

Edwardsville Community Unit School District 7

Listening Circles Survey Results

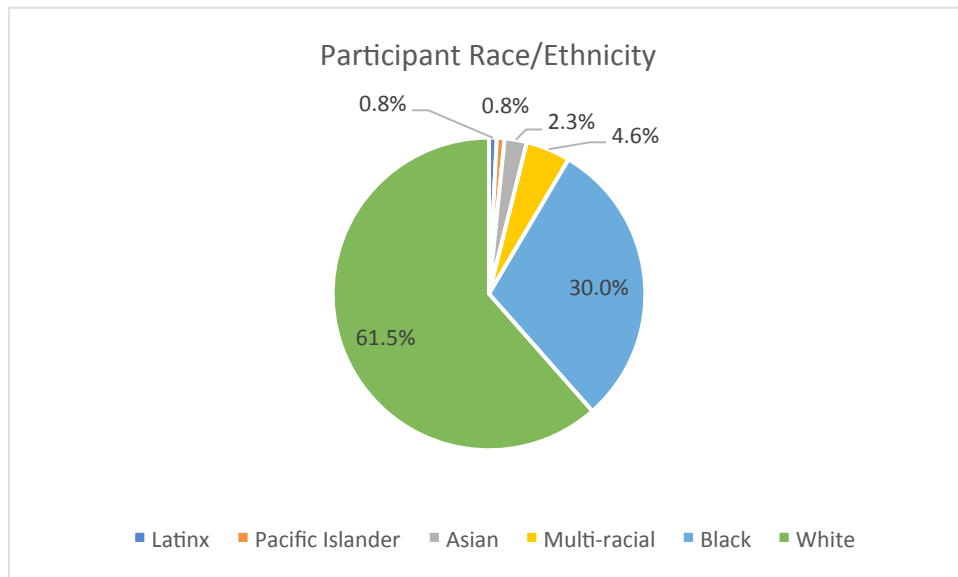
Methodology

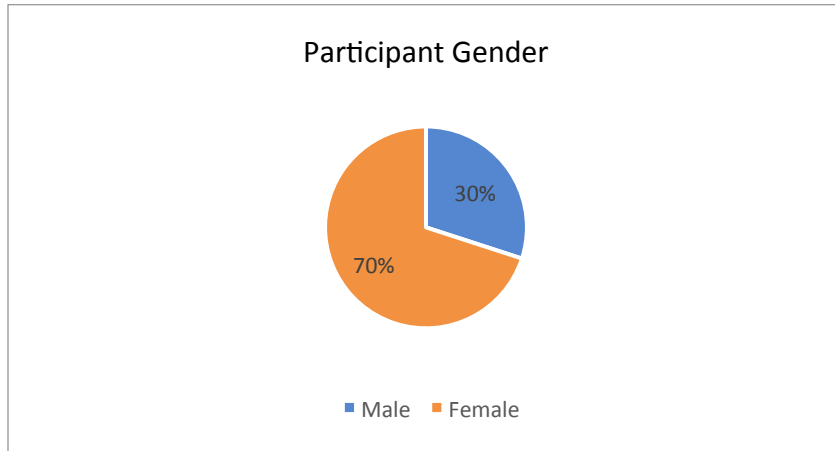
Three listening sessions were held with adult community members and one listening session was held with high school students. Twelve small group facilitated dialogues occurred over the three adult sessions. One small group facilitated dialogue was held with the students. Prior to the dialogues, participants were asked to fill out individual surveys to share their thoughts.

