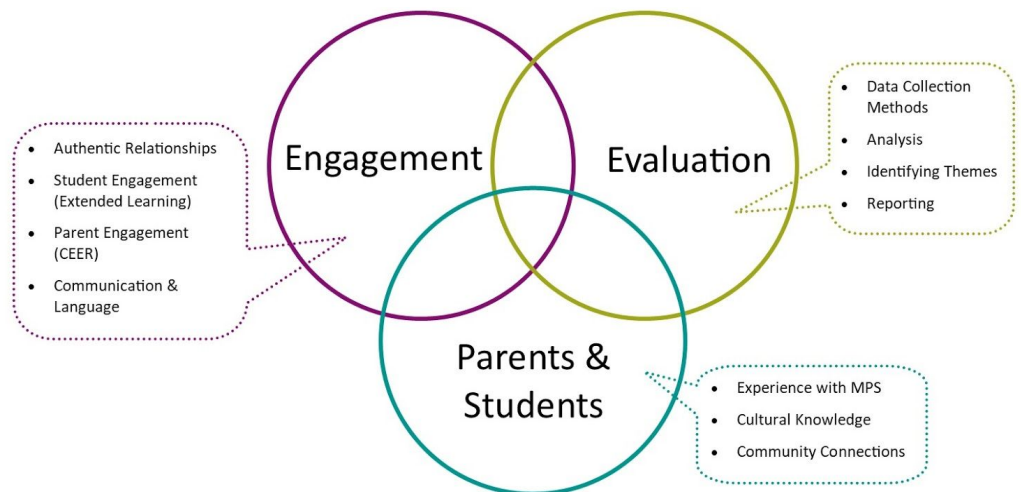


To: Chair Ellison, Superintendent Graff, and Board Directors
From: Eric Moore, Chief of Accountability, Research, & Equity
Celina Martina, Executive Director of Engagement & External Relations
Re: Parent and Youth Voice in Minneapolis Public Schools
Date: June 9, 2020

This memo provides an update on three cross-departmental efforts to collect and adapt in response to parent and student voice throughout MPS: [Parent Participatory Evaluation](#) (PPE), [Youth Participatory Evaluation](#) (YPE), and the [CityWide Student Leadership Board](#).

Participatory evaluation empowers the people who are closest to the issue to take the lead in the evaluation -- gathering input from others in the community, figuring out what's working and what's not working, and making recommendations about what needs to change. We believe students and parents have experiences and expertise about their communities that needs to be heard. Through cultural humility, change happens *with* the community, not *to* or *for* the community.

This work is only possible through intentional partnership and relationship-building. Leading departments include: Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA), Engagement & External Relations (CEER), and Extended Learning (Student Engagement). The image to the right illustrates this three-way partnership. Staff experience, existing structures, and resources are leveraged to honor community expertise.



Parent Voice

PARENT PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

MPS has experienced little success using traditional research methods to engage our diverse communities. As a response, REA launched the PPE program in partnership with CEER in 2018.

In 2019, parents representing our American Indian, African American, Hmong, LatinX, and Somali communities designed a culturally-relevant data collection process to engage parents in their communities in identifying: “How can a school **value and respect** your child for who they are?” Parent Evaluators were trained on three data collection methods—surveys, focus groups, and participatory methods (such as sticker voting or a graffiti wall). Parents analyzed the data they collected and presented their [findings and recommendations](#) to MPS leadership. Parent Evaluators brought cultural innovations to the research process and were able to reach many more parents from these communities

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN RESEARCH



MPS serves a **racially and ethnically diverse community** of students and families:

- ✓ Over 37% of MPS students identify as Black or African American, with nearly one-third of those students (about 12% of all MPS students) speaking Somali at home.
- ✓ About 6% of MPS students identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, with over one-third of those students (about 2% of all MPS students) speaking Hmong at home.
- ✓ About 36% of MPS students identify as white, 17% Hispanic/Latino, and 4% American Indian.



