



College of Education  
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®

**System of Great Schools  
School District of Philadelphia  
James Rhoads School  
Parent, Family & Community Input Report  
November 2017**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	3
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	4
MAJOR AREAS OF STRENGTH	4
1. Strong school leadership	4
2. Caring staff members	5
3. Frequent communication with parents	6
MAJOR AREAS OF CONCERN	7
1. Student safety	7
2. Opportunities for students to receive individual attention	8
3. Quick pace of the math curriculum	9
4. Some staff members act unprofessionally	10
5. Low academic rigor	10
SUGGESTIONS FROM PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS	11

## INTRODUCTION

The Philadelphia School District in partnership with Temple University and others embarked on a school review process. Temple University Urban Education faculty and graduate students took the lead in the development, data collection, and analysis of parent and community experiences with the six target schools.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Between September 28th and October 17, the research team visited Rhoads for four events: a community kick-off meeting, two focus groups, and a community input and ideas meeting. At each event, the team held between 1 and 2 small group discussions with parents and community members, for a total of 5 focus groups. According to the district's Family and Community Engagement (FACE) team, 51 parents, 8 staff members, and 36 community members participated in our data collection process at Rhoads. The vast majority of participants were women—mothers, grandmothers, and relatives of students attending the school. While other people (staff, community activists, etc.) also attended the events, the analysis here focuses on parents (or caregivers) and their comments about their and their children's experiences. It is also worth noting that most of the parents who participated have had several children through this school or currently had several children in various grades attending the school, thus giving richer data about the school.

The goal in conducting the focus groups was to understand how parents experienced Rhodes, what they saw as its strengths and challenges, and what suggestions they had for its improvement. In addition to discussing academics, climate, leadership, and parental involvement, the team also spoke to parents about additional issues that they raised that were important to them. Lori Shorr attended every event as lead facilitator and was assisted by Temple graduate students. The conversation at each meeting was recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service.

Analysis involved multiple steps. First, after conducting two rounds of meetings (the kick-off meeting and focus group 1) and debriefing about the conversations, the team revised the protocol for the community input and ideas meetings to allow the team to dig more deeply into key topics and test emerging theories about parents' perspectives. The team then read the transcripts, making notes about key themes and important issues. Next the team created a coding system, which included such codes as "Academics," "General Climate," "School Safety," "Leadership," etc. A coding book, with definitions for each code, facilitated consistency across coders. Each transcript was coded, with all data related to a particular topic highlighted and put into a new

document. Coders also included comments aimed at summarizing and interpreting the quotes. Then the lead researcher for the school re-read the coded data to further examine themes and patterns, compare parents' comments, identify points of agreement and disagreement, and prioritize areas of concern to the parents. The results of this analysis appear in the feedback and findings presentation and, in greater depth, in this report.

In this report, the team lays out findings, summarizes data across key issues and uses quotes from parents to illustrate the points. Each topic discussed here surfaced at multiple sessions and was voiced by several parents. For each, the team assessed the extent to which parents generally agreed on the issue or whether or not there were opposition perspectives. The examples that appear in this report are not the only instances of parents speaking on a particular topic. Rather, they were chosen because they are especially clear, best represent parents' perspectives, or raise issues for further analysis.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Major areas of strength:

- Strong school leadership
- Caring staff members
- Frequent communication with parents

### Major areas of concern:

- Student safety
- Opportunities for students to receive individual attention
- Quick pace of the math curriculum
- Some staff members act unprofessionally
- Low academic rigor

## MAJOR AREAS OF STRENGTH

During the focus groups parents spoke passionately about both the strengths and weaknesses in their school. There were various moments in which the parents highlighted some of the strengths at Rhoads School. The following represent some of those strengths in relative order of how often they were mentioned:

## 1. Strong school leadership

There is a new principal at Rhoads which the parents are aware of and about whom they feel very positively. There was not one negative comment across all the focus groups about him:

*"I like his communication and his interaction with the kids...The kids come in the yard, he give[s] them high fives..."*

*"I like his communication and his interaction with the kids. I see this every morning and stuff. Them kids come in the yard, he give them high fives and you never know."*

