

DATE: March 8, 2024

RE: Community Leaders Think Tank

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) launched a Community Leaders Think Tank on February 15, 2024. This event was also the kick-off to a larger community engagement effort to gather feedback and perspectives around potential 2024 referenda, so together we can build a brighter future for our students.

Academic outcomes, budget forecasts, and facility needs continue to be pressing issues facing our community's public schools. As such, the Think Tank took place at a pivotal transition time – before the district's next superintendent was announced.

Community leaders heard news and updates directly from MMSD staff to increase their understanding of MMSD's academic strategy, facility conditions, and funding outlook. Then, leaders went into small groups and shared their thoughts, feedback, and ideas to help shape what's next for MMSD. The Think Tank also was intended to build and enhance trust and transparency between MMSD and community leaders, and re-establish and strengthen relationships.

The UW-Madison School of Education Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) supported this event with data collection, analysis, and creation of a focus group summary report. While not participating in the focus group portion, district staff were present to engage with community leaders and answer any questions afterward. The involvement of an external third party allowed participants to express their thoughts and collaborate with other community leaders freely absent any real or perceived influence from district staff.

Community leaders were allowed to have their names included in the final report. The list of those leaders follows on the next page.

District leadership was pleased with the robust dialogue, thoughtful engagement, and earnest collaboration fostered by Think Tank participants. The district looks forward to holding additional Think Tank sessions with community leaders in the future.

MMSD Community Leaders February 15, 2024 Tank Tank

State Senator Melissa Agard
Senator for the 16th Senate District

Mayor Julia Arata-Fratta
City of Fitchburg

Anne Arnesen
Grumps/MFPS

Barbara Arnold
GRUMPS

Chief Shon F. Barnes
Chief of Police, Madison Police Department

Jane Belmore
Retired Interim Superintendent

Rebecca Carlin
Executive Director, Wisconsin Youth Co

Salvador L Carranza, PhD
Chairman of the Board BG CDC

Carol Carstensen
GRUMPS, former school board member

Dr. Jack E. Daniels, III
President, Madison College

Cortney Dunklin, MS
Education Director, United Way of Dane County

Jason Freedman
Captain, Madison Police Department

Norma Gallegos Valles

Beth R. Giles, PhD
Interim Provost, Madison College

Chris Gomez Schmidt

Ed Hughes

Jennifer Jeffress
President, Oscar Rennebohm Foundation

Michael Johnson
President & CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of
Dane County

Michael Jones
MTI

Angela Kamoske, Lieutenant
Madison Police Department

Jeff Knight
Executive Director, MTI

Gloria Ladson-Billings, PhD
Professor Emerita, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Brett Lindquist
Vice President - Communications and Community
Engagement, Ascendium Education Group

Marty Malloy
Board Member Madison Public Schools Foundation

Dr. Andrew P. Manion
President, Edgewood College

Sandy Morales
CEO at Big Brothers and Big Sisters of
Dane County, Inc.

Satya Rhodes-Conway
Mayor, City of Madison

Kelly Ruppel
Fund For Wisconsin Scholars Inc.

Martha Siravo

Deirdre Steinmetz
Program Director, Madison Reading Project

Alex Thompson
Basileus- Gamma Gamma Gamma Chapter of the
Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc.

Charles Tubbs
Director of Dane County Emergency Management

Regina Vidaver, PhD
District 5 Alder, Madison Common Council

Jim Yehle
President & CEO, J.H. Findorff & Son Inc.



Wisconsin
Evaluation
Collaborative

March 2024

Madison Community Leaders Think Tank Focus Groups

Focus Group Summary Report for Madison Metropolitan School District | Feb 15, 2024



Madison Community Leaders Think Tank Focus Groups

Authors

Shahanna McKinney-Baldon, M.Ed.

Evaluation Implementation Specialist and Principal Investigator

Molly Garner Carroll, Ph.D.

Researcher & Evaluator

Oriana Eversole, Ph.D.

