



Advisory Committee Report: Community Engagement

DRAFT 9-30-16

1. Executive Summary

Through a series of live and digital activities, the Community Engagement (CE) advisory committee collected input from families, staff, and other stakeholders about various aspects of the BuildBPS ten-year educational and facilities master planning process. The group has invited comments and questions about both the current state of school buildings and priorities for future investments and improvements. In addition, advisory committee members provided direction and feedback about the communications tools and resources that would be most useful to stakeholders.

The group helped design and execute four major components:

- a community **survey**;
- a district-wide **Community Forum**;
- a series of informal “**Kitchen Table Talks**”; and
- a **communications toolkit** for information dissemination.

The community survey, available in nine languages, received 952 responses from April 2016 through June 2016. Respondents rated and provided comments on topics related to school buildings, particularly the current condition of specific schools. The survey also asked respondents to rate the range and quality of academic and non-academic programs offered in the schools. Highlights of the findings include:

- Stakeholders are generally dissatisfied with the condition of BPS school buildings, citing extensive need for renovations and repairs.
- Respondents report vast inconsistency and inequity across the district in the types of specialized spaces available in school buildings.
- There is widespread need for modernization of the school buildings, particularly in terms of safety and security features and instructional technology.
- Despite these facilities shortcomings, respondents generally gave high marks to the range and quality of academic and extra-curricular programs offered in schools.
- School buildings are inconsistent in their appropriateness for serving students with disabilities.

2. Purpose / Charge

The Community Engagement advisory committee was established to ensure that the educational and facilities master planning process included widespread input from the full range of BPS stakeholders, most notably parents, students, teachers, administrators, community partners, and other residents. The group was charged with designing and providing execution support for a range of activities that would inform, inquire, and engage the community (See Appendix A) throughout the process, including opportunities to submit comments, ask questions, and propose ideas.

The advisory committee (see Appendix B) is comprised of BPS and City officials, as well as representatives from several parent advocacy groups, community organizations, the Boston Teachers Union, and the Boston Student Advisory Council.

3. Approach / Methodology

The advisory committee helped to design and support the execution of four major engagement tools and activities: a community survey, a community forum, a series of Kitchen Table Talks, and a communications toolkit. Each of these is described in greater detail below.

a. Community Survey

The group's primary tool for gathering input from families, staff, and the community was a survey, designed to collect opinions about the physical condition of school buildings, quality of instructional programs, and hopes and expectations for future investments and improvements. The BPS Office of Engagement, in collaboration with organizational partners, conducted outreach to solicit participation from a broad group of stakeholders.

The survey consisted of 21 questions, some of which asked respondents to "rate" particular aspects of schools, and others that asked them to "agree" or "disagree" with various statements. The committee initially developed a much longer list of questions but chose to narrow the focus in order to keep the survey from becoming too long for respondents to complete. The group acknowledges that there are many other areas that could have been explored in greater depth.

It was available in nine languages: English, Spanish, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole, Traditional Chinese, Portuguese, Somali, Arabic, and Vietnamese. Responses received in other languages were later translated into English in order to compile and analyze results.

Advisory committee members received training in conducting the survey before it went live. It was administered both on-line (through a digital survey platform) and in-person at various locations and events. Many of the responses were collected by volunteers, fluent in different languages, often assisting respondents through the process using electronic tablets.

The survey was launched in early May, with an original closing date of June 1, but the deadline was later extended to July 1 in order to generate more participation.

Outreach

The survey was widely publicized through the project's e-news, website, fliers, social media, press release, listservs, notices to schools, and other strategies.

In collaboration with family outreach staff from the Boston Housing Authority (BHA), hard copies of the survey were distributed to English and Spanish-speaking BPS families and guardians living in BHA developments citywide. The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) also circulated the electronic survey to its members and to other student-led organizations.

Members of the Community Engagement advisory committee circulated promotional flyers, attended BPS Office of Engagement's Parent University learning sessions, and Office of English Language Learners (OELLs) leadership meetings, and Citywide Parent Council (CPC) and Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SpedPac) monthly meetings. Outreach targeted BPS schools, and also community-based organizations (e.g., Phenomenal Moms, Determined Divas in Education) and public meetings at the Bolling Municipal Building and UMass Boston.

Incentives were provided to increase parent participation. Each public housing respondent received a \$10 Target gift certificate, and attendees at Parent University entered a Kindle giveaway. All parents who provided contact information were entered into a drawing for two Chromebooks.

b. Community Forum

On Saturday, June 4, 2016, the BuildBPS team hosted a community forum at the Bolling Municipal Building to update advisory committees and the community on the project, including work completed to date and next steps. Following an opening session led by Superintendent Tommy Chang, the nearly 100 attendees moved among various small sessions to hear updates and participate in conversations about demographics, facility assessments, and educational planning. The event concluded with a debriefing session. Attendees also were invited to complete the community survey during the forum.

