



College of Education
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®

**System of Great Schools
School District of Philadelphia
Alain Locke School
Parent, Family & Community Input Report
December 2018**

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2018, the Philadelphia School District in partnership with Temple University 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 three target schools. This report represents a synopsis of the major themes from the focus groups conducted at Alain Locke School.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Between October 11th and November 7th, the research team visited Locke for six events: four focus groups, parent-teacher conference day, and a feedback and findings meeting. According to the District's Family and Community Engagement (FACE) team, there were 60 attendees across all of the events who participated in the feedback process with 38 of those being family members. On each occasion the same interview protocol was used (see Appendix A). While the majority of participants were women—mothers, grandmothers, and relatives of students attending the school, this school had a notable number of men participate. While other people (community members and activists, etc.) also attended the events, and their input is included here, the analysis focuses most heavily on parents (or caregivers) and their comments about their and their children's experiences. It is also worth noting that there were attendees from the community who represented the local political committees. There were also several members of the local Bangladeshi community who came to multiple focus group meetings and expressed real concern and commitment to the process of improving Locke in the future. Many of the parents who participated have had several children through this school or currently have 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 Locke, 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 (except parent-teacher conferences) 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 the focus groups, 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. 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.

The importance of this work is that policy-makers are able to hear the voices of many parents and community members, recognizing that they have important knowledge to add to the discussion of how to make this school better for their children. In essence, we asked them in many different ways, what is and what is not working in their child's school. For that reason, this report is, in essence, a collection of curated quotes that represent the most often cited insights on those questions with little to no commentary by the researchers.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Major Areas of Strength:

- Strong teaching staff
- Use of ClassDojo to communicate

Major Areas of Concern:

- Student safety
- Academic Program
- Staff disciplinary practices

Suggestions for Improvement:

- More staff
- More extra-curricular activities
- Identifying and addressing underlying issues involving behavioral problems
- Upgrade facilities

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 Locke. The following represent some of those comments in order of how often they were mentioned:

1. Strong teaching staff

Parents most often cited the quality of the staff at Locke as its greatest strength:

"There are some good teachers. I mean, my son is only in first grade so I can't really say, but some of the teachers that I have talked to, or peers I have talked to, some of them are really good. His Kindergarten teacher was really good, his first grade teacher I really love her."

"We have some awesome teachers here... that went through and did all of the props and the scenery. They did an awesome job. Then they had the father-daughter dance, the mother-son dance that they did. They do things here, and that's the type of things that we need."

"They got some really awesome teachers. They do. They have some really good teachers that's willing to work with you at home, willing to work with your child. You know, they don't single out kids, they make sure the kids is safe."

Interviewer: *What do you think the positives about the school are?*

Speaker 1: *Some of the teachers and staff, like [their teacher], the discipline staff and stuff.*

Speaker 2: *For me, it was the teachers. Basically the teachers, how they communicate, and the students, just mostly.*

2. The use of ClassDojo to communicate

Parents mentioned that they felt there were new efforts to communicate with them, particularly through the ClassDojo. Although not all parents knew about Dojo, the parents that did really appreciate its ability to keep them informed:

"I like ClassDojo, it's good to be able to text with the teachers and stuff and know what's going on."

"They send school closing. Report card conferences. If anything they send home to the kids they normally send it on ClassDojo. I normally get through the day his point system so I know if he behaved, if he did this, how he was, if he had a bad day. Normally if something goes on his

teacher responds. Sometimes he won't tell me, but she'll send it, if it was an accident, she'll send and let me know. So, I really love Dojo."

"I like the ClassDojo...I can check my daughter's progress throughout the day."

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, chaotic climate or actual physical altercations, parent's number one concern, by far, is about their children's safety:

Interviewer: *"What's your number one concern?"*

Parent 1: *"Safety."*

"The thing that I'm actually saying is that there's no respect, there's no discipline or there's no communication with the children. There's a lot of bullying, there's kids being on their phone, they're not learning they're playing around at school"

"There is a lot of fighting, lot of things."

"We need some kind of disciplinary action. But the bullying and all the fighting and stuff like that, because my child doesn't have a tooth right now. But I sent him to school with a whole tooth, but he has a gash in his head from that chair when someone pushed him into that thing over there... that air conditioner. So my child is getting hurt here. To me he's not safe here."