Evaluation and Research Scientist

Erica Ramberg, M.Ed.

Ph.D. Candidate, Curriculum and Instruction

About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at <http://www.wec.wceruw.org>.

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Executive Summary

This report delves into comprehensive insights garnered from the MMSD Think Tank launch event on February 15, 2024, at which 35 Madison leaders from across sectors were asked to reflect on MMSD teaching and learning, budget, and facilities in focus groups facilitated by personnel from Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at The Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER).

The focus on Teaching and Learning illuminated urgent short-term needs, notably the pressing concern for students' mental health and well-being, especially post-COVID. Additionally, the discussions underscored the significance of investing in teacher well-being and diversifying the educator workforce.

Regarding budgetary considerations, participants exhibited a nuanced understanding of the district's fiscal landscape, with mixed sentiments surrounding the feasibility and impact of a 20-year referendum. The imperative of prioritizing investments in high-quality staff, alongside strategic facility enhancements, emerged as a recurrent theme.

In the realm of facilities, participants emphasized the need for transparent, long-term planning, coupled with a concerted focus on safety, accessibility, and sustainability.

Introduction

Madison Metropolitan School District invited Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) to facilitate and analyze data from its first “Think Tank” meeting for Madison community leaders. This report contains insights garnered from focus groups conducted at the Think Tank launch. It contains an analysis of themes from participant discussions, and representative quotes for these themes. Questions are listed as they were asked by facilitators.

At the event, 35 Madison leaders from across sectors gathered at the new South Side Elementary School building. After a presentation from school district leaders, attendees broke into nine focus groups that were facilitated by dyads of University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education staff, faculty, and graduate students.

Focus groups were tasked with exploring critical questions in three areas vital to the district's progress: **Teaching and Learning, Budget, and Facilities**. There was an individual interview option for those who were not comfortable with their voices being recorded in the focus groups. Analysis consisted of text transcription, coding for themes, and co-interpretation of data among a diverse team of WEC analysts.



Figure 1. Word clouds of summary data from each of the three think tank questions

Question 1: Teaching and Learning

What do you see as immediate or short-term needs for the district, its families, and students? And what do you see as long-term needs? For example, as was mentioned, MMSD has prioritized literacy, as well as programs like dual language immersion and early childhood education. How does MMSD continue these programs without adequate funding from the state?

Caring for Students was a strong theme in the focus groups, with an emphasis on the need to better support students as a more immediate issue.

- A common concern raised across groups was that **student’s mental health was not getting enough attention**. A few focus groups were concerned that children didn’t feel joy, connection, or a sense of belonging at school. These groups also noted that the district needed to focus on social and emotional learning and mental health when children returned to schools after COVID, when instead they focused on academics. Several respondents talked about the district providing students with time and space to learn to process their emotions and manage conflicts with peers.
 - “One of our short-term needs is behavioral health, mental health, as our students are hurting and they

need help, and I think that it's also going to be true long term. Just what's happening in the world is heavy, and it affects them. And they have a lot on their minds and a lot of needs. I think that the investment that we make in mental health support for our children is absolutely critical.”

- “[Children] are going through the motions. They're not finding joy. They're not finding engagement, or connection or community in their spaces. It's really difficult because we opened the doors, and the first immediate thing was “we're going to get the literacy rates back up. We're going to...we're going to drill them with the science of reading and get everyone back in. And literacy is core, it's base. We need to do that, but we also need to pair that and not make it separate from the social, emotional well-being of the child.”
- A few respondents indicated that when children are in well-maintained facilities, they feel valued in schools and that can benefit their sense of well-being.
- Some focus groups discussed the **challenging reality facing many children** in MMSD. These groups thought the district could be better informed about these children’s experiences and the impact on their learning. This theme was connected directly to respondents’ thoughts on partnership with the community, addressed in an upcoming section.

Caring for teachers was also another consistent theme across focus groups.

