



# 100-Day Plan: COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Recommendations to the Superintendent  
January 12, 2017



Every student by face and name.  
Every school, every classroom.  
To and through graduation.



# Superintendent's Focus Areas

Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams coached each project team, provided research expertise and supported development of the plans. She has laid out five areas of focus that guide this process and her work as Superintendent.

## **Prioritizing educational equity:**

“It is critical that we create a District where every person, in every department, is responsible and accountable for the education of all students at every school. We must be devoted to eliminating the opportunity and education achievement gaps for urban youth. We can do this by adhering to a theory of action that ensures strong dynamic interaction between great educators, rigorous and cognitively demanding content, engaged students and families, and community partners that bring coherent supports matched to the specific needs of Rochester children.”

## **Building relational capacity:**

“By building shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect, we will improve learning. We will increase engagement and motivation. Recognizing every person’s experience as unique, we can connect to each other through a deep understanding and acknowledgement of race, ethnicity, and culture. This will ensure that we are mindful, respectful, and inclusive.”

## **Nurturing innovation:**

“We need to consider fresh ideas, and help our schools, leaders, teachers, and students customize solutions for their unique needs. Innovation and customization are essential to ensure that every student gets to grade level, that we accelerate their learning, and get them to graduation.”

## **Creating coherence:**

“Fragmentation gets in the way of serving our children, our parents, our teachers, our schools or our community. The “system” needs to be coherent and user-friendly. Coherence does not mean we all must do the same things. It does mean that our work must produce powerful learning for all youth, with equitable and strong outcomes.”

## **Accountability for action:**

“The talent is here. The answers are in Rochester. But there’s a fifth element of my role as your superintendent. It starts with me holding myself accountable. Holding ourselves accountable for action, and working with a strong sense of urgency.”

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# Introduction



The Rochester City School District's (RCSD) new Superintendent, Barbara Deane-Williams, initiated a 100-day listening and learning process to identify thoughtful and effective solutions to the challenges that are most important to Rochester students, families, staff, residents and businesses. This process actively engages the entire RCSD community in the identification of the District's most significant needs and concerns, and challenges them to implement research-based innovations that optimize the District's many existing resources.

The Listen and Learn Communications Team (LLCT) is one of five listening and learning project teams. The overarching objective of the LLCT is to ensure timely communication and quality engagement opportunities to build community understanding and involvement.

## **The critical challenge presented to the Listen and Learn Communications Team is:**

***How might we improve communication, customer service and public engagement through digital media and enhanced two-way communication with staff, students, family and community?***



# Executive Summary

Communications and engagement are the essential foundations for improving achievement in Rochester schools. Our work to strengthen instruction, align resources with results, improve school climate and better match Central Office support to school and student needs depends on clear understanding and active participation by the customers we serve.

As part of Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams' 100-day planning process, the Listen and Learn Communications Team sought input on how communication and engagement are working now and how we can improve moving forward. We broke our challenge statement down into a few questions addressed in this report.

## Communication

- What do stakeholders want to know?
- How are they receiving information now?
- How would they like to receive information in the future?

## Engagement

- How are stakeholders involved in their school and the District?
- What prevents them from being as engaged as they would like to be?

## Customer Service

- Do stakeholders feel valued by their school and by the District?
- How do stakeholders feel about customer service when they receive help from their school and/or the District?

We began by reviewing exemplar surveys, policies and practices from other districts. Through online surveys we received direct input from more than 1,600 students, parents, staff members and community partners. We reviewed quantitative data with students, teachers, school administrators and community partners as part of extended-team conversations. Project leads participated in focus groups and large-group meetings with teachers and administrators for additional insight.

A few key findings emerged that cut across stakeholder groups.

- Schools are viewed more positively than Central Office for communication, engagement and customer service
- Academic performance and ways to improve achievement are the most important topic that all stakeholder groups want to know about
- Email is a preferred means of communication – the top choice of all groups surveyed for receiving general information
- Views on use of social media and smartphones during school hours are mixed

We should note that Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams has taken actions during the development of our plan that align with these findings. One is the creation of *Leadership Link*, a weekly round-up of essential information for school administrators that is designed to reduce the demand on schools to review and respond to a high volume of emails from multiple Central Office departments. A second example is “At Your Service,” a dedicated resource in the Superintendent’s Office to ensure responses within 24 hours to concerns that schools or District departments have not addressed in a timely way. In December 2016 the District launched “RCSD Headlines,” a web-based resource that covers District news and administrative actions for staff members, community partners and families.

Our report provides recommendations in six areas to build on these actions and strengthen communication, engagement and customer service.

