

## UPPER DARBY RISING

### SECOND COMMUNITY-WIDE FORM

FEBRUARY 22, 2021

#### OVERVIEW

This second event in a series of three community-wide forums wrapped up the foundational civic engagement phase of the Upper Darby Rising initiative.

The event began with a welcome video put together by the school district, featuring Central Office and school board leaders explaining the goals of Upper Darby Rising.

Then, the Catalyst Community Conversations team reviewed the steps that had taken place leading up to the night's forum. They then reviewed the [four themes](#) that emerged as the core topics of Upper Darby Rising and prepared the group for the coming breakout groups by reviewing the ground rules for the dialogue.

During this time, participants were posting into the chat their answers to two prompts:

- *Tell us why you decided to come tonight?*
- *Quickly, what word or phrase sums up for you the Upper Darby School District?*

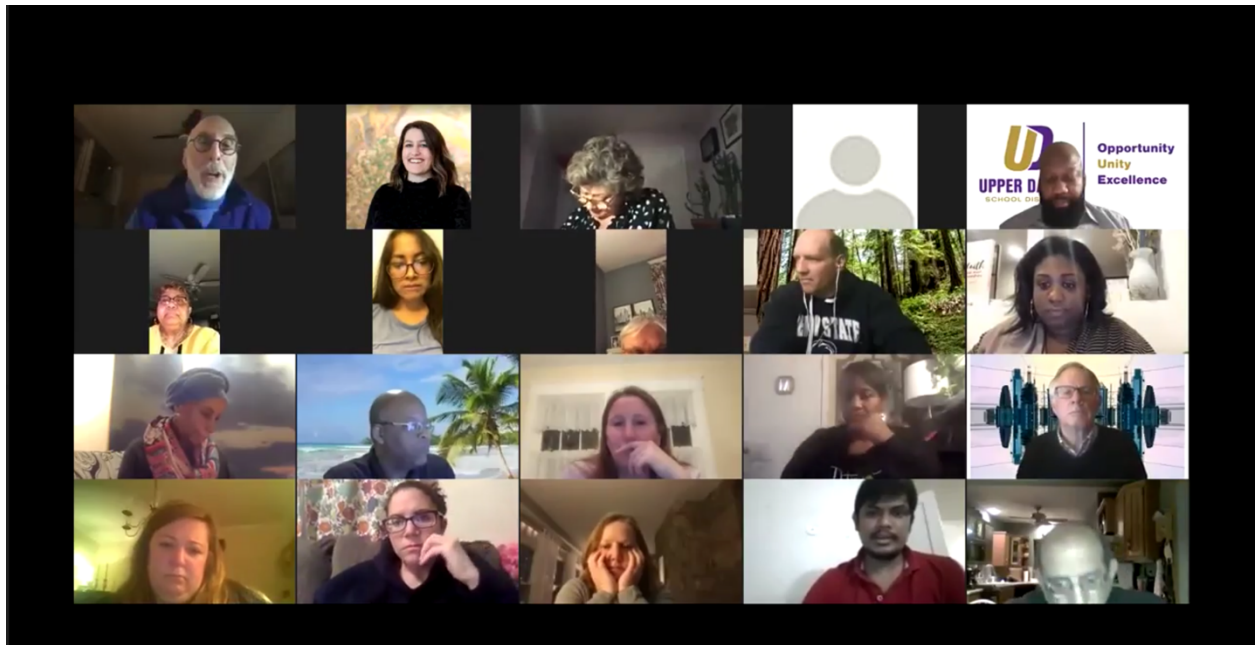
The responses were numerous, revealing and mostly positive. They are summarized at the bottom of the report.

At the end of the opening plenary, the participants and observers were divided into ten breakout groups, each led by an experienced moderator provided by CCC.

The moderators led breakout groups through a structured discussion of the four themes, using stories and quotes garnered from an earlier round of interviews and focus groups to prompt discussion. You can see the stories and quotes [here](#). Each group tried to come up with a set of specific action steps to address each theme, while also suggesting some overall guiding principles for the Upper Darby Rising action plan.

Each moderator filed a detailed written report on the breakout. These are provided below.

The evening concluded with a plenary discussion of insights and findings from the breakouts, with some participants posting their key takeaway in the chat. Those posts are also included at the bottom of this report.



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## BREAKOUT GROUP REPORTS

The reports are presented by alphabetical order of the moderator's last name. If you want to jump to a particular group's report, please use these links:

[BRIAN ARMSTEAD](#)

[MARISA DENKER](#)

[CASSANDRA GEORGES](#)

[ELLEN GREENBERG](#)

[GERMAINE INGRAM](#)

[SERRANO LEGRAND](#)

[KIM LEICHTNER](#)

[CAROL LYDON](#)

[KIERSTEN MAILLER](#)

[CHRIS SATULLO](#)

[HARRIS SOKOLOFF](#)

## GROUP 1

MODERATOR: BRIAN ARMSTEAD

There were seven participants and one observer in this group. About half of the participants were immigrants. There were also two African-American participants and one white participant. The majority of the group had younger children in the district. Overall, the participants were very engaged and offered balanced perspectives about things they liked about the district along with challenges they felt should be addressed.

### THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

There were significant concerns about the safety in the High School and the middle schools (especially the high school).

One mother said her daughter has told her that at the High School kids are always hanging out in the hallways and kissing in the hallways and stairwells. Her daughter also said “a boy tried to grab me.” Her daughter told her the hallways are so bad she is late to class and then she has to go to the office to get a slip so it doesn’t go on her record. She said the bathrooms also smell like pot. Another mother said her son “hates going to the bathroom.”

One of the Arab mothers (whose children are still in elementary school) said she hears a lot of scary stories about the middle school and the high school. The high school stories are particularly troublesome. “That’s what we hear from people. It’s not a safe place for the kids.”

The participants did not have a long conversation about this issue and there weren’t many themes, but they all had comments with some examples.

On related issues:

Regarding bullying and isolation, one participant said her kids used to be in Catholic school and it was “way worse.” These district schools are big enough so that her kids can find places to “fit in.”

Another parent commented that she thought the kids in the district aren't being disciplined enough. The teachers witness something and tell the kids "if you keep doing this, I'll write you up." Or they get written up, but they just get a demerit for it and there's no real consequences unless the student gets 45 demerits. She felt that "the way the rules are, it just makes the kids get disrespectful."

This same parent said she hears that kids in the HS are always roaming the halls. She is concerned her son will have troubles when he gets to HS.

Another parent told a story about her son. Another student hit her son and he hit that student back. He got in trouble. But she also said her son has a hard time "keeping his hands to himself" and that "he likes to play fight and he can get too hyped." She went on to say that a teacher did ask her if he has a hard time keeping his hands to himself. She also said the schools teach the kids not to bully (and they do so in a good way).

Some participants discussed behavior and violence outside of the schools.

The East Indian father relayed a story from his brother: They are immigrants. His brother's daughters have been getting annoyed on their way to school. His brother misses work because he has to drop them off at school even though they live close enough to walk. He also said his brother has called the police "lots of times."

One person commented that she saw hundreds of kids in the intersection last year. It happened at football games. And after school sometimes kids get unruly. However, she said the police presence got better and things seemed to get a little better.

There was agreement in this group that parents need to take more responsibility for what their kids are doing. They need to be more aware of what their kids are doing. Some parents don't acknowledge when their kids are acting up.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Don't let kids in the HS roam the halls.
- Hall monitors (or more security) in the HS.
- Ensure hallways are orderly so kids can get to class on time.
- Clear up the bathrooms so kids don't smoke and act up in there.

- End the demerit system. It allows kids to do too many bad things before any consequences and many of them don't take it seriously.
- Actually hold kids accountable (goes along with ending the demerit system).
- Identify the repeat offenders and develop a strategy that would deal with them).
- Help students be safer walking to school. Especially immigrant kids.
- Encourage parents to take more responsibility for their children's actions. Start with being more aware of what your kids are doing. And acknowledge when your kids are acting up.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

One parent of a child at Drexel Hill just assumed the kids at Beverly Hills did the Camp Speers trip as well.

One parent said the median income is probably double or triple in some neighborhoods: "I don't know how to get around that."

Another parent said that she believes most people are aware of the difference in resources between district schools "but they don't care. To people in Drexel Hill, Upper Darby is like a different world. It's a different zip code. They (the Drexel Hill parents) are doing what they can for their own kids."

The group agreed the district doesn't do enough fundraising: "They used to sell hoagies."

Before the pandemic hit one mom wanted to send her child to a different school. Her 15-year old-daughter has to walk almost two miles, which the mom doesn't think is reasonable.

Regarding the story about the heating system, one mother thought it was horrible that the kids almost go into trouble for trying to keep warm.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Do more and better fundraising (like selling hoagies like they used to).
- Reduce the transportation/distance rules. Don't make kids walk so far to school.

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### THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

One parent said she graduated from Upper Darby high in 1996 and that it was diverse then but the district is even more diverse now. The diversity helped her when she went to college: “So many kids (in college) grew up in silos. This was true for both the black kids and the white kids. But it wasn’t weird for me to live on a floor with different ethnicities.”

One of the Arab parents said: “Black people need more respect. They treat people too badly. I see white people and black people fighting outside of the schools.

Another immigrant parent countered that it’s not a black, white or Asian thing. Lots of people are very nice. And each group also has some bad people. That is true for every society.

However, regardless of race, some families are not doing their jobs teaching their kids how to respect others. A parent relayed a story about a friend from India whose child is in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. He has had big trouble when he has lunch from his culture. One kid spat in his lunch bag “because I don’t like the smell of your food.”

