



Whitnall School District
2023-24 Community Survey
Comment Theme Analysis
Fall 2023

This comment analysis report identifies the prevailing themes collected through the comments gathered in the District’s fall community survey. A major theme is identified as a result of having multiple participants referencing similar issues or concerns. Please note that these themes represent diverse opinions and may not align with each other.

Of the 905 total survey respondents, 411 participants (45%) left at least one comment.

Comment frequency:

- 146 respondents wrote one comment.
- 103 respondents wrote two comments.
- 81 respondents wrote three comments.
- 81 respondents wrote four comments.

Comment Themes

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Respondents shared comments on what makes the District unique or special.

Community and Small Size: Many respondents value the small, close-knit community within the Whitnall School District. They appreciate the sense of togetherness and the family-like atmosphere. The relatively small size is seen as an advantage, allowing for better opportunities for parent involvement, community engagement, and a more personalized educational experience for students. The community's pride in the District is evident in comments about traditions, events like the Homecoming parade, and the sense of togetherness that extends from families to school staff. This community spirit often extends beyond the school and into the neighborhoods, creating a unique and special atmosphere.

Staff and Teacher Quality: The consistent praise for teachers and staff indicates that many individuals believe the District's success is closely tied to the dedication and commitment of these professionals. They are viewed as a significant positive aspect of the District. Some respondents express a strong belief in staff's ability to provide quality education and support to students. This emphasizes the importance of retaining and supporting quality educators.

Academic Excellence: A focus on academic excellence and maintaining high standards is evident. Some respondents express a desire for the District to continue its tradition of providing quality education. Some respondents recall a time when the District had a strong reputation in this area and believe that this should be a point of pride and emphasis for the District moving forward. A few respondents compare Whitnall to neighboring districts, emphasizing the need for the District to define what sets it apart and makes it unique, particularly in the context of competition with other nearby schools.

Inclusivity and Diversity: A commitment to inclusivity and diversity is mentioned positively. The District's commitment to embracing different backgrounds and needs is seen as a strength. Some respondents appreciate the District's efforts in this regard, and it is viewed as an important aspect of the school community. In particular, the recognition of special education services as a strength indicates the ability to cater to diverse student needs is valued.

Facilities and Campus Layout: A few comments highlight the layout of the schools and the quality of facilities. This includes praise for athletic facilities and the convenience of having multiple schools in close proximity to each other. The uniqueness of the District's size and location, involving multiple communities and compact school buildings, is highlighted.

Community Engagement: Many respondents appreciate the level of community involvement in and for Whitnall. This involvement is seen as a strength that contributes to the overall success of the schools. The positive mention of community involvement and support beyond the classroom underscores the broader engagement of parents and community members. While some comments express nostalgia for traditions and school pride, there is also concern that these elements may be fading. This highlights the desire to preserve and strengthen the sense of tradition and pride in the District.

Areas respondents believe the District should focus planning and resources.

Staff Support and Retention: Many comments express a concern for the quality and well-being of teaching staff. Competitive pay is considered crucial in achieving this goal. There is also a desire for ongoing professional development, mentoring to help educators improve their skills, and appreciating and respecting staff in order to create a positive work culture. Attracting and retaining high-quality staff is considered critical for maintaining educational standards. High turnover can negatively impact students, so investing in and supporting teachers and administrators is a common concern.

School Board Effectiveness: Comments highlight the importance of having school board members who prioritize the best interests of students and the community. Some comments mention the need for board members to collaborate effectively with the school administration and focus on educational goals rather than personal agendas.

Curriculum and Education Programs: Comments emphasize the importance of offering a diverse and comprehensive curriculum that caters to students' varied interests and future needs. A variety of curriculum options is considered important, especially in subjects like English, special education, foreign languages, and career and technical education. Early literacy education and life skills courses are seen as critical for preparing students for the real world. Overall, the school community values a broad range of options for their educational journeys. Encouraging the incorporation of nature and ecology into the curriculum underscores the importance of environmental awareness, education, and sustainability. Concerns are raised about the need to support and prioritize music and arts programs within the school district. These programs are seen as crucial for fostering creativity and artistic expression among students. As technology continues to play a significant role in education, preparing students for an online world and teaching them information-gathering and filtering techniques are considered critical.