Members of the Community Engagement advisory committee also are providing support for the BuildBPS Open House, a two-day, citywide engagement event that will take place at the Bolling Building on October 29-30. The event will feature interactive exhibits and activities to engage stakeholders in the process of designing and visioning the future of Boston's schools and classrooms.

c. Kitchen Table Talks

Boston's "City Hall To Go" program co-hosted a series of Kitchen Table Talks during the summer to engage residents in informal conversations about the project. Based on the premise that the best discussions take place around a kitchen table, representatives from BuildBPS set up kitchen tables in parks, festivals, and farmers' markets in seven neighborhoods across the city. They invited passersby to share their views about BPS school buildings using a series of guiding questions, including, "Which three features do you believe every Boston Public School should have?" The activities were designed primarily to build awareness about and interest in the project rather than to collect data in a systematic way.

d. Communications Toolkit

The Community Engagement advisory committee provided direction and feedback on the set of tools and resources that would be used to communicate with stakeholders, in order to share information and provide updates on the project. The communications toolkit that BuildBPS has developed includes:

- Project **website**: www.bostonpublicschools.org/buildbps;
- **Social media** content, primarily through Facebook and Twitter, including use of #BuildBPS for Twitter engagement;
- **E-news** platform, providing periodic updates;
- Public **Google Drive** containing files and reports from the project;
- Press releases, media advisories, and other **media outreach** tools;
- Project **fact sheets** and **brochures**;
- Answers to **Frequently Asked Questions**;
- **Fliers** for events and activities;
- Schedule for release of **reports and data sets**;
- PowerPoint **presentations** from School Committee meetings, community forums, and other events;
- Visual displays, such as **posters**; and
- **Video** content.

Whenever possible, the tools have been translated into multiple languages. BPS staff also have asked community organizations, including those participating on the advisory committee, to share the resources with their members and supporters.

The group continues to explore additional strategies for informing and engaging the public, particularly as preliminary reports and data are released to the community.

4. Results and Findings

Survey Participation

In total, 952 respondents completed the survey. Additional detail about the demographics of respondents is included below, including:

- Responses were received pertaining to 119 of the 126 Boston Public Schools (about 94%).
- Respondents who identified a particular grade level (either parent of a student in that grade, or the students themselves) were fairly evenly distributed from pre-kindergarten through high school, with slightly higher response rates at the elementary level.
- Parents represented the largest group of respondents (45%), followed by teachers (23%), and students (13%). Respondents could identify as having more than one role in a school.
- By educational program, respondents were affiliated as follows: 77% general education, 16% special education, 9% English Language Learner, and 7% “other” or “don’t know.”
- By race: 45% White, 20% Hispanic, 19% Black/African-American, 7% Other, 5% Asian, 4% Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic.
- By language: The vast majority (90%) were English, followed by Spanish (7%), and Haitian Creole (2%).

Survey Findings

Several major themes emerged from the responses to the survey. Most notably:

Stakeholders are generally dissatisfied with the condition of BPS school buildings, citing extensive need for renovations and repairs.

- When asked to rate the condition of school facilities overall, only 38% chose “good” or “excellent,” while 60% rated the buildings “fair” or “poor.”
- School bathrooms in particular received very low marks, with 74% rating them “fair” or “poor.”
- Many respondents also expressed concerns about the cleanliness of school buildings, as well as failure to attend to routine maintenance needs.

Respondents report vast inconsistency and inequity across the district in the types of specialized spaces available in school buildings.

- For example, when asked to rate particular features in schools, a significant percentage of respondents indicates that the feature “does not exist” in their school: library (24%), gymnasium (22%), auditorium (17%), science labs (26%), art room (26%), computer lab (26%), music room (30%), outdoor classroom (36%).
- Many respondents noted in particular the lack of spaces available for student support services.

There is widespread need for modernization of the school buildings, particularly in terms of safety and security features and instructional technology.

- Only 45% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement: “The school has sufficient technology.”

Despite these facilities shortcomings, respondents generally gave high marks to the range and quality of academic and extra-curricular programs offered in schools.

- 83% of respondents rated the quality of teaching and programs “excellent” or “good,” while 64% rated the range of class offerings “excellent” or “good.”
- In response to the statement, “This school sets high standards for all students,” 84% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed.”

School buildings are inconsistent in their appropriateness for serving students with disabilities.

- A series of questions specifically about special education programs yielded a range of opinions about the accessibility of school buildings, as well as the use of spaces specifically for special education programs.
- For example, 69% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement: “Special needs students have the ability to access the whole school.”
- 41% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with: “The school has appropriate indoor space for students with disabilities who need a quiet space.”

The following charts and graphs provide a more detailed breakdown of responses to many of the questions.

Figure 1. Building Conditions.

