



## PERFORMANCE **FACT**

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### **Princeton Public Schools** **SUMMARY OF "STUDENT VOICE" SESSIONS**

May 18, 20 and 25, 2022

The purpose of the "STUDENT VOICE" conversations is to provide Princeton Public Schools (PPS) students opportunities to share their experiences and perspectives, as the district conducts its Strategic Planning exercise. The "Student Voice" sessions provide a glimpse into the experiences and perspectives of students in Princeton Public Schools.

The student-focused conversations were held in late May 2022, with PPS Elementary, Middle School and High School students each participating in separate sessions. All sessions were held virtually and were facilitated by Senior Associate, Mrs. Lauren Klaffky of Performance Fact, Inc.

The three sessions were comprised of the following:

- Twenty-four Elementary School students;
- Twenty-three Middle School students;
- Twenty-five High School students

Students attending the sessions were selected by Princeton Public Schools to represent the diverse student body in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, grade-level, school experiences, special needs, etc.

The focus group conversations explored topics pertaining to:

- Students' perception of their school experiences,
- What is most important to students,
- Students' perception-Top 4 attributes of a Princeton Public Schools Graduate, and
- Their vision for the future "if you had one guarantee"

Participants were able to engage in the session by answering questions verbally, using google forms to answer questions, and using the chat feature of zoom. This report is an aggregate of STUDENT VOICE responses. It clusters together student perspectives but retains their language – as stated or written.

# I. Student Perception of School Experience

## Elementary School

### Strengths

- **Teaching Practices:** Enjoy mornings because teachers joke, makes them feel like they can share more. Music and Art are good. I like math because teachers play games. I like learning about fractions and mixed numbers. STEAM.
- **Environment:** Diverse community and playing 'woodchips'. Meeting new friends.
- **Extra-curriculars:** Gym (kickball), recess (playing foursquare or going on playground). Playing with friends, PE, recess.