Adults

Participant Characteristics

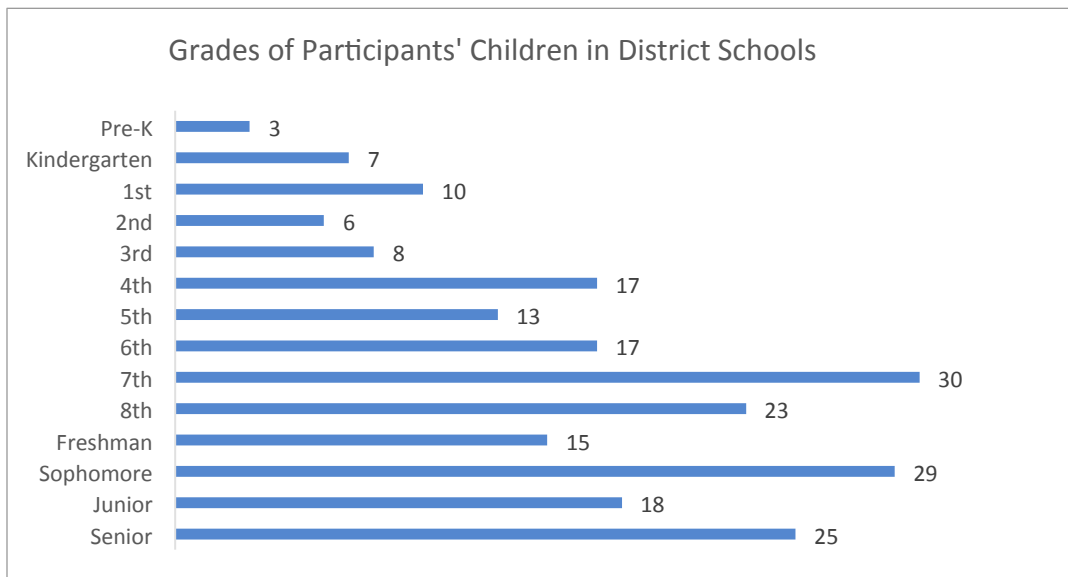
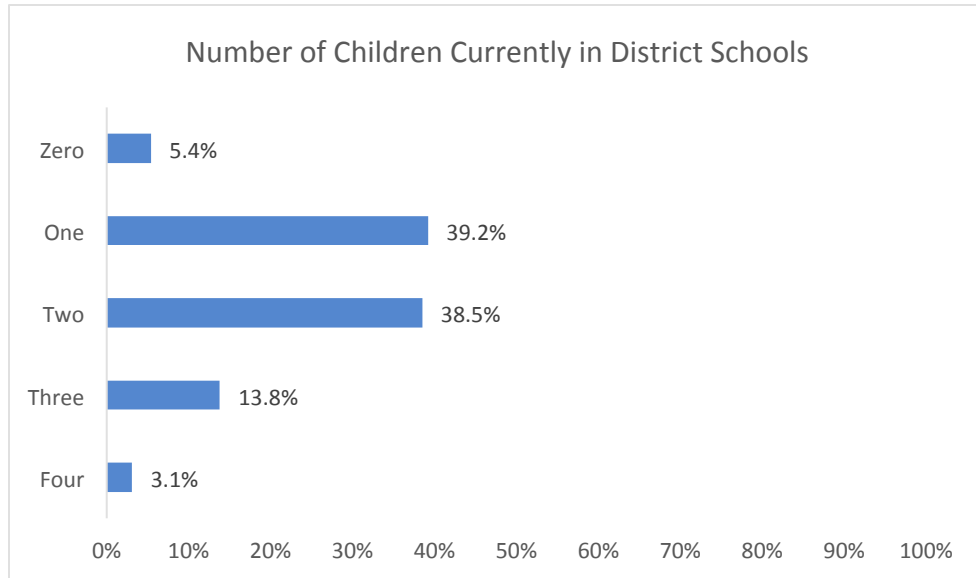
One hundred and thirty adults/parents completed surveys following participation in the Listening Circles. Thirty-nine identified as Black/African American, 80 as White/Caucasian, six as multi-racial, three as Asian/Asian-American, one as Latinx, and one as Pacific Islander.





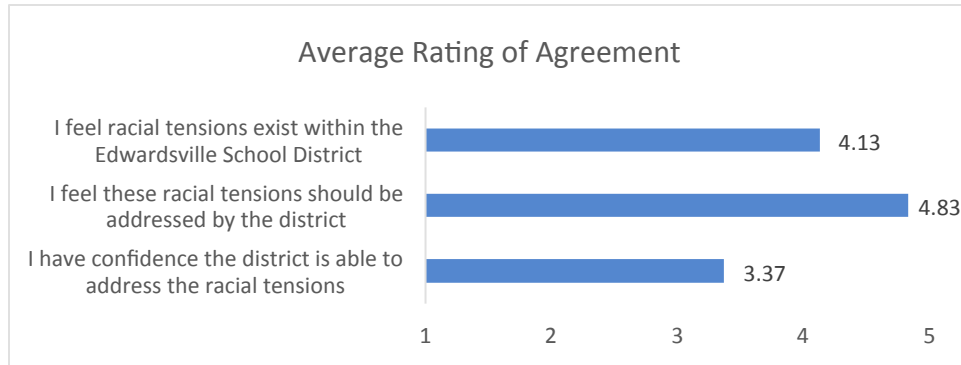
The majority of participants identified as female (91; 39 identified as male).

