

# **Fostering a Sense of Belonging: The House System at Trinity Christian School**

**A Capstone Project**

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### **Abstract**

Trinity Christian School (TCS) is a K-12 private school in the Northern Virginia suburb of Fairfax. Over the last four years at Trinity, increased student enrollment combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributed to student social, emotional, and academic challenges that levied additional demands on administrators' and teachers' time to address them. In the 2022-2023 school year, TCS implemented a house system, dividing the school into four separate houses, each with their own unique identity. The school anticipated that the house system would foster a greater sense of belonging within the school community, develop relationships between students and faculty, and provide more leadership opportunities for students and faculty. This research focused on how the house system implementation impacted students' perception of belonging aligned to three indicators: supportive adult, belonging to a positive peer group, and school environment, and the degree to which the school met the expected one-year, short-term outcomes identified in the logic model. Through my research, I determined that the house system fostered students' sense of belonging aligned to the three indicators of belonging, and the school successfully achieved each of the shop short term outcomes identified in their logic model.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Fostering a Sense of Belonging: Understanding the Impact of the House System at Trinity Christian School

Kelly Jenkins



## ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Trinity Christian School (TCS) is a private Christian School in Fairfax, Virginia serving students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Trinity serves 750 students and employs over 100 faculty and staff. TCS implemented a house system in the 2022-2023 school year in the upper school (grades 7-12), comprising four houses. A house system organizes students into smaller communities called, houses, like that of English Boarding schools and fantasy stories such as Harry Potter.”

## PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, TCS saw marked changes in students as they wrestled with the mental, emotional, and academic impacts of the pandemic. This led the administration to decide to implement a house system in the fall of 2022 to help foster students’ sense of belonging and address the challenges facing students on the heels of the pandemic. This Capstone focused on the first-year implementation of the house system and its impact on student perception of belonging at TCS.

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAME

To assess student perception of belonging, I identified three meaningful indicators to assess student perception of belonging at TCS in this project:

- Supportive Adult—meaning, students express having a caring relationship with an adult within the school.
- Belonging to a Positive Peer Group—meaning, the relationships students have to one another, the ways in which they form supportive networks, and how students view themselves in relative to these relationships.
- School Environment—meaning the structure of TCS and how students and faculty conceptualize their relationship to it, including involvement in extracurriculars, participation in the house system and events, and ways students can be involved or enhance perception of the school being welcoming.

I also assessed the school's logic model, which are the short-term outcomes the school expected to achieve within the first year:

- Improved opportunity for faculty leadership
- Improved house structure and culture
- Increase student leadership development opportunities.
- Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms.
- Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form
- Increase service and connection opportunity for students within house.

## PROJECT DESIGN

Q1. In what ways did implementing a house system influence students' sense of belonging at TCS, if at all?

- Indicator 1 (Supportive Adult)
- Indicator 2 (Belonging to a Positive Peer Group)
- Indicator 3 (School Environment)

Q2. In what ways did school staff (i.e., administration and teachers) perceive changes in student belonging following the implementation of the house system, if they perceived change at all?

- Indicator 1 (School Environment)
- Indicator 2 (Belonging to a Positive Peer Group)
- Indicator 3 (Supportive Adult)

Q3. In what ways did implementing a house system impact the outcomes identified in the logic model, if at all?

I employed a sequential, mixed methods approach to my research. I reviewed Trinity student and faculty end-of-year surveys that included ranked questions on a 1-4 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree and open-ended questions on the house system and its impact. I interviewed TCS administrators to fill in any gaps in the data that they survey did not address or required clarification.

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## FINDINGS

**Finding 1:** According to the student survey, the house system helped students develop meaningful relationships with a supportive adult. Students noted the role of form teachers as particularly influential through having an adult invest in them personally and spiritually.

**Finding 2:** According to the student survey, the house system allowed students to build deepened relationships with peers. Students fostered meaningful peer-to-peer relationships, especially through form time and other house events.

**Finding 3:** According to the student survey, they expressed a positive response about the house system's impact on their experience at Trinity, including the physical environment, opportunities available to be involved, and the overall school setting, surrounding, and context. They expressed frustration with specific parts of the school experience including the dress code, lack of inter-grade connection, student leadership selection process, and House Day replacing Day Away.

**Finding 4:** According to the faculty survey and interviews with administrators, Faculty developed intentional relationships with students, especially through form, fostering both mentorship and spiritual discipleship.

**Finding 5:** According to the faculty survey and interviews with administrators, faculty reported that the house system allowed students to develop intentional relationships and bonds. Faculty remarked that form time allowed students to get to know one another in a relaxed setting and help with schoolwork.

**Finding 6:** According to the faculty survey and interviews with administrators, the house system helped students become more involved in school activities, including serving in leadership roles and participating in events. It also provided a supportive environment through form time, that helped students to ease into the day, focusing on their emotional, spiritual, and relational development of students. However, faculty expressed a desire for further training and consistency between forms.

**Finding 7:** According to the student and faculty surveys and interviews with administrators, leadership opportunities for faculty improved not just in the sheer number of available roles, but also in the relationships with students that developed because of them.

**Finding 8:** According to the student and faculty surveys and interviews with administrators, TCS successfully implemented a four-house system that positively contributed to the development of cultural improvements within the school including peer-to-peer relationships, faculty and student relationships, and the school environment.

**Finding 9:** According to the student and faculty surveys and interviews with administrators, the house system provided students exponentially more leadership positions, including form reps, prefects, head boy/girl, and house mentors.

**Finding 10:** According to the student and faculty surveys and interviews with administrators, the House system cultivated relationships through daily forms in impactful and meaningful ways. Both students and faculty touted the opportunity to spend time together and develop close relationships with other students and their form advisor.



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## FINDINGS

**Finding 11:** According to the student and faculty surveys and interviews with administrators, students and faculty had differing perceptions of success on increased awareness of accountability to following school rules. While students did not perceive much impact on peer accountability, faculty observed improvements in positive peer accountability and decrease in the number of disciplinary actions, as well as better adherence to dress code policies. Administrators noted a substantive decrease in behavioral issues and an increase with students following the rules.

**Finding 12:** According to the student and faculty surveys and interviews with administrators, the house system provided a structure of intentionality that benefited many students. Students appreciated the variety of specific ways the house system created connective opportunities, including bringing people together to form new and sometimes surprising friendships, house events and service projects, and daily forms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Focus on the creation of inter-grade community across houses to enhance student sense of belonging.
2. Elevate the role of form reps so students feel empowered to have a voice in leadership and feel like they have a stake in the school environment and culture.
3. Continue to seek creative ways to engage students on the dress code, which emerged as a student area of concern related to the school environment.
4. Incorporate additional non-athletic events into the House tournaments to allow all students to have an opportunity to participate that may not excel in athletics and struggled to participate.
5. Help teachers better understand the requirements of serving in a house leadership role so better equip them to focus on fostering intentional relationships with students.
6. Formalize the key components of form instruction and help advisors understand the variety of ways that form can look so that each advisor understands expectations and how to create meaningful community in their forms.

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### **Organizational Context**

Trinity Christian School (TCS) is a K-12 private school in the Northern Virginia suburb of Fairfax. The school serves 740 students across the greater Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area. There are over 100 teachers distributed across grades K-12, including co-curricular activities, sports, and student support services. Along with the rest of the world, TCS faced a unique challenge with learning in the months following the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools grappled with providing distance learning while maintaining academic standards and rigor. TCS focused on a return to in-person learning in August 2020, while many public schools provided distance learning only. Trinity faced a surge in applications during this time frame (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

All of these issues placed a heavy burden on teachers and administrators within the TCS community. They faced an influx of new students, many of whom struggled with mental, emotional, and academic challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). Teachers and administrators found they had to focus more of their time on dealing with student behavioral issues (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). TCS leadership met to try and formulate a solution that would help students improve their behavior, adjust to being back in the classroom after dealing with the pandemic, and also help teachers build more time in their day to create intentional relationships proactively, rather than simply responding to negative behavior (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

Trinity focused on the house system due largely to the Assistant Head of School for Academics, who studied house systems in schools for several years as a part of her academic research toward her Doctorate of Education. She proposed the house system as a potential

solution, developing the following logic model to guide the discussion (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023) (See [Appendix A](#)). The logic model identified multiple factors that challenged the school, including increased enrollment, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting mental, emotional, and academic challenges, and the subsequent time and investment required from faculty and administrators to address them (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

The Assistant Head of School for Academics identified the implementation of a house system as a potential method to address these multiple factors positively. The logic model asserted that the house system would enrich the lives of the student body and foster a sense of belonging, allowing relationships to develop and grow deeper with others in their house, teachers, and TCS staff (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). The logic model identified a series of inputs required to successfully implement a house system at the school, including financial and participant investments (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

These inputs led to specific outputs and activities to help prepare the student body for the house system. This proposal comprised the necessary actions for creating the house system—professional development for staff and faculty, the design of the houses (names, colors, symbols, etc.), establishing student leadership positions and identifying individuals for them, conceptualizing and implementing house form time at the beginning and end of each day, and determining a service project that each house would complete in the course of a school year (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). These outputs precipitated 1-year, 2-year, and 3+-year outcomes the school hoped to see, resulting in fewer student infractions, better

connection to faculty, and ultimately increased students' sense of belonging at TCS (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

In response to this proposal, the school formed a house school improvement team (SIT) that met over six months to examine implementing a house system. The SIT comprised three subcommittees focused on school culture, organizational changes, and student/faculty leadership. The SIT subcommittees formulated a 3-5 year plan to improve their assigned focus area within the school through a house system.

The goal for the new house structure was to create intentional time for relationships to develop vertically between all grades in the same house and horizontally across a single grade level (K. Miller, Personal Communication, May 2023). The students began and ended their days with "form time," where they are with other students in the same grade in their same house, and it provided a unique opportunity for students to get to know one another in an intentional setting (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

Before the 2022-2023 school year, there was a traditional homeroom, where students would start the day together, before migrating to different classes, based on the upper school class schedule each student selected at the beginning of the year. Depending on the student's needs, interest areas, and selections, students did not consistently see the same classmates throughout the day. Particularly in light of the pandemic and related social, emotional, and academic challenges, the house system provided a new approach to promoting community and creating intentional spaces for students to feel included and a part of the school.

### **Problem of Practice**

Over the last four years at Trinity, increased student enrollment combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributed to student social, emotional, and academic challenges (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). This levied additional demands on administrators' and teachers' time to address them. (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). The Assistant Head of School for Academics proposed the house system as a part of a theory of action to address the school's challenges, with the following philosophy statement that governed its implementation:

Trinity's proposed house system intends to foster a more intimate sense of community and allow more students to serve in leadership. Students in each house can earn points for solid character, foster relationships, and conduct service projects together. (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023)

The school anticipated that the house system would foster a greater sense of belonging within the school community, develop relationships between students and faculty, and provide more leadership opportunities for students and faculty (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). The house system was implemented during the 2022-2023 academic school year. My research focused on how the house system implementation impacted student and faculty perception of belonging at TCS, and the degree to which the school met the expected one-year, short-term outcomes identified in the logic model (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).



### **Researcher Positionality Statement**

Ravitch and Carl (2021) underscored the importance of engaging in a reflective practice throughout the research process (p. 44). This practice equips the author to explain and connect personal aspects of their identity related to the topic and process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 67). In order to be an effective researcher, I must acknowledge my own bias and relationship to my research topic. This allowed me to engage my research with rigor and criticality, as it can have the potential for both harm and good (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 101).

I have a personal connection to my research topic; my child is a student at TCS. As such, I engaged in a participatory method of data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 155), and as a co-researcher in the process (Irizarry & Brown, 2014, p. 64). As a co-researcher and member of the community, I needed to always be aware and cognizant of my role as researcher and parent. Participatory research can cause disruption and a critical examination of issues within school. Irizarry & Brown (2014) noted that conflict can emerge between the researcher and those who are being examined (p. 73). I had to maintain awareness of my relationship with and knowledge of the school as I heard student and faculty perspectives to ensure that everyone I came in contact with was aware of my dual role as a parent and researcher, engaged in a partnership to drive for betterment to the TCS upper school community.

Being explicit about my positionality, privilege, and access, helped inform my participatory approach to this project. As a member of the TCS community, I recognized and understood the implicit desire of the administration to create and implement a system that improved faculty and student sense of belonging. While being a participant in the community and a researcher of the community was complex, it provided a far deeper research perspective that allowed me to intuitively understand the school, its administration, students, and desired

results. I gave care and attention to all my roles within this project—parent, TCS community member, researcher, and interviewer—to maintain the voice of the community and those who I sought to inform from my research.

## **Review of Literature**

In what follows, I will introduce the concept of belonging and the important role it plays within a school for students and administrators. Student and faculty perception of belonging underpinned the desired outcome of the house system intervention at TCS. The literature review defines belonging as a concept and situates it within the context of a school setting. I discuss how it impacts student and faculty roles and relationships to one another and the school. In addition, the literature review also provides an introductory overview to house systems and how schools or other learning institutions have employed them in the past. This will create the foundational knowledge necessary for this project.

### **Belonging**

TCS administrators wanted to address the issue of belonging in the school through the implementation of the house system. I turned my attention first to psychology and sociology literature on sense of belonging. Abraham Maslow (1943) established the concept of human motivation based on a hierarchy of needs. According to this hierarchy, each part builds upon the lower level to achieve self-actualization. Each one is required before an individual can move to the next level, and the further up the pyramid a person moves, the more difficult it is to satisfy those needs. At the bottom of the pyramid are physiological needs, i.e., those material needs required for human survival, including food, water, shelter, air, etc. Every human has these basic needs, that if not met, will result in death. Next, he identified safety needs, which include personal safety, employment to earn wages, health, and a safe place to live. The third level of the pyramid is love and belonging—the interpersonal relationships, sense of connection, and relationship that someone feels with their friends and family. Maslow identified this as a critical

component of a person's psyche to move from basic survival needs to safety and move up his pyramid to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) built upon the work of Maslow to more clearly and explicitly define what is meant by the concept of belonging. They highlighted belonging as a core human need, aligned with Maslow's research. Their research assessed that humans act in particular ways driven by an inherent need that must be satisfied. According to Baumeister and Leary, belonging is a core emotional construct of humanity and is the "need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships" (p. 499).