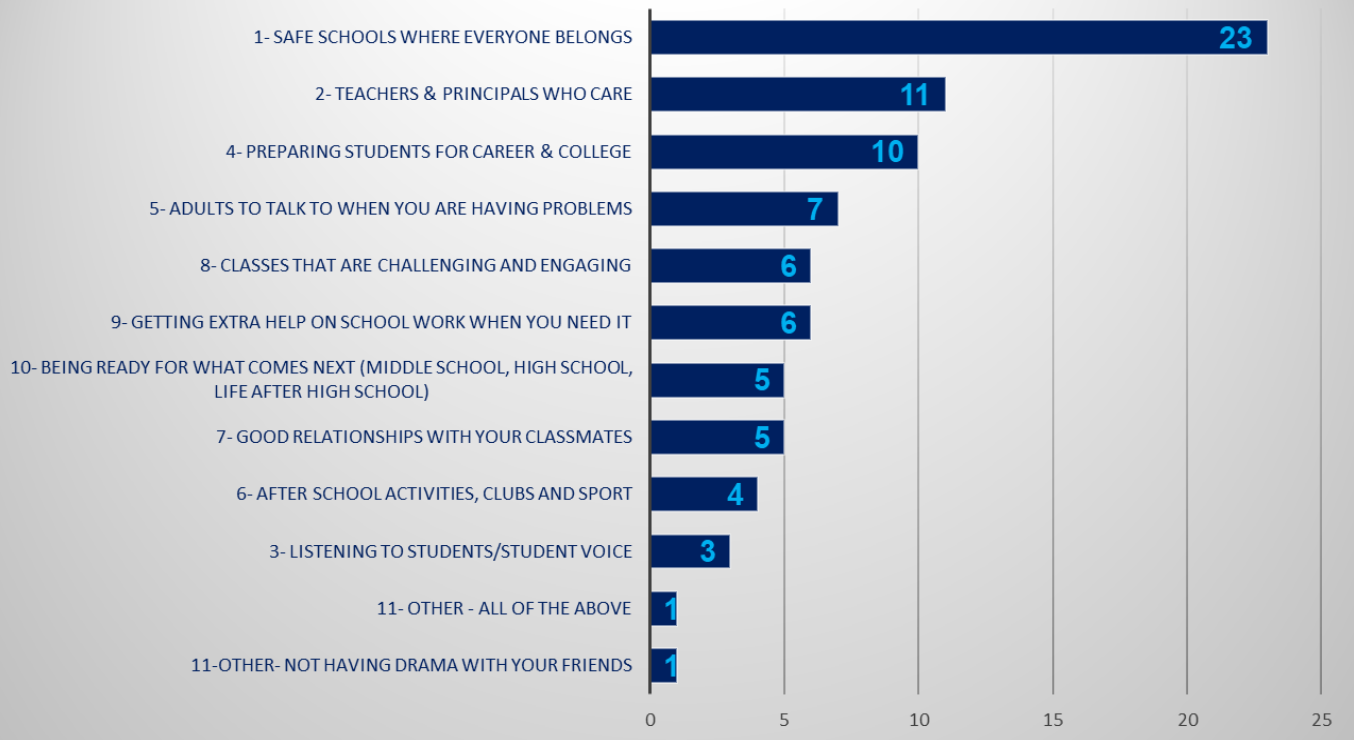
### Areas of Need

- **Teaching Practices:** I wish math could be better, sometimes it's boring and not fun. I have learned a lot in 5th grade math, but for a lot of the subjects and topics, we spend too much time on it, and we have learned in past grades, it would be better if we had specific groups for people who wanted to work ahead instead. In math we used to speed stream into different classes, and they recently stopped that, and they put us back into our homeroom classes and now math is slower and less fun. If we had more group projects and holiday breaks would be longer. We should have more fun projects to do in all subjects - e.g. we did a vacation planning thing for a class. I like the idea of the classroom for having a place to finish your work. We should have fun subjects in each class.
- **Support:** Sometimes people don't want to go to our school counselor because classmates don't want others to know that they are going to the school counselor. What would help me feel better? If everyone had a friend, and that no one was alone.
- **Environment:** Peer pressure - like when someone likes something, you feel like you must like it too otherwise kids won't like you and stuff. Longer breaks are great during the school day to help us get out our energy.
- **Behavior:** Every time I go to recess, I see balls being thrown on the roof which is not great because I would like to play with them, and they are always on the roof.

### What Matters Most?

- Safe schools where everyone belongs
- Teachers and Principals who care
- Preparing students for Career and College
- Adults to talk to when you are having problems
- Classes that are challenging and engaging

## What Matters Most? (Elementary School)



## Top 4 Attributes of a PPS Portrait of a Graduate (Elementary School)



## Middle School

### Strengths

- **Teaching Practices:** Math teacher provides note packets, having time to take notes and not having to submit them. Teachers are understanding, respectful and help me learn well. Spanish teacher makes learning fun. We do activities prior to the class. We do songs, dancing, etc. Math teacher does notes days and practice days to help solidify what we are learning. It gives us a break for our brains.
- **Support:** We are given time to complete missing work. Books at the library and English class assigns books that are relatable to me. Tutorials that are given to help with studying. Enjoy when teachers are trying to relate to your experiences, making you feel like you are not the only one experiencing something. Teachers are helpful.
- **Environment:** Lot of flexibility and opportunity to meet during PAUSE, social opportunities are provided. Love the way the Math teacher keeps the students engaged in the lesson, really strong program. Freedom that we have in the hallways. Not having to raise our hands every time we need to say something. All the teachers are nice and outdoor lunch is long enough. Ms. -- and Mr. -- have teaching ways that make it fun.
- **Extra-curriculars:** Sports and extracurricular activities are cool. Outdoor recess and lunch. It really makes a difference having the longer lunch, nice break and allows time with friends.

