**College of Education**
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®

**System of Great Schools
School District of Philadelphia
Avery D. Harrington School**

**Parent, Family & Community Input Report**

**December 2018**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Temple University, in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, facilitated family and community public engagement forums as a part of the System of Great Schools review process in fall 2018. This report summarizes findings from Avery D. Harrington School. Temple's urban education faculty, along with their graduate students took the lead in data collection and analysis of parent and community experiences for three target schools: Avery D. Harrington School, Robert E. Lamberton School, and Alain Locke School. This report represents a synopsis of the major themes from the focus groups conducted at Avery D. Harrington School.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Between September and November 2018 a research team from the Urban Education Program at Temple, led by Professor Will Jordan, gathered data at four focus group interviews. On each occasion the same interview protocol was used (see Appendix A). After opening with a general question about the major strengths of the school, there were four main subjects covered in the 90 – minute focus group sessions: (1) school climate & culture, (2) classrooms and academics, (3) school leadership, and (4) parent & community involvement. We ended the session with a catch all question, inviting the participants to comment on any aspect of the school they wished to. The conversations were all audiotaped with permission of the audience, and professionally transcribed. According to the Family & Community Engagement (FACE) office a total of 64 attendees (29 family members) participated in exchanges at Harrington. A few parents and committee members attended multiple focus group sessions.

While the conversations included a range of topics about the school, the focus of this report is on examining the collective perceptions of parents (or caregivers) about their children's experiences. However, students' voices are also included, as parents and facilitators gave students in attendance space to discuss their lived experiences at school. It is also worth noting that many of the parents who participated had more than one child currently or previously attending Harrington, thus giving richer data about the school. There were also a number of grandparents, uncles, and aunties caring for students, and advocating on their behalf. Additionally, a handful of parents were alumni who attended Harrington decades ago and remained in the West Philadelphia neighborhood. The goal of this project was on public engagement, specifically to understand how parents experienced Harrington, what they saw as its strengths and challenges, and what suggestions they had for its improvement. Moreover, the Temple team wanted to capture and record parents' hopes, fears and desires in their own words. While we developed a questionnaire protocol designed to address specific issues, the team was also open to topics that parents felt were important to them. Will

Jordan attended every focus group as lead facilitator and was assisted by Temple graduate students. A preliminary synopsis of the findings here was presented to Harrington staff, parents, and community members in late November.

The analysis of the interview data involved multiple steps. First, after conducting focus groups and debriefing about the conversations, the facilitating teams developed a coding strategy to allow us to dig more deeply into key topics and test emerging theories about parents' perspectives. The Temple team then read through transcripts again, making notes about key emergent themes and important issues. Next, we again refined the 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 Harrington 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 initially appeared in the feedback and findings presentation and, in greater depth, in this report.

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

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: AT A GLANCE

| | **Strengths** | **Areas of Concern** |
|---|---|---|
| INSTRUCTION | <ul><li>Parents perceived relationship building among staff – focusing on the kids instead of subject</li><li>Students enjoyed project-based instruction</li><li>Support for special education students was positive</li></ul> | <ul><li>Academic press lacking</li><li>Teacher turnover was a problem last year</li><li>iReady was viewed as disconnected from other learning</li><li>Guidance help needed for HS applications</li></ul> |
| SCHOOL CULTURE | <ul><li>Students feel respected by staff</li><li>Misbehavior is addressed right away "nipped at the bud"</li><li>School uniforms were viewed mostly positively by parents</li></ul> | <ul><li>Safety was once an issue but it's no longer. There was questions about whether the balance was right</li><li>Safety outside the building was a concern</li><li>Facilities: e.g. lack of air conditioning, aesthetics (lack of artwork and cheery colors), unappetizing food</li><li>Overly strict uniform policy</li></ul> |
| FAMILY & COMMUNITY | <ul><li>There is a semi-organized, small number of very committed parents</li><li>An infrastructure for communication exists but it needs strengthening</li><li>Community members without children in the school committed to the school's health</li></ul> | <ul><li>Overcoming prior trust issues with the community</li><li>Responding adequately to parent's concerns</li><li>Communicating with parents who are busy</li><li>Growing the number of parents who actively support the school</li></ul> |
| LEADERSHIP | <ul><li>The new school leadership rapidly gained respect of parents and students</li><li>Created schoolwide stability</li><li>Perceived as tough but fair</li><li>Involves parents in decision-making</li><li>Works well together as a leadership unit</li></ul> | <ul><li>The main challenge was the leadership team's ability to balance the need for order and schoolwide structure with forgiveness and second chances for students who need them.</li></ul> |