From a separate parent we heard a similar story about their child:

"I'm ready to pull my daughter from here and it's only October. Just because of the incidents that she's been in, being pushed. She had her head pushed into a table or something like that, and her tooth is loose now. The other day at lunch she had food poured on her, and the same thing if it had been hot or anything. It's like my question is, is it understaffed? Is there not enough supervision?"

"Even when I talk to his teacher, she's like, 'I can control what's going on in my class but in the school yard and the lunchroom, there's a lot of stuff that's going on.'"

"My daughter she got juice or soda poured on her in class."

“Oh yes, I was saying in my head thinking about, see, my two daughters, they go here. Second grade and fourth grade, and this is they first year ever being here. So the second day that my fourth grader that was here, she was being bullied. They stepping to her, wanting to fight her, and I don't know why I'm getting choked up but ...And then she got little boys picking on her, saying F her and all kinds of crazy stuff going on. And ... So, and then, but my second grader, she don't have no problems. It's only my fourth grader, and then once she start ... Because she been through so much, my fourth grader. And this was the only school that I can bring her to because every other school that I try to get her to, they say she's not in the area. ...If anything, she gotta protect her little sister now. So it's like, her back is against the wall, basically and I don't want my baby going down that road where nothing matters no more. I gotta protect me and my sister, and whatever happens from here on out, happens. I don't care.”

“I went to lunch one day with my son, there were 60 kids in the lunchroom and two lunch attendants. It's impossible for them to keep order in there. ...there's no order, there's no structure .”

“Just I would have to say safety, like I said before. Like the lunchroom and the recess area is usually pretty out of control. You know I've been up here several times about it, and I'm always told that they're under-staffed. That's definitely the main thing, because that where most of the incidents and the fighting and all of that stuff goes on.”

“No authority. They got kids here every time I come here they be running around doing whatever. They bully.”

2. Concerns about academic program

There were a few parents that spoke of some positive elements in the academic program, commenting upon such things as the sight words and the 100 day project. However, most parents are concerned that their child might not be receiving a high level of academic rigor in their schoolwork.

“I have a third grader and a first grader. My third grader could do a bit better work because he has a first grade book and that's not helping him at all.”

“My daughter's only in kindergarten. A lot of the stuff that they're doing, I was already doing with her so she kind of feels like, ‘What am I doing?’ You know? Like writing her name and stuff like that. So it's kind of like, she feels like her homework is what she already knew how to do that stuff.”

“Maybe he feel like he's not challenged enough, 'cause my son did tell me ... My son in first grade, he said, ‘Mom, it's boring. It's boring. I do in the class and then I gotta come home and do it again.’ So I have, even last year, I talked to his teachers so they give him different work, a little bit more challenging because when he came from preschool what he was doing here, kindergarten, he was doing that.”

"So when I ask her to explain it to me, [she] can't. And I'll be like, 'Well how you can't explain it to me when I know that the majority of the time the homework you get is what you supposed to learnt in school.'"

"So she say stuff like, 'Well the teacher just put this stuff on the board and then that's it.' So like he'll put this stuff on the board, and they don't really know it. You're [the school] not explaining it, how to go through it, the steps everyday. You know, how we would do at home."

Interviewer: *"Do you see a lot of homework come home?"*

Parent: *"There used to but not now. Now you get few homework like a week, you know what I mean? When he was in second grade he used to get more homework every day... So this is not good for the student. The good thing for the student have to have homework to work to do every time... So if they're getting like one time a week homework, that's not going to help the student."*

"We've been here since kindergarten. She coulda totally flunked kindergarten 'til like second grade, nobody done anything. I just want some more support for the students, honestly."

3. Staff Discipline Practices

Parents would like to see the staff behaving differently when they discipline the students:

"Sometimes you don't wanna be like that. I do feel like in here, they don't know how to talk to people at all and that's how I feel like that's the part with kids too."

Parent: *"The last meeting where I was picking my kids up, there was a girl chasing...one of the kids in the school cussing all types of stuff, and... they [the teachers] were just looking."*

Interviewer: *"What would you have liked to see happen in that instance?"*

Parent: *"Honestly, both of them to be taken to the office, like why is she cussing at you and why are you all running around the building in the first place?"*

"I feel like if it is NTAs here, they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing. They're too friendly with the kids. And I understand you wanna be ... you want them to have their level of trust or everything with you, but I even watch them ... You know you're not supposed to have your phone. And they'll say, oh ... put your phone away, put your phone away. Instead of taking it and doing what you're supposed to do."

