

thoughtexchange - results and insights



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Introduction

In the fall of 2017, Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 reached out to the community as part of a middle school review. Participants reflected on the mission defined by the Middle School Review Committee then shared what they believe is working well to support it, and how middle school could be improved.

Community members were invited to join a conversation about our schools and District 64, focused on three open-ended questions. Community members then had the opportunity to reflect on the thoughts of others by adding stars to those that best matched their own priorities. This exposes everyone to a range of thoughts and opinions, just as they would during an in-person town hall meeting.

Exchange Overview

Questions

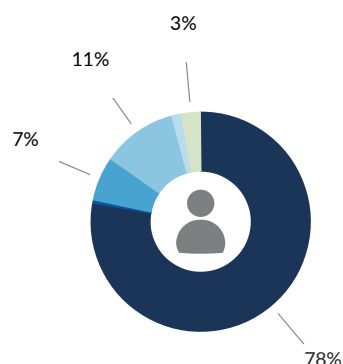
- Q1** What are some ways we can improve middle school to better achieve our mission?
- Q2** What are some things that are working well to support our middle school mission?
- Q3** What are some other things you'd like to see to support the middle school experience?

Participation

 1,000  1,371  39,109

Demographics

78%	■	Parent/guardian
0%	■	Staff member – preschool
7%	■	Staff member – elementary school
11%	■	Staff member – middle school
1%	■	Staff member – District office
3%	■	Other community member



Insights Overview

Thoughts shared by participants were grouped into themes and an analysis was conducted on the participants' starring patterns. This report explores areas of overlap and difference in the Parent/Guardian and Staff exchanges.

The analysis, which highlights participants' priorities and areas of interest, is presented in the following sections:

- / Things We Appreciate
- / Opportunities for Growth and Other Ways to Support the Middle School Experience

Things We Appreciate

In response to Q2, two common areas emerged between Parents/Guardians and Staff: **Elective curriculum** and **High quality of teachers and staff**. An additional theme, **Team concept**, was the largest theme in Q2 of the Staff exchange. These were the only large themes.

Priorities Shared by Parents/Guardians and Staff

Elective Curriculum

- ★ 2nd largest theme for Parents/Guardians (21.9% of stars)
- ★ 3rd largest theme for Staff (18.1% of stars)

Both Parents/Guardians and Staff discussed their appreciation for the diverse offering of electives available to students. They expressed that electives are a great opportunity for students to explore and develop their interests.

The elective curriculum is great. Helps students feel they have choices and can explore their interests. (Parents/Guardians)

4.5 ★ 28 👤

High Quality of Teachers and Staff

★ Largest theme for Parents/Guardians (22.7% of stars)

This is the top theme in Q2 for Parents/Guardians.

Participants expressed their appreciation that teachers and staff are engaged and attend to the needs of students in a well-rounded way. They described them as invested, caring and responsive.

Teachers are invested in students. Most teachers are available/willing to help kids when they need it. Most of them go the extra mile to make sure students understand the curriculum.

4.3 ★ 32 👤

★ 2nd largest theme for Staff (19.8% of stars)

Participants expressed appreciation for the level of collaboration among staff. They also described teachers and staff as dedicated, supportive, and well-connected to their students.

All teachers and support staff (counselors, social workers) help to support the social and emotional needs of our students.

Students are struggling with so many things. They need a great deal of support and information to make it through each day.

4.3 ★ 37 👤

Priority for Staff

Team Concept

★ Largest theme (20.1% of stars)

This is the top theme in Q2 for Staff.

Participants described the team approach of engaging with students as important to ensuring that students feel connected and supported in their learning.

Students feel supported and connected to their teachers. Positive student-teacher relationships increase student learning.

4.3 ★ 39 👤

Opportunities for Growth and Other Ways to Support the Middle School Experience

In response to Q1 and Q3, several small to medium-sized themes emerged; no single topic elicited a large response. Participants described a number of opportunities for growth and improvement for middle school. Shared priorities across Parents/Guardians and Staff included:

- social emotional learning
- elective program
- language arts classes

Only Parents/Guardians talked about having more opportunities to connect with schools and the District overall. They also shared several thoughts about positive behavior supports. On the other hand, Staff saw opportunities for improvement in school scheduling and in assessing students in a well-rounded way beyond test scores.

Priorities Shared by Parents/Guardians and Staff

Social Emotional Learning

★ 3rd largest theme for Parents/Guardians in Q1 (7.7% of stars)

★ 3rd largest theme for Parents/Guardians in Q3 (6.5% of stars)

Parents/Guardians emphasized the importance of fully integrating updated approaches to social emotional learning in middle school curriculum. These include offering techniques to equip students to respond to the unique challenges of their adolescent years.

Social and emotional growth support in our school is very important. This is important especially at this age when their young minds are questioning the type of person they will be.

4.7 ★ 30 👤

★ Largest theme for Staff in Q1 (15.3% of stars)

★ Largest theme for Staff in Q3 (12.0% of stars)

This is the top theme in Q1 and Q3 for Staff. Participants expressed a desire for an advisory program, suggesting that this dedicated time would allow teachers to connect one-on-one with students and offer social emotional instruction and intervention.

Make time for advisory. If relationships are a priority, then teachers need time to develop it. A daily advisory program fosters that.