The group agreed that students and staff need to learn how to communicate and deal better with immigrant students. People need to learn how to appreciate immigrant people and diversity in general.

Parents have a role in this as well as the school. Both need to teach kids how to appreciate difference. One parent emphasized the importance of parents doing their part to teach kids how to respect others and appreciate difference. He said, “you can’t expect everything from the school. They have limited time. Parents have to discipline their kids and not just love their kids. But they also need to spend quality time with their kids.”

Another parent summed this part of the conversation up, saying: “It’s 50 percent the school’s responsibility and 50 percent the parents’ responsibility.”

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Add a class for the kids to teach them how to understand and communicate with immigrants.
- Learn to appreciate the immigrant people and the diversity.

- Help parents teach their kids about appreciating difference and immigration (maybe videos, an easy curriculum, reinforce importance and resources at parent meetings etc.).
- Educate the parents; awareness of immigrants; numbers and their experiences.
- More efforts like these dialogues.
- Bring together the elementary schools so they will have some connections with each other before they are forced to be together in the middle schools. Do the same with the middle schools to prepare for the high school.
  - E.g., class picnics across schools.
  - Class trips/outings.
  - Meet and greets and hanging out after any competitions.
- After school activities to help keep out of trouble (but everybody's situation is difficult).
- The kids could have a brief topic during homeroom; a discussion piece to help learn about diversity.

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#### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

##### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

The parents all agreed that engagement at the elementary schools is very good. One parent said: "Any information I need I get from the teacher. I am connected with Facebook and emails. I send an email and always they get back to me faster than what I expect."

Another parent said she felt connected up until her child was in high school. She could walk into the middle school. And she knew all the security guards. But she said the difference in high school was OK because since her child is older she (the mom) doesn't want to be involved as much.

One parent said: "The social media lady does a wonderful job" butt the district perhaps could do a better job organizing the emails and various information and putting them into one convenient spot.

Several participants mentioned the schools used to be more engaged with the community, however.

The elementary schools used to have more community oriented affairs (school fair; holiday card at Garrettford where they would go around the neighborhood and drop off cards, etc. in people's mailboxes). There used to also be senior citizen/community food drives: "They made my daughter and her friends do it. At first they didn't want to do it but they got a lot out of it."

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Organize the emails and information into one convenient spot.
- Engage the community more actively by doing things with and for them
  - School fair
  - Holiday cards delivered to community members' mailboxes
  - Senior citizen food drives
  - Shovel snow for the elderly.

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#### **PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES OR CONNECTIONS**

Clear up the behavioral problems in the high school. And the middle schools, too, but especially in the high school. This is seen as a problem for current HS students and they are the source of "scary stories" for those with younger children considering what to do as their children age.

The group also had a strong belief that parents have to take greater responsibility, whether it is teaching their children how to appreciate and respect immigrants and "difference," or being more aware and active about their child's poor behavior or fundraising to help kids across the district have the same opportunities.

#### **GROUP 2**

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##### **MODERATOR: MARISA DENKER**

This group had some people who were angry – particularly a biracial woman new to the area who thinks the District is generally more responsive than her past ones but still has a lot of work to do and a black father who has engaged with the Superintendent a lot already, not to



much avail, it seemed. The conversation was very open – and mostly everyone was in agreement. There were not tensions, so much as tiredness / some anger.

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## THEME 1 - DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Story 3 appears to be racial discrimination immediately; would complain against the school immediately – should be illegal to happen to any child.
- Should not escalate / use force. It's wrong.
- Teachers and staff should not be making decisions that affect children because they're frustrated.
- Many stories where people of color are being mis-labeled and stereotyped; many people said UD had a lot of issues on its own.
- Some participants noted that they would rather the teachers not pinpoint publicly/to parents which students were involved in an altercation in order to enable less of a blame culture.
- Lack of trust from students – in positions where issues with peer pressure, other stuff going on – no conflict resolution – need to talk to students and teachers how to de-escalate.
- Cultural bias all throughout the district – and more people need to understand each other's perspectives and need same shared respect of culture.
- Have people who don't understand what it is to be black.
- UD has not always been most diverse place; not everyone can afford to go to programs – the problem is parents aren't involved - whether it's the parents' or schools' fault. Not particularly welcoming for a black father – stigma.
- One of the participants who is white but has black children and said her kids never got in trouble but would see bad/racist things happening. She wondered whether part of reason they didn't get in trouble much was because of her being a white parent.
- First story shows a teacher noticing the underlying issue in this case. But there always are underlying issues; it's a learning environment, kids don't just wake up and say I want to be bad today – things happen and we all have reactions to those things. Need more of a culture of empathy and understanding. People need to understand their own trauma, too.

- Trauma-informed caring/teaching needed.
- Racism can be Implicit as well as explicit.
- Easy for teachers to get overwhelmed – a lot for teachers to be educating and monitoring emotional issues. District should support the teachers better, i.e. have seen teachers provide things out of their own pockets.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED*

- Need to talk to students and teachers how to de-escalate; conflict resolution.
- More people to understand each other's perspectives and show shared respect of culture.
- Trauma-informed caring/teaching needed.
- District should support the teachers better re emotional monitoring – too much on plate.
- More of a culture of empathy and understanding

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#### THEME 2 - RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Son of one of the fathers experienced what's described in Story 1.
- Empathy / standard should be established prior to students entering the building (Story 2.
- Always has been a lot of disparity and comparisons between the two middle schools.
- District needs to come up with a way that creates balance and some type of fairness; one person said that allocation of students shouldn't be based on geography but on criteria so all have a chance to get into the better school. The other participants then countered that this shouldn't even be an issue – the should both be equally good schools should be afforded opportunity to go to better school.
- The DH-BH split has always been a thing. Why is it that Drexel Hill has always been better; why is BH not as good. BH got grants; why is more money not being put into that building?
- In relation to the story about no heat in one of the schools, one participant reflected that some students clearly responded to that by putting on sweatshirts (which broke the rules

because it made sense) versus other students wouldn't even feel comfortable or able to put sweatshirts on because they were raised to not break rules even when the rules don't make sense; need to understand different cultures / expectations.

- Hell should be raised.
- Story 1: Why can't HSA do District fundraising rather than school-by-school?
  - Worried that some parents will want it to be only for their school because wanting to help /benefit their kids directly; culture is very local here.
  - Big culture shift needed.
- Funds allocated need to be allocated better – especially in amount of taxes that we pay for school district; other communities pay less taxes and get better districts.
- One participant suggested the idea of needing more school, too – The better the school district, the better neighborhoods become.
- Read every review comment on the schools by parents from 2020 back.
- Need more allyship – humble, learn, accountable for them.
- One participant shared that one thing recently that made her feel optimistic regarding the district and race relations was that she experienced someone being racist to her, shared it with the school, and there was a very quick response.
- This district has a lot of promise; people are invested.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED*

- Every seat should be a quality seat. District should come up with a standard that measure and calibrates balance and fairness.
- HSAs should band together to do District fundraising rather than across schools.
- Perhaps need more schools to ensure equity among schools.

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#### THEME 3 - DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Township started becoming more and more diverse; diversity not really 'a thing' for students; feel like it's adults that need to be educated more and get over it.

- All agree that the problem is the adults; all about how you raise your child.
- A lot of people need to understand this word diversity – means we are all together in an area, come from different cultures and backgrounds, harmony living as humans.
- True diversity comes with understanding and working together so that the cultures understand one another.
- Parents even tell students not to deal with certain students; environment that they come out of and come into where they have to make choices on their own to be a human being.
- UD needs to promote education of these cultures in a meaningful way.
- School can start from kindergarten on up: Teaching salad bowl idea and not melting pot idea – show beautiful, unique, cultures living in harmony.
- Even with small children, when kids have been exposed to trauma, their ability to tolerate difference is reduced.
- Children are more open to the idea than the adults.
- Reflecting – Did I ever even have any black teachers? Do we have the pool to pull from? One parent agrees and has talked to McGarry about it and gotten push back; had 5 black male teachers and remembers them and impact because could identify with them.
- Part of problem – no sense of pride – when child looks around, they look for things they can identify with.
- District should put out incentives to draw that type of talent.
  - Example knew a teacher who tried to apply to UD and he never even got a call-back and instead works in Philadelphia.
- Politics play in this, too; politics of Delco has plagued our children immensely; people past and present on school board that plays politics with our children – speaks to structure. All superintendents serve at whims of school board.
- Curriculum changing – for POC, indigenous – schools districts won't say merry Christmas but will keep doing Columbus Day curricula – will say it's just words, continue to appropriate my culture – don't understand that words are traumatizing, are triggers.
- No response to generational trauma that is within your DNA – perpetuating trauma to not fix these things.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- All agree that the problem is the adults; all about how you raise your child.
- Adults need to be educated on different cultures, anti-racism, empathy etc.
- A lot of people need to understand this word diversity – means we are all together in an area, come from different cultures and backgrounds, harmony living as humans
- Promotion of salad bowl metaphor vs melting pot
- Need to teach history differently.
- Don't let politics play a role in all this – has impacted immensely.
- District should put out incentives to draw in talented teachers who are POC>

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#### THEME 4 - CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- One parent: You need to get into the community; your safe haven is behind administrative walls – You do not know what's going on with your students.
- Nonprofits, partnerships can come in – that have already developed relationships with community and can assist the schools – need to learn to trust external extensions of themselves, parents, etc. – and realize they don't know everything – don't understand the environment that some of these kids come from.
- Barriers put up that have separated.
- Need to teach history differently / correctly – kids are not getting true history – what they're being taught should change as its not representing a diverse community.
- People need to get over themselves and start engaging with each other ; school board needs to model that, diversity of teachers needs to reflect that – more exposure to different races / diversity.
- Administration needs to be out in the district and engaging and hearing; but at same time, it is a huge district and it's a lot to run and it's under-resourced.
- District should ask for help – ask for parent volunteers – some of us parents are sick of the 'same old shit.'