*"I made a complaint to the principal. Then the principal came the next day, and he was great, and he got my daughter right in class in five minutes. Had to go down to the school district and everything. She missed the first two days, but when I came back, Mr. Parker, he was great. And I addressed the issue I had with the staff, and I guess it was resolved because I haven't seen that staff here again."*

*"I like the principal. I think the staff is pretty cool."*

*"I like the principal. I have no problem with the principal. I talked to the principal these last two days, and he seems to be a very caring person. He talks to my son, you know what I mean? My son says he likes him, so I have no problem with the principal. I think he would do a great job here and get things done that needs to be done."*

*"They greet them, they encourage them, they smile at them, they have a joke. And he wants to be a helper. Tonight, all night, he asked, 'Can I go to Mr. Parker? I wanna be his helper. Can I ask him? Would you ask him?'"*

## 2. Caring staff members

Overall, the parents at Rhoads felt that the faculty care about the students they teach:

*"They greet them, they encourage them, they smile at them, they have a joke"*

*"When I bring my child in the morning, there are staff all around the building, and they are moving around. They are in the yard, and the children are playing,*

*and when it's time, you know, they encourage them, and the students so obey them, and they get in line, and they come into the building."*

*"I don't know about last year, because he was in another school, but I'm impressed with the idea and the morning time when the employees are around the building on the outside making sure that everybody's safe. And to me, when every employee in the school, since I brought him here, they speak to the child as if it's their own."*

*"They speak to the child as if it's their own."*

*"And I see a lot of the teachers, you know...some teachers'll be like, "Okay, you have breakfast, you know, and they'll ask you, 'Are you hungry? Would you like some more.'"*

*"Yeah, really great classroom, really great teacher. My son comes home, and we talk about how his day went and everything like that on a daily basis and things."*

*"My classroom is great. My daughter's, Ms. \*\*\*\*\*, that classroom, I would love that to be my classroom. It has fur rugs and everything. She's a great teacher, and she comes out of her pocket. Yeah, they had to buy no supplies or anything. So I'm happy she got to a good class, and good teacher."*

### **3. Frequent communication with parents**

Parents mentioned that they felt there were new efforts to communicate with them, particularly through the app Dojo. Although not all parents knew about Dojo, the parents who were aware of it thought that it was useful.

*"My son loves the points [Dojo] that they have here. He loves it, because it's, like, they're giving him something to strive for. So, I love the points system that they have."*

*"They have a breakfast program now that they didn't have last year. It changed, they got the class Dojo so you can know what's going on with the kids. They didn't have that last year either."*

*"My daughter, she talks too darn much so her teacher picks up the phone like, "She keep talking and we got a problem." I be like, 'All right. Here I come.' If they was behind on something they'll tell me, they'll call me and tell me, 'She missing*

*this homework and this homework. I don't know what's going on but ...' "*

Speaker 8: *"What would you say is like the biggest strength about the leadership team that they have here?"*

Speaker 5: *"Communication."*

Speaker 4: *"Communication. They communicate very well."*

## MAJOR AREAS OF CONCERN

Parents had some concerns they wanted the administration to know and understand. These are listed in order of how often they were mentioned:

### 1. Student safety

Whether it was bullying or actual physical threats of abuse, parents are concerned about their children's safety, particularly around the school grounds:

*"I had to take (my son) out of his classroom and took him home and in his special needs class because he couldn't take the last one because they were taking his food. Because we send our son to school with lunch. I'm gonna say like five kids took my son's lunch at one time. None of the people helped."*

*"It's not enough supervision outside for those kids whatsoever. In the morning and when these kids get out of school...It's not enough, it's not enough supervision. I done seen this little girl, she got jumped. She got jumped. She was fighting this little girl, they broke it up. "*

*"I see when they come out the teachers really cannot, when it's time for dismissal they really cannot account for all those kids. I watched the teacher, she's on the front, the kids is coming out, you've got other kids who's doing other little things other than what they supposed to do. The teacher's trying to get them together."*

