



BETTER TOGETHER COMMISSION

ENGAGEMENT ACTION TABLE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

REPORT FROM APRIL 26, 2018, MEETING

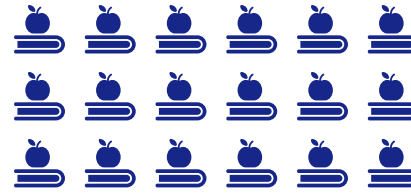
INTRODUCTION

The Better Together Commission was created to engage the community and facilitate a study of Jackson Public Schools to inform a collective vision and strategic plan for the school district with one goal: a quality education for every child in the City of Jackson.

One of the central elements of this work includes inviting a broad and diverse group of community stakeholders into a process of meaningful public engagement. This began during the commission's regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, April 26, 2018, at Pearl Street AME Church.

Parents, students, educators, community members, and other stakeholders convened around "action tables" to design a framework for engagement that will inform a series of conversations across the City of Jackson. These will provide community members an opportunity to share ideas and propose solutions to ensure all students in Jackson have access to high-quality, public education.

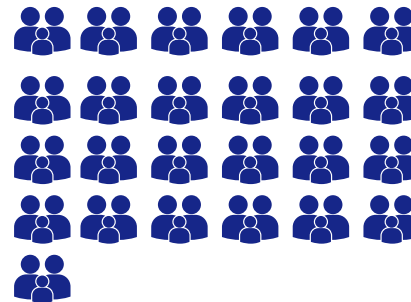
A total of 93 people participated in the initial meeting, representing a variety of backgrounds and roles within the district.



18 EDUCATORS



12 STUDENTS



25 PARENTS



38 COMMUNITY MEMBERS

THE PROCESS

A mix of parents, educators, students, and community members collaborated at each table. As community members entered the room, they were asked to share how they viewed their involvement in the work of the commission on a continuum from **disconnected to instrumental**.

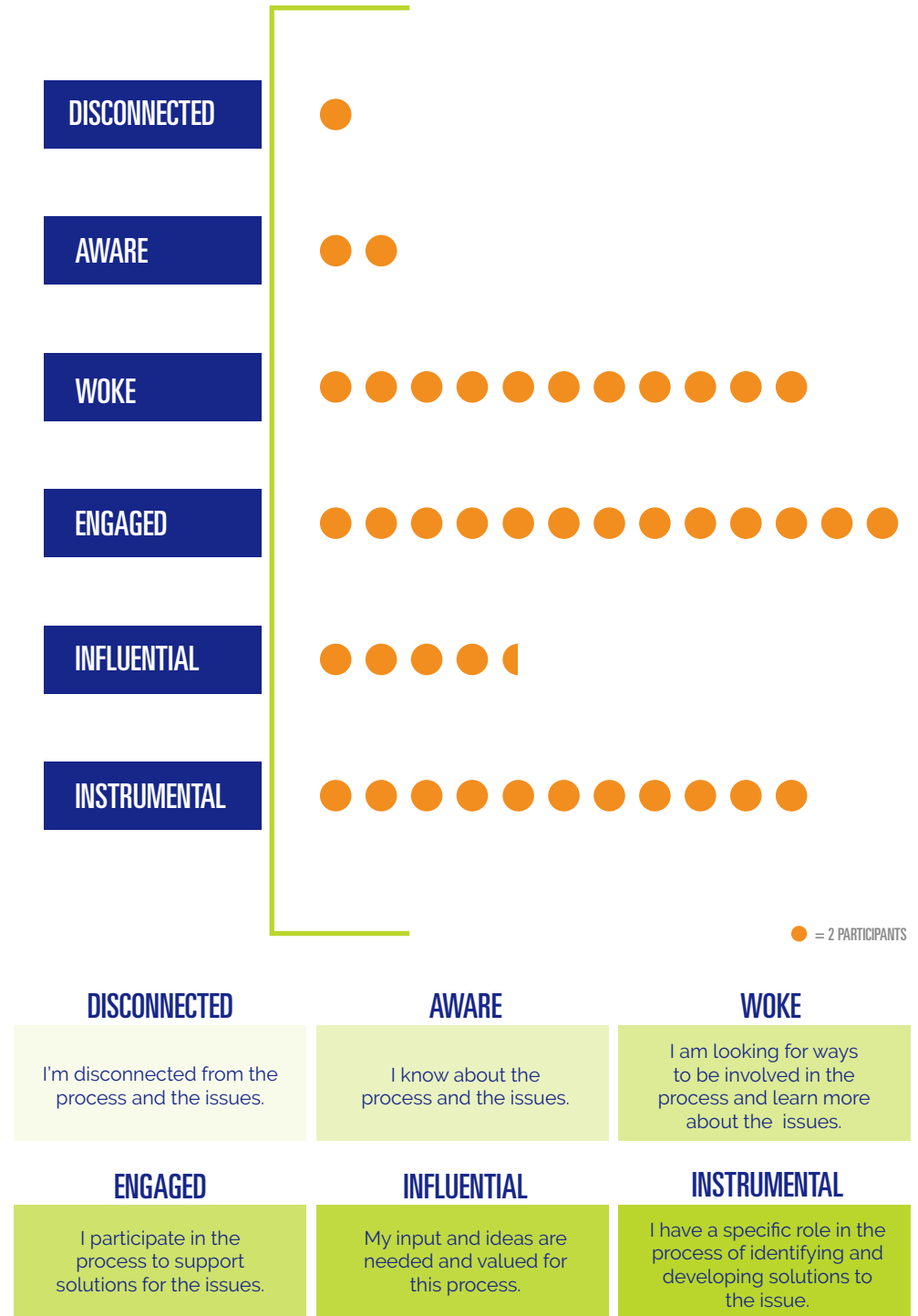
During the meeting, participants discussed four questions and shared their ideas with the group:

