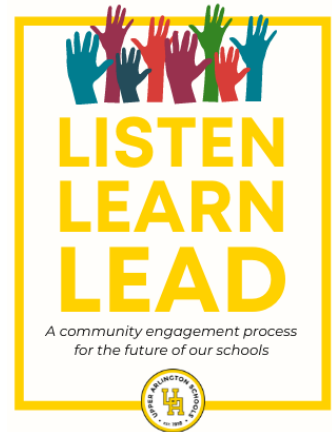


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Overview

Context

In February 2022, the Board of Education of the Upper Arlington Schools charged the district leadership to initiate a system for ongoing stakeholder engagement. The process would encourage meaningful and open dialogue with the goal of bringing people back together for a common purpose of helping the Upper Arlington Schools be the best it can be in preparing students for their futures. The intent of the “Listen Learn Lead” process is to honor the community by providing multiple options and opportunities to *listen* to all voices, *learn* from what was heard and use the community’s feedback to *lead* the school district into an even brighter future. Students, families, community members and staff members are all vital stakeholders in this process.



This briefing report outlines the learnings from the initial community engagement process implemented from March through May 2022. It is a snapshot in time and must be taken as such. This is the first check-in with the community to learn from their experiences. There will be more to come.

Timeline



Communication Strategies

In order to encourage broad participation in the Listen Learn Lead process, Upper Arlington Schools utilized a multi-layered approach to communicate and promote the engagement opportunities, utilizing all available communication mediums to reach as many stakeholders as possible.

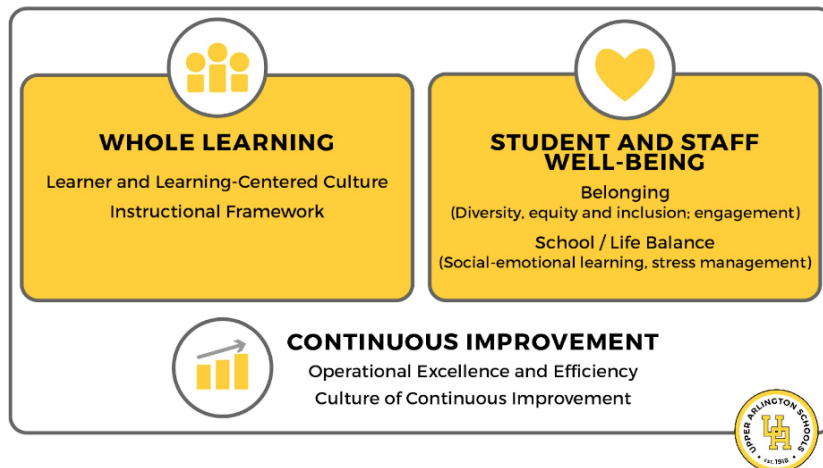
- A Listen Learn Lead webpage (www.uaschools.org/ListenLearnLead.aspx) was established as the central hub for communication with frequent updates. (ongoing — beginning February 2022)

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- A letter from the Upper Arlington Board of Education was mailed to all households in the Upper Arlington community, inviting them to participate in the process. (February 2022)
- All households in Upper Arlington also received initial outreach and updates in the UAiNSIGHT community newsletter. (ongoing — beginning in late February 2022)
- Families with students in the Upper Arlington Schools and staff members received 11 emails with information and updates about the process from the district and additional communications from their schools. (ongoing — beginning in late February / March 2022)
- The City of Upper Arlington also promoted the Listen Learn Lead roundtables in weekly UA CityiNSIGHT emails to the community. (March 2022)
- Posts and advertisements on district social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) promoted community engagement roundtables and the community survey. (March - May 2022)
- To reach students, schools shared engagement opportunities via school announcements and flyers. (March - May 2022)

Before Reading

Capturing the process, framing the learnings, and honoring the voices of the participants resulted in a lengthy report. As you proceed to the table of contents and begin your own journey of listening and learning, first consider grounding yourself in the lived experience of the students. Here is a high-level synopsis. UA's



K-5 students shared that when they have a great day at school or a bad day at school, it's most strongly related to the degree to which they are feeling included by their peers and friends, and the degree to which they feel they accomplished something as learners. Additional secondary factors are shared on p. 25-26 and include their teachers, fun activities and, of course, food. The two dimensions the students emphasized the most in their responses directly align and support the two strategic priority areas of the UA Schools - Whole Learning and Student and Staff Well-Being. The voices of even the youngest students are rich with wisdom as they express the value of engaged learning experiences within a school community that enable them to feel connected to each other and appreciated for their uniqueness as individuals.

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Process Overview

Community Roundtable Discussions

Interactive, two-way communication is a hallmark of community engagement. Bringing people together to engage in authentic discussions around topics of interest benefits both the school district as well as the participants themselves. At each community roundtable discussion, there were participants who commented on how refreshing it was to have a real conversation with others who also cared deeply about their school district.



The total number of participants in the community and student roundtable sessions was 348. These 90-minute sessions consisted of three discussion rounds where participants engaged with different groups of people. Participants selected three of the five prompts to discuss based on what was most important to them. The discussion prompts were identified through the lens of the 2019-2024

Upper Arlington Schools Strategic Plan, which was developed with community involvement and defines the strategic priorities for the district.

Discussion Prompts

1. Celebrating Strengths [Uniquely Accomplished]

- *What are the strengths of the UA Schools?*
- *How are we successful in attaining the vision of producing “uniquely accomplished students prepared to serve, lead and succeed?”*
- *What are you most proud of when you discuss the school district with others?*

2. Student Learning Experience

To prepare our students for their future, we are striving to create a learner- and learning-centered culture where students are empowered to take ownership of their own

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learning. This means that students are involved and engaged in personal, meaningful, rigorous, life-applicable learning experiences.

- *What aspirations and hopes do you have for the students of the UA Schools that have yet to be addressed or realized?*
- *What ideas or strategies do you have to bring these aspirations and hopes to fruition?*

3. Student and Staff Culture

Belonging - We define belonging as a person's feeling of safety and connectedness where they can be authentic, supported by an inclusive culture that intentionally promotes relationships, builds trust and celebrates individuals.

Balance - We define balance as a person's feeling of harmony between school and personal time that allows for satisfaction in all areas of life.

