

## UPPER DARBY RISING

### PARISH COMMUNITY FORUM

JAN. 7, 2021



On the evening of Jan. 7, 2020, Upper Darby Rising continued its community dialogue initiative with a focus group discussion for members of the township's Parish Community. The two-hour session, the third of seven in the opening phase of the initiative, was held on Zoom.

A total of 54 community members, including several principals of Catholic schools in the township, took part.

The participants were joined by 10 district administrators and school directors, who acted as observers.

In nine breakout sessions, participants were guided through an in-depth discussion of three of the four themes that the Upper Darby Rising initiative is exploring in its effort to ensure educational excellence with equity for all the district's schoolchildren.

The themes discussed in breakouts were: *Discipline and Bullying: Real and Hyped*; *Resource Imbalances: Inside and Out*; and *Diversity: An Asset and a Challenge*. The other theme: *Civic Engagement: An Island or a Hub* was touched upon in a concluding plenary session.

The breakouts were led by professional moderators from Catalyst Community Conversations, a unit of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Each moderator filed a detailed report on the yield from their group's discussion.

Here are their reports, followed by a list of highlights from the Zoom chat during the concluding plenary discussion:

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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](#)

[TED ENOCH](#)

[ELLEN GREENBERG](#)

[SERRANO LEGRAND](#)

[KIM LEICHTNER](#)

[CAROL LYDON](#)

[CHRIS SATULLO](#)

[HARRIS SOKOLOFF](#)

[JOSH WARNER](#)

### GROUP 1

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MODERATOR: BRIAN ARMSTEAD

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

##### Main Ideas

The participants gave ratings of 4 or 5 on the individual vs. systemic responsibility scale. They mainly talked, however, about a lot of systemic factors that do impact children's behavior. They also acknowledged how societal and economic factors make it very hard for

parents to parent effectively. Parents are working very hard to keep their children in line; they (children) are coming home to an empty house, as parents both work to achieve economic security. Also, systemic issues have been embedded in us for years. We've seen racial issues all over the country:

- Systemic issues and personal responsibility both go together; systemic affects personal responsibility/behavior... a lot of things going on in homes that we don't see or know about.
- Kids that live in school (i.e. go to both before care and after care) behave better. Because they are attached to a school system.
- Both personal responsibility and systemic issues. It's the old African proverb: It takes a village. The parents play a role but others do as well. You can have a stay at home mom that spends all day at home with the children and teaching them but that doesn't always work. Even at Catholic schools it's not perfect. The system has to work but a lot of times the system doesn't work. If the system comes at them in an inequitable way, it often doesn't work.
- in Catholic schools, it's quite disciplined. The teachers in public schools have their hands tied; so some kids take over the classroom. There is a common shared value system in those schools (Catholic). Public schools don't have that common shared value system. I have seen families that have raised children with very good values and then they go to schools where there are no values and start to act badly. The values. That is something that is important and missing.

*Facilitator question: Is it possible for public schools to foster these kind of values in their schools?*

The participants did think it is possible in public schools, just not done. One participant commented: "It is probably not in the top of the administrators' list."

*Participant story:* Gave a story of a Philadelphia public school that was absolute chaos; students asked to state their 5 year goals said, "I'll be dead." The principal was cussing at the kids and kids walked out of class. New principal set values, common values and set tone; school changed and went from kids selling drugs and doing inappropriate things in the stairwell. Changed to a place where kids were wearing jackets, good behavior, etc.

*Participant story:* The principal from Paul Robeson H.S. in Philadelphia made the same kinds of changes; turned the kids around.

*Participant story:* Son at UD high school. Taking AP calculus and biology. He was the only black kid in each. Teacher said to him, "How did you get in here?" and treated him so badly. Teacher would mark him just for the little things. He would get it right but get dinged. Teacher gave him F's and D's on graded assignments but he passed the AP exams. Student applied to Naval Academy. All he needed was reference. The AP teacher would not write a recommendation saying she's only written one recommendation for a student to the Naval Academy. Recommended he ask another pre-calc teacher because she wouldn't write one.

*Participant story:* Son in 1<sup>st</sup> grade had an experience. 1<sup>st</sup> year in the school. Son came home complaining about older kids calling him a certain name. Mom was told by principal he was just a 1<sup>st</sup> grader and is sensitive and he'll get over it. Son stopped complaining. A while later mom had to leave work because son was kicked out for the day for fighting. Mom was surprised because that was not his personality. When she got to school none of the teachers could explain why he was fighting; just that it happened, where and who was involved. Automatic response that her son had to leave school for the day. Mom found out from son he had had enough of them calling him that name. When the 4<sup>th</sup> grader came in his face, her son (the 1<sup>st</sup> grader) he pushed the 4<sup>th</sup> grader. Mom's question: Who was monitoring? And they just automatically said he was wrong and tried to sweep the whole situation under the rug. They never dealt with the fact she and her son had complained about this problem before.

*Participant story:* Participant is a member of and works with the Latinx community. The parents she works with have said when they come across these kinds of obstacles; they often just try to go around them. Latinx culture is to respect the teachers but this is a challenge. I.e. they don't argue and feel they have to accept what the teacher says. They are by themselves and frustrated because they feel they have to accept what is happening. Language barrier makes it difficult to speak up. Plus, they are not used to speaking up for themselves due to cultural value of respect for teachers.

*(What this would look like if the Latinx students/families got the support they need?)*

If addressed well, everybody comes together to help the kids succeed.. "OK what is your problem. Is your language a problem? Is it your accent? Study habits, etc."

*Participant story:* There is a lot of racism at the high school; not so much at the elementary; the comments that are made, whether they are conscious or not. Her son took Mandarin and was excited. By the time he got past Mandarin 2 he was saying he'll never take more because of racist comments the teacher made. In AP biology a definite sense of who they think should be there and who not. "I don't know why you're in here. How did you even get in here?" In calc: "Well, you need to start all the way over." "I don't know how you even got this grade." In

Mandarin he was put in a group of non-Asians in class because he is different (student was African-American).

*Participant comment:* Mom took issue to the principal and superintendent but it was just so difficult. They are so consumed with the day to day with drugs. other problems. Etc.

*Participant comment:* 4,000 students in the HS; how does a child even navigate that world; "It is incomprehensible to me how they set up a good learning environment."

*Facilitator comment:* The group talked a lot about the importance of creating and promoting a set of values in public schools. Especially at the higher grade levels. They did not say which values should be promoted. Additionally they understood they were talking about public schools so "Catholic values" (i.e. anti-abortion, etc.) were not being suggested. My sense was they were talking about things like "respect" and other values appropriate for public schools. And that they were suggesting that other public schools that had adopted similar values and worked to have the school infused with those values from the principal to the teachers and the students experienced transformative changes.

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## THEME 2: Resource Imbalances: Inside and Out

### *Main Ideas*

*Quote:* "Purely from a cost perspective; the money being spent per student far exceeds what a parent could pay to send a child to a private Catholic or other school. I've never understood the money that's spent per student and the outcomes."

The key inequity was described as the tax burden being so high with little payoff: "We have no problem paying taxes for a system that works but not for paying for a system that's failing."

"The schools themselves are just awful. Who would want to go there? It doesn't look like a place of learning. It looks like a place you just put kids."

"They need to build a new UD high school. It's sad when you compare it with what they do in Swarthmore."

### *Concerns*

They (the school district) don't receive enough funds from the state but the question is: Where should the money come from?

Teachers are some of the lowest paid in Delaware County; pay the teachers more.

Catholic schools will change soon because people can't afford high taxes and tuition.

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

A more centralized district would help. Too many school districts in the state. Too inefficient and too much money is wasted. Need to consolidate. Also need more standards; state and national. Too many little fiefdoms

Need more teachers of color; recruit more people of color to teach. Teachers and staff should reflect the population.

“We want to follow the good teachers; teachers are the most important thing.”

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

#### *Main Ideas*

Both an asset and a challenge. Anything good is a challenge.