- What is our vision for how the community engagement process will look? Who's involved and how does it feel?
- What is our vision for what the community engagement process will produce? What will we get out of it?
- What are the core values that should guide the engagement process?
- How should we organize/focus our community engagement efforts geographically—by ward, by feeder pattern, or some other way?

Individual tables worked to answer one of the following three questions:

- What types of community engagement will be most effective, meaningful, and valuable for our community?
- What specific organizations or networks can lead the community engagement efforts in the geographic areas we have chosen?
- How do we ensure our community engagement process is inclusive? Who needs to be in this room who is not here?

The following report includes a summary of the ideas and information shared during the community engagement session.



WHAT DOES MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE FOR JACKSON?

Meaningful engagement is rooted in a shared understanding that we must affirm the voices of everyone in Jackson in order to facilitate an inclusive, transparent, and intentional exchange of ideas that values our collective strengths and assets.

Through this process, we hope to develop intergenerational and cross-sectional relationships that foster shared accountability for the educational and economic success of our community.

WHAT ARE OUR CORE VALUES THAT WILL GUIDE THIS WORK?

INCLUSIVITY

As a community, we will relentlessly work to create meaningful opportunities, safe spaces, and creative channels so people from all backgrounds can fully participate.

TRANSPARENCY

As a community, we will openly and frequently share the information we collect, the intentions we hold, and the insights we have gained.

INNOVATION

As a community, we will be open to taking risks, exploring new ideas, and considering unconventional options to imagine new and different possibilities for our community.

COLLABORATION

As a community, we will collectively design and develop solutions that build upon one another's ideas, strengths, and assets and honor the contributions of every stakeholder.

HONESTY

As a community, we will be honest in our communication and interactions with one another to build trust and foster genuine relationships.

ADDITIONAL SHARED VALUES

Community members also shared these additional values they believed to be important in this community engagement process.



GEOGRAPHIC APPROACH

In a city as large and diverse as Jackson, determining a systematic approach to organizing community engagement efforts is critical to reach as many stakeholders as possible, and targeted enough to penetrate neighborhoods and networks.

As a community, we will seek to leverage the existing ward and school district feeder pattern boundaries and identify other methods to engage stakeholders who have organized themselves in other ways, including online and affinity groups.

Organizing By Ward

Community-based organizations, social and civic groups, teacher and support staff organizations, faith-based institutions, nonpartisan political groups, and neighborhood associations can assist with community engagement in the city's seven wards. These organizations can work together in small groups to take advantage of experience, resources, and hyperlocal connections to engage the general public, policymakers, business leaders, retired educators, nonprofit leaders and staff, and opportunity youth.

Specific criteria, research, and outreach will be required to identify organizations to assist with engagement efforts, especially hyperlocal groups and networks that can help facilitate organic engagement and interactions at the neighborhood level.

Organizing By Feeder Pattern

Educators, parents, and students are familiar with the Jackson Public Schools feeder patterns, and many people associate more closely with the schools in their feeder pattern than their ward.

Parent-teacher-student associations (PTSA's), parent groups, student groups, teacher and support staff organizations, and alumni organizations can assist with community engagement efforts within the school district's seven feeder patterns. These groups can take advantage of the connection to schools within individual feeder patterns and provide opportunities for rich and meaningful opportunities for students to participate in the community engagement process. These organizations can leverage existing relationships to engage students, partners, alumni, teachers, support staff, and administrators.

Specific criteria, research, and outreach will be required to identify a diverse group of parents, students, and organizations to assist with engagement efforts, especially students and families with special needs, disabilities, or unstable housing.

Other Organization Strategies

The Engagement Action Table will work closely with community engagement liaisons and other partners to identify additional approaches to organize community engagement efforts with a specific focus on identifying hard-to-reach, disconnected, and disaffected groups, especially those populations identified in the inclusion section of this report.



WHO CAN HELP?

