MMSD Parent Climate Survey Results – District 2016

Key Findings

1. MMSD parents rated *Relationships* highest among the six dimensions of school climate (84% positive responses).
2. Parents reported more positive responses in five dimensions in 2016 compared to 2015. *Family Engagement* posted the largest overall increase in positive responses, moving from 55% to 62%.
3. Among groups, parents of African American and low-income children responded more positively across dimensions than parents overall. Parents of elementary students reported more positive responses across all six dimensions compared to parents of middle and high school students. Differences were particularly stark in *Teaching & Learning* questions related to social-emotional learning.
4. Among open-ended comments, parents most often described *Relationships* as the greatest strength of their school, while they discussed aspects of *Teaching & Learning* as their school's greatest challenge.

Background

Since 2015, MMSD has surveyed parents, staff, and students each spring to measure climate in the district. The data gathered from these surveys informs the district's work around *Strategic Framework* Goal #3: *Every student, family, and employee experiences a positive school and district climate* and *Priority Area V: Accountability and School Support Systems*. The MMSD Parent Climate Survey focuses on six research-based dimensions of school climate: 1) Relationships; 2) Teaching & Learning; 3) Safety; 4) School Improvement; 5) Institutional Environment; and, 6) Family Engagement.

Within the parent survey, questions are intentionally aligned to district initiatives and priorities, including *Priority Area III: Family Engagement and Community Partnerships*; the *Great Teaching Matters Framework*; and MMSD's Family, Youth and Community Engagement Standards. Schools use climate survey data to drive their school improvement actions, including setting goals for their 2016-17 School Improvement Plans.

This report focuses on the 2015-16 district results for parents; similar reports are available for the student and staff surveys. For more information on MMSD Climate Surveys and to view detailed results – including interactive scorecards and comparisons across years – visit the climate survey website.

Data and Methods

MMSD administered the parent climate survey between January 29 and March 8, 2016 by distributing links to the electronic survey in English, Hmong and Spanish to families through MMSD's School Messenger system, parent newsletters, website, and social media outlets. Schools provided parents with paper or electronic versions of the survey in English, Hmong and Spanish during parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, a sample of parents without email or Internet access was contacted by phone to participate in the survey. Parents could complete one survey for each school where their children attend.

A total of 4,232 parents responded to the confidential survey for an approximate response rate of 20% among MMSD households. Respondents reported their own and their child's race/ethnicity, income status, and other demographic characteristics. For families with more than one child attending the same school, parents responded to the questions in reference to their youngest child attending that school. The demographics reported in Table 1 that follows reflect the demographics parents reported for their children.

Table 1: Demographics	Parent Survey (n)	Parent Survey %	District Overall %
African American	327	8%	18%
Asian	199	5%	9%
Hispanic/Latino	321	8%	20%
Multiracial	509	12%	9%
White	2502	59%	43%
Low Income	689	16%	50%
English Language Learner	939	22%	27%
Special Education	411	10%	14%
Elementary	2447	58%	49%
Middle	805	19%	21%
High	980	23%	30%

Compared to the demographics of the district overall, households that were not low income; not English language learners (ELL); and did not have students with disabilities responded more frequently.

On the closed-ended questions, we calculated response distributions (i.e., the range of responses) and percent positive responses. Percent positive aligns to the way MMSD reports metrics on other *Strategic Framework* goals, such as reading proficiency, high school graduation and challenging and well-rounded curriculum. We consider a response to be positive when it expresses agreement or strong agreement with a positive statement, and disagreement or strong disagreement with a negative statement. On the parent scorecard, response distributions show the percentage of responses from very negative to very positive for each closed-ended question. For negatively worded questions, such as those pertaining to students experiencing bullying or harassment, "strongly disagree" corresponds with "very positive." Each question on the survey aligns to a dimension of school climate and a percent positive response was also calculated for each dimension.