*"Some kids are there since breakfast, and they don't have anybody watching them. You know, there be fights and stuff.. Some don't feel safe. I hear the conversations of the kids, waiting for my child. That's why I come drop her off,*

*and I wait for her to go in. And I come into school, and I wait.”*

*“I see the big kids when they get out, and they get out from one side. You know it's always like ... one girl, one day she got jumped. I don't even know her, I said I'll walk her home. She said I'm scared to walk this way. I said, "Well, I don't walk this way, but I will walk you that way." I had me, the stroller and the baby, and I walked her home. Because you know, I don't want nobody to get jumped. She was scared. Got jumped the day before outside of school.”*

*“That's why I signed up to volunteer because since my daughter been here for three days, she told me about two fights in her classroom. She's never seen a fight. Two fights in her classroom. A boy attacked a girl and then another girl pulled another girl by her hair, but I've seen bullying when I come up in the morning time, they smacking each other.”*

*“I don't feel welcome, it feels cold. My child is like, in a panic state because there's so much going on. This morning he didn't wanna walk to the line. I asked him what was wrong. He didn't say it but I looked at this group of boys, they looked kinda rough and I already knew, okay, he doesn't want to go over there. But then when I looked back at him, when I looked back at the boys, they started pushing and like, doing all this wild stuff and I stopped them.”*

*“I even asked my son, he's been here for three years and he doesn't even want to come to the school. He's scared and he won't come to school no more.”*

*“The only problem I have, my daughter is saying some kids try and take her lunch and stuff. ....They are picking on my daughter at lunchtime.”*

Speaker: *“Yeah because my daughter, well she already had gotten jumped plenty of times.”*

Facilitator: *“Does this happen in the classroom?”*

Speaker: *“Classroom, after school.”*

Speaker: *“At recess, at lunch.”*

*“I think they need to have a better bullying policy.”*

Although other parents [above] commented that one of the things they liked about the school was that the teachers came outside to help in the mornings, one parent did not corroborate this sentiment in stating:

*“The teachers still don't come out in the morning, but I guess it's better, because*



*on two grades per door and they just run to their class. But I think it would be a little better if the teachers come out and greet the kids, so they can feel safe."*

## **2. Opportunities for students to receive individual attention**

A recurring thread throughout parents conversations about the school was their wish that their children- and other people's children-- could receive more individual attention from the adults in the building. But they also seemed to understand that this was not always possible because there are not enough staff to make this happen:

*"I don't know, like I remember even when my older kids was here, it was just a lot of people that were involved with these kids, there was a lot of avenues they could go through, a lot of people they could talk to besides the counselors and the principal and stuff."*

*"They go through a lot. You don't know the type of environments that these kids are in. Sometimes a kid want to hear, 'Have a good day at school.' Or they want to get a hug or a kiss or something. What I see in that yard every morning is frustration. Frustration with these kids, they frustrated."*

*"They just want that so much. They want that undivided attention."*

*"I don't know why it is we've been stripped of all these resources, because I'm going to public schools all my life, and we've always had ... additional resources. We always had everything. A full time nurse, we've always had counselors. We've always had support staff, everything. Arts."*

Parents also commented that the lack of one-on-one attention, or individualized instruction, has negative implications for learning:

*"For the class, so it's a discipline problem. That's what I think. I think that ... I met all three of my grandson's teachers and I've been in class with them and some of those kids act like, "Yo, what you need to do is sit down. I don't work here so don't play with me, okay? Sit down." I think they need somebody in to help out with those kind of situations because disrupting a class throws the whole class off. One kid start ... You don't really know what the kid, how the kid is learning or where they can be if they're distracted by another kid and a lot of times they're disruptive because they don't understand what's going on."*

*"It's like this, because they're not taking the proper time they need to take to teach a kid. All kids don't learn on the same level. Like some kids, they need more instruction. Some kids get it, some kids don't."*

*"I came to this school last year, quite a few times, I had to come quite a few times, and it was crazy. I went in a classroom last year and it was ... I mean, the teacher was teaching at the board. They had groups, the kids were in groups and they were doing thing and it was wild."*

### **3. Quick pace of the math curriculum**

When discussing academics the most often mentioned subject was math. In particular, parents feel that math instruction moves too quickly from one unit to another:

