

VII. SHARING AND COMMUNICATING HSSSE AND MGSSE RESULTS: FIVE STRATEGIES

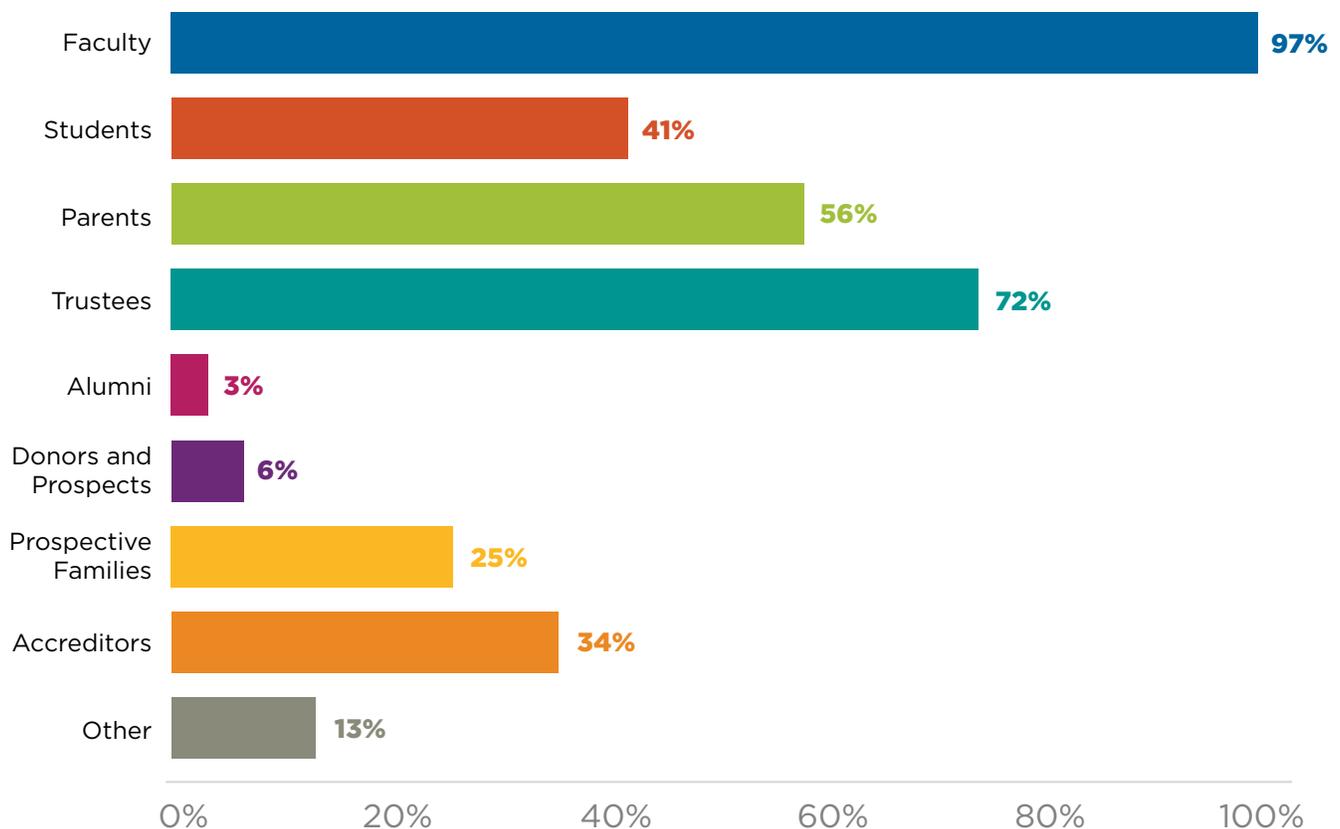
**User's Guide and Toolkit for the Surveys of Student
Engagement: The High School Survey of Student Engagement
(HSSSE) and the Middle Grades Survey of Student
Engagement (MGSSE)**

By Jonathan Martin and Amada Torres

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As part of a small survey of NAIS HSSSE users, respondents were asked to report with whom they shared HSSSE results. Not surprisingly, faculty topped the list. Trustees came in second.