## MAJOR AREAS OF STRENGTH

Before diving into a discussion of specific findings, we first discuss a general observation we noticed across the focus group sessions. That is, there was a perception among many participants that Harrington is improving. Although the current level of students' performance does not reflect recent changes, there was a belief the school was at the brink of an upswing. The source of cautious optimism was mostly the arrival of the new leadership at Harrington, namely Mr. Dixon (principal) and Ms. Rhodes (vice principal). The overwhelming majority of the participants we spoke with viewed the current leadership as being fundamentally different than previous ones. In fact, in responding to the facilitator's questions there was clear discernment between prior to, and since, the current administration. In practical terms, this translates into two or more years ago, and within the past two years. Therefore, as your read statements and questions about the school from participants, bear in mind the temporal context of the speakers.

### Academic Strengths

**Themes that emerged as major strengths of the instructional program were: parents perceived good relationship building among staff, focusing on the kids instead of subjects; students enjoyed project-based instruction; and support for special education students was positive.** Below are selected comments from parents and students illustrating such strengths. As you will notice, there was a range of perspectives on the issue.

*"We're actually doing a project today. We're doing gravity projects, experiments. I used a duck and a bowl of water… I said if you put a little bit of water inside the duck, it's not going to sink. But if you put a whole bunch of water in, the duck is going to sink because it's more heavy than putting in less water."*
*– 5th grade student*

*"There is a lot of engagement. I know that (my daughter) is very quiet, and now she's raising her hand, she's more involved, which is great for me. I'm also a parent at Harambe Science and Technology Charter. I'm seeing a lot of the ... it's a lot of similarities. Again, three years ago, it (Harrington) was horrible. I hate to say it but it was horrible." – Parent*

*"Again, last year's and this year's the teachers are phenomenal. They make the children engage. They're fun, which is important when you're learning. It's that hands on engagement. I don't really have any complaints." –Parent*

*"The best learning experience is probably this year, because the teachers, they actually listen to what you have to say. And, they make sure the lessons are thought out. If you don't still get it, they'll sacrifice their lunch or their after school to help you out and help you get a better understanding of it." – Student*

*"For the autistic support children and teachers, it's a positive that they work together. My grandson had the same teacher for three years and they go by age but his former teacher is still involved. I don't know if that's a policy or on her own but she stays involved, and they do a lot of things together." -- Grandparent*

*"… She (my daughter) could not read three years ago. Now, she's reading, she's more engaging, she comes home, she wants to do her homework, she wants to impress her teacher, and I'm just loving it." – Parent*

## School Culture and Climate Strengths

**The topic of school culture and climate was discussed early on in the focus group sessions. The major themes emerging from the data around strengths were: parents and students feel respected by staff; teacher-student relationships are positive; and misbehavior is addressed right away, "nipped at the bud," according to one student. Mostly, student discipline was framed as tough but fair. Here are illustrative comments from parents and students:**

*"Now that Mr. Dixon is here, he's made the school a better place." – Student*

*"It's not as harsh as, 'that's it, you're getting suspended, boom, outta here.' It messes up their (students') records. People don't realize it, long term, you going to college. But, oh you got suspended this many times? And you were late and missed school and stuff like that." – Parent*

*"I wouldn't say it's a family. I mean, there's like family in different classrooms. Like, I'm cool with everybody in my classroom. I don't have issues with anybody. But, I don't know how other classrooms are." – Student*

*"I'm respected. Before, I went through a lot of bullying and I believe that ever since Mr. Dixon came, he's taught the teachers to pay more attention to things that happen in the classroom instead of just having them half teach or doing whatever they would do. I'm paid more attention to and stuff like that, and I feel as though I'm respected." – Student*

*"Drama happens when it happens, but it gets nipped in the bud right away here. And this school is more of a family home." –Student*

*"They have a lot of warnings because sometimes people just act out. You don't know what they're going through at home, and this might be their only outlet. So I might say the wrong thing to someone at the wrong time, they don't mean to, but they might lash out. But it's not like, 'okay, you did this, you're suspended.' You get a warning. You just might got to sit and talk to the counselor, or to Mr. Dixon himself. They'll talk to you and find out what's going on instead of just being harsh right then and there." – Parent*

