

ANN ARBOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LEAD. CARE. INSPIRE.



Ann Arbor Public Schools
A Community Conversation
LISTEN & LEARN 2023

Report to the Board of Education
August 23, 2023





A Community Conversation: Listen & Learn 2023

Why do we gather?

We gather to solve problems we can't solve on our own.

We gather to celebrate, to mourn, and to mark transitions.

We gather to make decisions. We gather because we need one another.

We gather to show strength. We gather to honor and acknowledge.

We gather to build companies and schools and neighborhoods.

We gather to welcome, and we gather to say goodbye.

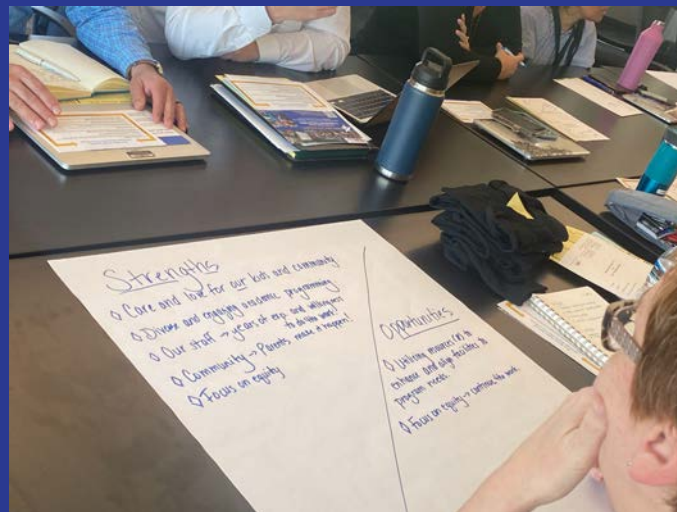
~Priya Parker

The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters



The premise of Listen & Learn is straightforward:

No one knows better the strengths and celebrations, the challenges and areas for improvement, the dreams and hopes for the future than those individuals who live, work, and bring their children to learn and grow in the Ann Arbor Public Schools each day.





A Community Conversation: Listen & Learn 2023

Please share your thoughts . . .

As we refine our AAPS strategic plan focus areas in 2023, please share your thoughts, responses and ideas to the questions below:

- 1) *From your family experience, in what areas are we doing well as a district, what should we continue to strengthen in the AAPS?*
- 2) *From your family experience, in what areas do we have opportunities for improvement in our schools?*

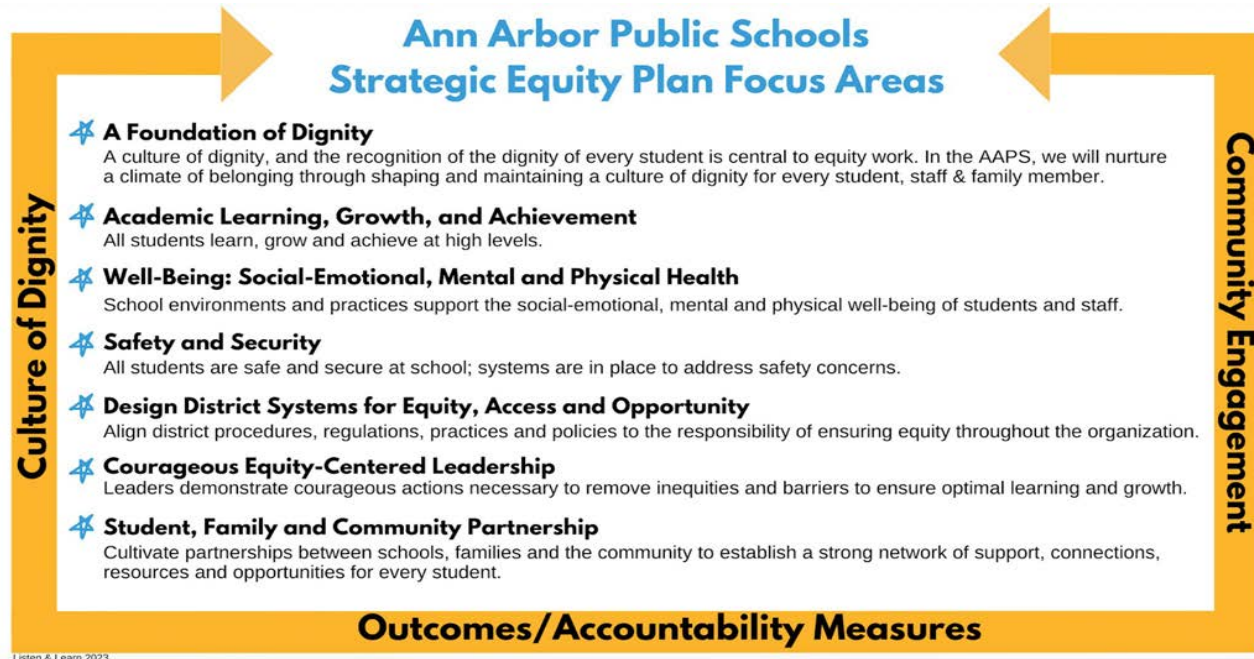
Summary:

Conversations **in-person** with 600+ participants & heard from 1,700 participants online forum
In total, 2,300+ students, parents, staff and community members participated in Listen & Learn



Listen & Learn 2023 Purpose

Engage with students, parents, and community members to better understand the experiences, strengths, and gaps that will inform the AAPS Strategic Equity Plan.





