Fresno Unified Community Schools
Asset Mapping Qualitative Report

FORT MILLER MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Prepared by

THE CHILDREN'S MOVEMENT FRESNO

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OVERVIEW

During the Community Schools planning process for Fresno Unified School District, engagement of the Fort Miller community was desired to help learn the strengths, needs, challenges, and what might help toward the goal of improving academic success through a "Whole Child" approach utilized in the Community Schools model. Shared decision-making is a foundational component of the model. Gaining insight from all perspectives is important for communication and collaboration. To do that, people needed to be asked for their thoughts. This report is the result.

Methodology

A team from The Children's Movement conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with the Fort Miller Advisory Council, parents, students, certificated, and classified staff with the support of the school. A total of 66 respondents comprised of

- 16 Advisory Council members
- 13 certificated staff
- 6 classified staff
- 15 students
- 16 parents

These individuals provided responses to five questions related to what they liked about the school, strengths of students and families, what interfered with learning, challenges, and ideas to address them. All comments within answers were then coded by individual topic which resulted in 724 comments from which to develop themes.

There are two theme "tiers". The comments were divided first into similar specific issues. These Tier 2 themes were then further consolidated into overarching themes or Tier 1. The result was 29 Tier 1 Themes and 262 Tier 2 Themes. Tier 2 themes give more insight on the Tier 1 theme for later consideration toward strategy development. The themes were arbitrarily determined by a single TCM team member conducting the analysis and some may be interpreted differently by other readers. The Appendix lists a link to the 724 comments (Tab 1), the themes summary in quantitative form (Tab 2), and analysis (Tabs 3 and 4). Comments that comprise a theme provide both nuance for future idea generation and help show the intensity of interest.

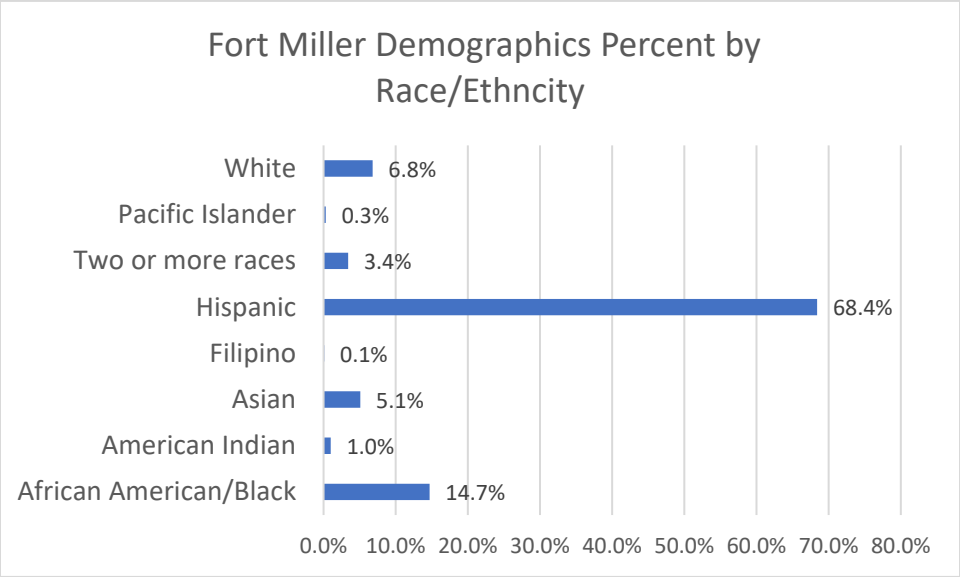
This analysis provides a starting point for further planning around assets and needs. A summary of the top themes follows.

Limitations

The interview format was semi-structured interview. (See Appendix for example.) However, the data collected did not include the collection of the race/ethnicity of every participant to compare against the demographics of the school. This can be gained in a quantitative survey that is planned for the beginning of the school year.