- *How are we doing currently at providing a sense of belonging for our students and staff?*
- *What can we do better?*
- *What ideas do you have to help us stretch and grow?*

4. Financial Responsibility

We are proud of the quantity and variety of programs we offer and the fact that we rank #1 in the State of Ohio for the percent of dollars that go directly to classroom instruction.

- *Would you prefer for us to sustain the current level of programming or reduce these opportunities to save money?*
- *What other programs, services or cost efficiencies can we consider?*

5. Communication

We strive to routinely and intentionally engage broad community stakeholder groups to inform the direction of the Upper Arlington Schools.

- *How are we doing currently?*
- *What can we do better?*
- *What ideas do you have to help us stretch and grow?*

Note - For each prompt, this guideline was provided: Please be as specific as possible and avoid using the names of specific people.

Participation

Seven community roundtable sessions were held with mixed stakeholder groups (families, community members, staff and students). Two were held during the morning and five in the evening. One of the evening sessions was held virtually. Overall, the majority of the 152 participants were family members of students and community members. Only a handful of students participated in these sessions.

To increase student participation, a convenient sample of 31 freshman students participated in a community roundtable experience during their March Leadership UA meeting. Only the first three prompts were used with this student group. Additionally, 11 student advisory classes consisting of 165 students in grades 6-12 participated in modified roundtable discussions using only the first three prompts. Advisory teachers were provided with guidance and a digital resource (Google Jamboard) for their students to record their own responses.

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At the elementary level, a sample of 91 students from grades K-5 across four elementary schools was asked a different set of prompts by their teachers (see below). These discussions were conducted in small groups ranging from two to eight students, with one larger group of 19. Teachers recorded the groups' responses electronically and did not include any student identifiers besides grade level and school. This process started in mid-May after the end-of-the-year testing was complete and was not included in the Survey of Roundtable Themes.

Discussion Prompts for K-5

1. What do you like most about your school?
2. What is one thing you don't like about your school?
3. What is one idea that would make your school a better place for you to learn?
4. What classroom activities do you enjoy the most?
5. When you've had a bad day at school, what made it bad for you?
6. When you've had a great day at school, what made it great for you?
7. Is there anything else that you would like the leaders of the school district to know so they can make the best decisions possible?

Analysis Process and Limitations

The qualitative data from the community roundtable sessions and student roundtable sessions were analyzed separately. Data was explicated through the process of open coding first, and then categorical coding. All pieces of data had equal weight in this process. Each data point was coded, reviewed and organized into clusters or themes (see learnings section). A limitation of the community and student roundtables was the low number of participants. Even with extensive outreach by the district, every time of year is a busy time of year for families of school-age children.

Survey of Roundtable Themes

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to verify that the participants see themselves in the findings (learnings). In an effort to honor the voices of those who participated and to engage with others unable to participate in the roundtable sessions, a survey was developed to share the primary themes that emerged from the community and student roundtable discussions, solicit feedback on the themes (a form of member checking), prioritize the themes, and provide the opportunity for additional ideas or thoughts. The survey was open to the community for two weeks from April 27 to May 11, 2022, and was promoted via email to families in the school district



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and staff members; on social media; in the UAiNSIGHT community newsletter; and on the district website. Paper copies of the survey were also available.

Survey Structure

There were two different sets of questions in the survey — one set for current students based on the themes that emerged from the student roundtables and one set for the adults based on the themes that emerged from the community roundtables. There were 1,422 total responses to the survey with an 88% completion rate. The average time to complete the survey was 7.5 minutes.

Response Review

Incomplete responses were reviewed individually to determine their viability. In many cases, the respondent simply forgot to select “submit” at the end of the survey. In some cases, the response was partially complete. In both cases, the responses were included in the final data set. In some cases, a respondent completed only the identifiers (type of stakeholder group, roundtable participant) and did not answer any of the prompts about the themes. In these cases, the responses were disqualified.

One last error was noticed - when submissions were made from K-8 students during school hours on school days. Since the survey was not emailed to these students, each submission with a timestamp during school hours was reviewed individually. In many cases, the open-ended response demonstrated that the respondent was actually a parent, not a student. In these cases, the open-ended response was included in the final data set, but the responses to the themes (which were from the student roundtables) were disqualified. Additionally, several other open-ended responses to the student survey indicated that a parent selected the wrong identifier. Again, only the open-ended responses were kept.

After the editing process was complete, there were 1,333 viable responses left in the final data set. Of those responses, 92% represented stakeholders who did not participate in the original community roundtables.

Survey Participation

Of the 1,333 participants in the survey,

- 66.5% were parents/family members of current students.
- 18% were staff members — a third of whom are also parents of current students.
- 11.7% were students.
- 3% were community members.
- Less than 1% were recent UA graduates.
- Less than 1% were business owners who were not residents.

Although the available mechanism to limit the number of responses per device was activated within the survey platform, there were still ways to submit multiple responses to the survey (i.e., using a different device, changing web browser, changing IP address, etc.). Upper Arlington

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Schools felt it was important to engage as many participants as possible, knowing there may be some stakeholders who responded multiple times.

Learnings by Topic

The learnings are first organized by topic area based on the five prompts used to guide the roundtable discussions. The learnings from the community roundtables and student roundtables (grades 6-12) will be shared in the same section since their questions were the same.

Since the Survey of Roundtable Themes was developed based on the primary themes that emerged from the roundtable discussions, it is not surprising that they were overall well-supported by the survey participants. For each question on the survey, the response “not applicable” was available to prevent participants from having to respond to a question about a topic that may not be relevant or familiar to them.

Within each section, there is a table that captures the survey responses. Please note that the first column in the table represents the priority of that theme based on respondents having to select the one theme they found to be most important to them at that time. Prioritization is never easy, and a few participants commented on how challenging it was to select only one theme as the most important. Following the aforementioned sections is an overview of what was learned from the K-5 student focus groups.

**“The paradox of listening is that by relinquishing power -
the temporary power of speaking, asserting, knowing - we become more powerful.”
- Amy Cuddy**

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Celebrations

Appreciative inquiry is the foundation for the first prompt to capture what is going well. Too often we focus only on what can be changed or improved and neglect to celebrate all of the great things that are happening.