A Community Conversation: Listen & Learn 2023

Octavio - from Guatemala

2 children, 1 elem, 1 high school

Mom - from Ukraine

2 children, 1 elementary & 1 high school

Mother of Premature Newborn

1 elementary & 1 newborn

Parents of LGBTQ+ Students

elementary, middle & high school students

**Parents of students w/ academic needs & gaps
& Parents of students sharing a need for more academic challenge**

**Many parents who have come new into AAPS during the previous 3 years
& Parents who have long-term experience - with many years in the AAPS**

*names changed



Ann Arbor Public Schools A Community Conversation

LISTEN & LEARN 2023

Report to the Board

August 23, 2023

- Purpose
- Engagement Strategies
- Participation
- What We Learned
- Next Steps





Listen & Learn – Ann Arbor 2023

Community Engagement Strategies - Spring 2023

Listen and Learn Conversations

In-person Conversations

Meetings with Public & Focus Populations

Meetings with Strategic Partners

Tables at District Events

ThoughtExchange (TE) Community

Online, Anonymous

Submit Thoughts

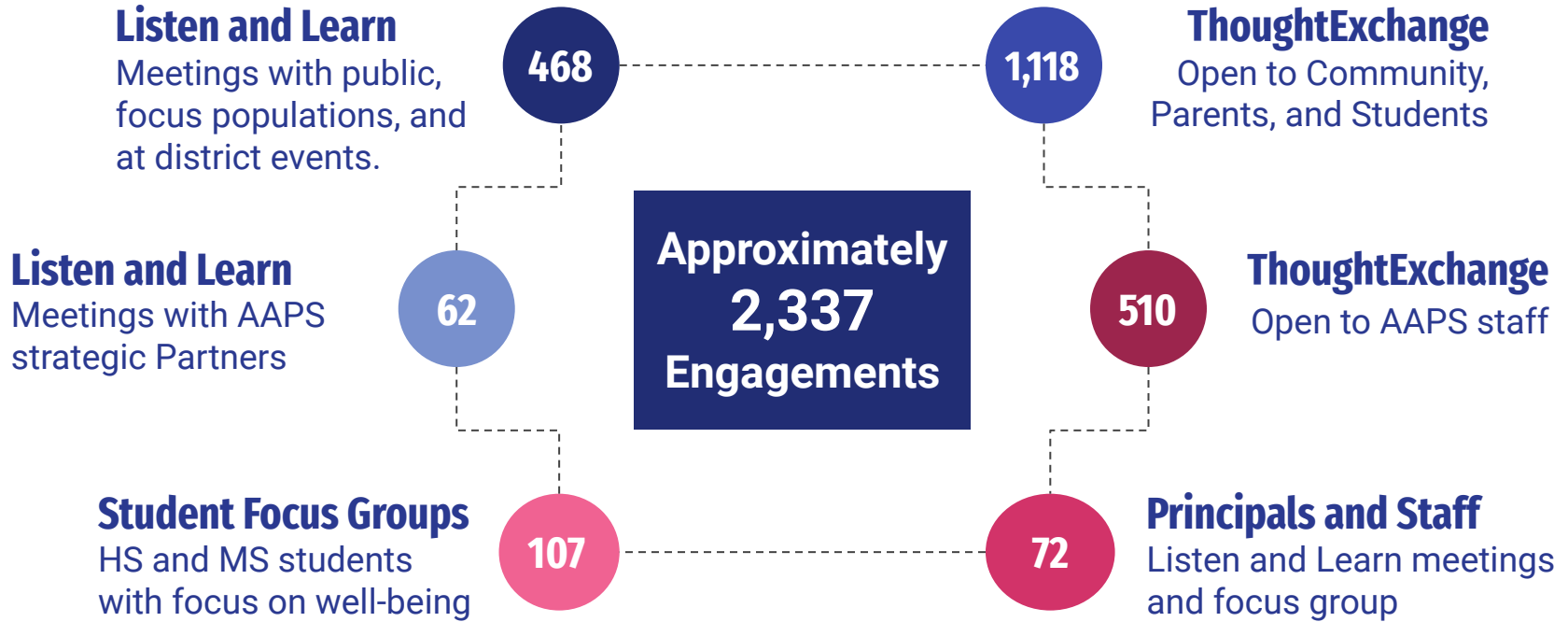
Rate Others' Thoughts

Option: Return to Rate More

Additional data collection: ThoughtExchange (Staff), Staff Survey during PD session, Staff Focus Group, Principal Listen & Learn, Student Focus Groups



