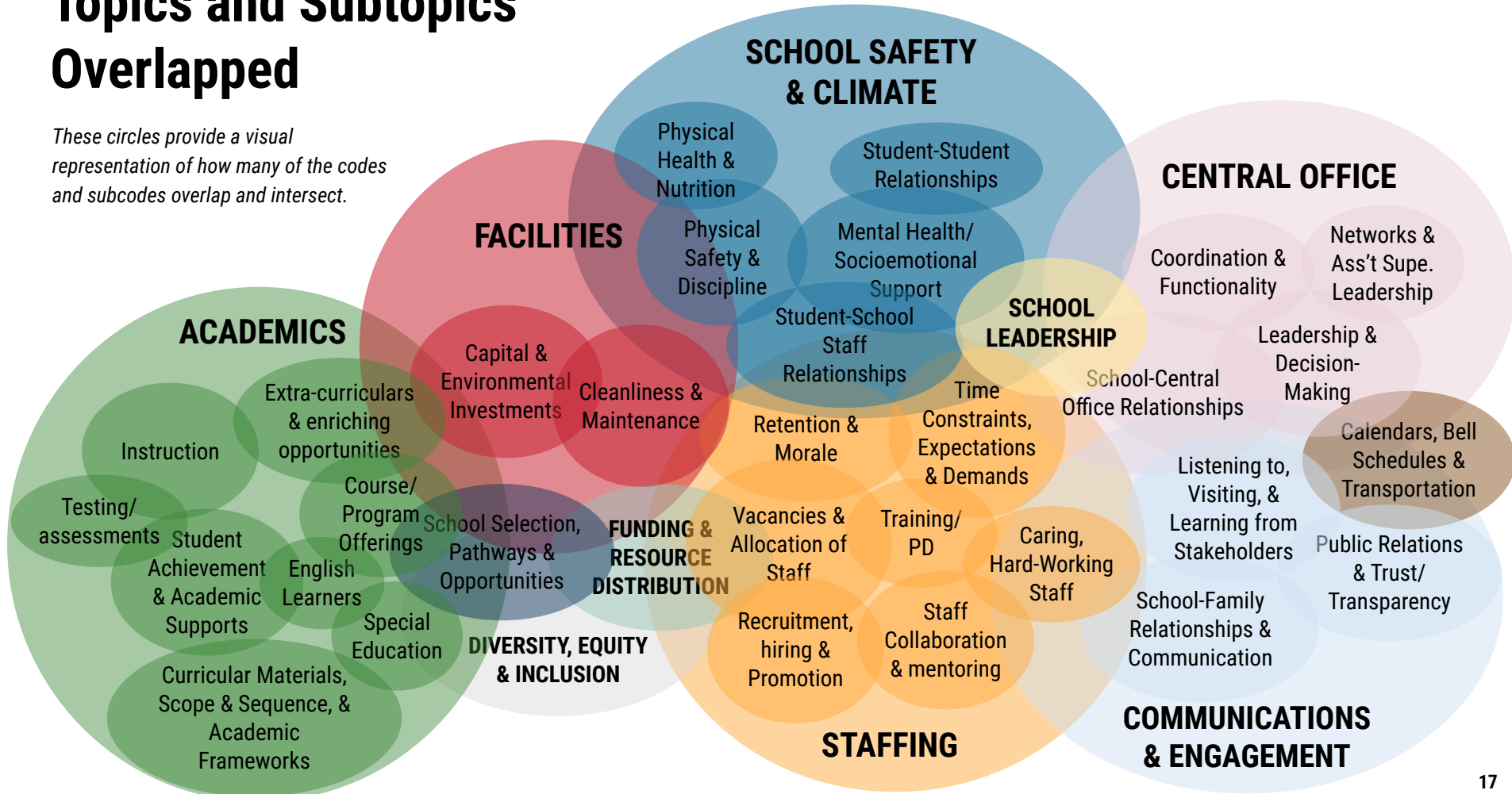# *Nine Main Topics Emerged from the Feedback*

1. School Climate & Safety
2. Staffing
3. Academics
4. Central Office
5. Communications & Engagement
6. Facilities
7. Funding Resources & Distribution
8. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
9. School Leadership

Nine Topics/Subtopics from the Survey and Listening Sessions

Topic and number of times that topic was used to code feedback	Subtopic and number of times that subtopic was used to code feedback
School Climate & Safety (n=1,176)	Mental Health/Socioemotional Support (n=483); Physical Safety & Discipline (n=359); Student & School Staff Relationships (n=242); Physical Health Support (n=107); Student-student Relationships (n=59)
Staffing (n=1,025)	Retention & Morale (n=421); Vacancies & Allocation of Staff (n=328); Caring/Hard-working Staff (n=258); Staff Training & PD (n=250); Time Constraints, Expectations & Demands (n=127); School Staff Collaboration & Mentoring (n=113); Recruitment (n=100)
Academics (n=994)	Curricular Materials, Scope & Sequence and Academic Frameworks (n=335); Special Education (n=231); Student Achievement/Academic Supports (n=225); Instruction (n=185); Extracurricular & Enriching Opportunities (n=109); Testing/Assessments (n=86); English Learners (n=76); Course/Program Offerings (n=52)
Central Office (n=817)	Central Office Leadership & Decision Making (n=386); School-Central Office Relationships & Communication (n=386); Central Office Collaboration & Functionality (n=190); Network/Assistant Superintendent Leadership (n=86)
Communications & Engagement (n=817)	Family Relationships & Communication (n=368); Listening to, Visiting & Learning from Stakeholders (n=326); Public Relations, Trust & Transparency (n=242)
Facilities (n=557)	Capital & Environmental Investments (n=281); Cleanliness & Ongoing Maintenance (n=172)
Funding & Resource Distribution (n=346)	No subtopics
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (n=318)	No subtopics
School Leadership (n=263)	No subtopics

Topics and Subtopics Overlapped

These circles provide a visual representation of how many of the codes and subcodes overlap and intersect.

SCHOOL SAFETY & CLIMATE

Physical Health & Nutrition

Student-Student Relationships

Physical Safety & Discipline

Mental Health/ Socioemotional Support

Student-School Staff Relationships

CENTRAL OFFICE

Coordination & Functionality

Networks & Ass't Supe. Leadership

Leadership & Decision-Making

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

School-Central Office Relationships

FACILITIES

Capital & Environmental Investments

Cleanliness & Maintenance

Time Constraints, Expectations & Demands

Calendars, Bell Schedules & Transportation

ACADEMICS

Extra-curriculars & enriching opportunities

Instruction

Course/ Program Offerings

Retention & Morale

Training/ PD

Caring, Hard-Working Staff

Listening to, Visiting, & Learning from Stakeholders

Testing/ assessments

Student Achievement & Academic Supports

English Learners

School Selection, Pathways & Opportunities

FUNDING & RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

Vacancies & Allocation of Staff

Public Relations & Trust/ Transparency

Special Education

Recruitment, hiring & Promotion

Staff Collaboration & mentoring

School-Family Relationships & Communication

Curricular Materials, Scope & Sequence, & Academic Frameworks

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

STAFFING

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

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How to Read These Slides

The following slides are organized based on the nine main topics that emerged from the surveys and the listening sessions.

Six of the nine main topics also include subtopics. Each topic/subtopic includes an introduction slide that summarizes the overall themes. Key issues and representative quotes from both survey and listening session participants follow to provide examples.

Quotes taken from survey responses and listening session transcripts are provided for each topic/subtopic and color coded by respondent group. The respondent group is also listed at the end of the quotation.

KEY: School Staff (Unspecified) | Teacher | School Leader | Central Office Staff | Support Staff | Students | Parent/guardian | Community Member

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
We need to recruit and retain more school staff of color	*Our teacher demographics need to mirror our student population better in terms of Race, Ethnicity, etc.* [Teacher] *We've got relationships with teachers that don't look like us but at the same time having them with people that look like us that we can talk freely with our way and everything from our neighborhood, that's good.* [Student] *We have to do a better job to create a pipeline around recruiting, have some strategic, targeted goals of how to recruit high-quality African American men to teach in the Philadelphia Public School System.* [Community Member]

Topics and subtopics are based on the codes that were used to organize and categorize all the data collected from the survey and listening sessions. While the topics help us make sense of what our stakeholders shared, they are all interrelated and interconnected.

Themes from the Topic of:
School Climate & Safety

- There are insufficient staff to meet students' mental health and socioemotional needs, especially given trauma related to COVID, addiction, and violence in neighborhoods.

- Students explained the importance of positive relationships with staff and their peers.

- Physical safety in schools is hampered by inadequate staffing and security measures.

- Many teachers are frustrated by a lack of alternatives to suspensions to ensure students have appropriate consequences for behavioral issues.

- Students' basic physical needs are not always met; they need healthy, appetizing foods and opportunities for physical activity.

School Climate & Safety Subtopics

School Climate & Safety

- Mental Health & Socioemotional Support

- Physical Safety & Discipline

- Student-School Staff Relationships

- Physical Health & Nutrition

- Student-Student Relationships

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Mental Health & Socioemotional Support

School Climate & Safety

- The trauma caused by COVID and gun violence has increased the need for mental health and socioemotional support (slide 22 and slide 23).

- There are insufficient staff to meet students' mental health and socioemotional needs (slide 24).

- Strong relationships between students and adults at school are critical for students feeling supported emotionally and intellectually. This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (Student-School Staff relationships, slide 31).

- This subtopic overlaps with another topic on the importance of coordinating with external partners and charter schools, to address student needs, e.g. COVID, gun violence, and poverty (see Funding and Resource Distribution, slide 183 and slide 184).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Schools need more trauma-informed approaches	*Greater supports for teachers and students at high challenge and trauma informed schools is the priority. Yes, it will cost money, but these teachers and students will benefit the most from reduced class sizes, released instructional coaches and teacher leaders as well as school-based behavioral health, mental health and wellness staff and services. All students must feel safe, included, and protected, and must have access to teachers who engage in equitable and trauma informed classroom practices as well as high leverage instructional practices that shift away from deficit mindset and toward building upon what our kids can do, and celebrating who they are…* [School Staff] *…what has struck me so intensely this year is how our kids seem to have the inability to regulate their emotions after everything they've been through, the gun violence and the pandemic. And if the adults don't feel supported and don't understand what that behavior is trying to meet that the child is exhibiting, then everything blows up…And so, supporting adults so that they can then understand why a child behaves the way they behave, and giving the child the right interventions is so critical. And I just have been struck by how difficult that has been this year for both the adults and our kids.* [Central Office Staff] *We need some kind of mental health programs in the school, because the children are being exposed to all sorts of violence throughout the city, whether it's gun violence or food insecurity. They have all this mental trauma, and sending them to the counselor for a 15 minute period or having them fill out a form on why they're sad today isn't working. All we're doing is sending them back into the classroom, and that's why we're continuing to see all these violent outbursts. These children do not know how to manage what they're feeling, and to just keep giving them hall passes to counselors and time outs is not helping them.* [Teacher]

For more about the impact of gun violence and addiction on schools, see Physical Safety & Discipline <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP should continue to focus on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	*[What is going well is] The district is starting to focus more on social-emotional learning.* [School Staff] *…with COVID and just a lot of the things that we're seeing, how this – the expectations that the district put on us and on our students, it really was just a rough time for our kids, and I think that we needed to really focus on SEL, not just morning meetings, because I just didn't think that that was enough. We really needed to put that into our teaching and curriculum. I had to really just force it in there because our kids are too traumatized – it was a violent summer. COVID, and plus on top of the other trauma that the kids were already dealing with on a day-to-day, not just the situation around and outside, but just different things that they were dealing with at home.* [Teacher] *[The top priority should be] Encouraging more social-emotional learning the first month of school and putting off standardized testing until the second quarter. Covid has erased the students sense of social norms…* [School Staff] *[The top priority should be] Centering Social Emotional well-being for staff and students. Seeing that it is meaningfully implemented throughout the day, on par with instructional pedagogy.* [Central Office Staff] *[The top priority should be] Robustly concentrating on social emotional learning from a general education delivery. We do not have a viable framework to adequately address SEL from a general education academic delivery system.* [School Staff] *Just wondering, has there been any deep discussions about making conflict resolution mandatory in the curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school, for that matter, to kind of help quell some of the violence, and to help our young people learn how to manage their emotions? And manage social media, and manage just dealing with one another. That was my question, just in terms of the conflict resolution, has there been any major moves to try to make it mandatory, just like Black history is mandated? Maybe conflict resolution could be mandated in the curriculum.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Schools need more counselors to meet student mental health and socioemotional needs	*And as a school counselor, I just want to address the student part and say that we're definitely understaffed as far as mental health resources in the district in regard to students. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students per counselor. And some schools have way, way more. And we know in Philadelphia there's also community violence, systemic racism, the pandemic, being a teen and child in general, and all of those issues that our students are dealing with, and when counselors have hundreds and hundreds of students in their caseload, you can't give them the individualized attention they need in regards to their academic needs, their personal and social needs, their postsecondary planning needs. There's a lot that we could give our students, but when we're working with so many it's hard.* [Support Staff] *What's the biggest need and priority should be filling vacant position and adding more positions because we're not able to do our jobs that need to be done when we're busy covering classes and students are needing more support. One counselor for a school with the amount of trauma is not enough…* [Teacher] *We have two counselors at our school. They're great, but they're also just absolutely overwhelmed because this school is [big], they're not only helping with college and career readiness, but they're also helping with the mental health issues that our students are facing.* [Teacher] *I am also very concerned that counselors have been reduced for schools, the ratio has further been reduced. That is not a good thing. If we're going to say that student wellbeing is the first priority, then we need to take care of their health, mental health, so I would really like to see that as a top priority for the [audio cuts out] because it directly impacts our students.* [Parent/guardian]

For more about structures that support students mentally and socio-emotionally, see Student-Staff Relationships [here](#).

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Physical Safety & Discipline

- Students, families, and staff at schools in neighborhoods where gun violence and addiction are prevalent shared their experiences of not feeling safe going to and from school (slide 26).

- Understaffing was raised as a factor undermining some schools' ability to maintain order and security (slide 27).

- Issues with doors, keys, locks and cameras make people feel unsafe in schools (slide 28).

- Many teachers are frustrated by the lack of alternatives to suspensions to ensure consequences for student behaviors; however, perspectives about what to do about this varied widely (slide 29).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Gun violence and addiction negatively affects schools	*To see people die all the time is not normal. I'm not going to accept it as such. When our second baby got murdered, he got murdered coming to school. That's how he got murdered…They drove up, drive by, killed him, coming to school, eight-thirty in the morning. He wasn't hanging out. He wasn't gambling. He wasn't – he was coming to school…When I got the news, I got the news in school, and they're like, what are you going to do? I'm trying to process this because this is now student number five, six in the last year, 18 months…I can't even process it to even say give you a thoughtful response of what am I going to do next because I have all my employees and my students in the other room, and I got to pull myself together, and I got to act like I'm ok, and tell them to come to school the next day. That was hard for me. That's not normal.…. [School Leader]* *I'm also in Kensington…We're very similar situation, with children stepping over needles…We've had staff stepping on needles, children stepping on needles. I get there right when the building opens. Sometimes there are homeless people laying there…I know several staff members had incidents with run-ins, and their safety has been jeopardized outside the surrounding areas. [Teacher]* *There was a shooting [half a block from our entrance]…The second teacher behind her was there when the two men raised their gun and shot a person that fell in front of her car; she could not move. The third teacher behind had to go around. She was hysterical. Yet we were not put on lockdown. Not put on lockdown. [Teacher]* *My babies, my…children, walk through impossible conditions where they see people shooting up, they see needles and drugs and everything.We have a gate, we have security, we have all of those things, and yet and still, we have to have lockdowns regularly to the point where, one time…the police actually had to bang on our door to come in because they thought that the person was actually in here, and they went into a classroom and it frightened kids to pieces. [School Leader]* *…there are times where there are threats that are around the school. There was two lockdowns last year because there was a shooting outside. It feels like [my school] is a good school but in a bad environment. [Student]*

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Schools need more resource officers, crossing guards, and climate staff to ensure school safety	*In order for us to feel a little more safe, we need more school resource officers. We did not have one this year, and we have had one for the past pre-pandemic for a while. My school had a lot of shootings around the school, even dealing with some of the parents were involved in the shootings this year. A lot of accidents, things going on in the neighborhood. And just to have that added person there would have made it so much easier.* [School Leader]
	There used to be four crossing guards, now there's one, there's a safety issue crossing the streets because of the cars that drive. They don't care if there's a child crossing the street. They just keep going past. [Parent/guardian]
	Not every school has a school security officer in place. The process that they use for admitting somebody to the building basically is…There's a buzzer system... We need somebody at our doors to monitor who comes in and out of our buildings and that's not being done. [Teacher]
	School police gets shifted and changed daily and in HS are severely short staffed and I feel that EVERYONE esp staff who enter buildings should go thru metal detectors not just the students and visitors. [School Staff]
	The school is out of control, the neighbors have to stand guard during opening and closing of school. No crossing guard or police. Many of the residents have had their cars vandalized by students. Need more security presence. [Community Member]
	As we know, there's a lot of violence and our children are prey to it not only in the buildings but on their way to and from school and we need to continue to work on that. I don't know if it means more detectors, more school police, more police presence, but I think that's a major issue. [Parent/guardian]
	Hire additional climate staff so that all hallways & exits can be properly monitored. [Teacher]

For more about the impact of insufficient staffing levels on safety, see Staffing here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Doors, keys, locks and cameras are essential for security	*[The top priority should be] School Safety - ensuring all k-8 school have metal detectors, security cameras and doors that lock and keys for all those locks.* [School Staff] *[The top priority should be] Safety in the schools. It would be VERY easy for a mass shooter to enter our school. Even though it says right on a sign outside that all will be searched or subject to a metal detector, it NEVER happens. ALL schools should have metal detectors-not just high schools. Elementary schools are being targeted. We received a letter that there would be random checks on middle school students last year, but it never happened at our school.* [Parent/guardian] *[The top priority should be] Classroom doors, outside entries, cameras, officer on duty, training for active shooter that is not hide in the corner, and visitor requirements (license scanner, visitor sticker). Also, a buzz in with video monitor from the schoolyard so a door doesn't have to be propped open when coming in with your students at arrival and picking the class up from recess.* [School Staff] *[The top priority should be] Ensuring the safety of everyone who is inside of a school building in the SDP by having doors that automatically lock, and ways that ONLY staff members can open the doors. As someone who has seen outside violence come into schools, I believe that we can prevent a tragedy from happening by making sure school doors are locked during the day and only select people have access to unlocking these doors.* [School Staff] *[The top priority should be] School Safety- we are a high crime area and do not have cameras outside our building at all. We are not even on the list to receive cameras this year. We have lost a student this year to gun violence, have had many shootings right across the street of our building, and have been in lock down several times this year.* [School Staff]

For more about how inadequate doors, keys, locks and cameras make staff feel unsafe, see Facilities <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There is a lack of consistent expectations and consequences for students	*… the pendulum swung too far to the direction where there were very few consequences for serious behaviors and the serious behaviors that we see in our news stories are serious issues that are happening with 12 and 13- and 14-year-old children…It's heartbreaking to see this cycle and we have very few tools at our disposal to really do anything about it…and it perpetuates.* [Teacher] *I just know throughout the year we were like, "We need consequences." We were being told 440 said, "You can't punish the kids. You can't suspend the kids. You can't do this, you can't do that." I know there were situations kids should have been suspended. But we were told multiple times, "440 says you can't suspend a kid. 440 said –" So I don't know if it's true, but I feel like a lot of the answers were, "440 says," and we were frustrated too. You could see it. Like the admin was frustrated too.* [Teacher] *I would say follow-through and consequences. It seems like there were absolutely none this year. And I get some of the cases where that we had kids who didn't have teachers, so their stability factor was off and their structure was nonexistent, but it just seemed like it was a no holds barred, like kids could say almost anything to a teacher, and you could say something to them, and there was just no support, it seemed, from climate, administration, whoever, that there was the follow-through on the consequences.* [Teacher] *…the discipline issues in the classroom. I've been in some schools where it's horrible. The administrators are just not running the schools properly, children are not learning because there are a lot of behavioral problems in the classroom. How can a teacher teach when there's no discipline in the classrooms? …The biggest problem I've seen in the school district is the teachers are just not getting the support in these classrooms.* [Community Member] *I just feel like they should do a better job at explaining the rules. You need to explain why we've got the policy. A lot of times they just throw stuff out there and they don't really give us an explanation for why.* [Student]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Student-School Staff Relationships

- When students were asked what makes them feel safe and supported in school, they talked about the positive impact of having strong relationships with adults who care about them on a "human" level, and who are empathetic, patient, and understanding about their lives (slide 31).

- Students spoke about the importance of adults listening to what they have to say and what they need, and keeping what students tell them confidential (slide 32 and slide 33).

- Students need to feel respected by all staff members. When staff speak rudely to them, students lose trust in them (slide 34).

- Stakeholders recognized the need for more school-wide (tier one) efforts to meet students' needs, such as structured times that facilitate positive student-school staff relationships, e.g., community meetings, restorative circles, race dialogues, etc. (slide 35).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students feel cared for when adults connect with them on a "human" level	*I agree with basically what everyone's saying. Having a really engaging teacher or multiple engaging teachers really reduces the stress level as a student, at least for me. Being able to have a teacher or teachers connect to you on a more personal, human level, is a lot better than anything else.* [Student] *In order to teach someone, you have to love them first. In order to learn, you have to love the person you're learning from. That starts with that person saying, "I'm here." I attach myself to people pretty quickly. For me, it was the school safety officers. All three of them…they were this great support system. First people I saw in the morning, and I would be like, "Hey, what's up?" I would hug them and everything.* [Student] *I think I do feel supported by the staff because I know it's their job and everything, but I feel like some or most of the staff go further and beyond when it comes to just the word supportive. Some staff even help you with family problems, problems that have nothing to do with them. I feel like that's good to have because we're still at a young age.* [Student] *All of our teachers, they're not the kind of teachers that are only here nine to five and they're just trying to do their work and go home. They always point you out for doing something right, wrong. They always let you know. They never stay quiet. And they always communicate [with us].* [Student] *One of the teachers in seventh grade…she was an amazing teacher. A ton of support, really connected to her students on a personal level. You could ask her anything. She was really open to a bunch of different things, topics. She was this amazing, amazing teacher.* [Student]

For more about how caring adults facilitate learning, see Instruction [here](#).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students need adults to listen and understand their experiences	*Teachers should—staff in general should look at us not as equals but as someone who understands. Half the time when I'm speaking to staff, I feel like they're treating me like I'm a four-year-old and that doesn't make any sense. I feel like they should really understand what we're saying. Of course, we're not equals, but they should just really listen.* [Student] *Half the time, we just need someone to sit there and listen to what we have to say…Sometimes, it's like people put on—me personally, I would say every day, I put on a brave face. Even though I'm living with so much, I put on a face to show that I'm not trying to deal with it. Even though I want to deal with it, it's like I can't at the moment. We really should get someone to talk to and really just sit there and listen to us because we all go through stuff. Sometimes, we don't have no one there to listen or sometimes people hear what they want to hear or sometimes they don't care.* [Student] *My administrator…She was amazing. She understood everyone. She knew who, their problems. She honestly would give you her personal number just to call her if you needed it because she knew being in a different neighborhood – Of course, this does not apply to everyone, but having kids come from difficult neighborhoods need that support. She understood that, especially her being another woman of color.* [Student] *…when I first come to this school…My only goal was to just get out of the school, get away and that was it. I had a teacher… talk to me. She helped me out through the year, and I just feel like that's the way you trust somebody by talking to them, listening to their problems, and just understanding them. So that's one way I trust other people.* [Student] *I feel as though if [teachers] come to you in the right manner and show that they actually care and they're not just here to come and make money through you and it's like they come to do their job and leave, if they show that they care and they listen— if you feel as though you need to be by yourself or whatever the case is, they actually listen or whatever.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Confidentiality is critical to students trusting adults	*Basically,…if I go tell you something, I don't want you to go run off and tell someone else. I want this to be a space for us and us only. But if it's something I need you to tell and get out there for other kids to understand, I will tell them.* [Student] *I was going based off what [another student] had said about the environment and depression and all that and dealing with counselors and therapists. Let's say one of the kids was talking to a counselor and they request not to bring it up to their parents because they don't know what's going on, but the counselor continues to do that. They get home, the parents are lashing out on them because they ain't depressed or they don't feel suicidal or something like that. I feel like some counselors should listen to the child when they say that because they don't know what's going on at home.* [Student] *I know we have a bunch of support and stuff, but we can't just immediately go up to someone and just start talking about your emotions because it's not easy to open up to everyone, especially if it's like a counselor because what I see mostly that happens, that counselors would eventually end up telling your parents and your family because they have to, but if it's something that you don't want to tell your parents and they still do it, there's kind of a sense of betrayal, and I feel like that's where the problem comes in, why most kids don't go to the counselor because they don't want their parents finding out.* [Student] *Certain staff I trust, certain staff I don't trust. But my only reason why I don't trust certain staff is because if I would tell them something, let's just say I tell them something, it doesn't matter what it is. I would go to the next classroom and I would hear from every teacher and everybody what I told that teacher.* [Student] *Sometimes I feel like I can't open up to anybody because I don't know how that person is. No matter how you think somebody is, they could be like someone else. They might be different. Maybe if you tell somebody what's happening in your life, the story will go around, and it'll go around the school, and other people will start to understand what your life is, and that can just make you have a bad school year. Everybody will make fun of you.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students need to feel respected by all staff members	*I feel like as an adult if you want my respect you've got to earn respect just as much we've got to earn respect from y'all. The way the staff be talking to us is crazy.* [Student] *They be acting like we don't got no say so we can't say nothing back to them and all that. We're so-called "being disrespectful" when we say something back to them. They be talking crazy and even cussing at us. They make it seem like we can't say nothing back. They keep saying they come from where we come from, but really if you come from where we come why are you talking crazy? You know how we'll react. We come from the same scene; we'll react the same way. If somebody is getting crazy we all will be shook and get right with them. You come over here and acting crazy with me. [This school] ain't that bad but because of the way they be talking to us and they expect us not to say nothing. I don't appreciate that.* [Student] *I was going to say I feel as though the teachers and staff members, they feel as if they're on a higher podium than us. We're not on equal ground so what they think is happening, they might say something different or in a different way and it will affect us but we can't do the same back to them.I know they're adults and stuff like that. "Respect your elders," and all that, but... yeah, they're on a higher podium.* [Student] *I feel, like what they said about the respect thing, I feel like if y'all want us, you've got to understand where we're coming from. If y'all claim that y'all are the same as us and y'all know where we come from and y'all grew up in the hood just like us and y'all go through the same struggles as us, y'all got to understand where we're coming from. If you come to me on some hype stuff because you think I did something I'm going to come back to you hype. I'm not going to sit here and be like, "No, I'm sorry. I'm so confused." No. Y'all have got to know who you're talking to because I'm from the hood, I don't do things like that.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Schools need more structures in place that facilitate positive relationships between students and adults	*I feel that student wellbeing is enhanced most with supportive relationships, I have has a lot of success with restorative circles.* [Teacher] *[Students] need to feel safe, they need all their basic needs met, they need to feel cared about, they need to know that their teacher cares about them…—because if they don't trust our environment, they're not going to learn.* [Teacher] *In terms of addressing the [socioemotional] piece, it should be a school-wide responsibility, i.e., respect for the student and making the student feel valued. It would certainly benefit students if staff know their story, so you can learn about the child, and their home life, thus leading to more positive relationships, including behavior, and academic success. Relationship building is KEY!!!* [Teacher] *Me personally, I have really enjoyed this [listening session] right here because I feel like I was going crazy.* [Student] *In the past two years, the district has had larger focus on students' socio-emotional health through such initiatives as Community Meeting and the Student Well-being Survey. Both of these opportunities give students the chance to use their voices and/or share their feelings with staff.* [Central Office Staff] *We see it already happening in schools around the district and we've seen it for many years, the school with a really, really strong focus on having a strong welcoming tier-one climate that emphasizes positive relationships, that gives kids voice and builds a sense of belonging needs to be a huge focus of our energy. And I think sometimes in schools they feel like they're in a sense of crisis a lot of the time and so that makes it hard to focus on building that tier one, because we're solving problem, problem, problem. So to me the best supports we can provide are really helping them with, how do I both manage all the things that are happening in the building at any given time and maintaining that focus on tier one, because it is kind of a both/and.* [Central Office Staff]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Physical Health & Nutrition

- Providing students with healthy and appetizing food in school is necessary in order for them to be ready and able to learn; this is particularly true for our students that deal with food insecurity at home (slide 37). Not all schools are currently meeting this need (slide 38).

- Multiple barriers prevent students from having adequate opportunities for physical activity, namely during recess and PE (slide 39).

- Stakeholders also recognized the need to support and expand health services and screenings in schools (slide 40).