- Can't be the same anymore – kids are dying in the streets.
- School needs to be more inviting.
- Black parent didn't feel welcome – been giving feedback time and time again – feels like he is being ignored / rebuffed often.
- Trauma-informed, understanding actual perspectives of cultures, two way change needs to happen.

### GROUP 3

#### MODERATOR: CASSANDRA GEORGES

There were six women in the group: five participants and one observer. It was a nice blend of people of different backgrounds at different stages in life– including parents of district students, staff and a retired teacher. We had a productive conversation from start to finish. Participants were listening to one another and building on each other's comments. There seemed to be a sense of hope and enthusiasm about what would happen in the district. It was a pleasure to work with this group.

The discussion was very lively and informative. People were open, creative, and honest about sharing ideas and experiences. The group was able to work through all the topics, although the final topics had fewer comments due to the time.

#### THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

##### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Be willing to look and dig past “bad” behavior since there is always a root/an underlying reason for it. Remember that we are all human and can all have bad days.
- Understand that every parent wants the teacher to see the good in their kid. It is a challenge when the only communication between teacher and parent is when something is wrong. It sets a bad tone.
- Relieve some pressure of purely academic testing. Avoid setting unreasonable expectations.

- Promote two-way communication. It would be helpful for parents to alert the teacher when something happens at home that could influence the student's behavior/mood.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Get more bodies in the building. Increase number of counselors and staff.
- Carve out time for teachers to address the social and emotional needs of students.
- Read the book *Lost at School*.
- Focus on quality communication: You listen to me and I listen to you.
- Become knowledgeable about different cultural norms.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Start with the assumption that parents want to be active. Figure out the barriers to family involvement. Is there a lack of confidence in volunteering because the parent does not feel prepared? Feel too busy? Feel too worried about providing dinner for children after work? School could host a pizza party for parents meeting so kids get food while parents participate.
- Remember that every little bit helps. If more people helped, it would make a difference (avoid burnout of same small group doing all the work all the time.)

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Address why gaps exist not just across districts, but also within the district.
- Pool resources. For example, the District could save money by buying in bulk for the spirit sale if the Home and School Associations for all the middle schools were combined.
- Distribute a list of creative ways to be involved that can be handed to parents. There should be options at various price points/ levels of involvement. It should not matter how much money a household has or how many minutes a parent can spare. Respect that people have different ability levels/talents. Make it easy for parents. It could be a mini task list for a fundraiser, such as bringing something to school when you drop kids off. A parent should be able to say, I can't do X, but I can do Y.

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### THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Noted evolution of diversity. At one time, diversity was about moving from all teachers being women to having men as teachers. Now it's about moving from having all White teachers to having people of color as teachers and leaders within the administration.
- Analyze consequences of high staff turnover at Beverly Hills. Kids know that teachers are not going to stay, so less reason to change behavior.
- Recognize the impact of representation/kids seeing people that look like them as teachers/, leaders, etc.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Think outside the box for hiring AND be prepared to pay for talent.

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### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Use local library as model: Library is a hub where friends can come together for events. School could host events, not just those related to school/education, so that people could get know each other.
- Collaborating with local entities: District already has financial constraints. Partner with local businesses and entities like the new community center to save/find money. Connect with businesses that provide grants. Use connections to link students with career opportunities at local businesses.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Pool resources.
- Assign person(s) to be responsible for building these connections and finding money. Consider interns and grad students from local universities.
- Build on already existing/already great programs, like the summer theater program.



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## PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES OR CONNECTIONS

- Communication was mentioned throughout the discussion. The group talked about strengthening the connection between parents and staffers so that communication is not limited to negativity/times when there is a problem. The group stressed the importance of having one-on-one time for teachers and students. People want to feel seen and heard.
- This theme was tied to engagement. The group talked about ways for parents and staff to interact and spend time together to develop lasting connections. The group wanted more social events and forums to appreciate the culturally rich community.
- The group noted the importance of engaging and recruiting parents of younger students as the next leaders, so that successful initiatives could continue and not be reliant on the same few people.
- The group talked about reallocating time and resources in school. Participants explored creative ways to maximize time and resources:
  - How parents could support school efforts even when busy (parents contributing items of any size while taking kids); &
  - How teachers could get time to provide students with emotional support or help to tackle issues that are not strictly academic (while dealing with pressure for academic results).

### GROUP 4

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#### MODERATOR: ELLEN GREENBERG

Thoughtful conversation. Heard from most of the group although there were a few people who said upfront that they were there to listen and learn. Encouraged them to share their perspectives and experiences.

The pace of the discussion was “slow and steady wins the race.” The group was engaged and interested, but they seemed somewhat reserved. They appreciated the process and hope for continued opportunities to engage.

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#### THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

1st story - The first person who responded said that hearing the story was “like a lightning bolt.” Her child had the same experience. There was talk of getting her committed, but she had a first grade teacher and a principal who worked with her and her daughter to identify the underlying issue. They addressed the problem, not the behavior and once they addressed the problem, the behavior changed.

Scenarios - bullying starts with the bully being bullied. A lot of times they don’t see that backdrop. They pinpoint the person bullying without really exploring why the person is bullying.

One of the participants who’s a teacher in Philadelphia said that she doesn’t know if they have the same program in Upper Darby but in Philadelphia they’re working towards creating an anti-bias curriculum. She said that a lot of times bullying comes from difference, so focus is on teaching students to be more tolerant and accepting of differences. They’re teaching that differences are OK.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Social emotional learning - spending time everyday talking about it with our children
  - How you interact and be accepting of differences
- Encourage children and staff to share their stories (we have a lot more in common than what separates us)
  - Help kids feel less alone which will lessen the bullying
- More minority teachers in Upper Darby
  - Children will be more open to faculty and staff who are like them
- Share questions/process that are being asked when incidents happen
- Create a policy or practice of restorative justice - talking things out/using conflict resolution
- Staff - use an equity lens and mindset - make sure that we try our hardest to understand where our kids are coming from
- Create an atmosphere of non-judgment
- Pay attention to everyone involved, not just the person who got caught

- Have a restorative practice approach - if something happens, we'll use conflict resolution and talk things out.
- Utilize an equity lens.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Questions around why there is a financial imbalance between schools:
  - One participant said that she doesn't have a good grasp of what goes on - where is there an imbalance? She assumes that the resources should be the same.
  - Feel like the school district is playing pick and choose related to who it's choosing to fund. We put our trust in the teacher's hands. All schools should be funded the same. They shouldn't be unfair. If someone can't afford to go to a trip, they should talk to teachers or staff to figure out a way for the child to go on the trip. Shouldn't be picking or choosing who they want to support
  - General question about how schools are funded.
  - Funding - have that question too. Long term Upper Darby resident, school tax is the highest tax that we have to pay - where does it go if not to funding schools equally
- Regarding the story about kids getting detentions for wearing hoodies when it was cold:
  - Why would children get detentions for trying to stay warm? Should have had the detentions revoked.
  - Exceptions should have been made for the children. If it's that cold and the problem with the heaters was so serious, why would they have even been in class? Shouldn't have been punished because of that.
  - The heating thing happened at one of the participant's daughter's schools. The teacher told her that her daughter couldn't wear a hoodie. Her issue was that she had to come up with a solution with the school which was that her daughter wouldn't wear a hoodie anymore but would wear a sweater.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Have someone in leadership bring everyone together (parents, teachers and principals) to determine the main issues in schools and fix/address them (like being bullied)
- Go to the city to fund schools more equitably
- Come together with the schools and the community to lobby the state (funding is not fair funding in the state of PA - it's different by zip code). Need to start with the state level
  - Advocate as a community so that children are safe
  - Has to be the whole community - a louder voice
  - We have the numbers to support and warrant more conversations
- Empower teachers and administration to break the rules when appropriate - teacher should have been empowered to not give the kids a detention for wearing hoodies
- Financial assistance where needed (things like trips)
- Do an in depth look at the facilities in the school district - figure out what needs to be fixed so we can lobby to get things fixed.
- Look for the root of the problem.
- Leverage these things as learning opportunities and provide hands-on experiences that will help them as they step into the workforce.

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### **THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE**

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Diversity as a challenge - One participant shared about a challenge she's having - She's looking for a house and it feels like no one wants to help her and her husband (her husband is black and she's Asian). She also talked about how her son is bi-racial and doesn't know how to talk about it. She has talked to his teacher about it and what she's experiencing. She said it feels like they're not being helped because they're not white.