Overall Engagement - By the Numbers





Community, Parent, and Student ThoughtExchange

1,188 Participants



988 (83%)

Answered all
demographic
questions



950

Total number of
individual Thoughts
entered



38

Average number of
Thoughts rated per
participant

Summary report: bit.ly/2023_AAPS_TE_Report



Community ThoughtExchange: Demographic Data

988

**ThoughtExchange
Participants**
who answered all
demographic questions

AAPS Affiliation

82% family members

14% Community members,
4% students

Race

63% White

16% Preferred not to say
6% Asian/Asian American, 4% Black, 4% Multiethnic,
3% Latino/Hispanic, 1% Arab American, 3% Other

Gender

73% Female

13% Male, 12% Prefer not to say, 1% Non-binary

Level

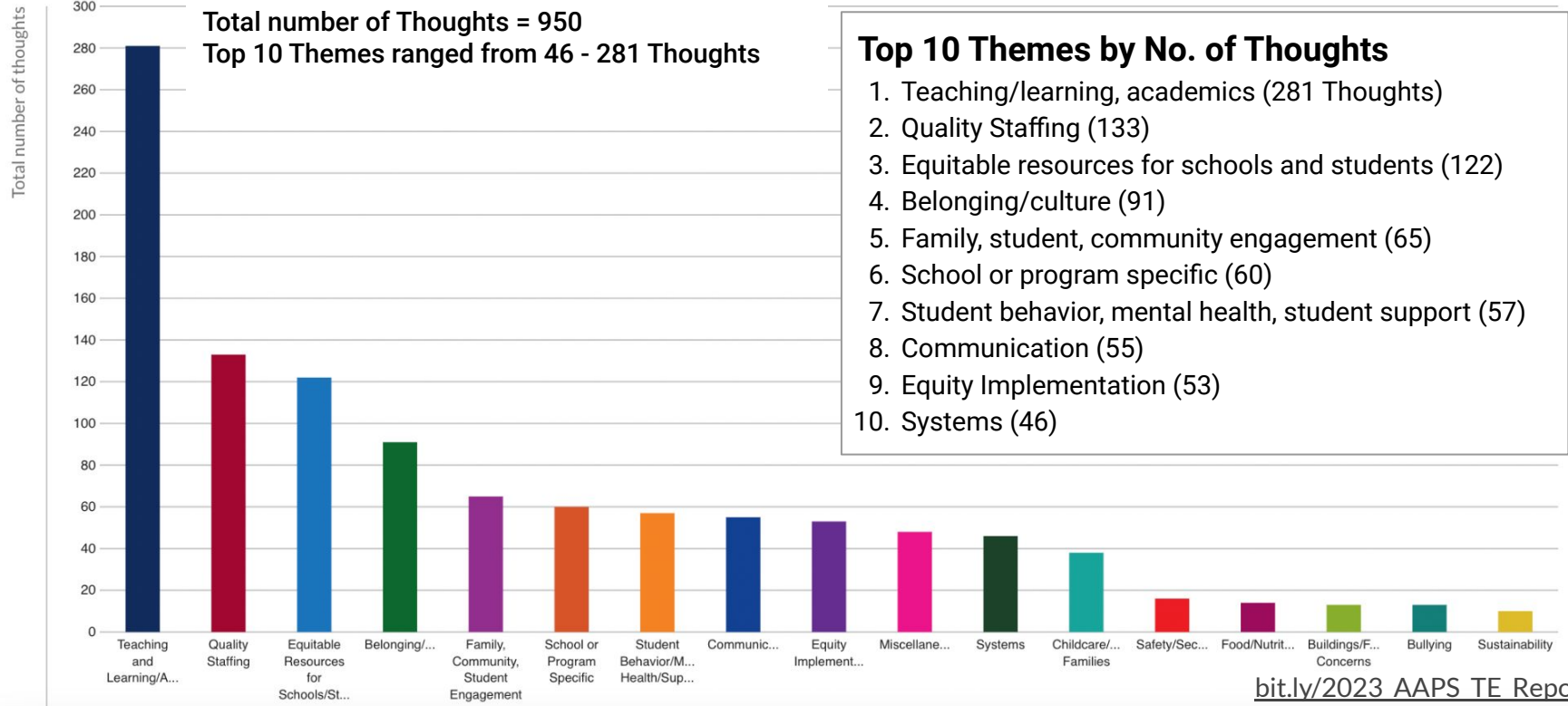
57% Elementary

29% Middle, 33% High





Community ThoughtExchange: Top Themes by Number of Thoughts



[bit.ly/2023 AAPS TE Report](https://bit.ly/2023_AAPS_TE_Report)