- In some schools, additional supports for students such as menstrual products, access to water, clean clothes, and outdoor time is needed. Some staff also mentioned needing more transition time for bathroom needs (slide 41).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Hunger, food insecurity, and basic needs not being met are a challenge to student learning	*It's like, how am I expecting you to learn and be attentive and be able to concentrate and focus if you're not able to think on a full stomach at least?* [Student] *The next thing I found out in Philadelphia is that kids come to school hungry. Some of them don't have breakfast, they're racing out without breakfast and how can we fix that problem?* [Community Member] *I just wanted to say, my students come to school hungry. They're hungry. They leave hungry…They have to go in line as soon as they come in in the cafeteria, it does open up, but if they don't go up to the ladies to get their breakfast, they're being refused a breakfast. If the food is there, I do not understand why it's not being given to the children….It's hard to sit still for eight hours a day, or seven hours, when you're hungry.* [Teacher] *I think your success is going to rely heavily on issues that you may not solely be in control of like violence, like food insecurities at home, household access to health, and all of those things are going to matter to your kids because we know that learning happens best when a kid feels safe, confident, supported, and loved.* [Community Member] *I think one of the things that keeps our children from successfully learning at school, and this might seem simple, but doesn't it make the world go round is hunger. Being food insecure. Our kids can't think because one, they're thinking about their next meal… if they are worried about having enough food when they get home, they're not thinking about doing their homework. They're not able to do what they have to do.* [Community Member] *[What needs improvement is] Meeting students where their needs are and not where we would like them to be. Prioritizing core, foundational needs such as access to basic necessities (i.e. food, clothing, shelter)...* [School Staff] *Maslow before Bloom!!!* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Improving the quality of school meals should be a focus	*Yes, I eat [school lunch] sometimes but sometimes I don't want to eat it because they don't know how to cook the food. They don't season it or nothing.* [Student] *If we served better lunches, that would uplift the students.* [Student] *…But the food here is mediocre at its best.* [Student] *More fresh food and things that the students will eat.* [Teacher] *If food can be something… think about what can be added… [such as] international food that everyone can eat. This is some concern that I have that they're coming back home with an empty stomach. They've been starved the whole day probably just drinking water.* [Community Member] *…In addition to that, we don't have a full kitchen. We don't have an operating kitchen, so the children get the space meals, and they don't like it because it's poor quality; it's crap… I would like to see more fresh fruits and vegetables or something for them, because the food they get—they'd rather just spend a dollar at the [corner] store to eat some chips…* [Teacher] *So, I think we do a great job with offering breakfast, but I've gotten muffins before from the teachers to give to the kids who are still hungry, and sometimes they feel like they've just been taken out the refrigerator. And I definitely wouldn't want to eat that for breakfast. So, I think if we can get food that the students are willing to eat that's warm into their bodies, that does help with their wanting to learn, so they're not hungry, their heads and their bellies aren't hurting.* [Support Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More time, resources and staff training to support recess and Physical Education is needed	*To add on to the student well-being. Can we can go back having extra recess time for students? I am sorry but 10-15 minutes a day is not enough and many times it's taking away. I was a student in Philly public schools, and we had 3 recesses. Those extra recesses I felt help give us a break which then turn into more willing to learn and want to do.* [Teacher]
	I like the recess part. Just being able to play with your friends, and the opportunities to play and have sports like soccer, and softball is good other than just learning all day. [Student]
	A lot of times we see our kids just standing around, and then that's when they get into fights a lot. That's where a lot of our issues come from is the recess, because our climate staff doesn't have any training on even just to get the kids to interact with each other. [Teacher]
	Armed with studies and increasing awareness of our children's needs, increase recess time from 15-20 minutes to 45 minutes. Our children need more breaks in order for them to learn to the best of their ability [Parent/guardian]
	I had both morning and lunchtime recess as a student in West Philadelphia, and I think it was more healthy. [Teacher]
	We have students that attend schools that don't have gyms. We have students who – so, they're doing physical education in their classrooms. We have students who attend schools that do not have outdoor spaces. [Central Office Staff]
	I've been in my school for 20 years and I've taught without a gym for 20 years. I keep getting shuffled around from place to place. I'm grateful that I have a health room, but a gymnasium would be awesome to help the students more, become more physical, and have an outlet. I know that having an outlet is very important for our students. [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP should improve and expand health services	*The one thing that the SDP needs the most improvement is recognizing student health services. School Nurses are often forgotten about and therefore our needs to support student health are not addressed. There should be better communication so that we function as a team to support students. It seems disjointed.* [School Staff]
	Then my second question is about nurses in schools. That's very important because my daughter has type one diabetes and that was one of the reasons why I stayed in the school because I'm always – if the nurse wasn't there, I would have to be here because I wouldn't – unless the principal, she would call and ask me questions, but it's not really her responsibility. [Parent]
	I wanted to say that from the nursing perspective, there are many counties outside of Philadelphia who do mass screenings early in the year. And what that does is it identifies students who have hearing loss or students who need vision correction. And one of the ways they do it is they have spot screeners. And they can do an entire building in a day or two. If we had the resources to get the spot screeners for our students. This is what the Eagles do when they come in and screen our students. When the Eagles Youth Partnership comes in. But if we had that ability ourselves within the schools to do that, we would know much earlier on in the year, and we would be able to identify students who had vision or hearing concerns and we could get them done more quickly and get these students where they need to be so they're less vulnerable. That's just one example of funding having a source where we could have the equipment that we need. And I think that's very doable. [Support Staff]
	…something that is very challenging for us as a district right now is making sure that each school is staffed with a qualified nurse…to make sure that our students and families are taken care of. And that communication and that knowledge is given to parents on how to take care of their children when they're outside of school. A lot of our parents look at our schools as hospitals or physicians. So, what we really need to do a good job of taking care of our students when they're in our school, and then helping our parents when they're at home as well. [Central Office staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Other physical health needs are left unmet	*[What needs improvement is] …the school bathroom for girls (needs to have pad dispenser and body wipes this will allow the girls who can not get their period essentials to be able to get some while their at school).* [Student] *[What needs improvement is a] Structure that better supports student and staff wellness (e.g., more time to transition between classes for bathroom, snacks, and to re-set between student groups/classes; better bathroom, water, healthier food facilities and offerings, more time outside of locked and closed window buildings - recess, school grounds for older students to help them have space for emotional challenges and to live healthier lives).* [School Staff] *…how are you going to support parents so that they can send their children prepared with basics like pencils and notebooks, and clean clothes? I can't tell you how many children I've seen come in to class with the shirt inverted because that's the clean side. Or they're just disheveled in some way and not having supplies.* [Community Member] *…I think that we need to ensure that every single school in the district has outdoor – safe outdoor space with trees, not just concrete, but where there are trees and there are some natural resources. Every single school really should have a program where they get those kids outside into nature on a regular basis, not just once a year, but on a regular basis. And it absolutely can be done. I think it's an essential piece for the mental, physical, spiritual well-being of our students and their families.* [Community Member] *My first year in this school district, I was in a high school which had a block schedule of periods of 90 minutes, and there were days where I had two 90 minutes periods in a row, meaning that I could not go to the bathroom for 180 minutes. I'm expected to let my students go whenever they need to, yet I have to stand in the front holding it in and even if I call the office, they don't have enough staff to send to like let me go to the bathroom…If I don't have to worry about that in the other job [office or retail], that is not something that I should have to worry about my biological needs while in a teaching position..* [Teacher]

Student-Student Relationships

- Students explained that other students' negative behaviors can be distracting, particularly in the classroom, which makes learning difficult (slide 43).

- However, when students have positive relationships with their peers, it makes them happy and can encourage them to come to school (slide 44).

School Climate & Safety

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students feel frustrated, distracted, and scared by other students' negative behavior	*I feel like the teachers, like supervisors, they know how to do their job. They know what's right from wrong. They really know how to handle it right. It be the kids that distractive and destructive. They do the most, and it be hard for the teachers…* [Student] *[Students] doing too much, doing the most in class because I feel like most of the kids need to get work done because they're not focused on the work. They're focused on what this person is doing and why they're doing it and let me see your page and this and that. I don't think that the kids are actually into learning. Some kids are. Some kids aren't.* [Student] *One thing that's really irritating is when some students—let's say the teacher asks you a question, somebody gets the answer wrong, and then three people have something to say about you getting the answer wrong or they laugh at you or something like that. For me personally, that's really irritating because it's like nobody was talking to you.* [Student] *I don't like when other kids are fooling around, and they're out of their seat, and they're running. There's always like a few people paying attention, and the teacher just starts yelling at everyone. Even for the kids who are paying attention, it makes you feel like they're yelling at you, too. I get upset…*[Student] *Some of it, I can see they're playing, but they shouldn't be playing in that way. Some of the after-school kids, especially from [a nearby high school] since they get out a half an hour earlier than us, they come up here, and they just start stuff for no reason.* [Student] *I feel like whenever I'm at school I feel like there's always kind of this threat that somebody might hurt me, be it on accident or on purpose. Because like I'm annoying or something, or it's just an accident. But I feel like that's complicated. I do feel safe from like, life threatening stuff. Because I know that the schools have trained a lot for that. But there is always kind of a threat.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Student friendships have a positive impact on their wellbeing and learning	*They've got so many teachers, so many staff, and they smile all along, but the reason why I come to school happy is I come just for my friends.* [Student] *Really, I think the people you're in class with are the people you're on a team with, especially when you have them every single class. You all feel as though it is one team, one fight, especially when it comes to education.* [Student] *I love being at school that I'm at right now—well, that I was at. It's a nice environment, nice learning environment. I love my classmates, you know, so really fun, I get to learn a lot. I really enjoy being at the school that I'm at right now.* [Student] *But the days that I am having fun in school is mostly because I'm doing something that I like. I'm around friends, and I'm around people that don't put me down. When it is enjoyable it's mostly because of people I'm surrounded by.* [Student] *My friends and the teachers, and staff just make me feel very safe, and comfortable in school.* [Student] *Friends. If you have friends in school that are—Friends can help you, if you're uncomfortable around more people.* [Student] *I actually enjoy being at school like this. Probably some pros and cons, pros is having friends and the cons is waking up early.* [Student] *It's like school is somewhere I can go where I can just meet other people because I don't go outside too much. It's like I enjoy coming to school because I get to talk to more people, I get to be more interactive, and I feel like to me, that's good.* [Student]

Themes from the Topic of:
Staffing

- Stakeholders frequently expressed appreciation for hard-working and caring staff, highlighting that despite staffing challenges, dedicated employees are a key strength.

- Insufficient and inconsistent staffing is a challenge for virtually all SDP priorities, including:
  - Collaborative school team planning
  - Meeting student socioemotional needs
  - Ensuring school safety and cleanliness
  - Building and sustaining staff relationships with students and families
  - Staff morale and well-being

- School staff attribute poor morale and retention to multiple issues including insufficient staffing, unsupportive leadership, lack of respect for teachers, and unreasonable demands on their time.

- Staff called for more differentiated and school-based professional development (PD) and PD addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), inclusive of support staff.

Staffing Subtopics

- Retention & Morale

- Vacancies & Allocation of Staff

- Staff Training & Professional Development (PD)

- Time Constraints, Expectations & Demands

- Staff Collaboration & Mentoring

- Recruitment, Hiring & Promotion

Retention & Morale

- The Retention & Morale sub-theme overlapped with many other themes and sub-themes such as vacancies (slide 52), cleanliness (slide 175), safety (slide 25), and time constraints (slide 67), showing how multiple dimensions of employees' experiences can contribute to how they feel about their job and whether they choose to stay.

- One overarching theme about morale is that teachers and support staff do not feel respected as professionals (slide 48). This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (school leadership, slide 199).

- Staff felt more positive recognition and interactions would increase morale (slide 49).

- Teachers spoke to how their school leadership can have both positive and negative impacts on their morale (slide 50). The importance of school leadership on teacher retention overlaps with another subtopic (School leadership, slide 202).

- Compensation, remote work options, and parental leave were also highlighted as important for retaining employees (slide 51, slide 79).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Teachers and staff need to feel trusted and respected as professionals	*We are all professionals. We are professionally trained….Everyone has a master's degree. Most – a lot of our staff actually we have quite a few staff who have doctoral degrees or multiple master's degrees. We know what we're doing. And so, having curricular programs that are being given to us by the district that don't allow for a lot of flexibility are not something that we need….And I would just hope that moving forward we can see that honored a little bit more and acknowledged a little bit more.* [Teacher] *I think at [my school], one of the big strengths to teaching and learning has been that our admin in general does trust a lot of the educators to be passionate about the subject we teach. We're, as much as possible, trusted to bring our ideas about different projects, trips, contents, and that's really helpful because it allows us to flex our expertise and our interests and input from our students and it just makes us, as a teaching staff, more excited about the content* [Teacher] *I think that as teachers, we feel like at times it's more of a dictatorship than it is a partnership. I feel like the distrust and why maybe teachers, for whatever reason, may have left the district is just the overall lack of respect for teachers and their craft.* [Teacher] *No other profession is micromanaged like this. How can you give me a list and tell me that this is the only thing that I'm allowed to use? I got written up because a worksheet I gave my kids had somebody's name on the bottom that I guess came from Teachers Pay Teachers, which is a big no-no in our network. These things are just ridiculous to me.* [Teacher] *[What needs improvement is] Getting staff to feel respected, valued and vital to the district's goals for our students.* [School Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Respect and autonomy for the school nurses within the district.* [School Staff]

For more about how good school leaders are key to morale and teacher retention, see here and here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Staff need more positive recognition and interactions	*I'd like to point out two positives that I experienced this year, and a lot of my colleagues did, as well. One was when we had one of our last walkthroughs, it was positive. [District staff] came and they put Post-it notes on our desks or handed it to the teacher, and that was—you would have thought you won an Oscar. It was unbelievable, the feedback from the teachers circulating throughout the building. It made you feel great. There was not one negative comment. Then you start reevaluating where you are and it gives you that good feeling again. That was a morale boost…* [Teacher] *[My comment] was more about principals and assistant superintendents doing observations on the day before a holiday or the day after a holiday. That's more of a "Got you," and "I'm going to catch you not doing the right thing." Teachers feel that—when somebody walks in, it's like, "It's a got you." It's not a trust. There is no trust between principals and assistant superintendents and the teachers, because there hasn't been a time where that's been allowed to happen. It's "You have to do this, you have to do this, you have to do this." We're human. Just treat us as humans.* [Teacher] *When we get evaluation reports that 9 out of 10 of our special ed files are in compliant, but one is not. We receive a giant red X that says we're not in compliance. When we look at our student files and our operational walkthroughs and one is missing a birth certificate, then all of the student files are out of compliance. That's not fair. That's not fair to look at our operational walkthroughs and instructional walkthroughs and say, well, you got nine out of 10 but you still failed.* [School Leader] *Let teachers teach and have more autonomy and respect on the classroom. We are not respected as professionals and are not trusted by administration at any level to do our jobs…. Change the GOTCHA moment mentality with admin and start focusing on what we are doing correctly as teachers are beat down.* [School Staff]

For more about how poor building conditions impact staff morale, see Facilities here.
For more about how teachers felt that there is a lack of consistent expectations for students, see School Safety & Discipline here.
For more about Central Office retention and morale, see here and here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School leaders are key to staff morale and retention	*I really appreciate that my principal allows us, as long as we're meeting the standard, to do adjustments as we see fit, which is very much appreciated and shows, I think – for me, it shows a lot of trust in me as an educator which is also appreciated since I spent so many years and hundreds of thousands of dollars to do it.* [Teacher] *For me, it's the systems of supports that are in place. It is the ability for administrators to support teachers in a holistic type of way, and for administrators and teachers to support the students in that same way, to ensure that we're all giving our best version of ourselves when we are in the building.* [Teacher] *Re-engaging the leadership potential within schools. Principals and teachers seem burnt out and if they feel hopeless, then little good will come of that. Help reignite their passion, orientation, so that my children can have the best leaders in their schools.* [Parent/guardian] *…I would also like to see a clear path to leadership for teachers in the district. Teacher retention is at an all time low. A teacher with ambitions to become a school leader should be embraced and assisted internally.* [School Staff] *…one of the huge challenges of our Philadelphia public schools, particularly those that are challenged the most, is having continuity, not a revolving door of leadership. It is hard to build culture when you have folks coming in and out. It's not only getting the staff in place that is so essential, but keeping them in place, so that you really can create a culture and a climate. Because I think that is what helps staff to feel safe, helps students to feel safe, helps parents to feel safe.* [Community Member]

For more about how good school leaders are key to morale and teacher retention, see School Leadership here.
For more about frustration with the lack of communication between schools and Central Office, see here and here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Remote work is a retention strategy at the Central Office (440)	*And many of us are overseeing teams that are actually doing the implementing and supporting schools. So, obviously, it's critical that we have high-quality teachers and school leaders and school-based support staff in schools. But also here at Central Office it's critical to have high-quality talent to be able to support schools every day…I really like workplace flexibility policies and remote work opportunities for people that are competitive and necessary in the current labor market to attract and retain talent.* [Central Office Staff] *The biggest example of this is of course the remote work policy - we finally, finally were granted two days a week of work from home. This allowed me to be SO much more productive, less stressed, to have higher work satisfaction. Same for so many of us. But out of nowhere, our office was told that for some of us, there would be no work from home allowed, and for others, it would be maximum one day a week…no explanation given…over 50% of our office quit last year during the period when so many other jobs were able to work remote and we weren't. This isn't a trivial matter. Remote work is proven to increase worker satisfaction, productivity, retention - the research is overwhelming. For those of us who sit at our cubicles day after day, not being able to have that flexibility is just asinine, as well as a clear indicator that we aren't trusted.* [Central Office Staff] *…retention is a huge problem here. This has only been accelerated since the beginning of COVID with a lot of remote work opportunities. We have adjusted to that with our flexible work policy, and I think we do a good job. Being in the public sector, we will never match the salaries of private sector [which] is very lucrative and we struggle a lot to keep a lot of those resources…what keeps 440 together is glue and duct tape by people who have been here longer than two years. And when you lose your key assets like that, that's what causes a lot of these communication problems, response-time problems that we see out in the field. So everyone wants to make more money, but I do think we need to take a serious look at that for a lot of the admin positions, just because the market right now, there's never been a better time to look for a new job.* [Central Office Staff]

For more about Central Office retention and morale, see Internal Functionality & Coordination <u>here</u>.

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Vacancies & Allocation of Staff

- Teachers and other school staff have highlighted how class sizes and caseloads have reached unmanageable levels (slide 53), sometimes beyond national standards and frequently worsened by staff absences and lack of substitutes (slide 54, slide 55). This issue overlaps with another topic (funding and resource distribution, slide 179).

- Insufficient staffing levels lead to insufficient staff release time for planning and collaboration within school teams (slide 56).

- Adequate staffing is needed to support key priorities such as safety (slide 27), socioemotional support (slide 24), Special Education (slide 57, slide 58), and bus transportation (slide 59), as well as cleanliness and maintenance of facilities (slide 173). These issues overlap with another topic (funding and resource distribution, slide 177).

- A lack of substitutes results in teachers, counselors, and administrators covering colleagues' classes, leading to burnout and students not receiving needed services (slide 54, slide 55).

- Principals report that budget limitations force them to choose between essential positions (slide 60). School budgeting challenges overlaps with another subtopic (funding and resource distribution, slide 178).

- The "leveling" process is a major disruption for schools, undermining their ability to maintain strong relationships between school staff and their colleagues, students, and families (slide 61).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Class sizes and caseloads matter	*I think that what determines student wellbeing more than anything is the degree to which teachers can be responsive to them as individuals as well as grade-level people…Unlike many, many, many of my colleagues, I had a really productive year, and I'm going to tell you, I had 20 kids in my class. More than anything else, class size will get you results or doom you. We were, for the most part, held harmless based on class numbers this year, so there was no leveling this year. If we go back to the same standard that we have lived by every other year where 30 or 32 is the expectation, we will not be attending adequately to the wellbeing of children because it's not possible.* [Teacher] *I think class sizes are very important because you want teachers to really be able to have relationships with students and when you have larger classes, it's just not as possible. You literally have less time for those students. You have less time to contact parents. You have less time for everything related to it…* [Teacher] *What I wanted to talk about is class size. Last year [when I had a low class size] it was amazing and through all of the challenges because my great partners were able to build very deep very meaningful relationships with our students and some of them are experiencing the most severe trauma during the year, family members murdered, going to court of parents, anything you can think of on the spectrum of what can go wrong but they knew we had their backs because we knew them intimately.* [Teacher] *I've been a district parent. I've been a district teacher. So, I just want to say briefly that looking at the five-year plan…I hope that that translates to a commitment to smaller class size.* [Community Member] *Hiring more teachers in order to lower the class size and then in turn this will lower the stress of the students and teachers alike.*[School Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Class size. Our students are in need of much attention in order to learn based on their individual skills. Class size in K-3 should not exceed 20.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Vacancies and lack of substitute teachers leads to students not receiving needed services	*I lost almost 98 preps last school year due to teacher shortages. Our expressive arts teachers were pulled to cover classes all the time. My students only saw the gym 2x the whole school year!! That is unacceptable. We never had music and we only had art a few times. That's just a shame.* [School Staff]
	Using School Counselors as an example, many of us are assigned multiple tasks that include non-counseling duties.They include many clerical tasks that take up much of a day in order to follow up with the necessary partners. This leave little time to address our full time job of counseling and addressing the needs of our students, parents, teachers, and school communities. Please consider that the interventions that are considered, chosen, and being "implemented" look wonderful on paper but are close to impossible to complete with fidelity. [Support Staff]
	My concern is our system for getting substitute teachers because we have…anywhere from 18 to 30 people out in a given day… when I have 10 people out, it makes it difficult to function and make sure the kids are getting their services. [School Leader]
	But we, again, no subs, which means the principal's in there. The SBTL is in there. I'm in there. The SPECM is in there. And then teachers losing their preps. Or if not, then what occurs is that they split classes or they send students across to different classrooms. And we could end up with a classroom that has close to 40 students in order to address that. [Support Staff]
	We don't have enough people to meet the needs of schools. Every school needs a resource officer, climate manager, school-based teacher leader and assistant principal. In addition, we need more climate support staff for lunch/recess. Principals are often pulled to do jobs that prevent us from focusing on teaching and learning. [School Staff]
	[What needs improvement is] insufficient building staffing which leads to elevated student discipline issues. [School Staff]
	Counselors given the time and tools to deal with some of the trauma. My counselor was constantly covering classes. [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Vacancies and lack of substitute teachers leads to poor morale, burnout, and attrition	*For my staff this year, it was absences and inability to cover those absences with substitutes. I just feel like people got really burned out by the end of the year…and I think that brought the morale down.* [Teacher]
	…the lack of staffing and substitutes was an extreme hardship on the entire school community at large. I think when we talk about the state of our teachers, they covered every single day, they stepped up to the plate… And I think over all, that had an extreme impact on some of the morale, the mental, the physical well-being of the staff. [School Leader]
	[The First priority should be] Properly staffing the District at all levels, understaffed leads to burnout, resentment, poor performance, and results in a chain of issues not being addressed. [School Staff]
	Dr. Watlington's first priority should be to work on the teacher shortage / many vacancies in our District. We need qualified teachers / not long-term substitutes to teach our students. The stability of a qualified staff will greatly help with various climate issues in our public schools. [School Staff]
	We felt that burnout too from substitutes. We lost preps three to four times a week, so trying to constantly play catch up got to be too much. [Teacher]
	We had a few teachers who left... We couldn't find enough subs to fill the positions, so teachers had to fill in all year. It was very stressful. Students didn't benefit from this and teachers were burnt out by the end of the year. [Support Staff]
	When teachers are covering classes during their preps frequently and there are fully released staff who are only on the prep rotation (ex. SBTL) , it increases the frustration and impacts climate dramatically. [Teacher]
	…in terms of staffing, it's nearly impossible to get substitutes because they have to have certain requirements. I think a solution would be to remove those requirements [e.g., having a certain degree]. [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Insufficient staffing leads to lack of time to plan and collaborate	*…We would like to have some more time to collaborate with people within our subject area. I feel like there's a lot of good things going on. But there's not a lot of communication throughout the school and throughout the district. So, if having more teachers would give us that time to collaborate and also to differentiate.* [Teacher] *One of the things this year and the last couple of years that we've struggled with as being sort of a [School-Based Teacher Leader], so sort of being on that administration piece is the lack of support in staff, in subs, in people coming into the building. It affects everything because it affects planning. Teachers can't have time to plan, to even talk about instruction. It affects student behavior, there's barely a chance for a break. Teachers are working 24/7 other than their 30 minute lunch.* [Teacher] *I know at my school alone, we had six vacancies pretty much all year that we had to run numerous teachers, losing preps, which, unfortunately, is not unusual in the three years that I was at that school – well over 60 plus hours of missed prep alone, and I think virtually that was the only time I didn't really lose prep.* [Teacher] *Teachers are supposed to squeeze all that into the school day instruction wise, and then not have enough time in a day to plan everything they want to teach…I don't understand why there is not more time built into the school day to give teachers the opportunity, to both plan individually as well as plan in teams and co-workers their instruction and curriculum, because I know it's given to us but with every school, every classroom, a teacher has to adapt what the school district gives to their students' needs and there's not time built into the day for that, even with two prep periods, one of which is usually taken up* [Teacher] *Coverages are a major problem, especially this year due to people out with COVID. But the lack of substitutes and the removal of the free period of a teacher to be able to collaborate with their – with other professionals in their school, to be able to plan, it's a huge problem. And that's one of the reasons why they're so exhausted this year.* [Central Office Staff]

For more about how additional time is needed for collaboration among support staff, see Mentoring and Collaboration <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Adequate staffing is needed to support key priorities such as safety, socioemotional support, and Special Education	*New York…recently I believe lessened their class sizes. It's something that needs to happen. It is really untenable… one of the barriers is, if you are a gen ed teacher, and you have even just say two or three students who have an [Individualized Education Plan], it makes your job 10 times harder. Because oftentimes, you might not have access to a special education teacher. And it is hard to figure out how to be everything for everyone when there's 33 kids in the class….* [Teacher] *[Schools like mine] should have more resources in terms of staffing. Having more counselor support, having more interventionists, having smaller class sizes, because like it was said before, kids walking over needles, and having trauma, and witnessing violence, affects their learning.* [Teacher] *[What needs improvement is] Smaller caseloads, more special education teachers…* [School Staff] *…going back to all the staffs, the positive support and all that is gone. That's who we felt comfortable with and who we trusted in the school, but I feel like they took them people away because that's who we was comfortable around and not more so comfortable with the teachers. I feel like that's where our mental and emotional support went, to know that we could talk to them any time, any day. If we need a break from the classroom, taking a five-minute break, the people in the hallways, them, that's who we could talk to.* [Student] *I'm not as happy as I was last year. We lost…some stuff that normally the other kids have. We lost a lot of privileges and we also don't have budget for our senior trips and stuff, as far as making college visits, because they haven't found anybody to replace the lady's job who was in control of that. Everything is now falling on the teachers and it's ridiculous.* [Student]

For more about how staffing levels are insufficient for ensuring school safety, see School Safety & Climate here.
For more about how additional support staff are needed to meet students' socioemotional needs, see School Safety & Climate here.
For more about how staffing levels are not adequate for meeting Special Education needs, see Academics here.
For more about how staffing levels are not adequate for keeping schools clean, see Facilities here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Schools need more support staff	*Kindergarten teachers [like myself] SHOULD have a classroom assistant in our classroom [of 30 children] during some part of the morning so we the teachers can effectively work with small groups. For the past 3 years I have NOT had a classroom assistant :(* [Teacher]
	We need more staff to support our students. All my students that are co-taught due to special education students are so well helped by the co-teacher. We need more reading interventions, small group teachers, paraprofessionals, co-taught classes. More PEOPLE resources. [School Staff]
	Our schools need multiple designated Reading Specialists, Spec Ed teachers, and Counselors etc. Many of our students need way more support than the regular education can offer... [School Staff]
	[What needs improvement is] Appropriate staffing ratios for special education teachers (higher than state minimum formula); special education administrator in every school or a required released SPCM [Special Education Compliance Monitor]. [School Staff (Unspecified)]
	[What needs improvement is] Safety, discipline and there is a need to increase the number of NTAs [Non-Teaching Assistants] and special education assistants. [School Staff]
	[What needs improvement is] Additional nursing support, more than one nurse in a school to support the mental health and as advancement of our students. [School Staff]
	I've been a paraprofessional for 13 years for the district…I can't chime in enough about the need for staff, and just – it's overwhelming. We're just badly in need of staff. Support staff is very much needed. We need paraprofessionals, we need bus attendants, we need drivers, we just need and we need. [Support Staff]
	…staffing, we need more paras to help in classrooms. There's a shortage because the pay is low. [Support Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
The lack of bus drivers caused many logistical and safety issues	*Transportation. I get there's a shortage of bus drivers. I get that. We have busses that'll show up late to start the day, late to pick up. Which then you have to pay people to stay after school. Which cuts into your school budget. It also leads to a safety issue because when you have kids who have been sitting all day in school and then they're sitting for an extra hour after school and everybody's exhausted, the kids are exhausted, you're exhausted keeping them busy but not knowing will buses show up five minutes. Will the bus be an hour? You can't really plan, "Let's do this activity." You can't do that.* [School Leader] *Transportation, ditto to what [was just] said. There's no communication unless you know the actual bus company and the garage. If there's no driver, schools aren't always contacted to say, "There's no driver." Families aren't contacted to say there's no driver, so families are standing outside for a really long time without knowing what's going on.* [School Leader] *I was going to say the same thing about the transportation for special education students. We had many students who were unable to come to school on a consistent basis because of bus driver shortages.* [School Leader] *As it relates to transportation, again, the elephant in the room is staffing…You see the billboards all over the city. This company's hiring for $25 an hour starting with training…Yes, we have that manpower issue when it comes to transportation but seeing canvassing or whatever it takes to let folks know we're hiring. But being competitive means a lot. I think Walmart is $95,000 a year for CDL drivers. I don't think we could compete with that. But it underscores the point that there is a shortage for drivers.* [Central Office Staff] *I realize that there is a shortage of bus drivers, but it is unacceptable to be told regularly that we need to notify parents because no bus is coming to pick up our special needs students. Parents work and cannot be expected to leave work or scramble to find someone to pick up their child at a moment notice.* [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Principals must choose between essential positions	*Many of us have to choose between key positions. After I buy all of my essential staff, I have enough money to buy paper. The leadership team then just becomes me. If the district is prioritizing the well-being and safety of students, every school should have a climate manager. If the district is prioritizing academic achievement, every school should have a SBTL, etc.* [School Leader]
	In a school that where I started there was a leadership team of eight people and that we are down to four, including the secretary. And we used to have two secretaries, and we only have one. It really becomes—I think the saying is, and if I get it wrong, I'm sorry. English is my second language. Robbing Peter to pay Paul? I think that's the phrase. And I think that's happening—It's happening in my school, so I know it's happening in other schools. [Support Staff]
	As a leader, how do we support teachers to become better instructional leaders in their classrooms to impact student outcomes? That comes at that budget piece. We need the support, especially at some of our higher needs buildings, where we really need to push that instructional piece, we need the money to do that. We need assistant principals. We need SBTLs. We need coaches. Those things need to be in the budget. We shouldn't have to be robbing Peter to pay Paul to get the things that we need, because the expectation is still the same… For me, it's frustrating because it'd be nice to have what we need to be successful to be able to push our teachers to instructional mastery, because that will impact your students. We can't do that without people. We're one person, and some of us have staffs over 30. [School Leader]
	Financially we should not have to juggle for a teacher leader in some school and others have multiple instructional supports. Every school should have an assistant principal and a climate manager. [School Leader]
	In a building that is overcrowded and have to use I shouldn't have to choose between a climate manager and an assistant principal when I have no police officer. [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
The "leveling" process disrupts key relationships	*…When it comes to October or so, leveling happens, and a lot of schools lose some of those supports and services that they start out in September with, and that can be a challenge. I really would hope… that there is true focus on what is needed in the buildings, and not just what seems to be what schools need. Because sometimes leveling happens and they take two, three teachers away.* [Teacher]
	Most schools' enrollment projections were a lot less than the number of students who actually attended in the previous year. As a result, we lose teachers, beg for them back, and cause them and students to be emotionally distraught. Consistency is lost. Our well being is definitely threatened. [School Leader]
	Leveling probably leads to a lot of the distrust between families and the SDP. [Teacher]
	Yes, I remember when the whole building got new rosters 2 weeks before grades go in because of leveling. [Teacher]
	…leveling is a terrible, incredibly disruptive practice. [Teacher]
	You've built relationships with the teachers and parents and then if there's not – if the numbers don't work, they move teachers. They move them to different classrooms. They move them to different schools. They move them across the city. It results in this panic. Instead of rooting ourselves into how do we launch the year well, we spend – as a parent, the first two months of the year asking the principal what is enrollment? How are the numbers looking? Do we need to write letters? Do we need to advocate? [Parent/Guardian]
	I don't feel that [budgets are] child centered. I think that when principals and administrators, they get their budgets in March, there's always cuts made, and then teachers get worried, and then they look at other positions, and then we then have to backfill a position, because a teacher was afraid of not having a placement, so then we then have to backfill with a newer teacher, and there's a lack of consistency for our kids. [Teacher]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Staff Training & Professional Development (PD)

- School leaders and teachers would like to see more time dedicated to school-based PD as opposed to having the majority of PD time being used for District-wide PD (slide 63).

- Staff spoke about the need to differentiate PD sessions for different schools and staff, noting that "one size fits all" PD offerings are less helpful (slide 64).

- Many staff highlighted the need for additional PD for non-instructional staff, particularly paraprofessionals and climate staff (slide 65).

- Stakeholders would like to see more trainings, PD, and structured school-based conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion issues. This subtopic overlaps with another topic (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, slide 190).

