



## MMSD Parent Climate Survey Results – District 2017

### Key Findings

1. This year, 9,197 parents participated in the climate survey – an approximately 43% response rate compared to 20% in 2016.
2. MMSD parents rated *Relationships* highest among the five dimensions of school climate, with 85% positive responses, followed closely by *Family Engagement*, with 84% positive responses.
3. Percent positive responses increased across all five dimensions of climate from 2015-16 to 2016-17, with the largest increases in *Family Engagement* and *Safety*.
4. Among the open-ended comments, parents most often described *Relationships* as the greatest strength of their schools, while they discussed aspects of *Teaching & Learning* as their schools' greatest challenge.

### Background

Since 2015, MMSD has surveyed parents, staff, and students each spring to measure climate in the district. The district's Research & Program Evaluation Office (RPEO) is responsible for the creation, administration, analysis and production of resources annually. 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 five research-based dimensions of school climate: 1) *Relationships*; 2) *Teaching & Learning*; 3) *Safety*; 4) *Institutional Environment*; and 5) *Family Engagement*. Within the parent survey, questions are aligned intentionally 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 2017-18 [School Improvement Plans](#).

In 2016-17, we made revisions to the parent survey which included: deleting or adding questions in dimensions, realigning questions across dimensions, simplifying the wording of questions, and changing to a consistent scale for all items. We eliminated the *School Improvement* dimension and the single question previously in it was moved into the *Teaching & Learning* dimension. We made these changes to increase clarity, reduce length, and ensure maximum utility from every question and dimension.

This report focuses on the 2016-17 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

RPEO administered the parent climate survey between February 1-28, 2017 by distributing links to the electronic survey in English, Hmong, Spanish and Arabic to families through email and text messaging. 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 9,197 parents responded to the confidential survey for an approximate response rate of 43% among MMSD households, compared to a 20% response rate in 2016. The significant increase in year-to-year response rate is largely attributable to new survey software that allows for less spam filtering of messages, deployment via text messaging, greater customization of survey messages and reminders, as well as the ability for respondents to choose their preferred language using a drop down menu. We constructed the survey so that parent responses match to their students' 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.



On the closed-ended questions, we calculated response distributions (i.e., the range of responses) and percent positive responses. Percent positive reflects the percent of responses that were desirable (either strong or very strong agreement with a positive statement) and 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. On the [parent scorecard](#), response distributions show the percentage of responses from very negative to very positive for each closed-ended question. As part of the realignment of survey questions, items that were negatively worded in prior years were rewritten so that “strongly agree” now 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 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. Secondly, we assigned the comments not captured in the previous step to an *Other* category, as they did not directly or explicitly relate to any specific climate dimension in the climate survey. Finally, we ran a word frequency on the codes in the *Other* category to determine if we could include any of those words in our word searches as performed in the first step. We identified an additional word applicable for each dimension and we again ran key word searches and coded those statements accordingly.

## Findings: Participation

Compared to the prior year’s survey, four times as many parents of Hispanic/Latino and Asian students; three times as many low income students; and double the numbers of parents of African American, Special Education and English Language Learner (ELL) students participated. Participation was also higher among parents of advanced learners and white students, as well as parents of middle and high school students. The dramatic increase in participation rates across parent groups demonstrates progress in *MMSD’s Strategic Framework Priority Area III: Family, Youth and Community Engagement*. The demographics reported in Table I below reflect the demographics of students associated with the parent responses received.

Demographic	Parent Survey (n)	Parent Survey %	District Overall %
African American	927	10%	18%
Asian	830	9%	9%
Hispanic/Latino	1345	15%	21%
Multiracial	818	9%	9%
White	5233	57%	43%
Low Income	2539	28%	50%
English Language Learner	2012	22%	28%
Special Education	957	10%	14%
Advanced Learner	1913	21%	14%
Elementary	5,444	34%	48%
Middle	1896	30%	22%
High	1848	35%	30%

