



## **Strategic Planning Staff Survey**

### *Open-Ended Feedback Themes*

**Theme #1: Chronic staffing issues and leadership development strategies must be addressed to help alleviate many of the other issues mentioned in the survey. Maintaining high-quality staff at all levels must be prioritized through the following:**

- Developing a plan for resolving chronic and worsening staff shortages that includes measures to increase recruitment and retention
- Ensuring that classrooms are staffed appropriately given the size and the diverse needs within the classroom (interventionists, SpEd staff, paras, SSTs, etc.)
- Hiring substitute teachers as needed to ensure that school staff has adequate time to plan and fulfill their responsibilities
- Consolidating schools and distributing the student population equitably to maintain appropriate class sizes while balancing concerns about disrupting school culture and communities
- Reinforcing the notion that Central Services/administrative positions are there to support school-based staff and any new administrative positions are directly tied to supporting school-based work
- Implementing consistent and clear accountability measures including annual evaluations for staff at all levels
- Providing to non-administrative staff more transparency about and opportunities to participate in spending and decision-making processes
- Requiring more training for staff in administrative roles to reduce leadership practices that are corrosive to staff relationships (micromanagement, bullying behavior, poor communication skills, low levels of support, etc.)
- Implementing a work-from-home policy equitably and expeditiously

*“SST's have been looked over this year and last. We are treated as building substitutes. I am highly disturbed by this. I DO NOT feel valued. This is the first year in 20 years I have actively sought employment elsewhere. I have a master's degree and am nationally board certified. I do not want to be a substitute. If the district does not figure out a solution to this HUGE staffing issue, I am leaving and so are many others.”*

*“Please, please, please start consolidating buildings. There is no reason to have 200 kids here, 300 kids here, and 150 kids there when they could all be under one roof in a fully functioning, vibrant school. Also, it would allow greater opportunities for high school students to have a more enriching high school experience and allow them to be in extracurriculars that they don't currently have because of many schools' low enrollment numbers.”*

*“I see supervisors routinely who don't know or don't care how to manage employees. I've worked in the corporate world for many years. Some organizations invest in their leadership; others do not. I can tell you that when people feel like they matter, it pays dividends. I would say MPS routinely turns a blind eye to how managers interact with their people. There's so much turnover that nobody seems to really care or want to do something about it. Relationships matter. When supervisors don't even attempt to get to know you personally or understand what you think is important, that is a problem. When supervisors routinely ask for your input*



*and then second-guess your decision-making in front of others, it sends a message that you're not very smart and aren't a valuable member of the team. So, why would you want to go the extra mile for someone who you know doesn't have your back."*

*"Please allow more central office staff to work from home when necessary. I will visit 2-3 schools in a day. Between visits, I am coming and going to and from Central office when my home is within blocks of those schools. Often, I will just work from my car. I'd like the ability to make choices about where I work when not in school."*

*"A couple things that I think could be hugely important to the success of Milwaukee Public Schools would be prioritizing the inclusion of paid academic interventionists in every MPS building. As we adjust to learning loss due to COVID-19, teachers are becoming increasingly stretched thin to meet the needs of students at the Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 levels of a multi-tiered system of supports for our students' academic growth. It is becoming increasingly challenging for them to deliver Tier 3, one-on-one interventions with fidelity while also trying to provide small-group targeted supports to students in need of academic help. Paid, licensed regular education teachers serving in an interventionist role could be hugely impactful to meeting the learning needs of all students."*

**Theme #2: The hiring process and human resources department needs an overhaul to ensure that MPS does not lose qualified candidates. This requires the department to streamline the hiring and application process, utilize best practices within the industry to retain and recruit staff, and ensure that all incoming staff have both the qualifications and tools necessary to perform their duties. Changes to the department include the following:**

- Revising the application and hiring process to reduce barriers to completion
- Ensuring that candidates who apply are followed up with in a professional and 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
- Requiring all teachers to have full licensure before they can teach in the classroom
- Conducting exit interviews to assist with retention efforts
- Revamping the onboarding process for all employees to ensure that staff new to the district or beginning a new role receives the proper training and information necessary to perform their role