- Diversity as an asset - One of the participants (Black woman) talked about how coming to UDSC is better for her children - she said they've all gone through primarily black schools. This is their first experience with kids other than black. Diversity is better here. In DC they didn't see many Muslim students. She thinks this may have been the best choice. This has been the best thing for them. Her youngest child is fair skinned and for the longest time she thought she was white. The school system here works with them. She's let the schools know that she's a concerned parent. Her daughter's teacher explained that black people come in all shades and she's not white.
- Another participant also said that she likes the diversity of the schools around here.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Ask questions to understand who the child is/where they come from to learn
  - create an environment where people can ask questions and share who they are
- More diversity within the faculty and administration
- Share information with the community/parents to inform them about the conversations that are being had - pass this along to the children (depending on age and level)
  - I want children and teachers and staff to learn how to have more conversations about diversity so they can learn about each other
- Each class should have one day where they should have students explain/share their culture. do a project about their background
  - Partner them up so you can work with a partner to create the project
  - Report out on each other and share what they are learning about each other - encourage people to have the conversation and share what they're learning
- Push us to say - not just one project or event. This needs to be our everyday culture. Having these conversations everyday - differences, where we come from, etc.
- Have more forums like this
- Create safe spaces, training teachers, involving the community and allow it to be an open space to share and feel free - children become knowledgeable about each other

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#### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

##### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Thought about the community arts center and how it involves the community and has become a flagship initiative. Providing breakfast and lunch for everyone makes sure that needs are being met - can still get better
- Outlet for a way to help - can find ways to pinpoint particular volunteers from the community - how we can prepare kids for the corporate world
- One participant talked about things the school district is doing - giving space like tonight and other events where parents are invited to come together and share thoughts - seeing it like a community school where parents can come for resources that aren't always related to school purposes - maybe things that are going on in their personal life (nurse for instance) the community knows it's a resource. Linking community members with students to prepare them for college or career readiness.
- Like the idea above and bringing in different health fairs would be beneficial.

##### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Put a call out for volunteers from parents and the community to offer career and college preparation
- Health Fairs
- Offering other resources non-school related (health, real estate, etc.)
- Students: Schools are focused on their own components - is there a way to have the two middle schools come together or the elementary schools come together so the kids feel like they're all part of the larger community (since they'll all be in high school together - no separation between the schools)
- Offer more challenges academically - all have the same education levels within each grade - so every child is learning the same thing in the same grade.

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## PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES OR CONNECTIONS

- Having a more diverse faculty and staff
- Creating an environment where having conversations about diversity and using an equity lens becomes the norm
- Treating kids as individuals and investing the time into learning, understanding and sharing what they're learning with students, parents, faculty and staff
- Meeting kids and families where they are and seeking to understand

### GROUP 5

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#### MODERATOR: GERMAINE INGRAM

This was a spirited, and generally optimistic conversation. Five (5) of the seven (7) participants were educators (current or past), so there was a lot of discussion of dynamics within schools, especially as it relates to racial/ethnic diversity. The participants, especially the teachers in the group, were not reticent to identify the problems, but expressed varying degrees of optimism about change happening. There was a high degree of engagement: They built on one another's comments, and asked questions of one another. They were full of recommendations for how to make things better.

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## THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

The story prompts became wallpaper in this discussion. There was little discussion of bullying, per se, as distinguished from discipline. There was a mention of adults who engage in bullying

behavior, but that comment was not elaborated on. To the extent that there was commentary on the story prompts, it was how inexplicable and inexcusable story #3 was.

Discussion of discipline went almost immediately to the racial composition of school staff. This was true of both white and Black participants. A white parent/teacher said that it's hard to implement a restorative justice model if there aren't supporting relationships. She said that it's intimidating for kids to be disciplined all the time by people who don't look like them. A Black participant said that sometimes Black kids need to be disciplined by other Black people----kids can hear the message better because of a sense that the teacher understands them. Another participant added that parents need to see school staff who look like them in order to feel a sense of connection to the school, and to feel that there is possibly some understanding of their culture and circumstances.

There were strong opinions about what the UDSD needs to do to increase diversity of school staff. One person (W/M) said that talk of money as a hindrance is just a cop-out. He said that the district "should be able to do better." There was criticism of the district by the Black teachers in the group about the "hoops" you have to jump through to get a job in the district, and the resistance to paying more to get Black teachers who have experience from working in the Philly district. A white teacher in the UD district said that the UDSD should be prepared to pay more to bring about staff diversity that will serve its students. She said that people get offended when you say that a Black teacher can do a better job. She said that from her perspective, she wants the district to invest in the best person to help her reach her students. One person said that there is a stigma attached to Philadelphia teachers, even though they have experience that well exceeds that of teachers in the UD district. She said that not only do Philly teachers have experience teaching diverse populations and working with diverse staff, but they have also been using educational models "since light-years ago" that the UD district is just introducing. Someone said that there is fear within the UD district of the reputation of the PFT.

Black teachers in the group who work in Philly talked about why transferring to UD was not an option for them. They said that they would be required to take a pay cut. One also said: "Why would I teach somewhere where no one looks like me. I can imagine what the kids feel like." Another said, "I'm not going to be a token."

There was no pushback on this line of thinking. If anyone disagreed, they did not express it.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

The strong consensus is that UDSD needs to invest more in attracting more Black and Latinx educators to the teaching ranks and administration. The word "investment" was expressed several times. The proximity of the Philadelphia district, and the fact that there are numbers of



Black teachers who work in Philadelphia and live in Upper Darby was seen as a ripe opportunity for UDSD to diversify its ranks if it has the will.

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## **THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT**

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

There was a consensus view that the inequities are apparent, especially when it comes to facilities. A participant who teaches at Beverly Hills and has a daughter at Drexel Hill said that her daughter recognizes the inequities-----so why can't the adults see them? An AA mother said that she tried to have her diabetic daughter transferred to Drexel Hill because the cold temperatures at Highland Park were a danger to her daughter's health. She said that she could not get a transfer. One AA mother said that she likes her children being at Beverly Hills because of the large Black student population there. But she said that she might be too accepting of the inadequacies of the facility because of aspects of the school environment she appreciates.

The question of priorities came up: Why does the district want to build a new field at Beverly Hills when the boilers are unreliable? There was also a comment that decisions are made on investments in order to appease the people who are paying higher taxes. One participant summed it up: "At the end of the day, there's no equity. How can kids get a fair shot when the facilities are so bad?"

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

In terms of principles, the UDSC needs to pay closer attention to addressing the fact and perception of inequities in the area of facilities. No particular action steps were proposed.

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## **THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE**

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

The discussion around this theme tended to be further elaboration on the conversation that emerged about the behavior theme. One participant said that one of the principal reasons she moved to UD was for its diversity. But once she got there and took a close look, she said that

she might better have stayed in Philadelphia and kept her kids in the good charter school where they were. She said that she has to go out and buy books to make sure her kids have materials that reflect the histories and accomplishments of diverse communities. Another AA parent said that she could be in Lower Merion but chose to be in UD because she doesn't want to have to explain Blackness to her children. One person said that due to residential segregation, there isn't real diversity in school populations until you get to high school. Another person said that when it comes to ESL students, you can pretty much guess from what their home language is which school they attend.

The conversation came back to the lack of diversity in school faculties. One participant said that her son had to wait until 6th grade to have a Black teacher. Another participant related the experience of a friend who taught in UDSD but left after encountering what she took as racial hostility from her white colleagues---comments about her hair "Is that real?", and shady comments about the fact that she dressed up to come to work while most of her colleagues dressed very casually. There was at least one occasion where a derogatory name was used. One person said that the district needs to invest in more teachers of color "at any cost". She said that there are a lot of political appointments of white teachers. She recommends recruiting from Philly---both teachers of color and white teachers, who are "seasoned" in teaching Black kids and other non-white students.

They talked about the need to do more to build relationships with the spectrum of families who live in the district. Too often, the encounters between parents and their children's school are felt as negative and building stronger relationships can mediate encounters that are difficult. The UDSD might take a page from Philly by including ethnic holidays on the district calendar. Someone suggested holding bar-b-ques and other such events to bring a diverse array of families out. A district teacher suggested tapping more into the cultural traditions of different communities as a way of celebrating diversity. One W/M participant said that he has trouble discussing the diversity issue with his neighbors.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Invest in diversity of school faculties.
- Get closer to the ground in working to build relationships with diverse communities.
- Invest in Upper Darby parents who want to return to school---employ them in the district; give scholarships contingent on a commitment to return to the district.

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#### *THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?*

### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

We did not have much time to address this theme. One person said that the district is a “peninsula,” a term that seemed to resonate. One person said that in order for the district to be a “hub”, there needs to be more training on what it means to be inclusive. It needs to be “grass-roots work.” Building trust needs to be a central factor. In response to one participant, a district teacher, saying that she is very hopeful, another participant asked her to expand on what she is hopeful about. She talked about the work that is happening in an equity program at Beverly Hills. She said that they are broaching the uncomfortable conversations that have to be the starting place, and that teachers “are evolving.” She also said that she finds advantages in teaching in virtual space---in her ability to focus in on individual kids in ways that are sometimes hard in a classroom.

### ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Invest in building relationships with children and families.

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### PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES OR CONNECTIONS

The two consistent threads in this discussion were:

- The need for the district to make major investments in racially/ethnically diverse school faculties and staff.
- The need to do more to take advantage of the diversity that exists in the district---and not allow “diversity” to be an illusion that does not withstand scrutiny.

### GROUP 6

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#### MODERATOR: SERRANO LEGRAND

There were eight participants as part of this group: six parents, a district volunteer, and a student, as well as an observer. This was a mixed group of participants: White and Black as well as a mix of perspectives, ideas and offerings. Some participants expressed their interest in learning more about the school district (some were new to the region). Others voiced concerns about feeling disconnected and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to connect via zoom. There was one parent who was simultaneously at work while listening in and chiming in when she could. In general, this conversation was very rich and robust. Participants were thoughtful about the responses they shared relating to the excerpts.

