



Strategic Planning Community Survey

Open-Ended Feedback Themes

Theme #1: Chronic staffing issues must be addressed to help alleviate many of the other issues mentioned in the survey. Staffing issues should be addressed by:

- Intentionally planning ways to enhance teacher retention
- Keeping classrooms staffed appropriately given the size of them
- Investing in school support staff to alleviate the burden of classroom teachers
- Offering pay commensurate with other districts and the rising cost of living
- Reinforcing the notion that Central Services/administrative positions are there to support school-based staff

"I strongly believe drastic measures need to happen to address the vast list of vacancies across the district. If it is really about the kids, unpopular, unprecedented decisions will have to be made regarding school closures, mergers and rezoning of transportation regions. MPS also needs to ensure unbiased and culturally responsive policies and procedures are in place to ensure the neediest of our Milwaukee population are being best served. There should be no way a school who only has one vacant position would get staffed before a school that has 7 vacant positions."

"Treat teachers with respect and higher pay. We are burnt out and high quality, amazing educators continue to exit because of the poor working conditions in MPS. Our buildings are outdated, dirty all of the time, and we need air condition. Bring back teacher incentive days like we had before. Staff is absent all the time and don't come to work and continue to push more on those who go above and beyond. MPS can do better."

"I honestly think that MPS needs to look into some type of trauma/mental health programs to come into the buildings and help with the students. Many of the students are totally out of control and teachers are not trained to deal with these types of issues. They need behavioral therapists and others who work in that profession to come and be in the schools. Teachers are getting blamed for everything and have to put up with everything!"

"Focus back on smaller class sizes from 32 to 25 or smaller. Place an aide in each classroom to assist teachers with students that need extra help. Salary for teachers and aides should be in line with other districts in the surrounding community. Sell ALL OLD or Rebuild All out of date buildings to meet the needs of Student population now and the future."

Theme #2: The district as a whole is overly bureaucratic, top-heavy, and lacks the transparency and efficiency necessary to build trust and confidence with the community it serves. Some issues to address include:

- Developing a plan for consolidating schools that includes all stakeholders in the process to ensure it is done in a way that is equitable, reasonable, and efficient

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- Spending within the district should be more efficient, transparent, and well thought out, not reactive
- Incorporating all stakeholders more often in the decision-making process, including students, school-based staff, parents, and the larger community, not simply through surveys
- Developing leadership that asks tough questions, admits fault, and is more transparent and honest about issues that the district is facing
- Supporting and empowering those in the classroom to make more decisions based on what is best for their students/classroom and incorporating their expertise in PD rather than utilizing a one-size-fits-all approach
- Reducing the paperwork and meetings required of teaching staff to ensure that they have adequate time to plan, prep, and recharge

“There needs to be a deeper investigation into how Central Office is run and how decisions are made. Many people at Central Office have not been in the classrooms recently. There are not enough staff and split classrooms are absurd. K12 in one building does not work and too many admin in buildings need to be replaced. Staff are burnt out, not supported and made to be the escape goats. There are buildings that don’t have high enrollments and should be merged with other schools.”

“I am working in MPS only for the children. Not for the support (none) or the illogical rules that continue to affect morale. I don’t feel anyone at Central Offices truly listens to staff and/or care what is suggested. The way that the district improves school buildings only when there are scheduled walk-throughs or exposure to the public is absolutely ridiculous and insulting to the everyday activities. The children in this district require more assistance and mental health support than is provided. There are so many negatives to MPS that I’m unable to list them all. I’m not proud to say I’m an MPS employee.”

“School consolidation is a likely necessity but doing it equitably and in deep conversation with community is critical to avoid causing harm to communities that often experience disinvestment. The district budget document is difficult for non-school finance experts to decipher. It would be great to have a one- or two-pager written in simple language explaining the inputs and outputs. It also is really helpful when the district highlights major changes from previous budgets.”

“MPS is and can remain a viable and valuable entity to deliver quality education, but not if it does not grasp the fact that it serves a little more than half of all publicly funded K-12 students in the city. Currently, I don’t see a strategic plan that matches this future, nor does this community, especially the business community.”

Theme #3: Schedule changes should reflect best practices and limit the logistical challenges that families might face getting all of their students to different schools. This includes:

- Having start times for all schools between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m.
- Having one calendar that aligns with the traditional school year
- Communicating busing changes in real time to families (running late, not arriving, etc.)



“Two school calendars for a school district does not make sense. I’m not sure the reason it happened in the first place but it puts unnecessary strain on both parents and MPS workers that have multiple children in the school district.”