- Expand utilization of existing tools by improving processes and practices
- Develop strategies and toolkits to address the mixed satisfaction ratings between schools and Central Office
- Create flexible, comprehensive and inclusive policies and regulations on social media and student cell-phone use
- Provide coordinated support to partners
- Improve communication and engagement on controversial or complex issues by adapting the multi-faceted approach employed by the City of Rochester, which includes facilitated forums, “telephone town halls” and online surveys
- Initiate an ongoing process to review communication and customer service satisfaction levels among stakeholders so that we can assess progress and areas for improvement

The following pages provide more detail on our findings and recommendations for continued feedback from the students, families, staff members and community partners we serve.

# Team Members

## Executive Sponsor

### *Chip Partner; Chief Communications Officer*

Chip reports to the Superintendent of Schools and is responsible for District-level communications to staff, parents, students and the general public. He also serves as the District's spokesperson to the news media and compliance officer for Freedom of Information Law requests. Before joining the District in December of 2012, Chip was the Director of Public Relations for Roberts Communications, one of Rochester's largest ad agencies, serving corporate, nonprofit and government clients. He served previously as president of Saphar & Associates, a smaller agency specializing in public relations that merged with Roberts in 2004.

## Project Leads

### *Annmarie Lehner; Information Technology Officer*

Annmarie is the Chief Information Technology Officer of the Rochester City School District and has been with the District for 29 years. In this role, Annmarie oversees all facets of network infrastructure, telecom (VoIP), enterprise business and student applications, HelpDesk, school technology support, Print Shop, District-wide copier services, Instructional Technology, as well as all Online Learning Initiatives for students and staff. Prior to her role as CIO, Annmarie held the positions of Director of Business Enterprise Applications and Software Developer within the District.

### *Eva Thomas; Senior Director, Youth Development and Family Services*

Eva is the Senior Director for Youth Development and Family Services/Office of Parent Engagement for the Rochester City School District. This is a new position for Mrs. Thomas. She has been a part of the RCSD family for approximately 13 years. She was the former Principal of Dr. Charles T. Lunsford School # 19 where she served for five years. In her current role as Senior Director, she oversees many projects and tasks such as supporting the Parent Advisory Council and Bilingual Educational Councils, utilizing one percent (1%) of Title I funding to support initiatives and programs that empower and encourage parents. Parents are motivated to be productive members of school communities, teaching them how to advocate for their children, and sharing power within the school community to make a difference. In addition to this, the Office of Parent Engagement collaborates with many community partners to hold Title I events that support educational opportunities for growth and development within the family and school community.

### *Keith Babuszcak; Executive Director Career Pathways*

Keith serves as the District's Executive Director of Career Pathways. The District offers 24 career programs that prepare students for a variety of careers and opportunities for further study. To support these programs, the District works among numerous community, workforce and postsecondary education partners. Keith has taught, led, and consulted with career pathways in Texas, Massachusetts and New York.

## **Project Manager**

*Judy Schuster; Project Resource Manager*

Judy provides project management and grant writing support for large, Districtwide projects, such as this 100-Day Plan, summer learning and School Improvement Grants. Her previous professional experiences include being a project manager for Kodak and grant writer for the Greece Central School District and Girl Scouts of Western New York. She is “Grant Professional Certified” (GPC) and has worked in the Department of Financial Management and Grants for seven years.

## **Extended Team Members**

### **RCSD Staff**

- Mary Andrecolich-Diaz; Principal, Rochester International Academy
- Anthony Smith; Director, P-TECH Rochester
- Abel Perez Pherett; Executive Director, English Language Learners
- Thea Delahanty; Instructional Technology Teacher
- Peter Hilling; Instructional Technology Teacher
- Ricky Frazier; Volunteer Coordinator, Office of Parent Engagement
- Nydia Padilla Rodriguez; Director, Strategic Partnerships

### **Students**

- Jarell Green; World of Inquiry School #58
- Jonathan Orlando; Integrated Arts and Technology High School

### **Community Groups**

- James Smith; Director of Communications and Public Events, City of Rochester
- Ted Capuano; Assistant to the Director of Communications, City of Rochester
- Todd Butler; President and CEO, Causewave Community Partners





The Office of Parent Engagement aligns its work to the *National Standards for Family and School Partnerships* and works diligently to make all District stakeholders aware of these standards.

**STANDARD 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community**

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued and connected to each other, to school staff and to what students are learning and doing in class.

**STANDARD 2: Communicating Effectively**

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

**STANDARD 3: Supporting Student Success**

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

**STANDARD 4: Speaking Up for Every Child**

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

**STANDARD 5: Sharing Power**

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence and create policies, practices and programs.

