MPS Community Organization Transformation Facilitation Guide

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

As Minneapolis Public Schools continues the school transformation process, we are seeking feedback about the MPS student experience. Feedback will be focused on the academic core (required classes) and beyond the core - the classes, opportunities and experiences that students have access to as we plan for the future of the district. Feedback will be used to inform decisions and make plans.

Our goal is to improve the MPS student experience to ensure that ALL students are able to access the academics, programs and services they need to become successful adults. MPS acknowledges that the availability of opportunities for students currently differs from school to school around the district. A primary objective of school transformation is to understand how to best utilize the resources we have in a more equitable and sustainable way to ensure that the programs and resources most valuable to our students are available to all, regardless of where they attend school. Feedback from our students, caregivers and community is critical.

MPS is inviting community organizations to join us in this very important conversation by:

(1) Hosting focus groups and sharing the collected data with us
(2) Phone banking to MPS caregivers to complete the survey (shortlink: ttps://tinyurl.com/MPSTransform - case sensitive) and encouraging MPS caregivers to complete the survey.

If you plan to join MPS to host a focus group, please complete our Intent to Participate Form (shortlink: bit.ly/focusgrouppartner - case sensitive).

If you need a translated version of this Facilitation Guide in Spanish, Somali or Hmong please contact Donnie Belcher, donnie.belcher@mpls.k12.mn.us. With general questions contact engagement@mpls.k12.mn.us. All data is due via email on or before February 16, 2026. Organizations that submit data will be included in our final report.

FOCUS GROUP FORMAT:

- Host a focus group with between 10 - 20 participants.

  If you have more than 20 people, consider breaking participants up into smaller groups who can then report back to the larger group. This ensures that each person has time to share their perspective and invites a better experience.
- Choose whether you want to have a focus group for adults OR students.
  - For adults you can host a focus group:
    - with MPS caregivers (adults who currently have children enrolled in MPS),
    - current MPS staff,
    - or MPS community members (including organizations that support MPS students/families OR adults who do not currently have children enrolled in MPS). You are welcome to host a focus group with your staff if your organization supports MPS students or families.
  - Students (should be currently enrolled in MPS). Alumni are welcome to participate in an MPS caregiver conversation (if they have students currently enrolled) or as MPS community members.
  - Please do not mix the groups to ensure the appropriate amount of time can be devoted to the discussion. If you work with both adults and students, our recommendation is to host two separate focus groups - one for adults and one for students.
  - We encourage home-language focus groups where possible to ensure that our multilingual community members have the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives. You can also support outreach efforts through phone-banking, in order to encourage multilingual families to complete the survey.
- We recommend planning 45 - 60 minutes for the focus group conversation. Anything less than 45 minutes may result in having to rush through the discussion questions.

- Each focus group should have a **facilitator** to both manage time and to ensure all participants have the opportunity to share, as well as a **notetaker**. The notetaker should utilize our Notetaking Template (Note: The templates are available for download via the links on page 11).

FACILITATION GUIDE

Opening the Conversation:

(1) **Welcome:** Thanks for joining us to participate in this focus group as we support outreach efforts for Minneapolis Public Schools.

(2) **Share the purpose of conversation:** Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) has invited community organizations to host focus groups on school transformation. The district is reimagining the MPS student experience and wants to hear feedback from students, caregivers and the broader community.

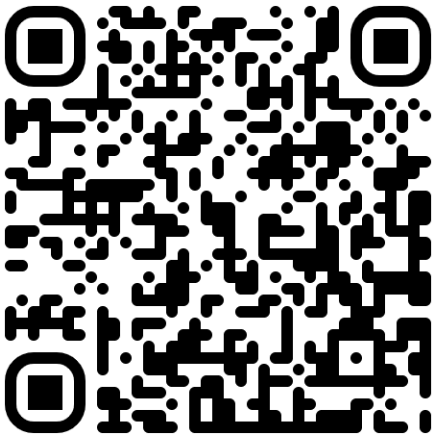
(3) **Introductions and Centering the Conversation:** Please share your name and relationship to Minneapolis Public Schools.