*"1. HR/Talent Management is a huge problem; my opinion of the district and desire to remain an employee within MPS has decreased significantly as a result of multiple bad experiences related to maternity leave/FMLA. These issues were a direct result of incompetence and a lack of care/concern by staff. 2. I am deeply troubled by the lack of experience and credentials required of teaching staff. I have opted out of sending my own children to MPS as a result of these decreased standards and expectations. While I understand this to be a result of staffing shortages and difficulty hiring/maintaining employees, I have encountered enough staff that are so grossly ill prepared (resulting from a lack of education/training) that I struggle to believe we are doing right by are students."*

*"Give more opportunities for tenured and experienced teachers to hold supervisory positions. Not just giving the positions to unqualified individuals because of who they know. There are plenty of experienced and professional staff that can hold these positions. I am bilingual, have a Bachelor's and Master's degree in*



*education, hold 2 administrator licenses, have 11 years of teaching experience in MPS, live in Milwaukee (close to the southside schools that I've worked at) and proud graduate of MPS. I have applied for several positions within MPS and have never gotten the opportunity to interview. Please take into consideration the professional employees that are within MPS, that know our students, look like our students and live in our community to take on higher roles within MPS. Who else is better equipped to fight and empower our communities!"*

*"MPS desperately needs to improve its hiring practices and the efficiency of Human Resources. When I was hired, my interviewer immediately offered me a position and it took 3 months to sign the paperwork with HR. I had to continually call and email and practically beg to work for MPS. I'm certain that we are losing qualified candidates to other districts because of an inept and dysfunctional HR department."*

**Theme #3: To recruit and retain staff and students in the district, MPS must provide programming, services, and resources equitably across the district that are comparable to surrounding districts. The district should concentrate these efforts on the following:**

- Offering a wider variety of extracurricular programming (clubs, sports, etc.) and coursework options
- Providing school meals that are of higher nutritional value and higher quality
- Equipping all classrooms with adequate materials, supplies, and updated technology
- Assigning teachers to schools with the most vacancies first
- Developing a process for student behavior reassignments that does not overly burden a small set of schools
- Reducing the disparities in resources and programming offered among MPS schools
- Offering affordable before- and after-school care to accommodate working families and enhance learning time

*"We need to address the inequity between the south side schools and the north side schools. We really have two separate districts and I really wish we could admit to this."*

*"School lunches are disgusting. I cannot believe that there was no questions asked on this survey about how our terrible school lunches impact our students, their learning environments, and their behavior. Breakfast is high in sugar and low on actual nutrition. Lunch is often skipped."*

*"MPS needs to provide middle and high school students with similar opportunities as other surrounding schools. For example, improved lunches with choices, more extracurricular activities, increased opportunities to be competitive in sports/clubs by starting more athletic/club opportunities in elementary schools."*

*"As a district, there is great inequity among schools within MPS. For example, some schools are fully staffed with teachers and paraprofessionals in every room, specials every day, clubs/extracurriculars for students, adequate supplies, etc. while others have the majority of classrooms with unlicensed teachers/paraprofessionals teaching, no specials, and inadequate physical resources. Unsurprisingly, these under resourced schools are often schools have high populations of students if color or students living in poverty."*



**Theme #4: Curricular and instructional changes should prioritize the following areas:**

- 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
- Revising graduation requirements to reflect students’ desired postsecondary outcomes (foreign language requirement only for college-bound students, internship/work requirement for non-college track students, etc.)
- Incorporating life skills courses such as financial literacy
- Returning to letter-based grading
- Reducing the reliance on computer-based instruction and returning to the fundamentals of education
- Soliciting teacher input on curricular changes
- Reducing the emphasis on “teaching to the test”
- Providing more explicit social-emotional learning lessons to alleviate behavioral and mental health-related issues
- Increasing academic expectations and opportunities for learning (more-rigorous Summer Academy, ending social promotion, intentional preparation for high school through exposure to grade 9 work, etc.)

