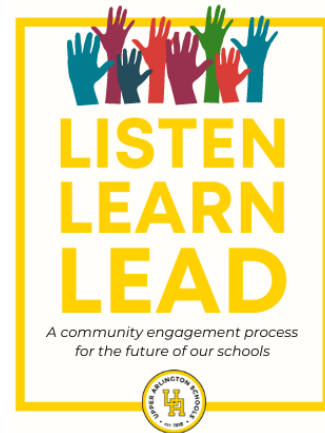


Listen Learn Lead **Briefing Report - June 2023**

Overview

Purpose

In early 2022, the Upper Arlington Schools' Board of Education and District Leaders made a commitment to the community to provide ongoing opportunities for two-way engagement with stakeholders so leaders could be responsive to the current context in this rapidly changing world. The initial *Listen Learn Lead* community engagement effort, implemented in March-May 2022, engaged students, families, community members, and staff through roundtable discussions, survey feedback, and student focus groups. The purpose was to bring the community back together to share ideas that could strengthen the UA Schools to be the best they can be in preparing students for their futures. This resulted in a briefing report (June 2022) and the development of an implementation plan (December 2022) with quarterly updates.



The 2023 *Listen Learn Lead* community engagement effort was designed to support the current context - the onboarding of a new superintendent, Dr. Robert Hunt, and a new deputy superintendent, Dr. Stephanie Siddens, who will begin their service in July 2023. At the seven staff and community engagement sessions held May 2-4, participants had the opportunity to interact with the new superintendent(s), celebrate their community, share their experiences, and offer guidance for their first year. Additionally, a sample of students from each school representing grades K-12 participated in focus groups to share insights about their community, ideas to strengthen their schools, and advice for their new superintendents.

Participation

The Upper Arlington Schools' Board of Education and District Leaders are appreciative of the 578 people who participated in this year's *Listen Learn Lead*.

- 219 people participated in the community engagement sessions - 98 staff members (many of whom also identified as parents of current and former students), 66 parents of current students (not staff members), and 55 community members.
- 359 students across grades K-12 participated in teacher, counselor, or advisor-led focus groups - 93 elementary, 74 middle, and 192 high school students. A sample of students from every building is represented.

Table of Contents

[Executive Summary](#)

[Learnings - The Student Perspective](#)

[Learnings - Parents, Staff, and Community Perspectives](#)

[Activating the Profile of an Engaged Learner](#)

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

Executive Summary

Learnings are outlined with supporting details and examples by stakeholder group (students, adults) and by area of focus beginning on page 4. Presented in this executive summary is a high-level overview of the learnings to guide Dr. Hunt's and Dr. Sidden's first year goals.

Celebrations - Upper Arlington's community and schools are highly regarded for their supportive and connected atmosphere, dedicated teachers, engaging learning experiences, safety, inclusivity, and well-maintained facilities. Upper Arlington and its schools are valued, cherished, and held in high regard. There is a strong sense of pride in the community, its achievements, and its history. It's a place where memories are created and where the community comes together to enjoy and share life. Some common descriptors across all participant groups include safe, inclusive, connected, supportive, and service-oriented.

[The Best of Upper Arlington](#) (Students)

[Uniquely Upper Arlington](#) (Adults)

Building Relationships - To build **student** relationships, parents, staff, and community members suggest active participation during the school day (recess, lunch, arrival/dismissal times, classroom visits), school events outside of the school day (sports, performances, extracurricular activities), and the development of communication systems and structures such as student advisory councils, open office hours, and suggestion boxes to gather student input. An area of emphasis for building student relationships was ensuring that students with different abilities, backgrounds, and identities feel valued and included. The superintendents are encouraged to go beyond easily accessible groups of students to interact with and to be intentional about learning about and addressing the needs of all students.

[Student Relationships](#) (Adults)

To build **staff** relationships, parents, staff, and community members emphasize the importance of the superintendents being visible and available, attending staff meetings, visiting classrooms, attending social events, and participating in professional development sessions. Collaboration and empowerment are also crucial, with staff wanting to be involved in decision-making processes and given opportunities for professional growth. Parents, staff, and community members also highlight the importance of supporting well-being and work-life balance through resource allocation, reducing unnecessary responsibilities, and supporting self-care. Staff needs to feel and see that district leadership supports them, empathizes with them, and 'has their backs'. [Staff Relationships](#) (Adults)

Recommended actions suggested by parents, staff, and community members for the new superintendents to build **community** relationships demonstrate alignment with those suggested for building student and staff relationships. Being visible by attending school events and community events (parades, festivals, art shows) and building personal connections through meaningful, informal interactions are a top priority. More specifically, they suggest establishing open channels of communication, such as coffee chats and online platforms for regular input. Community members would like to see more partnerships with local organizations as well as

Listen Learn Lead

Briefing Report - June 2023

opportunities for senior citizens to be connected. Transparency and accountability with a clearly communicated leadership focus area were also valued actions of district leaders.

[Community Relationships](#) (Adults)

Students holistically concur with the primary focus of building relationships. They believe the superintendents should take the time to get to know as many people as possible, spend more time in the schools, and be involved in the activities and events happening within the schools and community. They want their voices to be heard and suggest student advisory committees, an online platform for sharing ideas and suggestions, and regular town hall meetings.