However, **MPS has experienced little success engaging these diverse communities** in research and evaluation:

- ✓ In a recent survey, MPS collected data from over 3,000 families and community members, but only 469 identified as a person of color, 338 spoke a language other than English at home, and only 420 reported living on the North side of the city.



PPE Parent Evaluators created many **cultural innovations** to meaningfully engage with their communities and collect authentic data, such as:

- ✓ Using a medicine wheel in a participatory activity
- ✓ Inviting families to join a discussion on a Somali radio station
- ✓ Collecting data in their homes, at the grocery store, market, or mall, in their place of worship, at schools, and at community centers or parks

than previous REA efforts.



FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

After presenting their Fall projects to District leadership in December 2018, Parent Evaluators demanded the District take action in response to their research and recommendations. To facilitate action planning and ensure accountability, staff aligned the Parent Evaluators' findings and recommendations to the MPS Equity Framework and organizational chart, and asked District staff to share a response with parents.

HOW CAN A SCHOOL VALUE AND RESPECT YOUR CHILD FOR WHO THEY ARE?



Pedagogy of Equity: Parents want MPS to create an educational experience that honors the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population.

- Parents feel the MPS academic experience does not reflect and value the languages, cultures, and histories of MPS students.
- Parents expect staff to create safe learning environments by addressing issues of bullying and student conflict.
- Parents need better communication about schools' expectations for behavior, as well as equitable treatment in response to behavior.
- Parents of students in Special Education programming want to better understand Special Education services and the progress their child is making.



Families as Education Partners: Parents of color need schools to break down barriers so they can be partners in their child's education.

- Parents want to be partners in their child's education, but need schoolwide structures to support them in this role.
- Parents seek more positive communication from the District and their child's school.
- Parents want to be able to communicate with school staff, but often do not find multilingual staff or interpreters at MPS schools.
- Parents find it essential that schools make their cultures visible by creating and displaying culturally-specific works and languages, and acknowledging important cultural holidays.



Equity in Operations: Parents want to be sure their child has a safe and equitable school experience.

- MPS must prioritize hiring staff who represent the students who attend schools in the District.
- Parents want MPS staff to know more about their students' cultural histories, values, and practices.
- It is important to many parents that MPS provide transportation to all students.

These memos, which captured the status in Spring 2019, can be found [here](#). In addition, the parent presentations from Spring 2019 can be viewed [here](#).

DISTRICT RESPONSE

MPS continues to monitor the staff response to PPE parents and communicate these changes with PPE graduates. We acknowledge that due to changes in staff and leadership of key departments, the Comprehensive District Design, COVID-19, and other competing priorities for District staff, not all action steps identified last spring were completed this school year. Staff re-engaged with department leaders and the senior leadership team to document the status of these efforts in Spring 2020.

MPS Action Steps (Spring '19)

- Increased budget for Interpretation and Translation services
- Hired additional Recruitment and Retention Coordinator to increase staff of color
- Increased budget for Arts department for more culturally-specific arts displays
- Increased Special Education Cultural Liaisons working weeks to include projects that improve relevancy and accessibility of parent communication
- Henry HS added a full time teacher for Hmong language course
- Heritage HS added a full time teacher for Somali Studies course

MPS Updates (Spring '20)

- Hired Video Storyteller to produce oral/visual communication in four languages
- Included three pathways - American Indian, Hmong Language (new!), and Spanish Language - in Comprehensive District Design
- Increased use of non-traditional communication channels to connect with families (e.g. Somos MPS podcast, WhatsApp, Facebook groups, community-led radio)
- Released mandatory video training series for all staff on bullying
- Amended the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) union contract to integrate Restorative Practices districtwide starting August 2021
- Empowered parent leadership in Special Education Advisory Committee to expand parent education, communication, and resources

In addition, PPE has trained parents on the Systems Change Framework and [organized findings](#) from the Spring 2019 efforts using this image. While some technical solutions are identified by Parent Evaluators, the most pervasive theme they bring forward is a need to focus on **systems change**, which is defined as “shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place (Kania, Kramer, Senge 2018).”