Prompt 1 - Celebrating Strengths [Uniquely Accomplished]

- *What are the strengths of the UA Schools?*
- *How are we successful in attaining the vision of producing “uniquely accomplished students prepared to serve, lead and succeed?”*
- *What are you most proud of when you discuss the school district with others?*

In the tables below you will find the primary themes that emerged from the roundtables and the responses of the survey participants to the question, “To what extent is your experience with the UA Schools reflected in this statement?” Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of alignment with the statement using a sliding scale from “Very UNTRUE of my experience” [0] to “Very TRUE of my experience” [100]. The average number selected is represented in the table next to each theme. Themes are organized from greatest to least.

Community Roundtable Primary Themes: Celebrating Strengths - 1,177 responses *Scale of 0 [Very UNTRUE of my experience] to 100 [Very TRUE of my experience]*

81	Our community and families support our schools and students well.
80	We have dedicated and supportive teachers, staff and administrators.
79	We have strong academic and curricular options.
74	Our schools are student-centered - inclusive, caring and responsive to needs.

Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the community roundtable discussions. These included the school facilities and organization of the district with neighborhood elementary schools, the extra-curricular options, the service-based orientation of the educational approach, the focus on students being future-ready, progressive education options, athletic program, visual and performing arts, and the responsiveness of communications from the district and Board of Education.

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “Our elementary child has struggled with reading and behavioral issues over the past few years. The UA school system has provided us with a tremendous amount of resources to address all areas. Our child is now reading above average for his peer

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group and behavioral issues have significantly improved. UA schools have done an incredible job in helping our child grow and develop.”

- “There are so many jewels in the district! We want teachers, staff, and administrators to know how much we appreciate their efforts. So many good things are already being done.”
- “I think our schools do an excellent job of providing quality education, in an environment that values diversity, equity, and inclusion.”
- “I have worked in over ten schools in my career, and while I have seen dedicated teachers and administrators at each of them, the UA schools that I have been a part of have these assets in greater abundance than the rest.”
- “UA is a very strong school district. School leaders do a great job communicating with families and remaining accessible. The focus on Serve, Lead, Succeed and PRIDE creates a firm foundation upon which the next generation of wonderful adults will emerge.”
- “Overall, I observe that UA Schools have done a fantastic job evolving from a highly competitive academic-focused system in the 80s & 90s to a more holistic and broad education system with success in not only academics but also the arts and building community. After learning about the evolution of our education system, I decided to return to UA to raise my family.”

Student Roundtable Primary Themes - Celebrating Strengths: 53 responses *Scale of 0 [Very UNTRUE of my experience] to 100 [Very TRUE of my experience]*

79	We have a successful athletic program/teams.
78	Our teachers and staff are helpful and respectful.
78	We have many opportunities for extra-curricular options and clubs.
71	We have an accepting culture; it is safe, inclusive, kind, friendly and compassionate.

Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the student roundtable discussions. These included quality academic programming and a wide variety of courses and options to select from to customize their learning experience.

Summary

Clearly, there is much to be celebrated in the Upper Arlington Schools. Both adults and students alike celebrated the supportive nature of the teachers and staff, highlighted the robust opportunities for extra-curricular involvement, and valued the strength and quality of academic programming provided, with the adults emphasizing this strength more often. Both groups also identified an inclusive/accepting, caring and safe culture as a strength. Some of the themes identified in this section will be seen as opportunities for improvement in later sections, which demonstrates the value of ongoing, reflective practice and the drive for continuous improvement that is a hallmark of the community and is reflected in the strategic plan.

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Learning Experience

This topic area is explicitly aligned to the priorities of the Upper Arlington Schools identified in the strategic plan and is a key driver of the mission of the district.

Prompt 2 - Learning Experience

To prepare our students for their future, we are striving to create a learner- and learning-centered culture where students are empowered to take ownership of their own learning. This means that students are involved and engaged in personal, meaningful, rigorous, life-applicable learning experiences.

- *What aspirations and hopes do you have for the students of the UA Schools that have yet to be addressed or realized?*
- *What ideas or strategies do you have to bring these aspirations and hopes to fruition?*

In the tables that follow are the primary themes that emerged as recommendations from the roundtables, and the responses of the survey participants to the question, “Based on your experience with the UA Schools, to what extent do you agree with these recommendations?” Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a six-level Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) and the option of “not applicable.” The final question in this section asked the respondents to select the one theme that is most important to them at this time to help prioritize the themes. This is reflected in the first column. Themes are organized from greatest to least importance.

Community Roundtable Primary Themes - 1,121 responses								
Rank	Theme	SA <i>Strongly agree</i>	A <i>Agree</i>	SWA <i>Somewhat agree</i>	SWD <i>Somewhat disagree</i>	D <i>Disagree</i>	SD <i>Strongly agree</i>	NA <i>Not applicable</i>
1 (40.71%)	Strengthen the healthy and supportive learning environment (i.e., reducing peer and grade pressure, seeing failure as an opportunity for learning, supporting social-emotional learning, etc.).	37.47	29.08	17.48	6.33	4.82	3.93	0.89
2 (23.04%)	Expand relevant course offerings at the secondary level by building onto existing courses such as robotics, public speaking, life skills, macro and	42.55	30.06	12.04	3.03	1.61	1.34	9.37

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	microeconomics, trades, environmental studies, etc.							
3 (20.09%)	Increase opportunities for the application of 21st-century skills across courses and content areas such as collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and curiosity.	45.0	31.79	15.0	2.86	2.32	0.89	2.14
4 (16.16%)	Provide greater access to academic supports such as tutoring, additional resources, mentoring, etc.	35.09	31.87	21.07	3.84	3.48	1.43	3.21

Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the community roundtable discussions. These included using technology less and increasing active learning experiences, increasing community-based learning such as internships and career exploration, increasing the focus on academic excellence, and increasing opportunities for personal interests to be explored. It was also noted that there seems to be too much emphasis on the college-bound pathway and that other pathways to success needed to be honored as well. Specific to the elementary and middle school levels, there is a desire to increase exploratory options (music, arts, languages) and bring back performance-based music options. Coherence horizontally across elementary and middle schools was also identified as an area to strengthen.

