



# Seattle Public Schools



Photos by Susie Fitzhugh

Family Survey Analysis  
Research & Evaluation Department  
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# What is the SPS Family Survey?

Every spring, the Seattle Public Schools sends out a survey to each household in the district, asking families for feedback on their child's school and the district office.

This report provides a summary of families' responses to open-ended response questions. For more detailed information and other climate survey results, visit [www.seattleschools.org/performance](http://www.seattleschools.org/performance).





# District Response to Family Feedback

## What we heard

### Families want...

- High quality, rigorous curriculum and instruction in schools
- Leaders who are warm, approachable, and sensitive to student discipline issues
- A comprehensive, forward-looking plan for enrollment and boundaries
- Social and emotional wellbeing and safety addressed, especially during recess
- Continuity in teaching staff assignments throughout the year

## What we did

### SPS efforts to date...

- K-12 literacy adoption; planned middle school math adoption; ongoing professional development for new WA state learning standards.
- Met with and provided consult to school leaders in moving discipline from punishment to shaping behavior; 4,000 staff trained in positive student-teacher relationships and school climates.
- Expansive and early community engagement created and conducted to create a comprehensive planning schedule.
- Online training video related to playground safety developed and deployed for building staff and volunteers.
- Mitigation funds provided to hold schools “harmless” during October staffing adjustments.





# District Response to Family Feedback

## What we heard

### Families want...

- Concrete efforts to support increased funding to schools
- A fully articulated vision for advanced learning programming
- Clear communication about upcoming policy changes (e.g. bell time shifts)
- Policies to address school leader turnover
- Discipline policies that are applied consistently, equitably

## What we did

### SPS efforts to date...

- Legislative agenda focused on Levy authority extension and full funding of McCleary; partnered with SCPTSA, SA, and PASS; Levy extension granted.
- Programmatic review underway to be complete Fall 2018.
- Implementing Community Engagement Framework aimed at improving engagement and communication with stakeholders on major district decisions.
- Developed principal induction program resulting in 88% retention rate.
- Implemented moratorium on non-violent elementary suspensions/expulsions. Revised student rights and responsibilities policy with youth: 2016; and families/community groups: 2017; providing ongoing trauma informed professional development of staff and have intentioned restorative justice practices.





