

Horace Mann Strategic Planning Survey & Focus Group Data Report

March 24, 2023

Preface	2
Process	2
Participant Data	3
Primary Connection to HMS	3
Student Grade Level	3
Demographics	3
Gender Identity	4
Race/Ethnicity	4
Deaf/Hearing Identity	5
Student Responses	5
Overall Satisfaction	5
What Do You Like Most About Your School?	6
What Could Your School Do To Improve?	7
Responses from Adults	8
Length of Affiliation	8
Overall Satisfaction	8
Reasons for Satisfaction	9
Top Three Areas of Focus	10
Areas for Improvement & Growth	11
Focus Group Data	15
1. What are HMS' strengths and assets?	15
2. What are HMS' major issues or challenges?	15
3. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about HMS...	16
4. Are there any gaps in the community being served where HMS could advance its mission?	16

Preface

This report is a summary of data collected to guide Horace Mann School for the Deaf (HMS) leadership and its ad hoc strategic planning committee in identifying the most important strategic priorities for the organization to focus on between 2023-2028.

The data is based on a community survey and focus groups facilitated by Innivee Strategies, Inc., a Deaf-led organizational and leadership development company. This summary report presents an objective interpretation of the data provided and is intended to support HMS in identifying current strengths, gaps, and what strategic changes the organization could implement over the next few years.

Please note that any information or written material provided to HMS by Innivee Strategies, Inc. or any of its affiliates (together, "Innivee Strategies"), including, but not limited to, information or written material concerning third-party vendors or service providers, should not be construed in any way as an endorsement or stipulation by Innivee Strategies. Recommendations and opinions expressed are current only as of the date indicated. Innivee Strategies does not accept any responsibility to update any recommendations, opinions, or other information contained in this material.

This material should not form the primary basis for any decision that you make in relation to matters referred to herein. Innivee Strategies has not taken any steps to verify the adequacy, accuracy, or completeness of this material. Review the material carefully and perform such due diligence as you deem fit, including consulting your own independent legal, tax, accountancy, and other professional or specialist advisors, as necessary or appropriate.

Innivee Strategies, Inc. is grateful to all individuals who participated in our data collection process for their time and involvement.

Process

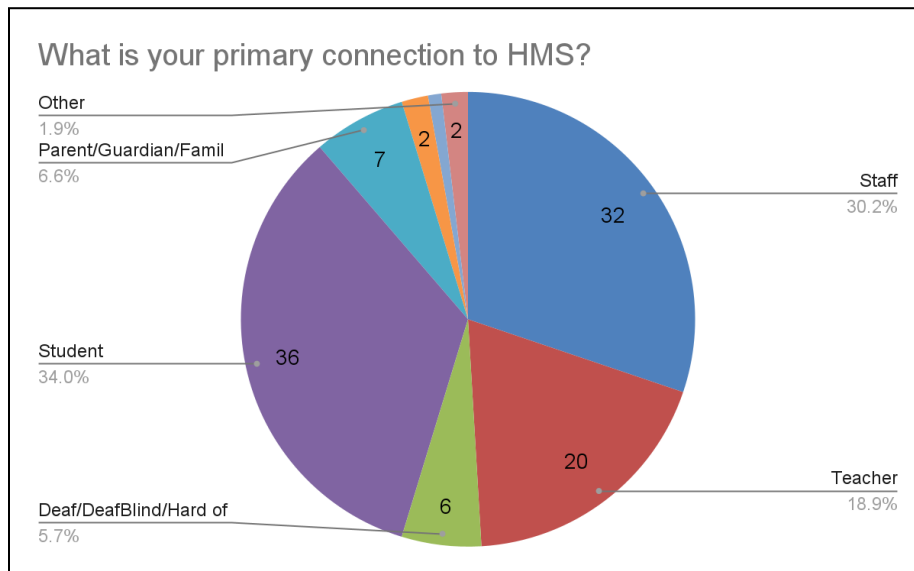
Survey questions were provided in English and ASL; respondents, similarly, had the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions in English or ASL. Seven focus groups were held with representatives from the following constituencies:

1. Students
2. Staff
3. Parents/Guardians
4. Boston Public Schools representatives
5. Community Members/Alumni
6. Early Childhood and Elementary Department Teachers
7. Secondary Department Teachers

All responses were guaranteed confidentiality. Open-ended responses were organized into in vivo codes to capture emerging patterns and themes. We did not employ inferential statistics to make predictions for the full body of respondents; instead, this analysis looked at percentages, frequencies, and ranges.

Participant Data

Primary Connection to HMS



There were a total of 106 unique survey responses. When asked about their primary connection to HMS, survey-takers responded as follows:

- 53 respondents identified as faculty/staff (of which 20 identified as teachers)
- 8 respondents identified as Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of hearing community members
- 7 respondents identified as a parent/guardian/family member of student
- 1 respondent identified as a Boston Public Schools representative
- 2 respondents identified as an organizational partner
- 2 respondents identified as other
- 36 respondents identified as students

Student Grade Level

Students were also asked which grade level they belong to, and responded as follows:

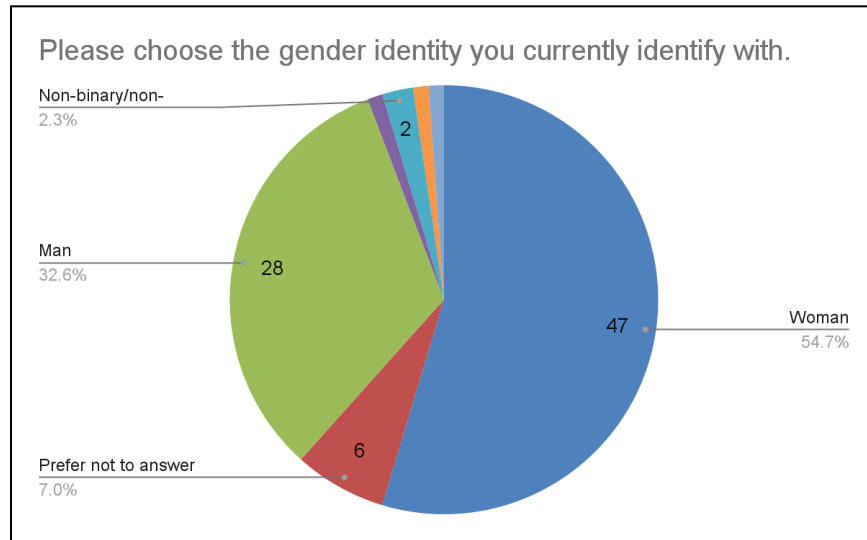
- 1 student respondent was in elementary school (K-5th grade)
- 13 student respondents were in middle school (6-8th grade)
- 18 student respondents were in high school (9-12th grade)

Based on a review of all ASL video responses, we identified three (3) additional students who did not identify themselves as students, and therefore, their grade levels are unknown.