This understanding of belonging helps establish a theoretical foundation of a fundamental human need for relationships with one another. Baumeister and Leary highlighted the need for each individual to form meaningful relationships with others who have regular contact and care for one another's well-being in a continuing relationship built on mutual affection and concern (p. 500). This type of relationship is not merely something humans desire but a core, intrinsic need. Baumeister and Leary asserted that belonging is a critical need for humans to be healthy, well-adjusted, emotionally stable, and mentally strong.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) highlighted several predictors of belongingness that evidence this phenomenon, including forming social bonds, not breaking bonds quickly, cognitive thought patterns that inform care for others, and an emotional response. When these predictors are present, the resulting state is a sense of belonging concerning another person. They argued that the deprivation of belonging leads to several adverse effects, including both psychological and physical (p. 520). They concluded, "the belongingness hypothesis ought to have implications beyond immediate psychological functioning and might prove useful as an explanatory construct for the phenomena studied by researchers in other fields" (p. 521).

### ***Belonging in School***

Baumeister and Leary provided a framework for belonging, but I needed to understand the concept of belonging in a school setting. How does one conceptualize and operationalize this term for a school so that it can be understood, studied, and evaluated? Goodenow and Grady (1993) applied the concept of belonging to an individual in a school setting, which they defined as “the extent to which they [students] feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers and other adults in the school environment” (pgs. 60-61).

Sense of belonging, when situated within the context of a school, refers to how students relate to peers, other students, teachers, faculty, administrators, etc. Goodenow and Grady (1993) further explained that students find school more meaningful when others in the environment like and support them, and that belonging in school:

“can in some ways *override* the influence of a student's friendship group. Schools that can function either as a whole or as a set of smaller teams to create a sense of community where adolescent students feel personally known, important, and encouraged to be active participants may have a more powerful impact than the influence of individual friends or cliques.” (p. 69)

### ***Factors that Contribute to a Sense of Belonging***

Recognizing the importance of belonging in schools, what are the factors that practically determine what that means? Karen Ostermann (2000) acknowledged that belonging in a school is vital to students. It positively impacts their motivation, learning, and commitment to school, ultimately affecting student performance, academic outcomes, and student learning quality. In

addition, Ostermann also underscored the vital role the classroom experience and the school have in influencing student engagement and academic achievement. There are multiple levels where a student must belong—on a personal level between peers, in the classroom, and within the broader context of the school itself.

Belonging happens for students on an interpersonal level—e.g., how someone understands their relationship with others around them. Allen et al. (2018) found that emotional stability and positive personal characteristics were essential to a student’s sense of belonging. Characteristics such as support for one another, conscientiousness, optimism, and self-esteem had a lasting impact on whether students felt like they belonged at school (2018, pg. 24). Kahu et al. (2022) further elucidated how having familiarity and relationships with other students is critical to belonging. These relationships with others deepen over time and help ground students in a sense of purpose and meaning—that they have a role and place within the school and that others know who they are and desire a relationship with them. Walker and Greene (2009) found that when students had a sense of belonging, they focused on understanding and “put[ting] forth a cognitive effort to make that understanding possible” (p. 469). Belonging means that students feel they are a part of something, seek understanding and a relationship with others, and pursue cognitive efforts to make those relationships a reality.

The surrounding environments—teachers and classrooms—also impact student belonging. Allen et al. (2018) described, “Students who believe that they have positive relationships with their teachers, and that they are caring, empathic, fair, and help resolve personal problems, are more likely to feel a greater sense of belonging than those students who perceive a negative relationship with their teachers” (p. 25). Teachers create and contextualize belonging for students, including the type of classroom experience. Lee (2014) determined that by creating

authentic classroom experiences, including “asking interesting questions, digging deeply into understanding a single topic, applying the subject to problems in life outside of school, and discussing ideas with the teacher,” students had a greater sense of belonging within the school. Booker (2021) further expands that when teachers have a positive relationship with students, it helps to facilitate a sense of community (p. 66). Booker concludes:

Teachers are gatekeepers of belongingness. [When] they...actively engage with students and build positive relationships [it] determine[s] the degree to which the learning environment will thrive. Relationally, belongingness requires teacher caring, warmth, and feelings of trust. Instructionally, teachers provide and elicit actionable feedback, offer many opportunities for autonomy in the classroom, and make content relatable to the students. (p. 81)

Teachers create the environment for relationships to thrive by establishing the relational context for students and encouraging them in the classroom.

Finally, the broader school community context also impacts school belonging. Allen et al. (2018) described how the school climate affected school belonging through the types of opportunities created for student participation, including extracurriculars and group memberships. In addition, according to Slaten et al. (2016), schools needed to develop and foster a safe environment where students feel protected and secure. The indicators discussed above represent an overview of the most common ones noted in literature, but they are certainly not an explicit list of every indication that could describe a student’s perception of belonging. The indicators identified in this paper provided the necessary starting point to understand student sense of belonging within the context of TCS, but continues to merit further research.



## House System

House systems originated in the United Kingdom, and Richard Dierenfield examined their potential benefit for schools in the United States. British schools employed house systems since medieval times, and Dierenfield (1975) believed it better equipped faculty to maintain a personal connection with students (p. 605). In his studies, Dierenfield (1975) found that teachers and guidance counselors were overworked and could not devote the time and attention that those in junior high and senior high required to be successful (p. 605). He believed that one of the biggest issues American students faced was the lack of personal, individualized care in schools (Dierenfield, 1975, p. 605). Dierenfield asserted that students needed to receive a certain level of care and attention that was critical to ensuring healthy, long-range development of students over time. He found that students grew through individual and group activities as a part of the house system, which fostered a sense of belonging and that someone at the school knew the student and cared about them (Dierenfield, 1975, p. 607).

At TCS, the house system comprises four houses (Veritas, Fortitudo, Caritas, Fidelis), and TCS divides all upper school students into one of the four houses, ensuring that each house has a quarter of each grade represented in the upper school grades K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). According to Diane Oxley (1994), organizing students into smaller units allows teachers to focus on them and create a more personal, intimate, and supportive environment (p. 521). This provides numerous benefits by creating cohesive units with leaders that can assume more authority over students in that group, take collective responsibility for success, and develop relationships over multiple years that facilitate mutual respect and support between leaders and students (Oxley, 1994, p. 521). Hooper (1999) also affirmed the importance of smaller units as it allows students and teachers to know each other far

better than they would within a larger school environment and have greater self-efficacy and responsibility for learning (p. 4). A house system is one method of creating smaller, intentional communities in schools. There are other potential methods of creating intentional communities within schools (Battistich et al. 1995; Battistich et al., 1997; Scales, & Gibbons, 1996; Soloman et. al, 1996); however the focus of this research will remain on house systems.

Schools that implemented house systems have seen positive benefits. Green (2006) observed the effects of the implementation of a house system and noted that it “created stronger bonds between students and faculty” and resulted in a decrease in suspensions and bullying rates (p. 67). Nixon et al. (2010) also observed similar results noting positive changes in student achievement and school climate. Nixon et al. (2010) concluded that “...the House System has widened and deepened student support structures, relationships, responsibility and has helped students develop a stronger sense of identity and self. The power of these constructs is noteworthy and transformational...” (p. 27).

As more research emerges on the impact of house systems, Christian schools, in particular, are beginning to employ house systems. Thomas (2016) determined that Christian schools in the U.S. are implementing the house system to unite students across grade levels and improve school unity (p. 119). Brennan (2012) discovered similar findings when examining Holy Trinity Catholic School. Implementing the house system at Holy Trinity Catholic School improved vertical connectedness between grades, improved student and faculty’s connection to the school, and students now identify as part of a great collective (Brennan, 2012, pgs. 348-350).

## Conceptual Framing and Project Questions

### Conceptual Frame

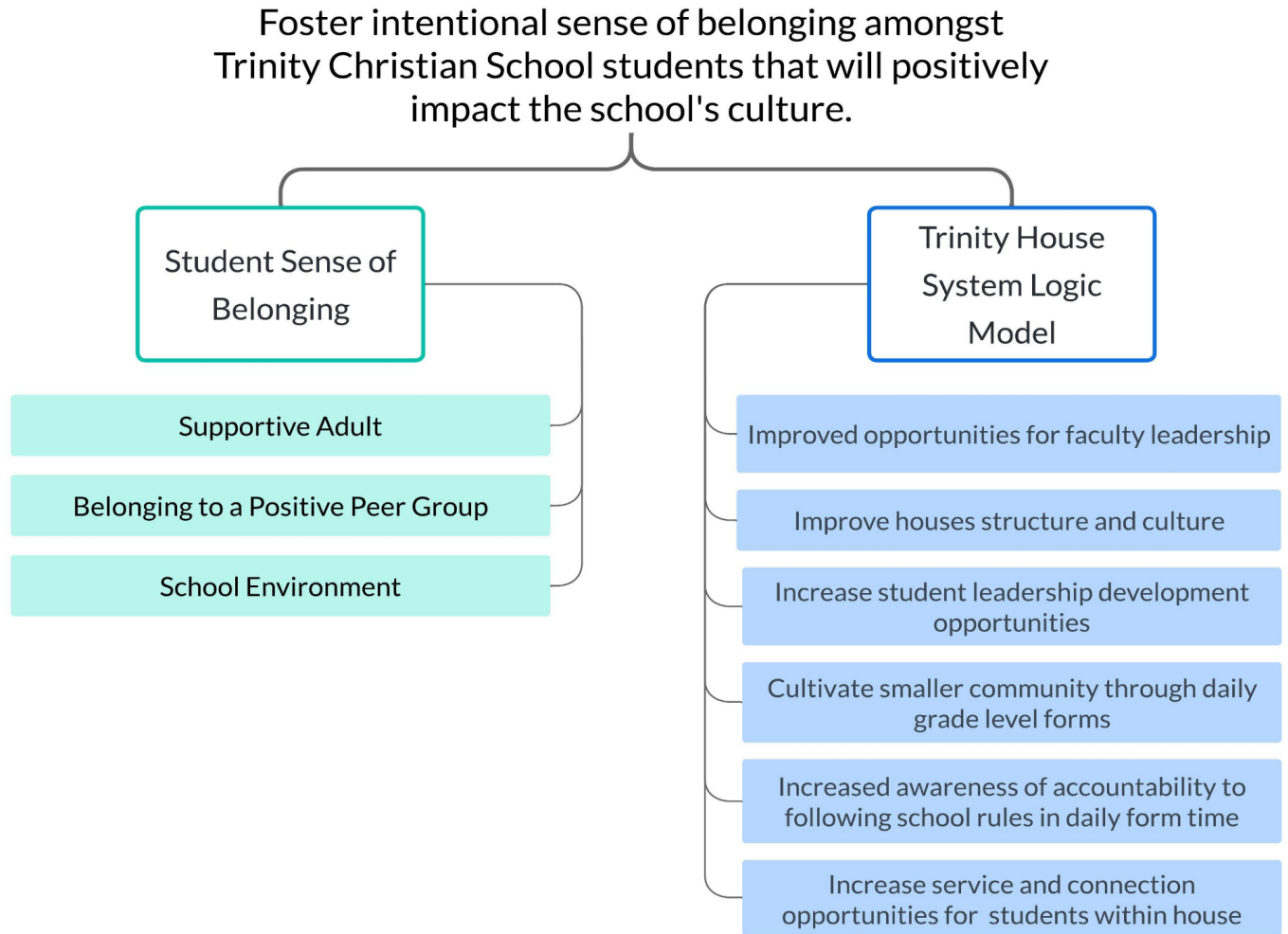
Scholarly literature on sense of belonging literature review provided a conceptual framework to understand TCS's house system implementation. Belonging in schools is essential to the overall health and well-being of students (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Allen et al., 2018; Kahu et al., 2022; Walker & Green, 2009; Lee, 2014; Slaten et al., 2016; Booker, 2021). TCS administrators wanted to address the academic, behavioral, and mental challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

Research indicated that belonging stems from the relationships between students and teachers in the classroom and the broader school environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Allen et al., 2018; Kahu et al., 2022; Walker & Green, 2009; Lee, 2014; Slaten et al., 2016; Booker, 2021). Both TCS faculty and students desired more meaningful community and relationships, which led TCS to implement the house system to address these desires (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). In addition, research also noted that intentional, smaller communities can help foster a greater sense of belonging amongst students and faculty (Oxley, 1994; Hooper, 1999; Dierenfield, 1975; Green, 2006; Nixon et al., 2010; Thomas, 2016; Brennan, 2012).

Building upon this knowledge, I developed the following concept map to crystallize my thinking on what I wanted to explore. I first highlighted what Trinity's desired outcome was: foster an intentional sense of belonging amongst Trinity Christian School students that will positively impact the school's culture. I then needed to conceptualize meaningful indicators that I could assess for belonging and are visualized below.

**Figure 1**

*Concept Map*



***Indicators of Student Sense of Belonging***

This concept map provides an overview of the different areas of investigation this project explored. According to Ye & Wallace (2014), student sense of belonging depends on several factors: identification and participation in school, perception of fitting in among peers, and generalized connection to a teacher. I derived these indicators in the concept drawn from Ye &

Wallace’s research on the effects of negatively worded questions in the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), a widely used scale that measures school belonging. Their research identified a method effect associated with negative wording in the PSSM and proposed three clearly delineated dimensions of school belonging—across the school, peers, and teachers (Ye & Wallace, 2014, p. 212).