With what audiences do you (selectively) share HSSSE results? Select all that apply.



Source: NAIS, "Feedback on Your HSSSE Participation Survey"

It is interesting to see that nearly half of the participating schools communicated HSSSE results to their students, and it is surprising that so few schools shared data with prospective families and accreditors. In the case of the latter, it might have been a matter of timing; many schools who have been using the HSSSE only a year or two probably haven't had a self-study or accreditation visit in that time.

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Here are some thoughts on best practices in sharing HSSSE and MGSSE data.

1. GO BEYOND PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS.

The most common approach, as shown in the survey and in many conversations, is for the head or upper school head to present slides featuring a select set of data points at a faculty meeting (since the MGSSE was just released in 2016, there are no examples of sharing its data in public presentations). For example, Michelle Lyon at Parish Episcopal School (Texas) brought to her faculty a 34-slide presentation in which she reviewed about 25 key HSSSE questions. For each question, she provided two bar graphs for her audience to evaluate, one comparing three years of the school's data for that question and one comparing the school's most recent year data with NAIS and public school norms. She organized her selected items into three categories: academics, school life, and rapport.

As much as this approach is common and as valuable as it can be for ensuring a wide awareness of the HSSSE (or MGSSE) and your school's results, don't overlook the static nature of such a presentation. It can be limiting in the ability to generate true shared ownership for the tool and for its meaningful implementation into consequential assessment. As noted in the discussion in Section VI, it should be every school leader's aim to go above and beyond just showing data to colleagues; instead, escort them into a deeper dive of querying, unpacking, comparing, and applying these data.

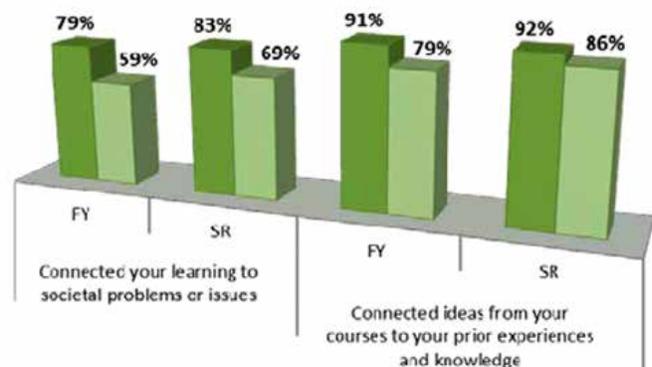
2. FOCUS AND DISTILL YOUR COMMUNICATIONS.

Many school leaders emphasized that the HSSSE's greatest challenge is its bulk and breadth. There's so much material that it quickly overwhelms. Schools using the MGSSE will probably share the same opinion. Communicate your committee's key findings about the data in small, digestible bites, and be wary of inundating constituents.

- Some schools create very small baskets of just one to seven questions of greatest importance and keep people's focus there. Albuquerque Academy (New Mexico) focuses on whether students have considered transferring to another school; at Parish Episcopal School (Texas), it is, "I do projects in which I interact with people outside school."
- Consider using infographics for powerful, visually illustrated communications, as has been done at Mills College to convey NSSE data to faculty, students, admissions visitors, and alumnae.



Mills students in their first and senior years are significantly more engaged in connecting their learning to societal problems or issues, including diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments, and connecting ideas from their courses to their prior experiences and knowledge.>>



3. CONVEY POSITIVE RESULTS.

Many schools take care to use the “feedback sandwich” approach in their communications, beginning with a celebration of their school’s successes and triumphs and putting the areas for improvement in a subordinate position. This happens, for example, when heads are new to a school. When launching a HSSSE or MGSSE program, heads work to help administrators and faculty members, and perhaps even trustees, feel a degree of comfort and affirmation from the tool in hopes of generating greater confidence when using it as an improvement device.