### Areas of Need

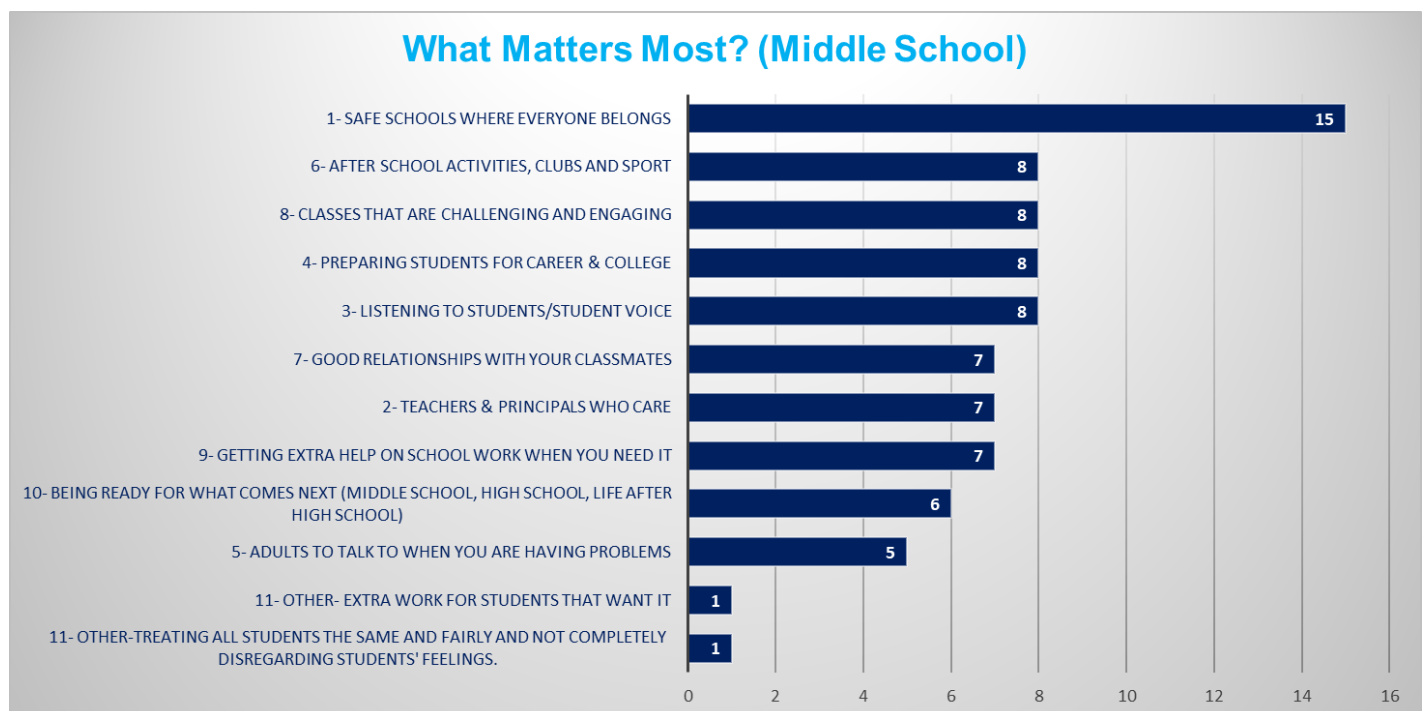
- **Teaching Practices:** More hands-on learning would be better. Better prepare students for high school. Different mode of learning in classrooms instead of just lecturing. Need to try different learning techniques. Need clearer details when assignments are given. More reminders regarding due dates. I think some of the teachers just don't understand us and how we learn. Teaching methods are inconsistent. Teachers don't put any thought into making it interesting. Certain teachers have a hard time teaching children, making lessons easier for everyone to learn. The curriculum is strange -- either kids are struggling or way ahead of the materials. Some of the kids are just lost during the instruction. I think teachers make students uncomfortable. Many people, including me, feel that our education is not providing us with as big enough of a challenge as it should.
- **Environment:** The -- teacher makes students uncomfortable by making micro-aggression towards student. A lot of teachers have favorites, and it is clear. They treat students differently. Give students longer breaks between classes and breaks in classes. Hard to stay on task for 45-50 minutes at a time. Maybe go outside during homeroom, get energy to help refocus. I feel as though there are a lot of students who are disrespectful towards teachers and other students. The language that is being used in some places even if not directed at me does not make me feel good and sometimes not safe. Especially during passing time it is pretty chaotic and at times crowded shoulder to shoulder with many of kids.
- **Racism/Discrimination:** The racism at school is prominent and put a sour taste in my mouth. When you report it, nothing happens. If I get called a monkey and report it, nothing happens. I have to confront them and put myself in that situation. I want justice and I don't believe it is happening. The system is bad to the victim of the situation. Two of my friends have experienced racism in their middle school period and something needs to be done about it. The process should be more effective, and something should be done about the issues. I feel like the school as a whole has been attempting to bridge out and become a more inclusive, equal community. Unfortunately, I feel as if it has not been working as well as many had hoped. I've heard many stories of discrimination and prejudice inside the school, and it has seemed to have gotten even worse throughout the year. I

