EVIDENT CHANGE
Inform Systems. Transform Lives.

DOWNTOWN MONTESSORI ACADEMY
2023-24 SURVEY RESULTS

Contents

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Introduction

Evident Change conducts biennial school culture and climate surveys. These surveys provide a platform to understand the experience and perspective of the school community (including students, parents, teachers, staff, school leadership and board members) to determine areas of improvement. The survey highlights strengths and opportunities for growth based on five elements that support school improvement.

Survey Participation

Students, parents, staff, and school leaders were invited to participate in the survey (Table 1). Evident Change staff visited all schools to explain and proctor surveys to students in sixth through twelfth grades. Each school designated a survey coordinator to work with Evident Change staff to create a distribution schedule. Twice a week for three months, the school shared the survey link and/or QR code to families via text messages, newsletters, flyers, postcards, and emails. The school also set up a survey station equipped with Chromebooks for parents to participate in the survey onsite during parent–teacher conferences. Teachers, support staff, board members, and school leaders were invited to participate through email.

Five Indicators of Improvement

The School Climate and Culture survey is loosely based on the 5Essenials framework created by the Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago.[1] This survey measured school culture and climate by aligning multiple choice and open-ended questions with five indicators of school improvement.

- Supportive Environment

- Ambitious Instruction

- Collaborative Staff

- Effective Leadership

- Involved Families

Strong scores on the multiple-choice questions in these five areas lead to improved outcomes for all students, including improved attendance and larger test score gains. Research indicates that students enrolled in schools that are strong in at least three of these indicators were up to 10 times more likely to increase their math and reading scores than students in schools that are weak in three or more indicators.[2]

Survey Results

The comprehensive scores (Table 2) are based on climate and culture questions organized by the five indicators of school improvement. Schools are considered in a strong position for school improvement if the school community has a positive sentiment score of 60 or higher in three or more indicators of success.

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[1] 5Essentials
[2] Supporting Schools

TABLE 1

RESPONSE RATE				
STUDENTS	**CERTIFIED STAFF**	**SUPPORT STAFF**	**LEADERSHIP**	**PARENTS**
98.0%	90.0%	53.0%	43.0%	76.2%

TABLE 2

POSITIVE SENTIMENT SCORES						
INDICATOR OF IMPROVEMENT	**SURVEY**					**OVERALL**
	Certified Staff	**Supportive Staff**	**Leadership**	**Parents**	**Students**	
Supportive Environment	94.0	78.1	N/A	88.1	84.9	**86.3**
Ambitious Instruction	96.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	87.0	**91.5**
Collaborative Staff	93.1	84.2	N/A	90.6	N/A	**89.3**
Effective Leadership	85.1	90.1	100.0	95.1	93.0	**93.0**
Involved Families	82.2	92.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	**87.4**
Overall Rating	**90.1**	**86.2**	**100.0**	**91.3**	**88.3**	**89.5**

Note: N/A indicates that the questions related to the listed indicator did not apply to the specific subgroup.

Thematic Analysis

This report presents a thematic analysis of feedback collected from open-ended questions in the 2023-2024 Downtown Montessori Academy Culture and Climate Survey. The analysis focuses on key indicators of school improvement, identifying common themes that emerged from the responses. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement within the school, based on the perspectives of various stakeholders. By examining these themes, the report seeks to inform efforts to enhance the overall school environment and support ongoing improvement initiatives.

Parent Survey: Themes Identified

Supportive Environment: School Community

Positive Aspects:

- The school community is described as welcoming and friendly, with strong parental involvement.
- Teachers and office staff are highly praised for being warm, approachable, and going above and beyond.
- The educational environment is seen as superior to traditional settings, with a focus on student safety, inclusivity, and individualized learning.
- The community fosters a family-like atmosphere, with strong connections between families, teachers, and staff.

Challenges:

- Some events and meetings are scheduled at times that are not convenient for working parents, leading to feelings of exclusion.
- There is a desire for more community-building activities and opportunities for engagement.
- Concerns were raised about the school's culture becoming less student-friendly over time, with inadequate discipline and a perceived overemphasis on political correctness.