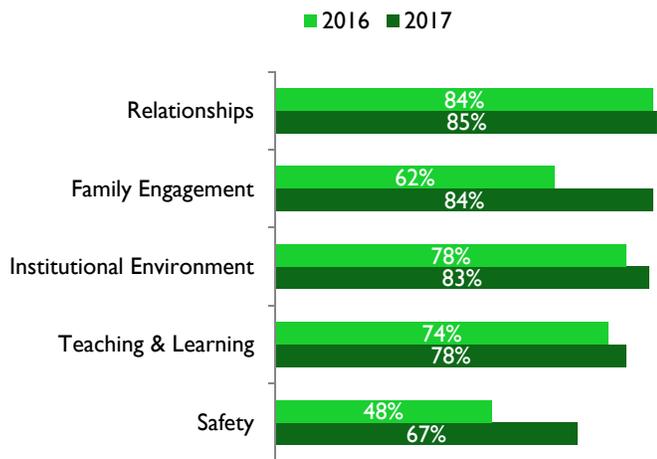


## Closed-Ended Responses

### Overall and Year-to-Year

Parents rated *Relationships* highest among the five dimensions of school climate with 85% positive responses to questions overall, followed closely by *Family Engagement*, 84%, and *Institutional Environment* with 83%. *Safety* was rated the lowest with 67% positive responses to questions overall. The year-to-year percent positive responses by dimension are shown in Figure 1 below.

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



The percent of positive responses increased in all five dimensions of school climate. The dimensions that posted the largest increases year-to-year were *Family Engagement*, increasing twenty-two percentage points from 62% to 84% positive responses and *Safety*, increasing nineteen percentage points from 48% to 67%. The significant year-to-year increases in dimensions should be interpreted cautiously in light of the revisions made to the survey. Items within *Family Engagement* and *Safety*, where the wording and scale remained the same year-to-year, had negligible changes in percent positive responses.

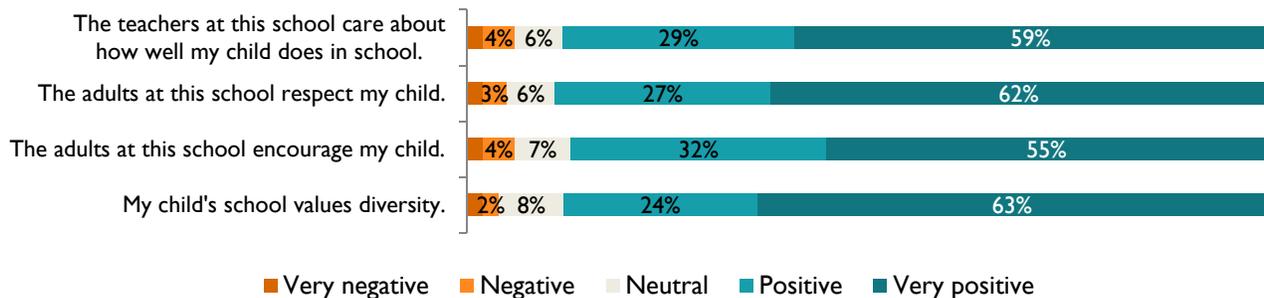
Similarly, the dimension of *Institutional Environment* had a five percentage point year-to-year increase in its percent of positive responses, moving from 78% in 2015-16 to 83% in 2016-17. The questions within *Institutional Environment* were consistent year-to-year.

### Highlights Within Dimensions:

#### Relationships

Across all dimensions, parents rated *Relationships* the highest with 85% positive responses to questions overall. Within *Relationships* questions, 89% of parents agree *the adults at school respect their children* and 88% agree *the teachers care about how well their children do in school*. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of parents believe *adults at school encourage their children* and that *their children's schools value diversity*. The highlighted *Relationships* questions connect to MMSD's *Great Teaching Framework's* culturally and linguistically responsive *Practices #1 Set high and clear expectations for all students and #2: Acknowledge all students*.

