

Minneapolis: Your Voice Matters

A final report on
Superintendent Community Engagement
MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

presented by
EPU Consultants, LLC
February 7, 2023



Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes the following data on you as an applicant for appointment this Selection Committee are public: name; city of residence; education and training; employment history; volunteer work; awards and honors; prior government service; veteran status. If you are selected to be a member of the Selection Committee these additional data become public; residential address; telephone number and/or email; first and last dates of service on the public body; the existence and status of any complaints or charges; and final investigative report upon completion of an investigation.

Revised, 2/23/2016

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Executive Summary:

What follows is a *final report* of EPU Consultants, LLC community engagement work in assisting with the selection of a new superintendent for Minneapolis Public Schools.

This report includes findings from an online survey for staff, students, and members of the school/community, and quantitative and qualitative results from 8 listening sessions and 5 focus groups designed to engage community/school stakeholders affiliated with Minneapolis Public Schools. It is important to note that six of the eight listening / focus group sessions were offered in the evening, three were held on a Saturday and two supported student leaders from each high school. Two of the five focus groups were virtual. Each listening session offered childcare, a light meal, language ambassadors and/or materials in English, Hmong, Somali and Spanish.

The listening sessions were designed to guide participants through discussions addressing six questions that identified the values, issues, and leadership qualities desired in the next superintendent for Minneapolis Public Schools. This report does not include the entire process. It does, however, capture themes that emerged to help inform and shape the superintendent selection process.

At each listening session, the dialogue was guided by six questions:

1. What three leadership qualities should the MPS look for in the new superintendent? (Choose 3)?
2. What three strategies will advance academic excellence in Minneapolis Public Schools? (Choose 3)
3. Which three strategies support student well-being? (Choose 3)
4. Which three strategies center their work on students and equity? (Choose 3)
5. Which three strategies advance Minneapolis Public Schools' goal to be a more welcoming, responsive, and connected school district? (Choose 3)
6. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the search for a new superintendent?

Focus group sessions were guided by three questions:

1. What do you want the new superintendent to know about being an administrator/employee/student in the MPS public schools?
2. What do you want the new superintendent to do to retain students and staff in MPS?
3. What would make the biggest difference in your daily life as an MPS administrator/employee/student?

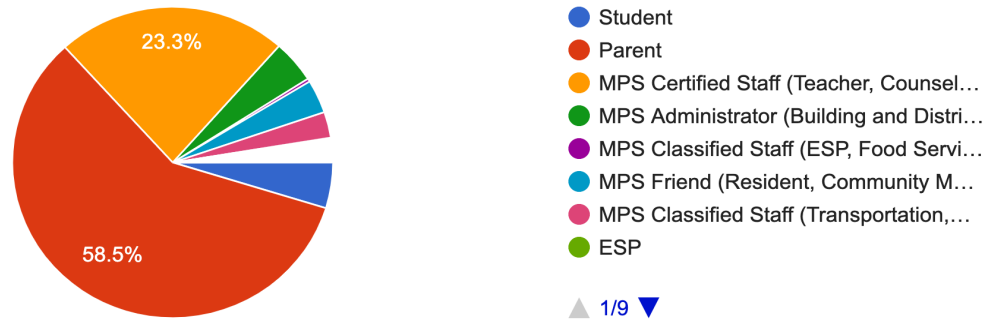
It was an ambitious goal to have a very inclusive process that provided as many opportunities as possible to gather school/community input. We appreciate the opportunity to serve the Minneapolis Public Schools process to select a new superintendent and share our final report.

