



Capital School

District

Administrator, Staff, Family, and Community Forum Report

June 15, 2018

Written by:

Karmen Rouland, Ph.D. and Hannah Sung, Ph.D.

Introduction and Aim

On May 14, 2018, two facilitators from the Center for Education Equity (CEE) at the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) in collaboration with Capital School District conducted forums for two groups: (a) administrators and staff and (b) family and community members. The forums followed the administrator, staff, family, student, and community member focus groups conducted April 10-12, 2018. The overall aim of the forum was to actively engage stakeholder members of Capital School District, constructively discuss issues, and generate strategies.

Summary of Forum Activities

The purpose of the forums was to provide a summary of the focus group findings, discuss findings with forum participants, and generate strategies to address issues that emerged from the focus groups and forum discussions. The following is a summary of the forum activities. The activities were consistent across both the administrator/staff and family/community forum sessions.

- 1. Presentation of focus group findings:** CEE facilitators presented a summary of the focus group findings for the forum participants. The presentation included descriptions of the major themes that emerged from the focus groups.
- 2. Whole-group discussion:** CEE facilitators led participants in a discussion to reflect on themes from the focus group findings and provided a space for participants to voice additional issues, concerns, or themes.
- 3. Selection of themes for small group discussions:** Each participant selected 3 major themes that they would like to discuss in small groups. CEE facilitators determined the 4 themes with the highest votes for the small group discussion.
- 4. Small group discussions:** Focus group participants divided into four groups to discuss the selected themes. Each group completed a poster that asked participants to reflect on

how the theme is an equity issue, who impacts or is impacted by the issue, and what three actions can the district and community take to improve the issue. The groups rotated through each of the 4 themes so that each group could provide input on each theme.

5. **Selection of high priority themes:** After the small group discussion and activity, forum participants selected 2 themes that they believed were priorities for the next academic year. CEE facilitators determined the 2 themes with the highest votes.

Forum Participants

CEE facilitators helped conduct two forum sessions. The first session included Capital School District administrators and staff (n = 15 participants). The second session included family and community members (n = 11 participants). Some of the participants in the forum also participated in the prior month's focus groups. Participants were not asked to self-identify their race or ethnicity, but it should be noted that there was a lack of representation from the Latino and Asian communities. Therefore, a limitation of the forum findings is that they do not include voices of all racial and ethnic groups in the Capital School District community. As will be stated in the recommendations, Capital School District should continue to strive to recruit participants that reflect the diversity in their community.

Overall Reflection of the Forum

Though attendance in each of the forum sessions was relatively small, the participants were passionate, invested, and willing to discuss issues and generate strategies. Notably, forum participants voiced similar issues and concerns as the focus group participants. A major concern across forums involved developing ways to involve all members of the Capital School District community and constructing spaces to discuss issues across stakeholder groups.

Main Ideas from the Whole-Group Discussion

Discussion of Prior Focus Group Findings

Administrators and staff

Some administrator and staff forum participants noted that there were no Latino or Asian voices represented in the focus groups. They emphasized that voices of all community members are important in efforts to improve communication and relationships. Other participants expressed the importance of finding alternative ways to recruit community members so that the community feels heard. Moreover, one staff member stated that administrators and staff should be explicit and clear about what issue they are pursuing and specifically name the issue. In other words, administrators and staff should not use vague or broad language of "all" community members or "all" students, if the purpose is to improve communication and relationships with specific groups.

Family and community

Similar to the administrator and staff group, many family and community member forum participants emphasized the importance of creating spaces for dialogue and including all stakeholders and diverse members of the community. Participants critiqued current communication methods, including the community forum format that has resulted in low attendance. Many forum participants echoed the voices of the focus group participants, stating that communication with district or school administrators and staff, at times, feels one-sided. Many participants also noted the lack of clarity in communication regarding the description and purpose of events or meetings. In addition, some participants voiced that there was a lack of communication not only about events or meeting but about expectations for students, parents, families, and communities. Furthermore, in alignment with the focus group responses, parents and family members in the forum expressed that they would like their concerns and questions to be addressed in a timely and inclusive manner.