Participants identified the following organizations as groups to aid and assist in the engagement process.

- Artists
- Ask for More Jackson
- Barber shops
- Black Business Pages
- Businesses (inclusive of owners)
- Community-based organizations
- Community elders
- Current and retired educators
- Greater Jackson Chamber
- Institutions of Higher Learning
- The Institute of Southern Jewish Life
- Jackson Council Parent Teacher Association
- Jackson Federation of Teachers
- Jackson State University | Mississippi Urban Research Center
- Jobs for Mississippi Graduates
- Leadership Greater Jackson
- Legislators and city council members
- Lodges, clubs, and Greek-letter organizations
- Midtown Partners
- Ministers
- Mississippi Association of Educators/Jackson Association of Educators
- Mississippi Economic Council
- Mississippi M.O.V.E.
- Mississippi Public Broadcasting
- Neighborhood associations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Operation Shoestring
- Operation Shoestring Ambassadors
- Parents
- Religious/faith-based organizations
- School adopters and sponsors
- Students
- Trade organizations
- Youth Leadership Jackson

WHERE DO WE START?

Participants suggested and shared the following ideas as places to begin engagement efforts.

- Conduct engagement activities in each ward
- Schedule student performances during parent-teacher association meetings
- Host block parties and/or street festivals with entertainment (e.g. fall into..., spring into..., or a Village Festival)
- Plan revival activities that engage parents and children
- Support free, quality extra-curricular activities
- Host a free lunch event for teachers
- Plan recreational activities for teens
- Build awareness through the media (television, billboards, and radio)
- Mail information to Jackson residents

WHO NEEDS TO BE INCLUDED?

Participants identified the following groups and organizations as essential to the engagement process:

- Civic organizations
- Culturally-diverse clubs
- City leaders
- Fire departments
- Police departments
- Mississippi Department of Education
- All community stakeholders
- Young people
- Groups of various ages
- Parents
- State representatives
- College and university representatives
- Educators
- Administrators

RADICAL INCLUSION

In order to gather ideas from all Jacksonians and develop solutions that meet the needs of every child and family, there are many voices that need to be heard, including:

- Homeless students and families
- Students and families with unstable housing
- Opportunity youth (16-30 year-olds disconnected from educational institutions and formal employment)
- Students who have failed/repeated one or more grades
- Students with multiple disciplinary referrals
- Immigrant/non-English speaking populations/non-native English speakers
- LGBTQ students and parents
- Pregnant and parenting teens (including fathers)
- Female single parent heads of households
- Non-custodial fathers
- Non-custodial mothers
- Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents
- Foster and adoptive parents
- Head Start parents/parents with children in Pre-K/K-4
- Youth in the juvenile justice system
- Students currently or formerly attending Capital City Alternative School and their families
- Students and parents with disabilities
- Students with mental health needs (including substance use disorder)
- Grandparents and other biological guardians
- College education majors/similar majors (including JPS graduates)
- Millennials/Xennials
- Non-Christian faith communities
- Young people who are not involved in any extracurricular activities
- Creatives, artists, and musicians
- Matriculating students
- School counselors



HOPES & ASPIRATIONS

Participants shared their hopes and aspirations for this community engagement process. Here are some of their responses:

- That there is an avenue for ALL community members to express their concerns
 - That this will drive greater community buy-in
 - A bond will be built between school and community
 - We build stronger schools and communities “brick by brick”
 - That Jackson thrives for excellence for families, schools, and communities
 - We will define problems and find solutions that work for everyone
 - The meetings will grow in size and intensity
 - One city. One vision. One dream.
 - All voices will be valued in the process
 - We will have a better, “world class” school system that prepares students for their futures
- Our schools pedagogy emphasizes self-realization through student-initiated, solutions-based learning that is opted out from state testing
 - The commission will continue to share information that is easily accessible
 - The commission will be transparent and honest
 - That the process will be transformative for all who are involved
 - Students will become more aware of what’s going on
 - Stakeholders (faith-based organizations, colleges, businesses) will be supportive/reward students
 - Decisions made will be intentional and reflective of multiple voices at the table

OUR COMMITMENTS

COMMITMENTS

The 93 participants committed to doing the following to ensure this engagement process is successful:

- Show up and inspire/embrace change
- Accept criticism
- Be authentic
- To continue to hold the commission accountable and do my part by playing an active role
- Invest time and money in areas I am able to move the work
- Commit to being committed
- To stay engaged
- To be all in and use my personal and professional power
- To support effective collaborations in support of Jackson Public Schools and the Jackson residents
- To remain involved and be intentional
- To remain active, even after my child graduates from Jackson Public Schools
- To work to provide exposure and opportunity for students
- To continue coming to meetings and share information with others
- To volunteer/invest time and energy
- To making sure that the student's voices are heard

BETTER TOGETHER

COMMISSION

Our Schools.
Our Community.
Our Future.

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