(4) **Set conversation norms:** Minneapolis Public Schools aims to be a place where students, families, staff and community feel and experience a sense of belonging, safety, wellness and respect. The district's values include:

(a) Equity, representation and anti-racism.
(b) Physical and emotional safety and wellbeing.
(c) Relationships, trust and communication.
(d) Shared decision making and voice.

- During this conversation we ask that you honor the district's values as well as avoid mentioning any personally identifiable information – whether positive or negative – about specific students or staff.
- As you share your perspective, please also be mindful of time, so that we can include as many voices as possible in this conversation.

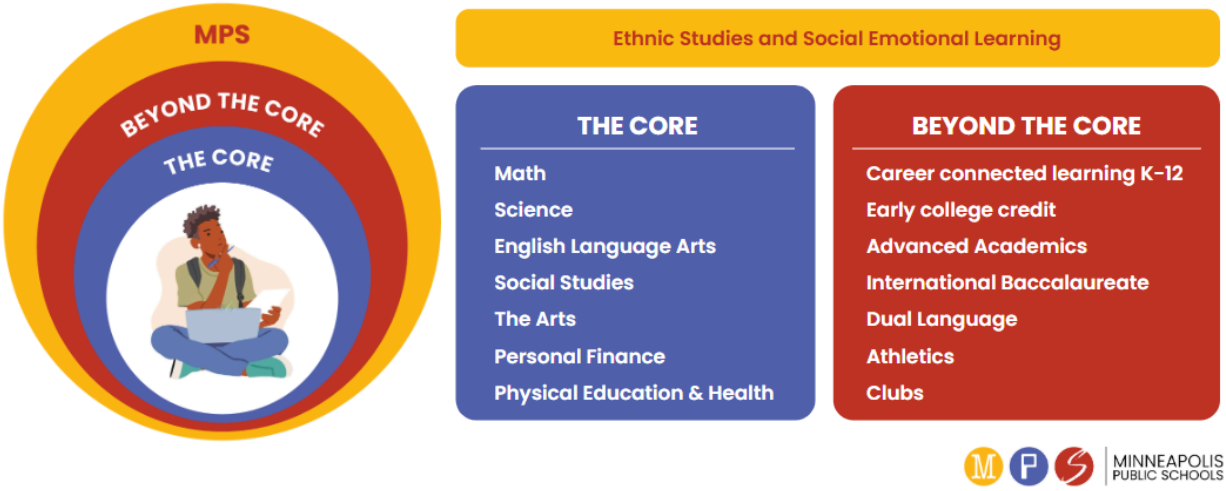
(5) **Have all participants sign in using the QR code/short link to share their demographic information.** Short link for demographic survey: https://tinyurl.com/MPSTransformEvent (case sensitive).



For the first question - “Which event are you attending?” - please ask participants to select the answer choice “Community Organization-Led Discussion Session”. The next question will then ask them which community organization is leading the discussion session.

This is important for data collection and reporting purposes. This information helps us to ensure we are hearing from a wide range of voices within our MPS community. Please note, the QR Code is also available in the School Transformation Slide Deck (also linked in the resource section of this guide).

Discussion Questions for Caregivers:



Ensuring the Core

(1) What specific opportunities and experiences (curriculum, programs, etc.) within their core academics have been most helpful or important to your child?

(2) What challenges or barriers have your child or your family encountered that are impacting your child's academic success?

Beyond the Core

(3) What specific opportunities and experiences (curriculum, programs, etc.) outside of your student's core academics have been most helpful or important to your child?

(4) What challenges or barriers outside of your student's core academics are impacting their success?

(1) Our goal is for your child to become a "contributing adult." What does that look like to you?

(2) What does it look like for your child to have a culturally sustaining education - one that recognizes and celebrates their own and other cultures represented in their academic experience and school community?

(3) Why did you select the school that you chose for your child?