For the purposes of this research, I conceptualized “generalized connection to teachers” as *adult support*, and it relates to having a caring relationship with an adult within the school where students perceive they are accepted, known, and matter to an adult at TCS. I understood “perception of fitting in among peers” as *belonging to a positive peer group*, and it references the relationships that students have to one another, the ways in which relationships form supportive networks, and how students see themselves in connection to these relationships. I viewed “identification and participation in school” as *school environment*, and it refers to the structure of TCS and how students and faculty understand their relationship to it, including involvement in extracurriculars, participation in the house system and events, and ways students can be involved or enhance perception of the school being welcoming.

### ***Trinity System House System Logic Model Outcomes***

In addition to the indicators of student belonging, I also used the short-term logic model outcomes to determine if the house system achieved the intended results (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023). Although I expected some of the logic model outcomes to be inclusive of the indicators for student sense of belonging, I wanted to investigate each identified area of desired impact stated in the logic model. In the discussion that follows, I explain how I conceptualized the outcomes for my research.

I studied whether faculty perceived that they had improved opportunities for leadership in the house system. By improved opportunities for leadership, I meant that faculty served in leadership roles in the house (e.g. as a head of house or form lead) and developed relationships with students within this leadership context. For improved house structure and culture, I investigated the ways in which students and faculty perceived improvements to the school community as a result of the house structure implementation. For improved house structure and culture, I understood this as the ways in which students and faculty expressed perception of the house structure and events that directly affected the system's culture. For increased student leadership opportunities, I explored student perception of leadership roles and changes in opportunities available to them. By increased leadership opportunities, I comprehended this as the changes from 24 student government association (SGA) leadership positions to the new 72 house positions (e.g. prefects, mentors, form reps), as identified in the logic model (K. Miller, personal communication, May 22, 2023).

For cultivating smaller communities through daily grade level forms, I investigated student and faculty perception of whether the daily form meetings helped impact the creation of smaller communities within the school. By this, I meant the specific times of day when grades within each house met together as a small group (e.g. Fortitudo Grade 7 form time). For increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time, I explored student and faculty perception of the role form time played in increasing accountability to following the school dress code. By this, I conceived this as whether students or faculty identified students following school policies better (e.g. less dress code violations). For increased service and connection opportunities for students within the house, I probed student and faculty perception of service opportunities and whether they increased connection. By service

opportunities, I understood these as the service projects (e.g. Operation Christmas Child) and connection as the specific house events designed to build intentional community (e.g. house assemblies, dances, etc.).

### **Project Questions**

This capstone research addressed the following questions that guided the project design and methodology. The intent was to understand the ways in which students and faculty perceived the house system as it impacted their sense of belonging. In addition, I sought to understand whether the stated outcomes identified in the logic model were met. The research questions were:

- Q1. In what ways did implementing a house system influence students' sense of belonging at TCS, if at all?
  - Indicator 1 (Supportive Adult)
  - Indicator 2 (Belonging to a Positive Peer Group)
  - Indicator 3 (School Environment)
- Q2. In what ways did school staff (i.e., administration and teachers) perceive changes in student belonging following the implementation of the house system, if they perceived change at all?
  - Indicator 1 (School Environment)
  - Indicator 2 (Belonging to a Positive Peer Group)
  - Indicator 3 (Supportive Adult)
- Q3. In what ways did implementing a house system impact the outcomes identified in the logic model, if at all?



## **Project Design**

### **Study Design and Methodology**

To address the research questions in this study, I employed a sequential, mixed methods approach to data collection through surveys and interviews. I began with the student and faculty end of year survey that TCS collects each year, which comprised both descriptive statistics and open-ended questions elements. I aligned the survey elements and responses to different indicators of belonging in schools developed through my literature review to assess whether the house system impacted students' sense of belonging. Following a review of the survey data, I interviewed school administrators to fill in any gaps in the data that the survey did not address or required clarification.

### ***Survey***

I reviewed Trinity student and faculty end-of-year survey data; TCS collects yearly surveys from students and faculty as part of their regular feedback loop. The surveys contained questions about the house system, house tournaments and events, and the overall impact it had on the school. Because TCS implemented the house system in August 2022, I only had access to data from the 2022-2023 school year surveys, but they provided student and faculty perceptions of the house system in its first year. I aligned the survey elements and responses to different indicators of belonging in schools developed through my literature review to assess whether the house system impacted students' sense of belonging.

**Student Survey.** The student survey comprised 34 questions that respondents ranked on a scale of 1-4 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), as well as seven, free text, open-ended questions about the house system, house tournaments and events, and the overall impact it had on the school. Because I sought to understand how the house system impacted perception of student belonging, I used descriptive statistics to understand the outcomes in this specific population group– TCS upper school students and faculty. Because I did not seek to draw conclusions or probability about a wider population, I referred to the ranked questions as descriptive statistics. On average, approximately 312 students replied to the descriptive statistics questions out of 322 students enrolled in the upper school during the 2022-2023 school year. For the seven open-ended questions, the number of respondents varied for each question. The total responses and and questions left blank for each open ended question are below:

<b>Open-Ended Survey Items</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Blanks</b>
House System: Please add any additional comments	62	260
House Events/Tournaments: Please add any additional comments	42	280
What has been a surprising blessing about the House system?	251	71
What suggestions do you have that would make the House system more effective in building community and spiritual development?	228	94
What previous school challenge has the House system improved?	172	150
How can Trinity better foster our three core values of Truth, Courage, and Service within the House system?	158	164
How has the House system improved Trinity's Upper School?	190	132

**Faculty Survey.** The faculty survey contained 14 ranked response questions and seven open-ended response questions on the same topics as the study survey. 44 teachers in the upper school responded to the descriptive statistics questions, and for the seven open-ended questions, the number of respondents varied for each question. The total responses and and questions left blank for each open ended question are below:

<b>Open-Ended Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Blanks</b>
What has been effective about Form time?	34	10
What could make Form time more effective?	34	10
What has been effective about seminar time?	34	10
What could make seminar time more effective?	33	11
If you are not currently a Form Advisor, how do you envision getting more involved in your House?	19	25
What has been a surprising blessing about the House system?	41	3
What suggestions do you have that would make the House system experience more effective?	36	8

### ***Interviews***

The survey data offered the possibility for student and faculty perceptions of the house system. Because TCS implemented the house system prior to when I began data collection, I was not able to assist in the drafting of the survey questions. In order to mitigate some of the gaps in data, particularly around leadership perception and decisions, I interviewed the Assistant Head of School for Academics and the Assistant Upper School Principal, both of whom were the champions and senior representatives for the House system. This helped me understand the

rationale pre-implementation, learn about how faculty and students initially perceived the house system, and learn about their understanding of student and faculty feedback, and any changes they made going into the next school year. This also helped me identify areas for future research as the school continues to make improvements to the house system.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

Research tools used in quantitative and qualitative research have their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. For this project, I relied on two tools to gather data—surveys and interviews. According to Babbie (2016), surveys allow researchers a flexible approach to analyzing data. They are able to ask multiple questions over a series of topics and provide a standardized measurement for a specific set of criteria. Simultaneously, Babbie (2016) also noted their drawbacks; the standardization and set question criteria means that the questions can only address what is understood by the participant and must apply across the lowest common denominator. In addition, the author notes that they are unable to be adjusted on the fly. For example, if a researcher is observing a phenomenon in person, they can make an adjustment based on their observations (Babbie, 2016). He finally noted that surveys also struggle with the concept of artificiality, where you are measuring someone's reaction to a stated question in that moment, and it may not fully reflect feelings of a participant (Babbie, 2016).

Surveys, Babbie (2016) noted, “are weak on validity and strong on reliability” (p. 287). He remarks that validity refers to how accurately a measure reflects the concept it is intended to measure (Babbie, 2016). As mentioned earlier, surveys suffer from weaknesses in that they are only able to measure to the lowest understanding of a respondent taking the survey. This means that someone may not understand the question completely or may not have thought about the topic until confronted with a survey question. While surveys struggle with validity, Babbie

(2016) commented, are strong on reliability, which means that the tools used are expected to produce the same results each time it is collected (p. 149). Because surveys ask the same question without change, we expect the data we get is reliable (e.g. repeatable in the measurement process), but may not be as strong in validity, (e.g. how well the tool measures what it was intended to measure (Babbie, 2016).

In addition to surveys, I also employed the use of interviews. As is the case with surveys, interviews have their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. According to Babbie (2016), interviewing someone in person tends to decrease the number of non-responses and can clarify questions that may be confusing the respondent (p. 273). In addition, it offers the interviewer the opportunity to observe the respondent and make notes that would not be possible through a survey response (Babbie, 2016, p. 273).

Babbie (2016) reflected that because of the nature of interviews, it is important for the interviewer to be cognizant of ethical issues, such as what an interviewer might note about someone they are interviewing or how they characterize them after the fact. He explained that interviewers must remain as neutral as possible, and sometimes this can prove difficult, which may inadvertently affect the interview responses (Babbie, 2016). Interviews tend to be more valid, in the sense that the interviewer can ensure the respondent understands the topic and questions asked. However, the reliability in such cases is not as strong, and one will likely get different answers each time you ask the question (Babbie 2016).

All research tools come with inherent challenges, and it is imperative as the researcher that I recognize those limitations and account for them. The surveys provided a contextual overview that helped me derive a broad understanding of student and faculty viewpoints aligned to perception of sense of belonging and the logic model indicators. The surveys provided a

simple, repeatable response from students and faculty. This survey data is more reliable in the information it can provide, but its validity is a weakness.

To help me better understand the leadership perspective on the house system, I did use interviews to further contextualize my data. I conducted interviews with the two leaders who led the planning and establishment of the house system at TCS. I chose these two leaders because they advocated for incorporating the house system and were instrumental in its initial stand up. Because there were only two individuals, this makes it much easier to conduct interviews. The interviews provided better validity of information, but the reliability was not as strong as the surveys. The critical factor is that I understood the limitations of the different options and accounted for them as needed through the project.

## Data Collection and Analysis Report

I sequenced my data collection to focus first on understanding and analyzing the student and faculty survey data, which then informed any gaps in information. The data from the student and faculty survey responses provided enough information to address my research questions. I then interviewed the Assistant Head of School for Academics and the Assistant Upper School Principal, who helped design, implement, and run the house system in its first year at TCS to understand as leaders, how they understood the feedback they had received and the ways it informed changes or improvements made to the house system entering the next school year.

### Survey Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I approached it as a multiple step process. First, I began with the student survey, which had more questions and a greater number of responses. I began by breaking out the descriptive statistics questions ranked on a scale of 1-4 (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Agree, 4-Strongly Agree). I aligned each of the statements in this portion of the survey to the indicators for sense of belonging and the logic model outcome, and I captured the total number of respondents to each question. For example, if the survey prompt was, “having a relationship with my Form Advisor was beneficial,” I aligned this with the *supportive adult* indicator for sense of belonging and *cultivate a smaller community through daily grade level forms* for the logic model outcome. For a complete table of alignment, consult [Appendix B](#). Finally, I created bar charts to understand the percentage of respondents to each survey element based on the ranked scale and used that information to inform my understanding of how the data answered my project questions.

I applied this same methodology to the faculty descriptive statistics questions that were ranked on a scale of 1-4 (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Agree, 4-Strongly Agree). I aligned each of the statements in this portion of the survey to the indicators for sense of belonging and the logic model outcome, and I captured the total number of respondents to each question. For example, if the survey prompt was, “the house system improved relationships with students,” I aligned this with the *supportive adult* indicator for sense of belonging and *improved opportunities for faculty leadership for the logic model outcome*. For a complete table of alignment, consult [Appendix C](#). Finally, I created bar charts to understand the percentage of respondents, which provided a descriptive statistical overview of my data and how it answered my research questions.

Next, I wanted to understand an overview of the free-text questions students answered. I first grouped the open-ended questions together with a total count of how many responses or non-responses I had for each question. This was important to understand the total number of respondents out of the student population that took the survey, in order to provide context for the answers. For example, out of 322 students that took the survey, only 62 responded to the survey question, “Provide any additional comments about the house system.” The number of responses for this question totaled 62 responses and 260 blanks. This is important to note as the number of students who responded will impact how I understand their responses. An open-ended question with more responses may indicate a stronger sentiment from students. This is an important challenge that could impact validity and findings.

Once I understood the total number of student responses to each open-ended question, I performed a sentiment analysis using natural language processing (NLP). According to Liu



(2022), sentiment analysis, or opinion mining, is analyzing the ways in which people see, view, evaluate, and apprise different entities (p. 1). According to Bordoloi & Biswas (2023):

NLP deciphers human language and makes it machine understandable. With the aid of NLP, the sentiments behind human-generated...comments can be processed and represented by patterns and structures that can be used by software to comprehend and implement them. Sentiment analysis...helps users in opinionative/sentimental decision-making.” (p. 5)

For both the faculty and student open-ended question, I used sentence-level sentiment analysis, which uses NLP to assess sentiment on a more granular level, where sentences are examined on an individual level to investigate overall sentiment (Wankhade et al., 2022, p. 5734). This allowed me to categorize each response to the free-text questions and align them to one of the sense of belonging indicators and determine if the response was positive, neutral, or negative. For example, if the open-response was, “It helped create a better relationship with my form teacher,” I coded this as a positive sentiment and aligned it to the *supportive adult indicator*. For additional information on how I aligned open text questions, see [Appendix D](#).

Because I was interested in student perception of belonging, understanding the sentiment behind their responses was critical to generating my findings and recommendations. I relied on NLP to initially categorize each response and assign a sentiment; however, NLP does not always capture sentiment accurately. Wankhade et al. (2022) note that there are “impediments to accurately interpreting sentiments and determining the appropriate sentiment polarity” (p. 5731). Therefore, I reviewed each categorization to ensure that the NLP coded the sentiment correctly, and adjusted if there was an error in the sentiment analysis.

