



C S
e o

Community
Engagement Report:
*Parent/Family
Satisfaction*

Independent School District 318
03.03.2021



Independent School District 318 ThoughtExchange Analysis Report

Parent/Family Satisfaction

February 18–March 1, 2021

prepared by Susan Brott, APR, and Jim Cummings, APR,
Senior Strategic Consultants, CESO Communications

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. 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.

Process

The digital engagement platform ThoughtExchange was used to facilitate the online engagement of ISD 318 Core Planning Team by providing a virtual environment in which they were able to anonymously share ideas as well as review and rate the contributions of others. In this exchange, participants were asked what is going well and what can be done better in ISD 318.

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** - *Participants share a thought or idea in response to the open-ended questions posed*
2. **STAR** - *Participants review the thoughts of others*
3. **DISCOVER** - *Participants review the results of the exchange, including which thoughts were rated highest by others and see emerging themes*

Parent/Family Satisfaction with ISD 318

Audiences

Parents/families of ISD 318 were the target audience for this virtual exchange.

Timeline & Communication

This exchange was conducted from Feb.18-March 1, 2021. To encourage participation and engagement throughout the exchange, invitation and reminder messages were crafted and shared via text messages and emails, in addition to other communication channels.

Exchange Question

The following open-ended question was posed to participants:

As we continuously look for ways to improve our programs and services, we want to hear from our parents/families on specific strategies to help us. What's going well for you as an ISD 318 parent/family and what could we do better?

03 | Exchange Findings •

Participation

- The exchange had 311 total participants, of which 98 participants (32%) shared thoughts.
- In total, 235 thoughts were shared, with 59% of participants exploring thoughts and 49% rating ideas.
- In all, 9,547 ratings were accumulated. The participation and resulting ratings indicate a moderate level of engagement with those stakeholders who participated in the exchange.
- **Participant Language**
 - All participants did so in English
- **School/Program Affiliation**
 - 11% of participants said they had a child attending an ISD 318 early childhood program
 - 40% an ISD 318 elementary school
 - 33% an ISD 318 middle school
 - 40% an ISD 318 high school or alternative learning center
- **Employee Participation**

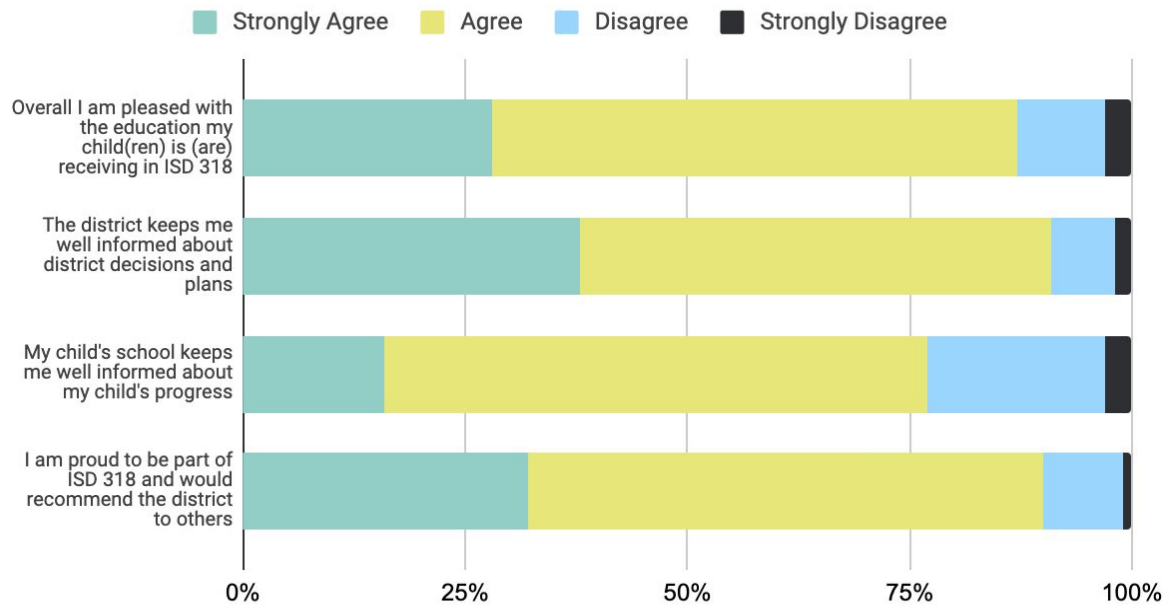
Of the parents participating in the exchange, 29% indicated that they were also employees of ISD 318. Of those employees:

 - 7% worked at East Rapids Elementary School
 - 6% at Grand Rapids High School
 - 5% at West Rapids Elementary School
 - 4% at Robert J. Elkington Middle School
 - 2% at the Administrative Services Building
 - 2% at Bigfork School
 - 2% at Cohasset Elementary School
 - No participants indicated working at the Alternative learning Center or Itaskin Education Center

Parent/Family Satisfaction

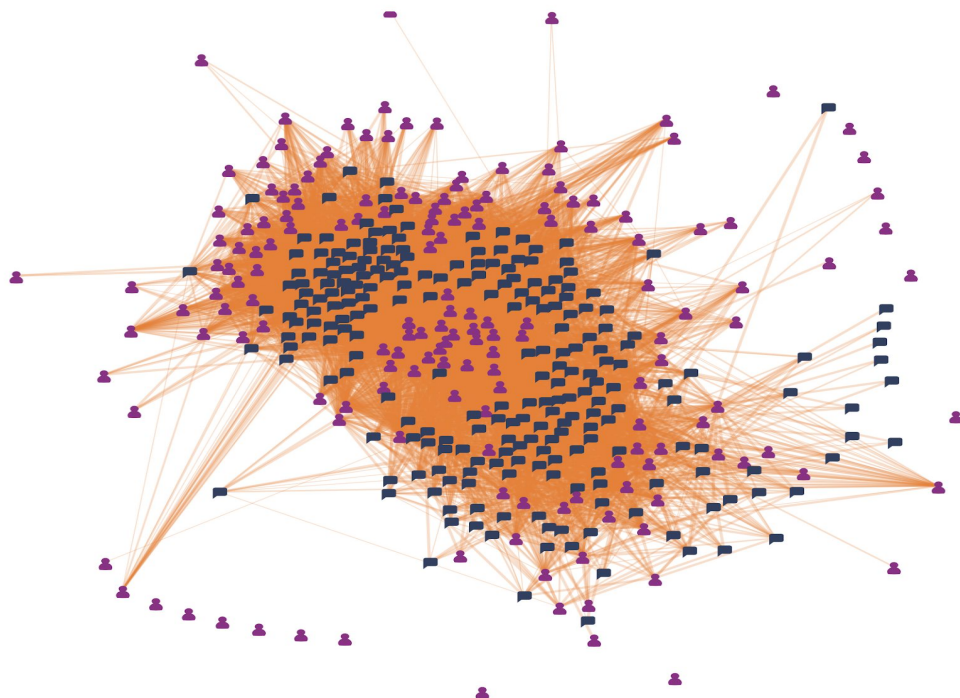
Prior to entering thoughts, respondents were also asked to identify their agreement with a series of satisfaction questions in regard to ISD 318.

ISD 318 Parent Satisfaction



Parent Engagement

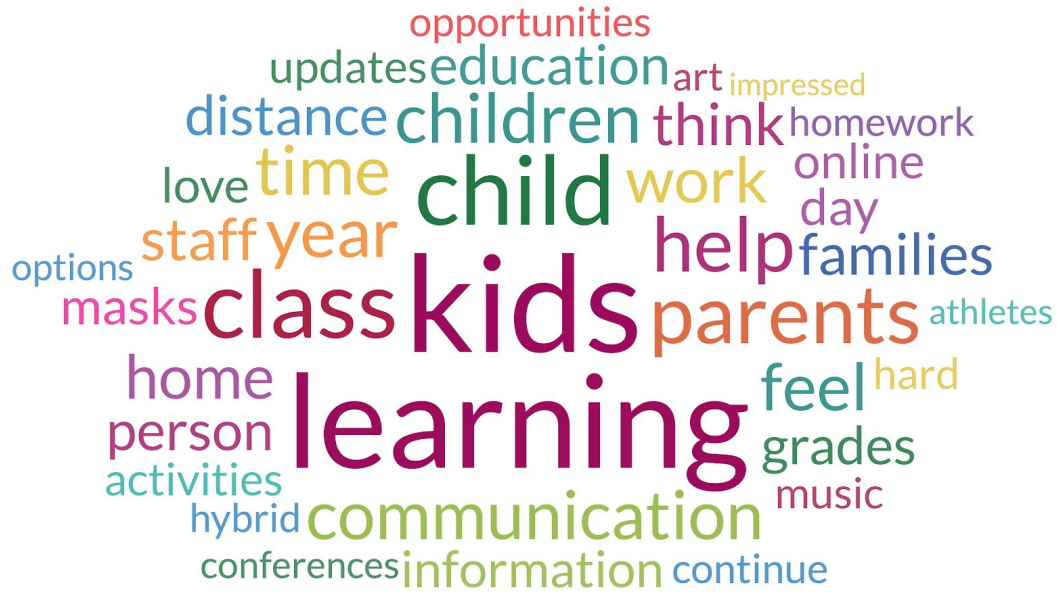
The following image illustrates the connections between the participants (person icon) and thoughts (quote/thought icon) shared throughout the window of the exchange, and shows a high degree of engagement among a subset of participants.