4. CREATE DASHBOARDS.

For your board of trustees and your leadership team, a dashboard (sometimes called a scorecard) captures and communicates your school’s five to 15 key quantifiable success measures for ready viewing and better planning and monitoring. The metaphorical names for these tools are apt. Ideally, they convey the most important data succinctly and at a glance, like a car’s dashboard or an athletic scoreboard. And just as a dashboard that only has a speedometer (and no temperature or gas indicator) will potentially lead you astray, suggesting you can drive as fast and as long as you want without slowing or stopping, a school dashboard that highlights only academic achievement indicators (SAT scores, AP performance, elite college admission) could similarly steer you wrong.

Dashboards are becoming increasingly common in colleges and universities, and many of them include their student engagement scores. Many examples exist. One excellent comprehensive scorecard is the University of Cincinnati’s “President’s Report Card.”

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President's **Report Card** to the Board of Trustees

Goal 6: Create Opportunity

Item	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Change since Most Recent Measure	Change Since Baseline Year
Diversity of Students - Total University Female Student Headcount	17,747	18,235	19,105	19,363	19,745	2.0%	11.3%
Diversity of Students - Total University % Female Students	52.5%	53.1%	54.2%	54.5%	54.3%	-0.2%	1.8%
Diversity of Students - Total University African American Student Headcount	3,787	3,951	4,023	3,858	3,677	-4.7%	-2.9%
Diversity of Students - Total University % African American Students	11.2%	11.5%	11.4%	10.9%	10.1%	-0.8%	-1.1%
Diversity of Students - Total University Minority Student Headcount	5,302	5,562	5,630	5,468	5,396	-1.3%	1.8%
Diversity of Students - Total University % Minority Students	15.7%	16.2%	16.0%	15.4%	14.8%	-0.6%	-0.9%

Enrollment

Faculty Diversity

Student Diversity

Financials

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	EMERGING	PROGRESS NEEDED
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Source: University of Cincinnati, "President's Report Card to the Board of Trustees," 2007; online at <http://www.uc.edu/president25/reportcard/sept07/goal6metricsc.htm>

Another example comes from the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell) 2020 Report Card 2015.

National Survey of Student Engagement Results: Overall Student Satisfaction						
	2008	2011	2012	2013	2014	2020 GOAL
UMass Lowell Freshmen	80%	86%	82%	81%	85%	86%
New England Publics Freshmen	82%	85%	84%	84%	86%	
UMass Lowell Seniors	79%	85%	84%	81%	83%	86%
New England Publics Seniors	86%	83%	84%	84%	86%	

**Percent of students evaluating their entire educational experience as "good" or "excellent."*

National Survey of Student Engagement Results: High-impact Practices*				
		2013	2014	2020 GOAL
* For Freshmen, these high-impact practices include learning community, service learning and research with faculty;	UMass Lowell Freshmen	65%	63%	70%
	New England Publics Freshmen	56%	54%	
	Carnegie Class Peers	57%	57%	
for Seniors, these include internship, study abroad and culminating senior experience in addition to those for Freshmen.	UMass Lowell Seniors	83%	87%	88%
	New England Publics Seniors	86%	88%	
	Carnegie Class Peers	85%	86%	