Specific comments:

- “District has 70 different languages. That’s challenging. It’s rewarding but definitely a challenge. All the cultures that make up those 70 languages is a challenge. We need to learn more about everyone.”
- “The UD High school choir is absolutely magnificent; there’s every nationality and every color. They hold a concert at St Dorothy’s every year because they have the biggest space. The place is mobbed.”
- “The asset is learning from each other. There has to be space for that, though. I don’t know if that space even exists. I think it’s more about finding a way to teach on a day to day basis but if they are not given that time and facilitated for them. I don’t know if they have the inclination or the resources to do this.”
- “We have to start with the values. Then we can go forth. Helps find common ground. Start by helping everyone see the values that do cross language or cultural boundaries.”
- “From a teacher’s standpoint. We have to find a way to come up with strategies. Include teachers in those planning discussions. Include as options in professional development and allow teachers to select as opposed to just dictating the professional development. They can choose topics, etc.”

*Facilitator question: How would you respond if teachers say they don’t have time to add this task of teaching values/diversity/cross-cultural learning?*

- Get your priorities straight
- Race and everything can be integrated into things across the school. It doesn't have to be something big. And it shouldn't be a standalone.
- You can find a way to incorporate a diverse approach, for example, even the Egyptians and the pyramids. How did they do that math?
- That's the beauty of private and catholic schools. They do that. They have global clubs, etc.

## GROUP 2

MODERATOR: TED ENOCH

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

#### *Main Ideas*

- When viewed on the spectrum between personal responsibility and systemic issues and factors, the participants each believed in a strong aspect of personal responsibility -- particularly to be borne and realized by students' parents -- that prevents and solves issues of discipline and antisocial behavior.
  - One parent told the sad story of a friend's child who was bullied by several students. And despite the district bringing in the parents of all involved, this was described as a failure of the parents of the "bullying" students to accept responsibility and intervene. This child had a scarring experience and eventually left the district.
  - Another participant started with: "It starts at home. When you go to school, you bring the home with you."
  - The priest in our group who helps lead a local Catholic school went on to say, "We don't tolerate bullying at all in our school. We deal with it immediately."
- When comparing public and private schools, some participants noted that when parents of Catholic school students pay for tuition, they become more invested in all student outcomes, including behavior outcomes. Thus this investment leads to greater parent involvement to prevent and correct disciplinary problems. "This is what happens when parents have more skin in the game ..."

- Others noted that beyond the faith-based experience for the students, the safer environment is part of what parents value about the Catholic school experience.
- Further, some noted the value and impact (both positive and negative) of peer learning and influence for students on behavior.

### *Concerns*

- Some of the participants spoke about their perceptions of unruly students at the McDonald's at State Road and Lansdowne Avenue, where police were called in to intervene.
- "How can we impress upon parents about this type of responsibility?"

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- "Things seem quieter this year in the neighborhood, probably due to the pandemic..."
- "Much of my perception comes from the news and local media. I don't see or experience negative student behavior personally."

## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

Participants noted several impacts and burdens that negatively impact the Catholic community:

- Parents of Catholic school kids pay both tuition and school-related property taxes.
- Catholics and non-Catholics are moving out of the district to avoid the tax burden
  - Enrollment rates continue to drop in the Catholic schools due to the combined burden of tuition costs and local property taxes.

It took some time, but value and resources provided by the school district to the community were eventually noted, including:

- Buses, nurses, crossing guards



- The UD orchestra's annual (11 years plus) tradition of performing a holiday concert at the local middle school
- The Performing Arts Center then was recognized with excitement as a valued contributor to the whole community.
- Summer Stage was also recognized in this way.
- After this quick brainstorm of value provided by the school district one participant noted that "I forget about things like these programs. I am so used to seeing us as separate that I feel like 'Never the two shall meet.' But this reminds me that we do share some things."

### *Concerns*

"Are we throwing good money after bad in the school district?"

- Why couldn't the Cares Act support our Catholic schools?

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Can we look for cost savings in the public school district? Are we saving money now during the pandemic? (Less busing. Less in school costs?)
- Is it possible to lower taxes? I'm paying over \$6K in property taxes.
- How can we communicate more about the public programs and value provided by the district? We forget about these things.

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

### *Main Ideas*

"I was raised to treat everyone the same... We are all God's children. We are all equally valuable..."

- "Why can't we meld together? We are all people. In my neighborhood we come from different religions but we get along... Can't we encourage this?"
- "Let's be honest... There is a diversity and difference that makes a difference. There is diversity among things like: Single parent families; poverty; language... These lead to

real challenges. But when we meet these challenges, that is when something special and beautiful happens.”

This recognition of difference, particularly with regard to language, then led to an interesting, quick discussion on how children of immigrants often play a crucial role in translating and communicating between the school and immigrant families. The Catholic participants seemed interested and impressed by the situation and some of the strategies noted by the school district observers in the group.

Eventually the group began to imagine the potential of a high performing school, “a Blue Ribbon School” that could attract families and business to the community. That school improvement would lead to real benefits to the community.

#### *Concerns*

- Are all of our families helping to instill a love of learning in our students?

#### *Tensions/Trade-offs:*

Once we are willing to see and notice differences and diversity, we can see the inherent challenges, but we can also notice the rewards and payoffs we receive when we meet these challenges.

#### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- How can the compelling vision of a high performing school, as a centerpiece of a richly diverse community, be (further) shared out in a compelling, inspiring manner?

### GROUP 3

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MODERATOR: ELLEN GREENBERG

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THEME: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

#### *Main Ideas*

- This group leaned towards seeing the issues of discipline and bullying as being systemic.
  - The perspectives on the higher end stemmed from thinking that people come into the world as good people and that circumstances shape their lives and that systems can't always support kids in the ways they need to be supported.

- There seemed to be some agreement around the following:
  - Bullying and acting out is about kids' trauma or because something is happening at home and is a cry for help
  - There are not enough resources to support these issues
  - If kids feel safe and heard, they'd respond differently
  - Lack of knowledge and resources on how to support kids who have experienced trauma
  - Faculty in some schools are being trained in trauma informed care and that helps them identify the signs that indicate the child may have experienced trauma and then respond holistically
- Some thoughts related to some of the mid-range responses (5 and 7) included
  - Schools need to have a consistent disciplinary code; children need to know they'll be held accountable AND at the same time teachers and administrators need to be listening to them.
  - Have to take care of the children being bullied as well as the child doing the bullying. Adults working with the child have to develop empathy in the child so they understand what they're doing with the other child.

### *Concerns*

- Lack of resources in the schools to prepare teachers and administration to support children who are experiencing trauma.
- Belief that public schools experience more fracture but that it's "crept in" to the Catholic schools in the last 10 years,
- Need to find ways to build the relationships between teachers and students so the children feel they can trust teachers.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

There seemed to be general agreement that:

- Catholic schools operate on a shoestring budget.
- One person indicated that she thinks going to Catholic school is a choice (free education is available) and you take the downsides with it when you make that choice.
- Another person mentioned the belief that parents are choosing Catholic school because of the good values being taught as well as because of safety and security concerns. Gave the example of having non-Catholic children who attend Catholic school.
- One person mentioned seeing a change in the district and mentioned that UDSD is not a value-based education. (Note: part of the discussion about the “change” in the district was the belief that kids from outside of Upper Darby are attending school in the UDSC. One of the observers shared that this isn’t true - that parents have to prove residency in order to attend school.

### *Concerns*

- This discussion centered around Nursing and the belief that it’s an Upper Darby financial decision to only have a nurse one day a week.
- The assertion was made that tax dollars should cover the physical needs of our students.
- Regarding what equity would look like or what actions might the district take for you to think there was a more equitable distribution of resources?
  - Find ways to share resources.
  - One person said that they shouldn’t have to suffer the absence of medical care or make a choice around medical support. The district needs to come up with that money. She was fine with the idea of raising taxes because she thinks we need to keep them physically safe above all else
- Equity would look like kids getting what they need and meeting them where they’re at to be successful.