Finally, I assessed each of the open-text responses for alignment to the outcomes identified in the TCS logic model. This allowed me to understand how the answers aligned to different indicators, either belonging, or in this case, the logic model. For example, if the response was, “I have enjoyed watching the new students feel like they have a consistent space where they are known,” I aligned this to *cultivate a smaller community through daily grade level forms*. For additional information on how I aligned open text questions, see [Appendix E](#).

Following this analysis, I developed an interview protocol to fill in any gaps in the data or to seek clarification or further understanding on the data from the surveys that were confusing. For example, there was not a lot of data from the survey around improvement to following the school rules and dress code. This was an area of focus for my interviews that provided additional information, context, data to more fully address each of my research questions.

### **Interview Data Analysis**

Once I evaluated the survey data, I used interviews to fill in remaining gaps in understanding. The survey provided a good snapshot in time for student and faculty perceptions of how the house system impacted perception of belonging at TCS. Interviewing the Assistant Head of School for Academics and the Assistant Upper School Principal provided insights into how the school analyzed and understood the data, the ways in which it aligned to their expectations, and the changes they made going into the new school year. I focused my interviews on the Assistant Head of School for Academics and the Assistant Upper School Principal, who were vital to the establishment and maintenance of the house system. Through the student and faculty surveys and interviews, I developed a sense of understanding of the first year of the house system at TCS, and the ways leaders viewed feedback and adapted as a result of it. This also provided useful information for areas of future inquiry.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Through an analysis of information from the student and faculty surveys, which included both descriptive statistics and open-ended responses, as well as interviews with key TCS administrators, I developed the following findings and recommendations. In the discussion that follows, I will focus on each question, and sub-indicator, as appropriate, and highlight how well the school achieved a sense of belonging, as evidenced by student and faculty feedback. In addition, I will discuss how well the school achieved the short-term, first year outcomes identified in the logic model, and then provide a series of recommendations for the school's consideration as it moves forward with the house system. Where appropriate, I include information from my interviews on ways the school already made adjustments going into the second year under the house system, as well as potential areas for further inquiry.

**Project Question 1: Q1. In what ways did implementing a house system influence students' sense of belonging at TCS, if at all?**

#### ***Supportive Adult***

Implementing a house system at TCS positively influenced students' sense of belonging as evidenced in reports of student relationships with a supportive adult. In both the descriptive statistics and open-ended responses to the student survey, relationships with a supportive adult emerged as a success for the house system. A majority of students developed a better relationship with teachers, particularly the form advisor, as a result of the house system.

**Student Survey Responses: Supportive Adult.** In the open-ended responses, 78 responses aligned to the supportive adult indicator. In these responses, a majority of students pointed to the positive impact of having a supportive adult at school, as a result of the house system. Students noted that the house system created an opportunity for students and faculty to get to know one another better in a more intentional manner. In particular, students noted the relationship with their form advisor as particularly impactful. The form advisor is an adult faculty member who oversees a Form (a group of 15 students in the same grade.) The form advisor seeks to foster spiritual growth, facilitate peer to peer relationships, and monitor students' overall wellbeing . This positive sentiment is expressed in the following student responses:

- “Being able to have a teacher who actually knows you and sees you every day and cares about you and your school year;”
- “The system has allowed for a closer relationship with form advisors, which is much more influential than a typical student-teacher relationship;”
- “...take an example from my form because of [the] sense of community and care. We have [a specific teacher] whose ability to make everyone in a room feel seen, heard, connected, and like they can contribute is unparalleled.”

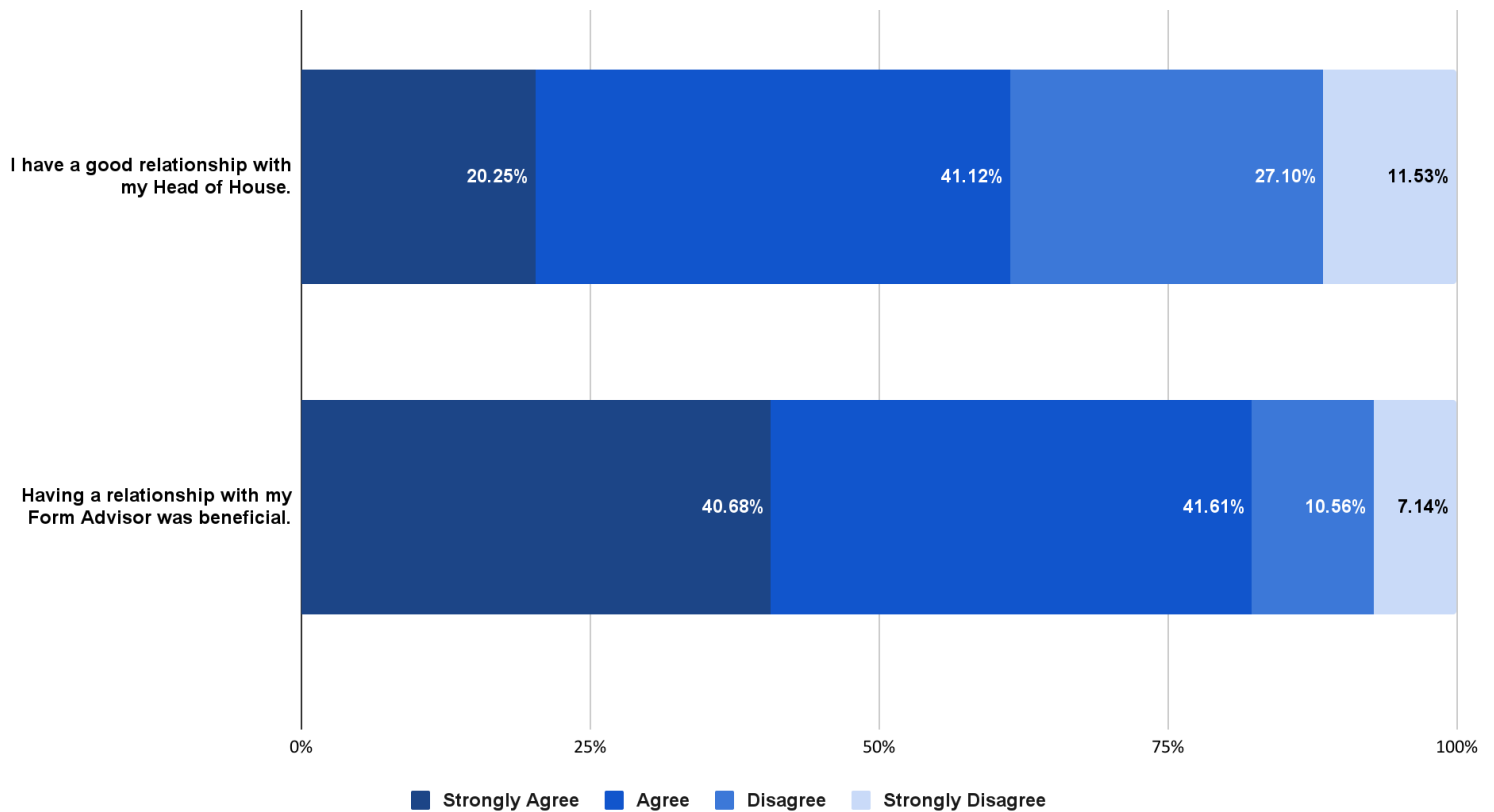
Some students noted that not all form teachers had the ability to create this type of environment, and that this was not a universal standard across all of the forms. Not all students had this experience, and they noted this in their open ended responses that it could depend on the form teacher if you were able to develop this type of relationship with your form teacher. However, even though this was not a universal experience for all students, the feedback indicated that having a supportive adult relationship with a specific teacher within the house structure

provided students an opportunity to form a unique relationship that positively impacted their sense of belonging.

**Student Descriptive Statistics Responses: Supportive Adult.** Two of the descriptive statistics survey questions addressed the supportive adult indicator. Both of the questions indicated a positive response, with students particularly noting that a relationship with their former advisor was beneficial. This aligns and supports the positive sentiment established in the open response feedback, where students noted the development of relationships with their form advisor and the impact this had on their sense of belonging.

**Figure 2**

*Student Responses Aligned to Supportive Adult*



**Summary of Findings on Supportive Adults.** The role of a supportive adult is critical to the development of a sense of belonging for students within the house model at TCS, as evidenced by a review of the open-ended feedback and descriptive statistics responses from the student survey. Students valued their relationships with a supportive adult, but most especially, the form advisor. This data demonstrates that students found the relationships developed with faculty provided a sense of affection and care and allowed them to have someone they could go to at the school, positively impacting students' sense of belonging at TCS.

### ***Belonging to a Positive Peer Group***

Implementing a house system influenced students' sense of belonging as evidenced in reports of deepened relationships with peers. In both the descriptive statistics and open-ended response to the student surveys, students indicated that their relationships with other peers positively grew, due to the house system. A majority of students found the house system provided multiple opportunities to build meaningful peer-to-peer relationships, especially through form time and other house events.

**Student Survey Responses: Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** In the open-ended responses, 316 responses aligned to the belonging to a positive peer group indicator. In these responses, a majority of students indicated that the house system fostered a sense of belonging through belonging to a positive peer group. Students highlighted that the house system provided multiple opportunities to build deeper relationships through form, seminar, and other house events. Students mentioned that it created smaller communities where they could get to know one another in a more personal setting. This led to new friendships, deepened relationships between already existing friendships, and an opportunity to spend time with others across grades 7-12.

Students highlighted the relationships that grew out of the house system as a positive benefit and created a sense of belonging, community, and fellowship. Some students expressed that prior to the house system, there were cliques that formed between certain friend groups, and it was more difficult to make friends. The house system created an intentional setting for students to get to know others they would not normally be friends with, and this positively impacted the school. The following quotes are illustrative of the positive sentiments students expressed:

- “Being new this year, it put me in an environment that I would spend time with at the beginning and end of the day everyday, so I was able to make new friends quickly;”
- “Forming relationships with people that I would've never talked to if we weren't in the same house;”
- “I think that form time was a very beneficial thing for us - it encouraged people to start relationships with people who they wouldn't usually reach out to!;”

- “The house system has created more opportunities and events that build school spirit and relationships within forms. The house system has also allowed me to develop friendships with people I might not have become friends with if we had not been in the same form;”
- “I think just how nice it is to know and be known;”
- “Truth with accountability, Courage with keeping others accountable and speaking up, and service through all the serving opportunities and volunteer events;”
- “There are a lot of kids in my form who I never would have talked to or even considered talking to. Because of the house system, they are some of my closest, most accountable friends.”

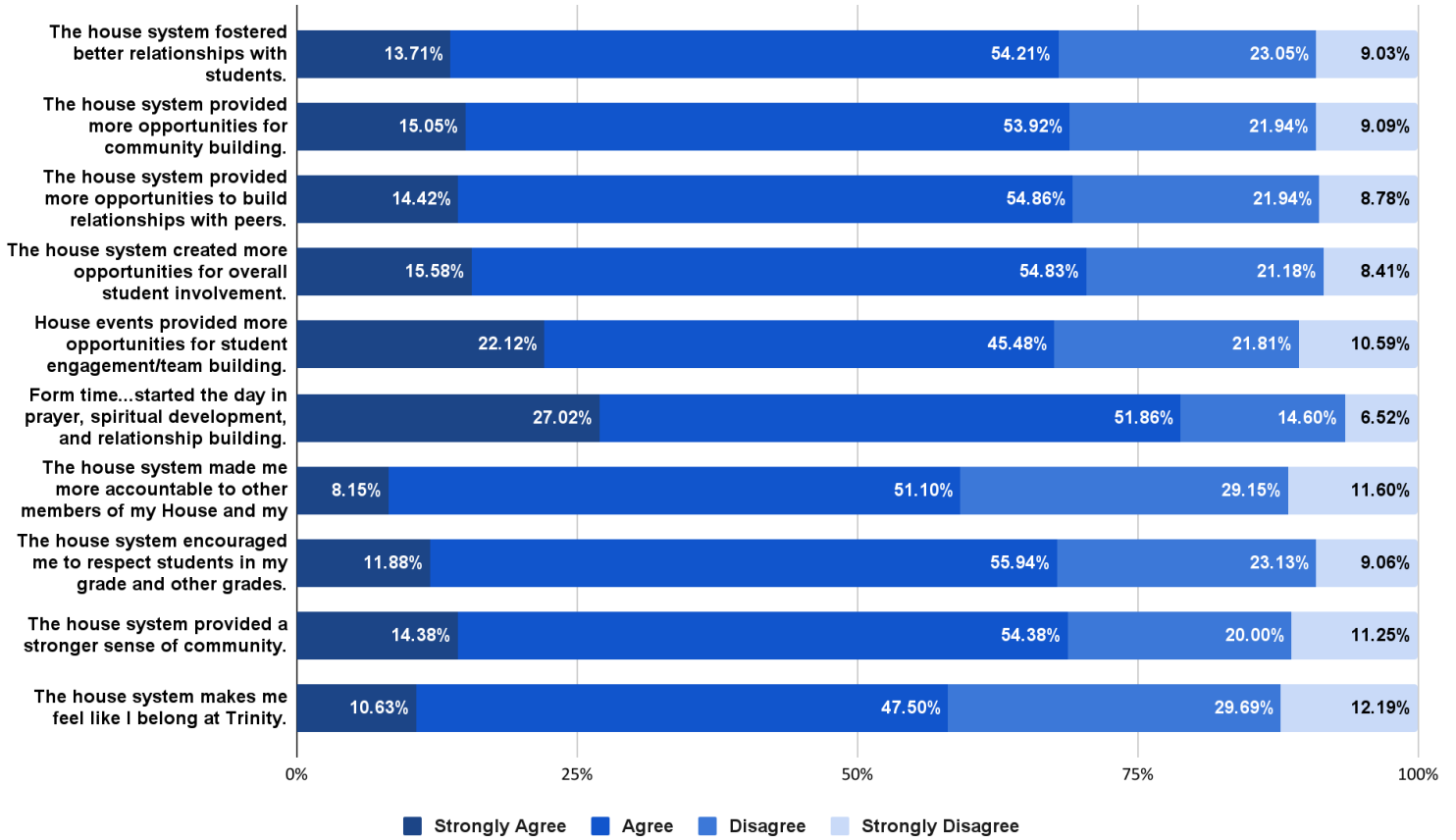
Some students noted that the house system actually divided their friendships rather than enhanced them. Some students expressed that while the house system was intended to develop relationships, many of their friends ended up in other houses and forms, and as a result, they are not able to see them. One student explained, “The four houses have actually divided my friendships, because the only actual time I can hang out with my friends is during lunch and the two classes I have with them.” Students expressed a desire to have more flexibility in being able to choose to spend time with other friends that are not in their house. While not all students had a positive experience, the majority of the feedback indicates that the house system did provide an opportunity to build friendships and relationships with other peers, and helped most students feel like they belonged to a positive peer group, positively impacting their sense of belonging.