(4) What advice do you have for your school/the district to increase enrollment?
(5) Please take a moment to complete the MPS Caregiver Survey: https://tinyurl.com/MPSTransform (case sensitive).

Discussion Questions for Students

(1) What are the best parts of your school?
(2) What do you want adults to remember about students as they make decisions about changing school or MPS?
(3) When you think about moving to the next school (middle, high school, graduating), what are you excited about or concerned about?
(4) You've just received $10,000 and get to spend the money on anything for your school. How are you going to spend your money?
(5) Using your answers above, create a poster that shows what your dream school would look like, sound and feel like. What would the adults be doing? What activities do schools get to do? What are you learning about?

Discussion Questions for Community Members

(1) How does your organization support the core academic success of MPS students? Are there other community organizations you'd recommend MPS connect with that support the core academic success of MPS students?
(2) How does your organization support MPS students' success in areas beyond their core academics? Are there other community organizations you'd recommend MPS connect with that support students' success in areas beyond their core academics?
(3) MPS has identified known challenges that impact the district's ability to support students' core and beyond the core success. Does your organization have any of the same challenges in working with MPS students? If so, how do you address them? What other challenges or barriers are you aware of that impact MPS students' success in their core academic and beyond the core programs.

a. Examples of known challenges:
    i. Attendance
    ii. Transportation
    iii. Behavior support (or lack thereof)
    iv. Academic intervention support (or lack thereof)
    v. Advanced learner services (or lack thereof)
    vi. Assessments
    vii. Housing stability
    viii. Communication (or lack thereof)
    ix. Service or resource availability in student's home language
    x. Lack of awareness or communication about opportunities
    xi. Cost
    xii. Limited opportunities or availability of opportunities
    xiii. Student interest in available opportunities
    xiv. Lack of time or availability of opportunities

(4) Does your organization provide culturally sustaining (one that recognizes and celebrates their own and other cultures) programming for MPS students or families?
(5) Which communities does your organization support and how do you provide that programming?
(6) How does your organization support MPS students in becoming contributing adults when they graduate?
(7) What advice do you have for the district to increase enrollment?

Discussion Questions for MPS Staff

Ensuring the Core

(1) What specific opportunities and experiences (curriculum, programs, etc) within the core academic program have been most helpful or important for your students?
(2) What challenges or barriers have your students encountered that are impacting their academic success?

Beyond the Core

(3) What specific opportunities and experiences (curriculum, programs, etc) outside of their core academics have been most helpful or important for your students?

(4) What challenges or barriers outside of your students' core academics are impacting their success?

(5) Our goal is for MPS students to become a "contributing adult." What does that look like to you?

(6) What does it look like for your students to have a culturally sustaining education - one that recognizes and celebrates all of the cultures represented in your school community?

(7) What does your school do really well for students?

(8) What advice do you have for your school/the district to increase enrollment?

Closing The Conversation

(1) Thank you for joining us for this focus group conversation.

(2) We will share the notes that we took today with MPS, who will then utilize the information to inform decision making and next steps regarding transformation.

(3) A final report will be publicly available on the MPS transformation website in April 2026. Feel free to reach out directly to MPS with feedback or questions.

NOTETAKING GUIDE

Download your template (based on your focus group participants) by clicking the "Make a copy" button using the download link(s) below:

- **FOR CAREGIVERS** - download link: tinyurl.com/mpscaregivernotes
- **FOR STUDENTS -** download link: bit.ly/mpsstudentnotes
- **FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS/ ORGANIZATIONS** - download link: bit.ly/commorgnotes
- **FOR STAFF download link:** bit.ly/mpsstaffnotes

Once you complete your notes, please email engagement@mpls.k12.mn.us. All notes are due on or before February 16, 2026, but we encourage you to send your notes as soon as you complete your session.

Notetaking During Your Session:

During your session, you do not have to write down verbatim what people are saying. Use these guidelines to help you understand what is most important to record.

