Listening to and Learning from Saint Louis Public Schools Community

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Summary of the school-based Listen and Learns within Dr. Scarlett's 100 Days engagement and impact efforts

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Introductions

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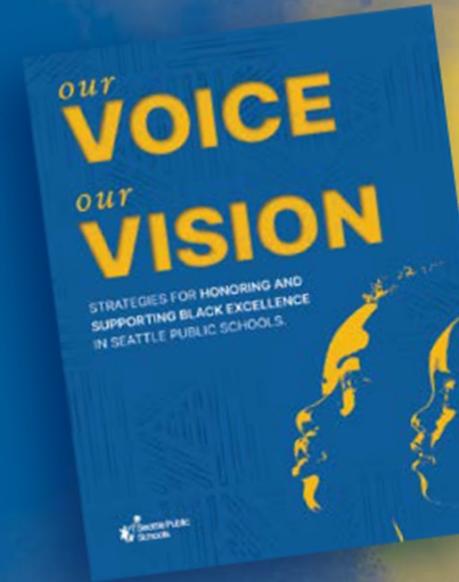
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Starting with the dissemination approach, intentional learning, and positive community reception, **Our Voice Our Vision** themes continue to be used as organizing frameworks for school and system accountability.

our
VOICE
our
VISION

STRATEGIES FOR HONORING AND
SUPPORTING BLACK EXCELLENCE
IN SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

✓ Districtwide CSIP plans

✓ Instructional Philosophy, Policy 0010

✓ Professional development

✓ Strategy map in goal-area budgeting

About This Effort

Superintendent Scarlett held school-based "Listen and Learn" conversations across Saint Louis Public Schools as part of her robust 100-day entry plan. These were one set of many conversations. Listen and Learns were held in August and September 2023 at six schools and included over 200 students, families, and staff members. The goal of these sessions was to build relationships and listen deeply to student-, family-, and staff-sourced ideas for innovation during the start of the school year.

Conversation notes were coded and analyzed by the consulting research team in the context of recommendations from the Blueprint and national literature.

Data Sources

- *Insights from Engagement.* Direct feedback and experiences shared by students, staff and families during listening sessions along with follow-up key stakeholder meetings.

- *Literature.* Research findings, academic studies, and best practices within the field of education.

- *Blueprint.* Aligning insights with the district's educational plan, the Blueprint.

Uplifted Themes

1. *Student Voice.* **Enhance student engagement and academic excellence by promoting student voice, choice, and leadership in schools and across the system**

2. *Family Engagement.* **Establish and strengthen routines for family and community engagement and communication in ways that leverage family assets and promote trust**

3. *Safety.* **Promote safe, connected, and thriving school communities**

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1. Student Voice

Students and staff members discussed engagement efforts that move beyond listening to respond to and, ideally, partner with students while uplifting structures for youth-led decision-making. However, students had varying perceptions of the potential impact of student voice.

Student voice and leadership have long been associated with increased academic engagement and school attendance, and a growing body of literature highlights the ways in which student voice is directly associated with academic outcomes (e.g., Salisbury et al., 2023). Despite their many benefits, student voice initiatives are often localized and rarely part of systemic state- or district-level policies (Mitra et al. 2014).

Considerations

- ☐ Establish student leadership committees for district-wide decision-making.

- ☐ Thoughtfully include students on the school board, incorporating their input on expectations, norms, and power dynamics.

- ☐ Encourage youth participatory action research as a means to engage students in transformative change through information gathering.

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2. Family Engagement

Saint Louis Public Schools staff members, students, and especially families and family support workers highlighted the need for reliable routines for core operational functions (e.g., school calendar and bussing information) and interpersonal communication among educators and families for relationship building and student success. There was a desire for to build from the strong building-level strategies for authentic engagement throughout the district.

Strong engagement provides opportunities for families to express their experiences and ideas in formal, informal, or even family-led contexts (e.g., Ishimaru, 2019; McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Considerations

❑ Dissemination plan for start-of-school informational packets, supplies, and districtwide calendar of events and holidays

❑ Professional development and school-level goals around asset-focused engagement with families so engagement is a shared practice held by family support workers and all staff

❑ Family-led forums and leadership spaces for family-to-family connection and power-building across school communities

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Transportation and Educator Relationships

Transportation innovation and infrastructure

- **Prioritize the implementation of a user-friendly, centralized information system for school calendars and bus schedules that is easily accessible to families and community members, enhancing transparency and convenience while fostering trust and engagement**

- **Foster a culture of open dialogue and accountability within the transportation infrastructure, working to mitigate negative in-school experiences by providing responsive support mechanisms and clear communication, thereby increasing families' trust in the district's transportation system**

Foundational trust cultivated by educators and school-based staff members

Families and students also emphasized the vital role that educators play in creating the conditions and connections essential for learning, leadership, and life outcomes. Research underscores what our students and families know: Educators who establish strong, supportive relationships promote learning, social and emotional skills, and well-being (Jackson & Davis, 2016; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2017).

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3. Safe and Connected

Educators, students, and especially families highlighted the need for ongoing safety measures and emphasized the importance of connection.

Students who reported experiencing restorative practices had more positive perspectives on school climate, school connectedness, peer attachment, and social skills and lower frequency of bullying behavior, particularly physical and cyberbullying (Acosta et al., 2019; Katic et al., 2020). Educators also highlighted the importance of wraparound support in schools for physical and mental health.

Considerations

❑ **Restorative practices to promote dialogue and accountability**

❑ **Embedded instructional interventions for social awareness**

❑ **Involvement of community stakeholders for school safety and well-being**

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Blueprint Alignment

Student Voice

" All schools and education support systems in the City of Saint Louis must provide equitable academic resources to students, such as programs specific to performing arts, world languages, leadership, science, technology, engineering, and math programs within 12 months of the adoption of the Blueprint" (HWS-R8).

Family Engagement

" Within 12 months of the adoption of the Blueprint, all schools and education support systems in the City of Saint Louis, using a participatory process with families, must develop a published template for sharing effective family and student engagement strategies, which should be reviewed and finalized, annually" (CO-R10).

Safety and Connection

" All schools and education support systems in the City of Saint Louis must create an intentional process to coordinate health, wellness, and safety resources for students, families, caregivers, and staff" (HWS-R9).

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How do student and family voices show up in system accountability and data?

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Moving Forward Together

Through school-based listening sessions and various discussions, Dr. Scarlett and the leadership team have established a foundation for strong connections and resilient communities. The research has highlighted three critical themes: student voice and leadership, family engagement, and creating safe, connected school communities, and we are committed to implementing these recommendations with a focus on community-centered leadership.

We are dedicated to implementing these recommendations with a strong commitment to community-centered leadership, recognizing the vital role it plays in creating a positive, inclusive school climate that values unity and safety.

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★ OUR FUTURE ★

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