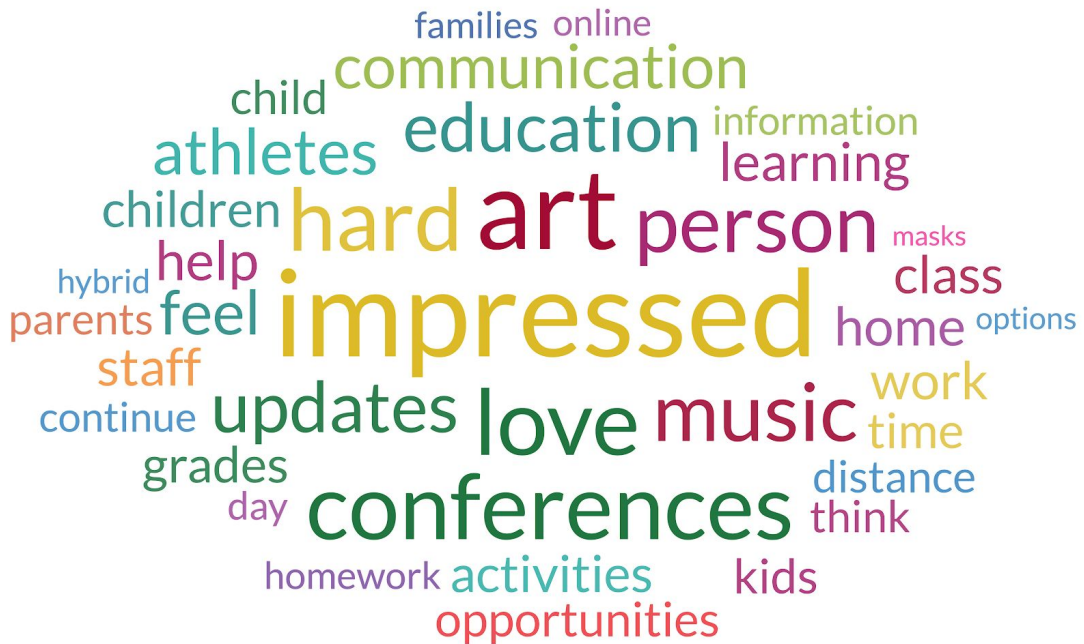
- c ●
- e ●
- s ●
- o ●

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). Note that related words are shown in the same color.