“More training for adults who are in the building while you're acting with kids, no matter what their roles. So, support and training for them. Some tactics, some strategies”

4. School Leadership - Some strength cited but overall a lack of insight

Some parents mentioned the school's leadership from the security guard to the the Dean of Students in favorable ways, but also as possible points of intervention in the school's turnaround. Overall, though, the quantity of comments about the leadership was not large. When asked about it there was often silence.

On the positive note:

Parent 1: *“The dean is out there everyday in the school, like you said, he's able to round the kids up and it's everyone. He motivates them and that's what I think they need, like come on, let's go.”*

Parent 2: *“He's dean, and security officer”*

Parent 1: *“Yeah, those two are very well respected amongst the kids.”*

“If there were more of them, they have [school police], he's awesome. Helping to calm kids down and positively reinforcing them.”

“She [the principal] went out of her way to write the grants to get the extra funding that we got this year. She had made strides last year to try and do things. I don't think that her being the head is the problem... She goes out of her ways to do these things. Last year she got turned down for stuff that she wound up getting this year. I think that's the type of person that we need, that won't give up when, you know, like you said, the person that would be like, ‘oh they don't want to do what they do, I'm going to get paid anyway, so I'm not going to write this grant. They denied me last year so I'm not going to do it this year.’ She still has that fight and she still believes in the school and believes that we can get better, so she is doing everything that she can do.”

On the leadership as a possible point of intervention in the turnaround:

“I would settle for leadership. Regroup that because the same for three years and nothing really changed. I know it takes time, but three years and nothing changed, it go up and down? That's nothing I want to focus on. I want to push them out, bring somebody new to fill it and get the job done. Honestly, I equate everything in my life to sports. If it don't work, get rid of it until it works. If it's the leadership, if we get a new principal and it's just that one part that was messing up, everything will fall into place. But if we get a new leadership and everything remains the same then we can actually see, it wasn't the principal, it was everybody underneath that wasn't participating...”

“To improve this, we need a strong administration that keeps a good principal, vice principal has to be stronger.”

[When asked about things to change]: *“I think one of the things, one of the issues definitely would be the administration and the leadership”*

SUGGESTIONS FROM PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

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

1. More staff

The parents took every opportunity to mention that there are not enough adults in the building to meet the needs of the students - not in the classroom, or the lunchroom or the school yard or the hallways, or even the bathrooms.

“I feel that it's understaffed.”

“I know. For me, the biggest thing here, is the lack of staffing. “

“More people that work here. 'Cause to me, I could tell the school district is very limited with they funds. So y'all don't have a lot of people working here, which is not monitoring the kids”

“They need more staff... You got kids getting out of the classroom”

Interviewer: *“How could the school use the staff?”*

Parent 1: *“Maybe in the lunchroom. Recess. What else you were saying?”*

Parent 2: *“What makes you say lunch and recess?”*

Parent 1: *“Always because that's where the problems come. So lunch and recess I feel like its more classes in here.”*

Parent 3: *“in lunch and recess.”*

Parent 1: *“So I feel like lunch or recess is overcrowded. Not overcrowded, but it's more classes and with the less people it's hard to watch over everyone. Even with more staff they won't completely be able to watch over, but enough so you can catch more things than what is probably”*

They also see the need for more staff in the classroom to deal with behavioral issues so the teacher can teach:

"...if there's other people in the class. I sat in my son's class for the day. My son, he said that people weren't picking on him because they were scared of me. But my presence being there, the presence of somebody else, can help the other children to stay in order and I think it's easy for them. Especially kindergarten through second grade, it's so easy for them to see one child misbehaving and for them to just follow suit. You know, for them to just jump on the bandwagon. But if somebody else is there, because the teacher can't. She just can't because she's focusing on the learning, the lesson. At the time, I see like three other kids misbehaving and she's focusing on the misbehavior, my son's sitting there like this, bored. So then what's his next move? He's gonna start."