**STANDARD 6: Collaborating with Community**

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.



## Methods

### *Survey Design*

Using the communication survey exemplars, the LLCT created four distinct surveys tailored to the specific needs and interests of:

- Parents
- Students
- Staff
- Community Partners and Volunteers

Each survey addressed the key focus areas of communication, customer service and engagement. Questions were designed to answer the following questions:

- *On what information/topics do the stakeholders need to be kept informed?*
- *Overall, how well do schools and the District provide the information that is important to stakeholders?*
- *What methods of communication are most frequently used now?*
- *To plan ahead, what are stakeholders' preferred methods of communication?*
- *Do stakeholders feel valued at their school and the District?*
- *How are stakeholders involved in their school and the District?*
- *What prevents stakeholders from being as engaged as they would like to be?*
- *How do stakeholders feel about the customer service they receive from their school and the District?*

In addition, school administrators were surveyed for feedback on the District's social media policies. Specifically, school administrators were asked for feedback on the accessibility of social media sites for staff and students while within the District's network.

## Survey Administration

Surveys were distributed and communicated using a variety of methods:

- A 100-Day Plan landing page was added to the District website. All surveys were accessible through this site.
- Emails were sent to all staff and to students in grades 5-12 using their District email addresses.
- The Office of Parent Engagement sent links to the parent survey to parents included on the department's listserv. Emails were also sent to parents whose email addresses were in PowerSchool.
- Partners and volunteers were contacted by email.
- Other communication outreach included the FOCUS on Education event sponsored by Henderson Ford, WDKX radio and RCSD Board of Education President, Van White.

Summaries of all stakeholder data collected using SurveyMonkey are included in Appendix E.

## Engagement of the Extended Listen and Learn Communications Team

The Extended Listen and Learn Communications Team included students, teachers and school-level administrators in addition to the core team, along with City of Rochester and Causewave community partners. This team met after the survey completion date to review the survey data. Their observations and conclusions are incorporated into the findings and recommendations in this report. The Extended LLCT also suggested improvements to the surveys and the survey process for future data collections.



Want to improve the  
Rochester City School  
District? *Tell us how!*

Five project teams are creating 100-Day Listening and Learning plans to improve these critical areas:

- Instruction
- Finance
- Central Office
- School Climate
- Communication and Engagement

### How You Can Help

Learn more about each project team and take our surveys on [www.rcsdk12.org/ListenLearn](http://www.rcsdk12.org/ListenLearn)

Send your ideas, questions and comments to [ListenLearn@rcsdk12.org](mailto:ListenLearn@rcsdk12.org)

