

UPPER DARBY RISING

AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK DIASPORA COMMUNITY SESSION

DEC. 10, 2020



On Dec. 10, 2020, Upper Darby Rising began its community dialogue initiative with a focus group discussion for members of the African-American/Black Diaspora Community. The session was held on Zoom.

About 45 Upper Darby School District residents, parents, students and other stakeholders took part. (Nearly twice that number had signed up to participate, but this 50 percent “melt” from pre-registration totals has proved pretty typical of Zoom events in the pandemic era. By the evening, many people are simply “Zoomed” out.)

The residents were joined by a number of district administrators and teachers, who joined one of the 10 breakout groups as observers.

In the breakouts, which lasted about 70 minutes, participants were guided through an in-depth discussion of three themes that the Upper Darby Rising initiative is exploring in its effort to ensure educational excellence with equity for all the district’s schoolchildren.

The themes discussed in breakouts were: Discipline and Bullying: Real and Hyped; Resource Imbalances: Inside and Out; and Diversity: An Asset and a Challenge. A fourth core theme: Civic Engagement: An

Island or a Hub, was discussed in a concluding plenary session. A video of that discussion will be posted on this site soon.

The breakouts were led by professional moderators from Catalyst Community Conversations, a unit of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Each moderator filed a detailed report on the yield from their group's discussion. You can jump to a particular report by using the links below, listed by group number and moderator name. Of you can scan all 10 reports, presented in order of group number.

BREAKOUT GROUP REPORTS

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GROUP 1

MODERATOR: GERMAINE INGRAM.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

The participants moved into a discussion of the complexities of addressing school discipline.

The mother of a 4th grade son related how there was a time when a kid was taking her son's lunchbox every day. She was reluctant to classify it as bullying. She went to her son's school, the offending kid's parent was contacted, and the behavior stopped. She was satisfied with the way it was handled and

resolved. She said that she believes that there is sometimes subtle bias regarding children and families of color. In the end, there needs to be a partnership between the family and the school for school discipline to be effective. There needs to be consistency.

The father of a 7th grader and 2 college age sons said that the district must have clear guidelines with regard to discipline, and there must be training to combat inherent biases. Some teachers may harbor biases toward certain groups, and if clear expectations, training, and supervision don't curtail biased behavior, those teachers need to find work elsewhere. He spoke of the challenge of communication in a district where 70 different languages are spoken. He also said that there must be zero tolerance for certain behaviors. He applauds the fact that the district embraces a restorative, rather than a punitive approach to discipline. Among the strategies used by the district are restorative justice and Youth Court.

At the request of one of the participants, the observers joined the conversation, talking about the proactive and ongoing steps the district is taking to ensure equity, including a district-wide equity initiative (Committee on Equity Planning), that includes training on implicit bias; turn-around training; equity teams at each school; emphasis on restorative practice; efforts to educate parents as well as kids in order to try to build consistency between expectations at school and at home.

One of the participants summed up the conversation by saying that "communication is the key".

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

By decision of the participants, resource allocation was the first topic we tackled. When the topic was introduced, one participant asked what we meant by "resources". The moderator gave several examples: class sizes, facilities, money and materials for arts and extra-curriculars, uniforms and equipment for sports. The mother of a fourth grader said that she is satisfied with class sizes in the district but is concerned about the state of facilities. She said that she understands the problems with funding for capital improvements. Still, kids need a comfortable environment in order to learn effectively. She was especially concerned with air quality in the classrooms.

The mother of the 6-year-old said that she too is aware of the underfunding problem. She said that she is pretty impressed with what the district has been able to do despite chronic funding issues. Her son is too young to be involved in sports or extra-curricular activities that might reveal inequities. So far, she's happy with her experience.

The father of a 7th grade daughter and two sons who graduated from the district focused on the class size and facilities issues. There is a major overcrowding issue at Beverly Hills Middle School, which was described as "bursting at the seams"; and there needs to be expansion of elementary facilities, as well as retirement of modular classrooms that have been in service for many years. The district is planning to build a new middle school but has encountered entrenched resistance from neighbors of the site where the school is planned.

The observers joined this part of the session, sharing their perspectives and challenges with respect to class sizes. One observer talked about the “huge role” of class sizes in the ability of teachers to provide individualized instruction. Another observer talked about the challenges the Kindergarten Center faces. There are 16 classrooms, 32 ½-day sessions per day, with 25 children in a class. They received an additional teacher, that made a marginal difference in the size of the classes, but made teachers feel that their concerns were being heard by the district. A third observer said the largest elementary school had 805 children last year and that it couldn’t accommodate another class because there simply is no room.

Late in the breakout session, the conversation returned to the plans for a new middle school and the pushback that is coming from the surrounding residents. The purported concern of the residents is that they don’t want to lose the community football field to construction of the new school. The district has assured them that they will have access to a better field after the construction is completed, and that the district is prepared to sign an MOU memorializing its commitments. That has not satisfied the neighbors, who also demanded that they be able to select the students who would be admitted to the new school. The district rejected that demand categorically. There is concern that the neighbors are being pressured to fight the new school by some local politicians, and that neighbors who would either support the new school or not be opposed to it are afraid to express their views.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

The moderator contextualized the topic by invoking the memory and legacy of the late civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis, referencing his commitment to making “good trouble” at the same time as he was deeply respected for his ability to engage and work with legislators across the aisle. The participants seemed to appreciate the idea that being considered a “challenge” and being considered an asset aren’t inherently in opposition. The parent of a 4th grade boy said that she feels that she is considered an asset. She considers herself an engaged, hands-on parent, and does not feel that she was treated poorly, or even with reluctance, for advocating for her son.

The parent of a current 7th grade student and two college-age sons who attended the UDSD said that when he first came to the district he felt that he was not getting the attention and answers he expected as a “very involved” parent. He had particular concerns about the rigor of the curriculum. It was his dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the district years ago that drew him into becoming an education advocate. He has seen the district make concerted efforts over the years and feels that every year the district gets better in its engagement with families. He made a distinction between “parental involvement” and “family engagement”; he said that family engagement goes deeper---it extends to connecting to what’s going on in students’ homes, without becoming intrusive. When asked what strategies the district has used to improve its engagement with families, he said the type of forum happening that night helps the cause. The parent of the 6-year-old said that she had a discussion with

her son's teacher about the coursework in her son's classroom and came away happy with the teacher's response. She says that the district does a "pretty good job" in its outreach to parents.

In this segment of the breakout we discussed the district's handling of the pandemic. There was general agreement that the district has done a good job under very difficult circumstances. One parent said that she would like more educational support for her child, who she considers gifted. She is also disappointed by the short instructional schedule, even though she recognizes the pressures on the district. She is working from home during the pandemic and provides enrichment activities for her son. The district has distributed 9000 laptops to families and has worked to ensure that families have internet access, regardless of income. One participant said that safety has to be the district's first priority, with education right behind safety.