Sincerely,
Radious Y. Guess, Managing Partner
EPU Consultants, LLC

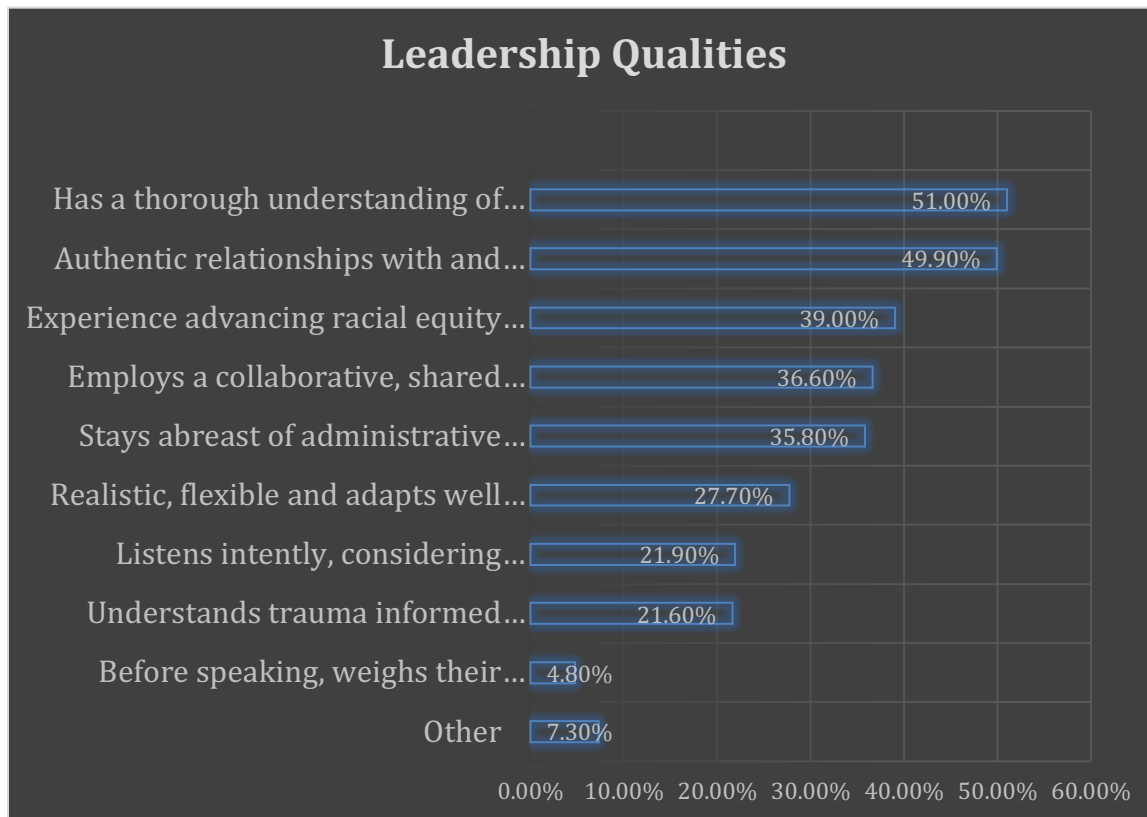
Summary 2,823 responses

Which stakeholder group do you most identify with?

2,823 responses



Student	134	4.7%
Parent	1,652	58.5%
MPS Certified Staff (Teachers, Counselor etc.)	657	23.3%
MPS Administrator (Building and District)	125	4.4%
Other	80	2.9
MPS Friend (Resident, Community Member)	98	3.5
MPS Classified Staff (Transportation)	76	2.7



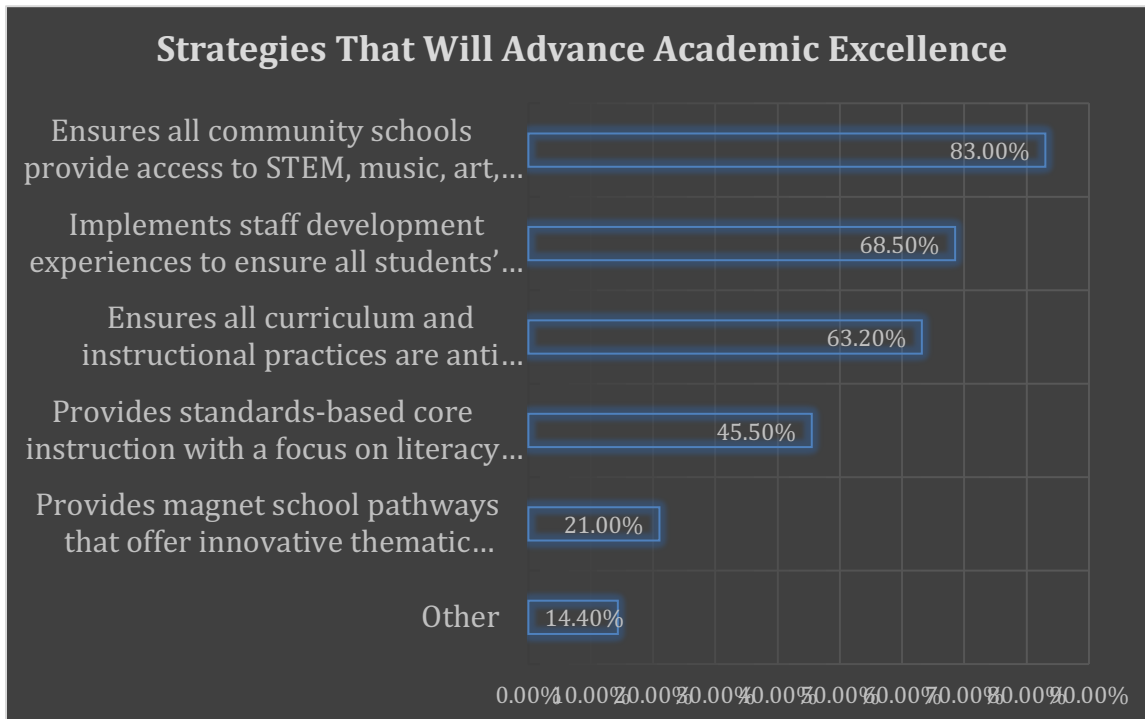
What three leadership qualities should the MPS look for in the new superintendent?
Top 5:

