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Community-Based Listening Sessions Report



championing student success.



“Accountability as a community: We vs. Me!”

Findings from Community-Based Listening Sessions and Interviews

MARCH 18, 2019

Prepared by Reaching Higher NH

Executive Summary

Between November 27, 2018 and February 18, 2019, Manchester Proud hosted 23 community-based listening sessions in order to hear from individuals with a diversity of backgrounds, who may not have been reflected in its other in-person community engagement activities. Because Manchester Proud is a community movement, this work needs to be by and for the community; therefore, Manchester Proud trained facilitators who already had established relationships within the community in order to facilitate their own sessions for staff and/or individuals their organization supports.

Throughout this process, 171 individuals participated in these community-based listening sessions, representing families who have opted out of the Manchester School District to send their children to charters or private schools, individuals with experience and expertise about students with disabilities, higher education staff, individuals who have immigrated to the United States to Manchester, and the business community, to name a few. Additionally, sessions were held for current Manchester School District students through community organizations with whom they have established, trusting relationships, in order for them to participate fully and openly.

Facilitators scheduled and held their own sessions in a location that was most convenient for their participants; Manchester Proud supported the outreach, but the work truly lived within the community. In addition to location, some participants were able to share their thoughts in the language they feel most comfortable in, specifically Spanish and French.

Manchester Proud was most interested in learning about perceived successes and challenges of the school district – and, in doing so, found similarities to the school-based listening sessions, such as positive comments about staff and negative comments about budget. However, there were distinct differences: individuals were concerned with the perceived lack of student support in the schools, how leveling affects students of color, how students with disabilities are treated, and the bureaucracy of the district that feels, to parents, like a highly challenging system to understand and navigate. Individuals who are not currently connected to the district expressed concern about the district’s reputation, as well as its effect on their property values and people moving to the city.

Overall, comments made by various sub-groups appear interrelated with other sub-groups’ comments – yet, there appears to be a disconnect between the “we” versus the “me” – and how the individual can engage to address the concerns they raise, which affect the community as a whole.

Introduction

Manchester Proud focused the final portion of its Discovery Phase on engaging with communities and organizations that may not have been reflected in the other in-person community engagement activities.

Community canvassing allowed Manchester Proud to have a sampling across the city through meeting with individuals in every city ward. School-based listening sessions allowed Manchester Proud to hear from folks directly impacted by and connected to the school district on a day-to-day basis.

Listening sessions, similar to “focus groups,” were kept intentionally small to ensure participation by all attendees. These sessions were primarily hosted and facilitated by community organizations and leaders. A few were facilitated by Manchester Proud volunteers with experience from the school-based sessions. The listening session format allowed individuals to share their perspectives about the school district, regardless of their own affiliation. In addition, it provided participants with the contexts of *other individuals in the room* – whether they had shared experiences, drastically different experiences, or something in between.

There were a few priority groups from whom Manchester Proud wanted to hear, in order to have a more inclusive understanding of the perceptions in the community. These groups included, but are not limited to, families who are currently opting out of the Manchester School District, individuals with expertise in disabilities, individuals who had recently immigrated to the United States and now live in Manchester, individuals who are English

Manchester Proud is a community movement, and as such, needs to be by and for the community. To that end, Manchester Proud invited organizations across the city to participate in a facilitator training, and then convene and facilitate listening sessions with their own members and community partners.

language learners, members of the Manchester business community, and individuals within higher education, whether as staff or students. Additionally, Manchester Proud sought to hear from more current students of the Manchester School District, and strategically partnered with organizations that work with students outside of school hours.

Manchester Proud trained facilitators; however, the outreach and engagement work lived almost solely with the convening organization. This rendered the community-based sessions straightforward in comparison to the complexity of convening and facilitating the school-based sessions. Finally, Manchester Proud provided technical support on an as-needed basis, and then collected the information from the sessions for data analysis.

In addition to the community-based listening session, Manchester Proud also interviewed members of the Board of School Committee (BOSC) and the Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BOMA). In these meetings, elected officials were asked the same questions – based on the Board on which they serve – in the same order, with an opportunity to elaborate after each one.

The community-based listening sessions and individual interviews with elected officials comprise this community-based report. Throughout this process, Manchester Proud was interested in learning the following:

- *What are the overall perceptions of the Manchester School District by community members?*
- *What are the perceived strengths of the Manchester School District by community members?*
- *What are the perceived challenges of the Manchester School District by community members?*
- *How do community members see the school district impact the communities they are a part of?*
- *How do community members see their communities impact the school district?*

Process

Between November 27, 2018 and February 25, 2019, Manchester Proud hosted listening sessions across Manchester for the community and interviewed Board of School Committee members, as well as Aldermen, individually.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Beginning on December 3, 2018, Manchester Proud contacted 61 organizations in Manchester to invite them to a facilitator training, in order to host listening sessions within their organization. Organizations represented various communities within Manchester, with which Manchester Proud wanted to specifically engage, including, but not limited to:

- Business Community
- Civic Organizations
- Disabilities Community
- Early Childhood Centers
- Faith-based Community
- Higher Education: Staff and Students
- Hospitals
- Newcomer & immigrant communities
- Opt-Outs (Private, Charter, Homeschool families and students)
- Public Service
- Youth-Serving Community Partners

Through these invites, 14 organizations responded with interest in hosting listening sessions. Between January 3 through 29, 2019, Manchester Proud trained 15 new facilitators, as well as previous facilitators from the school-based listening sessions, in a specific protocol for *community-based listening sessions*. This protocol was used in all community listening sessions, regardless of organization: the shared community

agreements and norms for the sessions; the materials needed for each session; the four questions; how to introduce the questions and avoid any leading comments; how to document the information without agreeing or disagreeing with statements; and information to share with folks at the end of the session.

After the training, facilitators were then tasked with scheduling their organization’s listening session(s) and inviting members of their community to participate. In some cases, they would invite staff members at the organization; in other cases, the invitations would be to individuals in the community with whom their organizations work and/or support. Manchester Proud would help to promote these community sessions, but the onus of the outreach and participation remained with the specific community organization. Facilitators would update Manchester Proud on upcoming sessions, so that materials and any additional support could be coordinated. After the session, Manchester Proud would pick up all materials from the facilitator.