Wrap-up

In the closing minutes of the session, the participants talked about their general takeaways from the conversation. Overall, there was a sense of encouragement and optimism about the district, and the prospects for the district to be vibrant and contribute to the vibrancy of the entire community. There was expression of satisfaction in getting a sense of like-mindedness, and that "everyone is in this together"; and gratitude for the chance to gain more insight into the district's efforts, plans, and strategies.

GROUP 2

MODERATOR: CASSANDRA GEORGES

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

In looking at the 1-10 scale for personal irresponsibility vs. systemic issues as the root of discipline. Issues, there was full agreement that systemic issues cause (or are more responsible for) these behaviors. All ratings were at least 6, with 2 people using 10. Those who completely assigned responsibility to systemic issues, described the cycle of bullying. Seeing bullying behaviors(as in an adult relative's relationships) or experiencing bullying behaviors tend to lead to replicating that behavior (e.g., people who were the victim of bullies become bullies themselves).

Race was seen as an important factor in the dynamic. Group discussed the trickle-down effect of conscious/unconscious bias. If people in society treat students as though they don't have value, then the students might have lower self-esteem and/or treat others like they don't have value, continuing the dynamic.

As for data, there was energy and interest in having info shared. They want to understand details of what has happened, including demographics of who was involved (e.g., grade level/race), when and where incident occurred, and resulting actions of administrators including severity of discipline/duration (e.g. verbal warning/suspension/police involvement). Group mentioned that data is already available, particularly through external advocacy groups that collect/find the data. Information system could be even more transparent, widely available.

Concerns:

- Administrators do not have a full understanding of issues related to trauma or how situations outside of classroom impact behavior in the classroom (e.g. housing insecurity leading to sleepy students, food insecurity leading to hangry conduct, and loss of loved one leading to outbursts).
- Administrators treat incidents involving students of color differently. Group agreed that there was disproportionate amount of discipline for one group of students over another, e.g. more likely to suspend/dole out more severe consequences.

Tensions/Trade-offs

There was tension about the negative impacts of data (e.g. having so much info that you can identify bully/victim or causing victim to become more of a target).

There was a conversation about financial competition for resources within the Black Diaspora. Someone shared that there have been programs/funding to support Africans/members of the non-native English speakers, such as providing language support. They were concerned that there was not the same amount of money/effort put forth to support African-Americans.

Possible pro-equity actions

- Train administrators to disrupt their bias. Ensure that all staff respect/value/appreciate all parents. Make sure that parents feel welcome in school.
- Instead of assuming that bullies are bad, administrators should approach situation as cry for help/attention and teach bullies alternative methods.
- Avoid discipline as the very first resort. Create process for restorative practices/conflict resolution.
- Provide meaningful training/programs like Navasa bullying program and talk to students about being bystanders.
- Give kids tools to resolve their disputes and express their emotions in constructive ways.
- Ensure consistency in disciplinary processes/practices. If two different students commit same infractions, then they should experience same outcomes. Make sure details of processes are written down and made widely available.
- Instead of suspending both bully and victim, find ways to address situation so that victim doesn't feel punished by administrators.

- Give students equitable education.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

Participants agreed that there were resource imbalances to some extent. Other districts have more resources than others, like unlimited hours for tutoring, buildings with adequate heating and cooling. Teachers need support to determine what their students' needs are and create a plan for filling in any gaps. There was also a brief debate about perception vs. reality. Someone pointed out one area that was equal. Teachers at different schools receive in reality the same training.

The group discussed the role of budgets and explored the roots of imbalances, such as who are the budget decision makers and what are the priorities that are valued/funded. The group agreed that there should be some standard level of quality set for every student, at the bare minimum. The conversation returned to the number of programs/initiatives funding to teach African immigrants English as compared to those helping to close the gap for African Americans. Someone shared that language programs receive federal funds that do not take away from money for other students in the district.

Group suggested that everyone should play a role in addressing these resource issues. Group agreed that current funding formula is unfair and needs to be addressed.

Concerns

The group worried about parents and teachers that are already facing struggles. Not all parents can be "squeaky wheels" about getting support for their children. How is the district reaching out to people who don't know they need help, don't how to ask for help if they know, don't have time for squeaky wheel advocacy, etc.? Group also acknowledged that teachers are doing even more with less in the pandemic. Certain teachers are struggling even more without adequate tech support.

Tensions/Trade-offs

- The group acknowledged that change can take a long time. Administrators in district believe that they are doing all they can. Employees want to keep their jobs, so they wouldn't express disagreement.
- *Possible pro-equity actions*
- District should focus on grant-writing to grab more federal money.
- Get big business to invest in education.
- Ensure timely responses when parents reach out.
- Encourage community members to apply for district jobs and make sure community reflects area it serves.
- Figure out how to include/thank taxpayers without children who help fund schools.
- Contact Congress and state representatives about revising funding formula away from zip codes.

- School should shift from being reactive to proactive. Administrators should resist urge to pass the buck, point fingers, or redirect responsibilities to others. Everyone can be part of the solution. When an issue arises, don't just go through the motions and eventually address this one situation. Take the appropriate steps to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

Group agreed that approach/experience of feeling like an asset vs. challenge varied widely. It depends on who you are dealing with. One parent might have a different experience interacting with two different employees in the same department. One parent might have a different experience interacting with same administrator on a different day. Two different parents might have a different experience interacting with same administrator.

The group discussed race as a factor. The group also mentioned gender (with the possibility of men being better received than women). Occupation (having connection with administrator coworker/peer) helped create an ally dynamic, since they got to know each other.

Group explored engagement. Group debated the extent to which administrators seemed to want parents' input and the extent to which parents shared input. Stories were shared on both ends of spectrum. Some described being present and feeling heard at school events. Others described absent parents and school events that only had organizers in attendance. Someone pointed out that administrators shouldn't make negative assumptions about parents that do not physically enter schools (e.g. work or other scheduling conflicts). There are many reasons why a parent might not be able to attend, but that same parent could still be very active/influential in their children's life outside of school. One participant felt treated like an ally, when they were in a position to help the school/ provide a service they could use.

Group had a friendly conversation about the shift away from village mentality (neighbors being part of students' lives). Schools provide rare opportunities to connect with/meet other neighbors through school functions. Some parents complained that they don't know or speak to their neighbors. Others shared how active their blocks/neighborhoods are. Group even exchanged invitations for parents in less connected areas to get introduced to friendly neighbors/attend future block parties.