Focus first on the most important pieces of information to record, then adding additional details as time allows. Focus on the following information, in decreasing order of importance.

a. **High Priority:** (1) Primary aspect/area, (2) positive effect/concern, and (3) what the outcome/problem is.
    i. What is the **primary aspect** of MPS the speaker is discussing?
        1. Examples: language barrier, unstable staffing, UFLI curriculum, advanced math program
    ii. What is the **primary positive effect** or **concern** with the topic identified above?
        1. Examples of positive effects

a. Advanced math program → *student is being appropriately challenged*
b. UFLI curriculum → *student has learned letter sounds*

2. Examples of concerns:
   a. Language barrier → *family cannot receive school resources in their home language*
   b. Staffing stability → *student who receives special education services has had multiple paraprofessionals*

iii. What is the **primary positive outcome** or **primary problem** resulting from the topic and concern identified above?

1. Examples of positive outcomes
   a. Advanced math program → *student is being appropriately challenged* → <u>interest in school attendance has improved</u>
   b. UFLI curriculum → *student has learned letter sounds* → <u>is now able to sound out unfamiliar words</u> & <u>making progress toward to grade level expectations</u>
2. Examples of problems
   a. Language barrier → *family cannot receive school resources in their home language* → <u>family feels unable to advocate for or participate in their student's education</u>
   b. Staffing stability → *student who receives special education services has had multiple paraprofessionals* → <u>unfamiliarity with school staff is affecting their ability to make academic progress</u>

b. Medium Priority
   i. What **suggestions** do the individuals have, if any?
c. Low Priority
   i. Any **information that adds additional context** to the areas described above.

Notetaking Guidelines:

High Priority: Primary aspect, primary positive effect or concern, primary outcome
Medium Priority: Suggestions
Low Priority: Additional details that add context to the high and medium priority info.

What would this look like as a notetaker?
High Priority, Medium Priority, Lower Priority

(do not color-code actual notes, this is just used here as an easy visual representation)

Discussion Question: What specific opportunities and experiences (curriculum, programs, etc) within their core academics have been most helpful or important to your child?

P: Literacy Curriculum, UFLI/Phonics Instruction, student can sound out unfamiliar words now after struggling with word recognizing last year

P: Dual-language program, new to country student, has allowed student to feel part of a community & take on leadership role despite speaking little English yet. Expand enrollment/programs for dual-language opportunities, explore languages other than Spanish.

S: Arts programming, instrumental music classes, makes student want to come to school even when they don't enjoy other subjects. Suggest making arts offerings standardized across the district. Also enjoys ceramics and photography, but ceramics are no longer available at school due to budget.

Discussion Question: What made you select the school that you chose for your child?

P: Walking distance, no need to send young student on the bus, parents felt more secure and less stressed about their child starting kindergarten. Suggests that community schools, close enough to walk to, are essential for parents choosing MPS. Parents feel like they need to drive students to school to ensure safety, which affects their ability to get to work on time. Considering open enrolling elsewhere.

P: Principal tenure, felt like the building had a well-established structure and program due to low staff turnover. Suggest continuing to focus on staff retention to stabilize programs.

P: After school program availability, caregivers work full-time, school would only work if extended-day programming was available. Appreciate the different clubs, athletics, and academic programming that students can attend depending upon needs and interests. Suggest that the availability of extended day programming may help with recruitment and retention of students.

RESOURCES:

School Transformation webpage - this page outlines all of the work related to school transformation so far.

Dec. 2023 Resolution - this resolution initiated the school transformation process.

Oct. 2025 Resolution - this resolution outlines the next phase of work which includes community engagement.

School Transformation Slide Deck - This slide deck can be used during the "opening the conversation" component of your focus group. It includes a link to the QR code where focus group participants can share demographic information.

MPS provided the school board with information about the MPS Student Experience, the updated definition of transformation and more. Watch the Nov. 18th school board presentation in:

- English,
- Spanish,
- Somali
- Hmong

With questions contact Donnie Belcher via email donnie.belcher@mpls.k12.mn.us or phone (612) 946-5891.