myself have heard so many homophobic statements as a “joke”. The X teacher can be kinda racist. He called my Ching-Chong.

- **Support:** Teachers do not keep an open mind about things going on at home. Teachers are not flexible and/or understanding what might be going on at home. Teachers can make children feel better by getting to know their students, there is a lack of human connection.
- **Special Education:** Sped Education is very unprofessional. Teachers are condescending. It is not organized like an actual classroom. This year kids are not being disciplined. It is not an actual class because the kids are not being taught. The teachers are not teaching and people who want to learn, cannot. Classes are unorganized and not a good learning environment. Nothing has changed.
- **Behavior/Expectations:** I think that kids are taught that they can do things to hurt other children at the school. Some kids do not get a proper punishment for what they did. Students talk in classes and certain teachers do not do anything about it. Sometimes people, the older kids, say bad words and nothing is done about it. The school community, students are not taught that they should not say certain things. Every class of mine have people who really disrupt the class a lot. There are kids that want to learn and pursue their education and the certain kids continuously try to ruin everyone’s education.
- **Lunch:** The food, the school lunches need to be better. Not enough vegetarian options for lunch.
- **Recognition:** There are not enough music or academic programs to participate in. Kids that are more academic and do musical things also need recognition.

### What Matters Most?

- Safe schools where everyone belongs
- After school activities, clubs and sport
- Classes that are challenging and engaging
- Preparing students for Career and College
- Listening to Students/Student Voice



## Top 4 Attributes of a PPS Portrait of a Graduate (Middle School)



## High School

### Strengths

- **Teaching Practices:** Some classes show visual representation in class to understand the topic more easily; teachers let us explore different ways to learn, not just writing essays every day.
- **Environment:** I love how some of my teachers are super engaged with the students and are always willing to check on us! People are really caring; I am new to this school and that is one of the things that has really struck me - everyone within your circle and your teachers are all really caring.
- **Opportunity:** A lot of opportunities for student leaders which is awesome. Student advisory committee where we can let our voices be heard
- **Support:** Teachers and everyone are very connected with mental health and making sure students are ready for school mentally; having a free block or Tiger Time where you can have personal time. My teachers are very understanding about mental health - if we say we need a day to relax or get caught up, they don't make a big deal about it. A lot of teachers go above and beyond to help students outside of the classroom e.g. holding office hours even if they don't have to. I like what the school's doing for freshman like teen pep or peer group. When the teachers create a relationship with us that isn't school based it makes it easier to learn from them. My teacher takes consideration of our life outside of school and she is very flexible when it comes to promoting wellness for our mental health
- **Extra-curriculars:** There are a lot of clubs and activities that kids can do to find their own groups and find people who have similar interests and lives as you.

