Opportunities to Heal and Thrive in Des Moines Public Schools:

Winter Roundtable Report

In December 2022, Des Moines Public Schools hosted community roundtables at five high schools to report the findings and action plan created from the Spring 2022 roundtables. The events brought together parents, students, community members, teachers, and staff to talk about how we, as a community, can create safe, healing schools and communities.

Community School Coordinators (CSC) and Bilingual Family Liaisons (BFL) planned and led the Winter roundtables, with the high school CSC as the lead contact and coordinator for each event. 192 people participated in the roundtables with at least 5 languages represented: 125 English, 53 Spanish, 11 Karen, 2 Vietnamese, 4 Burmese.

*The roundtables took place on the following dates:*

* East High School: December 7th
* North High School: December 8th
* Roosevelt High School: December 12th
* Lincoln High School: December 14th
* Hoover High School: December 15th

**Roundtable Themes and Highlights**

The [executive summary and action plan](https://aces360org-my.sharepoint.com/personal/andrea_dencklau_aces360_org/Documents/DMPS/October22_June23/DMPS%20Report__EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY11_28_22.pdf), as well as current services and supports provided by each feeder pattern were presented to participants and followed with discussion and time for questions. Community School Coordinators, Bilingual Family Liaisons, staff, teachers, and administrators, including Interim Superintendent Matt Smith, were available to answer questions. Participants were also given information about their School Advisory Council and were encouraged to attend.

Iowa ACEs 360 compiled and analyzed the notes from these discussions. Table 2 shares the highlights from each theme/topic area discussion and additional questions raised by participants. Overall, participants shared appreciation for their school personnel, the Action Plan and the opportunities for discussion. Participants continued to raise concerns about safety, staff and student mental health, and challenges in district communication.

Table 2

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| **Themes/Topics**  | **Highlights**  |
| **School Advisory Council**  | * What do we hope to accomplish with SAC’s?
* Excited about it, good place for youth involvement, ownership, and voice
* Ensure families are informed about meetings, times, etc.
* SAC’s are not a viable option for many families, especially non-English speaking families; not inclusive and too structured
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| **Mental Health (student and staff)** | * Questions about how students are identified, process, resources, etc.
* Happy about Go Guardian Beacon
* How are we addressing staff mental health? Does panoramic survey ask about staff mental health?
* Need to continue to improve mental health support
* Need lower ratio for school counselors & therapist (add more)
* More accessible—additional languages, times, etc.
* Students who aren’t visibly struggling should be able to access resources easily
* Need spaces for students & staff to practice self-care
* Education and strategies for prevention, break stigma
* Additional instruction to kids about SEL and coping skills
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| **Safety**  | General: * Safety needs are still not addressed—something [bad] is going to happen.
* Need to get to root of violence and include more people in conversations

 Concerns about drugs getting into buildings and on busPersonnel* Appreciate the additional hallway staff, etc.
* Need to address weapons & fighting (what is data telling us?), are staff empowered to break up fights?
* More police and personnel (and bilingual)
* Want school to be seen as a neutral zone (police involvement contradicts that)

Security devices, tools, and protocols* Need checkout or process for students leaving the building.
* Back to basic safety procedures and protocols
* More cameras

Emotional safety.* Parking lot safety (some feel safer than others)
* Some students feel unsafe so carrying weapons to protect themselves
* Good to move from punishment to restoration.
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| **Belonging** | * Need more transformative relationships—When teachers & staff talk with students on personal level, results in students feeling comfortable communicating about safety issues
* More support for transitions from grade to grade
	+ - Transition from 5th to 6th & 8th to 9th is difficult.
* Need peer accountability
* Need diverse education opportunities at ALL schools
* Allowing certain students to leave (for classes) creates major social & education impacts
* Create pathway so students have opportunities to participate in activities that propel them into careers.
* Racial tension
* Slurs
* Are staff/teachers comfortable or approachable about race?
* Gender & sexuality education
	+ Students need to know about resources available to them
* Authentic youth engagement
* Youth connect with their teachers & school staff
* SAC’s are good way for students to be involved
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| **Communication**  | District’s communication is ineffective * Communication on multiple platforms, parents feel it is excessive.
* School CNX—confusing, not using it (Spanish-speaking)
* Needs to be more personal
* Families want to know about resources.
* Need diverse communication tools (multiple languages, medias, etc.)
* Change narrative around SRO removal
* Improve communication around safety concerns/threats (want to be told sooner)
* Need clear points of contact for certain issues at schools
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| **Investment** | N/A  |
| **Staff Diversity/Representation** | Develop a plan* Try new recruitment methods (other cities, etc.)
* Need data—what’s the goal for representation?
* Need to recruit and encourage from our student/family population
* Continue this work.
* Invest in staff, not metal detectors
* Staff retention/burnout is an issue
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| **Community Collaborations** | * Appreciate roundtables, but some people don’t feel they can express in that setting
* Continue roundtables
* Involve outside organizations (some specific examples of good school partnerships)
* Need to increase parent/volunteer involvement
* Need more events that involve the community (maybe planned by?)
* Address the communities wants & needs
* Providing food & childcare to increase involvement at school functions
* Parents/community members can’t show up because of obligations (work, children, etc.)
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| **Other** | * We need to address root causes of violence
* Appreciate the changes/action steps to make kids safer
* Feels like this is reactive work versus proactive planning
* Need to recognize long term impact of the pandemic
* Data transparency
* SRO data
* Post pandemic trends
* Violence
* Population
* Clear cell phone policies
* Transportation is a huge issue for families
* Participants wanted to see report and executive summary sooner
* Students & parents would like to see more follow through from district and schools
* Several positive comments about how participant’s schools are handling things

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**Next Steps:**

Des Moines Public Schools is committed to continued family and community engagement. As we continue to heal as a community and district, the work continues to ensure student safety and wellbeing. The district continues to take steps in the Action Plan. Families and community members are encouraged to participate in the School Advisory Councils to continue to discuss safety, wellbeing and family and student engagement.