

FIRST BI-ANNUAL COMMUNITY REPORT CARD
RE: NEW LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS THAT WORK FOR US

PARENT & CAREGIVER VERSION

2019 - 2020

 STEP
UP
NEW
LONDON



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

Step Up New London (SUNL) is committed to supporting the voice, power, and actions of community members while strengthening a local movement for change. In 2019, as a continuation of this commitment, SUNL initiated a study to validate the experiences of members within the New London community in order to assist decision-makers with understanding its schools' climate. This study was concentrated on the community's most marginalized demographic; Black and Brown people. Historically, they are often denied safe spaces to express their concerns and experiences and are not given the adequate opportunity and attention to have them addressed by those in power. This report, "The First Annual Report Regarding New London Public Schools", will focus mostly on accountability; the area participants identified as most in need of improvement. A brief overview of the other top areas of improvement and themes listed below are included in this report. Detailed issues, solutions, and non-identifiable quotes are available upon request.

SCOPE

The scope of the study was limited to predominately marginalized parents and guardians of children within the NLPS system. However, students, alumni, teachers, staff, and community partners were also included in an effort to establish a more complete analysis. The study included an extensive extant data review of existing manuals, handbooks, and other materials, results of a survey launched by SUNL, and 89 in-depth interviews. In doing so, SUNL was able to identify key areas needing improvement as well as provide recommended solutions. This resulted in the NLPS 2019-2020 Community Report Card.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT	THEMES IDENTIFIED
1. ACCOUNTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PUNITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE• RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT• COMMUNICATION• 504/IEP STUDENT
2. TEACHING & LEARNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PARENT INVOLVEMENT• ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT• CURRICULUM• TEACHER BIAS
3. REALATIONSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DISCRIMINATION• CULTURAL EQUITY AND REPRESENTATION• LACK OF TRUST• RETALIATION
4. RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PROGRAMS• PERSONNEL• TIME• INFRASTRUCTURE

STEP UP NEW LONDON BACKGROUND



SUNL emerged out of an education restorative justice campaign in 2017 as a platform for organizing centered on Black and Brown mothers and caregivers. Our organization is founded and centered around community voices, specifically those who are most impacted by systemic inequity. We consist of staff, volunteers, and members whose lived experiences are what guide our mission, values, and goals. We are focused on creating a space that is led and developed by Black and Brown folks, womxn and non-binary folks, and others who may not always have a space to share their experience in a real and supported way.

We want an anti-racist, equitable, and just education system that nurtures a sense of belonging and ability to thrive. Because of systemic racism, Black and Brown children and families in our community are not achieving the same rates of success as their white counterparts. Our school system is faced with critical issues around funding, truancy, suspensions, dropout rates, transient populations, and low academic performance- all rooted in various forms of oppression and systemic in-equity. Students and parents experience this through punitive discipline policies, lack of representation in curriculum and in teaching staff, lack of mental health support, challenges accessing 504 accommodations and special education services, and more.

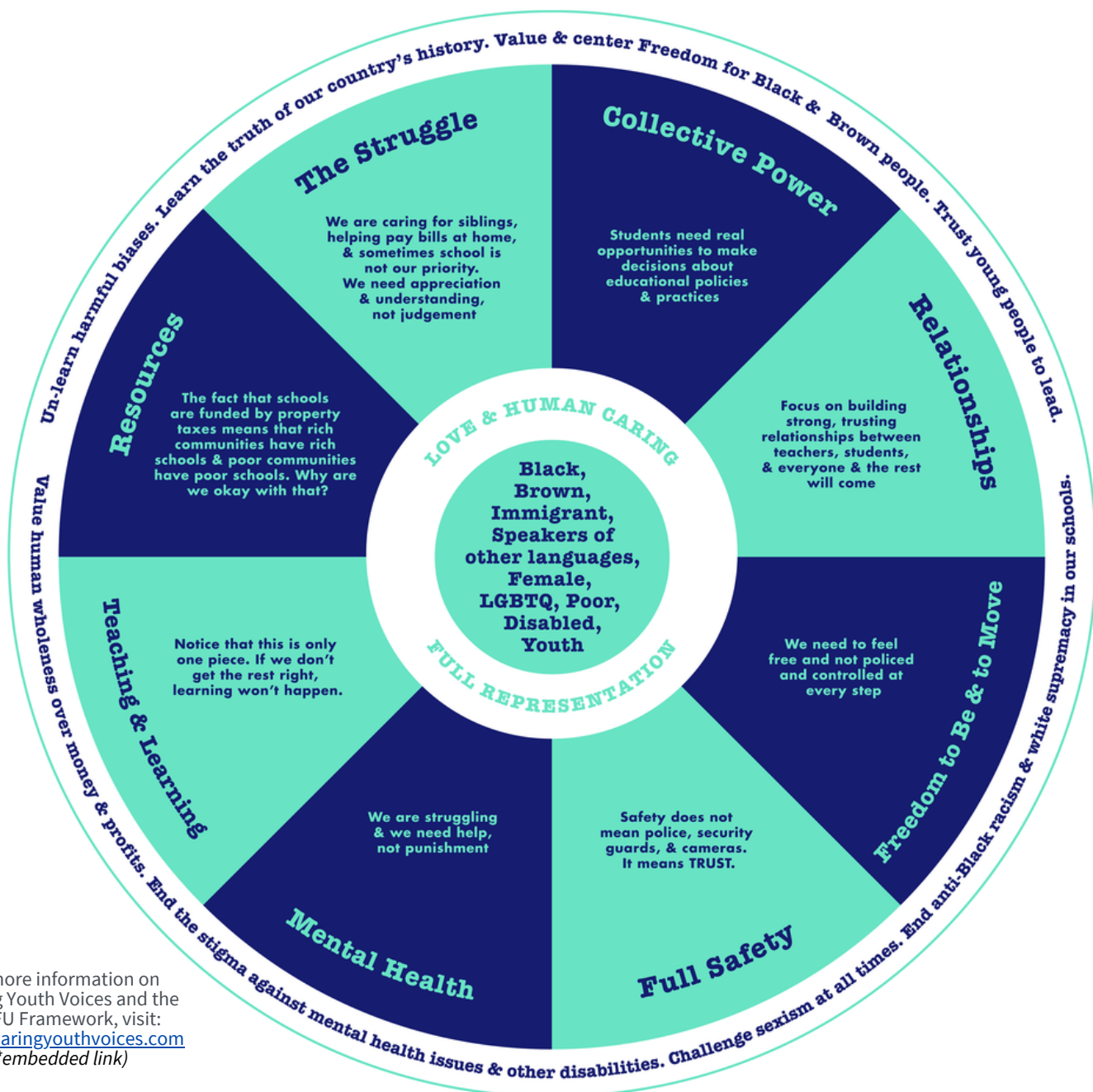
We plan to influence system change through supporting civic involvement of our members and constituents, influencing policies and practices impacting youth and families, offering various workshops addressing education, organizing, system change, and building a strong base of anti-racist parents and caregivers. SUNL also has an ongoing commitment to support intergenerational movements. We are constantly learning how to support youth-led efforts while doing parent-led work. As parents and caregivers, we are our children's most effective advocates and organizing helps us to build a strong base of people to drive our campaigns forward. Together, we can direct our collective power to win improvements in our children and families lives.



