

Summary of Hartford Public Schools

A Community Conversation on District-wide School Redesign

June 12, 2017

Nearly 200 people gathered at the Artists Collective on June 12 to participate in the first of a series of Community Conversations aimed at gathering feedback from multiple audiences on determining the right design for the district to achieve the goals of educational excellence and equity for all students. The invitation to join the conversation was widely distributed, and 45% of attendees were parents and family members whose children attend Hartford Schools. Along with teachers, school administrators, district office staff, board of education members, community leaders, interested residents and even a few students, they provided input to the district as the challenging process of redesign begins.

While not everyone indicated their role, the following table provides an overview of the majority of the participants:

Please tell us who you are (check all that apply to you)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Community Organization Representative	26.2%	32
Parent/Family Member	45.1%	55
Student	3.3%	4
School Principal	4.1%	5
Teacher/Staff	21.3%	26
District Office Staff	9.8%	12
School Governance Council Member	10.7%	13
Other (please specify)	19.7%	24

Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez opened the conversation with information about the district—our students, our vision and how our strategic operating plan for 2015-2020 provides direction for achieving our goals. She discussed progress that has been made and identified the challenges that must be addressed. [[link to PowerPoint presentation](#)].

The superintendent then presented the characteristics of great schools. Drawn from extensive research, these “best practices” are the standards that Hartford Public Schools strive to achieve in all schools. Small, mixed-role groups of 7-10 people representing all the groups in attendance then discussed how these standards are demonstrated in schools and indicated whether they believed Hartford schools exhibit these standards. Leadership Greater Hartford facilitators assisted these conversations as participants shared their experiences and opinions, listened to each other, and offered suggestions for improvement.

While 77% of the participants agreed that students have personal relationships with caring adults who want to help them succeed, fewer than 50% of the participants believe that the other 14 characteristics of great schools are universally present in Hartford schools. Access to technology (49.6%), student engagement (46.4%) and collaboration among teachers (45.2%) were the next highest rated characteristics. Coherence and alignment to shared goals and priorities (11.3%), resources allocated where they are most needed (9.6%) and school size in relation to effective learning (6.7%) ranked the lowest. For more information, please see the Summary of Participant Feedback on HPS and Great Schools [[link to What Makes a Great School Participant Feedback](#)] and detailed participant comments [[link to What Makes a Great School detailed comments](#)].

In a second activity, the superintendent shared priorities identified in previous community engagement activities that should be considered in the implementation of the strategic operating plan. Participants were asked, “Which of these priorities are most important to you?” Again in their small groups, discussion followed, several additional considerations were added to the list in some groups, and each person selected the five highest priorities for them. Tabulating the “votes” from all 24 discussion groups resulted in School / Academic performance receiving 96 votes, Neighborhood impact 94 votes, while Staffing received 83. The Condition of School Facilities and Community Resources in Schools received 67 and 64 votes, and all other considerations garnered fewer than 50. For more information please see the Summary Ranking [[link to Summary Ranking of Highest Priority Considerations](#)] and the detailed comments from participants [[link to Highest Priority Considerations in School System Redesign Detailed Comments](#)].

Participant feedback about the Community Conversation was extremely positive. Eighty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that the conversation was informative and helpful, and 85% said that they have a good understanding of the things that need to be considered as decisions about redesigning the district’s schools are made. Even though some participants recognized

that their views were limited based on their experience and knowledge of the school or schools with which they are most familiar, many commented that what was most helpful to them was the opportunity to discuss these issues with people with different experiences and perspectives. One participant said that “exchanging concerns and ideas with different members of the community was an eye opener. Others look at things differently than myself, and it makes sense.” This idea was reflected by dozens of respondents even as many also stated that they would like to have similar conversations within individual school communities.

When asked if they had an opportunity to ask questions and express their opinion, 88% agreed or strongly agreed; but only 66% believe that their ideas and feelings will be heard and considered in future decision making. There is some skepticism about whether all voices are being heard and whether input will be taken seriously. Some participants expressed impatience with the speed of needed change. Said one, “HPS has a terrific opportunity for improvement here. I hope it’s not squandered because of inertia.” Transparency also is a concern for some, but at least one participant expressed hope, “The district seems to be moving in a direction that will allow for more transparency and communication. Keep it going!” [link to document reporting feedback results]

Plans are underway for additional opportunities for input over the coming months as a plan for district-wide school redesign is developed. Watch for updates on future opportunities to add your voice.