**Student Descriptive Statistics Responses: Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** Ten questions in the descriptive statistics portion of the survey aligned to “Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.” All of the responses indicated a positive sentiment, with students particularly noting that a relationship with their form advisor was beneficial. This aligns and supports the positive sentiment established in the open response feedback, where students noted the development of relationships with their form advisor and the impact this had on their sense of belonging.

**Figure 3**

*Student Responses Aligned to Belonging to a Positive Peer Group*



**Summary of Findings on Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** Belonging to a positive peer group had a positive impact on students' sense of belonging within the house system at TCS, as evidenced by a review of the open-ended feedback and descriptive statistics responses from the student survey. Students developed new friendships and deepened existing ones, particularly through the small group time in form. While some students struggled with friends in other houses, overwhelming, the data shows that students benefited from the house system's impact on peer groups. This data illustrates that the house system enhanced relationships and sparked new ones, positively impacting students' sense of belonging at TCS.

### ***School Environment***

Implementing a house system did positively influence students' sense of belonging as evidenced in reports of student experience at Trinity, including the physical environment, opportunities available to be involved, and the overall school setting/surroundings/context. However, this indicator had more of a mixed response in student feedback. Many students expressed that the house system improved aspects of the school environment, including events, starting the day in form time, and increased leadership opportunities. A number of students expressed frustration with parts of the school environment including lack of inter-grade connection. Students indicated the house system created a positive environment through house competitions and events, form, and expanded leadership opportunities; however, they also expressed a need for more interaction for students in the same grade.

**Student Survey Responses: School Environment.** In the open-ended responses, 671 responses aligned to the school environment indicator. Broken down by sentiment, students responded negatively in 121 responses, neutrally in 201 responses, and positively in 349 responses. In them, students expressed a largely positive experience with the house system and the impact it had on Trinity's environment. For example, students largely enjoyed the opportunity to participate in different events, including House Day, different competitions and events, such as dances, and expanded leadership opportunities.

Students also highlighted some areas of disappointment and frustration, including that Day Away went away, fragmentation of grade levels, the rigidity of the house system, and that everything in the school was too aligned to individual houses. Students felt that this precluded those in different houses from getting to spend time together in chapel and at other school-wide forums. Several students also expressed frustration with the dress code and the amount of homework. While the school environment Indicator had more mixed sentiments in the responses, they were still mostly positive on its overall impact on Trinity's culture and context.

Students appreciated a number of ways that the house system positively benefited the school, including the different events and structure of the house to intentionally foster community amongst students through form. In addition, students noted that having form at the beginning of the day allowed them to start the day without the same academic pressure in previous years, and focus on preparing for the school day and on spiritual development rather than jumping right into academics. The following quotes are illustrative of the positive sentiments students expressed:

- “The House system has improved Trinity to be a school more than just academics, and a school where students want to come and also have the ability to have fun;”

- “The environment is better, and although it’s more competitive, it is a controlled competitiveness, making upper school more enjoyable and light;”
- “The House system has been great so far, and I have really enjoyed all the opportunities to compete in the kickball tournament, volleyball tournament, capture the chicken, etc.;;”
- “Student leadership opportunities have definitely improved.”

Students also shared neutral and negative sentiments in their responses, particularly focused on the school environment indicator. These primarily focused on the need for more interaction for students in the same grade, more opportunities for different types of events (e.g. non-athletic), and frustration with the amount of homework and dress code. Despite the presence of neutral and negative sentiments, students expressed an overwhelming positive response about the house system itself, and expressed neutral or negative sentiments about specific aspects of the house system. The following quotes are illustrative of the neutral and negative sentiments students expressed:

- “Day away was so fun, I wish we still had it;”
- “I think the house system has been beneficial in some ways to build culture, but also doesn't help to get to know people in the other houses in our grade;”
- Incorporating the houses together more. Like during Chapel etc. you're only with your house so you don't really interact with the other houses as much;”
- “We need a casual dress day every other Friday;”
- “We really need to bring back Day Away. I know countless students who miss it and resent the removal of it. I do love house day and getting to do it, but I think for a lot of people it was more fun, and effective to spend a day outside of school, with your grade. It

helps us get to know everyone but without the school setting. I think we can do house stuff once school starts, but we need to BRING BACK DAY AWAY :);”

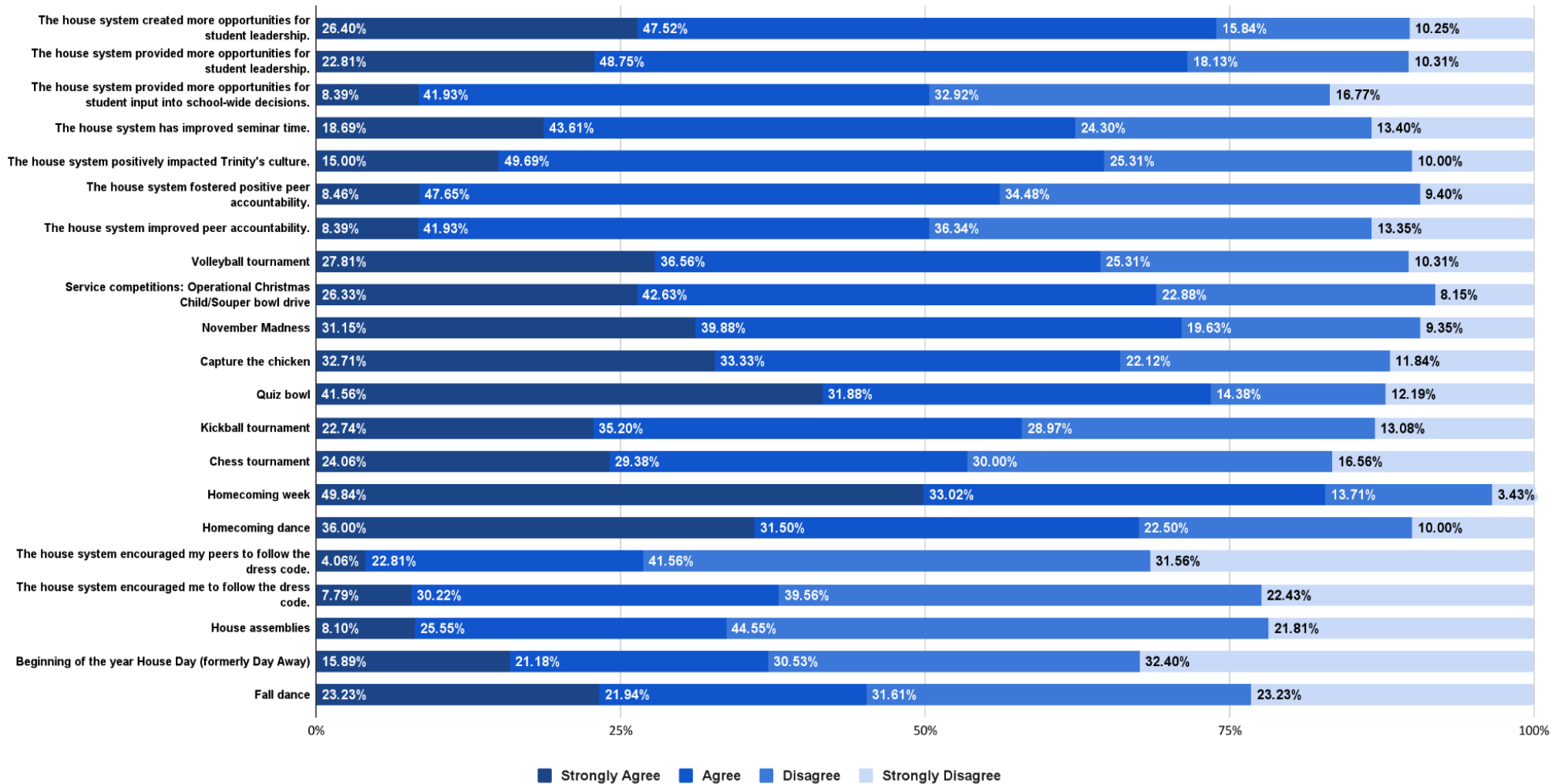
- “Letting people sit with others and not just the house itself for everything;”
- “I think it would be nice to do things with other houses and not just be limited to forms but do things with our whole grade;”
- “More events that people can participate in give an opportunity for non-athletic people, like games...;”
- “SLT is unfortunate because it actually does potentially provide some good leaders, but having zero student input except for form advisors sucks. For one, form advisors don't have much responsibility and aren't really in as much of a leadership position as others. Also, some of the appointed SLT members end up being ineffective and just holding the title with no responsibility and/or no influence;” and,
- “I would ask that the process for student leadership is more involved from multiple admin and that students had a little bit more of an opportunity to elect (like SGA) I think the students often feel overlooked with how SLT has been operating. I also think Form Reps should be given more responsibility and opportunity within their house, they did not get to do much this year. (I understand the higher leaders take priority though)”

**Student Descriptive Statistics Responses: School Environment.** Twenty-one questions in the descriptive statistics portion of the survey aligned to the “school environment” indicator. These questions fell into several categories—school/house events, such as House Day, Dances, and tournaments, student leadership opportunities, peer accountability, and school cultures. Sixteen of the responses skewed positive and five of the questions skewed negative. The positive questions focused on the creation and provision of more student leadership opportunities, impacts of the house system on the school, including seminar and the school’s culture, improvements to peer accountability, homecoming events, and several house events: volleyball tournament, service projects, November Madness, Capture the chicken, quiz bowl, and the kickball and chess tournaments. The negative questions focused on input primarily on the dress code, responses to House Day replacing Day Away, House assemblies, and the fall dance.

These responses are in line with the results reflected in the open-ended survey feedback. Students clearly expressed that they had more opportunity to serve in leadership roles under the new system, and that the house system positively impacted the school’s culture and structure of seminar and a number of newly introduced events, as well as service projects, homecoming week and dance. The negatively-skewed responses also align to the open-ended survey responses. Students expressed a negative sentiment towards the dress code, change from Day Away to House Day, and the House structure in assemblies. Although there is some negative feedback, the descriptive statistics is mostly positive and reflects specific areas for improvement based on student feedback.

**Figure 4**

*Student Responses Aligned to School Environment*





**Summary of Findings on School Environment.** Feedback from students on the school environment indicator was mixed, demonstrating both positive impacts and opportunities for growth for the school. In a review of the survey data, students appreciated the slower start to the day in form, as well as a number of the house events, which created a fun and engaging environment for students participation, and more opportunities for students to serve in leadership roles. However, students also noted that the house system divided grades across the four houses, and that they desired further inter-grade connection opportunities for all students in the same grade to spend time together. Having a supportive adult is critical to the development of a sense of belonging for students within the house model at TCS. This data shows that students enjoyed many aspects of the house system but desired some changes to further enhance the school environment. This indicator positively impacted students' sense of belonging at TCS, but also offered areas of additional growth for the school.

**Project Question 2: In what ways did school staff (i.e., administration and teachers) perceive changes in student belonging following the implementation of the house system, if they perceived change at all?**

*Supportive Adult*

Implementing a house system at TCS positively influenced students' sense of belonging as evidenced in faculty reports of student relationships with a supportive adult. In the open-ended and descriptive statistics responses to the faculty survey, as well as feedback from administrator interviews, faculty relationships with students were a successful result of the house system. Nearly all faculty respondents praised the relationships between students and a supportive adult as an important outcome of the house system. Faculty relayed that they developed intentional relationships with students, especially through form, fostering both mentorship and spiritual discipleship.