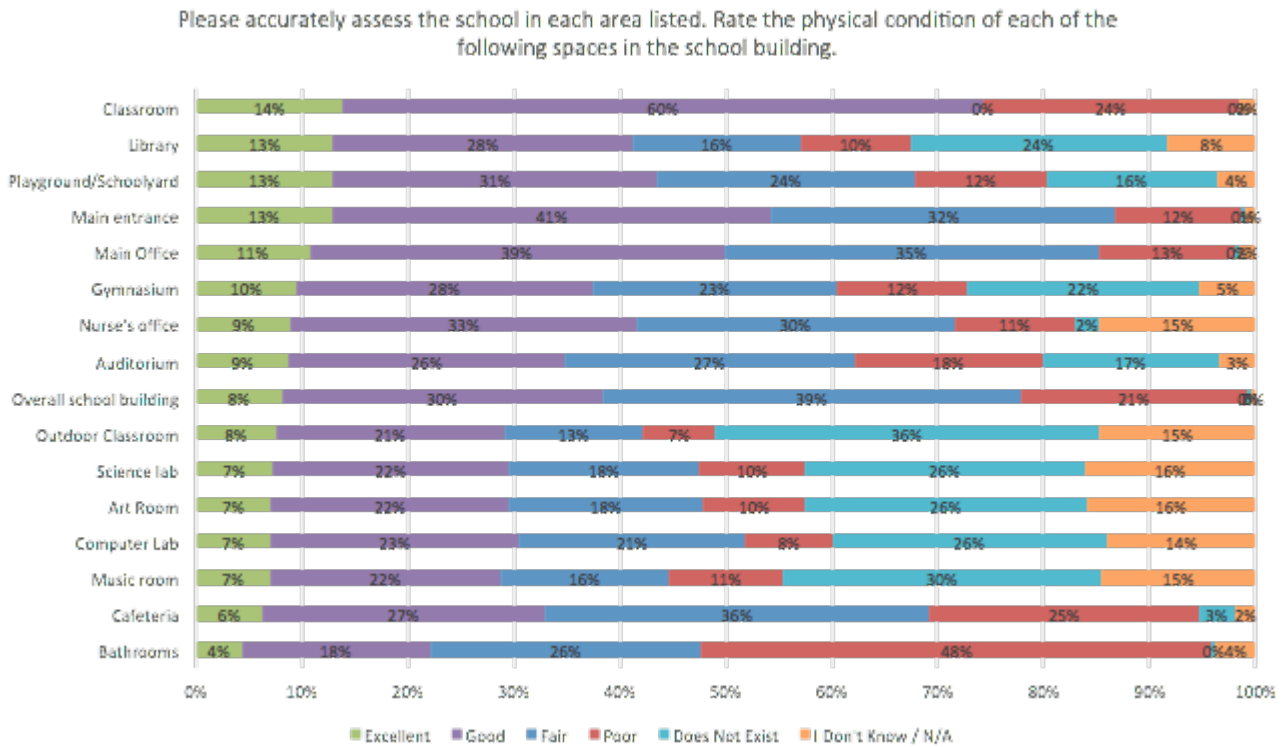


Figure 2. Building Suitability.

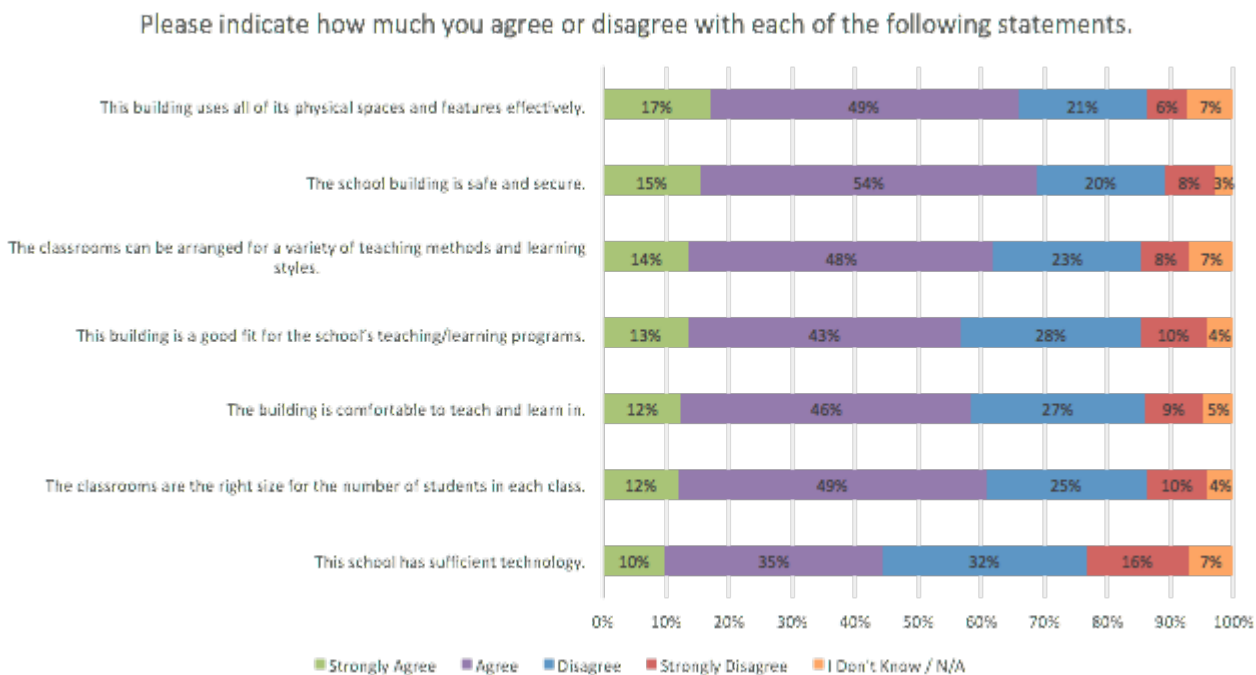


Figure 3. Range and quality of programs.