SCHOOLS THAT WORK FOR US FRAMEWORK

In 2019, SUNL began developing a campaign pertaining to public education. A community-based study was launched to help identify pressing issues that parents and caregivers face within NLPs. It was quickly realized that a framework called "Schools That Work For Us" (STWFO) greatly aligned with the experiences of parents and caregivers. This framework was created by a local partner organization named Hearing Youth Voices (HYV) as the result of 6 years of youth-led research and data collection. It is a comprehensive framework that includes 8 themes impacting students, and was released in 2018.

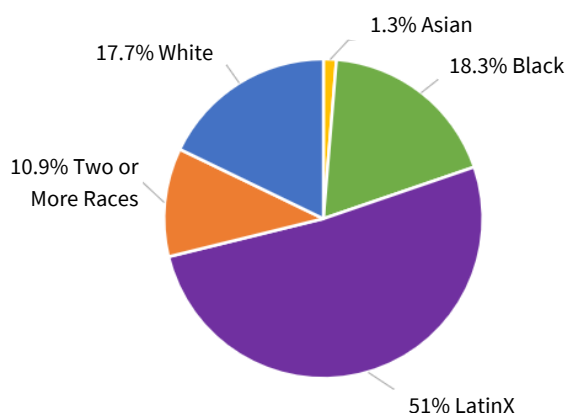
With permission from HYV, SUNL is working towards bringing the experiences of Black and Brown parents and caregivers into this framework. We discovered that in addition to the 8 themes, accountability was an emerging issue. Upon bringing these findings to HYV, they agreed that we should include it as the 9th theme; recognizing that accountability is fundamental to the STWFO framework.



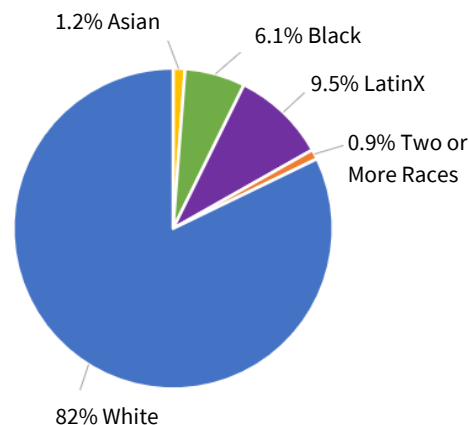
New London Public Schools Overview (2018-19)

In the 2019-20 school year, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems world-wide and NLPS cancelled all in-person classes and switched to fully remote instruction in mid-march for the remainder of the school year. In order to capture the most recent complete and reflective information on NLPS's district performance, we chose to focus on the information provided from [Connecticut's State Department of Education District Performance and Profile Report for School Year 2018-19](http://edsight.ct.gov) (*embedded link). To find more information, please visit: <http://edsight.ct.gov>.

STUDENTS



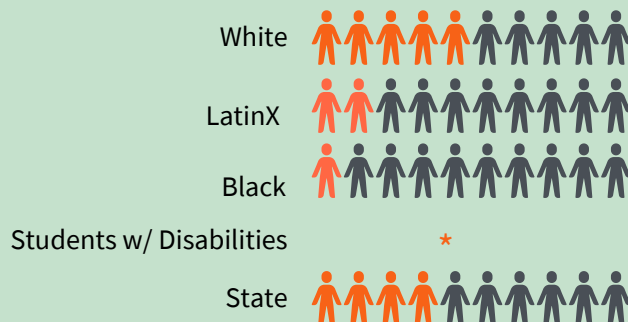
EDUCATORS



SUSPENSION/EXPULSION RATE (%)

Black	12.4%
LatinX	9%
White	*
Students w/ Disabilities	12.3%
District	8.5%
State	6.5%

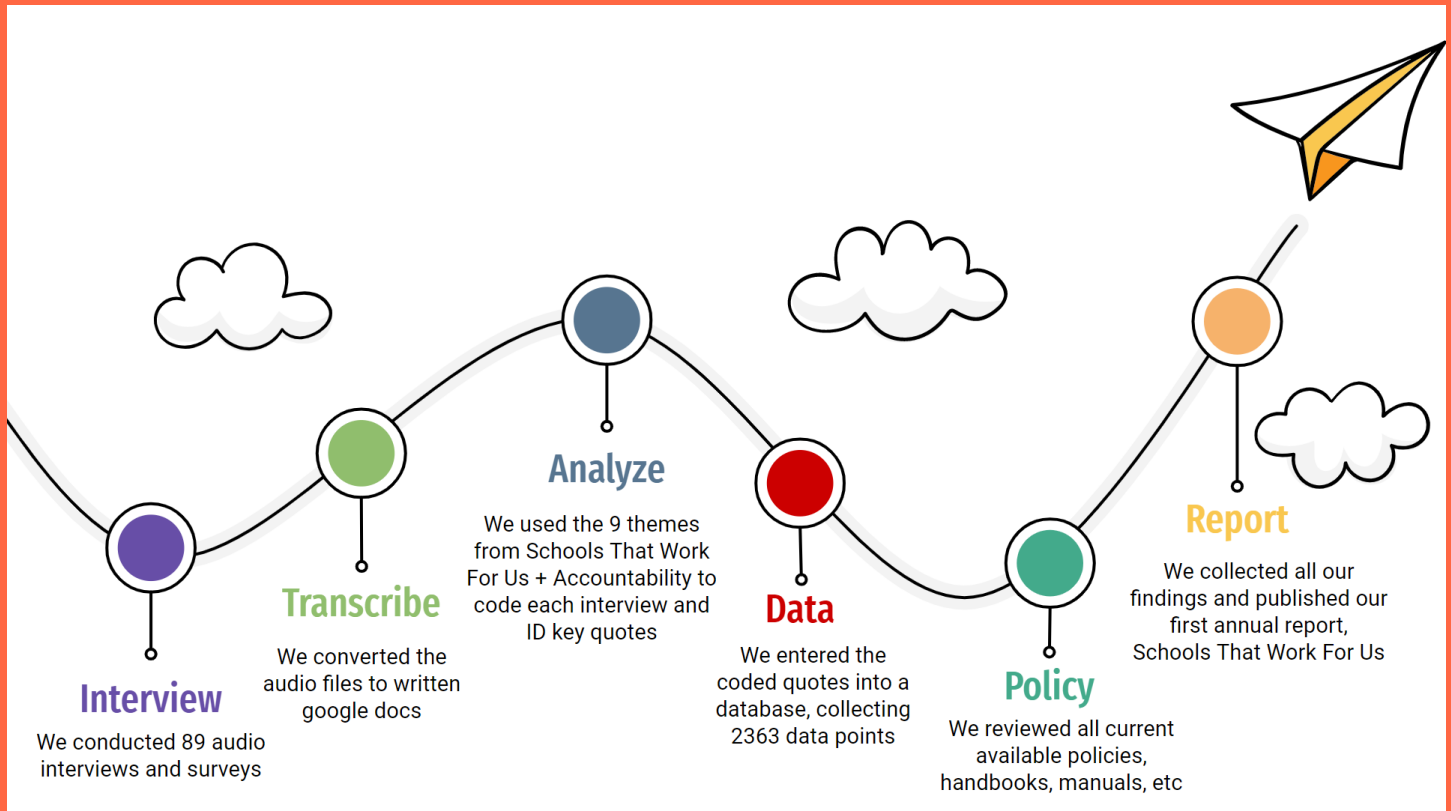
11th and 12th Graders Meeting Benchmark on at Least One College Readiness Exam



Numbers rounded to the nearest 10th

- Race/Ethnicity Representation for students does not include American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander because the information was suppressed. See note on asterisk (*) usage. Race/Ethnicity Representation for educators does not include American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander because they were 0%.
- When an asterisk is displayed, data has been suppressed to safeguard student confidentiality, or to ensure that statistics based on a very small sample size are not interpreted as equally representative as those based on a sufficiently larger sample size.

