

Focus Group Notes – 11/18/20 – Russian (group 2)

After a warm welcome to 14 participants a presenter introduced herself and informed everyone that participants can choose to have their camera on or off, she also stated that the session was recorded.

A presenter explained the format of the focus group and the agenda: a short presentation and time for asking questions, sharing ideas and concerns.

Participants were offered a chance to introduce themselves and share something pleasant and positive about this week.

The parents introduced themselves:

a mother of a student from Kelly Elementary,
a mother of several students from Harrison Park (HP),
a father of several students from HP,
a mother of several students from HP,
a mother of several students from HP,
a father of several students from HP,
and an English Speaking teacher from HP.

A comment from a father “the fact that we are meeting today is already a positive fact, and we will be able to accomplish something positive”.

A presenter reminded that everyone will have a chance to ask questions and all questions will be recorded and passed to PPS district.

First question from a presenter: how familiar are you with the site about Enrollment and Program Balancing?

The website in Russian was displayed on Zoom.

A presenter reviewed information posted on PPS website, pointing out the goals, the phases, and the time frame of the process, details of the proposed changes.

Then a presenter asked if anyone had questions.

1. A mother of several students from Harrison Park:

“We met with other parents from our school, and we all have the same request. We have an opinion and want the district to hear what we have to say, especially regarding the changes to our school. When the school will be changed from K-8 to 5-8, that will lead to a challenge for us, for example I will have to take children to 3 different schools. Please understand that it is very difficult for many parents. That’s the first point. Next, we have so many ethnic groups in our school, and we never had any issues or conflicts between our ethnic groups or anything of that sort. And we are very happy that our school is so international. And we are very happy with our teachers and our principal, and how wise is the leadership; it is a big school but I don't think it's overcrowded. And what **we would like most** is for **our school to remain as it is**, because we are very satisfied with the way it is. We have children in different grades, upper grades, lower grades, and it's very convenient that all the kids go to one school. The other point is, if it is not possible to save our school, though we really want that, here is what to consider: we have many working parents, and older children are helping

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to look after little ones. They pick up younger kids from class and they all go home together. And if the school gets divided, then again it's an extra stress on the parents. It is a great stress for us that the school is getting divided, and for children the stress is even greater. Plus new teachers, new everything, very stressful for kids, which also effects their grades, their emotional state and everything. So in case there is no way going back and keeping our school as it is, **then we would like all our teachers and our ethnic group to be moved together to 92nd St** (it used to be Clark school, now it's Creative Science school), all the students and teachers as one group move together. **If that's at all possible, that is what we ask for.** It is in our neighborhood. That would work for us because these two schools are close to each other and their are both in our neighborhood. Imagine if our little ones will have to move further away on the other side of 82nd, it's challenging: that is a very busy road, not safe for little ones to cross, please understand our concerns. Please consider all of these points.”

A presenter thanked a parent for sharing specific and clear ideas.

A presenter confirmed that the parents is concerned about major roads and streets separating school from the area where little children live.

2. A father of 7 children from Harrison Park spoke in English: “We would like to avoid any changes, thinking about the safety of the kids just like the previous mother said. This school is like a family school for us. Keep in mind more kids from Slavic families are coming to school, which each a positive thing. **We have a good team supporting Slavic community.** Thanks you.”

3. Another mother stated: “When we first came to this area, our children went to a regular school and it was hard for my kids emotionally, when my kids started to go to K-8 it was just so wonderful. Great difference. I would really **want our school remain the way it is**, and I think all the parents want the same thing.”

4. A father with several children: “All of our children went to Harrison Park, very convenient, staying in the same school. We still have little ones in this school. Talking with other parents and comparing with other schools, our Harrison Park offers many programs and activities, field trips before COVID. I also wish the school remains undivided. But of course if it is not at all possible, perhaps the whole teaching staff could move together because many personal connections were build which will help kids not to be so stressed with changes and not to affect their grades and emotional well being. School's primary goal is to educate and raise good citizens, if emotional and educational stability is considered and provided that will only be a plus for all. If it is not possible not to split the school, then **keep all the teachers and staff and kids as a group** continue being together.”

A presenter confirmed that all the parents express same idea that the school community is important and keeping the community together is everyone's wish.

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5. A mother stated: “We are in this school already for 10 years, and never had a regret that we moved to this school. On the contrary I am very grateful that we moved specifically to this area and had a chance to go to this school”.

6. The mother who spoke first added: “And we have been in this school for 18 years. We lived in a different district, and the attitude to our Russian kids in that middle school was not so good, and after Harrison School opened everything changed, We had a principle Mr. Walden, an exceptional person, and all other teachers, like this teacher Miss Michelle who is here today are caring and such a difference for our children. I’ll give you an example: in Clark school the principle never acknowledged our presence, never said “Hi”. As I said we had Mr. Walden and now Miss D, simply wonderful. And all the rest of our teachers are the best. And we would never want to exchange our teachers for any other teachers, or our school for any other school”.

7. “**Sometimes our voice is not heard** perhaps because when we need something we go to school, to go to counselors, **we address all our questions to the principle**, and they always help and answer. So we never address anything to the district, may be that’s why they think that we don’t care. Bu we simply go straight to our principle and use interpreter to communicate with her and she always helps with all our needs and questions. And we have Natasha, an interpreter, working at our school, we never have difficulties with anything. Our school is really very good, and the staff is excellent. And it’s hard for us to hear about splitting our school”.

8. A mother added: “ I would like to mention that **we want to avoid driving all around town to gather all of our kids** because it is very hard, and hopefully they could move our school to the one that is close to us on 92nd.”

A presenter asked if there were any other questions.

A brief discussion about Chinese Immersion program to clarify where will it move and if it affect Harrison Park.

A presenter pointed out that the move of a Chinese Immersion Program is based on the greater number of Chinese speaking families in the area and the need for that program at this location.

9. The mother who spoke first added: “Why not **move all the existing different ethnic communities including our to the Clark school?** We live in this neighborhood, so even if they can’t keep K-8 school then at least they can keep us her in our area on 92 St.”

10. A mother who stated that she does not speak Russian very well because she is from Moldova: “We are asking to **keep our kids in Harrison Park and Clark**, I have 5 children and having them all in one school is better”.

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A presenter stated that if there are no other questions, the meeting can end for today, but tomorrow there will be another open house for all parents, and thanked all for coming. Participants thanked the organizers and interpreters.

The meeting was very orderly, all the speakers were respectful, thoughtful, polite, expressed their opinions in a suggestive manner using words like “please consider, please keep in mind, we would like, if at all possible”. There were no demands or controversies, rather the desire to be heard and understood.