Most of the participants reported having at least one child *currently* in one of the district schools, with the majority having children in high school.



Attitudes about Racial Tensions in the District

Three questions asked participants to rate their attitudes using a 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree rating scale. On average, participants felt strongly that racial tensions existed within the Edwardsville School District and that those tensions should be addressed by the district. Participants were, on average, less confident that the district would be able to address racial tensions.



Open-Ended Questions

In addition, participants were given the opportunity to write in their own responses to several questions. Each question is presented below with the most frequently recurring themes from the responses for each question.

Examples of Racial Tensions in the District

Overall, most people of color reported specific examples of racial tensions, whereas white participants tended to comment that they did not have personal experience with racial tensions but were aware that they existed. The most commonly-mentioned specific examples of racial tensions in the district were that students of color (particularly black students) were treated differently (e.g., punished more readily and more harshly, assumed to be bad, had to work harder to get recognition); that there was segregation in the schools (e.g., social groups, lunch room seating, sports); that racist remarks, actions, and symbols were common and often not acknowledged or punished; and that there is an atmosphere that racism is acceptable (among students and teachers/staff).

What Should be Done by the District to Address Racial Tensions

The most common response to this question was cultural sensitivity and/or diversity and inclusion education/training for students, teachers, staff, administrators, school employees, and parents. Some common content mentioned for this training was cultural awareness/competence/sensitivity, white privilege, and bias. Many participants who recommended education/training also felt it should be mandatory, ongoing, and included in the curriculum for students, starting in elementary school or earlier. Several participants stressed that prejudice/racism is learned and often starts at home, so education and training should start with the parents (e.g., “start at home”).

Another common recommendation was acknowledgement of racism and racial incidents and open communication about racial tensions. Many participants felt that the district ignores or misrepresents (e.g., “sweeps under the rug”) racial incidents instead of bringing them to light and being transparent about what goes on in the schools. Participants also mentioned that open dialogue among diverse groups (e.g., the Listening Circles) would allow for the sharing of diverse experiences and address differences and tensions that exist. Some participants felt that a district taskforce or strategic plan should be implemented towards this goal, and others mentioned student clubs, diversity events, and celebrations of diversity as ways of promoting intercultural interactions for parents, students, and school employees.

Many participants also suggested that there should be zero tolerance (e.g., punishments, rules preventing) for racial or prejudicial comments, symbols, and behavior at school (both among students and from faculty/staff/employees). These participants often felt that racist or other prejudicial behavior is often not addressed, including behaviors from teachers and staff towards minority students. Some mentioned that an environment of equity and inclusion, wherein bias and prejudice is considered unacceptable, should be the goal. Many participants also specifically suggested that school employees of all levels be trained in bias and prejudice awareness and in how to deal with incidents involving bias, racism, prejudice, or inequity.

Several participants also suggested that that school be made more diverse, both by hiring more diverse staff and teachers, but also by diversifying the curriculum to include multicultural histories and perspectives, more culturally diverse courses, and more diverse authors or authorities on subjects.

Additional Comments

Several participants wrote additional comments on their surveys, separate from any of the rating scales or open-ended questions. One common comment participants made was that the district reflects the current national climate regarding racial tensions and attitudes. Other common comments had to do with confidence that the district could address racial tensions. Some of the common concerns participants reported were that racial tensions are too entrenched in the community and school to fix; that there are likely practical restraints (e.g., time, money) to implementing change; and that the school may not address racial tensions because people do not want to admit racial tensions exist in their schools or in the community.

Themes from Facilitated Dialogues

Participant comments captured by facilitators were analyzed for common themes, points that were made multiple times across the 12 group dialogues. The following themes emerged across responses (see appendix for representative responses):

Theme 1: The district is historically seen as silent, inactive and non-responsive when it comes to race or racism

Theme 2: Race plays a role in classroom and district dynamics

Theme 3: Identity-based assumptions and stereotypes are happening frequently.

