

UPPER DARBY RISING

THIRD COMMUNITY-WIDE FORM

MARCH 1, 2021

OVERVIEW

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

A total of 68 community members participated, along with 15 district observers and the members of the Catalyst Community Conversations (CCC) team. Overall, 151 people registered to take part in the event.

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 nine breakout groups, each led by an experienced moderator provided by CCC. One group of three Spanish speakers had its own session, aided by an interpreter.

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.

Here are links, with moderator names, that will enable you to jump to a particular report in the text:

[GROUP 1 – BRIAN ARMSTEAD](#)

[GROUP 2 – CASSANDRA GEORGES](#)

[GROUP 3 – GERMAINE INGRAM](#)

[GROUP 4 – SERRANO LEGRAND](#)

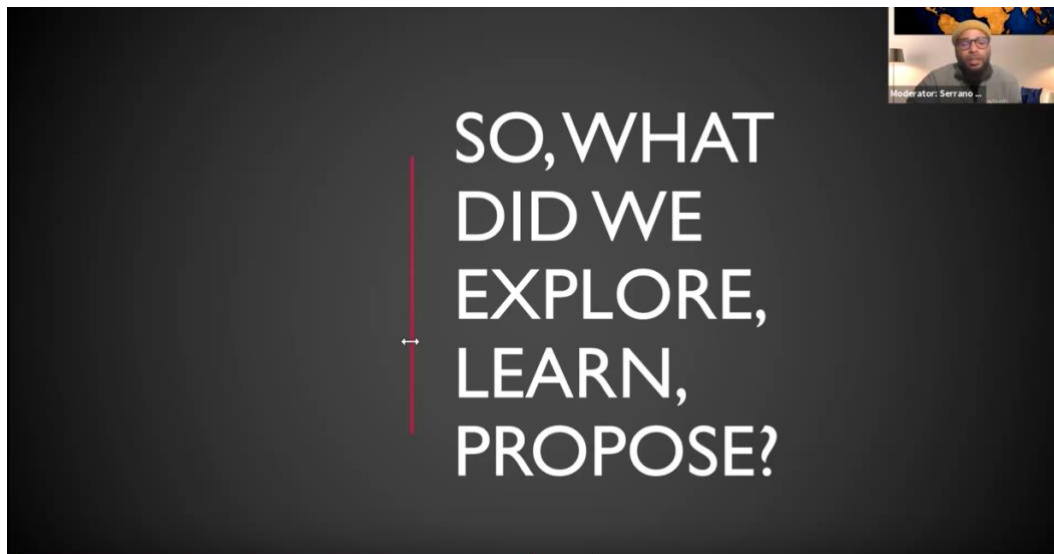
[GROUP 5 – CAROL LYDON](#)

[GROUP 6 – KIERSTEN MAILLER](#)

[GROUP 7 – CHRIS SATULLO](#)

[GROUP 8 – HARRIS SOKOLOFF](#)

[GROUP 9 – JOSH WARNER](#)



GROUP 1

MODERATOR: BRIAN ARMSTEAD

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

An African-American parent shared that her children have had experiences similar to the one in the third story about the two Black kids handcuffed in the hallway during a school lockdown drill. When her kids came to the district from West Philadelphia, several teachers made comments to them insinuating that her kids weren't used to the types of discipline that the UD teachers had in store for them. The mother said that some staff and children have a bias but it's important to manage their bias.

One parent said she is hesitant to just simply take the father's version of what happened in that story, that the father might be seeing things from a different perspective than the Assistant Principal in the story. Depending on the perspective they both could have been right and they both could have been wrong. The participant asked, "Is there a third person that can sit down and listen to both sides?"

One participant who teaches in a different district said, "As an educator it is important to know other cultures."

Bullying was an issue for some participants. One immigrant parent said that some of her children had been bullied and that "differences bring about bullying, at times."

One way to counteract the behavior problems brought on by difference is to help everyone interact with each other, socially.

One parent noted she's seen "a lot of improvements." She said her daughters were on the dance team for homecoming and the parent said she saw at homecoming how everybody was dancing and competing in a fun way. She suggested the district should have more activities where people from different backgrounds dance and have fun, etc.

The group believes the district needs a better understanding of how to welcome differences (both staff and students) and how to use it as a learning tool. They also felt it was important to remind the teachers to stay curious. For one parent, the first story about the successful effort to find the root causes behind the two children's learning and behavioral issues was a prime example of the importance of curiosity. She said it had a happy ending because someone took the time to be curious to help the child; to ask questions instead of making judgments.

One of the immigrant parents thought it was important for teachers to be more understanding and not to make judgments. However, he also reminded the group that teachers don't have much time. They need to be given the time to be able to spend time to talk to the students to find out how things are going and what's going on.

The district should focus asking parents to help with the discipline issue as well. Utilize the HSAs to talk about child development, about diversity and getting to know each other.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Teach staff how to identify and manage their biases.
- Teach the educators about other cultures.
- Have more activities where people from different backgrounds dance, and have fun, etc.
- Remind teachers to maintain their curiosity when they are faced with behavioral and learning issues. They should take the time to be curious to help the child; to ask questions instead of making judgments.
- Utilize the HSAs to talk about child development and also about diversity and getting to know each other.
- Arrange for teachers to have the time to actually speak with their students to find out what is going on with them.
- Develop some third party mediation or listening system when the school and the parent have differing versions of what happened during an incident.
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THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

The participants agreed that other nearby districts probably have more resources but noted that other nearby districts have *fewer* resources. Several said they don't have access to solid information to compare district and also weren't sure about specific things to look for. As one parent said about her elementary school-aged daughter: "At least she has books."

However, one parent specifically said that there is a resource imbalance between Upper Darby and Lower Merion schools: "It makes me sad. Overcrowding has been a problem for a while. I assume it has to do with taxes. Is that true?"

At the parents' request, the observer gave some information about Central Office's view on school underfunding:

- The district is underfunded by over \$16M every year.
- At one point every building used to have 9-10 reading specialists, a math coach and a reading coach

- Also, staff training in diversity and other needed trainings cost money that's hard to find.
- If the district had more money it could supplement some of the things that the HSAs can't provide in some school communities.

One of the parents said it was “eye opening to hear how many specialists they have or don't have” and “to look at the supports they have is an interesting lens.”

Another parent agreed saying, “It's good to have these conversations because we need to hear the administration perspective, the teacher perspective; the student and parent perspectives.”

Most also agreed that people are not generally aware of all the things that go into making a school a school.

The participants were troubled by the discussion about the resource imbalances among schools within the district.