51%	1466	Has a thorough understanding of academic excellence, how students learn and is student-centered
49.9%	1410	Authentic relationships with and among students, staff, and families
39%	1101	Experience advancing racial equity with demonstrated success
36.6%	1033	Employs a collaborative, shared decision-making management style
35.8%	1012	Stays abreast of administrative challenges, student progress and facility needs

Main Results:

- The top leadership quality selected by respondents have **a thorough understanding of academic excellence, how students learn and is student-centered** (51%). A close second was **Authentic relationships with and among students, staff, and families** (49.9%).

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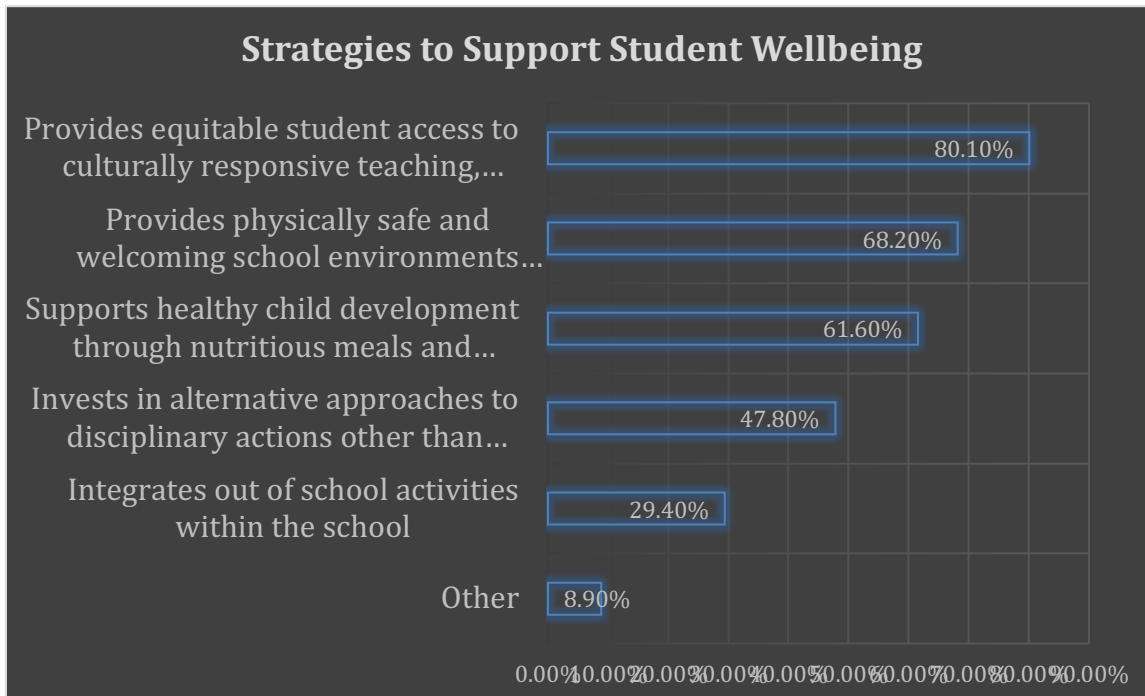
Top 5: What three strategies will advance academic excellence in MPS? Out of

Ensures all community schools provide access to STEM, music, art, language and for high school, ethnic studies, and college credit courses.	2343	83%
Implements staff development experiences to ensure all students' needs are met through a system of academic support and intervention.	1935	68.5%
Ensures all curriculum and instructional practices are anti-racist and sustain the cultures, languages, and experiences of our students.	1785	63.2%
Provides standards-based core instruction with a focus on literacy and mathematics.	1284	45.5%
Provides magnet schools pathways that offer innovative thematic instruction and integrated learning opportunities.	92	21%

Main Results

- The top strategy selected by respondents for advancing academic excellence was **ensuring all community schools provide access to STEM, music, art, language, and for high school, ethnic studies, and college credit courses** (83%).
- The next two were **to implement staff development experiences to ensure all students' needs are met through a system of academic support and intervention** (68.5%) and **ensure all curriculum and instructional practices are anti-racist and sustain the cultures, languages, and experiences of our students** (63.2%).