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “Expand access and education around financial literacy and the trades to ensure that non-college attending graduates can find meaningful careers.”
- “We should be careful not to de-emphasize content knowledge and academic rigor in our efforts to support students.”
- “Too much time seems to be spent on Social Emotional Learning. Not that that isn’t important but if we help kids feel academically successful, then maybe they will feel happy and a part of the group.”
- “Would like to see band and orchestra back in elementary school.”
- “I have been underwhelmed by what I have seen from faculty in their ability and/or willingness to engage students and spur their curiosity in regard to learning.”

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- “Arlington has a history of greatness, unity & tradition. It is important to preserve this and not be swayed by social pressure. The district needs to put children and academics first. There has been a movement in the last couple of years that has taken the importance away from academic excellence. It is critical that we refocus and get back to making our district excellent again.”
- “I would like additional opportunities for students in grade school and middle school who are identified as gifted to take advanced classes. There are too many students who partially qualify for gifted services that are only offered basic classes and are not sufficiently challenged in those classes.”
- “Our children need more/deeper educational experiences. Upper Arlington has an abundance of resources in the community that our children could benefit from. These include opportunities to explore career choices etc. In an ideal world, each class would expose our children to real job opportunities that relate to that class in high school.”
- “I understand the reason behind no homework in elementary and know that it is backed by data. However, it makes it hard to connect with your child about what is happening during their school day. We receive information via email and updates from teachers, but that is one side of the communication triangle. I'd like to be able to connect with my child more over what they are bringing home from school.”
- “Please ensure that history is being taught without blame being assessed on the current generation of students for past generations' shortcomings. Teachers' political affiliations should remain unknown to students. Teachers should teach children how to think and not what to think.”
- “Stop any teaching of political or gender concepts in the schools - these are parental issues that should not be taught in schools.”
- “We need to encourage and support our staff to stop talking at our children and engage them in authentic, real-world collaborative work.”
- “I wish UA Schools had better prepared me to discuss social issues, politics, and diversity and inclusion. I went to college and felt ill-equipped to participate in class discussions on these topics.”
- “We need content coaches back. We have no Math coach or Language arts coaches, hence no vertical alignment. Our departments are fractured and have little vertical articulation. Also, we need to expand computer sciences to middle school. We offer German in middle school, but not computer coding? Computer sciences are involved in so many jobs!”
- “It's important for UASD to recognize, meet & support the needs of its twice-exceptional students (as well as its gifted and talented for whom nothing structured is offered).”

Student Roundtables Primary Themes - 152 Responses								
Rank	Theme	SA <i>Strongly agree</i>	A <i>Agree</i>	SWA <i>Somewhat agree</i>	SWD <i>Somewhat disagree</i>	D <i>Disagree</i>	SD <i>Strongly agree</i>	NA <i>Not applicable</i>
1 (67.76%)	Increase relevant, life-applicable curricular options and learning experiences that include opportunities for authentic	32.89	37.50	21.05	3.29	3.29	1.97	0

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	problem-solving.							
2 (32.24%)	Increase community-based projects such as service projects, internships and shadowing opportunities.	25.66	34.21	26.32	5.92	1.97	1.32	4.61

Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the student roundtable discussions. These included reducing technology issues (i.e., WiFi, access to educational websites); improving access to teachers for support; decreasing the focus on grades and homework; and addressing concerns with the facilities (i.e., cleanliness especially in bathrooms, more comfortable seating).

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “Add the trades to the College Night Planning for Juniors; this shouldn't be an afterthought but equally important as going to some high ranking college and taking a bunch of AP classes during high school. Not everyone is cut out for that.”
- “More elementary extracurricular opportunities. Lots of options for HS, but not enough for Elementary school students. More field trips and real-world learning.”
- “I am uncomfortable with the gender-neutral bathrooms. I am also uncomfortable with all the race, gender, sexual orientation focus - it is in our faces everywhere and school is not the place to address these topics.”
- “Broaden opportunities for travel and study abroad.”
- “Too much class time is used to address things outside of the curriculum.”
- “Teachers need to be able to punish students who are disrespectful without fear of parent backlash.”

Summary

The topic of Student Learning Experience generated the most energy during the roundtable sessions and open-ended feedback on the survey. There is consensus on the importance of academic excellence and providing support for all students and a commitment to continuous improvement. Creating a healthy learning environment, expanding course offerings to increase relevance and community-based learning, and increasing access to student support were well-supported areas of opportunity. The perceived decreased academic ranking of the district was an area of concern as well as the perceived degree of political and social issues in the classroom, especially in the younger grades. While there is still work to be done to meet the needs of all students, the absence of programming was not a concern.

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Student and Staff Culture

This topic area is explicitly aligned to the priorities of the UA Schools identified in the strategic plan and is a key driver of the mission of the district.

Prompt 3 - Student and Staff Culture

Belonging - We define belonging as a person's feeling of safety and connectedness where they can be authentic, supported by an inclusive culture that intentionally promotes relationships, builds trust and celebrates individuals.

Balance - We define balance as a person's feeling of harmony between school and personal time that allows for satisfaction in all areas of life.

- *How are we doing currently at providing belonging and balance for our students and staff? What can we do better?*
- *What ideas do you have to help us stretch and grow?*

In the tables that follow are the primary themes that emerged as recommendations from the roundtables, and the responses of the survey participants to the question, "Based on your experience with the UA Schools, to what extent do you agree with these recommendations?" Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a 6-level Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) and the option of "not applicable." The final question in this section asked the respondents to select the one theme that is most important to them at this time to help prioritize the themes. This is reflected in the first column. Themes are organized from greatest to least importance.

Community Roundtable Primary Themes - 1,089 Responses								
Rank	Theme	SA Strongly agree	A Agree	SWA Somewhat agree	SWD Somewhat disagree	D Disagree	SD Strongly agree	NA Not applicable
1 (62.5%)	Ensure schools and classrooms are safe spaces so students feel they are connected, valued and belong.	48.03	29.94	14.33	3.67	2.20	1.10	0.73
2 (19.67%)	Increase staff morale with actions that support work-life balance and engagement.	38.51	29.23	15.07	3.49	4.14	2.48	7.08
3 (17.83%)	Strengthen a culture that welcomes and supports parent and community involvement and meaningful partnerships.	34.53	37.47	19.74	3.86	2.66	1.47	0.28

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Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the community roundtable discussions. These included preventing bullying and discrimination through a systemic approach of awareness building and use of respectful language; providing learning opportunities for staff and students to strengthen inclusivity and eliminate racism; examining structures that potentially inhibit student well-being (i.e., the start time of school, open lunch at the high school, nap time for kindergarten); and increasing learning opportunities for students to develop character, life skills and social skills.