One recent graduate (a 7-8 years ago) said she used to hear stories about Drexel Hill having more resources. At the time in Beverly Hills they didn't have many clubs but Drexel Hill had clubs. She attended Beverly Hills and played sports. She saw the Drexel Hill gym. It was more organized and cleaner and was painted better and more recently. It just seemed like Drexel Hill had more money. She also used to hear stories that Drexel Hill kids were happy.

A parent of students at Aronimink said, “This is news to me. It makes me feel uncomfortable. But what do you do? It makes me sad.”

Later, she said that she has heard some of the other Aronimink parents mention that other schools don't do the same fundraising that they do. Some felt this was a problem. However, this participant's sense was that it was felt to be a problem not for equity reasons, but out of fear that if this imbalance continues Aronimink kids might not be allowed to go on some trips.

Another resource issue is that the district only has one high school and two middle schools, all overcrowded.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Educate parents about the types of resources that go into making a good school. [e.g. reading specialists, math coaches, staff trainings on diversity, after-school activities, clubs and sports teams, class trips, conditions inside the building (i.e. gym cleanliness and paint, etc.)]
- Organize parents across the district to hold fundraisers to support student activities at under-resourced schools in the district.
- Open a second high school to relieve overcrowding.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

The group definitely saw the diversity as an asset. One parent transferred her child to the district from a Catholic school in Philadelphia. It was 98% Black at that school and this is the first time her daughter has been in such a diverse class. The mom is happy because her daughter recently learned about the hijab from one of her Muslim classmates.

Another parent likes the fact that there is such a big population of African students in Upper Darby and nearby.

One of the white participants acknowledged she has a concern, however. She likes the diversity but she always wonders whether the young couples that she sees will stay here to raise their kids once they have them. She also wondered how we help families where English is not their first language. She mentioned some virtual meetings were a challenge trying to help parents understand the school changes caused by the pandemic.

One African-American mom cautioned against putting too much weight on the 1st quote about the teachers not understanding Black boys.

She said there is a danger in lumping people together (in this case lumping teachers together): “Using too broad of a brush would be doing to them what we say they are doing to us.” She said it also gives the Black students an out (I.e. “She doesn’t like me because I am Black.”)

Several participants also agreed that the goal should *not* be for teachers to understand all the cultures.

A Black mom said: “I don’t think the teacher should understand each culture ... It’s about respect.”

She is a teacher at a different district and gave an example of a boy she taught that came from a culture where he wasn’t expected to listen to females. But she and the family talked and she approached it in a position of respecting their family and culture but helped them see that his belief was not productive here. She and the family eventually worked things out.

Another participant agreed, saying that a general background about the different cultures is what is needed. She graduated from UDHS in 2013 and feels that teachers/staff should learn simple words in the child’s language.

The mere effort of trying and of spending time with the child can be very important. She mentioned that a relative spoke Punjabi with very limited English. A teacher used to sit with her and just try to talk and listen. She told the girl that her language was beautiful. She helped the girl adjust and showed respect just by trying a little.

The participant went on to suggest using technology to help support translation and interpretation. She also mentioned that she used to try to help whenever she could by translating for parents or helping to talk to younger kids, etc.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Teach the teachers/staff simple words in the various languages they deal with.
- Train the teachers and staff to use technology to help talk to both parents and students. E.g. Google translate, iPad, phone interpreters, interpreters hired by the school, telephone interpreters; interpretation on zoom/using video.
- Ask older immigrant/multi-lingual students to help out. They can help new students adjust. They can help do some translation as needed.

THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

In the limited time we had for this topic, one parent said: “Forums like this would help. We have to continue to communicate with each other. The schools can’t do it alone. We’ve got to work together.”

Another agreed that “This forum is a good place to talk about folks.”

Another parent commented that she sees a lot of parent involvement in Upper Darby.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS

- Communication with each other is important.
- Learning how to respect each other may be more important than learning all the ins and outs of everybody’s culture.
- Parents don’t really know everything that goes into making a really effective school so it is hard for them to see the resource imbalances beyond the obvious things like facilities, overcrowding and the number of books.

- Remind teachers to focus on each child's individual needs by being curious and asking questions to understand instead of jumping to judgement about the child's needs or background.
- Value curiosity above judgment or control.
- Help parents understand more about school resource imbalances, diversity, child development and behavior issues.

GROUP 2

MODERATOR: CASSANDRA GEORGES

The group included many perspectives. There were educators, parents and even students. Overall, there were more women, people on the younger end of the spectrum, and people outside of the school staff. Participants were very open. They were candid while sharing opinions, ideas, and stories. They were ready to do the work.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Importance of teacher getting to know students vs. negative consequences if it doesn't happen, like racial profiling or stereotyping. Participants shared experiences with being accused of being a drug dealer and blaming students with certain backgrounds for school problems.
- Importance of understanding different cultures – Student with touchy culture at home could be perceived as/described as being violent for touching at school.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Have staff recount/document/portray situations accurately. Avoid adding to drama by making student's action sound worse than OR describe situation in different way than it actually happened. Get all the details. Take people's backgrounds into account. Provide context for what happened. Reflect the tone of interaction.
- Be preventive. Teach socialization over Zoom.
- Listen to parents.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- How schools raised funds for activities in the past (e.g. Memorial holiday camping trip, Christmas tree sales, and T-shirt sales) and how fundraisers could change moving forward.
- Limits to participating in fundraisers – Remember that families may have limited time, limited connections (aka targets for sales), and or limited money. Some students may always face cost-prohibitive concerns with school activities. School staff spent own money to fund students in need. Group debated fundraising approaches. Are they feasible and/or sustainable? This has worked to pay for a smaller number of students. What happens if/when most students are in need? Should district cancel fundraiser, e.g. should district cancel camping trips if everyone can't afford to go?
- Perception of district-wide fundraisers – Do other schools care about efforts that benefit other schools? Are efforts seen as being limited to/lead by/for the benefit of one specific school? Do families know whether are the lawn signs for graduate being organized for just one school or are they available to whole district? Is there an out-of-sight/out-of-mind dynamic? You know the 800 kids at your school. Are you thinking about /do you feel connected to the other students in the district? Assuming that someone foots the bills on district-wide initiatives, why didn't the sponsor pay for you and your school?

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Provide financial assistance in way that preserves anonymity of student in need.
- Think outside the box. Look for ways to include all students.
- Increase awareness of initiatives so that all families know what is going on. Make sure that regional home and school presidents are sharing info.
- Encourage continuity in programs. The clubs and sports that the district supports at higher grades should be promoted in middle schools.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Definition – Diversity is more than just the things you can see (e.g. insight from religion or educational background). Remember to look at everything someone can bring to the table.
- Duration – It takes twice as long to undo a problem than it does to create a problem.