School Demographics

Fort Miller's 673 students are 95.8% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged and come from nine different "feeder" elementary schools, often from long distances. There are 18.7% English Language Learners and 15.2% are students with disabilities. Foster youth comprise 1.8% of the student population and homeless youth are 0.7%. It has a higher than usual (for Fresno County) Black student population at 14.7%.



All student groups measure "very low" on academic performance in English Language Arts, except for Asian students measuring a step up at "low". All student groups measure "very low" in math. Interestingly, the 31 reclassified ELL students do English Only students.

As is the case for all FUSD schools in SY 2021-22, chronic absenteeism was very high due to COVID-19, showing at 66.2%. There was slightly better attendance by English Learners and Asians at about 55%. The suspension rate is also very high, with the highest percentage for Black students at 36.3% suspended at least one day and the lowest being White at 15.8%, which provides some question about the potentiality for systematic bias or racism.

From the interviews, student characteristics were often described. Two descriptions stood out – resiliency and self-advocacy. The resilience of students was primarily noted by staff, while students described their pride in standing up for themselves. As one classified staff member explained, "They stand up for what they believe is right. They want to be heard."

THEMES

Tier 1 Themes

The top Tier 1 overarching theme by far is School Safety, with 35% of the comments within the theme focused on concerns about fights at school. Bullying, drug use, and vaping are also highly ranked as Tier 2 themes. School Safety is endorsed by all the

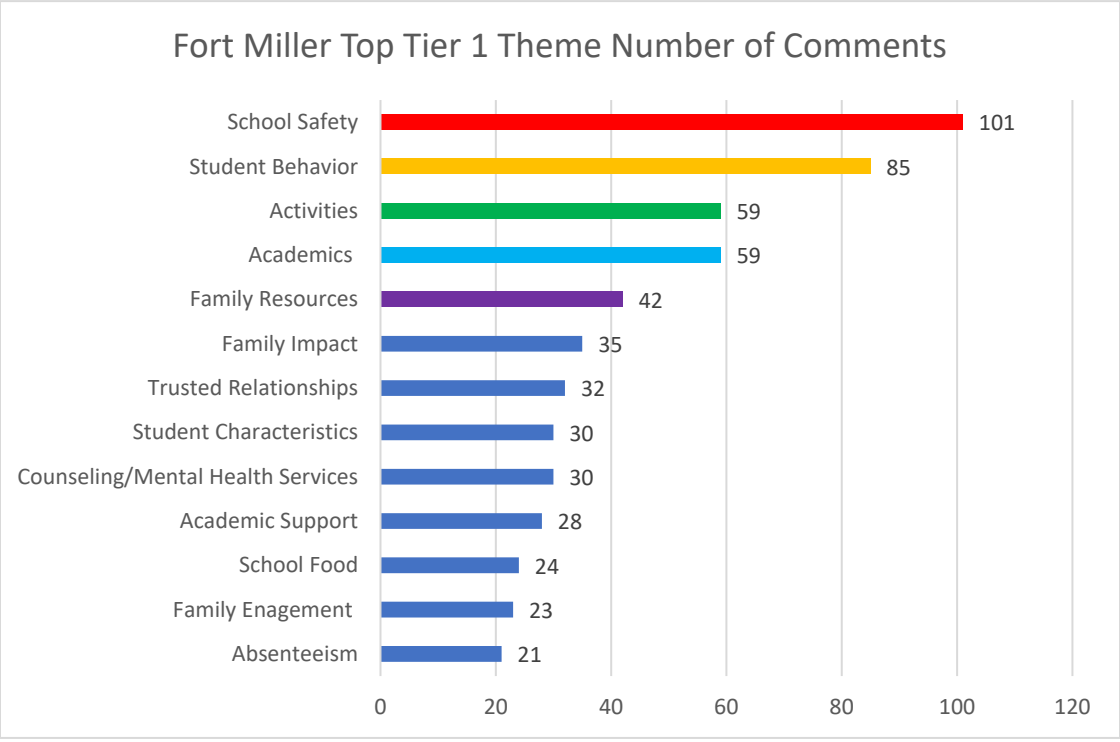
different respondent types, as is the second highest Tier 1 theme. Students expressed the most thoughts on this theme of all respondents.