We analyzed results and selected findings for this report based on a variety of factors. First, we reviewed percent positive responses, looking for differences of four percentage points or greater among respondent groups at the dimension and question levels. Then, we reviewed results based on groups of interest related to district initiatives and priorities. We also identified questions of interest based on district priorities, connections to school improvement and district goals or accountability. Among the groups, dimensions, and/or questions that stood out, we selected specific items to highlight based on interest and impact.

On the open-ended questions, we analyzed results to tie them to specific dimensions using a multi-step process in NVivo, a software program designed for qualitative analysis. The approach relied on coding, a way of organizing and sorting qualitative data that involves assigning labels, or codes, to each comment or response, which makes it easier to draw themes from and summarize the data. We began with a provisional code list (i.e., a predetermined set of codes) that consisted of the dimensions from the climate survey. First we performed preliminary coding, by manually coding a subset of comments into the dimension they best represented. We then searched the comments for key words identified from survey questions pertaining to each dimension, along with other synonyms and antonyms to these words, and coded those comments accordingly. Next, we used the Autocode feature of NVivo, which is a program function that uses an algorithm to automatically code comments based on existing coding patterns, to code additional comments. Finally, we assigned the comments not captured in the previous steps to an Other category, as they did not directly or explicitly relate to any specific climate dimension in the climate survey. This Other category was scanned and more coding was manually performed if appropriate. The findings presented in this report are the result of this exhaustive multi-step process.
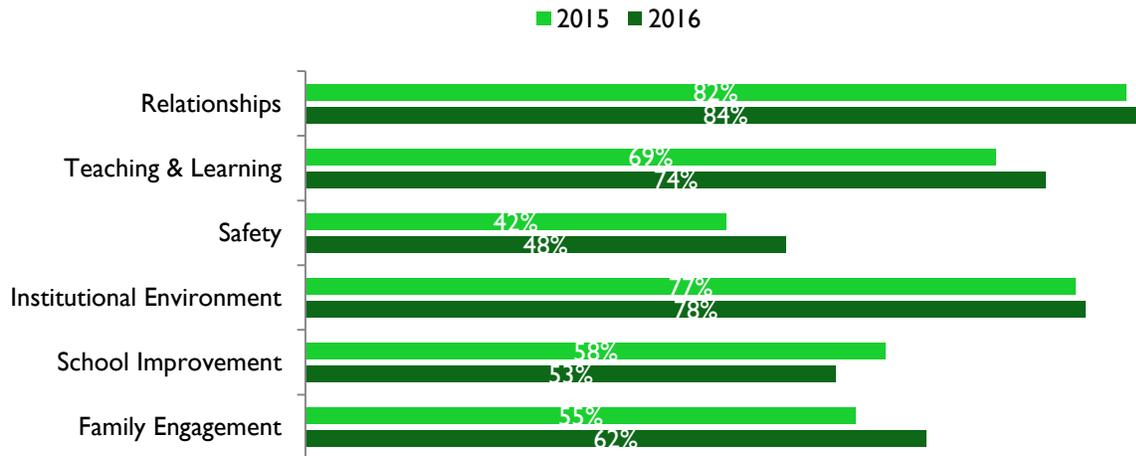
Findings: Closed-Ended Responses

Overall and Year-to-Year

Parents rated *Relationships* highest among the six dimensions of school climate with 84% positive responses to questions overall, followed by *Institutional Environment* with 78%. Safety was rated the lowest with only 48% positive responses to questions overall.

The percent of positive responses increased in five of the six dimensions of school climate. Only *School Improvement*, which is represented by a single question about the school's School Improvement Plan (SIP), decreased from 58% to 53% positive responses. The dimensions that showed the most growth year-to-year were *Family Engagement*, increasing seven percentage points from 55% to 62% positive responses and *Safety*, increasing six percentage points from 42% to 48%.