Parent 1: *"Teachers should have an assistant."*

Parent 2: *"Yeah."*

Parent 1: *"An assistant to deal with the kid who's acting out."*

Interviewer: *"I see all of you are shaking your head on that"*

Parent 1: *"If the schools can actually get a teacher's aid for the younger, k-2, because by the time they're in 3rd grade, you should know what you have to do"*

Parent 3: *"Yeah that happens way too often where a teacher has to stop teaching to discipline one maybe two children, and the rest of them [inaudible 00:34:50]. Valuable time. Those one or two minutes that a teacher has to stop and deal with that child, that's one or two minutes that my child could learn more or their child could learn more."*

Parents also see the need for more staffing so children can receive tutoring, more individualized academic support.

"We need somebody in the class with the teacher. Somebody who could take three, four kids to the side. Let them go back, take another group while the teacher's learning or teaching something. Like I said my son needs help."

"I think there should be a tutor for each grade."

"More staffers, tutoring, there needs to be a staffer for lunchroom aides, and specifically for public relations. If there is just a staff member here that's totally focused on reaching out to the parents, making sure the parents have the information they're supposed to have."

2. More Extracurricular Activities

Most parents knew about an after-school reading program and many spoke about the play and the father-daughter dance, but all expressed interest in many more additional extracurricular programs for their students:

"We did a play last year, and I think for you, to speak to what she said, those extracurricular activities, I think that they can be huge for the school, and that is one way where I think you would also be able to get a lot more parental involvement. Yeah, the parent may not show up for the focus group or the parent may not show up for these meetings, but they'll show up if their daughter is cheerleading or if their son is playing football. They'll show up. That's how you get them more involved."

"I did a sports club, basically need more sports, more activities"

"And they need a before [school] program, he'd love it."

"Just like more activities and groups, and maybe sports."

"I'm actually happy that they finally have an after school program catering all grades, instead of just certain grades. I feel if more family encouragement and maybe after school tutoring"

"They're taking a lot of stuff away, funding is getting low. Stuff like that. But my thing is like, we need some more after school programs like tutoring and stuff."

"What does the school need in order to be better?"

Parent 1: *Activities*

Parent 2: *Drama?*

Parent 1: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Is there anything you think that could make it better?*

Parent 3: *Like sports or, like more sports and activities.*

Parent 4: *The more after-school programs and stuff for the children, because they, to me, y'all just rush 'em through things. They don't really take the time out to really teach 'em.*

Interviewer: *Are there particular extra curricular activities you'd like to see that you can think of?*

Parent 5: *Maybe a sport. I'm trying to think. Something. Maybe. I don't know what, but maybe like age brackets like something for the younger and something for the*

older. Just so they won't match them all together. I know they have like the reading programs. When they have like a robotics, like something that keeps them more interested, they want to come out and support. Maybe like a cooking class for the girls. Just something so they'll want to come out.

Parent 6: *'They get the students involved they'll be more active, volunteer more. I think they should, I don't know, have something to look forward to like the after school program.'*

3. Identifying and addressing underlying issues that lead to behavioral problems

While parents see consistent disciplinary practices as important to addressing their concerns about student safety, they also express an understanding that there are underlying issues that must also be addressed:

"I think one of the things, one of the issues definitely would be the administration and the leadership, a lot of this bullying and stuff that's going on, these kids being pushed around talked to the way they're being talked to, and cussed at. That's coming from how I hear a lot of these [parents] standing out here talking to they kids in the yard in the morning."

"There is a large number of kids here who have a lot of behavioral issues. Who have gone through trauma, and if there are more staff here, they can help to rein them in."

"Honestly I think that they need to re-implement having behavioral specialists, the STS [School Therapeutic Services] program. I think they need to bring that back into the school, because right now other parents ... at one point I had the STS working for my son... They took the program out so I had to go find outside resources."

"Like a room for children with anger behavior."

4. Fix up the facilities, particularly the bathrooms

The parents would like to see improvements to the physical plant of the building, including: painting, groundskeeping, cutting the lawn, some flowers, and more equipment for recess.

"The men's bathroom and the girl's bathroom right here is ... There's a hole in the wall that needs to be covered."

CONCLUSION

Overall, parents at Locke would like to be part of the conversations on how to make Locke a better school:

“It seems like our school is just behind. I don't know when it's gonna pick up, but it seems like our words aren't being listened to right now.”

Appendix A - Interview Protocol

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?*