[Leading the Way](#) (Students)

Areas of Opportunity - In addition to providing ideas for how district leaders could build relationships, parents, staff, and community members were invited to share other topics of importance for the new superintendents to focus on during their first year. Some of the themes that emerged include diversity, inclusion, STEM education, technology and innovation, communication, addressing the needs of marginalized students, supporting the arts, improving curriculum consistency, prioritizing well-being and school safety, consistency in support for students with differing abilities, and curricular and decision-making transparency.

[Other Areas of Importance](#) (Adults)

Similarly, students were asked to share ideas to improve the schools (Getting Better) and to provide advice to the new superintendents about how to be successful leaders (Leading the Way). Not surprisingly, they identified relationship-building as the most important action leaders must take to be successful leaders. Students expressed a desire for more equity and inclusion in the school system, cleaner bathrooms, upgraded playgrounds, and advanced technology. Additionally, students advocated for changes to the school schedule and policies, such as shorter school days, longer lunch periods, and reduced homework. They also recognize that their leaders need to focus on helping them learn and suggested more personalized approaches for them to connect what they are learning in school with their own interests, strengths, and learning styles. They are also interested in field trips to learn more about the world around them and increased partnerships with local organizations so they can learn outside of the classroom.

[Leading the Way](#) (Students)

[Getting Better](#) (Students)

Portrait of an Engaged Learner - Thirty ideas for consideration were extrapolated from the data set to support staff and administrators as they work collaboratively to embed the six competencies into the learning experience and learning environment for students. Many of these ideas are probably already occurring in various degrees across classrooms and schools. Compiling these recommendations into a single document for staff to reflect on the degree to which the conditions or experiences are already present in their schools and classrooms is a great place to start. This springboard activity could then lead into individual, school-based, and district-based action planning to strengthen and accelerate implementation.

[Activating the Profile of an Engaged Learner](#) (Adults)

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

Learnings - The Student Perspective

This section represents the voices of the 359 students across grades K-12 who participated in teacher, counselor, or advisor-led focus groups - 93 elementary, 74 middle, and 192 high school students with representation from all schools.

The Best of Upper Arlington

What makes our schools and community so special? What are you most proud of when you discuss the school district with others? The students of Upper Arlington expressed numerous strengths of their community and schools. They emphasized the supportive and connected nature of their community, where everyone helps each other and is welcoming to newcomers. The kindness and dedication of teachers and staff were praised, along with their engaging teaching styles. The schools were described as safe places that provide comfort and a sense of belonging for all students. The presence of various resources, such as community pools and a new recreational center, were mentioned as valuable assets.

The students appreciated the range of activities offered by their schools, including field trips, end-of-year parties, and events like "Spike Out Hunger." They valued the opportunities for learning and personal growth, highlighting the mentor programs and the availability of extracurricular activities and sports teams. The physical aspects of the school buildings, such as nice classrooms and special areas like the music room that can transform into a stage, were also mentioned.

The community's inclusivity and diversity were recognized as strengths, with students appreciating the acceptance of different cultures, races, and backgrounds. They emphasized the collaborative nature of the community, where people work together to achieve common goals. The presence of support systems, such as adult supervision during recess, aides for assistance, and counseling services, were cited as contributing to a safe and nurturing environment.

The students also mentioned the availability of resources and opportunities, such as a well-stocked library, multiple recesses, and different clubs and extracurricular activities. They valued the emphasis on learning, both academically and through hands-on experiences, such as hatching chicks and participating in service learning projects. The strong sense of community pride and school spirit, along with the involvement of parents and the larger community, were highlighted as factors that contribute to the overall strength of the Upper Arlington Schools.

Based on the responses provided, several trends can be observed regarding the strengths of the Upper Arlington community and schools:

Community Support and Connectedness: A common theme among the responses is the sense of community and how everyone helps and supports each other. The community is described as connected and welcoming, with a strong sense of togetherness. Example

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

responses: "Everyone helps each other," "The community is connected," "We have a great community that is friendly, trustworthy, and kind."

Engaging and Caring Teachers: Students appreciate the kindness and dedication of their teachers. They value the teaching styles and the support they receive from the teaching staff. Example responses: "Kind staff," "Teachers are very nice," "Our teachers are incredible," "The teachers are the best, kind, caring, and they help us."

Fun and Interactive Learning Experiences: The students express enthusiasm for the engaging and enjoyable learning opportunities provided by their schools. They appreciate field trips, hands-on activities, and the chance to explore different subjects. Example responses: "Fun ways to learn (field trips)," "Explorations help us learn and it's FUN," "We have lots of activities and fun field trips," "Activities that are fun and hands-on."

Safe and Inclusive Environment: Students feel that their schools and community provide a safe and inclusive space for everyone. They appreciate the efforts made to ensure the well-being of students and the availability of support systems. Example responses: "It's a safe school," "It's a safe place for everybody, literally everybody," "Our schools are very inclusive," "We have paras and other adults who help people in need learn."

Good Facilities and Resources: The students mention various positive aspects of their schools, such as well-maintained buildings, modern facilities, spacious playgrounds, and well-stocked libraries. Example responses: "Love the building and the architecture," "We have the nicest elevators," "We have a huge library with lots of books," "We have great outdoor facilities."

Extracurricular Activities and Sports Programs: The availability of diverse extracurricular activities and sports programs is highlighted as a strength, fostering a sense of belonging and community engagement. Example responses: "All of the activities that we do as a school," "Good sports programs," "Different sports options for each age group."

The trends indicate that Upper Arlington's community and schools are highly regarded for their supportive and connected atmosphere, dedicated teachers, engaging learning experiences, robust resources, safety, inclusivity, and new facilities.