The Student Behavior theme contributes to the School Safety issue as well as academic success. Different types of distractions in class are the most noted as Tier 2 themes, with the highest distraction type being cell phone use at school. Students had just as many complaints as teachers about its interference. Note, however, these complaints do not indicate the feelings of all students. As one classified staff member noted, "Parents text them during class. There are melt downs when [phones] are taken away."

> Phones get in the way of learning. Teachers don't interrupt cell phone use. – *Fort Miller Student*

> [Allowing] phones seem to be at the teacher's discretion. It's [the policy on cell phones] not policed. A lot of the behavior issues start from social media outside school, and it bleeds in.
> - *Certificated Staff member*

Teachers, classified staff, and students had Student Behavior as their second highest Tier 1 theme comments. Coming from a different vantage point, the parents' second highest theme after school safety may be related since they indicated counseling/mental health services. A chart showing themes by respondent type is provided later in the report.



The importance of Activities and attention to Academics are the third and fourth themes, a drop of one-third from the top two themes. Academics are addressed by students and

teachers/certificated staff, with slightly more comments by students. Activities are addressed by all respondent types except classified staff.

Within the Academics theme, students primarily focused on improving teaching methods, dismayed by the reliance on packets, and wanting classroom control improved so that they had a better chance to learn. Two students had positive things to say about academics. Two students and one certificated respondent had negative comments about bias/racism. Certificated staff had more divergent comments related to academics, with the highest Tier 2 theme explaining why they don't give homework anymore (4 comments). Other themes included accountability, low student motivation, classroom control (students had 4 times as many comments as the teachers), and incentives.

> Start at the beginning of the school year to be more strict and not giving as much slack to mess around. – *Fort Miller Student*

Family Resources and Family Impact are the next Tier 1 themes, with Certificated and Classified staff offering the most suggestions for family resources. Health services including vision and dental services, along with food and basic needs support were all desired. Counseling/Mental Health Services is its own Tier 1 theme, although it could be considered a family resource. It is a bit lower in the Tier 1 ranking, but the Tier 2 theme of needing counseling or mental health services at the school was almost double the health services Tier 2 number of comments in Family Resources.

Fort Miller employees, parents, and students have evidence of building trusted relationships among each other, which is exceedingly beneficial for implementation plans to help build momentum and is a hallmark of Community Schools. It is at the half-way mark in the rankings.

After previously mentioned Student Characteristics in the demographics section and Counseling/Mental Health Services mentioned above, Academic Supports is next in the rankings. The greatest support in comments on this theme came from parents, with half of them saying they see evidence of student support and half of them wanting more support for their children.

