



thoughtexchange - results and insights



Introduction

In the spring of 2017, the Dobbs Ferry School District reached out to adults and students to start a conversation about areas where they can continue to improve and the times that they are at their best.

Participants were then invited to review and prioritize the thoughts of others by placing stars next to the ideas that were most important to them. This report highlights those priorities and considers areas where the thoughts expressed could inform the district's strategic plan as well as current and future student needs.

The Thoughtexchange Process

Thoughtexchange is a group discussion app for modern leaders who want to build relationships while making informed decisions. A simple process ensures everyone is heard, everyone learns and important ideas emerge.

Thoughtexchange can be used to engage groups of 5-50,000 people and patent-pending data analysis provides deep insights so customers can take actions that have support.

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

Adult Exchange Overview

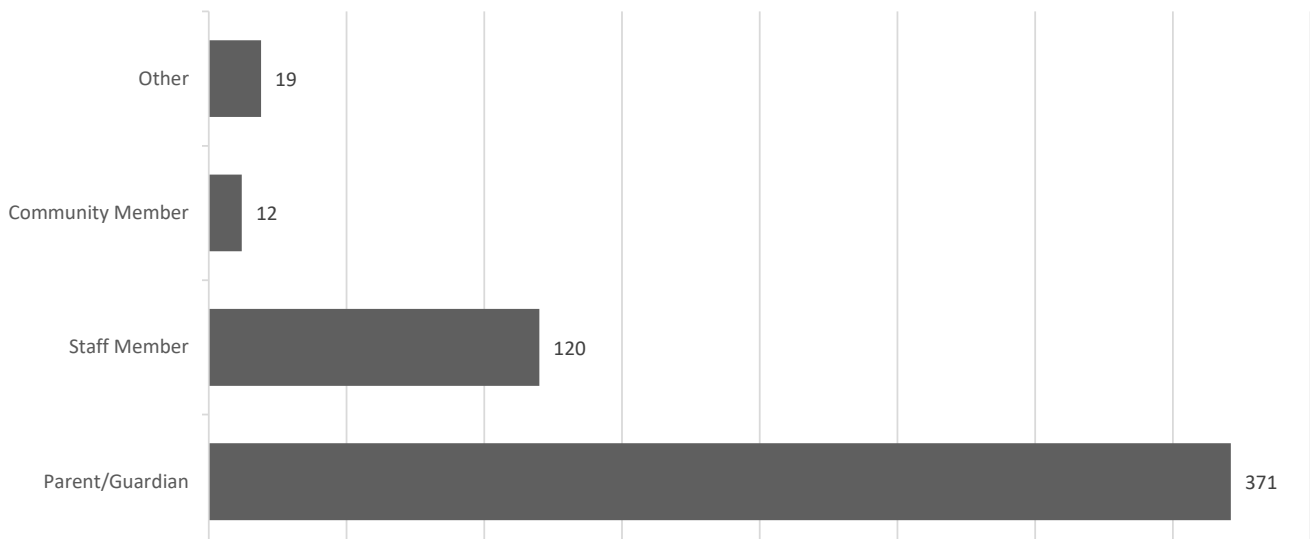
Participation

 522  1,469  42,051

Questions

- Q1** What are some of the best experiences students currently have at our school? Please share an example and describe why it is important.
- Q2** What are some things we could improve at your school?
- Q3** As we begin discussions on the future of our schools and district, what are some things we should consider?
- Q4** What questions do you have about our schools and district?

Demographics



Student Exchange Overview

Participation

 1,019  2,994  75,028

Questions

Q1

What are some of your best experiences at school? Describe why that is important to you.

Q2

What are some things we could improve at your school?

Q3

What are some things you would like to be able to do or experience that you currently do not?

Demographics

We invited students from grades 6 to 12 to share their thoughts and assign their stars.

Insights Overview

In two separate exchanges, adult and student participants shared their feedback. Student participants had very large conversations about just a few topics, whereas adult participants were interested in a wide variety of subjects and assigned stars accordingly.