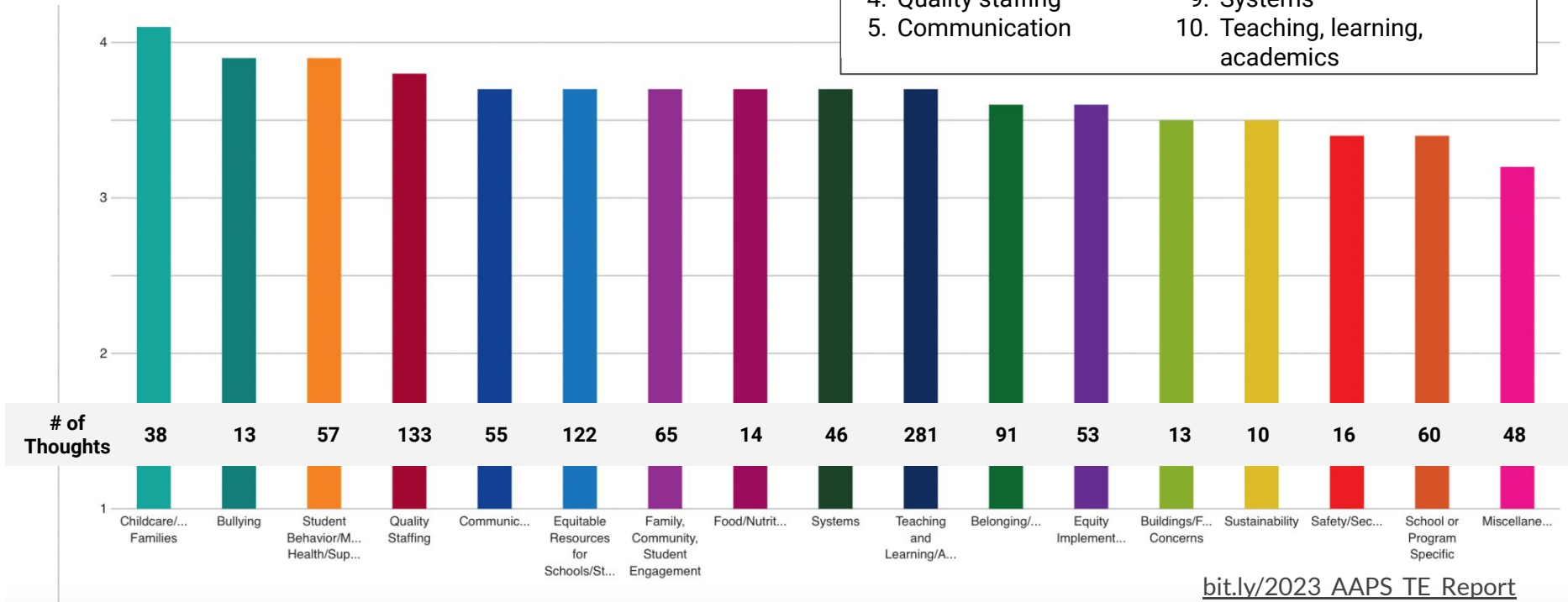


Community ThoughtExchange

Top Themes by Ratings

Top 10 Themes by Ratings

1. Childcare/working families
2. Bullying
3. Student behavior/mental health, student support
4. Quality staffing
5. Communication
6. Equitable resources for schools/students
7. Family, community, & student engagement
8. Food/nutrition
9. Systems
10. Teaching, learning, academics