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “Students with conservative values are not openly supported. Accept and support all students regardless of their religion or family values.”
- “What about a director of creativity, connections & relationships. A position to provide opportunities to nurture our students & faculty's creative dispositions, find connections across content areas, student interests & global needs, & lastly help develop the social/emotional well-being of students through joy, connection & flow. We also need to stop communicating rankings & competition-based successes.”
- “I would love to see an increased focus, above and beyond the great work already being done, on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion among teachers and staff.”
- “I want teachers to feel protected and empowered to do their best work, and not second-guessed by parents who might be uncomfortable with social change.”
- “I feel the district has moved backward in the past five years. Specifically, the district feels less inclusive of student differences (e.g., learning style, identity). If you have a star athlete, an AP or IB student, UA is the district for you; for everyone else, maybe not.”
- “I'd like to see more support for our youngest learners in regards to their social/emotional development. One guidance counselor is not enough.”
- “I hope that the conservative voice is included and considered in schools still. We do not feel that this is the case anymore and it is causing stress to both students and parents.”
- “Competition starts young, pushed by parents, coaches, teachers, and admin. There is not enough focus on differences, all are good and worthy, no matter how good they are at things, how popular they are, or how much money their family has.”
- “UA could do better at supporting the students who otherwise may go unnoticed and taking time to connect with children and families who are in the middle of the pack.”
- “I would like to see our district staff be more united. We need to all work together in an effort to support ALL of our students, understanding that the actions at one building are a direct impact on our district as a whole.”
- “I would like a bigger effort to increase racial diversity in the teachers in the schools.”
- “It is appalling that we point out if students are multi-generation graduates on the commencement list. In a community where POC (people of color) were not allowed to own homes for many years, pointing this out on a commencement program does nothing more than promoting that historical disparity. UA needs to be better than that.”
- “Staff morale is at an all-time low. It's beyond creating a ‘work-life balance.’ Staff needs to feel valued and respected. Our professional opinions and experiences matter, and should be taken into consideration. Actions should show that we are valued.”

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- “We need to continue educating the teachers and staff on managing mental health for their students and themselves. This has been a tough couple of years for all and we need to not expect one size to fit all when it comes to our kids.”

Student Roundtable Primary Themes - 151 responses								
Rank	Theme	SA <i>Strongly agree</i>	A <i>Agree</i>	SWA <i>Somewhat agree</i>	SWD <i>Somewhat disagree</i>	D <i>Disagree</i>	SD <i>Strongly agree</i>	NA <i>Not applicable</i>
1 (42.38%)	Reduce homework load; use time in class better.	25.83	23.84	15.89	15.23	11.26	1.99	5.96
2 (29.14%)	Educate and support teachers to create a more supportive classroom environment for all students - respecting students' identities, checking in with students.	34.44	25.77	14.57	8.61	8.61	8.61	0
3 (28.48%)	Provide community-building activities to build peer relationships, connect new students and increase cultural awareness.	25.83	30.46	19.87	10.6	8.61	4.64	0

Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the student roundtable discussions. These included strengthening advisory time and teacher-student relationships, and increasing belonging opportunities (student mentoring, population diversity, access to clubs during the school day).

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “Could we have a lunch group to learn more about diversity and that it’s okay to be different?”
- “I love my teachers. What could we do for them?”
- “A mandatory program added, with the intent of educating and helping better the understanding of diversity, ie LGBTQ+ education/explanations (perhaps from an LGBT person), education of Black/PoC/LGBT history, how to be more inclusive, etc. Should include sharing pronouns at the beginning and then respecting preferred pronouns throughout sessions.”

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- “There is not enough being done to stop bullying at the elementary and middle schools. Cyber and social bullying is completely out of control and not being addressed as a major problem within the schools.”
- “Less focus on football and other dangerous and violent sports, more support for character building sports like Crew.”
- “The major takeaway from my responses should be that the focus must be on education; avoiding politically-aligned agendas. We need a culture of respect for people's decisions around identity, but not make acceptance of people's identity the goal of education.”
- “Schools need to do much more activities to promote peer relationships especially those with any kind of disability.”

Summary

The topic of Student and Staff Culture generated congruence around the importance of teacher-student and student-student relationships as well as providing a psychologically safe learning environment free from bullying and exclusionary practices. As the district has worked to become more inclusive, there is a group of families and students who have begun to feel more excluded. A strong desire for unification and harmony was present in many responses. Providing a more personalized approach where all students and staff feel heard, respected and valued is a good place to start. Families desire to be more involved and have the opportunity to leverage the supports and experiences they feel are best for their students.

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Financial Responsibility

This topic area was selected because the taxpayers fund the majority of the budget for the school district. Significant investments are being made by families to live in this school district, so fiduciary responsibility is imperative.

Prompt 4 - Financial Responsibility

We are proud of the quantity and variety of programs we offer and the fact that we rank #1 in the State of Ohio for the percent of dollars that go directly to classroom instruction.

- *Would you prefer for us to sustain the current level of programming or reduce these opportunities to save money?*
- *What other programs, services or cost efficiencies can we consider?*

In the table that follows are the primary themes that emerged as recommendations from the roundtables, and the responses of the survey participants to the question, “Based on your experience with the UA Schools, to what extent do you agree with these recommendations?” Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a 6-level Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) and the option of “not applicable.” The final question in this section asked the respondents to select the one theme that is most important to them at this time to help prioritize the themes. This is reflected in the first column. Themes are organized from greatest to least importance.