Recommendations:

- Adjust the scheduling of events and meetings to be more inclusive of working parents.
- Increase community-building activities to strengthen the school's sense of community.
- Address concerns about school culture by balancing discipline with a focus on inclusivity and student engagement.

Supportive Environment: Quality of Facilities

Positive Aspects:

- The school is well-maintained, clean, and strategically uses its limited space.
- The school building is appreciated for its cozy, intimate atmosphere, which helps focus on early elementary education.
- The playground is praised for its thoughtful design, and the limited emphasis on technology is valued.

Challenges:

- The lack of a gymnasium, cafeteria, and lunch program is a significant concern for many parents.
- The multi-purpose room, while useful, does not fully meet the needs of a gym space.
- The school's old building, while charming, poses challenges in terms of space and facilities.

Recommendations:

- Explore options for expanding the school's facilities to include a gymnasium and cafeteria.
- Consider partnering with local organizations or programs to provide lunch services.
- Continue maintaining the school's cleanliness and strategic use of space while addressing the limitations of the current building.

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Supportive Environment: School Safety

Positive Aspects:

- Staff are committed to student safety, with a focus on preparing students for emergency situations.
- The school's approach to lockdown drills is seen as both sensitive and helpful.
- Parents appreciate the efforts to share policies and information related to safety.

Challenges:

- There is a need for more support staff to assist with fostering respectful friendships and bullying prevention.
- Some parents are concerned about the lack of a bus service and the need for better monitoring of younger children in the bathroom.

Recommendations:

- Increase the number of support staff focused on social-emotional learning and bullying prevention.
- Provide more information about the school's safety procedures.
- Explore options for offering bus services and enhancing supervision in bathrooms.

Collaborative Teachers: Parent-Teacher Partnership

Positive Aspects:

- Teachers are highly praised for their knowledge, dedication, and responsiveness.
- Parents feel comfortable communicating with teachers and appreciate the focus on child development and learning needs.
- The small, close-knit community allows for strong partnerships between parents and teachers.

Challenges:

- There is a need for more frequent and detailed communication from teachers about students' daily activities and progress.
- The new parent-teacher conference system, which includes student participation, is seen as limiting open communication between parents and teachers.
- Some parents feel that there is a lack of consistency in feedback across different teachers and classrooms.

Recommendations:

- Increase the frequency of communication between teachers and parents, providing more details on students' daily activities and progress.
- Reevaluate the parent-teacher conference format to ensure that parents have opportunities for open, private discussions with teachers.
- Ensure consistency in communication and feedback across all teachers and classrooms.

Effective Leadership: Parent-Leadership Partnership

Positive Aspects:

- The current principal is described as approachable, communicative, and proactive, with a strong connection to the community.
- Parents appreciate the transparency and responsiveness of the school leadership, particularly the principal.

Challenges:

- Some parents feel disconnected from the broader leadership team and are unclear about the roles and responsibilities of the board of directors.
- There are concerns about a lack of communication from the school's executive director and the board, leading to perceptions of secrecy and exclusion from decision-making.

Recommendations:

- Improve communication and transparency from the broader leadership team, including the executive director and board of directors.
- Provide more opportunities for parents to engage with leadership and participate in decision-making processes.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the board of directors and ensure that parents have access to this information.

Likes:
- The staff and community, including parents and friends, are highly valued for their engagement and support.
- The Montessori curriculum and the school's close-knit, community-oriented environment are appreciated.
- The school's focus on independence, advocacy, and life skills is seen as beneficial for students' development.

Dislikes:
- The lack of communication about board activities and decision-making processes is a concern.
- Behavioral issues and bullying have been problematic in the past, though improvements have been noted.
- The limited facilities, including the absence of a gym, cafeteria, and lunch program, are significant drawbacks.

Improvement Suggestions
- Enhance communication between teachers and parents, providing more detailed feedback on students' daily activities.
- Offer more extracurricular programs, such as band, languages, and sports, to enrich students' educational experience.
- Implement a lunch program and consider expanding the playground to better accommodate students' needs.

Conclusion
Overall, the school is highly regarded for its welcoming community, dedicated staff, and strong educational environment. However, challenges related to communication, facilities, and inclusivity need to be addressed to ensure continued growth and satisfaction among parents and students. By implementing the recommended improvements, the school can enhance its supportive environment, strengthen partnerships, and better meet the needs of its diverse community.

