MPS VALUES SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS:
Preliminary Findings

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In February 2017, Superintendent Ed Graff outlined the district's financial challenges and the district's continued commitment to a structurally balanced budget by the 2019-2020 school year. In order to achieve a structurally balanced budget, Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) needs to make important decisions regarding program costs and infrastructure. Given these challenges, feedback was sought to better understand the values of the MPS community around the district strategic priorities.

Online and phone surveys were conducted, both of which asked respondents to determine which of the six goal areas in the district's strategic plan they believed should be prioritized for additional resource allocation. The online survey had 3,262 respondents. The online respondents were not representative of the larger MPS community, with 84% identifying as White, 89% speaking only English at home, and 70% reportedly living in south side of the city. Over two-thirds of the sample identified as parents of current MPS students whose children largely attended southside schools, and just over one-third of respondents identified as current or former MPS employees.

Because the online survey was not a reflection of the community, it was determined that other feedback opportunities were necessary. The phone survey was conducted to get a better representation of the views of parents of students of color. The phone survey had a total of 750 respondents, 150 from each of the five major racial/ethnic groups (American Indian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, white). This meant that the phone survey respondents were 80% parents of students of color, who were more evenly distributed throughout the district's boundaries than online respondents.

A total of 25 focus groups were also conducted. Significant efforts were made to engage stakeholders throughout the district. Between five and 21 people participated in each focus group, with a typical size ranging from 10 to 12. These groups included a combination of staff, parents/family members, and community members/taxpayers, and, on occasion, students. The focus groups were mostly conducted with Parent Advisory Councils and School Site Councils.

Across engagement methods, the MPS Community placed Improved Student Outcomes and Equity overall as their highest priorities for resource allocation

Among online survey respondents, respondents reported Improved Student Outcomes as the most important Acceleration 2020 goal, followed by: (2) Equity, (3) Effective Staff, (4) Resources, (5) Engagement, and (6) Stewardship. When online survey respondents were asked to determine which of two possible choices to allocate more resources to, the individual choices that fall into Improved Student Outcomes and Equity were most often selected. This was also true for phone survey respondents, however they were followed by: (3) Engagement, (4) Effective Staff, (5) Stewardship, and (6) Resources. It is important to note that on the phone survey, when asked if each goal area was important or unimportant, over 95% of respondents said that each goal area was important or very important.

When considering the average dollar amount allocated to each goal, the rank order described above held for the full online survey (i.e., overall, respondents allocated the most money to Improved Student Outcomes and the least to Stewardship), but not for people of color, who tended to allocate slightly more money to Resources than Effective Staff, or MPS parents, who tended to allocate slightly more money to Effective Staff than Equity. Not a single respondent allocated $0.00 or $100.00 to any of the six goals, also suggesting that respondents valued each of the six Acceleration 2020 goals.

Focus group participants were asked to place stickers on the strategic goal areas that they felt were their lowest and highest priorities. The focus group participants also most often selected Improved Student Outcomes and Equity. However, focus group participants acknowledged that things like effective staff, resources, and engagement are necessary to achieve improved student outcomes and equity.

It's important to keep in mind that respondents were asked where they would prefer to allocate additional resources (i.e., "Which of these two choices would you prefer MPS allocate more resources to?"). However, respondents were not asked whether their choice was because they felt like there were not currently enough resources allocated to their preferred choice, or because they find resource allocation sufficient for the alternative choice.

There was consensus among MPS Community members that additional resources are needed for the following:
- Additional staff support for student behavior and mental health
- Reading and math tutoring programs
- College credit earning opportunities for students
- Additional staff support for students with special needs beyond what is required by federal law

There was less consensus overall among phone survey respondents than online respondents, suggesting that online respondents were more similar to one another in their views. **Phone survey respondents had consensus that, in addition to the programs/activities listed above, additional resources are also needed for:**
- Programming that develops understanding of different cultures and languages
- Additional afterschool programming
- Evaluating teacher effectiveness
- Additional staff support for second language students beyond what is required by federal law
- Hiring more staff members to support communication between schools and families

A majority of online survey respondents and several focus groups expressed a desire to allocate additional resources to limit class size increases, even if the increase was only one student. However, phone survey respondents had less consensus when choosing limiting class size reductions over other options for additional resource allocation.

Opinions on calendar change options indicate additional engagement is needed

Online survey respondents largely supported reductions in the school calendar this year and next year as a cost saving measure, with 67% of respondents in favor of eliminating the last two instructional days this school year (2017-18), and 72% in favor of beginning next school year (2018-19) after Labor Day. However, only 30% of phone survey respondents were in favor of the change to this year's calendar, and 44% were in favor of the change to next year's calendar. Focus group participants indicated that concerns about finding child care and impacts to afterschool activities may impact families' opinions on these options, and that additional community input and engagement is needed.

Other themes emerged during focus groups

During the focus groups, participants used the engagement opportunity to raise several other concerns and issues. Some groups wanted to see more details and line item budgets, while other groups wanted more basic budget information to be shared earlier. Focus groups also identified a variety of challenges with trust and transparency. There were concerns about the engagement process that revealed deeper issues of trust in how the district communicates, implements programs, and is able to improve student outcomes. Additionally, focus group participants had many questions about the budget deficit and how it was connected to previous budget cuts, referendums, and the fund balance policy. Lastly, the focus groups highlighted there are a variety of needs and access regarding issues of customer service, experience with teachers, and how budget decisions were made.

Next steps

As an immediate next step, the Accountability, Innovation, and Research division is conducting budget focus groups with Youth Participatory Evaluation teams at middle and high schools to ensure that student voice is also reflected in budget priority decisions. The staff who conducted focus groups will inform focus group participants of how the information collected is being used, in an effort to increase transparency and support engagement. Lastly, further understanding of

how opinions and values may differ among different stakeholder groups within the MPS community is needed, especially once the district has identified more specific potential budget allocations.