Staff continue to work in partnership with parents to continue to advocate for change throughout MPS. Through the progress monitoring process, it is clear that MPS has recognized a need to increase parent-staff connections and, in particular, to break down language barriers to ensure full participation of all communities. There has also been an increase in intentional efforts to gather parent voice on key issues and decisions facing the District, including the Comprehensive District Design and its implementation plans. Parents will serve a key role in the development of our Climate Framework and Curriculum Transformation.



Systems Change Framework (Kania, Kramer, Senge 2018)

NEXT STEPS FOR PPE PROGRAMMING

Given the success of the first year of the program, PPE graduates were hired to support data collection for the [Student Placement EDIA](#) conducted in Fall 2019. Parents provided input on drafted data collection tools to capture parents' experience with the Student Placement process, and engaged members of their community to gather more diverse voices. MPS planned to launch a second PPE cohort this spring, but plans were interrupted by COVID-19. We are developing plans for either a virtual or in-person launch next fall.

PPE EXPANSION

This innovative approach to parent engagement and evaluation has garnered external attention. The PPE program was featured in [Education Week](#) last summer. We have secured a grant from the Northside Funders Group to support an expansion of the model at the school-level, with pilots planned for Hall Elementary and Hmong International Academy. These sites were selected because both of these schools are located in the Northside and would potentially be impacted by changes from Comprehensive District Design. Upon connecting with school leaders, both schools have shown great interest in implementing this model at their sites. After consulting with school leaders about parent and school capacity to continue this work, we have decided it would be best to launch the project in late summer to allow time for families and schools to adjust the new realities of this remote work.

PPE is also included in the Evaluation Plan for our Full-Service Community Schools (Bethune, Cityview, and Green Central).

Youth Voice

Youth voice means that youth, in partnership with supportive adults, have a say in the programs or places that are designed to serve them. Youth voice in MPS recognizes that students' identities impact their school experience. Therefore, we use data collection methods to ensure that youth voice is representative of *all* MPS students.

MPS uses two models to gather youth voice. The **CityWide Student Leadership Board** functions much like any representative board, and includes the Student Representative on the MPS Board of Education. Much of their work is providing counsel to MPS staff. The **Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE)** program, in contrast, is a community-based approach where youth identify the topic most important to them at their school.

YOUTH PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION (YPE)



For the past five years, YPE teams at every MPS middle and high school have conducted an annual research project rooted in answering the question, **“What is getting in the way of you and your classmates having the school experience you want to have?”** YPE equips young people with research and evaluation skills, and takes a democratic approach to legitimize and leverage the voices of young people in shaping their education.

(Watch this [intro video](#) for more information, including student and staff testimony about the importance of YPE)

YPE empowers underrepresented voices in our schools and provides a positive, proactive space for students to advocate for school change. In the 17-18 school year, black students in MPS were over four times more likely to receive a suspension than their peers, and students who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch were nearly five times more likely — both in line with national trends. YPE asks *these youth* to shape the conversation around school improvement and climate.



27 Schools



266 Students



African American



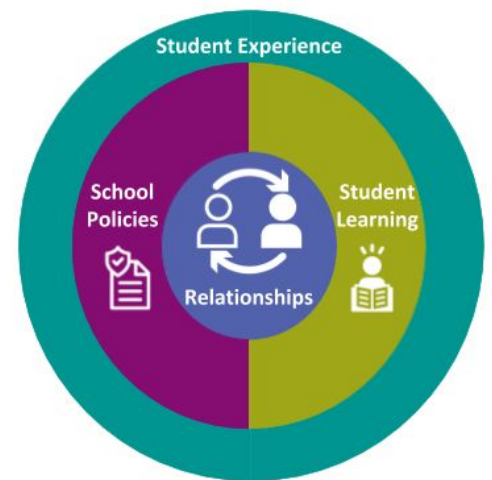
Eligible for FRL

Each YPE team has a system of support that includes a Youth Voice Advisor (school leader supported by Quality Compensation funds) and an Evaluation Coach from the Accountability, Research, and Equity Division. Each year, teams gather for a Fall Summit to learn about the evaluation process and identify their research question, and again for a Spring Summit to share their projects with their peers and district staff.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