**Figure 2: Relationships**



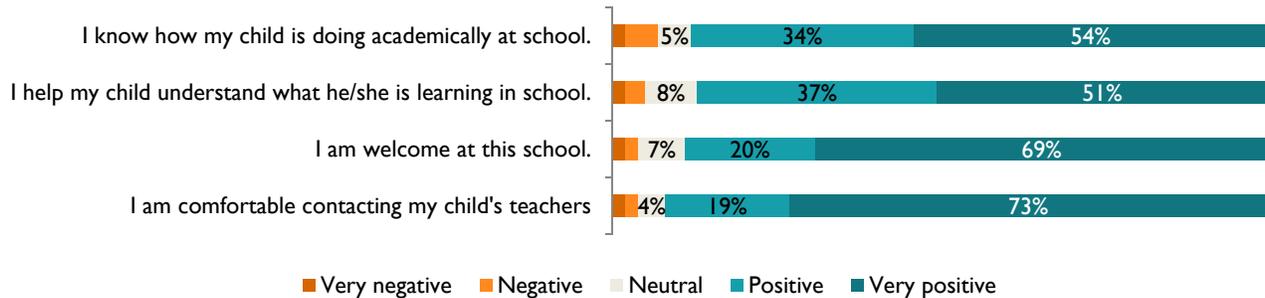
#### Family Engagement

Overall, *Family Engagement* questions received 84% positive responses. Among *Family Engagement* questions, 92% of parents indicated they were *comfortable contacting their children's teachers* and 81% of parents feel *welcome at school*. Equal percentages (88%) of parents report *they know how their children are doing academically at school* and that *they help their*



children understand what they're learning in school. These specific questions align to MMSD's Strategic Framework Priority Area III: Family Engagement and Community Partnerships and 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: Family Engagement**



**Highlights Among Parent Groups:**

The highest percent positive responses by dimension was among parents of Asian students, followed by parents of ELL students while parents of multiracial or special education students had slightly lower percent positive responses across dimensions compared to parents overall. The percent positive response by dimension for all parent groups is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Parent Groups Percent Positive Response by Dimension	Teaching & Learning				
	Relationships	Learning	Safety	Institutional Environment	Family Engagement
African American	78%	78%	68%	84%	87%
Asian	86%	85%	82%	86%	87%
Hispanic/Latino	83%	80%	70%	84%	84%
Multiracial	81%	77%	63%	82%	82%
White	87%	77%	65%	82%	84%
Low Income	81%	80%	70%	84%	84%
English Language Learner	85%	85%	78%	88%	87%
Special Education	80%	76%	64%	81%	82%
Advanced Learner	86%	78%	66%	80%	84%
<b>Parents Overall</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>84%</b>

**Parents of Asian Students**

Parents of Asian students rated all dimensions of school climate more positively, by a range of 1 to 15 percentage points, compared to parents overall, with the largest differences in the dimensions of Safety and Teaching & Learning. For example, a much higher percentage of parents of Asian students reported positive experiences in Safety, 82% compared to 67% overall. More parents of Asian students, 74%, believe the consequences when students break rules are fair for everyone, compared

to 52% of parents overall. Additionally, 73% of parents of Asian students agree bullying is not a common problem at their children's school, compared to 51% of parents overall and 77% agree harassment based on personal characteristics is not a common problem in their children's schools, compared to 60% of parents overall.

Similarly, parents of Asian students also had a higher of percent positive responses related to Teaching & Learning, 85% compared to 78% of parents overall. Of note, more parents of Asian students, 79%, reported they had an opportunity to provide input on the school improvement plan, compared to 64% of parents overall. Higher percentages of parents of Asian students also agree their children's schools value equity, 90%, compared to 81% overall and that their schools are responsive to students' language and culture, 85%, compared to 77% of parents overall.

**Parents of English Language Learners**

Parents of English language learners (ELL) rated four of the five dimensions more positively than parents overall, by a range of 3 to 11 percentage points. The only exception was Relationships, where results were the same. ELL parents rated Safety 78% positively, compared to 67% of parents overall. Among Safety questions, a higher percentage of ELL