Demographics

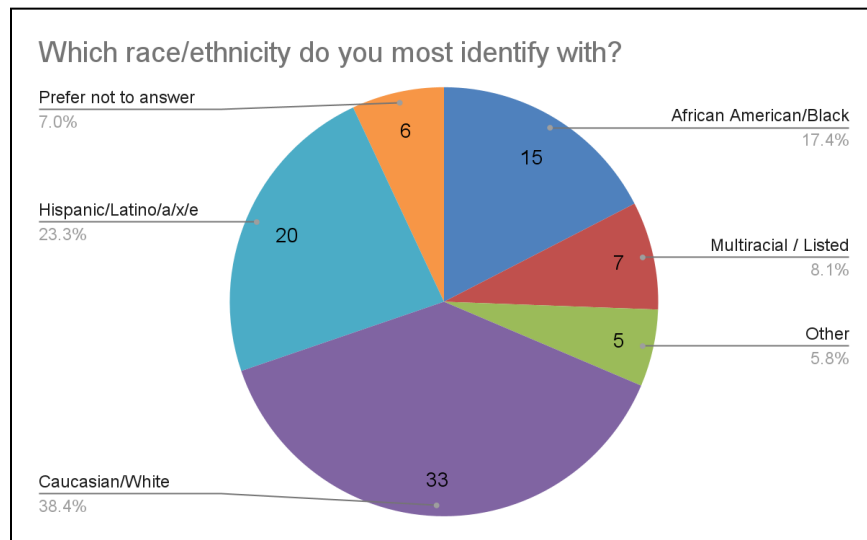
Demographic questions were optional and asked at the end of the survey; as such, not all respondents provided answers. We have noted the number of respondents (N) for each question below.

Gender Identity



Respondents (N=85) were given the option to choose more than one answer. The majority of respondents (55%) identified as women, with 33% identifying as men, and 12% who chose “prefer not to answer” or identified as non-binary/non-conforming, and/or other.

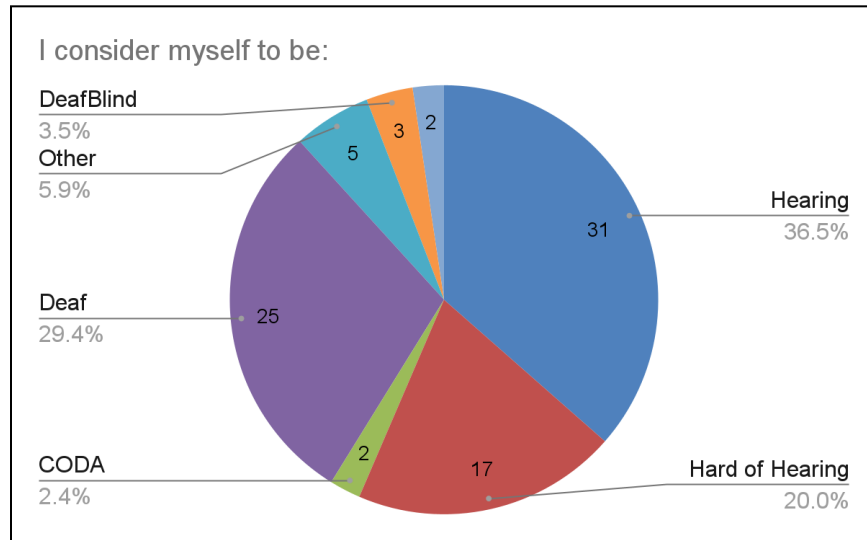
Race/Ethnicity



Respondents (N=86) were given the option to choose more than one answer. The largest number of respondents (38%) identified as Caucasian/White, followed by those who identified as Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e (23%) and those who identified as African American/Black (17%).

The chart above also includes the 8% of respondents who either identified as multiracial or listed more than one race/ethnicity in their response, as well as the 6% of respondents who identified as “other” or chose a singular racial identity (Asian/Asian American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Middle Eastern/North African), which are consolidated under “Other” above. Lastly, 7% of respondents chose “prefer not to answer.”

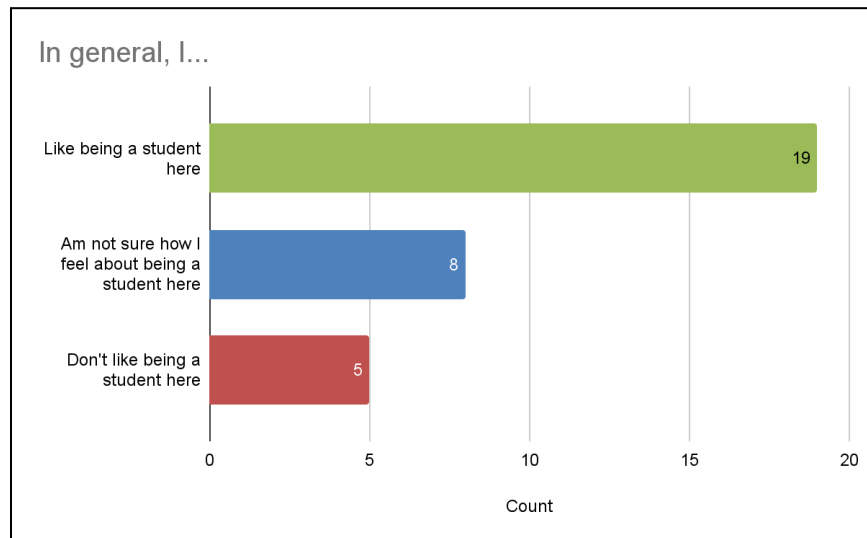
Deaf/Hearing Identity



Similar to the other demographic questions above, respondents (N=86) were given the option to choose more than one answer in response to this question. A total of 54% of respondents identified as Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or DeafDisabled, with 38% identifying as hearing and 6% identifying as “Other.”