COMMUNITY STUDY OVERVIEW



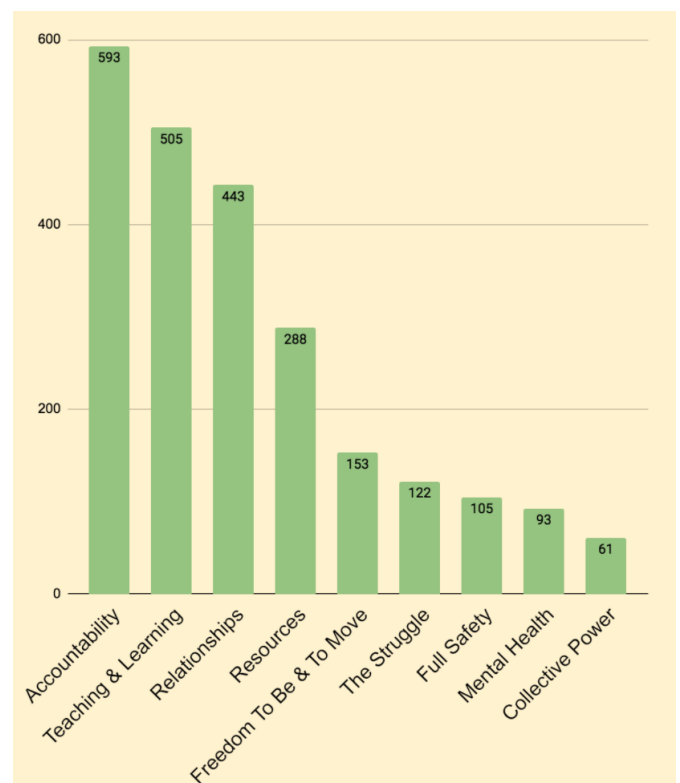
METHODOLOGY

To capture qualitative information, SUNL conducted and recorded 89 audio interviews and uploaded the files. They were converted into written google documents using a transcription software. The transcribed and recorded interviews were then compared for accuracy and completeness.

Next, each interview was read line-by-line in order to code them, using the 9 themes from the STWFO framework. Coding data is a process in qualitative research of categorizing information based on themes, phrases, and key words. We utilized a double coding approach for each interview to improve reliability. Two coders were responsible for coding a transcript and then meeting to compare results and reach consensus. This process ensured accuracy as the information was not drawn from a single source or individual. Finally, each coded piece of data was entered in the form of direct quotes into a database, where further analysis took place. In the end, there were 2,363 data points. Once the data was sorted by themes, the analysis team discovered that accountability was the most recurring topic, followed by Teaching and Learning, Relationships, and Resources.

Each theme was analyzed in order to collect an in-depth list of issues and solutions discussed by the participants. Lastly, we (or the analysis team) conducted an extensive extant data review of existing manuals, handbooks, and other material to identify possible improvements to be included into policies, practices, and procedures

RESULTS

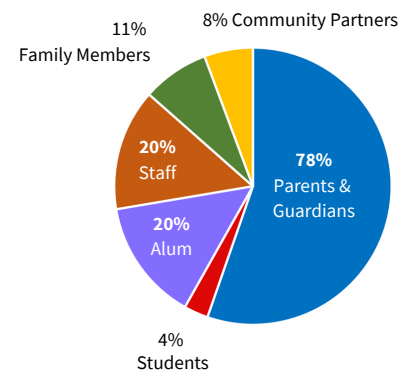
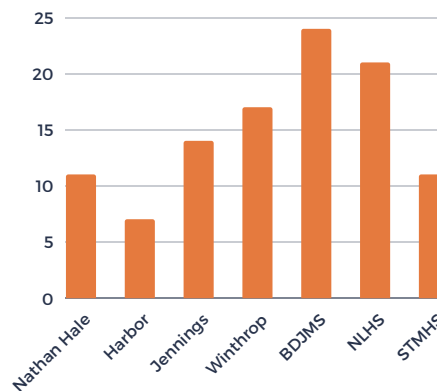
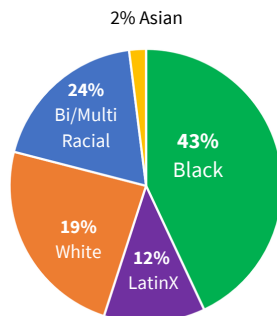


NEW LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2019-2020 COMMUNITY REPORT CARD

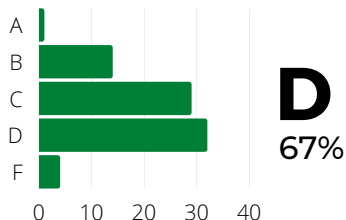


We understand that the grading system is flawed and that student performance can't always be accurately captured with the way it is measured now. However, what would it look like if we graded the school system similar to the way they grade our children? This is not to attack individuals working within NLPS, but rather, it is an assessment of the NLPS system. We know there are many great people in our school system, and we know there is still a need for improvement. In the survey, we asked the people we interviewed questions rated on a scale of "very satisfied" to "very unsatisfied." Through the interviews, we were able to understand why people responded the way they did. Of the people we interviewed, 90% are local residents, 80% struggle to make ends meet, and 42.5% of parents have children with 504 and IEP's. We also thought it was important to note that in community representation, there is some overlap. Meaning, we interviewed parents who are also staff or community partners. We also interviewed parents who had multiple children who attended different schools in the district.

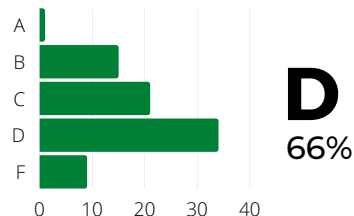


SURVEY RESULTS:

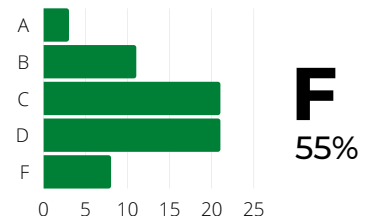
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS IN NEW LONDON? (WAYS STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH LEARNING, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM, LIFE SKILLS, CAREER READINESS, SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES)



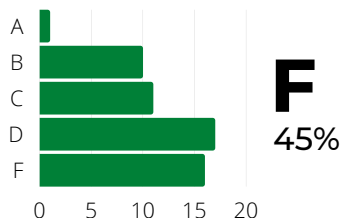
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NEW LONDON? (THE WAY THINGS RUN: SCHOOL FUNDING, TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION, ADMINISTRATION, FACILITIES, SCHOOL MEALS, ETC.)