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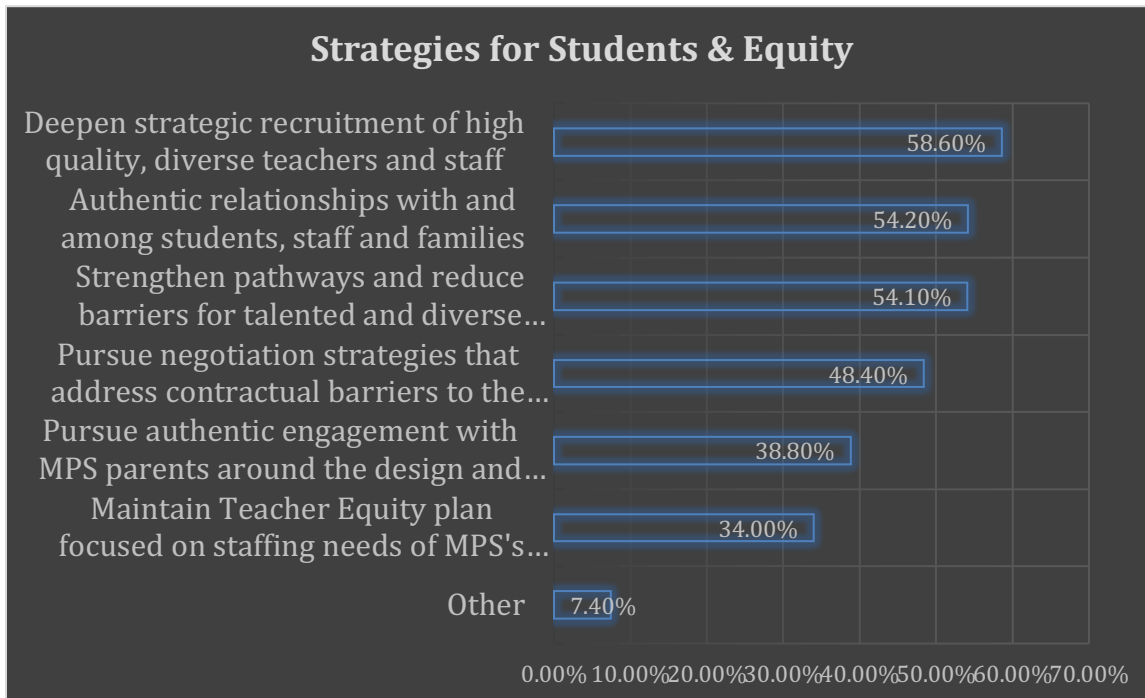
Top 5: Which three strategies support student well-being? (Choose 3)

Provides equitable student access to culturally responsive teaching, counseling, and mental health services.	2262	80.01
Provides physically safe and welcoming environments through strategic shortening of walk zones, building cleanliness, building improvements, land area and strong emergency management practices.	1925	68.2
Support healthy child development through nutritious meals and promotion of physical activity.	1739	61.1
Invests in alternative approaches to disciplinary actions other than suspensions and expulsions.	1349	47.8
Integrates out of school practices within the school.	830	29.4%

Main Results

- **Providing equitable student access to culturally responsive teaching, counseling, and mental health services** (80.1%) was the most selected strategy to support student wellbeing.
- The next two most selected strategies were **providing physically safe and welcoming school environments through strategic shortening of walk zones, building cleanliness, building improvements, land area and strong emergency management practices** (68.2%) and **supporting healthy child development through nutritious meals and promotion of physical activity** (61.6%).

