Return to School Plan

ISD 318
08.31.2020

ThoughtExchange Analysis Report
Return to School Plan
August 5–14, 2020
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01 | The CESO Story •

Our innovative approach to addressing issues management and challenges sets us apart. We are naturally curious as part of who we are and what we do. We have a desire to know more and learn about what our clients are experiencing. We have a boundless interest in learning, and go beyond what we know to ponder, "what else can we know." We remove distractions, solve problems, and enhance relationships through strategic communication, marketing and engagement, allowing school leaders to focus on students and their learning.

CESO is committed to "rethinking possible" in all we do. We are grounded as an organization in the belief that the best ideas come from curious minds with unexpected backgrounds. We are firmly committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion and to dismantling historically racist systems in an effort to improve student outcomes. We understand that our disruptor approach may not be for everyone, but by holding strong to our core values we believe we can help schools make real and impactful change that truly serves the needs of each and every learner.

CESO Communications has school communication professionals from across the country with more than 125 years of combined experience. We understand the issues faced by schools and districts, and we have experience in solving any issue. We combine our school expertise with a creative team of designers, marketers and strategists who bring agency and consumer experience into the mix to help us address issues facing schools and school districts. And finally, we bring our technology expertise to help our clients probe more deeply and focus their strategies to maximize effectiveness.

02 | Scope of Work •

Using the crowdsourcing platform ThoughtExchange, CESO Communications has the ability to establish virtual conversations with key stakeholders to promote engagement and connection during this time of isolation. These exchanges are developed, facilitated and

monitored by CESO. All exchanges operate in real-time, with participants able to see live results, which in turn promotes transparency and trust with participants.

In August 2020, CESO Communications assisted Independent School District 318 (ISD 318) in creating and facilitating a virtual conversation with district families, staff and community to gather input on their thoughts, questions and concerns regarding ISD 318's return to school plan.

Process

The digital engagement platform ThoughtExchange was used to help facilitate the online engagement of ISD 318's families, community and staff by providing a virtual environment in which they were able to share ideas anonymously as well as review and rate the contributions of others. In this exchange, participants were asked to share their thoughts in regard to the back-to-school plan developed by the district.

It is important to note that ThoughtExchange is not a survey, but rather an online conversation that operates as a way to crowdsource ideas. Participation is about not only sharing thoughts in response to an open-ended question but also about reviewing and rating the thoughts of other participants.

ThoughtExchange operates as a three-phased process in the span of a condensed period, with participants going through the following steps:
1. SHARE - *First, share a thought or idea in response to the open-ended questions posed*
2. STAR - *Review the thoughts of others and star thoughts you like*
3. DISCOVER - *See the results of the exchange, including which thoughts were rated highest by your peers and see themes that emerged.*

ISD 318 Family, Staff and Community Engagement

Audiences
ISD 318 families, staff members, students, and community were the primary stakeholders in this virtual exchange. In addition, the analysis included in this report looked at a breakdown of thoughts and responses based on the various stakeholder groups.

Timeline & Communication
The ISD 318 exchange was conducted between August 5 and 14. To encourage participation and engagement throughout the exchange, invitation and reminder messages were crafted and shared via text messages and emails, as well as through other district communication channels.

Exchange Question
The following open-ended question was posed to participants:
> *On August 7, School District 318 released its return to school plan for 2020-21. What are your thoughts or questions about this plan? What else do we as a district need to keep in mind as we implement this plan in the fall and as we move through the school year?*

03 | Exchange Findings •

Participation

- The exchange had 972 total participants, of which 29 percent shared a thought. Yet, while less than one third of participants offered a thought or suggestions, over two-thirds of respondents engaged with the thoughts shared and offered ratings and feedback.