Analysis was completed to determine participants' priorities. The analysis has been divided into the following sections:

- / Areas of Appreciation
- / Areas for Improvement
- / Considerations for the Future
- / Opportunities for Engagement



Areas of Appreciation

The adult and student exchanges did not prioritize any of the same areas of appreciation. In the adult exchange, participants showed appreciation for a wide variety of thoughts, while the students showed greater appreciation for a small selection of thoughts.

The analysis below is arranged into the following topics:

- / Areas of Appreciation - Comparison
- / Areas of Appreciation - Adult Exchange
- / Areas of Appreciation - Student Exchange

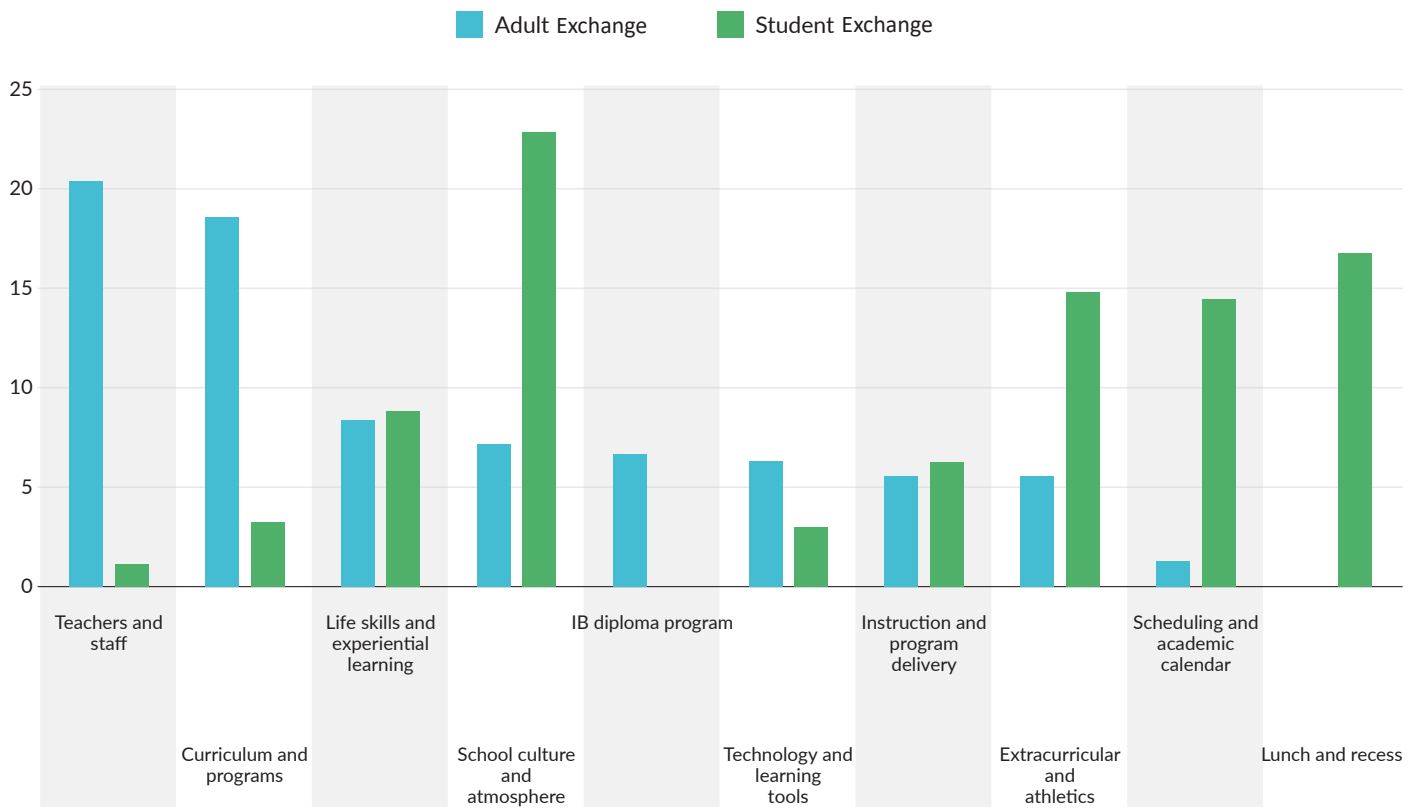
Areas of Appreciation - Comparison

The largest areas of appreciation varied across both exchanges.