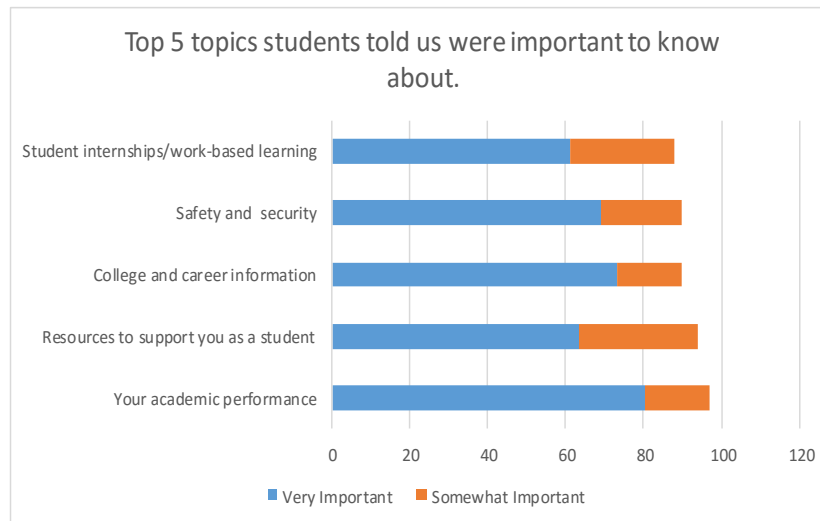


*Together, we can improve our schools.*

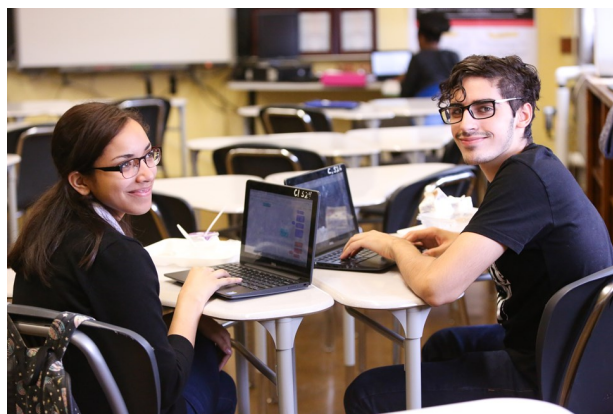
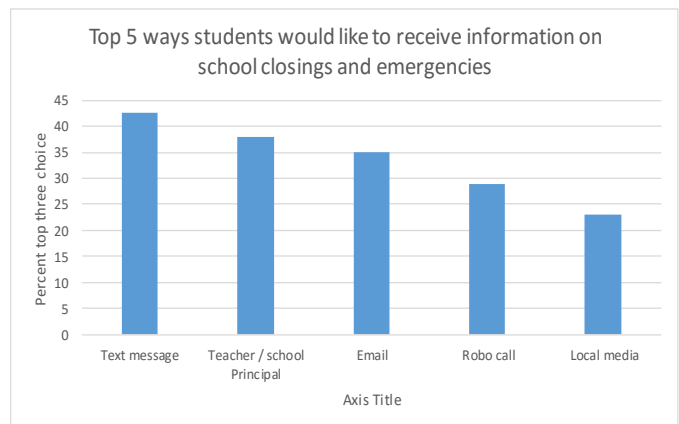
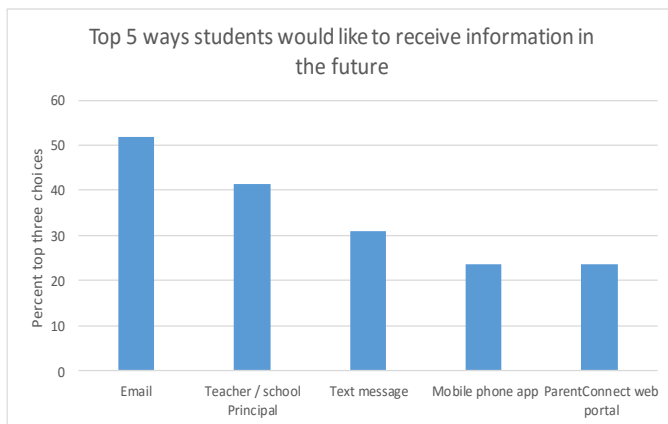




- Nearly all students (97%) identified their academic performance as the most important thing they want to know about.



- 72% of students reported that the Code of Conduct was “very important” (35%) or “somewhat important” (37%) to know about.
- Students’ top three choices for their preferred method of communication were:
  - 1) email (52%)
  - 2) teachers/Principals (41%)
  - 3) text messages (31%)

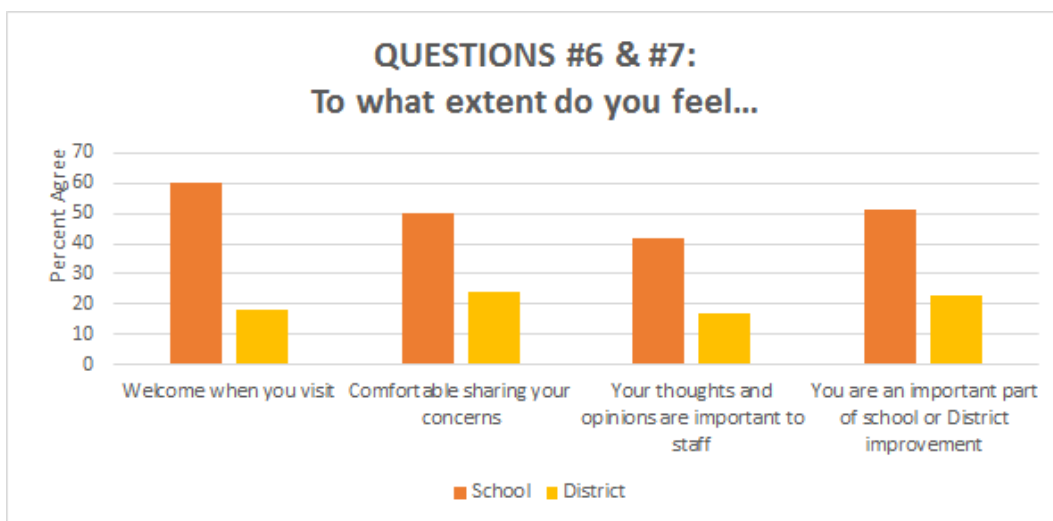
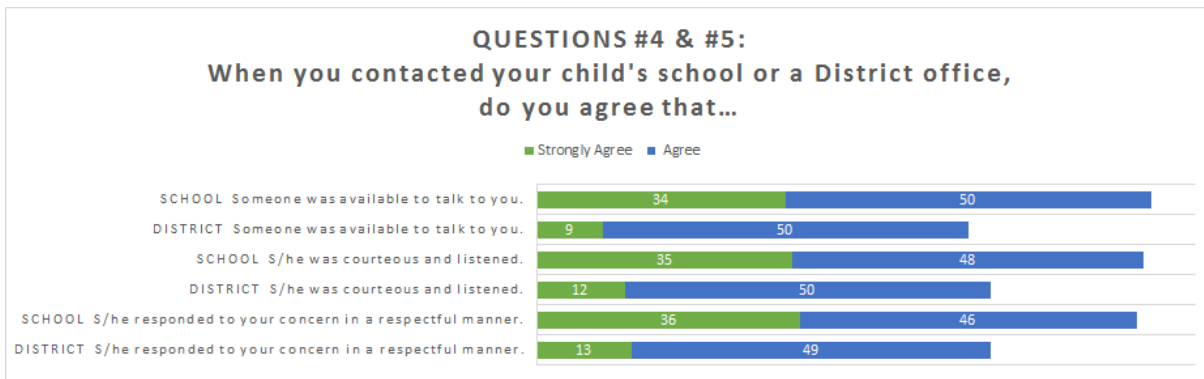