- Participant demographics:
  - *Participant language* - Of those who participated all but one participated in English.
  - *Stakeholder participation* - Responses were identified under various stakeholder groups:
    - **Prominent Role in the District**
      - *ISD 318 Parent/Guardian/Family* - 76 percent
      - *ISD 318 Employee* - 19 percent
      - *Current ISD 318 Student* - 4 percent
      - *ISD 318 Community Member* – 1 percent
    - **School/Site Location**
      - *Participants who work or participate in Early Childhood or Preschool Program* — 25 percent
      - *Participants who have a child in, or work in an ISD 318 elementary school* — 63 percent
      - *Participants who have a child attending or work in an ISD 318 high school or alternative learning center* — 44 percent

- 592 thoughts were shared, with 69 percent of participants rating ideas shared by all stakeholder groups, resulting in 37,354 cumulative ratings. The rate of participation and resulting starring of thoughts shared indicate a strong level of engagement among those who participated in the exchange.
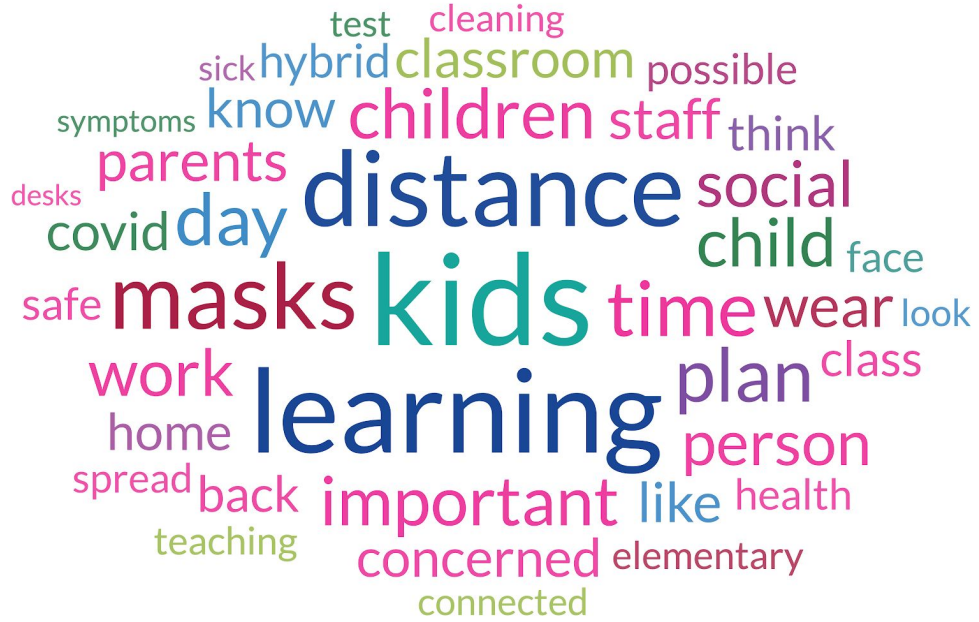
Visual Analysis
The following graphic illustrates the connections between participants (person icon) and thoughts (quote icon) shared throughout the window of the exchange. The graphic below