*"I'd say a lot of the children that were weeded out made the atmosphere a lot better. A lot of kids are less stressed out. They're more concentrating on their work instead of worrying about if someone is staring at them over their stall or somebody is going to bully them after school or doing a class, transition classes and stuff like that." – Parent*

*"A lot of disciplinary action has been taken as far as that, and I see that the kids are a lot calmer. Their day is more fun so they can absorb what they're learning." – Parent*

*"There was even a time where she (my daughter) was scared to go to the bathroom in here because you had girls looking over the stalls on top. I'm sitting here like, 'you got to be kidding me.'" – Parent*

## Family and Community Strengths

**Several strengths emerged from the data regarding family and community resources at the school. First, there are a small number of semi-organized, very committed parents at the school. We make this claim based partly on the fact that some participants returned to each event, sometimes with a child or friend. Additionally, these same parents are active members and/or leaders in various organizations at the school and in the community. Therefore, second, we believe an infrastructure for building strong school and community partnerships with open communication exists but it needs strengthening. Third, and lastly, there were a number of community members without children in the school who were committed to the school's health which we viewed as a strength as well. Here are comments from the discussions:**

*"There's so many different ways to communicate with parents. We can't keep allowing obstacles to stand in the way." – Parent*

*"I've been dealing with this for 12 years. It makes me angry because like I said, until a tragedy happens... Then everybody wants to come up here all up in arms. And we're trying to get something positive with the schools. And these kids wanna come to school and have fun in a good environment." - Parent*

*"You have to prepare these kids for a job. I'm a vet technician. Usually I'm in scrubs and you have to learn to be in uniform. You dress up nicely to go a job. You have to be in uniform. That's why I'm so glad my oldest daughter started uniforms." – Parent*

*"I actually live in the community. My kids went to this school… so I've seen a lot of stuff. I was amazed at how it has calmed down... I used to call it the holding cell. You know, sad to say. That's the way it felt to me, like a holding cell for the children, because nothing else was going on. But now, since the new principal ... I've seen where they've made the climate more conducive to learning." – Parent*

### Leadership Strengths

The current school leadership was perceived by most participants as probably the strongest resources for change. As mentioned earlier, even without prompting, parents, students, and community members participating in the focus groups had a positive appraisal of Mr. Dixon's team. There was clear discernment made between the quality and conditions at Harrington before and after the new principal's arrival. In fact, when asking questions about school leadership, participants sometimes asked for clarity on whether the facilitator was referring to "then" or "now." Our interview protocol contained just one all-encompassing item for leadership which participants answered from different angles.

**Numerous themes emerged regarding the strengths of the leadership team. The major finding was there was a consensus, bordering on unanimity, among participants that the new school leadership rapidly gained respect of parents and students. This mutual respect laid the groundwork for relational trust between the school's leadership and parents. Indeed, according to parents, students, and community members, it was a key resource for school improvement. Whereas the school was described as a disorderly environment where students were seldom held accountable for their behavior, there was a perception that the new leadership brought about school-wide stability. They, especially the principal, were perceived as being tough but fair. Both parents and students believed they work well together as a leadership unit. Finally, parents discussed how they now feel listed to and involve in decision-making in ways they previously were not. Below are examples of comments made by focus group participants.**

*"Every time I try to get the other principal to do something she thought, "Oh, we can't do this; parents are not going to want to do that." I've been asking (the former) principal for years to do certain things and get more resources in here and all. And, this (new)*

*principal is like the sky has opened up finally. I can see the daylight, my hands aren't tied." – Parent*

*"Mr. Dixon came, it was difficult. I saw him battle. He got it done. He insisted that this became a place of learning. And he stood his ground. I was really pleased with that, and I'm still pleased with it." – Parent*

*"Mr. Dixon's stern, in a good way, instead of being lenient. You know, like, 'take your hoodies off when you come in the door,' 'you're supposed to be in uniforms' stuff like that, which was so lenient before. It drove me crazy." – Parent*

*"I can say everyone, as far as the adults, is pretty much a leader. He does have leaders here. Whereas before you'll find someone wanting to hide behind the curtain, or blend in the crowd with the kids, and that's how I think a lot of things became chaotic here. I think some of the teachers wanted to be invisible." – Parent*