- Adult exchange: **Teachers and staff, Curriculum and programs and Life skills and experiential learning.**
- Student exchange: **School culture and atmosphere, Lunch and recess and Extracurricular and athletics.**

Adult and Student Comparison

The chart below shows the percentage of stars assigned to each theme in the adult and student exchanges.



Areas of Appreciation - Adult Exchange

The themes on the following pages reflect the largest areas of appreciation in the adult exchange.

Teachers and Staff

★ Largest theme in Q1 - 20.41% of stars assigned

- Adult participants expressed appreciation for the interactions and connections between teachers and students as well as the quality of instruction, abundance of academic support and engaging material for all levels of learners.
- Participants from Springhurst Elementary School placed emphasis on this theme by assigning 28.6% of stars in Q1. They particularly appreciate the quality of instruction and lesson plans.

Caring and compassionate teachers.

Children need to be cared for at school as well as at home. A caring school environment makes a big difference in a child's desire to go to school, try their best, and work hard. Learning new things can be difficult enough, but with patient teachers guiding them, it makes a big difference.

63 ★ 19 👤

Curriculum and Programs

★ 2nd largest theme in Q1 - 18.59% of stars assigned

- Adult participants shared appreciations for the varied academic curriculum provided for students. Courses that participants particularly like include the Spanish language program, arts and music classes, science, technology, reading and literacy .
- Schools that assigned significantly more stars to this theme than other themes in Q1 include:
 - Dobbs Ferry School District - 29.3% of stars assigned in Q1
 - Springhurst Elementary School - 25.9% of stars assigned in Q1

Exposure to specials in addition to academics.

Students at the elementary level participate in art, music, PE, technology, and library in addition to their academics. At the upper elementary levels, students participate in chorus and can participate in band or orchestra as well. This provides for a more well-rounded student.

74 ★ 24 👤

Life Skills and Experiential Learning

★ 3rd largest theme in Q1 - 8.39% of stars assigned

- Adult participants expressed appreciation for the many opportunities for hands-on or experiential learning projects and the way they provide a different perspective and skillset outside of the textbook/classroom for students.

- Schools that assigned significantly more stars to this theme than other themes in Q1 include:

Springhurst Elementary School - 17.2% of stars assigned: Participants prioritized a conversation describing appreciation for the many opportunities that students have to access hands-on learning in the curriculum.

They value learning activities such as working in the school's community garden, raising chickens for animal biology, dance classes in the local community, and the outdoor classroom.

- Parents and guardians in the district appeared to care more about their students' access to experiential learning than the other demographic groups.

Parent/Guardian participants - 9.6% of stars assigned to this theme in Q1

Outdoor classroom/garden/composting.

The hands-on experience of working in the garden is, in my opinion, invaluable. The children learn so much - whether they are planting seeds, composting or digging up decomposers. They gain insight into the natural world, an appreciation of the food on their table, and see the cycle of life play out.

52 ★ 15 👤

Areas of Appreciation - Student Exchange

The themes on the following pages reflect the largest areas of appreciation in the student exchange.

School Culture and Atmosphere

★ Largest theme in Q1 - 22.87% of stars assigned

- Student participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to build and sustain friendships.

Hanging out with friends, getting good grades, having more freedom. The best experiences I have had, I would have with my friends. I love having classes with them and communicating and talking about academics and being able to get help with homework. The most important thing to me is getting good grades and excelling in high school.

51 ★ 15 👤

Lunch and Recess

★ 2nd largest theme in Q1 - 16.76% of stars assigned

- Student participants shared appreciation that they are able to leave campus during lunch breaks and access a wide variety of food in the local restaurants.
- Some students added that they appreciate the opportunity to spend time with friends or work on homework during lunch hour.

Some of my best experiences at school are during lunch and my free periods. This is the time when I get to relax and hang out with my friends. I take advantage of how we have an open campus at lunch and I try a bunch of new restaurants every day. This is also a great time for me to catch up on homework and get prepared for the rest of my school day.

58 ★ 16 👤

Extracurricular and Athletics

★ 3rd largest theme in Q1 - 14.82% of stars assigned

- Student participants commented that they enjoy participating in sports and extracurricular activities. They expressed their appreciation for events such as Mac Field Day and capture the flag.

Extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities such as sports are a great way for me to escape the stress of school. It is great to have a team supporting me and to become friends with new people who I may not have talked to otherwise. It is a fun way to represent the school.

44 ★ 14 👤



Areas for Improvement

Adult and student participants shared and prioritized different thoughts about what could be improved.

The analysis below is arranged into the following topics:

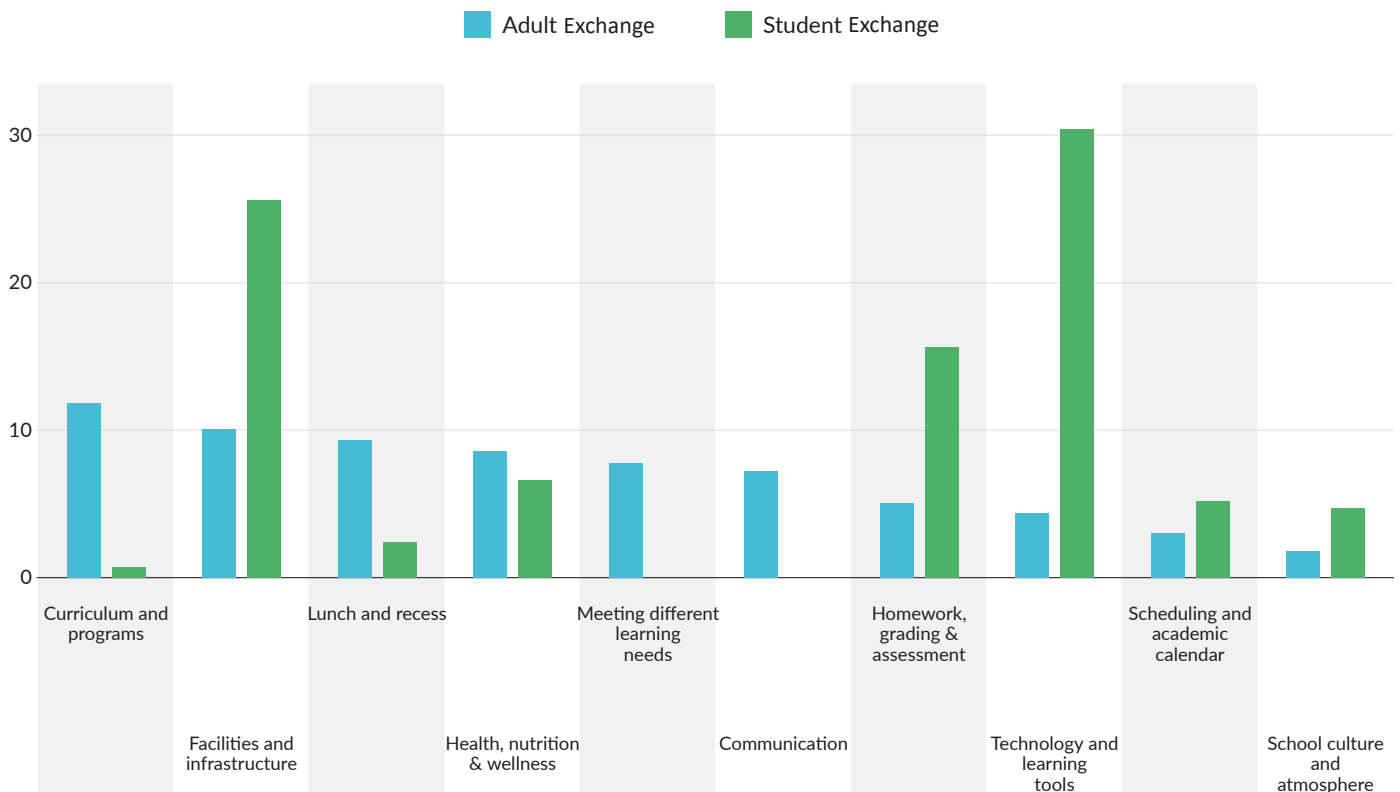
- / Areas for Improvement - Comparison
- / Areas for Improvement - Both Exchanges
- / Areas for Improvement - Adult Exchange
- / Areas for Improvement - Student Exchange

Areas for Improvement - Comparison

- Both groups prioritized **Facilities and infrastructure** as an area for improvement. Student participants focused on the HVAC system while adult participants discussed a variety of facilities that could be improved.
- Adult participants are concerned about **Curriculum and programs** and the scheduling of **Lunch and recess**.
- Students shared that **Technology and learning tools** and **Homework, grading and assessment**, particularly their homework load, are areas that could be improved.