Student Responses

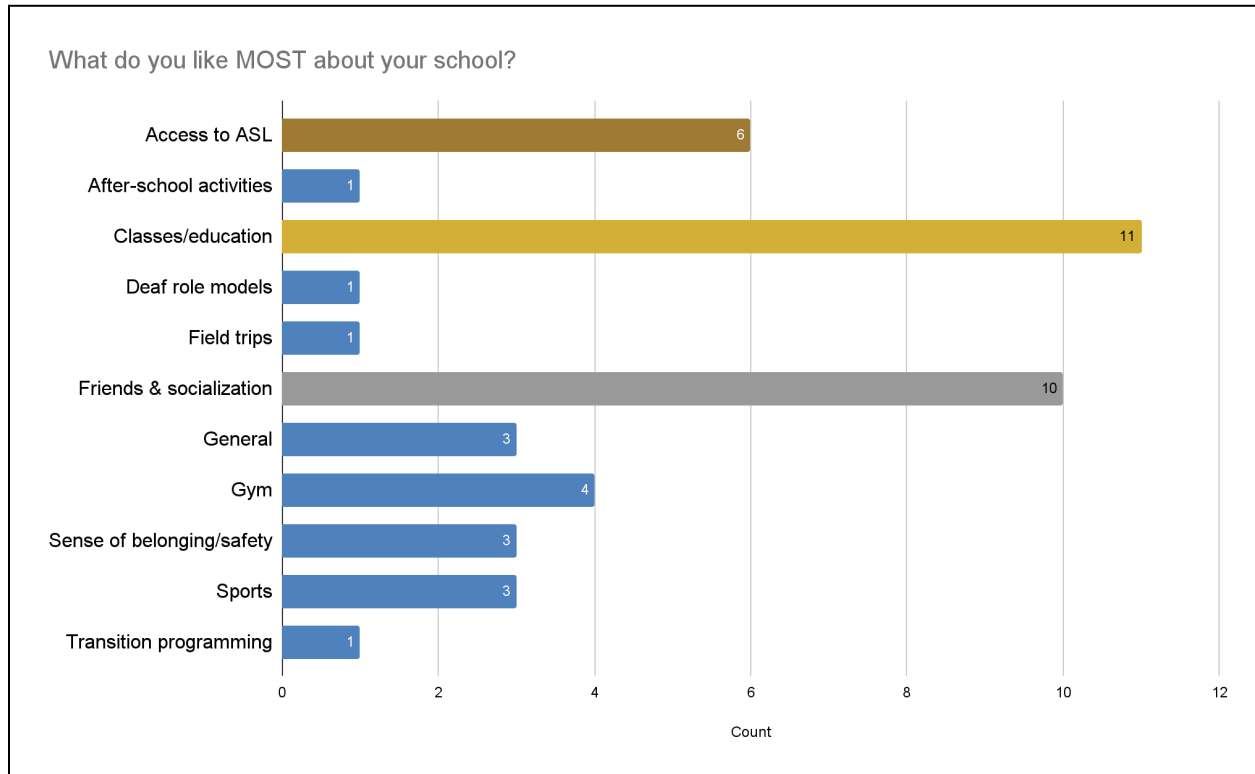
Overall Satisfaction



The majority of students (59%) stated that they like being a student at HMS, with 25% expressing ambivalence and 16% expressing dislike.

Students who expressed a clear like or dislike were directed to the question, “What do you like most about your school?” Students who responded ambivalently by selecting “I am not sure how I feel about being a student here” were given an additional question, asking them to tell us more about their answer, with the opportunity to provide an open-ended response. Responses to “Please tell us more” were coded and categorized into likes/dislikes and are reflected in the next two graphs.

What Do You Like Most About Your School?



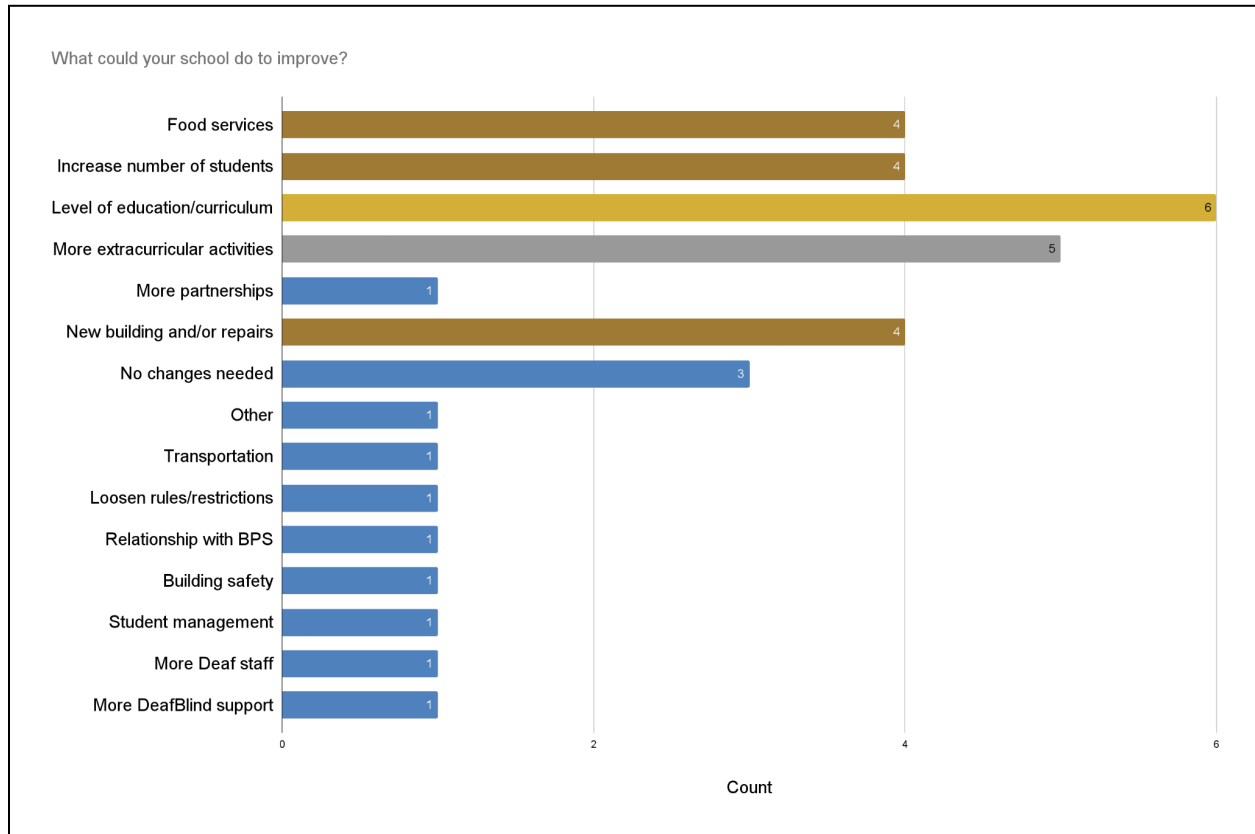
In response to this open-ended question, most students spoke favorably about their classes/education, either in general or specific classes (e.g. “Math”), and also valued the socialization opportunities that HMS offers. As shared by student respondents:

- *I enjoy HMS and the work that I do, and the consistency. I enjoy the different classes and chatting with my friends. It's a lot of fun.*
- *I like learning classes. It's compelling to me. It makes me feel smarter and hard working.*
- *I love my school, because gym classes aren't bad, because of art class, because of social studies class, and last because science class. I love all of them.*
- *I like the sports and the good access I get in education*
- *I enjoy school very much. I have friends and can communicate well.*

This was followed by specific mentions of having access to ASL at school, which also ties back to the opportunity to socialize with peers. As stated by student respondents:

- *In general at school I never felt the need to learn ASL. Now I picked up ASL and I'm happy. Because I'm with my friends and it's fun to socialize with them.*
- *I learn ASL and English in school. It is different than spoken English. I am learning how to sign stories in both English and ASL. Before that was not the case, but now I'm making progress towards that. ASL makes this the best school. It helps me figure out history and other things. This is the best school because of the ASL and English that's provided.*
- *I like HMS. It's nice. The students and my friends are nice. And learning to sign.*

What Could Your School Do To Improve?



Of the students who responded to this open-ended question, most indicated that they want more rigorous instruction or more courses offered. As stated by respondents:

- *Adjust their education level or the curriculum to be improved*
- *High school learning could be improved and more better*
- *Many things: more courses, better education quality, support and more resources, support from BPS, provide new building and safe space for all*
- *The education needs to be more advanced.*

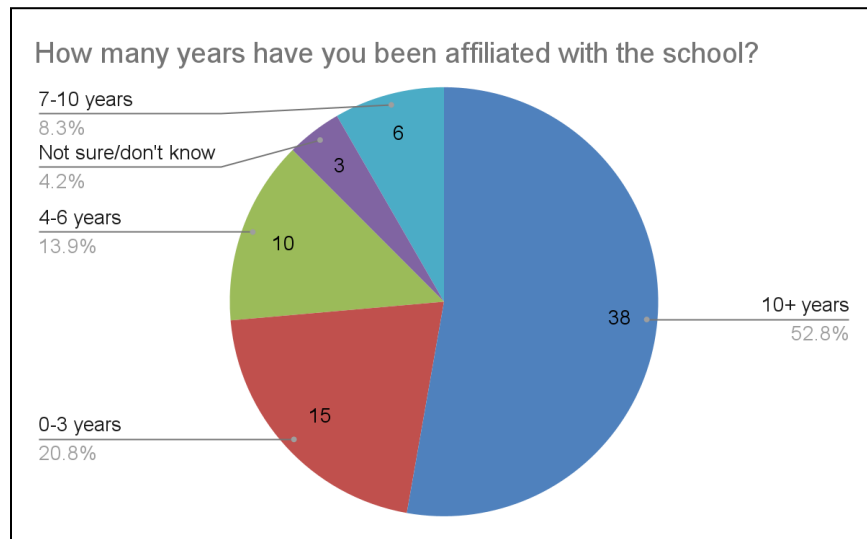
The second-most cited need for improvement was expanding the availability of extracurricular activities. As stated by respondents:

- *I think our school needs more students, clubs*
- *More sports*
- *I want to improve the sports and activities. Like basketball and running.*
- *I feel like this school needs more fun activities and more people in it*
- *our school needs more new students in our school, improve foods, add condiments everyday, drinks option, add more clubs*

The third-most cited need for improvement was split evenly between improving food services, increasing the overall number of students, and the need for a new building and/or repairs to the current building.

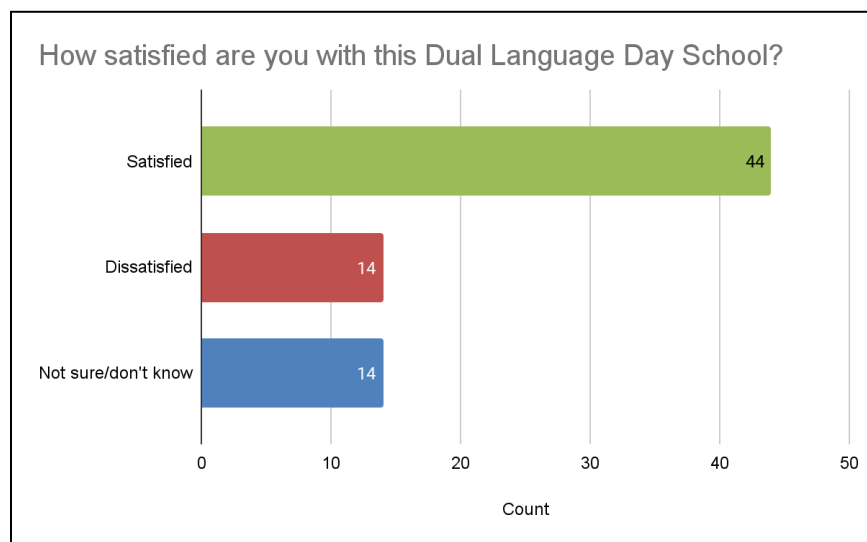
Responses from Adults

Length of Affiliation



The majority of respondents have been affiliated with HMS for 10 or more years.