METHODS

Manchester Proud provided four questions for individuals to answer one at a time, which were visible both on the graphic organizer (Appendix 1) and on the poster paper, with one question per poster:

- *What successes have you seen in Manchester Public Schools?*
- *What challenges have you seen in Manchester Public Schools?*
- *How do Manchester Public Schools impact the community/communities you are a part of?*
- *How are the community/communities that you are a part of impacted by Manchester Public Schools?*

For clarification, in a session that included charter school families, one participant asked, “When you say ‘Manchester Public Schools,’ do you mean [*name of charter school*]? Or should we answer about the district schools?” The facilitator clarified that the prompts were meant for the *district schools* - the answers reflected throughout all sessions pertained to the district, despite the language in the prompt including the phrase “public schools.”

When attendees arrived to their listening session, the shared community agreements/norms were already posted in the room. They included:

Maintain confidentiality	Share space	Participate voluntarily	Respect participants
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Facilitators would first introduce themselves, and share a very brief overview of the session process. They would then explain the importance of each of the community agreements in detail: that confidentiality was a top priority for Manchester Proud, and that the facilitator would only share the raw notes with the few individuals who would analyze the data. No identifying information would be shared from Manchester Proud with the organization that hosted the event, or anyone else outside of Manchester Proud. Folks were also encouraged to ensure other individuals in the room had space to answer the

questions, so that no one or two individuals could dominate the conversation. Additionally, the sessions were voluntary, so if at any time an attendee wanted to leave, they could. And finally, though people in the room might have differing experiences or perspectives, the agreement was that all individuals needed to be respected.

Each participant was given a graphic organizer upon arrival; after the facilitator introduced themselves, they provided two minutes for participants to respond to the first question. All graphic organizers were collected at the end of the session.

After the two minutes of writing, the facilitator would open the conversation and ask volunteers to share their thoughts. The facilitator would then write down the information on the poster paper with the question or the number of the question at the top. The facilitator, as participants shared their responses, would check to ensure that what was written on the paper reflected the comment made.

The facilitator also made sure that the session lasted only one hour – no matter what. Even if a group only answered the first question within the hour, the session would not go over the publicized time, in order to respect participants’ time. For the large majority of sessions, the groups did not complete all four questions.

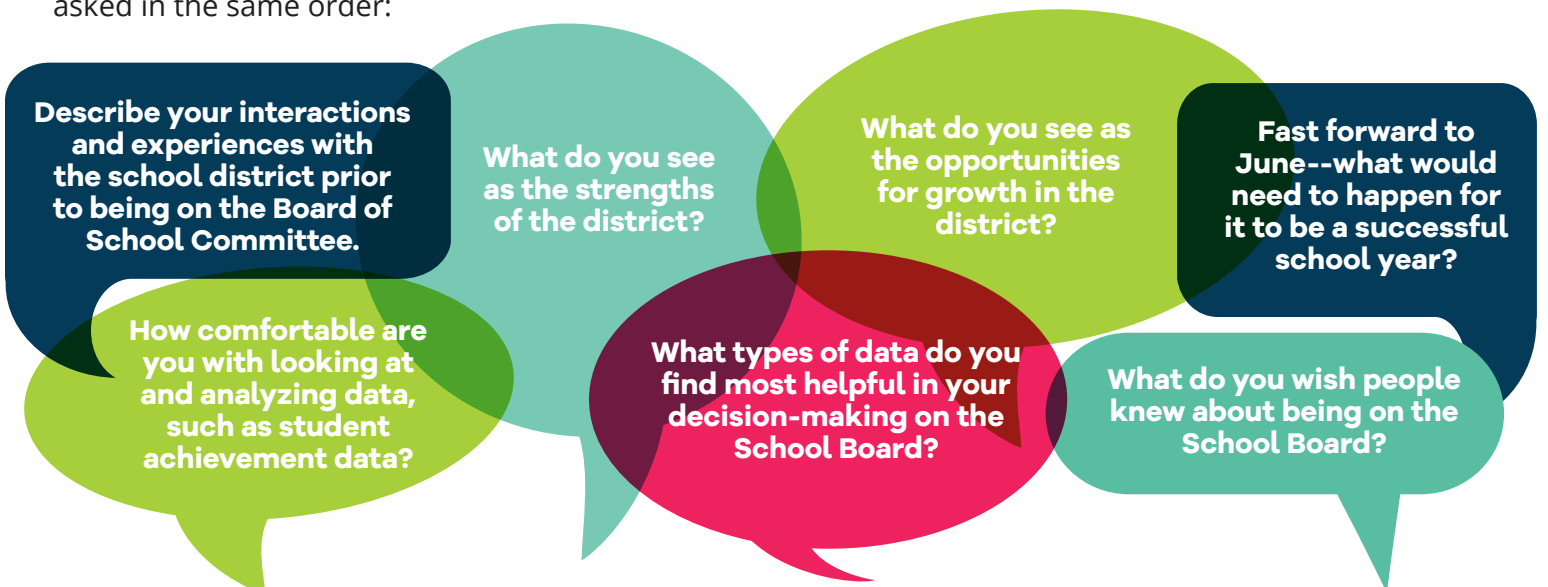
PARTICIPANTS

Between November 27, 2018 and February 18, 2019, Manchester Proud hosted 23 listening sessions across 14 organizations, with a total of 171 participants.

Interviews with Elected Officials

METHODS

Each interview with members of the Board of School Committee included the same questions, asked in the same order:



Each interview with Aldermanic members focused on two core questions:

How would you describe the relationship between the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and the Board of School Committee?

Describe the budget process between the BOMA and the BOS.

Based on the responses, the interviewer may have asked follow-up questions, which was explained in advance of the interview. However, the questions were not shared in advance of the meeting. Manchester Proud wanted to learn from each elected official – but did not want anyone to prepare materials or answers in advance. The majority of these interviews lasted about forty-five minutes to an hour, with one going as long as two hours, and others as short as fifteen minutes.

PARTICIPANTS

Between January 25, 2019 and February 25, 2019, Manchester Proud interviewed 12 out of 15 members of the Board of School Committee, including the mayor, as well as three Aldermen.