Community Roundtable Primary Themes - 1,075 responses								
Rank	Theme	SA <i>Strongly agree</i>	A <i>Agree</i>	SWA <i>Somewhat agree</i>	SWD <i>Somewhat disagree</i>	D <i>Disagree</i>	SD <i>Strongly agree</i>	NA <i>Not applicable</i>
1 (62.01%)	Expand opportunities for student learning and engagement (i.e., music in elementary, art in middle, students falling behind, life skills, robotics, summer coursework, etc.).	50.05	28.56	13.58	4.28	2.14	0.84	0.56
2 (22.35%)	Ensure ongoing communications, clarity and transparency about financial decisions.	49.67	34.33	11.16	1.86	1.02	0.84	1.12
3 (15.64%)	Continue the current level of programming; we appreciate our school	19.72	33.67	23.53	12.0	6.70	3.07	1.30

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	district and the resources provided to students.							
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Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the community roundtable discussions. These included increasing spending on staff (ie., benefits for paraprofessionals, retaining high-quality teachers, etc.); reducing the number of administrators; and wondering about the return on the investment in regard to academic ranking.

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “Do more with less!”
- “I think teachers are doing their absolute best in this tough time. I definitely don’t want to see any further cuts in programming.”
- “Stop spending on buildings. Start spending on teachers that are actually great.”
- “We have the highest-paid teachers and our ranking in the state and in the local area has continued to decline.”

Summary

The topic of financial responsibility was challenging due to its complexity. Not surprisingly, there is a sense of consensus about not reducing programming as well as maintaining and even expanding offerings for students. There is some tension around the topic of teacher salaries due to the perception of decreased academic rankings of the district. Financial transparency is highly valued.

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Communications

This topic area was selected due to the importance of communication at all levels of the organization, especially throughout the pandemic. Communication mediums and platforms continue to change and evolve. The UA Schools leadership wants to understand what is working and what is not.

Prompt 5 - Communications

We strive to routinely and intentionally engage broad community stakeholder groups to inform the direction of the Upper Arlington Schools.

- *How are we doing currently?*
- *What can we do better?*
- *What ideas do you have to help us stretch and grow?*

In the table that follows are the primary themes that emerged as recommendations from the roundtables, and the responses of the survey participants to the question, “Based on your experience with the UA Schools, to what extent do you agree with these recommendations?” Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a 6-level Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) and the option of “not applicable.” The final question in this section asked the respondents to select the one theme that is most important to them at this time to help prioritize the themes. This is reflected in the first column. Themes are organized from greatest to least importance.

Community Roundtable Primary Themes - 1,057 responses								
Rank	Theme	SA <i>Strongly agree</i>	A <i>Agree</i>	SWA <i>Somewhat agree</i>	SWD <i>Somewhat disagree</i>	D <i>Disagree</i>	SD <i>Strongly agree</i>	NA <i>Not applicable</i>
1 (37.22%)	Increase proactive communication by teachers to parents.	32.92	29.23	20.44	9.08	4.45	1.99	1.89
2 (21.88%)	Differentiate communication by stakeholder group and purpose - a clear information system is known by all.	29.80	35.76	21.67	5.01	2.74	1.42	3.60
3 (20.83%)	Increase opportunities for communication with the Board of Education.	27.63	32.36	26.77	6.34	3.50	0.57	2.84
4 (20.08%)	Continue with the great communication practices	18.92	27.15	26.96	11.92	8.04	5.30	1.70

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	already in place.							
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Secondary Themes

In addition to the primary themes included in the survey, secondary themes emerged from the community roundtable discussions. These included providing alternate means of communication for households with limited digital access, improving communication about the curriculum, and continuing or expanding outreach like the community roundtables where stakeholders could engage with one another.

Below is a sample of specific individual insights and ideas shared. While these comments do not necessarily reflect trends in the data, they are included here to illustrate the broad range of feedback and ideas received.

- “As a kindergarten parent, there are lots of things that are not well described. E.g accessing testing scores, log-in details, timing, etc. that may be more well known for parents of older grades. A better orientation for the parents of kindergartners would be recommended.”
- “I’d like to know when involvement and clubs and activities are offered to students. My 7th is involved in no school activities because we don’t know when sign-ups are, or even what is being offered.”
- “As a parent, too much communication is generic and/or not applicable to my students. More effort could be made for teachers and staff to approach students as individuals.”
- “Trying to understand the whys behind many decisions which are made - I believe many decisions are made without parental consent and/or knowledge which is troubling from a transparency perspective.”
- “Work to reduce the recent (last 5 years) division between admin and teachers by increasing teachers’ role in decision-making and improve communication.”
- “I would really like to be able to communicate and exchange ideas with the school board members on a more regular, casual basis rather than just at board meetings.”
- “Improve the district website, please. Try to add more sports options for rec (non-competitive) sports.”
- “Canvas and PowerSchool don’t work well together. Difficult for parents to know what has or hasn’t been turned in versus what hasn’t been graded yet.”

Summary

The topic of communications inspired many ideas to strengthen communication from the classroom level to the district website. The value of parent and family involvement was a common theme in the responses as well as transparency. Differentiated, more personalized communication, especially proactively from teachers to parents, is desired.

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Focus Groups: K-5

At the elementary level, a sample of 91 students from grades K-5 across four elementary schools was asked a different set of prompts by their teachers. Focus groups were conducted in small groups ranging from two to eight students with one larger group of 19. Teachers recorded the groups' responses electronically and did not include any student identifiers besides grade level and school name.

**“Students who believe they have a voice in school are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who feel they have no voice.”
- Quaglia (2016)**

Following each question is a summary that captures the synthesized voice of students and specific words and phrases used by them to describe their experiences and ideas.

Prompt 1 - What do you like most about your school?

Students were very positive about their school experience and had many comments in the following general categories.

- **Learning** - Students mentioned enjoying a variety of subjects, ranging from STEM to music and art. Methods of learning that were particularly popular included the use of the learning neighborhoods, Explorations and group projects. Creativity and interaction were most often cited as the most compelling learning approaches.
- **Facilities** - The overall quality of the school building and playground was mentioned frequently. Particular areas mentioned included the media center, the library, the “neighborhood” areas, the gym, and the new playground with the “Big Toy.”
- **Teachers** - The teachers were repeatedly described positively, including as “really nice,” “really good,” “helping us learn,” and “helpful.”
- **Inclusivity and Friends** - Many students listed friends and inclusivity as the main positives. In addition to noting being around friends, there were a number of specific comments related to inclusivity including, “I like that we’re so inclusive and care for each other,” and “I like how everyone is welcoming, no matter your skin color, your shape, your size, or your gender.”
- **Safety** - The safe environment of the school was named by a few students as an important positive.
- **Fun** - The area most often mentioned by students as a positive involved fun activities and play. Many listed recess as a big plus, and also included field trips, class parties, theme days, games, field day, gym, pizza Thursdays and Wake up Windermere.