- Quality/expectations – District has always been diverse, but now has concerns over drop in quality of education. Participant shared experience of having their kid turn in homework with all wrong answers intentionally, but student still received a perfect grade. Group discussed whether children were being challenged or just passed on without actually learning.
- Issues related to acclimation, assimilation, and politically correct culture. Make sure immigrant students have same bonding opportunities as other students. Ensure that students that use English as a second language are not inadvertently penalized by evaluation criteria. For example, does bilingual student have same chance to get student of the week recognition if award based on number of times student volunteers to speak (in English) in class?

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Hire diverse teachers/staff.
- Implement policies to include/not inadvertently exclude students of different backgrounds.
- Spend the money to address.
- Use space of new school building to reduce tensions of overcrowding

THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

Return on investment - If you pay for it, then you'll want a say in it. Group talked about the crazy level of taxes and that taxpayers want to give input.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Show taxpayers what their money has been used for, e.g. building new school.
- Remember to support the middle of the road students, not just the superstars and not just the "problem" students.
- Lobby the state.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS

Set high expectations for students and maintain it for all educators. Disparities are more obvious because students are on zoom/ one on one.

Focus on coordination and cooperation between schools.

MODERATOR COMMENTS

The discussion flowed. The group kept an eye on the larger picture, regularly talking about district-wide dynamics and their perspectives about what happens between schools. This group also shared ongoing concerns about academics.

GROUP 3

MODERATOR: GERMAINE INGRAM

Even though there were eight people in the group (two teachers, two students, three school parents and one district observer), the conversation was really among 5, who communicated with one another easily, and were respectful of including others in the discussion. The high school student was a conversation starter and thought leader in the group. Others respected his perspective and gave him kudos for his participation.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

The group offered an interesting array of responses to the provided stories:

One participant said that Story #3 made her angry----that there was no reason to put handcuffs on kids. With respect to the same story, another participant questioned what might have happened in the vice principal's day that could have caused her to respond the way she did ("Maybe she had a bad day"). One of the teacher participants could relate to Story #2, saying that you have to look at all factors when exercising discipline, to get everyone communicating and make it a "teachable moment". The high school student was drawn to Story #1, saying that some white teachers have difficulty relating to a large population of Black students and that the

schools need more teachers who can communicate with Black students. He noted that security guards, who are often Black, are able to relate to students in ways that many teachers can't.

A participant who is a teacher at one of the elementary schools talked about the need to get more parents involved with the school as a means of addressing discipline issues. She said that with respect to immigrant families, there is too often an attitude that "you can't reach them," which she considers inexcusable. Another parent said that there needs to be more outreach and more events to get parents engaged. She talked about how many parents have multiple jobs, and how it's hard for them to spend time at school. Schools need to recognize and respond to the weight that's on parents.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

The two principal takeaways from this theme:

1. Context is everything when it comes to discipline. The aim should be to understand motivations, amp up communication and look to create teachable moments.
2. Building relationships with students and parents is critical---cultivating capacity of faculty to relate to students, and increasing outreach to parents, especially those who are considered "unreachable".

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

All participants said that they recognize inequities in the district. There are inequities that are visible; there are also assumptions/perceptions about certain schools, like Beverly Hills, receiving fewer resources than others. Perception of inequity is not as strong at the high school, but the high school student questioned why he is the only Black student in some AP classes.

Opinions about how well the district is addressing inequity were mixed.

One person said that the district has improved in the fairness of distribution of resources. Another said that the district is doing pretty well with what resources it has. One participant mentioned how the district is being hampered by a lawsuit in its efforts to build more schools and classrooms and reallocate kids. (A teacher participant said that he hears from both sides of the battle over the middle school.)

At least two participants expressed frustration over not knowing how the district should address inequities. One person talked about the role of Harrisburg in creating inequity, and

that some things don't seem to change. She said, "Everybody's got to think about the kids." A teacher participant said that he has confidence that the current administration is "doing everything it can," but that they have so much on their plate.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

No guidelines or action steps came out of this discussion. There was a general sense that the district administration is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

The discussion on this theme was multi-faceted. The comments went to:

- The need for more black and brown teachers.
- The need for Black students to see greater access and recruitment to higher-level classes.
- Black students lacking strong advocates either at home or at school.
- A curriculum that seems "white-washed" to some, in need of being reworked to incorporate the histories of Black, Latinx, and other communities.

Participants noted tensions around the issue of diversity. One person said that talk of diversity becomes a mask for racial/ethnic tensions. Black students experience "micro-aggressions." During the 2020 election, tensions were especially intense on social media.

Despite concerns about how the district's diversity generates tensions, there was general optimism within the group regarding the way the district is addressing the issues.

Comments included:

- "Our district gets it."
- "The district has done an amazing job of addressing some of the issues."
- The Upper Darby Rising forums are a "huge step forward."
- It was noted that, at the High School, the Equity Team is dealing with difficult issues, and teachers are "onboard" with being community-oriented.
- High praise for Melissa Figueroa-Douglas for the job she has done since becoming the district's chief equity officer.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Greater racial/ethnic diversity in school faculties
- Rewrite curricula to reflect history and accomplishments of the diverse communities of the district.
- Have a district-wide focus on a different ethnic community each month.

MODERATOR'S COMMENTS:

It was an earnest, open discussion - although not nearly as animated as other UDR groups I've done. I was struck by how much confidence there was in the district administration to do the right thing regarding inequities and the tensions related to diversity. The sense of optimism was real.

GROUP 4

MODERATOR: SERANO LEGRAND

This group had eight participants: an assistant superintendent (observer); an African-American father and professional barber who attended all of the community forums and had several children in or through the Upper Darby School District; an African-American mother of three students; an African-American mother of two whose children attend the elementary schools; a Catholic woman who has in Upper Darby her entire life, but didn't attend public schools; a state senator; an African-American mother who just moved to the area and a school board member who was an observer.

Overall, every participant expressed concern about their children's educational experience as well as their children's educational futures. While there was a common thread of concern, there was also a common thread of optimism and interest in imagining a better Upper Darby School District. Every participant was there to be part of the solution.

A little more than half the participants were part of this community forum for the first time and expressed gratitude for the model and the school district's initiative in listening and speaking with the community.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN IDEAS DISCUSSED:

- Most participants agreed they saw all three provided stories as things that happen. One spoke of an experience with her son, who was involved in an incident. Her son, who is black, was portrayed as the offender and was in fact, not. A good teacher did the work and realized what had happened and identified supports for all the children involved.
- The parent who originally related Story 3 to our team spoke about what happened subsequently: He worked with administrators to become more receptive of parents and work with parents to de-escalate situations. Parents do not want to attack teachers he said, but they do want to be productively involved with their child's educational experiences, good or bad. He said he sees this incident as indicative of the problem with the school to prison pipeline and the ways it manifests in the classroom and school. Black children are viewed from a punitive perspective. Implicit bias needs to be addressed with teachers and administrators. How do you identify the bad seeds? How do you not scar children while still holding them accountable?
- One participant raised the following questions: What types of cultural competence training and implicit-bias training are in place? There was a redirect to the school district's website on this.
- Bullying is seen in a Catholic school context as well; the role of technology and smartphones have exacerbated this role.
- Youth organizations should help students see the bigger picture and grasp first-hand what bullying looks like.

ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- More implicit-bias training for teachers. Every job-description should include a required continuing education/professional education on implicit bias (at all levels of the school district)
- A theater class that allows students to see first-hand what it looks like for bullying; something acted out on stage.
- Opportunities for students to sit in a counselor's office and discuss what happened in depth; One parent remarked that she hasn't really observed this happening with her own children in their schools.
- The SD should team up with community organizations that provide mentoring and connecting students with community mentors
- Set up an equity community council that provides opportunities for parents, legislators and school members to engage in building better schools.

- Normalize conversations about these topics and issues; students experience these things and should also be given space to reflect and discuss such topics and issues consistently
- The SD should ensure that in message, tone and action they are treating all children and parents with the same respect, no matter where they come from, whether they Upper Darby natives or newly arrived.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN IDEAS DISCUSSED:

- One parent had a daughter who experienced the heating failures described in one of the provided stories. She still has questions about whether or not the heating system works). Asked question: What can community members and parents do to ensure these types of instances (no working heat) do not happen again? Would this problem be a problem with those students who are white?
- Inequitable resources problem is persistent across the state. Let's push for federal stimulus dollars to be used for schools for lasting impacts like an improved ventilation system. In Harrisburg, investments seem to be temporary and not designed for long-term impact (e.g., conditions of school buildings, etc.)
- One participant raised the following questions: What do interventions look like? What are the immediate needs? How do schools better meet their needs in the moment? What is the protocol in place that addressed these needs?
- One participant remarked that this decision about heating should have been a commonsense decision. It's cold in here. Cold weather in the classroom makes it harder to learn. Similar to hunger. Unsure of the disconnect or why it took teachers going up so many layers to get an approval for something that seemed obvious and more humane (i.e. easing the dress code).
- One participant remarked: "We begin to live when we live outside ourselves. When we become of service to others, that's when life begins". The role of educator is to service our children and our community. This parent felt like some educators were missing the mark on this service piece.
- African-American and African immigrants have experienced traumatic events, and the SD needs to recognize and conceptualize the pain of this group of community residents and appropriately listen to them.
- One participant asked: What is being done to address the Covid-19 learning loss?

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

- One parent agreed with all the provided statements. “It is disheartening to see the percentage of non-white teachers versus white teachers”. She mentioned not seeing enough BIPOC teachers, all the way from the lowest level through high school.
- Recently learned that the SD is seeking out teachers of different races, etc. Unsure about the reasons why teachers are not here and not coming (is it pay? is it not wanting to work in this school district?) but it is worth investigating and figuring out.
- There is a need for the voices in the school district to be representative of the community members.
- There is an issue of values. Beyond skin-color, values need to be communicated and shared.
- Black educators are having difficulty passing the praxis exam; and getting into the SD.
- One participant discussed recruitment efforts and asked, “Where haven't we looked”?

ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- There needs to be more open and honest real conversation from teachers who are in the trenches (what are their hopes, fears, etc.) that are with children 8-10 hours per day. Ask teachers what they need to be effective in a diverse district? What do they need from the SD? What do they need from the parents?
- Parents need to get more involved and not everyone can get involved in the same way. District should make clear a variety of ways and paths for parents to contribute to school equity and excellence.
- Teachers and educators should look for and prioritize partnerships.

THEME 4: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: AN ISLAND OR A HUB?

- Zoom has opened the doors for making this easier. Parent-teacher conversations have been the best in the Covid-19 pandemic. This is one of the lessons learned during Covid that the SD should keep in mind once the pandemic is over.
- The SD should create education equity groups to connect the school community with legislators.
- The SD should consider keeping what's going on in the ways they are currently engaging community and figure out how to sustain it.
- The SD should create opportunities for schools and families to face each other and discuss hard issues.

MODERATOR COMMENTS

This group was enthusiastic, honest, open and vulnerable. Several participants who were parents shared personal experiences that their children had throughout the school district. The prompts and excerpts selected (especially the ones connected to Black children being unfairly disciplined and treated) seemed to resonate with many of the participants in this group.

These quotes, in turn, ignited an exchange of storytelling and story sharing that was partly somber and sad (of the realities some children are experiencing based off their skin color, where their parents are from, cultural background) as well as partly optimistic (in the ways that the SD currently wants to gather input and engage parents and families in the solutions generating process).

GROUP 5

MODERATOR: CAROL LYDON

This was an energetic and engaged group of 7 - mostly parents, one recent alum, one teacher, one school director. Most of the participants were actively involved in the district, above and beyond being parents. They spoke highly of the district and the nature of the conversation was generally optimistic. They offered many concrete ideas and action steps to address each of the issues presented. The conversation flowed easily and almost seamlessly transitioned from one subject into the next.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

Two of the three provided stories generated discussion and some pushback, but at the end specific actions steps grew out of the discussion.

They felt that it was a problem that two kids went through school connecting with *only one* teacher. They agreed that connection might seem easier if the student could see some similarities with the teacher, i.e. racially, but that that was not necessary. One man felt that *anyone* has the ability to connect with a child, if they are given some training in how to do so.

One gentleman took issue with Story #3. He felt that there had to be more to the story. He felt that there had to have been no alternative and wants to know what really happened. This led to the discussion about whether parents are always the experts on their children. They can interact with teachers and staff when problems arise, but they often aren't given the full story. It's necessary in all cases to try to get to the full story - without bias - in order to handle each situation.

The participants all agreed that it does take a village to raise children and that discipline doesn't always need to be punitive. Discipline could start with support - tag team help for teachers, staff and students.

Educate parents about children's issues, e.g. ADHD - help them understand. Make connections to people who can provide support. Stop problems before they start. See everyone at the school as an integral part of educating the students. Use mentors.

They said that the use of security guards, while understandably necessary, should be reimagined. Are they there to provide safety or instill fear? It's a school, not a correctional center and guards should see their job accordingly.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Training in building supportive relationships (teachers, administrators, staff and security guards). See the school as a village.
- Make connections to people who can provide support.
- Engage families to determine what is acceptable behavior.
- Track and analyze cases of students who don't "succeed". What went wrong? How can we learn from that?
- Use mentorship. Have a program, with a script; don't make people have to figure it out.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

School activities are very helpful in helping to make students feel involved and also helped with discipline. Students who are involved are less likely to get in trouble. The high school has many opportunities to get involved, but less so at the elementary or middle school levels.