*"But the teachers are not taking enough time to go through these [math] instructions with these kids, that's why they're failing. I mean, my daughter's bright, but she ain't that bright, you know what I mean? She said, 'They give it to us, they put it there and the the next thing you know, we taking a test and then we fail.' So the teacher's not taking the time out to explain the whole instruction. They're going over it once, but they're not going over it twice. Not three times. Not four times. Just making it sink it what it is that they're teaching them and that's why they're failing. They can't get it because the teacher says, 'Well, we gotta get through this.' The instructor says, 'We gotta fly through this.' "*

*"It's been all the same. It's a rush through. Like they have it for one week and they rush through it and they're tested on it in the same week. There's not no time ... Like when we went to school, we had a tutor within that week that we would go to and get help with if we didn't understand it. Right. They don't have that. They have the test the same week."*

### **4. Some staff members act unprofessionally**

While the parents had positive things to say about the faculty in general, there were some negative comments from parents about unprofessional behavior with some faculty and staff that it warranted inclusion here:

*"Also some of the staff are rude and they say things to the children that should not be said."*

*"The way that some of these teachers talk to these kids is like they're talking to them like they out in the street somewhere. Not professional. And then they bring the kids' self esteem down even more."*

*"Need new staff. You could tell those who love what they do, and those who just*

*do it just for a check. That's the big difference."*

In particular, the staff in the front office were mentioned several times related to this concern:

*"When I first came in the first day with my son the very first day. I don't want to be mean or anything like that, but she was at the front desk, she was kind of nasty, kind of arrogant. Me, I'm only 28 years old, like I said, but I'm also mature enough to know how to talk to adults."*

*"The greeting of the staff was unprofessional to me, as I first came in. It was a secretary. The way they talk to you, or they treat you like you was a child, but I was an adult, you know? Of the child that's trying to get into high school, my child to come to school. And they made it such a hassle. I feel as though it was like, unprofessional environment."*

*"That office definitely needs some help. Office people, they really need some real office people or somebody who really wants to do the job."*

## **5. Low academic rigor**

Besides the recurring comments noted above regarding math, the other noteworthy thread was the feelings that some parents have that there is some miscommunication regarding the academic achievement levels of their children.

*"With my daughter I don't see a lot of progress with her. I'm concerned that sometimes teachers wait until it's way too late before they inform you that there's a problem that there's a problem academically."*

*"I'm gonna tell you, last year when she got her report card and her teacher told me that she was operating on a second grade math level. Prior to that every teacher that she had when I spoke to them about her math level, "Don't worry about it, it'll be okay." I knew she wasn't okay. I tried to work with her with math and brought all kinds of things to help her out with it but everybody kept saying don't worry. Last year I applied for IEP because I felt like she needed to be tested. She's still not been tested, it's almost another year."*

*"He's in second grade and I brought it up to the teacher that I don't think this is on his level. It was the letter "A" was one of the sight words in second grade."*

## SUGGESTIONS FROM PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

The parents provided some suggestions on how to improve Rhoads School. The following provides details on each one of those areas:

### 1. More supervision of the students particularly during arriving and dismissal

*"The supervision is not enough supervision outside for those kids whatsoever. In the morning and when these kids get out of school ....not at all, it's not enough."*

*"I see when they come out the teachers really cannot...account for all those kids."*

*"My daughter says some kids try and take her lunch and stuff. So I don't know if there's a lot of staff in the cafeteria. But they needed like three more people in the cafeteria."*

### 2. Parental support on homework assistance

Parents want support for how to help students with their studies at home, particularly with math.

*"That's one thing you all could do, send a guide book home for the parents, because they teach them totally different than the way we learned...That's one thing that would really help because it's easier to help a child if you know exactly what they're doing."*

*"My son, he had a math problem. It was multiplication and fractions. I'm like, I don't know what this is but he has to do it. I sent a text to the teacher like, 'Hey, I'm coming up tomorrow. I need help so I can help so I can help my son.'"*

*"My grandson brings stuff home and I'm like, 'What are you doing? Why ... ' He's like, 'No grandma, we're supposed to do it like this.' They teach them totally different ... That's one thing you all could do, send a guide book home for the parents, because they teach them totally different than the way we learned."*

*"The one thing I really can't help my child with is the math and stuff what they be giving her. It can be seventh or eighth grade math. What the heck is going on? You only in the fourth grade. I'm like whoa, honestly we've been there and done that but this is not for them. I'm just trying to give them something that they*

get.”