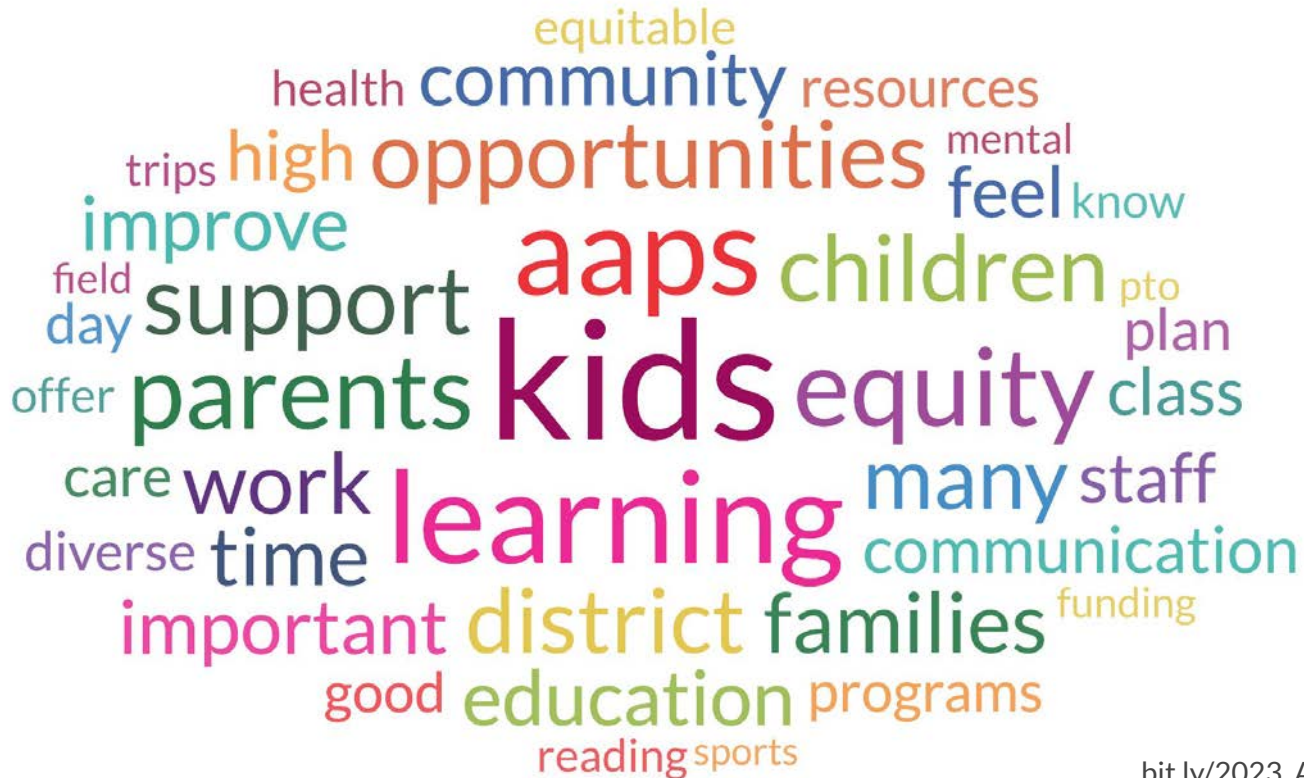
[bit.ly/2023 AAPS TE Report](https://bit.ly/2023_AAPS_TE_Report)





Community ThoughtExchange 2023

Words are sized by how many Thoughts they appeared in.



bit.ly/2023_AAPS_TE_Report



Listen & Learn In-Person Meetings



Public Listen and Learn meeting at Huron High School.



Girls Group (Non-profit) staff Listen and Learn meeting.