- Many respondents noted the on-going staffing crisis, high teacher turnover, and the strain on teachers as being short term issues. They noted that nearby districts are offering better pay, and that we lose teachers to those districts.
- Groups brought up teacher recruitment, retention, and pay as critical issues for the district to address. One group also discussed more broadly about the need to ensure teachers feel valued and respected as professionals.
- A few respondents focused on teacher preparation for the diverse student population in MMSD and two groups talked specifically about improving recruitment and retention of teachers of color to the district.
 - “I think investing in the people that work with kids every day absolutely has to be at the top. We're losing teachers to other districts; we're losing administrative staff to other districts. In order to build those communities in school and for kids to feel safe, we have to prioritize staff. We have to prioritize bilingual educators, diverse teachers, and administrators in schools for those things to happen. People need to get paid, and they need to have professional learning opportunities and all of that, too. I feel like again, none of this happens without those people in their jobs for like more than a year or two or five, you know, to build that space and that those relationships with those kids. And teachers are under stress right now.”

Keep Focus on Literacy and Early Learning: Focus group participants were enthusiastic about MMSD’s current focus on literacy and early learning and encouraged continued investment in these areas.

- **Literacy:** Several focus groups agreed that MMSD is moving in the right direction with its focus on literacy:
 - One focus group suggested that **continued professional development** over the long term would be key in making that investment a success.

- Another group noted that it is important for MMSD to **communicate the benefits** they're starting to see from the new curriculum.
- "I think for teaching and learning the investment that was made in early literacy and the science of reading is crucial, but it has to go beyond just purchasing a curriculum for K to 8. It is about the professional development and the implementation that goes with it. And as you have teacher turnover, you have to continue to do that training and the implementation in a really cohesive and systematic way to make sure that the students see the benefits. So, continuing that is going to be crucial. And it's going to take a while. It's a long-term investment right in our students and in teaching. So, I see that as really crucial."
- **Early Learning:** Many focus groups applauded the investments MMSD has made in early learning and expressed strong support for growing that commitment to the youngest MMSD students:
 - Several focus groups identified early learning as an important focus because of the **equity implications** - children gaining access to care and educational opportunity. They wish to see **more full-day 4K implementation** in the city and two groups talked about focusing on even younger students.
 - "In terms of things to focus on, I just think our younger children and families don't have time to wait and that's where our gap really starts."
 - Respondents also expressed that **early learning was the best investment of budget dollars**, alongside frustration with the funding model for early learning and hoped that future investments might come from state or federal level, or even non-profits.
 - "But we're also saying if you have to make priority right, you have to prioritize with the limited revenue you have, where would you put it? Think we're all kind of saying is you got to you got to hit early, I mean you have your biggest bang for your buck or most impact.... We hit them at an early age, educate them."

Cultivate Stronger Relationships with the Community - Non-Profit and Private Sector

Most focus groups identified that MMSD could cultivate better and more strategic relationships within the community. They suggested MMSD focus on families, non-profits, and the business sector in order to support students and access other funding opportunities.

- **Student Success:** Several focus groups recommended MMSD connect with non-profits and the business community to **leverage resources in support of students**. They agreed it would be important to **coordinate that support** so that there weren't redundant efforts with some students not getting the support they needed.
- Several focus groups voiced **frustration** with changes to MMSD's approach to community partnerships and that there wasn't a clear person to turn to initiate those relationships with the district. Two areas came up for what stronger partnerships in the community could mean for students and families.
 - **Alternative Pathways/Job Training** - One focus group discussed that partnerships with the business sector could lead to job training and apprenticeship pathways to graduation.
 - **Wrap-Around Care** - Several focus groups talked about how important relationships with community organizations are for meeting the needs of children and families. There was a desire to see **more coordination of these resources**. Several respondents brought up the community schools approach

as a way to make schools even more supportive for families and the community.

- “This is a place where there's so many resources. There's so many things going on outside of schools. If there was some way to better utilize the external partners and get everybody talking together to support the schools. I think that that could potentially be something that would help basic needs. There's a lot of, there's a lot of resources in the community, there's a lot of things that are available to people and they're spread out or people are doing the same thing in all these random places.”