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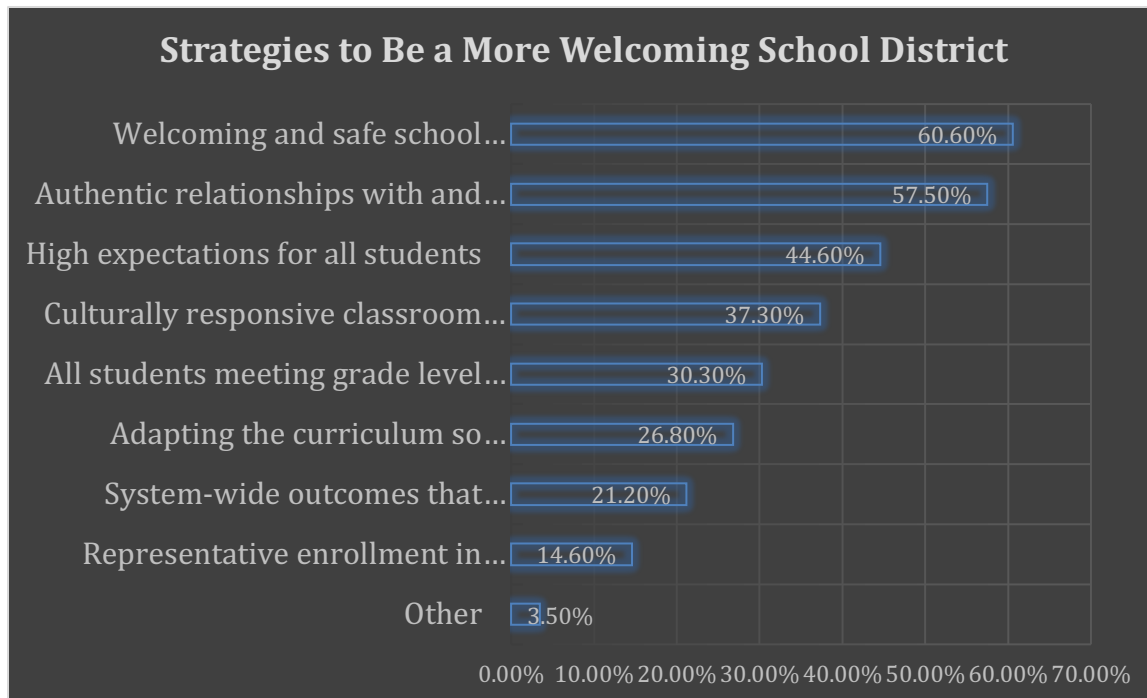
Top 5: Which three strategies center their work on students and equity? (Choose 3)

Deepen strategic recruitment of high quality, diverse teachers and staff.	1653	58.6
Authentic relationships with and among students, staff, and families.	1531	54.2
Strengthen pathways and reduce barriers for talented and diverse MPS employees and potential employees to become teachers.	1527	54.1
Pursue negotiation strategies that address contractual barriers to the equitable distribution and the recruitment, hiring, and retention of high-quality, diverse teachers and staff.	1367	48.4
Pursue authentic engagement with MPS parents around the design and implementation of equitable policies and practices.	1095	38.8

Main Results:

- There was less of a clear consensus for strategies centered on students and equity compared to the earlier items. **Deepen strategic recruitment of high quality, diverse teachers, and staff** (58.6%), **authentic relationships with and among students, staff and families** (54.2%), and **strengthen pathways and reduce barriers for talented and diverse MPS employees and potential employees to become teachers** (54.1%) were the most selected strategies.

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Top 5: Which three strategies advance Minneapolis Public Schools goal to be a more welcoming, responsive, and connected school district? (Choose 3)

Welcoming and safe school environments.	1712	60.6%
Authentic relationships with and among students, staff, and families.	1622	57.5%
High expectations for all students.	1258	44.6%
Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction.	1053	37.3%
All students meeting grade level and graduation expectations.	856	30.3%

Main Results

- The two top strategies selected to advance MPS's goal to be a more welcoming, responsive, and connected school district were ***Welcoming and safe school environments*** (60.6%) and ***Authentic relationships with and among students, staff, and families*** (57.5%).

Qualitative responses to the prompts:

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the search for a new superintendent?

- What do you want the new superintendent to know about being an administrator/employee/student in the MPS public schools?
- What do you want the new superintendent to do to retain students and staff in MPS?
- What would make the biggest difference in your daily life as an MPS administrator/employee/student?

Themes:

- **NOTE:** Many of the sample comments below fit into multiple themes. That is, they may be placed in only one theme below but if they touched on other themes, they were also coded for those themes.

#1 Student Focused / Students First / What’s Best for Students - 845 references.

- **Take away...” How do you make learning Student Focused?”**

#2 Willing to Support Teachers / Staff - 607 references.

- **Take away.... “How do you make teachers feel supported?”**

#3 Strong Communication & Listening Skills - 577 references.