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## **THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED**

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Sometimes it takes that one good teacher to figure it out. Re: Story 1: One participant shared that she wished her son would have been the student who had “that teacher.” Unfortunately, her son did not get these teachers; her child was labeled as acting out without enough support from the school, teachers and counselors.
- The SD should provide training and education for teachers working with different cultures; doing whatever it takes to be aware to be more culturally relevant is important
- One parent remarked that It was clear that what was going on with their own experiences (systemic racism); children are innocent and don't recognize the larger systems that are problematic. The ways the SD follows up (emotional and physical interventions) are important for child's development and parents' faith in the SD.
- Teacher and parent should have more open dialogue to learn more about each other and the children.
- One participant shared that her son was suspended unfairly, there were not enough layers of communication and support for her son despite having some emotional issues; would have liked to be more helpful and support.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- There should be multiple meetings in place before a student is suspended; essentially, there should be more “steps to the process”
  - One parent remarked that picking her son up from school was essentially a day off for him
  - Parents' voices need to be heard when it comes to consequences and punishments for their children.
- Communication between parent and child is important as well as the ways parents provide consistent consequences at home .

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- One participant works to provide funds so that students can go on trips and was curious about whether teachers applied to the grant funding? And did they know?
- Hoodies example seems to be extreme and too harsh particularly because school is not providing a warm space.
- One participant remarked that there is a need to know the full story about what was happening with the students being handcuffed example but there needed to be more sensitivity to student and family connections.
- One participant mentioned that some schools need more resources and encouraged the SD to continue to do what they have been recently doing in terms of resources.
- One participant spoke about the need for athletic fields to be improved and does not compare to other school districts.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- School District should keep connections to families and parents who may know and be connected to other resources.
- Better leverage using involved parents to reach other parents with message about lobbying to increase resources.

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## THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- One participant remarked: it is unfortunate that there are still people who will sell to only one race (the only color that should matter is green).

- The UDSD Community is diverse, and the teaching approach cannot be a one size fits all model.
- Teachers are stressed and overworked, how is the school district thinking about better supporting them?
- There is a whole lot of diversity in the SD but there are opportunities to do even more.
- There is a genius and knowledge that the SD's younger children have from their diversity that needs to be better excavated and leveraged.
  - For example, a student speaks multiple languages but has to take one English exam.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- The SD needs more curriculum that is more culturally relevant and diverse.
- There is a need to better understand student cultures and backgrounds (for teachers and administrators).
- Teachers are not diverse enough, stressed out and overworked across overcrowded classrooms.
- The SD needs to prioritize and ask the families first-hand what they would like to see, focusing on different cultures, getting feedback from families.
  - For example, asking them how do they think UDSD acknowledges their culture? How do they think the SD could better learn and leverage their cultural expertise? genius?

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#### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- One participant remarked that they have seen improvement with the SD's communication; website is clearer and more accessible than before.
- One participant mentioned that this is a good start (community forums) ; keep them coming because they provide opportunities for parents to engage who would otherwise need to be working.

- The SD needs to provide opportunities for different pathways for students to be successful.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- The SD should continue to incentivize students (e.g., pizza parties) to attend events and encourage their families to attend
- The SD needs to continue to listen to parents and prioritize them

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#### **PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES OR CONNECTIONS**

There was consensus that the school district needed to do a better job at engaging parents and community, though some participants mentioned that the SD was on the right track, especially the zoom format and the current community conversation model.

#### **GROUP 7**

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#### **MODERATOR: KIMBERLY LEICHTNER**

This group consisted of five women: 3 Caucasians, 1 Indian and 1 Hispanic. Four participants were parents of students in the district and one was a guidance counselor at the high school. Two parents were graduates of UDSD. There was one observer. It was a good discussion with some engaged parents and a guidance counselor who had a lot of positive things to say about the district as well as suggestions for improvement.

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#### **THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED**

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

In response to Story 3, the Indian parent was surprised this happened given the recent climate of our nation in regard to Black Lives Matter. She was not proud of it but realized it's the reality.

Another parent was saddened by this story and told a story about two Black males she worked with at BH Middle School who had been accused of something, but when she showed up with

them, “I believe my White privilege got them out of the discipline they were supposed to have. At that time, it felt like an isolated incident, but I believe it’s larger than that.

She continued: “The minority population, especially the Black population, seems like they are targeted or accused more readily than others. One thing that I would appreciate is having more eyes on the situation, having more adults involved who are able to speak to certain things is helpful. I don’t know that it’s *the* answer but it’s not okay if students are being targeted because of their skin color or if there are assumptions being made of their behavior.”

She shared a personal experience she had when she was at UDHS (Class of 2004). She was wrongly accused of something and both the lead principal and her grade principal called her and her parents to make a formal apology for the mistake they made. Her grade principal even came to her house to apologize in front of her family: “I think that was a very humbling experience for those principals involved but for me as a student, it showed me the reality that as adults we can even be wrong. There are ways for us to correct some of our wrongs and to have teachable lessons for students. In the immediate, for adults to be able to acknowledge when they maybe are wrong will go a long way and teach life lessons to all of our students. As traumatic as the incident was, the apology stands out much more and had a lasting impact on me.”

The guidance counselor said story 1 was valuable because it shows that all it takes is just one caring adult for students to connect with to make positive traction and move forward. Story 2 is a cultural lens that shows a parent feeling frustrated on behalf of their student who was being victimized. Story 3 was a situation she could see happen having been in a lockdown at the high school herself where everything is elevated and there is a much lower tolerance for questions or students navigating the system: “I don’t know why handcuffs were involved, but if we were still in an active lockdown, there just isn’t time to have discussions. If perhaps there is an active shooter on campus or an imminent danger and if there was a discussion and noncompliance, I could kind of see how this might evolve. Although I completely agree that handcuffs weren’t necessary.”

She went on to state that the critical part of the story is the assumption that the parent/guardian didn’t witness this incident but was something shared with them so she would like to know more.

Another parent stated that to her all these stories have to do with staff knowing the students. In the third story, the assistant principal let the kids down, but she also wonders how well the assistant principal knew the students because “to know a student helps the staff tremendously.” In story 1, that teacher obviously knew the student. In story 2, it would’ve helped if the staff knew that family or their background. “But it comes down to there’s just too



many students with discipline and bullying and fighting in school. There are just too many students for the staff to get to know them personally. I really think it would help a lot of these situations to really get to know each student.”

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Restorative justice circle where involved parties have the opportunity to talk and to listen and students have the opportunity to present their viewpoints. There are group norms, group sits in a circle facing each other, and there are questions to loosen the conversation and then to address the challenges at hand.
- Communication – listen and be willing to see other person’s point of view, why are they behaving a certain way
- Respect – teachers need to respect students and students need to respect teachers and staff. Also let parents know they matter and have a voice.
- Add more clubs or organized activities for students to get to know each other and for teachers/staff/parent volunteers to get to know students to help with communication. Parents were in consensus that there were very few clubs offered to elementary school students in the district and “what parent wouldn’t want more clubs?”
- There’s a huge need to slow down and process discipline and bullying. The fast pace of how discipline is doled out doesn’t allow for “processing time” – there’s an incident, emotions are high, a report gets written up, students get disciplined (maybe too quickly), maybe cops are called. When an incident occurs, is there a way to create a space for everyone involved to have some time to process it, bring emotions down, bring more stakeholders to the table, review how decisions were made and focus on problem solving vs consequences?

One action step that generated some controversy was the proposal of having volunteer parents in a mentor role. One parent suggested, “Since there are only so many guidance counselors or support staff available, is there a way to collaborate with community members to support the school, to add people without adding funds?” She described an experience in the Boston-area public schools where they partnered with local pastors and people like that... “there are probably a number of community members here who would be willing to volunteer at school to support students, observe and listen to them”

- This generated a strong response from one parent who said wouldn’t having extra adults in the building “just confuse the child? If there are too many hands in the pot and it boils, who’s to blame? I wouldn’t want too many outsiders, even if they had good intentions, coming into the school and interacting with my kids.”
- Another parent raised the concern that some schools might get a lot of parent volunteers while others get no parent volunteers.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

A parent alum said these stories reflect the truth – when she was at Drexel Hill Middle School, there was always a preference to attend DH over BH because it had more money and smaller class sizes: “One of the reasons we moved away from Bywood were due to the disparities we noted even among the elementary schools.”

Resources imbalances need to be addressed from a district-wide perspective, she said. For example, a few years ago her neighbor invited them to the Bywood Elementary winter concert. She was one of 3 people in attendance because it was during the morning where other working parents couldn’t attend. “As a community member, I would happily attend every winter concert in our district if I knew who needed people to attend because those are things that allow kids to have pride in what they’re doing. Whether it’s engaging in sporting events or putting on a concert... after that, the church I worked for collected school supplies for kids at Bywood Elementary School every year. This year we collected 40 backpacks full of school supplies. That’s just one community connection and I think there are more available to us that would help. I just can’t imagine there aren’t businesses that would love to pay for the kids at BH to go to Camp Speers. I think it’s an invaluable experience and these kinds of things can’t just sit on the shoulders of school administration, but I don’t know how to create these kinds of community connections or even volunteer myself for these roles. There must be national resources as well they can tap into.”

Another parent discussed the disparities in schools from attending sporting events at Bywood – their bathrooms were falling apart (falling tiles, broken sinks) and she couldn’t believe it because if it happened at Hillcrest, it would’ve been addressed and she didn’t understand why it wasn’t being addressed at Bywood. “It comes down to the district being on top of all the schools and having the money to do that and I know we don’t necessarily have it. There’s a major difference between all the schools.”

She also discussed how other schools have new sports uniforms and nicer fields while UD doesn’t and it’s embarrassing for the kids. Before COVID hit, a small group of DH parents was fundraising to get new uniforms. “We all have to work together to help all the schools in the community.”