Concerns

Employees with years of seniority may show more attitude/make less effort to be helpful/ appear to have little accountability for behavior that upsets others. The group acknowledged that they are not all bad.

Someone expressed concerns over administrators' level of responsiveness due to pandemic. Some parents are still having difficulties with school supplies, enrollment, etc.

Tensions/Trade-offs

Someone talked about African Americans needing to unite and advocate for selves, like other immigrant communities who seem to all know each other.

Possible Pro-equity Actions

Group was adamant that diversity training was important and should be taken by everyone.

GROUP 3

MODERATORS: KIM LEICHTNER AND CAROL LYDON

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

In response to the rating scale, all participants gave a rating of 7 or 8 and saw systemic racism as the main cause of behavioral challenges in the school. Everyone took turns speaking calmly and there was a lot of agreement among participants about the systemic problems that exist within UDSD. Everyone had a personal story to share about how their children or they themselves had been discriminated against by a mostly white faculty.

Concerns

Participants shared several concerns about being discriminated against because of the color of their skin. One shared a story about how a fight between two girls in middle school turned into a brawl in front of her home. She said principals saw the start of the fight in school but no one did anything. She expressed concerns that things can get quickly blown out of proportion without school support.

Another participant expressed concern about the under-representation of minorities in staff and administration. He said that the district expects students to come to school every day and listen to mostly white faculty who have no understanding of what's going on in students' lives. "Teachers expect black students to drop whatever they're dealing with at the door."

One participant said that, to undo the stigma that Upper Darby has, more diversity is needed. Her grandson had a situation at the high school and was told to stop "acting like them" because he was a bi-

racial child. She believes it starts from the home, but the schools need staff that understand and know how to tackle differences between Caucasian and black students, especially at the high-school level.

School staff need to better understand how children of different ethnicities are raised. People gravitate towards others who look like them. A lot of the behavioral problems are systemic because staff can't relate. Instead they labeled a participant's daughter as "aggressive" and "loud"; there was constant discipline, phone calls and detention vs. trying to understand her daughter's behavioral problems. How do different races discipline children and talk to and manage children? It's not the same across the board and staff need to be aware of that.

Tensions/Trade-offs

Participants agreed that "representation matters" - they need to see people in leadership roles that look like them and/or can at least relate to them. One point of tension was that while it would be great to have people in leadership roles that look like you, what's more essential is for there to be people who are open and willing to understand others.

A participant who was an educator mentioned that she wants to work with people who look like her so she has someone to connect with and believes that the same thing is true for students. More Black teachers are needed and changes in the curriculum need to happen. From a young age, she would like to see Afro-centric curriculum built into schools so that Black students don't feel less-than and are aware of accomplishments Black people have made so that they can be inspired. It would also be good to introduce Caucasian students to Black history and literature so that they become more accepting of diverse cultures.

The student in the district bluntly stated that UDSD "wears mask of diversity" but that doesn't mean there is no racism or prejudice. In his school career at UD, he's only had one or two Black teachers. As a senior, he's finally taking an African American studies course with a black teacher for the first time. The lack of Black teachers and Afro-centric curriculum means that students don't have a chance to find a sense of their history/pride. He wants a curriculum that is centered more around black literature, black history, black oppression/struggles. He feels that students aren't motivated to learn because they're learning about things from a white perspective.

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Think about interventions like talking to students and making sure students have emotional support
- Need mentorship to help support Black students and help them advance in school
- Need to educate/train staff so that they understand differences between Caucasian and black students and how to tackle these differences, especially at the high school level
- Need to hire more diverse (i.e. Black) teachers
- Need to consider a curriculum change to include more black literature, history and discuss black oppression and struggles

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

All the participants agreed that there was inequality in resources between the Drexel Hill area and Beverly Hill/Upper Darby area, with the latter getting an under allocation of resources, both rumored and personally experienced. Participants shared their stories about inequities and suggested actions the school district could take that would help towards addressing the bias against the black community.

Concerns

- “Things are definitely done differently in Upper Darby” as opposed to Drexel Hill. There is a still a very strong sense of there being an “other side of the tracks”, with Garrett Road being the dividing line. All three of the adults, who moved to the area as adults, said that they had never been called the N-word until they moved into the area.
- One participant said that growing up in Philadelphia, her parents talked to her about not driving through Upper Darby because the cops will pull you over the simplest thing, and they were told to go the long route down City Ave. and avoid Garrett Road to get to Springfield.
- One of the participants who had children who attended both Beverly Hills Middle School and Drexel Hill Middle School said that in Beverly Hills there was often no heat, no A/C and a general lack of books and resources compared to the school in Drexel Hill. Sports equipment and facilities were not as good as at Beverly Hills. The “way the school looks is old” and not as well-kept.
- There is a perception that “all the *bad kids* go to Beverly Hills.”
- Bonds between the security guards (who are black) and black students are stronger than bonds between teachers (who are predominantly white) and black students.
- The events of the spring/summer (George Floyd death and the resulting protests) were not addressed in school by anyone. This would have been a great learning opportunity, but it was not addressed. All that is taught is book-based learning.
- Very little black-based history, literature or other subjects taught except during Black History Month. Even then, the only thing we are taught is slavery. As the student said, “the only thing many students know about black history is that they were a slave.” He wants to know: “Who was I besides a slave?”

Tensions/Trade-offs

Another participant stated that her experience with Beverly Hills differed greatly since her daughter attended in the 1990’s. The school was not as diverse then. She felt that her daughter had a good experience and she also felt that the curriculum was “very good”. Even though some of the teachers were not great, some she would describe as great.

This participant also stated that “the curriculum is there, but how do we get students to take advantage of it?”

Schools can't address all issues.

Students also need to be willing to give teachers a chance and accept that you can learn from someone who doesn't look like you. One woman stated that her favorite teacher growing up was a white man.

"Equity doesn't mean everyone gets the same thing; it means everyone gets what they need."

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Use school as a forum to discuss "uncomfortable subjects". The student said that if the school had had discussions in class or generally after and around the spring/summer protests that "would have gone *miles*". He said that twice, "Having someone hear you would go miles to making a difference."
- He also said that he felt that teachers and leaders were afraid to have uncomfortable conversations, but that they need to find a way to facilitate these conversations among people who have different backgrounds. He stated that "as a black guy, I feel uncomfortable every day - all I want is a few uncomfortable conversations."
- District needs to find a way to help students/staff become more comfortable talking about these, and other, difficult issues. Kids have questions - people don't want to be offensive, but then issues and questions are just ignored. Nothing is going to change without talking.
- Open forums at the school - bring in moderators to help students and teachers talk to each other. Then, get the community involved.
- Give students the opportunity to get together with other groups. They will get to know each other.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

We spent about 10 minutes on this theme as we had such a rich discussion about the themes above. In general, participants could see how they were viewed as both a challenge and an asset by the district.