Getting Better

The Upper Arlington Board of Education, superintendent, teachers, and administrators continually work to strengthen our schools by improving learning experiences and supporting well-being (belonging and balance). What ideas do you have that could help us make the UA Schools even better? The analysis of student responses reveals many trends representing students' ideas and desires. In general, students emphasized the importance of equity and inclusion, calling for a more accepting and diverse school

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

environment. They also expressed a desire for improved facilities and resources, including cleaner bathrooms, upgraded playgrounds, and advanced technology. Additionally, students advocated for changes to the school schedule and policies, such as shorter school days, longer lunch periods, and reduced homework. A more robust description of these trends follows.

Focus on Equity and Inclusion: Students expressed a desire for more equity and inclusion in the school system, such as doing more to include the LGBTQ community and promoting respect and kindness among students. Example responses: "More equity for everyone," "Do more to include the LGBTQ community," "Standing up for people even though you don't know them," "Making people feel loved," "Crack down on all forms of bullying."

More Engaging Learning Experiences: Students want a balance between group work and individual work. They also expressed a desire for more trips and experiences outside of school, as well as more service-learning opportunities and incorporating hands-on activities to make learning more engaging. Example responses: - "Using Minecraft as an educational tool," "More hands-on activities during classroom learning," "More of a balance of group work and individual work," "More opportunities for people interested in theatre."

Improvements in Facilities and Amenities: Students mentioned the need for cleaner bathrooms. They also desire better food options and longer lunch periods. Improving playground equipment, upgrading Wi-Fi, and adding more windows and furniture in classrooms were also suggestions. Example responses: "More playground balls and equipment on the playground," "Put turf in the stadium," "More room at the tables in the cafeteria," "More windows, maybe on the ceiling," "Fix the outdoor basketball courts," "Better food, provide a variety," "More vegetarian options."

Changes in School Policies and Practices: Students expressed a desire for changes in the dress code, such as allowing bare midriffs. They also mentioned allowing the use of phones during lunch and listening to music between classes. Other suggestions included shorter school days, more notice prior to testing, and optional computer science classes. Example responses: "Allow phones during lunch," "Want to be allowed to listen to music...especially between classes," "Another break during the day - not just lunch," "School to be longer so we don't have to do work at home."

Student Voice and Engagement: Students want to have a voice in decision-making processes and feel more included in the school community. They suggested activities like having a day where kids can teach teachers something new and involving students in the school morning shows. They also mentioned the importance of building relationships, being kind, and working on friendships. Example responses: "Students should have different options for Capstone experiences," "Students have good ideas and should be asked their opinions more," "More student input on menu," "A day where the kids could teach the teachers something new."

Various other suggestions were made, including the implementation of a school pet at the elementary level, connections across elementary schools, and activities with other schools. The

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

data provided reflects the perspectives and ideas of students for making Upper Arlington Schools better.

Based on student suggestions, these are recommendations for district leaders to make UA Schools even better:

1. **Foster Equity and Inclusion:** Implement comprehensive diversity and inclusion programs that educate students and staff on LGBTQ+ acceptance, cultural understanding, and equity. Create opportunities for open dialogue and support student-led initiatives to promote inclusivity within the school community.
2. **Enhance Facilities and Resources:** This includes maintaining clean and well-equipped bathrooms, upgrading playground equipment, ensuring reliable and fast Wi-Fi access, and providing comfortable furniture in classrooms.
3. **Revise School Schedule and Policies:** Review and adapt the school schedule to allow for longer lunch periods, more recess time, and breaks throughout the day. Develop fair discipline policies that consider all sides of a situation and promote restorative practices. Consider implementing a homework policy that balances academic requirements with students' well-being.
4. **Expand Extracurricular Activities and Field Trips:** Increase the availability of extracurricular activities and offer a diverse range of options to cater to students' interests. Provide more opportunities for hands-on learning experiences, field trips, and interactions with the broader community. Forge partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and other schools to expand learning opportunities for students.
5. **Empower Student Voice and Involvement:** Create channels for students to actively participate in decision-making processes. Establish student councils or advisory boards to provide input on school policies, curriculum development, and extracurricular activities. Encourage student-led initiatives and projects that address issues important to the student body.
6. **Strengthen Hands-on and Engaging Learning Experiences:** Incorporate more hands-on activities, project-based learning, and real-world applications into the curriculum. Provide opportunities for students to engage with technology, arts, and other interactive learning tools to make learning more enjoyable and practical.

Leading the Way

What advice would you give to the new superintendent(s) about how to be a great leader for our schools? What could he do to be a successful leader? Trends in student responses indicate alignment with the search firm's focus group findings with building relationships as the most important strategy for the new superintendents to enact. Additionally, students care about being included and engaged with the superintendent and more opportunities for personalizing the learning experience and strengthening inclusivity. Here are some specific examples from the data set aligned to these trends.

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

Building Relationships: A common trend among the student responses is the emphasis on the new superintendents building relationships and being visible in the schools. Students believe that the superintendents should take the time to get to know as many people as possible, spend more time in the schools, and be involved in the activities and events happening within the schools. Example responses: "Get to know as many people as possible," "Spend more time in the schools - be visible," "Share even more about himself so people get to know him as a person," "Get involved with the things that are happening in the schools."