Figure 1: Parents' Percent Positive Response by Dimension of School Climate

■ 2015 ■ 2016

Dimension	2015	2016
Relationships	82%	84%
Teaching & Learning	69%	74%
Safety	42%	48%
Institutional Environment	77%	78%
School Improvement	58%	53%
Family Engagement	55%	62%

Similarly, the dimension of *Teaching & Learning* had a five point year-to-year increase in its percent of positive responses, moving from 69% in 2014-15 to 74% in 2015-16. Every question within the dimension of *Teaching & Learning* increased its percentage of positive responses year-to-year.
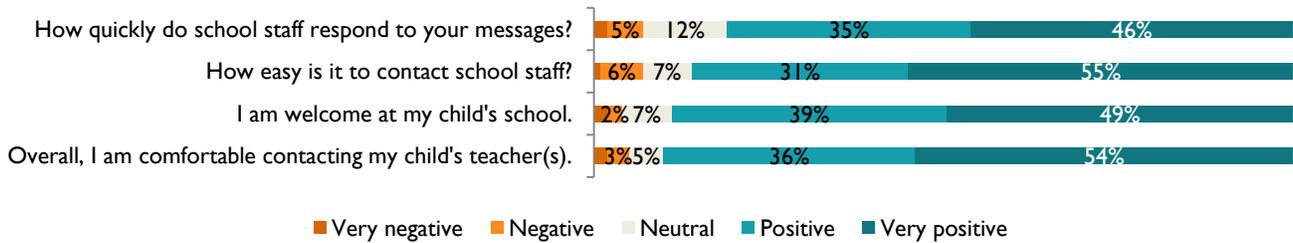
Highlights Within Dimensions:

Relationships

Parents rated *Relationships* highest with 84% positive responses to questions overall. Notably, within *Relationships* questions, 90% of parents responded they are *comfortable contacting their children's teacher(s)* and 88% of parents feel *welcome at their children's school.* Eighty-six percent (86%) of parents also reported it is *easy to contact school staff* and 81% reported that *staff respond quickly to messages.*
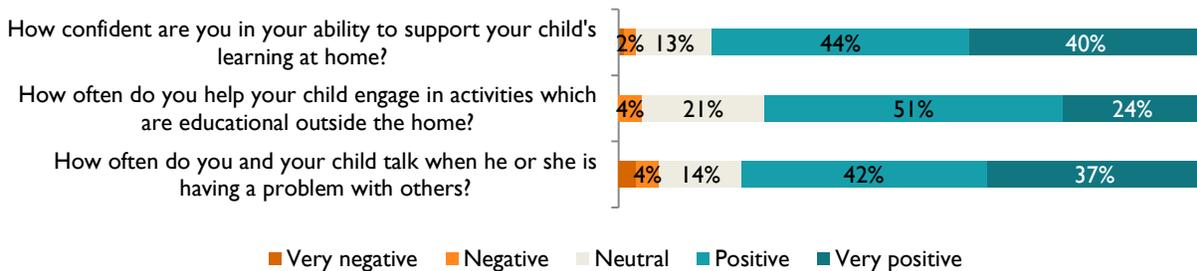
Figure 2

	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
How quickly do school staff respond to your messages?		5%	12%	35%	46%
How easy is it to contact school staff?		6%	7%	31%	55%
I am welcome at my child's school.		2%	7%	39%	49%
Overall, I am comfortable contacting my child's teacher(s).		3%	5%	36%	54%

■ Very negative ■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive ■ Very positive

Family Engagement

Overall, *Family Engagement* received 62% positive responses to questions. Among *Family Engagement* questions, 84% of parents indicated they were confident or extremely confident in their abilities to *support their children's learning at home.* Seventy-nine percent (79%) of parents reported talking to their children frequently or almost all the time when the *children are having problems with others* while 75% *help their children engage in educational activities outside the home.* These specific questions align to *MMSD's Family, Youth and Community Engagement Standard 3: Supporting Student Success* and schools can use the findings to set goals around the Family and Community Engagement focus area within their School Improvement Plans.