*“With the instruction, because even I know with the math, I don't even know what that mess is ... Like, I have no idea what is. I don't know what my son's doing, I don't know what my daughter's doing. I don't know what that mess is. It's hard for us try to figure out where do we go to help those figure that out? We can go online and we can put that up and say, "Can you help us figure this out?"”*

### **3. More adults in the classrooms to support learning**

Parents felt strongly that there needed to be more help in the classroom so more instruction could take place.

*“My children have gone to plenty of schools throughout the school district, but their needs are not being met. You may have a handful of teachers like Ms. \*\*\*\*\*, my daughter's in her class. But the teachers have to be teachers, disciplinarians, and mothers. Everything all in one classroom, and in the allotted time for them to teach the children. The children aren't getting what they need, because the teachers don't even have all the support that they need to give it to our kids.”*

*“I think it need to be somebody extra in the class with these teachers that got more kids.”*

*“30 something kids to one teacher. That's not fair to the teacher. That's not fair.”*

*“They just want that so much. They want that undivided attention. I do think that there's some behavior issues that run deep, but there are some behavior issues that are simply kids crying out for attention, or they are not feeling capable of doing the work, and so they act out because they need help. I feel like having more assistance in the classroom, it's really hard for one teacher to meet the needs of 30 students.”*

*“I feel like having more assistance in the classroom, it's really hard for one teacher to meet the needs of 30 students.”*

*“The teachers don't have support either. They gotta do like five jobs in one, you know what I mean? A lot of the teachers are very, very overwhelmed.”*

*“There's a teacher and all these kids that she has to learn. Maybe classroom management is also a thing that we should talk about and maybe another issue*

*that I feel like comes up in the classroom, especially when you're dealing with students with behaviors and then you're neglecting other students because you're dealing with students with behaviors. I'm assuming that that probably comes up a lot within the classrooms."*

*"Especially when you get to higher grades and you got them kids that don't want to sit down, they want to act a fool. Now she got to go deal with them and try to get them to chill out and still try to teach her class at the same time."*

#### **4. Listen to and talk with students more**

Parents believe that if more time and attention was paid to listening to students and talking with them that the school would see better outcomes.

*"And then when they come back he suspending them again for something they can't control. Instead of just sitting down, give them the talk, let's call the mom down, let's call the CS workers in, let's call community counsel in so we can get down to the bottom of it."*

*"He lost his mom. They have counseling for him up in their school. He was an 'A' and 'B' student and when his mom passed away his grades dropped, his behavior went like ... They finally realized that something is not right and this is the problem and this is what we have to do."*

*"I really think what they should do before it become[s] a fight they should nip it in the bud right then and there. That means that them kids should be able to talk it out. The teachers tend to, they see what be going on but they overlook it. That's the biggest problem."*

#### **5. Disinvestment from the district and this school**

Parents believe that resources that were once in the school are gone and contend that has not been good for the students.

*"And I just feel like a lot of that stuff dropped in the schools of Philadelphia. A lot, you know what I mean? A lot of that stuff, like dissecting and health class, all that was ... Shop class, I loved shop, you know what I mean? But they don't have a lot of that stuff in the Philadelphia schools. But when you go to the suburbs, they got all of that. They still got shop, they still got music class, you know what I mean? They got gymnastic, they got cheerleading class."*

*"A lot of the stuff and a lot of the support staff that they had is gone. That's*

*when this school started going downhill.”*

*“I remember when my older kids was here, it was just a lot of people that were involved with these kids.”*

*“I think the school district need to get down here and observe at least two or three times out of the week to figure out what needs to happen with the school instead of just going off cutting stuff because they don't have the funding.”*