*"I think with the new principal that's there now, he did a lot of shaking up. It was like, if you're not going to teach, then you're not going to be here. We did lose some good ones that probably just could not take some of the rules that he was setting. But, all in all… it seems to be working. Like I said, teachers that they have… are pretty good." – Parent*

*"Mr. Dixon did clean this place up in a physical way. Also, the morale I see is different. Because I'm out on that corner, people tell me everything… I know everything goes on in this building, pretty much. And I hear a lot of negative stuff, but the ones that I heard it from weren't doing it." – Community member, crossing guard.*

*"Well Mr. Dixon, he did do stuff, but it wasn't just him. It was mostly the teachers, because they (are) enforcing the rules. But they actually know how to teach. Like the other teachers, they were just here to get a paycheck and leave. These are new teachers, they actually are eager to teach the kids, as the kids are eager to learn." – Student*

## MAJOR AREAS OF CONCERN

As mentioned above, while many participants perceived an uptick in academic quality at Harrington, there was a perception of lingering challenges as well. We stress however, that the overall tone of the focus group sessions were quite positive as participants explained how conditions are improving. Some expressed a belief in lag time between improving the learning environment and outcomes for students. In other words, many

see the school now heading in the right direction. The expressed that time and more resources might be needed in order to see the fruits of the current leadership's labor. However, still, the comments below outline several areas of concern.

### Academic Challenges

**In addition to scarce resources, the themes reflecting academic areas of concern were: academic press was lacking; teacher turnover was a problem last year; iReady was viewed as disconnected from other learning; and guidance help is needed for high school applications. Specific comments were as follows:**

*"It's a shame because they suffered; because seventh grade was very critical. You know, because this is what high school is looking at, that particular grade. So, I had to actually speak with them (the high school admissions staff), and ask them what can I do as far as for them to try to understand the reason. Luckily, they do understand the public school and some of the setbacks and stuff and cutbacks that the school has went through. So, I did attach a letter and it is helping her … Because other than that, they're just going to be looking at the PSSA scores, and that's not her. I mean, she's getting As and stuff now." – Parent*

*"We didn't have teachers then (last year, 7th grade) because they were either fired or ... resigned. So, because of this, my PSSA results, they didn't do too good. I got advanced in ELA. But I did really bad in math because the little things that we did manage to learn throughout us having a bunch of subs, they weren't right." – Student*

*"We had different teachers and we had long-term subs. But the long-term subs would often quit because... they didn't know what they were getting themselves into. So, the kids were really bad. So, they resigned after maybe a week." – Student*

*"I had to actually get a letter, just to explain the reason for my daughter. She's always been on honor roll from kindergarten all the way up until now. Her PSSA is in math (was low) because they did not have a math teacher. In sixth grade, the math teacher left, I think, in January. So they kind of really fell off, and she struggled. So she went below basic and that's never been a problem." - Parent*

*"Unfortunately my daughter suffered that fate last year because they could not keep a seventh grade teacher. The eighth grade teachers that we have now are outstanding. They're playing catch up, pretty much doing seventh and eighth, instead of just jumping on eighth grade. He had to backtrack and start all over again." – Parent*

*"My daughter, she's like, 'I don't understand this math, I don't understand it.' And, she's sitting there crying to me. I'm sitting there crying to her. It looks like Greek to me. I'm like, 'come on, we gotta do it together.' I really don't like her to be on the Internet, to me that's kind of cheating. I want you to really sit there and figure it out. They keep telling her, 'oh, you can go on this site,' you know. I'm like, 'she gotta figure it out,' you know?"– Parent*

*"I know a lot of counselors feel really overwhelmed with very urgent issues that students are facing in terms of emotional support or things that are going on in their lives. It almost seems like you kind of need a dedicated person to like manage all of that stuff, the (high school) application stuff." - Parent*

iReady. The exchange below comes from a focus group session where a half dozen or so students participated. All of them voiced concerned over iReady, an instructional support program recently implemented at Harrington. None of them expressed positive experiences with iReady. The discussion went on this way for some time, until the facilitator steered it back to the next protocol item. Here is an excerpt of the conversation:

*"I don't understand why, when I go back and pass something, they make it seem like I'm not doing it. So, they say you have to pass this. I pass it. You have to pass this now. I pass it. You have to pass it again… It's like they don't want me to win! And, that's just messing up my grade completely. –Student*