Addressing Funding Issues: In light of the budget issues introduced in the meeting, many focus groups considered how better connections between MMSD and the community could address student needs and lead to more funding possibilities for schools.

- In the absence of funding for different programs, several respondents suggested that non-profit organizations can be partners in providing services.
- One focus group discussed that a relationship between MMSD and the business community could build investment in public schools as they start to see the quality of schools as connected to their ability to recruit employees.
- One focus group discussed using UW as a model for seeking different funding streams within the private sector or from individuals.

Better Communication with Community about Funding Gaps and Goals: Several focus groups brought up how critical it will be for MMSD to be clear in communicating with the community about budget issues, referenda, and the role the state government has played in defunding public education.

- “I think one of the things the district needs to do, and the people involved in the district is do a better job educating the broader community about what the needs are, what we are doing, what we would like to do, but can't at the moment. I think it's continuing that kind of an education, a broader education kind of program that I think will ultimately benefit everybody if people understand where the money is going and why it's so critical.”

“I think that the investment that we make in mental health support for our children is absolutely critical.”

Question 2: Budget

How should MMSD prioritize their district budget to best serve students and families? For example, MMSD staff mentioned the ongoing costs of hiring and retaining a highly qualified and skilled workforce, while also balancing the need to implement academic programs and facility needs. What are your thoughts on a potential 2024 referendum to meet these needs. And what do you think about the idea of the 20-year referendum?

Referenda:

Respondents were generally positive when it came to the idea of a referendum in 2024 to support the school district. In terms of a possible 20-year referendum, there were mixed feelings expressed.

- Overall, participants expressed that a **20-year referendum** would be a large commitment but that generally they thought that **the community would support** such an effort.
 - “Yeah, I think that's a great idea. I think it creates predictability. It allows leadership to be able to count on a certain amount of revenue they cannot plan for one year or three years or five, [but] to be able to plan for 20 years or those efficiencies you can build into that. You don't have to worry about it every couple of years.”
 - Some individuals discussed how a **referendum could allow for more flexibility** and spending and allow future superintendents to have the ability to do longer term strategic planning to support the district's long-term goals. Others mentioned that it would be helpful for the school district to have longer-term funding so that they do not have to put the effort into asking for money every 4 or 5 years.
 - Focus group participants also shared that for a 20-year referendum to be successful, it would take more planning time; an effective public relations and communication strategy; and more specificity from the district about how the funds will be used over time.
 - The **cost of the 20-year referendum**, with the assumption that it would be close to a billion dollars, was also something that focus group members expressed concern over. They wanted to make sure that the 20-year referendum would be able to keep up with inflation. In addition, individuals shared that voters are typically more supportive of facilities referendums than they are of operational referendums, due to having something concrete that comes out of the investment.
 - Some individuals **wanted to have more clarity** on what the 20-year or the shorter-term referendums would entail and how these would impact taxpayers. Some respondents also mentioned that there was just a referendum in 2020 and that they were not sure if we were still paying on that referendum at this time.
- Some concerns were expressed that the referendum would have a particularly **negative impact on working families and those with limited incomes**, especially given recent inflation and property tax increases:
 - “For numbers, just increasing taxes, let's say there's a \$500 impact. We don't know because we haven't seen them. So, let's say it's a \$500 impact. Can you knock on the door of a single mom with three kids

in her first starter home and say hand me \$500 to keep your kid in the school and educated? If you can't do that ethically, you don't have the right plan because literally that mom is cutting expenses. Right? She's making choices on food, rent, clothes, everything in between. And if we [the district] aren't making that level of difficult choices.”

- “I don't think we're being good stewards of the overall financial health of the district. We have to make just as difficult choices as every family member is, especially in inflation, when the economy is down... and the gap is growing bigger so it's harder and harder for many of our families to fund these bills. And I just don't hear that. I don't hear empathy in that.”
- Some of those who were **not in favor of the referendum** suggested that **the district should investigate more creative solutions for increasing funding**, such as partnerships and private donors, and examine where they could make strategic budget cuts.