shows the concentration of those participants who both shared ideas and rated the thoughts of others. Other participants who were less engaged contributed a thought or merely reviewed the ideas of their peers. They are represented at the outer edges of the graphic. The two areas of compact connections of participants and ideas illustrated in this visual demonstrate high engagement in two areas, while the more loose connections reflect the wide range of the thoughts of those who participated in the exchange.
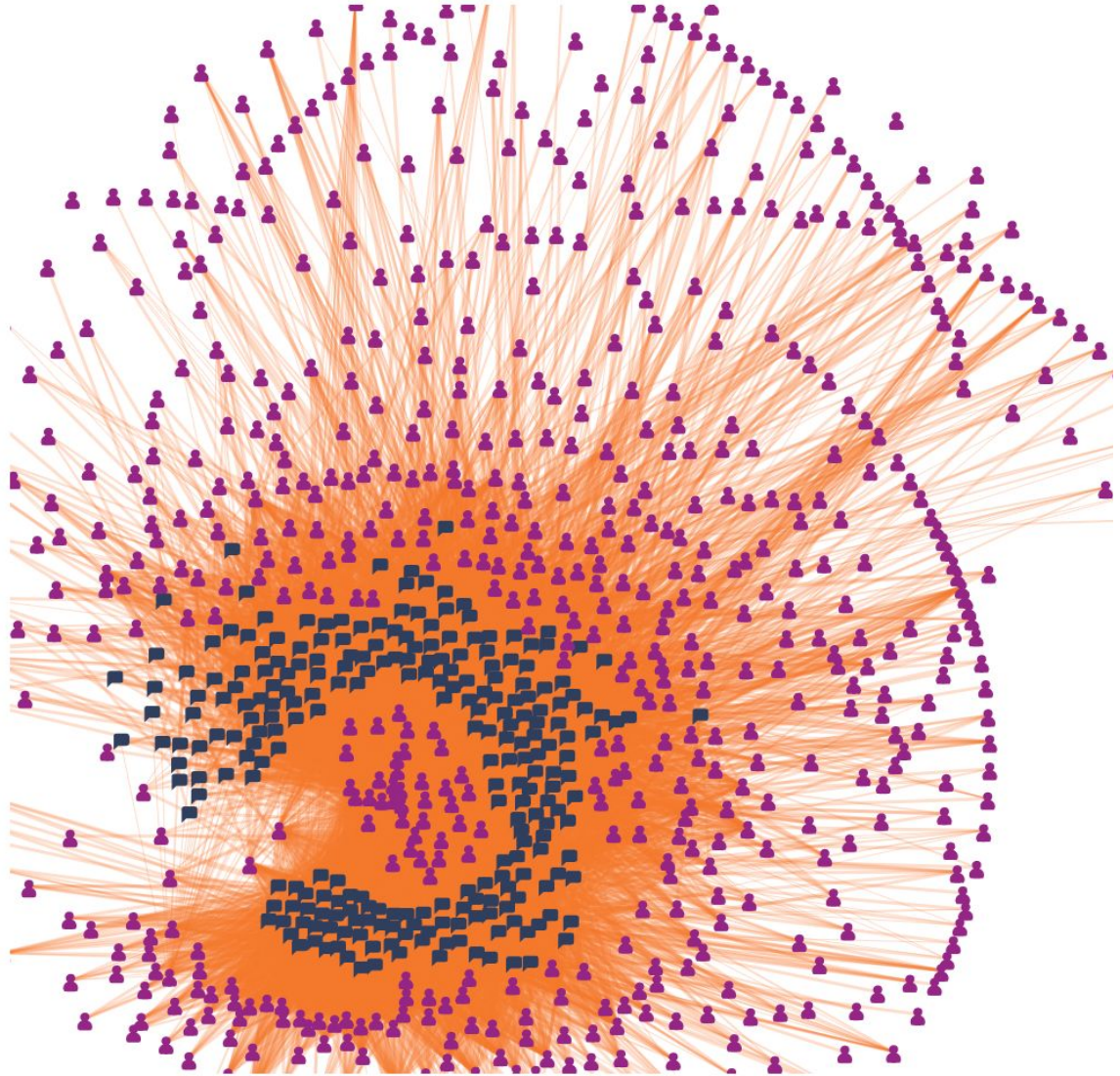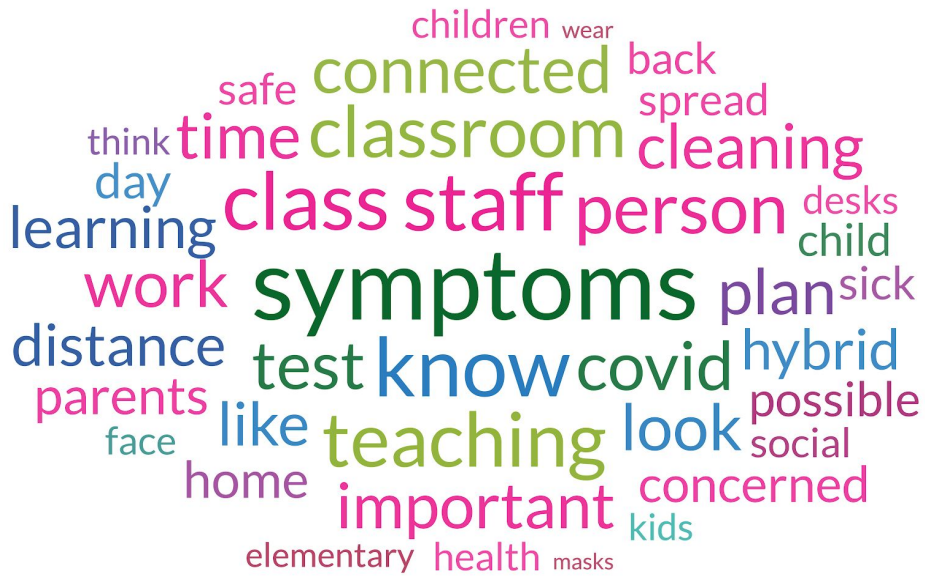