Figure 3

	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
How confident are you in your ability to support your child's learning at home?		2%	13%	44%	40%
How often do you help your child engage in activities which are educational outside the home?		4%	21%	51%	24%
How often do you and your child talk when he or she is having a problem with others?		4%	14%	42%	37%

■ Very negative ■ Negative ■ Neutral ■ Positive ■ Very positive

Highlights Among Parent Groups:
Parents of African American Children

Parents of African American children rated five of the six dimensions more positively than parents overall. The only exception was *Relationships*, where results were similar. For example, parents of African American children reported more positive experiences in *Family Engagement,* 70% compared to 62% overall. Far more parents of African American children, 75%, indicated they frequently *help their children understand the content they are learning in school*, compared to 58% of parents overall. Seventy-three percent (73%) of parents of African American children indicated they were confident or extremely confident in their abilities to *make sure the school meets their children's learning needs,* compared to 60% of parents overall. A higher percentage of parents of African American children, 63%, also believe *the classroom lessons at their children's school* are quite motivating or extremely motivating, compared to 53% of parents overall. While these results are positive, it is important to keep in mind the lower number of parents of African-American children who responded (327 total; 8% of total respondents versus 18% of district overall).

Figure 4: African American vs. Overall Percent Positive Response by Dimension of School Climate
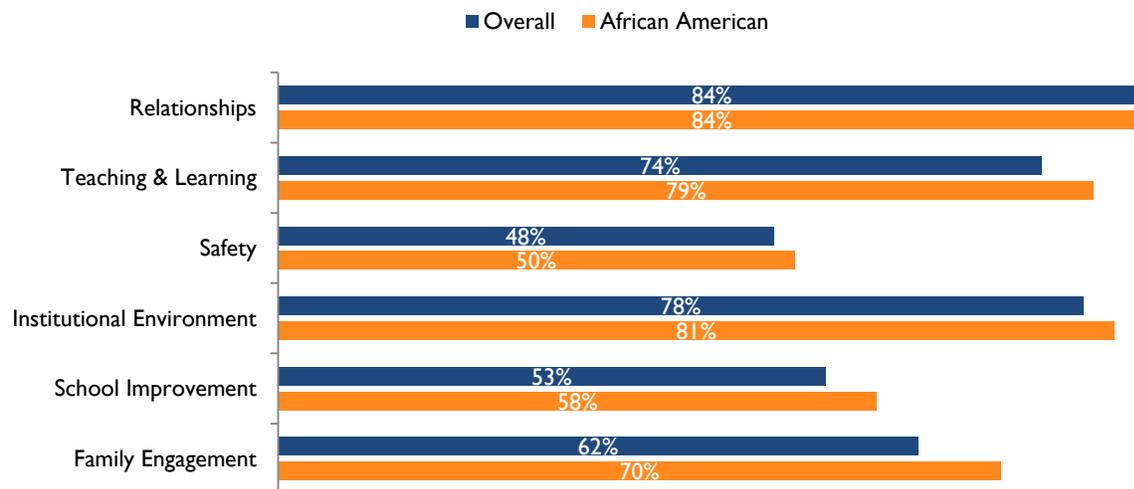

Although parents of African American children rated *Relationships* just as positively as the overall group, 84%, there were a few notable differences among their responses to key questions within the *Relationships* dimension. More parents of African American children, 92%, feel *welcome at their children's school*, compared to 88% of parents overall and a higher percentage of parents of African American children, 88%, believe *the school provides opportunities for parent involvement*, compared to 84% of parents overall. Conversely, parents of African American children's responses to questions about diversity and respect were less positive than parents overall. Seventy-four percent (74%) believe *teachers at their children's school have quite a bit or a tremendous amount of respect for the children,* compared to 82% overall and 79% of parents of African American children believe *the school culture values diversity*, compared to 83% overall.