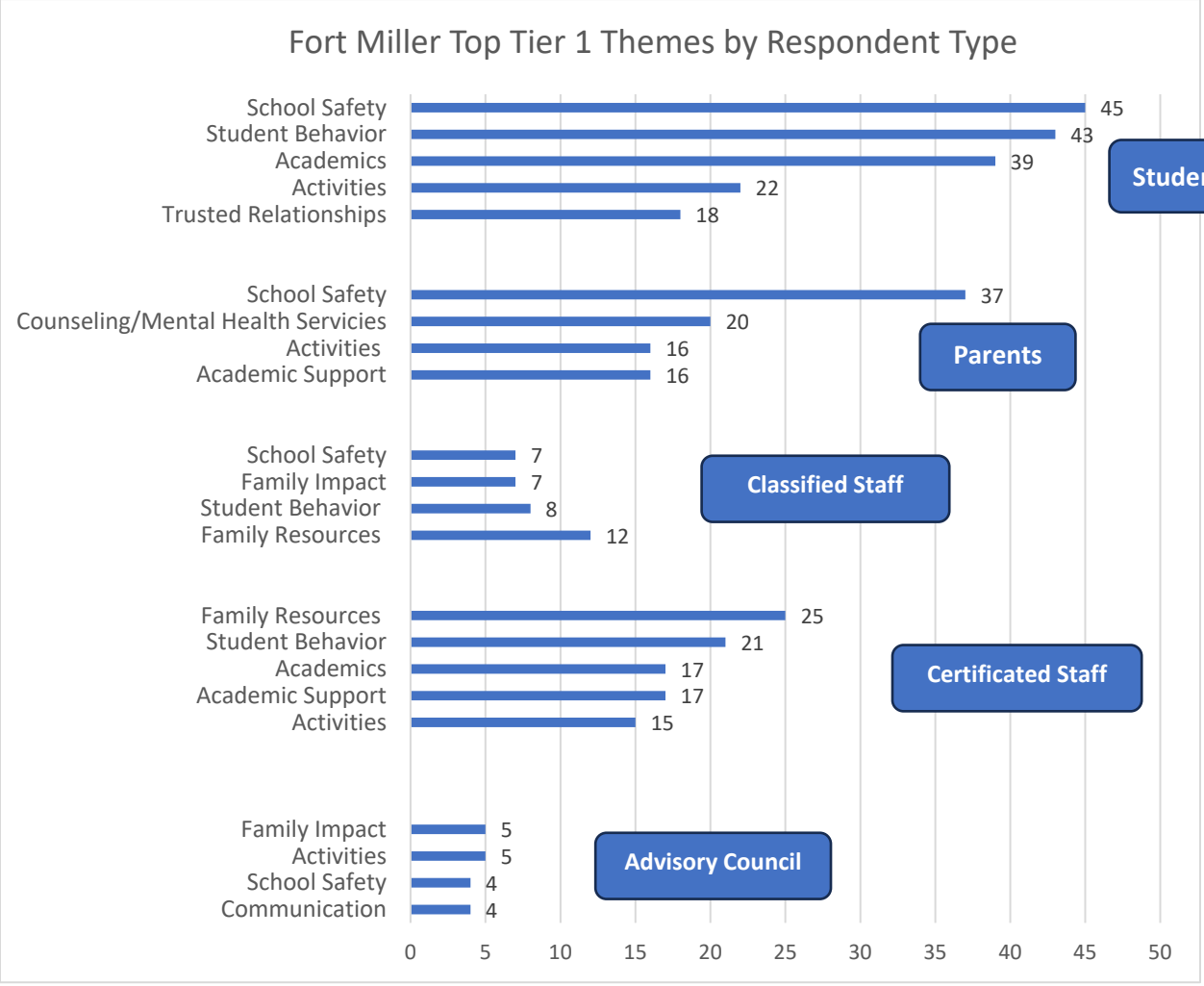
School Food was a popular student theme. They described the need for more and better choices ('disgusting" and "gross" were two descriptions of school lunches) and was supported to some degree by Classified and Certified staff. Two different students suggested conducting a survey to find out what students want to eat. Another two students asked for homemade food instead of "stale and frozen, expired or rotten food." This desire for better food and the student characteristic of self-advocacy could provide a good promotion tactic to a future school quantitative survey.

> Food options are limited. Students come to school hungry, often want seconds, but it is against the rules to give students extra food.
>
> – *Classified staff member*

Family Engagement and Absenteeism are the last top themes. Unsurprisingly, teachers had the greatest number of comments on the Absenteeism theme. Parents had just one, which could relate to feeling there is nothing they can do about it due to their own circumstances or perhaps they are unaware. Something worth exploring, perhaps.

Family engagement included comments about disconnected parents as well as noting that many came to sporting events or award ceremonies, while parents had positive comments about communication from the school. There were requests for parent classes. Knowing the timing of parent availability or being available when they are available was mentioned, along with needing space for meetings.

The highest Tier 1 themes by respondent type are in the chart below.



An alphabetical list of all 29 of the Tier 1 themes is in the table below.