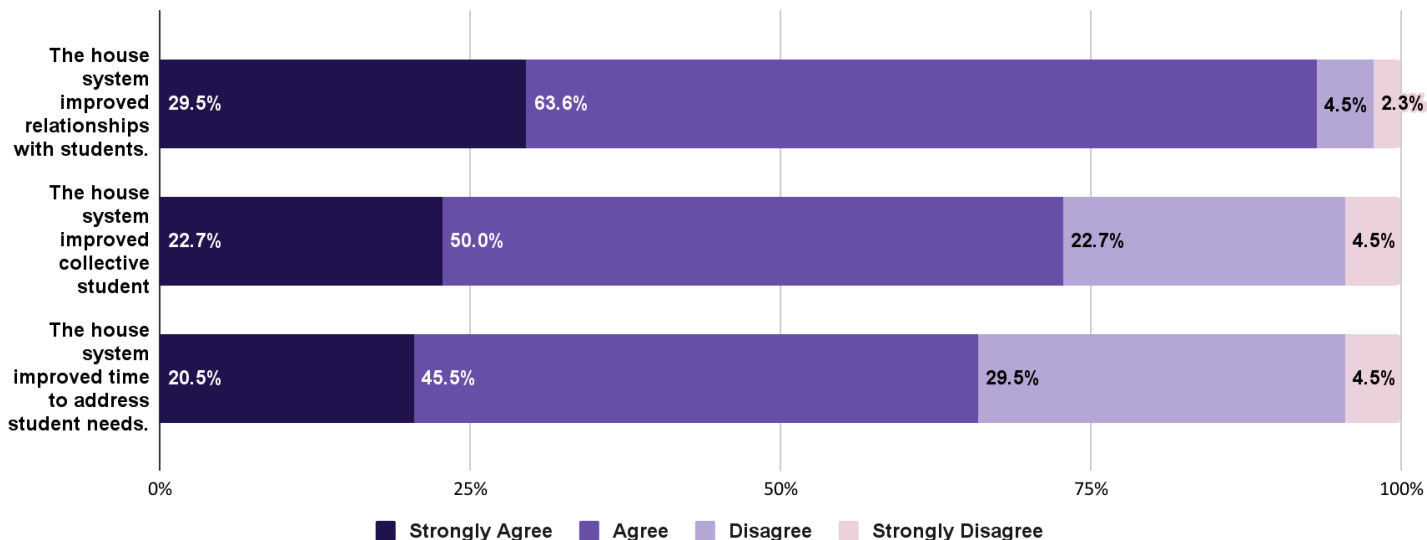
**Faculty Survey Responses: Supportive Adult.** In the open-ended responses, 52 responses aligned to the supportive adult indicator. Nearly all of the faculty responses to the open-ended survey questions pointed to the positive impact of students having a supportive adult within the school as a result of the house system. Faculty noted that the house system created an opportunity for students and teachers to form relationships in a deeper and meaningful way. In particular, faculty praised the relationship between form advisors and their students as especially important to this indicator. Faculty remarked that their relationships with students grew deeper over the course of the year, and they enjoyed seeing students bond with one another. The following quotes represent the positive sentiment expressed in in the faculty responses:

- “The regular, predictable time with students has allowed for intentional relational spiritual conversations. I have observed community building among students, strengthening of relationships between students and form advisors, building relationships among students who may not have had the opportunity otherwise;”
- “I have felt a greater burden to pray for my form students. I think it is very helpful to have adults in the building to whom each student ‘belongs’;”
- “The strengthened relationships with the students has actually enhanced my classroom instruction, because of the bonds with kids, the students seem more inclined to behave and comply during normal academic time!;”
- “The ability for a student to be vulnerable about what is going on in their life and the ability to encourage/connect with them through it.”

**Faculty Descriptive Statistics Responses: Supportive Adult.** Three of the ranked survey questions addressed the supportive adult indicator. The faculty responses demonstrated a positive relationship between the house system and students having a supportive adult in the school. In particular, faculty noted an overwhelmingly positive response to the relationships developed with students. This similarly reflects and supports the open response feedback, where faculty noted the critical role developing meaningful relationships with their students had during the year.

**Figure 5**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to Supportive Adult*



**Administrator Interviews: Supportive Adult.** Interviews with administrators further supported the positive value of supportive adults. Administrators expressed the importance of the relationships between faculty members and students. According to administrators, form is where faculty is “praying and doing devotions and activities together [with students]. That’s where the bonding and relationship really happens, and the kids were saying they really loved it, and it’s been a huge success” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Both faculty and students gained benefits through the intentional time within form to grow deeper relationships, both personally and spiritually.

Going into the 2022-2023 school year, TCS administrators changed aspects of the house model. Previously, the day started with form, the intentional 20-minute meeting of 15 students with one teacher that began the day before starting classes. The school day ended with seminar, a

40-minute session with the same teacher and group of students gathered in a less-structured meeting time to do homework, hang out, collect themselves before sports started, etc.

In faculty feedback directly to administrators, they expressed that 20 minutes with students at the beginning of the day and 40 minutes at the end of the day was a lot, so TCS removed the seminar meeting at the end of the day. My interviewee expressed, “The form advisers are asking to get the time back. They went from having an hour a day with their kids that they love, want to pour into and disciple, to 20 minutes a day. There’s this disconnect that we want our kids, but we don't get to see them as much. I think that it shows that they do want to continually foster in depth relationships with these kids as much as they can" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

**Summary of Findings on Supportive Adults.** From the faculty perspective, a supportive adult played an important role in the development of students’ sense of belonging at the school. The open-ended and descriptive statistics faculty survey responses and interviews with administrators at TCS confirmed the importance of this indicator. The data demonstrated that faculty found the relationships developed with students provided a sense of ownership and care as a direct result of their inclusion in their form, and allowed them to build into students in a more meaningful way that directly benefited their sense of belonging at TCS.

### ***Belonging to a Positive Peer Group***

Implementing a house system influenced students’ sense of belonging as evidenced in reports of deepened relationships with peers. In the descriptive statistics and open-ended response to the faculty survey, as well as administrator feedback, faculty indicated that the house system positively cultivated relationships between peers. Nearly every faculty member conveyed

that the house system improved students' ability to form meaningful connections and relationships with one another. Faculty also observed that the house system provided a consistent community for both relational and spiritual development between peers. They also observed that students had fun and bonding through house events.

**Faculty Survey Responses: Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** In the open-ended faculty survey, 24 responses aligned to the belonging to a positive peer group indicator. Nearly all faculty indicated that the house system fostered a sense of belonging through belonging to a positive peer group. Faculty highlighted that the house system allowed students to form meaningful connections and relationships with one another. In particular, faculty noted that form allowed students a non-pressure setting to get to know one another in ways not otherwise available to them. It provided a consistent community for both relational and spiritual development between peers. Faculty also noted that through the house system, including events, it brought together different types of students, and that they enjoyed seeing students come together and have fun. The following quotes are illustrative of the positive sentiments faculty expressed:

- “Building relationships, bible study, prayer, community building, starting each day together;”
- “I think students like the slow start to the day. It's been a good time to follow up with students about prayer requests and what's going on in their lives;”
- “Time for the kids to get to know each other in a non-pressure setting;”
- “Each student has a base, a consistent peer group, and spiritual input;”
- “I love that it has brought different types of students together;”

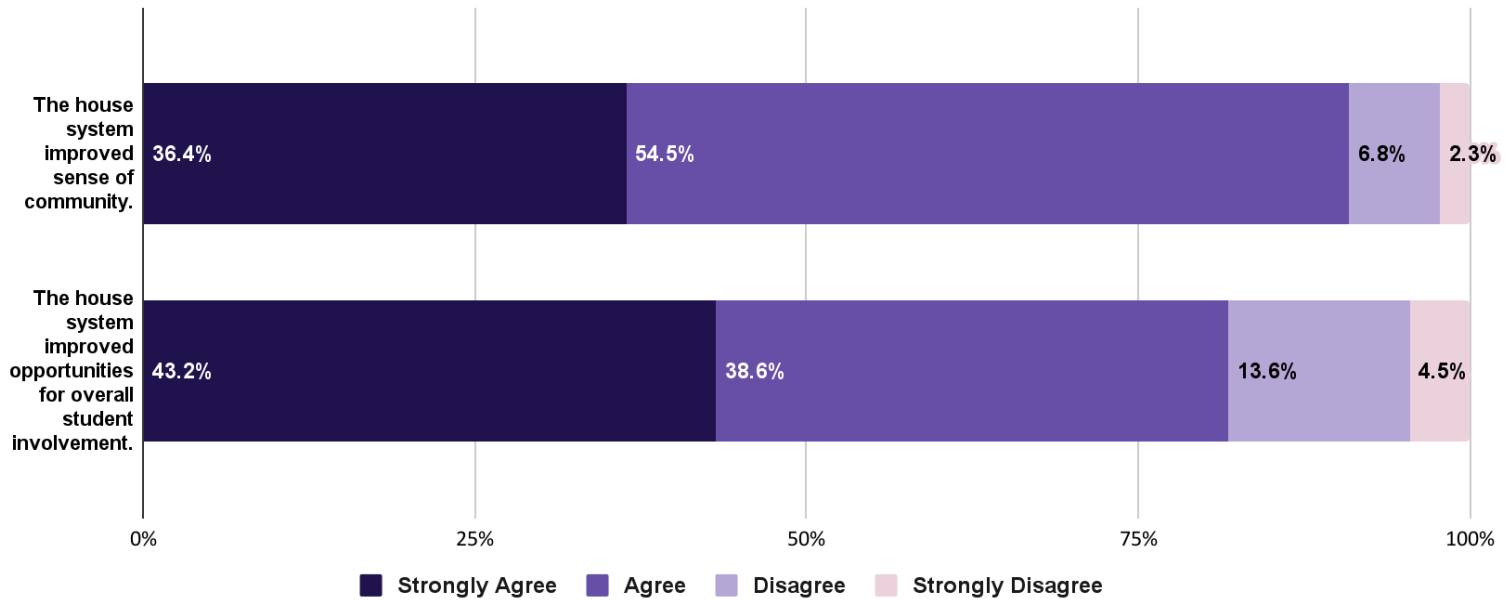
- The number of students not making friends/being excluded has been reduced. I think it has been very effective helping new students acclimate and feel a part of the school community faster...The hotdogs and games at the beginning of the year were priceless. The students had a fun time and got to know the teachers and each other so much faster and better than the usual day aways at the pools. More fun for the teachers too.”

**Faculty Descriptive Statistics Responses: Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** Two questions in the descriptive statistics portion of the survey aligned to the “belonging to a positive peer group” indicator. The questions denoted an overwhelmingly positive response to the house system’s impact on belonging to a positive peer group. According to faculty observation, the house system improved the school’s sense of community and belonging amongst students and improved their opportunities for involvement within the school. This aligns and supports the positive sentiment established in the open response feedback, where faculty noted that students appreciated the time to form relationships, be involved with one another spiritually, and participate in events as part of a community.



**Figure 6**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to Belonging to a Positive Peer Group*



**Administrator Interviews: Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** Interviews with administrators further supported the benefit the house system had on perception of student belonging as it relates to the “belonging to a positive peer group” indicator. During our interview, one of the administrators stated that when they arrived at the school, “the one thing missing from Trinity [was] this connection time” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Students on sports teams were naturally more extroverted and could easily make friends, but the student population was going from class to class without much opportunity for intentional connection to form meaningful friendships.

The House System was designed to create intentional small communities (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). According to one of the administrators, “The house [system] opened up so many opportunities for those students that are more

introverted to make that one friend. An introvert doesn't want 60 Friends. An introvert wants one or two friend[s]. Verbal feedback is [that] for people who are more introverted... [the house system] almost forced [me] into relationships with people that I never would have talked to, and now we're best buds" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

Administrators expressed the House System had a meaningful impact on students that had otherwise struggled to connect as a part of the student body, and that it created meaningful relationship opportunities for more students.

The Administrators also mentioned another goal of the house system is a desire by students to have more spiritual depth in their daily form time. Ms. Miller shared, "I had feedback from a parent [that their student] wanted more spiritual depth. They wanted devotionals and a deeper dive [into spiritual areas in their form]" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Mr. Fellows further expounded, "I entered a form the other day near the end. There were kids laying hands on each other and praying for each other. We want to try and [have a] safe space [to] focus on spiritual well being and relationship building. I think student feedback has been quite good on that" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

Connection and forming of peer groups also happened outside of established house structures. Administrators shared that there are impromptu groups forming based on student desires for further relationship building. In one form, a group of students asked if they could meet during lunch and have a prayer time. Ms. Miller shared, "A group of boys asked their form advisor [if they could] pray during lunch for each other. [The form advisor] sits there, and they all pray for each other" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

In another instance, a group of girls felt disconnected from the rest of their grade and asked to form a Bible study. Ms. Miller shared, “[There were] five girls that were feeling disconnected in a grade that was completely disconnected. Kids were withdrawing last year left and right. Thirty-nine girls showed up last week, and I didn't do anything but sit in the back of the room” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Students are organically forming communities supportive communities on their own, and administrators expressed that the House system has helped empower them to feel like they can.

**Summary of Findings on Belonging to a Positive Peer Group.** Belonging to a positive peer group had a positive impact on students’ sense of belonging within the house system at TCS, as evidenced by a review of the open-ended feedback and descriptive statistics responses from the faculty survey. Students developed new friendships and deepened existing ones, particularly through the small group time in form. Administrators also observed students felt empowered to form other small groups within their grade where they desired more personal relationships amongst their peers. From a faculty perspective, the data shows that students benefited from the house system’s impact on peer groups, positively impacting students’ sense of belonging at TCS.

### ***School Environment***

Implementing a house system influenced students’ sense of belonging as evidenced in faculty reports of student’s involvement in school activities, including leadership roles and classes, providing a supportive environment to ease into the day, focusing on the emotional, spiritual, and relational development of students, and the overall school setting/surroundings/context. Faculty perceived the house system positively impacted the school

environment with more student involvement in house events, leadership roles, and form; however, faculty expressed a desire for further training and consistency between forms and advisors.

**Faculty Survey Responses: School Environment.** In the open-ended responses, 142 responses aligned to the “school environment” indicator. This reflects a similar jump in responses for this indicator as student responses, and also represents more diverse sentiment and feedback. Broken down by sentiment, faculty responded negatively in 17 responses, neutrally in 57 responses, and positively in 68 responses. In them, faculty expressed a mostly positive experience with the house system and the impact it had on Trinity’s environment. Faculty appreciated the ways in which the house system encouraged students to build community and how many students stepped into leadership roles and built into other fellow classmates. Faculty highlighted some areas of frustration, largely stemming from the lack of consistency across forms, seminar, and teacher expectations. While the school environment indicator had more mixed sentiments in the response, they were still mostly positive on its overall impact on Trinity’s culture and context.