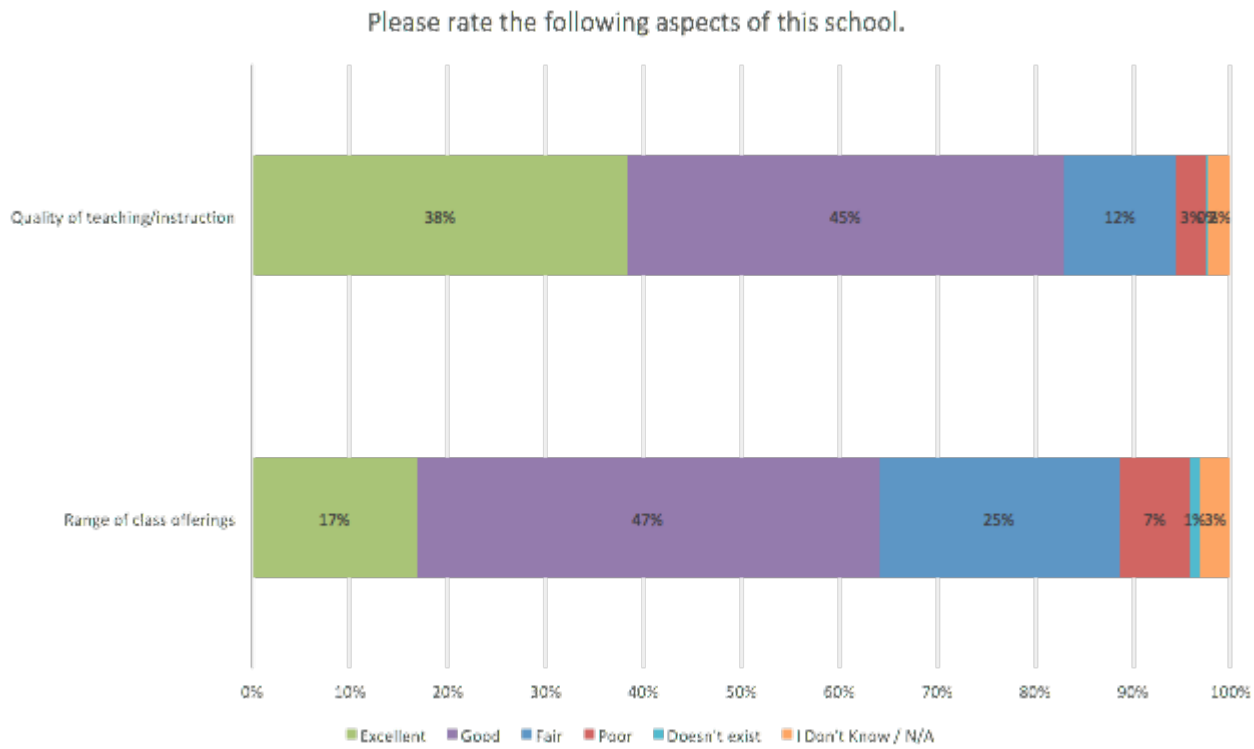


Figure 4. Programmatic offerings.

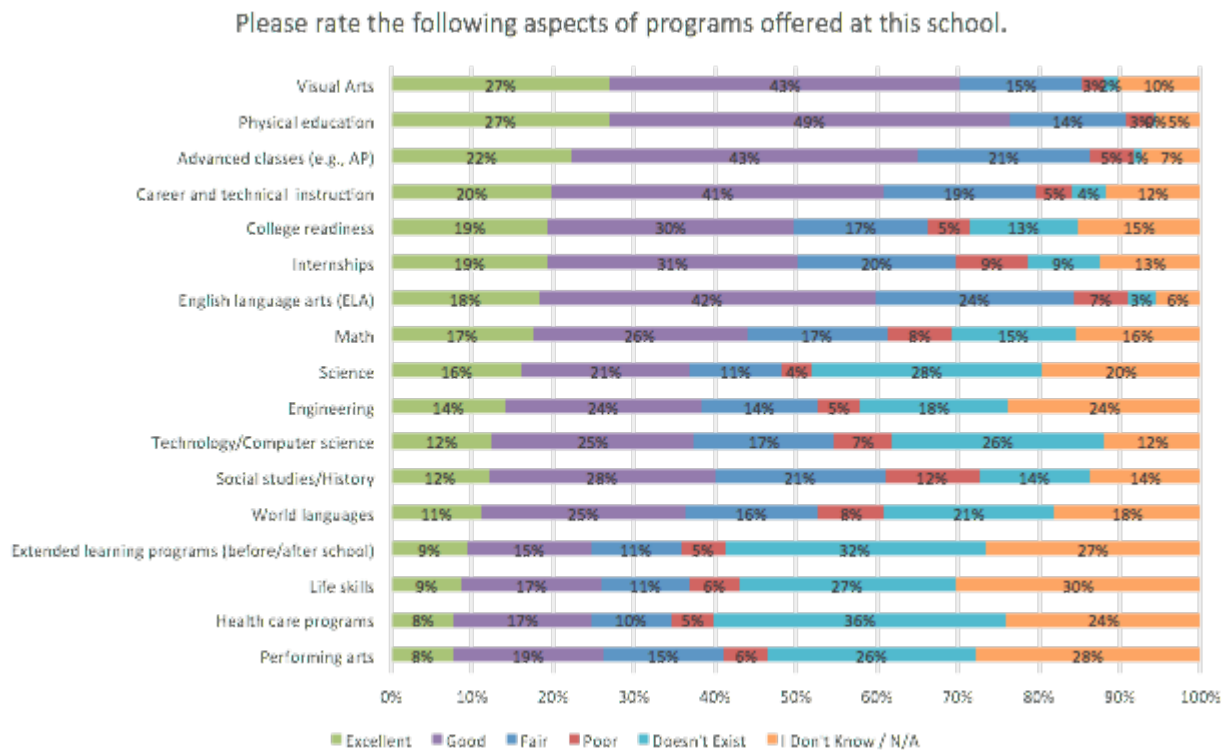


Figure 5. Importance of programs.