- There were multiple positive comments about the optional "Tune-Up Tuesday" PD sessions that are offered to teachers by the Office of Teaching and Learning (slide 66).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More time should be allotted for school-based Professional Development (PD)	*I think that the way professional development was structured, that every single month that PD day was district wide, and this is what fourth through eighth grade is doing, this is what K through three is doing, it separated the schools and didn't provide time for school leadership to then meet with teachers, and for teachers to meet with each other, when you're sitting at a screen all day.* [Teacher] *We have monthly professional development days, but the district has scripted what is provided during that time, so we have spent those days sitting on Zoom screens like this. I know that the pandemic has made meeting as a group difficult, but every single PD day was allotted for district PD, which meant that there was no time for us as a school to come together and really have that opportunity to collaborate across grade levels, across subject areas, and made it hard for even our grade level teachers to meet because we were losing preps and everything, with no subs.* [Teacher] *Most professional development this year was Central Office. There was no differentiation for teachers whatsoever, so I have veteran teachers who have been teaching for 20 plus years and they're sitting in a literacy PD where they're literally segmenting words into faux names, so I think that we need to have some more school-based opportunities. We know the needs of our buildings. We know our data. If we're asked to use data to inform our decision making, then we need to be able to have opportunities with our staff as a whole group together to be able to roll out what we feel is best for our building and that will also allow us to better differentiate within our building, so that we get more supports based upon, again, what the data says.* [Central Office Staff] *Everything should not be centrally allocated because it is not necessarily what all of our teachers need at a certain time. We should have the opportunity to have some more input and we should have more opportunities to have professional development…* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
A "one size fits all" approach to Professional Development (PD) is not helpful	*One size doesn't fit all in terms of curriculum, but it also doesn't fit all in terms of PD.* [Teacher] *Sometimes it's not a one-size-fits-all for the protocols. And there should be a little more flexibility around the agendas and documentation, especially if the first priority in a particular session is to learn and to professionally develop your staff. So if we can really think about protocols and our – do they need to be mandated for every…meeting? That would be some great flexibility if a school could have that.* [Teacher] *If I have to unpack the standards one more time I'm going to scream. I don't need to do that again. I need to sit down and think about what my specific community needs at my school. Because it's going to be different than what somebody else needs at a different school.* [Teacher] *So, in order for teachers to be supported, I think that the professional learning opportunities need to be targeted, they need to be tiered, so that everyone's not having a one size fits all, and it also needs to be cascading.* [Central Office Staff] *The level of professional development needs to be differentiated as well, because everything is coming in at the entry level, but some of us will tune out because it's like, all right, I already know that part.* [Teacher] *Not one size fits all professional developments, we need a shift where each content area's professional development is tailored to the area's expertise. As a result, student achievement can be realistically ascertained because resources are utilized properly.* [Central Office Staff] *My network contains schools that simply do not share the same needs and yet, we are clumped together for the same PDs. Some schools have NEW [School Based Teacher leaders (SBTL)] where others have seasoned SBTLs. Differentiate…* [School Staff] *Professional Development [should be] relevant to each developmental population, grade, culture of the students and staff, positions at central office and in the school buildings.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More Professional Development (PD) for non-teaching staff is needed	*…when it comes to professional development opportunities for non-teaching staff, there's none. It's paltry…I'm running a [large] school I don't have time to PD the climate staff, even though they desperately need it.* [School Leader] *There need to be offerings for support staff. There are no options in district wide offerings for our classroom assistants and one on ones. They are in need of supports.* [Central Office Staff] *I also might add just parenthetically that it might be good, too, given that we occasionally have to deal with kids who are hurt in roughhouse situations to have, to maybe provide CPR or first aid training for paraprofessionals who have to deal with recess and keeping kids under control in recess situations or in a rowdy cafeteria or something.* [Support Staff] *There is not enough support for paras. Especially the ones that are just starting out. There's nothing. You have people coming in off the street who have never dealt with sped kids. And you're just throwing them to the wolves.* [Support Staff] *The importance of sensitivity training for educators, but [it] also needs to include—or should include—administrators and staff and security and coaches because 50% of the time they're in the classroom. The other 50% they're in the cafeteria and in the hallways and on the court and in the offices and so everyone should be inclusive, not just the educators in the classroom.* [Community Member]

For more about how PD and training is needed for Special Education and support staff, see Academics here.
For more about how PD and training is needed on DEI topics for all staff, see DEI here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Many teachers like the "Tune-Up Tuesday" PD Sessions	*I think that the "Tune-Up Tuesdays" that are given for professional development really runs very well and it's been a success for me, and it's been a way—it motivates me to keep refining my craft as a teacher.* [Teacher] *I think the incentives that the district puts together are operated from within from all the talent and the expertise within the district are often really well received. I'm thinking of the example of the Teachers Symposiums… and Tune-Up Tuesdays, things like that. I think those programs in those areas really lean on all the strong resources within our district and are very trustworthy and well received by most people.* [Teacher] *I have attended many of the Tune-Up Tuesdays and other virtual PDs this year, they have mostly been excellent. I wouldn't be able to participate in so many classes if they were not virtual. So, thank you for that.* [Teacher] *I like Tune-Up Tuesdays just like everyone else said. I do like that.* [Teacher] *I really wanted to give a shoutout to certain aspects of the programming departments. I think that the "tune up Tuesdays" that are given for professional development really runs very well and it's been a success for me, and it's been a way—it motivates me to keep refining my craft as a teacher. I also really appreciate the science curriculum specialists at the 440 who have really come such a long way from when I started as a science teacher.* [Teacher] *I think the professional development opportunities are great and readily available for teachers.* [School Staff] *[What is going well is] Tune-Up Tuesday.* [School Staff]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Time Constraints, Expectations & Demands

- Teachers in particular lamented how there is not enough time in the day to complete all the tasks that are expected of them (slide 68, slide 69).

- Both school and Central Office staff noted that schools are overwhelmed with the rollout of too many new initiatives at once (slide 70).

- In particular, school staff described the rapid rollout of the new ELA and math curricula, which did not allow for enough time for teachers to engage with it before they were expected to use it in their classrooms (slide 71).

- The amount of work that is expected of school staff, combined with a lack of time, supports and resources lead to burnout (slide 55).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Teachers have "crushing" workloads that are not sustainable	*We have a very high turnover rate and we have not had a fully staffed department in at least a decade. I think one of the reasons for that is that people feel so overworked all the time, maxed out at the state…of our caseload all the time that people leave, they go to other districts.* [Teacher]
	Everything that we're expected to do, there is not literally enough time in the day for us to be able to do that, and to do it with efficacy and do it with being able to provide what we are supposed to provide to students, and it's just not fair to teachers and/or the students and the families. Just being realistic about what it is we are supposed to provide and how we are supposed to do it within the constraints of the day. [Teacher]
	We have too many students on our caseloads and combined with all the paperwork that that entails, not just delivering instructions to students, the lesson planning, just the documentation…, progress monitoring. Then you have the other side, which is the IEPs and the completing FBAs and positive behavior support plans. It's a crushing workload. [Teacher]
	…they don't have time in their day to reach out to the parents for all the different things that we need their engagement with, but dealing with all the other things, with staff shortages, and the day-to-day happenings and needs of the students. There's just not enough staff to support the families and that grows the frustration. [Teacher]
	I think that some of the adults and staff, and teachers, in my school, they try and support the students to the best of their ability, but I feel like they're a little overworked themselves because some of these teachers, they're dealing with 60 students and different classes, and they're overworked themselves. Yes, I think they try and support us to the best of their ability, in the best way that they can. [Student]
	I feel like there is teachers that I have good relationship with and I can talk to, but some of the teachers, I feel like they feel the same way we feel, like over stressed, overworked, and they don't know who to talk to either. [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Teachers have to "wear too many hats"	*[What needs improvement is]…offering teachers support. Sometimes we feel like we are spinning our wheels wearing so many hats: being mentor, coach, parent or aunt/uncle, counselor, friend, etc. and on top of that teach.* [School Staff] *My school, one of the best things that we offer, we have a thriving Autistic Support program, we have incredibly gifted Special Education staff. However, they do not have the time to do their jobs. In order for them to be able to do their jobs, they either need to be partially released, their caseloads need to change significantly, or they need to be offered [Extra Curricular] time to be compensated for the work that they are doing outside of their workday.* [Teacher] *We had this issue and we talked earlier about the staff and requiring the staff to be more than teachers. It's trying to meet the needs of that whole child because children come to school with issues that are multifaceted and that in order for them to be successful and do well and so forth, those other issues have to be addressed. The challenge, I think, in education today, and I applaud all of you that are in education is how do you do that? How do you teach and how do you teach to all the needs that need to be taken care of for that child to be successful and do well?* [Community Member] *Teachers are being asked to do a whole lot other than just being able to have a focus on curriculum development and teaching. More things continue to be added on the teacher supposed to do, or a behavior plan supposed to be entered into [the Student Information System], an academic plans to be entered into [the Student Information System]. Teachers are now doing Naviance, and me and the teachers are sitting there like "That's my curriculum content. Why is that not something?" …it is very different in comparison to school districts that I have experience within my number of years in higher Ed. I'm just like, why are teachers being given this so much when there's so many different positions? That, if we have these job descriptions and climate has this, why aren't they attendance designees? If school counselors have the curriculum content with Naviance, why isn't that us?* [Support Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There are too many new initiatives at once	*A lot of times schools feel overwhelmed because there's a lot of new initiatives, or new ideas, or new processes that happen throughout the year, where folks feel a little discombobulated in terms of what they – (a) what they should prioritize and (b) what needs to be done now versus at the end of the year.* [Central Office Staff] *In the midst of a challenging school year when we had to deal with changes in curriculum, changes on how things operate, reacclimating students back into the building, the district kept piling on work for principals to do. It got to the point that it became really overwhelming for you to do your job as a principal and as an instructional leader, that a lot of our colleagues resigned, because they were overwhelmed with the amount of things that we were asked to do on an everyday basis.* [School Leader] *I just think that there is a lot of information to be shared and it's being shared rapidly. It's being shared very quickly with us. Not enough time for us to actually take it in for a full understanding of what's being asked and to really meet the deadlines without getting so many different things from other offices…* [School Leader] *I think another big factor, at least this year, was that I don't think we were considerate of how much we were asking schools to implement this year given all of the sort of challenges that we were presented from just reopening schools. I think we have to be real thoughtful about when we ask schools to launch new curriculum or adopt new assessments. Those things occur in the context of all of the other challenges that we face and so I think just being mindful of not overwhelming folks with too many asks.* [School Leader] *[Needs Improvement] Ensuring that the demands on school staff are sustainable- we run the risk of losing good people to burnout.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There was insufficient time for the curriculum rollout	*…as someone said earlier, this is a new curriculum and [teachers are] going to get it, I believe I was told it was going to be able to be seen, mid-August. That's not soon enough when they need to do the planning process to be able to do this in a way that's going to make sense for them and their kids.* [Teacher] *I'm hoping that this year's schedule is a bit different, but I was going to say time. With teachers getting on board with what the curriculum, those types of things. I'm hoping that we have more time, school [Professional Development (PD)] days as opposed to district PD days to regroup and get that together. I know we have our [Common Planning Time] or the professional learning cycle times that some schools call them but more time to do those things together and to figure those things out because we know that the job is very, it's overwhelming so having more time to do those things.* [Teacher] *It's nice to have all these resources, but not having the time to look at them, go through them, pull it apart, figure out what's going to work for me or for my students, or collaborate with my peers. It doesn't do a hill of beans of good if I don't have the time to implement it.* [Teacher] *The district rolled out a new curriculum, which again I think has had really mixed reviews, because it's reactionary. There's not time to do it properly.* [Teacher] *And I think the other barrier is understanding – so there are district priorities that are rolled out. Then they are implemented in the schools, based on professional development cycles but then that two-way information back up of this is how this is actually living in the classrooms, in the schools, with the teachers. I think we switch our strategies so quick that we never really get the chance to understand whether the thing that we're doing is actually leading to some significant impact in teacher practice or student outcomes, because we just switch so quickly.* [Central Office Staff]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Staff Collaboration & Mentoring

- Stakeholders spoke about the positive impact of collaborating with their colleagues and how mentoring experiences have been beneficial (slide 73).

- There were also many comments about the need for school teams to have more time to collaborate and coordinate, and for this collaborative time to include Special Education and ESOL teachers and support staff (slide 74).

- Stakeholders believe that good school leaders support collaboration and shared decision-making among school teams. This subtopic overlaps with another topic (School Leadership, slide 197, slide 198, slide 199).

- Stakeholders emphasized that there are many caring and hard working staff (slide 75).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Schools value time for collaboration - Common Planning Time and Professional Learning Communities	*I think the common planning time is excellent. I love common planning time. I love planning with my staff, I love [professional development (PD)], I love instructional things, all of that. To say what gets in the way of that at times is the staffing. And it is the ability to have all of our staff together. So when we're talking about cross-curricular and cross-subject and cross-grade, very rarely on a PD day do I have the privilege of having my whole staff, including a nurse and a counselor and an entire team for any length of time.* [School Leader] *One of the things I had mentioned that between having a supportive administrator teacher leader as well as great team partner and content leaders, this year we had the opportunity to meet almost on a weekly basis for about an hour, just having that time frame where it was just a small delayed opening for our students to meet with my content partners from fifth through 12th grade. So, being able to meet with them and to map out how we connect, how we connect from when they go from ELA from fifth grade all the way up until 12th grade, and connecting what we're doing – each of us, what we're doing in the classroom, being able to have that timeframe to talk to them. So that way, we are making more of a connection to build a stronger department. That was definitely one of my greatest supports as I've gone through this past school year.* [Teacher] *For me, the strengths at my time at [my school] was definitely the Common Planning Time. That individual support and coaching made a huge difference. This was my first year in person in the district, this year. Last year I was online—or two years ago I was online. Having that group support—we do teach backs, like [my colleague] said, where one of the teachers, we will show a problem or practice, or something we want to try, and we'll try it with the group. This is each week. That really did help, because you're actually getting to run through your materials and get feedback, and it really helps with planning in advance. That definitely can be a strength, and is a huge strength for our community.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School teams need more time to collaborate, especially with coaches and Special Education and English Learner teachers and support staff	*[Teachers] don't have enough time to collaborate, because of our [Common Planning Time] meetings. They were mostly scripted and you had to follow a protocol, but the protocol didn't always fit the need of what they needed to talk about at the time. They needed more time to collaborate with one another. The grade teachers needed time to collaborate, but also the SpEd teachers, they needed time to collaborate with the teachers for the students that they service.* [Teacher] *There also needs to be more time for training, collaboration, unpacking, and co-planning with [English Learner (EL)] and [Special Education (SpED)] teachers to provide scaffolds and supports in order to best meet the needs of all students. EL and SpED teachers did not always receive the same district [professional development]/training as the classroom teachers.* [School Leader] *A positive thing that I think that the district has been really effective at is that they actually hired leadership coaches within—principals that were principals in the School District of Philadelphia. Because previously, they outsourced them, and they weren't—they were just principal coaches. I think that, if we're looking at a good development piece, I personally benefited from a coach for the past few years.* [School Leader] *There needs to be better coordination between the Climate Staff and the teachers…I think monthly meetings between teachers and the Climate Staff, on what's working, what isn't working. I know there are things we teachers can maybe do to help the Climate Staff be more effective at their jobs, and vice versa.* [Teacher]

For more about how insufficient staffing levels constrain time for school teams to collaborate, see Vacancies & Allocation of Staff here.
For more about how Special Education teachers and support staff need more time to collaborate, see Special Education here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP has caring and hardworking staff	*I think you have some staff that are very dedicated and go beyond the job… I've often heard the stories of those who have dug deep in their own pockets to provide what they could for the children, whether it was sometimes clothing, sometimes shoes, sometimes food, and hours that were way beyond the hours that were listed to try—and also to fix up the school buildings.. I applaud those teachers who have held onto that tradition, as a tradition for teachers for a long time, but still doing it in so many ways.* [Community Member] *I would like to thank my teachers. Usually when you go to an average high school, you have your nine to five teachers, and they just go home. Our teachers here, they care.* [Student] *…I think that people are working really hard, and I think that you have a lot of people who care very deeply about this work. That is really special and amazing, and we should capitalize on that.* [School Leader] *I work in the school district as a special education classroom assistant, and I'm talking from experience. The other staff has spoken about teamwork, including all staff, but this is what I have to say. I think teachers are working very hard, from the schools I've worked with….*[Support Staff] *…there's some really awesome teachers, like really, really, really, really awesome incredible people that are not just doing one job, but they're doing three jobs, and they have families, and they're raising kids. How teachers stay, I don't know.* [Teacher] *The teachers go through way too much and they literally take the money out of their own pockets to supply schools. I can't count on my fingers the number of times a teacher has either bought a child school supplies because their parents didn't have the money or gave the children in their class the stuff that they needed in order to go throughout the school year.* [Parent/guardian]

Recruitment, Hiring & Promotion

Staffing

- Some staff identified a need for new recruitment strategies in order to fill vacancies (slide 77).

- Some staff mentioned challenges and delays in the hiring process which affect schools' ability to fill vacancies (slide 77).

- Staff talked about the need to recruit more teachers/staff of color (slide 78). This overlaps with another topic (DEI, slide 188).

- Responses mentioned the need for greater compensation, particularly for part-time and support staff. Others mentioned benefits, such as paid maternity leave and remote work (slide 79).

- Other responses emphasized the need to clarify career pathways and promotion policies and to invest in professional growth of staff (slide 80).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Improving hiring and recruitment processes is critical	*Really, my question would be, how do you see incentivizing getting qualified teachers here to stay and to work in the underserved communities and come in with more than the idea of this is a nine to five job?* [Community Member] *As a union rep, let me point out also, you've got to pay the teachers a proper raise, too, because guess what? You're going to lose teachers every day, as they have to pull out of their pockets for materials and so forth that should be automatically given.* [Community Member] *Staffing, again I think it was already mentioned, it's a struggle. [Last year] I didn't have any teacher vacancies, but I had support staff vacancies. And I was told that, "well, we're just going to prioritize the teacher hiring first." And I get it, I clearly get that. But I just don't know why we can't do them both. So they just weren't hired until later… after school had already started. So you don't have that opportunity to prepare them for the start of the school year.* [School Leader] *Something that's been challenging this year has been the Office of Talent. There's been a lot of turnovers in terms of talent partners…so consistency in terms of communication has been really frustrating. There has been communication with candidates that hasn't been communicated to us at the school level… it led to me having some pretty awkward conversations with candidates that I wasn't aware in terms of communication with the Office of Talent. And I think in terms of the talent portal feedback that I have is, there have been – several times that we've reached out to candidates who've already been hired and haven't been taken off of the talent portal.* [School Leader] *I think the human resources department I think is very overwhelmed. When we have people apply for our program, when we have SLPs applying, they don't get callbacks efficiently. Sometimes we'll hear, we have students who come, and they intern with us and then they go, and they apply and then they don't get a callback for a month or six weeks, and by then they've already taken another position or they do an interview and then they don't hear back. I think that is not just true for our department…It's really become an obstacle, this hiring piece. We do everything we can to convince people, our students, our alumni networks to convince people to apply, but we can only get them so far.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
We need to recruit more teachers/staff of color and who are from the school community	*I think that throughout the district everyone is aware of the need for more teachers of color, staff of color to be more representative. It's hard because we know at colleges less and less people are graduating with education degrees in general, let alone people of color, but I think that's something that's definitely been a push is looking for more teachers of color and staff members of color.* [Support Staff] *…staffing, and especially staffing people of color. I would say in my school, like I said, the majority of our teachers are white, and the majority of our climate staff is of color. And I would like to see more staff that are of color that are teachers, because those are who the kids are that we're looking at.* [Teacher] *One thing that talking with different people in the community…is role models for people. [Specifically] Black male teachers, making sure that we have a diverse set of teachers who represent our community. Because these are the role models that our kids are seeing in schools every day. And we want to make sure that they have someone to look up to and to aspire to.* [Community Member] *I'm also thinking about our current context now with all the vacancies we have, and how do we recruit, how are we working year-round to find talent going to HBCUs, going wherever to find our next generation of teachers, and how do we support them.* [Central Office Staff] *…many re-visited bringing back NTAs. That's non-teaching assistants and at some point in time we got rid of these non-teaching assistants, but here's how they work. When you would go to school and you see [people] from the neighborhood. They're working inside our schools in the lunchroom, walking down [school] hallways, and you have respect for them, nine times out of ten you probably won't engage in things that's not appropriate while you're in school because you have somebody from the neighborhood who has eyes on you.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Improving and streamlining compensation and benefits should be a focus	*Paras do not make enough and they do so much, it would really show them that they are respected and valued members if they and clean[ing] staff made more…*[School Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Wage/salary for non-teaching staff (custodial, climate, and so on).* [School Staff] *It should be a crime to lead a woman-dominated workforce and offer no paid maternity leave. Paid maternity leave NOW.* [School Staff] *SDP has worked with PFT to avoid teachers striking, keep benefits fair and affordable and created a pay scale that is fair for teachers.* [Community Member] *[A top priority should be to] Raise our pay to the proper rate we had to give back for four years now we're at the the bottom and we still can't get a proper raise to keep up with today's economy.* [School Staff (Unspecified)] *To help central office morale, a serious salary audit needs to occur to support equity among the responsibilities of many team members managing multiple projects/initiatives.* [Central Office Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Finding ways to make the district an attractive employer, and recruit/retain employees. Case in point - [my central office department] apparently is not honoring the work from home policy created by the Office of Talent. It was communicated in a way that felt disrespectful…and does not make me feel valued. After [many] years of service to the district, I'm starting to wonder if I'm valued enough to stay here instead of taking my skills elsewhere.* [Central Office Staff] *Beyond salaries, our work from home policy and general climate can be less attractive than other environments…* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Promotion, career pathways, and salary increases for non-represented staff should be more clear and transparent	*[What needs improvement is] Hiring and Promoting based on job modeling, competency modeling, and merit as opposed to nepotism. Too many people in positions of leadership without the competencies and skills needed, which perpetuates the problematic culture that has plagued the district for years.* [Central Office Staff] *Addressing nepotism and privilege. The School District has untapped potential in employees. There is a lack of effort to engage employees and connect them to opportunities to develop their talents and potential.* [Central Office Staff] *And so, we have the benefit of seeing where people are getting raises, and where people are not getting raises. So, we see that there's a level of inequity across the district.* [Central Office Staff] *It's been difficult to hire and retain staff, and I think a big part of that is the convoluted and non-transparent way salaries are distributed. There is no way for a well-performing staff member to be compensated for their work since we don't give raises outside the 2-3% bump each year (which does not keep up with the cost of living), and the only way to change their salary is to move them to a new position, which doesn't always make sense….There's no wiggle room in negotiating salaries, and people at the same level with similar experience and qualifications end up with vastly different salaries with no real explanation.* [Central Office Staff] *If I'm trying to hire someone for a 12-month position and they're coming from a 10-month position and there's no incentive there, because the salary literally is less. I would make more money as a 10-month employee than I would be making as a 12-month employee, depending on which union I'm coming in and out of. There's also scenarios where people that are directly reporting to people are making maybe $1,000 or less than their supervisor, who is supervising a team of many people.* [Central Office Staff] *My position has a salary band, but I have no guidance, support, or resources about how I can move up in my salary band…*[Central Office Staff]

Themes from the Topic of:
Academics

- Some teachers believe the curriculum is headed in the right direction, but requires additional materials, training/PD, and common planning time in order to implement well.

- Stakeholders want consistency; it is challenging when curricula keep changing.

- Rigorous academic and career programming and co- and extracurricular opportunities should be offered in all schools, especially neighborhood schools.

- Special Education, English Learner, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs need more support.

- Grading policies may need revision.

- Too much standardized testing stresses students and detracts from instruction, authentic learning, and social-emotional learning. Teachers want more professional autonomy.

- Students explained that individualized support, caring teachers, hands-on activities, and topics relevant to their lives help them learn.

Academics Subtopics

- Curricular Materials, Scope & Sequence, and Academic Frameworks

- Special Education

- Student Achievement & Academic Supports

- Instruction

- Extracurricular & Enriching Opportunities

- Testing/Assessments

- English Learners (ELs)

- Course/Program Offerings

Academics

Themes from the Subtopic of:

Curricular Materials, Scope & Sequence, and Academic Frameworks

- Instructional staff and leaders had both positive and negative reactions to recent updates to the curriculum and academic framework content (slide 84, slide 85).

- Additional and differentiated curricular materials are needed to implement the new curricula well, including physical books (slide 86). This subtopic overlaps with another topic, which touches on libraries (funding and resource distribution, slide 185).

- Implementation of new curriculum and academic frameworks was uneven across the District and posed challenges for teachers and school leaders (slide 87).

- Clear and consistent curricula are needed across schools; changes in curricula have been too frequent for teachers to implement well (slide 88).

- Anti-racist curricula are needed, particularly in social studies. This subtopic overlaps with another topic (DEI, slide 192).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Some staff feel positively about the new academic framework and math/English Language Arts (ELA) curricula	*I want to piggy-back on the idea that the curriculum department is fabulous. They are unsung heroes of the school district of Philadelphia in that they do these amazing things. Most of them are former teachers.* [Teacher] *First of all, the strengths certainly would – I would say, would be the equity curriculum initiative… It's an ambitious project, perfectly aligned with the values of the district research base, and, quite frankly, essential to supporting the needs of our students.* [Central Office Staff] *One positive has been the ELA and Math programs we use. The kids have responded really well to them, and for many of the children it has been their first experience with a novel in ELA. The district's curriculum engine has also been a plus for planning instruction. I like that I can see every quarter-at-a glance, as well as the whole year at-a-glance.* [School Staff] *The math framework is excellent!* [School Staff] *Heading in the right direction with implementation of the reading science, but nowhere near where we need to be.* [School Staff] *After 26 years, they have finally provided quality lesson plans for ELA that will be taught across the district.* [School Staff] *[One thing going well is] our innovative, inclusive, research based math curriculum created by Curriculum Specialists AND the teachers who teach our students.* [School Staff] *I enjoyed the curriculum used this year (3rd grade), as my students were interested in the content and felt that it helped them to contribute positively to society.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Some stakeholders feel negatively about the new academic framework and math/English Language Arts (ELA) curricula	*The new curriculum is not appropriate. Many people feel their feedback is falling on deaf ears.* [Teacher] *We all struggled through the ELA, this last year. The new curriculum that was written last year. There was nothing in place. There were so many components of that, that we all did not understand. We thought it was confusing.* [Teacher] *The district rolled out a new curriculum, which again I think has had really mixed reviews, because it's reactionary. There's not time to do it properly. They got all this feedback from students and then they ended up picking programs that our school didn't necessarily want. We're stuck with a curriculum that's not excellent. It's adequate. Even that would be OK, but teachers aren't even trained on the adequate or less than ideal curriculum.* [Parent/guardian] *In regards to the curriculum, I taught third grade this year, so we were part of the new K to three curriculum. I'm going to be honest, I struggled with it, and I just felt like the way it was written out it was like a puzzle that I just could not solve. Me and my grade partner, and my grade partner he taught for many years. Between him and I we just could not figure out how do we do this. We got no clear answers.* [Teacher] *The SDP needs to be more thorough with [professional development] and materials (hard copies in addition to digital!) when implementing new curricula.* [School Staff] *Curricular choices have always been one size fits all in Philadelphia. No real thought as to how we differentiate for each schools needs.* [School Leader]

For more about how stakeholders want more anti-racist curricula, particularly in social studies, see Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students need updated books and materials	*[SDP] wants us to teach a culturally responsive and antiracism model, so we have that curriculum there. However, the materials that we have doesn't match what you want us to teach…But the materials that we use in class, they not necessarily are differentiated to meet our students, so those are the barriers that we have. We have the materials that you want us to use, but they don't match what we want to do.* [Teacher] *…we got new standards and we got new curriculum for ELA. And for math. The ELA, for the little kids, there were no books. Why was my child learning to read without books? Thank God my son's teacher had a classroom library. And he sent his own purchased books home with my son every week. But not every teacher can afford them. Maybe somebody's a new teacher who just doesn't have that kind of thing built up, and it's not fair to those children that they don't have books to read.* [Parent/guardian] *The children need to have a reading curriculum where there are enough books to read. Children should not have to rely on reading articles or books on the computer. They should have access to books where they do not have to share.* [Teacher] *[What needs improvement is] Books and equipment!* [Parent/guardian] *I was looking at the materials that were available for students. It was criminal. Social studies that talk about Barack Obama as a state senator from Illinois. That should not happen…Books that are taking up space on shelves because you're not allowed to throw them away, and yet the teacher says I don't even use them, because none of the information is correct.* [Parent/guardian]

For more about how stakeholders want more libraries and librarians in schools, see Funding and Resource Distribution here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Teachers need more time and support to implement the curriculum with fidelity	*I think a plan for the year is what's really needed for curriculum.* [School Leader] *I think with that, teachers were given a lot of stuff very quick and— "Roll it out, push it out," and I think just giving them enough time to really settle in with it before just having to pump it out. I know with some of the curriculum, especially with ELA, we didn't have all the books, so the kids were—teachers were trying to make copies, so I'm walking into a classroom like, "How come the kids don't have books?" They're like, "We didn't get them."* [School Leader] *We need to choose highly rated curriculums that are backed by research. Our teachers do not have the time to assemble and workshop curriculums that they keep being given. They should be spending their time learning how to accommodate and modify great content for the specific students in front of them.* [School Leader] *…there's a lot of distrust and that stems from when the school district introduces new curriculum, and you might have the people from that office come and do a [professional development (PD)], it's never PD to fidelity which would allow us to teach and understand the materials that we're using. It's always this is the materials that we have, and you have all these components, and you expect us to know how to use these components and then here comes your assistant sup, well why aren't you using all these new materials and you're still trying to understand those things. It's hard for you to trust them when they're analyzing you for materials that you don't understand, and they don't understand either…* [Teacher] *My strongest feeling is that teachers should also have time to collaborate and practice those skills. We do have a new math framework. And, of course, I'm yet to see what's happening at our school. I am hearing a new framework with science as well. As I'll be the in charge of science department there, so I will have to see to the fact that teachers get a chance to practice those frameworks. That would be my strongest point of coaching at this point. So, I want to make sure that teachers do get that opportunity to collaborate with each other and share lessons with each other, blend the lessons together, and do that little extra thing for the framework when it comes to teaching practice.* [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Increased consistency in the curriculum is needed	*It's a constant battle between the changes in curriculum and then learning the new curriculum and implementing it, and then the lack of materials, and it just seems to happen again. If we could just stick with something for a bit, it would really help.* [Teacher] *The consistency is the problem because when students enter at sixth grade, they've had multiple different curriculums for elementary and teachers who've been trained.* [Teacher] *…once I get one thing down with curriculum, like right now I could teach Envisions under the table. I have immersed myself in it. I know what works. I know where I need to add more… I know this is probably my last year with Envisions. Then I'm going to go back after five years of six years of investing myself into this program that we picked as a whole, remember we went back, and we picked these things as a whole, what we were going to use? I know in the back of my mind, things are going to change, and I understand that change is part of life and it's part of, but I just think consistency goes a long way.* [Teacher] *I remember the days… when every school had the same curriculum. We were in the same pacing. We did not have problems with any kinds of assessments, our goals…we're doing too much and too many different things at the same time.* [Teacher] *…if you have teachers who are relying on things like teachers-pay-teachers or some of the other sites that aren't necessarily research-based and having high quality instructional materials, it makes it very hard as a parent to be able to understand what my child is being taught, how I can support them at home…not having a curriculum that I can go back to and understand I don't know that there's been a concerted effort to make sure that every school has those kinds of [expectations].* [Parent/guardian] *The school district needs to stop changing curriculum every 5 seconds and complete the full year of scope and sequence for a given grade.* [School Staff]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Special Education