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

### *Main Ideas*

*Framing question:* Thinking about other groups in the community ... which strike you as an asset and which strike you as a challenge and why?

- Assets:
  - Able to welcome 32 new Spanish families in our school - diversity is great. Great to experience the other different cultures
    - UD has an advantage being so diverse. Growing up in Haverford, the kids didn't experience that much diversity.
    - Diversity - language, culture, skin color, styles, huge assets.
    - Reaction to the BLM movement: moving and beautiful and took hold.
  - Spent money on books that featured diverse characters and asked the archdiocese to look at the book list so kids can see the material and feel good about who they are.
  - Autism: we are a culture seeing more kids in the classrooms who are operating fine
    - Having autistic children in the class - brings something else to the table that other students don't have and other kids would learn how to interact.

Challenges:

- Spanish families
  - Struggle trying to get them help to make the tuition - want to help them get in but they have low income jobs and now many are out of work.
  - Meeting people where they're at is challenging and language barrier is challenging
- Realizing that there are not enough books showing positive role models in those communities.
- Autism - can be challenging if the kids aren't ready or prepared to be in the classroom. Then they make enemies and it becomes a bad experience.
- Children are going home to things that are different than what we grew up with
  - What does family life look like to them - they might not have the same experience - not the same unity

- Families that don't have jobs now - families are struggling
- Don't have as many Asian population as we do Spanish families

### Concerns

- Equity - everyone has access to the resources - no one gets special treatment
- Children's academic, social emotional and physical needs would be taken care of in terms of the experts in each school. If there was a reading problem, we could get a reading expert. If there was a physical ailment, we could get nursing. Whatever was going on, the school would be able to provide what's needed (religious school included). If they are paying taxes, kids should get needed resources
- Making sure that needs get met. Seems to require that we get excited about diversity and that being seen as an asset.
- *What would the School District have to do for you to feel like you were an asset to the District/community?*
  - Money, resources (Nursing)

### GROUP 4

MODERATOR: SERRANO LEGRAND

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

#### *Main Ideas*

This group mainly thought that bullying and discipline were both due to personal responsibility while also being connected to the system. In this group, parents shared how they and their children signed an anti-bullying contract at the first day of school and felt like for the most part, students either stuck to what they pledged on the contract or were held accountable, as outlined within the contract. They attributed this to their Catholic faith as well as the explicit shared mission that underpins Catholic schooling, and its strict code for not tolerating these types of behaviors. In addition, this group also discussed the ways home life, social media, television and culture could contribute or aid in the discipline and bullying issues. Some additional excerpts from the dialogue:

- "There needs to be a shared mission released from the school that outlines expectations or students"

- “Discipline and Bullying” is uniquely individual to each person”
- “Partners with the school means partnering with the visioning”

Parents mentioned the importance of schools looking for acts of bullying and made notes that when this does happen, they are notified immediately (or should be). They also raised the following questions: Who is defining bullying? What is the shared vision of the school? In what schools are bullying and discipline issues happening? What's actually happening? Is this a pattern? What is the frequency? Are schools being transparent about these incidents?

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Some in this group felt like the entire system is inequitable. One participant imagined resources should be financed by businesses and people and the way these get allocated is based on utility of space. As one parent mentioned:

“It doesn't seem equitable that my child goes to \_\_\_\_\_ Middle School” and I am paying \$2,000 while my neighbor has three children and spends the same amount.”

Parents in this group mentioned and named that Catholic schools require you to pay per child and they were willing to make this sacrifice for their children's education. One mentioned that it was a bit upsetting because public school parents complained about wanting more taxes, even though Catholic school students didn't get the same access to these funds. In some instances, it was expressed that “parents should have more skin in the game to advocate more for their children.”

One parent described taking advantage of some resources around busing and IEPS for her children that needed them. While one parent talked about the familial relationships she was able to develop with the bus drivers throughout the years (and even referenced her and her children attending the funeral of a former bus driver), she was not satisfied with the level of service provided during the pandemic, citing a lot of back and forth and unclear communication from the UDSD. She felt as if the policies had changed with no notification to parents. She hopes that when public schools open, the new rules for eligibility with regard to bussing apply to public school kids as well.

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

In. general, participants said they felt treated as an asset, prompted by different interactions between their children and the Upper Darby School District (e.g. Little League, summer programs). Though sending their children to Catholic school, parents were proud their children

got to interact and play with a diverse group of kids that mainly did not go to Catholic schools and they were proud that their children's Catholic school also allowed those that don't share the Catholic faith to also attend. Some other notes from this dialogue:

- One parent mentioned “not having too much of a relationship” with the school district
- Appreciated the use of the public school space; when using this space didn't feel uncomfortable.

Parents recommended that at the administrative level, there should be someone who is coordinating conversation across the levels and schools.



## GROUP 5

MODERATOR: KIMBERLY LEICHTNER

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

#### *Main Ideas*

On the individual/systemic responsibility scale, two participants gave rating of 5, one 3, and one 7.

Rating of 5: “Always takes TWO to tango – always someone learning and always systemic issue. Not one or the other.” There’s some self-responsibility and some systemic issue. We didn’t



have social media around when growing up and that's playing a huge role now. Virtual bullying is just as bad as physical bullying. Parents play a key role "because they're not holding their kids responsible or don't know what's happening in social media, but there's also a lot going on in the world like what happened in Capitol yesterday. Is that acceptable? Are conversations happening in family unit to filter that? It's a little bit of everything. Faith is also a part of that. I don't see many young people at church anymore and we all need to treat each other better."

Rating of 7 – There are biases related to issues of race/ethnicity. Disparate experiences between Black/Brown and White kids – different educational environments, different experiences that seems systemically linked to predominant makeup of race in school. Data show that there's biases in how disciplinary actions are meted out to different students and are carried out more harshly on children of color. Maybe not intentional but it happens.

Rating of 3 – "Living next to a park, I see a lot of things that are going on in the community. It is much more lack of respect than I would anticipate would happen in a more structured environment. So different 35 years ago when Catholic/private schools were more economically available to UD residents. For example, during activities that my kids were involved in (baseball, b-ball), you could see differences in behavior/expectations between public school and private school individuals and even in their conscientious efforts. I don't want to get prejudicial but that's the point that I really see – there's a difference in expectation of behavior between the two and that carries over into the community. I hear particular adjectives used in the park next door and you can pretty much tell who they are and where they're from and what school they go to."

### *Concerns*

#### *What do you want UDSD to pay attention to?*

- One participant had conversations with a truant officer at UD high school years ago and discussed the need to teach civics – "learning how to interact w/ community, being respectful of themselves and carrying that respect from themselves to their family to their community."
- For example, right before holidays, he saw two girls deposit an Acme shopping cart in a park next door. He asked them: Did they really need to do that? Why not take it back to the store? He didn't get verbal responses but got arched/raised eyebrow and was ignored. "Reflects UDSD environment."
- Another participant expressed that social media plays a huge role especially among high school students. He expressed the view that the amount of damage Snap Chat does to students was enormous. "While private school kids might have higher expectations

because they're a little more respectful and disciplined, it's not always the case just because of their age group." He stated that social media can be really detrimental to students' mental health down the line. Schools should proactively educate on negative power of social media because it can be detrimental to someone's self-esteem and can be damaging (i.e. leading to suicide).

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- A participant raised important questions: Who is setting the bar for discipline? How are those things being defined and established? Who is communicating? (Hopefully these conversations are carried out in a way that's educational – helping students understand particular values. It doesn't always have to be just about "the stick." Who is there to help have those conversations? Is there a need for diversity in staffing?
- One participant said, "I can say that there's a difference in public vs. private school environment for proper disciplining of students. I know there's certain things done at private schools. For example, at St. Joe's Prep, there was an incident that happened outside school and these kids were expelled. This would never happen at public school unless there was a criminal activity or something happened on school property. Correct me if I'm wrong but I attended a meeting last weekend about this and it seems it's harder to have a more parental-type discipline in a public school setting whereas in private school, the old joke we had was. 'If Sister scolded you, just wait until you get home and your father will scold you even more.' Today, if a public-school teacher says something derogatory or corrective to a child, there would be hell to pay for that teacher."