Facilities: Some comments address the need for maintaining school facilities, particularly the swimming pool, gymnasiums, and auditorium. Upgrading these facilities is seen as a way to enhance the overall educational experience. Others emphasize the importance of efficient resource allocation, focusing on areas that directly benefit students.

Student Well-Being and Safety: Ensuring the safety and well-being of students is a significant concern. It encompasses everything from physical safety in school buildings to emotional well-being. Providing an environment where students feel safe is crucial for effective learning. There is an emphasis on maintaining a well-disciplined learning environment. This includes enforcing clear and consistent rules and consequences to ensure an effective classroom environment. At the same time, some comments call for better communication with students and active listening to their interests and needs. Mental health services and emotional support for students are also mentioned as essential life skills. Resources such as counseling and stress management are considered foundational. Teaching emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and time management are viewed as crucial for students' development into adulthood.

Extracurricular Activities: The importance of extracurricular activities, such as sports, arts, and clubs, is noted in several comments. These activities are seen as valuable for keeping students engaged, accountable, and well-rounded. Extracurricular activities can teach teamwork, time management, leadership, and other vital skills.

Life Skills and Practical Education: Preparing students for real-life situations post-high school is a recurring theme. This includes broader themes such as college and career readiness and more specific points, such as teaching financial literacy, personal finance/budgeting, cooking, job skills, and time management. There is a desire for students to learn these essential skills as a conduit to becoming responsible, independent adults.

Community Involvement: Effective communication with parents and the broader community is stressed as a means of building a supportive, trusting, and engaged educational community. Involving the community in decision-making and seeking input is seen as important for a well-rounded education. Involving the community in educational initiatives, forming partnerships with local businesses, and opening school facilities to the community are ways to strengthen the connection between schools and the neighborhoods they serve.

Challenging and Rigorous Coursework: Some comments call for more challenging curriculum options. This focus on academic rigor is essential to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged and prepared for their futures. Comments also stress the need for teaching critical thinking and logical reasoning. More specifically, mathematics is highlighted as a discipline that fosters these skills and is essential for students' ability to understand complex topics.

Student-Centric Education: The theme of putting students first underscores the idea that all decisions and initiatives should primarily serve the educational needs and well-being of students. This could involve personalized learning approaches, curriculum adjustments, and support for students' emotional and social development.

Comments/suggestions for the community advisory committee (CAC).

Prioritization of Safety and ADA Compliance: This theme reflects a collective commitment to creating a secure and inclusive learning environment. Safety is paramount. Parents and community members express concerns about issues that compromise students' safety, like inadequate ventilation, heating and cooling problems, or other structural issues. ADA compliance is also emphasized. Prioritizing ADA compliance demonstrates a commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment for both students and staff. Upgrades to facilities can directly impact the quality of education. For example, modern science labs can enhance hands-on learning, while safe, well-maintained classrooms can help students concentrate. Addressing safety concerns, like cracked parking lots, can also prevent accidents and reduce liability exposure.

Investing in Educational Spaces: Comments focus on the impact of facility improvements on educational quality and prioritization of academic areas over extracurricular facilities. Upgrading classrooms, labs, libraries, and other learning spaces can directly affect teaching and learning outcomes. Investment in educational spaces is seen as an investment in students' success and future opportunities. Addressing these needs is an acknowledgment of the importance of providing the best possible resources for students and educators. High school upgrades can also influence the District's ability to attract and retain students.

Focus on Infrastructure: Attention to core infrastructure is evident. A properly functioning HVAC system ensures a comfortable and productive teaching and learning environment. Addressing roofing issues and energy efficiency not only saves on costs in the long run but also reflects responsible fiscal planning. Commenters also express concerns about the outdated appearance and functionality of school facilities. Outdated aesthetics can affect morale and create a sense of neglect. Aging lockers and the need for a fresh coat of paint may represent visible signs of wear and tear that give a poor first impression to students, staff, and visitors. The desire for modern and visually appealing learning environments reflects a commitment to creating spaces that promote a positive atmosphere for education.