Student Survey: Themes

Supportive Environment: Academic Personalism

Positive Aspects:

- Some students feel supported by their teachers, especially when they seek help. They appreciate the personal attention given to them, such as being signed up for advanced classes or receiving extra time to complete assignments.

- There is a recognition of teachers' efforts to help students understand concepts and improve their learning.

Challenges:

- A notable group of students feel that their teachers move too quickly through the material and don't adequately listen to student concerns.

- Some students expressed confusion and a lack of clarity regarding academic expectations, suggesting that not all students feel sufficiently supported.

Recommendations:

- Teachers could benefit from receiving feedback on the pace of their teaching, possibly incorporating more frequent check-ins or pauses to ensure all students are keeping up.

- Consider implementing additional support mechanisms for students who express confusion or need further clarification, such as after-school tutoring or peer-assisted learning sessions.

Supportive Environment: Peer Support for Academic Work

Positive Aspects:

- Some students find their classmates to be good peers who support each other and take school seriously.

Challenges:

- A significant number of students are frustrated by their peers' behavior, such as goofing off, being distracting, or not taking school seriously. This behavior negatively impacts their ability to focus and succeed academically.

- Disruptive behavior and lack of seriousness about school among peers are common concerns, suggesting a need for improved classroom management or peer engagement strategies.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen classroom management techniques to minimize distractions and promote a more focused learning environment.

- Introduce peer mentoring programs where students who are more engaged can help guide those who may struggle with focus or motivation.

Supportive Environment: Feelings of Safety

Positive Aspects:

- The majority of students feel safe at school, citing good security and an overall sense of trust in the school environment.
- There is an acknowledgment that safety has improved over time, with some students feeling safer compared to previous years.

Challenges:

- A few students have concerns about unsafe behavior by some peers, which can detract from the overall feeling of safety.

Recommendations:

- Continue to monitor and address unsafe behaviors promptly to maintain and further enhance the feeling of safety within the school.
- Consider implementing additional safety measures or programs that allow students to anonymously report concerns about unsafe behaviors.

Supportive Environment: Student-Teacher/Leadership Trust

Challenges:

- Some students feel that teachers don't always listen to both sides of a story, which could erode trust between students and faculty.
- There are concerns about the new principal not being as effective or favorable as previous leadership.

Recommendations:

- Foster open communication between students and teachers, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in disciplinary or conflict resolution situations.
- Leadership could engage with students more frequently to build trust and address concerns about any changes in school administration.

Supportive Environment: Quality of Facilities

Positive Aspects:

- Some students are generally satisfied with the school's facilities, despite recognizing areas for improvement.

Challenges:

- The lack of a gymnasium and poor maintenance of facilities, particularly bathrooms, are recurring issues. Students frequently mention problems such as broken toilets, graffiti, and unpleasant odors.
- Temperature control within classrooms is another concern, with rooms being either too hot or too cold.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize the maintenance and cleanliness of existing facilities, particularly bathrooms, to improve the school environment.

- Explore options for adding or improving athletic facilities, such as a gymnasium, to enhance the physical education experience.

- Address temperature control issues by assessing and adjusting HVAC systems to ensure a more comfortable learning environment.

Ambitious Instruction: Academic Press

Positive Aspects:

- Some students appreciate being challenged and pushed to learn new things, indicating a positive response to academic rigor.

- There is an acknowledgment of teachers encouraging students to improve their skills and knowledge.

Challenges:

- A few students feel that the academic challenges are inconsistent, with some tasks being too easy or not relevant to their future use.

Recommendations:

- Continuously assess and adjust the level of academic challenge to ensure that it is appropriate for all students, potentially incorporating differentiated instruction strategies.

Likes: What Students Like Most About the School

Positive Aspects:

- Students appreciate the unique aspects of the school, such as field trips, extracurricular activities, and the freedom to learn at their own pace.

- The community atmosphere, including interactions with friends and staff, is highly valued by students.

Least Like: What Students Dislike Most About the School

Challenges:

- Common complaints include the state of the bathrooms, lack of a gymnasium, and issues with the playground.