## Areas of Need

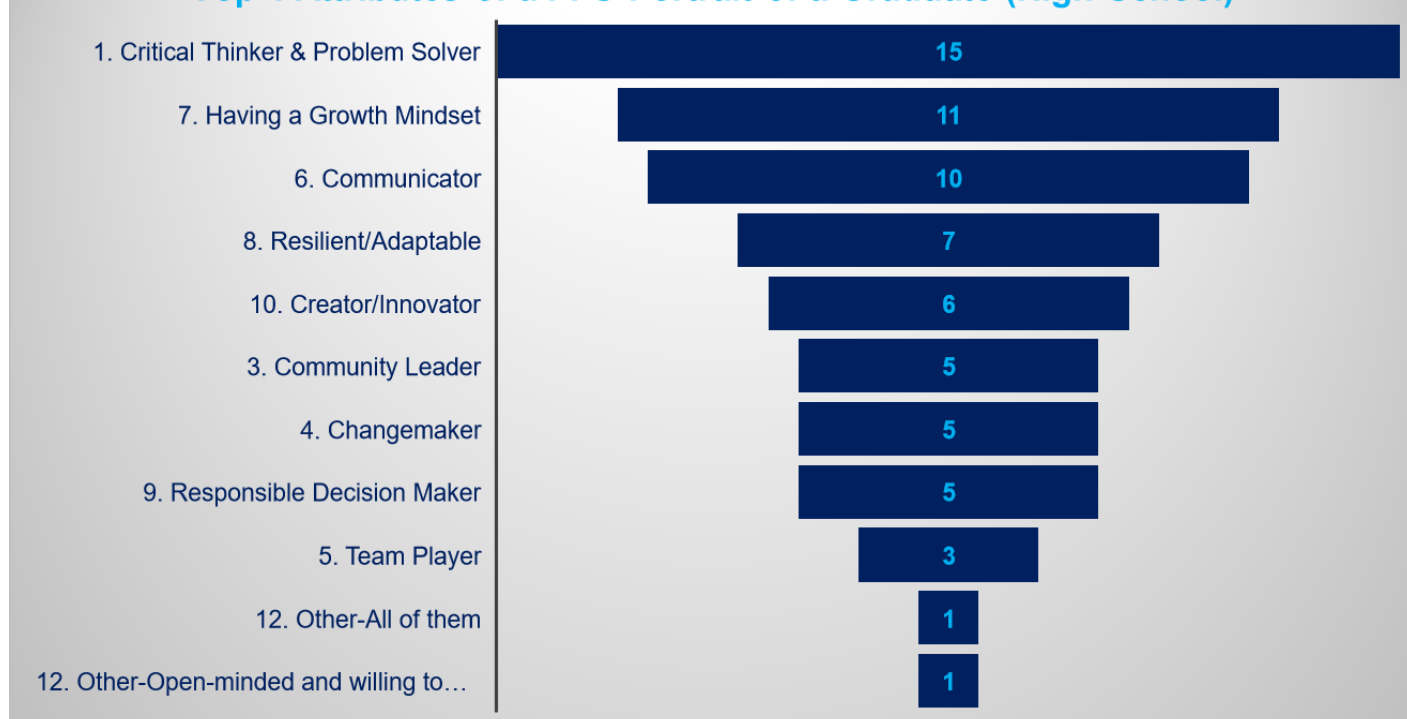
- **Environment:** Some things that are unnecessary e.g. homeroom. We barely use homeroom to be honest, it's a waste of time. We never end up talking to anyone and don't establish relationships with anyone in homeroom. Some teachers are not kind, have made students cry - sometimes they are openly rude to students, and it makes it hard seeing that - it makes me not want to learn from them. Princeton is a very accepting place but I have met teachers here that are not accepting of students' pronouns or gender -e.g. "I don't care what your name is, I don't care what your pronouns are etc." I have a teacher who picks and chooses who she likes and is very passive aggressive and kind of "mean girl" to the ones she doesn't like. There is one that I dislike it is that all ESL teachers acting like a "baby" with you literally can't understand anything and that you have to have all this special class. There are some teachers that really pick and choose which students they want to help. Some teachers make certain comments that come across as offensive and they just move past it. When I speak up about it, they just brush it off and say 'Oh I didn't mean it that way'. I think teachers should listen more. One thing is that it's a stressful learning environment, and there is a high expectation of success and excellence which is a lot of pressure and makes it harder for us to learn. It's like we are learning to not 'learn' but to compete with others. You feel like you are only worthy of being taught, if you are smart enough. That is how the teachers make us feel.
- **Teaching Practices:** A couple of teachers expect you to be really smart and know everything but of course there are some things you don't understand right away , and I've had teachers deny teaching me stuff or explaining that to me, because I didn't get it the first time. It's really unfair because it's usually the white kids who work really hard and the teachers favor them. Teachers that have been working at the school for a long time refuse to change their methods or ways they teach. Teachers pick and choose who they want to help - they don't care if you are behind on your grades. This teacher specifically is a mean girl, she will gossip about you to other students, make inappropriate jokes which I don't think is okay. You need to have a sense of maturity as a teacher and learn to teach kids which you might not like. Many teachers teach the same course, but other teachers have different styles for the exact same course, some students end up having way more work for the exact same class as others which does affect your grades because their teachers are 'harder'. It leads to an unequal learning experience.
- **Choice:** There's a huge stigma that comes with taking AP classes, and that if you choose not to take them, you're not "smart enough" or the idea of AP's switch from "classes to push yourself and go more in depth with" to "classes for advanced kids".
- **Placement:** I am new in this school, a freshman not from the country and they put me in the ESL class, but it was hard to make friends. A big difference between the ELL students and the other students at the school - there's almost sympathy for them because they are older, and they are in their own group.
- **Mental Health:** Students also feel more inclined to sacrifice their mental health or cheat because they want to get the grade or think that they HAVE to be taking this class and such.