# Survey Administration



**34,536** households received a survey in one of **6** languages



**43,821** surveys sent to 69,842 contacts  
(through email and 8,795 paper surveys)



**28.3%** of households responded to at least 1 survey

 **4% increase over 2015**



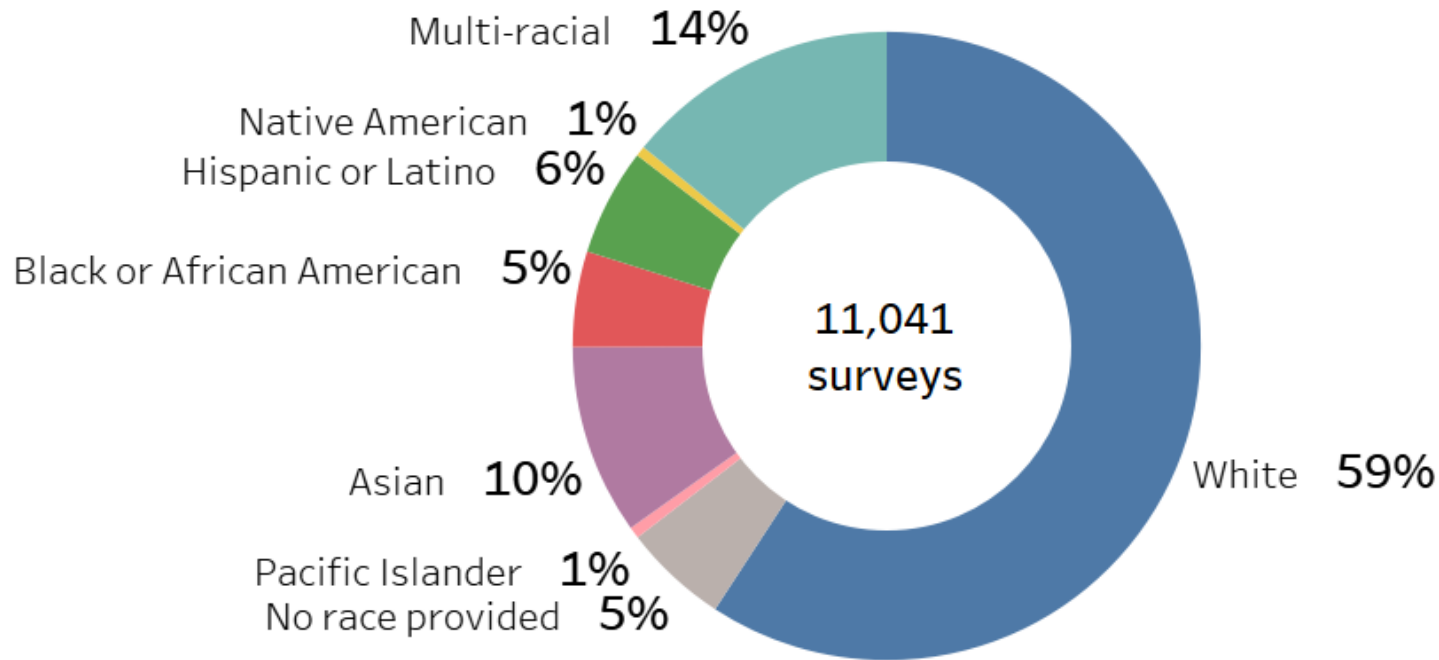
**3** open response items this year



# Respondent Demographics

Findings from the family survey should be interpreted in light of the fact that respondent demographics do not represent the overall demographics of our district. Responses were disproportionately from families of white students (59% response versus 45.6% of actual district enrollment).

**What is your child's race/ethnic origin?**



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# Findings from Open-Ended Responses

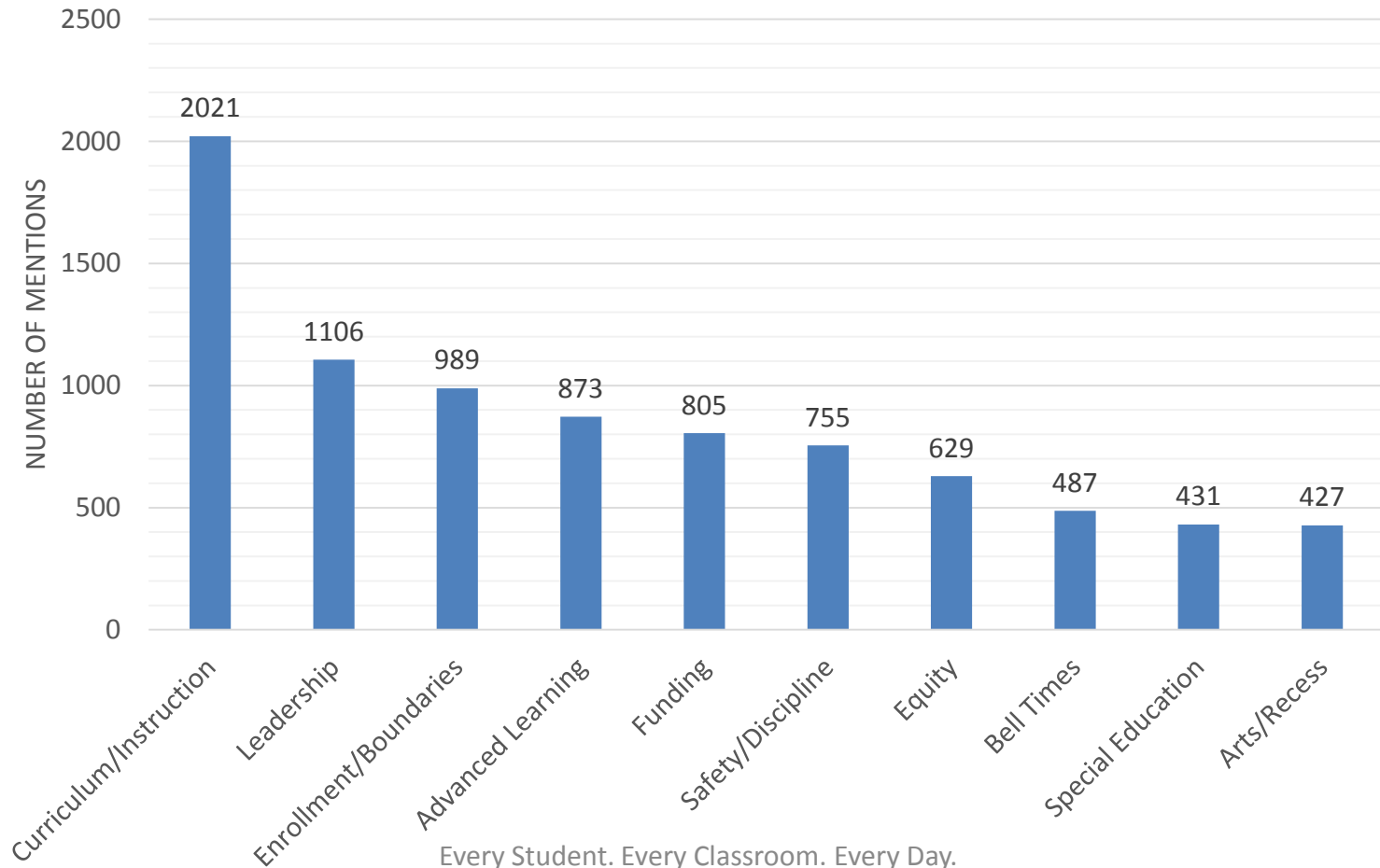
**This year's survey contained three open-ended response questions:**

1. The district does a good job engaging the community about issues and concerns that matter to my family – Please explain your answer
2. Please provide any feedback to help us improve your child's school
3. Is there anything else on your mind you would like to share with the district?