Theme 4: These experiences and tensions related to race and racism are not new to Edwardsville.

Theme 5: These dynamics should be seen in the broader context of community.

Theme 6: Edwardsville is invested in maintaining its image.

Theme 7: Work on race, racism, and improving climate takes time and investment.

Theme 8: People might not be equipped to engage in the work, so support will be needed to build capacity.

Theme 9: The administration will need to navigate naming race and racism while taking into consideration dynamics in society.

Theme 10: The administration is charged with acknowledging mistakes and being transparent and communicative about next steps.

Theme 11: This work requires a plan.

Theme 12: Training is needed across the board.

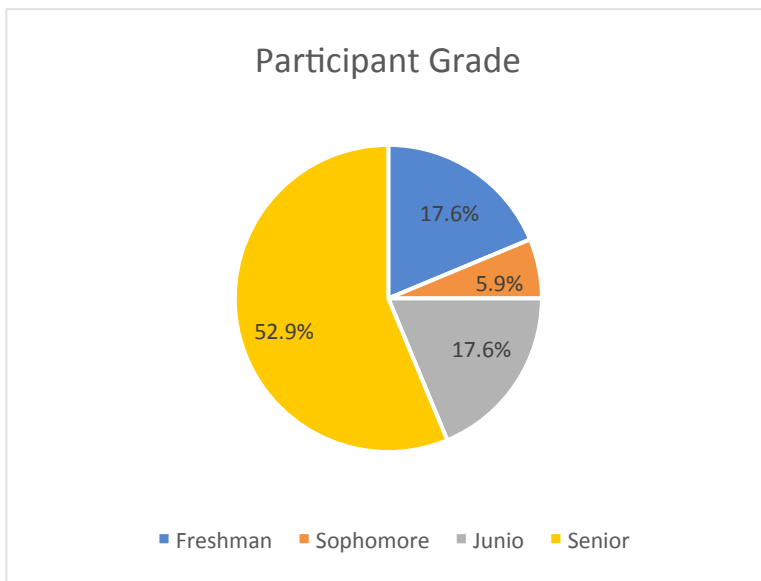
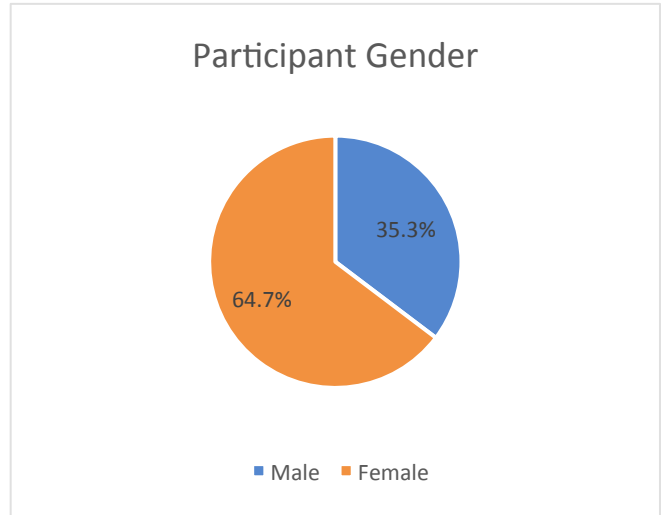
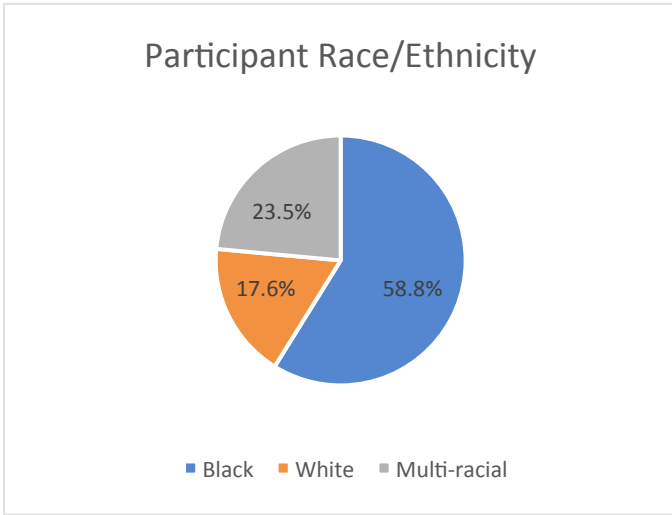
Theme 13: Use internal and external data to guide decision making.