Academics

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More support and consistency is needed from Central Office (440) for Special Education	*As far as 440 is concerned, I can't speak to all the offices. I'm not sure what goes on with [the Office of Specialized Service]. I don't know about that. But I know it's always a confusion there.* [Teacher] *Supports needed, a curriculum, knowledgeable persons working out of [the Office of Specialized Services].* [Teacher] *I've been a [Special Education Compliance Monitor (SPECM)] now for 15 years in the district, so I've seen a lot of people come and go. I feel on the Special Education side, we need more consistency.* [Teacher] *I will point out a direct inequity. There is a major inequity in terms of special education in this district. And I see that based on criteria-based schools versus neighborhood schools.* [Central Office Staff] *I think it's hard for teams, for special educators to get these [legal] complaints, and it's not always a reflection on the job they're doing. I think that the biggest asset is they care so much about these kids, and I think it comes through when you're talking to them about an individual kiddo in an individual case, all of the work they have been putting in, all the work they want to put in. I think that's where the negative comes in is maybe they know, they can identify the issues that the student has, but they don't have the resources, the time, or the ability to give them what they need. And a lot of times the legal cases do come from that. It's not because we don't know what we should be doing. We know what we should be doing, but it's just not happening for any number of reasons…* [Central Office Staff] *… there's really no set curriculum for self-contained classes. I see my teachers order stuff and try to adapt stuff instead of being a set thing for them.* [Support Staff] *As a Special Ed teacher, I find that, especially as it relates to transition, there aren't a lot of tools that are in place for us to be successful within the classroom setting. As it relates to curriculum, that's also an issue.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Special Education teachers and support staff need more training and time to collaborate as part of school teams	*There's no cohesiveness between the special education teachers and the teachers. That collaboration is missing in the classroom. I have a student that is part of special education, and the special education teacher doesn't collaborate with the teachers, so that part in the classroom is missing. And I would like to see that cohesiveness come back in the classroom, so that my child can have a better experience in the classroom, both one in special education and one without, same situation. I feel like there's not a lot of collaboration.* [Community Member] *Special education assistants do not receive training that adequately prepares them for supporting complex needs students.* [School Leader] *Getting the support that we need to really support those students—and I'll be very honest, our school has one of the highest percentages of students who need special ed services and we have a very high percentage of non-English first language learners. It's very difficult to be able to incorporate those accommodations and all of the things that we need to do in order to provide an equitable education for those students. The time is the issue. Very rarely last school year did we work with the special ed or [English as a second language (ESL)] department. I am a math teacher, so I don't even get the ESL support that the [English language arts] teachers get.* [Teacher] *Parents wouldn't seek [legal] counsel if they were getting prompt responses from school teams, from school administration. A lot of time, they become legally involved because they are not getting that response. Again, I don't think it's a culture of not wanting to respond. It's just an effect of all of the things that's on everybody's plates and just the ability, the time constraints, that we're all under.* [Central Office Staff]

For more about school teams needing more time to collaborate, see Collaboration & Mentoring [here](#).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Policies around identifying and providing appropriate services for Special Education (SPED) students need to be revised	*And I feel like if they could do some diagnose – I know in kindergarten, if they're not coming with an [individualized education plan (IEP)] or things of that nature, or the parent isn't advocating for it, they won't get tested. But I really feel like the teachers are really watching. We usually know when there is a challenge of some sort. And I think as a district, we need to get better at identifying and moving people more quickly and getting them the services they need.* [Teacher] *As a school psychologist, I am constantly testing, testing, evaluating students to determine if they qualify for special education services. Every child in the district is not special ed. I'm not trying to be facetious, but I'm saying—it's very unnerving to find all these students that are being thrust my way to be evaluated because they're failing reading or they're failing math, or whatever the case may be, but what I have found and my colleagues have found—and I can speak for them—reading, reading, reading is a big issue, and again, as we used to talk about in our trainings, they're building prison systems based on the number of minority, of Black and Hispanic males in the third grade. If they can't read by the end of third grade, the studies and research has shown they end up in the criminal justice system or dropping out of school. Folks, if we already know this, what are we doing?* [Support Staff] *Some of the things I wanted to bring up is one the learning support classrooms, special ed classrooms. They're atrocious. Essentially, what happens is kids that have behavioral problems or have ADHD, a lot of it's trauma, and the children are misdiagnosed.* [Community Member] *I'm a SPED assistant in an autism support classroom, and a lot of times we are kicked, hit, punched, bitten, by our students, and it's not always a behavior issue. It's a behavior issue but it's like we're attacked, daily. Some people have bruises and cuts and scars all over their arms, their legs. Some has bitten on their cheek, some on their chest, everywhere. And it's, how can we be more safe? How can administration help us be more safe? Because we should not be getting attacked by our students.* [Support Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
The allocation of staff to support students who require special education and related services needs to be revised	*The ratios for the number of special education teacher to students needs to be re-evaluated. In a K-8 school, there is no consideration about how difficult it is to schedule. There's a team of people whose sole job is to oversee litigation, but we don't have the number of people we need to avoid litigation.* [School Leader]
	…consider a different formula for assigning the number of Special Education teachers to a building. Presently our K-8 schools and our high schools have insufficient numbers of Special Education teachers to effectively engage special education students with the general education core curriculum in ELA and Math. [Central Office Staff]
	Improve the process or method for allocating special education teachers to schools. [School Staff]
	It was very difficult for the school to obtain and retain sufficient para support staff to support students who required emotional or autistic support. This created unsafe situations and interfered with learning. [Teacher]
	One issue at [my school] over the past year that's come up is seeing a steady increase of students who are high needs enrolled, but we don't actually have the staff or the facilities for that. We do not have an [Autistic Supports] room. We do not have an [Emotional Supports] room. We do not have an [Autistic Supports] specialist of any kind. So, we'll have students who really deserve and need a certain level of care. [Teacher]
	…the sheer lack of staff and manpower for students to meet their needs. We have students who have behavior health needs that are impeding their learning, and they are either escalating or getting expelled or getting hospitalized, because there's no staff to provide those services. [Support Staff]
	We are paying thousands of dollars in special education settlements. We need to pay the money upfront in staffing and lowering class caps, especially for emotional support. [School Leader]

For more about school teams needing more time to collaborate with Special Education teachers and support staff, see here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
We need more support staff, in particular, for Special Education students	*Students with disabilities and students without disabilities need to have the support that they require. Staffing issues have affected this support.* [Teacher] *I agree that the support staff issue is a big problem. Our school is so big; we have [over 1000] kids and just not enough people to support those children. We have kids with speech issues who are just left to hang in the wind, a special ed population that aren't identified or recognized.* [Teacher] *… the sheer lack of staff and manpower for students to meet their needs. We have students who have behavior health needs that are impeding their learning, and they are either escalating or getting expelled or getting hospitalized, because there's no staff to provide those services. It's a district issue in that these are students in the building every day. And I heard some para folks saying that they're getting hit, bit, those kinds of things. And students have these behavioral health needs, and there's nobody to provide them. That's a huge barrier from my perspective.* [School Staff (Unspecified)] *And once a child is given a formalized plan, whether it be a 504 [plan] or an [individualized education plan (IEP)], that's where extra staff comes in. I would like to know what can be done to support more of that? More formalized plans, which is the only way you get more staff in a school unless they're specially assigned.* [Community Member] *I don't know if there are enough people to do the jobs that need to be done, in order to support special education students and students who require [individualized education plans (IEPs)]…. our son still doesn't have an IEP completed from the end of the year, a reevaluation was never completed. Stuff like that opens up the school district to lawsuits and liability, and it also opens up to parents and families deciding "Hey, maybe I shouldn't have my student in a public school, at least not this public school", and maybe look somewhere else or look to another schooling system….I want to see our schools, and our school district, and our students lifted up and supported as much as they can be. That needs bodies…..it needs to be addressed numbers wise in the short term, and I think it needs to be addressed staff well-being wise for the long term.* [Parent/guardian]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Student Achievement & Academic Supports

- Many school-based staff said the District needs to rethink grading policies, considering grade inflation (slide 96).

- Students expressed wanting more time to complete their assignments (slide 97).

- Students also explained how it is helpful when teachers take the time to explain things to them one-on-one when they are struggling with material (slide 98).

- Stakeholders voiced that SDP has not ensured that all students are where they should be academically (slide 99).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP should rethink grading policies	*We need to fix the grading system. Would the 0-4 system be too dramatic of a change? I realize moving to more competency based grades is still a long way off. But our students have a very skewed view of what success actually looks like.* [Teacher] *Say they come in first marking period and they get a 90. That student never has to come back to class, and will end the year with a 60. What are we producing? What message are we giving young people with the inflation of grades like that?* [Teacher] *… about grade inflation…[our valedictorian] graduated in June, and she dropped out of her first semester at [a four-year university] in September. Because of grade inflation, because of how easy it is to get your 90 in quarter one or get your 90 in quarter four, and pass for the year, we've created a system with really, really low rigor… If our valedictorian couldn't handle her first semester at college, how can we expect that of any of our students?* [Teacher] *The 50% floor doesn't help our bottom students (they're still failing quarter after quarter). But it definitely hurts our middle students (They can get by with working just 1 or 2 quarters to secure credits. When they stop investing because they can rest on a guaranteed 50% 3rd and 4th quarters, they're getting credits, but not a thorough and complete education.* [School Staff] *[What needs improvement is] The grading system. As a high school teacher if a student gets a 90 or above and fails three other marking periods they never have to show up again to pass the class. If the district wants to keep a 60 as a minimum to pass then the 50 needs to be lowered to 30.* [Teacher] *[What needs improvement is] Holding students accountable for their learning. Students have figured out that if they work hard for one quarter and earn a high grade, they won't need to participate in class for the rest of the school year and still pass the class…Most children in Philadelphia are graduating and are not marketable/be successful in college since they are barely educated. It is a balancing act for sure, trauma the students face vs. being educated and holding them accountable.* [School Staff]

Student Achievement & Academic Supports

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students want more time and support to understand and complete their work	*I'd say the teachers… they support my learning but they just give out too much work. Everybody is just dropping too much stuff and they don't really give us time.* [Student] *No one is just stopping and really showing us assignments. They'll just show us a little bit and then move on to the next thing.* [Student] *They don't break it down to us. They just show us the work and then we've got to do it on our own.* [Student] *I feel like they should support us more in our schoolwork. Schoolwork-wise. Sometimes they'll just throw assignments out and just keep throwing them out. Just keep throwing on one thing for a little bit of time and then a new one starts up and it's like they just keep switching this up.* [Student] *Another thing, writing notes. Everyone cannot write at the same pace. Usually, what I would do is take a picture and copy it down. I couldn't do that yesterday, and the teacher wanted to skip to another slide. I'm like we're not finished.* [Student] *I feel like we're bright when it comes to testing. We get all this information and supposed to learn it and the test is every month or every year, so we only got that month or that year to learn that stuff and sometimes people need – people learn at different paces. And I feel like some teachers or some staff, they don't understand that everybody's learning pace is not the same.* [Student] *I like when teachers do activities, fun activities make it a little easier to learn and they take their time. I don't like to see them not even listening to us or just going too fast. Just slow down and if people need help just help them.* [Student] *Something I really think is blocking our success is time. When our teachers are just like, are assigning us homework constantly, it doesn't give us time to go through and understand anything.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students appreciate when teachers give them individual support	*What helps me learn at school is when you have— A lot of my teachers, I never had a problem with missing any work. Every teacher would understand. All I had to do is reach out and be like, "I'm sorry for this being late," or "I need help on this, can you please—?" and they would take the time to help me and I feel as though that's a good thing to be able to reach out, but if you don't say anything then you won't get the help that you need.* [Student] *What helps me learn the most, mostly I have a very good focus point when I'm listening to music and what I like about it the most when my teachers give us an assignment or an activity, they actually take the time to sit down with you if you ever actually need help and you don't understand what the assignment they sit down with you, explain it to you and just tell you step-by-step what's needed and what's not needed to do for your assignment.* [Student] *For me, I personally struggle with coming into school on time, so I wouldn't—the majority of the time I miss out on first class… and afterwards when I'm done every other class, I come in during lunch. My teacher, she comes and takes the time to pull me aside and help me get my class work back on track and help guide me and direct me, tell me what to do, if need be she'll help tutor me, in that field. Taking the time out of her day when she has other stuff to do.* [Student] *For me, I have a really hard time concentrating, so sometimes, I don't understand what the teacher is going on about. What I like it is when the teacher comes to me and helps me with one problem to try to see if I can understand it more with them and give me more examples of how to do it. I really like learning by examples. They really help me.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP is not doing what is necessary to get students to where they should be academically	*It's hard to think of anything that the school district is doing well, with 92% of the schools coming in under 60% when it comes to student achievement.* [Community Member] *Our young people are graduating from high school, and specifically are not ready for college level mathematics. Therefore, when they get to college, they have to take remedial classes. And as you know, they cost money, they don't earn credit, and it extends the time that they are in college. Unfortunately, some…drop out because they become frustrated.* [Parent/guardian] *I think there's too much focus on data and numbers and testing, and our children have been just passed along. And the gap with literacy – because I teach ELA and social studies – and by the time I get them in the fifth and sixth grade, they're so far, as far as reading levels, are so many grades behind that it's really hard to get them where they need to be by the end of the school year.* [Teacher] *Our children truly, truly are in need of interventions. The reason I feel that the reason the curriculum's not working in many cases is because our kids are two or three levels behind in reading and we're not addressing how to get to them individually. We're testing on a grade level to kids that two or three grade levels behind. They would do well if you have a child in a second-grade reading level if you give them a second-grade test.* [Teacher] *The most recent test scores, the keystone scores in 2019, in network four, the highest percentage was 29%. So, the highest percentage, one school had 29% of their students completed advanced down to 2%. Network 13, when you have some of the lowest performing high schools in Philadelphia, that number is substantially lower. We have to do a better job preparing our children for career and college, so that they're not burdened with remedial classes, remedial courses, when they get out of our school system. We can do much better…*[Community Member] *Literacy skills in the primary grades. Kids arrive to high school unable to read confidently. Kids needs books and libraries. Kids need arts. Kids need enriching programs. And lots and lots of counselors and social workers.* [School Staff]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Instruction

- Teachers (and Central Office staff who work closely with teachers) expressed that the "joy" of teaching is missing when there are too many top-down mandates and a lack of trust in teachers' professional judgment (slide 101).

- Teachers and school leaders feel more time is needed for common planning and collaboration. This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (staff collaboration and mentoring, slide 73).

- Teachers reported mixed feelings about professional development on instruction. This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (staff training and professional development, slide 62).

- Students want hands-on activities that are relevant to their lives, not packets or textbook assignments (slide 102).

- Students explain that having trusting relationships with their teachers help them learn (slide 103).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
The "joy" of teaching is missing when there are too many top-down mandates and a lack of trust in teachers' professional judgment	*What I think one of the issues as far as teaching and learning in building is, I feel like teachers feel like they can't do what they do best, which is teaching. There's a lot of joy in teaching missing because things feel top-down. When we talk about education being differentiated, and teachers knowing what's best for their students, yet we have this overarching idea that from the top down, this is what you should do, and this is what has to be done, and when we come into your classroom, I want to see a, b, c, d, e, and f done in this order, not taking into account that this is the teacher's students. It's like someone else said before, just to check off a box.* [Central Office Staff] *I think at [my school], one of the big strengths to teaching and learning has been that our admin in general does trust a lot of the educators to be passionate about the subject we teach. We're, as much as possible, trusted to bring our ideas about different projects, trips, contents, and that's really helpful because it allows us to flex our expertise and our interests and input from our students and it just makes us, as a teaching staff, more excited about the content.* [Teacher] *I'm in buildings all day. And I coach new teachers and teachers who are needing additional support. And I think one of the things that I am seeing across buildings, because I'm in 18, 19 schools per year, is teachers just have lost the ability to do what they do well. And that's just teach. We have so many initiatives, like someone else says. And accelerate, not remediate. But teachers don't have the proper tools to do these things. We talk about being data driven as a district, but what data are we looking at? Is it true data? What are some of the programs that we use to look at this data? And also, teachers doing things that I feel like don't need to be done. So, if we have this system that will pull data, why does the teacher then have to go back and do the same thing? We're tying teachers up in remedial tasks just to say that we're having teachers do this. And they're asked to do more with less if that makes sense.* [Central Office Staff]

For more about teachers wanting to be treated as professionals, see Staffing [here](.).
For more about how teachers believe that supporting teachers' professional autonomy is a quality of a good school leader, see School Leadership [here](.).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Hands-on activities are more engaging to students	*For me, I think it's when teachers are able to implement creativity to classes. Because I think it's really easy to have a super boring class, even if you're just doing what your academically supposed to do. I have a lot of teachers who are really good with doing things….Also, teachers who are able to facilitate discussions in class. I found that my best experiences with the last school year was in my [one] class, where we were able to discuss current events and things like that openly…[Student]* *People around me and if I need help, I know I have a couple people I can go to or teachers that I can go to. I like when teachers do activities, fun activities make it a little easier to learn and they take their time. I don't like to see them not even listening to us or just going too fast. Just slow down and if people need help just help them.* [Student] *To me, sometimes just listening to teachers talk for a long period of time does just make me bored and zone out.* [Student] *I believe we have the ability to learn, but school isn't for learning. It's for more remembering because for example, one of my teachers — not throwing blasts, but he just gives us videos. He gives us a textbook, tells us to read this, watch this, remember this, do this homework, and then we have a test the next day. Well, not the next day, next week. That's not promoting us to learn. That's promoting us to remember…* [Student] *I have a problem with teachers not teaching. They give you a packet every day, and you complete the packet and you hand it in and you get a grade. I don't remember anything in the packet. Then they'll give you another packet the next day on a total different subject. Can you marinate what I just learned yesterday? I just feel like that's not teaching because you're not teaching me anything. I'm literally doing this packet by myself completely. I don't understand.* [Student] *…your typical nine to five [teacher] - it looks like they just come in the morning, they don't want to be here, they just sit down and give you maybe a packet or just a bunch of work and put it right in your face and they expect us to just finish it by the next [class].* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students learn better from teachers they trust and believe care about them	*For me, it all comes down to the teachers... If you have a teacher who actually talks about why you need to know these things and tries to connect with you as a person, not just, "you're a student, you have to do this," it just makes all of the difference. Last year, I was really enjoying my math class, which I've never really done before…* [Student] *It's pretty much like teachers and students – it's your environment is what helps me when I'm learning. And mainly the teachers, because if they're not willing to teach us then how are we able to learn? It's mainly the teachers that help me learn.* [Student] *And I feel like my teachers' dedication helps me learn because it – if someone who's teaching me is not all in for it, then how can I be? I like that they're dedicated also, make sure I'm on track…* [Student] *Another way that helps with me learning is that even though a lot of people feel overworked, this school does less work than the last place I was at and the teachers here, a lot of them, the ones from last year, we already have connections with them so they know how we are— how our personalities are or how our personal life is with our families— so we can basically feel as though, "Duh, they have basketball practice after this," so they're like, "OK, I can accept a few more days with you if you have to go to a game on Friday," or "OK, now I can move the thing for you during this day. It can be two days later so you can have more time to do it."* [Student] *He would always play it up as a teacher. He bought us some snacks so that we wouldn't be hungry. That's how a teacher should conduct themselves. They shouldn't think that they're better than you. They shouldn't think none of that. They should be understanding. They should be on the same level.* [Student] *There's just a connection, and when you're able to connect with a teacher, and you're able to speak to them about your problems or what you're confused about, you're actually able to learn.* [Student]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Extracurriculars and Enrichment Opportunities

Academics

- Stakeholders see extracurriculars as important for student engagement (slide 105).

- Students and adults explain that extracurriculars give students important opportunities to build relationships with adults and other students, which is important for their socioemotional well being (slide 106).

- Respondents note the need to expand options and opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, particularly for students attending neighborhood schools and those that have after-school commitments (slide 105).

- There were comments specifically about ensuring that middle school students have access to athletics (slide 107).

- Some students face barriers to participation, including safety and transportation (slide 108).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Co- and Extra-curricular opportunities help engage students in school	*If you had programs—of course, some people only come to school because of the sports, right? That's the only way to even get them in the classroom.* [Parent/guardian] *I feel like we should have the same thing as college where we can pick what type of subject we want to choose. You could have the four main subjects, math, reading, science, and social studies, but those extra curricular activities should be chosen by us because that will help us towards our future.* [Student] *The more we have outside of the academic arena…they'll buy in more. They'll be more attached to the school.* [School Leader] *Would love to see more after-school activities provided for our students!* [Teacher] *But I would love to see that money funneled to other things, or even just an expansion of what is possible for [Career and Technical Education] or something like that. For instance, our kids love engineering and building things. And I always wonder, why can't we have more food or cooking classes, or home ec classes?* [Teacher] *I think that the lack of connection between the school district and the rec centers and the youth programs in the communities, I think that could be so beneficial to have that connection, because speaking to the youth, they don't have anything to do after the school. They don't- the rec centers don't have programs for them… so the kids are literally left out in the streets, and the issue they do have in the street is what we also see back in the schools.* [Community Member] *I run a Saturday program and I have kids that come and we did interviews with the kids for a video and every, just about every kid on the video was so appreciative of what we are giving them because they're not getting it in the school and that's the arts, things to learn how to be successful in life. I'm talking about entrepreneurship and things like that. With these types of issues that these children are dealing with, it's hard for them to succeed so we end up with kids out in the street that don't want to go to school because there's nothing, they don't feel as though there's anything there for them.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Extracurriculars (EC) give students opportunities to build relationships with adults and other students	*For me, I had the vice principal of my school show up to one of my clubs. She sat the whole time, listened to us, I know it was after school, it was out of her way. She contributed to the conversation, we learned more about who she was as a person, and it was a really positive experience. I trust her now.* [Student] *He's my coach…my basketball coach since 10th grade…He's the one person I know that I'd go to because he's there. Compared to all the other teachers. I talk to him outside of school, in school. I still talk to some of the staff members but other than that, he's the only person I feel like I could go to that I'm comfortable with.* [Student] *… one of the things that truly does keep young people in schools is the carrot and that's the thing that they buy into maybe athletics, technology, just camaraderie with friends, but there's a carrot. And once you build that relationship with young people, you then realize what that carrot is, and you use that carrot to keep them in there and then provide them with the resources and information. So they become successful and competitive in this world.* [Community Member] *…[speaking of] the advisory model. Coaches are advisors too. The advisors for these EC things, these EC programs, they're advisors too. So, there needs to be that relationship building where we say to the kids, I'm holding you accountable. You need to do well on this. Is there something I can do to help you do well on this?* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Middle school students need sports and extracurriculars	*With respect to the students, it's all about providing them with activities that fit their interest. Whether it's through [extracurricular] programs or [Philadelphia Interscholastic Athletic Association] middle school activities.* [School Leader] *Middle school sports. So, I think when we look at the surrounding districts with private schools, many of those middle school students have the opportunity to participate in school-based sports programs and many of our kids don't and are reliant on either private clubs or other things that cost a lot of money. And so they lose out on some of those opportunities that their peers get in in other areas.* [Parent/guardian] *There's a small after school program at our school, but there's a lack of money for athletics; only for high school in Philadelphia. It would be something that'd be really helpful for the kids in middle school to have quality after school activities, whether they're clubs, after school programs.* [Teacher] *Too big and too much bureaucracy that makes it hard to get anything done. One small example, I inquired about starting a girls middle school basketball team at our school and was told to process for getting a new team approved through the district would be too long to make it worthwhile.* [School Staff] *Back in the day, it used to be the middle school had activities that you could go to, basketball, volleyball, swimming. All of these things in every school. High school, you had trade schools. You had also activities, gymnastics. I remember gymnastics being in middle school.* [Parent/guardian] *I just think that it's all important, especially for kids in middle school. Middle school kids want to participate. They want to get out there and learn and have fun and meet other kids and learn rules and leaving our school and getting on a bus and learning all the valuable things that middle school athletics should be all about.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Transportation, safety, and other barriers to extracurriculars and athletics	*…school sports are always extremely popular. I know this came up when the district was thinking of shifting high school hours to later. My outdoor school field, like many other high schools, our lights aren't working, so there's a lot of increased safety risk when it comes to that, as well, where just if you want the kids to stay later for after school things to help quality of life, safety, all that, well then, the school needs to be safe to be out after dark.* [Teacher] *Down to us going on trips and stuff. We don't never have busses. I don't know why we don't ever have new school busses. …We walk to [public] bus stops. Mine's not safe. People die on the [public] bus. I'm not saying— just anything could happen. [Another student cut in: There's sports, too…] This school is literally in the middle of a warzone…literally gang territory and anything could happen and we don't never have no school busses.* [Student] *Transportation. Most student will not join clubs because there is no transportation if they join clubs or sports.* [Teacher] *More often than not, those things are offered as after school and, as a high school teacher, most of my students either work or take care of their younger siblings. Even clubs that end up being very popular, it's really hard for students to attend, and so I don't know the ideal way to make space for that during the school time, but I would really appreciate some more looks into how to make sure it we're really meeting the students at where they are instead of being upset that they are not accessing resources when we understand what their schedules are.* [Teacher] *I just wanted to let you know that we were told within four weeks, that the children all needed to have their COVID vaccines in order to participate and it was very scary and very frightening for a lot of parents. It was just an overload for them. it was an overload for the kids.* [Teacher]

Testing/Assessments

- Stakeholders explained that too much standardized testing takes up time in the classroom that could be better used for authentic instruction (slide 110).

- Students and teachers reported that taking tests and assessments is a stressful experience for students (slide 111).

Academics

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Too much standardized testing takes away from authentic instruction	*I know many of my students get very overwhelmed and stressed by the amount of testing that we're required to do, and I know when we explain the reason behind testing and using data, that does help but especially the STAR testing that rolled out this past year. I really think four times a year is very excessive. I know the assessment office sent a survey asking for feedback as to whether three times would be sufficient instead of four, but it so takes away from instruction. I think students feel that and they feel as though they're not being prepared for the next grade because we're spending so much time testing.* [Teacher] *…I do feel like that human element is lost – particularly in the acceleration network because there's such a strong push for testing and scores and improvement which is obviously very important but that social and emotional learning sort of comes secondary to that…* [Teacher] *…our students are tested to death, almost. Fourth quarter, we had PSSAs, which were then followed by STAR testing, which then ended the year with i-Ready, so instead of doing authentic learning tasks and letting my students celebrate their learning by doing project based learning, it was, "I need you to do this test. I need you to do this test. I need you to now do these."* [Teacher] *Stop all of the assessments that have been piled on the younger grades and allow the teachers to teach. My children had the benefit of teachers actually teaching and not giving endless assessments and it made a difference.* [Parent/guardian] *…students have not been able to have their social/emotional wellbeing attended to - especially in light of multiple traumas - because of an over emphasis on testing, even in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic and a political climate that has allowed an extreme white supremacist message to be aired broadly and with broad support. We need time to attend to [socio-emotional learning].* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Tests and assessments are stressful for students	*Especially with big, standardized tests. The state testing, the Keystone, the PSSAs, the SATs. They tell us that they're not graded, but they put so much stress on us about studying for them. If they aren't going to report it, why are you all trying to overwhelm us with something that's not even going to count?* [Student] *…It's like, what do I even choose to study for? You have to basically count your losses. Oh, I'm going to study for this because I don't have time to study for that, and I would just try to like try to bring my grade up, and it's like it's not realistic. It's like why are we having so many tests on one day. We tell teachers we're stressed, but it's like, "oh, this day's convenient," so it's like, "oh, we're going to give you a test on this day, even though we know you have a quiz and a test on that day." It's like, why?* [Student] *So since because of the test if we get a bad score we can get the anxiety that our parents are going to hate us. Since if we get a bad score our parents can yell at us, and that's why we kind of don't feel supported.* [Student] *Something else with the testing, we did do AIMS[web] in the past, and three times a year was benchmark. Now the STAR is four times a year, and the benchmarking is always testing on their current grade. If they're two grades behind—at the beginning of third grade, I'm giving them a third grade test and they're testing on first grade level, two months later I test them again on third grade, they're still going to be on a first grade level. Not only am I wasting my time, these kids are sitting there repeatedly taking tests that they cannot take. The emotional—you can see them in tears, and you see that and it just kills you.* [Teacher]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
English Learners (ELs)

- Many District staff feel that multilingual families are not prioritized in the District, although translation services are appreciated (slide 113).

- More support and prioritization is needed for newcomers (slide 114).

- Support is needed in differentiating grade-level instruction for English Learners (slide 115).

- More staff are needed to cover instruction and required testing (slide 115).