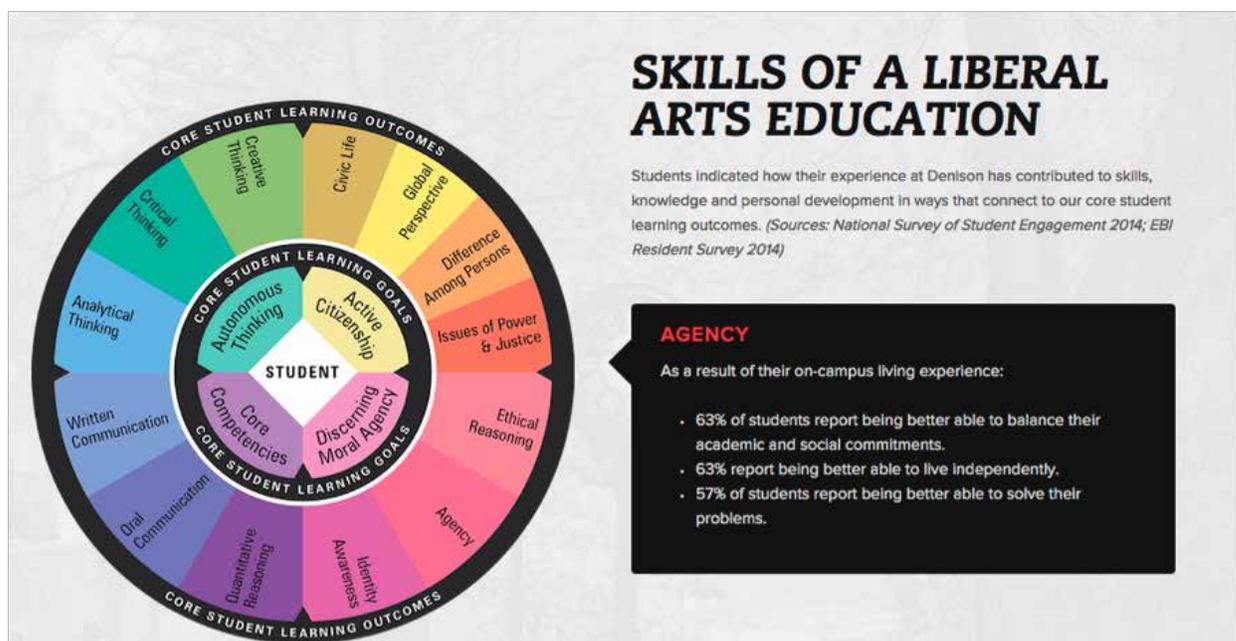
Source: University of Massachusetts Lowell Report Card Indicators, UMass Lowell 2020 Report Card 2015; in NSSE, *Using Data to Catalyze Change on Campus: Lessons from the Field, Volume 3*.

For more information, see the case study about dashboards at The Lovett School (Georgia) and Seacrest Country Day School (Florida).

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5. USE HSSSE AND MGSSE DATA IN MARKETING.

As seen in NAIS’s survey of HSSSE users, only about a quarter of the responding schools use HSSSE results in their marketing and enrollment work (“Prospective Families”). There are good reasons for that. The survey results do not provide the firmest of foundations, and they can change from year to year. Furthermore, whether or not the norms for comparison are truly fair “comps” is questionable. But it bears noting that many colleges and universities do post their NSSE data on their websites and use them in admissions. Wofford College created a four-page brochure, “Measuring Student Engagement: Learn What Your Students Will Actually Get,” for prospective parents. Another excellent example comes from Denison University, which prominently placed a colorful, interactive wheel on its website for visitors to learn more about NSSE results for various key items, such as global perspective and student agency.



Source: Denison University, “Skills of a Liberal Arts Education”; in NSSE, *Using Data to Catalyze Change on Campus: Lessons from the Field, Volume 3*.

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NSSE has published a handy guide on best practices for posting NSSE data to an institution's website, with supporting examples from NSSE institutions. For instance, NSSE recommends “highlight[ing] strengths and areas for improvement to demonstrate candor.”¹

¹ National Survey of Student Engagement, “Guidelines for Display of NSSE Results on Institution Web Sites”; online at <http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/Guidelines%20for%20Displaying%20NSSE%20Data%202014.pdf>.

CASE STUDY: THE LOVETT SCHOOL (GEORGIA) AND SEACREST COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL (FLORIDA)

Two southeastern K-12 schools are blazing the trail for the use of HSSSE data. Lovett, a large school in Georgia, and Seacrest Country Day, a smaller school in Florida, provide great examples of how to successfully use data on institutional dashboards with boards of trustees.

Both schools use HSSSE results for more than just their dashboard, of course. At Lovett, Upper School Head Dan Alig and Assistant Headmaster Marsha Little report that the HSSSE has been highly valuable for them in a multitude of ways. When they noted that their students were reporting lower ratings on the time they spent independently reading for pleasure, for example, the school responded by restructuring summer reading assignments and looking for different ways to encourage independent reading throughout the school year.

Lovett leaders have also worked to “triangulate data” by comparing student responses on the HSSSE with other student surveys, including the SAIS Value Narrative Survey² and the Freedom from Chemical Dependency³ survey. When doing so, they look at how the data from each can be better understood with reference to the other. In accreditation, HSSSE data have informed Lovett’s self-study considerably. For that self-study, Little reports, school leaders established several goals that can be informed by HSSSE results. They use particular items from the HSSSE, such as “How much has your experience at this school contributed to developing creative ideas

² “SAIS Value Narrative Surveys,” Southern Association of Independent Schools; online at <http://www.sais.org/?page=297>.