Prompt 2 - What is one thing you don't like about your school?

Students had some negative things to express about their school experience as well with comments in the following general categories:

- **Learning and Behavior** - Students had some suggestions related to learning, including “we would like contemporary and informal time to work together” and changes to policies

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such as lessening restrictions on iPads for things like Book It. Most of the comments about learning centered on poor behavior by some students that hinder overall learning. Comments included “the people in our class are really not behaved,” “they always interrupt our teacher and we have to stay in for recess,” and “sometimes kids don’t listen and it kind of annoys me because we can’t do as much stuff as possible.”

- **Facilities** - There were concerns about a few aspects of the school facilities including bathroom cleanliness/graffiti, that “you can’t drink from the water fountains,” and that the lockers are too small. Regarding recreation, more access to the gym was requested, along with a preference for a larger outdoor grass field for play.
- **Inclusivity and Friends** - A number of students expressed unhappiness over treatment by others, and in particular for people being mean. In addition to specifically being concerned with meanness, comments included “I don’t like when people make fun of other people,” and “I get judged a lot for my height.”
- **Fun** - A few students wanted to see a longer recess period and to be sure that all grades were able to go on field trips.
- **Food** - Food-related comments numbered the largest of any category. Several students were unsatisfied with the quality of the lunches, and there was also a request for more vegetarian and drink options. There were also a number of comments about the administrative aspects of school dining including requests for a longer lunch period, people cutting in line, not getting breakfast, and reinstating the snack bar in the cafeteria.

Prompt 3 - What is one idea that would make your school a better place?

Students had a number of specific suggestions to improve their school environment. Many of the answers repeated concerns from the previous question instead of distinguishing aspects that would specifically improve the school as a place to learn. Comments included the following:

- **Learning and Behavior** - The idea of putting all of the fourth grades into one neighborhood at one school, including both informal and contemporary, was reiterated here. Other ideas included adding a preschool, putting suggestion boxes in each classroom, and “having the option to go to a quiet space to work during our rotations.” There was also a suggestion to “have no math.”
- **Teachers** - Several students suggested adding additional teachers.
- **Facilities** - Primary concerns centered on bathroom cleanliness and graffiti. The graffiti aspect may overlap with inclusivity issues as well since the graffiti is characterized as “really bad and terrible things” and other similar descriptors. Regarding recreation, in addition to a larger outdoor grass field, there were requests for a kickball field, tire swings, and more places for four square. There was also a request for a gaga pit at a school that doesn’t have one and clearer rules for the gaga pit where there is one.
- **Inclusivity and Friends** - A number of students expressed unhappiness over treatment by others in responding to this question as well. Comments included the desire that “people stop bullying each other,” and “people could be kinder.” There is interest in both non-gendered restrooms and in restrooms with both boys’ and girls’ stalls to allow shorter walks for use.

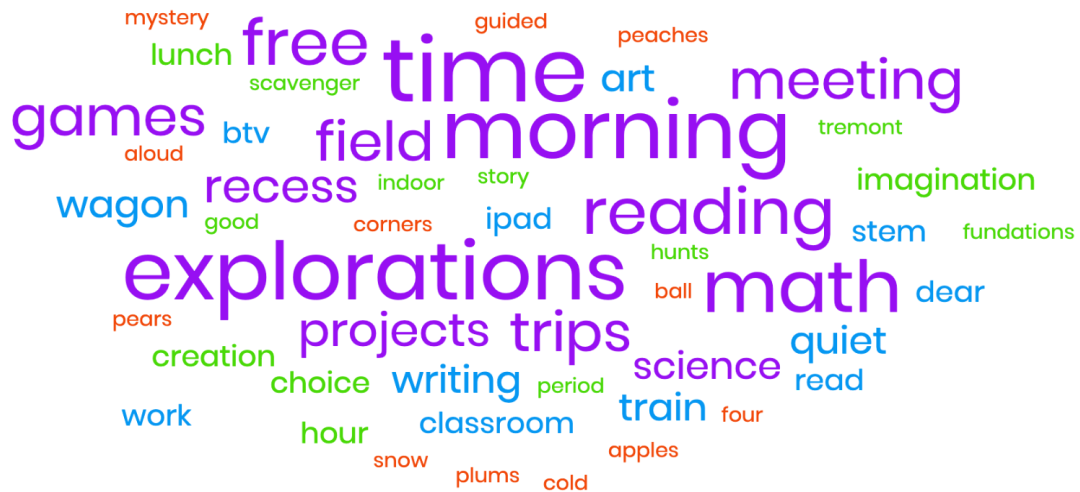
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- **Fun** - Many students want longer recesses/playtime and the additional playground options described above. Several students requested school pets. Other ideas included birthday parties, classroom prize boxes, and more toys in classrooms for indoor recess.
- **Food** - There were some suggestions for better food and the addition of breakfast. Also added requests for longer lunches and the ability to choose their own seats.

Prompt 4 - What classroom activities do you enjoy the most?

Students had a long list of favorite classroom activities. Their responses were difficult to categorize, so this word cloud represents their collective responses.



Prompt 5 - When you've had a bad day at school, what made it bad for you?

The responses to this question were largely focused on a few key areas.

- **Learning and Behavior** - Some students noted “bad behavior” in the classroom or on the playground as a challenge.
- **Inclusivity and Friends** - Most of the responses to this question were related to interpersonal interactions with other students. This includes disagreements between friends, people being mean and bullying, and students feeling excluded. Comments included “when my friends are being mean to me,” “getting excluded and being bullied,” “bullying and unfairness,” “when someone hurts my feelings,” “one day a friend played with someone else and I felt left out,” and “feeling all alone.”
- **Tired/Stressed** - Several students described the challenges when they haven’t gotten enough sleep and how that negatively impacts their day as well as stress related to completing work. Comments included “if you haven’t had enough sleep and you’re really grumpy in the morning,” and “stressed about how much work I had to do.”
- **Food** - Several students don’t like the lunch “pizza pie.”