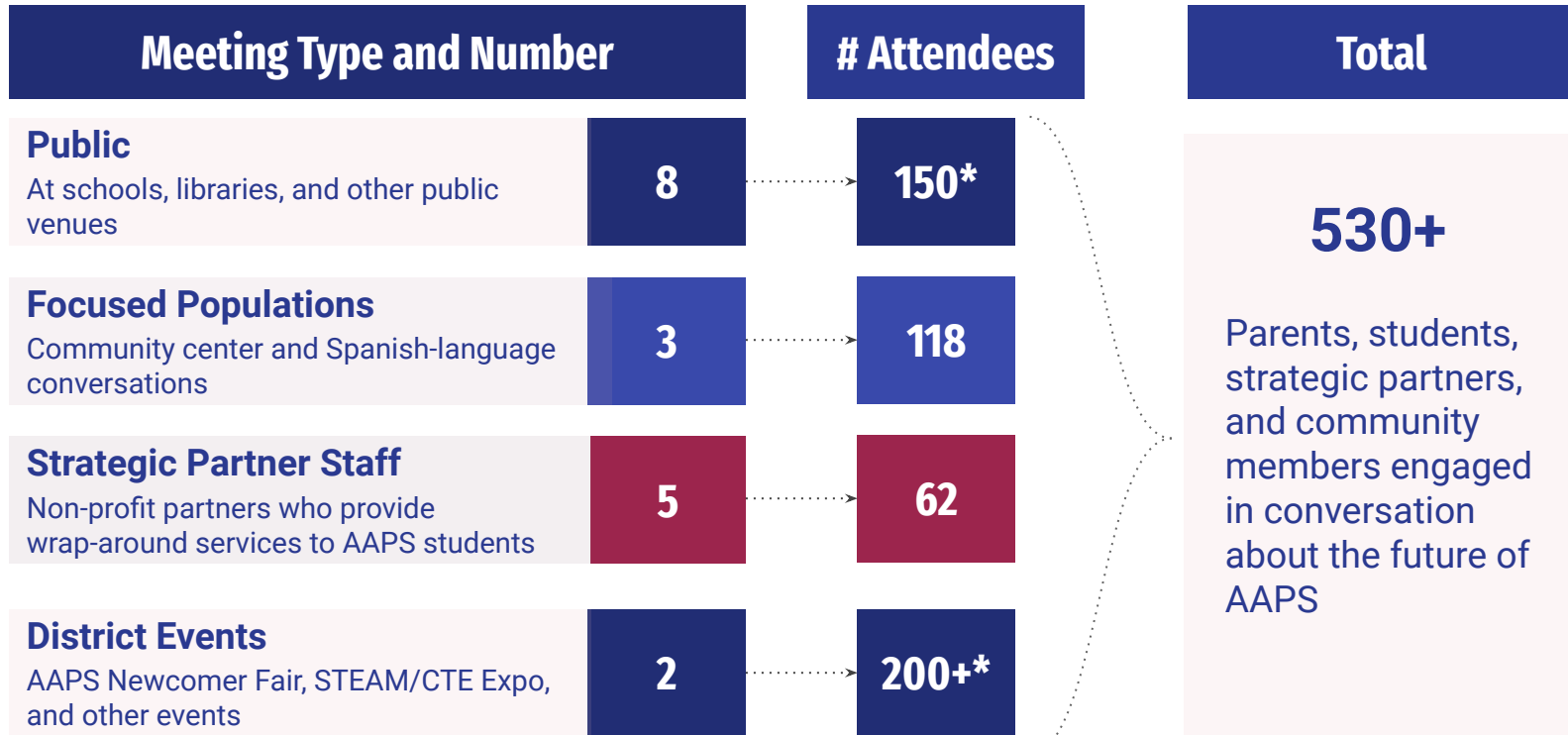


Approach to Listen & Learn Conversations

- Face to face conversations in small groups
- Goal to hear directly from families about their unique experiences.
- Listen to the strengths, challenges and difficulties -- honest and open conversations.
- Extra attempts to reach families who might not attend public meetings or go into ThoughtExchange
- Listen and Learn conversations were held with strategic partners who provide wrap-around support to students: **Avalon Housing, Community Action Network (CAN), Peace Neighborhood Center, Girls Group, and the Student Advocacy Center.**
- **These staff and programs supported approximately 1,105 AAPS students this year, many for the full school year and also year round**



Listen & Learn In-Person Meetings Participation



*Approximate





Listen & Learn Themes – Strengths

Examples of comments shared at multiple Listen & Learn meetings

Public, Focus Populations & District

Strengths Included

- **Quality Staff**

Dedicated, high quality teachers who get to know and care about students; highly competent principals

- **Resources/Opportunities for Students**

Arts and Music programs; extra curriculums such as Rec & Ed and clubs; magnet schools and programs

- **Teaching, Learning and Academics**

Arts, humanities, Project Lead the Way, STEAM, use of evidenced-based practices, International Baccalaureate

- **Belonging, Inclusion and Culture**

Students and families feel welcome at schools.

- **Student Support and Wellbeing**

Peer to Peer program; academic and SEL support

Strategic Partners

Strengths Included

- **Responsive Staff**

Many examples of responsive staff and willingness to work with outside partners.

- **Resources/Opportunities for Students**

Variety of classes, programs and opportunities; schools provide materials and items needed for learning.

- **Community/Partner Engagement**

District-level engagement with partners, including supporting partners in working with AAPS schools/staff

- **Communication**

District-level communication to/from Strategic Partners.





Listen & Learn Themes – Areas for Improvement

Examples of comments shared at multiple Listen & Learn meetings

Public, Focus Populations & District

Concerns Included

- **Teaching, Learning, and Academics**

Math and reading instruction; support for students who are above grade level; or who experience gaps; achievement disparities

- **Supports for Students**

Social-emotional, mental health, and well-being support; college and career support; special education processes and systems

- **Culture and Belonging**

Teacher awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students. More support/understanding for the experiences of ELL families and those with low SES.

- **Communication**

Want more clear communication regarding opportunities at individual buildings; Building and district communication available in more languages beyond English

Strategic Partners

Concerns Included

- **Family, Community, & Partner Engagement**

Some parents do not feel welcome at AAPS because they come from a different racial or life experience than the staff supporting their children.

- **Student Support and Behavior**

Need more support for students with chronic absenteeism. More support for student well-being and academics.

- **AAPS Staffing**

Need more staff dedicated to supporting students; racial bias awareness and training for teachers

- **Systems**

Need more consistency in systems (e.g. IEP process)

- **Racial Equity**

Differential treatment of students based on race



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

- **There is a resonance and appreciation for our shared AAPS core values and the quality that the AAPS offers in educators, programming and opportunities;**
- **There is also recognition that higher levels of challenge and concern exist across many areas, including academic achievement, social emotional & mental health, support for special needs, more aggressive behaviors exhibited in our community,**
- **The AAPS and our community currently face levels of challenge not previously seen across our schools, these challenges align with the areas / framework of our strategic equity plan,**
- **We must to continue to increase systems capacity across the AAPS organization and community, to level up district and community systems to meet the much higher levels of challenge we experience.**



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

Love AAPS approach to diversity with dignity

**A strength is focus on inclusion & belonging across the board
& developing the ability of students to work together**

Parents & students & staff choose the AAPS for value of diversity as a strength

Need for more support with college application & entrance process

***“Listen more to students - they know what they need;
they are often looking for small ways to adjust and ease the school day”***



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

Across the spectrum of values and concerns shared, clear patterns emerged; the patterns of strength and concern reflect and align well with the seven focus areas of the AAPS Strategic Equity Plan 2023