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Pursue dialogues around racial issues taking place and be thoughtful about who is facilitating that dialogue.
- Proactively educate students about negative/damaging effects of social media and responsible use
- Need policy that if something's brought to the district's attention, they need to deal with it. A school district as large as UDSD might need a full-time person who's a "disciplinarian" to monitor social media to a degree and deal with issues that arise. Participant gave an example that 9-10 years ago, two kids got into a fight outside his Catholic school over Instagram and the school had to address it at the time.
- Better define the school's responsibility if kids are fighting over social media?

- One participant responded, “There are services that monitor social media activity. As CEO of an organization at State College at Penn State, our national affiliate monitors social activity for mentioning activity of any of our academic members. There’s a sliding scale. Public school administrators and teachers are now bound to behave when there’s an undesirable activity either on or off campus.”

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

One participant who was the head of a Catholic school had a lot of concerns in this area as discussed below. The observers even chimed in to point him to resources and to help address his concerns.

### *Concerns*

- The Catholic school head expressed that there’s Title 1 money that students in all schools are entitled to and he didn’t feel that they were getting their fair share and he has to “fight for the money they deserve.”
- He asked, “Who’s making these decisions? Is it UDSD or DCIU? We know there’s money out there and there’s certain percentages that should be coming to each school schools based on the students in that school.” He expressed concerns that they don’t have resources that public schools have because they’re tuition-based and they fund their staff and services based off that. They rely solely on tuition.
  - Said he’s thankful for the busing during this pandemic from UDSD and Delaware County.
  - But over summer, he had to find out on his own that there’s food opportunities for his students and families. “Everyone assumes people who go to Catholic schools are rich but that’s not the case. There are a lot of poor families that go to our school and they deserve opportunity to take advantage of these different things like free meals since students rely on schools for meals. When I approached Upper Darby, I found out about the free meals being provided by UDSD and I could then share that with my students. Some of those services listed in plenary, I didn’t know about them. Unless I hear about it from someone in passing or see an email, we’re not made aware of what those resources are. But I know for a fact that our students deserve an allotment of money for services to be provided for them in school.”

- Communication is unclear – who is being contacted? If it's the archdiocese, he's not getting that communication.
- Observer messaged this school official in chat that UDSD's Director of Federal Programs contacted directors of private schools in UD about pickup times for free lunch. She said that on UDSD website, there's a spot to sign up to receive communication from district so he'll get all communication going forward. Participant expressed concern that if he wasn't part of this conversation tonight, he wouldn't know about it and he's just "finding out now."
- A parent participant chimed in and said she heard about those services through other parents. In thinking about UD as being a hub of community engagement, this seems to her like an opportunity for a more widely publicized community-facing website? She said she had been on UDSD website but hasn't been able to find certain information

#### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- From private school side, it comes down to resources. UDSD gets some amount of money per student and we just don't get the same proportion for our students from UD. The Catholic school has a principal and an advancement director who fundraises. UDSD has a bigger staff. Private schools just don't have the resources that public schools have, understandably, and "It may be DCIU that's involved, too, which is more political – but if I don't take time as the principal to take time to find out or learn info, we won't know because simply don't have the staff."
- Safety and security structures in school is a huge issue. UDSD might have in their budget to hire security officers and put in camera but as principal of private school, he has to go find the money by applying for grants and fundraising. He felt that they should get money from UDSD to help with that.
- An observer unmuted to say that this is what this whole initiative is about: "For last three years, we've been trying to figure out how to get communication to as many people as possible and there's always something someone's not hearing about. It's not intentional. We put a lot of communication on main page of school district website. We have an Instagram and Facebook page, send out Twitter, there are mass emails and mass texts. Every district and school has issues of getting information out to everyone. There's no intentional lack of communication; it's a constant struggle to get critical information to everyone. I mean the Township probably still has food boxes they're distributing that people probably don't know about. It's a big community! Not hearing about something isn't intentional on the district's side or even a lack of effort – that's the struggle that we all have."

#### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- UDSD should reach out to Catholic/private principals to share resources that are available. It's a simple operational procedural solution. Who should be made aware of what's going on and how does that information get disseminated? Private school principals should be able to tell students at beginning of year which websites to go to or who to call if they want more information about any of these specific resources.
- Maybe a couple times a year, DCIU or UDSD administration meets with principals of private schools to deal with issues on a higher level like nursing and access to food/meals.
- Build relationships with local government and state reps to become more aware of resource opportunities.
  - "Of course, it's always hard to figure out what funding sources are out there. On private side, we think there should be more money given to private entities. Constant tug and war. Our main access to that is now is Educational Improvement tax credits. That's our biggest funding mechanism that we can get from the state now."
- The parent commented upon hearing administrators having to spend time and resource to acquire basic things that schools should have like security cameras, "Are there ways to simplify the processes for securing funding for some of those things that are more fundamental? Is there a way to simplify visibility for some of those resources that are available, the kinds of grants that are out there and can be applied for?"

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

#### *Main Ideas*

Half the participants viewed themselves as assets and diversity as an asset, while the other half viewed diversity as neither a challenge or asset but as a reality that's "true and is just there."

#### *Concerns*

- One participant stated that as a parent, her and her family are treated as an asset because they're "a middle-class White family with advanced degrees. There are privileges and advantages that are unfairly afforded to us. I have biracial brothers and sisters and their experiences have already been different from some of my own children. I moved to UD

because it's so culturally diverse and there's opportunities to engage with people from so many different backgrounds."

- The Catholic school director said that he has a diverse student population – 50-50 African-America/Caucasian students, 50-50 Catholic/non-Catholic students. He recognizes that they have opportunities to take advantage of this and make it an educational opportunity for his students to have "those conversations, especially in today's climate with everything going on throughout the country. We need the right people to do that – a lot of people are afraid to have that conversation. They're afraid to make statements and be called a racist. I know my teachers are afraid to have those conversations and that's unfortunate because it's a great opportunity to be having those conversations now. I have friends who work in UDSD who feel the same way. Is there an opportunity to educate our teachers to be able to facilitate those conversations about what's happening in the world right now, to help develop better citizens, face these challenges and be a better leader?"
  - Another challenge in his school was that they had to change freshman curriculum to teach who Jesus Christ is because some students didn't know and that's the foundation of a Catholic education.
  - He also described an incident they had today in a virtual classroom where conversation about white privilege broke out because of DC incident, and he got a call from a parent saying their child was accused of being racist. He knows adults who aren't ready to have those kinds of conversations. He knows the teacher wasn't prepared to have that conversation and "you need to be able to facilitate or diffuse that in the right direction and if not, it'll blow up."

#### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- Student population is 50-50 in the Catholic school but predominantly Caucasian staff. There's only 2 African-American staff (no Black teachers) and UDSD is probably facing similar issue where staff racial ratio doesn't match students.
- Part of challenge is you have a landscape that's changing on the fly – "Having a collar doesn't make me knowledgeable in this area and I wouldn't be comfortable addressing these issues. I have a school that's probably less than 10% European at this point. I'm trying to process this stuff internally let alone being able to explain it to someone else and I'll be the first to admit it."
  - A participant agreed with this and said maybe part of it is providing resources for parents to have these kinds of conversations with their own kids

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Need to create an environment that thinks of diversity through that asset-oriented lens. It takes so much work, but how do we create an asset-oriented culture about diversity? How do we see that students from different backgrounds have potential for success not just in K-12 but also in college? How do we create a culture in leadership/administration/teaching? How do we recruit and hire staff who are responsive to that diversity and bring that to be one of the great attributes of the school district?
- Create opportunities to help teachers facilitate tough conversations
- The earlier that kind of engagement can happen where students can learn about different backgrounds, the more helpful it can be for them.
- DCIU should train all teachers in Delaware County how to have these conversations. It would be a great hub to bring teachers from all schools to share their experiences.
- Create opportunities to share resources between the Catholic schools and between Catholic and public schools but also create more and new opportunities for communication and collaboration in ways that can advance the district as a whole where Catholic school is viewed as part of that system versus as a separate entity.