The following ideas about **district budget** and spending priorities were shared:

- In terms of budget priorities, the most mentioned priority was **investing in high quality staff**, including staff supports and professional development.
- **Teacher salary as a recruitment and retention strategy** was a dominant theme expressed. Focus group members said that we are competing with other districts to attract quality teachers and staff and that staff need to have a “good salary” to stay in the district.
 - “I think people are everything. If you have good people, they can make magic happen. They can do a lot. And they can provide that leadership, that vision, even with limited resources. I think you could have the greatest programs in the world but if you don't have good people who are committed to it, it's not going to sustain. So, I would start by focusing on people and again figuring out, you know, it's probably not just money, it's the environment. It's the culture. All of those things. So how do we get these people? How do we keep them? And we unleash their talents and that will make up for some of the other gaps that are inevitable.”
 - “You can't implement academic programs if there's new people that have to learn that stuff every year or two.”
 - “I think that we've been talking a little bit around this, but making staff feel critically important in the district is one of the first steps we need to take. There's been a lot of negativity. We've lost a lot of people. The community is worried that the district is not functioning properly.”
- Participants also mentioned that some **veteran teachers may not be seeing the same types of increases** that incoming new teachers and staff are receiving. They expressed that this may lead to some lack of retention of staff.
- **Recruiting and retaining high-quality and a diverse group of teachers and staff** was also a strategy that was brought up in the focus groups.
 - “But I think that we have to really think about getting good teachers and training them. Well, it is just extremely important for our district especially when you have a district like this, which is very diverse.”
- In addition to teacher salaries, **professional development opportunities** and **teacher well-being** were

also addressed– including mentoring, recognizing and listening to teachers and staff, and support for teachers with diverse backgrounds.

- Several respondents brought up the need to **invest in district leadership** and that **having a stable, long-term superintendent** will help the district with strategic planning and budgeting.
 - Some suggestions included incentive pay to ensure that superintendents and principals stay with the district for longer periods of time:
 - “It is a stable superintendent. Over the last fifteen years, there have been 9 superintendents between the interims and it's like you can't stabilize a budget, stabilize a team, create a strong climate without having stable leadership. Superintendents coming and going...it's very political, but a superintendent that runs half a billion-dollar budget but makes 200-and-some-thousand dollars a year is a joke.”
- **Facilities were also commonly mentioned as a priority**, especially in regard to attracting students and having a positive environment for learning.
- In terms of the district's budget and spending, participants shared that **“right-sizing” of schools or school closures** might be something for the district to consider in the future.
- Many focus group participants shared the sentiment that **investing in staff and also investing in facilities were important** and recommended that the district try to address both within their upcoming budget.
- Participants mentioned **community partnerships as one way to leverage funds**, including asking for capital and facilities funding for joint efforts.
- In addition, several focus group members mentioned that there may need to be **policy changes at the state level** to help support increased funding for education.

“[M]aking staff feel critically important in the district is one of the first steps we need to take. There's been a lot of negativity.”

Question 3: Facilities

How should MMSD prioritize their facility needs to meet the needs of the district and community - both immediately and long term. Here's an example: Bob Soldner mentioned investing in critical infrastructure such as HVAC and accessibility. He also mentioned sustainability and renewable energy. What are your thoughts on these issues?

The following three main themes related to facilities were most prevalent at the Feb 15 MMSD Think Tank sessions: staggered replacement of facilities, system needed to rank improvements, and pride in learning environments.