Student Voice and Engagement: Students expressed a desire for the superintendents to listen to and consider the ideas and opinions of students, teachers, and parents. They want their voices to be heard and valued, and they believe that the superintendent should actively seek input from all stakeholders. Students also mentioned the importance of creating a positive and inclusive school environment where everyone feels respected and supported. Example responses: "Listen and consider students, teachers, and parents' ideas," "Don't pick favorites; if you have a favorite, don't let it show," "Give respect, share what you think," "Listen to everyone - listen to ideas, even kids - kids can have good ideas."

Flexibility and Personalized Learning: Another trend is the recognition that not all students learn best in a traditional classroom setting. Students suggested that the superintendents should be flexible and open to alternative educational options, such as online academies, to cater to the diverse needs of students. They also mentioned the importance of providing equal opportunities and resources for all students, regardless of their background or abilities. Example responses: "Be accepting of all kinds of students," "Continuing to provide flexible options," "Make sure everyone is equal, Latino, Asian, Black, white, all of them," "Make sure people have a mind and have help whenever they need it."

Based on student suggestions, these are recommendations for the new superintendent(s) to be great leaders for the UA schools:

1. **Foster a Culture of Relationship-Building:** Prioritize relationship-building by regularly visiting schools, attending events, and actively engaging with students, teachers, and parents. This could involve scheduling regular school visits, organizing meet-and-greet sessions, and creating opportunities for open dialogue between the superintendents and various stakeholders.
2. **Establish Student Advisory Committees:** To ensure student voice and engagement, district leaders can establish student advisory committees or councils. These committees should include representatives from different grade levels and backgrounds who can provide input on important decisions and policies.
3. **Promote Flexible and Personalized Learning:** District leaders should support and expand alternative educational options, such as online academies or flexible learning environments, to accommodate students' diverse needs. They should advocate for

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

resources and training to implement personalized learning approaches that cater to individual student's strengths, interests, and learning styles.

4. Create Channels for Feedback and Suggestions: District leaders should establish channels for students, teachers, and parents to provide feedback and suggestions. This could include anonymous suggestion boxes, online platforms for submitting ideas, or regular town hall meetings where stakeholders can interact in person.

Based on the students' responses, it is clear that they value a superintendent who prioritizes building relationships and being visible within the school community. They want leaders who are approachable, involved, and takes the time to get to know students, teachers, and parents on a personal level. Additionally, students emphasize the importance of student voice and engagement, urging the superintendents to listen to their ideas and opinions and consider them in decision-making processes. Finally, students highlight the need for flexibility in education, recognizing that not all students thrive in traditional settings and advocate for personalized learning options.

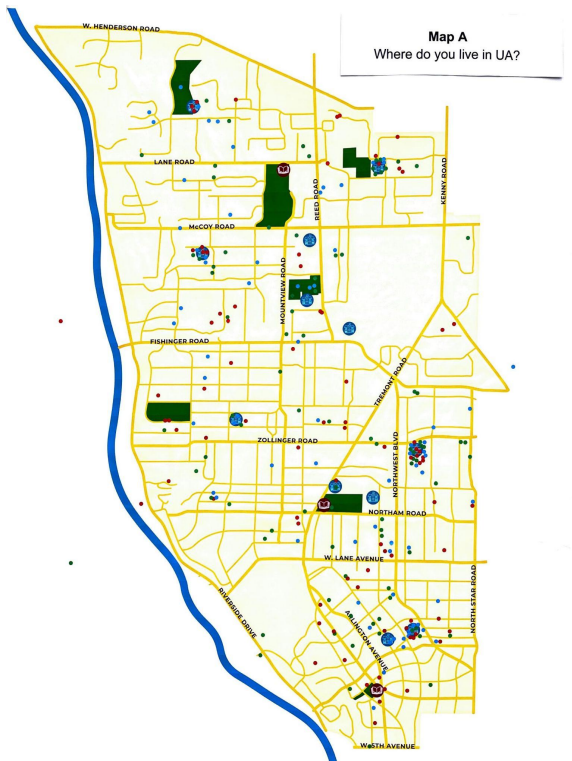
Listen Learn Lead **Briefing Report - June 2023**

Learnings - Parents, Staff, and Community Perspectives

This section represents the voices of the 219 people who participated in this year's *Listen Learn Lead* community engagement sessions - 98 staff members (many of whom also identified as parents of current and former students), 66 parents of current students (not staff members), and 55 community members.

Uniquely Upper Arlington

The first activity of the community engagement sessions for parents, staff, and community members asked them to interact with 2 maps of the district. They placed a dot on Map A representing where they lived (if they were staff who were not residents, they placed a dot on their school) and a dot on Map B representing a place in UA that makes it special to them. Dr. Hunt was able to observe the maps, ask questions, and get to know more about the community that he and his family will call their home.



Map A - Where do you live in UA?