Additionally, the following word clouds represent the most common words and phrases shared in the exchange based on frequency (top graphic) and importance (bottom graphic).

FREQUENCY - Words are sized based on how often they appeared throughout the exchange

test cleaning
sick hybrid classroom possible
symptoms know children staff think
parents distance social
desks covid day child face
safe masks kids time wear look
work plan class
home learning person
spread back important like health
teaching concerned elementary
connected

IMPORTANCE - Words are sized based on the star rating (importance) of the thoughts in which they appear

children wear
connected back
safe spread
think time classroom cleaning
day class staff person desks
learning symptoms child
work plan sick
distance test know covid hybrid
parents possible
face like look social
home teaching concerned
important kids
elementary health masks

Top Thoughts

When identifying the top thoughts shared and rated (starred) in the exchange, we looked at two different calculations: **Simple Average**, which calculates the sum of the star ratings divided by the total number of ratings per thought; and **Bayesian Average**, which calculates a weighted average for each thought, accounting for how many ratings there are across all thoughts.

In the interactive live report, available HERE, we included the Bayesian Average of the ideas contributed, providing a more prioritized look at thoughts and rankings shared by ISD 318 stakeholders. In this approach, the following thoughts ranked among the highest in terms

As a teacher, will I be in charge of students in person AND online via distance learning/ConnectEd? I feel overwhelmed just thinking about the possibility of a double work load.

4.3 ★★★★☆ (74 👤)
Ranked #1 of 586

ISD 318 STAFF ARE AMAZING! We are thankful for all that you do and for thinking on your feet during this hard time!

4.3 ★★★★☆ (61 👤)
Ranked #2 of 586

Support teachers and paras The teachers and paras are going to be working hard in situations rife with conflict. Be careful of how much criticizing we do.

4.3 ★★★★☆ (33 👤)
Ranked #3 of 586

Safety for our students and staff is PRIMARY

4.2 ★★★★☆ (85 👤)
Ranked #4 of 586

How will subs be handled? With or without Covid-19, there is a shortage of subs. What is the district's plan to deal with that? Staff will ultimately need to be out.

4.2 ★★★★☆ (84 👤)
Ranked #5 of 586

of agreement by exchange participants:

I think the teachers will need help For better learning one person can't do inside and outside school learning alone	4.2 ★★★★☆ (74 👤) Ranked #6 of 586	
We need to protect our staff and teachers. Their mental & emotional health is equally as important as educating our children. The district should be doing everything possible to support them.	4.2 ★★★★☆ (74 👤) Ranked #7 of 586	
Teacher Burnout How are our teachers expected to connect to their students enrolled in Connect Ed while teaching the students in their classroom.	4.2 ★★★★☆ (71 👤) Ranked #8 of 586	
As a parent, it's worrisome how many teaching staff are sharing about being uninformed and unknowing about their roll and the overall plan. Unaware of what their duties will be (in person, distance, both?) It appears the district is far from ready. And yet we are to commit to a choice.	4.2 ★★★★☆ (43 👤) Ranked #9 of 586	
Hoping parents will set positive examples for their children. Negativity towards masking and the virus is heard by kids and repeated. Lead by Positive Example!	4.2 ★★★★☆ (26 👤) Ranked #10 of 586	

Themes

Looking only at the top thoughts only provides a small part of the story of the ISD 318 Family Exchange. Our team thoroughly analyzed the data collected, which yielded the following themes of ideas posed and prioritized by ISD 318 stakeholders. *(NOTE: themes are presented here in alphabetical order and not in order of importance.)*

- **Cleaning / Sanitizing** — This category includes thoughts in regard to how ISD 318 will clean and sanitize classrooms, buses, equipment, common surfaces and other areas of its facilities.