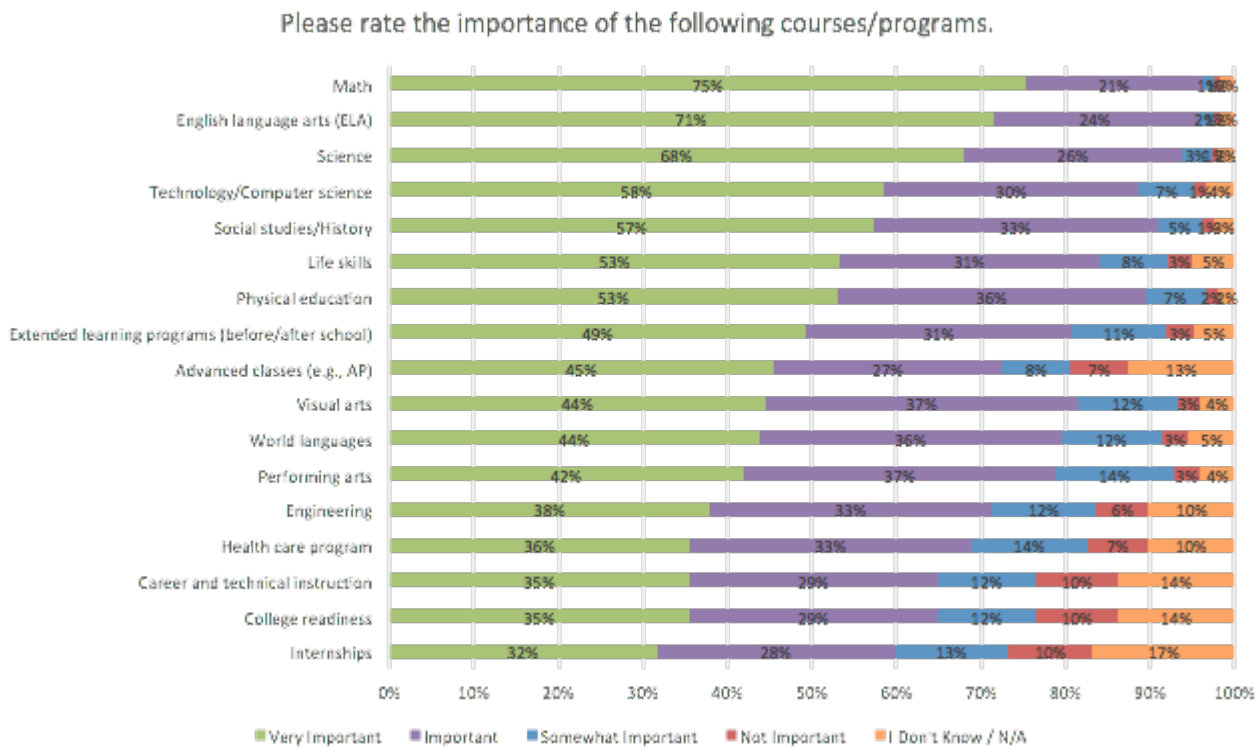


Figure 6. Agree/Disagree statements: General.