### *District Observer Comments*

- Observer thanked participants for honest communication: “We’re really all in this together. We can always do better; communication is a 2-way street. We often share students so it truly is a partnership – students move between public and parochial schools in our community. This conversation is just a first step and we are planning to have follow-up and an action-plan.” She stated that she already put together an email to superintendent so he can follow up with principals to get the information they need.

## GROUP 6

MODERATOR: CAROL LYDON

THEME 1: DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING: REAL AND HYPED

### *Main Ideas*

Participants were unable to put a number on the reasons contributing to this theme. All seemed to think that it was a problem that was too big for the schools to address on their own.

One participant believed that both statements were true at some level but that “solving bullying is HARD” and as a result, there is no one way to solve bullying. They stated that their daughter had been bullied at Highland Park to the point that she didn’t want to go to school, however the school counselor “did a great job” in solving the issue and it didn’t happen again. He made clear that this was not the reason they chose to send her to a private Catholic School (he did not say the reason they did) and that they did not look that closely into the reason for the bullying.

Another stated that she and her husband (he was not present) were very concerned with discipline issues around their kids. She describes her older son as a “model kid” as far as discipline goes but stated that their younger son had a lot of discipline issues throughout grade school and into middle school, during which time he attended public school. He would do things and they would beg the teachers for there to be “real consequences” to his actions. They were told that there were kids with much bigger disciplinary problems than his, who needed more intervention than he did. She said once he learned of that latitude, his behavior became worse because he knew he could get away with things. She felt that this was partly due to the fact that they were white, they were from a “stable, two-parent family”, their older son was a “good kid” so that their younger son got the benefit of the doubt, more so than if he would have been a minority. She thinks if he had been [from a minority], he would have received more discipline. Now that he attends Catholic School, where there is all around more discipline, he is doing much better and thriving. She believes that Catholic schools are generally stricter without regard to students specifically, which has benefitted her son.

Another woman spoke of how in the public schools, there are “so many kids”. She recalls going on a field trip when her daughter was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 3-4 kids acting up. The teacher had to spend so much time with those 3-4 kids that the other kids missed out.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

A participant said she “didn’t want to be that person” but that she believes that there are more issues from children from single-parent homes – they need more attention, mothers work several jobs, etc. – issues and that’s hard to address as a school district.

Another stated there needs to be diversity in the faculty and administration, the lack of which leads to bias in the school environment. He said that if you come from a certain environment (lived and/or worked) and learned to handle problems in a certain way, you might not be prepared for all the differences in how other’s handle problems. If you try to use a “one size fits all approach” to discipline without taking into account differences culturally, socio-economically, etc., it’s not going to be effective. Derek believes that “Personal responsibility” is too much for schools to manage.



All participants agreed that leadership (principals, teachers, staff) needs to be consistent i.e. constant turnover of staff creates an unstable environment. Every time the leadership changes, there is a change in levels of discipline, structure, teaching, etc. In elementary school, the kids know how to toe the line; they know what's expected on them. In middle school, there are many more influences and without stable leadership, there's a break down. There's no one stable message when leadership is always changing. It's hard for students to feel like they are in a stable environment with a "rotating cast of characters." They cannot know the expectations when the expectations continually change. There needs to be discipline at the elementary school level – a solid foundation – which will guide them through middle school and high school, when students naturally start to question authority and sow their oats.

Having stability at a leadership level would help lead to an understanding of differences. It "would happen".

They all felt that it's understandable that good teachers and good principals go to other schools/districts and want to elevate their careers, but it's hard to see them go, especially strong male teachers. All agree that it takes at least two years for teachers to get on board and get their footing, which can't happen with constant staff changes.

It was stated that there is generally good parental engagement at the elementary school level, but that drops off in middle and high school. People are encouraged to participate or volunteer but it is hard to participate for many reasons, including too many clearances and security issues. Just getting to a meeting or an activity is a chore. This makes it harder to connect with other parents/teachers/staff. All the rules make it harder to feel a part of it. Leadership has to work harder in order to make parents feel a part of the school community, especially in middle/high school when kids don't want parents involved.

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

A participant who was a teacher in the 1970s stated that there is "something to be said" about how adults model for the kids, how teachers/staff interact with each other and respond to bullying. She said that there needs to be a way to get adults or better yet, student leaders to be models for other students in the school and to find different ways to handle stresses and disagreements. "There's a way to pull out the positives of how children relate to each other."

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

- There was a lot of discussion around people feeling that they were paying taxes for other people's kids, however, none of the participants expressed these feelings themselves.

- One person indicated that her daughter received bus service through the district to Sacred Heart Academy.
- All participants agreed that school funding should not be based on property taxes, which inevitable results in inequity between districts. Increased state funding across the board would result in more equity. If funding were equitable, there wouldn't be a reason to look at some schools as "good" and some as "bad."
- They discussed the actual school properties. Tara stated that the look of a place can be inspirational. Someone described a recently built school in Springfield as looking like a college campus and imagined that kids going to that school feeling inspired to do well, to succeed, go to college. It was noted that Upper Darby High School needed a "facelift". It looked exactly the same as it had when one alum attended in 1990.
- When there are immigrant communities, ESL is necessary. The students need these services in order to succeed.
- Teachers need training on bias.
- One participant stated they want all students in Upper Darby to have a good school experience, to go to college, to have good teachers. They would love to not have to pay to send their daughter to private school.
- Another can count on one hand the number of teachers that she wasn't crazy about. The teachers are "incredible" in how they can do so much with so little. Teachers are **not the issue**. However, she feels that the more minority teachers there are the better – so that they mirror back to the students.
- A mother states that she has seen her school become more diverse and, as a result, more "rich," but there are many families who fear that diversity. They cannot see beyond the differences.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- Several participants stated that a lot of people felt that as middle-class, working people, they pay most of the taxes but poor kids (in public schools) get most of the benefits in terms of more aides, lunches, etc. Their kids get less because someone else's kids get more. Those with the most resources need the least resources. Whereas, with Catholic schools "everybody pays." There's a real struggle in how to get around people's fear of not having enough and not wanting to share. Some people felt it was just human nature to not want to share, so how do you change that?
- They also noted that different districts have different resource needs, but if there was a base level of equity between schools, the differences wouldn't be so pronounced.

- There is a feeling that people in certain communities feel that other communities e.g. Aronomink, live in a bubble and don't want "troubled kids" in their community. She cites an example of a few years ago, when kids from other communities were sent to Aronomink with no resources to succeed. She called it a "recipe for failure" which failed. There's a concern that if you live in a "bubble" you don't really care about other students as long as your kid is okay.
- Lack of diversity on staff. A participant stated that they don't have any black teachers, but it wasn't for lack of trying. They've had candidates, but they ended up taking other positions. You can't just find "an African American teacher and throw them in the mix."

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Get public, private and parochial schools to work together so that education can be well-rounded and people can find their niche.
- Figure out ways to get more diversity on staff – how to recruit minority teachers who may want to work in minority-majority schools and give back to their own communities and make a difference. How to convince these people that it's just as important to work in these schools.
- Money from the property taxes could be put into another fund so that the taxes are pooled and distributed forward, rather than staying just in that community. It would avoid keeping all the money where it started and avoid certain places getting more money and therefore, more resources.
- It was noted that kids "get it" on equity – they know how to get it together, how to work for equity. "It's "in their (kids) hands and in their hearts – it's there already." They need exposure to different people at a young age.

## **THEME 3: Diversity: An Asset and a Challenge**

### *Main Ideas*

One father talked about being a black family with children in a white school. He felt that the school saw them and their differences as an asset, but that it was a challenge because now they had to think about their curriculum, the activities, etc. and make them inclusive in a way they hadn't needed to before.