- **Distance Learning** — This theme includes thoughts in regard to distance learning and the protocols involved in it. It also includes thoughts on how this could be accomplished. A significant number of thoughts under this theme support distance learning over in-school or hybrid learning. Also, thoughts and questions in regard to the availability of technology and broadband for those families that cannot afford it can be found here.

- **Health and Safety** — These are thoughts that speak directly to COVID-19, social distancing, the desire to keep schools closed or open for in-school learning because of it, distance learning and the school district's reaction to COVID-19. This theme also contains questions in regard to what will happen should a student or staff member be diagnosed with COVID-19.

- **Masks and PPE** — This section includes thoughts concerning wearing masks or not wearing masks, what Personal Protective Equipment will be required, and who will provide and pay for it. This section also contains thoughts that question how ISD 318 will address those students or families who refuse to comply with school and district guidelines.

- **Protocols and Communication** — These thoughts address what protocols will be in place should a student or staff member be diagnosed with COVID-19, or should a school become a COVID hotspot. Additionally, there are thoughts that ask what protocols are in place to keep sick students and staff at home. Finally, there are thoughts shared that address how all those protocols and issues will be communicated to ISD 318 families and other stakeholders.

- **Scheduling** — In this section participants shared thoughts on a variety of scheduling options, as well as plans for pre-school and other early learning opportunities.

- **Special Education** — Thoughts in this section are concerned with special education students and how ISD 318 will meet their needs.

- **Staff Concerns** — In this section staff shared thoughts in regard to workload, sick leave policies, substitute teachers, and mental health.

Differences

Our team further analyzed how the ideas contributed compared when disaggregated by key ideas. The following table highlights some of the thoughts where differences were most pronounced and where and where there was common ground.

DIFFERENCE I: As with almost all issues surrounding COVID-19, there are two distinctive camps: one that wants to be "back to normal" quickly, and one that would rather proceed with a great deal of caution. ISD 318 is no different and that is reflected in this exchange. Nevertheless, there are commonalities to be found among the two groups, and, as the chart below indicates, they center on staff well-being and expectations and the student experience.

GROUP I-A	COMMON GROUND	GROUP I-B
Preference for wanting to return to in-person learning, dissatisfaction with previous distance learning experience 60 percent *about half to two-thirds were*	• Concerns about staff expectations and well-being (i.e. how will substitute teachers be utilized, will teachers have to teach both online and in-person,	Preference to focus on safety first and the need to not return to in-person until certain safety criteria are met and sustainable 40 percent *about half of which were*

elementary, middle school and high schooll parents/families	PPEs, etc.) ● Questions about what the student experience will be like (i.e., schedule, will they be switching teachers or rooms; etc).	*elementary & middle school parents/families*

DIFFERENCE II: In a second analysis, we saw a strong difference between respondents in favor of strong safety measures and protocols being put in place, versus those articulating a need to normalcy. Again, the common ground between these perspectives live in the area of staff support and welfare.

GROUP II-A	*COMMON GROUND*	GROUP II-B
Concerns about what safety protocols will be in implemented to protect students and staf 74 percent *mostly comprised of preschool and elementary parents/families*	● Concerns about staff expectations and well-being (i.e. how will substitute teachers be utilized, will teachers have to teach both online and in-person, PPEs, etc.) ● Strong advocacy and support for ISD 318 teachers and staff.	Advocacy for return to normalcy, unrealistic to expect everyone to wear masks 24 percent *mostly made up of preschool, elementary and middle school parents/families*

ADDITIONAL DIFFERENCES: The remaining differences seemed to focus on protocols and expectations for wearing masks. A lot of questions remain, particularly among ISD 318 parents/families about the reality of requiring masks in school. Specifically:

● Whether or not students would actually comply
● How such rules would be enforced
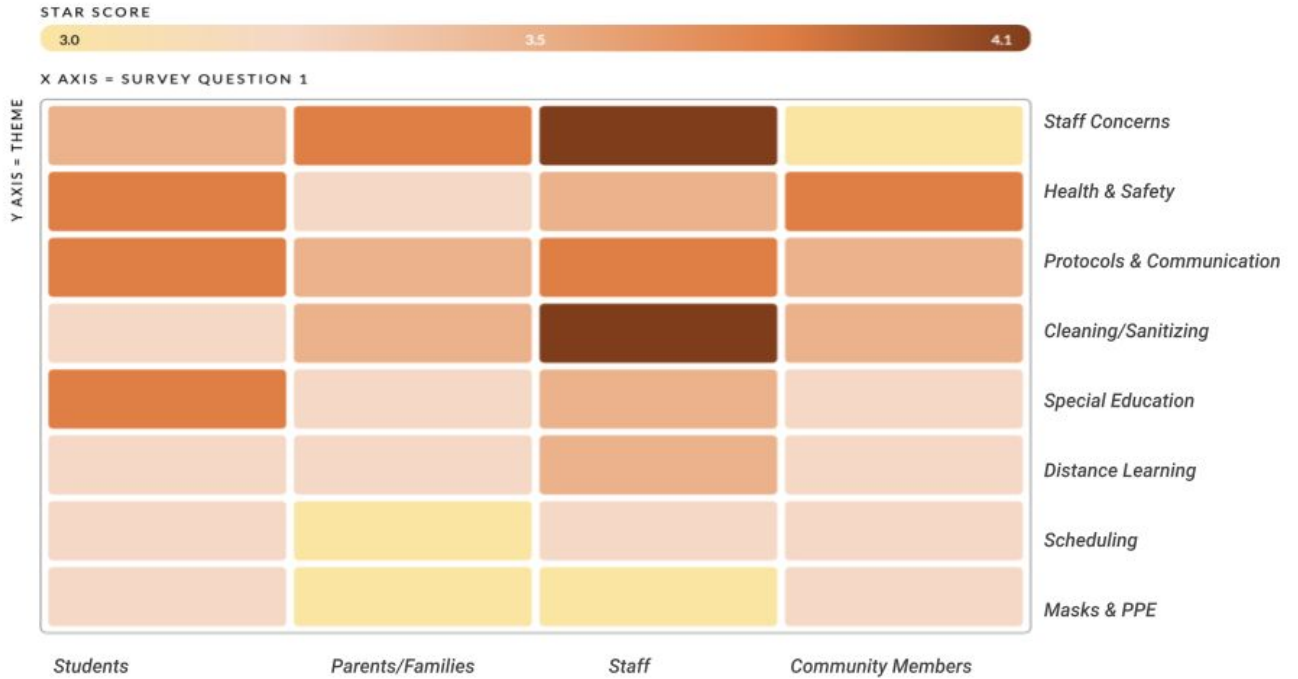● Whether or not masks are effective or necessary

Intensities

Our team also created heatmaps to assess how intensely participants felt about the thoughts shared within the themed categories. In analyzing this information, we again reviewed two statistical approaches based on the total number of thoughts shared, and a heat map indicating the importance of each theme by group.

First, we looked at each themed category to assess how many thoughts were shared, the average star rating, and the number of stakeholders who engaged with these thoughts:

- Cleaning / Sanitizing
  - 24 thoughts shared
  - 366 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.5
- Distance Learning
  - 69 thoughts shared
  - 508 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.4
- Health & Safety
  - 133 thoughts shared
  - 589 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.4
- Masks & PPE
  - 93 thoughts shared
  - 546 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.0

- Protocols & Communication
  - 116 thoughts shared
  - 566 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.5
- Scheduling
  - 98 thoughts shared
  - 538 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.1
- Special Education
  - 10 thoughts shared
  - 236 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.3
- Staff Concerns
  - 38 thoughts shared
  - 412 stakeholders engaged
  - Average star rating: 3.8

The following highlights the themes with the level of intensities by statistical approach as indicated by *ALL RESPONDENTS*

In the graph below, you can see the importance of each theme to the various audiences that participated in this exchange (the X-axis from left to right: current students, current families, staff, community members). Among parents, concern about staff welfare is most important. In addition, parents express concern about how schools will be cleaned and sanitized as well as the protocols and communications being developed by ISD 318. Students' primary concerns are with health and safety, as well as the protocols and how they are communicated. Besides their own concerns, staff is chiefly concerned with cleaning and sanitation, as well as protocols and communication.