# Findings

## Parents

141 parents responded (representing all grade levels)

- 100% of parents reported that their child’s academic performance was important.
- Parents preferred the same top three methods of communication as students:
  - 1) email (67%)
  - 2) teacher/Principal (43%)
  - 3) text message (35%)
- 68% of parents reported that communication on the Code of Conduct was “very important.” An additional 19% reported it was “somewhat important.”
- 58% of the parents stated that it is important for them to know about resources available to them to support their child and family.
- In general, parents reported greater satisfaction with school-level interactions than District-level.







# Findings

## Staff

**610 staff responded**

59 administrators

378 teachers

43 instructional support staff

130 other support staff

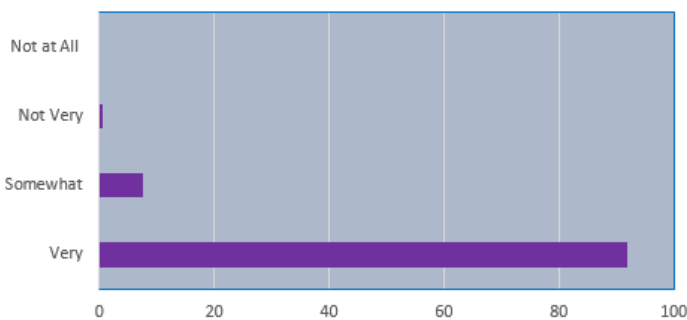


- While 93% of staff respondents felt that they were valuable contributors to their school or department, only 77% felt comfortable sharing concerns with leadership and fewer (66%) felt their thoughts and opinions were important to leadership.

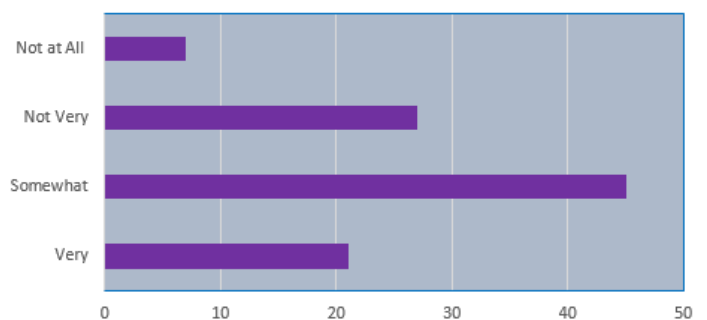
	Very Much	Somewhat	Not Very Much	Not at All	Total
You are a valuable contributor to your school/department	67.33% 408	25.25% 153	6.11% 37	1.32% 8	606
You are an important part of improving your school and/or the Rochester City School District	56.77% 344	30.03% 182	10.07% 61	3.14% 19	606
Comfortable sharing your concerns about your school and/or the district	38.14% 230	39.30% 237	16.58% 100	5.97% 36	603
Your thoughts and opinions are important to school and district leadership	27.36% 162	38.68% 229	24.49% 145	9.46% 56	592

- Staff commented that changes in leadership have created inconsistencies in practices and communications from the District.
- Many staff reported difficulty in getting information or responses from District offices. While 92% of staff respondents felt that it was very important to be aware of resources available to support them in their jobs, only 21% of staff reported a high rating to the District or their schools in providing this information.