³ “Surveys and Assessments,” FCD Prevention Works; online at <http://fcd.org/what-we-do/surveys-and-assessments/>.

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and solutions?” and “How much has your experience at this school contributed to understanding yourself?” as examples of ways to track and measure their success.

At Seacrest, the HSSSE has become part of the formal annual work of standardized measurement. School leaders explain, “Part of Seacrest’s mission from its very beginning has been the empowerment of children to take charge of their education and that engagement with learning is the best path to success. The HSSSE is the best available measure of how we are fulfilling our mission in this very important domain.”⁴

Seacrest Upper School Head Erin Duffy reports that she relies heavily on HSSSE data above all other assessments. After receiving the report, Duffy explains: “First I go over it myself thoroughly, and then I bring the dean and the department chairs into the process, giving them specific questions to think about and particular items to respond to.”

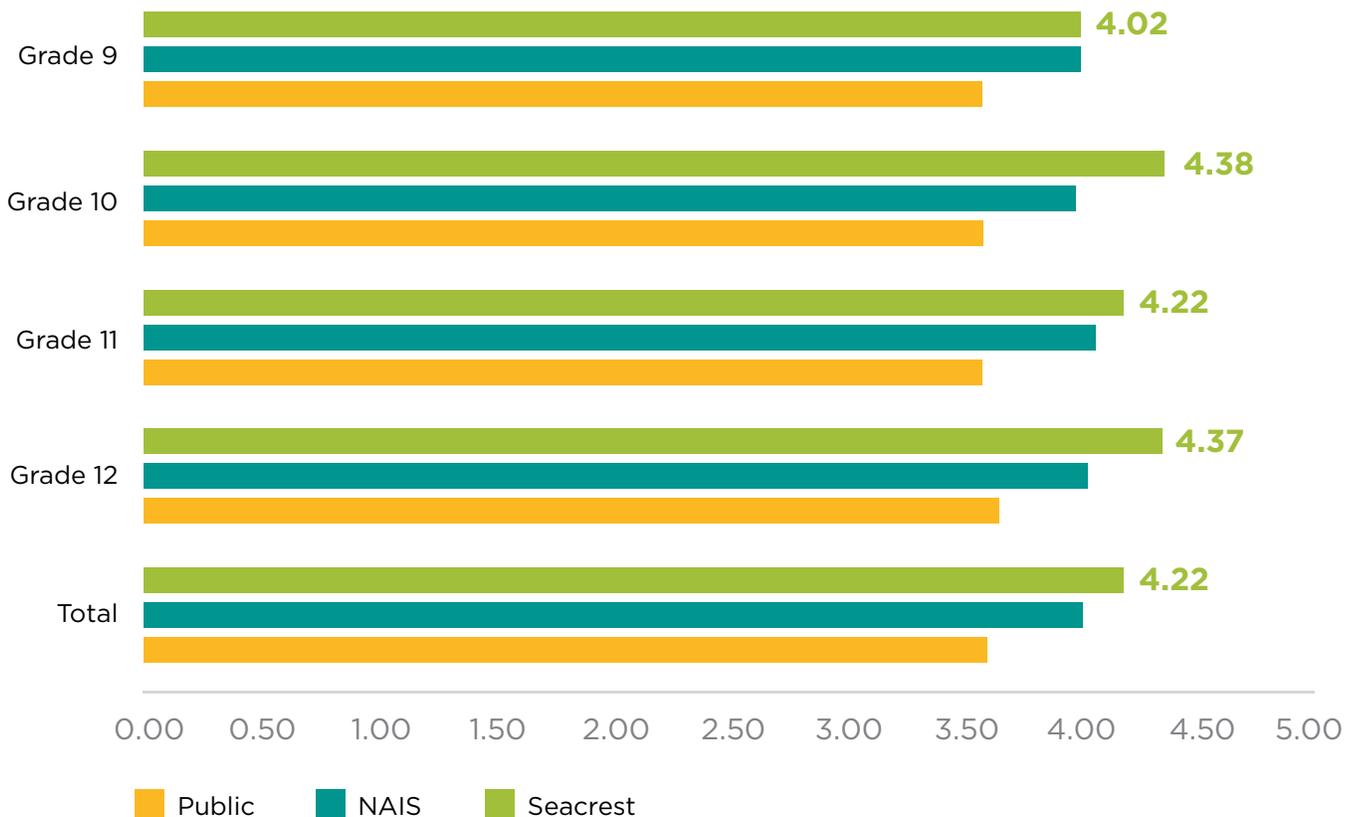
Duffy reports paying close attention to cohort comparisons and drawing new understandings of how students change and view the school differently at different grade levels. She gets satisfaction from the fact that students from ninth through 12th grade increasingly report feeling comfortable with themselves, suggesting that the school must be doing something right! On the other hand, seniors do become more critical about fairness in school procedures, which Duffy chalks up to the inevitable developmental disillusionment that happens among 12th-graders in most schools.