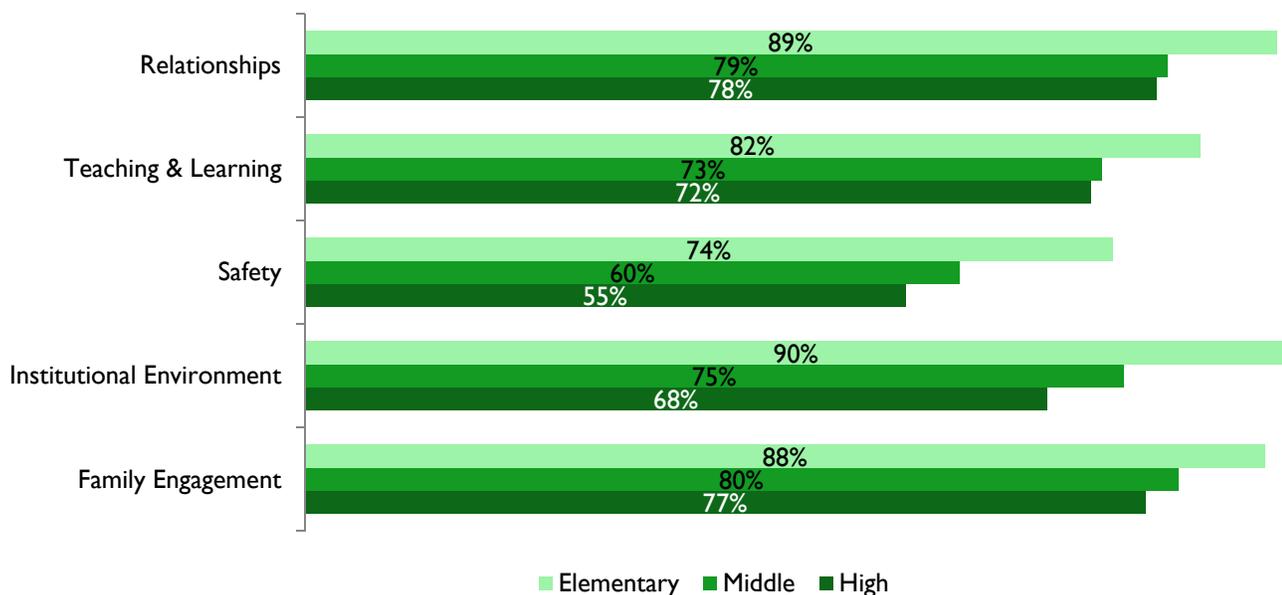
parents, 69% agree *the consequences when students break rules are fair for everyone*, compared to 52% of parents overall. More ELL parents also agree *harassment based on personal characteristics is not a common problem in their children’s schools*, 75%, compared to 60% of parents overall and that *bullying is not a common problem at their children’s school*, 64% compared to 51% overall.

ELL parents also had a higher percentage of positive responses in *Teaching & Learning*, 85% compared to 78% overall, rating all but one question more positively than parents overall. Within *Teaching & Learning*, a larger percentage of ELL parents, 87%, agree *their schools are responsive to students’ language and culture*, 85%, compared to 77% of parents overall and more ELL parents, 86%, agree *school staff encourage their children to believe that intelligence can grow through effort* compared to 78% of parents overall. Additionally, 75% of ELL parents reported they had *an opportunity to provide input on the school improvement plan*, compared to 64% of parents overall.

### Highlights Across School Levels

A distinct difference among parent opinions emerges when the data is analyzed by school level. Parents of elementary school students reported more positive responses across all five dimensions compared to parents of elementary and high school students. Responses for parents of middle and high school students were very similar on all but two dimensions of school climate (*Institutional Environment* and *Safety*). The percent positive responses by dimension and level are shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Parents' Percent Positive Responses by Dimension & Level**



Of note within *Safety*, 84% of elementary parents agreed *their children’s personal things are safe at school*, compared to 65% of middle school parents and only 47% of high school parents – a 37 percentage point difference. More elementary parents also agreed that *bullying is not a common problem at their children’s schools*, 58%, compared to 44% of middle school and 38% of high school parents. Significant differences in opinion also emerge within *Relationships* questions when viewed by level. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of elementary parents agreed *their children look forward to seeing the adults at school*, compared to just 69% of parents of middle and high school students – a difference of 18 percentage points. Similarly, more elementary parents agreed *their children enjoy going to school*, 87%, compared to 73% of middle school parents and 70% of high school parents.

