

UPPER DARBY RISING

BUSINESS COMMUNITY SESSION

JAN. 4, 2020



On the morning of Jan 4, 2020, Upper Darby Rising continued its community dialogue initiative with a focus group discussion for members of the township's Business Community. The hour-long session, the second of seven in the opening phase of the initiative, was held on Zoom.

A group of nine Upper Darby School District business owners and nonprofit leaders took part.

The participants were joined by several district administrators and school directors, who acted as observers.

In two breakout sessions, participants were guided through an in-depth discussion of two of the four 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; and Diversity: An Asset and a Challenge. The other two themes: Civic Engagement: An Island or a Hub and Resource Imbalances: inside and out, were touched upon in a concluding plenary session.

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.

Here are their reports, followed by a list of highlights from the Zoom chat during the concluding plenary discussion:

BREAKOUT GROUP REPORTS

GROUP 1

MODERATOR: HARRIS SOKOLOFF, WITH LINDA BREITSTEIN RECORDING

THEME: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

- *One participant started this theme by expressing compassion for his son who said he wasn't looking forward to going into middle school where he's heard about a lot of lockdowns (1 per month).*
 - Participants agreed that lockdowns are too frequent but said they are handled well
 - Communication about lockdowns (for example when a child brought a gun to school) can cause chaos, with children texting parents or using social media to tell what's going on and parents not knowing how to respond.
 - Later in the conversation, another parent noted that Beverly Hills Middle School is working hard to deal with discipline issues.
- There is also concern about fights between African students and African-American students. Children are expelled and they feel voiceless.
- Name-calling, and how the school/district handles name-calling, is also an issue and cause for concern.
 - The schools do not always handle this well.
 - However, people noted that the District is doing better than in the recent past; that things are changing for the better under Dr. McGarry's leadership.

THEME: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

Main Ideas

- In general, participants agreed that younger professionals of all races and nationalities are moving into Upper Darby. They see the diversity in UD as an asset.
- The realtor in the group said she uses the diversity in the community as a selling feature to people in their mid-20s to their 40s looking to move.
- Diversity seems to be a real draw for young people moving here from Baltimore and Philly.

- Property values are going up.
- People see diversity as an Asset.
 - Brings together voices, languages and sense of belonging for immigrants. Immigrants bring tax dollars to municipality. Able to get to know your neighbors.

Concerns

- While those in the group said they value diversity and think it bolsters property values, not everyone welcomes diversity the same way – particularly, it was asserted, some of the older white families who have lived in Upper Darby for a long time.
 - Thus, as much as immigrants want to feel welcomed that doesn't always happen.
 - Too often, depending on the way they are dressed or if they are speaking their native languages at that moment, they might be called a name and be told to go back to where they came.
- An example of challenges, when a Pakistan mother can't easily speak to her principal she needs to reach out to a community advocate to help her
- Other concerns:
 - Children come to school and bring attitudes (good and bad) they've heard from home.
 - Some administrators and teachers do not treat immigrants well.
 - Undocumented people cannot receive services.
- Problematic attitudes not just in the community, are also imbedded in schools by students, teachers and administrators.

Tensions

Some long-time resident White families don't want to sell their homes to non-white people.

GROUP 2

MODERATORS: CHRIS SATULLO AND BRIAN ARMSTEAD

THEME: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

Main Ideas

Participant 1:

Each child is different. Bad behavior kids get that from the environment or the adults they are around

I can always tell its 3:05 on a school day because that's when all the kids come through to my business.

I really don't have a problem with them if they are just being loud and are not destroying anything.

One of the biggest issues is outlets for these children; we need 3rd party resources to give these kids a place to go and something to do after school. Not everybody can be on a sports team.

Participant 2:

At the McDonald's -- During the school year we lock our doors from 2:40-3:15 until kids aren't around; this is because of fights, etc. Police asked us to do that (lock the doors). We've been doing it for 3 years.