- Bilingual Counseling Assistants (BCAs) were seen as an invaluable asset to schools and families want more of them (slide 116).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Many District staff feel that multilingual families are not prioritized in the District, although translation services are appreciated	*This district should lead the way in the education and treatment of multilingual students and their families. We are a sanctuary city and one of the first to welcome Afghan refugees. We are expecting around 500 Ukrainian refugees this coming school year. These students and families shouldn't then be discriminated against in the main office of their schools and told they can't enroll, which is something that occurs across the district…Further, this district likes to talk about being linguistically inclusive. With the Culturally and Linguistically Inclusive Framework, you would think people would be banging down the door of OMCP [Office of Multilingual Curriculum and Programs] and yet [OMCP is] relegated to one slide in other PDs, on-your-own-time professional development, and "give me a list of strategies," and students and their families are still discriminated against from the moment they walk into their neighborhood schools.* [Central Office Staff] *The Multi-Lingual Assessment Center is a powerful and mighty small team. They really care and they know what they're doing, and I would love to see more support given to them, because they work really closely with us and bend over backwards to work with community-based organizations, and I know they want to help families.* [Community Member] *I just want to uplift that we have families that represent a variety of languages. And while as a system, we focus on the 10 greatest languages of diffusion and communication with parents. But I can't help to think about the parents that are not represented in those 10 languages when we're trying to communicate information. So, I think that system of really ensuring that all of our families are getting the communication and have the means to communicate is something that we have to constantly pay attention to to build that kind of trust that is needed.* [Central Office Staff] *Hopefully you can take a visit to our building and see, we have 19 languages in our building. We have students from all over the world that come to [School Name]. It is a very unique school…We have a lot of families in need, as do the rest of the schools. We have students coming as refugees from all over the world that come to [School Name], and we are in need of a lot of resources to help these families get situated in the United States, and then to give their children something to do other than just the curriculum, to keep them off the streets and to keep them engaged.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More support is needed for newcomers	*There is a Newcomer program here…but instructionally, in terms of staffing, in terms of autonomy – it doesn't have the requirements to make a really successful program.* [Parent/guardian]
	Currently there is NO curriculum for [English as a second language (ESL)] Newcomers. We used to have textbooks with lesson plans that were accessible online. We are now left to our own devices, which is not a good thing especially if a student moves and goes to another school within the district. There is no guidance. [School Staff (Unspecified)]
	The only increasing student population is English learners. Despite the fact, the District is more than a decade behind in providing programs / schools for newcomers, etc. [Central Office Staff]
	We don't have enough resources to be able to support parents of our newcomer students and give them the in-depth orientation that they need… [Community Member]
	[SDP needs to] provide really targeted, specific support of that newly arrived students who grew up in another education system in another place might need. [Community Member]
	I think that integration into the schools is extremely challenging, and I think that this is something that really came back to the forefront as refugee arrivals increased in the past year, especially due to the crises in Haiti, Afghanistan, and Ukraine still coming, of course, for that big influx of refugees. [Community Member]
	…the first day, she didn't know that there was food available in the cafeteria… for recent arrivals, immigrants, and a lot of other schools, there isn't really a place to land and get their bearings for things as simple as getting breakfast and lunch at school…creating a safe and welcoming environment for immigrant students and really being able to connect so they can know where they are, what's going on, who they can trust, and who to ask for help would be a great first step. [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More staff is needed to adequately cover both testing and and instruction for English Learners (ELs)	*As English language learners teachers, we're the EL points. What that means is that in schools with small populations, we're responsible for screening in September—because we lose weeks in September to screening and doing the WIDA certifications. I do seven because I'm K through 12. We have to screen all incoming students, English language learners, and then we have a window that because Pennsylvania is a WIDA state, they might say testing is from January 6th to March 6th, so what happens is you have to test all those students within that window. For someone like me, if I'm only in your school two days a week, how am I going to do the testing and service the children?* [Teacher] *We need more [English Learner] and Special Ed teachers to do push into the classes. We would need to hire more...*[Teacher] *After December, it's six weeks of nonsupport and you have to start all over again, because we have WIDA testing… It's four domains, and each domain takes anywhere between 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes. What happens is that…we lose the whole quarter, just about….I was asked to do an end of year reflection… and I wrote that I needed improvement in doing the testing and continuing to work with my students during the testing time. When you're under tight deadlines, I really don't know how to get it done.* [Teacher]
More support is needed in differentiating grade-level instruction for English Learners (ELs)	*I cannot modify the grade level instruction for [EL Level] ones and twos... We're told to follow the can-do descriptors which are like list things – make a list and label drawings. Then we're told to prepare for PSSAs, and we can't do that. So there are just all these conflicting expectations, there's no support…*[Teacher] *We need to get specific training in working with our EL population, who need oral language development.* [School Staff] *It was really hard, because [an unaccompanied youth] didn't understand the classes. Everything was in English and there wasn't people who could translate… her foster mom would ask her, "Why are your grades low?" And she was explaining, "It's because I don't understand English yet and there isn't anyone who can do that translation."* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Bilingual Counseling Assistants (BCAs) were viewed as invaluable to schools	*We have a large number of newcomers at our school. We try our best to meet their needs, but we fall short sometimes. It would be greatly appreciated if our school had a bilingual counselor.* [Support Staff] *BCAs have been instrumental in building relationships with families. They need to be paid more!* [Teacher] *I think the communication strategy is something that should be looked at as well, because I absolutely echo the value and importance of BCAs and want to see the district investing in more BCAs and paying them well for the really invaluable work that they do to connect and inform parents.* [Community Member] *Hiring more staff onsite who speak Spanish – the BCAs that work in schools are an incredible resource, and we recognize that, but they have a lot of work on their plates, and there's not enough BCAs in the district. There's not enough BCAs at each school to handle the volume of work that is required. Often, when families show up at the school, and the secretary doesn't speak Spanish, or there's no one onsite who can help interpret, that's really discouraging and is a barrier automatically – their first contact with the school isn't welcoming and doesn't work.* [Community Member] *Chinese speaking families share the same concern. In our district, we don't have enough of …it's called a consultant, Bilingual Consultant Assistant in the district. I understand the school district is making effort try to recruit more, but due to the low pay, that was shared by one other BCA and this is the big concern. We cannot get the BCA into the school district. For the first-generation immigrant family, and it's a huge benefit for us to have a BCA. Without a BCA, it's so hard for our family to communicate what we need and to communicate with the school district. Especially challenging for other families with special needs kids. Without BCA, we won't be able to engage in the [Individualized Education Plan (IEP)] process. We cannot understand or communicate during the IEP meeting, cannot read IEP report, and also evaluation report is difficult to comprehend without such a help.* [Community Member]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Course/Program Offerings

- Stakeholders recognize that not all students have access to rigorous courses, particularly Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and honors level courses (slide 118).

- Students would like access to a wider variety of courses and electives that are more aligned with their interests, relevant to their lives, and prepare them for their future (slide 119).

- Stakeholders believe CTE and dual enrollment programs are beneficial for students and would like to see them expanded (slide 120).

- Arts and music classes should be available to all students, each year (slide 121).

- Stakeholders believe that the school selection process would be less contentious if there were more equity in course and program offerings in neighborhood schools (slide 122). Equity in the school selection process overlaps with another subtopic (DEI, slide 193).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP should offer rigorous academic courses in all schools, not just in criteria-based schools	*Neighborhood catchment schools such as Roxborough High has [Advanced Placement (AP)] classes, excellent academics and also a college access program. So again-let's also focus on giving more resources to our neighborhood high schools too.* [Parent/guardian] *I seem to notice on social media what was gaining traction is this sense of access to some of our high-achieving schools...how do we develop more of these schools, or how do we create more of these options so that students don't feel that those are the only schools that they can go to to particularly get access to some of these high achieving credentialing that is necessary for college when you talk about AP classes and honors classes?* [Community Member] *…so that students aren't all trying to get into half a dozen select schools, there is a need in the school district to invest seriously in those AP courses, IB courses, nobody's talked about IB. If it were not for the International Baccalaureate program at [her school], my daughter would not have been able to go overseas to study. And she's getting her PhD overseas….And it has opened up tremendous doors for her for college. I know AP courses will do that as well.* [Parent/guardian] *…the best thing ever that helped me eleventh grade year was the honor classes and if you have the right teacher, they challenge you. I like a challenge. When they challenge you, I feel like you learn more. I appreciate the honors AP classes because it's the challenge that I'm looking for.* [Student] *Get more kids into [this] school so we can have honors classes because the reason we don't have honors classes is because there's not enough kids in school to have a big enough honors class.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students and their families want more challenging and interesting courses	*They got in the same classroom learning stuff we learned years prior. We already know. Last year I felt like in algebra I was learning 7th grade math. I learned that stuff in 7th grade.* [Student] *I'm in [Advanced Placement (AP)] classes. I feel like the best thing ever that helped me eleventh grade year was the honor classes and if you have the right teacher, they challenge you. I like a challenge. When they challenge you, I feel like you learn more. I appreciate the honors AP classes because it's the challenge that I'm looking for.* [Student] *In my middle school, we didn't have honors and stuff like that. My first honors class was tenth grade before I came to school. I wasn't in this school freshman year. I was able to come to this school in tenth grade and I had got first honors class, and through that honors course …my Bio teacher, he's the one who helped direct me in what honors was about and how more intense and a step above it was from a standard class. With the right guidance and direction, I was able to understand and feel what the severity or intensity of honors was going to be like…* [Student] *Get more kids into [this] school so we can have honors classes because the reason we don't have honors classes is because there's not enough kids in school to have a big enough honors class.* [Student] *At the end of the day work is not fun. No matter how I try to do it. For me no matter how hard you try to make it fun it's just not. At least try to make it so I can listen to music while I'm working. That's something because then it's just like I can do something to not irritate me while getting the work done.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Stakeholders would like to see more Career and Technical Education (CTE), dual enrollment, and internship opportunities	*The other thing that is keeping me up is the stalling or the start and stop of our career academy learning. We have a lot of infrastructure here in the city of Philadelphia internships and opportunities for young people to explore careers, but there has been consultant after consultant and plan after plan, little action, little implementation, and I have not seen any accelerated results and strategies towards scaling whatever it is.* [Community Member] *The CTE programs are fabulous. I love sending kids to a CTE program knowing that in four years they're going to feel safe and confident that they have a future that they're going to go be electricians, or they're going to be HVAC repair, which we could really utilize as a school district. We should be leveraging that.* [Teacher] *I believe strongly in CTE type programs. That…students see that what they're doing in the building has some sort of advanced purpose for their post-secondary plans. And that could be anywhere from college credit to getting into a pre-apprenticeship program, to whatever. They find a meaningful something that they're getting out of their programming.* [Teacher] *Increase the opportunity for our young, particularly our young boys to get a vocational education, get back in those classes where they learn how to do things with their hands. Because everybody's not going to college. But they surely need to be prepared to make a living and to have some skills.* [Community Member] *I'd love to see 440 focus on redeveloping high school structure. It's frustrating that there's not enough vocational training. Not every kid is going to college, how can they help you create programs or pathways from school to jobs.* [Teacher] *[What is going well is that] Our high school options offer diverse students multiple pathways to achieve their career and college readiness goals.* [School Staff (Unspecified)] *…Expand the CTE and Academy models throughout the district…Not every kid is going to be a doctor. But we always need plumbers, and electricians, and web designers. Those are the programs that need to be expanded.* [Parent/guardian]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
All students should have access to quality music and art programming	*I think that they should give gym and art this year every day. Last year, they only gave art. This year, they're giving gym. I say we should have dance class, ballet. I also think they should do more here because they're not really doing enough for what I think they should be doing. That's what I think they should be doing because all schools are giving this and that. They're giving dance class, gym, and all this stuff. I just think they're not really doing too much here. I think that this with my—you need more help because right now, it's not working out. I think they need more help. Philadelphia needs more help because they're not doing right. All the other schools are getting this stuff, but our school, it ain't.* [Student] *I am a music teacher for the school district. I'm also a gifted education teacher. And so, you were talking about music, I support that. I think we should give, the arts in general, students an outlet. And we really need to make sure that we have music and art in all schools.* [Teacher] *I wanted to say, in my own school experience, I wasn't athletic, but I was involved with the Glee Club, and with the shows, and I feel like that there's just not enough emphasis on the arts, because of budget cuts and I think the students suffer because of that. When I first started at [my school] 10 years ago, they put on the show Annie, and then several years they just didn't have the funding.* [Support Staff] *So, bringing back, I think, some of those things that really motivate kids, the arts is, I think, something that would also help with their well-being as well. And across the board, I think we've lost areas in that, and those areas. We've lost a lot of things that we could be doing. Dance being one of them. It could be music programs. Music programs have been condensed to someone coming in and teaching them how to play instruments and doing a yearly program in the schools.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School Selection is so contentious because we need more equity in course offerings in Catchment/ Neighborhood and K-8 schools	*This meeting is indicative of one of the biggest problems in the Philadelphia School District: people are far too concerned with magnet schools and providing opportunities to those students, while neighborhood schools languish.* [Parent/guardian] *…if some of those resources that are going into all of these special admissions schools that are being created were actually put into the neighborhood schools, then we wouldn't need all of these special admission schools and everybody could go to school in their own neighborhood. You wouldn't have to worry about kids taking two and three buses to get to a school.* [Parent/guardian] *I don't want to give much more air time to the Special Admit conversation because, honestly, I think it is a distraction from what is truly at the heart of the concerns with the district, which is how do we serve and improve the quality and the buildings of the most under resourced schools in this building?* [Parent/guardian] *I think there are serious problems with the way that we change the admissions process that really also impact the kids that we're trying to help and that we're trying to level the playing field for. We need to go really to the root, which is starting way younger, starting at the elementary schools.* [Parent/guardian] *…the inequities between the high schools is very extreme…what made me lose trust is last summer I participated in a committee to try to work on high school admissions… and I remember speaking to the network in August about the hopes and dreams of this committee in trying to bring equity to the neighborhood high schools….a lot of decisions were made about high school admissions without the committee's advice. And then we were told we would meet again, and we never met again.* [School Leader]

For more about how stakeholders felt about the rollout of the 2021-22 school selection process, see here.

Themes from the Topic of:
Central Office

- Decisions feel abrupt and are often made without collecting stakeholder input first, contributing to a sense of "disconnect" to schools. New initiatives typically lack solid implementation plans.

- Central Office is too siloed, its organizational structure is unclear, and its employees lack accountability mechanisms.

- Stakeholders want timeliness and clarity in communications, especially about changes to school logistics.

Central Office Subtopics

- Leadership & Decision-making

- School-Central Office Relationships & Communication

- Internal Coordination & Functionality

- Network/Assistant Superintendent Leadership

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Leadership & Decision-Making

- There is a broad sense of disconnect between Central Office leadership and school-based staff, students, and families, which leads to a lack of trust for Central Office by and a sense of "us versus them" (slide 126).

- Decisions feel arbitrary and sudden, "top-down," more like a "dictatorship than a partnership." Stakeholders often do not understand the rationale; there is a sense that many decisions have not been strategic or informed by school-based perspectives (slide 127, slide 128). Instead, decisions should be more consistent and grounded in shared values (slide 131).

- When feedback is sought, it often feels like only "lip service" or performative, and not a true opportunity to provide meaningful input (slide 134). This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (school-family relationships, in Communication & Engagement, slide 147).

- Central Office lacks clear accountability structures (slide 132). Some departments have good leadership, delegate and prioritize well, and work well with schools and other offices (slide 129, slide 130). However, other departments should be evaluated for competent leadership, adequate staffing, overall functionality, and effectiveness (slide 133).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There is a "disconnect" between schools and Central Office (440)	*…there is no trust in the leadership at the district level. I think there's a problem there, there's a real gap and there's definitely a gap between the school leaders at the school level and the decision makers at 440. There's a huge void I would describe it as a chasm that has grown much larger over the last three or four years. I don't know how you bridge that, but I think you definitely have to start making decisions that are reflective and involve those school leaders that are trying to do those jobs because if you don't, it just becomes more and more siloed and more and more fractionalized.* [School Leader] *There's just a disconnect that's hard to put in words sometimes, but a disconnect between the folks who work in [Central Office] and those of us that work in the schools.* [School Leader] *I feel like the district offices have created an us versus them environment.* [Central Office Staff] *…[teachers] don't feel like they're trusted, and they feel micro-managed. There's really no rationale. It's just initiative here, initiative there. It doesn't really make a whole lot of sense, I think, at the school level.* [Central Office Staff] *…the people at 440 don't really have a clue what happens in school and they're making decisions--school-based decisions on--about things that affect schools drastically but without--with little knowledge of how those decisions will impact schools.* [School Leader] *People in power, I guess you could say – oftentimes, they pick decisions based off what they think is best or what would look best for them, but it's not always the most convenient for us [students].* [Student] *One of the challenges that we have found at [my community organization] is that there's sometimes a disconnect…we'll invest in particular projects that are going well at the school building, and teachers and principals are really excited about it and families. But often…there's disconnect and sometimes not as much interest or investment at the central office level.* [Community Member]

Leadership & Decision-Making

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Decisions made by Central Office feel abrupt and arbitrary	*One of the things that I think has really undermined not just student or staff trust, but family and district and city trust in leadership is, we've been subjected to a string, a long, recent history of decisions and spending that come out to no discernible benefit.* [Teacher]
	There are a lot of decisions that seem to be made very abruptly, even though we've had surveys, and you've had meetings for input and stuff. These decisions seem to be made but not thought out. [Teacher]
	I think that one of the things that I've seen over the last 10 years is that the district, in desperation to try to fix what's wrong, right, grasps these things that are like maybe they would work. Maybe they won't work, but they're simple. They are not thoughtful and we never give things enough time to see if they actually work. As a result, there's this frenetic crisis mode that we are always operating in. It's very corrosive. It stifles creativity. It burns people out. I think it really averts trust. When I think of what we can do to rebuild trust, I think focusing on stability while moving forward is really important. [Parent/guardian]
	One thing that soured me to the district—to Central Office—was when they abruptly changed the school schedule last year. We used to start at 8:00, and then they abruptly changed our time to 7:30. They didn't get input from the teachers...That was like, OK, we have to be the ones to come in to do the work, but you didn't take our lives into consideration. That's offensive. [Teacher]
	People are making these huge decisions for everyone and teachers don't know who they are or the reasoning behind choices… With this comes the feeling that teacher input is never considered. [School Staff]
	The district does not make it easier on families, especially on families who did not have resources because there's lack of accountability, lack of transparency, and the decisions are made willy-nilly. [Parent/guardian]
	When arbitrary decisions like this are made across departments, this SIGNIFICANTLY impacts morale. [Central Office staff]

For more about the way decisions are communicated, see School-Family Relationships & Communication [here](#).

Leadership & Decision-Making

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Central Office staff are frustrated by sudden changes of course	*I don't know if my colleagues agree with this but probably some do at least – where we…will be engaged in a pretty long and elaborate planning process to execute what have been identified as priorities or goals or initiatives, and then things change very abruptly last minute. And so the plans that we have carefully made and worked hard and pretty tirelessly to arrange get really upended, and we have to make a very last-minute switch. That's a big disruption of trust in my perspective.* [Central Office Staff] *After something has been significantly thought out, strategic planning around it, significant efforts put into a specific project and just the frequent change out of the clear blue like we're not doing this anymore. And at times, there may be great rationale that exists. I don't know if throughout all of the levels of the system that we're clear on what the rationale was that related to the specific change. So that is definitely something that I would also uplift that contributes to the trust in this system, because there's a certain level of integrity that I believe we all bring to our work. And when you bring that level of integrity and commitment to the work and for something to just out of the clear blue just vanish without any clear understanding of what was done or even memorializing what was done to consider how to enhance or make improvements, I think is really critical to building trust.* [Central Office Staff] *And sometimes we begin down a path, and we're putting in a lot of time and effort and collaborating with multiple offices to provide support, content, whatever is needed for our kids and our staff in schools and our principals. And then it feels like sometimes at the last minute a different decision is made. And it's extremely frustrating to pivot when we feel like we have tried so hard to be collaborative and supportive of students, and principals, and staff. And that makes you feel a little undercut.* [Central Office Staff] *At some times, it has delayed decision-making that then we find out something has finally been approved, and then if it's late in the game, then we have to do a lot of work really quickly, which then adds pressure to us and teams, which then starts the cycle that we've already kind of discussed and the emails and the working and some of the conversation that we've already shared. Again, I think there's positives, but also, if some of the larger decisions, that's where it's only made, and that is delayed, then that can clearly affect the rest of the system in a huge way.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good leadership and decision-making means listening	*And when it comes to trust, I think there's one component of listening to what – from leadership, listening to what your employees are saying. I also think that there needs to be … a little bit more of an active effort to just be present and go out and actually create opportunities to hear what your employees are saying. So, don't make your staff come to you and chase you down.* [Central Office Staff]
	To me [transparency] feels like the district is honest, truthful, thoughtful, engaged, listening… but too often I feel like I have been engaged in conversations like this and the information, the input, goes absolutely nowhere, so that's frustrating. [Parent/guardian]
	we're misdiagnosing problems when they come from above. And so, we're trying to put a lot of round pegs in square holes because we're not considering the context within schools, and we're not valuing the expertise of the folks in schools and on the ground to help that – to allow them to help us generate solutions. [Central Office Staff]
	People don't trust systems, people trust people, and if that relationship exists where students and families and schools and principals and teachers can connect to people who hear them and who know that their voice is real and elevate their voice to the level by which action can take place and really address the issue, then I think that that's what we need to foster more that relationship. [School Leader]
	… I appreciate the listening sessions, because it does truly give us teacher voice, and that's a first step to building a relationship, as you coming in as a superintendent and us as teachers. [Teacher]
	Rather than seeing [Central Office] as the holder of knowledge, we have a great opportunity to take a facilitative role, instead of handing off top-down information. Recognizing the immense value school communities' input is key. [Central Office Staff]
	I certainly try and embrace…bottom-up leadership. We have a history of when folks are in elevated positions, it doesn't always translate to a service role of being the person that takes the folks that have that content expertise and using your expertise… I would certainly love to see us as a district and particularly as a leadership team explore some new approaches to where folks that are closer to the work on a day-to-day basis are really elevated in their voice and in their input in how we make our decisions. [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good leadership means delegating and prioritizing well	*I don't think any of my colleagues here, at any level, are blatantly ignoring a communication. It makes me think about why. What is at the root cause of not being able to give that timely response? There are two things that come to mind. One is around permission to prioritize. I am a believer that when you try to do everything, you end up doing nothing at all. Sometimes, you end up upsetting a really important stakeholder, when you have to prioritize. It's helpful to have permission to do that. I think sometimes the firefighting and the distractions and the having to pivot quickly from planned work to reactive work often is a function of not prioritizing… Getting better practice as an organization around where there is a true sense of urgency and needing an immediate response, because there is a difference between an immediate response and a timely response…* [Central Office Staff] *It's not uncommon to have an extreme delay in hearing back from [Central Office] and to reach a voice mailbox that is full…I understand that they're all very swamped, and I find that some sort of mid-level people who are closer to the work are actually very well-informed and able to make decisions, but they feel like they can't make the decision because they need to speak with their supervisor before they even respond to me. I was just going to add that to the list of actionable suggestions that [another respondent] made, was what's in addition to permission to prioritize, the permission to delegate, I think, is something that—we're a very top-down organization sometimes, I think, and it gets in the way of efficient decision-making and communication.* [Central Office Staff] *I would start with deputizing central office personnel to get closer to the issue. We already have personnel, so it's not about adding the personnel. It's maybe redistributing assignments, purposes, action steps, and goals around the issue that we have closest to the problem. I think an issue right now currently for my colleagues and I is we have one person in our entire network cabinet team that is our direct support. And that's our network professional learning specialist, PLS... So, how do we expand the supports of network leaders or assistant superintendents which kind of play the role of liaisons from central office to schools, and then how do we get people at central office closer to the problem so they can actually do something about it? …But how much closer to the problem would we be if we as key stakeholders influence the system instead of just implementing it? So, I think it's some reorganization around the structure of how we address the actions that we're going to take to get closer to the solutions of the problems.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Decisions should be consistent and based on shared values	*I think one of the challenges any large organization has is that not everybody can be in the room for decisions. And what we're not really consistent on and clear on is what are the values that we're using to make decisions. And so, as an example of that, when [a big problem happened], everybody wanted to be in the room... And we had big community meeting where everybody was upset. And when we finally said, here are the three principles that we're going to use to make a decision… everybody was cool. Because they understood what was going to ground our decision. And so, we had consistency then around what was guiding it. And so, I think that when it comes to the decision-making process, we're never going to get to a spot that we're always in the room, or that others are in the room. But they need to be able to know what our values are and what's anchoring those decisions.* [Central Office Staff] *And my answer to both the educator and the learner well-being, the main factor is consistency and that there are very clear – it's like a flow chart. It's very clear, if something happens, something else happens. And that people know what the expectations are and that it's not willy nilly. And it's not, we changed this policy yesterday, or these new things were done, that there's support for things that are going on. So, if there's a new initiative, that there's people who are in the building to support those initiatives, that it's not a lot of just train the teacher and the teacher's responsible for all of these things. And then, that the learners know that there is something that they can expect to happen, and also things – people that they know they can expect to see and rely on. So that those expectations are clear, that they're very visible, and that everybody knows what to expect, and that there's consistency.* [Teacher] *[T]hey implement it, not realizing the impact that it will make in the classroom setting. Because we have the pyramid wrong. We have a hierarchy that makes a decision that deals with the base, instead of flipping it around and making the classroom the decision-maker of how we're going to get to where we're going to get to.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Accountability systems are needed for Central Office (440)	*Having worked in 5 schools across the district, leadership has no accountability and teachers have it all.* [Teacher] *[School leaders] are rated every year based on our performance and on some specific components. It's my belief that everyone at 440 should be subject to those same kinds of ratings. I'm a person who operates with urgency. It has worked for me for all these years. When a parent calls with a concern or complaint, they get a call back from me within 24 hours. If parents don't get a response they'll call for and make a complaint. I can call an office at 440 and wait weeks for a response or not get one at all. That should be part of that level of accountability, that just the responsiveness, just knowing that you're being heard or someone's taking care of it...* [School Leader] *One of the things that, and I know that a lot of my colleagues have experienced this, we have central office folks who really act and behave with impunity because there's no accountability. When we're talking about curriculum and we're talking about special ed, we're talking about, the student rights office … we have central office middle managers who are making decisions for our schools who may have never been an educator formally as a teacher or a building-based administrator….I think that all of us we want to be held accountable for our outcomes, but on the flip side of that what does accountability look like for the Central office?* [School Leader] *Accountability: performance evaluations should be standard. People around here do what they want, sometimes without consequence, because they aren't held accountable, evaluated and/or provided measurable feedback for areas of improvement.* [Central Office Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Creating more accountability at 440 so when decisions are made there is a clear why, clear person in charge of the decision and when those decisions go well or poorly, there is ownership.* [School Staff] *…we don't have a system for accountability. Often people want responsibility, but they don't want to be held accountable for the decisions they make.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Stakeholders describe Inconsistent department effectiveness and competence	*I can quickly say that I think one thing that breaks down silos in our department is that [my supervisor] is a comfortable leader…with a very good and open energy. I think that that makes me comfortable, just going to colleagues, going to the folks around me. But I think that sometimes cross departmentally, that's not always true. Folks get sensitive, if there's a collaboration that should happen at this kind of top level and we should be told that we need to collaborate.* [Central Office Staff] *I think someone mentioned earlier, [the] weekly emails, those are phenomenal. I read them all the time. She does such a wonderful job of bridging what's happening at 440 to what's happening with the teachers in schools. She does it in such a positive, transparent way that really helps us to understand. I think that's a bright spot for 440.* [Teacher] *…I just really encourage you to really look at 440… at those folks that are going to be in between, so to speak, you and your vision and us at the school level, and who those folks are and how they approach the job, what their mindset is, and whether or not they really have a true mindset of service to the schools, to the principals, and the staff in those buildings.* [School Leader] *The way that they were configured this year was a disservice to students. The people in [that office] were spread thin without pretty much any reason…I don't know what's going on down there. It just — they're — it doesn't feel like they're servicing students or in support of students. And these are our students that need the most support.* [School Leader] *Responsiveness across Central Offices is not the same. I'm curious as to why that is.* [School Leader] *…they screw up the easy stuff. I would get notices about early dismissals…as my daughter was getting in the car. One time I got a notice as I was already taking her home that after school activities had been canceled. Those are things that can't happen. You have to get the easy stuff right before you can start moving down the path to solve some of the bigger challenges and really engage a community and trust… It's some baseline competence in the functioning of what's going on in the district to move on these bigger issues. You have to get that base level stuff right. Otherwise, there's never going to be an open line of trust between the two communities.* [Parent/guardian]

Leadership & Decision-Making

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Decisions made without considering stakeholder input and input that was sought is only "lip service"	*The listening sessions are great.....if things change based on them.* [Teacher] *I feel like there is lip service paid to come and tell us what you think, but it's not actually followed up on.* [Teacher] *We are offered various surveys throughout the year in regards to asking for our feedback, but we rarely hear about the results of those surveys and do not see how that data is implemented.* [Teacher] *…too often I feel like I have been engaged in conversations like this and the input, goes absolutely nowhere.* [Parent/guardian] *Establishing and building trust involves trusting that those who do the work, can provide relevant, informed and meaningful insight and feedback about the work that they do as decisions are being made. All too often, decisions are made from the top down, without any input from the individuals who will be impacted.* [Central Office Staff] *It messes with me because I feel like those things, they're just checking boxes to say, "Yes, we asked student feedback," but it's not necessarily being implemented, it's not necessarily being heard. It's just so that they can say that they did it.* [Student] *[What needs improvement is having] Less administrative edicts without staff, parent, and student involvement. Decisions are continually being made by authoritative figures without consulting the actual stakeholders.* [School Staff] *By the time…assistant superintendents, let alone principals and teachers, are given an opportunity to provide feedback, there's 99.9% of the work already done…You're reading what you're going to be implementing,…you're reading to understand, instead of reading to reflect and provide feedback. So, if that's happening at the top, it definitely occurs with principals and then teachers. So, how do we create a culture that truly represents the key stakeholders that we keep talking about, teachers and principals?* [Central Office Staff]

For more about how "lip service" is also a key issue in School-Family Relationships & Communication, see here.

School-Central Office Relationships & Communication

- This subtopic overlapped a great deal with other subtopics, indicating that there was clear consensus.

- There is a broad sense of disconnect between Central Office leadership and school-based staff, students, and families, which leads to a lack of trust for Central Office by and a sense of "us versus them." This subtopic overlapped with the subtopic on Leadership and Decision-making (slide 126).

- When feedback is sought, it often feels like only "lip service" or performative, and not a true opportunity to provide meaningful input. This subtopic overlapped with the subtopic on Leadership and Decision-making (slide 134). This subtopic also overlapped with another subtopic (school-family relationships, in Communication & Engagement, slide 147).

- There are not usually clear, realistic, and detailed implementation plans for new initiatives, programs, and policies. It feels like Central Office is often "building the plane as we're flying it" (slide 141). When new programs and initiatives are started too frequently, the lack of consistency feels like incompetence, like Central Office doesn't know what it's doing or doesn't have a good plan. More cross-departmental coordination is needed (slide 142).

Central Office

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Internal Coordination & Functionality

- Departments are currently too siloed and disconnected (slide 137). Offices too often do not seem to communicate or coordinate well with one another or with schools (slide 138).

- Central Office lacks a clear organizational structure that is accessible to school staff and parents. There is mixed messaging and uneven support for schools (slide 139). School staff and families do not know who to contact or how to get in touch with the right office or person when there is an issue. Understaffing at Central Office is sometimes why (slide 140).

- There are not usually clear, realistic, and detailed implementation plans for new initiatives, programs, and policies. It feels like Central Office is often "building the plane as we're flying it" (slide 141). When new programs and initiatives are started too frequently, the lack of consistency feels like incompetence, like Central Office doesn't know what it's doing or doesn't have a good plan. More cross-departmental coordination is needed (slide 142).

- This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (School Leadership). From Central Office and Assistant Superintendents, some school leaders need more support (slide 203) and accountability (slide 205), while some well-established leaders may need more autonomy (slide 204).