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











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



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 participants. In this approach, the following thoughts ranked among the highest in terms of agreement by ISD 318 parents:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>I'm glad the district is continuing to support a well-rounded education. I've heard of other districts minimizing physical education, arts, and anything that isn't math or reading. We can't do that here!</p> | <p>4.3 ★★★★★ (68) </p> <p>Ranked #1 of 224</p> |
| <p>Elementary Art is a wonderful addition to our student's learning! Thank you for adding Art to student's schedules. My 5th grader loves every project. She's learned so much. She's often recreating projects at home!</p> | <p>4.3 ★★★★★ (64) </p> <p>Ranked #2 of 224</p> |
| <p>Arts, Music & Gym My child has had very positive experiences with the elementary Art, Music and Gym classes. I'm glad those classes are made a priority for kids.</p> | <p>4.3 ★★★★★ (62) </p> <p>Ranked #3 of 224</p> |
| <p>My child enjoys going to school It's important to us that our child has a love of learning and feels engaged and is being supported in his ways of learning</p> | <p>4.2 ★★★★★ (64) </p> <p>Ranked #4 of 224</p> |
| <p>We know kids at RJEMS in classrooms with upper 30s of students, and in gym in the upper 40s. What measures can be taken to reduce these numbers? How can a student learn with 45 other students in the same class? Receive individualized help? How are those teachers staying sane, doing jobs well?</p> | <p>4.2 ★★★★★ (33) </p> <p>Ranked #5 of 224</p> |
| <p>Our schools need home economics classes. In this day and age our students are not prepared do take care of themselves. Ask them if they cook, clean, shop most answer no.</p> | <p>4.2 ★★★★★ (15) </p> <p>Ranked #6 of 224</p> |
| <p>Better communication between conferences When kids start to lag behind, I think it's important to catch them up as soon as possible. It shouldn't wait to be discussed until conferences.</p> | <p>4.2 ★★★★★ (13) </p> <p>Ranked #7 of 224</p> |
| <p>I like that when decisions are made we are given as much notice as possible. I know this isn't the case in other places.</p> | <p>4.1 ★★★★★ (65) </p> <p>Ranked #8 of 224</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>The addition of a regular Art class in elementary has been such a wonderful experience for our student. Plus the new Art room/space is fantastic! Art is an important part of the curriculum</p> | <p>4.1 (57) Ranked #9 of 224</p> |
| <p>I like all the options students get at the high school level for electives. It gives them an opportunity to test the water of a career they may be interested in.</p> | <p>4.1 (34) Ranked #10 of 224</p> |
| <p>Impressed by the teachers! They are clearly working hard.</p> | <p>4.1 (34) Ranked #11 of 224</p> |
| <p>students need two parent teacher conferences a year. One is not sufficient. Very difficult to gauge progress from fall to spring based simply on papers that come home at random. Need more thorough and frequent assessments.</p> | <p>4.1 (11) Ranked #12 of 224</p> |
| <p>I am thrilled that we have in person learning again! My child is happy to be back in the classroom, with his teachers, and around his friends. It is important for our kids to be in the classroom, with their teachers and their classmates. They need social interactions, not more screen time.</p> | <p>4.1 (10) Ranked #13 of 224</p> |
| <p>I think it is hard for teachers to both do distant learning and in person at the secondary level. My child;s teacher will be teaching a class they should not to zooming and in person</p> | <p>4.1 (6) Ranked #14 of 224</p> |
| <p>Extra curricular activities need to be allowed, if sports teams can play the band kids should be allowed to play Activities are important to all kids not just athletes</p> | <p>4.0 (65) Ranked #15 of 224</p> |

Themes

Looking merely at the top thoughts only provides a small part of the story of the district's seeking to find what was working for ISD 318 families, and where the district needed to improve. Our team thoroughly analyzed the data collected, which yielded the following themes of ideas posed and prioritized by participants. (*NOTE: themes are presented here in alphabetical order and not in order of importance*).

- **Art/Music/PE** – Thoughts shared in this area focused on respondents appreciation for these special areas of study, the need to keep them in place, how students benefit from them, and how these areas help give students a well-rounded education.
- **Communications** – Participants in this area shared thoughts in regard to communications of every variety. Many thoughts expressed an appreciation for the consistent communication families have received throughout the pandemic in regard to district-level decisions, as well as school-to-home communications. Conversely, thoughts in this area also expressed concern over the lack of classroom-to-home communication, especially in regard to their child's progress. In addition several thoughts were shared that expressed a desire for more than one parent-teacher conference per year.
- **COVID/Distance Learning** – Thoughts in this area addressed concerns around the pandemic, including both positive and negative issues in regard to distance learning, masks, and thoughts on the return of students full-time.
- **Curriculum** – Thoughts shared under this theme included those on ISD 318's current curriculum, homework, the need to challenge students with more rigor, testing, and having high expectations for students and staff. In addition some thoughts shared a concern about the perceived politicization in the curriculum and classroom.
- **District** – Under this theme thoughts were shared about issues that are typically handled at the district level such as transportation, food service, school calendar, discipline matrix, and budget priorities.
- **Teachers** – In this area, most participants took the opportunity to compliment the ISD 318 teaching staff, particularly in light of, and challenges related to, the COVID-19 pandemic.



Differences and Agreements

Our team further analyzed how the ideas contributed compared when disaggregated by key ideas. While called “differences,” this approach is designed to highlight both areas of division and agreement in the exchange. The content of the thoughts in an exchange often mirrors known dynamics in an organization or community, and as such can bring these dynamics out into the open where they can be addressed. Differences pick up dynamics that are not always visible when you read the top thoughts or explore the themes.