Challenges

Because the community-based listening sessions were designed to be hosted and owned by community organizations, there were very few challenges.

The most significant challenge was recruiting organizations to host sessions; Manchester Proud reached out in numerous ways - by email, by phone, by personal connection - to local organizations and community leaders, and did not hear back.

As a movement to build a plan for the Manchester School District that is by and for the people, findings from all of Manchester Proud’s engagement work - from the community canvass, the school-based one-on-ones, listening sessions, office hours, the community-based listening sessions explored in this report, and the community survey - serve as the foundation of the planning effort.

Relatedly, given the large scale of Manchester Proud’s community engagement work (also referred to as the Discovery Phase), one notable challenge was the overall timeframe for implementation. As a movement to build a plan for the Manchester School District that is by and for the people, findings from all of Manchester Proud’s engagement work - from the community canvass, the school-based one-on-ones, listening sessions, office hours, the community-based listening sessions explored in this report, and the community survey - serve as the foundation of the planning effort.

With the formal launching of the Design Phase beginning in February 2019, the timeframe for implementation of the engagement work was compressed. And, a practical outcome of that was that for all aspects of the engagement work - most especially the community-based sessions, the timeframe allocated for them came to a close as they began to gain momentum. To that end, asking community members to come share their real and often raw experiences, hopes, and concerns with others, demands awareness that the sessions are happening - and, trust that the space and overall format of the sessions will be inclusive, respectful, and confidential. It takes time for word and information to spread to both effects. Thus, for the community-based sessions, as word began to spread across Manchester about the sessions, additional organizations that might have convened their own, expressed an interest in doing so - but, after the window for engagement had closed.

The overall receptivity of elected officials to interview with Manchester Proud varied considerably. The vast majority of BOSC members were receptive to meeting and only one opted out of meeting for an interview. Two others had scheduling difficulties, which led to one member declining to reschedule, and the other not securing a meeting date before the interview window closed.

Aldermen were, overall, less receptive to meeting for interviews, with only a few responding to the invitation. Three interviews with Aldermen took place. During these meetings, some shared that they heard that other Aldermen did not want to meet with Manchester Proud, due to skepticism - although the nature of the skepticism or any further related details were not shared. Two others scheduled meetings with Manchester Proud, but did not show up. As these interviews were the last components of the Discovery Phase, only three interviews are reflected in this report.

Findings

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

After each meeting or session, the one-on-one interviews were transcribed, full-group notes were written, and listening session graphic organizers were collected. All of this information was transferred to qualitative analysis software, which allowed text to be highlighted and coded for themes and characteristics. These themes include ones that can be seen at the school level

Any time a topic was documented, whether on the poster paper or a graphic organizer, it was counted as a "mention" meaning that a topic could have multiple mentions in the same session, as well as for the same question.

(such as technology, English Language Learners supports, and attendance), at the district level (such as the Board of School Committee, the teachers' union, and the budget), and at the community level (such as poverty, drugs, and community services). A full list of these topics can be seen in Appendix 2.

Once all notes were entered and coded, the data was analyzed to find the most frequently mentioned topics. It is important to note what is meant here by "mentions." Any time a topic was documented, whether on the poster paper or a graphic organizer, it was counted as a "mention" – meaning that a topic could have multiple mentions in the same session, as well as for the same question. Even if the topic was mentioned more than once for the same question, however, the context could be different.

Throughout the findings section, this report will provide top overall mentions, regardless of whether they were positive, negative, or neutral. It will then provide the top overall positive mentions. Finally, it will provide the top overall negative mentions. This findings section will also incorporate a number of direct quotes, either from posters or from graphic organizers, in order to better understand the meaning of the topics discussed.

In order to provide the reader with the most comprehensive list of topics discussed in listening sessions, this report also includes Appendices for each of the analyses in the Findings section, in the same order as they appear. While this report focuses on the most frequently mentioned topics – or, at times, the least frequently mentioned topics – the reader is encouraged to review the full array of topics, as well.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Across all 23 community-based listening sessions, there were 171 participants. For some findings in this section, only participants from listening sessions are included, due to the question or subgroup. Other findings include the 12 Board of School Committee members, and/or the three Board of Mayor and Aldermen members – each time, for clarity, their inclusion will be noted.

Six of the participants answered questions in Spanish; one participant answered in French.

Additionally, four of the 23 sessions were specifically for *current Manchester School District students*, hosted and facilitated by community organizations. There were 19 current MSD students across these sessions, out of the 171 participants.

While this report focuses on the most frequently mentioned topics – or, at times, the least frequently mentioned topics – the reader is encouraged to review the full array of topics, as well.

To begin with, it is helpful to look at the most frequently mentioned topics and themes across all participants, which includes interviews with elected officials, as well as the community listening sessions. The overall frequency of these topics is listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Top Five Frequently Mentioned Topics Overall

Overall	Positive	Negative
Students supported (189)	Staff (80)	Budget (123)
Budget (138)	Students supported (59)	Students supported (114)
Staff (129)	Enrichment activities (55)	School reputation (72)
Diversity (104)	Diversity (49)	Equity (71)
College & career readiness (101)	College & career readiness (42)	Special education (65)

As demonstrated in this table, the most frequently mentioned topic is “students supported,” with 189 mentions. This category includes general statements about how kids feel in their schools, as well as how students are prioritized. Although this is the most frequently mentioned topic, it appears in both the positive column (59 mentions, 31.2 percent), as well as the negative column (114 mentions, 60.3 percent). This demonstrates a clear divide: more often, when participants and interviewees discussed the idea of students supported in their schools, it was negative. This will be explored further.

The second most frequently mentioned topic is the budget, which has 123 negative mentions out of a total of 138 (89.1 percent). In fact, over the course of all listening sessions and interviews, the budget was only mentioned positively four times (2.9 percent, Appendix 3).

The topic most frequently mentioned positively is the staff with 80 mentions out of a total of 129 (62.0 percent).

These first few findings are almost identical to the findings in the school-based listening sessions. However, we begin to see some differences with the topics of “college and career readiness,” “diversity,” “school reputation,” “equity,” and “special education.” Although all of these were mentioned during the school-based listening sessions, none were discussed at frequencies high enough to come close to the most frequently mentioned topics.