Overall Satisfaction

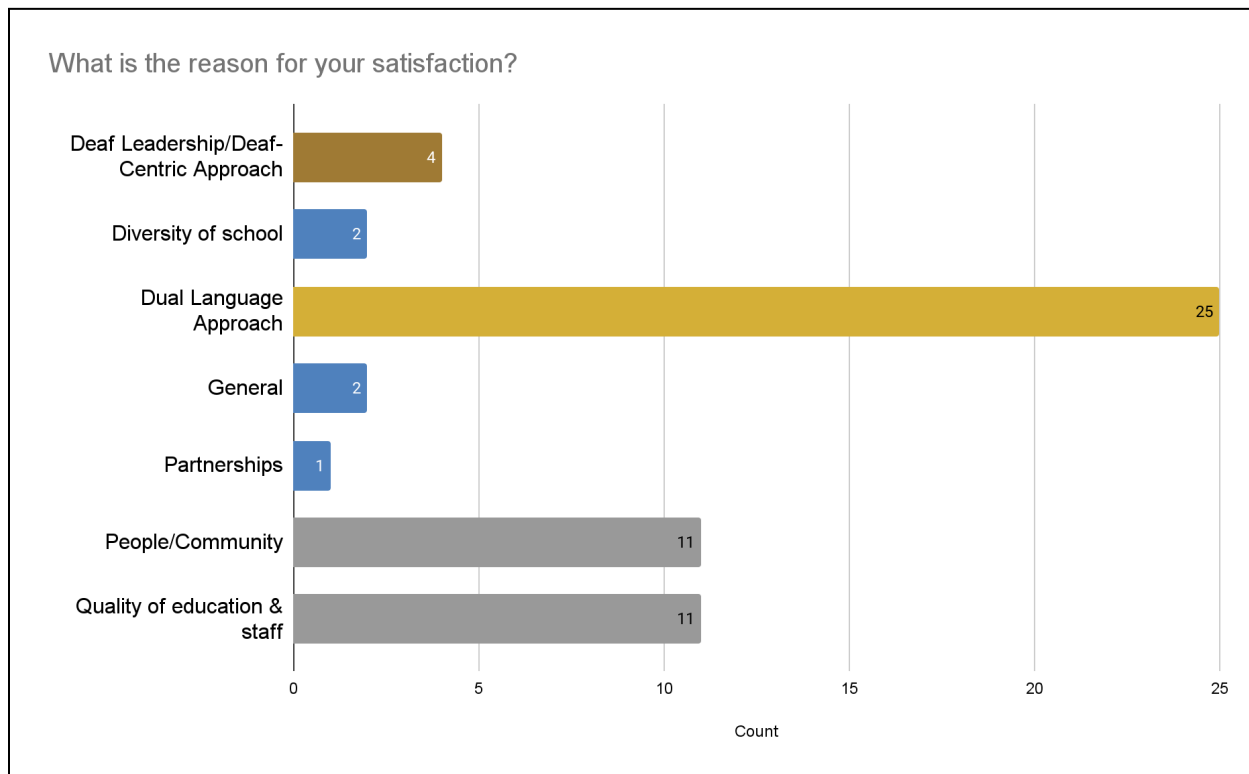


The majority of adult respondents (61%) stated that they are satisfied with HMS, with 19% expressing ambivalence and 19% expressing dissatisfaction.

Similar to the students, adult respondents who expressed a clear like or dislike were directed to the open-ended question, "What is the reason for your satisfaction?" or "What is the reason for your dissatisfaction?" respectively. People who responded ambivalently were asked, "Please tell us more," with the opportunity to provide an open-ended response.

Reasons for Satisfaction

This graph includes responses to the question, “What is the reason for your satisfaction?” as well as responses that were coded as satisfactory from those who were asked “Please tell us more” as a result of expressing ambivalence about their overall satisfaction with HMS.



As demonstrated above, HMS' Dual Language approach is deeply valued by the community. As stated by respondents:

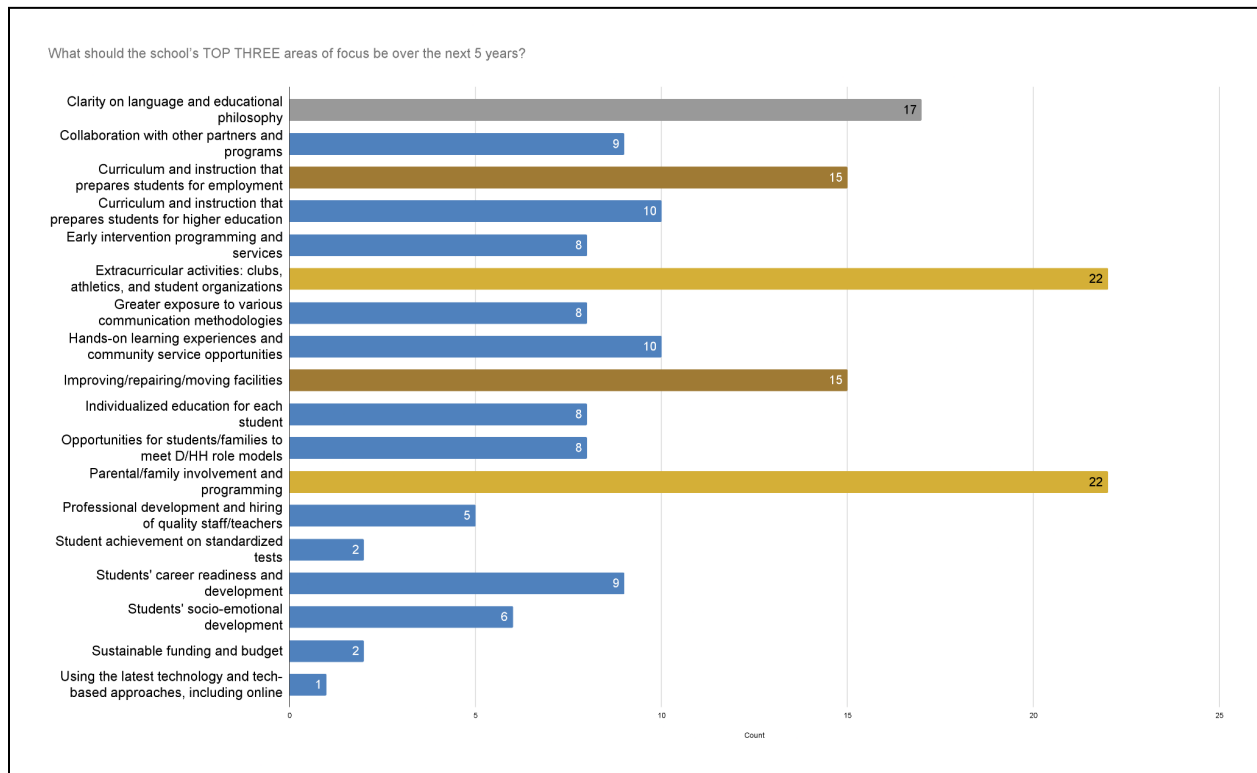
- *I am really impressed with the work they've done on their language philosophy and truly becoming a dual language program. They've also really embraced deaf leadership.*
- *I loved to see how our school has transformed over the years to become the dual language school that it is now. We are continuing to improve, but it's important to remind ourselves about our history and where we came from. Our administration is supportive, and our staff are innovative. We are constantly trying to improve what we do.*
- *I see lots of growth at HMS. We are moving in the right direction. Students are developing a caring community. Language access is a priority and right.*
- *We are working hard to make sure students are fluent in ASL and English (reading and writing) and spoken English as appropriate. We are doing an amazing job making and procuring ASL texts*
- *I think overall the dual language label has given staff a better ability to support students ASL. My only issue would be that some staff still find it acceptable to speak around deaf staff and students if the students are able to hear enough to understand. It's not perfect, but nothing ever is truly perfect.*