Parents of Low-Income Children

Parents of low-income children also rated five of the six dimensions more positively than parents overall. The only exception was *Relationships*, where results were similar. Fifty-five percent (55%) of *Safety* responses from low-income families were positive, compared to 48% of parents overall. A larger percentage of low-income families agreed *consequences when students break rules are fair for everyone*, 63% compared to 52% of families overall. More low-income parents disagreed that *students experience bullying,* 27% compared to 21% overall. Their opinions also differed on questions related to harassment in schools. On every harassment question, low-income families were more likely to disagree *students experience* harassment, with responses between 7 and 10 percentage points higher, compared to parents overall.

**Figure 5: Low-Income vs. Overall Percent Positive Response by Dimension of School Climate**
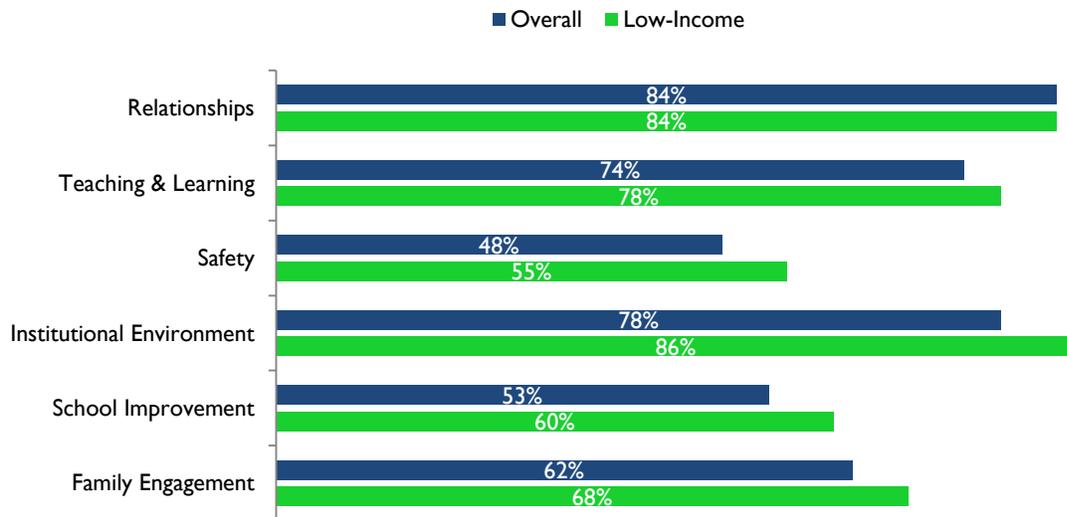
Low-income families also report more positive experiences in *Family Engagement*, 68% compared to 62% overall. A much larger percentage of low-income families, 74%, *help their children understand the content they are learning in school*, compared to 58% of parents overall. Sixty-three percent (63%) of low-income families believe *the classroom lessons at their children's school* are quite motivating or extremely motivating, compared to 53% of parents overall and a higher percentage of low-income parents *meet in person with their children's teachers*, 29% compared to 19% of parents overall.

Highlights Across School Levels:

Sharp differences among parent opinions emerge when the data is analyzed by school level. Parents of elementary students reported more positive responses across all six dimensions compared to parents of middle and high school students. Differences were in the double-digits in all but one instance.