*"Has anybody complained?" – Parent*

*"Yeah, everybody, we even go to the principal. There's nothing they can do about it."*
*–Student*

*"This is because you tried really hard on the first one didn't you?" –Parent*

*"And I'm passing, but my grade is not going up as I'm passing, which I don't understand." –Student*

*"Because maybe you're not showing enough growth?" –Parent*

*"We can't take them home. You can ask every student, I'm not gonna say the school, but eighth grade are all failing." –Student*

*"What do teachers say about it iReady?" –Facilitator*

*"They usually say, 'we didn't make it up, so we can't really do anything about it.' They just told us it was a small portion (of the course grade) when we first started, so we do it. We stop trying our best on it. So we go back, and we look at our grades, and it says F. And some of us are trying hard. Like, all of us are trying hard to get our grades up. We even take time when we go home and during our lunch to try to come up and do it. Still, it's not passing and I don't understand why. That just messed up our whole thing. How does that even look? We have all As, and you go into seminar and there's an F. None of us, we never got anything lower than a C. How does that look, a whole F?"* – *Student*

### School Culture and Climate Challenges

**There were also several areas of concern about school culture and climate. Safety inside the building was once an issue but it is no longer; (still, there were questions about whether the balance schoolwide discipline was right.); safety outside the building, and from school, was a concern; facilities are wanting (e.g. lack of air conditioning); unappetizing food; aesthetics (lack of artwork and cheery colors), and some questioned and overly strict uniform policy.** We discuss the issues of facilities and food in the final segment on parents' recommendations for improvement.

*"This may not seem big but a lot of people's behavior is influenced on what they see. Like this is a nice school; it's well designed out. But I feel as though a lot of things could be better. The school is not a dirty school. But I feel as though if you go to other schools and you walk through them you see art, it's not just plain wall and marble all over it. That's how it is here. If we had paintings or some sort of color, it would brighten up the students and have them actually excited to see what they're going to see when they come to school."* – *Student*

*"I'm sure it depends on which kids come in that don't have uniforms on. I've seen kids as young as kindergarten being turned away. Again, my concern is for the child because you don't know if they ever make it home... So now you're talking about a second safety issue. Where I think if we have available, at least uniform shirts here and require parents to wash their shirt and send it back or something like that so the children don't have to leave the school. It cuts that issue out."* –*Parent*

**Safety to and from School.** The issue of safety outside of school has a bearing on school climate and culture as well. If the morning walk to school is eventful or a source of stress, this could influence readiness to learn on arrival. While external conditions are not in the control of school or district leadership, they were nevertheless on the minds of participants. The main entrance of Harrington sits at a busy intersection, where

Baltimore Avenue, 53ʳᵈ Street, and Thomas Avenue all collide. Blind angles are formed for pedestrians and vehicles alike. A trolley car runs down the middle of Baltimore Avenue, and cars often make aggressive moves to pass it. Even for adults, crossing the street to enter the school is not so simple. Several worried parents discussed this problem, and below are examples of what they said.

*"Me and my daughter saw a parent get hit by a car. Just because the light is green, that doesn't mean go. Look and look again. So a parent, he was a pretty tall gentleman, and a little inky dink with him, like a kindergartner. So they're walking and I hear this car. I happened to pull clear back, like wait a minute. This lady came flying around the corner. Next thing I see the parent flipping up in the air. I'm surprised she didn't get the kid too. But then the guy, he laid stomach, got up, and then she took him and put him in his car and took him to the hospital. I was like, 'are you kidding me right now?'"* - Parent

*"We need a crossing guard back up there because she retired last year. She almost got hit by a car, it's dangerous. They don't have one up here near the bridge either. That's another dangerous place, up here on the bridge. That's why I said we need safety."* – Parent

*"One of the issues is always the emergency vehicles and how they can get onto Baltimore Avenue without having to wait for traffic or trolleys. So that cut off is good for them. But it could be a situation where, I know when I lived in the Cedar Park area, we had several places shortened with planters. Oh, those big flower pots, they're beautiful too."* – Parent

*"That's why it got done because those intersections were absolutely horrible to cross. To do it in front of a school (place large flower pots) is even better. That can definitely be an option but it has to be moveable."* – Parent