**Over 10,000 responses were received across the three questions. Responses were systematically coded and analyzed by issue raised, nature of feedback (praise/criticism), and subject of feedback (district/school).**

# Top 10 Issues Mentioned (across all open-ended questions)

Issues of curriculum and instruction received the most mentions. When disaggregated by region, respondent's race of child, household income, and other factors, curriculum and instruction concerns remained the #1 issue.





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# Curriculum and Instruction

Respondents noted variations in teacher quality ...

- “[M]any teachers go above and beyond, for which we are grateful. Unfortunately, there are also some that we are not sure are teaching our child what he needs to know. It all depends on the teacher...”

But respondents also have asks of the district. They say...

- There needs to be more differentiation of instruction
  - “I think that struggling children need more individual attention and that advanced children need to be challenged more.”
- The district overemphasizes memorization, testing at the expense of other priorities
  - “There should be less emphasis on testing and more care put toward the whole child.”
  - “Technology is almost not existent in this school...these are kids raised in the digital age and they should access learning through multiple modalities.”
- The district should support unique programs in neighborhood, option schools
  - “I feel strongly for the immersion program, it is extremely valuable in today's connected world.”
- Homework is not calibrated to student needs
  - “As far as homework goes, he has none, so we do not know what he's struggling in nor does he know what direction he's supposed to be going in.”
  - “I think much of the homework my child spends hours on is waste of time busy work, which takes away from the little family time we have and causes chronic sleep deprivation.”

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# Leadership

Respondents gave pointed feedback on specific principals...

- *“It's hard to improve on perfection. Principal [X] is very approachable.”*
- *“There really isn't much opportunity to give feedback directly to the principal as she has not asked for it. Many parents have expressed frustration with her lack of willingness to truly listen and take in what they have to say.”*
- *“I have been really disappointed by the lack of leadership and communication from the principal.”*

Families want leaders who:

- Are warm, approachable, and inclusive of family needs
- Have positive interactions with students, especially with regards to discipline
  - *“I appreciate the amount of time the administration spends with the students”*
  - *“The principal's leadership has been nonexistent and the inconsistent disciplinary policies for dealing with troubled kids has been shocking.”*



Families worry about high turnover rates

- *“[T]oo much turnover at the leadership level at [School] & the district!”*

# Enrollment and Boundaries

## Respondents said...

- Communication is inadequate, opaque – specifically with regard to registering for Kindergarten, HCC placements, understanding how broad enrollment trends will affect their family
  - *“The District has had a very difficult time figuring out a plan for the next several years and then sticking to it...This frustrates parents, resulting in more students going to private schools.”*
  - *“Navigating the SPS website has been a bit of a struggle. Things aren't easy to find (especially when looking for info on registering for K)”*
- Parents’ voices not heard/heeded with respect to boundary changes, grandfathering, class sizes, overcrowding
  - *“School overcrowding is a major problem and, although there has been talk in the past and the appearance of two-way dialogue, basically, the District has been and is too slow to address overcrowding issues.”*
- Mid-year teacher assignment changes are disruptive to student learning
  - *“The annual teacher shuffle timing (after the school year has started) is ABYSMAL and extremely poorly executed by the district.”*

# Advanced Learning

Respondents said...

- Central office needs to better articulate its vision and plans for advanced learning
  - *“Parents have not been engaged in dialogue about capacity management for HCC. There is no HCC curriculum and pathways from elementary to middle school to high school are unclear.”*
  - *“I detest the HCC name and the divided culture at the school. It's like a gated community. Is my daughter NOT capable?”*
- The testing, enrollment, and placement process is in need of an overhaul
  - *“The HCC testing this year was ridiculous -- delays, miscommunications, private information released. What a mess!”*
- Many students lack equitable access to advanced learning
  - *“I want more equity across the board so we don't have these small isolated accelerated programs but a chance for all kids to be challenged.”*
  - *“End the HCC apartheid”*

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# Funding

## At the district level...

- The central office should forcefully advocate for full funding of public education, and be transparent about funding issues
  - *“The Seattle SD needs to be a leader in pressuring the legislature to meet their funding mandate.”*
  - *“I do not feel like the district is engaging the community on the budget & how money is being spent, funding of schools, distribution of \$, etc.”*


## At the school level...

- Schools are under-resourced, overcrowded, and overly reliant on PTA fundraising
  - *“Our school does not have funding to cover essential learning resources such as PAPER and TEACHERS! Classes are over crowded and teachers are showing signs of exhaustion.”*
  - *“The school relies too heavily on parent, PTA, and teacher support for fundamental things like classroom supplies (dry erase markers), educational materials, and kindergarten assistants*

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# Safety and Discipline

Respondents said...