A parent who grew up in UD said, “it’s the money. Everything is about money. I wish I had money to give but then we’re struggling parents because we live in UD. If we had the money, we wouldn’t just fork it out to the district, we would move out of the district. Who would want to stay in the Bywood area? Am I wrong? I grew up here and my kids go here... it’s money and we don’t have it.”

The guidance counselor talked about how funding of public schools in PA is inequitable and pasted a link to group about a lawsuit currently in works that will hopefully effect changes:

<https://www.pubintlaw.org/cases-and-projects/school-funding-lawsuit/>

In response to the above comment, the observer wanted to interject that he actually chooses to live in UD because he wants to, not because he has to and that may be the reality for others, too.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Pool money/resources from different schools into a central pot and disseminate equally so all students in district can get new uniforms or scholarship opportunities are created to fund students who can’t afford the Camp Speers trip.
- Prioritize resources to address higher-need issues (i.e. food insecurity, school safety, physical plant improvements) over desirable things (i.e. new sports jerseys).
- Petition state and federal governments for more funding for district.

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### THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

The guidance counselor said that high schoolers can speak to the quote referencing the cultural fluency of youth because pre-COVID, “The priceless interaction they had with one another with so many different languages being spoken and so many different cultural lenses and how to navigate that system gave them a skillset that a student who is at a predominantly white institution doesn’t have. That skill is that global society skill and it’s an invaluable asset at UDHS.”

Another parent said she also loved the diversity at UDSD. She loves what she sees coming out of the high school – all the different groups and clubs – because it gets them ready for the real world. The diversity is a positive point of being at UD, but she also sees the reality of those who

don't want to sell their homes to non-Whites, which "makes no sense." She also felt that the school district was moving in the right direction in creating diversity among the teaching staff, especially at Hillcrest. "The programs that Mr. McEaddy has put out there for Black History Month has been fantastic and I love what he's bringing to the table at Hillcrest."

The UDHS alum echoed the parent above about the diversity at UD being an asset. Her daughter, who's Asian, is only in kindergarten but she had the opportunity to be part of a Black History Month video where they had a film crew come in:

"The excitement and enthusiasm the district is cultivating around cultural diversity is impressive. I, as a parent, have been encouraged just even by their social media presence – they've been identifying different kids on their social media and that's a positive reinforcement of the good things that are happening in our community. I think unfortunately so many of the negative pieces, like lockdowns and violence, make it to the news so that becomes the narrative that even people on the outside look at and see. It would be great if we could capitalize even more on our community pride. I'm proud to have graduated from UDHS and it actually means something when you get a job because you have that cultural language that other kids don't have and that has gotten me so far in my own job and it's not something you can create and that is something that's unique to UD in this area. I think there is a lot we can do to further that and we have to help kids, even as young as K, to be proud of that and to know that's special about them, about us and about their experience. My daughter really struggles that she looks different from me but when she started school, she said there are kids that look like her. I as a parent can't even create that ... that's something that the district has gifted to my own kid. If we can continue to shout from the rooftops the things that are happening here, I think it would help our kids take pride. Like others tonight said, we might not be able to afford something different or we might choose to be here, but if we can help our kids see the value in their existence here, I think it would go really far."

The Hispanic participant said she has a hard time with her daughter speaking a different language (Spanish) from her classmates and her asking questions about why her classmates all look so different, but it's good to grow up in a global society. The school is supportive of her daughter and she's in an ELL class where she can share her culture and language with other students. One thing the school could do to be more supportive of her family when kids are back in school is to have afterschool programs to help with homework and help her socialize with other students.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Create more afterschool programs where students can have more interaction with other students and build relationships
- Mentor Family: match families from different cultures to build personal relationships. The UDHS alum shared that this happens at Rose Tree Media School district in one of their

elementary schools. When a new family comes to their school, they're paired up with another family who's been there longer to answer questions and show them the ropes: "Can we use a model like that but for the purpose of diversity? We can expose our children and families to others of a different culture – what would it look like for my family to be matched with an Indian family and for us to share our cultures? That might create a more intentional relationship where families can get to know each other better – this can be an optional program where families opt to build more fun personal relationships. This cultivating of relationships is what helps kids respect other cultures instead of seeing others as 'them,' see them as their friends."

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#### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

##### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

The UDHS alum said that it seems possible for UDSD to be the hub if they could first address safety issues in the school buildings and classroom. She would hate to see resources being diverted for the purposes of UDSD being a community hub: "Safety and education need to be our primary priorities." She has seen collaborative relationships like police partnerships with local classrooms and that's a positive influence in terms of creating a community hub. It's "possible but not practical yet."

She also commented that given so many different cultural backgrounds in the district, she's not sure if everyone has a good understanding of how to navigate our school system – what even is a home and school association meeting?: "I consider myself an involved parent who knows the American school system but I don't even know what happens at those meetings. When I lived in Bywood area, a lot of my neighbors didn't even understand when their kids got a report card and would ask me to help them read it. We need to explain what's happening and invite people in. I actually think UD Rising was really well-communicated. I understood what I was being asked to come to tonight and it wasn't until I got the third email that I finally responded. I speak English, I'm from here, I have pride in UD... I don't know that that's the case with everyone. We have to take into account the cultural differences that exist. We've seen it in the narratives that were presented tonight. Just being more clear in our invitation to things might be more helpful."

The guidance counselor said it's also possible but "there are a lot of financial challenges." One thing the school district can do is to reach out to the community and ask what times work for them to attend activities and events for their kid and maybe offer an event multiple times

during a day so more people can attend and aren't precluded from attending because of work schedules. They can also use technology to their advantage and maybe livestream or record events so those who aren't able to make it in person can still participate. Also the school district can ask the community what events would be valuable to them, something that maybe the school hasn't traditionally done but new traditions can be created that gets more parental buy-in.

The Hillcrest parent said that she's at a loss of how to get more parental buy-in. She doesn't know what it takes to get parents to meetings: "Do we need to do more social media? Do we need to communicate better what the meetings are about? But more parents need to get involved and support our school. They need to go to the home and school meetings and to school board meetings to learn and see how they can help, how the school district works. I don't think people understand how big and high up it goes to get support and money for our kids' education."

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- UDSD as a hub is possible but not practical – focus on safety and education first.
- Continue to build collaborative relationships with community and engage those who are already engaged.
- Invite families in through clearer communication about different initiatives, meetings, etc. Demonstrate to the community what different meetings are about to draw people in just like how UD Rising did in the videos. Communicate clearly with families what meetings are about and why they're important – for example, this is going to be a listening meeting, or this is going to be a meeting where we're looking for community engagement. Maybe not pressure families to attend all the meetings but ask families to commit to attending one or two meetings.
- Make the website clearer. The UD Rising website on the district website was pretty clear. Don't make assumptions that people know what different things are, like home school association. Communicate clearly and everything should be translated for all the major languages rather than put translation responsibility on teachers' shoulders.
- Parent liaisons identified and vetted by the school who can welcome/invite new families in to help navigate the school system, someone who can help answer questions and help build relationships

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#### *PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES OR CONNECTIONS*

- Clear communication and translate information into languages families can understand.

- Build relationships and connections with families – for example, a principal gave A parent her cell phone number and invited her to contact her if she needed anything: “It created a level of comfort and connection as a parent that has carried me through this year as a new parent in the district.”

## GROUP 8

### MODERATOR: CAROL LYDON

There were six participants (5 women, 1 man) and 1 central office administrator observer. One woman was originally from the area, while another was from Liberia and has lived in Upper Darby for 16 years. Three people did not participate in the introductions, other than to give their name in the chat. Nor did they turn on their cameras.

- There was very little discussion, despite my efforts to engage them. The gentleman left the group during the first part of the discussion (on discipline). One woman was at work, so engaged very little.
- One of the people who I could not see wrote long comments in the chat section to which others did not respond. She is the mother of four children in Upper Darby schools. I asked her to join the conversation, but she continued to put all her comments in the chat.
- Of the two people who did speak, one said she just came to listen and the other one stated that she came to hear what "we" had to say. Generally, one woman did most of the talking. The general gist was that they wanted the district to get parents more involved. I explained that the district was conducting these forums in order to get ideas for the district and that any action steps they offered would be passed along to the district. However, I was unable to get them to give me any concrete actions or guidelines to pass along.

### THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

#### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

There is a real need to make people feel comfortable in coming to the school.

Comment from chat:

*For the first story, I believe that it is natural for parents to be biased towards their own children and without proper communication can have a misconception towards the true nature of their children. In*

*this case, the parents are not spending enough time with the children so the parents don't truly get to know their children. However, in some cases, it could just be the circumstances. On the other end of the spectrum, it may be that the children is the victim, in which case, what steps should the parent take next? Would it be considered a minor problem to brush over? On the administrative end, while it would be nice for the teacher to pay attention to every child, it is just not possible. The teacher may be stretched too thin so it is easy for the child to be overlooked for years and develop a tendency for misbehavior.*

#### **ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:**

- Training for staff in how to approach people.
- Do what Bywood does, because they do it right.

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### **THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT**

#### **MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:**

The two participants who spoke were very upset about the "hoodie" story and wanted to know more about that, whether lawsuits were filed, could they trust sending their children to that school. I tried to explain that we were just using that as an example and tried to steer the conversation back to the issue at hand, but the strong emotions raised by this story dominated this segment.

One woman also said all school trips should be free, which would eliminate disparity.

#### **ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:**

- Make all school activities free.