- There is dissatisfaction with the bathroom pass system, gender-divided classrooms, and the handling of bullying incidents.

Improvement Suggestions

Recommendations:

- Students suggest various improvements, such as building a gymnasium, enhancing playground facilities, and improving the handling of bullying.

- Consider implementing some of these suggestions to enhance the school environment, such as better sports facilities, more effective bullying prevention programs, and additional resources for student mental health education.

Conclusion

The student survey reveals a complex landscape of academic and social experiences within the school. While students generally appreciate the personal support and safety provided by teachers and the school environment, challenges persist in areas such as peer behavior, facility maintenance, and the effectiveness of academic rigor. To address these issues, it is crucial for the school to implement targeted improvements, including enhancing classroom management, maintaining facilities better, and refining academic challenges to align with students' needs. By fostering better communication between students and teachers, introducing supportive programs, and addressing infrastructure concerns, the school can create a more supportive and effective learning environment that aligns with students' expectations and enhances their overall educational experience.

Certified Staff Survey

Ambitious Instruction - Quality of Student Discussion

Positive Aspects:

- **Promotion of Student Discussion:** The school is actively promoting student discussion across all age groups. Students are encouraged to share their unique perspectives in a respectful, open-minded environment, which helps them learn from one another.

- **Safe Environment:** A safe and supportive environment is provided for students to share their ideas and experiences, fostering personal growth and learning.

- **Innovative Approaches:** The weekly "class council meetings" allow students to discuss classroom issues, express gratitude, apologize, and share personal experiences, contributing to a holistic development.

Challenges:

- **Social Issues:** Some students are still struggling with social issues, potentially exacerbated by the pandemic, which may limit their participation in discussions.

Recommendations:

- **Support Quiet Students:** Implement strategies to support quieter students and those with social challenges to ensure they are equally engaged in discussions.

Effective Leadership - Instructional Leadership

Positive Aspects:

- **Improvement in Leadership:** There has been a noticeable improvement in leadership this year, with the current principal bringing a positive outlook, productive environment, and effective professional development.

- **High Expectations:** The principal holds high expectations and serves as a role model, driving innovation and accountability within the school.

- **Positive Community Impact:** The principal is highly regarded by both staff and students, contributing to a mission-driven environment.

Challenges:

- **Uncertainty of Roles:** Some staff members are unclear about the roles and responsibilities of certain leaders, particularly Ian, who has been absent from the school for months and is not involved in professional development.

Recommendations:

- **Clarify Leadership Roles:** Provide clear communication regarding the roles and responsibilities of all leadership members to ensure transparency and understanding among staff.

- **Engage Absent Leaders:** Re-engage leaders who have been less visible or involved to strengthen the overall leadership team and support.

Effective Leadership - Program Coherence

Positive Aspects:

- **Alignment of Materials:** Montessori materials are well-aligned across grade levels, ensuring continuous learning and growth for students.

- **Efforts to Improve Coherence:** The new principal has been actively working to address and improve areas of program coherence that were lacking.

Challenges:

- **Lack of Cohesive Writing Curriculum:** There is a concern about the lack of a cohesive writing curriculum, leading to potential gaps in students' writing skills across different classes and grade levels.

- **Past Program Issues:** Previous administration decisions, such as ineffective spending on the adolescent program, have left a negative impact.

Recommendations:

- **Develop a Cohesive Writing Curriculum:** Implement a consistent writing curriculum across all grade levels to ensure students build upon their skills effectively.

- **Learn from Past Mistakes:** Use the experience of past program failures to guide future decisions and ensure more effective and thoughtful program implementation.

Effective Leadership: Teacher Influence

Positive Aspects:

- **Satisfaction with Influence:** Teachers feel content with their level of influence and believe that their concerns would be heard if raised.

- **Autonomy in Material Selection:** Teachers have some autonomy in choosing additional materials for subjects like reading and math, which allows for flexibility in instruction.

Challenges:

- **Limited Influence:** While teachers have influence, it is often limited to certain areas, which may restrict broader contributions to curriculum development.