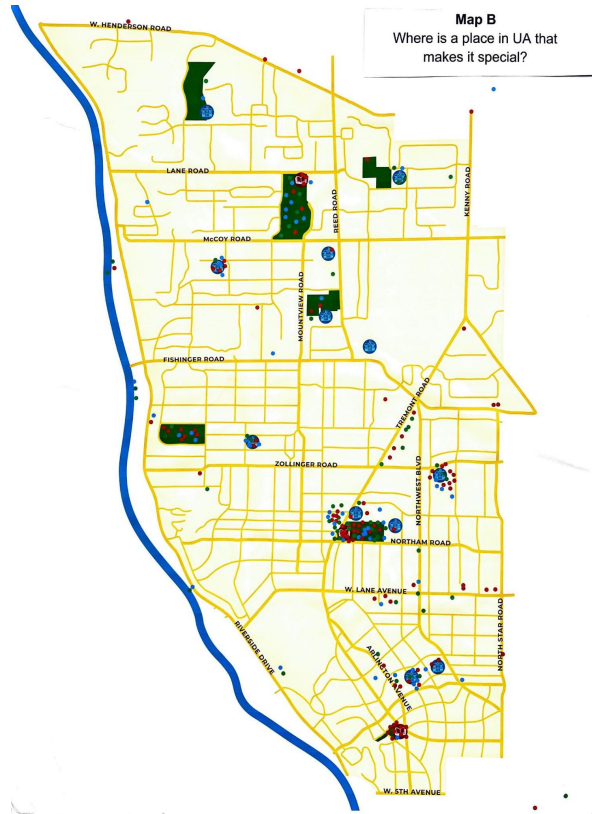
One of the unique features of the City of Upper Arlington is that its borders align with the school district. Map A shows the 219 participants represent almost all neighborhoods within the city, with a slightly heavier concentration from the area close to W. Lane Ave. The dots on the schools represent the staff members who are not residents, and a few people indicated they lived slightly beyond the border on the west side of the river.

Dr. Hunt and his family were in the process of finding a home in a very difficult market, so he jokingly solicited information about potential homes for sale.

Listen Learn Lead **Briefing Report - June 2023**

Map B - Where is a place in UA that makes it special?

With the assistance of Board Members, participants located places on the map that were special to them and then shared stories. Some notable favorites include the festivities surrounding the 4th of July, the amenities in the parks and their distribution across the community, the library system, recommended restaurants and shopping locations, and of course, the river - fishing, kayaking, and even a marriage proposal or two occurred on the bank of the river.



Leading Together - Advice for Building Relationships

The second activity of the community engagement sessions was framed by the feedback collected from the superintendent search firm's focus groups. They asked the question, "What should be the new superintendents' priorities during their first year?" They learned that the community valued time spent building relationships with students, staff, and the community. At *Listen Learn Lead*, small group conversations were designed around these three topic areas - student relationships, staff relationships, and community relationships in an effort to ideate concrete actions and expectations for Dr. Hunt (and Dr. Stephanie Siddens, the new deputy superintendent). Additionally, other topics of importance beyond building relationships were solicited.

Student Relationships

What does it look like and sound like for our superintendent(s) to build relationships with students? Parents, staff, and community members discussed and recorded what it looks like and sounds like when the superintendent is building relationships with students and several

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

common themes emerged. The stakeholders emphasized the importance of the superintendent being visible and engaged in various areas of the school, such as recess, lunch, extracurricular activities, and classrooms. They also highlighted the need for the superintendent to interact with students directly, participate in events, and demonstrate approachability and inclusivity. Specific examples mentioned included attending sports and theater events, teaching lessons, riding the school bus, eating lunch with students, and engaging in special projects.

Based on participant responses, recommendations for the superintendent(s) to build relationships with **students** include:

1. **Be Visible and Engaged:** Actively participate in various areas of the school, such as recess, lunch, extracurricular activities, and classrooms. Attend events, sports games, theater performances, and other activities to demonstrate support and engagement.
2. **Show Support for Diverse Learners:** Ensure that students with different abilities, backgrounds, and identities feel valued and included. This includes addressing the needs of marginalized groups, advocating for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans, and modeling respect for all cultures and religions.
3. **Emphasize the Whole Child:** Take an interest in students' interests, passions, and goals outside of academics. This can be done through conversations about hobbies, career aspirations, and personal achievements. Make an effort to learn the names of students and address them personally.
4. **Be Approachable and Accessible:** Create an environment where students feel comfortable approaching the superintendent. This can include open office hours, an open-door policy, and regular opportunities for students to interact directly with them.
5. **Foster Open Communication:** Create opportunities for students to express their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions. Establish student advisory councils or use suggestion boxes to gather input. Engage in informal conversations during lunch, recess, and arrival/dismissal times. Clearly communicate the role of the superintendent and the district's vision to students. Engage in non-politicized conversations and address questions and concerns honestly and openly.

Staff Relationships

What does it look like and sound like for our superintendent(s) to build relationships with staff? Parents, staff, and community members provide valuable insights into what it looks like and sounds like when a superintendent is building relationships with staff. The data highlights several key themes and actions that contribute to effective relationship-building. These include the superintendents' presence and accessibility, active listening, open communication, personal connections, recognition, collaboration, empowerment, and support for well-being.

Participants emphasized the importance of the superintendents being visible and available by attending staff meetings and participating in professional development sessions. Staff values personal connections and recognition, such as receiving notes about achievements or having the superintendent attend social events. Collaboration and empowerment are also crucial, with

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

staff wanting to be involved in decision-making processes and given opportunities for professional growth.

Based on participant responses, recommendations for the superintendent(s) to build relationships with **staff** include:

1. **Foster Open Communication:** Establish clear channels for staff to express concerns, provide feedback, and share ideas. Create a culture of transparency and actively listen to staff members' perspectives and suggestions. Ensure timely responses to their communication and address their concerns effectively.
2. **Be Visible and Accessible:** Make an effort to be present and engaged with staff by attending staff meetings, participating in professional development sessions, and regularly visiting classrooms and other departments. This visibility shows support for the staff and their work, and provides opportunities for direct interaction.
3. **Recognize and Value Staff:** Take the time to recognize staff members' achievements and efforts. This can be done through personal gestures like writing notes of appreciation, attending staff social events, and organizing staff breakfasts or lunches. Show genuine interest in staff members' lives and interests to make them feel valued.
4. **Collaborate and Empower:** Involve staff in decision-making processes and seek their input. Empower them to take on leadership roles and provide opportunities for professional growth. Value their expertise and encourage a sense of ownership in shaping the school's vision and direction.
5. **Support Well-Being and Work-Life Balance:** Prioritize staff well-being by supporting self-care initiatives, reducing unnecessary responsibilities, and advocating for resources that demonstrate their value. Show empathy and understanding towards the challenges they face and actively address any safety or security concerns.