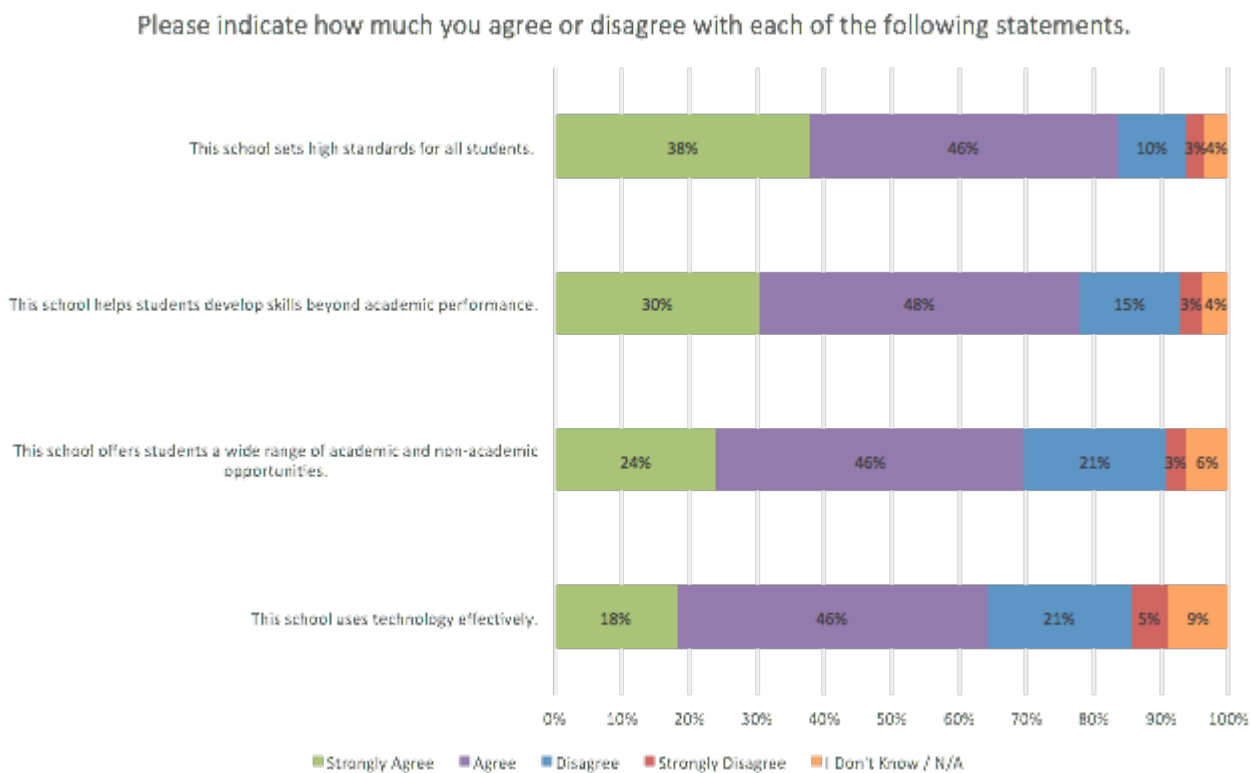


Figure 7. Agree/Disagree statements: Students with disabilities.



Figure 8. Respondents by Race/Ethnicity.

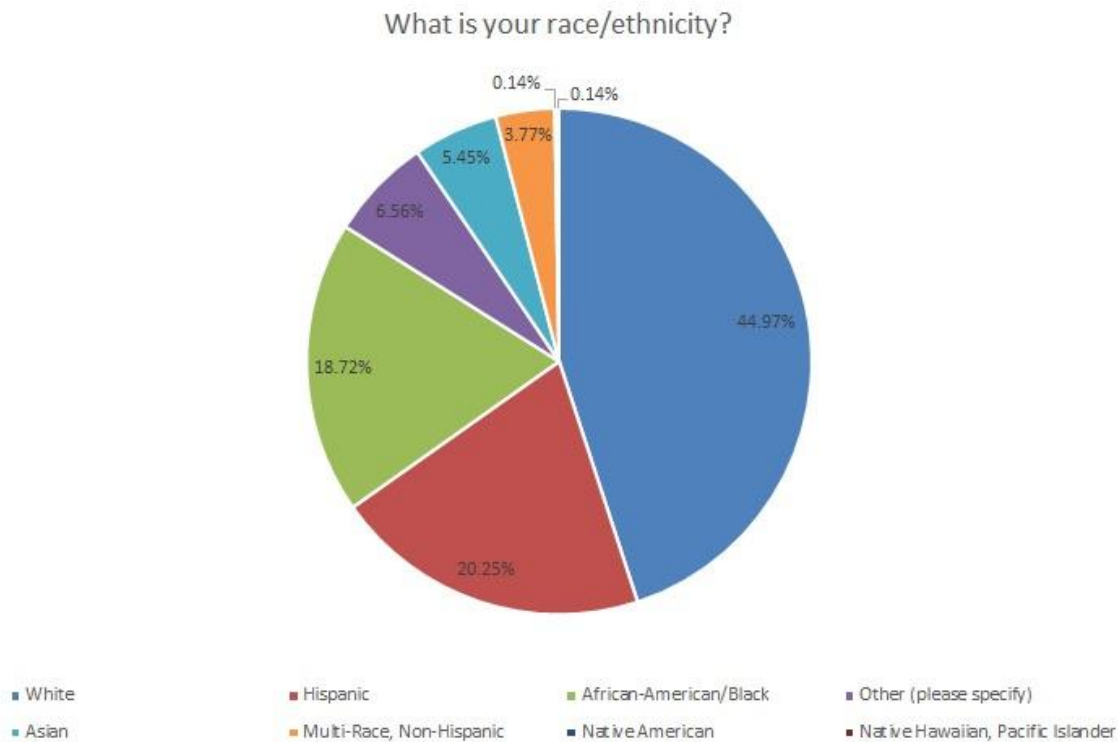


Figure 9. Respondents by Language.