Internal Coordination & Functionality

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Bureaucracy & silos in Central Office (440) prevent 440 from operating effectively and efficiently	*There's a lot of fractionalization and siloed in those departments. There's not a lot of communication, I think, between the departments that are making these decisions.* [School Leader] *One of the biggest obstacles to excellent work at 440 that I've recognized is the lack of collaboration across offices. There is a great deal of siloing here. We need more people that, as part of their role, work across offices.* [Central Office Staff] *…there are too many different offices and programs at 440 that makes it difficult sometimes to navigate through all the different offices.* [Teacher] *There's no working org chart of who manages who across 440. We need that with correct contact information.* [School Leader] *[The top priority should be] Examining the current structure of 440 staff to eliminate waste and redundancy, ensure all 440 staff are doing their very best to support school-based staff.* [School Staff] *440 operations don't efficiently support students, teachers or school communities which leads to mistrust, confusing processes, and miscommunications. I think this is a fundamental issue that feeds a host of other issues downstream.* [Parent/guardian] *…the current organizational structure can be viewed as a barrier for [Assistant Superintendents] to give more input and feedback around decision-making.* [Central Office Staff] *…the way one learning network functions is often completely different than how another learning network. A lack of communication in all departments is a big setback for the district.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Lack of coordination across Central Office (440) departments is a challenge	*…if we want to flourish and we want to achieve, we're going to have to figure out how to improve communication between what comes out of 440 and schools because I think there's somehow there is a misstep, so that the message that comes out of 440 that is delivered to schools is perhaps missing something, and then our school administration communicates it to us and then something is further lost. Then we're all grappling around trying to put these puzzle pieces together.* [Teacher] *There's a lot of these things that are coming out and you're getting an email. And the email's only going to the principal, and in schools where there's only one principal – this is a huge problem in schools where there's only one principal. That person is now overwhelmed with 60 emails a day in their inbox. They don't know who to send it to on their team. They don't have enough time in the day to have a team meeting, so there's not a leadership team meeting that they're having on a weekly basis. They maybe have it on a monthly basis. And then, those things slip through the cracks, and then things don't get done.* [Teacher] *One office at 440 does not always speak to another office and schools get conflicting messages.* [School Leader] *One of the key areas that would help school-based leadership be more effective is better coordination amongst our offices at the district, so be that facilities, enrollment, and planning and OSS or other programing. As schools shift and as the landscape of education shifts in the district…the offices are supporting individually and autonomously but not in a coordinated effort around the schools and if that is happening, it doesn't feel like it's happening transparently. So whether you're a school that is growing rapidly and running out of physical space…or if you're a school where your enrollment is dropping, how can we better utilize our facilities--not in isolation, but also in collaboration with our other offices?* [School Leader] *…At times messaging is in direct conflict with another office, which leads to confusion or unclear directives. Although efforts have been made to correct this, there is still much to be done to clearly communicate expectations or initiatives across the district and with stakeholders as appropriate.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School staff and parents are often confused by mixed messaging from Central Office	*…one of our barriers is the way that we communicate within our system and also with our families and across our system. That's in this, even in our departments. I think the lack of consistency and coordination, there are two different departments that may be planning and doing something. And that puts leaders and different people at odds at times because there are competing priorities. And I think…being very clear about what we're doing. What are we all working towards, so we're all coordinated.* [Central Office Staff] *Sometimes as a principal, we send an email and it's the wrong person, rather than funneling it through, as I said, the assistant superintendent, who then gets you an answer, and if they don't, then you're going to one person because you know that's the right person. I think the trust factor comes to the fact that we seem to be a little splintered as far as who do we go to when, and where?* [School Leader] *…get together with all of the assistant superintendents and understand how the district is currently running in the different learning networks. Each network is expecting different things from their teachers and administration.* [School Staff] *When you're a parent trying to get information from the district, it's pretty much a nightmare. The website is hard to use. It's hard to figure out who's in charge of what, it's hard to get someone on the phone. Often, you're going to voicemails. It's hard to figure out who to call, get a call back, just getting even basic information.* [Parent/guardian] *Central office employees are really trying to help, but sometimes what comes out of central office is overwhelming and can be confusing seems to be lack of coordination across the departments within 440 and for principals that haven't built their relationships with people downtown, it's almost impossible to navigate.* [School Leader] *…at a systems level… really examining the capacity of folks to deliver on the priorities. And I'm not saying capacity, whether someone has the intellectual capacity, but are there systems in place within this organization to ensure that these are our priorities, we have the appropriate staffing, the appropriate models to deliver on what our priorities are?* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Vacancies, understaffing, and morale impacts Central Office too	*…central office, central administration, has been in a position when, when there were times of financial constraints, this is the place where most of the cuts happen. I don't think that there's a wide understanding of the number of vacancies, the lack of staffing, for the amount of requests that come in from the field. Just by way of an example, I had a principal who was very upset …about the lack of response from phone calls, calls she was leaving and leaving voicemails or not getting an answer, or the voice mailbox was full and she couldn't leave a message. I don't think that people realize that when there were times of financial difficulty, the first place that we went to shield schools from having to lose resources, having to lose teachers, the first place we go is central administration. A lot of times, it's operational, not academic-facing things, so [the Office of General Council], finance, [Office of Information and Technology (IT)]. Those are the places I think get hit first because—and we all believe that it's important that schools are fully funded with all the resources that they need, but by the same token, they're aggravated and frustrated by the lack of response from IT, finance, legal, HR, because …staffing has been cut…* [Central Office Staff] *We've had two positions lay open for almost a year just in my office, and I think it's become increasingly challenging to retain people in what is a very competitive labor market.* [Central Office Staff] *We all know that we want to respond within 24 to 48 hours. I think everyone knows that that's the expectation…No one is not responding purposefully…I think it is just the way it is as far as time constraints and being pulled in different directions.* [Central Office Staff] *One of the things I think a lot of us are facing right now are the challenges or vacancies that we have on our teams. I know that there are a lot of folks who are looking to build their teams or replace roles that have for folks who have moved on to other opportunities. And I also recognize that the HR department is really focused especially this time of year on filling the vacancies in schools. So, that's got to be a priority. But where I see a gap is the supports that those of us who are trying to find employees outside of the schools, we don't get as much support.* [Central Office Staff]

For more on morale and retention in Central Office, see here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Need detailed implementation plans, not "building the plane while flying it"	*Otherwise, [Central Office] doesn't seem to be very involved and programs seem to be half implemented and or not being used enough/long enough to be properly implemented.* [Teacher] *There often doesn't seem to be a plan for almost anything. We are often too reactive instead of proactive.* [Teacher] *The district has ideas that they want implemented but information is usually given last minute and schools aren't given the resources or guidance to follow through.* [Teacher] *Another problem is that plans are made as initiatives are in process. In other words, we're "building the plane as we're flying it." That might lead managers/chiefs to want people in the building because even they don't have a clear idea of what those they supervise need to do.* [Central Office Staff] *"Your lack of planning is now my emergency" is a theme I observe all too often.* [Central Office Staff] *Overall, just I feel like a general sense of leadership having a true understanding and empathy for what's going on on the front lines, what's going on in schools, what's going on in the offices. And it often feels like a top down, mandates are just getting piled on, and piled on, and piled on without a real understanding … or a plan even, for how it actually needs to be implemented in schools and within departments. And so, by pushing out mandates without clear operational plans for implementation, it results in a lot of running around and putting out fires. And when you're putting out fires, you never have a chance to build anything.* [Central Office Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Timeliness of communication and level of preparedness that is required for advance planning (ie the Math Framework was provided to us in August, to be implemented in late August, the new units were shared with us in August, to be implemented immediately). If we are being asked, as principals, to implement new priorities, instructionally or otherwise, give us the proper planning, preparation, and [professional development] time to implement effectively.* [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More cross-departmental coordination is needed	*The other that I wanted to comment on was we had progress monitoring meetings, and these progress monitoring meetings was a time for offices across different departments to really come together and examine data, examine root causes, and as I reflect on that process, one of the things that I learned is that with every challenge we face in this organization, every office in this organization contributes to the root cause and the solution. And if we don't learn anything else from that process, I believe that that was something that was very clear to me. So while we may be looking at an academic dataset or we may be looking at some behavioral data or we may be looking at facilities data or some operational task, each and every department in this district had a role in the root cause and the solution. So I think that we need to really leverage that type of collaboration and find more authentic ways that that happens frequently… [Central Office Staff]* *I think we stay in one box by looking at assessment data alone or just a teacher survey. So we'll get teacher survey data or we'll get an assessment, and we'll use that to draw our own conclusions about root causes, but I think there's also another place or another area of data that exists that we're not also acknowledging or even examining on our instructional rounds and our walk throughs. What is happening on a day-to-day basis in the classroom and then how is that informing our improvement efforts? [Central Office Staff]* *I think it's also important to say that our organization has a long history of silos…I've been here three years – and I would say in that much time, I've seen a big change in…the commitment to that level of collaboration. I would say there's not a team that personally I'm a part of that isn't cross collaborative and involving multiple offices, but there are a lot of barriers to that here, and I think we have to be very focused. And I think the deputies really are, but we have to be very focused as an organization on continually questioning who should be at the table for any decision that's made and making sure that they are at that table… I think the barrier is that culturally and historically in the district we work in silos. This office does this, this office does this, this office does this. We know that that's very frustrating for schools, because they get sort of different messages from different offices about similar content or similar work sometimes. And so I think the people on this call and many others have been really working hard to undo that. [Central Office Staff]*

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Networks & Assistant Superintendent Leadership

- This subtopic overlapped with another topic (School Leadership). From Central Office and Assistant Superintendents, some school leaders need more support (slide 203) and accountability (slide 205), while some well-established leaders may need more autonomy (slide 204).

- This subtopic also overlapped with the subtopic on Internal Coordination & Functionality (slides 201-203).

Themes from the Topic of:
Communication & Engagement

- True community engagement is not just collecting feedback but using it and closing the feedback loop around how it was used to inform or make decisions.

- Communications from the District to families are unclear and not timely.

- Central Office is not responsive to families, as calls and emails to Central Office are sometimes not answered.

- District staff finding out important information from the news feels disrespectful.

- Stakeholders appreciate Listening and Learning Sessions and want more opportunities to be heard.

- School-based staff want Central Office leadership to spend more time visiting schools.

Communication & Engagement Subtopics

- School-Family Relationships & Communication

- Listening to, Visiting & Learning from Stakeholders

- Public Relations, Trust & Transparency

Themes from the Subtopic of:
School-Family Relationships and Communication

- Families and members of the community expressed that the way the District asks for feedback can feel performative because it is not clear whether feedback was considered when making decisions and if so, how (slide 144).

- Families lamented that important communications, often about logistical issues, are made last minute and can be unclear (slide 148). Efforts to contact someone at the District can be frustrating when calls and email are not answered (slide 149). This results in a lack of trust between families and the District.

- Stakeholders also acknowledged that a lack of trust between families and the District is often the result of their past experiences (slide 150).

- There were many comments specifically about the proposed change to school start times (slide 150).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Stakeholders want SDP to close the feedback loop	*I think the biggest challenge is when the district engages with us and with the community and there's not a tangible result that you can see, it's very hard to see that happen.* [Community Member] *Not just improving the communication, but – and not just getting feedback, but getting meaningful feedback. Not just coming, inviting people… but actually listening and employing and then explaining the decision.* [Parent/guardian] *You know, just transparency and real community involvement, not community involvement after the fact, after the decision has already been made and then showing us how you implement that or don't implement it and why.* [Community Member] *I think there's been a lot of mistrust…that's mostly come through the lack of communication. We always get stuff on the backend, and we're not given it up front. Even if we're asked through surveys, it just seems like you all are going to do whatever you want to do anyway; you just go through the motion of asking us. It's very disjointed, it's not very collaborative...* [Teacher] *We have tons of feedback meetings and stakeholder meetings. We need to make sure that we're communicating the results of the process throughout the entire system, so that everyone is clear on what was done, what were the challenges, and how we're responding to those particular efforts.* [Central Office Staff] *Not just getting feedback, but getting meaningful feedback… actually listening to it and then making a reasoned decision based on that feedback and explaining yes, we took this into consideration.* [Parent/guardian] *I think sometimes either we don't include equity of voice and various perspectives into our conversations and our decision-making process, and when we do—because there are many times that we do—we don't close the feedback loop.* [Central Office Staff*]*

For more about closing the feedback loop so that the results of feedback are communicated, see Central Office [here](#).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Communications are unclear and not timely	*I would like to talk quickly about the communication issues…. During the uncertain times, during COVID and virtual learning, coming back to school, as a parent, me and our community are looking up to communications from the district, as an employee similarly. Sometimes, the communications that came out were so cryptic. We are looking for very simple information. Will there be school in person tomorrow or is the school closing tomorrow?* [Parent/guardian]
	Now, or actually starting last year, her school start time changed to 8:15. We were not given a warning and all of the working parents started scrambling trying to figure out a way to make this 8:15 start time work to get to work in a reasonable time. [Parent/guardian]
	The bell schedule, I totally agree with you. Finding out, as a parent, my son was starting at 9:00, and that my school was starting at 7:30am, about two weeks beforehand, was really difficult for a lot of us to find childcare. [Parent/guardian]
	Another place where I feel like communication is maybe not missing, but not timely enough, is with school selection. Again, a lot of people talked about it, so again, my child is now a rising fourth grader… I'm trying to figure out what information is coming from the district. There's nothing. It's mid-August. School is starting in a few weeks. [Parent/guardian]
	Sometimes we do a lot of spinning when we make mistakes with families, with teachers, and not being truthful with them. So, then that also goes against us being trustworthy. Because they know we're not being truthful. They knew we made the decision before we came to the meeting and told them that this was happening. But yet we wanted – or we were getting their feedback. But they knew that it was already a done deal. So, I think it's just really about our communication and our consistency with our actions. [Central Office Staff]

For more about unclear and untimely decisions, see Central Office Leadership & Decision Making here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Central Office is not always responsive to families	*We signed [our daughter] up for a summer enrichment program with the school district trying to make sure that she is prepared for next year and has everything she needs, and we go up there and they tell us we're not on the list. I've been calling for days and showing them the registration email that I have, and they say, oh, that's not enough… I feel like time and time again, even when I ask for help, it's never a solution. It really doesn't matter what happened or what went wrong down the line when I come with a problem and I ask for help every time it's always, oh, well, I don't know what happened. We can't help you or we'll have somebody call you back or just some sort of runaround over and over again.* [Parent/guardian] *I shouldn't have to email 10-12 people to get resolve for a matter…There's no accountability. I'm emailing people, I'm coming to the school district, I'm taking off work. That's my daughter, it's nobody else's responsibility, but it's mine, and I will see it through…*[Parent/guardian] *The enrollment process that you go through online did not work for us…The problem was, when I tried to log on to the system to select a school, I couldn't get on. I emailed the school district, I came down to the school district, no resolve.* [Parent/guardian] *The voice of people, regular people – parents, teachers…it's very, very hard to have a good relationship with people inside the district and for parents to be able to speak up and feel like they're heard and feel validated. A lot of people have told me when they've spoken up about things…people have felt bullied or felt retaliated against.* [Parent/guardian] *What I noticed, and what I found out, and what I observed, and it hurt me, but…the Black parents tend to not to believe that they had the right to speak up, advocate for their kids. They felt other people…that look like [someone else] knew more and had the right to complain but had the right to speak up and do it. So, I would really love our new superintendent as well as the board and others who are far brighter and more intelligent than me to try to really figure out, how do we engage our Black parents, the have-nots, those in poverty, that their voice is as important as [anyone else's]. So, I'm asking you [to] really figure out what does that look like that's genuine and caring. And how do we make sure that happens?* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Families were frustrated with the changing school start times	*I've seen a lot of things go on, and these past few years have been some of the most stressful as a teacher and also as a parent. The bell schedule, I totally agree with you. Finding out, as a parent, my son was starting at 9:00, and that my school was starting at 7:30am, about two weeks beforehand, was really difficult for a lot of us to find childcare.* [Parent/guardian] *District times or school times were changed numerous times last year… Again, it's not about me. We were able to manage…But when school time changes or the start time changes from 8:30 to 9:00, or from 8:30 to 7:45, a lot of families are impacted, especially for elementary school kids. Changes like this happen without thinking about the downturn, repercussions for families with no information that is shared.* [Parent/guardian] *School communities were not consulted about what start times worked best for them & more privileged schools got better start times.* [Parent/guardian] *My two points about building trust on the parental side is the school district deciding to change the times that students go to school. They changed it the first year that we came back from COVID and now they're changing it again the second year. One, it's very hard for parents who have multiple children. When we talk about trust, how can I trust someone when you keep changing things on me every year.* [Parent/guardian]
Past relationships with the District contribute to their distrust	*It's frustrating that there is a lack of trust from the parents to the school district. But then on the other hand, it's like how can I blame them when they've been failed time and time again.* [Central Office staff] *Parents can have a sense of mistrust towards the SDP based on their own experience as students in the city.* [School Staff] *Parents will call a lawyer or the police before trying to solve problems within the district because they have so little faith that the district will actually solve their problems.* [Teacher]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Listening to, Visiting & Learning from Stakeholders

- Stakeholders appreciate the Listening and Learning Sessions and would like there to be similar opportunities moving forward (slide 152).

- School-based staff want Central Office leadership to spend more time visiting all schools in a genuine way, not just as a press event. In particular, school staff would like to see the Superintendent visit schools unannounced, especially those that are not "blue ribbon" schools (slide 153).

- Students want more opportunities to have their opinions and experiences heard and be considered in decision making (slide 154).

- This subtopic overlaps with another subtopic (School Leadership). Stakeholders believe that good school leaders value collaboration (slide 197); are visible in the school community (slide 200); are understanding and responsive (slide 201), and involve students, families, and school staff in decision-making (slide 198).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Stakeholders appreciate the Listening and Learning Sessions	*I just wanted to start by saying how much I appreciate the listening sessions, because it does truly give us teacher voice, and that's a first step to building a relationship, as you coming in as a superintendent and us as teachers. It breaks down that gateway that's always seen as superintendents are up here, teachers are here. Know your lane, know your role…I appreciate this very much. I think it is a good first step in building transparency and trust between teachers and administration.* [Teacher] *Things like this session matter a lot and make a huge difference.* [Teacher] *So, I think – thank you, Dr. Watlington, for having these listening sessions. This is a really valuable format, and I hope that it's the start of a continued and ongoing involvement with folks who have different on the ground views of whatever their department they're in because it gives a sense of nuance and understanding. It also helps us understand what other folks are doing, so that we're not getting information.* [Central Office Staff] *Thank you for taking the time to listen to us. I appreciate that and thank you Dr. Watlington for holding these meetings.* [Support Staff] *Thank you for having an open dialogue like this. This is the first major step, and that is having someone that's actually going to open the door and listen, to hear, not just do things in a vacuum.* [Parent/guardian] *I think his focus on Listening and Learning to staff, students and families *is* the first priority. It's of utmost importance to establish a relationship and trust with all stakeholders before any decisive actions are taken.* [Central Office Staff] *I appreciate the opportunity we were given today to speak with Dr. Watlington. Opening the door to communication is an excellent step as many have said we were never given the opportunity to be heard before today.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Central Office (440) leadership should spend more time visiting schools	*…it would also be nice to see…presence in schools that are not just our blue ribbon schools.* [Teacher] *I don't know if this is a part of your 100 Days or five years, or however long you're going to be with us, Dr. Watlington, but I would invite you to visit every last school in this school district. Go to all 250 schools, a personal visit during the school year, while we have students, so you can assess the needs of every last school.* [Teacher] *I think getting into schools and seeing, because every school in the district is different... definitely getting out there and showing that you do care about us in coming and visiting our schools and seeing the work that we are doing.* [Teacher] *I also think that administrators need to spend more time observing in school. I'm talking about Central Office. More time observing in schools, all of them. Not just the staged schools…* [Teacher] *So, I just think that we need to just take a look and walk around and observe some of the buildings. Take a walk through, have the people from 440 come through and do a walk through and look at the buildings.* [Support Staff] *Visit the schools. Unannounced so there is no dog and pony show. See the differences among schools and neighborhoods. See the old, crumbling buildings with no working water or a/c for yourself.* [School Staff] *Come and visit our schools. In 28 years I have seen only one superintendent at one of the schools where I worked where he came into my office and looked at my bulletin board to see what I had posted to help my students.* [School Staff] *I think that the more we get to be upfront and close with what is happening in schools, the better we are able to respond. The more we are working directly with teachers in their classrooms and engaging them in our processes, we are able to learn from their experiences and we're able to create solutions that are viable to them.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Students want more opportunities to be heard	*I don't think I had a lot of trust in the district. I didn't think it really mattered. But I think it is important to establish to a student that on every level of the administrative ladder, there's somebody that's willing to hear you out. Sometimes, as we all acknowledged earlier, principals don't do anything. That also sucks. I don't think they realize how important they are either. They're more than just administrative jobs. You can leave all of the social work to the teachers, but then if one of those teachers fails a student, which as we also established is pretty common, it's beneficial to be able to go up. I send emails to principals and vice-principals all the time – Not all the time, but frequently recently. I've not gotten any reception, even during the school year. I think the district could potentially be a very useful tool. I don't really think it's had all that much of an effect. I think that the student advisory board this year is a really good idea, I'm glad that that happened. I signed up and then could not make a single meeting.* [Student] *I was going to say basically, y'all should just do more of this. Basically, y'all should just have an environment to where people can come and talk in a circle or do certain things like give us snacks or stuff. That's all cool and stuff.* [Student] *I feel like emotionally and stuff, we should have more stuff like this. It gives people the ability to speak their mind.* [Student] *Like she was saying, listen. All you have to do is listen to me. Just listen to what I've got to— Yes, I'm going to hear you out but also hear me out as well. I feel like teachers, they should be more open with their opinion and stuff, too, because when a higher-up says, "Make a policy," it needs to be right for the situation. Talk to us as well. Set it up in their opinion as well. Because sometimes he's going to agree with some situations.* [Student] *Just having more discussions. Doing this. Doing things where we'd be able to express themselves more because I feel like y'all do enough…Y'all do a good job sometimes but you do enough of enforcing rules and stuff that I feel like we just need to be heard.* [Student]

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Public Relations, Trust & Transparency

- District staff finding out important information from the news feels disrespectful, causes distrust, and puts school-based staff in a position where they look incompetent and unprepared (slide 156).

- Families felt communication around the rollout of the School Selection process for the 2021-22 school year was not transparent and was communicated poorly (slide 157).

- Some felt that hiring external consultants undervalues or ignores the expertise that already exists in SDP (slide 158).

Public Relations, Trust & Transparency

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Finding out important information from the news decreases trust	*Communicating with the staff is essential. Don't go to media first, because we have to look at the news to know what's going on, and often social media and the media gets it before the staff that it impacts gets that information. Communication is huge, and at the top of my bucket list when it comes to everything.* [Teacher] *…oftentimes teachers are the last to know; media finds out first. I'm sure you could go onto any Facebook group when there was an announcement made prior, and you would see how angry the parents are that they're finding out last minute. Sometimes teachers get that brunt of the anger, because we're putting out the information as soon as we know, parents are angry at us; it just brings a vicious cycle with that.* [Teacher] *When our stakeholders see us, they see us as the face of the district and I think something that has led to a lot of distrust of school leaders this year has really been the communication of information and I think that has also led to challenges with distrust of school leaders and also central office staff as well. For example, we might find out the morning of something big happening. We'll find out either on the news with other stakeholders, like parents, or we will find out minutes before it's going to public and the PR team is ready to go, so that creates distrust and it makes it challenging for school leaders who are then asked to be the face and say, "Hey, go talk to your school community about these new rollouts that are happening" when we're not even able to understand what's going on.* [School Leader] *I have watched this erosion of leadership's visibility and knowledge. There's this gross disconnect between [Central Office] and building principals. The people who are put out front on their school's front porch to answer questions for their families do not get the information. The number of times that they've been usurped by the news.The number of times that parents come to them to say, what is this that [Inquirer journalist] Kristen Graham just printed? And a principal says, you got that information before I did. It blows my mind. What is going on, that there's not a definitive and well-oiled process for building principals to be the first in line for information that their families need to know from their leaders? It takes all the wind out of the sails of trust within the individual communities.* [Parent/guardian]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Stakeholders were frustrated by the roll out of the 2021-22 school selection process	*After school selection started, my trust for the school district has went down because they switched it up like that.* [Student]
	…the high school admission process. For me, I feel like I'm in the dark because of the hastily put together program announced at the very last minute, but I also feel like the results of the first year…I don't really feel that as a person from the public that I have any input on how it worked, how many kids were accepted, what kinds of services will be provided… [Parent/guardian]
	The other thing is trust. I'm sure you heard a lot about this, but the way things were rolled out last year, with just telling us on the first day that there was going to be a whole new system and then rolling it out as we were going, it often felt nativist. It felt anti-immigrant. It felt – it just wasn't explained and it was going on…All the things that parents were saying was going to be wrong, actually happened. If you just would have engaged the parents first. [Parent/guardian]
	Either you're going to have a fungible system where everybody gets in by lottery or what we were trying to do in the past that I thought was working, was getting kids into their skill set to a particular curriculum. Again, it felt like we were breaking what was working, instead of fixing what was broken. [Parent/guardian]
	I think what can make families lose trust, and staff is the way changes are rolled out. For example…we probably all agree that change was needed for a number of reasons but the way [the high school selection process] happened seemed rushed and created a whole other slew of problems with trying to have online essays scored by a computer program. [Teacher]
	…we've got to talk about how the district rolled out its changes to the high school admissions process for last year. Where essentially, there was no discussion or communication with parents beforehand. If anything, there was a fake process that happened…A fake survey was conducted. The results of it, the district went ahead with the least favorite option for changing the process of admissions to the high schools, and announced a new process, I think the day before applications were due that year, which left thousands of parents, I think, really feeling like they'd been utterly cut out of the process. [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Hiring external consultants undervalues or ignores the expertise that already exists in SDP	*You undermined a lot of goodwill and trust with your expensive hiring of an outside firm with lots of baggage. And your transition team lacks educators in a way that is really disappointing. Unless you are genuinely partnering with your school-based educators -- not just inviting them to occasional listening sessions but actually empowering and partnering with them in an ongoing way, throughout the structures of your administration -- then your decisions, however well-intentioned, will be both under-informed and lack necessary buy-in to lead to successful implementation, and you will add to the feelings of disrespect that drive teachers out of the profession.* [School Staff] *Be honest and not misleading. This $450k consultant outlay, and who it's going to, was not transparent. No open listening sessions for staff is not transparent. Teachers may be admin's biggest critics but only because we're your biggest asset, and we've seen it all.* [School Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Spending on consultants rather than trusting expertise of people in the district and developing leadership.* [School Staff] *[The top priority should be] Utilizing the individuals with expertise and supports that are already employed by the SDP, within the schools and [Central Office]. The rest of the transition team should be identified, rather than only two individuals. Although the recent email cited that there are two individuals with knowledge of Philadelphia, we would want to know who they, and the remaining individuals are, and if they are actual district employees with first-hand knowledge/experience or simply stakeholders that live in the city. This is the only way to build trust with the parents, employees, and communities. Building trust should be the first priority because it does not exist for many currently.* [School Staff] *…why do we need to spend 450 thousand dollars for an outside consulting firm to come in and to tell us what we need in Philadelphia schools? We have neighbors here that are very well educated and very well qualified to tell you exactly what we need and what has worked in the past.…*[Community Member]

Themes from the Topic of:
Facilities

- There were many concerns about the building age and slow remediation of asbestos and lead.

- Stakeholders say we need to reconsider processes for responding to large and small-scale work orders and planning for capital projects. Clarity and transparency is needed about how projects get prioritized and who to contact for issues.

- Stakeholders see a link between building conditions and equity, climate, and staff morale. Teachers described how facilities issues impede teaching and learning.

- School leaders spend too much time on facilities issues, which detracts from other important tasks.

- Updates to keys, doors, locks, and cameras are urgently needed.

Facilities Subtopics

- Capital & Environmental Investments

- Cleanliness & Maintenance

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Capital & Environmental Investments

- Stakeholders are deeply concerned that lead and asbestos remediation is not happening fast enough (slide 162).

- In many cases, buildings need to be air conditioned and electrical upgrades are necessary (slide 163).

- Building age impacts teaching and learning. SDP should upgrade and make better use of existing facilities (e.g., pools), wherever feasible (slide 164).

- Building age and condition is linked to safety from intruders and active shooters; SDP needs to upgrade classroom and external doors and door locks, fix broken cameras, and teachers should have keys to their classrooms (slide 165).

- Stakeholders want better planning and transparency around capital projects (slide 166).