The HMS school community and the overall quality of education/staff, along with their dedication to their work and general commitment to the Dual Language approach, came in second. As stated by respondents:

- Warm welcoming teachers and staffs. My child is able to have great school experience from the start.
- I've worked mostly with administration and teachers at the school, and the high quality of care and instruction that I've observed are what I'm basing my response on.
- My daughter has gained amazing communication and life skills because of the teachers at this school.
- My daughter loves this school & community and I have built strong connections with staff and administrators
- Great people. I love my colleagues, the students and their families. Great sense of community and a common purpose.
- I have worked at other schools prior to working at HMS. There is no place like HMS. I feel I could grow here. I have seen changes over the years. My main reason for being here is for the students and I love them!!
- Overall, staff members have a strong commitment to the dual language approach, including improving their teaching practice every year.
- HMS, in its 154 year history, has transitioned from an oral school to separate schools within the school for hh and signers, to total communication, to this wonderful powerful iteration of Dual Language Certified- ASL/English. The school has a long way to go to achieve it's vision, but the staff is dedicated and amazing, despite the hardships, oppression from BPS and lack of understanding (tolerance) from the greater BPS district community.

The third-most cited reason for satisfaction was HMS' Deaf leadership and Deaf-centric approach, which also ties back to the dual language approach.

Top Three Areas of Focus



Respondents were given a pre-set list of options to choose from in response to this question. These options are listed below, with the top three choices bolded for emphasis:

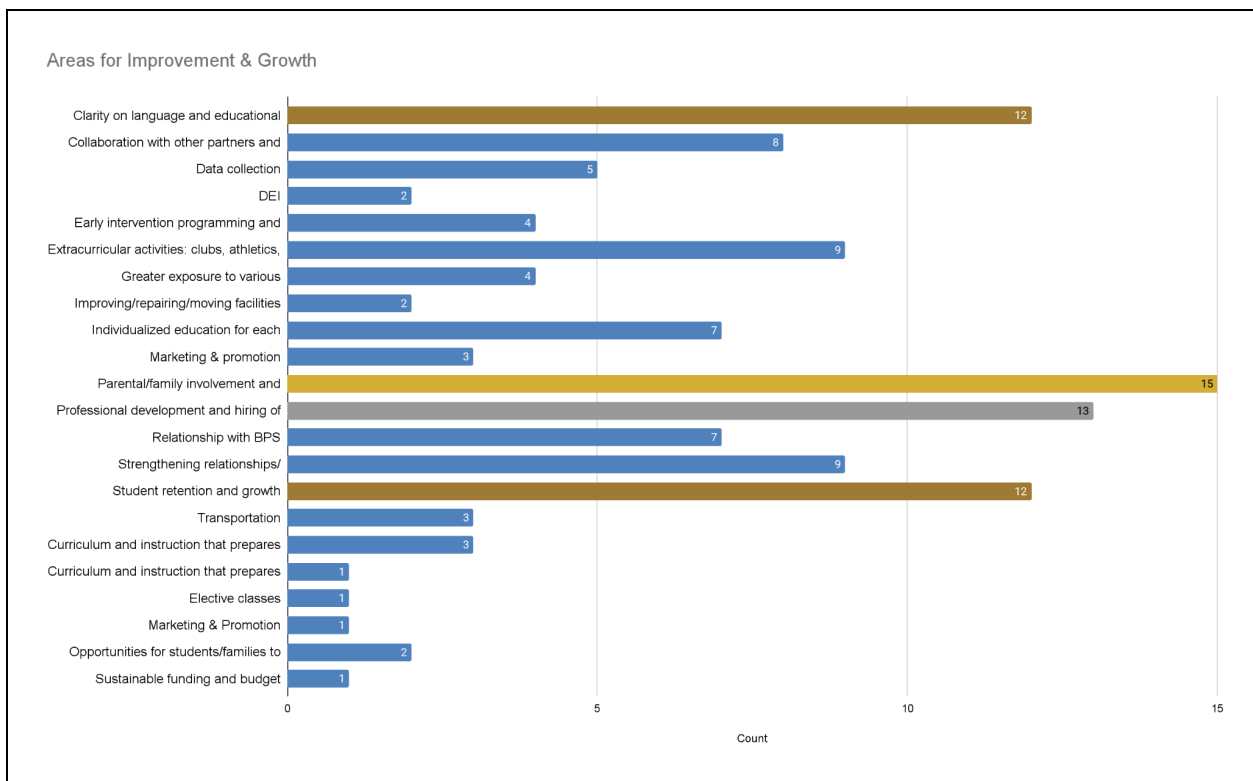
- A. Clarity on language and educational philosophy (Second choice)**
- B. Collaboration with other partners and programs
- C. Curriculum and instruction that prepares students for employment (Tied for third choice)**
- D. Curriculum and instruction that prepares students for higher education
- E. Early intervention programming and services
- F. Extracurricular activities: clubs, athletics, and student organizations (Tied for first choice)**
- G. Greater exposure to various communication methodologies
- H. Hands-on learning experiences and community service opportunities
- I. Improving/repairing/moving facilities (Tied for third choice)**
- J. Individualized education for each student
- K. Opportunities for students/families to meet D/HH role models
- L. Parental/family involvement and programming (Tied for first choice)**
- M. Professional development and hiring of quality staff/teachers
- N. Student achievement on standardized tests
- O. Students' career readiness and development
- P. Students' socio-emotional development
- Q. Sustainable funding and budget
- R. Using the latest technology and tech-based approaches, including online education

