



2023 Saint Paul Public Schools Student Convenings: “How Are the Children?”

In spring 2023, Superintendent Gothard invited students in 9th -12th grade to share their experiences in SPPS. The conversations, entitled “How Are the Children,” were held at the Black Youth Healing Arts Center in St. Paul. Each of eight schools had one day for their conversation.

The convening was planned and facilitated by members of the Office Of Equity. Participants were divided into four groups: freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. The Superintendent rotated through the day to each of the groups.

The conversations centered on understanding how high school students experience their schools; strengths, challenges, recommendations and questions.

Student Participants

431 students from eight secondary schools participated in the student convenings:

- o 24% of participants were enrolled at Highland Park Senior High School
- o 21% of participants were enrolled at Central High School
- o 15% of participants were enrolled at Open World Learning (OWL)
- o 11% of participants were enrolled at Johnson High School
- o 9% of participants were enrolled at Washington Technology Magnet School
- o 8% of participants were enrolled at Como Park Senior High School
- o 6% of participants were enrolled at Harding High School
- o 5% of participants were enrolled at Humboldt High School
- The grade distribution of the participants was very similar for grades 9 (26%), 10 (28%), and 11 (27%), with a smaller percentage of participants in 12th grade (16%).
- Most participants (74%) were enrolled in SPPS for at least three years prior to SY2022-23.
- Participants reflected all racial/ethnic perspectives
 - o 14.7% of participants are Hispanic/Latino
 - o 0.2% of participants are American Indian
 - o 17.5% of participants are Asian
 - o 43.1% of participants are Black
 - o 16.1% are White, and

- 8.4% of participants are biracial/multiracial
- Participants were more likely to be female (56%).
- Students learning English as a second language are 17% of participants.
- Participants; languages other than English, spoken at home are Spanish (11%), Somali (10%), Hmong (10%), Karen (4%) and Oromo (3%). Other home languages identified as less than 2% included Arabic, Cambodian, French, Hindi, Vietnamese, Burmese, Pashto, Amharic, Napali, Swahili, Tigrinya, Yoruba, Gokana, Hausa and Karenni.
- Most participants receive free or reduced priced meals; the percentage (74%) nearly mirrors the district percentage for SY22-23.
- Similar to meal status, the percentage of participants receiving special education services (16%) was similar to the district percentage for SY22-23.

Data Collection

Data collection included the following:

- Artifact review
- Observation notes
- Informal discussion

Qualitative data collected during the experience was analyzed for themes across all schools.

Results

Many high school students experience their high schools as spaces where the school climate and culture is often a barrier to learning. Students feel this is due to:

- differential treatment based on race, ethnicity, culture and identity
- inability of the school to articulate, communicate about and ensure physical safety
- escalating stress and anxiety
- lack of racial ethnic and cultural representation in classrooms
- restricting access to essential school resources such as bathrooms
- teachers' disinterest, lack of respect for students, and inability to facilitate learning in relevant and engaging ways

High school students value a school climate and culture that includes:

- access to school resources
- a network of friends, acquaintances and peers
- outreach from support staff
- teachers that build connection to the curriculum and reflect care for the student as a successful learner
- trustworthy adults