“A success would be the teachers, as they do a great job of teaching their classes even with limited supplies and fairly large classes.”

College and career readiness was mentioned a total of 101 times -- and divided almost evenly between positive and negative mentions. Because this report focuses on the community, and members of the community at large tend to measure school success on graduation rates or colleges to which students have been accepted, it is unsurprising that this topic rose to the top of the most frequently mentioned list. A further analysis of this topic will be explored later in this report.

The topic most frequently mentioned positively is the staff with 80 mentions out of a total of 129 (62.0 percent).

FINDINGS BY PROMPT

This next section focuses on the specific questions from the community-based listening sessions. For the first two questions, the interviews with the BOSC members are included, as they were asked these questions as well (though reworded to “strengths” instead of “successes” and “opportunities for growth” instead of “challenges”). The interviews with the BOMA members are not included. Additionally, unless stated otherwise, all direct quotations are from listening session participants, not from elected officials.

**Question 1:
“What successes have you seen in Manchester Public Schools?”**

Table 2: Top Five Frequently Mentioned Topics for Question 1

Overall	Positive	Negative
Staff (72)	Staff (69)	Budget (9)
Students supported (51)	Students supported (45)	Equity (8)
Enrichment activities (41)	Enrichment activities (39)	Class size (5)
Diversity (39)	Diversity (37)	Students supported (5)
College & career readiness (30)	College & career readiness (27)	Materials (4)

Participants identified “staff” most frequently when considering the successes they have seen in the Manchester School District, with 69 positive mentions out of 72 total (95.8 percent) for this question. A participant shared, “A success would be the teachers, as they do a great job of teaching their classes even with limited supplies and fairly large classes.”

The topic mentioned most frequently next was “students supported,” though, as mentioned previously, this topic has far more negative mentions overall, in response to the other questions. There was a range of comments related to this topic, three of which were:

“Keeping students safe”

“Teachers give options for passing if you don’t do exact assignment”

“Teachers and staff dig into their pockets for what students need - frequently - EX: jackets, hats, sweaters”

Diversity stands out in this list; with 37 positive mentions, it is one of the top “successes” participants see in the district. One participant wrote on a graphic organizer, “Tall task of taking in so many ESL children.” This comment sheds some light on how participants view diversity as a success: that the district is supporting students in learning their second (or third, fourth, or beyond) language of English - and that this is a difficult task.

Participants also identified “college and career readiness” as a success they have seen in the district, with one participant sharing that the “top 10% of students excel.” Another participant shared that, “Students in upper level classes supported by truly caring families have experienced phenomenal success in post-secondary education.” Other participants mentioned specific schools that they heard students had been accepted to over the past few years, such as Stanford, Yale, and Dartmouth. They commented that this shows that the district is doing a good job in preparing the students who are high-achievers for after high school.

“Biggest problem is language – parents don’t have enough English to communicate with school, sometimes don’t know they should, don’t know what to expect or how to get their children through the hoops.”

**Question 2:
“What challenges have you seen in Manchester Public Schools?”**

Table 3: Top Five Frequently Mentioned Topics for Question 2

Overall	Positive	Negative
Students supported (80)	Students supported (6)	Students supported (70)
Budget (67)	Staff (5)	Budget (66)
Special education (51)	District leadership (3)	Special education (49)
District leadership (45)	Diversity (3)	District leadership (40)
Equity (41)		Staff supported (40)
Staff supported (41)		

“Students supported” is the most frequently mentioned topic when participants discussed challenges they have seen in the school district. Three participants, in varying community sessions, commented on how students are not supported, particularly when considering courses that have different levels. Their exact comments, which also address “equity,” are below:

“The higher the level, the more the teacher cares.”

“High level teachers (no black kids in higher classes).”

“For immigrant children, they are being held in easier classes.”

Participants also commented on the challenges they have seen regarding in-class supports, regardless of the course:

“Overreliance [sic] on calling the police to deal with students with disabilities who experience behavioral challenges and actually ALL students”

“Not utilizing ‘age appropriate’ curriculum to support positive social/emotional growth and learning at elementary level”

Within the category of “students supported,” participants across numerous listening sessions elevated the concern about supporting students who are English Language Learners (ELL):

“Few resources for ELL and/or the ability to truly prep them for college level work”

“Not enough resources for ESL students”

“Increasing ELL population and lack of resources for services for ELL”

Additionally, parents who may speak another language were mentioned, as without supports from the schools and district, they can experience challenges in helping their children navigate both the school system and the learning needs of their children within it:

“Biggest problem is language – parents don’t have enough English to communicate with school, sometimes don’t know they should, don’t know what to expect or how to get their children through the hoops.”

And finally, there were the concerns around teachers specifically, and the learning environment within a school:

“Teachers not feeling the need to stay after school to help”

“Teachers not respecting personal emotions”

“[I] feel miserable in school and good at [organization facilitating listening session]”

The budget is second in most frequently mentioned challenges seen in the district. For this question, the budget was mentioned 66 times negatively out of 67 total times (98.5 percent). Some participants shared about Manchester, in comparison to other towns and cities in New Hampshire, having a significant funding challenge:

“All public schools seem to have funding problems – we are even worse off”

Participants also recognized the barrier of the budget with attracting and retaining high-quality staff members:

“Can’t attract best new teachers with poor funding”

“Low teacher wages – how to retain talent?”

And, frequently, the subject of the budget was discussed in terms of affecting so many other aspects of what happens in the school district:

“Funding is the foundation of all issues – everything spiders off of that”

After the budget, the topic of special education was the most frequently mentioned as a challenge in the Manchester School District:

“Special Education process does NOT meet the needs of students”

“Inappropriate evaluation methods are being used to evaluate students (using what’s convenient not necessarily what’s appropriate)”

“Language used in IEPs [Individualized Educational Plan] to describe # of hours of services (as a bulk # of hours) so technically school is not out of compliance until the end of the school year when a student should be receiving regular services throughout the year”

Families who had opted out of the school district, to instead send their child to a charter school, also spoke about special education services as a challenge:

“Manchester School District is not providing adequate services for students with disabilities to be successful in Manchester charter schools”

District leadership followed special education; participants discussed their concerns around both the Board of School Committee, as well as the top district leaders, for this question:

“Lack of clear vision at BOSC and MSD leadership – crashing from one problem to the next – without shared vision”

Some folks mentioned the “bureaucracy of the district” as a significant challenge, which affects the staff, and also how families can engage and receive answers in response to their concerns.