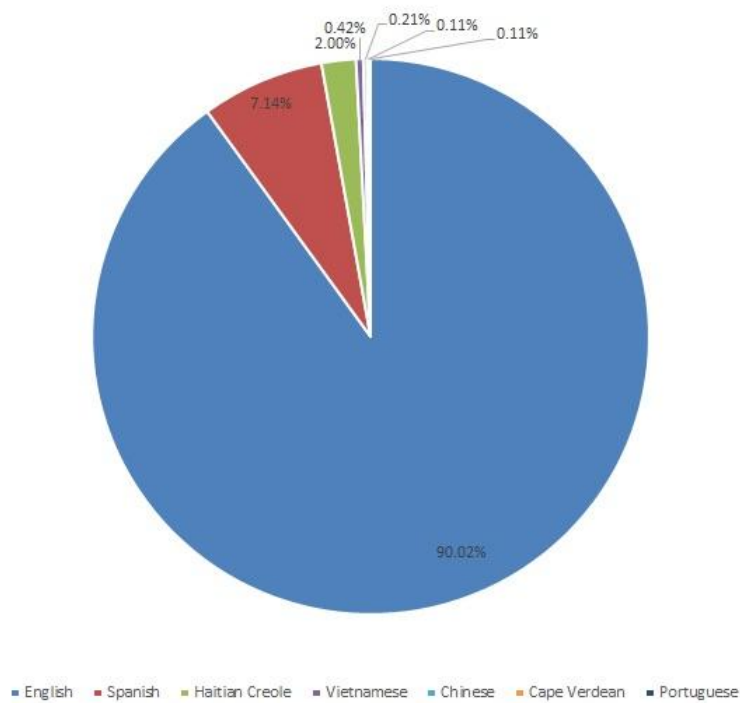


Figure 10. Respondents by Educational Program.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option.

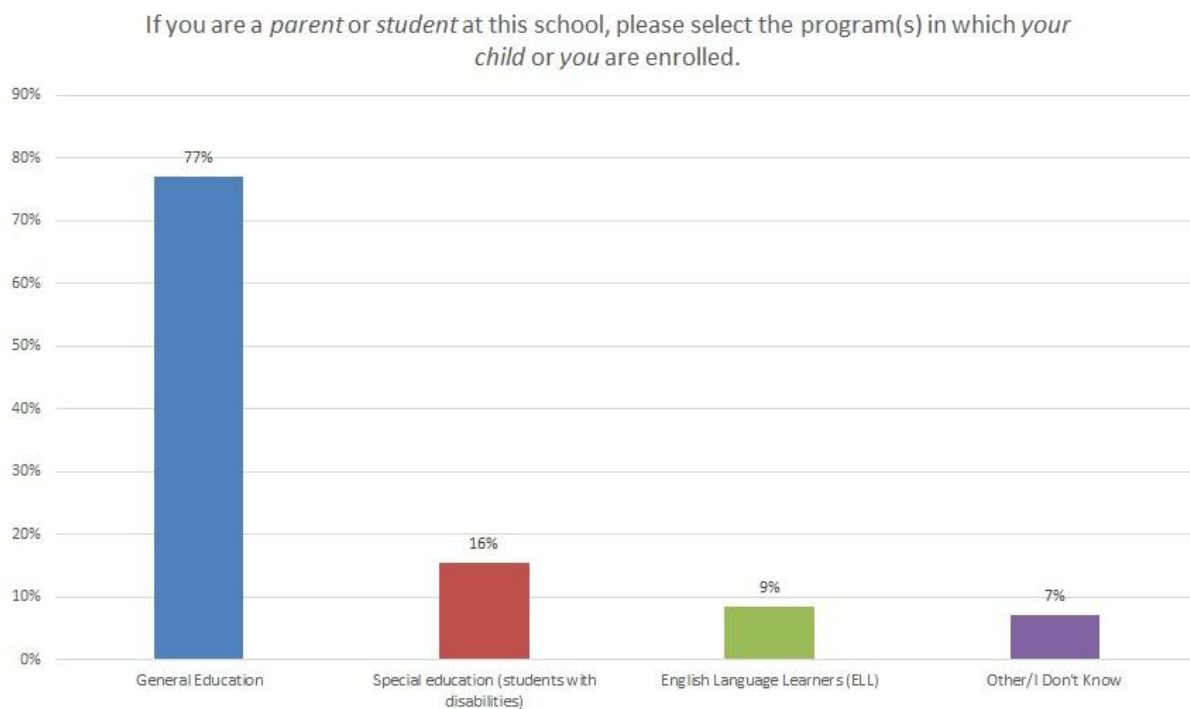
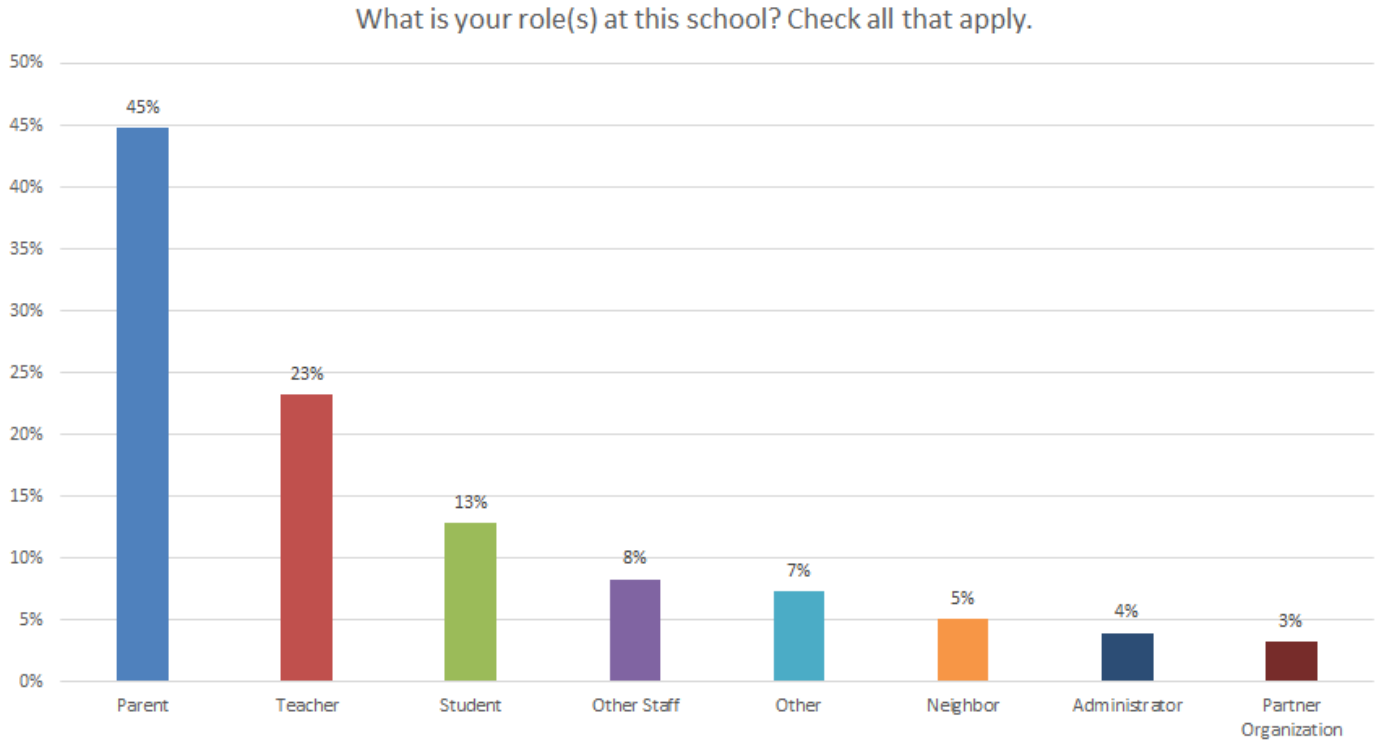