Y AXIS = THEME

	Students	Parents/Families	Staff	Community Members	
Staff Concerns					
Health & Safety					
Protocols & Communication					
Cleaning/Sanitizing					
Special Education					
Distance Learning					
Scheduling					
Masks & PPE					

05 | Conclusions •

The purpose of this exchange was to gather insights and allow for a virtual conversation among ISD 318 stakeholders in regard to the district's *Return to Learn* plan. Specifically, the exchange highlights some ideas about what needs to be kept in mind as the school year progresses and adjustments to the plan are likely made; as well as some opportunities for key messages to different stakeholder groups that may help answer lingering questions. We like to think of this exchange as more of a crowdsourcing platform rather than specific data gathering with a conclusive decision.

That being said, based solely on the comments and engagement of this exchange, and not taking into account additional considerations that must be factored in (e.g. personal circumstances, access to technology, participation rates, etc.), we provide the following observations:

- Not everyone is satisfied with the current back-to-school plans, particularly participants who believe school should return to normal in the fall. While these participants do not represent a majority, they are significant in number. Having said that, however, there are a considerable number of those participants who will go along with the plan, provided key questions and concerns are addressed (See differences above). Many of these participants also are supportive of a hybrid model.

- Among those who wish to return to school as normal, there were two specific areas that concerned them most: the availability of affordable child care for families, particularly those who are considered essential workers and who would be unable to stay at home with their children; and providing devices and broadband access to those families who do not have access.
- On the other side of the spectrum, those who urged caution in the start to the school year were primarily concerned that opening for in-person learning too soon could cause COVID-19 to spread. There are also many families who have elderly relatives living with them, and they are concerned their children could be positive but asymptomatic, and in turn infect older family members. Some participants also expressed concerns for children with asthma and immune-deficiencies.
- Participants are particularly concerned about cleaning and sanitation once in-person schooling begins again. They want cleaning protocols in place that will help minimize the spread of COVID-19. This isn't just in classrooms, but bathrooms, cafeterias and other eating areas, playground equipment, high-touch areas (door handles, desks, shared equipment, etc.) and school buses.
- There was a great deal of support for school staff, in particular a strong affinity for ISD 318 teachers.

- Among current district staff, some specific concerns were often cited — from how absences will be handled should they be exposed to COVID 19 while in class, to finding substitute teachers. In addition, staff expressed concern in regard to workload — specifically having to prepare for both online and in-person teaching — and the strain that comes with it.

Additional Considerations –

As with any engagement, it is important to identify how representative the sample is of the entire population. Participation in this exchange was generally healthy. The vast majority of those who participated identified themselves as ISD 318 families, with the second highest participation level was among staff. One concern that stands out, however, was that there was only one non-English participant, which does not seem to align with the district's demographics.

Going forward, we encourage the district to use the information learned in this exchange to help communicate and message the Return to Learn Plan with stakeholders. In particular, we suggest setting up a dynamic FAQ to address some of the most common questions and concerns, perhaps having one for internal staff questions and the other more of a public facing page on the district's website.

We also suggest reaching out to traditionally underrepresented voices in the district, in particular the students and families whose first language is not English. While the exchange was available in multiple languages, all but one respondent participated in English. This suggests that additional targeted communications and engagement with such populations could help yield a more robust and comprehensive assessment of the needs of ISD 318 students and families.

Finally, we encourage the district to set up future ThoughtExchanges such that participants not only react to thoughts shared by others but more importantly, offer their own insights and suggestions in response to the question prompt.

05 | Final Thoughts •

A key attribute of the ThoughtExchange platform is its focus on transparency for participants. CESO Communications affirms the need for transparency when engaging stakeholders and the importance of sharing results not only among district decision-makers, but also with all members of the ISD 318 community, including parents/families, students and staff. This feedback loop is critical to maintaining trust and encouraging participation in future engagements. We strongly encourage, at a minimum, the sharing of the live report on the district website, including the report in upcoming district stakeholder communications and sharing it with the district leadership team.