## Top 4 Attributes of a PPS Graduate

- Critical Thinker and Problem Solver
- Having a Growth Mindset
- Communicator
- Resilient/Adaptable



## Top 4 Attributes of a PPS Portrait of a Graduate (High School)



**If your school or district guaranteed one (1) aspect of your education, what should it be?**

### Elementary

- Making sure everyone feels included!!
- Good help and learning
- History
- Teachers and Principals are nice and listen to the students
- I would like if we could have more times to work together.
- Why people should be kind and why everyone should belong.
- I hope that the principal and teachers will always care and other students respect others boundaries.
- Increase the pace of math
- More recess time
- I think that there could be a group of other kids that you can go to if you need help with something rather than going to a school counselor. Some people also may not want to go to the counselor in fear that their classmates might think something about them.
- I would like to learn physics
- There should be a good and healthy lunch so that kids can grow and so that you can get energy to learn
- I would like them to make sure that all students are fully engaged in whatever they are teaching because often kids won't really be paying attention.
- I think a longer math period.
- Science, social studies



- Probably make math more fun
- Maybe be wait a little for other kids to catch up or if their raising their hand to choose on them and have a good answer.
- There should be an adult in the school you can trust
- If my school or district guaranteed 1 aspect of my education, it would be to make the classes more exiting or make them more interesting. That way we would be more enticed to learn.
- An education that we will need in our life, or in other words that we will use. And to enjoy in a way where we are not just doing work sheets and staring at a computer, we should be able to use are hands to be actively doing things.
- That all the adults try their best to help children that need physical help ,mental help or school related help and they are always there for them.
- There should be good teachers and good equipment to best teach the students.
- Nothing
- I want Mrs. -- to give us extra recess because after my recess I am still very energetic.
- (I hope you don't mind that this is more than one aspect) If PPS guaranteed one regard of my education, it would be that they raise me well. It would be that they educate me on the things I need to know for my future, both moral and academic lessons. It would be that I am around the right people, that I am safe, that I learn hard lessons that I need to learn, that I learn to be both a leader and a team player, that I get opportunities, that I grow as a person, that I learn to make decisions that are good for me, and, most importantly, that I become the person and the leader that I want to be!

## Middle School

- Being able to get instructions clearer
- Friendliness in the communities and a guarantee for education
- Being able to focus on 1 thing.
- "I think while we are working towards this and that it has been hard with covid but to not make school feel like prison. While that sentence is exaggerated it isn't too far off. Sometimes in classrooms with no talking, desks in rows that are too far apart to connect, and with the teacher lecturing, it can feel like prison. Whether it be more projects or classes outside or in different locations, or practice days, or somedays at students on pace. I would like our school to be able to change up each day so that they don't blend together.
- To make sure that students can study ahead if they want to.
- Mental Health
- That we will be able to dive deep into every topic in the curriculum.
- Physical education (more soccer and hockey)
- To be able to teach us the necessary life skills to have success in life inside and outside of academics.
- That I would always be challenged by the material in every class I took.
- It would be that we got to do more theatre and creative writing projects.
- It would be that the teachers should give the same treatment and the same kindness to all students, no matter how much or little the teacher likes them.
- I would like to be guaranteed that if I want to progress faster and move ahead, I will get the opportunity in my classes to do so.