Resources To Support Job  
Level of Importance



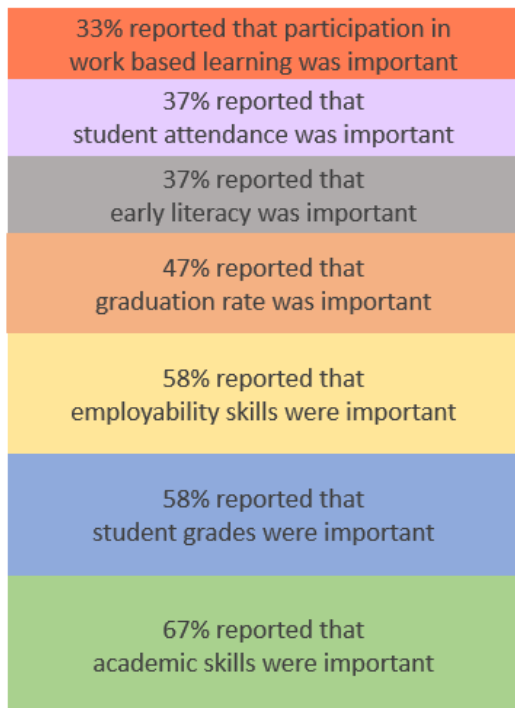
Resources To Support Job  
Accessibility of Information







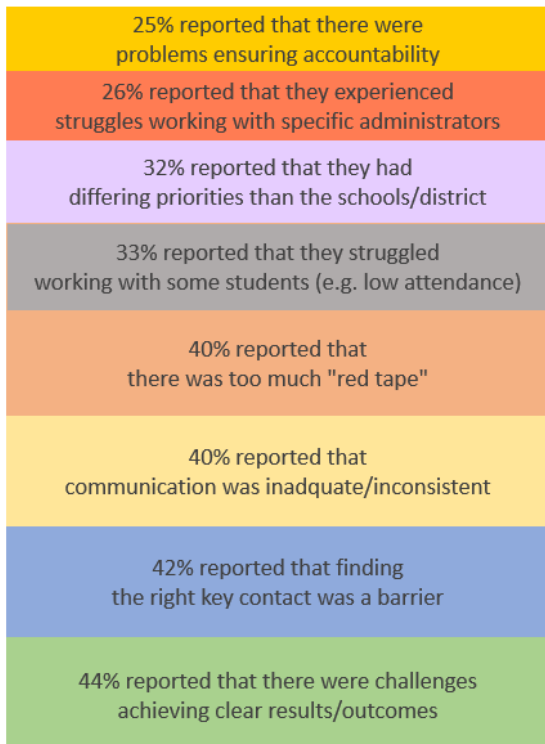
### What Metrics Are Most Important to Partners?



Partners identified the student outcomes that are most important to them: academic achievement, soft skills/ employability skills and attendance rates. These measures cross all grades from early literacy skills to graduation.



### What Were the Biggest Challenges You Faced Working With Schools and the District?



Partners also identified areas that hinder their work with schools and students. Top barriers included unclear outcomes (including different priorities and a lack of accountability), poor communication, student concerns such as low attendance and visibility/feeling valued.



# Findings

Extended Listen and Learn Communication Team

## City of Rochester, Department of Communications & Public Events

James Smith, Director of Communications and Public Events for the City of Rochester, and Ted Capuano, Assistant to the Director of Communications, provided an overview of methods used by the City of Rochester when engaging the public. For all critical City of Rochester initiatives, public feedback is sought using a three-pronged issues engagement strategy:

### Telephone Town Halls:

Tele-Town Hall® dials out to a list of phone numbers. The targeted audience receives a personalized, pre-recorded message inviting them to remain on the line if they wish to be transferred automatically to the live Tele-Town Hall® event.

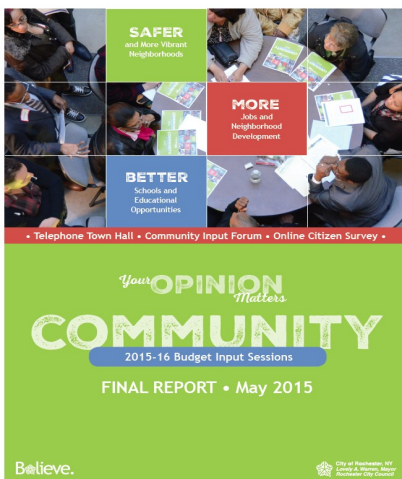
When joining the meeting, participants have the opportunity to ask the Mayor questions live, as well as to respond to integrated survey questions using their phone keypads.