Leaders can address these dynamics by creating a plan and messaging that uses common-interest thoughts to bring people together. By doing this, decisions and actions they want to take can get more immediate buy-in, which in turn means they can be implemented even quicker.

While there were some examples of division of thoughts, where one group rated something high and a counter group rated it low, the areas of common agreement were similar. As evidenced by the following table, when thoughts created strong feelings on one side or another of an issue, there was common agreement in regard to continuing the district’s comprehensive educational offerings, in particular arts, music, physical education.

DIFFERENCES: It is important to note that the following areas of division only represent between 30 to 33 percent of all participants. Nonetheless, by using messages on the common ground ideas of a well-rounded education, communication and high quality staff, the district will be able to bring people with differing views together.

| <u>GROUP A</u> | <u>COMMON INTEREST</u> | <u>GROUP B</u> |
|---|---|--|
| Continue to enforce COVID safety protocols (masks, social distancing, etc.) <i>52 percent</i> | <i>Continue to offer a well-rounded education (arts, music, PE)</i> <i>High quality teachers</i> | Get rid of the masks (kids can’t breathe, can’t see/understand teacher) <i>48 percent</i> |
| More communication from teacher/classroom on student progress (in all subject areas) <i>57 percent</i> | <i>Appreciate advanced notice of decisions</i> <i>Continue to offer a well-rounded education (arts, music, PE)</i> | High quality communication from the district, especially regarding COVID decision <i>43 percent</i> |

Intensities

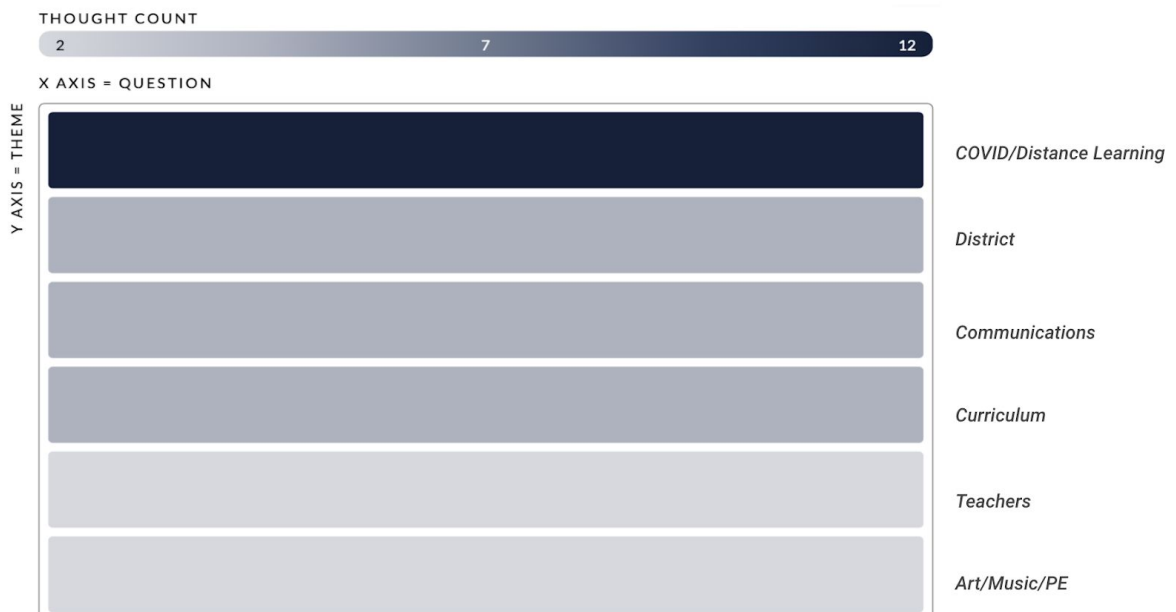
Our team also created heatmaps to assess how intensely participants felt about the thoughts shared within the themed categories. In analyzing this information, we again reviewed two statistical approaches based on the total number of thoughts shared and the importance of each theme by group.