Pool and Sports Facilities: Concerns about the state of the pool and sports facilities reflect the role of extracurricular activities in student development. These facilities are not only used by students but often serve as community resources. Ensuring their maintenance and possible improvements can positively impact both students and the community. Modern athletic facilities can not only benefit students but also attract community members and generate revenue through rentals and events.

Consideration of Long-Term Impact: The theme of considering long-term impact underscores the community's focus on the future. Facility improvements should not only address current needs but also contribute to long-term success. The potential effect on property values, attracting new families, and the overall reputation of the District is in commenters' minds. The focus on long-term planning indicates a desire to avoid repeating the same facility issues in the future by identifying and addressing needs early.

Concerns About Taxes: This theme reflects the community's concern for affordability and financial responsibility. Comments about the financial burden on taxpayers reflect an understanding that funding for facility improvements comes from the community. Balancing fiscal responsibility with necessary upgrades is crucial. The call for efficient spending and creative funding solutions suggests a desire to minimize tax increases while addressing pressing needs. Commenters suggest fundraising and exploring alternative funding sources, demonstrating a willingness to seek creative solutions. Donations from private individuals or businesses, along with cost-saving measures, can alleviate the financial burden on taxpayers.

Comment/suggestions regarding the pool.

Importance of the Pool to the Community: Many comments highlight the pool's central role as a community asset, emphasizing its contribution to student education and the broader community. The pool is viewed not just as a school facility. It serves various community needs, particularly for swim lessons, exercise, and recreational activities, which are considered important for community health and well-being. Hosting swim meets and events helps build a sense of community. Ensuring community access to the pool is underscored as vital. Accessibility is seen as essential for both educational purposes and recreational activities. Opening the pool to the community is thought to enhance community engagement and overall quality of life.

Revenue Generation: A modernized pool is seen as a way to attract more users and generate additional revenue. Ideas include renting the pool space to outside groups, hosting swim meets, and providing swim lessons to generate income that could offset maintenance and renovation costs. The potential to relieve the financial burden on taxpayers is a key point.

Cost and Funding: Questions regarding funding sources, potential grants, and the impact on property taxes are common. Concerns about cost are primarily focused on the price tag associated with renovating or replacing the pool. Commenters want a detailed breakdown of expenses, including construction, maintenance, and long-term costs. There are worries about the financial burden this project might impose on taxpayers, especially given the potential for increased property taxes.

Need for an Updated Pool: Commenters stress the importance of bringing the facility up to current standards and enhancing its versatility to accommodate various activities, from lessons to competitive events. Commenters argue that the pool's existing state no longer meets the needs of students, athletes, and the broader community. Some suggest expansion and updates to accommodate a more comprehensive range of aquatic activities and comply with competitive swimming regulations.

Concerns About Losing Programs: Some comments underline the importance of the pool in teaching swimming and water safety, emphasizing the need for a convenient and accessible place for students and community members to learn these life-saving skills. Many are worried about the potential loss of swim and dive programs, emphasizing their importance for student-athletes and the potential for scholarships. The removal of the pool could lead to a decline in the quality of education and extracurricular opportunities.

Alternative Use of Space: Some comments suggest exploring alternative uses for the pool space rather than replicating what other schools have. They advocate for repurposing the area for different activities, such as creating a new weight room or expanding educational facilities, such as classrooms or labs.

Comparisons with Other Schools: Reference to other districts, like Greenfield, serves to highlight disparities in facilities and the need for Whitnall to remain competitive. A focus on neighboring districts with updated pool facilities frames the discussion in terms of local standards and expectations.

Questions and Request for More Information: A majority of commenters express a strong need for more detailed information. They seek specifics about costs, revenue projections, and the potential consequences of various options. A comprehensive presentation of data is desired to make informed decisions. Commenters express a need for more data, including statistics on pool usage, revenue potential, and a cost-benefit analysis of the different options. More information is seen as crucial for making an informed decision that considers the best interests of both students and the community.