Selection of Themes for Small Group Discussions

Participants in each forum voted on three themes they would like to discuss during the small group activity. The following lists show the top 4 themes selected by participants in each forum. The administrator/staff and family/community groups both selected *improving communication with all groups* and *improving student-teacher relationships* as one of their top themes.

Top 4 themes selected by **administrators and staff**:

1. Addressing assumptions and racial biases (10)
2. Supporting educators in their work (9)
3. Improving student-teacher relationships (9)
4. Improving communication with all groups (6)

Top 4 themes selected by **family and community members**:

1. Establishing clear expectations (6)
2. Improving student-teacher relationships (5)
3. Improving communication with all groups (4)
4. Supporting parents (4)

The table below shows the votes for each of the major themes by forum group.

Themes	Administrators and Staff votes	Family and Community votes
Underlying Equity Issues		
Addressing assumptions and racial biases	10	3
Increasing diversity in school staff	--	--
Addressing “life sentence labels”	2	2
Communication		
Streamlining communication methods	--	2
Improving communication with all groups	6	4
Improving reciprocity in communication	1	3
Increasing access to technology or information	3	--

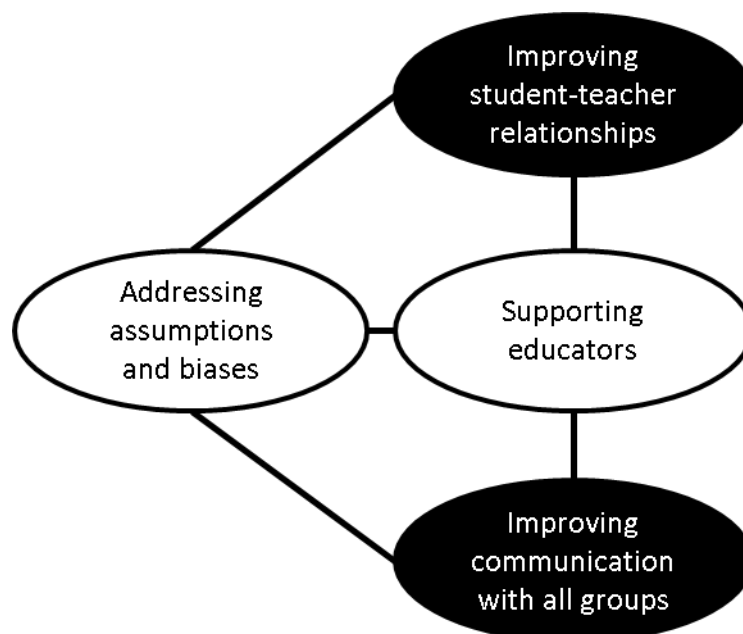
Relationship Building		
Supporting educators in their work	9	--
Valuing all levels of parent/family participation	2	1
Improving student-teacher relationships	9	5
Additional Themes		
Establishing clear expectations (for each other, students, parents, teachers)	--	6
Supporting parents	--	4

Main Ideas from the Small Group Discussions

Administrators and Staff

Administrator and staff forum participants discussed in small groups the following themes: (a) addressing assumptions and biases, (b) supporting educators in their work, (c) improving student-teacher relationships, and (d) improving communication with all groups. The theme of *addressing assumptions and biases* – particularly related to providing diversity, cultural responsiveness or sensitivity, and anti-bias training – permeated throughout the small group discussions. Participants also voiced that educators require more support (in time, resources, and relationships) in order to improve student-teacher relationships and communication with the community – two themes that they believed were highly important. To facilitate their work, participants emphasized creating a common language and understanding around the term equity and equity-related issues.

The figure below shows a conceptual representation of how administrator and staff forum participants connected the themes. The dark circles are themes that were common across both forum sessions.