*“We really need to add focus on career and trades and not just college for every student. Equity shouldn't force the same choice onto every student; rather their goals and dreams need room to be realized. Support and opportunities for a great career and future should allow paths leading to college, skilled trades, apprenticeships, and non-traditional careers as well. There are industries that pay very well looking for future employees and management, and we should start partnering with them to open those doors.”*

*“Curriculum needs to be addressed. Our students lack the background knowledge that the text books require. All of the material is very challenging, and does not meet the needs of our students. We need Math Intervention and Reading Intervention teachers. Every school should have an SST to help facilitate PD to help us understand our text materials that we are required to teach. What the district level Curriculum people don't know is - we have limited prep/planning time.”*

*“Also, students are not held to any kind of rigorous standards. Their grades are gifted to them to make it easier for the schools, not to help the student actually learn.”*

**Theme #5: Adjustments to the salary and benefits structure across departments must center on the following:**

- Placing the most qualified and experienced staff in schools with the greatest need for improvement while incentivizing the placement
- Incentivizing high performance and tenure within the district (raises, PTO, benefits, etc.)



- Providing equitable accommodations for religious observances among staff by considering non-Christian holidays when scheduling breaks
- Offering more options for 10-month employees to continue receiving pay during the summer months
- Making pay and benefit accrual clear, consistent, and transparent across departments
- Centering negotiations with the union on salary and benefits

*“Do a better job with the hiring process. For example, if a position pays up to 60,000 a year; and you currently make 42,000 a year you should be able to negotiate rather than accepting less than an 8% increase. If you are outside the agency and you apply for the same position you are allowed to negotiate and possibly get the top pay and the person that is given the less than 8% increase will train the outside person.”*

*“MPS should consider incentivizing people to work in the more challenging schools. These schools need the absolute best staff and they often end up with the worst administrators and least experienced teachers. It should be required that all staff have at least 5 years of experience to work in these challenging schools and they should be paid more for it.”*

**Theme #6: Facilities enhancements and building upkeep should focus on the following:**

- Prioritizing the cleanliness of buildings, especially pest and rodent control
- Upgrading the bathrooms and ensuring that they are consistently stocked with supplies
- Developing a plan to equitably address health concerns related to a lack of AC and the presence of asbestos and lead paint
- Creating a plan to address deferred maintenance in school buildings that does not disrupt learning
- Equipping the Department of Facilities and Maintenance with the equipment and vehicles necessary to perform their jobs

*“Building cleanliness and repair is often a problem. I understand we have older buildings with many needs, and there is not always funding. However, my building has not had major work done (HVAC, flooring, doors, etc.) in the 70 years it has been standing. Many staff believe that there is as much illness in students and staff in part due to lack of air quality in the building, and that the state of the building (along with inattentive, inconsistent, or sometimes lack of cleaning) is negatively affecting the health of many.”*

*“The buildings bathrooms are horrible, and we need school supplies. Teachers should not have to keep buying supplies for the students to use.”*

*“Then, ensure each building has proper heating and air conditioning. Within a school building there are rooms like feel like a sauna and others like an ice box (which changes from day to day).”*



**Theme #7: The school schedule and calendar should limit the logistical challenges that families might face getting all of their students to different schools as well as enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of student learning time. This includes the following:**

- Returning to the two-tiered bus and school schedule system with the third, late-start tier removed
- Switching all schools to one calendar and consider making school year-round with more two-week breaks to reduce learning loss
- Eliminating the block schedule and returning to the eight class periods to reduce cognitive fatigue
- Protecting teacher planning, collaboration and preparation time by switching to a four-day student attendance week or one half-day per week

*“I would highly consider surveying staff about moving to a 4 or 4.5 day attendance week for students. Would people say our student outcomes are already low? Yes, but look at the research - staff need time to prepare higher quality lessons. Staff need time to receive PD and coaching.”*

*“Please look at late schools. We are unable to attract quality staff and families with our hours. We have no before or after school programs which allow working parents to keep their students here. Staff has to miss work for appointments due to these hours. Buses are always late and we can only attend field trips for 3 hours due to them having to leave.”*