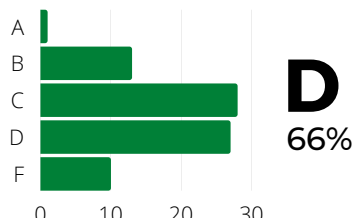
IF YOUR CHILD IS STRUGGLING WITH LEARNING, HOW PLEASED ARE YOU WITH THE SCHOOLS INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS?



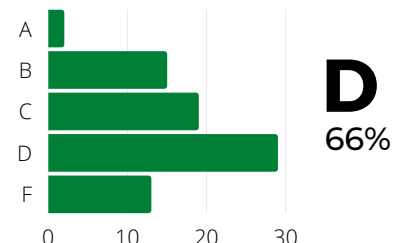
IF YOUR CHILD HAS STRUGGLED WITH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE WAY IT WAS HANDLED?



HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE LEVEL OF SAFETY (PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, CULTURAL) IN NEW LONDON SCHOOLS?



HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE LEVEL OF ACCOUNTABILITY AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?



METRICS

A - Very Satisfied, B - Satisfied, C - Neutral, D - Unsatisfied, F - Very Unsatisfied
A - 100, B - 80, C - 70, D - 60, F - 50



ACCOUNTABILITY

"I'M NOT SATISFIED AT ALL WITH THE LEVEL OF ACCOUNTABILITY. THEY DON'T TAKE BLAME. THEY TRY ANYTHING TO PUSH IT OFF ON THIS PERSON, THAT PERSON, IT WASN'T MY FAULT. IT WASN'T THE NEW LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS."

DEFINITION

An ongoing, fluid process of the school system and individuals being responsible to parents, students, and staff, especially those who are the most marginalized- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). This includes individuals in the school system honoring their responsibility to act, and the responsibility of the system to meet the needs of anyone who has been harmed. An example would be a parent informing the school about their child being attacked and being disciplined even though they were the victim, and the school brushing the parent off. Another example would be a teacher doing the bare minimum after PPT/504/IEP meetings, and not following through on the plans created at those meetings.



WE HEARD PARTICIPANTS TALK ABOUT THESE FOUR THEMES WITHIN ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Punitive School Discipline
- Responsibility to Act
- Communication
- 504/IEP Students

"HOW DO WE BUILD OUR OWN INFRASTRUCTURE THAT ENABLES ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENABLES PARENTS AND STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO BE IN POSITIONS, I DON'T WANT TO SAY OF AUTHORITY, BUT IN REAL DECISION-MAKING ROLES?"

ACCOUNTABILITY

PUNITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

"As a Black girl, especially when I was in middle school, I noticed that when I did something wrong, I was most likely to get reported to authorities or have a phone call to my parents way more than white kids doing similar things if not worse."

IN NLPS, SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DOES NOT FOLLOW CONSISTENT RESTORATIVE PRACTICE GUIDELINES, WHERE THROUGH PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND DECISION-MAKING, HARM REDUCTION IS ACHIEVED THROUGH PROMOTING INCLUSIVENESS, RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING. THE CURRENT SYSTEM STIFLES PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND DOES NOT PROTECT STUDENTS OR PARENTS FROM THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, POLICE, OR DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (DCF) INTIMIDATION. THE FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA) IS THE DEFAULT REASON WHY SCHOOLS DON'T INITIATE THE INVITATION OR INVOLVE PARENTS, HOWEVER FERPA GIVES PARENTS THE RIGHT OF CHOICE. OUTLINING PARENT AND STUDENT RIGHTS WITHIN STUDENT DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES AND FULL RESTORATIVE PRACTICES WILL EMPOWER PARENTS AND STUDENTS WITHIN NLPS NETWORKS.

ISSUES:

- Stricter discipline practices are disproportionately impacting students based on race, gender and special needs, i.e., one student is disciplined, the other student isn't or less harshly disciplined; you can get away with it one day and not the next; cell phone and dress code policy, etc.
- Age appropriate behavior and behavior associated with children's special needs is being mishandled, and practices to address and support regulation, such as allowing students to take a break/walk, etc., are having to be written/protected in 504 and IEP's instead of being regularly accessible throughout the school.
- Excessive punitive discipline policies and practices: instances such as SRO's/NLPD coming into the school and taking mugshots, questioning students without parent consent or a parent present, making arrests in and out of school; suspensions for minor offenses; physical restraining; threatening DCF involvement; punishment during lunch/recess; use of physical intimidation and abuse (yelling directly in students faces, pushing/pulling, pinching, squeezing, towering over or blocking reasonable movements, overcrowding, etc.); teachers disciplining to prove a point of control; schools not referring students to JRB and pushing students through the criminal justice system without the opportunity to redirect or address the issue.
- Lack of staff for adequate supervision of students, lack of training for de-escalation .
- Restorative Practices is not consistently or effectively utilized and approached as a last resort instead of the first option.
- Discipline policies and practices prevent getting at root causes. Students are not able to access opportunities and resources, such as guidance counselors or school psychologists, to address issues such as students are not happy in the pathway they are in, need to change classes, bullying, depression, etc. This results in repeated disciplinary actions.
- Bullying incidents are mishandled or neglected, resulting in escalation of the bullying. In some cases, bullies following students off of school grounds, leading to taunting or physical altercations, leaving some parents to seek police/legal action. Responses to physical altercations between students is biased. Students are disciplined for physically protecting themselves. Schools are not fully supporting both/all parties involved, the student who caused harm is seen as the bad one and are not given the support they need, instead they are isolated/ostracized.

"They told me that they did a circle, and my son told me that they sat down with him and the student, which if we're talking about restorative practice...no, that's not what that was...Mediation, that is what they are doing, mediation. They are not bad, they are good, but...they are not restorative."

SOLUTIONS:

- **Mandatory anti-racism training** for professional development, and accountability standards that are written into performance reviews.
- **Explicitly write and implement Restorative Practices into school discipline policies and procedures.** Properly inform and empower families through training and other modes of communications, outline parent and student rights within student discipline and ensure parents are fully informed on Restorative Practices, how it is implemented with fidelity, and give them the opportunity to engage in the process. Build capacity within the school network (including students, parents, teachers, and administrators). Hire an outside agency to work in partnership with NLPS to ensure people have access to non-biased facilitators, and increase support of the Wellness Team so they are able to implement a sustainable strategic plan.
- **Hire Black and Brown teachers and school personnel** and fully support the completion of the paraprofessional to certified teacher pathway.
- **Hire staff that handle "emergency response" situations** related to behavioral, emotional, or bullying issues, that are trained in de-escalation, restorative practices, and have a background in mental health. These should be personnel who students can build relationships with and trust. They should not be school administrators, police, disciplinary staff, school psychologists, or counselors (especially those who are white and not from New London).
- **Allow parents into schools and into the classrooms.**
- **Revise the disciplinary policy and procedures** to include restorative practices, the use of the JRB, and provide distance learning options for students who are suspended.

"To me, it's such a very shining example of racism and discrimination and the way that students of color are monitored and controlled every step of the way through their education."