“One school calendar - When I went to school, I had to watch my brothers and sisters and I couldn't come to school until they started school. Too confusing for people.”

Theme #4: The focus for facilities enhancements:

- Cleanliness of buildings, especially pest and rodent control
- Bathroom upgrades and consistent stocking of supplies
- Health concerns related to a lack of AC and the presence of asbestos and lead paint
- Standardizing structural features to address inequities among schools
- Investing in recreational upgrades to sites, such as adding sporting fields, outdoor play areas, pools, etc.

“I’m often shocked by the appalling condition of MPS school facilities when attending sporting and community events after school hours. Bathroom facilities are in general disrepair (missing mirrors, faucets not working, no hot water, stall doors broken/missing, peeling/flaking paint, etc.). Oh, I am also still shocked that many MPS buildings do not have air conditioning. We had to move a community meeting outside this past fall because it was just too hot inside the building. I can't imagine what it was like during the day with students in the building. I've primarily only been to high schools. Riverside, King, and Washington being my three most visited. I understand they are old buildings and difficult to maintain. I understand there are many schools that are empty or not even close to capacity. It seems the time has come to merge these schools and focus on maintenance/upgrade/rebuilding complete and full buildings.”

“Update and renew old buildings. The south side of Milwaukee is losing students to new and updated charter schools. Students and staff need updated buildings that are safe, asbestos free, air conditioning, HVAC appropriately regulated, etc. They should not be in buildings with old pipes, lead paint, that may in the future cause health problems. Teachers, students, families and staff want new and enhanced school buildings.”

Theme #5: The hiring process and human resources department needs an overhaul to streamline the hiring and application process and ensure that MPS does not lose qualified candidates to other districts. This includes:

- Revising the application and hiring process to reduce barriers to completion
- Ensuring that candidates who apply are followed up with in a timely manner
- Building a pipeline for future educators, including with current students, that attracts and retains more diverse candidates to reflect the population served
- Eliminating nepotism in the hiring and promotion process



“Human Resources needs a complete overhaul. MPS is losing highly qualified individuals who want to work in MPS but Human Resources takes too long to respond to applications and inquiries.”

“MPS has student teachers and field students from local universities, but it could be double if the process of placing students made more sense. There are too many barriers for interested students and interested teachers to get hired. Waiting 2 months for HR to follow up with paperwork to get hired, is unacceptable. 50% of teachers leave in the first 3 years of the profession and I know many leave MPS for other districts that offer support and financial compensation.”

Theme #6: Invest in high-quality professional development for staff at all levels that is practical and ongoing (rather than “one and done”) and that reflects the needs of the district and individual teacher levels. Areas that need particular attention are:

- Anti-bias/anti-racism training for all staff
- Behavior/classroom management for teachers
- Cross-training for support staff to be able to work across grade levels
- Trauma-informed care to better serve students and their families

“Stop doing things that are not working. District PD/Monthly institutes are NOT making a difference in student achievement. While they are necessary for some informational sessions, the time put into pulling off monthly institutes are not moving the academic needle. Reconsider the resources and time of district employees to assist STUDENTS.”

“One of the priorities of additional staff should be to train teachers who do not teach correctly and have no skills in behavior management. Training should not be a one-and-done training approach, but trainers should stay with teachers all year.”

Theme #7: Curricular, instructional, and extracurricular changes should prioritize the following areas:

- Ensuring that all schools have access to high-quality, culturally relevant, well-balanced curricula that includes hands-on learning opportunities and arts-based programming (art, music, etc.)
- Preparing youth for a wide variety of postsecondary options by incorporating more school-to-work initiatives, internships, and partnerships with local businesses and by exposing students to an array of options outside of the college track
- Incorporating life skills courses such as financial literacy, automotive classes, home economics, etc., back into the curriculum
- Enhancing the community-school connection through volunteer, mentorship, and partnerships with local agencies to increase students’ engagement with their community
- Offering a wider variety of extracurricular programming (clubs, sports, etc.) across all MPS schools



- Ensuring that students at all levels receive the differentiated support they need to succeed in school

“Intellectual curiosity is vital to being a well-rounded reader and problem solver. I appreciate the growing support of trades and technology. Moreover, an increased emphasis on supporting the development of tech is a window of opportunity as well. Coding and computer trouble-shooting and repair is an opportunity for valuable employment. Schools like the immersion schools and arts emphasis as well as Bradley Tech are vital. I really don't care how we teach reading, but know that developing students who love to read is the basis for critical thinking.”