One woman talked about parenting her Latino son as a white mother.

### *Concerns:*

At Highland Park, two parents (who are Black) said they were viewed as an asset because they were a two-parent family.

From a school's perspective, St. Andrew has 1,000 students, which the former teacher believes helps the district because it frees up space in the public schools, but it draws resources, such as busing from the district. She feels like they have a good working relationship with the district.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs:*

- Sacred Heart Academy just started a black student union but there was no black faculty to run it; they had to enlist the help of alumni to run it. There is a distinct lack of diversity in the staff.
- One mother is white raising a Latino son. There are preconceived notions of what he is and what his family is like that may be incorrect. Assumptions are made based upon how he looks and what kind of family he has. Their family has two different kids in two different schools with two different ethnicities. They have to be able to advocate for them and teach them to advocate for themselves – both asset and a challenge. They bring a lot of diversity just within their family.
- She doesn't feel any more that there is a public–parochial feud anymore. It's more public school vs. public school, fighting for resources. She doesn't believe that Catholic schools are seen as a bad thing. The public schools have enough strife of their own that people are fighting there for their "weird" reasons. She talks about the opposition to the building of a new school on a field in Clifton Heights. She can't imagine being upset at the building of a new beautiful school for her children to attend. She doesn't know why people there don't want a new school.

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

Again, it's important to have diversity in the staff. Students need to be exposed to different people, not just students but teachers too.

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### **BONUS DISCUSSION – HUB OR ISLAND**

We ended up with a few minutes following our discussion about diversity, so I asked people to speak about the final theme of *Community Engagement: A Hub or an Island*. We did not have time to fully discuss this issue, but the main points are listed below:

- Most people felt that during the pandemic, the district had become more of a hub, especially since they had begun to provide free meals to Catholic school students.
- Even though it was hard to feel connected during the pandemic, the District got an A for effort.
- It was mentioned that some people always are the ones to do the heavy lifting and a “lot of people who need to be here [at tonight’s meeting] are not here.”
- One person talked about a school that makes the effort to get parents involved but some just aren’t even going to be responsive. She gave the example of during a snowstorm, people are informed of school closings by phone messages, e-mail and text messages but inevitably two kids always show up to find the school closed.
- All participants stated the need for people to get to know each other in a small group setting – that this evening’s forum made that clear. They suggested a coffee klatch in which people could get to know other parents as people, stating that it would be one way to get people to be more empathetic to others.

## GROUP 7

MODERATOR: CHRIS SATULLO

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

#### *Main Ideas*

- Participant responses to the individual vs. systemic question were scattered all over the scale, which was reflected throughout a long, robust discussion of this theme.
- One St. Dot’s mother began our discussion by advocating strongly that discipline and behavior are purely a matter of parenting and values at home.
- Others agreed that parenting and teaching of values matter, but they were far more open to the notion that systems and various matters beyond a parent’s reach affect their child’s experience of school and how they react to that experience.
- People detailed experiences that gave them this more forgiving view:

- One woman, noting that she was raised in an Irish-Catholic household that to outsiders would seem to be value-driven, said, “A lot went on in the home where I was raised that outsiders couldn’t see and wouldn’t know about.” The only specific she gave was that her family was “very biased. I can see that a lot of problems come from systems that instill a lot of preconceived notions in people.” She went on to say that as a young, single mother, people at her child’s Catholic school made her feel that her child’s struggles with a learning disability were her fault, because she was a bad parent who got pregnant too young.
- A man, who said he had been very active in UDHS’ home and school association, said his high-achieving daughter transferred from the public school to Archbishop Prendergast due to bullying that caused her “actual terror.” He didn’t fault UDHS officials’ response to the situation, saying “their hands were tied,” due “to the backgrounds of the other students involved.” He said his daughter then experienced a different kind of alienation at Prendie, as she was treated as an outsider who “lacked true Catholic identity.” Overall, he said, this experience taught him that parents can’t control everything their child does or experiences at school. He said he has some understanding when kids whose parents have to work multiple jobs end up falling in with peer groups who lead them in bad directions.
- Another woman, who sent her son to public schools, said her son was punished for bringing a knife to school that a friend had talked him into buying. “Boys will just do the stupidest things to earn points with their peers.” The experience was “earth-shattering” for her.
- This led to a discussion among several parents of sons about how “boys are just more difficult.”
  - When I shared with the St. Dot’s mother who was so strong on parental responsibility the stories of mothers who were in my group for the Dec. 10 forum about how they felt their sons were misunderstood and singled out because of stereotypes about black boys, she responded, “You see, I think they are wrong there. It doesn’t have anything to do with race. It has everything to do with them being boys. That’s the bias - people just know boys are more likely to be trouble.”

### *Concerns*

- Bias from systems and individuals operates on multiple levels, not just the ones that get talked about most.

- Boys are more prone to risky or defiant behavior, but school systems sometimes don't seem prepared to deal with it.
- "Kids aren't cookie-cutter, so discipline shouldn't be either. You can't do it one-size-fits-all." Interestingly, this quote - which spurred heads to nod in agreement - came from the mother who most strongly advocated for a focus on parental responsibility.
- Drugs are a constant, threatening presence in all secondary schools in the township, whether Catholic or public.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- This group was inclined to believe on principle that Catholic schools provide a more values- and community-oriented environment, but several acknowledged that their personal experiences cast some shadow on that sunny view.
- Everyone was adamant that parental values, examples and accountability were important - but varied in their willingness to give systemic issues, including bias, an equal role in any problems that arise.

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- The man whose child transferred to Prendie said he's aware of and highly impressed by the way peer review is used at UDHS and would like to see that program expanded and better advertised.
- This came to light in discussing Theme 2 but pertains here: Several Catholic school parents said they had not been aware of some of the free psychosocial and remedial services made available to Catholic schools. They said information and savvy about those services is by no means equally spread among Catholic parents.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

This group expressed no anger and little sense of grievance about being required to pay school taxes on top of parochial tuition.

- The parents who'd sent their children all the way through Catholic school said that public school had never been an option for them, mostly because of what they saw as the positive benefits of parochial schools' small size and sense of community, and not so much because of negative perceptions of Upper Darby public schools.
- The group was struck by the list of support services the district and IU provide to parochial/private schools.
- One mother said, when her husband died a few years ago, her parochial school principal made her aware of the counseling services provided by the district: "She said, 'Here they are. What do you want?' I said, 'All of it.' So we utilized those services heavily and they were amazing. Just fantastic."
- By contrast, other parents said they were not aware their children could access any of the publicly funded supports mentioned in the opening presentation. "I wasn't aware my kids were entitled to anything," one said.

### *Concerns*

- While most in the group were not familiar with resource imbalances among UDSD schools, several were thoughtful about the challenges and costs that the school districts faces in serving so many ESL students.
- One man said too many students in UD lack broadband access at home, which he said is the most punishing inequity of all.
- For this part, we invited the Drexel Hill principal who was observing to join in to talk about some of the resource challenges his team faces - and his sense of how varied the resources at different suburban schools are.
- The group asked him a lot of questions about how schools and the IUs are funded, how state aid works and why it is that resources lag in Upper Darby. They discussed a bit the impact that having few big industries or commercial centers inside the district might have on the tax base and available resources.

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Do more to explain and promote the publicly funded services available to parochial students.



- Do more to explain to the general public how the school budget comes together and is funded.
- Do something to increase broadband access for students to do homework and research outside school.

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

#### *Main Ideas*

- This group was inclined to see diversity mostly as an asset.
- One parent said: “Growing up in a global society, my son will have to speak a cultural language that I was never taught. Already I can see that he and his friends are way more fluent in it than I am.”
- Another said: “I love the diversity of Upper Darby. Corporations are going more and more for diversity, so the earlier our kids get comfortable with it, the better. I think my children already are more inclined to see similarities among people, rather than the differences.”
- A St. Bernadette parent said with pride that the parish school is “very diverse,” but that doesn’t mean there are no problems: “They had a Santa in one time before Christmas and he was asking the kids what they wanted to be when they grow up. And kids were saying doctor or lawyer. But the Santa - an older white guy - looked at a black kid in the class and said, ‘I’ll bet you want to be a basketball player.’ The only good news was that my child said the kids in the class said that was a wrong thing to say.”