ACCOUNTABILITY

COMMUNICATION

"We have to be walking the walk on restorative practices and being an anti-racist and trauma-responsive system. It's not enough to be receptive and responsive to individual complaints. The system has to look different."

IN THE NLPS SYSTEM, THERE IS AN ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, STAFF, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS. THE DIRECT LINE OF COMMUNICATION IS BROKEN BETWEEN PARENTS AND STAFF. DECISIONS MADE FROM CENTRAL OFFICE CAUSE A LOT OF BARRIERS AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES SUCH AS INCONSISTENT AND CONFUSING PARENT COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS AND UNBALANCED CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS FOR CERTIFIED AND NON-CERTIFIED STAFF. ADDITIONALLY, PARENTS AND STUDENTS HAVE EXPRESSED THEY ARE NOT A PART OF DECISION MAKING, AND THAT ADMINISTRATION IS DISCONNECTED. FOR EXAMPLE, ADMINISTRATORS DO NOT CONTINUOUSLY ENGAGE WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY WHEN MAKING DECISIONS THAT HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT. PARENTS DESERVE A CLEAR STUDENT AND PARENT ADVOCACY OUTLINE, ACCESS TO FORMAL MEETINGS WITH ADMINISTRATORS, TRANSPARENCY IN DECISION-MAKING, AND A CLEAR CHAIN OF COMMAND.

ISSUES:

- Students are not able to approach teachers for help during class, personal issues, or conflicts with other students. They are being treated as a nuisance, excluded from communication and involvement regarding discipline, school level decision-making, and open discussions about events/consequences leading to the removal of staff when addressing overt racism and sexism.
- Schools prevent effective resolutions when excluding parents during meetings with students in restorative practices.
- School personnel disregard parent advice on handling difficult situations; more so with students with special needs, leading to escalation, students shutting down, inappropriate discipline, etc.
- Teachers don't consistently communicate academic information or resources to parents. PowerSchool was identified for not being a sufficient platform for parents to understand academic progress and needs.
- Personnel are inconsistent with communicating pertinent information regarding behavioral challenges and disciplinary action. Transparency is only given by the student or during parent-teacher conferences, PPT, 504, and IEP meetings. In cases of emergencies, or "incidents", the school omits certain information that parents should be made aware of; including but not limited to staffing misconduct and abuse.
- The lack of transparency in the school's communication, chain of command, and complaint/grievances process is creating confusion and frustration. In addition, parents are pushed to express themselves "emotionally/aggressively" as they are not taken seriously due to the unfair and damaging perception/treatment towards "helicopter" parents.
- Complaints or concerns expressed verbally or through email are not being acknowledged as "formal", delaying resolution in a timely manner.
- Separated co-parents who have expressed wanting to be involved do not receive the same level of communications from school regarding discipline, academics, and decision-making.

SOLUTIONS:

- **Students should be a part of conversations and decisions happening.** There should be robust student leadership systems in a formalized way and there should be multiple ways in which they can share their reflections.
- **Parents should have platforms and formal opportunities to meet collectively** and have the ability to create the agenda, support each other, and address complaints/concerns while being a part of problem solving, decision-making and policy creation/revision.
- **Clarify the standard guidelines around parent involvement and the complaint system.** Make it clear that the faculty and staff are going to be held to it and what the repercussions are for that.
- **Close line of communication:** what happened/decision was made as a result of the complaint or issue and whether it needs to go another level. Give timeframes and punctual responses.
- **Parent teacher conferences** that give more than 10-15 minutes, are private, and allow time with the teacher.
- **Utilize apps/platforms for direct/instant communications** similar to text vs email for teachers/parents. Preferred methods of communication varied and a survey of preferred platforms/methods from parents should be completed. Some parent's referenced the benefits of the Dojo app and text-like capabilities. In addition, parents need to be given a calendar and push notifications of dates for BOE and school-related decisions making meetings on a platform other than the website.

ACCOUNTABILITY

RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT

"They don't ever actually say sorry. They don't ever say, 'we did something wrong and we're going to fix it'. I think this is systematic and it's not so much about the individuals but there's a real unwillingness to admit when you're wrong. And that's really frustrating."

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT INCLUDES BOTH OWNING RESPONSIBILITY WHILE ALSO TAKING APPROPRIATE ACTION. THE GRIEVANCE PROCESS TO RESOLVE INCIDENTS, COMPLAINTS, AND CONCERNS IS LOST IN BUREAUCRATIC AND CONTRACTUAL LOOPHOLES. RETALIATION IS ALSO AN EXPRESSED CONCERN OF STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND STAFF AS A WHOLE. PARENTS ARE DISCOURAGED AND PREVENTED FROM ORGANIZING AND MEETING COLLECTIVELY WITH SCHOOL OFFICIALS TO ADDRESS ISSUES. ABSOLUTE OVERSIGHT BY THE ADMINISTRATION DOES NOT ALLOW AUTONOMOUS SCHOOL GOVERNANCE COUNCILS, WHERE STUDENTS AND PARENTS CAN ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES. SCHOOL AND DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITY TO BE ACCOUNTABLE TO THEMSELVES AND OTHER EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS, IS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESSFUL RESTORATIVE PRACTICES.

ISSUES:

- NLPS fails to own mistakes and follow through on actions to resolve issues within a timely manner. Parents feel they must take the initiative for accountability to happen, or are passed along from person to person to person ("passing the buck"). Issues are swept under the rug, or personnel approach accountability as trying to disprove or to redirect/place blame on students and parents.
- In some cases, schools only follow up or get involved when parents call upon known community members, get an advocate, or involve lawyers.
- Parents, students, and staff experience and/or fear retaliation when addressing issues.
- Mandated reporting/contacting/threatening DCF involvement based on racial and single-parent assumptions; bias can be seen in discipline, attendance, 504/IEP related areas, etc.
- Caregivers are having to pick up the slack or put in excessive energy because schools are not following through on responsibilities or are causing more damage. Parents are being told they or their children are not priority enough due to caseload/needs.
- Student and parent concerns or complaints regarding staff or personnel are not being taken seriously and therefore not being acted on. School/personnel are addressing multiple parents' concerns as individuals rather than as a collective, which leads to individualized solutions or results instead of fixing system issues. School/personnel making commitments to parents/students when there is not capacity to accomplish it.
- School personnel are not being documented or receiving consequences or professional development when their own behavior needs to be addressed; and are not holding each other accountable- especially in incidents of explicit racism. Personnel are not being fired or moved when they should be.
- A majority white personnel hold power or higher-level positions such as admin, while staff of color work in "non-certified" positions, where treatment, respect, and pay is differentiated. Inappropriate contractual agreements (prep-time/pay/professional development/advocacy) preventing or excusing teachers/staff from doing their job effectively.
- Schools are in contract with agencies but do not support parents trying to address issues with staff, such as bus company or temp substitute agency- "its out of their hands".
- Schools are leveraging disciplinary actions for personnel who speak up/out or make public issues that need to be addressed (silencing/preventing civic engagement).
- Large collaborators, partners, and funders taking admin at their word, are not seeking the feedback of others on the ground, or are connected with "token" people, and not taking a look first-hand (like sitting in classrooms without notice), presenting narrow/(mis)information and preventing accountability.