### Community Input Forums:

The City of Rochester provides facilitator training to key staff members. Facilitators participate in Community Input Forums, working with small groups of community members during the session. Four or five facilitators work with community members at each forum, gathering input on different topics. The Mayor attends most forums and will participate in sessions with each group. At the end of each forum, facilitators report out to the full group of participants. In this way, the City receives the feedback it needs, but the public also receives immediate feedback.

### Online Citizen Surveys:

The City of Rochester posts online surveys on its public website and also advertises these surveys through local radio stations and through social media.



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Rochester is planning now for the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2015 and ends June 30, 2016, or fiscal year 2015-16. The Office of Management and Budget estimates a budget gap of \$34.8 million.

Mayor Warren wants to hear about the community's priorities in relation to City programs and services, as decisions are made on how to close the gap. This report highlights the citizen perceptions and opinions gathered through a telephone town hall, a public citizen input forum and an online survey.

The public was invited by the Mayor to provide input to the budget process in one of three ways:

Date	Event	Participation
April 27	Telephone Town Hall	2,723
April 21	Citizen Input Forum at City Hall	198
April 21-27	Online Survey	373

Example from City of Rochester, 2015-16 Budget Process

## Extended LLCT Feedback and Recommendations

Students, teachers and administrators on the Extended Listen and Learn Communications Team reviewed survey results and proposed improvements to the survey design and distribution process. The Extended LLCT reported:

- The surveys were too long.
- Surveys should be administered in multiple formats, not just electronically (e.g., paper, telephone).
- Distribution should not focus on email as the sole method to advertise and promote surveys (e.g., also use school events, bookbag hand-outs).
- Student surveys could be conducted in class on “down days” (e.g., before vacations, first couple days of school).
- Surveys should be repeated annually to track changes in stakeholder preferences and needs.
- A process to keep phone number lists current is needed for effective calling and text messaging.
- Parent Centers should be established at every school.
- Students asked that students be answerable for their own cell phone use. The role of the school should be to provide guidance on responsible decision making.
- Students said that social media is a distraction at school.