And finally, participants also identified staff as not being supported, with 40 out of 41 mentions throughout this prompt as being negative (97.6 percent). Often, these comments pertained to understaffing:

“Lack of para support and difficulty in getting the IEP team to provide a para”

“Sharing a para between 4 rooms”

“Lack of consistent providers (staff, paras, therapists, bus drivers)”

One participant even shared that it seemed “selfish,” but that property value matters, and the schools directly - and currently, negatively – impact the ability to sell a home in Manchester.

“Funding is the foundation of all issues – everything spiders off of that.”

Throughout these comments, the overlap of topics is evident: rarely is a comment made that is specific to only one topic. Instead, issues and concerns are interrelated: for example, in this last group of direct quotes, a participant references a lack of paraprofessionals – which pertains to the district budget - as well as the impact on special education needs via the IEP (Individualized Education Program).

“Lack of clear vision at BOSC and MSD leadership – crashing from one problem to the next – without shared vision”

**Question 3:
“How do the Manchester Public Schools impact the community/communities you are a part of?”**

For this question, only participants in listening sessions are included in the overall data. Additionally, many listening sessions did not complete the third question, due to time constraints.

Table 4: Top Five Frequently Mentioned Topics for Question 3

Overall	Positive	Negative
School reputation (32)	Enrichment activities (9)	School reputation (27)
College & career readiness (29)	Community engagement (8)	College & career readiness (13)
Students supported (16)	Students supported (4)	Students supported (11)
Community engagement (14)	College & career readiness (3)	Budget (8)
Enrichment activities (14)	Diversity (3)	Staff supported (7)

When reviewing this table, the primary takeaway is “school reputation,” which is the most frequently mentioned topic, as well as the one mentioned negatively most often (27 mentions out of 32 total, 84.3 percent). Some participants mentioned the real estate market as being affected by the reputation of the district schools:

“Real estate market – purchasing a home based on school system rating”

Similarly, participants identified the Manchester School District as directly impacting them as homeowners - one participant even shared that it seemed “selfish,” but that property value matters, and the schools directly - and currently, negatively -- impact the ability to sell a home in Manchester.

“Lack of para support and difficulty in getting the IEP team to provide a para”

College and career readiness is second on the list, and this can also connect back to “school reputation.” If a senior in one of the high schools has been accepted to a highly-selective college, which is publicized in the news, this connects to the school’s (and district’s)

reputation. Additionally, however, participants who work in higher education in Manchester had more specific concerns around “readiness”:

- “I (we all) get them as students. Not ready for college. Math deficient, English.”*
- “Unprepared students coming to us leads to fewer higher ed graduates and employees”*
- “Schools impact college preparedness, attitude towards educators, and willingness to seek and use resources”*
- “Students struggle to adapt to college curriculum and environment”*

The final question for the listening session had too few participants, due to sessions not completing all four. We have included overall responses in Appendix 6.

When examining these first few tables – both the overall responses, as well as the individual questions – we were interested to further explore comments made by individuals who used to be directly connected to the Manchester School District (as a parent, educator, or student), as well as comments made by individuals who are currently connected to the Manchester School District (service providers, families, students).

PAST CONNECTION TO MANCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

For this table, there are eight individuals represented - however, we have only included responses that were overtly connected to a past experience as a family member, or student who is no longer connected to the district. With that, there is an assumption that there were more participants who are part of this cohort within the listening sessions, yet would not be represented here. Additionally, all elected officials are excluded from this table.

Table 5: Top Five Frequently Mentioned Topics with Past Connections to MSD

Overall	Positive	Negative
BOSC (51)	Staff (17)	Budget (34)
Budget (40)	District leadership (12)	Students supported (25)
Students supported (38)	Diversity (7)	BOSC (23)
District leadership (28)	Community engagement (6)	School reputation (17)
Staff (27)	Family engagement (6)	Equity (16)

“Need more bilingual teachers and teachers of color”

“School sends home students with disabilities who are a challenge to support their behavioral needs rather than figure it out and support the success of student”

These priorities mirror the overall responses by all participants: concerns focus on the budget, students not being supported, the Board of School Committee, and school reputation. In some cases, families have sent their children to other schools in the region, instead of the school district, because of their concerns. A few were staff members who now work in a different school (such as a charter or private school), instead of the Manchester School District. The majority of the participants within this sub-group, though, tend to be alumni of the school district - some participants fit into more than one category, as well - who are now worried about property values in Manchester – and, perhaps, how the reputation and school district has changed dramatically from when they were enrolled.

CURRENT CONNECTION TO MANCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

For this table, there are 28 individuals represented, including current service providers, current families, and current students of the Manchester School District. Again, all elected officials have been excluded.

The clearest contrast, however, is between those who are not connected with the schools and those who are. The general “concern” of those not connected, is how the reputation of the district affects them: through property values and through word-of-mouth about Manchester as a whole.

Table 6: Top Five Frequently Mentioned Topics with Current Connections to MSD

Overall	Positive	Negative
Students supported (43)	Enrichment activities (16)	Equity (31)
Staff (39)	Staff (13)	Students supported (30)
Equity (34)	Students supported (13)	Staff (26)
Special education (27)	Diversity (9)	Special education (25)
Enrichment activities (24)	College & career readiness (7)	Leveling (21)
Leveling (24)		

This table looks distinctly different from the previous table - in fact, there are very few topics that appear on both the previously connected and currently connected tables.

Current students continued to address the issues of equity, not feeling supported, staff, and leveling in their comments:

- “Teachers won’t stay after school”*
- “Teachers should be more professional”*
- “Need more bilingual teachers and teachers of color”*
- “Teachers will call out Hispanic girls but not whites”*
- “Teachers give more assistance to white kids”*
- “Teachers are quick to judge you and stereotype students”*

These comments and findings are similar to the school-based report, which showed that current students view the teachers and staff negatively.