- **Staggered replacement of facilities:** MMSD should share a detailed plan to stagger the replacement/repair of facilities. This phased approach should be shared with the public as part of a 20-year plan that is transparent, balancing all attendance areas of our community. Try to use upbeat messaging about the updates already completed at the high schools and how those were/are a part of larger plan to make needed improvements to schools.
 - “The sustainable green stuff, which is very expensive, it's a “nice to have,” it's not a need to have. No one can concentrate if you're sweating in class or if you're cold and freezing. These are the basics, and you have to do that first. You have to make sure that HVAC works, because it could be tied to your electric or gas costs. If you fix that stuff, you could reduce cost elsewhere.”
 - “It depends on what kind of referendum you have, right? If you do have a longer-term referendum and you're investing in sustainability and renewable energy, you could be saving money that you're spending on the front end on the back end. That allows you to put [resources] back into buildings and make new buildings. In the short term, I think the HVAC and accessibility that immediate things are going to be more important.”
 - “Planning out 20 years could be really impactful for our children starting kindergarten...to raise their family here because they're going to have the best and the schools are just going to keep getting better.”
 - “For the referendum that was passed in 2020, the construction work finishes at the end of the summer of 2024. Fall of 2024 is within a couple months of election time, so let's roll out the red-carpet tours. Get people through the schools to see what their money did.”
 - “The first priority is to create as effective a teaching and learning environment for as many students as possible. And it's important to not let perfect be the enemy of improvement, right?”
 - “You want to target certain schools because, if you're going 20 years the priority is you set a standard, and then you evaluate the schools against those standards. And you develop your list of priorities in terms of how you get them to that level.”
- **System needed to rank improvements:** Participants advocated for a ranking system to assess school condition and the need for replacement/repair. This type of system would allow the district to do the work in smaller increments, focusing on schools that are older and replacing systems (like antiquated HVACs) with more economical and environmentally sustainable alternatives that can allow buildings to be used comfortably year-round. There were mixed perspectives as to whether it would be best to update middle schools next or to put forward a mixture of middle and elementary schools with greater need. A few people suggested building new buildings over renovating older buildings. While there were several unique brainstorms, such as selling

Doyle to finance new building, many groups agreed it's critical to put safety and accessibility first. After those priorities are met, people should take priority over buildings.

- “We should think about it as a plan that's going to be a 20-year, but sell it in components.”
- “I definitely agree with [focusing on] the schools that are falling apart. Those should definitely be priority. When we think about the future...with green energy and innovative things, I wonder if we were to put money into having schools become green and more sustainable in the long term, how much would that save?”
- “It's admirable, but it's a tradeoff. The more you commit to [sustainability], the more expensive it is [and] the less money you have for other things. There needs to be a balance in there. A wiser investment would be in people. A safe, healthy building, yeah...meet that minimum threshold and then invest in people.”
- “Some schools might just need to be torn down...sometimes it's cheaper.” “How do you compete with the school that's built in 2024 versus the school that's built in 1911?”
- “It is a combination of you have to have nice facilities and you have to have effective people working in them, right? And so, it's as simple as that, and it's complicated as that.”

- **Pride in learning environments:**

- Somewhat connected to the idea of prioritizing people over buildings, participants expressed that learners and staff deserve to be in a learning environment they are proud of. They believe that everything from student learning to staff retention could be positively impacted by inviting, well-maintained schools.
- “In these renovated spaces, teachers and students engage with the building much differently. They internalize it differently. There's just a different energy. And our elementaries and middles, some of whom are older than some of our high schools, those kids deserve just as much.”

- **A few groups engaged in discussions about:**

- State funding structures and how to **lobby to remove revenue caps**.
 - “[If we pursued] a petition to undo the revenue cap that the state legislature has imposed, [it] would allow for schools to be fully funded, and we would no longer pursue referendums.”
- **Community schools** and the implications school facilities might have for proximity to housing and issues of food scarcity.