The table below shows a summary of the strategies provided by the administrator and staff forum participants.

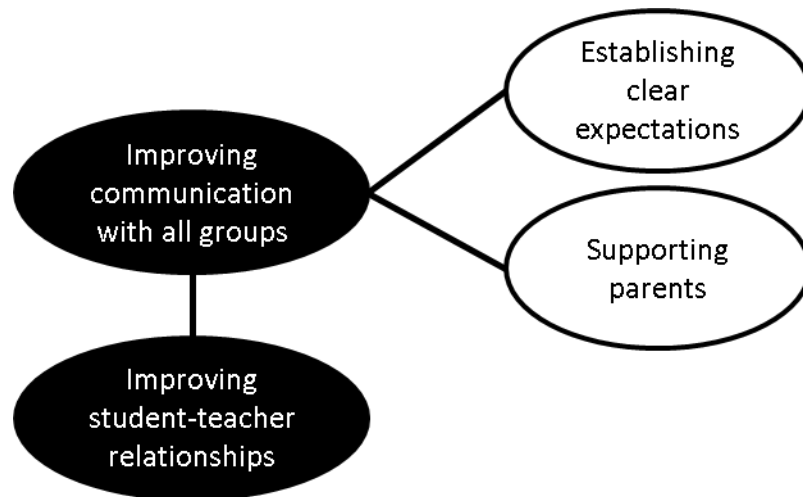
Themes	Strategies
Addressing assumptions and racial biases	Provide ongoing professional training and learning
	Develop a common language around equity and cultural responsiveness; Develop a common approach
	Address issues openly and explicitly (i.e., stop tip-toeing around assumptions and biases)
Supporting educators in their work	Take time to establish relationships at the beginning of the year
	Build in more time for educators in their daily work
	Provide onboarding and ongoing training around cultural sensitivity, bias, and issues of access and equity
Improving student-teacher relationships	Train staff on diversity, culture, and bias awareness*
	Create consistent expectations across schools (e.g., behavioral expectations and what it means to be a Senator)
	Allow focused time to get to know students and their families
	Develop sense of community across all levels of the district
Improving communication with all groups	Diversify and personalize communication methods*
	Use plain English*
	Make communication a consistent and central part of the vision
	Identify individuals to serve as ambassadors for communities and schools

Note: A * symbol indicates that the strategy was similar between administrator/staff and family/community groups.

Family and Community

Family and community member forum participants discussed in small groups the following themes: (a) improving communication with all groups, (b) establishing clear expectations, (c) supporting parents, and (d) improving student-teacher relationships. Similar to the administrator and staff group, the family and community participants viewed *improving communication with all groups* and *improving student-teacher relationships* as highly important. Related to improving communication, participants emphasized establishing clear expectations for students and families as well as supporting parents so that they can help in their child's learning. Moreover, participants voiced issues around the use and implementation of communication methods. For example, parents and family members stated that they received messages or notifications from the schools without sufficient context, such as clearly stating the importance of the message.

The following figure shows a conceptual representation of how family and community forum participants connected the themes. The dark circles are themes that were common across both forum sessions.



The table below shows a summary of the strategies provided by the family and community forum participants.

Themes	Strategies
Improving communication with all groups	Recruit and engage diverse members of the community
	Diversify and personalize communication methods*
	Increase access to communication technologies and methods
	Use plain English*
Establishing clear expectations	Create consistent, 2-way communication channels
	Respect students as individual learners and set high expectations for students
Supporting parents	Host parent-friendly events (e.g., education workshops, parent information night, technology classes, workshops on using apps such as Home Access Center)
	Schedule 1-to-1 parent teacher conferences
	Communicate the why and how (e.g., share the importance of a meeting or explain changes that have been made and why)
Improving student-teacher relationships	Train staff on diversity, culture, and bias awareness*
	Strive to balance power in student-teacher relationships and value student voice
	Establish positive interactions with students on a daily basis (e.g., effectively instructing and managing behavior, showing kindness)

Note: A * symbol indicates that the strategy was similar between administrator/staff and family/community groups.