Families also addressed issues they have experienced with staff. A few parents, who are most comfortable writing in Spanish, wrote the following on their graphic organizers:

“En su segunda semana de estar en la escuela, el conductor del autobus la hizo bajar en una parada que no era la suya y estuvo perdida por mas de media hora. Eso fue muy cruel por el conductor.”

[translation] “In her second week of school, the bus driver made [my daughter] get down in a spot that was not hers and [she] was lost for more than half an hour. This was very cruel on the part of the bus driver.”

“Mi hijo de 8 años siempre llega a casa diciendo que no aprendió nada nuevo, que los compañeros de su salón mantienen rodando y jugando por todo el salon y la profesora no dice nada. En conclusión no le interesa nada de lo que hace.”

[translation] “My 8 year old son always comes home saying that he didn’t learn anything new, [and] that his classmates are wandering around and playing throughout the classroom, and the teacher doesn’t do anything. In conclusion, [my son] isn’t interested in what he is doing.”

Individuals currently connected to the school district mentioned numerous times the concerns around special education, some of which have been addressed earlier in this report. Here are a few more comments, specific to special education and equity:

- “Overreliance [sic] on segregated classrooms”*
- “School sends home students with disabilities who are a challenge to support their behavioral needs rather than figure it out and support the success of student”*

Again, the comments demonstrate that concerns and experiences are interrelated, and not distinct to one sub-group.

Participants were able to identify individual success stories: one school’s pre-K, a student who was accepted to an Ivy League university, a program offered at a few schools in one area of town. But participants struggled to identify system successes.

Discussion

Manchester Proud's intent in offering community-based listening sessions, by training facilitators to host their own sessions with stakeholders with whom they have previously-established relationships, was to expand its reach into the community, to best hear from individuals who may not have felt comfortable, welcomed, or included in the school-based listening sessions. The reality when engaging with the community – any community – is that there needs to be representation from a diversity of stakeholders, not just the folks with whom it is “easiest” to engage.

These community sessions reflect this intent: those who participated come from a variety of backgrounds, and many are from historically underrepresented communities, which Manchester Proud was not able to hear from in the school-based listening sessions, due to the lack of trust and relationships between the schools and these communities. These issues are explored in greater depth in our report on the school-based listening sessions, *“I didn't know you did that. I do that, too”: Learnings from School-Based Listening Sessions and Interviews*.

In the community-based sessions, there were participants who engaged entirely in the language in which they feel most comfortable, such as Spanish and French. There were students who do not feel included or seen in their own school buildings. There were families who have fought for their children, who have IEPs or 504s, and have

felt like they were running into a wall for years. There were folks who have decided that working outside of the district is preferred and better over working within the district. And there were folks who are not connected with the school district at all, but watch the downturn in its reputation correlate with their property values, thus impacting them.

What comes across when analyzing this data is that participants were able to identify individual success stories: one school's pre-K, a student who was accepted to an Ivy League university, a program offered at a few schools in one area of town. But participants struggled to identify system successes. No participants point to something across the district as working to meet the needs of all students.

And the system-wide issues affect various communities differently; for example, families with students who have disabilities want to ensure that all families know the processes and have support in getting their student tested early, so that supports can be in place. Yet, because they have gone through it, they recognize that understanding and navigating the oftentimes confusing process is not on the families: it is on the district in how it communicates and supports families and teachers. For higher education staff, they identify that if the district is not preparing students for post-secondary academics, colleges and universities are struggling to support the students once they arrive in their classrooms.

The families and students in the schools are saying that these types of opportunities are not available equitably across the district.

The clearest contrast, however, is between those who are not connected with the schools and those who are. The general “concern” of those not connected, is how the reputation of the district affects them: through property values and through word-of-mouth about Manchester as a whole. Some also point to students who are highlighted in the news for their academic successes, and state that if those students can do it, anyone can – as long as they want it.

And yet, the families and students in the schools are saying that these types of opportunities are not available equitably across the district. Students of color do not feel that they are receiving the same supports and academic opportunities as their white peers. Service providers work with families who want to support their students, but do not see the district as supporting them unless they speak English.

There is commonality, however, with the school-based sessions: the staff and budget are at the top of participants’ minds. Yet, when examining comments about the budget, the connection to individual self is not there: there were almost no participants who identified the budget with their own property *taxes*, or their own *contribution* to the budget. And therefore, they did not connect the concern with paying teachers more, for example, with their *own property taxes* or their *own contribution*. A participant wrote in a graphic organizer, “Accountability as a community: We vs. Me!,” which highlights both the community as a whole, and how individuals contribute to the larger group. There appears to be a disconnect, however, between how people, both individually and collectively, perceive the issues expressed in the sessions and their own ability to impact them.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Graphic Organizer

Manchester Proud Listening Session
Use this space to write down your thoughts/opinions.

<p>1. What successes have you seen in Manchester Public Schools?</p>	<p>2. What challenges have you seen in Manchester Public Schools?</p>
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<p>3. How do the Manchester Public Schools impact the community/communities you are a part of?</p>	<p>4. How does your community/communities impact the Manchester Public Schools?</p>
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Appendix 2: Overall Responses, All Topics

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	15	12	27
Attendance	2	0	3	5
BOSC	7	34	44	85
Budget	4	11	123	138
Class size	0	1	46	47
College & career readiness	42	22	37	101
Common Core	0	0	1	1
Communication	7	2	46	55
Community engagement	30	10	9	49
Community services	13	4	9	26
Course offerings	8	2	15	25
Crime	0	0	7	7
Curriculum	7	3	30	40
District leadership	15	9	52	76
Diversity	49	17	38	104
Drugs	0	0	24	24
Enrichment activities	55	6	19	80
Equity	8	2	71	81
Family engagement	18	8	27	53
Family structure	0	2	15	17
Graduation	1	0	10	11
Health	0	1	4	5
Housing	0	2	9	11
Leveling	7	6	30	43
Literacy	4	2	32	38
Materials	2	1	41	44
Math	2	0	24	26
Multilingual/ELL	16	8	31	55
Nutrition	3	2	20	25
Poverty	1	6	25	32
Professional development	2	1	16	19
Project-based learning	1	0	1	2
Salary	0	0	12	12
School administration	19	2	21	42
School culture	18	4	22	44