#### GROUP 8

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MODERATOR: HARRIS SOKOLOFF

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

## *Main Ideas*

One participant who was at a “7” (i.e. It’s more a systemic issue) told a story about teenagers who did something to a neighbor’s house and they could see who did it because of their Ring system. The kids were black. The neighbor called the police. The participant said: “Shortly after, something happened to my house and I also caught it on the Ring. Neighbors asked if I saw who it and I said yes. They asked if I was going to call the police, and I said no. Their assumption was that it was kids of color, but it wasn’t. I know the kids; they are in my daughter’s school. The assumption was that if it was white kids from the street, then it was kids just playing around, but that if it was black kids it was more serious. This is not the first time conversations like this have taken place. Often, I feel that I don’t fit in with my neighbors around this issue.”

- Another story from another participant: “I live a couple of blocks from St. Dot’s and when I was growing up, like other kids I roamed the streets. Just kids being kids; some threw an egg at times. I’m not a police caller, either. I know who the kids are, too. White boys fooling around, doing silly things. I’m not sure it’s systemic. I am 50-50 systemic and personal responsibility. As a mom, I’m trying to teach my children right from wrong and hope the schools are supporting that. And I’ve not seen any bullying with my children yet.”
- “Children learn from people that surround them and need to be surrounded by adults who teach right from wrong.”
- “I see this in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders I coach. There’s a little bullying, but it’s like a cry for attention if something is going on at home or something.”

*Question: How do adults act/respond to children whose behavior we view as inappropriate? Whether bullying or raucous behavior?*

- “ Sometimes the adults make the situation the fault of the person being bullied based on the child’s skin tone – “Oh, they’re always this or that. They are the problem.””
- Adults need to make sure they listen and give full examination of what’s going on and not base it on the color of people’s skin.

*Question: What are some of those outside factors?*

- “There is a lot of influence when we see the disgrace in DC yesterday [Jan. 6] and see people who think rules and laws don’t apply to them. And then protestors this summer were treated differently. There are systemic issues that lead people (whether adults or

impressionable youth) to think they are entitled to behave in certain ways; that make some groups feel entitled to do horrific things.”

- Social media – cyber-bullying
  - “As a parent, when I’m on Hillcrest or Drexel HSA pages, the things that are commented on the students in our building, I am constantly offended by the way children are spoken-about. At the end of the day, they are children who are trying to figure things out. My daughter comes home and will say, “Why are some kids always being blamed? On these Facebook pages I see people trashing teachers and children, talking about children in the worst ways.”
  - Two biggest outside influences:
    - History of township was that it was not diverse and those there earlier feel it is “theirs” and others are intruders
    - Economics: those at the lower economic scales sometimes get treated less nice.
- The HSA pages are monitored, and people are asked to take down an inappropriate comment, but once the parents have vented, it’s been posted. People are not punished, but it gets posted.
  - If this is how the parents post and talk at home, this is what the child hears and does.
- If you take time to build relationships and get to know the kids, you don’t have the same problems.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

#### *Inequities Within/Across District Schools:*

- As an employee, I work in all 11 elementary schools
  - There are clear inequities across schools – books, staffing and class size, physical conditions of the buildings.
  - Staff are invested in their students even with those stark inequities and overcome a lot for the kids. They play the hands they are dealt.

- Overcrowding at Highland Park school
  - Would love to see additions at Aronomink but it would NOT reduce overcrowding or class size at other elementary schools or address concerns teachers or families have in the most populous buildings
- Constantly see difference between Drexel Hill Middle and what they have in Beverly Hill Middle Schools in terms of resources
- Quality of buildings affects student motivation – temperature, repair of the school, and more – affects student’s ability to work (too hot in some schools in warm weather, too cold in other schools in the same warm weather).
- Poor conditions don’t show any pride in the school, which affects how the children feel about themselves and their schools.
- Neighborhoods that have higher paying taxes are the schools that get more attention.
- Economic status of families and students – lowest economic students have poorest facilities/materials/etc. If you look at the economic status of the kids in DH and BH is a clear and marked difference, and you know which one is air conditioned, and which ones don’t have doors on bathrooms.
- Sports fields not in good condition, trashy.

#### *Between District and Catholic Schools*

- Always an issue to pay taxes and tuition
  - I never had a child in public schools and paying school district taxes was always an issue. I don’t have a problem making donations. But I’d rather pay what I choose to give than being made to give.
  - I thought Monsignor Bonner high school was good. My child went there, and I had no complaints. I know that UDHS has some better resources but know my son would have been lost there – it was too big.
- While I didn’t get anything personally from the taxes paid to UDSD, if I look at it globally, all of the children educated in the district affect all of us. Their behavior affects us all.
- People wouldn’t have so much problem with the taxes they pay if they thought they were getting a quality product, or if they heard good things about the schools.

- My children have had wonderful teachers and wonderful resources in UDSD, including full-time nurses. Teachers in UDSD changed my children's lives so I can sing praises of UD Schools.
- I want to see my taxes (12K/year) reflected in the schools and classrooms I teach in.
  - The teachers are great, but they don't have the resources or support for the number of children we have pouring into the district.
  - But the school don't look good from the outside
- Catholic schools don't get resources from the state – no AC, same old desks as when I went there.
- My kids go to Catholic Schools, and it pains me to know some public schools in UDSD get more than other schools in UDSD.

Underfunded by the state, need elected representatives to fight for better funding

- Public schools are mandated to do different things, but the mandates are not funded.
- UDSD is basically a bedroom community without a lot of corporations paying taxes to the district.

As a coach of flag football for the Catholic leagues, we play at DHMS fields, and that track area is almost a barren land. The track has broken beer bottles, etc. and no one cleans it. So in getting ready for games, I'd spend time cleaning up the visitor side so visitors would not be laughing at us for having trash all over the place.

We choose to send our kids to Catholic schools, even with the high taxes. It comes down to personal experience. If the product was worth it, I'd have no problem at all sending my kids to public school.

- We want our children to develop a strong religious foundation. A good faith-based education helped me, helps my children

#### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- We need to advocate with our state representatives for more funding for public school.
- Better and cleaner fields and buildings
  - Schools that are in better condition – at least from the outside (windows, cleanliness, etc.).

- Maybe redraw the sending and receiving lines. It would be very difficult, but worth it if it could lead to more equitable resource allocation, but parents at schools that benefit now would be vocally against this. Maybe parents would invest in more schools, not just those right around the corner from where they live.
- What we are doing now – the conversations – would be a good place to start.
- More support for younger children – even down to kindergarten, outreach to pre-schools day care pre-K; full day K. State requirements for K and elementary school assume all children are getting quality day care.

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

#### *Main Ideas*

- *How it's an asset:*
  - Exposure to and learn how to work with people outside of your “box”, outside of what you are used to. You need to be exposed to all kinds of people. I went to Catholic school all my life (K-college), and when you are there it's safe, but I was shell-shocked when I went into the real world. I had to learn how to work with all different kinds of people.
    - Have to learn how to live with people of different races, religions, and senses of sexuality.

#### *How it's a challenge:*

- It's uncomfortable.
- We have a very divided community, but children don't get a good experience of it until they enter the high school. Elementary schools are not very diverse at all. Even middle schools can be very polarized in terms of the populations/neighborhoods they serve.
- Some schools have more dense neighborhoods and that creates overcrowded.
- Drexel Hill is getting more diverse and that's a challenge to deal with more diverse students with greater diversity of needs,
- We are not diverse until high school,
- The challenge of diversity is seen in:

- Resource imbalances and diversity breed some resentment
- Resource inequities makes diversity more of a challenge
  - I had no idea of all the diversity (languages, ½ are on free and reduced lunch), and that creates more challenges that I don't know about.
  - We need to understand that those kinds of home situations can place more stress and demands of children
- Differences between 19026 and 19082
  - We need to stop focusing on ZIP code good and focus on greater good – one of us succeeds, all of us succeeds.
- There were some ugly moments in meeting re: a new school in Clifton Heights was all about not wanting “those” kids in their neighborhood – it felt very racist and I was horrified by it.