- I would ask for them to make a higher-level math course, for kids who are above the current accelerated level.
- That all of my teachers understand how I feel and that they actually care about us and not

## High School

- I want the school to guarantee that they will invest equally into each of their students and fight for all of them to succeed.
- Understanding and Critical Thinking
- Teacher support and treatment.
- Encouragement of the arts and thinking outside the box.
- I can't think off anything
- Joyful education on not just academic aspects but also lifelong subjects such as perspectives, differences, understanding decision making, and more
- guarantee an outlet to express my voice
- To use critical thinking skills to collect and analyze information as well as generate a nuanced/complex ideology open for discourse and reform.
- The teaching could be a bit better to be honest. Some teachers just talk and talk without making sure that their students fully understand the topic at hand. A few of them rush a lot of topics into a small amount of time which leads the students panicking and not getting the knowledge they deserve, and the teachers really do need to do better with their time management.
- Guaranteed physical and emotional well-being.

## What is the one promise you would like the adults in your life (e.g. teachers, principals, parents) to commit to?

### Elementary

- To help
- To make education interesting and engaging
- To spend on school and for my parents
- Be trustworthy
- I don't really know
- To help us out when we need it.
- To do something when they see something going on or a student tells them.
- I would like them to promise to create an engaging learning environment because when we are unengaged, we cannot learn and can easily forget important lessons.
- They will help us if we fall behind
- for my parents to spend more money on school and to play with me more
- To be very supportive.
- Help those in need
- To make sure I get a good education
- I would like them to encourage us and make sure we are learning and understanding lessons and material.
- I think they should commit to always try to understand the kid.

- To always listen to what people are saying.
- to be kind and respect others with disabilities. For example, it happened with my brother who has physical and speech problems.
- Newer giving up, always be nice and kind and respect themselves and others and be kind to themselves.
- To keeping everyone safe and healthy in the school
- One promise I would like the adults in my life to commit to is to try their best to never make things embarrassing.
- Talking about activists that stand up for important things that could change the way that people think.
- They should try their best to understand and help you
- I would like them to be supportive of what I do
- I need more recess time to get focused
- Having a yes-day.
- I would like the adults in my life to promise that they will always listen to me. I want my voice and my peers' voice to be heard, because our voices will change the world. Everyone says we are the future. So let the future speak.

## Middle School

- Not getting mad about needing help.
- To be accepting.
- To my Baseball.
- I think one promise I would want them to commit to is to treat me/us like adults but allowing us to be children. In other words, to recognize our worth as adults and our opinions, but to know that we don't know everything, and we can make mistakes. That balance to me and others is crucial.
- To promise to make sure that students do not visit inappropriate websites.
- Talk more about mental health and also have nap times in school like for example in Italy they have Siestas and I think it would really be helpful to sleep a little.
- I can be safe in school.
- Same thing as the top
- To work harder towards a more inclusive and accepting community.
- That they will prepare me for a career in theatre and living as an adult, so that I can make responsible decisions with money and other things.
- To always help or offer to help if a student is visibly not understanding it.
- I would like them to not lower their expectations and create room and opportunity for the kids who want to do more accelerated work.
- I would like the teachers to be more understanding of students' situations, and I would like them to actually have passion for the subject they are teaching. Many of the teachers lack the passion for their respective subject, and that really shows and harms students' learning experiences.

## High School

- To engage in more diverse learning styles to help students with different learning styles thrive.
- Take our outside-of-school lives into consideration and be kind to all.
- To treat us students with the same respect as you would a fellow teacher, adult, or parent.
- Doing their best to help kids succeed.

- My one promise would be for the adults to be happy with whatever the student chooses and be supportive of their decisions. I feel that that is a huge part of a good mental health and supportive system in all ways. at home, at school, with friends and more.
- provide guidance and push me even when I am disinterested, and to not give up on me.
- I hope the adults commits to supporting us through means of encouragement and through the spread of ideas and nuanced ideologies.
- I would like them to commit to checking in with us personally about things and not only when we're with a group of people because when we are with lots of people, we tend to speak up less about things we really want to address or we're scared of feeling behind.
- You will always respect boundaries, and see us as not just students, but humans with emotions and limits.