- **Take away... “How do you make people feel heard?”**

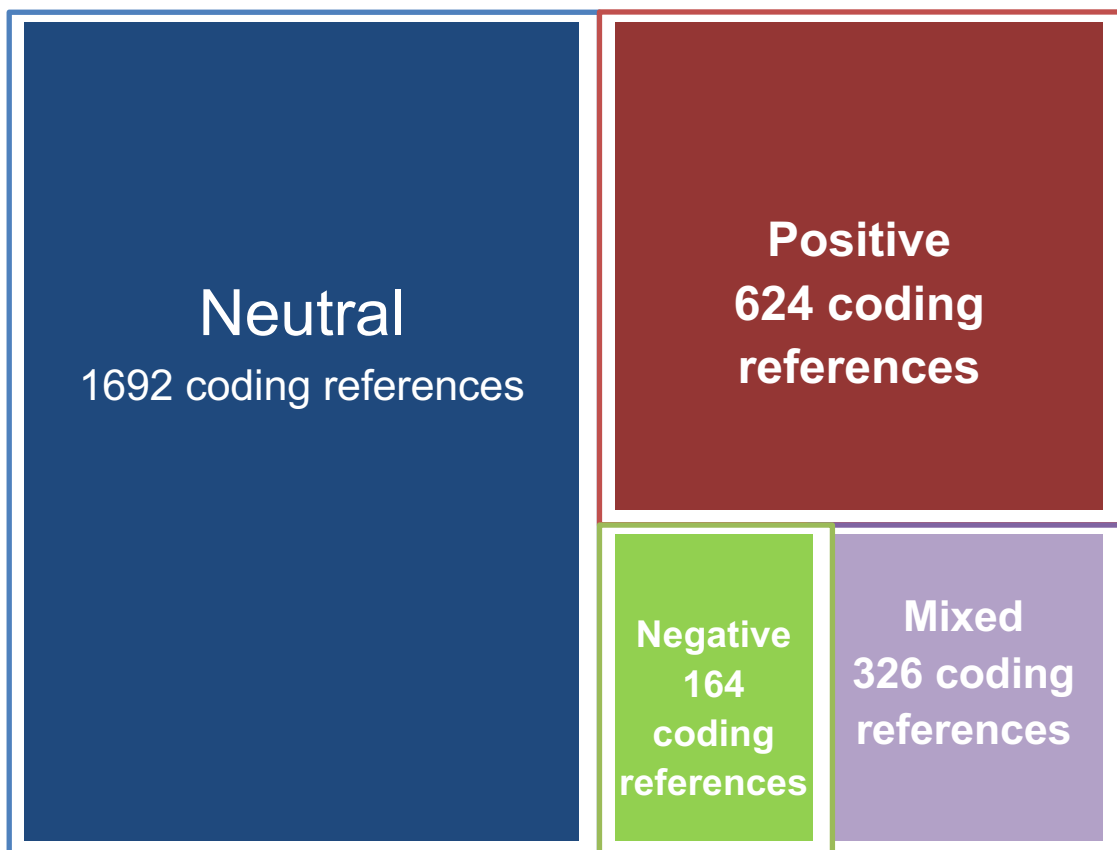
The remaining themes are present and listed for completion however are not considered as relevant.

- **Live in Minneapolis / Someone who Knows District - 336 references.**
- **Experience Teaching / Time in School Buildings - 249 references**
- **Makes the Tough Decisions - 242 references**
- **Wellbeing – 239 references**
- **Frustration with CDD - 80 references**

- **Diversity - 77 references**

Qualitative Sentiment Chart

- for responses to *Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the search for a new superintendent?*
- **Take away, Overall, the sentiments were mostly neutral towards positive.**



Facilitator Training:

Once the survey was finalized, we began our engagement work with a training of facilitators and recorders from diverse racial, ethnic, language and cultural backgrounds. Language ambassadors represented the following languages: English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. Multilingual facilitators and recorders played a critical role in establishing the productive, face-to-face dialogue that is the hallmark of EPU Consultants, LLC. Multilingual facilitators and recorders participated in a well-developed two-hour training session led by EPU Consultants, LLC. The session ensured that what happened inside each listening session was consistent with the overall goals of effective community engagement: democratic deliberation, broad and diverse participation, and shared problem solving.

Facilitators and recorders who were Hmong, Somali and Spanish were key to making the listening sessions and focus groups for the superintendent engagement process work. Each engagement opportunity offered facilitators/recorders in English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish, and childcare and refreshments to school/community stakeholders. Materials were available in English, Hmong, Somali and Spanish. Facilitators and recorders created an atmosphere for democratic deliberation, one in which each participant felt at ease expressing their ideas and responding to those of others in their native language. The facilitator's primary responsibility was to manage the discussion by giving everyday people opportunities to make a difference in their school/community. An overview of the training session for facilitators and recorders is included in the appendix.