Upon review, Innivee Strategies noted that options C and O were very similar; if responses to these two options were combined, the theme of employment and career readiness would be the first choice, with options F (extracurriculars) and L (parental/family involvement and programming) tied for second, and option A (clarity on language and educational philosophy) coming in third.

Areas for Improvement & Growth

The graph below incorporates responses from four questions:

- Asked of all respondents: *If there is an area of focus that the school should prioritize over the next 3 years that was not listed, please add it here.*
- Asked of all respondents: *What other changes should the school implement in order to best serve its students, community, and achieve its goals?*
- Asked of the 14 adult respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with HMS: *What is the reason for your dissatisfaction?*
- Responses coded as dissatisfactory/needs improvement in response to "Please tell us more" for adults who expressed ambivalence regarding their overall satisfaction with HMS.



As combined above, fostering greater parental/family involvement and improving their overall understanding of HMS' approach and what it has to offer was the top area of improvement/growth. As stated by respondents:

- *Educating parents and families about our work as an ASL/English dual language program - the research that supports what we do, and how/why it is sets up students to thrive.*
- *I think preparing for the move, engaging with parents and families, and early intervention are the best ways to increase enrolment , be prepared for a stressful future of moving locations, and intervene with students who struggle with asl acquisition to avoid future struggles for those students.*
- *Need more improvement for parents and students involved programs different things their goals , actives, club socialization*
- *parent involvement is key for our students' success*
- *It may be worthwhile for existing teachers to regularly see what is done in general ed classes for non-deaf/hoh students so that we better understand the expectations and be reminded that they apply to all students, d/hh too. It will help them better explain to families how they're differentiating for a specific student and develop challenging goals that match the academic rigor that is expected in BPS.*

The second-most selected option was in relation to the professional development and hiring of staff/teachers. As stated by respondents:

- *Continuing and finishing all of the work we started to completion. Some endeavors include academic discourse, biliteracy/bridging, dual language programming, anti-bias/anti-racism & CHRE, ASL publishing, and ASL WIDA. While a number of colleagues have "skilled up" and made substantial progress, many others are still early in this journey. Elementary has also started a wonderful CORE Humanities curriculum that needs support over the next couple of years to complete.*
- *I think that it would be helpful to provide more training on ESL/bilingual philosophy and strategies to staff. Also, it would be nice to provide more parent education so that family members better understand the dual language philosophy and what it looks like in practice. Could we collaborate*

more with the hospitals. We do connect with hospitals in the Parent Infant Program. But for children with cochlear implants: this is the most challenging in terms of parent education. We are not seeing as many referrals to our pip program for children who have had CI surgery, although recently, we have had 3 referrals. When we explain to parents the importance of full access to language and the critical period for learning language, they feel more comfortable with learning ASL and with a bilingual approach. However, there are many families we are not even seeing in pip as they choose to receive services from an oral/aural program.

- Professional development and evaluation goals that focus on the fundamental aspects of teaching that we need to improve upon: assessments, meaningful grading, improving the IEP process
- hiring more deaf faculty/staff

The third-most selected option was tied between HMS' language and educational philosophy and student retention and growth. HMS would benefit from clarifying, providing guidance on how to implement, and promoting the benefits of its Dual Language approach among staff, parents, BPS, and the community, which also correlates to parental/family understanding of the value that HMS offers. As stated by respondents:

- *I think we have done an amazing job building up our ASL program for students. I am still a little uncertain about how we can better incorporate spoken language when appropriate. It's very hard to find a balance for the students who benefit from both.*
- *I'm not sure what "dual language program" means exactly. I've seen students who can speak Spanish pulled from their ASL or ESL classes halfway in so they can go to their English or Spanish speech therapy. Is that it? I would like to know how effective it is.*
- *Be explicit with parents about our school's philosophy*
- *1) Growing student population numbers 2) Marketing and promotion of the school to BPS and the Commonwealth*
- *I think it is important to focus on expanding the amount of students we have in school.*
- *We need to expand our program to include more students. The only way to do this is to hire more ABA trained staff, get more after-school clubs/sports and partner with other schools so our students get other opportunities.*
- *I think the top priority is student recruitment and retention. Students are leaving for a reason. We could prevent that. I think students try to come here, but we delay the process. Either it's too long, and they have to pick another school, or... the student numbers concern me. If we continue to lose students or grow too slowly, it will be too easy for BPS to harm BPS and make us smaller, less recognition of our value, all because of our numbers and because BPS is ginormous - HMS can get lost. Also, staff quality... if we had more highly qualified, highly skilled staff, teachers, specialists, paras, etc. we would not need as many staff. The ratio of staff to students is a little ridiculous. We are a very specialized school and we need many different kinds of staff, but at the same time - we have so many staff because many of them are not able to do certain things.*
- *We recently lost the opportunity to have 5 new students join us. I think we need to look at our intake process and figure out how to get more students and a more streamlined and positive way.*

When looking at the original questions, it should be noted that responses slightly differed from the aggregated chart above. We have included this data below, with quotes (in italics) pertaining to the areas that did not make it into the top three selections above.