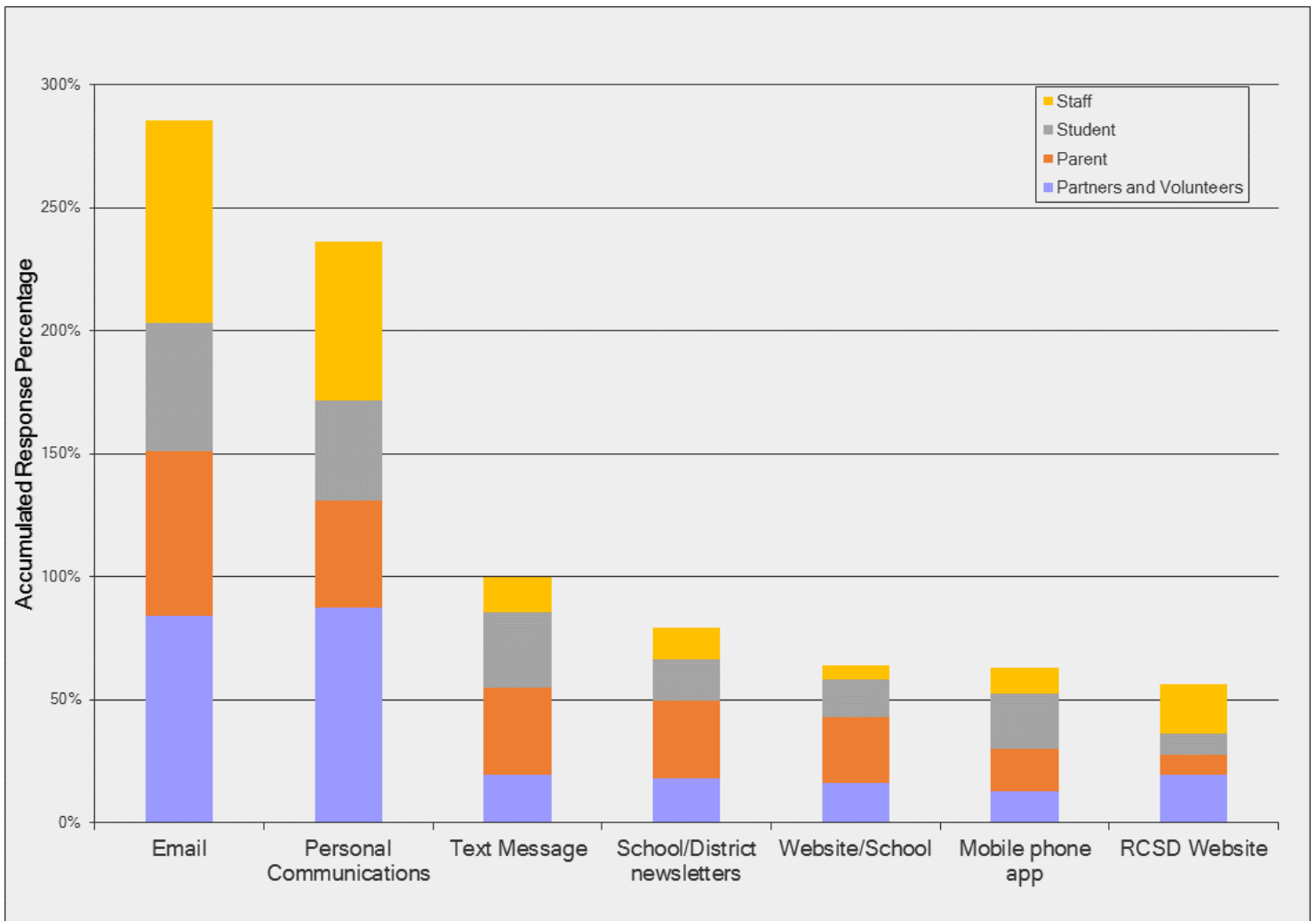
# Findings

## Common Observations Across Stakeholder Groups

Students' academic performance was the most important topic that students, parents and staff wanted to know about.

Stakeholder Group	Reported Very Important & Somewhat Important
Students	97%
Parents	100%
Staff	92%

All stakeholder groups identified e-mail and personal communications as their preferred method of communication.



# Voices of RCSD Stakeholders



“Communication between Central Office and schools needs to improve.”

“I feel my school communicates better than the District.”

“I am pleased with site-based communications, but not with Central Office.”

“Personally, I receive great satisfaction and positive emotional experiences from spending time with students. I feel like a rock star at school because the kids value their experience with us so highly and are so happy to participate.”

“Notify the students more on grades and alerts.”

“Give out information on events and other activities weeks in advance so students and parents can prepare for them.”

“It would be great if the District could update their communications skills, especially when it comes to the students.”

“Social media is a big distraction while at school.”



“It was nice knowing that someone wanted to know my thoughts.”

“Teachers should inform parents/guardians of any issues or concerns way before a report card comes home. Teachers should also recognize the different learning styles of individual students due to social economic status, culture.”



# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve utilization of existing tools by improving processes and practices.
  - Engage and communicate with families using initiatives that align with the six National PTA Standards, such as parent learning cafes and family-friendly school certification.
  - Improve electronic communication with parents, students, staff and community members (including email, social media and smartphone apps).
  - Equalize two-way communication to maximize engagement by implementing formal channels for feedback and suggestions.
  - Establish a regular practice of collecting parental email addresses at all District and school events to build a comprehensive database that allows targeted communication by grade level and school.
  - Expand the use of text messaging through Blackboard Connect automated calling.
  - Employ technology to encourage online engagement opportunities, such as web chat “office hours,” Twitter town halls, Facebook live chat and telephone town halls.
  
2. Develop strategies and toolkits to address the mixed satisfaction ratings between schools and Central Office. Steps to consider include:
  - Identify and celebrate bright spots of excellence in school communication and customer service.
  - Disseminate these practices throughout the District.
  - Develop toolkits to make excellent customer service routine in interactions with internal and external constituents.
    - Consider simple, easy to implement tools like “[Happy or Not](#)” or other interactive surveys for departments and events that warrant.
    - Recognize that employees who feel appreciated and respected provide better customer service, and institute a regular employee satisfaction survey conducted by Executive Cabinet with results posted each year.
  
3. Engage students, parents, and staff to develop comprehensive and inclusive policies and regulations on social media and student cell-phone use. Policies should be flexible enough to support innovation and variation at each building.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Provide partners coordinated support.
  - Cultivate partnerships that align to District priorities and communicate consistently with partners through a single point of contact.
  - Engage community partners in the development of a comprehensive and inclusive rubric for measuring partner impact on student success.
5. Improve communication and engagement on controversial or complex issues by adapting the City of Rochester model.
6. Initiate an ongoing process to track communication and customer service satisfaction levels in schools and District departments. An improved survey tool and process can play a central role in making this happen, following the improvements recommended by stakeholders in this 100-Day Listening and Learning process.



# Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Exemplars

Appendix B: District Cell Phone Policies

Appendix C: Social Media Guidelines

Appendix D: RCSD Board of Education Policies

Appendix E: Survey Summary Data

(Appendices are available online at [www.rcsdk12.org/listenlearn](http://www.rcsdk12.org/listenlearn))



## Rochester City School District

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