Due to the length of time spent on this theme, there was not enough time to explore specifically tensions/trade-offs or possible actions.

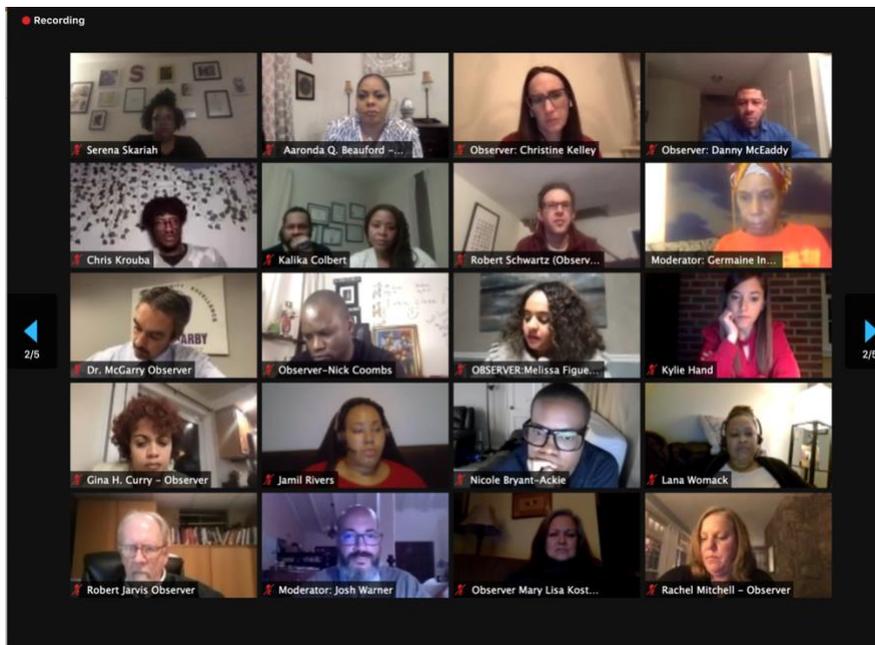
Concerns

One participant said that her family was treated as an asset because she has been in the community for a long time (30+ years) and she is part of the community, a part of "them" whether it's right or wrong. At a hockey game, they told her son "you're not like *them*, a regular black person" and I was offended, but to them, "I have what they have so I'm okay." She believed "they" accept her because she makes the same money, has the same house, her kids go to the same school and play the same sports but she *is* Black through and through. She felt that she was viewed as a challenge because how could she be their equal when she's not supposed to be? "How am I a parent in Drexel Hill with property? How am I their superior when I'm not supposed to be, but that's their issue and not mine."

Another participant didn't know how the district or community would view her but she would tell them that she's an asset because she is an engaged parent. She tries to be present for her children and be available to speak to teachers to address any challenges. But her desire to hold the district and teachers accountable to her children makes her a challenge to them.

Another participant felt that she was an asset, but if the district doesn't see her that way, then she takes a part of the blame. She's an engaged person who has reached out in her own community but didn't feel accepted so she focuses more of her community outreach and engagement in the Philadelphia area where she grew up. "If I'm not seen, it's because I didn't make myself seen." She sees herself as a challenge since she had to challenge and fight the district to get the special education resources that her daughter needed. She wonders if she was of a different skin color whether the district would have treated her differently.

The student participant sees himself as an asset because he is in leadership positions (captain, on school board, student representative) and is therefore able to help and educate others. People have told him that he has a way with words and is "very motivating," has a lot of empathy and is a relational person. He sees himself as a challenge because he's perceived as "white-talking" and "they" probably ask "who does he think he is?" He thinks that some of his classmates probably think he shouldn't be there, that he's getting things because he knows someone in the district but he earned it all. The other participants reassured the student that he was definitely an asset.



THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

Most of the responses for the individual/systemic responsibility scale were 5 or 6 (i.e. in the middle), with one 3.

- Those in the middle range discussed ways that an incident that seemed to involve implicit bias on the part of the teacher was handled well by the principal which suggests that personal responsibility on the part of an adult was involved. As one participant said:
My daughter, was very upset that the teacher had her personal biases, when he was hesitant to share the story... I did like the way the school handled it. I wasn't happy with the teacher (who did apologize) but gave it a 5 because of the way the school handled it, we all had a chance to talk about it.
- One of the other participants, noted that he was more on the personal responsibility side noted:
I'm glad to hear your perspective so I can understand the differences.
- There was agreement that it's important for adults to understand the personal homelife of students, and that children might be struggling inside. Teachers need to know they are responsible to help children feel safe (from other kids and from the institution). Adults can help mitigate the institutional and implicit biases and pay attention to their kids as individuals. In specific cases it's probably more at one end or the other.
- This suggests the need for adults to approach students on a case-by-case basis, to learn what's going on. Not only the adults, but the policies/rules may carry implicit biases and we need to see how that interacts.
- In another story that generated a lot of energy, it was suggested that discipline issues can often carry systemic biases. Security guards who stop the students repeatedly, students who have passes and they should know, are guilty of microaggressions that add up over time. And this seems to happen more to black boys, almost an assumption that they are doing somethings they shouldn't be doing.

Concerns

- Ethnicity of teachers (and other adults) matter – it's a very diverse school district and need educators that mirror that diversity, so it might be easier to make a real connection with students (and parents). As one participant noted:
The admin seems to lack training in how to talk with us, they automatically seem to think we are wrong. There's a step they miss and that can be the difference between being suspended for 3 weeks and getting off with a warning.
- Consistency is important. As one participant noted:

There are white students who get a warning for the same things a black student will get suspended for.

Tensions/Tradeoffs

- We need a different approach for discipline: adults have to learn how to manage our personal prejudices, to take the differences into account.
- We need to learn how to tolerate that we are diverse. Working toward valuing diversity is not just a label

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Make sure rules are clear so students don't get caught in crack.
 - Some rules need to have "exceptions" or be framed in terms of what's permitted. E.g., rules for students in choir, band, AP classes that note what they are allowed to do that's different (e.g., how they might go to cafeteria at different times because they don't have a lunch period)
- Adults should know the students – who they are, what's going on in their lives
- Not easy, but we need more diversity among faculty and staff, so students feel represented when they are going through the district.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

(We didn't have much time to go very deeply into this theme, because the group wanted to do Theme 3 before this one.)

Main Ideas

Have to acknowledge that Upper Darby is racially segregated. None of this is subtle:

- Clear demographic differences between the two middle schools in who goes there, in the resources available are obvious. And there's a rivalry between the two.
- Similar kinds of differences exist in the elementary schools – a black student had to be bused to a different, and predominately white, elementary school for the gifted program
- Division also in the high school because of earlier segregation in elementary and middle schools, so students have to learn to adapt to being with students of other races.