Adult and Student Comparison

The chart below shows the percentage of stars assigned to each theme in the adult and student exchanges.



Areas for Improvement - Both Exchanges

Participants in both exchanges prioritized **Facilities and infrastructure** as an area for improvement.

Facilities and Infrastructure

- ★ 2nd largest theme in Q2 of the adult exchange - 10% of stars assigned
- ★ 2nd largest theme in Q2 of the student exchange - 25.6% of stars assigned

- Adult participants expressed concern about a variety of facilities-related issues. These include a lack of outdoor playground areas, addressing cleanliness and aging facility repairs, repairing the HVAC system, and improvements to common learning areas.
- Students discussed issues with the HVAC system unevenly distributing heat/air, making it very hot throughout the school during the summer. They were also concerned about the maintenance of washrooms and ongoing pest-control issues.

Facilities/air conditioning. I think it's ridiculous that installing air conditioning in the school was a lower priority than sports fields. It can be terribly hot in the early fall and late spring, and the building is far too hot, particularly for very young children.

46 ★ 13 👤

Air conditioning. It gets too hot in the school, especially on the third floor, in the summer and the heat is too much to handle. It makes learning harder because no one is focused. It's almost too hot to think.

54 ★ 15 👤

Areas for Improvement - Adult Exchange

Adult participants prioritized **Curriculum and programs** and **Lunch and recess** as areas for improvement.

Curriculum and Programs

★ Largest theme in Q2 - 11.8% of stars assigned

- Adult participants expressed a variety of concerns about the curriculum and their thoughts focus mainly on how to improve specific subject areas or questions as to why the curriculum is structured as it is. The top subject areas in focus are English, math and science.

Comprehensive math/science curriculum.

I wish that after-school math programming were implemented and that the math curriculum slowed down so that all students could fully understand concepts. Also had hoped that the science curriculum was more comprehensive, hands-on and more frequent for the younger grades.

40 ★ 13 👤

Lunch and Recess

★ 3rd largest theme in Q2 - 9.4% of stars assigned

- Adult participants expressed concerns that students do not get enough recess time and breaks during the day for physical activity. They suggested that the inclement weather in the winter is not a sufficient reason to keep the students indoors for long periods of time.
- The only school in which **Lunch and recess** is a priority is Springhurst Elementary School.

Play/recess. Kids need recess. Kids need play. Kids need movement, unstructured time, and downtime. It is important. It is essential. It helps them learn, regulate, and socialize. I fear this time is too often eroded - not only by academics, but by adult-led recess games, or unsuitable alternatives in bad weather.

59 ★ 15 👤

Areas for Improvement - Student Exchange

Student participants prioritized **Technology and learning tools** and **Homework, grading and assessment** as areas for improvement.

Technology and Learning Tools

★ Largest theme in Q2 - 30.4% of stars assigned

- Some students expressed frustration with the slow speed of the Wi-Fi connection and not being able to access websites (e.g. YouTube) that are blocked by the security settings.

The Wi-Fi. The Wi-Fi is terrible and it needs to have less things blocked on it.

54 ★ 13 👤

Homework, Grading and Assessment

★ 3rd largest theme in Q2 - 15.7% of stars assigned

- Students would like less homework. They expressed concerns that homework assignments along with commitments to sports and other extracurricular activities make them feel overscheduled.

Less homework. I am constantly bombarded and overwhelmed with homework. The teachers do not understand that I have other obligations in my life besides school and it is redundant to assign copious amounts of homework.

53 ★ 14 👤



Considerations for the Future

Adult and student participants shared and prioritized thoughts from similar themes when suggesting future considerations for the district.