Selection of High Priority Themes

Participants in each forum voted on two themes they believed were priorities for the next academic year. Participants in both administrator/staff and family/community forum participants

selected *improving communication with all groups* and *improving student-teacher relationships* as high priority themes.

Top 2 priorities selected by **administrators and staff**:

1. Improving teacher-student relationships (10)
2. Improving communication with all groups (8)

Top 2 priorities selected by **family and community members**:

1. Improving communication with all groups (6)
2. Improving student-teacher relationships (5)

The table below shows the votes for the high priority themes by forum group.

Themes	Administrators and Staff votes	Family and Community votes
Underlying Equity Issues		
Addressing assumptions and racial biases	4	--
Communication		
Improving communication with all groups	8	6
Relationship Building		
Supporting educators in their work	4	--
Improving student-teacher relationships	10	5
Additional Themes		
Establishing clear expectations (for each other, students, parents, teachers)	--	4
Supporting parents	--	3

Feedback about the Forum

After the small group discussions and closing statements, several participants from each group provided feedback on the forum by writing responses to two questions: (1) What did you think about the forum and (2) What would you change or improve about the forum? The participants' feedback can be found below.

Administrators and Staff

What did you think about the forum?

- Good, concise discussions
- Time to discuss among peers was valuable
- Well organized
- I enjoyed hearing great ideas!
- Forum is a start & should not be covering as a blanket to the district
- Opportunities for all groups to talk together about all topics was useful. It helped us dig deeper into the topics
- Would like to see more turn-out with staff across the district and within each school

What would you change or improve about the forum?

- Define if about all populations or focusing on one
- Nothing
- Please have the questions before the results
- Gathering opinions is a good step. Another necessary step is learning what districts that have made good progress in addressing issues of access and equity have done
- I would encourage more of the candid, passionate discussions
- More locations of various forums in different schools. Other formats for forums (e.g. chats, online surveys etc.)

Family and Community

What did you think about the forum?

- Very informative. Great forum
- I enjoyed the smaller groups breakdown. It gave everyone a chance to be heard
- Very one-sided meeting
- Wonderful
- It was really good and heard other people's opinions

What would you change or improve about the forum?

- More involvement from community
- More involvement at all levels
- Involvement from Administrator, Board & Teachers
It was like this was unimportant by them not being here
- Maybe giving the info found beforehand to be understood. That way we could come to work
- I would do more activities and time
- Snacks

Next Steps

Below, CEE outlines next steps based on findings from the community forums held in Capital School District.

- As mentioned in the prior focus group report, to ensure that the voices from all communities (racial, ethnic, SES, religious) are represented in future activities, CSD should develop alternative methods of recruitment. The district can initiate communication with families and communities in their homes or where they gather, for example religious or community organizations. The district can also invite religious or community organizations to school spaces to exchange information or collaborate in an event. Finally, the district can distribute information or recruit participation by using the "snowball" method of reaching out to key parents or community leaders who, in turn, reach out to other parents and community members and so on. Also, district or school

leaders should create opportunities for family engagement during events that are already in place.

- CSD Central Office leaders should be explicit about the issues they are trying to solve and make sure that is communicated to stakeholders.
- CSD administrators and staff should employ clear communication when reaching out to families and students so that they understand the importance and goal of the communication. In communicating, leaders and staff should write or say messages in a way and language that recipients can understand. Moreover, district or school leaders can help identify ambassadors to the communities to assist with bridging the perceived gap between the school district and the community.
- As mentioned in the prior focus group report and reiterated in the forums, CSD administrators should provide more ongoing equity and anti-bias training for administrators and educators. Training should move beyond awareness of equity and bias to creating strategies to implement in daily work.
- CSD staff should focus on strengthening the relationships between students and educators on a day-to-day basis, attending to power differentials between students and educators as well as among students. Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with positive academic and socioemotional outcomes.