
UMCS Parents of Color Affinity Group

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

Questions

1) Share one word to describe UMCS

- Grow
- Resilient
- Naive
- Independence
- Different
- Blind

2) UMCS Strengths

- Anti-racist work
- Being open to change and/or learning
- Logistically strong; last year w/out a campus; this year being able to move into a school that lost its' charter
- Seen the school being able to pivot a lot
- Being able to have this space today is a huge strength


3) UMCS areas of growth

- ❖ Clear communication; a big point that the school as a whole can improve on is amplifying not just the plans for improvement, but also the criticisms of the plans. My experience is hearing a lot of uproar; I hear about things after it's been a long conversation. Why do I feel like I haven't heard things before it gets to crucial time? Not a lot of cross-communication or sharing of concerns.
-

- ❖ A lot of the committees that are established; I joined a couple of committees when my child started at the school. Real problem with their being oxygen left in the room; did not leave room for other people's voices. No space for other opinions or other perspectives, or for people to feel like they are comfortable sitting in those rooms? Parents and others are volunteering their time; people need to step back and let others carry the torch.
- ❖ Communication, especially in families that are multi-generational. We have a grandmother who is expected to navigate zoom and all of these other platforms. We have to meet people where they are; we had to teach my mom about facebook in order to get the proper information. There's a lot of miscommunication, but the channels just don't happen.
- ❖ There's also a lot of growth; I've been there for seven years; I've seen the difference when we were on separate campuses. As a school community, there's a lot of healing to do, and space that needs to be recovered. We have a lot more communication coming now than we did earlier, but one thing that was a concern was that all of the communication is being done through social platforms. Not everybody has access to [the parent-teacher platform].
- ❖ Not having the space to be heard; still having the same conversation we had six years ago. Lots of repetitive conversations. We say what we need, but there's no action; our voice isn't used to support the need. Just disconnected, especially between the mono-lingual parents and multilingual. Big disconnect. Emails are so long; can't really access it from the phone; the majority of my community doesn't look at emails at 9 pm to read long emails from school. Big disconnect within communication. Interpretation is not always available; there is an assumption that no Latinx person will show up, so why have interpretation.
- ❖ Along with communication; I reached out to one of the leaders to ask if this time would work for the majority. No willingness to send a poll to get folks here.
- ❖ Reading the language from this email; there was an assumption that no administrators will be here. The structure should have been an agenda with all of the questions listed. I don't know if a problem has been established and the clear solution is we want more commitment from people of color.
- ❖ We tried to have affinity groups in the past; the only one that survived was the Latinx group. One thing that surfaced was we were told we were the Latinx group; we were never asked what the purpose of our group was and how we wanted to be identified. In our first year of meetings, people were like, "what does Latinx mean?". We were told and assigned a label. There was confusion in the group about our name; we were labeled and never asked. For this meeting, I've been doing the interpretation for the school community for seven years. This school year that is ending, was the first year

I was contracted to do the work. No one thought interpretation would be needed at today's meeting; that was very late. Today, at the beginning of the meeting, we had a mono-lingual spanish person at the meeting, but she left before I could get to her. When we know if we make these calls, there should not be a question whether we need translation or not.

- ❖ The school seems afraid of culture. Everything is "Montessori doesn't include culture"; children in the school are diverse, and we need to embed those topics as part of the curriculum. The school seems white-washed; "leave the culture at home". An example from the Latinx group: we were doing presentations for dia de las muertos; we have to be very careful how we approach it. There is a lot of fear; not offensive to other people or other cultures. We need to learn about all ethnic groups; my family is used to navigating multiple identities; we are inclusive in our family. Folks are on pins/needles talking about race, ethnicity and culture. Events for parents must include translation (spanish, asian languages). Parents who have to work 9 - 5 might not be able to come at this time; meetings are set at 6 - 7:30, but that's when I'm doing dinner and bath time. We need sensitivity to working parents, and single parents. Cannot imagine a mom with multiple children being engaged. Food and childcare need to be available for parental engagement. Are there administrators who are not white who could be present?
- ❖ Main teachers versus teachers' assistants seem to have an uneven racial component. We also see this in our fundraising; prices can eliminate whole families entirely. If we're talking about buying \$30 plants. Same thing w/baked goods; do we have to do cookies, or can we do cornbread, tamales, etc. Let's not pretend that our schools aren't diverse; we can tie things back in culture. We struggled with the books; literature that was being presented. What is the connection? Trying to understand the Montessori philosophy in real life, and what's coming across the screen. We're constantly in communication with each other trying to pull the strands together; we have parent-teacher conferences, but those are around test scores, not an actual assessment around culture.
- ❖ One of the blind spots is understanding that as people of color, our culture is who we are; we bring our whole selves into who we are. If we think we cannot bring our whole selves into space, that might be why we don't participate.
- ❖ I'm a little frustrated; just to clear the air, what Krishna sent out to us is not what is happening here. When are we sitting down to make movements to have more people involved to change these systems?
- ❖ I was frustrated with the email.

- 
- ❖ There's a massive lack of awareness. We've heard about interpreters; we've had tons of microaggressions. If we're going to sit at the table and ensure voices will be heard, it's time for the administrators to be in the room to hear our concerns. Administrators don't value our concerns. We need to figure out structurally
 - Why do you want our participation? Do you need to have us involved, or do you want to have us involved?
 - If so, ask us what we need and ask us to help design what those meetings will be.
 - We need a poll to determine how to have these meetings
 - "This is a miss"
 - ❖ I didn't feel heard when I voiced concerns about my child, so I don't want to participate in parent orgs. Language is a great need.
 - ❖ I believe we are only doing this because we're up for charter renewal; why this urgency? I believe we know what we need and how we need it; are we being heard?
 - ❖ When is the school going to have these conversations with the white, affluent parents coming into our school not making room for others? Not only the administration, but it is also the white parents who don't make room for us.