*“The district needs to be put back on one calendar. This was a good idea, however has yielded many unintended consequences that are not helpful to families or the district budget.”*

*“I find it interesting that there is no talk about transportation in any of this survey, when late and or canceled buses impact our students and therefore our classrooms daily. The system needs to work for our children and often does not.”*

**Theme #8: 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
- Allowing for alternatives to suspensions for chronic disrupters and violent students such as behavioral reassignment schools and alternative placements
- Creating a culture in which thoughtful, proactive, and reflective decision-making is valued rather than reactive to criticism
- 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
- Ensuring that all schools are appropriately staffed with security and/or safety employees
- Providing all staff with training in de-escalation techniques to reduce conflicts between staff and students



- Returning to traditional K–5 and middle schools to ensure that students are exposed to developmentally appropriate behaviors

*“I feel our parents are willing to be more engaged, but we lack the creativity to get them more involved. I would like to know what other schools are doing to innovatively engage parents in the culture of the school and the academic efforts at school and home.”*

*“I think the biggest issue in MPS (in my building and as a whole) is that we need to increase discipline and consequences. Students are getting away with so much these days that they will not get away with in “the real” world. Admin is told that they can’t suspend so they often do nothing in response. Students have gotten so disrespectful and violent to staff and other students. It is getting out of control.”*

*“I really love teaching in MPS and am proud to teach in MPS. I often defend MPS against those who think we are not doing what we should. However, I also believe that we have room for improvement and that we could attract and retain teachers if working conditions were improved. Our students do not make as much progress as they could if we were able to teach more and deal with fewer behavior problems. We are losing our well behaved, higher performing students to CHOICE because their parents are tired of their children losing education time to teachers dealing with behavior problems and NOTHING being done about it. In the last 3 years, I have lost many students because of this.”*

*“For staff to feel that the workforce is valued, it would be helpful not to only see changes made when there are media postings, lawsuits threatened or corrective actions pending. It makes people feel as though some of the improvements are only by force and not because the organization, or teams are authentically concerned for them and their wellbeing. When people staff, students and families, don’t feel valued, it impacts a lot.”*

**Theme # 9: 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, school, and individual teacher levels. Areas that need particular attention are the following:**

- Centering PD on staff input in what is most meaningful and useful to them (e.g., trauma-informed care, SpEd student inclusion, and universal design for learning techniques)
- Scheduling mandatory in-person PD to foster collaboration among teachers and develop meaningful changes to teacher practices
- Front-loading PD, especially for new teachers, before the school year begins
- Streamlining the Educators Effectiveness process to limit the amount of paperwork required and instead focusing on feedback that is useful to the teachers, involving more reflection
- Implementing mandatory facilities and maintenance staff training and on-boarding to enhance their ability to perform their duties effectively and efficiently

*“Please bring back two staff meetings per week - we rarely have time for professional development. We have not been able to address crucial topics like culture and climate, disproportionality, and classroom management for several years because we have no time to dive in. Please also bring back the extra hour of the*



*teacher's workday. We need time to collaborate and work as school staff, and almost everyone leaves right after the students are gone."*

*"School-based staff development needs to be increased. Teachers are not choosing to be reflective growth orientated practitioners. Having an 8-hour workday and allowing school teams to coordinate staff development opportunities will lead to better outcomes for students. This will also build a positive school climate as staff works together for improvement."*

*"We are professionals, and we need to be listened to. Please listen to what teachers are telling you is happening in their classrooms and schools. Central Office personnel are not in schools regularly enough to really discern the amount of issues or type of issues each classroom and school are dealing with. Additionally, administrators are not in classrooms enough to really understand the behaviors of students. Teachers are telling you what we need to make our environments more safe, secure and how to increase the rigor and engagement of learning and work in our environments. Please listen to us."*

