

Superintendent Community Engagement Series

What we Heard from Our Community



From February to April 2026, more than 1,000 families, students, staff, and the community participated in meetings that Superintendent Ben Shuldiner hosted in each of the 7 board director districts along with one virtual session.



What Participants Said Is Going Well:

Strong, caring educators and staff

Teachers, counselors, principals, and school staff were described as *dedicated, compassionate, and deeply committed* to student success and relationships.

Positive school communities

Families felt that schools fostered a strong sense of belonging and celebrated their welcoming environments, cultural diversity, and active parent organizations.

Enrichment and extracurricular opportunities

Music, art, PE, theater, STEM, after-school programs, sports, and cultural events were seen as essential to supporting the “whole child.”

Dual language and multilingual programs

Dual language programs were described as a point of pride and a reason families choose SPS schools. Many asked for these programs to be sustained and expanded.

Social emotional learning (SEL) and student supports

Mental health supports and SEL practices were viewed as deeply important.

School-level communication

Consistent, personal communication from teachers and principals was appreciated, as were the Superintendent’s weekly emails.

Access to basic needs and equity supports

Free breakfast and lunch, along with food, health, and family partnerships, were described as critical supports for students and families.

Academic opportunities where available

Families value highly capable services, accelerated math, and positive early results from Science of Reading implementation in some schools.

What Participants Said Is Not Going Well:

Technology overuse

Excessive screen time, especially in younger grades, and unclear policies on cell phones and AI.

Safety and school climate

Families cited inconsistent discipline, escalating student behavior, and concerns about physical safety.

Equity and resource disparities

Equity was seen as a stated value that is not always realized across schools.

Barriers to volunteer and family engagement

Volunteer processes were described as slow and confusing, and families often felt engagement happened after decisions were already made.

Budget, staffing, and enrollment instability

Families described opaque budgeting, large class sizes, staffing shortages, and October staffing changes as disruptive and inequitable.

Communication, transparency, and trust

Many families shared frustration with inconsistent messaging, frequent changes, and unclear decision-making processes from the district.

Advanced learning and academic rigor

Families raised concerns about inconsistent services, limitations, and a perceived decline in academic challenge.

Specialized services and supports

Special Education and 504 services were described as inconsistent and difficult to navigate, with staffing gaps and unclear accountability.

Ideas Participants Shared for Improvement:

- **Increase budget transparency and equitable resource allocation**
- **Stabilize staffing and ensure baseline services in every school**
- **Improve communication and engage families earlier in decisions**
- **Strengthen academic rigor, differentiation based on skill, and advanced learning opportunities**
- **Sustain and expand dual language programs**
- **Reduce technology overuse and clarify expectations**
- **Simplify volunteer and family engagement processes**
- **Ensure clear, transparent facilities and consolidation planning**

What's Next:

Superintendent Shuldiner will use this feedback to guide both short-term and long-term actions in leading the district. He plans to continue monthly community engagement sessions, including conversations focused on specific topics and on different school levels (elementary, middle, and high school). Feedback about the meetings themselves will be used to improve the format and discussions over time.

Thank you for your continued support of Seattle Public Schools.

Summary of Meetings:

Visit the website to learn more by following the url or scanning the QR Code:

<https://www.seattleschools.org/what-we-heard/>