Faculty praised the positive aspects of the house system, particularly the opportunity it provided students to build community across a range of opportunities, including serving in leadership roles, participating in house events and tournaments, and engaging with other peers in form and seminar. In addition, faculty mentioned the positive benefits of having both time in the morning to ease into the day and the ability for students to have flexibility at the end of the day to quietly get work done or de-stress from the day before they began their next activity. The following quotes are illustrative of the positive sentiments faculty expressed:

- “Student buy-in! They have been so receptive and positive. Students have shared with me that their walks with the Lord have gotten stronger because of the structure of our days, student leadership visibility, and intentionality of their form advisors. So many students have shared that the competition improves school spirit and pride!”
- “The student leadership team has really risen to the challenge this year, which is so amazing. I wasn't sure they would because I knew many students were disappointed that we were switching to the house system. But I quickly became so confident in our leadership team and relying on them has made form time so much more meaningful and valuable than I could have imagined;”
- “It has given students the ability to get mentally and spiritually prepared for their day, as well as an atmosphere to be vulnerable about life and academics;”
- “Starting the day with a sense of unity and security-- students know our form is a safe space, so starting out the day that way sets of a positive tone for the rest of the day;”
- “It's a great chance for students to just catch their breath and have a moment to be seen, rather jumping into academic time;”
- “A relaxed approach to getting some work done;”
- “Flexible time for students to steward in the area of their choice.”

Faculty also shared neutral and negative sentiments in their responses, particularly focused on the structure of form and seminar. Faculty expressed frustration over the lack of consistency between different forms and seminars, and this led to faculty members having mixed expectations of what they were supposed to look like. It created a disparity between teachers who enforced rules and accountability different from another teacher. In addition, some form advisors expressed surprise about the amount of work required of them by the school, and that it increased

over the course of the year. Despite the presence of neutral and negative sentiments, faculty expressed an overwhelmingly positive response about the house system itself and had neutral or negative sentiments about specific aspects of the house system. The following quotes are illustrative of the neutral and negative sentiments faculty expressed:

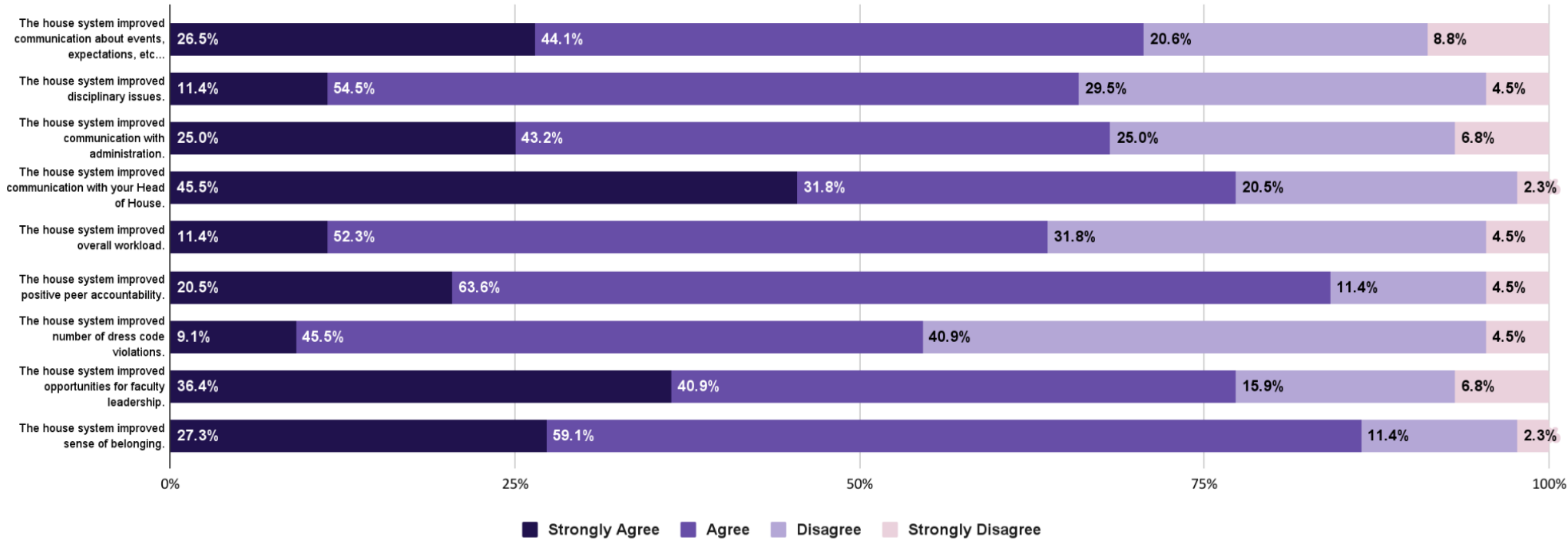
- “Clearer picture of what we were being asked to sign up for when charged with being a Form Advisor;”
- “I think that a lot of students find it frustrating because of the variety of enforcement of seminar rules. When I'm getting complaints about "but so-and-so lets their kids. . .", it just makes my job harder;”
- “Consistency between forms. Some rooms are loud and disruptive, and others are quiet and focused;”
- “Better understanding of where students can and can't be;”
- “More consistency between rooms or even a new system where students could choose from quiet or group work or talking rooms; different kids have different goals for seminar; it's hard to tutor kids who need teacher help when I am busy policing my own seminar;”
- “Making the expectations more clear and uniform, but without rigidity;”
- “More advance communication, more formal training for both student leaders and Form Advisors;”
- “Communicate the schedule of events and provide resources to increase efficacy of form/seminar time;”
- “More help from House leaders on planning vertical in-House activities (e.g., 7th, 8th, and 9th grade have a breakfast during Form one day, etc.);”

- “More precise plan for expectations of student leaders (primarily Form reps).”

**Faculty Descriptive Statistics Responses: School Environment.** Nine questions in the descriptive statistics portion of the survey aligned to the school environment indicator. All of the responses in the descriptive survey demonstrated a positive sentiment by faculty of the impact the house system has had on the students and the TCS community. This aligns and supports the sentiments established in the open response feedback, where faculty expressed similar positive responses around the impact on students, but a desire for additional guidance for teachers.

**Figure 7**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to School Environment*





**Administrator Interviews: School Environment.** Interviews with administrators further expounded on faculty perceptions of student belonging related to the school environment indicators. Administrators spoke in depth about the importance of creating a school environment where students felt a sense of belonging. From the administration's perspective, faculty are critical to creating a school environment that promotes belonging. Ms. Miller shared, "If we're asking our faculty to pour into students to encourage their well being, we have to back up and foster their own teacher wellbeing" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). This led to changes in the opportunities offered to faculty to help reinforce and encourage them better.

From the administrator's perspective, the relationships with students is the most important part of the school environment. Faculty are working hard to develop meaningful relationships with their students as they work to reinforce school rules and create an environment where students are growing and flourishing, Ms. Miller shared, "We have a statement we say all the time: [you can't have] rules without relationships. [We have these] 21st century small skills that we're trying to implement, [and] it's kind of our hidden curriculum. It's not the overt, academic things. These are heart related things that are part of the hidden curriculum that we're trying to implement and foster" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Through the House system, faculty are building relationships with students that allow them to enforce school rules due to meaningful relationships.

In addition to the focus on students, Ms. Miller also shared that Trinity's adaptive goal, which is a focus area for the administration that changes year to year, for the 2023-2024 school year is "faculty well-being." Ms. Miller concluded, "Starting in the summer, everything we're doing [is] to love and support them [the faculty]. [We] know that we can't be conduits to pour

out grace, love, mercy, [unless they] have helpful systems themselves. We want [our faculty] to help students, so as an administrative team, we are trying to be very cognizant and mindful of their health and well-being” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

**Summary of Findings on School Environment.** Feedback from faculty on the school environment indicator was mixed, demonstrating both positive impacts and opportunities for growth for the school. In a review of the survey data, faculty believed the house system had a positive impact on students through providing more school events and ways to be involved, including additional leadership roles. Faculty observed that the house system encouraged students to build community and step into leadership roles, and it also provided a way for students to slowly start their day in form. However, they expressed frustration stemming from the lack of consistency across forms, seminar, and teacher expectation. Administrators acknowledged that they needed to have more focus on teachers, and that this was the focus of their adaptive goal for the new school year. This data shows that faculty enjoyed many aspects of the house system but desired some changes to further enhance the school environment and teacher’s experience of it. This indicator positively impacted students’ sense of belonging at TCS, but also offered areas of additional growth for the school.

**Project Question 3: In what ways did implementing a house system impact the outcomes identified in the logic model, if at all?**

The implementation of a house system met all of the short-term outcomes identified in the logic model. These outcomes comprised six focus areas that administrators at TCS identified as key to the successful implementation of the house system. Through it, they expected to see positive changes in both faculty and students at the school, increased opportunities for involvement, the establishment of a functional system, and the formation of communities throughout the school.

***Improved Opportunities for Faculty Leadership***

The House system provided faculty with the opportunity to serve in distinct leadership roles. This included the establishment of 24 form advisors, who served in a leadership role with the students leading form in the morning and seminar in the afternoons. In a review of both the student and faculty surveys, descriptive statistics, and the administrator interviews, TCS successfully achieved this outcome, not just the sheer number of increased leadership opportunities for faculty members, but also in the relationships that developed with students as a result of them.

In the open-ended survey feedback, students noted the relationships they developed with faculty, particularly with the form advisors, as a major benefit to the house system. It provided them with a home base, where they felt known to a specific teacher of the course of the year. One student expressed, “I love the house system, especially my form teacher who has been amazing, and I’m thrilled to have [them] again next year.” The dedicated faculty leaders within the house provided students a connective opportunity to form a relationship with a specific teacher who they felt knew them well.

Similarly, faculty noted the importance and growth of intentional relationships with students as a direct result of serving in a leadership role in the house system. Several also mentioned the value of the mentorship from other faculty members that served as a Head of House. One form advisor noted, “I enjoy that I have the same students for form and seminar. I love the fact that we bookend our day with our house/form family. It has helped me to get to know the students and to be a mentor in all aspects of their life: extra-curriculars, academics, and social/spiritual.” In addition to being a mentor and role model for students, the members who served as Heads of House also provided mentorship and care to the faculty members serving as form advisors. Another faculty member relayed, “[My faculty member] is such an amazing Head of House. [They are] so involved and positive and always have time for me. [They] want to know me on a personal and professional level, which has been such a blessing to me this year. Our house wouldn't be what it is without [them] at its head.”

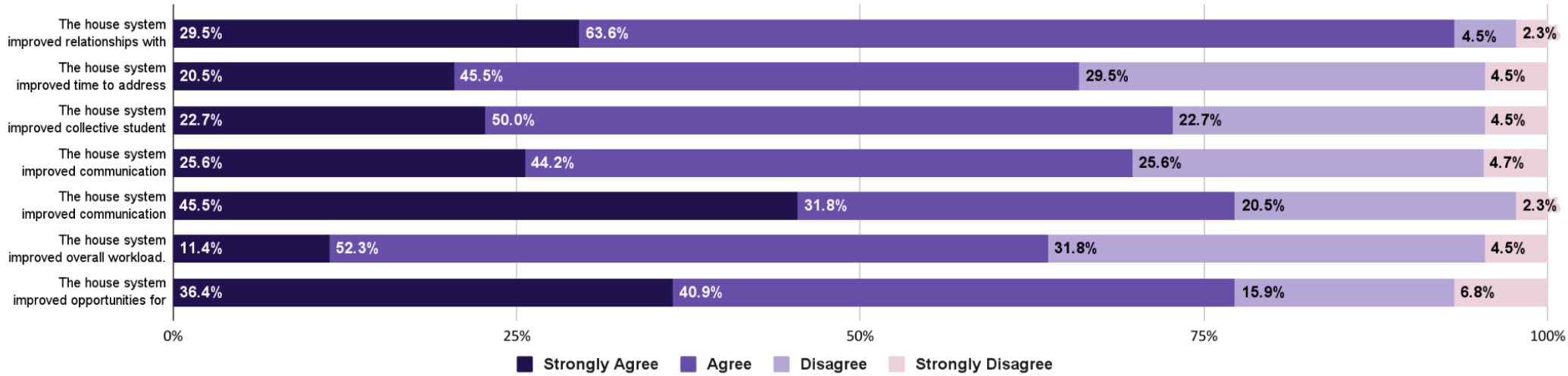
In the administrator interviews, they noted the important role that the faculty leaders play in the role of the House system. Although teachers will leave the school, the goal is to have the same form advisor stay with the same group of students from when they join the upper school in seventh grade until they graduate. Mr. Fellows explained, “I always tell us the form advisor—you want to know something really special? No one in this school is going to know your kids better than you do. No one. That's the beauty of this” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). The House system provided leadership opportunities for faculty and gave them a unique role to develop relationships with students critical to perception of belonging.

Faculty responses also provided descriptive statistics that indicate TCS successfully achieved this outcome. The data indicated that faculty had a largely positive response to serving in a leadership role within the house system, and that it provided them an opportunity to mentor

students and address their needs. It also improved communication with administrators and reflected good communication between form advisors and Heads of Houses.

**Figure 8**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to Increased Opportunities for Faculty Leadership*



***Improve House Structure and Culture***

The second outcome identified in the TCS logic model was to improve the house structure and culture. Because this was the first year of implementation, the focus for this outcome centered on the degree to which students and faculty identified resulting effects from the house system (e.g. friendships with other students not possible without the house, tournaments and events). In a review of both the student and faculty surveys, descriptive statistics responses, and administrator interviews, TCS successfully achieved this outcome. They developed and implemented a four house system with a structure in place that contributed to the development of cultural improvements within the school.