Figure 6: Parents' Percent Positive Responses by Dimension & Level
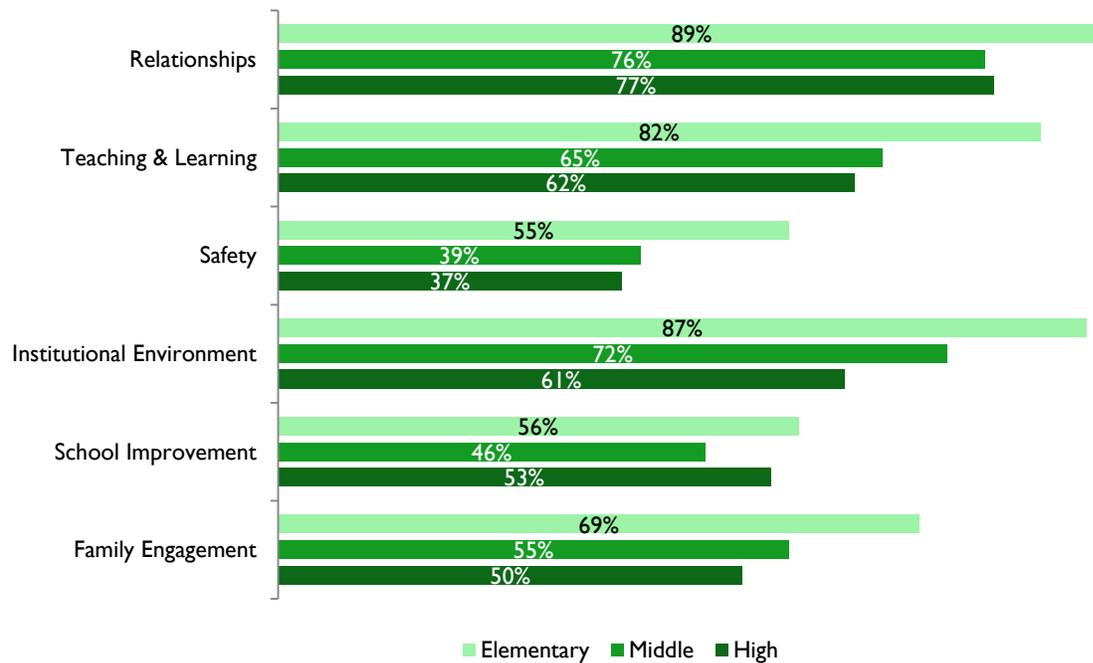
Of note within *Teaching & Learning*, positive responses to questions about social-emotional learning skills which align to the district's *Great Teaching Matters, Practice #1*, declined sharply among parents of students in secondary school, compared to elementary school. Parents of high school students, in particular, had the least positive responses to social-emotional learning questions. Just 47% of high school parents agree that *school staff help their children to manage emotions effectively*, compared to 82% of elementary parents – a 35 percentage point difference. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of high school parents believe *school staff help their children to understand others' feelings and how one's behavior influences others,* compared to 85% of elementary parents, while 52% of high school parents agree *school staff help their children learn to help others in the community,* compared to 75% of elementary parents. These findings on parents' perceptions of social-emotional learning can inform schools' practices as staff engage in the *reflect and adjust* cycle of *Great Teaching*.

Findings: Open-Ended Responses

We report the findings from parent responses to the open-ended questions below. For more details about the dimensions, the percent of coded comments in each dimension, and example quotes coded into each dimension, see the Appendix. Our two open-ended questions, which we used to organize our analysis, were:
1. What do you feel is your/this school's greatest strength?
2. What do you feel is your/this school's greatest challenge?

Parent comments about their child's school's strengths most often related to *Relationships*, especially the presence of diversity in the school, the connections between parents and staff, and the school's sense of community. To a lesser extent, parent comments related to components of *Teaching & Learning* followed by *Family Engagement*. These top two dimensions for most frequent comments align with two of the higher rated dimensions in the closed-ended questions. Within ethnic/racial groups, parents of Asian children did not leave as many comments related to *Family Engagement* to the extent of parents with children of other races, while parents of Hispanic children commented more on the strengths of *Family Engagement* than *Teaching & Learning*.