Child Care Orientation:

A community partner and local faith-based organization offered to provide childcare workers for each listening session in accordance with state and federal law and District policy.

Methodology:

We were very practical in gathering our information. In this process, we used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather complementary data. By using both methods we maximized all resources at our disposal. There were no predetermined hypotheses however there was clearly a topic to explore which was getting input into the selection of a new superintendent.

The listening sessions and focused groups were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The attempt was to uncover the deeper meaning and significance of the Minneapolis school district experience, which oftentimes included contradictory beliefs, behaviors and emotions. For example, conflicting views from staff online surveys and the community listening sessions stated:

A review of the generated text as a phenomenon being studied, aided in completing a theme identification. This was evidenced by an analysis of words (word repetitions, key indigenous terms, and keywords in context); and a careful reading of larger blocks of text (compare and contrast, missing information, intentional analysis of metaphors, transitions and connectors).

A study circle model was employed for the listening sessions. Study circles are a simple and powerful process for democratic discussion and community problem solving. Study circles are perfect for small-group, face-to-face settings. The study circles model allowed participants to address concerns and brought the wisdom of ordinary people to bear on a complex issue, selecting the next superintendent for Minneapolis Public Schools. Ground rules were introduced at the start of each listening session to capitalize on the experience of each stakeholder in the circle, and to manage the circle's listening session and dialogue. A copy of the ground rules can be found in the appendix.

Outreach:

1. Listening Sessions – school/community
2. Focus Groups – staff, administrators, students
3. Online Survey – school/community

Listening Sessions

- The Listening Sessions employed two types of data collection. A semi-structured interview methodology for a qualitative research approach. This method allowed new ideas to be brought up during the listening sessions resulting in what was said by the district's stakeholder.
- ❖ ***Several factors might attribute to the low turnout at the listening sessions***
 - Politics of the district
 - Perceiving the process had been stopped due to a BOE decision
 - Belief that the candidate had already been decided
 - Distrust on how the data would be used

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❖ **The online survey employed a quantitative methodology of analysis with 40.7 % (2023) and 87% (2016) STAFF PARTICIPATION**

➤ **Online Survey (2,823 Participants)**

- 134 - student (4.7%)
- 1652 - parents (58.5%) – *this is huge!*
- 657 - certified staff (23.3%)
- 125 - administrators (14.7%)
- 76 - classified staff (2.7%)
- 98 - MPS friends (3.5%)

Orientation: Minneapolis Public Schools Listening Sessions Agenda -

Welcome, Introductions and Review of the Agenda

Who is EPU Consultants, LLC?

Why Host Listening Sessions to Select a New
Superintendent for Minneapolis Public Schools?

Introductory Ice Breaker

The Basics of Facilitation and Recording

Suggestions for Dealing with Typical Challenges

Listening Session Questions

Final Comments and Adjourn

Community Engagement Circles

- A process for small group deliberation that is voluntary and participatory.
- A small group, usually 8-12 participants
- Led by a facilitator who is impartial, who helps manage the deliberation process, but is not an “expert” or “teacher” in the traditional sense
- Considers many perspectives, rather than advocating a particular point of view
- Uses ground rules to set the tone for a respectful, productive discussion
- Is rooted in dialogue and deliberation, not debate
- May have multiple sessions which move from personal experience of the issue, to considering multiple viewpoints, to strategies for action
- Does not require consensus, but uncovers areas of agreement and common concern
- Provides an opportunity for citizens to work together to improve their community.

Ground Rules (meeting norms)

These ground rules will help our community conversation conduct a civil, productive discussion. We need your help enforcing the ground rules.

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Share “airtime”.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- We share responsibility for making the conversation productive.
- Listen actively—respect others when they are talking.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability—community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
- The goal is not to agree but to gain a deeper understanding.

Key Facilitation Skills

- Reflecting – feeding back the content and feeling of the message. “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly...”
- Clarifying – restating an idea or thought to make it clearer. “What I believe you are saying is...”
- Summarizing – stating concisely the main thoughts. “It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes...”
- Shifting Focus – moving from one speaker or topic to another. Thank you, John. Do you have anything else to add, Jane?”
- Using Silence – allowing time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.
- Using Non-Verbal Signals – combining body language and speech to communicate – for example, using eye contact to encourage or discourage behaviors in the group. Be aware of cultural differences.
- Neutrality is important here, so that we don’t encourage some people more than others.

