Tri-State Consortium Executive Summary of Focus Groups on the Hybrid Learning Model

Here are the main points that emerged from the focus groups. The sections that follow provide more context and specific detail.

1. Stakeholders value and support the District's health and safety precautions and perceive that, for the most part, they are working well during school hours.

2. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators express support, empathy, and appreciation for each other as they adapt to the uncertainties, pressures, and extra work that has come to pass.

3. Everyone believes that in-person instruction is going well. Indeed, many told us that the smaller class size has led to stronger student-teacher relationships and higher quality instruction. They want more of it. Some argue for expanding time available within the hybrid model; others want to return to full-time instruction.

4. Parents have less confidence in what happens when students are not in school. They express concerns about the organization and quality of asynchronous learning experiences and seek additional resources to help students learn at home.

5. Special education and virtual-only parents feel marginalized with respect to the District's planning, communication, and technology efforts.

6. Parents believe District level communication is overwhelming in volume and length. They want to get the information they need in a more succinct form.

7. Many parents distrust District communications because they do not explain WHY and HOW district leaders make particular decisions. They wonder what the long-term plan is.

8. While the majority of parents with whom we met advocate for more in-school instruction, the preponderance of teachers is concerned about bringing students back into school for longer periods of time both for health and safety and educational reasons.

9. Teachers perceive that District communications have been top-down in nature, reflecting a lack of a decision-making process that includes and values the voice of teachers and building administrators. They perceive that decisions are made in a reactive manner, often in response to parent pressure.
10. The Wednesday schedule has produced widely different perspectives. Many parents feel the day is a waste of potentially valuable time, and students find the ever-changing schedule confusing. Teachers, on the other hand, want and need the time for planning and preparation.

11. The recent plan for “cross-cohort streaming” seems problematic on several levels: the decision lacked meaningful teacher participation, communication about the plan was unclear, and the technology infrastructure is not in place to deliver a high-quality experience. Moreover, the approach undercuts the advantages of small cohort size and adds to a student workload that is already daunting.

12. Although current conditions are an improvement over the prolonged closure last spring, stresses on social and emotional health persist for all stakeholders. Some of the sources of stress include the students’ need for more social interaction, parents’ worries about their children falling behind, and teachers feeling the pressure of totally overhauling their curriculum and instruction without adequate time and training.