The analysis below is arranged into the following topics:

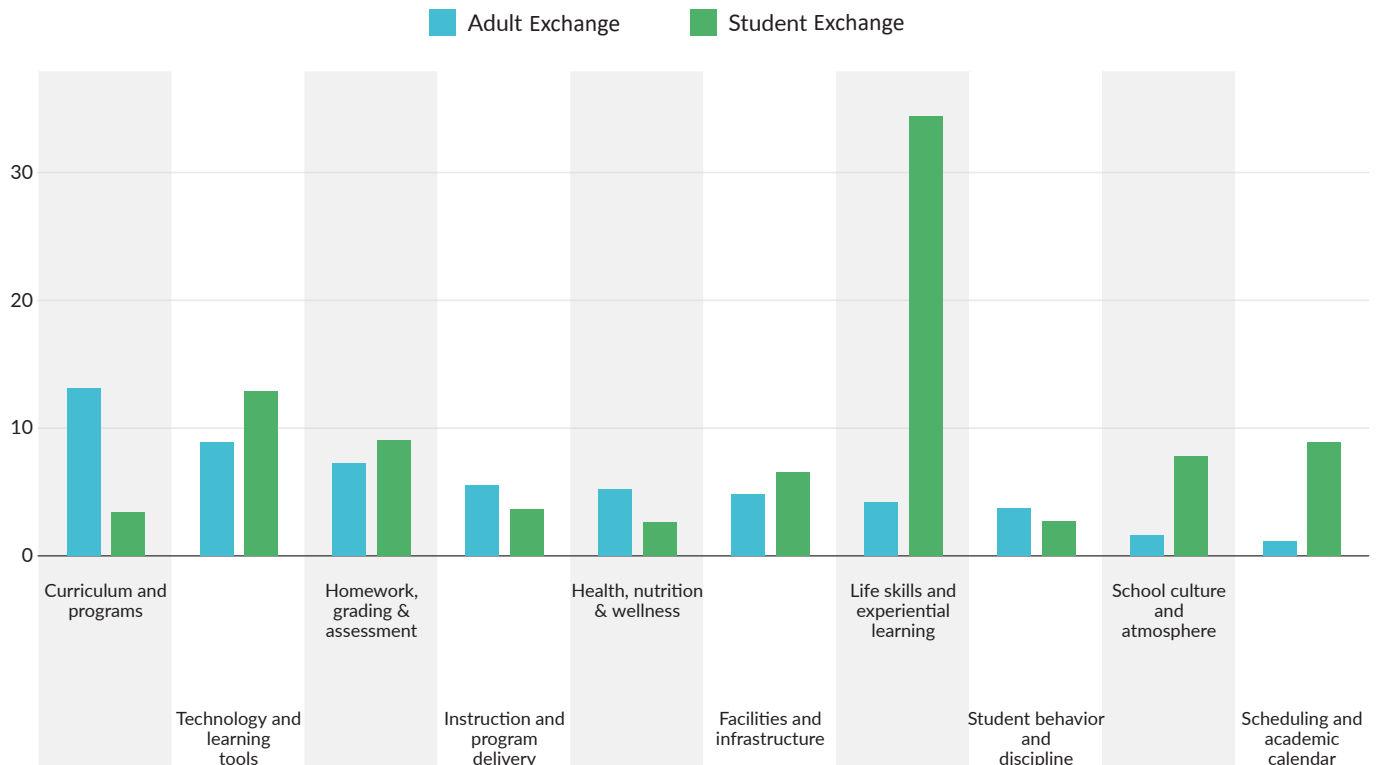
- / Considerations for the Future - Comparison
- / Considerations for the Future - Both Exchanges
- / Considerations for the Future - Adult Exchange
- / Considerations for the Future - Student Exchange

Considerations for the Future - Comparison

Both adult and student participants prioritized conversations about **Technology and learning tools** and **Homework, grading and assessment**; however, the content of thoughts shared in the different exchanges greatly differed.

Adult and Student Comparison

The chart below shows the percentage of stars assigned to each theme in the adult and student exchanges.



Considerations for the Future - Both Exchanges

Participants in both exchanges prioritized **Technology and learning tools** and **Homework, grading and assessment** as areas requiring consideration for the future.