### Findings: Open-Ended Responses

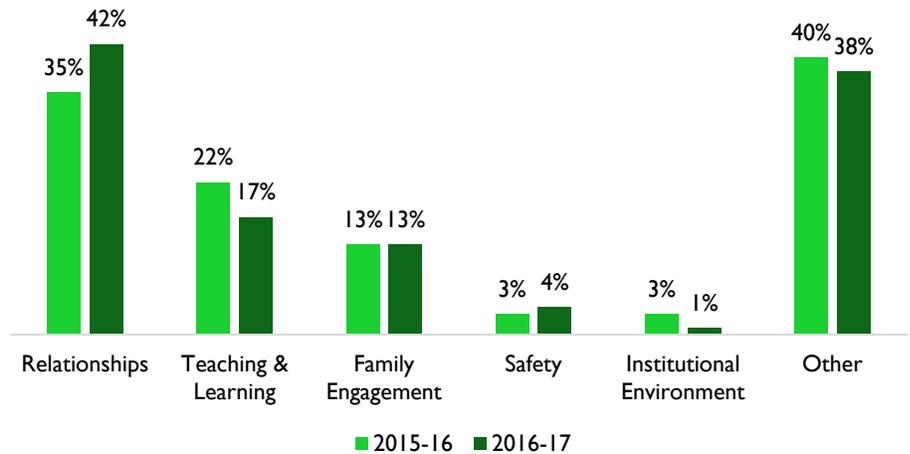
The climate survey asked parents two open-ended questions: (1) What do you feel is your/this school’s greatest strength?, and (2) What do you feel is your/this school’s greatest challenge? Our analysis focused on categorizing these comments into the dimensions; for those comments that were off-topic or unclear, we coded them as *Other*. The



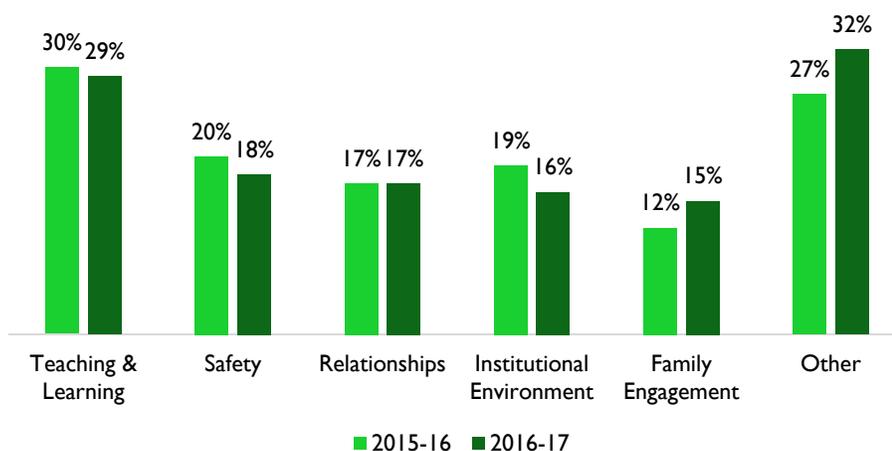
percent of coded comments for parents responding to the question about school strengths is reflected in Figure 5, and the percent of coded comments for parents responding to the question about school challenges is shown in Figure 6.

Parents often identified aspects of *Relationships* (diversity, community, caring) as a strength of their school, followed by *Teaching & Learning* and *Family Engagement*. These findings support the closed-ended findings, where *Relationships* received the highest percent positive responses from parents. While the rank ordering of these dimensions by percent of coded comments is the same compared to 2015-16, the actual percent of coded comments in some of the dimensions changed. For example, a higher percentage of coded comments were in *Relationships* in 2016-17, but a lower percentage was in *Teaching & Learning*. By race, parents of African-American students identified strengths in *Relationships* less than other racial groups, but felt more positively about *Family Engagement* than other racial groups. When looking at the rank ordering of dimensions, parents of African-American students identified *Relationships* as a strength most often, followed by *Family Engagement* then *Teaching & Learning* to a similar degree.

**Figure 5: Overall Parents' Percent of Coded Comments for School Strengths by Dimension**



**Figure 6: Overall Parents' Percent of Coded Comments for School Challenges by Dimension**



When articulating the challenges of their school, parents often described aspects of *Teaching & Learning*, followed by *Safety*, *Relationships*, *Institutional Environment*, and *Family Engagement* to a similar degree. These results somewhat support findings from the closed-ended responses, where *Teaching & Learning* and *Safety* received the lowest percent positive responses from parents. Comparing across years, parents' feelings on the challenges related to *Teaching & Learning*, *Safety*, and *Relationships* has remained relatively stable, although they are slightly less concerned with *Institutional Environment* this year than

2015-16. There were variances in the percent of coded comments belonging to *Teaching & Learning* by student race, with parents of African American students identifying it as a challenge less than other racial groups. Parents of African Americans also identified *Institutional Environment* as less of a problem than other racial groups. Parents of Asian students identified *Safety* as a challenge less than other racial groups, and they identified *Relationships* as a challenge less than other racial groups. *Family Engagement* by race was spread out, with parents of Asian students seeing it as less of a challenge than other racial groups.