However, resources aren't always available and teachers already had a lot on their plate. This led to a brief discussion regarding self-care for teachers and why that was important.

There was discussion comparing schools to a sports event: *Those in the sky box are making the rules*. They don't want everyone to succeed - just those like them. They know that all students take the same tests, the same exams without having the same funding. There is *no way* for those not in the sky box to compete. There has to be a way to level the field. The ways schools are funded has to be changed so that funds can trickle down where they are needed, not hoarded.

The group discussed the need for HSAs in *every school*, with support and training so that they can be effective. This falls back on the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. People might start to look at the school as a whole, rather than at just their child.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Provide appropriate opportunities in elementary and middle school for children to get involved.
- Find new ways to fund for extracurricular activities?
- Teacher compensation for academic clubs.
- Find ways to assist teachers with self-care.
- Make it a priority to have an HSA in every school - provide training and support.
- Change state funding source away from property taxes, e.g. sales tax, in a way that would allow funds to trickle across districts.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

There was a lot of discussion on the need to have a more racially diverse teacher population. However, it was noted that it is difficult to recruit teachers, specifically young black male teachers. Education has to be recognized as a viable and interesting option for students to pursue, especially in high school when students are making decisions regarding further education or careers. It is also important to recruit teachers from the community so that they have a vested interest not just in the school, but in the community - because they live and work there.

People also discussed a change in curriculum to allow students to see themselves in what they are learning. One woman stated that her daughter had to read *Tom Sawyer* and couldn't connect to it at all. She couldn't see herself in the book. Include subject matter that is not decades old. Engaging curriculum would keep kids in school and could also help teachers develop.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Recognize and mentor students, especially black males, who express an interest in education. Perhaps, develop some sort of apprenticeships/internships/focus groups for interested students. This would not help immediately, but it could pan out in the long run, not necessary just in this district, but generally.
- Provide students with subject matter in which they can see themselves - make it more relatable to them.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS

There was a lot of discussion around the connection between diversity and discipline. The conversation generally flowed in and out of these two issues. They agreed that representation could help mitigate disciplinary problems.

MODERATOR COMMENTS

This group was optimistic but realistic. There seemed to be a level of trust that the district could make changes to make the district what they envision. There wasn't any cynicism expressed - none, which was unusual.

GROUP 6

MODERATOR: KIERSTEN MAILLER

The group included a Black parent of high schoolers; a mixed race (East Asian and Black) couple with two children at Senkow; an educator who works in another district but has a child in Upper Darby schools; a Black parent with a son at Garrettford; a township police official and a school board member who was observing.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- We ended up talking about systematic racism for most of this section.
- The underlying point: We must analyze how we look at behaviors in students and how we define them. Unpacking cultural norms about how groups see and name/address behaviors. The provided story about a parent who got help for her child after one teacher figured out what was going on got cited as an example of this being done right.
- How do we name behaviors with black and brown children? How are we affirming identities, exposing them to meaningful instruction, showing them love? Re: provided story about police handcuffing students: These are our children; should not have police involvement.
- School community has not talked about the role of systemic racism in these topics, or in the school system. That discussion has a place within the context of these community meetings.
- Element that is missing from all three cases: Nowhere does it say that anyone took into account their culture. Who is there to take into account that it may be cultural? Re: fist story ... “finally someone”? Why did it take so long?
- Solutions need to be rooted in what is best for black and brown children.
- Police brutality is outrageous on any level. Would like to ask officer who handcuffed children what he was thinking.
- Observer from police department: Re: the handcuffing children story. “We have been working together with the school district. That kind of action won’t be tolerated moving

forward. We do not want to handcuff children. Not good for anyone. No one should have to worry about this. We now have teaching programs on racial biases and de-escalation, implicit biases. We need to solve this through training before the officers serve the community.”

- One parent responded: “Officers in uniform are stressful/traumatizing. Can you send plain clothes officers if you decide to send them into schools?”
- Sometimes teachers bully students; so it’s not just peer-based.
- Something else that must be addressed: No one wants to be disciplined by someone of a different culture. Easier to be disciplined by someone with some kind of relationship to you. Culture can also mean community, not only color

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- More interpersonal relationships between teachers and parents needed. Need to see that teachers are trying to help and get to know them. Break down barriers of communication.
- Police official said he wants department to be active in finding ways to limit bullying; will be in schools a lot more with programs and offer resources. Want to be out there to listen. Looking to hire a highly diverse new group of officers: representative of township. Working on hiring a mental health advocate as well.
- Don’t assume an incident at a school is a disaster Don’t send out six police cars. Send out ambulances when response is appropriate: not just a police officer. Watch out for mental health crises. Think about sending plain clothes.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- “The first story about unequal rings true. Our school (Senkow) is interested in starting an initiative for district-wide funding, unifying things. “
- The second story provided, about the Beverly Hills heater: Woman’s daughter was threatened with truancy because she has health issues, and it was far too cold for her to go to school. Kids kept coats on all day long. Heating system has been broken for years - because of who the students are at BH. People have been complaining about mistreatment for years. I love the diversity, but not the resource disparity. Sometimes there weren’t enough books!

- Why don't we just mix the student bodies at these two middle schools?
- Why do we have such separation in UD? Why do rich kids go to rich schools and poor kids go to poor schools? Lottery system?

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Diversity and resources: examine through a lens of culture and language: How are the resources reflective of the many diverse cultures that exist in the system. How are we affirming the identity of the diverse student body beyond cultural days?
- One parent: "I haven't experienced these issues but have in the past in other systems where it's clear that I'm mixed race. Son is in 3rd grade and feels like this system is very diverse. "

One divergence of views:

- "I believe in diversity as much as the next guy, but I believe in getting back to standards. There are ways to even it out. I don't think cultural celebration is relevant in school."
- "The world is diverse; children need to learn in school and at home how to relate to other cultures. They can't learn that at home. How will children learn about other cultures if not in schools where diversity exists?"

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Start with curriculum: who you are teaching them about, what their environment looks like: what representation they see. Do they see themselves represented and reflected in others (teachers, images, families: not just commercial representation)?
- We must intentionally infuse children with diversity and affirmation about identity.
- We have to be intentional about celebrating, because of the systemic exclusion from a white historical lens.
- Black history doesn't just start at slavery, but we don't get anything else in our textbooks. We have to dismantle white supremacy culture in our system before we can do away with specific celebrations.

- We need to talk more about diversity in school. Parents can only teach from their own lens at home, they need to learn from their peers.
- From observer: The District has recently implemented an initiative whereby UDHS grads who go on to college and earn teaching degrees will have a guaranteed teaching job in the district when they complete their teaching credentials. (addressing lack of diversity in teaching staff. There has been emphasis on recruiting a more diverse set of professional staff.)

THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Community involvement: “We struggle at our elementary school to get home and school involvement, and it most likely is a language barrier.”
- “We are confusing lack of engagement with lack of energy and time for parents. We don’t consider reasons why parents don’t show up. Not all, but many. They don’t have the space (in their schedule) Easier to engage when you feel accepted and respected.”
- How are we engaging the parents in their native language?

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Looking for cultural representatives in their community to promote home and school association idea.
- Come up with a way to help communities help themselves when associating with school district.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS

A *lot* of conversation on diversity, systemic racism, and a lot of topics we weren’t going to solve in this amount of time. There were some great recommendations!

MODERATOR COMMENTS

There was some misunderstanding about people's opinions and points, as the discussion got impassioned. There was a division around HOW and WHEN culture and diversity should be represented, and whether there is a place for it in schools (i.e. should holidays and "special months" for non-white people be celebrated or is integration enough?). Whose responsibility is it to teach about culture? It was said that if schools were just better integrated (bussing was recommended) by race and income, then there would be no need for cultural days. Another parent noted that kids can't learn about other cultures at home, only their own, so the cultural celebrations help to introduce them to other cultures and are therefore vital.

GROUP 7

MODERATOR: CHRIS SATULLO

This was a diverse and lively group of eight community members, along with one school board director who served as an observer while offering some timely context. The group included a number of Bywood parents, who were enthusiastic boosters of the school. The words "love" and "Bywood" were linked in the same sentence many times during the 90 minutes. It also included one childless couple, who shared one video screen, who had just chosen to buy a house in Drexel Hill in November, largely because of the community's diversity.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED:

Immigrant mom: "It's obvious how diversified the district has become. I would be wonderful if the staff were more generally culturally competent. Then they could be clearer with parents about the norms and the rules. For example, the rule about keeping hands to themselves, which is a difference from the West African culture that I come from. If the school had clearer ground rules that understood the cultural differences, then the parents could do better at preparing their children. The parents don't want these incidents to happen."

Black mother: "My kids never get into real trouble, because they were taking advantage of what the school community had to offer. And I was a parent who was there, you know? The teachers knew me by name."

Mother of a middle schooler: "My daughter's whole first year in middle school has been virtual until now. She hasn't set foot in a classroom at her school until now. Such a weird year; it's hard for me to interpret the social aspect. She's been a very talkative child and got into some trouble with that in elementary, but her teachers were on top of it and worked with me."

The husband of the recently arrived couple: “I work in tech for another school district. I know that the devices permeate kids lives more and more – and it ramps up the social pressures and the bullying more and more in ways parents sometimes don’t see. Where I work we try to emphasize restorative practices over punishment, helping a student see the ways they might have offended or harmed another student and to do something to make amends. We can’t be anti-tech, can’t just pull the devices. This tech is going to be part of their lives all their lives. Being smart about has got to part of a new way of raising kids.”

Several of the Bywood parents praised how proactive and communicative the staff there is when there’s a problem with behavior or bullying – “They call you and put you on the phone right away to talk to your child” – but several parents whose children had moved onto middle school noted that the change in climate and procedures there came as a shock to both kids and parents.

Several in the group highly praised the Youth Court class and program at Beverly Hills and suggested that some version of it be made universal in all district schools – and be promoted much more widely so that all parents and the community in general could learn how successful it is.

While at least one parent praised the orientation program that helps students and parents prepare for the elementary to middle school transition, others said the district should build on that foundation to do more to prepare parents and children for how different the climate, the challenges and the rules will be in middle school.

ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES SUGGESTED:

Expand and extol Youth Court – make sure all parents and the community at large know about this excellent program.

- Provide resources and training so both teachers and parents are more knowledgeable about how bullying, teasing and other discipline problems brew out of adult view on digital platforms.
- Expanded culturally competent, outreach to immigrant families so they know school rules and know what resources exist and how to contact staff when behavior problems arise.
- Intensify the preparation for the middle school experience that’s offered students and parents during the elementary-to-middle transition program.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED:

A Garrettford parent: “There’s lot of dialogue needed. After 2020, we’re supposed to be more aware of equity. But talking to some of my suburban friends about how incredibly unfair state school funding is, it becomes clear I value some different things from them. These suburban folks need to become allies, but something’s amiss. We need to be about lifting all boats to get better outcomes for society, but I could use some advice on how to sell that message to some of the people I know.”

The wife in the newly arrived couple: “When we told our Realtor we wanted to look in Upper Darby, he kept saying, ‘Are you sure?’ There’s a lot of stereotypes out there about this community. We want to be here, but I have to say it is concerning what we’re hearing here about inequities among elementary schools. That should not be.”

A parent who moved her child from a Catholic school to Bywood and is very happy with that choice: “But I’ve got to see a difference in Beverly Hills, some sign of upgrade, before my child goes there. Sure, it would help if more parents game more. But there’s a limit to what some can do. In terms of fund-raising, I’ll all over it. At my work, they are tired of seeing me coming with the next thing I’m selling to help the school.”

ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES SUGGESTED:

- Equip your parent-advocates with good facts and talking points to make the case for more equitable state funding to their friends who live in affluent districts.
- Hold a “lunch and learn” for local Realtors to give them and factual, positive narrative about the school district’s assets and progress.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED:

This group, led by the Bywood contingent, had many compliments for the district’s efforts to integrate a celebration of community diversity into school programming: music and dance performances at schools, the flea market at the high school, movie nights at Bywood (“They just make you feel comfortable”)

“You see the effort and the impact. Hooray for the teachers at Bywood,” said one mother of West African origin.

“Diversity is wonderful concept if managed well,” she said. “Upper Darby could be a great model for the whole region, the whole state. Everything is right here. We are a connecting point for different communities around the region.”

But, she added, work remains to be done: “When someone like me goes into a school as a guest, there’s a manner in which you are received or looked at. Body language is a huge thing – and I can tell I’m not welcome or my motives are suspected. There are a lot of great services at the school – but some people get scared away by that tone, that lack of greeting.”

She added, in a point that also tied into Theme 4 on civic engagement: “Dan [Superintendent McGarry], his messaging is very good. He clearly believes what he says about diversity. But why is that message only in English? The approach is not reflective of the message. The district has to put a lot more effort into providing translation and interpretation.”

A Black parent offered a caveat about the challenges of capitalizing on Upper Darby’s great diversity, given the backdrop of racial bias and trauma that some longtime residents experienced: “A group that righteously feels it has been marginalized then turns around and villainizes another group. It’s important not to do that. Everyone’s background has to be respected and treated as important.”

ACTION STEPS AND GUIDELINES SUGGESTED:

Find resources to enhance translation and interpretation services.

