GFSS: A Community Synthesis

(2025-07-07) Voices of Staff, Parents, and Students | Cross-analysis

Why these voices matter

At GFSS, we're working together to shape a future that reflects who we are and what we care about most. To do that well, we need a vision and mission that feel authentically ours. We need to set our direction in a way that is grounded in the values of our community.

That's why, this spring, we launched a series of processes to hear from the people who know our school best: our staff, our students, and our families. Each group had its own way of sharing, but all were guided by the same questions: *What matters most in education? and what kind of school do we want GFSS to be?*

This report brings those voices together. It highlights the common ground across school community and lays the foundation for a vision and mission that can truly guide us forward.

How we gathered input

School leadership engaged each group (staff, parents, and students) in ways that invited thoughtful, honest, and meaningful responses.

Students in grades 8 and 10 participated in small group listening forums where they shared what their ideal school would feel like, what's working well now, what's missing, and what changes they'd like to see at GFSS. Additionally, students in grade 10, 11, and 12 completed the Student Learning Survey. Their responses were honest, imaginative, and filled with practical suggestions for improvement.

Staff took part in a "Hall of Fame" storytelling activity. Educators shared personal stories of success in their work and then listened closely to one another, identifying the values behind each story. More than 50 staff participated, generating hundreds of value words that were later sorted into themes based on frequency and meaning.

Parents and caregivers were invited to complete the Beliefs About Education survey. This included a variety of questions about what they believe school is for, what they value in their child's education, how they prefer learning to happen, and how they engage with the school. We received responses from 48 families, representing more than 60 students.

What we found: Four shared themes

When we brought all three perspectives together, four big themes rose to the surface. While each group expressed things in their own way, there was remarkable overlap in what they value most. Here's what we learned.

1. Connection, belonging, and relationships

This theme came through loud and clear. **Students** described an ideal school where they feel safe, seen, and included. They want more interaction between grade levels, a friendlier environment, and a place that feels warm and welcoming. They also talked about the need for action on issues like vape culture and unsafe washrooms. Those barriers that direct impact their sense of safety and belonging.

For **staff**, values like *kindness*, *compassion*, *trust*, and *being heard* were central to their stories of success. “Connection” was the single most mentioned value overall.

Parents echoed this by emphasizing the importance of social and emotional growth alongside academics. Many support their children’s learning at home and want stronger communication with the school to feel more connected.

What this means for us: People thrive when they feel they matter. We need to keep building a culture where every student, staff member, and family feels connected, respected, safe, and included.

2. Growth, learning, and purpose

Students want learning that feels real and relevant. They asked for more variety in courses, more hands-on projects, and life skills classes like financial literacy and cooking. They want school to feel purposeful and to help them figure out who they are and where they’re going.

Staff shared values like *perseverance*, *reflection*, *hard work*, and *curiosity*. Their stories pointed to a culture that values learning for students and for adults.

Parents told us they want school to prepare their children for future education, but also to help them grow as people. Academic success matters, but so does learning resilience, independence, and self-worth.

What this means for us: We’re a community that values growth for everyone. Learning at GFSS should be meaningful, challenging, and connected to students’ futures.

3. Voice, partnership, and agency

All three groups spoke about the importance of having a voice in shaping school life.

Students were especially vocal about having more say. They want more input on student-related issues, more visible student council roles, and opportunities to shape activities at school. They also proposed clear ideas such as grade/class representation and more two-way dialogue with school leadership.

Staff named *accountability*, *authenticity*, and *integrity* as key values. They want to work in a place where people are honest, dependable, and where all voices are respected.

Parents, while engaged, said time and communication gaps often limit their involvement. They want better ways to stay connected and more opportunities to give input into decisions.

What this means for us: A strong school includes its community in shaping decisions. We need to make space for partnership, invite input early, and make sure everyone sees the impact of their voice.

4. Engagement, environment, and innovation

Finally, all three groups expressed a desire for learning and school life to be dynamic, joyful, and well-supported.

Students painted vivid pictures of their ideal school spaces: vibrant colors, quiet music, art, plants, and places to relax. They want more options for extracurriculars and better access to equipment and facilities. They also asked for more play, fun, and beauty in their school day.

Staff spoke about *creativity*, *enthusiasm*, and *self-expression* as energizing forces in their work. Joy helps us stay connected and motivated.

Parents showed a strong preference for experiential, hands-on learning. They want classrooms that are active and adaptable to the needs of individual learners.

What this means for us: Engagement matters. When learning is alive, when spaces feel welcoming, and when students have room to be creative, GFSS becomes a place people want to be.

At-a-glance: Four core themes across groups

Theme	Students	Staff	Parents
1. Connection, Belonging, Culture	Want a safe, inclusive, colourful, chill spaces; less drugs	Compassion, relationships, kindness, emotional safety	Value social-emotional learning alongside academics, improved communication
2. Growth, Purpose, Lifelong Learning	Purposeful classes, financial literacy, career prep, electives	Growth, grit, perseverance, reflection, success	Academic prep plus life skills and personal development
3. Voice, Agency, Partnership	Input, visible student council, representation	Integrity, trust, accountability, being-heard	Want meaningful input, challenge of time commitment
4. Engagement, Environment, Innovation	Better facilities, more variety, playful ideas, tech upgrades	Creativity, joy, fun, enthusiasm	Prefer hands-on, participatory learning

Looking ahead

This report offers a portrait of who we are as a school community. It reflects our shared values and priorities and points to a future we can build together.

These four themes: **Connection**, **Growth**, **Voice**, and **Engagement,** will guide the next step in our process: crafting a new school vision and mission that truly reflects GFSS. One that helps us stay grounded in what matters and focuses on what we're working toward.

We'll continue sharing, listening, and building together. Please contact Tom Eccleston, GFSS Principal, for more information.

