

Needs & Nurture: Student Reflection Summary

When students in Grades 3-8 were asked to reflect on their school experience, a common theme began to emerge across all grade levels: they have many of the same needs as well as an equal desire to be nurtured.

Throughout the months of October and November, Superintendent Ted Stec and Director of Communications & Strategic Planning Jenn Nimke met with nearly 100 students in Grades 3-8 to seek their feedback as part of the Connect 44 Strategic Planning Process. Students were asked a variety of questions to better understand their needs such as describing their best day of school, reflecting on the attributes of their favorite teachers, commenting on what they would like to change about their school and sharing what they wish their was more of in the world.

While responses did differ based on building and age group, their overall ideas shared a high-level of commonality. The following list was created to highlight those common themes.

1. Leadership Opportunities and Student Choice

Several students shared that subjects or specific days in which when they enjoyed their learning or school the most was when they had an opportunity to lead. For example, they were elected to student council or named a Kindergarten Helper, What was also important to them was feeling like they had a choice, or ownership, in their learning. They were able to pick what kind of project they wanted to complete, dress up as different characters or be part of a decision that impacted their school. At the middle school, students even suggested the idea of having choice over deciding their schedule.

2. Recognition and Reward

Whether it was winning a writing contest or being rewarded in a classroom with a small prize, students commented on how this helped build their confidence as well as understand their strengths. They enjoy both public and private recognition, and that can take on many different forms, none of which students ever connected to letter grades. Instead, much of their reflection was focused on having their work be celebrated and shared such as winning a contest, an announcement over the P.A. or a display that is visible in the school.

3. Safety and Security

Without question, the most significant and important need children spoke to was the desire to feel safe and secure in their classrooms and schools. From wanting to combat bullying they were witnessing to feeling like their teacher was a trusted person to talk to, students clearly must feel like school is a safe place from both an intellectual and physical perspective. They are extremely aware of current world events and even commented that they wish there was more love and happiness in the world. Students also made several remarks about how important it is to them that their teacher or coach teaches them how to fail and work through that feeling of disappointment.

4. Connection and Caring

The topic of safety and security is very closely related to this area, but it was a significant portion of our conversation with students that seemed to take on two different paths. There was the need to feel safe and secure, but also the need to know their teacher was genuinely invested in their well being. When their teachers demonstrated humility, humor and kindness, the students were able to excel. They liked being engaged in their learning with their teacher, not just because of their teacher. What was also significant was how many students commented on their teachers helping them through difficult times such as a friend moving away. They were able to self-identify that without this, they wouldn't have been to learn.

5. Active Learning

It is clear that all our students love to move! Whether it is playing games in math, participating in field day, going on field trips, pajama day or physical education, all grade-levels loved days at school where they were encouraged to be active. While some of this was certainly related to their need to burn off energy, others did comment that it allowed them an opportunity to be social with their classmates in different ways. They felt like it was through some of these activities that they built upon their connection with each other and their school because they were experiencing something together and in the same way. In some instances, such as participating in a breakout session, it also allowed them time to collaborate, and they enjoyed that.