If there is an area of focus that the school should prioritize over the next 3 years that was not listed, please add it here. (29 responses)

1. First Choice: Student retention and growth

2. Second Choice (tied):
 - Clarity on language and educational philosophy
 - Parental/family involvement and programming
 - Professional development and hiring of quality staff/teachers

3. Third Choice: Extracurricular activities
 - *Also add many different kind of sport teams, not just basketball but could do track if we find an open gym.*
 - *I want my students to have the same opportunities as I had as a Deaf student. I had opportunities to participate in different after-school activities that did not focus on academics. I had opportunities to join sports- swimming, and softball. Our students only have basketball. They should have opportunities to play soccer and track. I also participated in clubs after school. We do not offer any after-school only during school hours due to transportation.*
 - *I did not check the extra curricular activities as the top 3, but I would like to say it would be my 4th choice. I do hear comments about our school not having enough sports and extra curricular activities. We do have some nice activities such as the arts or dance, but maybe this could be expanded. I think this would benefit our program and in the eyes of prospective families would make the school more appealing. That, combined with a new location, may make a big difference.*

What other changes should the school implement in order to best serve its students, community, and achieve its goals? (40 responses)

1. First Choice: Parental/family involvement and programming

2. Second Choice (tied):
 - Professional development and hiring of quality staff/teachers
 - Collaboration with other partners and programs
 - *If all 18 areas were grouped in 6 action plans of 3 goals, I think a lot of those issues could be tackled with community partners like BUDeaf program. If there's another Deaf program out there that goes to the White House or receives notoriety, I think Horace Mann should work with them as well.*
 - *more community partners--especially for internships and jobs for students*

3. Third Choice: Relationship with BPS
 - *Boston Public Schools views HMS mainly as a special education school and not as a dual language school in ASL & English. BPS needs to work in partnership with HMS in the development of a clear policy and protocol for placements of Boston students who are deaf and hard of hearing.*
 - *developing programs of study and corresponding assessments that align with our dual language philosophy. BPS and the IEP process require data, but the systems they want us to use do not often highlight our students' actual growth.*

What is the reason for your dissatisfaction? (10 responses)

1. First Choice: Clarity on language and educational philosophy

2. Second Choice: Individualized education for each student
 - *Not enough language for the people that are immigrant.*
 - *I feel satisfied with ASL and English, but I don't feel like I'm learning more Spanish. I want the teacher or visitor to be able to teach some Spanish as basic words. I feel like I don't*

feel a strong connection to the family for languages. And I do love my family. The student wants to learn to write, vocabulary and reading, wants to feel connected with the family. People who are deaf or hard of hearing want to communicate comfortably with other people.

3. Third Choice: Greater exposure to various communication modalities
 - *Students who have access to spoken language have very limited academic time using it.*
 - *i feel as though staff are criticized when using certain communication methods other than the primary ASL only approach hms goes by. and although i am a hearing individual i have noticed that each Deaf person's method of communication is different. therefore we should value / consider this when making decisions.*

Focus Group Data

Focus groups provided us with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to participants' remarks, many of which touched on the primary areas mentioned above. Each focus group was asked four questions, with additional follow-up question(s) if time allowed.

1. What are HMS' strengths and assets?

Themes included, in no particular order:

- Quality instruction and student experience
- Diverse, multilingual, and talented students
- Staff and teachers' expertise
- Dual Language program
- ASL being used as an academic vehicle
- Preparation of teachers and staff in ASL and English
- Strong leadership with two Deaf women leading the school
- Supportive school community and positive relationships between students and staff

2. What are HMS' major issues or challenges?

Themes included, in no particular order:

- Need for more rigor in writing and innovation in this area
- Lack of metrics for evaluating students, especially for ASL
- Challenges in communication and the need to improve all areas
- Uncertainty about the long-term planning for the building and lack of deaf space for learning
- Perception of the school by parents, community members, and BPS
- Disconnect between BPS' vision of "inclusion" and HMS' view of inclusion, and need to protect this idea of inclusion
- Declining enrollment
- Consistently explaining the school and its approach to decision-makers due to high turnover
- Disparate views on dual language among staff
- Need for more intentional opportunities to learn ASL and inclusive classes for families who speak more than one language
- Need to improve on educating families on the dual language aspect of the school
- Struggle with family engagement, varying parent schedules, and availability
- Perception that ASL is more strongly emphasized during younger ages
- Not enough activities for older students to keep them engaged
- Need for additional support for new teachers and dedicated time to work on paperwork
- Need for policies around teacher training and onboarding

- Need for increased partnerships and data collection

3. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about HMS within the next several years, what would it be?

Themes included, in no particular order:

- Create a campus for all dual language schools
- Ideal space for school in Allston or Brighton with community involvement in development
- HMS to become center for Deaf education in Boston, if not the Commonwealth, equivalent to top tier schools, and a centralized resource for all things Deaf-related, possibly with satellite sites
- Increased exposure to ASL and social opportunities through extracurricular activities
- Family focused ASL classes, parent education, resources, and events
- Autonomy from BPS with new school building and resources
- HMS as the first step for hearing screenings and school placement, along with the BPS “mainstream team” under HMS
- Expansion of therapists/staff working with students in their home languages
- Partner with Deaf education programs across the Commonwealth
- Increased school hours and after-school programming
- High school students access to more internship/workforce development programs
- New location central and accessible to MBTA
- Training program to increase and retain Deaf/HH teachers

4. Are there any gaps in the community being served where HMS could advance its mission?

Themes included, in no particular order:

- Gaps for deaf students, students of color, and students from other marginalized identities
- Language access for parents and creating a sense of belonging, knowledge, and shared resources for new parents of a deaf child
- A need for more after-school programming opportunities and social engagement opportunities for students
- More DeafBlind training
- The need to increase collaboration with other deaf members in the community and become a central resource for Boston’s Deaf/hard of hearing students, families, and school staff
- Deaf staff lack equity in training opportunities provided by BPS
- Need for more marketing efforts and collaboration with private companies, universities, and other organizations
- The need to change how HMS is portrayed/perceived by some within BPS/the community (as a “special school” rather than a dual language school), which impacts resources and funding
- HMS as a resource hub for evaluations, screening, and referrals