Keeping building off of a sound foundation of multicultural events at schools.

Be sure to include in all equity/cultural competence training the office staff who can be the face of the district to parents and other visitors.

THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR A HUB?

We had just a few minutes for this topic, but the group offered two heartfelt suggestions:

- “When you have an intensely colorful community like Upper Darby, you can’t communicate in only one color.”
- “I really liked what we did tonight. This was great. The district should do much more of this – giving people a chance to talk with one another about what’s going on and what could be done.”

GROUP 8 – CONDUCTED IN SPANISH

MODERATOR: HARRIS SOKOLOFF

This session was conducted in a separate Zoom meeting from the rest of the March 1 participants, with an English-speaking moderator but a Spanish interpreter provided by the district. The entire opening plenary presentation was delivered in Spanish by the interpreter. Though nine people had requested Spanish interpretation, only three ended up attending, one of whom left about half-way through the conversation and one of who left before we got into the community engagement discussion. There was a general tone of being happy with the elementary school their children attend and the sense that their children are happy there. There was also concern about what the children would meet when they went to middle and high school, places these parents don't know much about.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- All in this group have only young elementary school children (grade 4 or lower), and don't see any incidents of bullying (particularly not in this virtual world), nor do their children get disciplined. The father in the group did, however, note that he passes the middle and high school and thinks there is too much violence there.
- This father said he'd like to see more security, more police as the children get older.
- The mother noted that she thinks any behavior problems come from the children's home, and parents need to make sure children know that behavior is not acceptable.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- More safety officers for middle Schools and high school, and in the community if needed.
- Want to avoid incidents before they happen.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- The parents said the provided stories don't relate to their experiences. They noted that resources at the elementary school are fine and that the teachers and the school supply everything their children need.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Participants thought it was great to have so much diversity in the school – there are “people from everywhere” in the school and that is great!
- One parent noted: “Many cultures make you strong – teaches them well.”
- Another parent noted: “The teachers do a good job helping my children learn English.” Enables children to communicate with the teacher as well as with other students.
- The school provides interpreters when needed. But, as one parent noted with some support from others, no teachers speak Spanish. Thus, they are missing teachers who can connect easily with the community. Recommended that the school should find teachers who speak different languages and teachers should come into the community.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Need more teachers who can speak the language of the students.
- Teachers/district employees should go into the community to build stronger relationships with the immigrant community.

THEME 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ISLAND OR HUB?

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

There was agreement that the district should be a “hub” because “that way we can have more community participation which makes it more comfortable for everyone.”

Work more closely with the churches to create stronger community. (Also with community organizations)

A general sense that this kind of conversation can be good, and we need to work on it.

GROUP 9

MODERATOR: JOSH WARNER

The group had seven participants, including three school parents and two teachers, plus two observers. It included people of white, Black, West African and South Asian ancestry. had some rich conversation; however, it was lopsided and driven by the participants with cameras

on – who contributed most of the stories and opinions. In general, participants oriented their comments to the stories, but because of this, the conversations were slow-going. Despite some longer silences, the group hit on some of the deeper issues and questions surrounding equity, inclusion, and diversity.

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- Participants touched on all three stories in the examples, though they bounced around between topics.
- They reflected on the amount of power that educators have in kids' lives:
 - Teachers (like the example in the prompt) can do a lot to improve kids' lives or notice issues.
 - Teachers can help a great deal, but they can also hinder, depending on the context.
- Biases and narratives hang around in the air that can be “against” kids, or particular kinds of kids:
 - Perceptions matter
 - Teachers and educators need to be aware of these biases and narratives.
- We all come from different backgrounds; we need to a) know these things—these differences or cultural norms—about each other, and b) share these things with one another more often.
 - Include parents as well as students in cultural conversations, multi-cultural days, etc.
- Our voices matter! Especially voices from differing cultures or perspectives
- Parents are the first educators!
- We need clearer policies on bullying, discipline, and conflict resolution.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Having implicit bias trainings, but taking them deeper into anti-racism conversations, white privilege.
 - Being okay with being uncomfortable while learning & sharing and exposing feelings
- Emotional management trainings or services, too.

- Some of the actions of teachers/staff in the examples are really problematic; the issue may be beyond just systemic biases – there could be anger management or other personal issues at play, too.
- Teach the students well about the different cultures and different approaches / ways of doing things.
 - Students need these exposures as much as teachers do.
- Surveys of students, teachers, and parents about some basic cultural competencies or understandings.
 - Do this district-wide and share the results so that we all learn more about one another.

THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- The group focused on both stories provided in the prompts.
- One participant summarized that “the things that aren’t stated can sometimes speak louder than what is said.” In relation to the Camp Speers inequality, the unspoken statement is that some schools or students are less important than others. What does it mean in the UDSD that this “unspoken message” is loud, repeated, and long-standing?
- For the Speers issue, could we raise a grant to provide equal access? Secure dedicated funding for equal access?
 - The move to purposefully create equity opportunities for this fun/enriching activity could be powerful, in terms of re-writing the unspoken message.
- Why are hoodies still some kind of an issue?
 - It is odd that the someone in the school focused on this particular aspect, especially with Trayvon Martin and BLM. It speaks to harsher treatment or biases. Some children with traumas feel more safe or secure in a hoodie; they get a sense of safety and comfort. Being punished for this would be particularly jarring or mean.

School uniforms used to be a thing, but the policies or appetite seem different today.

- Should we look again at school uniforms? Participants noted that bullying and emotional health issues related to poverty – through the

image kids' present or their looks, class-wise – could be reduced with uniforms

- Other participants pushed back, that uniforms can stifle self-expression, or repress some students. The hoodies example in the process prompt was referenced here.

Why not have a larger conversation about this, together as a district? A discussion of uniforms, expression, poverty, image, etc.

- This would be a chance to address the “clothing gap” more directly
 - Maybe have a “school clothes closet” or a school store for students’ clothes?

Equality is not equity

- We understand that resources are scarce, but why does the district insist on equality in school nurses, AP courses, counselors, social workers?
- We actually need more counselors, AP teachers, Lead Teachers, and behavioral specialists. Some schools or student groups may need more of these than others in the district.
- Not only do we need more, but we need these specialists earlier in schooling too.
 - Not just at the high school, but also middle and elementary, too.
- We have to move to more holistic thinking about the whole child:
 - Not just holistic in mind, education, classes, etc., but also in culture, in trauma exposures, in perspectives or norms, etc.

Kids can come up with ideas, too!

- Call on the district’s students to share stories, identify inequities, and work together to organize to solve them.