Theme 14: Develop and use community resources.

Students

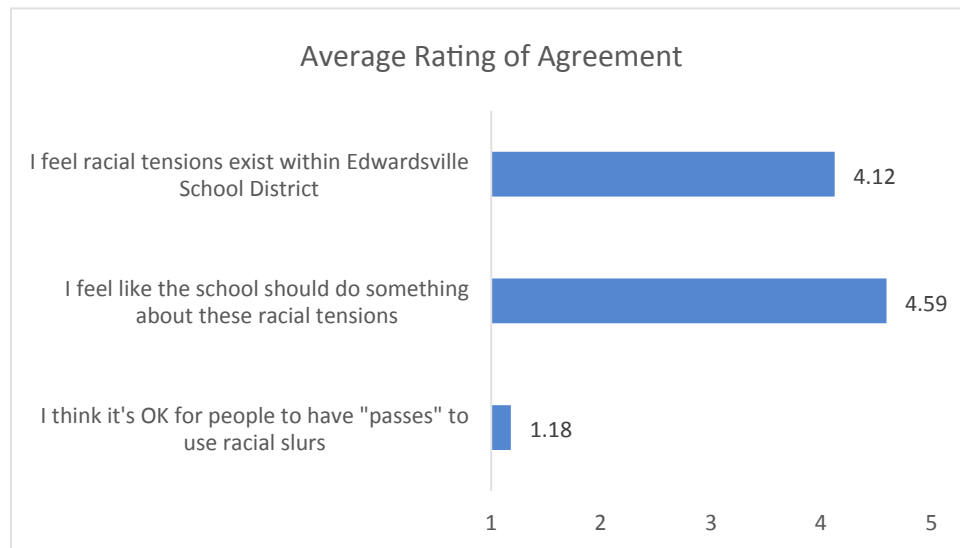
Participant Characteristics

Seventeen high school students completed surveys following the student Listening Circles. Ten identified as Black/African American, four identified as multi-racial, and three identified as white/Caucasian. The majority identified as female (11; 6 identified as male) and as seniors (9; 3 juniors, 1 sophomore, 3 freshmen; 1 student did not report their grade).



Attitudes about Racial Tensions in the District

Students were asked to rate their agreement with several statements about racial tensions in the district on a 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree scale. On average, students felt strongly that there are racial tensions within the Edwardsville School District and that the school should do something about those racial tensions. Students were asked a different third question about “passes” for using racial slurs. On average, student strongly disagreed that it was okay for people to have “passes,” most commonly citing that no one should use racial slurs (or any type of slur) because it is disrespectful, intended to offend or hurt others, and ignores the historical context that makes the words offensive. One student mentioned that the use of slurs reclaimed by their communities (e.g., the black community using the “N” word) is the only time it is acceptable.



Open-Ended Questions

Students were also given the opportunity to write in their own responses for several questions. Below are the questions along with the most commonly occurring responses (i.e., themes) for each question.

Examples of Racial Tensions in the Edwardsville School District

Many students mentioned hearing the use of racial slurs or the “N” word around school, as well as teasing or making fun of other races, ethnicities, and cultures. Some students also mentioned specific threats made by students to engage in KKK-style violence or lynching students of color. Several students also mentioned the segregation of groups by race at school.

Another common theme was the feeling that the school and students deny racism exists or that racist incidents are actually racism. Students mentioned that this causes some students to not listen when racism is brought up as an important issue. One student recounted a story in which they reported a racist incident to the administration and the administration said they could not do anything about it.

What Should be Done About Racial Tensions in the School District

Many students mentioned harsher punishments (or any punishment) be implemented for racism and/or adopting a zero-tolerance policy about racist language and behavior.

Another common theme was implementing communication and education to promote cultural understanding and awareness, with several students citing the Listening Circles as examples. Students also mentioned that racism needs to be acknowledged in order to address it. One student also mentioned having more diversity in the classroom among the students, so that minority students do not feel so "ostracized."