Aspects of *Teaching & Learning* were most often mentioned in parent comments as their child's school's greatest challenge, especially parent concerns over having children's specific academic needs met in the classroom, as well as unease related to achievement and the achievement gap. Less frequent but still notable, parents commented on issues related to *Safety*, *Institutional Environment*, and *Relationships* a similar amount. These findings may seem counterintuitive after learning that *Teaching & Learning*, *Relationships*, and *Institutional Environment* received the highest percent positive responses to the close-ended questions, but they show that parents may have different experiences with their school's climate. Although some parents identified certain aspects of *Relationships* and *Teaching & Learning* as strengths within their school, parent open-ended responses revealed that parents also identified challenges in those same areas. Within ethnic/racial groups, parents with African American children contributed fewer comments regarding *Institutional Environment* as a challenge than parents with children of other races. Parents of Asian children left fewer comments concerned with *Teaching & Learning* than parents with children of other races, and their number of comments about *Relationships* as a challenge were greater than their comments related to *Teaching & Learning*.

Appendix: Open-Ended Comment Coding Scheme

Below is Table 2 depicting the percentage of coded comments applied to each dimension of climate across the comments parents left regarding the strengths and challenges facing their schools. There is also a column of example comments coded into each dimension. Percentages may not total to 100% because comments could be coded into multiple dimensions.

Table 2: Parents Reported Strengths and Challenges		
Strengths		
Dimension	**% of Coded Comments**	**Example Quotes**
Relationships	35%	"diversity" "sense of community" "respect and communication" "respect by the principal and teachers to students" "Communication between parents and teachers. Feeling very welcomed whenever I enter the building"
Teaching & Learning	22%	"the high school provides lots of opportunities in the curriculum" "the staff challenges students to do their best work" "a knowledgeable and expert teaching staff" "they seem to be able to teach to a wide range of student skillsets, and they integrate those skillsets well" "wide range of classes, clubs, sports and experiences"
Family Engagement	13%	"parental support" "getting parents involved" "communication between staff and parents" "the Parent Teacher Organization/parent involvement" "the involvement of parents in education outside of school"
Safety	3%	"great security" "provides a safe learning environment for all kids" "strong stance against bullying"
Institutional Environment	3%	"small size" "a welcoming space" "facility appears to be adequately staffed and equipped" "new school and clean"
School Improvement	1%	"reaching out to parents/community for input" "The teachers at […] have a common mission to meet the needs of a diverse group of students and see that all grow and succeed to their fullest potential"
Other	40%	"I don't know" "not applicable" "not sure" "teachers" "great staff" "the principal" "good leadership" specific staff names
Challenges		
Dimension	**% of Coded Comments**	**Example Quotes**
Teaching & Learning	30%	"dealing with a range of preparedness and balancing the needs of students with a range of skill levels" "Setting higher expectations for the students" "ensuring that every child is academically challenged" "achievement gap" "getting kids to learn at grade level" "providing a curriculum and environments that celebrates all races" "additional learning opportunities out of class" "modifying curriculum in a planful way"

Safety	20%	"bullying" "equity in discipline and expectations set for all students" "not taking appropriate action for bullying" "keeping students physically and emotionally safe, especially in lunchroom and at recess" "new behavior plan" "Safety/Security" "being a completely safe place. Anyone entering and can go directly to any classroom that nobody talks nada. Children play outside and have a few assistants to look at so many children"
Institutional Environment	19%	"space" "the building" "bathrooms for girls need doors and to be able to lock" "class size" "overcrowding" "funding" "limited resources" "parking"
Relationships	17%	"diversity" "parent/teacher communication" "not much diversity in staff" "students having respect for staff and authority" "language/cultural barriers, children self-segregating?" "could be more welcoming to new families"
Family Engagement	12%	"empower teachers in the classroom and parents at home to work together to improve their children's only educational experience" "involve parents in the education of students" "keeping parents informed daily about what the child is learning so we can support it at home" "parent engagement"
School Improvement	1%	"lack of vision" "involving families of color in the decision-making processes of school" "MMSD guidelines restrict the school's ability to respond to the "whole child", e.g. "health and wellness" isn't a SIP tab so it needs to be added/special, EVERY school should be required to address, just like 3Rs and recently family engagement"
Other	27%	"I don't know" "not applicable" "nothing" "poverty" "teacher retention" "the negative issues in the world in general" "meeting the complex needs of so many students"