Community Relationships

What does it look like and sound like for our superintendent(s) to build relationships with our community? The responses from parents, staff, and community members highlight several key aspects of building relationships between the superintendent and parents/community members. Attending community and school events, such as sports games, musical performances, and parades, is seen as important for demonstrating support and involvement in the community. Open communication channels, including coffee chats, suggestion boxes, and direct communication platforms, are seen as vital for listening to community concerns, responding appropriately, and fostering transparency.

Fostering community involvement through partnerships with local organizations and promoting civic engagement is also emphasized. Building personal connections through small group meetings and engaging with diverse groups, including parents, grandparents, teachers, and community organizations, is seen as crucial for understanding different perspectives and building trust. Transparency and accountability are also highly valued, with participants stressing

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

the importance of sharing information, providing regular updates, and actively seeking and responding to constructive feedback.

Based on participant responses, recommendations for the superintendent(s) to build relationships with the **community** include:

1. **Attend Community and School Events:** Make it a priority to attend a diverse range of community and school events, such as sports games, musical performances, parades, art shows, and festivals.
2. **Establish Open Communication Channels:** Create transparent and accessible communication channels, such as coffee chats, suggestion boxes, and direct communication platforms, to actively listen to community concerns, respond appropriately, and provide updates.
3. **Foster Community Involvement:** Encourage and promote community involvement by partnering with local organizations, promoting civic engagement, and inviting the community to participate in school events and activities. Explore opportunities for senior citizens to share their knowledge and mentor students, promoting intergenerational connections and learning.
4. **Build Personal Connections:** Schedule meetings with small groups, including parents, grandparents, teachers, unions, and community groups. These personal interactions allow for meaningful conversations, understanding different perspectives, and building strong relationships based on trust and mutual respect.
5. **Prioritize Transparency and Accountability:** Ensure transparency in decision-making processes, share information about plans and initiatives, and provide regular updates to the community. Actively seek and respond to constructive feedback, demonstrating accountability and a commitment to continuous improvement.
6. **Maintain a Positive and Enthusiastic Approach:** Show passion for the job, maintain a positive attitude, and be open to suggestions and feedback while staying focused on what is best for the students and the community.

Other Areas of Importance - *What other areas of importance should the new superintendent(s) focus on during their first year?*

Parents, staff, and community members provided a wide range of responses when asked about areas of importance for the new superintendent(s) to address during their first year. Some of the themes that emerged include diversity, inclusion, STEM education, technology and innovation, communication, addressing the needs of marginalized students, supporting the arts, improving curriculum consistency, prioritizing well-being, school safety, support for students with special needs, and curricular and decision-making transparency.

Specific examples of their responses include the need for a district STEM coordinator, support for the arts with a focus on middle schools, improved pay and benefits for paraprofessionals, increased visibility of the superintendent in the community, addressing the needs of students

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

with disabilities, transparency in budgets and decision-making, and prioritizing mental health for both students and staff.

Based on participant responses, recommendations for the new superintendent(s) to address **other areas of concern** include:

1. **Foster a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Prioritize creating a district-wide culture that values and celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion. Develop and implement comprehensive DEI initiatives that address the needs of all students, staff, and community members. Engage with diverse community organizations and stakeholders to build strong partnerships and ensure diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making processes.
2. **Enhance STEM Education and Opportunities:** Consider hiring a STEM Coordinator to lead the enhancement of STEM education across all grade levels. This includes providing resources and training for educators to implement effective STEM teaching practices, creating partnerships with local STEM industries and organizations for real-world experiences, and expanding access to STEM-related extracurricular activities and competitions. Ensure equitable access to STEM opportunities for all students, irrespective of their background or identity.
3. **Prioritize Student Well-being:** Develop comprehensive strategies to prioritize student well-being, including mental health support. Increase the number of counselors in schools and provide professional development for general education teachers to better support special education students.
4. **Support the Arts:** Recognize the importance of arts education and provide resources and support for arts programs in middle schools. Encourage partnerships with local arts organizations to enhance opportunities for students.
5. **Embrace Technology and Innovation:** Embrace the potential of AI and technology to enhance education. Evaluate the district's technology infrastructure and ensure it meets the needs of students and teachers. Encourage innovative teaching practices and provide opportunities for students to develop leadership and critical thinking skills.
6. **Focus on Academic Excellence:** Maintain a strong focus on academic rigor and critical thinking. Evaluate curriculum and instruction to ensure they are research-based and aligned with best practices. Support teachers as experts in their field and provide professional development opportunities for continued learning. Ensure all students are appropriately supported no matter their ability.

