



The logo features the word "Community" in a large, black, cursive font. A red apple icon with a green leaf is positioned over the letter 'o'. Below "Community", the word "CONVERSATION" is written in a bold, red, sans-serif, all-caps font.

In the fall of 2015 the Newport School District received a grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to help build the district's capacity for effective school community engagement. The grant has three phases, including an onboarding phase, a planning phase, and an implementation phase.

During the onboarding process, district, school leaders and community members participated in telephone interviews to begin to learn together about best practices for effective engagement.

The planning phase brought together a planning team including a community coalition, which included a diverse group of school committee members, school staff, students, and community members. They met once a month to: a) learn about best practices for effective school community engagement; b) identify short and long term engagement goals for the district; and c) create an engagement plan, which includes measures for sustainability to address issues and work required to help improve communication, parent empowerment, and student learning.

Between February 2016 and May of 2017, the technical assistance team from Everyday Democracy and Great Schools Partnership made in person visits to schools in the Newport School District. During these visits, informal conversations as well as ten structured dialogues and meetings were held with approximately sixty individuals, including twenty staff members and forty middle and high school students from across the district, as well as community conversations with approximately thirty more participants from the community in November of 2017 that were held in five different locations for four consecutive weeks.

Below are the themes that emerged across the conversations, followed by several high level recommendations for engagement.

<b>THEMES FROM STUDENT CONVERSATIONS</b>	<b>THEMES FROM TEACHING STAFF ACROSS THE DISTRICT</b>	<b>THEMES FROM COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS OVER 4 WEEK DISCUSSIONS</b>
Building Facilities	Social Emotional Support	Communication
School Pride	Discipline Support	Community
Advisories	Communication	Relationships – Diversity
Preparation for life skills after High School	Collaboration	Skills, Jobs, Hands-On Learning
More support from Teachers	Tracking concerns	Challenge – Higher Expectations for ALL students
Include students in decision-making processes	Technology	
Lack of respect for Diversity in the School	English Language Learners Support	

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ALL CONVERSATIONS**

1. Create opportunities for students to have more of a voice at both school and district levels.
2. Create as many opportunities as possible to bring staff together across schools for peer learning and professional development.
3. Lift up the successful collaborations among school and community.
4. Provide opportunities to explore ways to work together across the district.
5. Provide well-structured opportunities for staff to have a voice in district level decisions, especially regarding substantive questions facing the new district.
6. Establish regular communication with school staff and students, which includes timelines and key decision-points.
7. Continue to inform and engage students, staff, and the community around what's happening in the school system.
8. Create mechanisms for the school committee to hear directly from each of the schools in the district through visits and presentations.

## **ACTION ALREADY TAKEN**

Based on the feedback that was gathered, during the interview processes the district began to move forward and implement changes. The district applied and received substantial grant support to study personalized learning and high school redesign. Students, teachers, parents, and community members are visiting several New England high schools to learn more. Young Voices, a student leadership group, began in September 2017 to teach students leadership and empower their voices. Teacher professional development opportunities on racial equity, diversity, mindfulness, and social emotional learning have been implemented. Additional funding was requested and secured for desperately needed technology by community members that participated in the coalition discussions. Monthly parent advisory meetings with the Superintendent have been implemented, more student choice for high school pathways is underway and additional bathrooms have been reopened for the students.

## **NEXT STEPS**

On January 16, 2018 the final phase of the planning process will take place. The district leadership and coalition members will review all work done to this date at a community convocation and share possible strategies to create action plans for future work to be completed in 2018. Additional people will be recruited to help support these efforts to help the district improve communication, parent empowerment, and student learning while at the same time creating a culture to sustain the changes implemented.