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Raise grant money to provide equal access for special trips, resources, equipment
- Review policies and look them over for implicit biases.
 - Maybe tie this into the Implicit Bias trainings – as a way to go deeper with change and anti-racism.
- We need more counselors, more AP, more lead teachers – behavioral specialists
 - Start this at the earlier school levels, don’t just offer them in the high school.
- Develop ways to look at the child as a whole – trauma, dress code, culture, voice – these things matter just like test scores, grades, attendance, etc.
- Conduct reviews or have surveys or conversations about school uniforms.
 - Would parents, teachers, students be comfortable with this?
 - Let’s talk about this all together, and maybe address the deeper issue of resource imbalances by making a school store or clothes closet where young students could get school clothes for \$1 a piece or something?

- Think holistically about the whole child.

THEME 3: DIVERSITY: AN ASSET AND A CHALLENGE

MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED:

- I haven't seen a lot of teachers of color in my kids' school.
 - In their neighborhood, there is diversity and a lot of different cultures of kids and parents.
 - My two 2nd graders first pointed out to me that most of their teachers weren't like their neighborhood.
 - These were two young white children noticing that teachers were mostly white in their school, but this didn't make sense to them, given their home life in the neighborhood.
- I do want my kids to see more people of color as authority figures.

This story opened the door for participants to speak of their own exposure to teachers of color when they were in school:

- "I didn't get exposed to a teacher of color until I went to my 2nd middle school, around 7th/8th grade."
- "I also didn't have a black teacher until high school."
 - "In that moment, I remember feeling great! I felt it was really important somehow."

Not that white teachers can't be great; but they could be a whole lot better with more training and exposure.

- Feeling seen and understood (at a fundamental level) can be so important for students of color, as we can attest.

Everyone values diversity, to an extent:

- Discomfort can creep in and the influence of these biases or structural issues can come to the forefront when diversity is "above a certain point."

It is important that we create a new narrative and allow kids to see the whole history:

- Allow kids to learn from multiple perspectives
- To learn from this dismantling of the old model that is currently happening all around us.
- There are lots of rich literatures to learn from; these can be rotated into current curriculums to bring different views, challenges, and other perspectives.

We should be teaching a new generation of students to re-write this narrative, paying attention to diversity at all levels.

- In fact, “re-writing the narrative” is the perfect summation of the Upper Darby Rising initiative.
- It could be the tag-line! It’s the core component of UDR, as we are understanding it.
 - Give the students more voice!
 - Allow them to see and embody multiple perspectives!

ACTION STEPS OR GUIDELINES DISCUSSED:

- Hire more teachers and administrators of color.
- Help make good teachers even better by investing in deeper and more meaningful diversity, inclusion, and equity trainings.
- Students can offer a lot of good input and insight, re: inequities, inclusion, and cultural understandings. Their voices and experiences should be integrated into programs, trainings, or other professional / community engagement efforts in UDSD,
- Make the Upper Darby Rising project be about “rewriting the narrative” on diversity, resource balancing, inclusion, teaching, and learning. The old perspectives should be re-written from the diverse perspectives in Upper Darby today, with emphasis on inclusion.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: OVERALL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS

- A central theme in the discussion was the friction between “old ways” of doing things (and the perspectives embedded in those ways – e.g., structural biases, one-sided curricula, white supremacy norms, cultural misunderstandings, etc.), and the need for a much more inclusive “new way” that draws strength from deeper cross-cultural and experiential understanding, elevation of multiple points of view, and the co-creation of solutions that honor different voices.
- Though the group did not tackle the “district as island or hub” prompts, I feel they were leaning toward the idea of making UDSD a hub, via these new norms around “re-writing narratives.” As in: the work of inclusively re-writing narratives would make the district and its actions much more hub-like in nature.
- Some strong themes emerged from the conversations: striving for deep inclusion, honoring individual voices and different cultures/perspectives, and approaching students, teachers, and education with a more holistic view.

MODERATOR COMMENTS

This group's participants seemed to fall into one of two camps: those with a deeper understanding of the purpose of the UDR forums (and came ready to deep-dive with listening and sharing), vs. those that came "just to hear about what's going on." Because of this, the discussions were lopsided, with a couple people sharing a lot, and about half the group staying silent or offering only 1-2 short points. It seems as if the immigrant parents were most often in the passive listening/absorbing role, while those with longer histories in UD or with the UDSD shared much more.

During the 2nd theme, a misunderstanding emerged in the conversation around being pro school uniforms vs. against. Without any moderator redirects, the group was able to discover that there was this difference among their perspectives, but then they honored that difference by making room for each other's views and suggesting that both deeper and broader engagement activities could be used to explore the difference more thoroughly.

In a way, they practiced and demonstrated this stated ideal of "re-writing the narrative" by doing just that when they encountered diverse perspectives that tie into school district policy!

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EVENT'S ZOOM CHAT

ON WHY PEOPLE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE:

To make things better for the children

Recently moved to the area and want to get greater insight into the community.

To Support Bywood and all of the students,

So I can be aware of the upcoming events and get to connect with the community

To support the Upper Darby school community

I wanted to share and express my input as a student, so those such as Freshmen and Sophomores after me, can have a better and improved experience.

To become aware of what is happening in school district and community and see how I can be helpful.

I am interested in becoming part of the solution to contributing to a better educational experience for all of our children.

To be as well versed in potential Covid back to school stuff as I can.

This is Senator Kearney, here to listen and learn.

I wanted to hear from the community as well as our students on what they are feeling.

I grew up in this area and moved back a few years ago, my parents still live here, and my children go to school in this district, so the wellbeing of all members of this community means a lot to me and my family.

I'm participating tonight as a stakeholder who wants to be part of real change within our schools and township.

Interested in Upper Darby School diversity and equity.

I love the diversity of Upper DarbyL makes me feel great.

I have kids at Aronimink and DHMS. I love our diversity and would love to help our community get stronger.

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

Most cited: Diverse or diversity.

Also: Open and welcoming; big; inclusion; great kids; multicultural; awesome but underfunded; overcrowded and underfunded; promising; amazing; great and underappreciated; a representation of the world; great teachers; community.

WHAT WAS YOUR KEY TAKEAWAY FROM TONIGHT'S DIALOGUE?

Stop talking about equity and change the systemic issues that perpetuate these issues.

Change is hard. Keep pushing; the result is worth it!!

These are the first steps to lasting change. Let's keep it going!

Through communication and passion everything can be understood and worked out appropriately

These conversations must be rooted in discussing systemic racism before trying to get to solutions because any other approach is performative and does not address the root causes of these issues.

We need more open dialogue that includes teachers, parents & administration to understand each other's perspective.

Thank you all for all of the administrators' hard work in coordinating these and for your time. We are grateful for these efforts. We look forward to reading the report and supporting the action plan.

Thank you to everyone who attended and participated

This was an amazing conversation! I've learned so much.