Figure 11. Respondents by Role.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option.



5. Application / Next Steps

In addition to public dissemination, the findings from the survey and other tools administered by the Community Engagement advisory committee will be shared with BPS and City of Boston leadership, as well as with the architects working on the master plan, and the members of the other four advisory committees.

SMMA, the architectural firm leading the master planning process, provided the following explanation of how the community engagement work contributes to the project overall:

The Educational and Facilities Master Plan benefits from community engagement in two primary ways.

First, the engagement process itself helps to develop positive involvement from the community and a real sense of ownership through their participation. In many ways, the open and ongoing dialogue is as much about building support within the community as it is about the input collected. The questions raised by stakeholders throughout the process influence how information and data are presented and often lead to further inquiry into particular areas of interest.

Secondly, the feedback provides a quality check on the assessment work. Statements such as, “my child’s school has no library” or “there are no windows and natural daylight in my child’s classroom” can be checked and validated or corrected within our Facility and Education Facility Effectiveness assessment data.

Ultimately, we will use these responses to gauge and understand the priorities and values of the community in developing the different options of approach.

Appendix A: Community Engagement Framework

The Community Engagement advisory committee helped develop a series of activities and tools to *inform, inquire, and engage* various stakeholder groups in the master planning process:

Build **BPS** Community Engagement Strategies



INFORM

OBJECTIVE:

BPS / City officials provide stakeholders with ongoing updates about the project, the process, data, findings, proposals, engagement opportunities, and other information.

TOOLS:

- Website
- Social Media
- E-News
- News Media
- Presentations

INQUIRE

OBJECTIVE:

Stakeholders provide BPS / City officials with perspectives on the quality of programs and buildings today, as well as their hopes and expectations for high-quality education in state-of-the-art facilities moving forward.

TOOLS:

- Survey
- Kitchen Table Talks

Stakeholders
 Parents
 Students
 Staff
 Partners
 Residents

ENGAGE

OBJECTIVE:

Foster deep participation in the development of a 10-year educational and facilities master plan that reflects the community's needs, priorities, and values.

TOOLS:

- Community Engagement Advisory Committee
- Stakeholder Meetings
- Community Forum
- Open House

Appendix B: Participants

Community Engagement advisory committee members:

- Monica Roberts, BPS Office of Engagement, Convener
- Mary Ann Crayton, BPS Office of Engagement
- Rahn Dorsey, City of Boston Chief of Education
- Ben Vainer, Mayor's Office
- Ramon Soto, Mayor's Office
- Mary McCoy, City of Boston Office of Management and Budget
- Christopher English, Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Relations
- Lara Merida, Boston Redevelopment Authority
- Carleton Jones, BPS
- Lisa Connor, Boston SpedPac
- Latoya Gayle, Boston SpedPac
- Dianne Lescinskas, Boston SpedPac
- Gloria West, Citywide Parent Council
- Andre Dorsainvil, Citywide Parent Council
- Jessica Tang, Boston Teachers Union
- Darlene Lombos, Community Labor United
- Student representatives from the Boston Student Advisory Council

Gratitude is extended to all committee members who guided the survey from draft through execution and dissemination. It should be noted that three committee members played a leading role in data gathering and outreach efforts across school communities and in neighborhoods: LaToya Gayle, Gloria West, and Lisa Connor. Special thanks also to partners Greg Davis, Special Assistant, Boston Housing Authority (BHA), and his staff for outreach to parents living in public housing, and Rose Dorgilus, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC), for outreach to parents at the Mattahunt Elementary School.

Thank you also to Boston Public Schools staff and City of Boston staff who participated in the Kitchen Table Talks.