- “The practice of Community Schools is really huge ...recognizing that schools are expected [to address] housing transition and food insecurity...all of those things and mental health issues as well as dental needs. Schools are being asked to deal with all of that. It doesn't like it doesn't make sense for teachers to be responsible for that, but their community partners who can work with the school to bring in those resources and then use the schools like. They're all over...they are these community spaces within neighborhoods where people can come together, and those needs can be met and really work at addressing those inequalities and basic needs right there in the moment.”
- **Career and tech education opportunities** for learners and the associated facilities needed to support those learning pathways.
 - “Every kid is not meant to [go into an academic career], but we've got some amazing kids. What if school truly was a place for them to really explore, hone in on interests. We see kids who drag their feet through our doors and then are making the most amazing things welding. You look at their high school GPA, and it's a 1.4 or something ridiculous, but you put that welding torch in their hand...and there's art coming out of them.”
- Possibilities for **engaging youth voices/perspectives** in the prioritization of renovating school facilities.
 - “The student is the asset...invite them into this. Say to a group of students, ‘in 10 years we want to be fully green.’ They will design things.”

“It's admirable, but it's a tradeoff. The more you commit to [sustainability], the more expensive it is [and] the less money you have for other things.”

“The student is the asset...invite them into this.”

Conclusion

The Think Tank focus groups organized by the Madison Metropolitan School District in collaboration with the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative have provided invaluable insights into critical areas of concern for the district's progress: Teaching and Learning, Budget, and Facilities. Through rich discussions and diverse perspectives, several key themes emerged, shedding light on both immediate needs and long-term strategies for the betterment of the district, its families, and students.

In the realm of Teaching and Learning, it's evident that the focus must extend beyond academic achievement to encompass the holistic well-being of students. Mental health support emerged as a pressing short-term need, emphasizing the importance of providing students with the necessary tools and resources to navigate emotional challenges effectively. Furthermore, there's a consensus on the significance of investing in teacher well-being and diversifying the educator workforce to create inclusive learning environments.

Budget discussions highlighted the complex fiscal landscape facing the district. While there was general support for a 2024 referendum to address funding gaps, opinions on a 20-year referendum varied. However, it's clear that prioritizing investments in high-quality staff and strategic facility enhancements is essential for the district's long-term success. Leveraging community partnerships and advocating for policy changes at the state level are crucial steps in securing additional funding avenues.

Regarding Facilities, participants emphasized the need for transparent, long-term planning to address infrastructure needs effectively. Staggered replacement of facilities emerged as a favored approach, accompanied by the prioritization of safety, accessibility, and sustainability. Moreover, pride in learning environments was underscored as pivotal in fostering student engagement and staff retention.

Some participants did share feelings about the Think Tank:

- “I’m really pleased with this whole event, that I feel like they’re finally listening to us.”
- “A lot of times you have these town hall meetings, and nobody really understands like what did people actually say? So, I would I encourage you all to do some sort of like with the media or one big town hall meeting where you invite everybody back and say, here's what we learned over the 11-12 sessions and maybe get the State Journal or somebody to do a story on it. So, it's front and center and people see.”
- “The only thing worse than not asking people for their input is asking for their input and then not following through on.”
- “I haven't been to one of these [engagement sessions] in five years. At one point, I used to go to these sessions every month and they become such a “suck on your tongue” and nothing ever happens. I [would be] on all

these committees and it was just checking the box...and nothing happens. I've never lived in a community where things get talked about so much as they do here. A lot of talking in Madison."

- "I will express my appreciation to the district for asking us here. This is a worthwhile exercise. It's been good, and I hope it's something that will continue."

"I encourage you all to do some sort of...big town hall meeting where you invite everybody back and say, here's what we learned over the 11-12 sessions..."

"The only thing worse than not asking people for their input is asking for their input and then not following through on."

Concluding Recommendations:

In addition to considering the recommendations from the community to prioritize mental health, invest in staff, pursue strategic budgeting, adopt transparent facility planning, and foster community partnerships, we recommend that MMSD also do the following:

1. Align data collection and data analysis from other think take meetings, and of other community engagement conversations on Teaching and Learning, Budget, and Facilities, to this analysis.
2. Conduct a member check in which you return to participants with, "Here's what we heard," and, "Based on what we've heard we are thinking of trying this—what do you think?"