Concerns

There are clear imbalances, and the challenge is how to address them, particularly when the district is already resource-strapped.

Tensions/Trade-offs:

Given the imbalances, where should the money really go? And how?

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

- Participants noted that diversity could be both:
 - It is (or could be) an *asset* for students and families to be exposed to people from different backgrounds and cultures.
 - A Caucasian parent noted that he viewed diversity as an asset, that his sons will “see what he and his diverse friends share, and not feel threatened by them.”
 - People who come through the district have experiences people don’t have in other places. It gives you a perspective that can be an asset.
 - It is also a challenge for the district to figure out how to intentionally use diversity as an asset. But more than one participant noted that the district doesn’t seem to make people feel valued for their differences.

- The district uses diversity promotes its diversity, using it as a positive marketing brand.
 - Yet, one participant noted that as a student he experienced being in a diverse environment, he never “learned about real life applications of diversity, in the ways it impacted my life and what I worked on.” And wished he had.

- Teachers fulfill a lot of roles, but black students don’t feel understood. Is experienced as discrimination.
 - For example, teachers don’t understand the challenges of dealing with “hair that can be difficult to deal with,” and can “look like a mess.” Teachers sarcastic and non-supportive comments are experienced as microaggressions.

Concerns

- Have to do a better job supporting each and all students.
- Sometimes our differences divide us. Will someone take responsibility to bring us together for better understanding?

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- If purpose is to take advantage of diversity, need a plan/blueprint on how to use it constructively, intentionally.

MODERATOR: SERRANO LEGRAND

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

This group mainly attributed discipline and bullying to being a systemic and cultural issue, rather than one that should be attributed to misbehaving students themselves. There was consensus that personal accountability was important but there needed to be an overhaul around mindsets, biases and fairness. This topic was emotionally charged, with one parent describing a story of how her son was bullied with no discipline or consequences given to the victimizer.

This topic also evolved into a discussion about the ways that some administrators in this SD handle situations. Several participants named out loud the fact that Black students consistently receive harsher consequences for the same actions than their white peers, even describing that there are typically more security guards that intentionally circle around Black students while not doing the same for white students. In these instances, Black students have been labeled troublemakers without knowing much context provided and outlined.

Possible Pro-Equity Actions

Some recommendations were to provide police officers and security guards in the SD with more diversity and bias training. In addition, if there are 82 cultures represented in the students, 82 cultures should be represented in district leadership and teaching staff. Lastly, it was recommended that the SD take a deep look at suspension rates, with a particular attention to the ways African-American and Latin-x students are being suspended.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

Participants in this group were unsure how resources were allocated across the district, though they provided several assumptions throughout the duration of this conversation for how they imagined the resources being distributed.

What surfaced was that not all schools in the district received the same support as others: mainly those schools who were on the other side of the “trolley track” were not getting the “business as usual”. This trolley track seemed to be a line of demarcation around race and class.

Some issues that were brought up: in certain schools, participants discussed observations of classrooms being overcrowded, often with no teacher aides. Teachers often play multiple roles at once because of

the school's lack of resources around additional student supports nurses, counselors, librarians, paras, etc.

Participants in this group also expressed a distrust for the types of communication that the SD provided to their school community. Transparency came up again and again, with participants in this group naming things like the SD typically provides "lame excuse after lame excuse". There were, however, suggestions for ways that SD could actively combat this.

Possible Pro-Equity Actions

This group suggested that in order to build more trust in the SD, they ought to develop a committee that allows for more school to school conversations, similar to the ones they were a part of in this forum. In addition, this committee would enable parents from across the SD to be better engaged with each other to continue to speak about discrepancies and equity issues. There also needs to be more thoughtful ways the SD needs to include and engage community members in decisions related to resource allocation.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

Three participants in this group viewed themselves as an asset to the SD while one participant viewed themselves as a challenge. These perceptions were directly linked to the types of experiences that parents had when dealing with issues their children had in schools (and how schools managed said situations).

The group explored the ways that "difference" for parents, often cloaked under them having a different religion, immigrant status, race, dominant language, etc., often met a different type of treatment than that of their white peers. In addition, parents' passion for seeing and advocating fair treatment for their children was often misinterpreted and viewed more negatively, than positively. Words that the group used were: threatening, combative and angry. Regardless, all participants in this group agreed that treatment should not be contingent upon how you present yourself or how you look, as a parent.

While the group did acknowledge that there are currently more people of color on the school board now, than ever before, there was still a lot of work to be done around diversity and representation in leadership (district and school).

Possible Pro-Equity Actions

The school district, as recommended by this group, needed to do a better job at 1) not sweeping things under the rug, 2) increasing student voice and 3) listening more to parents and the community to collaboratively problem solve.

MODERATOR: BRIAN ARMSTEAD

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

Four of the five participants gave an answer of “5” to the request to place their view of where the main responsibility for discipline problems rests: individuals (1) or systems (10).

One person responded with a “7.” In discussion, it became clear that person didn’t disagree much with the others, but just had a more systems-oriented way of thinking.

Comments from the “5’s”

- Personal responsibility is important. Kids should be held accountable for their actions. Should have respect for their classmates in general.
- “As a teacher, I have seen a lot of bullies come and go.” Some of the bullies are needy; others are just mean. In 4th or 5th or 6th grades, t’s often cool to be “mean” to someone. Sometimes they are mean because at they feel “at least it isn’t happening to me.”
- The policies are OK. But how the policies are implemented by the teachers and administrators is the problem. There is a bias towards African-Americans being seen as more hostile.
- Teachers don’t treat kids the same way.
- Teachers should be able to read the situation...i.e. this kid is just having a really bad day; talk to them not automatically send to office
- Teachers need to be trained to develop that “barometer” to be able to read the situation.

Example: A Black student had allergy meds on her and was suspended for a week for distributing; Her Caucasian friends didn’t receive the same punishment. (*The speaker acknowledged perhaps not knowing the full story, but said the child is “quiet” and most would consider “nerdy”.*)

Comments From the “7”

- Toxic stress is going unnoticed; acting out not knowing what the kids are going through.
- Entire system (education & child welfare) has greater responsibility -- creates environment; housing; poor schools etc. Creates stress; parent poor/working poor with extended family members; how do these things go home ..therefore greater stress should be on systemic.
- Need resources to address

All these comments received substantial agreement from all participants.