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### **THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE**

#### **MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:**

- Comment from chat:
  - *I find that the best way for students to bond with the community is community service.*



- *Volunteering not only instills pride and improved self-esteem for students, but also helps the community and allows the community to see that Upper Darby is not as the rumors portray.*
- *Diversity and differences can be overcome when individuals feel a sense of purpose and share a common purpose and that purpose in community service is helping and serving others.*

## GROUP 9

### MODERATOR: KIERSTEN MAILLER

Participants in this group were all nice and agreeable. Not very open with personal stories, but generally thought the district was doing a good job.

This group included seven participants (two of whom were teachers), including three people of color between 20 and 40 years old and three whites between 60 and 80 years old. There was one observer from the school board.

This was generally a quiet group in which an older teacher and the observer shared a majority of the airtime, which I allowed due to the quietness of the group.

### THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

#### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- District observer: The pandemic has made this problem less prevalent. Maybe we're not aware? For discipline, we go by the handbook: children and families know this. We bring in the child, the counselor, the teacher. Discussion and 1-1, and then you need to come to a resolution. Ask everyone: Are we willing to abide by this? It's all written down and the children know what is expected.
- "I was bullied in these schools" and think we need to correct it quickly. too many kids are affected emotionally. Parents may not have time or money, but they need to take action. It took almost a year for my situation to get corrected. Should be taking immediate action. It's not hype, it's real. Having parents and councilors involved takes too long.
- "I'm worried about after school fights; nieces see these fights."

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

Just take action. It just can't continue as it is, due to possibilities of violence.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- Core memories are created when things go wrong and it's so sad when that happens.
- Kids should be kept comfortable. The heat not working is not ok.
- The environment needs to be right for learning: That's the starting point: must work reliably to prepare the mind and the body: if a jacket is not allowed, there should be other options, or rules should temporarily change.
- Things happen occasionally; that there was a bad situation
- That situation (with the heat) was really bad: it's a stain and we have stains. As a public school, we are completely underfunded. Trying to build two new schools, lots of children but the area is growing. Trying to keep up with other local schools and it's been a fight.
- The times I've been in UD, I have been impressed with the professionalism of the teachers. The personnel are extremely important, and experience has been extremely good: very dedicated group.
- School was able to provide a lot virtually, sent a laptop home. Provided a lot of books as well.
- Grateful to the school district--they provide a lot, and other schools (in the world) don't provide this. Kids have access, books, everything is provided. Makes learning easier. Very, very grateful. Son's first teacher was so nice and down to earth, at home we didn't have to do much because the teacher was so good. Thank you to the teacher and the district, thank you (sentiment echoed).
- My daughter's 3rd grade teacher at Bywood is amazing and I would like to thank the school administration for all that they do.
- Kids have been talking through games and online, and a new set of values is being taught through virtual.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

Suggestion: it would be better if they can continue the after school programs, because some students need breaks and extra time. It helps advance kids: could still do this virtually. Some other choice and somewhere to go.

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### THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

It's good for kids to learn about different cultures and languages.

I have an issue because kids aren't taught to write in cursive anymore.

Principal: Cultural diversity among the faculty is important: lots of Spanish-speaking students and only one Spanish teacher: someone who came in to take pictures said it was great to have that one teacher to help. Would like to hire someone, but there's not a lot of diversity in applications. "We don't see color or race but we see souls." We know diversity is a strength. Important to study and know backgrounds because relationships are the most important. Our employees are not very diverse.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Attract more diverse teachers

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### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

#### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

Things have been limited this year, but before pandemic, we were a school where head of police Mr. Chitwood would use common areas for public meetings. Athletic meetings take place there as well.

Theater arts was a big draw for her child's school and for her child. Students will use other schools. Need to grow and collaborate. Food drives have been helpful but would like to see more collaboration with the different entities that have influence. (different schools, leadership, clubs etc.)

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Taking advantage of Upper Darby Performing Arts has been essential. More cross-pollination like this.
- Sports bring people together.

- There is a program called Speak Up: Would love to see continued engagement through what local legislators are doing: building and bringing people together. Acknowledge race and identity in Upper Darby: multi-cultural gatherings: lots of food in the area to take advantage of.

## GROUP 10

MODERATOR: CHRIS SATULLO

This was a diverse and talkative group, with some people overcoming challenges and distractions to remain active participants. One Asian-American father who experienced connectivity issues was unable to use video but contributed a stream of very detailed comments in the chat. A Black woman managed to be a full contributor to the dialogue while making and serving dinner to her family as we watched (salmon cakes, which were judged “delicious.”). The group also had two educators who formerly worked in the school district and had a lot of observations to share. The group really dug in on discipline and resource imbalances, so spent less time on the diversity and civic engagement themes.

## THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED

- Schools are so big with so many children and not enough administrators to help.
- They don’t have the time or the patience to and they may discipline without thinking about it too much.
- Teachers in a system like UDSD have incredibly stressful days and burnout is a risk. A burned out teacher is not going to handle incidents with kids well. We have to make sure teachers are doing self-care and getting support with handling with the emotional parts of the job.
- Looking at the history and data are important. The data on discipline in the past would let you know how black students were being disproportionately punished and would show you whether what you’re doing now with training on implicit bias and restorative practices is working.

- A comment about the first story provided: “ It brings a sadness to me that a child can go so many years without an adult connecting with them. These two children fell through the cracks.
- “When I was at Beverly Hills, I do know the principal asked us teachers what we knew about the kids. We surveyed the kids and put their names and things like their hobbies up on the wall, so they could feel and be known. The principal assigned mentors to students who seemed not to have connected with any teacher. We got training in building relationships, restorative practices, the ACES trauma survey.”
- A former teacher who also attended UDSD schools: “I’m here for my former students. I was definitely bullied in elementary and middle school, but my mom was a very involved parents and my teachers were in my corner, very helpful. I noticed when I went to BH, when I was in class with teachers who knew me, I was welcomed. When it was out in the hallway, I was spoken to differently, with suspicion and no respect. There was implicit bias that I was up to no good in that hallway.”
- The Asian-American parent (father of 4, Bywood) commented: “Would it be possible for children to learn law and ethics? That way, if the parents who cannot teach children how to behave due to circumstances, like working multiple jobs to provide and not having the time, the children will still know between right and wrong so that bullying can be greatly reduced. Despite the activities the school does, I’m not sure those brief moments are enough; a full course is needed throughout the year as a core course like math or reading.”
- The students in handcuffs incident was described as a “travesty.” One educator said: “Zerto tolerance was what was going in education generally in the early 2000s when I came in. But now we should be focusing on restorative practices. School should be cool. I don’t come at it from a place of punishment. We shouldn’t as educators be preparing children for that school to prison pipeline. We have to be aware as educators how we’re coming across to kids; it’s just what we do, it’s the tone. Tone can send things downhill fast. There are some kids, I can just tell I’m not the one who should be talking to them about something that happened. I try to find some other teacher who might have a relationship with the kid who can get across to them.”

## ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES

- All teachers should take an implicit bias test, like the Harvard one, so they can see where they really are on that.
- Gather the data/history of discipline of students in the district, for a benchmark going forward.

- Train faculty in staff regularly in non-violent interventions and de-escalation techniques.
- Make sure emotional support and self-care advice are available to teachers.
- Assign mentors who actually mentor. Train mentors how to mentor both students and colleagues.
- More counselors/more therapists.
- More family engagement” “Survey the community to supplement the feedback you’re getting here – to see what they know about policies and what they don’t know, what their experiences and perceptions are.”
- Guideline: *Zero tolerance has no place; empathy should always be in place.*

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

The provided story about the camping trip led to strong agreement that such disparities in opportunity between two middle schools just should not be allowed to go on. Ideas for how to pursue district-wide fund raising to equalize opportunity were briefly discussed.

The second provided story, on the heating fiasco at Beverly Hills, got the bulk of conversation.

And a key theme was that the perception of Beverly Hills and its students as second-best to Drexel Hill is outmoded and needs to change.

The sentiment was also expressed that perhaps too much energy goes into debating differences among district schools, when the real issue is the overall inequities in school funding regionally and nationally.

### ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES

- Do districtwide fund-raisers to equalize opportunity.
- Get perceptions to catch up with reality: Beverly Hills has been outperforming Drexel Hill lately.
- Need to focus on big picture; outside disparities are way more dire.

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### THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

The focus here in the limited time we had to discuss this theme was on the importance of students being able to have teachers who look like them and/or understand where they are coming from. The group agreed the district needs to be more proactive in recruiting teachers from HBCU's and other diverse districts, making a positive pitch about how UDSD is a place where such teachers can pursue their sense of mission in a rewarding environment.

The caveat here was not to assume a white teacher can't relate to or reach a student of color, nor to assume every Black teacher is going to reach every Black student. Gender and style matter as well.

#### ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES

- The group agreed strongly that the district needs to be strategic and aggressive in recruiting teachers of color from the schools and places that are turning out such educators.
- Part of that was being smart and confident in marketing UDSD as a great place for minority teachers to work, a place which where they can grow and find meaning in their work.

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#### MODERATOR COMMENTS

In that this group had several active participants who have advanced degrees and experience in education, this discussion was marked by an unusual sophistication about and focus on what has to happen around teacher recruitment, training and support to address the discipline and school climate issues, as well as diversity.

#### GROUP 11

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#### MODERATOR: HARRIS SOKOLOFF

Six of the seven district residents participated actively in the conversation, comfortably adding their concerns, questions and ideas, and building on comments made by others. There was general support for the District, even when people thought they could be doing more or better in one area or another. There was also a sense of appreciation for the district in making this opportunity available.