ALL TIER 1 THEMES (in alphabetical order)

Absenteeism Academic Support	Policy Accountability School Culture

Academics Activities Admin/Teacher/Staff Culture Behavior Supports Communication Counseling/Mental Health Services Facility Family Engagement Family Impact Family Resources Family Support Parent Involvement	School Food School Perception School Safety School/Family Interaction Social-Emotional Learning Special Education Staff Appreciation Staffing Student Behavior Student Characteristics Technology Transportation Trusted Relationships

Relationship with the Four Pillars

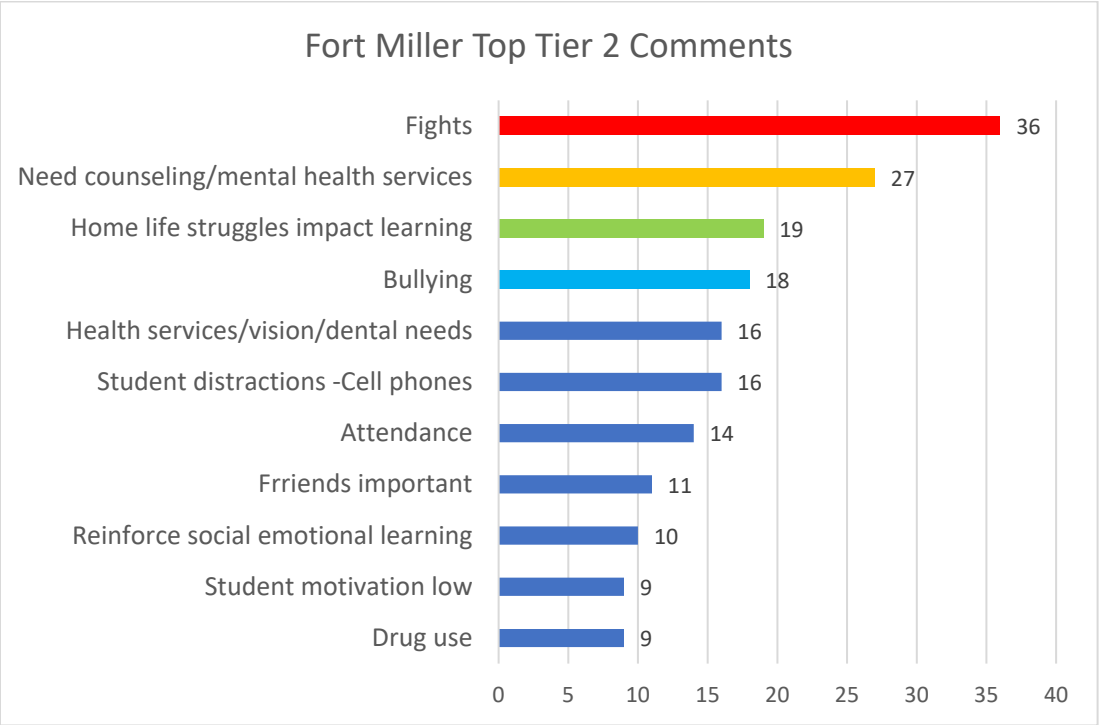
The top tiers align with the Community Schools Four Pillars in the following way. Themes may align with more than one pillar.

Four Pillars	Top Tiers
Integrated Student Supports	School Safety Student Behavior Family Resources Trusted Relationships Counseling/Mental Health Services School Food
Family and Community Engagement	Family Impact Family Engagement Trusted Relationships Absenteeism
Extended Learning Time and Opportunities	Activities Trusted Relationships Academic Support
Collaborative Leadership Practices	Trusted Relationships Student Characteristics Absenteeism

Tier 2 Themes

Tier 1 themes provide an overview of what is on the respondents' minds regarding school needs. Tier 2 themes provide more insight into both assets and needs within a Tier 1 theme and insight on the level of intensity around assets or concerns. The

themes also provide some insight into strategies that could be employed or are the foundation for strategy development. A chart of the highest comments regardless of Tier 1 theme follows. To see all Tier 2 themes, please access the link in the Appendix.