School discipline	4	2	54	60
School infrastructure	8	2	49	59
School reputation	4	8	72	84
School safety	12	2	47	61
Special education	7	6	65	78
Staff	80	6	43	129
Staff supported	6	1	61	68
Standards	0	4	61	65
STEM	9	1	11	21
Students supported	59	16	114	189
Taxes	4	19	31	54
Teacher contract	0	0	10	10
Technology	5	1	36	42
Testing	8	7	26	41
Transportation	6	1	14	21
Trauma-sensitive/EBD	2	2	15	19
Turnover	0	0	18	18
Understaffing	1	0	34	35
Union	0	0	6	6

Appendix 3: Full List of Successes

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	0	0	0
Attendance	2	0	0	2
BOSC	1	1	2	4
Budget	4	1	9	14
Class size	0	1	5	6
College & career readiness	27	3	0	30
Common Core	0	0	0	0
Communication	6	0	2	8
Community engagement	17	1	0	18
Community services	7	0	1	8
Course offerings	5	1	1	7
Crime	0	0	0	0
Curriculum	4	0	0	4
District leadership	5	0	2	7
Diversity	37	0	2	39
Drugs	0	0	0	0

Enrichment activities	39	2	0	41
Equity	6	2	8	16
Family engagement	6	0	3	9
Family structure	0	1	0	1
Graduation	1	0	0	1
Health	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	0	0	0
Leveling	4	2	0	6
Literacy	2	0	0	2
Materials	1	0	4	5
Math	1	0	0	1
Multilingual/ELL	11	2	0	13
Nutrition	2	2	3	7
Poverty	0	2	1	3
Professional development	1	0	0	1
Project-based learning	0	0	0	0
Salary	0	0	2	2
School administration	14	0	2	16
School culture	11	1	3	15
School discipline	0	0	1	1
School infrastructure	3	0	2	5
School reputation	3	0	3	6
School safety	11	1	1	13
Special education	4	2	2	8
Staff	69	0	3	72
Staff supported	3	0	2	5
Standards	0	1	0	1
STEM	7	0	1	8
Students supported	45	1	5	51
Taxes	0	1	1	2
Teacher contract	0	0	0	0
Technology	2	0	0	2
Testing	1	0	0	1
Transportation	4	0	0	4
Trauma-sensitive/EBD	1	1	1	3
Turnover	0	0	0	0
Understaffing	0	0	2	2
Union	0	0	0	0

Appendix 4: Full List of Challenges

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	3	1	4
Attendance	0	0	3	3
BOSC	1	1	12	14
Budget	0	1	66	67
Class size	0	0	31	31
College & career readiness	0	1	13	14
Common Core	0	0	0	0
Communication	0	1	28	29
Community engagement	2	1	4	7
Community services	2	1	5	8
Course offerings	0	0	7	7
Crime	0	0	2	2
Curriculum	0	0	12	12
District leadership	3	2	40	45
Diversity	3	4	20	27
Drugs	0	0	10	10
Enrichment activities	1	0	9	10
Equity	2	0	39	41
Family engagement	2	2	11	15
Family structure	0	0	8	8
Graduation	0	0	2	2
Health	0	0	1	1
Housing	0	0	6	6
Leveling	1	3	21	25
Literacy	0	0	10	10
Materials	0	0	20	20
Math	0	0	7	7
Multilingual/ELL	1	4	27	32
Nutrition	0	0	16	16
Poverty	0	2	11	13
Professional development	0	0	9	9
Project-based learning	0	0	0	0
Salary	0	0	11	11
School administration	2	1	15	18
School culture	1	1	7	9
School discipline	0	0	35	35
School infrastructure	1	0	19	20

School reputation	0	1	21	22
School safety	0	0	34	34
Special education	1	1	49	51
Staff	5	2	31	38
Staff supported	1	0	40	41
Standards	0	0	38	38
STEM	1	0	3	4
Students supported	6	4	70	80
Taxes	0	1	7	8
Teacher contract	0	0	6	6
Technology	0	1	21	22
Testing	1	0	12	13
Transportation	0	0	6	6
Trauma-sensitive/EBD	0	0	10	10
Turnover	0	0	16	16
Understaffing	1	0	22	23
Union	0	0	4	4

Appendix 5: Full List of Manchester School District Impacts on the Community

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	0	0	0
Attendance	0	0	0	0
BOSC	0	1	0	1
Budget	0	2	8	10
Class size	0	0	1	1
College & career readiness	3	13	13	29
Common Core	0	0	0	0
Communication	1	0	2	3
Community engagement	8	3	3	14
Community services	1	0	0	1
Course offerings	0	0	0	0
Crime	0	0	2	2
Curriculum	1	0	1	2
District leadership	0	0	0	0
Diversity	3	4	1	8
Drugs	0	0	1	1
Enrichment activities	9	3	2	14
Equity	0	0	4	4

Family engagement	1	0	5	6
Family structure	0	1	2	3
Graduation	0	0	1	1
Health	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	0	0	0
Leveling	0	0	0	0
Literacy	0	0	4	4
Materials	0	0	2	2
Math	0	0	3	3
Multilingual/ELL	2	0	0	2
Nutrition	0	0	0	0
Poverty	1	1	6	8
Professional development	0	1	0	1
Project-based learning	0	0	0	0
Salary	0	0	1	1
School administration	0	1	0	1
School culture	1	1	4	6
School discipline	1	0	4	5
School infrastructure	0	0	0	0
School reputation	0	5	27	32
School safety	0	0	1	1
Special education	0	2	3	5
Staff	0	0	1	1
Staff supported	0	1	7	8
Standards	0	0	6	6
STEM	0	0	0	0
Students supported	4	1	11	16
Taxes	0	5	2	7
Teacher contract	0	0	0	0
Technology	0	0	0	0
Testing	0	0	0	0
Transportation	0	1	1	2
Trauma-sensitive	0	0	0	0
Turnover	0	0	0	0
Understaffing	0	0	2	2
Union	0	0	0	0