Recommendations:

- **Enhance Teacher Influence:** Explore opportunities to increase teacher influence in broader areas of curriculum development and school-wide decisions, fostering a more inclusive and collaborative environment.

Effective Leadership: Teacher-Leadership Trust

Positive Aspects:

- **Trust in the Principal:** Trust in the principal has been building, especially since this is her first year. Teachers feel confident in her leadership and decision-making.

- **Exclusion of Certain Leaders:** Responses indicate a lack of trust in certain leaders, particularly the CEO, but trust is strong when it comes to the principal.

Challenges:

- **Mistrust in Some Leaders:** There is a notable mistrust in some leaders, which could affect overall team dynamics and collaboration.

Recommendations:

- **Address Trust Issues:** Engage in open dialogues to address trust issues with specific leaders, ensuring that all members of the leadership team are seen as trustworthy and effective.

Collaborative Teachers - School Commitment
Positive Aspects:

- **Positive Change with New Leadership:** The new principal has positively impacted school commitment, creating a more supportive and cohesive environment.

- **Strong Sense of Community:** Staff feel a strong sense of autonomy, trust, and love within the school, contributing to a positive work environment.

Challenges:

- **Uncomfortable Dynamics:** The presence of a former principal in a teaching role, who is not held in high esteem, creates discomfort among staff.

Recommendations:

- **Address Uncomfortable Dynamics:** Consider addressing or re-evaluating the role of the former principal to alleviate discomfort and maintain a positive school culture.

Collaborative Teachers: Collaborative Practices
Positive Aspects:

- **Strong Collaboration:** Teachers feel that collaboration is strong within the school, with staff willing to share ideas and resources, leading to a positive impact on student learning.

- **Use of Shared Materials:** Teachers are pleased to see materials they introduce being used in various classrooms, reinforcing a sense of collective effort.

Challenges:

- **None Identified:** No significant challenges were identified in the area of collaborative practices.

Recommendations:

- **Continue Fostering Collaboration:** Maintain and build upon the current collaborative practices to ensure ongoing success in this area.

Supportive Environment: Professional Development
Positive Aspects:

- **Improved PD Opportunities:** Professional development (PD) has greatly improved this year, offering valuable opportunities for growth that were not available in previous years.

- **Desire for Multi-Level Collaboration:** There is an interest in incorporating more multi-level collaboration within PD sessions to bridge gaps between different grade levels.

Challenges:

- **Need for Time Management:** Teachers have expressed a need for more time to work on report cards and for PD sessions that reinforce policies, procedures, and curriculum alignment.

Recommendations:

- **Incorporate Multi-Level Collaboration:** Design PD sessions that facilitate collaboration across grade levels to address common challenges and share best practices.

- **Allocate Time for Administrative Tasks:** Provide dedicated time during PD sessions for teachers to work on administrative tasks like report cards and material preparation.

Involved Families: Family Involvement and Community Ties
Positive Aspects:

- **Continuous Efforts:** The school is always thinking of new ways to bring the community together and strengthen ties.

Challenges:

- **Uncertainty About Involvement:** Some staff are unsure about how the school is involving parents this year, leading to uncertainty in their responses.

Recommendations:

- **Increase Communication on Involvement:** Enhance communication with staff regarding family involvement initiatives to ensure everyone is informed and can contribute effectively.

Likes
Community and Support:

- **Close-Knit Community:** Many respondents appreciate the strong sense of community among students and staff, describing it as supportive and caring.

- **Support from Administration and Staff:** There is a significant appreciation for the support provided by the administration, particularly the new principal, as well as the collaborative and professional nature of the staff.

Autonomy and Flexibility:

- **Teaching Autonomy:** Teachers value the autonomy they have in running their classrooms and creating curriculum, particularly in alignment with the Montessori philosophy.

- **Montessori Philosophy:** The ability to teach according to the Montessori method is highlighted as a key positive aspect, especially compared to larger districts.

Stable and Professional Environment:

- **Long-Standing History:** The school's long history as a public charter is noted as a strength, providing a sense of stability.

- **Professional and Respectful Culture:** The professionalism and respectfulness of the staff and administration are highly regarded.