Tier 2 Themes also align to the Four Pillars. More than one theme may align with a pillar.

Four Pillars	Top Tiers
Integrated Student Supports	Fights Need counseling/mental health services Bullying Home life struggles impact learning Health Services/Vision/Dental Attendance Drug Use
Family and Community Engagement	Home life struggles impact learning Friends are important Student distractions – cell phones
Extended Learning Time and Opportunities	Student motivation low Friends are important
Collaborative Leadership Practices	Fights Bullying

	Attendance Reinforce social-emotional learning Student distractions – cell phones

CONCLUSION

Fort Miller is showing some positive assets toward the implementation of Community Schools. Not only is the admin/teacher/staff culture generally strong, but the level of trusted relationships also cited as a theme by students is important evidence that the staff at all levels care and are making connections that students appear to need. In other words, they are looking at the whole child.

Another asset is the evidence of success cited about the progress being made at Fort Miller, the desire to be recognized in the community for it, and the fact that multiple staff members remarked on their desire to stay at Fort Miller. This all points to a strong team committed toward results.

The combination of some students having difficult home lives (whether it is poverty, not having enough connection with caregivers/parents busy trying to provide the basics, or generational gang families as examples) and the normal effect of navigating early adolescence seems to have heightened the need to establish and defend an identity. COVID-19 isolation also impacted key social and emotional development levels and students are playing “catch-up” in ways that are not always helpful. Thus fights, bullying, social media use, and students themselves being cited as distractions are all evidence of further “whole child” strategy need for implementation design.

Given the level of fighting and bullying concerns, it was notable that there were only three suggestions to add a strategy or theme around restorative justice inclusion. The key difference to restorative justice from “restorative practices” is that both students and parents participate in the process, not just the student (which seems to occur when restorative practices are mentioned as a strategy.) Both the victim and parent are met with immediately, then the perpetrator and parent, before determining if both parties are willing to participate and be heard in the full restorative justice process together. There may be previous negative experience or lack of knowledge around this strategy that led to it not being mentioned.

It was also striking how students appeared to want a different style of teaching and, as one said, for them “to be a bit more strict.” Related to this area were the two mentions of more consistency in discipline, with one teacher mentioning that administration does things differently than teachers and there is a feeling of inconsistency of consequences. Addressing cell phone usage in class could be an example of more consistency in policy implementation where all involved – teachers, students, parents, administration – may wish to take some collaborative time to address and agree on a cell phone use policy.

Next Steps

There are 3 ideal next steps, bulleted below, and then explained in more detail.

- Develop a fast, easy quantitative survey for all category types to complete in English and Spanish.
- Share this report with the Advisory Council.
- Share this report with all those interviewed for this qualitative report.

Due to the timeline pressure from the State Implementation Grant deadline and the time to organize and implement interviews, a quantitative survey could be developed by The Children's Movement to assist the incoming Community Schools Coordinator. This survey will be targeted to students, staff, and parents or a separate one for each group, depending upon desired results and survey implementation. Ideally, of course, the Advisory Council would be very involved in the survey development.

As Fort Miller reinvigorates its Advisory Council, this report could be helpful in developing site-specific strategies, as would a quantitative survey. In addition, to demonstrate the importance of collaboration and trust, sharing this report with those who participated in the interviews is desirable.

The Children's Movement appreciates the opportunity to meet and hear from so many in the Fort Miller community. Fort Miller stands on the precipice of even greater improvement of their school and students, while learning from each other.

APPENDIX

- Link to the spreadsheets showing the data.
  - The tab labeled "Full Raw Data" shows the Tier 1 and 2 themes and the comments that led to the theme assignment.
  - The tab labeled "Raw Data Summary" shows the number of Tier 2 themes and comments for each Tier 1 theme.
  - Tabs with the analysis that led to the development of the charts are not included but can be made available.

- Link to the Focus Group/Interview Template.