## Family and Community Challenges

**Several themes regarding areas in need of improvement also arose in our discussions about family and community issues. According to the participants, these included the following: overcoming prior relational trust issues with the community; responding timely and adequately to parent's concerns; communicating effectively with parents who are busy; and increasing the number of parents who actively support the school. Below are some illustrative quotes reflecting these emergent themes:**

*"We should start from the classroom because the teachers know the parents that they have a good relationship with. So, when we're talking about having our meetings, we're*

*going from, not just two parents, or three parents showing up. Now, we have 23 parents. And then these 23 parents are going to outreach to other parents. Call one parent... right. Exactly." -Parent*

*"We're going to check the kids book bags? They (notes to parents) could be a paper airplane on their way home." - Parent*

*"The school had been unfriendly to the neighborhood. So, that's a thing, I think, we're trying to adjust. So then, I kind of see what you're talking about in terms of now, what to do is kind of premature. We're not even on the same page in terms of our collective consciousness." – Community Member*

*"Once they see things that we're asking for is not getting done, they're like, 'what's the point? I'm not coming back tomorrow.'" – Parent*

*"I'm always working. You can't call me because I just won't pick up. But then I see a text, be like aw yeah… And I can quickly do something back, and I feel like, alright, something is okay. If it's something like an emergency, I gotta go. There was an issue, where I had to show my boss, and he was perfectly okay with that, seeing what it was."*
*– Parent*

**Leadership Challenges**

After a thorough analysis of the transcripts, we found no discernable criticisms or challenges concerning the current leadership made by parents, students, or community member. In lieu of quotes, we prepared the following statement based on a holistic view of the data gathering.

There was considerable discussion about the effectiveness of Harrington's leadership team in each of the focus groups. The overwhelming consensus was Principal Dixon represented an overall positive change for the school. Without prompting, participants stressed the various ways he has made a difference. Parents, students, and community members made it clear there was a difference between life before and after Mr. Dixon's arrival. There was optimism and hope for continual improvement.

## PARENT & COMMUNITY SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Throughout the conversations, parents and community members insisted on weighing in regarding the two potential outcomes of the SGS process which they learned about during the kick-off meeting. Specifically, this was segment of the presentation called, "what are the options for additional funding and support?" The options were either

entering into the district's Acceleration Network; or developing school created academic improvement plan. A conversation about this issue arose at each meeting. In each instance, there was a clear preference for including the voices of parents and community members in the final decision-making and a perception that developing a school created academic improvement plan would allow for this.

Each of the focus groups concluded with an opportunity for parents, students, and community members to share ideas that were not addressed above and/or to make suggestions for school improvement. Most of the responses pertained to improving facilities (air conditioning & heating), along with the quality of meals. Below is a non-exhaustive sampling of their closing thoughts.

*"Air conditioning and better lunches, sorry, I'm beating that thing like a dead horse. They're my main, top things. With the Title I money, we needed to have school assemblies to teach these kids as far as like stranger danger, stop bullying, be aware of your surroundings." – Parent*

*"First of all, better food, that directly affects learning. What you put in your body affects your mental development and physical development. All of that goes together. I did mention that earlier. That's directly associated with your overall ability to learn. They feed them junk. I'm keeping it 100. That's not healthy. I probably won't eat this food. In the military, I would eat that … if I was in Iraq or Kuwait on a regular basis, but other than that, no." – Parent*

*"My son tells me, dad I don't like the lunch. Or, I only ate this. He'll eat like one thing out of it because all the food is terrible." – Parent*

*"Better lunches, like maybe a distributor comes in here? I know it can be done because my oldest daughter goes to Westside and their food is totally better, and it's still a public school. I'm getting tired of hearing the excuse of, 'oh, well, we have a certain distributor we can only go to.' That's not true. Why are you serving kids cold cereal in the morning when it's ten below outside? A lot of these children don't even get to eat at home. They don't have time or their parents run out the door... In their lunches, you're giving them half frozen pizza or stuff like that. I'm like, you know, they're not even eating. So like, my daughter gets home, it's like I better have something ready, down her whole fruits thing, down there for her. – Parent*

**Focus Group Question Protocol**

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

8. CATCH ALL: What else is important to say about the school and your child's experiences I have not asked about?
   a. *What are your hopes and fear for this process?*
   b. *Final things you really want the district to know about this school?*