Dislikes

Resource and Staffing Issues:

- **Lack of Discretionary Funds:** There is dissatisfaction with the limited funds available for classroom improvements, which affects the learning environment.

- **Special Education Support:** The school is perceived to have too few special education teachers to effectively support students with IEPs in the classroom, leading to concerns about the adequacy of special education services.

- **Teacher Shortage:** The impact of the statewide teacher shortage is felt within the school, with difficulties in retaining qualified staff who are committed to staying long-term.

Diversity and Space Concerns:

- **Lack of Diversity:** Both economic and racial diversity among students and staff are areas of concern, with respondents expressing a desire for a more diverse school culture.

- **Physical Space Limitations:** The small size of classrooms, lack of communal spaces, and inadequate bathroom facilities for younger children are noted as significant drawbacks.

Operational Challenges:

- **Visibility and Involvement of Leadership:** The CEO's lack of visibility and involvement is a recurring concern, leading to uncertainty about their role and responsibilities.

- **Behavioral Issues:** An increase in students with behavioral problems has made teaching more challenging in recent years.

- **Facilities and Scheduling:** The lack of a cafeteria, limited green space, and challenges in scheduling due to specials and specialists are additional points of dissatisfaction.

Improvement Suggestions

Staffing and Resource Allocation:

- **Increase Special Education Support:** Hire full-time special education teachers to be assigned to classrooms with a significant number of students with IEPs to ensure they receive the support they need within the classroom environment.

- **Improve Resource Management:** Suggestions include better use of existing space, as well as the acquisition of more green space and outdoor equipment for students.

Diversity and Inclusivity:

- **Enhance Diversity:** Implement strategies to attract and retain a more diverse student and teacher population to enrich the school culture.

- **Support for Low-Income Families:** Introduce programs to support low-income families, such as free and reduced-price lunch programs and transportation options.

Operational Improvements:

- **Leadership Stability:** Retain the current principal to allow for continuity and the successful implementation of her plans.

- **Foreign Language Instruction:** Introduce a foreign language teacher to broaden the educational offerings and enhance the curriculum.

- **Optimize Scheduling:** Move specials to the afternoons to improve the overall daily schedule for both students and teachers.

Conclusion

While the certified staff recognize numerous strengths, such as a supportive community, effective leadership, and a commitment to fostering student discussion, several challenges and areas for improvement persist. Issues like the lack of diversity, resource limitations, and the need for more cohesive leadership roles create hurdles that must be addressed to enhance the overall school environment. By focusing on these areas—especially through increased support for special education, improved resource management, and clearer communication within leadership—the school can build on its existing strengths and continue to grow as a positive, inclusive learning environment.

Support Staff Survey

Collaborative Staff: Collective Responsibility

Positive Aspects:

- **Supportive Environment:** There is a strong sense of mutual support among staff, both physically and emotionally. The ability to listen to and be there for each other contributes to a positive and collaborative work atmosphere.

- **Shared Commitment:** Staff members are committed to working together for the benefit of the children, demonstrating a unified approach to student welfare.

Challenges:

- **Limited Data:** There is no data available on specific challenges faced in this area.

Recommendations:

- **Regular Feedback:** Implement regular check-ins or feedback sessions to address any underlying issues in collaboration and support. This could help in identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that all staff feel equally supported.

- **Recognition and Training:** Offer training sessions focused on enhancing collaborative skills and recognizing efforts to build a supportive environment. This can further strengthen the collective responsibility among staff.

Collaborative Staff: School Commitment

Positive Aspects:

- **Dedication:** Despite some challenges, staff demonstrate a strong commitment to their roles and to the students. Their dedication to working together for the school's success is evident.

Challenges:

- **Irregular Hours and Benefits:** Staff face issues with irregular and inconsistent hours, unclear policies regarding paid mandatory training, and inadequate health insurance. These factors contribute to financial and job security concerns.

- **Job Satisfaction:** There are significant concerns about the affordability of continuing work at the school due to these issues, which could affect staff morale and retention.

Recommendations:

- **Review Employment Policies:** Address concerns related to job security and benefits by reviewing and improving policies on scheduling, training compensation, and health insurance. Ensure that staff have clear information about these policies.