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

- **Art/Music/PE**
 - 14 thoughts shared
 - 129 stakeholders engaged
 - Average star rating: 4.0
- **Communications**
 - 50 thoughts shared
 - 146 stakeholders engaged
 - Average star rating: 3.6
- **COVID/Distance Learning**
 - 61 thoughts shared
 - 142 stakeholders engaged
 - Average star rating: 3.2
- **Curriculum**
 - 35 thoughts shared
 - 137 stakeholders engaged
 - Average star rating: 3.5
- **District**
 - 56 thoughts shared
 - 140 stakeholders engaged
 - Average star rating: 3.3
- **Teachers**
 - 17 thoughts shared
 - 134 stakeholders engaged
 - Average star rating: 3.8

We then again reviewed the two statistical approaches – frequency and importance – in each heatmap. The following heatmaps articulate which themes were most important for each analysis approach, with the darker color indicating a stronger intensity for the topic.

ANALYSIS (A) - Intensity of ratings based on frequency



ANALYSIS (B) - Intensity of ratings based on importance



Further analysis was conducted to look deeper at the various participant groups. For each subgroup below, the following themes emerged for each subgroup as *Important* or *Very Important*.

ANALYSIS (C) - Intensity of ratings disaggregated by *School/Program Affiliation*

* Note that there was little difference in frequency or importance between parent groups.

| | FREQUENCY | | IMPORTANCE | |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|--|
| | Important | Very Important | Important | Very Important |
| Early Childhood Parents | Curriculum | Communication, COVID, District | ---- | Arts/Music/PE, Teachers, Communication |
| Elementary Parents | Communication | COVID, District | Teachers | Arts/Music/PE |
| Middle School Parents | Curriculum | Communication, COVID, District | ---- | Arts/Music/PE, Teachers |
| High School / Alternative Program Parents | Communication, Curriculum | COVID, District | ---- | Arts/Music/PE, Teachers |

04 | Conclusions

The purpose of this exchange was to gather insights and allow for a virtual conversation among ISD 318 parents, families and staff in regard to what is going well for them, and what the district can do better. It is important to think of this exchange as a crowdsourcing platform rather than a 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, sample size, participation rates, etc.), we provide the following observations:

- **Ambassadors.** It is clear that the majority of parents who participated in this exchange are pleased with the learning experiences their students are receiving in ISD 318. We encourage the district to continue engaging parents and providing opportunities for them to not only provide input but also to serve as ambassadors for prospective families.
- **Specialty areas,** particularly the arts, are highly valued as part of a well-rounded education in ISD 318.
- **Communication** at all levels is critical. While in general ISD 318 was lauded for its communication efforts, there was also an area in which the participants would like to see improvement. Specifically, classroom-to-home communication needs to be enriched. While teachers are praised for using the tools available to them, just as frequently participants took issue with getting information about their child when it was too late to help them improve their progress.
- **There's no turning back.** ISD 318's parents and families have become accustomed to the enhanced communications coming from the district and schools, and now view this as a continuing expectation. Returning to "pre-COVID normal" is not an option for communication.
- **Leading from the top.** There are some areas parents would like to see the district tackle, and a number of them need to be brokered at the district level. There were several thoughts shared in regard for the need to hold students, and the teachers and administrators in their charge, more accountable and to maintain high levels for their behavior. Additionally, there were several thoughts shared in regard to the menu offered in school cafeterias and ways to improve it.
- **Engagement.** There were thoughts shared about increasing the number of parent-teacher conferences. While there were only a couple of these thoughts shared, there was considerable engagement among participants on both

thoughts and they relate to the desire for more communication between school/classroom and home.

- **Politics.** There were several thoughts shared in regard to the perception of politics being brought into the classroom, and in regard to the social studies curriculum. While there was no evidence offered to back up these claims, they shouldn't be entirely ignored. A cautionary message to staff, given verbally at the school level, may be the best approach.

Additional Considerations -

The moderate number of participants in this ThoughtExchange is mildly concerning, however the amount of engagement among the participants was high. Greater outreach on future exchanges will likely bring more participants.

It is clear that the participating ISD 318 parents and families feel strongly about the district and appreciate what it's doing on behalf of their children. District leaders can build on this support when finding ways to improve on an already high quality product.

While more detailed demographics were not included in this exchange, it is important that ISD 318 continuously seek ways to engage traditionally underrepresented voices to ensure that future decisions are inclusive and welcoming to all students and families.

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 decision-makers, but also in sharing the results of the exchange with all those who participated. This feedback loop is critical to maintaining trust and encouragement of future engagements. Therefore, we strongly encourage, at a minimum, the sharing of the [live report](#) back with your parents and families.