"Apologies don't fix some of these problems. You can't have an oops moment and then your kid is two grade levels behind, no...I think the apology has to come with really proactive actions. That we didn't notice this was happening with your daughter, but we put this plan in place and we'd like your opinion and involvement as her parent. This is what we're going to do as a school, and this is what we would like for you to do as a parent. We're going to circle back in a month and see where she's at, like something like that."

SOLUTIONS:

- **Address problem** when first reported or brought to the schools attention.
- **Shift who is responsible** for addressing student complaints/concerns; and create a system that allow them to be addressed by someone who is in good relationship with students.
- **Hire and support** personnel of color.
- **Create a liaison** to help navigate school processes and support in communications regarding complaints and concerns.
- **Once personnel do a training**, there should be measurables implemented into evaluations that they can now be held accountable to.
- **Teachers should have mandatory student and parent evaluations/assessments** throughout the year to support standards such as quality of student-parent/teacher relationships, commitment to supporting students vs. being there for the paycheck, etc, and address discrimination concerns.
- **Support the use of peer and community** advocates and advocacy trainings.

"[There needs to be] a clear this is your chain of command, this is who's responsible. I know you go from this person or this person but each school is so different. I started understanding Nathan Hale, but now my son's over at Bennie Dover, so now I'm trying to start to understand Bennie Dover, but I don't know who and how to keep anybody accountable, especially when my time interacting with them is so limited."

"However, when my other child who was in kindergarten at the time, he was being restrained numerous times per month, and we had tons of meetings. We weren't being heard, and it took until the end of kindergarten to finally have a plan in place, where all his restraints went down to zero. So, it's like if you were working with us, we could have got that plan a lot sooner."

PARENTS ARE EXPRESSING CHALLENGES SUPPORTING THEIR CHILDREN WITH ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS. PARENTS ARE PUSHED FOR TESTING/DIAGNOSIS TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS, NEGLECTING A FULL ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOMS AND OVERALL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS. INAPPROPRIATE TEACHER TO STUDENT RATIOS AND LACK OF REGULAR CLASSROOM AIDES EXACERBATE LEARNING AND CREATE BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES, PARTICULARLY FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. FULL 504/IEP PLANS ARE NOT BEING FULLY IMPLEMENTED AND THE BUREAUCRACY OF FERPA AND MEDICAL VERIFICATION DELAYS THIS PROCESS. THERE SHOULD BE APPROPRIATE STAFFING AND STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESSIBLE ACADEMIC SUPPORT, DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM, AND ABILITY TO ACCESS CERTAIN ACCOMMODATIONS IN RELATION TO BEHAVIOR AND REGULATION- WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE 504 & IEP PLANS. PARENTS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED WITH KNOWLEDGE OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PLANS AND RESOURCES THROUGH A NEW 504/IEP LIAISON. STUDENTS SHOULD NOT BE PASSED ALONG OR HELD BACK, AND PARENTS SHOULD NOT BE DISCOURAGED IN ADVOCATING FOR THE LATTER.

"When I would go in, there were no kinds of real lessons planned and ready to go. The special ed teacher, the general ed teacher, and [personnel] would have these meetings and say this is what they're going to modify... but they did not provide that to the paraprofessional prior... I'm like no, you need to provide whatever you're planning, give it to the paraprofessionals and explain how it's supposed to be done... I just need to see things being implemented with validity, and being observed and supervised by whoever supposed to be in charge."

ISSUES:

- Parents are not informed of their rights regarding 504/IEPs (including due process and complaints) and available options like the para, restorative practices, or PPT's. Loopholes in wording/language in 504/IEP make things optional instead of mandatory or consistent.
- Personnel are doing the bare minimum or not meeting requirements and the process/scheduling/time-frames-from the first PPT, testing, planning, and implementation is taking too long.
- Schools picking and choosing what qualifying documentation they want -when parents have sufficient evidence from outside professionals (including medical documentation), the school bounces it back to the district professionals to validate- most often resulting in disqualifying the student for services or slowing the process.
- IEP and 504s plans not being effectively implemented due to confidentiality- preventing paraprofessionals/ support staff they are directly working with from being prepared or meeting students' needs.

"My child was identified as a problem child. Not until she got middle school-high school, is when she was identifiedbut I want to say that her learning disability was addressed late...and then they try to threaten you with the whole DCF and so on forth, so it all boils down to, if we don't get the support and experience, and our kids are not being supported, it's a behavioral issue. And then it's almost like we get condemned for it instead of helping us walk through it, to help our kid walk through the issue or support them."

SOLUTIONS:

- **All school employees (certified and non) should be mandated to attend de-escalation training.**
- **Feedback systems and accountability checks** on student discipline and academic growth (not solely based on testing) should be added to employee assessments where parents and students get to participate. The director of special education actually needs to come to schools and into classrooms to do accountability checks for teachers and paras alike.
- **Parents should be offered information** that is supposed to be covered during PPT, 504, or IEP meetings in their primary language prior to the set date to give time to review documents and be prepared.
- **Provide paraprofessionals w/ the IEP/504 plans** and prepare differentiated learning materials to support during class and explain how it's supposed to be done.
- **New 504 /IEP liaison** (outside of case managers) that informs parents of their rights (including due process and complaints), available supports/resources pertaining to the creation/revision of plans, and supports peer advocacy.

"The things that we have asked for as accommodations are things that I don't think should have to be accommodations. I think that there are things that should be the default for every student. I shouldn't have to put in a written agreement that you're not going to shame my child as a form of discipline. I shouldn't have to put in a written agreement that if my child is hungry at 10 o'clock in the morning, she can get up and have a box of crackers. I shouldn't have to put in a written agreement that there's this space for her to go and take a break and get regulated so that she can get back in tune with learning. Like these are things that human beings need. These are things that I create in my workplace in order to make it through the day and I'm an adult with none of this background, the trauma that she has."

TEACHING & LEARNING

"THEY DON'T WANT IT TO SEEM LIKE ALL THESE KIDS ARE LEFT BEHIND BECAUSE THESE TEACHERS AREN'T DOING A GOOD JOB, SO THEY'RE LITERALLY NOT CARING ABOUT WHO THEY PASS, AND I FEEL LIKE EVERYBODY NEEDS TO BE MORE CONCERNED AND MORE INVOLVED WITH THESE KIDS PROGRESSION, TRULY PROGRESSING, NOT JUST MOVING THEM ON BECAUSE YOU HAVE THE OPTION OF JUST MOVING FORWARD."

DEFINITION



THIS THEME HAS TO DO WITH EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN THE CLASSROOM. WHO WE'RE LEARNING FROM, HOW WE'RE LEARNING, WHAT WE'RE LEARNING, WHERE WE'RE LEARNING, ETC.