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## THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- When daughter was in kindergarten had similar experience to story #2. Teachers were calling all the time. They'd call me into the school and that would be it. They didn't allow us to talk with other parents to figure it out. Parents should be brought into the conversation because we know our kids, particularly for little kids.
- There's a common thread in all three stories: misunderstandings/lack of fairness about who is victim and who offender. Raises issue re: how school staff look at students as either a victim or an offender. This may be because of the perceptions people bring into schools – and those perceptions can become realities.
- One parent noted: my daughter hasn't been in school that much during the pandemic.
- My granddaughter is doing well, willing to participate and interact with school mates.
- Older son last year saw the same thing, and parents can't talk with each other to address the issues.
- What response/discipline works with one kid will not necessarily work with another.
- Dress, skin tone, hair... -- all can lead us to see one person as victim and another as offender.
  - Each child should have someone to advocate for him/her.
- Told story of daughter not liking, and being liked by, another girl, and the teacher knew that. The class was walking down a flight of steps, and the teacher told the class to hold hands. Her daughter didn't want to; teacher said to do it anyway. Her daughter did as she was told but squeezed a bit hard. Discipline followed. *Then* they called me and told me my daughter "assaulted" another kid. I went in and asked to hear the whole story. The teacher said she knew the two didn't like each other but told them to hold hands anyway,. Whole thing could have been avoided. And they should have found out why the two little girls



didn't like each other. They wouldn't let me talk to the other girl's parents. I called them on my own and we talked it out and then the girls started to get along.

- Should bring kids, teacher and the parents in early – before they discipline the child and before they label the child.
  - Parents know how their children will respond. One child will shut down if you raise your voice, my son will correct behavior if you look sternly. Different ways of disciplining will work with different kids.
- What works for my niece will not work for my daughter. And as a teacher I know that getting parents involved early is very, very helpful.
  - I had a similar situation when my younger son last year. I had to move him out of Highland Park and purposely moved to Drexel Hill to get him away from kid she was having trouble with. I wanted to meet with his parents. There needs to be teachers and parents meeting together. Parents should hold their children accountable when they should be accountable and work with school for discipline that will work with their child.

#### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Involve parents as problem solvers in discipline issues – particularly in deciding how the discipline will be done. We know what will and will not work with them – each child will respond differently.
- Develop a school/district-wide policy that parents will be involved in discipline issues, involved early before punishment is made (so parents are not playing defense). Bring in parents as part of solution.
  - Children should have someone to advocate for them in discipline issues
  - Don't judge kids by the way they look – dress, skin tone, hair style... Know each child for who they are not what they look like.
  - Teachers can anticipate issues and act to avoid it (and if needed bring in the parents before problems)

### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

- FYI: BH is closed today because heat didn't work.
- A participant noted: "I went to Stonehurst in the 80s and the difference between Stonehurst then and Aronimink now is still huge. I'm not familiar with all the elementary schools and I know that schools that serve poorer families, families that struggle, have so little and it's outdated – the books, the materials, the buildings are all outdated. So we moved to Aronimink because we knew that they had better resources and materials."
- It shouldn't matter where you live. All kids should have the same chance. Everyone should have the same resources regardless of where they go to school.
- When my kids were in the K center, some other kids didn't have snack each day. If I'm able to help others, I will. So I'd bring in extra snacks for kids who didn't have their own. As a community, if we tried to help, things could get better.
- UDSD was more prepared for the pandemic than in Philadelphia. Which is why we chose the UDSD. And when we signed our child up for UDSD, it was easy. They got her a laptop and even repaired it quickly.
- This issue really bothers me. The equality issue here across the different school districts are just so glaring.
- District is working on addressing actual and perceived inequities, including that some parents are more able to supplement for their children.
  - While district provides equal books to all schools, parent perceptions are different.
- Is there a way for parents/HSAs to share resources?
- The pandemic worsens it – and many can afford even less now.

### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:*

- Parents could create a crowd source to raise funds for schools/teachers for materials
- IF parents get together and share resources – human and financial – to help each other that might help address inequities between district schools. That could improve things at the

- Empower and engage parents more in the schools (and the district) – strengthen HSAs.

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### THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

#### MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- I think the diversity is wonderful. I spent 20 years in the Navy and was shell-shocked because I had no idea about diversity. To be in this world and succeed you will have to deal with people of other races. Teaches my granddaughter how to deal with people of any race, color, religion, whatever and still be able to function.
- I love how diverse UDSD has become. When I first moved here 20 years ago, my first day in 7<sup>th</sup> grade was not pleasant. I was the only person who looked like me. It's even more diverse now.
  - I wish we have more teachers of different nationalities and cultures and they would benefit from that. I think in Garrettford there's only one African-American teacher.
- More conversations should happen. The second quote ...
  - It needs to be okay for teachers to talk with others. Leave the door open for parents and grandparents to be resources.
  - Told a story of watching her child in virtual classroom. She noticed that teachers did not call on students of color as much as she called on the others. So she sent the teacher an email of what she noticed and the teacher started to call on all students to make it better.
- One of the things I loved about growing up in UD was meeting people who didn't look like me, and that's why we moved back to Upper Darby.
- The diversity in the orchestra, choral groups, etc. is wonderful to see and wonderful that the children work and being together.

#### ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- It should be okay to point out what you see to teachers (story of telling teacher not calling on AA kids as much)
- More conversations are better.

- If you see something, say something,
- Be open to learning about each other.
- We don't have enough AA/Immigrant teachers – so all guest teachers/presenters should represent the diversity in the school. Students need to see modeling of those professionals of what they can become.
- With a common denominator and a goal, diversity can work.

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#### THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

##### *MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:*

Don't think the schools should be held to that. The parents, people in the neighborhood and the churches should be responsible. It's our community and we are the ones responsible for what happens in our community.

The schools are a part of that community. It would be great to have churches and community organization come into agreement with the schools. We should all come together to support the educational atmosphere of the district. It takes everybody and it would be nice if the district worked with other organizations to pull everyone together. It's easier to work and do business with people you like. And it is easier to learn with people you like. Scheduling events where people come together will improve mindset.

I work a lot and I get closer to people in the community when I see people playing, talking/networking, etc. together. The district could work with others to take the lead.

It's a both/and – they shouldn't close their eyes to what the community needs and communal events are powerful.

##### *ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED*

- Partner to bring all together around something to do together – to see and get to know each other. – community-wide events
  - Start planning now for something to bring folks together ASAP, and right after COVID.
- Parental involvement itself would improve communities.

- Events with parents and kids are important for networking.
- School can't do it all –schools should partner with community organizations and churches should be responsible.
- District already has a lot to do – many challenges -- to keep own home in order... so they shouldn't take the lead in helping the community get together.
  - They have a role to play and others have work to do as well.
  - Providing solid education improves the community.

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#### PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS

- Parental involvement and district needs to partner with parents for their children – involve parents in the mission of the district
- We have work to do of all different cultures and how we react. We have to be models for our kids around diversity – understanding and working with each other.
  - Teacher diversity is also important
  - Teacher cultural awareness – of the different cultures in the district – is important so children can feel comfortable in front of any teacher they have
- Cultural awareness to allow each student to feel comfortable with each teacher (and the reverse)
- Parental involvement – a district-wide commitment that should be in each school (e.g., all should have active HSAs)
- Make diversity an asset (not a drawback in any way) – acknowledge the gifts of each culture.
- Make parents feel comfortable, secure, safe and welcome in schools
  - Ask parents what it would take for each of them to be more involved.

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#### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EVENT'S ZOOM CHAT

##### ON WHY PEOPLE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE:

I was interviewed previously and I'm interested in knowing what results have come from the previous meetings. Thank you

I'm interested in engaging in meaningful dialogue with other community members.

I decided to join this forum, because I figured that being a part of conversations for change/improvements is the least I can do. :)

I am here because this is my son's first year of school in Kindergarten Center.

WHAT WORD OR PHRASE FIRST COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR UPPER DARBY SCHOOLS?

Most cited: Diverse, crowded and big

Others: Underfunded, struggling, dramatic, flair, home away from home, old school, considerate, passionate, bustling, committed, good staff, comfort, wonderful place!, culture,

WHAT WAS YOUR KEY TAKEAWAY FROM TONIGHT'S DIALOGUE?

Learning about the area, the intersectionality is important to me as to what is already being done and what is being planned

We need parent liaisons or a parent engagement coordinator

Recruitment of staff from community

Picnics between elementary schools that go to different middle schools

Engage parent volunteers. Put your need out there and ask us for help

Strive for more diversity in faculty & staff

Embrace diversity by communicating early and often

Better student and staff communication

Implicit bias training and tests for faculty and staff

Everyone giving even a little bit goes a long way.

We need to connect our mostly Caucasian teachers to our diverse student body.

Formalized UDSD ELL Department with translation services for families.

Recruiting and retaining diverse staff, and training staff so they can connect with their students,

Exploring ways to take advantage of the beautiful diversity our community has.

Use the community engagement groups that participated in these listening sessions to begin a new culture of engagement and build on that. There are people who want to be involved and help. Is a place to begin turning over control and building trust

More diversity within the staff.

This should be NO place for disparities in resources between schools within the district!

Family partnerships to increase cultural understanding & relationships across cultures

Empathy is a must. Trauma informed teaching is a must. A priority on recruiting a diverse teaching staff is a must and requires innovative approaches.

Having a conversation regarding diversity.

Parents need to be more responsible along with school; they need to spend more quality time with their kids.

Relationships, relationships, relationships

increase student agency and assist students in finding their voice and working to amplify their voice.

Thank you all! I'm really glad that I attended.