⁴ Seacrest Country Day School, “Standardized Testing at Seacrest: A Strategic Approach,” Seacrest website accessed August 18, 2016 at http://www.seacrest.org/uploaded/Academics/2014-2015/Seacrest_approach_to_testing.pdf.

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Positive Relationships and Partnerships with Adults in the School



Source: Seacrest Dashboard

It is in their dashboards that these schools are doing the most interesting work with the HSSSE. Lovett's Little recalls that the school's "academic scorecard" emerged from conversations at a board committee about five years ago; the committee became more thoughtful in evaluating the school's success and trend lines. For example, when looking at AP scores and participation rates, trustees began asking questions about access to AP classes. In part as a result of these conversations, according to Little, policies are changing, and more opportunities are being provided to students. Lovett's scorecard, which is pretty much "just a giant and fancy spreadsheet," has been backloaded with 15 years or more of historical data, including SSAT, ERB, PSAT, SAT, AP, NMSQT, ACT, and CWRA scores.

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However, after the first few years of using the new academic scorecard, several leaders at Lovett raised a flag of concern. “This is great, but it’s not the heart of our school or our mission. How can we track more fully what is in the mission and not reduce ourselves and all that we do to standardized testing scores?”

Accordingly, the committee added new sections to the scorecard. “It’s not been entirely easy,” Little said. “How do you fit character into a spreadsheet cell? It’s certainly still an experiment, a work in progress for us.” They’ve added cells for the percentage of seniors completing a senior project and those earning a diploma distinction, both of which require much more than academic competency. They’ve also added a set of carefully selected HSSSE numbers. Cognitive, social, and emotional engagement at each grade level and as compared with the mean each receive attention, as do HSSSE scores aligned to Lovett’s commitment to 21st century skills. This includes how students believe their school has contributed to the following:

- Writing and speaking skills
- Critical thinking
- Collaboration
- Creative ideas

The expanded scorecard is still in its early phases, but Little believes it is generating good discussion at the board level. In addition, there is a better appreciation for the breadth and the significance of the school’s mission to develop both intellect and character.

At Seacrest, Erin Duffy tells a similar story:

I’d been telling the board, which has been increasingly concerned with quantifiable metrics in recent years, that we can’t use traditional measures of narrowly defined academic achievement to measure the success of our independent school and its unique mission for intellectual engagement,

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ownership of the educational experience, and character. Finally, the board got tired of hearing me say this again and again, and they charged me to go do it, to go build that better and more comprehensive dashboard.

The dashboard Duffy developed — and continues to develop further each year — still includes SAT scores but also uses the HSSSE for data on things the school believes most aligned to mission, such as the following:

- Percentage of students participating in clubs, organizations, and athletics
- Percentage of students who report that teachers emphasize ideas in depth
- Percentage of students reporting that they regularly discuss questions in class with no clear answers

“It has been so educational for the board,” Duffy says. “Conversations now reflect a broader understanding of the school’s purposes, and priorities are set with the right balance of attention to student achievement, student learning experiences, and the whole child.”