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

Activating the Profile of an Engaged Learner

The third and final activity in the community engagement sessions introduced participants to the newly adopted *Profile of an Engaged Learner* framework, which outlines six competencies students need to develop to be lifelong, engaged learners. Participants engaged in table group conversations around one of the competency areas and responded to the question, “What can we do to develop these skills? What specific actions or experiences could we provide for our students?” A summary of the trends as well as possible actions or experiences for each area of the Profile are described below. It would be beneficial to share these ideas with staff and administrators as a springboard for conversation and additional ideation as they work to build annual goals and plans to embed the development of these skills for the upcoming school year.

Solution Seekers

Parents, staff, and community members provided valuable insights on specific actions and experiences that can help students develop the skill of becoming Solution Seekers. They emphasized the importance of teaching students how to ask questions and creating an environment where curiosity is nurtured. They believed that there are no stupid questions and that teachers should model effective questioning techniques to encourage students' inquiry. Additionally, they suggested reducing the focus on standardized testing and implementing more project-based learning, which allows students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problems.

Collaboration was another key theme in the responses. The participants highlighted the need to foster collaboration among students and reduce the boundaries between subject areas. They recognized that interdisciplinary projects and group work can promote a holistic understanding and innovative problem-solving. By working together, students can learn from each other's perspectives and develop a sense of shared responsibility in finding solutions.

Participants also emphasized the importance of providing diverse learning opportunities that align with students' interests and uniqueness. They suggested meeting students where they are and incorporating their interests into the learning process. This approach can enhance engagement and motivation, as well as allow students to explore different perspectives and experiences.

Finally, participants stressed the significance of practical applications and real-world experiences. They highlighted the need to connect classroom learning to the outside world by providing opportunities for students to solve real problems, engage in community experiences, and learn from professionals. By emphasizing the relevance and application of their learning, students can develop a greater understanding of how their knowledge and skills can make a difference in the world.

The responses from parents, staff, and community members emphasize the importance of teaching students how to ask questions, implementing project-based learning, fostering

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

collaboration, providing diverse learning opportunities, and emphasizing practical applications and real-world experiences. These suggestions aim to cultivate students' curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, collaboration skills, and real-world connections, ultimately developing them as Solution Seekers.

The recommended actions or experiences for developing students as **Solution Seekers** include:

1. Teach students how to ask questions and model effective questioning techniques.
2. Implement project-based learning approaches to promote critical thinking and problem-solving.
3. Foster collaboration and reduce subject boundaries to encourage interdisciplinary learning.
4. Provide diverse learning opportunities that incorporate students' interests and perspectives.
5. Emphasize practical applications and real-world experiences to connect learning to the outside world.

Creative

Parents, staff, and community members were asked to provide their input on specific actions or experiences that could be implemented to nurture students' creativity. There was a strong consensus on the importance of allocating dedicated time and creating an environment that fosters creativity. This includes allowing unplanned time during the school day for independent pursuits and creating an atmosphere where it is acceptable to try new ideas and embrace failure as a valuable learning experience.

Participants emphasized the need to break down the barriers between subjects and promote collaboration. They suggested making classes less departmentalized, encouraging cross-curricular teaching, and facilitating teacher-student collaboration. This approach enables students to see the interconnectedness of different disciplines and encourages them to think beyond traditional paradigms.

Project-based learning emerged as a highly recommended strategy. This approach encourages students to actively engage in real-world problem-solving, allowing them to develop critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative skills. It was also suggested that thematic studies, where topics are explored in-depth across multiple subjects, could provide a rich context for creativity to flourish.

The importance of community partnerships and real-world connections was also highlighted. Engaging with subject-matter experts, alumni, and professionals in collaborative workspaces can provide students with valuable insights, mentorship, and opportunities to apply their skills in practical settings. Additionally, field trips, art displays, and diverse storytime sessions were proposed to broaden students' horizons and expose them to different perspectives and experiences.

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

The recommended actions or experiences for developing students as **Creative** include:

1. Implement project-based learning approaches that allow students to explore and solve real-world problems.
2. Move away from traditional core classes and promote cross-curricular teaching to integrate different subjects and foster interdisciplinary thinking.
3. Engage with community partners, subject-matter experts, and alumni to provide students with opportunities to connect their learning to the real world.
4. Empower students to initiate and complete large-scale projects, such as creating gardens or play spaces, which encourage creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.
5. Establish an environment where students are encouraged to take risks, try new methods, and embrace failure as a part of the learning process.

Skilled Communicators

Based on the responses provided by parents, staff, and community members on how to develop students into skilled communicators, several key themes emerge. These include promoting active listening, fostering collaboration, providing speaking opportunities, incorporating art and creativity, understanding different communication styles, offering authentic learning experiences, modeling respectful communication, and teaching practical communication skills.

The recommended actions or experiences for developing students as **Skilled Communicators** include:

1. Focus on teaching students to actively listen to one another, promoting empathy and understanding. This can be achieved through activities such as town meetings, morning meetings, and structured conversations where students learn to listen attentively and respond thoughtfully.
2. Offer various speaking opportunities to students, such as giving presentations, engaging in public speaking, and participating in extracurricular activities. These experiences allow students to practice articulating their thoughts, ideas, and opinions in front of others, building their confidence and communication skills.
3. Promote collaborative projects and activities where students work together in teams. Collaborative work helps students learn how to effectively communicate, negotiate, and share ideas with their peers, enhancing their overall communication abilities.
4. Encourage students to create more art and engage in authentic "in the moment" writing. Artistic activities provide a platform for self-expression, helping students develop their communication skills in a creative and meaningful way.
5. Help students identify their own communication styles and appreciate the diversity of communication styles among their peers. By understanding different ways of communicating, students can learn to adapt and effectively communicate with others who may have different communication preferences.