Appendix 6: Full List of the Community’s Impacts on Manchester School District

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	1	0	1
Attendance	0	0	0	0
BOSC	0	2	3	5
Budget	0	0	5	5
Class size	0	0	0	0
College & career readiness	8	3	10	21
Common Core	0	0	0	0
Communications	0	0	1	1
Community engagement	1	3	1	5
Community services	1	2	1	4
Coursework	1	0	0	1
Crime	0	0	2	2
Curriculum	0	0	1	1
District leadership	0	0	0	0
Diversity	6	3	2	11
Drugs	0	0	6	6
Enrichment activities	1	0	0	1
Equity	1	0	2	3
Family engagement	4	0	1	5
Family structure	0	0	3	3
Graduation	0	0	1	1
Health	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	1	1	2
Leveling	0	0	0	0
Literacy	0	0	0	0
Materials	0	0	0	0
Math	0	0	0	0
Multilingual/ELL	1	0	1	2
Nutrition	0	0	0	0
Poverty	0	1	4	5
Professional development	0	0	0	0
Project-based learning	0	0	1	1
Salary	0	0	0	0
School administration	0	0	0	0
School culture	1	0	1	2
School discipline	0	0	0	0
School infrastructure	0	0	0	0

School reputation	0	2	7	9
School safety	0	0	2	2
Special education	0	0	0	0
Staff	0	2	0	2
Staff supported	2	0	0	2
Standards	0	0	0	0
STEM	0	0	0	0
Students supported	0	2	1	3
Taxes	1	2	4	7
Teacher contract	0	0	0	0
Technology	0	0	0	0
Testing	0	0	0	0
Transportation	0	0	0	0
Trauma-sensitive/EBD	0	0	0	0
Turnover	0	0	0	0
Understaffing	0	0	0	0
Union	0	0	0	0

Appendix 7: Previously Connected to Manchester School District

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	7	5	12
Attendance	0	0	0	0
BOSC	5	23	23	51
Budget	0	6	34	40
Class size	0	0	6	6
College & career readiness	4	5	2	11
Common Core	0	0	1	1
Communication	0	1	9	10
Community engagement	6	2	2	10
Community services	2	0	0	2
Course offerings	2	1	4	7
Crime	0	0	1	1
Curriculum	0	1	15	16
District leadership	12	8	8	28
Diversity	7	6	12	25
Drugs	0	0	7	7
Enrichment activities	3	1	2	6
Equity	0	0	16	16
Family engagement	6	2	8	16

Family structure	0	0	2	2
Graduation	0	0	5	5
Health	0	1	0	1
Housing	0	1	2	3
Leveling	1	4	10	15
Literacy	3	1	13	17
Materials	1	1	4	6
Math	1	0	10	11
Multilingual/ELL	1	1	3	5
Nutrition	0	0	1	1
Poverty	0	2	3	5
Professional development	1	0	5	6
Project-based learning	1	0	0	1
Salary	0	0	1	1
School administration	4	0	3	7
School culture	0	0	7	7
School discipline	2	2	11	15
School infrastructure	1	2	3	6
School reputation	0	1	17	18
School safety	1	0	5	6
Special education	2	2	8	12
Staff	17	3	7	27
Staff supported	1	0	10	11
Standards	0	3	15	18
STEM	0	1	5	6
Students supported	5	8	25	38
Taxes	2	7	15	24
Teacher contract	0	0	3	3
Technology	0	0	5	5
Testing	3	5	12	20
Transportation	0	0	4	4
Trauma-sensitive/EBD	0	0	3	3
Turnover	0	0	2	2
Understaffing	0	0	4	4
Union	0	0	2	2

Appendix 8: Currently Connected to Manchester School District

TOPIC	MENTIONS			
	Positive	Mixed/neutral	Negative	Overall
Aldermen	0	2	1	3
Attendance	2	0	0	2
BOSC	0	8	4	12
Budget	0	1	19	20
Class size	0	0	2	2
College & career readiness	7	1	1	9
Common Core	0	0	0	0
Communication	4	1	15	20
Community engagement	6	1	1	8
Community services	1	2	4	7
Course offerings	2	1	6	9
Crime	0	0	1	1
Curriculum	0	1	3	4
District leadership	2	1	8	11
Diversity	9	2	9	20
Drugs	0	0	2	2
Enrichment activities	16	1	7	24
Equity	2	1	31	34
Family engagement	2	5	6	13
Family structure	0	1	0	1
Graduation	0	0	1	1
Health	0	0	0	0
Housing	0	0	0	0
Leveling	3	0	21	24
Literacy	1	1	6	8
Materials	0	0	11	11
Math	0	0	2	2
Multilingual/ELL	3	1	5	9
Nutrition	2	1	5	8
Poverty	1	0	1	2
Professional development	1	0	5	6
Project-based learning	0	0	0	0
Salary	0	0	2	2
School administration	4	0	6	10
School culture	2	0	3	5
School discipline	0	0	15	15
School infrastructure	2	1	12	15

School reputation	0	0	4	4
School safety	3	0	5	8
Special education	2	0	25	27
Staff	13	0	26	39
Staff supported	0	0	8	8
Standards	0	0	3	3
STEM	0	0	2	2
Students supported	13	0	30	43
Taxes	0	2	2	4
Teacher contract	0	0	3	3
Technology	5	0	6	11
Testing	2	1	10	13
Transportation	0	0	0	0
Trauma-sensitive/EBD	1	0	2	3
Turnover	0	0	6	6
Understaffing	0	0	11	11
Union	0	0	1	1

Appendix 9: Reaching Higher New Hampshire

To support its efforts, Manchester Proud contracted with Reaching Higher New Hampshire (RHNH), a nonpartisan nonprofit that supports high-quality public education for all students in New Hampshire. During the reporting period, RHNH provided two services to Manchester Proud: first, it served as general project manager for Manchester Proud, with responsibility for coordinating and supporting both the Manchester Proud Champions Council and all of the community-led Work Groups; and second, RHNH led community engagement efforts to gather feedback, build public involvement with the planning process, and ultimately, create a public mandate to implement and support the new strategic plan for MSD.

Reaching Higher New Hampshire's mission is to foster support for high standards in all of our public schools, giving all New Hampshire children the opportunity to prepare for college, for immediate careers, and for the challenges and opportunities of life in the 21st Century. RHNH serves as a nonpartisan 501c3 public education policy and community engagement resource for New Hampshire students, families, educators, and elected officials.