Prompt 6 - When you've had a great day at school, what made it great for you?

Students responded with a number of areas that led to great school days, including:

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- **Learning and Behavior** - Attaining classroom achievements was noted as an influence on great days. Comments included “when we got all of our things done,” “if you do good in class like on a test,” “when I follow directions and listen,” and “when I have achieved something.” In addition, special assignments and activities seemed to resonate including “when I do a special project,” “when I have an art day,” and “when I have a bunch of special activities.” A few students specifically mentioned Explorations class.
- **Teachers/staff** - Teachers were a big reason for students to have a great day with comments such as “I like when teachers read to us,” “teachers giving us big hugs,” “when my teacher helps me,” and “being with our teacher - we love her!”
- **Inclusivity and Friends** - Having positive days with friends was mentioned frequently. Comments about having a great day included “getting along with my friends,” “when everyone is friendly and inclusive,” “when my friends include me,” and “when you’re having a really good time with your friends.”
- **Fun** - Special activities and events played a large part in the responses as well. Comments included “when we earn something like an extra recess or a movie day,” “when we went on a field trip,” “when we make a Birthday Book on your birthday and sing Happy Birthday,” “when we get to eat candy at school,” and “Kid Fest.”
- **Food** - Food contributions to great days included having “a tasty lunch,” “getting a favorite thing for lunch,” “being a lunch helper,” and “being full from lunch.”

Prompt 7 - Is there anything else that you would like the leaders of the school district to know so they can make the best decisions possible?

Students had a host of additional ideas and several that had come up in earlier questions.

- **Learning and Behavior** - A few ideas were shared including “more math,” “longer specials,” and “we love exploratory arts.” There was also a comment to allow students to have “more equal opportunities” to participate in service-learning projects in their school.
- **Teachers/staff** - Teachers were very appreciated with comments including “it’s the best school and there are lots of teachers to help us learn,” and “all the teachers are the best people in the whole world because they have good hugs and good manners.”
- **Facilities** - Additions and changes to the school buildings and playgrounds were suggested, including adding an indoor playground, bringing back previous playground elements, creating shaded areas of the playground, adding color to the school interior, adding light to the reading area of the library, and installing an ice cream parlor.
- **Inclusivity and Friends** - Adding transgender bathrooms and modifying gendered language were suggested.
- **Fun** - Similar suggestions to earlier questions were made including having more recess and gym time, having more outdoor activities, and adding field trips. In particular, it was suggested that the zoo field trip be an annual event for all grade levels.
- **Food** - Food improvements similar to earlier questions were suggested including better lunch food, more veggies, having breakfast for lunch more often, and specifically “do not serve pizza pie - I want the old pizza.”

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Summary

These 91 elementary students from the Upper Arlington Schools are generally very excited about their learning experiences, teachers, friends, lunch, field trips, and recess. They take pride in their school communities and buildings, and they feel frustrated when people do not get along, when students misbehave, and when their building isn't taken care of by everyone. When it comes to their learning experiences, they express that they enjoy projects, Explorations, being creative, and interacting with others. The word "inclusive" was readily used in their responses, indicating that they care about treating others well and being treated well themselves. When they have a bad day, the majority of the reasons stem from poor interactions with peers and feelings of stress. When they have a great day, a culture of care and concern is described along with a feeling of success of having achieved something. Throughout all of their responses, there were many references to the importance of food in their schooling experience.

Next Steps

Presented in this briefing report were the process, responses and learnings from the Upper Arlington Schools community engagement effort, Listen Learn Lead, implemented from March to May 2022. This process engaged students, families, community members and staff through roundtable discussions, an online survey, and student focus groups. The purpose of bringing people back together to share their experiences and inform the Board of Education and district leadership resulted in this snapshot of both successes and opportunities. As this is not a strategic planning process, specific action steps are not outlined in this report. Below is a framework for examining the content of this report as well as some suggestions for contextualizing the learnings and how to collectively identify action steps.

Listen: *What did we hear?*

We listen to the voices of the UA community by participating in the community roundtables, responding to the themes, and/or by reading this report.

Learn: *What does this mean to us?*

We learn from the voices of the UA community by individually and collaboratively interpreting what we heard.

Lead: *How will what we learned inform how we lead?*

We lead by using what we learned to inform our priorities, decisions and actions.

Discussions of the five topics as well as the K-5 student prompts produced rich data and personal stories of the lived experiences of Upper Arlington Schools' stakeholders. To honor these experiences, it is recommended that decision-makers invest time to collaboratively unpack each topic area. Using a discussion protocol that moves from the literal stance (what I see/read is...), to the interpretive stance (so what this means to us is...), and finally to the application/action stance (now what will we do based on what we learned). For example, the insight provided through the community engagement process can be used to inform district and school leadership teams as they construct their goals and action plans for the upcoming school year. The Board of Education can request that each department within the district review this

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report through the lens of their area of responsibility and identify opportunities for improvement - both short and long term. As always, keep in mind that this is a single source of data. Using this in combination with other sources of relevant data and research is important.

It is also recommended that a mechanism for ongoing stakeholder engagement be enacted to continue two-way communication with the community. For example, there could be a quarterly set of questions (1-3) generated by the Board of Education and district administration that could be posted to a web-based platform to solicit feedback. To honor the feedback that was provided, the Board of Education could share a synthesis of what was learned from this feedback. Perhaps, on an annual basis, the Community Roundtable process could be repeated so that stakeholders could sit at a table together and discuss what they care about and interact with members of the Board of Education and administration. Another example would be to have an annual or semi-annual shadowing day where board members and district administrators shadow students and staff to understand their lived experiences in the schools.

Although this report can feel heavy, as it is filled with opportunities and challenges, it is also grounded in the value of student worth, pride in the school community and a desire to be the best school district. Continue to celebrate the unique accomplishments of UA students, remain grounded in the voice of the lived experience of students, and embrace efforts for continuous improvement and innovation.