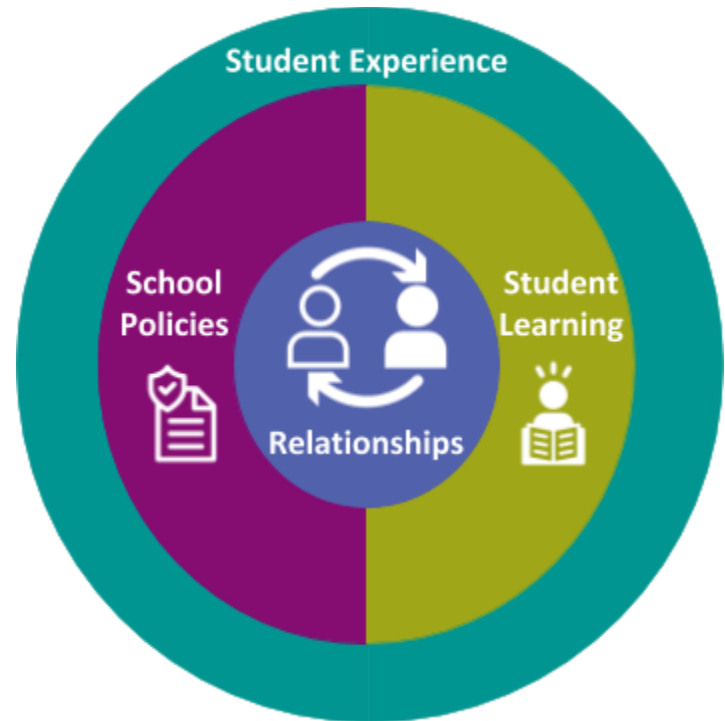


## A Summary of Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE) Findings

Gabe Spinks (Edison 2019) & Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department | Spring 2020

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?”** Over the years, student-led projects have covered a wide range of topics, and student research has primarily resulted in school-level change.

It is clear, however, there are commonalities across projects that can provide a District-level narrative about the MPS student experience. In an effort to better capture these themes and elevate youth voice for District leadership, the Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA) department partnered with Gabe Spinks, the 2017 MPS Student Board Representative, to conduct a meta-analysis using each YPE team’s 2018-2019 project as a data source. Three strong and interconnected themes, outlined below, emerged across schools and topic areas. REA staff have used the framework created by Director Spinks’ to develop a memo, linked below, documenting each of these three themes and outlining recommendations for action. Collectively, these memos can inform our understanding of the MPS student experience and innovative approaches to school improvement.



### RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships (student-to-staff and student-to-student) are impacted by student identity (race/ethnicity and gender), the presence or lack of trust, and a perceived belief gap.

*“If you have a bad relationship, it is harder to ask for help when you need it. If you have a good relationship, you can get positive help and it impacts your grade for the positive. When students feel respected, they feel comfortable talking about anything.”* (Edison 2019)

**Relationships are central to most issues young people identify in their school experience. Peer and student-staff relationships affect the ways in which school policies are enforced and how students learn.**



### SCHOOL POLICIES

Students feel some school policies need to change. Many are enforced inequitably and predictably by student identity.

*“I was in 3rd grade, I was told I had to put on a sweater because I had spaghetti straps, what was the problem? I was a child, and yet I was somehow sexualized for showing my shoulder as a 9 year old.”* (Seward 2019)



### 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 don't like class, it makes me feel uncomfortable. I didn't go to this class because I'm the only Black kid.”* (Southwest 2019)

## YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

YPE teams are asked to provide their school with recommendations to address issues found during their research. Common recommendations are listed below; more specific recommendations are included in each memo linked above.

1. Hire more staff of color, and in particular teachers of color. Encourage and prepare all staff to talk about race and culture in their classrooms. Remove staff who cannot effectively interact with and support students of color.
2. Provide all staff with professional development that focuses on better supporting the student population at their school, specifically addressing discrimination and using engaging teaching strategies.
3. Ensure school is connected to 'real life.' This includes providing relevant curriculum, honoring students' emotional needs, and strengthening the relationships between students and staff.
4. Find more opportunities for student voice within school decisions. Co-create policies with students and staff so that all members of the school community know and agree to follow them.

## WHAT IS YPE?

Since 2015, YPE has helped MPS students in grades 6-12 become evaluators, or the people who gather information from others in the school, figure out what's working and what's not working, and make recommendations about what needs to change. We believe youth have expertise that needs to be heard.

Born out of the District's agreement with the federal Office of Civil Rights, YPE students choose a research question that is important to them and relates to their education, school climate, and/or student engagement.

The team then tries to answer their question by collecting voices at their school, amplifying what they hear, and taking action. Youth recommendations contribute to school and District discussions and decisions. Each May, they present their findings and recommendations at the YPE Spring Summit.

Youth are supported by the Youth Voice Advisor, a QComp-supported position, and connected to their school's Equity & Engagement leadership team. For more information, visit <https://sites.google.com/mpls.k12.mn.us/mpsype/home>



## PARTICIPANTS

YPE empowers underrepresented voices in our schools and provides a positive, proactive space for students to advocate for school change. In the 18-19 school year, black students in MPS were over four and a half times more likely to receive a suspension than their peers, and students who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch were nearly four 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

## APPENDIX

For a categorized list of, and links to, all past YPE projects, [click here](#).