Teachers and staff must take the appropriate preventative measures to ensure students are properly supported inside and outside of the classroom. Parents are active participants in their children's education and should be used as a valued resource at all times, including when they are needed in the classroom to monitor their child's behavior. The parent-teacher relationship is an ongoing process and most evolve over time to be successful in supporting holistic student-needs

WE HEARD PARTICIPANTS TALK ABOUT THESE FOUR THEMES WITHIN TEACHING AND LEARNING:

- Parent Involvement
- Academic Achievement
- Curriculum
- Teacher Bias

"IT REALLY BROKE MY HEART TO SEE MY SON CRY AND GET TEARY-EYED BECAUSE HE DIDN'T KNOW A SUBJECT, AND I'M JUST LIKE WAIT A MINUTE, YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW THIS. YOU ARE LEARNING THIS. THIS IS WHY YOU'RE GOING TO SCHOOL. AND IF THIS IS THE EXPERIENCE THAT YOU'RE HAVING IN THIS LADY'S CLASSROOM, SHE DON'T NEED TO BE TEACHING BECAUSE YOU DON'T GO TO SCHOOL TO GET PUT DOWN OR EMBARRASSED OR DO LITTLE DIVISIVE THINGS TO HUMILIATE A CHILD BECAUSE THEY DON'T KNOW SOMETHING."

RELATIONSHIPS

"THE WAY TEACHERS WOULD COMMUNICATE WAS JUST NOT THE SAME AS HIS WHITE PEERS. THE WAY DISCIPLINE WAS HANDLED WAS NOT THE SAME AS WHITE COUNTERPARTS THAT WERE INVOLVED IN WHATEVER CONFRONTATION THAT HE MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN IN."

DEFINITION

THIS THEME HAS TO DO WITH LEVELS OF TRUST AND QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUTH, PARENTS, AND ADULTS WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

There are a lot of negative relationships between youth, parents, and teachers and we need to change that. Parents are not allowed into the classrooms. Students get sent out of class and suspended a lot. Students get disciplined for a lot of things that could be avoided if better communication and more trust existed in the first place. Also, students are youth and make mistakes. They need adults to help guide them when they make mistakes, not just punish them. There is A LOT of racism in the way discipline happens in schools too: nationally and here in New London, Black and Brown students get suspended and expelled at much higher rates than white students. We can't build relationships without being honest about what gets in the way- racism, classism, and other biases that our majority-white, middle class teachers often hold.

WE HEARD PARTICIPANTS TALK ABOUT THESE FOUR THEMES WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS:

- Discrimination
- Cultural Equity and Representation
- Lack of Trust
- Retaliation



"HE'S THE ONLY BLACK CHILD, SO HE IS CONSTANTLY COMING HOME, I MEAN TOO MANY TO COUNT IN A WEEK, COMING HOME TELLING ME HOW HE WAS REJECTED OR LEFT OUT."

RESOURCES

"I REALLY WISH THERE WAS MORE TUTORING SUPPORT, LIKE IF THERE WAS AN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM WHERE MY SON GOT ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT. "

DEFINITION

THIS THEME HAS TO DO WITH THE WAY THAT SCHOOLS ARE FUNDED IN OUR STATE.

Because it is mostly based on property taxes, this means that rich communities have a lot of money for their schools and poor communities do not. This is a set-up from the start. We demand a different, more equitable way of funding schools!



WE HEARD PARTICIPANTS TALK ABOUT THESE FOUR THEMES WITHIN RESOURCES:

- Programs
- Personnel
- Time
- Infrastructure

"I KNOW THAT MY OLDER SON WORKS BETTER IN SMALL SETTINGS. I VOLUNTEERED IN MY SON'S SCHOOL, AND THERE'S SO MANY KIDS THERE, AND THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS, AND MY SON IS OVER HERE, AND OF COURSE THE TEACHERS OVER HERE, AND THE PARA IS OVER HERE WITH THE CHILD SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE WITH. I'M CIRCLING AROUND AND I GO BACK TO MY SON'S TABLE AND I'M LIKE, OH, I SHOULD HAVE BEEN OVER HERE WITH YOU BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T EVEN GOTTEN THIS FAR AND I'M OVER HERE HELPING THIS KID, AND SO IT MADE ME REALIZE HOW EACH KID IS KIND OF IN THAT PLACE. BUT ALSO WITH MY SON, REALIZING THAT SMALLER CLASSROOMS HELP AND I THINK FOR HIM, I WOULDN'T SAY HE NEEDS ONE ON ONE SUPPORT AT ALL TIMES, BUT HE DOES NEED THAT REDIRECTION TO HELP FOCUS HIM ON HIS LEARNING SO THAT IN SCHOOL HE'S ACCESSING IT THE WAY HE SHOULD BE. BUT I DON'T THINK HE CAN DO THAT IN A LARGE SETTING LIKE THAT, ESPECIALLY WHEN HE IS KIND OF A SENSORY KID."

TARGETED POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES



MANDATORY ANTI-RACISM TRAINING FOR ALL STAFF (CERTIFIED & NON)

- Currently, there is no explicit anti-racism training required for NLPS certified and non-certified employees. Anti-bias and cultural competency training and courageous conversations alone will not address racism in the district. We need to target the structures holding it in place and support a shared understanding and analysis of systemic racism. SUNL recommends [The Undoing Racism Workshop from The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond](#) (*link embedded*). This workshop is recognized as one of the most effective anti-racist training and organizing institutions in the nation and is a 2 ½ day intensive and humanistic process for learning about systemic racism, analyzing power and how people play a role in maintaining current disparate racial outcomes. Completing this training will advance a shared commitment to create a more equitable and inclusive environment where our identities are respected and our ideas are valued.



COMMUNICATION

- The standards and expectations of communication between parents and teachers in regards to student performance (academics/behavior, progress/challenges) needs to be clearly outlined in the Employee Handbook, teacher contracts, and the [6000 series policy regarding Parent Teacher Communications](#). In addition, [policy 5124 'Reporting to Parents'](#) should include higher standards of communicating academic progress.
- Expectations and teachers' responsibilities to report student's progress to parents or guardians should be included in the student/parent handbook.
- There is currently no clear policy for parents and students on the complaint or grievance procedures to use outside of the [1312 policy, "Community Relations, Constituent Service,"](#) which only explains how to contact the BOE directly. This policy needs to be created, clearly outlined, and included in the employee and student/parent handbooks.
- Students and parents asked to be included in the regular staff evaluation process, beyond the current district evaluation. They should have a clear, official, documented method to provide feedback and voice concerns directly to supervisors.



SCHOOL DISCIPLINE & RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

- The school discipline policy and procedure addressing Level 3-5 incidents should explicitly include the involvement of the Juvenile Review Board as a means to redirect students from entering the criminal justice system.
- Information on levels of disciplinary infractions and responses and due process should be included in the Parent/Student Handbook, and parents should receive the complete version of the student code of conduct.
- Reference to restorative practices regarding disciplinary infractions should be included in the school discipline policy and [Student Code of Conduct](#), and all Student/Parent handbooks should inform parents of their right of choice to access conflict resolution through restorative practices.
- Information about the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) should be provided in clear and digestible language for parents in the student/parent handbook, as it relates to restorative practices, giving parents the opportunity of choice.



RESPONSIBILITIES TO STUDENTS & PARENTS

- In the current [employee handbook, "Staff Responsibilities to Students"](#) only specifies student internet use on school grounds. There needs to be a more thorough and clear level of expectation explicitly written. For example, maintaining regular communications with parents, properly directing concerns and complaints to the appropriate people, etc. This information should also be added to the [student/parent handbook](#).