#### *Pro-equity actions*

Having these kinds of forums – particularly for those of us who don't send children to UDSD – opens my eyes to things I don't see every day.

- As a parent of children in Catholic schools, we have to be responsible to help our children become aware of diversity and not to be afraid of it, to be more respectful.
- Diversity is an educational/learning asset. It's also a challenge in that it leads to inequitable use of resources. How do we distribute resources so that they go to those students with the greatest needs?
- Translators/interpreters so parents and students who don't speak English can participate in their children's education, attend HAS meetings, etc.
- Scheduling flexibility

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#### GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE FORUM

- I love being reminded of how awesome living in this area is.
- Appreciate district is forward thinking enough to have these conversations and involving such a diverse group of stakeholders.
- Happy to be here to let people know I like being Catholic and living in Upper Darby.

- I'm grateful that the SD is recognizing we are all in it together and am glad it was shared so broadly.

## GROUP 9

MODERATOR: JOSH WARNER

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

#### *Main Ideas*

- Scores offered along the personal/systemic scale: 3, 4, 4, 5, 6
- The prevalence of smartphones makes it much easier to bully. [Much agreement around this.]
  - It's not much of a problem in elementary schools, but in middle and high schools it's huge
- Physical bullying can be seen or witnessed. But online bullying can't be monitored well.
- Bullying can sometimes be noticed after-the-fact.
  - You can notice a change in the students being bullied – withdrawn, etc.
- Feel like there's been a shift in the amounts of bullying in UD and Delco over the last 10 years [Some disagreement on this point.]

#### *Concerns*

- Some concern that bullying was a leading topic for this forum.
  - Participant said they didn't have any recent experience with the state of schools – wondered aloud if they were out of touch with the schools.
- Concerns about the types (and daily changes in type) of students' supervision.
  - The kinds of coverage change.



- A teacher with a small room of 20-30, then a lunchroom with hundreds and a few staff.
- After-school issues:
  - Kids used to congregate at McDonald's, but then McDonald's changed hours to be closed during after-school hours.
  - Another example: A Curriculum Specialist in one of the schools said he spent 50% of his work time on student discipline! (pre-COVID)

Structural question: Aren't discipline & bullying two separate issues?

There's a history of really hard discipline in the past.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- Tensions over how to handle physical bullying vs. other kinds (social, online)

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- We should bring kids together more often to understand conflict resolution, to see what bullying looks like and develop skills to address.

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## THEME 2: RESOURCE IMBALANCES: INSIDE AND OUT

### *Main Ideas*

- Sending children to Catholic school is a proactive decision made by parents. It's a choice families make and they're informed.
  - This is a carefully weighed decision for many.
- The state does help defray costs, and we're grateful for that.
- Don't often think about equity differences between UDSD and Catholic schools; rather, we think a lot (and are worried about) equity differences between school districts.
- What about the resource gaps between UD and other Delco districts? These are very high in some cases!
- UDSD is just saturated with students.
  - Schools and class sizes are bursting.

- “I personally feel it is my responsibility to support the UDSD – just like any other resident or taxpayer. Even with this, I choose to send my kids to Catholic school.”
- The transportation benefits are big, and important.
  - Along with the textbook funding, psych services and evaluation services.
  - These are appreciated.
- It’s easy to see equity/resource gaps in the physical condition of the UD schools.
  - Not just across UD neighborhoods, but between UD and other Delco areas.

### *Concerns*

- We choose Catholic schools in part because we want our kids to learn morality; we don’t mind discipline; we want a faith-based education. We can’t really get that in public schools.
- In the olden days, Catholic schools were much cheaper.
  - Expenses/cost have been growing lately.
- Equity worries about families that want Catholic schooling but can’t afford the elementary school tuition.
- What would UDSD do if all of a sudden, 2-3 of the UD Catholic schools had to close? Crowding, strain...
- Even with IU services, there are low amounts of nursing services to the Catholic schools.
  - Some 2-3 days per week, others just 1.
  - IU has limits on nurse days.
- Equal spending isn’t necessarily equitable or fair.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs*

- Families have to weigh costs and budget.
- The differing school systems have differing needs and draw from different supplies of students.

- Even if students are treated equally in a spending sense (\$ per student), there still exist stark differences in facilities and other resource.
- Budgets seem to be hamstrung; they have to try to be even/equal across many differing schools and needs.

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Need to have more equal/fair funding at the state level.
- We need to bring in more businesses to supply taxes, resources.
  - Businesses are often partners, too – internships, volunteers.
- Tap into the diversity of Upper Darby as a unique *form* of equity.
  - Which other areas of Delco could claim so many languages, cultures, foods, etc.?
  - Students could be immersed in this, as a leg-up for their future lives.
  - We have big assets in the form of the immigrant community.

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

### *Main Ideas*

- The diversity in the district is real!
  - We can't hide behind it as a blame or excuse
- I'd say we are treated as an asset, because Catholic schools educate kids!
  - Leads to less crowding in UDSD schools.
- I'm impressed by what UDSD has done / can do with all the diversity in the community.
  - Seems to be a positive relationship with Catholic community.
- I'd say we're an asset – but "I'm not sure that UDSD knows I exist...except for me paying my taxes!"
  - Only a challenge when we speak up about a problem.

- One example of a problem arising with busing services for their child – I’m treated as a challenge cause I’m the person that calls 1,000 times about a problem.
- Are we seen as an insular group?
  - We are examples of folks pro-actively choosing Catholic education.
  - But there are assumptions out there that people choose Catholic schools because of UDSD’s crappiness or something – like an ‘anything but public school’ mindset. But this is not the case.
- We’ve created our own community over time.
  - There are historical precedents here – Italian/Irish Catholics facing discrimination in the past; having to serve their own.
- The group cited the business community as a big asset.
- Cited the immigrant community as a big asset, too.
  - Though with some challenges.
  - But also with a lot of successes (re: school achievement) and pride.

### *Concerns*

- We hear a lot about failing/struggling or IEP students (and resources go toward this). We also hear about high-achievers, success stories. But one of the “worst things to be in a system like UDSD is part of that ‘vast middle.’ Students who are fine, but not in the top or bottom.”
  - These middle students get lost – neither assets nor challenges, so little attention goes that way.
- Pondering question: “Would UDSD actually be better off if ALL of our kids went to public schools instead of Catholic?”
- We in this group are self-identifying as education-centric families.
  - We invest, we care, we volunteer and contribute,
  - But being this way, there is an inherent tension: How to care for UDSD while also following our desire for Catholic education for our kids?

- Business community is important; we need more from them.
  - Businesses often project or predict the skills students need for future jobs,
  - Grooming students for careers, offering internships.

### *Tensions/Trade-offs:*

Are we living in a unique, Catholic version of White privilege?

- Though I didn't think of it this way before, are we actually adding diversity to the district?

### *Possible pro-equity actions*

- Work on ways to make all these diverse communities “part of the whole pie”
  - Rather than fracturing different groups and different schooling options

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### HIGHLIGHTS OF PLENARY SESSION CHAT

- Great, great conversation!
- Absolutely. Totally agree
- We love Upper Darby Summer Stage!
- YES....THANK YOU for the BUS 🚌 service!!
- We very much appreciate the bus service as well at Bonner & Prendie-THANK YOU! And well said Dr McLean!
- Thank you everyone for sharing tonight! I met some great people and heard some new perspectives. I always love connecting like this and I am optimistic for ALL of the children in our community.
- Thanks everyone...wonderful program
- Thank you, everyone! It was great to meet and talk with some of you!