Possible Pro-equity Actions

To improve behavior:

- The community can be more involved in supporting the families and school system to communicate values; some community partnership (after school or in school) not sure what it would look like.
- Teachers need to be trained to develop the “barometer” to be able to read the situation and see if the child needs to be handled in a disciplinary fashion or some other fashion.
- Do the kids need time to draw; to clean up; to spend time with teacher? If they got some kind of “currency” for following rules and norms, you could set up some more proactive behavioral plans. One story -- once this student realized he had something to earn, a lot of the bullying stopped. Might take time; parent participation; a teacher needs to be ready/willing to do that; teacher training
- Time during first period for kids to learn how to express their feelings; either out loud or in a journal.
- Go beyond community partnerships to community/family partnerships...a more holistic approach.
- Find ways to help black males come in and help mediate. Philadelphia allowed community folks to come in and saw a drop in behavior problems.
- Teacher action -- change how they view the students & what “currency: students bring. Will require a lot of investment. “I don’t think we’ll be ready for it.”

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

Resource imbalances between nearby school districts.

- One parent’s child spent time in Rose Tree/Media schools -- plethora of resources; field trips etc. The child went from Media to Upper Darby in middle school. It was a nightmare; never attended one field trip at Beverly Hills middle school. It also seemed they didn’t have enough staff. Classes were packed.

Resource Imbalances within the district

- Aronimink looks like It’s in Media (compared to Beverly Hills)
- Problem bringing students from other parts of Upper Darby into those more affluent/well-resourced areas for programs, etc.
- It looks like the real estate values within the district impact the funding that each neighborhood’s school receives i.e. do the rich get richer ...?

Facilitator question: Do you think the community is aware of these differences within the district? How do they feel? What impact does knowing about those differences have on the kids or the community?

- Plenty of parents said the news sometimes covers the inequities, such as the faulty HVAC at Beverly Hills, but nothing seems to change.
- The parents feel powerless.
- It's a funding issue that trickles down from Harrisburg. How do we conceptualize we are being discriminated against by the state capitol?
- Even more of an issue for non-English speaking:
 - Sense of intimidation communicating with majority white staff/.
 - If that staff is not coming across as being receptive, those parents are less likely to come back or go up the chain.

What's your sense of the reaction to this from residents of the more resourced parts of the district?

- Some think that's the way it should be because they have higher property values so their taxes are higher. And also to protect their area.
- There is a fear factor among the residents in the Drexel Hill area; generational fear; generational superiority; or white privilege.
- There has been some improvement in these attitudes just by families moving into these areas.

How can the resource issues be addressed?

- Voting.
- imploring legislators to do what's in our interest and not just giving cookouts and backpacks.
- Board the buses and go to Harrisburg.
- Community fundraising can also help to raise fund
- Attending school board meetings
- Start with small local government
- Upper Darby could benefit from an infusion of startup businesses that could contribute to community.
- Could also benefit from more home ownership.
- The government hasn't paid its fair share in Harrisburg and elsewhere (local).

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

Asset

- We are an asset. If we didn't come to the school, who would the teachers/administrators teach.
- There's been a lot of white flight...
- I think an asset which is why this conversation is being had.

Challenge

- I think the community is seen more as a challenge than an asset; language and cultural diversity can be seen as a challenge.
- A good sense out there that we are not valued; otherwise there would be more effort to develop the relationships so we can feel more included

(Comments from participants: Upper Darby Rising is a step in the right direction)

- A lot of families show a lot of apathy towards the district.
- Immigrant families face particular challenges:
 - An immigrant family that had some unpleasant experiences at Drexel Hill middle and attempted to address with the teachers; But they had to reach out to the community for someone to help act as advocate; staff didn't know how to communicate the language and also didn't feel receptive.
 - Another was at the high School. There was some difficulty in the administrative office. An advocate happened to be there and was able to help out.

(Participant comment: Why does it have to take an external advocate other than that parent or child for them to be understood?)

- Teachers often approach black history like it is a chore. Comments from teachers include:
 - "Well, we better do this for women's history, too."
 - "Why do we have to do this anyway?"
 - "I'm just going to do the same thing as last year."
 - "Ugh, we have to do this again."

Participant would like to see the teachers have fun with these things; lean into it. Ask questions when they don't know. Do their own independent research.

- Several parents tried to get a black history segment in one of the schools. Felt like there was no effort. The administration "took our suggestion but told us it was hard to change the curriculum." The principal was on board but there was a lot of teacher resistance.

Possible pro-equity actions

- Diversity among faculty is needed for white students as well as black students
- The historic commission is currently researching for a project that would talk about the underground railroad and abolition in this part of Delaware County. Once it's completed, it should be a part of the curriculum. Timeline is not certain but it could be ready by the 2021-22 school year.

Observer comments at end

- As educators we have discretion and we must lead and fulfill our responsibilities with discretion; utilize our “barometers.”
- There is a need for continuing professional development for staff to address their implicit biases.
- Appeal to community to get more involved in state funding fight. Especially communities that have not been as involved.



GROUP 7

MODERATOR: CHRIS SATULLO

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

Black boys are just treated differently: Two of the parents have had both sons and daughters go through the system and they insist that the boys are misunderstood, mistreated and disciplined unfairly

far more often than girls. Neither mother pretended her son was an angel, but both reported they had a very rough go of it until finally, in each case, one good teacher figured out what their underlying learning/emotional issues were and got them some proper attention. The Black/Indian parents, who are very happy customers of Senkow School, seemed flabbergasted to hear all this, as their girls, described as good students, had never had a single problem with a teacher at school.

Trauma of bullying or a disciplinary injustice can linger long after the event: One mother said her daughter, who did pretty well in elementary, “had her foundation ground down to just dust” by teasing and bullying in middle and particularly high school. One of this parent’s complaints was that teachers not only tolerated teasing and insults to her daughter, but in some cases piled on with some of their own. She shared that her daughter had attempted suicide in high school, though thankfully without success.

Concerns

Lack of diversity among teachers means too many do not get what black boys have gone through and how they communicate. The key phrase was: Seeing my kid as a problem to be handled, not a human being to be understood.

One parent said when another student actually threatened to kill her son with a knife, while police intervened quickly to prevent harm, she felt that as the case unfolded, she was more concerned about getting services to the other student who’d threatened her son than the juvenile justice system was.

The statement was made that the “school to prison pipeline” begins in pre-K and by the time black boys get to high school it’s almost like they’re doomed to join it; it takes enormous effort and luck to escape.

Tensions/Trade-offs

No one in this group was of the view that the schools are too soft on misbehaving students. The Senkow father admitted that as a very proud and satisfied Upper Darby parent, whose children were not yet in high school, he was “scared” by some of the stories he’d heard in the breakout.