REA partnered with Gabe Spinks, the 2017 MPS Student Board Representative, to [conduct a meta-analysis](#) using each YPE team’s 2018-19 project as a data source. Three interconnected themes that span across schools and topic areas emerged. These themes are described in detail, along with summarized recommendations, in their own memo (linked below):

- **RELATIONSHIPS**: student identity, the presence or lack of trust, and a perceived belief gap all impact student-to-staff and student-to-student relationships.
- **SCHOOL POLICIES**: students want to see changes in some school policies as they feel many are enforced inequitably and predictably by student identity.
- **STUDENT LEARNING**: student learning is impacted by a school climate and environment that often lacks diversity, engaging and culturally relevant curricula, and positive student-teacher relationships.



“I think the YPE work has been pretty foundational for **awakening staff** to the student experience.”

REA has also studied the impact of program participation. Participants have identified that YPE has increased their ability to collaborate, have empathy for their classmates’ experiences, collect and analyze data, and take on a leadership role with confidence. The program also has developed students’ sense of agency; as one participant said, “It made me feel like I have a voice. I think it made everyone feel like they have a voice and it matters.”

Participants say, “It made me a **more open minded** student,” and “YPE gave me more **confidence** to speak up about problems in our school.”

DISTRICT RESPONSE

School leadership, including principals and the Equity and Engagement team members, are expected to listen to YPE students’ findings and recommendations, and determine the school’s response. Schools are supported through this process with a video training series on [The Source](#). Examples of school specific changes include introducing a youth-designed Buddy Room reflection sheet at Northeast Middle School and a new Hat and Hood policy at Roosevelt High School.

Moving forward, YPE findings and recommendations outlined in these memos will be used as a data source to inform the development of School Improvement Plans (SIP), the development of the MPS Climate Framework, and the individual school climate plans that result from that work.

CITYWIDE STUDENT LEADERSHIP BOARD

The CityWide Student Leadership Board is a group of high school student leaders that provides diverse perspectives on topics and/or issues regarding students' educational experience in MPS. Most often, they serve as consultants to district staff. To better represent their constituencies, CityWide has partnered with REA to utilize data collection strategies across MPS schools.



CityWide is responsible for recommending one student to serve as an advocate for student voice on the MPS Board of Education. The Student Board Representative works closely with CityWide to highlight student achievements and provide a diverse and unique youth perspective on topics addressed by the Board.

CityWide has taken on a student leadership role within the YPE program, including facilitating the majority of the YPE Fall Summit. In addition, they have used YPE team's school-specific research to identify districtwide youth issues and shape their agenda. In Spring 2019, CityWide presented a [proposed systematic process](#) for gathering and sharing youth voice with MPS decision makers to the Superintendent and several District leaders. This proposal includes four approaches to youth voice that range in scale and scope. This school year, CityWide began their first Comprehensive Data Collection project on the dress code policy. Plans were interrupted by Covid-19, but the work will continue next school year. CityWide members, many of whom participate in YPE as well, presented these innovative youth voice strategies at the American Evaluation Association conference last fall.

This student leadership group has also partnered with REA staff to design and implement student voice data collection. For example, student engagement on the CDD in the winter of 2020 included a survey that was piloted by CityWide. In addition, REA staff conducted focus groups with high school students. To help students in this activity, CityWide [created a video](#) asking students to keep themselves informed on the proposal. **They would like to play an integral role during the implementation process of the CDD, including the Climate Framework, next year.**