Listening Session | Focus Group Facilitators

- Set a relaxed and welcoming tone
- Show neutrality; don't take sides. Your opinion is not part of the discussion
- Create opportunities for everyone to participate
- Put the group first
- Appreciate all kinds of people
- Make everyone feel that his or her opinions are valid and welcome
- Don't use personal experiences to make a point or to get people talking
- Ask probing, open-ended questions to deepen discussion
- Silence is OK

The Importance of Neutrality

- Act as if you are neutral, **practice** neutrality.
- Encourage and affirm each person
- Explain your role
- Be aware of your own “unconscious” behaviors
- Resist the temptation to step out of the role of facilitator.

The Art of Recording

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible. Be careful not to alter the intended meaning.
- Check with the speaker or the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- Number each page at the top. Identify each set of notes with a clear title.
- Use markers that are deep earth tones, such as dark green, brown, blue, and purple. Use black sparingly. Use light colors (red, yellow, orange, light green) for highlighting or emphasis only.
- Be low-key. Stay in the background and don't distract people from the conversation. Be aware of times when recording is not appropriate (for example, when people are sharing personal stories).
- Create a sheet called "Parking Lot." Capture—or "park"—ideas that come up in the conversation that the group wants to return to later.
- Post the ground rules along with any notes or sheets of paper that the group will need to refer to during a particular session.

Note taking serves many purposes:

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It creates a group memory of the whole dialogue.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from the conversation will help us plan for action.
- Notes from our conversations will contribute to a summary report of our discussions.

LISTENING SESSION QUESTIONS

1. **What three leadership qualities should the MPS look for in the new superintendent? (Choose 3)**
2. **What strategies will advance academic excellence in MPS? (Choose 3)?**
3. **What strategies support student well-being? (Choose 3)**
4. **What three strategies center their work on students and equity? (Choose 3)**
5. **Which three strategies advance Minneapolis Public Schools' goal to be a more welcoming, responsive, and connected school district? (Choose 3)**
6. **Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the search for a new superintendent?**

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- **What do you want the new superintendent to know about being an administrator/employee/student in the MPS public schools?**
- **What do you want the new superintendent to do to retain students and staff in MPS?**
- **What would make the biggest difference in your daily life as an MPS administrator/employee/student?**

Engaging the Minneapolis Public Schools Community

Commentary: -

Engagement processes differ from school to school, school to district and community to community. However, the most successful efforts have a few things in common.

1. The entire board agrees that engaging the community is an essential part of the board's role.
2. The board and administrative team develop a long-term plan for community engagement.
3. The community engagement effort is well communicated to staff and in some cases, includes staff.
4. The issues discussed rise to a policy-level concern and are framed in public terms.
5. Community engagement sessions create dialogue, not debate
6. Community engagement is a sustained effort not a one-time event
7. Community engagement engenders a shared responsibility for big concerns; it is not used to solicit support for a predetermined or one-time decision.

Community engagement is not a project for a school board instead; it is a new way of governing. It takes thoughtful discussion, planning, time and often a reordering of a school board's priorities. Most of all it takes trust. Trust among the board superintendent team. And trust that the public can and will help the board make the tough choices that are associated with governing public schools.

EPU Consultants desire a different way of engaging communities that offers strategies that foster high levels of participation, not any one specific strategy. Our aim is to draw people from all parts of the school/community to work on an issue of shared concern. This process allows stakeholders to view an issue or area of concern from multiple cultural perspectives and consider many possible solutions. The engagement combines dialogue and deliberation; creating a public forum that builds understanding and explores a range of solutions.

Strong community engagement and outreach are important components of a successful school system. Today's stakeholders are more educated, more skeptical, have less time to spare and use social media to learn and connect. While several activities may

be called community engagement, many are actually one-way communication methods. The goal of true community engagement is to build relationships and to create a shared sense of responsibility for an issue or a problem.

Community engagement is not a quick fix to a problem or issue, a forum for a debate, a publicity method, or a strategy for educating or persuading people. An effective board sponsored community engagement creates dialogue among its stakeholders while helping stakeholders understand the costs and consequences for every decision made by policy makers.

Thank you for allowing EPU Consultants, LLC to assist you in the selection of a new superintendent.

Radious Guess, Managing Partner
EPU Consultants, LLC

Acknowledgements:

This project would not have been possible without the support of CityWide Student Leadership Board, Edison High School, Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, Hmong International Academy, Washburn High School, Emerson Dual Language School, North High School, Minneapolis Public Schools and TeamEPU!