“There needs to be more consistency with how sped is handled in the buildings. Every school does it different. While I believe in inclusion, it is not effective the way it's handled now. A classroom teacher should not have 30 students and half sped. Our students who are achieving have too many distractions because of the lack of support. The word from staff is that everyone is being worked to exhaustion from lack of consistency and “paper” work.”

“More emphasis on innovative programming that has shown proven, positive results and greater push for school-to-work initiatives in partnership with private sector to provide ready-for-work grads and much-needed employees for area employers, especially those in child & senior care, hospitality, skilled trades, and high-tech jobs.”

Theme #8: Improvements in communication between the district and family/community and the technology used to facilitate said communication are necessary and should focus on:

- Making the website more user-friendly with information that is easy to find
- Centralizing and standardizing contacts whom community members, partners, and families should go to with questions or for help
- Greater transparency with the community about the issues that the district is facing and how decisions, particularly budgetary decisions, are made
- More publicity about all of the offerings that MPS has for community members, partners, and families
- Providing easily accessible materials or guides for families interested in sending their children to MPS, especially at the high school level

“High frustration with roadblocks and obstacles at MPS that keep us from doing our work of serving MPS children. Basic things like getting MOUs done in a timely fashion (turnaround time is months long) or getting access credentials for people from our org who are working in your building. Technology access and getting computer equipment that we must order through MPS. These are all long and grueling processes with unclear procedures that delay or sometimes keep us from serving MPS kids, and often wasting resources. It would be nice if we had one partnership contact who could take care of all challenges that we have.”

“Each school varies so much. It is a big district, but it seems that interschool communication and district communication is lacking a centralized way to receive information timely and effectively.”



Theme #9: Revitalize the overall culture and climate at the district and school level by addressing key areas of concern:

- Instituting a uniform discipline policy that is applied consistently across all schools and addresses chronic behavioral issues that disrupt learning
- Establishing a consistent cell phone policy across the district
- Taking bullying more seriously, with the discipline policies in place to deter bullying in all forms
- Increasing parental involvement and accountability to ensure that families are involved and engaged in the learning process
- Putting students first by creating policies, procedures, and courses that are inclusive, provide opportunities for student choice/voice, are trauma-informed, and ensure that all students are prepared for the next grade level
- Creating a culture in which thoughtful, proactive, and reflective decision making is valued rather than reactive to criticism

"MPS needs to focus on retention of quality staff and do thorough exit interviews to understand why quality staff continue to leave. The district office CULTURE is key to improving MPS. I worked as both a district and school administrator in MPS for almost a decade and cannot emphasize enough how much the toxic, hustle, hierarchical culture is a central problem to moving the needle for student achievement. The adult culture needs to shift from competitive to collaborative, from quick fixes to thoughtful, intentional implementation. There are pockets of success to build upon (e.g., teaching for Biliteracy, PBIS). MPS leadership needs to focus on systems and structures to support staff wellbeing and open lines of communication. The people closest to the work have many brilliant ideas about how to improve the schools. Listening to secretaries, principals, teachers, para professionals, families and community members in a serious and meaningful way would help the district move towards lasting change. In the end, the folks implementing the changes have great insight but are often ignored."

"I personally struggle with staffing. It is difficult to run a school not fully staffed and still complete the pile of responsibilities. Second, the culture of MPS has normed egregious student and parent behavior as acceptable resulting in unsafe schools. I have personally been threatened, hit, and injured and families/students are never removed from MPS. Tolerance for truly unsafe behavior has been a normalized when it is truly outrageous. I am an alumnus and have always wanted to work in MPS. After over 15 years, I am actively seeking positions outside of the district because of burnout. Things do not change. The situation is worse than ever."

"I feel MPS is continually obscuring their problems by making claims to be providing resources and support to schools that are struggling. They aren't honest about what is happening in schools-many schools I have worked in have little to no structure in terms of behavior supports for students, and management is put on teachers-which is hard in schools with high vacancies, early-career teachers, uncertified teachers. There are few interventions being implemented other than suspensions, for which there is no data to prove that it works. Principals have few options due to lack of personnel in many schools."



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Theme # 10: Improvements to the food program, including:

- Offering a healthy variety for both meals served at the school
- Providing more diverse options for a variety of special diets (halal, vegetarian, etc.)
- Returning to food preparation in school kitchens with more kitchen staff

“Why aren’t the school lunches made at the school when there’s a kitchen available? The children complain how horrible the food is. The lunch menu on your site does not coincide with. What’s being served.”

“The lunches pre covid were much better- they are inedible, and I have to pack lunch for my kids.”

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