Possible Pro-Equity Actions

- More staff with the professional expertise to understand what learning/emotional issues might be behind problematic behavior.
- More support for those staff to serve as trainers and mentors of other staff.
- More case studies done and shared about how positive interventions can work.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

This discussion centered around the different way a beloved camping trip is handled at the two middle schools. At Drexel Hill, thanks to support from the HSA and the resources many DH parents have, the trip is seen as pretty much automatic for all eligible kids. Not so at Beverly Hills, according to a BH parent who said her daughter was distraught and felt very much devalued when she realized she couldn't go. "You'd have thought the world was going to end. I heard about not going on that trip for years."

This trip seemed to be an emblematic sore point for several parents - while again the Senkow parents were surprised to learn that such issues cropped up in a school system which to this point has served their family very well.

Concerns

How can you have a school-sanctioned trip which is made available unequally based on ZIP code and parental income?

The Senkow dad directly questioned Dr. McGarry how the district could tolerate this "tilted playing field." The group agreed to let the superintendent drop "observer mode" and respond. He said he has long regarded the inequity involved in this trip and some similar activities to be a big problem.

Tensions/Trade-offs

Some said that if the opportunity can't be offered equally, trips like this should be scrapped.

Others said affluent parents whose kids count on the trip would be understandably angry at that solution.

Possible Pro-equity Actions

Seek individual, corporate or philanthropic donations to provide scholarships to ensure equal access.

Ask every HSA to send a percentage of what it raises into a district-wide pool of dollars, to fund scholarships and other steps to ensure equity.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

We had the least time on this theme, but the discussion still was rich.

The group agreed that for them, the school system's diversity seems a huge asset.

But some Black participants said implicit bias by staff still comes into play.

“People didn’t know what to do with us,” one said. “I mean people who come from the 19082 were the ones whose kids get called ‘those Philadelphia kids’ and blamed for everything - even when they’re as much Upper Darby as anyone else.” She said when she lived in that ZIP, was a single mom and had an Islamic last name, “I got treated as a problem.” When she remarried, took on an Anglo name and moved to another part of town, “All of a sudden I’m worth respecting and listening to. But I’m the same person, with the same degree and the same kids.”

The habit of blaming “those Philadelphia kids” for problems is a lazy, not-so-subtle form of racism that needs to be called out as such more often than it is.

Possible Pro-equity Action

Use people and stories such as those coming up in the forums to train staff around implicit bias and better listening, rather than just bringing in outside sources.

GROUP 8

MODERATORS: SHARI GILMORE AND ELLEN GREENBERG

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

On the 1-10 scale, from individual to systemic responsibility, there was variation in the responses with most being in the middle.

There wasn’t agreement on whether or not the responsibility lies with the individual or the system. There was more desire for there to be more responsibility from the district/system (related to mediating, offering support to kids, etc.)

Concerns

There needs to be a space and opportunity for kids to say that bullying is what’s happening. Where is the peer mediation, and is that happening?

(The question was posed to the observers to confirm, but no answer. A follow-up with information is desired, as this is a possible tool for students to support other students.)

There is curiosity around what is causing conflict.

Self-awareness came up as a means to reduce conflict.

There was also a lot of energy around this intensely digital period in time, and how that is causing conflicts, i.e. cyber bullying, and kids spending more time online.

The flip side of that is the district's ability to reach students in a different way. Education around digital responsibility is needed. Overall, opportunities for enrichment are of interest.

Participant quote: *"Growing up is just so hard right now."*

- What does the district need to pay attention to?:
 - Enrichment
 - Peer mediation

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Bullying/discipline- coordination with other agencies. Having enough support services right on campus that have the ability to work with students who are acting out.
- Attention to collective trauma with COVID on top of whatever life trauma that may be experienced; have resources available regularly for children before they act out.
- Creating space for kids to say what's happening.
- Finding out what's causing the issues.
- Teach about digital citizenship - ways to prevent cyber bullying.
- Coordination with agencies, as there aren't enough support services directly on campus.
- Regular counseling in the schools, not just when students are acting out.
- Opportunity to value diverse and divergent thinking and exploring what that looks like.
- Tying the curriculum to the socio-emotional / psycho-social connection

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

It wasn't that there was disagreement, it was that each person had their own perspective from their own experience. Each person was given the space to talk through their thoughts/concerns.

Concerns

Concerns around resource imbalances and distribution included access to books; they seem to be outdated.

This prompted a curiosity about the formulas used for education allocations.

One parent stated, "This is a game." Elaborating on the statement, they said allocation distribution is centered around certain players. It was suggested that some people take access for granted, but that everyone does not have it. This turned the conversation to the digital divide, and how that was exacerbated by COVID:

- There are a huge number of students in poverty
- COVID has disrupted, even more, access to basic resources
- One parent reported reaching out to the school for support and being provided hot spots to support her children's learning at home.
- One parent said we're currently struggling with truancy and the digital world, asking, "How do we keep up with students who are falling behind?"

Additional concerns included how to get to the resources. Transparency and awareness around resources and budget, from the district all the way to Harrisburg, are lacking.

- Awareness of laws that direct funding is missing
- There are few Black/POC at district meetings. Obstacles experienced in participating at meetings
 - There is a "burden" in understanding the ins and outs of what's going on,
 - One parent attends district meetings often and has never seen an interpreter there to support and translate.
 - The most educated adult can have challenges understanding the legalities around distribution, budget, etc. This information needs to be more available and digestible to all community members.

Quote: *"We're up against the attitudes of others in the community, especially parents of those who have already graduated."*

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Partnerships with universities and neighboring businesses.
- Expose our kids to internships, ambassador programs. They may not have alternatives/exposure to other options. They need to have competencies, skills
 - Donation: Have we asked what the community might be able to donate, give? This involves everyone.
- Parents need to get moving. Form political action committees, become aware of laws that direct funding. Hold elected officials accountable
- Parents need to call the mosques, imams, pastors, go to soccer games, etc. They need to be present at community events and find out what's happening at the district

Quotes

"This is where inequities happen. It's always the White parents there to defend their turf."

"It's time to be creative about what we need to do."

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

(Note: We didn't have much time to hear from participants as time was running out)

Main Ideas

Lack of diversity within the administration. And the desire for a more diverse body of teachers that reflect the students more accurately.