POLICY REGARDING VISITORS AND OBSERVATIONS IN SCHOOLS

- The way [policy 1250](#) is written creates gray areas for interpretation and exclusion. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, in schools such as Winthrop and Nathan Hale, some parents shared how they aren't even allowed past the front doors unless they have been invited for a meeting, and other parents shared how they are able to bypass the safety requirements all together. Parents who are denied entry have to "accept this" or are forced to apply in a lengthy and invasive process to become a volunteer, which includes an application, fingerprints, DCF and criminal background checks, and approval of select school administrators. This is an extreme process for parents just looking to visit, observe, and support, and is subjectively applied based on how well a parent is connected. There needs to be a clearer policy that outlines and supports the rights of all parents to be involved, and that information needs to be included in all student/parent handbooks.



PPT, 504, AND IEP'S

- The PPT, 504 and IEP process is overwhelming and many parents expressed needing support with navigating it and holding the schools accountable. In NLPS, the current system is not parent friendly. Parents want a PPT/504/IEP liaison, where parents can receive guidance and support throughout their child's school career. This would be someone who is accountable to students and parents and can support parents by informing them of student and parent rights, explaining the PPT/504/IEP process, providing options or resources that are available both in and out of school, and helping parents if they feel their child's plan is not being implemented with fidelity. This is different from a case manager because a case manager supports the school (in addition to the student and the parent) as they establish and maintain the plan, whereas a liason would be a parent advocate, helping them to navigate the entire PPT/504/IEP system.



CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION:

- Students have different learning needs than the way NLPS is structured to support. Outside of special education and tiered supports for students, where, for example, students are pulled out of a particular class and grouped with other students at their learning level, there is no inclination of differentiated learning. Currently, the teacher keeps moving forward on classroom curriculum and either students keep up or are left behind. Parents shared how they want there to be a standard of differentiated teaching and learning that moves at the pace of students' individual needs and supports their academic growth.
- Parents asked for a shift in the classroom environment that supports the development of behavioral health and regulation of students' individual needs. For example, all students should have the ability to eat something if hungry, to take a walk to calm down, or to take a sensory break if overwhelmed. These human behaviors needed to self-regulate emotions shouldn't require the need to create or update an IEP and 504 plan. This is a systemic and structural shift in how NLPS education instruction is implemented and is necessary in creating equity in education.



STUDENT & PARENT GOVERNANCE

PARENTS

- Parents want a platform to meet other parents, develop support networks, and address issues they are facing. Parents of children with special needs also expressed a need for a space with other parents of children with special needs for support and guidance. Various schools have different parent engagement opportunities including Parent Teacher Organizations (fundraising and activities focus), and parent advisory groups that approve or offer feedback on administrative identified initiatives. The current policy, [6172.4: Parent and Family Engagement Policy for Title I Students](#), limits parent activities to providing assistance and support regarding academics. This policy should be updated to explicitly include and outline an autonomous parent council at each school to allow parents to connect with one another, control the agenda, discuss school based issues, concerns and ideas. This policy should also outline how the parent councils can engage with school administration and the BOE. The student/parent handbook should also be updated to include this information.

STUDENTS

- The policy [6145: Co-Curricular and Interscholastic Programs](#) promotes student government as the opportunity for students to improve "the general welfare of all students and shall give students the opportunity to participate in the orderly workings of the democratic process." It excludes them from having the authority to make policies or regulations for the district or having any disciplinary authority. This policy should be updated to include explicit language that gives the student council real opportunities to make decisions about educational policies, practices, personnel, etc.



CERTIFIED AND NON-CERTIFIED CONTRACTS

TEACHERS

- Teacher contracts do not give educators sufficient time and support. Teachers are forced to work longer hours than they are compensated for or they are not meeting requirements and responsibilities because of time limitations. Parents asked for class sizes to be reduced to alleviate both teacher workload and increase student academic achievement. Kindergarten and first grade class sizes of 20-24 students and second to twelfth grade class sizes of 24-28 does not support students or teachers regarding classroom instruction and management. In addition, the limit of 56 students per 1 teacher is too high and needs to be reduced.
- The quality and time parents have to meet with teachers during parent-teacher conferences is negatively impacted due to the limit set to two evenings a year for no longer than two hours each, resulting in parents receiving 10-15 minutes of time with teachers. This needs to be adjusted to allow sufficient time for parents and teachers to connect and discuss student performance.

PARAPROFESSIONALS

- A large majority of paraprofessionals are Black and Brown compared to the educator population in NLPS. Many are low-income and lack certification and support to become a teacher. There is a current program that supports the para to teacher pathway, however there is a fee to complete certification of \$6,000 that many are unable to afford. We demand representation, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in decision and accountability platforms, as well as school employees and Central Office hiring and retention. This program needs to be implemented for free to bridge the gap and support diverse teaching staff.
- Paraprofessionals work closely to provide direct support to students with various needs and behavior- many putting their body and mental health at risk. However, they are currently receiving inequitable pay and benefits compared to teachers. Paraprofessionals and tutors receive 10 days of sick time a year, and are allowed to accumulate up to 25 days, while teachers and board hired para-educators receive 15 days and are allowed to accumulate up to 150 days. non-certified staff are only given 3 paid days for bereavement of a spouse, parent, sibling, child, step child, and grandparent, compared to teachers who receive 5. Clearly, Black and Brown, and low-income staff are being systemically and disproportionately impacted. Both paid sick time and paid bereavement days for paraprofessionals and tutors need to be increased so that it corrects the inequality. In addition, we know that paraprofessionals are severely underpaid compared to teachers, and we demand that their pay should increase.
- Currently, only para-educators who are assigned to special education classes and the Stars program receive “Handle with Care” training (de-escalation and restraints). Not only should this training be extended to all paraprofessionals, they should be able to access professional development opportunities that support the para-to-teacher pipeline, and training that specialize in the areas they are supporting. An example is a paraprofessional who has never worked with a child with autism should be offered training that supports their understanding.

BUDGET PRIORITIES

Personnel	Programs	Infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PPT/504/IEP Liaison• BIPOC Teachers• Translators• Paraprofessionals• Classroom aides• Clinical mental health and behavioral counselors• Bus driver aides	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff training and professional development: anti-racism, de-escalation• Tutoring• Student/Parent Advocacy and civic engagement• Restorative practices• Para-to-Teacher Pathway• Childcare during meetings• Food and hygiene pantry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time• Technology• Communication Platforms• Buildings / Space• Air conditioning



STEP UP NEW LONDON WANTS TO GIVE



A SPECIAL THANK YOU!

AND RECOGNITION TO SUPPORTERS

To the 89 people- parents and caregivers, students and alum, staff, and community partners, who trusted us with listening to your experiences, despite fear of retaliation, and supporting our ability to create necessary changes.

To Hearing Youth Voices, and the young people making waves in New London and throughout Connecticut. Because of you, we're able to learn more and support what it is that youth want and need in our education system and community!

To our members and volunteers, campaign committee, and leadership team! This report is an example of your hard work and dedication!

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**WITHOUT YOU, WE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO THIS.
WE BUILD THIS MOVEMENT TOGETHER!**

"A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution."

— Martin Luther King Jr.