- Discipline is applied inconsistently, leading to classroom disruptions, lost recess time
  - *“The discipline plan varies. My child does not feel safe... The teacher spends much of her time redirecting which leaves little time for teaching.”*
  - *“I get frustrated when I hear that some teachers are disciplining students by keeping them inside at recess or having them miss PE. I find that to be counterproductive.”*
- Schools should address bullying more directly and have more supervision on playgrounds
  - *“I wish school paid more attention to bullies such as keep a record for each incident and their parents should be notified if their kids are being bullies.”*
-  More safeguards are needed against intruders, natural disaster
  - *“The open campus is a safety risk and I am concerned anyone can walk in off the street without being stopped or checking in. This needs to be changed.”*

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# Equity

Respondents concerns about inequity include...

- Students experience discrimination, implicit bias
  - *“There is still a problem at the school with regards to expectations of some teachers towards children of color. There were many assumptions made before class even started about how my student would perform.”*
- The district does not have enough teachers and staff of color
  - *“There are few teachers of color and even fewer black male teachers. Diversity in our teachers is good for all students. Young black males need to see black men in positive roles. It is equally important for white students to learn how to interact with people who don't look like them.”*
- Schools are de facto segregated by race, socioeconomic status
  - *“I am terrified that the segregated nature of Seattle Public Schools is teaching my children segregation and 'whites are in charge' in a way I really don't like. I would say integration is job ONE for Seattle Public Schools.”*
- District needs to invest in and support culturally responsive pedagogy
  - *“The school needs programs that improve cultural competency and diversity of their staff, materials and curriculum.”*
- District outreach to families is inequitable
  - *“The district has not done a good job at engaging racially, linguistically and economically diverse families...”*
  - *“English speaking families with internet access have greater access to information than non-English speaking families and/or those without internet. There appears to be no district-wide policy for equitable communication.”*

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# Bell Times

While some respondents had positive feedback about Bell Times engagement...

- *“I feel informed and included. One example is with regarding school start times. I feel like they are taking opinions of parents into account.”*
- *“I was consulted multiple times about bell times, and appreciated that effort.”*

Others expressed concerns...

- Central office engagement and communication were lacking
  - *“The district held outreach sessions, but largely had already made their decision before the meetings were ever held. The meetings were just to placate the parents.”*
  - *“Decisions related to issues including school bell start times and portable units used for after school care, have not been well communicated to families.”*
- Decisions themselves were disappointing (e.g. made for wrong reasons; didn't take into account family circumstances)
  - *“I'm not happy about the new start time. I want to know the metrics that the district will use to determine if the new late start times are effective.”*
  - *“Changing of start times is a nightmare. Was there any consideration to parents working and older siblings being available to pick up younger siblings after school?”*



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# Special Education

Although many respondents praised individual teachers or staff members who helped their SPED child, they also had suggestions for systemwide improvement...

- District and schools need to provide additional dedicated SPED support (including professional development for teachers)
  - *“We have many students with high needs and the district does not provide the resources that our students and staff need to help these students be successful (staffing or professional development).”*
  - *“Teachers lack basic understanding of the needs of children with autism and ADHD, especially if the children are also gifted intellectually.”*
  - *“It is time for Seattle Public Schools to serve kids with dyslexia in a real and significant way rather than ignoring the learning difference.”*
- Better communication from schools and district is necessary
  - *“I receive no contact regarding my child's lack of progress even though he has an IEP and is barely able to pass classes”*
  - *“Special Ed families have not been included in decision making and there is little transparency between spEd staff and parents.”*

# Arts/Recess

Respondents said...

- The physical and emotional safety of playground spaces must be addressed
  - *“There are too many students on the playground at one time and not enough qualified recess monitors to watch for unsafe games and bullying behaviors.”*
  - *“Our school needs a grass or turf space where kids can play, and increased recess supervision. Kids are trying to play sports like soccer or touch football on the blacktop because they have no grass, and when they inevitably get hurt and need attention, there is not enough supervision remaining for the other kids. It's a safety concern.”*
- More time should be allocated for arts and recess, lunch
  - *“Please stop withholding recess as a punishment.”*
  - *“There needs to be more time for play - its where they learn social skills and bond with each other - its difficult for kids to build friendships when play time is reasonably short”*
  - *“I think the music and art program should be a higher priority, more robust, communicated and funded better. Kids have really missed out on this which is a true global focus, unification & connection for all people/cultures.”*

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# CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information:  
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