Concerns

- Challenge/Obstacle
 - Not enough administrators of color - problem that there's a huge void. So many of the parents of our immigrant population are business owners and are stakeholders in our community. Essentially, we need get them connected to the district in a way that's meaningful. Need to say what their community needs. In other countries you don't engage in government the way we do here. Some of this has to do with being taught how our culture functions. In America there's a public engagement and expectation to be civically involved
 - Need to recruit at HBCUs to find more diverse teachers
 - What do we do when teachers are replaced? Need more diversity.
 - Diversity perceived as a power struggle
 - Can be a challenge / can be an asset

GROUP 9

MODERATOR: JOSH WARNER

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

- Trauma is a huge issue, and definitely plays into bullying and responses
- We can't just punish our way out of this; we need to get to the root of the problem (both for bully and victims) instead
- Need to focus on addressing issues vs. jumping right to disciplinary actions
- Social Media is a huge issue here, and makes the whole playing field much more different for students and parents and administrators – “the landscape of bullying has changed very rapidly [due to social media]”

- Schools (and parents, kids) still operate under a “culture of ‘who did it?’”
- Communicating and talking is key! Mantra of using your head before using fists or hurtful words/posts
- Could use more social workers or staff for this
- Middle School is a tough time – especially for girls

Concerns

- Social media really ramps up bullying
- Some parents are just difficult to get involved when it comes to discipline or problem solving with the school/teacher/other parents
- The example being set when some parents actively encourage their kids to fight or get revenge
- The tendency for students to “suffer in silence” when being bullied
- That schools’ handling of bullying still follows more of a “persecution & discipline” model rather than an “investigation, communication, co-addressing” style

Tensions/Trade-offs

- One tension that was evident was the desire to have a great deal more parental involvement (in bullying issues), but the fact that some parents are hard to reach, and some may actually worsen the situation if/when they become involved

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Expand ways that teachers, parents, and students can model conflict resolution and the communication necessary to move away from “the culture of who did it.”

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

- The neighborhood difference and property tax difference has really affected school resources broadly.
- Bigger, better, and more expensive school buildings in the richer/nicer part of town

- There is a wide diversity difference today in UD schools (students, teachers, staff) when compared to 12 or more years ago
- Bringing more voices to the table, re: equity, diversity, cultural competency, and hiring teachers of color is very important
- It's a morale booster to see the changes to date, and see Black principals in UD
- Things may be changing for the better, re: diversity of teaching staff

Concerns

- Some of the group were concerned that UDSD might rest on its laurels and not continue the push for more diverse teaching staff and other equity improvements
- Might there be "name bias" at play in the district's hiring practices?

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Get the community more involved
- Push for more teachers of color

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

- Group consensus of: "You're an asset when you're helpful and quiet" (this goes for students, volunteers, and parent involvement), but you're treated as a "challenge when you start speaking up, asking questions, seeking answers or details."
- The social cliques comprised of long-time volunteers, teachers, and staff (which are often multi-generational in duration or connection) make volunteering at UD schools very difficult and uncomfortable

Concerns

- Some teachers treat you as a challenge to avoid when you're seeking straight answers for "what's going on with my child"
- The schools clearly need volunteers, and many parents do want to help out, but if the environment is uncomfortable and unwelcoming, why waste my time?

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Practicing (and insisting on) "open communication" between parents and teachers

- Having school staff facilitate interactions when new volunteers are coming to schools. Set a tone of welcome and collaboration, and reduce the sharp edges of the cliques

GROUP 10

MODERATOR: TED ENOCH

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

How can our school district be more proactive than reactive, more program response than harshly reacting with punishment?

- How can our district communicate to kids from varying backgrounds that they are cared for and that staff and the school have a meaningful relationship?
- We have to remember that the kids' reactions in school often have more to do with things going on at home, rather than what is happening at school. How can we help our teachers and staff be more prepared for these types of issues? What is in the kids' figurative "backpacks" that they bring to school? Hunger? Homelessness? Substance abuse at home? Abuse?
 - Staff need and deserve more training about such factors.
- Can we diversify staff so our staff look more like our communities?

Concerns

- When my black or mixed race child gets her hair played with -- or cut off -- because her hair is different, and then she is the one that gets punished, that is unfair. One parent pulled her children from the school due to incidents such as this, and several parents in the group had kids that experienced this.
- The impact of police brutality and the loss of black lives, often on video, like the George Floyd murder, have huge impacts on black families, and immense issues and pressure hit young black males and boys.

Tensions/Trade-offs

- Student talk is sometimes just talk, and sometimes harmful. It can be hard to gauge what is a threat and what is play. How can we help staff and children learn the difference between playful and harmful language and actions?
 - How can we get staff up to speed about online culture? And microaggressions?

Possible Pro-equity Actions

- Staff training needed
- More proactive programs like Peer Mediators

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Main Ideas

- Our school buildings can be some of the clearest examples of inequity.
 - Some schools have gyms/cafeterias/auditoriums all in the same space.
 - Even an unkept school -- footprints on a painted wall -- sends a bad message about the quality of the experience we can have in a space
- Youth sports are a clear example of inequity. There are many more sports offerings on the west side of the district, far fewer on the east.
 - Me and my kids didn't feel welcome in the first sports experience we tried to have. We had to be persistent and keep looking.
- The pandemic shows how the combination of inadequate school provisions and family poverty -- or even simply modest means -- create strong disparities and inequities in the learning experiences of our students.
 - Think of families with printers and similar resources, versus families without. Many of our district's families need help right now.
 - I had to help my grandchildren out to make sure they had what they needed.
 - I know many families that are struggling right now

Concerns

- It's the combination of inadequate family resources that really get exacerbated by limited school district resources.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

- We're trying to expand a middle school in the district right now. We've got kids in trailers at this location. The local community, the local white community, is pushing back and not wanting to expand and improve the school at that location. That doesn't make you feel like your kids are valued in the district.
- Are we all welcomed here? Are we all valued? No! All you have to do is look at the staff makeup and its lack of diversity and you see clearly there is a problem. How are they going to empathize and have relationships with our kids?
- My kids didn't feel like they could approach their teachers with their problems. They didn't feel welcome and valued.
- When I was a student here, I was an ELL tutor. I was the only black student doing it at our school. That was something. But I learned a lot from the immigrant students I was tutoring, and the really hard circumstances many were coming from. How can we help our students build relationships with immigrant children? How do we communicate with all of our families?
- We need relationships with all of our families. Not just the involved parents. So often the parents who aren't in school aren't there because they are working two and three jobs to make ends meet. We have to stop assuming parents who aren't in the school don't care. They just have other pressing concerns.
- It is hard to find the right places to get involved. It's a struggle. I felt like I was lucky to bump into an old friend who told me about this tonight. These kinds of things need to be easier to find.
- When a loud kid, or strange kid, or just a kid from a different background is struggling, we need staff at that school to be able to demonstrate that those kids are valued, cared for, and in relationship.

Concerns

- Parents who don't spend time in the school, "uninvolved parents," are often devalued or judged, when oftentimes they are in really just difficult, demanding situations.

Possible Pro-equity Action

- Staff training to help staff have more empathy, connection, understanding with our kids and their different backgrounds.