- District staff feel that the work order processes for facilities issues are confusing and inefficient (slide 167).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Stakeholders are deeply concerned about lead and asbestos	*… I think it's really important that part of our students being able to feel safe is having facilities that are safe for them. And schools need to be free of asbestos. They need to be free of lead paint. They need to have functional air conditioning and not just the little air purifiers that they put in our classrooms and say, oh, you're OK, you're good…and I know that the district has started something with the facilities planning whatever process which seems really big and really confusing and hasn't really been explained well to anybody at the school level. But I've seen facilities initiatives before, and nothing has ever come of them…But I just hope that facilities is something that is going to be a priority moving forward. And I know that that's capital, and that's difficult to do. But it needs to be a priority.* [Teacher] *Common theme; everybody has something in their building that's definitely not working, and I know we do have some issue with asbestos in our building. It's not fun to be in a building working and you don't know if you're slowly killing yourself being in there. It's always a concern, what am I being exposed to? There are certain times in our building that the hallway on the third floor has this strong smell that nobody knows where it's coming from. It's an old building, yes, but that's still no excuse, because nobody wants to be working in an environment where they can potentially get sick.* [Teacher] *[The top priority should be to]…re-examine the budget and find the funds to make all school environments safe for all students by providing an environment that is free of asbestos and lead paint and provides air conditioning so that students can learn.* [School Staff] *At [my school] we had the asbestos issues. Staff and students brought up their concerns while construction was ongoing and 440 practically ignored us despite multiple staff and students being impacted by the construction. It wasn't until another school joined our building while we were still exposed to asbestos that the district did anything to help us.* [Teacher] *I would say that toxic schools is something that should be at the top of the list because nobody's child should have to go into a school that has asbestos, lead, mold or any of—rodents, rodent droppings which so many of our schools are still struggling with. I think resources need to go to making our schools completely healthy and that has to happen asap.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Air conditioning is needed in every classroom; electrical upgrades are necessary	*[What needs improvement is that there should be] No mold, lead, or asbestos. Safe drinking water. Updated electric panels and air conditioning for optimal student learning.* [Parent/guardian] *The schools, mostly it do not have air conditioning, so the students are sweating and just barely even to the point where is it humane? So, if we can't even treat them with that basic level of humanity, it's hard to have any trust for anything big at all.* [Parent/guardian] *…we don't have air conditioning and our electricity needs to be severely upgraded. You know what happens? We turn the lights out. If you have a fan, you run a fan; the windows are open. You have to turn the lights out because you can't run a fan and have all the computers running at the same time, because then that's a shortage. Then the electricity goes out and the whole floor goes black.* [Teacher] *Due to the scarce funding, some parts of the building will receive improvements, while another floor, grade group or part of the building will have to wait until the next year's budget. Unfortunately, something else occurs and the purchase or improvement is put on hold for another year. For example, only part of a school has air conditioner units installed. Some staff members and students are working in cool environments on hot days, while others are suffering through the heat.* [School Staff] *Buildings need to be upgraded - every school should be air-conditioned. Can't teach or learn in 90 degrees of heat.* [School Staff] *We have window units for some of our fourth floor classrooms because they were reaching over 100 degrees on hot days, but…they're not maintained; they were through a donation. We had to upgrade some of the electrical. A teacher turned hers on in June and got electrocuted. We still have two prong outlets in our school, and it's up to us to go buy the adapters, so we have adapters.* [Teacher] *I think the air conditioning. You know how on a hot summer's day you want a cold drink, glass of water or whatever. It's cold and fresh, and stuff. I think even in the winter cold equals fresh, and when I'm cold I am able to take more in and learn more I think. But when I'm hot I just can't pay attention. Better air conditioning and stuff.* [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Need to update old buildings and make better use of existing facilities	*But our building is almost 110 years old. It's dark, it's dingy, it's dirty. We do the best we can to try and brighten it and make it OK for kids, but the reality is no child should go to school in this building. It's completely infested with mice, as I know so many schools in Philly are, so that's not new. But they shouldn't have to deal with that.* [Teacher]
	REBUILD old schools - I realize the cost involved in such an endeavor but it is less expensive than trying to maintain 100+ year old buildings. AND it is the right thing to do for the children. [School Staff]
	The [School District] needs to take care of its aging buildings. We do not have a gym… [School Staff]
	…old buildings are not up code to provide the wifi for the 21 century learner. And of course these old buildings don't accommodate the disable students, staff and school community. [School Staff]
	In my classroom there are 2 useless blackboards… I would hope that the budget provides something to update our older classrooms with these basics… [School Staff]
	Something I don't like about the school sometimes is sometimes the ceilings look like they're about to collapse. [Student]
	I'm up here for two primary reasons, first of which is the [swimming] pool issue….It seems to be such low hanging fruit to have something that's already there, already built, already generating cost. There's a PECO bill, there's a meter spinning right now down there, whether there's water in that pool or not… The costs are already there. The costs are already sunk. Why not get the benefit of this building that's already there? No one suggested to start from scratch and go to the bajillions of dollars it takes to build from scratch. But just to use the resources that are already there. When all these things happen, violence and what have you, everyone's very quick to throw out thoughts and prayers, thoughts and prayers…At the same time, if there's a way that you can have this building up and running, a brick building where kids can be inside and safe, and learning and thriving, and benefiting from this amenity that's already sitting there, it would seem there's more to be lost by not fixing it, not making it functional… [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Keys, doors, locks, and cameras should be present and functional in every school	*Teachers should not have to beg for keys for their classrooms…* [Teacher]
	… Only 7 of the classrooms received a brand-new door, and these are the sturdy doors with just the one center pane of window while the other classroom doors are remaining with — they're very old with 9 or 12 panes of glass. In light of the recent shooting in Texas and in the school, it has been a big concern now for staff members about, if an active shooter makes its way into the building, how are we protecting our staff and students with these panes of glass in our doors? Because they could easily just kick them in or break through…it was not a rhyme or reason, and I couldn't really get a definitive answer as to why only 7 or 9 of the doors were replaced… [School Leader]
	One thing that I really struggled with specifically after Uvalde was this idea that if we had an active shooter in the building, we don't have a lock inside the door. So, that means, if I need to secure my door, I need to open my door, get my key out, put it in, turn it, and I mean, I struggle on a normal day, having that done. And if I was in a high stress situation, that seems against protocol to me that I have to open my door in order to secure it. [Teacher]
	I am in…a building where I have currently still one of my recess doors with a bullet hole in it from a shooting and a murder that happened outside of my grounds. No cameras were able to be used to identify and support Philadelphia police because our cameras don't work… I think that it's so important for us to have our cameras working, all of our schools staffed with school safety officers, climate managers and working camera systems…having those things in place and doors that lock is just the beginning. [School Leader]
	But at a foundational level, we don't really have the illusion of safety. So, at many of our schools they have cameras who are not working. They have multiple entry points that are not monitored because they don't have enough staff. Or even when the secretary goes on lunch and somebody has to cover the front door, they don't have that. And so, at a foundational level, we're not really monitoring who comes in and out of buildings at all schools. And we really don't have the equipment functioning to be able to even create the illusion of safety at a foundational level. [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Information about the current state of facilities and facilities planning is outdated and hard to understand	*Facilities inspection, whatever, those reports are from years ago. They're not current. Even the health of schools that you have measured is now years ago. That also gives cause for concern.* [Parent/guardian] *The school facilities website has fancy UI but is really difficult to get meaningful information. For example there is no way to get the list of all schools ranked by WCS (weighted combined facilities condition and educational suitability score) or FCA (facilities condition) scores. …This is yet another example of trying to pit parents from different schools against each other as opposed to work towards a common goal of betterment of all kids in Philadelphia.* [Parent/guardian] *Absolutely no transparency around building conditions. I can [audio cuts out] the district and say, "When was the last time there was asbestos testing in this particular classroom? Do you have the results of whether it was safe after the mitigation work that was done, abatement work that was done?" …As taxpayers who send our kids to a public school, I think these answers should be available to the public….The best way to manage it is to be honest with parents.* [Parent/guardian] *There was a lot of omissions, or lack of information, or sometimes straight up lying it felt like about the state of the facilities and what was going on…We understand the state of the facilities, the state of the schools, the enormity of the job that it is to run the Philadelphia School District after decades upon decades of underfunding, and lack of support, and parents leaving, and everything else. If you're honest with us, we're not going to expect you to solve all of these problems right away, but let's work together on them.* [Parent/guardian] *The district came out with this facilities plan, this big study with an interactive map where you could look at your schools and see what the findings were regarding the quality of the spaces and the utilization of the schools. We surveyed our speech-language pathologists, and we found that most of…those tiny spaces that we work in were not included in the facilities planning study. We're very concerned that schools are identified as underutilized on that study, but that's even when we don't have adequate spaces for the students, we're being told there's no space. Speech therapists are seeing kids in hallways and the school is being identified as underutilized.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There is a lack of transparent communication around capital project planning and work order processes	*The facilities plans and the way that the maintenance is rolled out, I don't understand why things feel so disorganized…We have been advocating, asking, pushing, fighting, planning for…facilities' issues and it's been crickets. Then all of a sudden, it's like we can do this and then you have to say yes, even if it's not a good time. [As a result of a rushed process,] it was difficult to communicate with parents. It put our school leadership in a position where they were caught flat footed. We couldn't plan. We couldn't prepare. It felt like people at [Central Office] were not talking to each other. … It was very reactionary, as opposed to being – feeling like there was this foresight and thoughtfulness where we could engage school leadership and community members to make this a really good thing. Facilities planning, I think is an issue that is – needs significant attention. Not just the work that needs to be done, but how those work orders get organized and planned…It just feels like is anybody talking each other? [School leader]* *This spring I have spent countless hours trying to get the system fixed and running. There was a lack of knowledge from district staff as to how the system works. When one of the sub contractors came back last week to fix the system they had many questions as to why work had been done in the way it was for the system to work effectively. Lowest bids are not always the best and create issues for us a building leaders that takes us away from the work of engaging with our students and teachers. [School Leader]* *With a huge capital project, people are – somehow information is not being shared. I think that the engagement process is fine, but what I'm seeing is whatever is getting – whatever information is getting shared or received, there's these breaks in the chain. People aren't understanding what's happening, when it's happening or why it's happening. [Parent/guardian]* *We started off with a plan to get our school renovated…And then it came to the point where we were getting ready to go back to school. And we had no bathrooms….We had to move our children the day before school starts to another building…I think a little bit more of consideration needs to happen. And the more than that, I think they just need to be truthful with us parents…. We have things that are falling apart. And we have kids in that room that have asthma. That shouldn't be. So, be truthful with the parents. [Community Member]*

Themes from the Subtopic of:
Cleanliness & Maintenance

- A lack of cleanliness and basic supplies to maintain cleanliness and hygiene are a major challenge in schools (slide 169).

- Major maintenance issues are not dealt with easily and in a timely and transparent manner. Processes around work orders and contacting facilities are not clear (slide 170).

- Teachers must clean (slide 171), which takes away time spent planning, grading, etc. Principals spend too much time on facilities-related issues (slide 172).

- There are not enough or inconsistent cleaning staff. Staff are doing the best they can, but are spread too thin (slide 173).

- Stakeholders explained how building conditions impact health issues (slide 174) and staff morale (slide 175).

- Equity in facilities overlaps with another subtopic (DEI, slide 195).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There is a lack of basic sanitation supplies, services, and facilities	*…this spring my building had no soap in any bathroom. This would be inexcusable before COVID, but truly atrocious during a global pandemic. As the saying goes "Maslow before Bloom." We cannot teach if the basic needs are being met.* [Teacher]
	Because our building's only 16 years old, and the second floor boys bathroom has no running water. The kids have to use hand sanitizer. And it's routinely locked because they can't – the water just shuts off even for the urinals. [Teacher]
	We are always out of toilet paper and paper towels and not have been cleaned. [Teacher]
	Facilities is just—it's awful. I'm sorry. I can't get masks, I can't get toilet paper, I can't get paper towels. We need the minimum and we can't get that. [School Leader]
	…things that are just like no-brainer things, like doors on stalls and restrooms, smells in the building, plumbing. [School Leader]
	Facilities and deep cleaning are major challenges in schools. This includes the waste management companies that do not pick up trash on delivery days, allow dumpsters to become full to overflowing for weeks. [School Leader]
	So the boys' restroom is never usually clean. Like on the percent chance that it is clean there's one soap dispenser, and sometimes people tear off the thing you press to get the soap. Then you just have to hope there's hand sanitizer nearby to clean your hands after you finish your business. [Student]
	soap dispensers are also sometimes missing. There aren't paper towels sometimes, and then sometimes the sinks don't work. [Student]
	…the stairwell that goes to the gym, it smelled like a dumpster a few days ago. [Student]
	I would say, for the most part, yes, like the former person said, we do enjoy going to school and things like that and I think the main thing at our school is cleanliness. [Student]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Work order processes, timing, and prioritization are not clear to school-based staff	*In regards to facilities, I do a biweekly building walk to check for things that need work orders, purchase orders, etcetera. The problem is we're doing it and at a point we stop doing it because the building engineer will put the work order in, but things never got fixed or it was a capital project, and that's a whole other process. You can have these systems in place, but if there is no follow through, it doesn't really matter.* [School Leader] *…there was a leak. Big leak. We lost several of the tiles on the inside. They were still there at the end of the school year. That's about two weeks. Why can't it get repaired relatively quickly? … mold, water damage…rooms were flooded earlier in the year. They weren't able to get them dried out for over a week in one case.* [Teacher] *How long does/should it take for the playground area on school grounds take to be repaired? I submitted an email approximately 3 years ago.* [Support Staff] *One of the things is as simple as grass not being cut, walls not being painted, lights not working…that shouldn't be what kids see. Something as simple as getting a building painted or getting a door painted takes so much red tape that is literally ridiculous to the point where if you don't do it yourself, it doesn't get done.* [School Leader] *Then we have these issues that you don't see when you first walk into the building or even walking in the hallways. Our staff bathroom on the third floor, if someone is on the fourth floor…The sewage leaks down to the third floor. Our building engineer…He comes, does an assessment, but some things [he] has to put in a work order for, from the district. This same bathroom, somebody came out, another engineer came out, but then it still wasn't fixed. Where did you go? What happened? Facilities is an issue.* [Teacher] *As far as facilities, I have found it very difficult to navigate and get things like toilets that are cracked and sinks that look like they've been from the original building. When I ask for updates and things like that, it's, "If it's not broke, we're not going to fix it." But if it's from 1920, maybe we should…You want it to be a place where kids want to come. You want the bathrooms to be clean, but you also want them to be functional and look like a place that I would want to go to the bathroom.* [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Teachers must clean and provide basic supplies	*…the main factor a lot of times is that affects the climate of the staff, affects the climate of the building is just the conditions of the facility…I do prep work at home but one of the things I don't always take into consideration is the cleaning that I have to do. I'm a kindergarten teacher and I have bathrooms in my room. There's no reason why a kindergartener should have to go into a dirty bathroom on a continuous basis. Then it's excuse after excuse…This person is out, we don't have this staff. I've been in the district for, this will be my 23rd year in the district and it gets old. So I think one of the priorities should be our facilities. The kindergarten children shouldn't have to sit on a dirty carpet. They shouldn't have to work in a space where they're seeing mice and rodents and roaches running around their classroom. It should be a safe place and part of being a safe place is being clean and healthy.* [Teacher] *There were a lot of inconsistencies as far as staffing and daily cleaning. A lot of times the bathrooms were not cleaned. We ended up – teachers and support staff had to clean our own bathrooms – student bathrooms and things being fixed.* [Teacher] *I shouldn't have to supply my own toilet paper or hand soap for my class or others that need it.* [Teacher] *I personally go in my classroom every day early because I know I have to sweep my floors. I know I have to Lysol my desks. I know I have to wipe up all around the classroom, because it's not done. We have plenty of staff in the building, but you go into the women's room, there's no toilet paper. You go to wash your hand, there's no soap. There's people sitting all over the building on their cellphones and hiding in rooms, where the facilities are absolutely unimaginable.* [Teacher] *The building I work in is never clean. Not even a little bit. Teachers clean, sweep, vacuum, wipe things down or they don't and it's disgusting.* [School Staff] *Most teachers at some point have to clean their own classroom. Classrooms and schools are infested with mice and roaches and are not thoroughly clean on a daily basis. I am sure the Superintendent's office is not in the same condition.* [School Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School leaders spend too much time dealing with facilities issues	*I think a really good next step would be—this is my personal perspective—a better understanding of the relationship between the principal and all other facility-related staff and what that dynamic looks like. What I mean by that, essentially, is I leverage my relationships in order to get things done…but it's a lot of nuancing, a lot of relationship building, which is important, but I do feel there just needs to be a clearer picture of, as a building principal, what is my responsibility and role with the FAC [Facilities Area Coordinator], with the building engineer, with the staffing and then making sure that all the pieces are working together effectively.* [School Leader] *We do have to spend, many of us, a fair amount of time during the day on facilities issues. Many of us have beautiful buildings but they are old and they require a lot of maintenance and sometimes it can take months or years for certain work orders to be completed and many of these work orders have an impact on our leadership and the time that we have to spend…* [School Leader] *I feel like we're often managing facilities and it takes up time. We're — I clean as well in the morning, just — masks or whatever the issues are, to even just start our day in a welcoming kind of manner for kids. Our bathrooms, I think in most city schools, are in really poor condition. The children don't want to use them.* [School Leader] *When I found out the third [building engineer this year] was leaving, at this point, it was like, I give up...I want to say that I want to continue to have high expectations for facilities because it is such an important piece, but it becomes really tiring, because we can't focus on everything.* [School Leader] *Facilities management consumes far too much time and mental energy.* [School Leader] *You have to spend your day looking for your [General Cleaner] , the [Building Engineer] doesn't hold cleaners accountable, they are not vested in the exterior grounds of the building as in other schools and our students deserve a clean facility.* [School Leader] *I feel like we're often managing facilities and it takes up time. We're — I clean as well in the morning…* [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Facilities understaffing & lack of supervision causes sanitation issues to go unresolved	*…my last school was a very old building, and we didn't have a building engineer. What I was told is basically that building engineers don't want to come to really big old schools because they're hard. That makes sense. But then we need a different way to incentivize people going to those schools because obviously the giant old buildings are the ones that need the building engineer the most. So what ended up happening was kind of a mix of cleaners in the building kind of hodgepodging together to try and fill that void…As a result for the entire year there is at least one of two bathroom stalls and the bathroom closest to us was out of commission. Obviously, that takes away from learning, and there's just no way to do literally anything academically if kids can't use a safe and functioning bathroom.* [Teacher] *I've watched building engineers in 23 years not fix a thing, not lift a thing, because of problems they were getting from people above them. Not necessarily their fault. A lot of them were good guys, or ladies, but they were just frustrated as well…I think it's a lack of people they have as well. They're having staffing issues.* [Teacher] *…when it came to our cleaning staff, we didn't have a consistent [building engineer]. We were getting substitutes, we would have one, then they would get pulled, they would have to go somewhere else, so some of the cleaning fell through. That causes an issue when it comes to COVID and everything else, because things weren't being maintained as they should. The one or two persons that was there did the best that they could, but that also became an issue.* [Teacher] *There is no system to replace a building engineer if the person is out on a long-term illness.* [School Leader] *Oftentimes, we're understaffed, so I have a very large building. If I have a call out of one or two staff members, their priority is to do trash and bathrooms. And this building is too large to only have trash and bathrooms done on a daily basis. So that is definitely an issue within the school.* [School Leader] *In the schools facilities are not cleaning the classrooms properly according to their contracts and…the principals are not holding them accountable…During the school year the classroom floors are not mopped daily which is not very sanitary.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Lack of cleanliness worsens asthma and other health issues	You got children coming into the building with different illnesses…and going into some of these buildings is not making it any better. You wonder why attendance of the children is low for some… is because in the buildings that they're in, they're not kept up, they're not clean, there rodents running all around, dropping feces everywhere and this stuff causes irritants to children with asthma and any other disease. I know I walked in a building one day and I had to go back out because my chest got so tight I couldn't stay in there. [Community Member] It's completely infested with mice, as I know so many schools in Philly are, so that's not new. But they shouldn't have to deal with that…So many teachers have chronic sinus infections. We know that there's mold and asbestos issues in our school. [Teacher] I want to raise up again this facilities issue. We work in a lot of schools. I've been in a lot of schools, I've seen the issues, they are obvious. The fact that our children and our teachers are in these buildings every day is terrifying… my asthma has never been worse than the six months that I worked in that building and that was six months. Our teachers, our students are in these buildings for years and years. They deserve better, it is the most unjust thing that our facilities are in this condition. I know funding is hard, but we need to do whatever we can to put our babies, to put our children and our teachers into a safe space. [Community Member] I came from industry, I'm an environmental consultant, so I know more than the average person about asbestos, and I worry about that in my own classroom, when I see the plaster crumbling, when I see the pipe insulation a little damaged… It's not good, considering we've already had instances of teachers coming down with mesothelioma in this district.[Teacher] I love my school, I truly do. I am very grateful to be there every day. But walking into roaches on a sticky pad every morning and having students ask me if I'm starting a bug collection, having mice in and out of my drawers, my closets, and things like that is just not – It's not an easy work environment. Mentally…It messes with my head and it's not healthy for the kids. Look at the studies on roaches and how they affect kids with asthma, of which we have many. It is not good for these children to be exposed to it. [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Cleanliness issues have equity implications and impact student and staff morale	*…workspace, facilities planning. It really impacts how staff feel in terms of doing their job, if they have a good working space.* [Teacher] *The deplorable conditions are an in your face message to the students that you are not worthy of a nice school…Our students deserve better than dirty and neglected school facilities.* [School Staff] *And one of the other things that teachers are dealing with is safety and building conditions. Teachers have to feel safe when they come in the buildings. And also, they should go to a building that's not making them sick.* [Teacher] *When I say climate, I'm not just talking about the behaviors of the children, the actual climate that we're living in without air conditioning, without healthy air…It's heartbreaking for the children and it beats us down, it really does.* [Teacher] *The quality of the facilities and the sort of spaces that we are putting kids and especially our children, that are not safe and not humane… Really, it's not ok the conditions that our kids are learning in…and it's completely demoralizing. The kids feel it. The teachers feel it. I think that is such low hanging fruit. Create spaces that are worthy of our kids.* [Community Member] *…the district's priority is equity. And our buildings are for shame…when somebody mentioned lowering expectations, I go through the day every day at my school and just go, as do the students, they go, this is what we're living in. This is where we're trying to learn in. And we try to overlook it every single day. Plumbing issues. Leaks from the roof…all the concrete is broken, the asphalt and everything.* [Teacher] *Dust and grime build up is extremely unhealthy and contributes to a setting that is depressing…* [School Staff] *facilities must be updated in EVERY school. When our space does not reflect the quality work that we are asking from our students, the only message they receive from the district and the city is that they don't matter. Every child deserves to learn in a safe, clean, and modern space.* [School Staff]

Themes from the Topic of:
Funding & Resource Distribution

- Teachers and other school staff have highlighted how class sizes and caseloads have reached unmanageable levels, sometimes beyond national standards and frequently worsened by staff absences and lack of substitutes.

- Budget limitations force principals to choose between essential positions. The "leveling" process is a major disruption for schools.

- Consistency and predictability in the budgeting process is needed for school planning. More stakeholder input and advocacy is needed.

- Coordination between community partners and schools can be improved, both to increase resources that non-profit organizations can provide, and to more equitably direct those resources to schools that need them.

- Coordination with charter schools could be improved.

- Some participants pointed out the academic and social-emotional value of libraries and librarians, noting that most have school library programs have been cut in recent years.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Staffing ratios of certain positions should be revisited	*…assigning and saying there's a certain ratio of social workers to students…I don't think necessarily a student ratio is the best way to determine that. I think about… the student population at [at my school]. 50% of the students have special ed learning plans and then, at the same time our community is economically disadvantaged, and I think about all of that adding up to – we could very much use more than let's say the two social workers that student ratio says we should have, based on the [number] kids that are at our school, but our student population would greatly benefit from having more access…and so I think thinking about the way that we assign social workers and counselors to support should be based more on…the needs of the school [population] versus saying the general ratio.* [Teacher] *…we have struggled with for a long time as the district is adequately supplying schools with enough special education teachers so that we can adequately engage with special education students in the general education core. The way we fund schools…The state will say, a teacher who is a learning support teacher whose supplemental – teaching supplemental, they're going to have 20 students on their caseload and going to provide 20 [Individual Education Plans]. But if I'm their teacher and I have 20 students, and I'm – those 20 students can be spread out across four grades, maybe six to eight teachers or more, which greatly limits my ability than to go into the classroom and provide support in the general education core.* [Teacher] *The ratios for the number of special education teacher to students needs to be re-evaluated. In a K-8 school, there is no consideration about how difficult it is to schedule. There's a team of people whose sole job is to oversee litigation, but we don't have the number of people we need to avoid litigation.* [School Leader]

For more about how additional support staff are needed to meet students' socioemotional needs, see School Safety & Climate here.
For more about how staffing levels are not adequate for meeting Special Education needs, see Academics here and here.
For more about how additional teaching staff are needed for creating lower class sizes, see Staffing here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School leaders face difficult budgeting choices	*I've been at the budget table on several years, trying to make a decision between purchasing an individual to keep my students safe versus an individual to teach my children how to read. Oftentimes, you're just forced to make that decision. Or maybe if I spend a little less on this individual, I can buy both, but then there's a talent or a staffing concern with the training and the expertise that people have that are in this category. I'm really just summing up what both my colleagues said before me and how sad that is, to have to sit at that table, because oftentimes, leaders in districts that perform don't have to make those kind of decisions. They're able to have both for their kids.* [School Leader] *Staffing—I have $15,000 left for next year to run the entire building because I had to buy key personnel, specifically as it relates to [English Learners] and special education. There's a formula that goes into giving schools the number of [English Learner] or special ed staff teachers. To run a K-5 or K-8 school, that formula does not work to implement a good instructional program. I have to buy the extra personnel, and then that's held against you the following year, because you made it work, so you're not going to get any more people the next year. That really is frustrating.* [School Leader] *Enrollment-driven budgets work [only] if our enrollment projections are correct. Most schools' enrollment projections were a lot less than the number of students who actually attended in the previous year. As a result, we lose teachers, beg for them back, and cause them and students to be emotionally distraught. Consistency is lost. Our well being is definitely threatened.* [School Leader] *Some barriers to what we're doing at our school, the number one barrier this year has been the budget cuts. We were finally, finally seeing academic progress in both—shoutout to middle school math, because that's me—we were finally seeing progress in math and [English Language Arts], and then we got the news that one-third of our staff was being cut.* [Teacher]

For more about how the "leveling" process disrupts key relationships, see Vacancies and Allocation of Staff <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
All schools should have certain positions	*…financially we should not have to juggle for a teacher leader in some school and others have multiple instructional supports. Every school should have an assistant principal and a climate manager.* [School Leader] *In a building that is overcrowded and have to use I shouldn't have to choose between a climate manager and an assistant principal when I have no police officer.* [School Leader] *In order for us to feel a little more safe, we need more school resource officers…My school had a lot of shootings around the school, even dealing with some of the parents were involved in the shootings this year.* [School Leader] *[What needs improvement is]…permanent positions in every building including a Special Education Compliance Monitor, Counselor, Nurse, Dean of Students for Climate, School Based Teacher Lead (SBTL), and Social Worker.* [School Staff] *[What needs improvement is] Smaller class sizes, librarians, math and reading specialist in every school.* [School Staff] *Every school needs to have a full time School Counselor, School Nurse, School Psychologist and Climate Manager. Needs that occur every year with attendance, behaviors, crisis, homelessness, [special education and English Learner] children are being assigned to staff that still have their assigned full time jobs that need to be done. The result ends up being that things are not addressed as well as they should be.* [School Staff] *I've been lucky enough for the past six years to be a reading specialist at my school not because a reading specialist is allotted in the budget, like it would be at every suburban district in every suburban school, but because I had a principal who was really good with the budget and figured out ways to fit me in. That's ended. He's gone and my position was cut.* [Teacher]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
More stakeholder input is needed for equity in school budgets	*I think that one of the things that I've noticed over the past, and I've been on my school's building committee…is just lack of clarity of how the budgets are decided and how budgets are allocated. There needs to be clarity within a school community of how the numbers come – right now, it seems like numbers come down from on high. And this is the amount of money you get as a school. And then it's a magical black box. And then, it spits out something and the principal says, this is what we have to spend. And so, I think it would be really helpful for just all of our teachers to know where do the budget numbers come from, how are funds allocated per school, and then allowing schools a little bit more flexibility to determine how they can use their budgets. There are – some schools need a lot of physical equipment or capital equipment and may not need as much for EC. Or some schools may want to be able to use money for EC and for extracurricular activities, giving principals the option, the opportunity to have that flexibility… it should not just be the principal's decision autonomously…if you're going to move money around, it needs to be a school community decision. There just needs to be more clarification and clarity on how budget decisions are made, and there needs to be more community input on budget decisions at the school level.* [Teacher] *I just wish we had more input to what was purchased. We have a lot of programs, a lot, so many that some can't get used properly. At what point do we keep throwing more fuel to the fire? I think we just need to take a step back and, again, each school needs to be individualized. It needs to be looked at. What do they need the most?* [Teacher] *So I think the budget is aligned to numbers and sometimes, it doesn't really say what you need as a school. So you're using dollars that are allocated to you to make it work the best way that we can, when some schools might need some more from instructional lifts. Some schools might need more of a climate lift, and then we're made to defend it. So I have to use this little bit of money that you're giving me and defend it and say that this money is going to help me keep scholars educated as well as safe. And I think that's unfair to take a one-size-all-fit approach if the size is 30 or 33 in each class. And we all know that this is like a Philadelphia formula and how they decide to give us funding, but it's not really individualized. It's like you have this operational budget and we're giving you this, and then you have these other monies, and you'll figure it out. And so then we're stuck, scrambling to be accountable for climate and instruction.* [School Leader]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Consistency and predictability are needed to make informed decisions about budgeting	*Financial stability, the district clearly has issues with this. I have seen firsthand practices that the district employs in their financial management that don't make any sense. We had this influx of recovery money. It was like a free for all. We had two weeks to figure out how we would spend all this money. That is the worst way to make financial choices and to make financial decisions. Every year, in our neighborhood school, we are frantically figuring out how to spend all the extra money, if there's any extra money before the end of the school year, because if we don't spend it, we lose it. Again, that is not the way to make thoughtful informed decisions. There are things that, as a school, we actually like to do, but we can't, because of the way that budgets are restricted…There's a financial practices that promotes stability that go beyond just state funding, which is a significant problem.* [Parent/guardian] *And so, that lack of consistency in personnel, the lack of consistency in decision-making leads to people not believing that what we say we're going to do is actually what we're going to do... So, we have no human resource to back up the support we say we're offering. And we have no fiscal resource. We have literally no fiscal resource to put into schools once we make commitments.* [Central Office Staff]
Advocating for more and fair funding is important	*I think that we are facing huge issues, huge funding issues. It's been going for decades if not longer, and the only way we're going to get anywhere is to work together to prioritize and to advocate working with other districts throughout the state who have similar funding issues. We need a huge coalition of people to advocate for better funding and more equitable funding.* [Parent/guardian] *…[we] don't have the ability to raise our own taxes, we're at the mercy of the state and the city. Your relationship with the city council, the mayor and city legislatures is paramount to the finances of the district. Until there's a fair funding formula that comes out of this commonwealth that gives us our fair share based on the population of kids we serve, it's always going to be political…the fact of the matter is that our finances are completely and totally dependent on relationship building with state legislatures, and with the city, and city council who pass their budgets around how they want to fund public education.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Budgets should align with our shared strategic goals and priorities	*[W]hen we think about how budgets are done and resources are aligned, do we feel that – there's the budgets and resources, and then there's also the message of we care about student achievement and student success. Do you feel that those two are actually in alignment with where the budget is allocated, where resources are allocated?* [Community Member] *I was actually going to suggest that we may need to take a closer look at the way we spend money in general as a district, really auditing and streamlining, so that we might evaluate where there's opportunities, even without the ARPA funds, even before COVID, where there might be opportunities to utilize funds more strategically and effectively.* [Central Office Staff] *People outside of the city don't even believe what they hear, that there's not air conditioning in buildings when it's 95 degrees outside, that there's libraries in 7 of over 200 buildings, that every year in October, [teachers] who have already spent time building relationships with students…find out that [they] are getting sent across the city with no warning. None of that should be right and fixing those things should be the first priority of the budget, not what's the shiny new programs, what's the shiny new adaptive learning, what's the new tech, what's this, what's that…We're not setting our priorities.* [Community Member] *I will say that it's a puzzle to understand whether or not, how much we are aligned if we have needs in the area of reading and we can't budget for a reading specialist….It doesn't feel like we're super aligned at all times.* [Teacher] *I think one of the things I look at my principal with the most respect for is that when the budget comes, she always invests in us as resources as teachers, so she would always rather see funding be put to maintain a teacher, or to make a position for a teacher. I think the district needs to do the same in that aspect, is to invest in their teachers.* [Teacher] *[My] school last made [Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)] in 2009, that was the last year that we had reading intervention utilizing 2 reading specialists. From 2010 until this year we had absolutely no reading intervention, in a Title I school!!! How does that happen?* [Teacher] *If it's not in the budget, it's not in your priorities.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Community partnerships are a key way to bring in more resources	*I would say one thing that is really going really well is the strategic partnerships. This year has been, and past years too for a while, but this year has been so stellar at bringing together the non-profit sector and helping us to collaborate and share resources and stuff. I think their use of data has been incredible, their convening has been really awesome.* [Community Member] *What I do think, to address all of the points that have been made so far, is that the community schools project that was started a few years ago, where you wanted to include a lot of supportive services within the schools, so that you could capture parents and meet needs of parents is a wonderful idea. I'd like to know what Dr. Watlington's plan is to not only enhance the schools that already have those community – what they call communities in schools services, but also to expand that. Because I am a firm believer, and I don't think there's anything anyone can say to me about this otherwise, is that unless you can get to the parents of these children who are also in distress, which is why they can't parent children well, they're not meeting the needs of their children at home. Until you can get to those parents, you're going to continue to see a lot of troubled children coming into the schools, acting out, falling asleep, being destructive, and the teachers cannot and should not be expected to be a social worker, a nursemaid, a teacher, and all of the other things all at once in the course of the day.* [Community Member] *[What is going well is] Community partnerships like Eat Right Philly and Community Schools.* [Central Office Staff]
Improving coordination with community partners	*I think one of the things that I think has been really critical to our work in partnering with schools in particular has been that having that partnership infrastructure in the schools. There's been college and career coordinators, people who have been able to be point contacts. School staff is so busy, so when you're bringing in these resources for post-secondary planning. When you're bringing these other resources around, academic supports, and all the different things that the non-profit community is bringing into schools, I think had never been in contact with the schools, the principals, the guidance counselors, they have so much to do rather than coordinate all of our crazy selves. I think having these point people has been really critical. There's not enough of them.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Charter schools can be a key partner on common issues like gun violence, teacher recruitment, and emergency responses to COVID	*One thing that I suggest is that we actually meet. There has not been regular meetings, at least that I'm aware of, between the school district and the charter school network for some time, going back several superintendents to take on anything. Anything from – even during COVID. I'm aware of two meetings during the entire crisis where the charter network and the school district actually met. Gun violence, as you all I'm sure are acutely aware, is a catastrophe going on in the city of Philadelphia…There's innovation on both sides and there's not been a formal dialogue or relationships, again, that I'm aware of, but I think there's an opportunity for us to build.* [Community Member] *There is absolutely no dialogue between us. It is of great concern…Gun violence is ripping apart our communities, especially as a high school in Center City drawing from all over Philadelphia. These things are absolutely conversations that we have to have together and we see each other's faces, we go to all the same meetings, but we just – we sit and listen, but there's no communication and no two-way dialogue.* [Community Member] *Our leaders don't get opportunities to talk to one another. Our teachers don't get opportunities to talk to one another, and so we perpetuate this divisiveness. We don't see the portfolio of schools as Philadelphia schools and Philadelphia students, and so it's a huge miss. And it's furthered by the challenges associated with COVID, associated with funding, associated with resources and teacher shortages, and so now we have a lack of resources and we are fighting each other in many cases. The district has their own method of recruitment, and the charter sector has their own method of recruitment, and private schools, and so we're fighting for the same people without a joint effort of how we can do this if we really cared about educating all Philadelphia students. By nature of the fact that charter schools educate more than a third of students, that should be worthwhile investment.* [Community Member] *I am absolutely positive that there are many other people like me in the community that want to do the right thing and that's what working in the district. There's concerned citizens, there are community partners that want to see us win. Pull our coattails, put us to work, we're willing to go to bat for you.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Librarians have academic and social-emotional value and most have school library programs have been cut in recent years	*Every school needs a fully functioning library staffed by a librarian.* [Parent/guardian] *[The first priority should be] getting libraries reopened on the to do list.* [Parent/guardian] *I also want to mention the equity that is involved with providing a strong school library program across the city… libraries provide a safe space in the school. Those students are not being judged on their academic learning. They have a chance to pursue their own interests…to engage in conversations with others and develop respect, or their peers develop a collaborative attitude…to create their own videos, express themselves, develop their voice, and agency. That's an important social and emotional aspect of libraries that I think sometimes doesn't get recognized.* [Community Member] *The bottom line is that a certified teacher librarian is a great bang for your buck. There are over 30 national studies that show that having full-time teacher librarians on staff will improve student literacy rates, particularly with students of lower socio-economic status.* [Community Member] *…my ulterior motive in filling this [survey] out is to shine a light on the defunding of libraries and certified librarians. We may only have 3 librarians left???* [School staff] *[The first priority should be to] Add librarians to the schools.* [School staff]

- Some say we are heading in the right direction, but more work is needed.