- **Financial Support and Incentives:** Consider offering financial support or incentives to improve job satisfaction and retention. This could include better health benefits or more stable work schedules.

Effective Leadership: Program Coherence

Positive Aspects:

- **Engaged Leadership:** The principal is noted for being knowledgeable, engaged, and present, contributing positively to program coherence.

Challenges:

- **Inconsistent Leadership Presence:** There is a lack of cohesion in leadership, with the CEO being frequently absent from the building. This inconsistency can impact staff perception and effectiveness of leadership.

Recommendations:

- **Leadership Development:** Enhance leadership training and development to ensure that all leaders are equally present and engaged. Consider implementing regular leadership meetings to improve cohesion and communication.

- **Increase Visibility:** Encourage leaders to maintain a consistent presence in the school to foster a more cohesive and supportive leadership environment.

Effective Leadership: Leadership-Staff Trust

Positive Aspects:

- **None specifically noted.**

Challenges:

- **Lack of Support and Future Uncertainty:** Staff members feel unsupported and uncertain about their future beyond their current roles. This perception can affect morale and job satisfaction.

Recommendations:

- **Career Development Opportunities:** Provide clear pathways for career advancement and professional development. Ensure that staff feel supported in their career growth and have opportunities for progression within the organization.

- **Improve Communication:** Foster open communication between leadership and staff to address concerns and build trust. Regular meetings and feedback sessions can help in understanding and resolving issues related to staff support and future prospects.

Supportive Environment: College Enrollment/Career Development

Positive Aspects:

- **Interest in Support:** There is some interest in receiving support for obtaining a teacher license, with a few respondents indicating a willingness to consider it.

Challenges:

- **Low Enthusiasm:** The majority of respondents either declined or expressed uncertainty about the need for support in obtaining a teaching license.

Recommendations:

- **Explore Needs and Preferences:** Conduct surveys or focus groups to understand the specific needs and preferences of staff regarding professional development and licensing support. Tailor support programs to address these needs.

- **Follow Through on Promises:** Ensure that any sponsored training or professional development opportunities are followed through effectively. Clear communication and commitment to these programs are essential for maintaining staff interest.

Supportive Environment: Career Development
Positive Aspects:

- **Potential for Sponsored Training:** There has been mention of sponsored training, indicating a recognition of the need for career development opportunities.

Challenges:

- **Lack of Follow-Through:** Promises of sponsored training have not been fulfilled, leading to frustration and a lack of progress in career development.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure Implementation:** Develop a clear plan and timeline for implementing sponsored training and professional development opportunities. Regular updates and follow-ups can help in maintaining staff engagement and trust.

- **Provide Diverse Options:** Offer a range of career development options to cater to different interests and career goals, ensuring that staff have access to meaningful and relevant opportunities.

Involved Families: Parent Involvement
- No data available

Likes
Key Themes:

- **Community and Energy:** Staff appreciate the strong sense of community and the positive energy present within the school. This fosters a supportive and enthusiastic environment for both staff and students.

- **Staff Relations and Support:** There is high regard for the positive relationships among staff members and the collaborative atmosphere. Staff enjoy working with great children and co-workers, and they value the supportive nature of their colleagues.

- **Student-Centered Focus:** The dedication to students' education and the organization and activity of the staff to support student needs are highly valued. Staff recognize the school's efforts to create a happy environment for students.

Dislikes

Key Themes:

- **Communication and Consistency Issues:** There is concern about a lack of cohesion and consistency among staff and leadership. Misalignment and communication challenges hinder effective teamwork and operational efficiency.

- **Facilities and Resources:** Staff have expressed dissatisfaction with certain facilities, such as the playground area, and a perceived lack of opportunities for older students, including extracurricular activities like music and sports.

- **Compensation and Benefits:** Poor pay and inadequate benefits are major concerns. Long-term staff have noted that their raises and compensation have not kept pace with their contributions or those of other staff members.

- **Bullying and Parent Interactions:** Issues related to bullying and difficult interactions with a small percentage of entitled parents are additional points of concern.

Improvement Suggestions

Key Themes:

- **Enhanced School Board Engagement:** There is a call for greater presence and engagement from the school board, including the inclusion of a parent board member. This could improve decision-making and community involvement.