I can't say they are all bad kids. They just aren't. They're just kids and they have nothing to do, no place to go but here.

A lot of the kids that work there are great kids. Coming to work has been a good thing for them during pandemic. They get to see people and interact with people.

But lots of families won't go to the McDonald's because of language and atmosphere from all the kids and how they act.

Managers feel a lot of stress and pressure from it.

Store is open to ideas and wants to revisit the policy. But we don't know what else to do.

Students often are just in there waiting for the bus, not even buying anything.

Some students leave right away. Others stay for 3-4 hours.

What led to decision to close doors?

- 2-3 fights a week with police involved
- Other kids gathered around, egging fight on.
- Disagreements starting at school; sometimes the kids know fights will happen and try to warn them.
- Sometimes the store calls police to notify them but they have a whole district to cover so not always able to come down as prevention
- Not safe for anyone
- Other stores in the shopping center experiencing the same thing
- Dollar Store and Acme have had a lot of destructive things happening there
- McDonald's had their seats slit.

Nowhere for kids to go after they come out of school. A lot of the kids, their parents are working at that time; it's an empty home. They say, "I'm not allowed to come home," not allowed to bring people to their home to hang out; or can't go home until a certain time.

No efforts have been made to get the businesses, the district and police together to problem solve. Open to that happening.

When McDonald's started locking doors, kids started ransacking the Dollar Store; they now limit number of kids in store. Then kids moved to Acme.

Participant 3:

Behavior is a learned thing. Parents bring kids in and say, they have a behavior problem, like it's someone else's thing to solve.

You have to get them when they are young.

Working with William Penn school district years ago, I started a martial arts program in the elementary school to head off problems they were experiencing at the high school.

At one point, the William Penn district changed program to just work with high school and middle school but that failed. It's too late by then.

Most effective part was the summer program -- martial arts/dance + education; physical and cultural (African dance; Chinese martial arts, etc.)

Some of the kids have problems at home; others have special needs.

District needs to diagnose these so the kids can get help.

Some minorities don't want to hear their kids are special needs. They focus on shame, instead of getting child the help.

Participant 4:

Involved long time back w/ bullying.

Not sure how this lockdown is serving/helping affecting kids that have been bullied before

A little surprised wondering how the issues have been addressed during the pandemic.

THEME: DIVERSITY, AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

NOTE: The discussion of discipline, particularly the situation at the Lansdowne Avenue McDonald's, was so extensive that this group had limited time to explore this theme.

Participant 1:

I see it as more of an asset

Everybody should understand each others' culture. Not understanding leads to teasing and misunderstanding. This needs to be taught.

District needs to do more of that. Food is a good entry way; then educate people about different cultures' ways.

African immigrant community and the black community tend to be fighting a lot. Because they don't understand each other's history and how that affects cultural values, they don't really understand the issues they're having with one another.

Participant 2:

Diversity is more of an asset than a challenge; society is diverse. The workforce in this country is going to be diverse going forward. The sooner children are exposed to diversity, the more they'll benefit down the road.

ZOOM CHAT COMMENTS OF NOTE

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM BREAKOUTS



- We have work to do, and I am not sure everyone really knows what we do, our limitations, obstacles, barriers, need for community leadership, and lack of community programs.
- Kids are watching how their parents deal with stress and anger and emulating them. So the problem is generational in a sense.

- We need honesty about the fact that there are members of our community who don't accept others.
- Diversity is a huge asset in our community; however, many in our community don't see it that way.
- Diversity is an asset. How we respond and be inclusive and responsive is the challenge. A good example was businesses of color responding to requests for community participation and donation differently. It is probably about us changing the approach/ask/or structure rather than businesses not wanting to participate.
- The kind of coordinated and responsive hub of partnerships Dr. McGarry talked about is so possible if there is a champion and a diverse set of stakeholders who can work toward a shared vision of providing a comprehensive set of afterschool opportunities for UD students. Could be really cool.