- Stakeholders believe that all staff should be culturally competent and anti-racist. In particular, more anti-racist curricula and more PD's and trainings on DEI topics are needed.

- School leaders are thinking deeply about how to lead structured conversations about race and racism with their staff. More frequent time to meet (e.g., Common Planning Time) helps ensure these important conversations can happen regularly.

- Staff talked about the need to recruit more teachers/staff of color.

- Many say we need to focus on inclusion practices such as supporting linguistic diversity and revisiting how we identify and support Special Education students, who are disproportionately boys of color.

- Others talked about the school selection process, as well as the need for more equitable academic and extracurricular programming in neighborhood/catchment schools, facilities issues, and other inequities in the distribution of resources.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
SDP is heading in the right direction with DEI	*I think the district is trying to make some strides in inclusion.* [Teacher] *The doing well at focusing on the importance of equity and inclusion in teaching and learning.* [Teacher] *The issue of equity has improved. However, it still has a long way to go.* [Teacher] *[What is going well is] The district is moving to a more equitable and anti racist culture in culture and academics.* [School Staff] *[What is going well is] the new focus on equity.* [School Staff] *[What is going well is] Beginning the conversation of equity that 10000% needs to continue.* [School Staff] *[What is going well is] Making strides to be inclusive and equitable. I don't think we are fully there and never will be. I do think we are taking the right steps to respect our community and members.* [School Staff] *I think the policy review cycle has helped in collaboration across offices and to some extent I get to be a part of that work, so I get to see different program offices contacting other program offices about where their work may intersect, or how a particular policy change or administrator procedure change might impact another office or the work of another office, and aligning across policies, several different thoughts, or overarching things. So, I think that the policy review process has really helped. And in addition to, I want to uplift the work of the equity coalition out of our office of diversity, equity, inclusion, is that that committee coalition has started partaking in the policy review process. So, I think that principals, assistant superintendents who might not otherwise usually participate in the policy development or review are becoming more engaged in that process and the thoughts underlying those things, which creates cross-pollination and understanding throughout the organization, I think. And I think, when I see that, it's really encouraging to me to see the collaboration that goes on.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
We need to recruit and retain more school staff of color	*Our teacher demographics need to mirror our student population better in terms of Race, Ethnicity, etc.* [Teacher] *We've got relationships with teachers that don't look like us but at the same time having them with people that look like us that we can talk freely with our way and everything from our neighborhood, that's good.* [Student] *We have to do a better job to create a pipeline around recruiting, have some strategic, targeted goals of how to recruit high-quality African American men to teach in the Philadelphia Public School System.* [Community Member] *I would say is that the individuals that are in the schools, whether you're a teacher, whether you are just a mentor, they should mirror some of the students in the schools, because it is very critical.* [Community Member] *[Needs improvement] I believe that more black male teachers from Philadelphia is an important improvement that the district needs. Some of the teachers (usually white females) don't live in Philadelphia which could be hindering to how they engage the students of the Philadelphia school district…It would really benefit the district to have equal representatives of the students, especially when it come to student engagement.* [School Staff] *[Needs improvement] Recruit more teachers of color, partner with [Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)]. Representation matters.* [School Staff] *[Needs improvement] There should be more teachers of color. I visited a school where the WHOLE student body was African American. I didn't see one white child. Yet the Principal and ALL teachers were white. What a powerful, terrible message to send to the children.* [Central Office Staff]

For more about the need for more teachers and other staff of color, see Staffing here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
All staff need to be culturally competent and anti-racist	*I have a son who feels like he's thrown away and each and every day I fight like hell to be reconnect him to an academic space, where he feels that is a waste of his time because all that he's taught in schools, like she said, was teachers who don't look like him, teachers who don't see his humanity. Let's face it. Our Black children are criminalized from the door. We need to understand that, so moving forward I think that all of your decisions should be made through an anti-racist lens and understand that we're living in a society of anti-Blackness, sun up to sun down.* [Parent/guardian]
	I feel like [school staff] treat us like criminals. [Student]
	our teachers do need to be more, again, culturally responsive, trained, and culturally responsive education. [Teacher]
	…the main factors influencing students' overall wellbeing, students specifically at [my school] is racism. It's a lack of reflection in the curriculum. It's unequal treatment by staff. It's not enough Black teachers, which really ties into what [another participant] was just talking about, which is a lack of understanding in the background of our students. And a need for cultural responsiveness from staff is what really influences our students' wellbeing here in Philadelphia. [Teacher]
	Adults in buildings also could use cultural information to best interact with children who are immigrants. [Teacher]
	The other piece I wanted to mention just around wellness is that we also largely have a staff of teachers, administrators, staff, the whole nine, who need to work on race and equity work to ensure that they're not putting their biases on children. Children in Philadelphia are very real and authentic and can feel when the adults are not equipped for them. I think that that's a problem that we have is there's a large group of adults that are not equipped for the children that they serve. [Central Office Staff]
	70%+ of teachers in SDP are white and there needs to be more intentional racial equity professional development. There a lack of cultural and racial awareness. [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
There is a need for more Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professional development and trainings	*…real equity work and real social justice work happens right in the classroom between the teachers and the students. So, I think that that is where we are in terms of the implementation. We've elevated things to a level where we are like, this is where it's great. But then, how do we get our various educators within our system – and not just our teachers. How do we get our leaders to that place as well? And that's through our professional learning cycles and the limited time that we have in those professional learning cycles. There's always a need for more professional learning.* [Central Office Staff] *Anti-racist de-escalation training for all teachers and staff.* [Teacher] *So I think teachers need more training on things like language lines so that they can feel confident reaching out to multilingual families if they're not multilingual or bilingual themselves.* [Teacher] *Our teachers do need to be more, again, culturally responsive, trained, and culturally responsive education. I know in order to reach more culturally diverse students that we have here. We need a way for administrators…to be trained in it as well, so that they can assess and evaluate, and also give feedback to teachers about culturally responsive education.* [Teacher] *70%+ of teachers in SDP are White and there needs to be more intentional racial equity professional development. There [is] a lack of cultural and racial awareness.* [Central Office Staff] *Teacher prep programs generally do not focus on the realities of urban education. If our onboarding included a course on teaching in an urban setting based on the work of Yvette Jackson (or someone like that) I feel staff would be ready to handle these challenges.* [Central Office Staff]

For more about professional development and training, see Staffing here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Difficult conversations about race are important and should be prioritized	*Our leadership team, on the other hand, were meeting every week…[and] we were able to have more engaging and challenging topics because of the frequency with which that group met, because we're comfortable with each other…because one of the things I know we've stressed in the district for a bunch of years and certainly stressed at our school here is this idea of being comfortable with discomfort, and not having a closure all the time. We were able to do that because we had the weekly leadership meeting. Our whole staff did not have that, so when we tried to bring everyone together for this larger conversation where we as a school are in the process of being an equity statement, we weren't able to do that as comfortably because we just weren't comfortable with each other because of the very infrequent meeting. I think if we're thinking about ways we can—if we're asking for everything here for next year, I think having more open time in those PD days where we can dictate or at least plan out what we want to do for our staff.* [School Leader] *Something that really accelerated, that the students really loved, was our race dialogues. That was that we sat around, literally, biweekly for about an hour to two hours, just talking about our upbringing as high school youth, the things we faced racially in our neighborhoods, in our houses, and also, in schools. The key thing that they always brought up was that they wished they could talk so freely and openly in schools. In terms of what are they doing now in schools, I don't know, but I can share that students yearn to share their experiences with others. There were a lot of tears.* [Community Member] *Another thing that we talked about a lot as executive leadership was about equity, and what this concept of equity means. And I still don't think that we have truly figured out what that means. It seems as soon as we begin to look at data, we all know what the data is showing. The data's showing that Black and Brown children in our students – in our district are represented in the achievement gap. But then, we still try to solve that problem with the same solutions that have not benefited Black and Brown children historically in public education. So, I think beyond just thinking about the different types of teachers that we have, the different students that we have in our systems, and what we're preparing them for as well…So, really re-imagining public education, re-imagining what instruction looks like in the classroom, and what that innovation looks like is really where we have opportunity. And I think that that's where we need to focus our efforts.* [Central Office Staff]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
We need anti-racist curricula (social studies, in particular)	*I wanted to add is that since I have been a member of the School District of Philadelphia for 13 years, our social studies curriculum has not received new materials throughout that time. So, we still have books and classrooms that have countries that no longer exist in them. I think that that's really- it's a civil rights issue. We're a school district that's serving a majority black and brown students and we're not providing access to materials that improve civic engagement, understanding of historical context. It really leads to a lack of criticality for our students in a really complex world. So, I think that that is something that we need to pay attention to. There are bits and pieces and movement that happen.* [School Leader] *I do appreciate them providing social studies teachers who might not know African American History, with professional development on the history, so that they can teach it in a more balanced way... I do appreciate the mandatory required African American History [professional development] for all social studies teachers who are teaching African American History, because I have worked with people who were teaching African American History with no knowledge of it and no caring about it, or the fact that the bulk of their students were Black and Brown, and it showed. I do appreciate them forcing that.* [Teacher] *…for integrating global diversity understanding among students in the curriculum. It can be easily done. Culturally responsive education can be. It's just a matter of giving teachers the understanding and principals the understanding and the willingness – that they can intentionally do that…There has to be an intentional push behind it. I guess that's also what I'm speaking about is just the visibility of multiculturalism to include everyone and not to exclude.* [Community Member] *I think that this is one of the things that students ask for the most. They don't see themselves represented in their schools. I think that that was one of the things that I struggled the most, as well as being a student here in Philadelphia. Not being able to identify myself with what we were learning and being like, "Is there something wrong with me or with my peers that look like me?" I think moving on to highlight that history, no?* [Community Member]

For more about responses to the new ELA and Math curricula, see Academics <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
The school selection process is not equitable	*The way that students enter high school has changed and even – there have been many, many changes to that process, but the LeGare process, we hear from families… that for the families we work with, it's been extremely confusing and also for school counselors it's also been confusing. Again, another area of inconsistency. What we see is that then this leads to our students with disabilities being shut out of some of the programs that are most desired in the city for participation…there needs to be more communication with families about how the process works.* [Teacher] *The first one I'm going to highlight is the new enrollment process that was rolled out this year. It was done in the name of equity to preserve neighborhood schools and address some equity issues at the highest level schools. But in the process, it seemed to leave out the most vulnerable families in our community and the only process for them to access schools that they wanted to and choice was by having the social and cultural capital to advocate at [Central Office], which I think has been highlighted over and over again. A lot of the families that we serve were unable to access schools in the way that they may have accessed our schools through this process of the past. We left a lot of students behind and a lot of families that were not able to choice as they saw fit and in the process, it impacted a lot of our school's enrollment and projections.* [Central Office Staff] *The fact that there's this very small handful of schools that anybody wants to get their kid into, and there's thousands of us, there's thousands of these kids who deserve as much as every single one of these schools, is an atrocity to me, that we are all responsible for, and we're all responsible for fixing together.* [Parent/guardian]

For more about how stakeholders believe that school selection would be less contentious if there were more equity in course and program offerings , see Academics <u>here</u>.
For more on the rollout of the 2021-22 school selection process, see <u>here</u>.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
We need better mechanisms to report and respond to discrimination	*We have heard this from our coaches - they are treated differently in school main offices depending on their perceived racial identity. Specifically, individuals of color say they are treated with suspicion or rudeness because staff assume they are parents (which is really problematic).* [Central Office Staff] *…the equity conversation has no substance. It is talk. I experienced a great deal of harassment and racial discrimination by a group of teachers at a school. The principal acknowledged it and admitted he did not know what to do about it. It is the reason I left the school after two years.* [Central Office Staff] *I think we have some hard policies around race, equity and inclusion but it is very difficult to get a teacher who is racist, homophobic, xenophobic, antisemitic out of our school. So, I think there needs to be some evaluation of what that looks like from a labor relations standpoint.* [School Leader] *We've been seeing more and more trends of immigrant students being targeted because they're immigrants or they speak other languages, and then parents having incredible challenges reporting it. There's a breakdown in the system, it seems…. Anyway, I'm here as a partner, and I would love to have a deeper strategy with the school district, but it's been incredibly difficult to find any in roads beyond the [Family and Community Engagement (FACE)] Office to get to a place of strategy. There's- when there's a complaint, we can find someone to maybe troubleshoot the complaints, but we're not doing anything proactive to ensure that we have a strategy for inclusion. Really meeting with welcoming.* [Community Member] *As you can tell, I'm Asian and my kids are multiracial… My issues with it is the fact that my kids have been bullied since they started public school. At one point, my six-year-old came to me in first grade and told me a classmate told him he didn't fully exist because he wasn't one race. And the other student came and drew a button and told him to push that button, said give me one race. Another student told him that he shouldn't be in that school and to go back where he came from…I don't trust the principal at [my] school at this point, because incident that just happened in that school.* [Parent/guardian]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Equitable resource distribution and access to facilities	*Please make schools equitable with regard to classroom resources including building conditions.* [Central Office Staff] *It's hard to build trust because it's really not a lot of follow through and like I said, it's not equal. The resources that you have in one zip code is completely different than you have in your neighborhood and your income level should not determine your quality of education. Your zip code should not do that. I noticed that and it's like we are getting penalized for where we live.* [Parent/guardian] *Because how can you trust a place that can't even give your kid hot water? That is unacceptable. If a kid came to me and it showed me a picture of a bathroom from their house that looked like a bathroom at [school name], I'd be calling DHS. That is a concern to me, that we think and we send a message to our kids, majority of the kids who are also children of color, and we're saying to them, this is what we think you deserve… I don't think people realize just how bad it is…and just how unfairly the distribution of materials is throughout our district, and that some kids have beautiful buildings and air conditioning, and they can flush a toilet. And then, other kids are sent home halfway through the school day because something happened and the power went out because everything's so old. This is stuff that happens, and it shouldn't.* [Teacher] *…how do you not have a bathroom that's functioning? How do you not have a water fountain? The basic necessities. I don't think anybody in here has a house that doesn't have running water or a toilet, but to come to school and not know whether you can use the bathroom, really speaks volumes of what the school district is doing, what the city allows to happen. I really think that resources need to be addressed at the very beginning of this, looking at each of the schools, and realizing they're not equal. Even if they're not equal, the community doesn't have equal access to resources either because if you don't have a community library, then you don't have a school library. I don't know where you're going to read at because it's not about not having the money because the city does have the money. It's about allocating resources to be sure that every building has running water, a clean bathroom, the ability for the kids to come and feel comfortable.* [Community Member]

For more on the link between equity and facilities, see [here](#).

Themes from the Topic of:
School Leadership

- Stakeholders say that good school leaders:

  - Collaborate and help their staff develop as professionals by providing a good balance of support and autonomy;
  - Listen and include students, staff, and families in decision-making;
  - Communicate well and respond to concerns;
  - Make themselves available and visible in the school; and
  - Protect Common Planning Time and teacher prep time.

- Good school leadership is an important factor in staff morale and retention.

- Well-established leaders need more autonomy and trust from Central Office, while struggling leaders need more support and accountability.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good school leaders value collaboration and foster positive relationships	*The strengths, I definitely want to say, our principal is amazing in that the five years I have been there, we have never—I have personally never lost a prep. She keeps that very consistent. We do have our Common Planning Time every single week, so that allows us to analyze data and see our strengths, and how can we make weaknesses into strengths?* [Teacher] *…we are very fortunate to have a principal who…does an excellent job at stepping forward and taking a leadership role, looking out for opportunities to notice the expertise, really trust the expertise and knowledge of her staff and her students, and I've noticed more and more her increased skill in admitting when perhaps another step would have been better and leaning on the knowledge and experience of the people of our school community. I think that's so important.* [Teacher] *It's the systems of supports that are in place. It is the ability for administrators to support teachers in a holistic type of way, and for administrators and teachers to support the students in that same way, to ensure that we're all giving our best version of ourselves when we are in the building.* [Teacher] *…we have strong school leaders that support each other. School leaders were asked to do the heavy lifting for the past two years with minimal support from central office. We had to rely on each other for support and without that support, many of the successes in school may not continue to happen at the rate it did.* [School Leader] *I think when you have those relationships from your leaders, it builds great relationships, and those relationships turn into great learning… [She] didn't come off as a wall between leader and student and do what I say as the adult figure. They know she's the adult figure, but at the same time, they know that they had that trust with her. So I can say that her ability to build relationships was highly effective and was something that was truly positive.* [Community Member]

For more on how mentoring and staff collaboration were an important sub-theme under Staffing, see [here](https://www.philasd.org/era/listening-learning/).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good school leaders listen and involve students, staff, and parents in decisions	*I would say, as far as the well-being, a lot of it really comes from the leadership. A lot of it is a feeling we get from the principals. Is the principal collaborating with the staff? Is the principal talking to us? Is the principal asking for our opinions? Are we being included? A lot of times, we feel like – a lot of times a teacher feels like they're doing everything they can in their one little classroom, but they're not really a part of the big picture. Especially when it comes to the administration of the school district who are making decisions and possibly not feeling like we're being asked.* [Teacher] *Decisions shouldn't be the Principal's autonomously. It should be more a "school" decision. Not one person.* [Teacher] *I will also say that we get a lot of support from our principal. He definitely works really, really hard to involve as many people as possible in the decisions. There are definitely decisions that need to be made just on the principal level, but he tries to involve as many people as possible in the communication and what goes on in the school. He also attempts to address issues and allows people to work on their strengths, to work with their strengths and to strengthen whatever it is that we are lacking.* [Teacher] *[What is going well is that] local school leaders are very in-touch with their neighborhood communities and parents.* *I like that they have an open door policy and are receptive to parental involvement. They listen to the children and are overall approachable. [Community Member]*

For more on how students want more opportunities to be heard, especially by teachers and school leaders, see here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good school leaders support teachers' professional autonomy	*Some of the best principals I've had have been the principals who treat you with respect… They support you, they don't micromanage you…Like if you're doing what you're supposed to do, your students are engaged, they're being instructed, your classroom is running. They don't come and nitpick on every little thing that might occur in the normal day to day teaching. But if something does occur that you need help with they're there to support you.* [Teacher] *I know that in my school I find that the administration is really supportive. Like for instance, I wanted to do this training to basically teach history in a different way. This summer I emailed my principal, it was free, and she's like go for it. I've heard a lot of bad stories about nitpicky, micromanaging administrators that can really make or break a teacher's experience in a school, for sure. I think that's number one.* [Teacher] *[A strength is] the administration gives us the freedom to teach what needs to be taught.* [Teacher] *[At my school,] one of the big strengths to teaching and learning has been that our admin in general does trust a lot of the educators to be passionate about the subject we teach. We're, as much as possible, trusted to bring our ideas about different projects, trips, contents, and that's really helpful because it allows us to flex our expertise and our interests and input from our students and it just makes us, as a teaching staff, more excited about the content.* [Teacher] *I really appreciate that my principal allows us, as long as we're meeting the standard, to do adjustments as we see fit, which is very much appreciated and shows, I think – for me, it shows a lot of trust in me as an educator which is also appreciated since I spent so many years and hundreds of thousands of dollars to do it.* [Teacher]

For more on teachers wanting to be respected, see Retention and Morale here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good school leaders are visible in their school community	*I have the same experience with the same vice principal, who showed up to a Latinx club meeting, and she's not even a part of the community but she still showed up and she learned about the issues we're facing in my community at the school and everything like that. I thought that that was really amazing of her. [She] is awesome, I love her. That was something that she did differently than mostly every other teacher at my school. It meant a lot for the Hispanic students in the organization to see a leader who isn't even a member of the community to actually care that much, to show up.* [Student] *more visibility by the school administration. I think that students learn best in an environment where they're encouraged to be their best. I think principals and admin not just being in their office all day, but walking the halls, greeting students, talking with students and teachers. I just think being visible, I think that's really important to help set that positive tone.* [Teacher] *I did have an experience where I trusted my former principal – she's not there now, but still the current principal was a part of the staff, where there was an incident with a special ed student who really harassed me and did a whole lot and a lot happened there, but my principal, she was right on it, handled the situation, moved the student out of my classroom. I didn't feel a need that he had to be removed from the school, but he was talked to and everything, and it was handled.* [Teacher] *I appreciated that my principal was always visible to students and staff. She supported that staff with hallway duty, cafeteria duty and participated in observations in a non-threatening way.* [Community Member] *I have watched him up close. He respects his students, and they respect him. It is as if he has a personal relationship with all 300 plus students. That personal touch cannot be measured but it makes a difference.* [Community Member] *I always her ability to build relationships with her students at her school. It was super important for her to make sure that she knew every single student by name, anytime she saw them in the hallway, she would always greet them, speak to them, even if there was something wrong, she would always come in and ask what's wrong.* [Community Member]

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good school leaders are understanding and responsive	*Our principal is also one that makes himself available to us, if we need to speak to him extensively about any issues that we are facing. The systems of support for me, it's important, and I feel like at [my school] there is consistent effort being put in place, to make sure that we know what's available, and for students to know what's available to them as well.* [Teacher] *Our principal and AP have open door policies. You can go with concerns. They also get to know us and will "check in" with us.* [Teacher] *But in my current school my principal is wonderful. She has a wonderful open door policy that she truly lives by. You can speak to her about anything. She is very down to earth, she understands, and she actually helps you work through if there's an issue. She will actually actively take part and try to help you get through that.* [Teacher] *Effective communication between staff and administration, or lack thereof is one of the major factors affecting staff and wellbeing at our school.* [Teacher] *I also walked into the office a couple of times and my principal just wasn't there. I get that she's busy, I get that she's doing other things. But I bothered her a lot. I sent her a good few emails, and every time I walked into the office… I told somebody to please tell her that I had emailed her or tell her to get back in touch. I left the number. I've been trying.* [Student] *Not to hate on my principal, but she would be like, "I'm anti-racism all the way," and we would have town halls on what it means to be anti-racist. Then when I was personally having issues with racism from a staff member, she swept it under the bus until I had to really get involved with it.* [Student]

For more on how students need adults to listen and understand their experiences, see Student-Staff Relationships [here](#).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Good school leaders are key to retaining good teachers	*I have been teaching in the district for 15 years… I spent a lot of years wanting to quit. And the only thing that kept me was supportive administration… in my experience, I've had fewer good administrators than bad. But the ones that stay and do their jobs and understand and remember what it is to be a teacher, those are – that's gold. Because we do the job. But if they tell us we can't do the job, or continually criticize us, then we leave.* [Teacher]
	Personally I think teachers leave a school due to admin not necessarily students. SDP needs to look at these high turnover teacher rates and question what admin is actually doing. [Teacher]
	Teachers are not leaving because of the students, but instead, are leaving because of poor administration in place. If SDP concentrates on changing principals at those schools with highest teacher turnover, I know you will see a difference in your staff at those schools affected. It is very difficult working in an environment that has low teacher moral[e] and inconsistent expectations and rules in place due to a poor leader. [School Staff]
	Not being nice or courteous from the administration towards the staff…I don't like being treated in that way or hearing my colleagues have so many different stories of being treated and spoke to in not a good way. It brings the morale down with staff and I'm concerned, who do you go to with this, who do you complain to about this? [Teacher]
	If you don't have admin support you're going to burnout. You feel defeated. That's just a big thing. But a lot of the times when they don't micromanage, and you're treated with respect it goes a long way. [Teacher]
	If we can get a good principal, that helps us to get good teachers. You heard a parent talk about the difference she felt where she felt the principal was strong and supportive, although everybody knows that middle schools are tough and more difficult in some ways in terms of safety. To get those good teachers and those good principals we all know that new teachers to Philadelphia need their hands held and they need their hands held much more strongly than we have been doing, so that they feel supported every step of the way and our process has not been that supportive and it just needs to be. [Parent/guardian]

For more on school leadership, see Retention and Morale [here](#).

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School leaders need more support from Central Office (440)	*What I would like to see is even 440 reaching out to schools of, "I noticed this is something in your school; how can we support?" rather than principals always having to go to 440 for the need. I think that's something that's important, is that just as individual schools analyze data, that 440 is also looking at that data and helping brainstorm... It would be nice if 440 made things easier sometimes for principals, instead of jumping through hoops to bring certain programs to schools or having to look at outside agencies to get what they need.* [Teacher] *Building those relationships with 440 staff I think would help this a lot. Especially if they came to our building and just hang out for half a day. I know this was the plan for last year at different times, because of shortage of staff, but not even to necessarily do work, just hang out and see what it's like. When you're like, "I tried to call you," I don't know what to say, I was four different places….and I think it's important that they see what it is day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, because it really does change. A way to build those relationships, I think would be key.* [School Leader] *I think just in terms of trust, I have very little trust in any pushing of the school district at this point just because of different experiences, different things that have happened. You know, just in general. Even having this conversation right now is kind of feeling like, "If I say something, how is this going to come back to bite me later?" …It's very much a trickle-down effect where the whole school gets impacted when the leader of the building doesn't feel the trust of the people who are guiding the principal…* [School Leader] *Being a principal is very lonely. Let me just say that. I think there needs to be more thought given to how principals are taken care of in this role. We took schools through a pandemic. It was just this—[another participant] used the word "disingenuous"—this disingenuous "How are you doing?" but I think there needs to be a real, on the ground, how do we check in on the people that are taking care of entire learning communities?* [School Leader] *I would say one of the things that I find challenge on the side of supporting local schools, especially the schools that are struggling is that the principals never stay long. They're in and out the door in a year or two. There's no stability. There's often times very young, first-time becoming principals. When I say young, I mean if you're not old enough to be president. The youngest person, so under 35, and as a professional, you don't know what you don't know. There's a lot of time wasted on revamping things over and over again and trying to get traction. That's a large problem for the underperforming schools.* [Community Member]

For more about the disconnect between schools and Central Office, see here.

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
Well-established school leaders can have more autonomy	*So in regards to district leadership capacity alignment, I think with well intentions like 440 program offices are really well intentioned but I also think that they want uniformity amongst our schools and in the innovation network and the opportunity network the one thing that I think many of our schools have developed I can speak for my school, is that the way we do things and the way we can do different things is because we've built the trust within our own human capacity and staffing within each school building. We built advisory programs that [was] talked about, seminar programs that have built trust within our communities with students. That allows us to try different things within our instructional models that are really important to this work. When 440 program or different offices try to come in and say, "Here is what the [professional development] schedule is for this curriculum using these protocols." It just doesn't align to what we're trying to do at our school and we've already used protocols that might extend further what's being presented to us. It's difficult and when you explain that at times or even just try I think [another participant] mentioned the three responses that you can get, you get ignored, you get curiosity or you get told you can't do it. [School Leader]* *…we have very, very complex needs. So, we interact with the Central Office on a regular basis. I'm at a retreat right now with my admin team. One of the things we're going to be focusing on today is literally planning for those things that are within our locus of control because so much of local decision making has been taken away. So, it makes the job incredibly challenging. [School Leader]* *I love that the innovation network and each principal is given a lot of autonomy to make decisions that help our kids in our individual school the most. [School Staff]* *Rather than create a system that makes all schools the same, allow the Innovative and Opportunity alternative schools to do what they do best. We get to know our students and their needs and couple that with meeting state expectations in creative, caring ways to support student success. [School Staff]*

Key issue	Representative respondent quotes
School leader accountability should be examined	*I feel like there is too much autonomy for individual schools.* [Teacher] *I also would like to address, another huge barrier that I don't know that anyone has addressed yet is teacher bullying and favoritism by the administration. I've noticed in the past, or at least in cases that I've seen, the district has consistently sided with school based leaders, which makes teachers feel uncomfortable speaking up.* [Teacher] *…There have been threats made against the school, sexual harassment toward teachers, physical assault toward staff, recording or staff, and lying on teachers…..and yet most things are not being adequately reported because principals are being policed or watched and limited on number of suspensions and write ups (at least thats what we are often told from various schools).* [Teacher] *One of the things that for me when it comes to staff wellbeing is the lack of accountability towards leaders that run the school. I can speak from personal experience, and from other colleagues in the district where a lot of teachers feel that people that are running the schools are kind of abusing their power and treating staff not like human beings. Which then causes for us to just not have good wellbeing. That's something that I feel should be addressed, and I feel like when teachers do bring up stuff that's happening in schools when it comes to the leaders that are running the school it's just kind of a slap on the wrist. Whereas us teachers we get held accountable for everything…* [Teacher] *…By having more [Assistant Superintendents (AS)], they could supervise fewer schools and be more present in their schools. Using data as the sole means of supervising does not give a valid picture of the principal and the principal's vested interest in the school. Typically, the school team is responsible for student achievement. If ASs were to spend time in the schools they are responsible for, they would be able to observe the principal similar to how a principal observes a teacher, in practice. Data can be viewed in many ways and doesn't provide an adequate picture of the daily practices in a school.* [School Staff]

Next Steps

1. This data has been shared with Dr. Watlington, who will move into Phase Three of the transition process.

2. Findings will be considered during ongoing strategic planning purposes.

3. Further topics and issues will be identified for future qualitative and quantitative research.

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