We have work to accomplish in the AAPS, and the next chapter of work aligns well to the framework & the seven focus areas



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

Academics

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**Well-Being - Social Emotional Health**

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Safety & Security at School

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**Interpersonal Relationships**

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Beyond the School Day

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**Programming Options**

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Importance of School Facilities & Neighborhood Playgrounds





Listen & Learn: What We Heard

Isolation of the pandemic time and societal changes have had a concerning impact on the richness of connections within and across our AAPS school neighborhoods & communities

**These thoughts were not in connection with the virtual time,
but more focused on the two years since returning**

“Fewer parent-teacher contacts - specifically through incidental contacts - during daily drop off and pick-up, for example. Practices shifted with some COVID mitigation steps such as maintaining distance at pick-up and, over time have resulted in a fraying of the rich parent-to-parent, parent-to-teacher, parent-to-school relationships that existed before.”



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

Parents shared that during this past two years they were pleased to have experienced an almost 100% restoration of school activities - that step feels like remarkable progress -

yet full re-engagement, connections & relationships - enriching of school community - among all parents who may have entered the school environment during the previous three school years has not yet fully been restored.

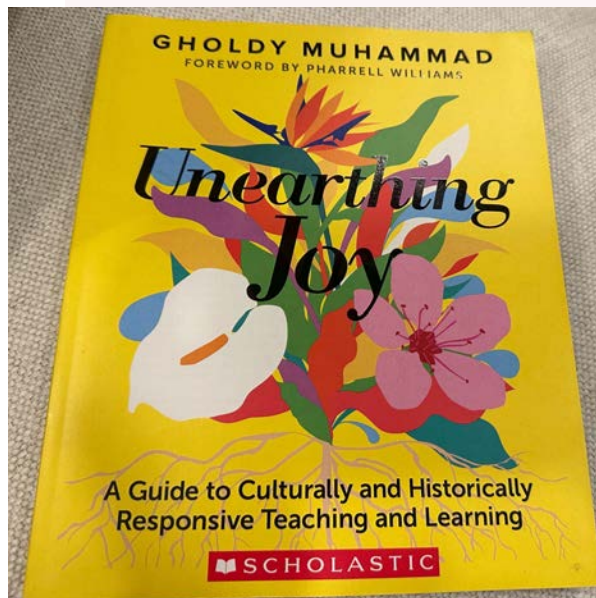
Parent-to-parent, parent-to-teacher/principal, and parent to school/district connections have been harder during this time, and this has had an impact on relationships.

Relationships are key to ensuring strong community and school.

These connections within and across the school community are deeply valued and there is a desire, a hunger, to reconnect more robustly within our schools and across the district.



Listen & Learn: What We Heard



“Joy is a feeling of belonging.”

~Gholdy Mohammad





Listen & Learn: What We Heard

- **'Super' theme within & across all the conversations**
- **A desire and a need to rekindle community through personal connections**
- **There is a willingness and commitment expressed to work together to address our challenges; also a sincere desire to leave behind negativity and polarization in order to fully re-establish the strong community within our schools**
- **Emphasis on the importance of individual connections, internal and external, to ensuring the sense of community that binds people together and has historically been an important attribute in Ann Arbor**



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

A fundamental question we face as an AAPS community:

Will we take the opportunity of this time, having heard from our community, to

- 1) come together, to take intentional steps together to strengthen the fabric of our community within and across our schools, and***
- 2) to leverage the strength of our educators, students, parents and school community to join together to address the increased level and scope of the challenges we face***



Listen & Learn: What We Heard

- **We have the necessary components: an engaged community whose individuals value quality educational experiences for all students in our Ann Arbor Public Schools, a committed, talented, and high-performing team of educators and staff who continue to work valiantly in support of our students, and**
- **Community partnerships, volunteers and resources we continue to leverage to support this whole-community effort to move forward from this time.**
- **The future of our Ann Arbor Public Schools demands our coming together, rekindling community, and mobilizing our collective ability to accelerate our work in support of our students, our schools, and the future of our Ann Arbor community.**



Listen & Learn 2023 Next Steps

- **Fall Follow-Up Feedback**
We will be out in community to check-in on what we heard last spring
- *Did we hear correctly?*
- *In what ways may we consider together 'rekindling' community together?*
- **Work groups to complete the goals and metrics in each of the Strategic Equity Plan focus areas, informed by what we have heard**