3.8 ★ 44 👤

Elective Curriculum

- ★ 6th largest theme for Parents/Guardians in Q1 (5.3% of stars)
- ★ 2nd largest theme for Staff in Q1 (11.8% of stars)

Parents/Guardians and Staff expressed that a diverse array of elective options should remain in place at the middle school level. They also suggested that new and innovative options would be welcome each year.

Continue offering all elective courses for students. Do not limit elective courses to those students who are placed in intervention classes. The elective courses provide successful experiences. (Staff)

4.0 ★ 30 👤

Theme of Interest Shared by Parents/Guardians and Staff

Language Arts Instruction

- ★ 5th largest theme for Parents/Guardians in Q1 (5.7% of stars)
- ★ 4th largest theme for Staff in Q1 (7.6% of stars)

Both Parents/Guardians and Staff expressed interest in increasing the focus and instruction on writing and reading. Parents/Guardians connected language arts skills to future-readiness of students, while Staff focused more on foundational skill building.

More focused time on language arts and reading. These are fundamental skills that students need to be in total mastery of as they head into high school and beyond. (Staff)

3.6 ★ 25 👤

Priorities for Parents/Guardians

Parent-School Partnership

- ★ Largest theme in Q1 (11.0% of stars)
- ★ Largest theme in Q3 (10.0% of stars)

This is the top theme in Q1 and Q3 for Parents/Guardians.

Parents/Guardians discussed their interest in having multiple avenues of communication with teachers. Some suggestions included longer parent-teacher conferences, consistent communication from schools and a strengthened and diverse PTO.

Establish a standard of ethical communication that includes respect for audience, full disclosure, transparency, and acknowledgement of mistakes.
Successful schools require collaboration between board, administrators, staff, and parents, and that requires trust.

4.1 ★ 43 👤

Support for Student Behavior

- ★ 2nd largest theme in Q1 (10.5% of stars)
- ★ 3rd largest theme in Q3 (6.5% of stars)

Parents/Guardians addressed an array of issues in this theme, including the need to hold students accountable for their behavior, and the importance of implementing positive behavior supports and leadership opportunities for students.

Encouraging respectful behavior to others. Makes environment more conducive to learning.

4.1 ★ 45 👤

Themes of Interest for Parents/Guardians

Homework

★ 4th largest theme in Q1 (5.8% of stars)

Parents/Guardians were concerned about the quantity of homework that students are assigned. They asked for workloads to be balanced and developmentally appropriate.

The quantity of homework assigned in middle school is overwhelming for students and parents. Homework should be a check on the skill, not a time for reteaching at home. Middle school students are juggling high school workloads and not being kids!

4.1 ★ 31 👤

21st Century Learning/STEM-STEAM

★ 11th theme in Q1 (3.2% of stars)

★ 15th theme in Q3 (2.8% of stars)

When combined into one theme, these topics related to future-readiness figured highly in the exchange for Parents/Guardians. They asked for more experiential learning as well as STEM/STEAM programming, such as coding, robotics and other technology-based electives for students.

A highly rigorous curriculum with lots of discovery based learning and STEAM. To prepare students for high school, college and careers.

4.1 ★ 30 👤

Priorities for Staff

Balanced Assessment

★ 2nd largest theme in Q3 (9.9% of stars)

This was a small theme in Q1, but emerged as the second largest theme in Q3 for Staff.

Staff value a balanced approach to assessments, and suggested that focusing on test scores and teaching to improve them would not be beneficial to students' overall learning.

Administering assessments does not mean we do not care about children or the whole child. We continue to find room for both. It is our current reality - accountability is here to stay. Finding ways to assess AND provide children with rich experiences is the key.

3.9 ★ 20 👤

Scheduling

★ 3rd largest theme in Q1 (8.3% of stars)

Staff discussed creating a standard bell schedule across grades, better organization of students' schedules, and the value of flexible scheduling.

Improve the schedule to be more consistent. Simplify! Continuity of classes, schedules, reporting, etc.

3.9 ★ 44 👤

Theme of Interest for Staff

Leadership and District Initiatives

★ 5th largest theme in Q1 (7.2% of stars)

Staff discussed the need to reduce the number of initiatives introduced in schools, and to focus on a few high-value initiatives.

Rankings should reflect priority as a district. We should put our efforts into the things we feel are important and cause the most change in our students for the efforts we put in.

3.6 ★ 31 👤

Key Takeaways

- / Consider implementing an increased focus on social emotional learning and the potential addition of an advisory period within the school day.
- / Participants are receptive to increased language arts instruction.
- / Review and update elective offerings in ways that support 21st century learning including more experiential, STEAM/STEM, and community involvement opportunities, while maintaining diverse and accessible options.
- / Continue or increase use of the team concept.
- / Increase opportunities for meaningful parent-school partnerships and promote awareness of this parent priority among staff.
- / Recognize teachers and staff for their great work.

The Thoughtexchange Process

Thoughtexchange provides software solutions that bring people together, build trust and make progress on important topics. People can confidentially and independently share their thoughts, appreciate other points of view and understand how their perspectives are connected to decisions.

A simple process ensures everyone is heard, everyone learns and important ideas emerge. The diagram on the right shows the three steps of the Thoughtexchange process. On the following pages, you can find the details of the questions asked and a summary of the findings.



Share answers to open ended questions



Add stars to thoughts shared by others



Discover what is important to the group