Technology and Learning Tools

- ★ 2nd largest theme in Q3 of the adult exchange - 8.9% of stars assigned
- ★ 2nd largest theme in Q3 of the student exchange - 12.9% of stars assigned

- Adult participants discussed a range of topics. Some of the top thoughts indicate that participants are concerned about the impact that increased technology use is having on student development both socially and mentally. They would like technology use to be limited to learning activities that require it or are strengthened by the use of technology.
- Some students commented that they would like to access more websites, and for the Wi-Fi to be improved.

Screens cannot be defeated. But, they can be delayed. Please limit screen time as much as possible. Most Springhurst kids will work on screens their whole lives. Give them childhood memories of something else!

63 ★ 20 👤

Homework, Grading and Assessment

- ★ 3rd largest theme in Q3 of the adult exchange - 7.2% of stars assigned
- ★ 3rd largest theme in Q3 of the student exchange - 9% of stars assigned

- Adult participants shared thoughts that suggested not teaching to the test as much. Some participants also indicated that they think some homework is not beneficial to students. They would prefer for teachers to use their discretion when choosing the amount and type of work that needs to be done, as well as making sure it is meaningful to the students' understanding.
- Students requested that less homework be assigned.
- By assigning fewer stars, Gr. 10, 11 and 12 participants indicated this topic is of less importance to them than it is to participants in younger grades.

Less homework. One thing I would like to experience is less homework because I feel that sometimes you're given too much homework and it's a lot being put on your hands.

89 ★ 21 👤

Considerations for the Future - Adult Exchange

Adult participants prioritized **Curriculum and programs** as a topic requiring consideration for the future.

Curriculum and Programs

★ Largest theme in Q3 - 13.1% of stars assigned

- Adult participants discussed their interest in the district introducing more **Curriculum and programs** that focus on a variety of areas. Suggestions include:

STEM programs

Language classes

Music and arts programming

Keyboarding

Language. I am delighted that my daughter will start getting daily Spanish instruction starting next year, when she is in 2nd grade. I would be happy if this instruction started even earlier, in kindergarten, even if it consisted of reading one book a day in Spanish or something along those lines.

82 ★ 25 👤

Considerations for the Future - Student Exchange

Student participants prioritized **Life skills and experiential learning** as a topic requiring consideration for the future.

Life Skills and Experiential Learning

★ Largest theme in Q3 - 34.4% of stars assigned

- Students discussed their interest in going on more field trips.

More field trips. I think that exposing students to more culturally diverse places or historical places is very important because it allows us to appreciate more of the places and things we see in the future. It also gives us a better understanding of how the rest of the world works.

92 ★ 22 👤



Opportunities for Engagement

The most highly rated questions asked by participants in Q4 are listed below and offer an opportunity for the district to engage with the community. Specific topics that emerged from the top questions were focused on:

- addressing facility upgrades to meet future population growth or current overcrowding needs
- providing a curriculum that focuses on critical thinking and character development
- smaller classroom sizes and expanding schools to meet larger capacity
- a curriculum that focuses on a skillset that addresses the current political climate, such as respect for diversity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement

Top Questions From Q4

Small class. How can we continue to keep class sizes small? The children benefit from a smaller class.

245 ★ 65 👤

How do we challenge students to become creative thinkers and work together?

Students need to work collaboratively in order to be successful as adults.

195 ★ 61 👤

How do we teach children to be independent thinkers and problem solvers? I feel like many children have limited capabilities to problem-solve, whether in a social situation or in school. This is important throughout life and it needs to be addressed early on.

220 ★ 62 👤

Why does Springhurst have so much indoor recess? So disappointing! And so against all research about what kids need. Springhurst is very behind compared to other districts on promoting outdoor recess. What is holding us back? Is it the faculty? The playground itself? Change it!

191 ★ 55 👤

Respect for diversity. Given our current national context, how can Springhurst best promote celebration of diversity and create an emotionally safe and secure place for children that are in vulnerable situations, such as children who come from immigrant families that may not be documented?

161 ★ 49 👤

Will there be dramatic expansion to meet the local housing “boom”? Dozens if not hundreds of new units of housing in Dobbs Ferry have recently been or are currently in the process of being created, and many if not most of these will house families. Will we expand our schools to meet what will be dramatically increased numbers, or just default to bigger classes?

166 ★ 50 👤