*"Why does the EE process look different district to district? Schools outside the district do not complete a lengthy form and teachers are not required to write rationales for every section. I felt like I clicked over 50 boxes for myself evaluation and then had to justify why I felt that way. If the end goal is for us to truly grow professionally and to have a genuine SLO than the process needs to be easier and more streamlined. Having a few artifacts uploaded that directly showcase the PPG and SLO should be sufficient. This process needs to be smarter, not harder."*

**Theme # 10: Communication across the district should be viewed as a collaborative effort among Central Service, administrative, and school-based staff that promotes teamwork and reaching shared goals, not simply enforcing top-down mandates. The district should develop a communication plan for the future that prioritizes the following:**

- Consistent, clear, and direct channels of communication between Central Services/administrative staff and schools regarding schools' needs and funding priorities
- Implementing a public relations campaign that showcases the positive work happening within the district
- Communicating a plan to deal with competition from charter and private schools that incorporates details on how the district intends to recruit and retain students (facilities upgrades, reducing class sizes, addressing behavioral issues, providing more diverse course options, etc.)
- Enhancing transparency and accountability measures for budgeting and spending decisions at the school and district level
- Increasing transparency and honesty about survey results, district issues, and how the district intends to address issues raised to promote trust and faith in district leadership
- Creating shared calendars at the school and district level to assist in planning and communicating events and reducing overlap

*"Stop purchasing additional curriculum that staff members are not aware of and most likely will not use. Stop purchasing technology for schools that already have an abundance of technology. There are schools out there*





*with obsolete SMARTboards and classrooms with no SMARTboard at all. Ask before purchasing. We could be using these funds in a smarter more efficient way.”*

*“The budget for MPS is astronomical, yet most people don't seem to know where that money goes. It is disappointing that curriculums change so frequently and that much curriculum just gets housed in places like Facilities & Maintenance buildings. This is thousands of dollars that appears to be wasted.”*

*“This survey is a great start, and I really appreciate the efforts it took to get in place as well as the efforts it will take to synthesize. I feel compelled to share that I am also worried it is hard to see this as a step towards building a better, more healthy MPS. This fear comes from seeing so many initiatives over the years, which at least I saw as positive, then be abandoned for another initiative. Or sometimes just the miscommunication of message as it moves from higher admin, to school admin, to teachers, to school support staff, to families. I will optimistically look for ways to engage in the direction this leadership team is taking.”*

**Theme # 11: The SpEd department needs targeted supports and system-wide reforms in order to fulfill student needs and meet the district's legal requirements. Changes in practice and procedures include the following:**

- Streamlining the evaluation process through IC, as the current system has too many redundancies and requires manual entry
- Focusing on the required paperwork being completed consistently and clearly
- Utilizing SpEd supervisor roles to assist in paperwork completion and accuracy
- Hiring qualified staff to assist in ensuring that all students' IEP requirements are met regardless of the school they attend
- Providing SpEd staff training on integrating students into general education settings and meeting students' needs in a variety of settings

*“The district needs to take a look at Special Education Services. Some schools aren't equipped to serve students with extreme SPED needs. Are kids actually getting "specialized services"? Just because kids are in a small group doesn't mean that their IEP goals are getting met. “*

*“We should have a group of SpEd teachers come together to see how to improve the Inf. Campus SpEd IEP routine. [ Everything from year to year needs to be brought forward manually [ Reevaluations - Should have a drop-down menu to bring forward initial meeting of disability criteria and other information].”*

*“I have been a teacher with MPS for 26 years. I like my job, my students and our school. I am a SPED teacher and there is WAY too much redundant paperwork that we have to complete and it's exhausting. I appreciate the Saturday work days BUT... that shouldn't be. I usually spend 4-5 hours on each IEP and my Sundays are filled with Lesson Planning. Filling out forms takes away from Lesson Planning.”*

*“Staffing is at a critical point in our district and we are losing teachers due to the caseload, huge class sizes in early grades, and significant SpEd students included without appropriate support. We will never get to the academic needs of our students if we can't manage the behaviors. If we are going to have so many SpEd (3-5 years below the grade level) in classrooms, then we need 2 teachers per room. More and more people will quit if something doesn't improve.”*