Listen Learn Lead

Briefing Report - June 2023

Open-Minded and Empathetic

The participants suggest the importance of exposing students to diverse perspectives, experiences, and cultures outside of their immediate environment. They emphasize the need for structured opportunities for dialogue and discussion on controversial topics, promoting active listening and fostering respect for different perspectives. Collaborative education, service learning, and real-world experiences are also highlighted as valuable methods for developing empathy and open-mindedness. Additionally, participants indicate the significance of incorporating compassion, kindness, and emotional intelligence into everyday interactions and recognizing these qualities through recognition.

The recommended actions or experiences for developing students as **Open-Minded and Empathetic** include:

1. Encourage students to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences will broaden their perspectives and increase their empathy.
2. Provide opportunities for students to express their opinions, listen to others, and engage in respectful debates to enhance their open-mindedness and ability to consider multiple viewpoints.
3. Organize field trips and incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum to expose students to a wider range of experiences, fostering empathy and understanding.
4. Engage students in large-scale service projects and collaborative initiatives with students from other districts to help them develop empathy as they work together to address real-world issues and make a positive impact in their communities.
5. Incorporate compassion and emotional intelligence into daily interactions and celebrate these qualities in a formal way to reinforce the importance of empathy and understanding.

Responsible and Resilient

The responses from parents, staff, and community members on actions and experiences to develop responsible and resilient skills in students revealed several key themes. These themes revolve around creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment, teaching responsibility and accountability, promoting resilience and adaptability, and modeling desired behaviors.

The recommended actions or experiences for developing students as **Responsible and Resilient** include:

1. Encourage students to see failure as an opportunity for growth and learning rather than a setback. Create an environment where making mistakes is seen as a natural part of the learning process and provide support and guidance to help students learn from their failures.
2. Focus on cultivating a love for learning rather than solely emphasizing grades. Foster intrinsic motivation and a growth mindset by providing meaningful and engaging

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

learning experiences that focus on the process of learning rather than solely on outcomes.

3. Encourage students to step outside of their comfort zones and take risks. Provide opportunities for them to explore new ideas, perspectives, and activities, which can help them develop resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to face challenges.
4. Empower students to take ownership of their learning and decision-making processes. Provide opportunities for them to make choices, set goals, and be responsible for their actions. This can help develop their sense of responsibility and resilience.
5. Equip staff with the knowledge and skills to support students who have experienced trauma. This includes understanding the impact of trauma on learning and behavior, implementing trauma-informed practices, and providing appropriate support and resources for students in need.

Well-Balanced

Responses from parents, staff, and community members on actions or experiences that could help students develop well-balanced skills revealed several key themes. Participants emphasize the importance of providing time and space in the school for quiet, peace, and reflection, as well as the need to be inclusive of all students by partnering with community organizations. They also highlight the significance of having fun at school and finding ways to promote being well-balanced.

Another common suggestion is to maximize learning during school hours in order to reduce the amount of homework assigned to students. The idea of providing and encouraging students to be involved in various activities is also mentioned, emphasizing the importance of experiential learning and stepping out of their comfort zones.

Participants stress the need to focus on mental health for all students, including discussions on the addiction and dangers associated with cell phones, social media, gaming, and technology. They also recommend reevaluating assessment and scheduling methods, considering using standards-based assessments for secondary students, and implementing block scheduling.

Additionally, using data to help students choose appropriate courses and actively asking students about their stress levels and homework were proposed as important actions to promote well-balanced development.

The recommended actions or experiences for developing students as **Well-Balanced** include:

1. Allocate time and space for quiet, peace, and reflection within the school day.
2. Foster inclusivity by partnering with community organizations and honoring well-balanced students.
3. Promote experiential learning and encourage students to participate in various activities outside their comfort zones.

Listen Learn Lead
Briefing Report - June 2023

4. Prioritize mental health discussions and educate students and families about the potential dangers of excessive technology use.
5. Maximize learning during school hours to minimize the need for excessive homework while also considering alternative assessment methods and scheduling approaches.

Applying the Recommendations for the Profile of an Engaged Learner

For each of the six competency areas, five recommended actions or experiences to support the development of the competency in students is presented resulting in thirty ideas for consideration as staff and administrators work collaboratively to embed these competencies into the learning experience and learning environment. Compiling the 30 recommendations into a single document for staff to reflect on the degree to which the conditions or experiences are already present in their schools and classrooms is a great place to start. This springboard activity could then lead into individual, school-based, and district-based action planning.

The 30 recommendations could also be organized into classroom-based, school-based, and district-based areas of influence. For example, recommendation 3 in the Open-Minded and Empathetic competency area is, “Organize field trips and incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum to expose students to a wider range of experiences, fostering empathy and understanding.” To enact this recommendation, both school and district-based educators would need to collaborate on the development, coordination, and implementation of this experience. Recommendation 4 in the Responsible and Resilient competency area is, “Empower students to take ownership of their learning and decision-making processes. Provide opportunities for them to make choices, set goals, and be responsible for their actions.” This recommendation is within the influence of classroom-based educators with support from school-based leaders. Teachers may need to be provided time to collaborate with each other to share and learn strategies that empower student ownership.

Simply reading through these recommendations will increase awareness of opportunities, cause reflection on current practices, and spark new ideas for implementation. Discussing these recommendations with colleagues would increase understanding and momentum leading to a more effective approach to implementation of the Portrait of an Engaged Learner.