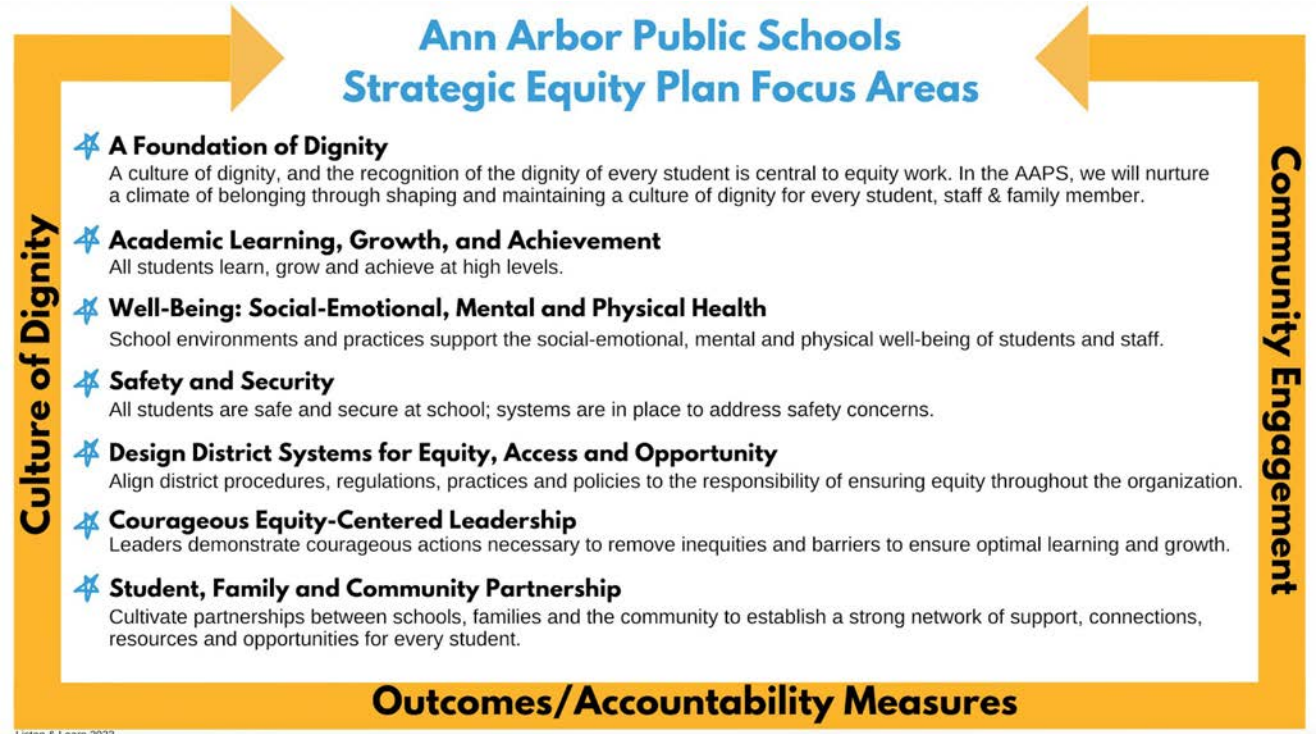


Listen & Learn 2023 Next Steps

The community expressed many strengths and areas for improvement related to each Strategic Equity Plan focus area.

Work groups will review community input related to each focus area to inform plans and next steps.

Immediate work is in progress to center Well-Being as a theme for 2023-24



Thank you!

To the community, staff, and students who shared your experiences, ideas, strengths, and gaps.

Your input matters and will be used to thoughtfully guide the completion of the Strategic Equity Plan during 2023-24.

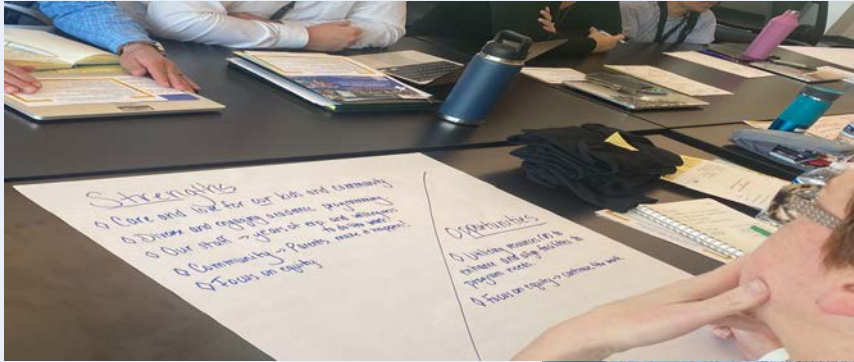
To the Ann Arbor District Library for hosting so many Listen and Learn meetings!



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A Community Conversation: Listen & Learn 2023





A Community Conversation: Listen & Learn 2023





A Community Conversation: Listen & Learn 2023





Listen & Learn – Ann Arbor 2023

The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging

1. ***Boundary:*** The line between members and outsiders.
2. ***Initiation:*** The activities that mark a new member.
3. ***Rituals:*** The things we do that have meaning.
4. ***Temple:*** A place set aside to find our community.
5. ***Stories:*** What we share that allows others and ourselves to know our values.
6. ***Symbols:*** The things that represent ideas that are important to us.
7. ***Inner Rings:*** A path to growth as we participate.

~Charles Vogl