- **Additional Programs and Facilities:** Suggestions include adding foreign language classes and improving opportunities for older students. Addressing facility issues, such as the playground area, is also recommended.

- **Improved Compensation and Benefits:** Address the need for better pay and benefits for hourly staff and ensure that compensation is competitive and reflects staff contributions.

- **Address Bullying and Parent Issues:** Implement strategies to better handle bullying and manage difficult parent interactions to create a more supportive and positive school environment.

- **Enhanced Working Conditions:** Conduct a thorough study to identify and address improvements needed for working conditions, particularly for hourly staff. This could include reviewing scheduling, compensation, and overall job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The Support Staff Survey highlights both the strengths and areas for improvement within the school environment. Positive aspects include a strong sense of community and mutual support among staff, which fosters a collaborative and enthusiastic atmosphere. The commitment to student welfare and positive staff relationships are also noted as significant strengths. However, challenges such as inconsistent leadership, inadequate compensation, and communication issues need to be addressed to enhance overall effectiveness. Recommendations for improvement focus on enhancing school board engagement, improving compensation and benefits, addressing facility and resource

issues, and providing better support for career development and professional growth. By implementing these suggestions, the school can build on its positive aspects and work towards resolving the identified challenges, ultimately creating a more supportive and effective environment for both staff and students.

Board/Leadership Survey

Expertise Needs for New Board Members

Themes Identified:

- **Marketing and Community Engagement**: There is a clear need for skills in marketing and engaging with the community. This suggests a focus on enhancing the school's visibility and involvement with the local community to drive growth and support.

- **Human Resources (HR) and Talent Management**: Expertise in HR and talent management is mentioned, indicating an interest in improving the school's ability to manage and develop its personnel effectively.

- **Management and Leadership**: Strong management and leadership skills are highlighted as crucial. The emphasis is on finding members who can provide guidance and strategic direction, given the existing team's diverse background.

- **School Management Experience**: Specific experience in school management and operational finance is noted, reflecting a need for individuals who understand the unique challenges of running a school and managing its finances.

Effectiveness of School's Leadership and Board

Themes Identified:

- **Leadership Quality**: The current leadership is described as excellent and experienced, suggesting that the school values strong, effective leadership which is crucial for its growth and development.

- **Board Diversity and Expertise**: The Board is recognized for its diversity and proficiency in financial and legal matters. This indicates a well-rounded Board that effectively addresses the school's needs in these areas.

- **Successful Transition and Community Engagement**: The recent transition in school leadership has been positive, resulting in increased parental engagement and support. This is seen as a foundation for future success, including attracting more students and expanding the school's population.

Conclusion

The Board/Leadership survey reveals that the school board is looking to enhance its capabilities with new members who bring expertise in marketing, HR, leadership, and school management. The current leadership and Board are generally seen as effective, with successful management of leadership transitions and strong community engagement contributing to the school's positive outlook.

Summary of Key Insights and Recommendations

This thematic analysis of feedback from the 2023-2024 Downtown Montessori Academy Culture and Climate Survey underscores the overall positive perception of the school's environment, characterized by its welcoming community, dedicated staff, and strong educational framework. However, it also highlights several critical areas requiring attention to foster continued improvement and satisfaction among stakeholders.

Key strengths include the supportive atmosphere, effective leadership, and commitment to student welfare, as noted by various respondents. Nonetheless, recurring challenges such as communication gaps, facility maintenance issues, inclusivity concerns, and inconsistencies in leadership and resource allocation must be addressed. These challenges impact different groups within the school community—students, certified staff, support staff, and board members— each with unique needs and expectations.

To address these issues, the report recommends implementing targeted improvements such as enhancing classroom management, refining academic rigor, improving facility maintenance, and bolstering inclusivity and support systems. Additionally, focusing on better communication, resource management, and leadership cohesion will be crucial for ongoing development.

By embracing these recommendations, Downtown Montessori Academy can build on its existing strengths, address identified challenges, and create a more supportive, effective, and inclusive educational environment. This comprehensive approach will not only improve the school's culture and climate but also ensure that it meets the diverse needs of its community and continues to thrive as a leading institution.