In the open-ended student survey responses, the feedback aligned to five subcategories within this outcome: dress code, events, friendships, in-grade relationships, and structure. Students expressed a desire for more flexibility and freedom within the dress code, including more casual dress days and the ability to wear sweatpants. In the interview with administrators, they noted that the dress code continued to be a challenge, but they have taken steps to provide more flexibility, from allowing more hairstyles, changing uniform providers to enhance the comfort and selection of the uniforms, and involving students in the review process of the dress code. Ms. Miller noted, “It levels the playing field from a socio-economic perspective [when] we're all wearing the same thing. The struggle with dress code is a challenge at every school. We've evolved based on student feedback” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Although students noted frustration with the dress, a few also appreciated the new house shirts in unique house colors, which are allowed to be worn during spirit dress on Friday, as a part of the dress code evolution.

Students noted that the inclusion of events are an important and enjoyable part of the house system. The different events include a variety of activities from dances, to quiz bowl, to capture the chicken, etc. Many students noted that it provided a fun way to bond with others in the upper school and earn points for their houses. A few students observed, “House games and competition have positively impacted student morale” and “[events] made it more fun, like there is something to be a part of.” While many students appreciated the events and competitions, several also shared a desire for more non-sports themed opportunities so that different types of students would be able to participate. A student shared, “I like knowledge games. I'm not a big sports enthusiast.” While several students expressed a desire for more non-sports themed events, overall, students enjoyed participating in competitions and being a part of something bigger.

The house system provided a means to establish different friendships that did not previously exist at Trinity. Many students noted that it helped create new relationships with others that did not previously exist outside of the house system. Some students struggled at times, though, because not all friends were placed in the same house. A student noted, “The house system created more opportunities and events that build school spirit and relationships within forms. The house system has also allowed me to develop friendships with people I might not have become friends with if we had not been in the same form.” While many students felt this way, some noted that it would be good to do, “...things together more often with the [other] houses. I don't really get to see my friends in the other houses due to them being separated and not having many classes with me.”

Students further expounded on this perspective with feedback on a desire for further integration between the grade levels to allow more opportunities for friendship and community to develop. Much of the student feedback focused on a desire to do more together as grades both within and across houses. One student highlighted, “The house system is alright, but I would



suggest allowing more time for grade-level activities. When grades are separated into houses, it becomes difficult to find the time to connect with other students within your grade, especially if you don't have many classes with specific students.” Another noted that while, “I think the house system has been beneficial in some ways to build culture, but also doesn't help to get to know people in the other houses in our grade.”

Further, much of the student feedback noted the desire to bring back Day Away, which the school replaced with House Day on the first day of school. Grades 7-12 used to get together on the first day of school for a day away together, and many students opined about bringing this back. For example, one student shared, “While House Day was a good time to get together with our houses, it would be more beneficial to have a Day Away type thing with our grade, rather than our house.” While the house system did help with school culture and forming relationships in some ways, students desired more relationships within their grade levels.

Finally, student feedback directly addressed the structure of the house system. Many students appreciated the intentional aspect of the system bringing together students from across all grade levels, and the competitions, forms, and seminars have built relationships within the school and contributed to an enhanced school spirit. Although students also expressed a desire for more flexibility to float between houses and spend time with friends in other houses, overall, the school established a system that worked, where the students could identify themselves with a specific house and form relationships and connections. Students did provide feedback on some pieces they missed from previous years, such as Day Away, and a desire for further grade level integration; however, overall the students seemed to appreciate the structure.

Faculty responses in the open-ended survey questions aligned similarly with student feedback. They appreciated the opportunity that the house system provided to students and the

friendships it helped foster. While many faculty noted an appreciation for the structure of the house system, many also expressed a desire to have more consistency between the forms, seminars, and also the potential for further flexibility to meet student needs. One faculty member noted, “More consistency between rooms or even a new system where students could choose from quiet or group work or talking rooms; different kids have different goals for seminar.”

In the interviews with administrators, they shared that they had received similar feedback from their faculty members serving in house leadership roles. Mr. Fellows remarked that the school purchased a copy of a devotional for all the form advisors to use as a way to address some of the faculty feedback for use during the 2023-2024 school year (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). He cautioned though, “I also want to be very mindful that forms should look a little bit different, and that's okay. Some form advisors are going to have a very structured form and [others will talk about what's] going on right now. I don't want them to all look exactly the same. It's looking for discipleship, engaged students, and relationship building” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). The administration wants to balance the parts of the structure that work well, while allowing some room for individualization that works for a particular form advisor and their specific group of students.

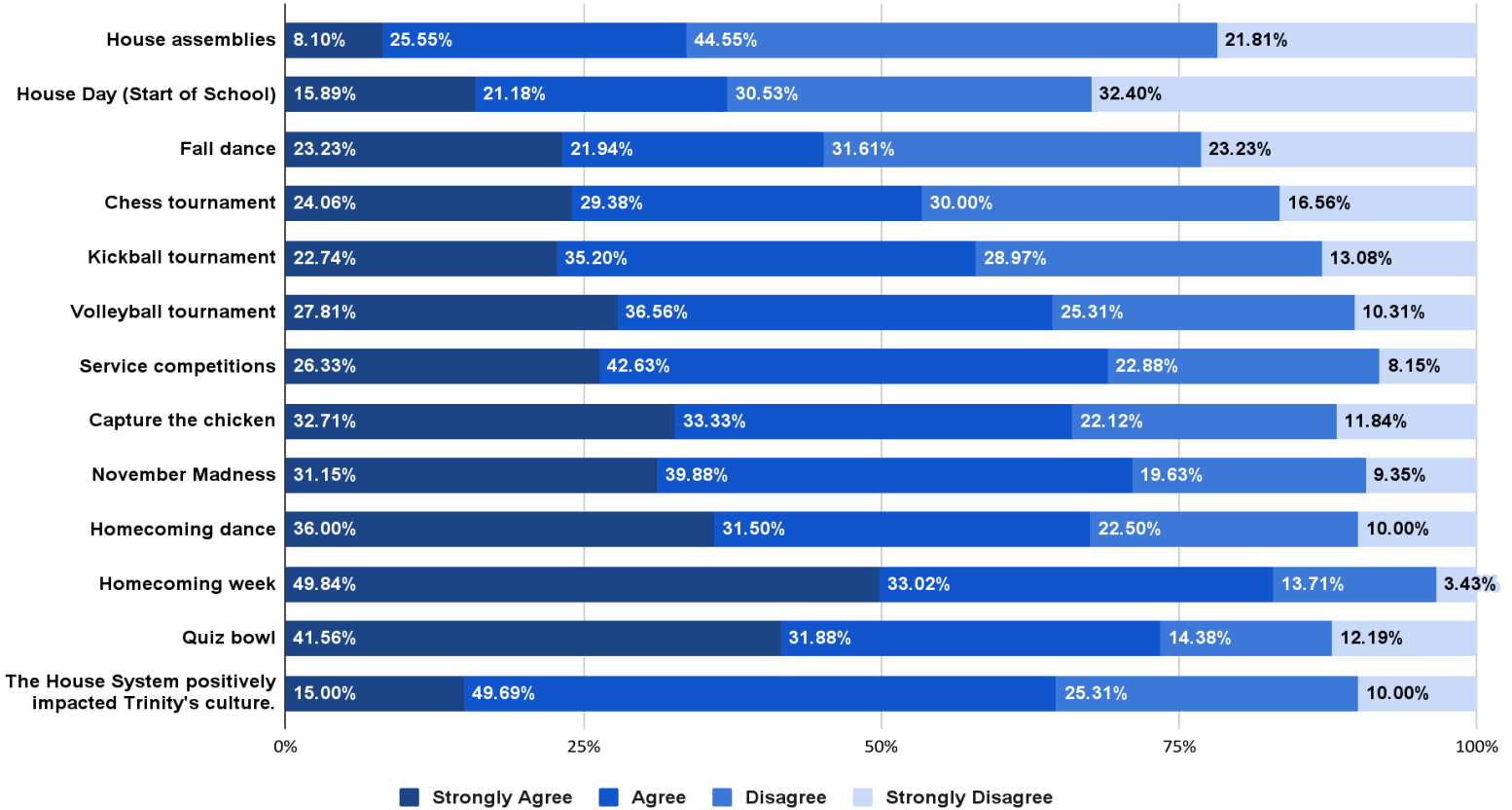
In the interviews, administrators also acknowledged the desire to have a variety of options when it came to the house events and tournaments. It can be a difficult challenge to balance sports versus non-sports themed events, because it can add a different kind of pressure. Mr. Fellows explained, “We've added a house debate tournament. There were kids that got to shine that we [normally] wouldn't see. The hardest thing about doing non-sports related tournaments is that it's harder to get buy-in from students. [For example in the debate tournament], it's pressuring you to stand up in front of 400 kids doing a debate” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication,

October 17, 2023). While this can be a difficult area to figure out, the administrators appreciated the student feedback and are seeking ways to respond to draw in as many students as possible to the events.

According to student and faculty descriptive survey responses, both groups overwhelmingly found the house structure as beneficial to the school and had a positive impact on culture. Although students expressed a negative opinion of house assemblies, House Day, and the Fall Dance, the remainder of the events, coupled with other student feedback, indicated that the house structure met the intended culture outcome. Faculty feedback demonstrated similar findings and expressed that the house system had positive effects on the school's sense of community and belonging, as well as an appreciation for communication about the system itself, and upcoming events, expectations, etc. Overall the school met the logic model outcome to Increase House Structure and Culture through establishing a system that both student and faculty appreciated and brought benefits to the school.

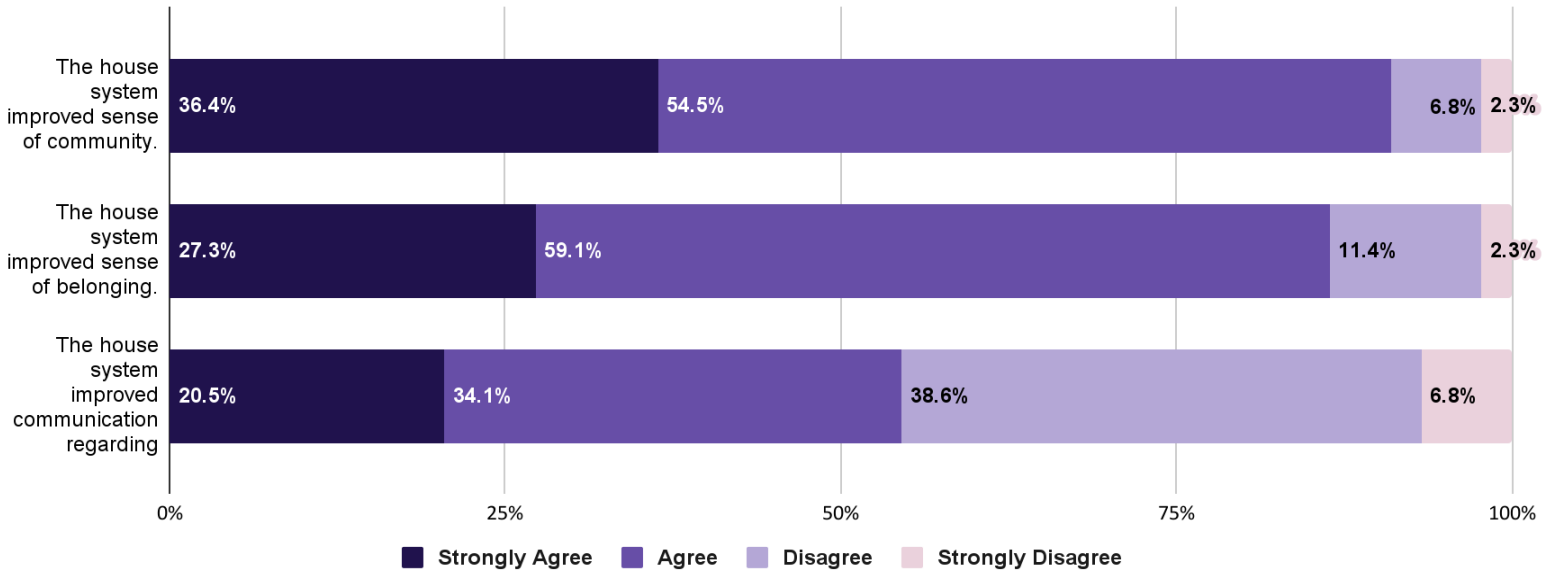
**Figure 9**

*Student Survey Items Aligned to Improve House Structure and Culture*



**Figure 10**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to Improve House Structure and Culture*



***Increase Student Leadership Development Opportunities***

According to a review of the student and faculty open-ended surveys, descriptive statistics responses, and the administrator interviews, the house system provided students with increased leadership development opportunities. Under the house system, the number of student leadership positions went from 24 under the previous student government model to 72 positions. There are three established roles that students can serve in: form reps, house mentors, and prefects, who serve on the student leadership team (SLT). There is one boy and one girl elected by each form to serve as the form reps, totaling 48 positions. There are three house mentors, chosen by the Head of House, and are students who represent one of the following values—truth, character, or service—and help guide fellow students to embody those values. Finally, the prefects are junior or senior students nominated by the entire upper school faculty and staff to serve as on the SLT and assist in

organizing student activities, such as homecoming, and provide leadership to fellow students and represent the student perspective to the faculty.

In the open-ended survey feedback, students acknowledged that there were far more opportunities to serve in leadership roles. One student shared, “There are many more ways to get involved in student leadership.” While many appreciated the increased number of ways to serve, many students also expressed dissatisfaction with the way that students could be nominated to serve in a leadership team. For example, one student explained, “The SLT (House Leadership) selection is unfair and to a lot of the student body, it appears as if it is a popularity contest to be selected.” Students expressed a desire to have more input into the nomination process and that Trinity should, “put student leadership back into the hands of the students.” In addition, students expressed that that faculty did not know how to use the form reps effectively, leading to mixed results. A student noted, “Having a more specific role for form reps would help in building community. If form reps could organize more things or be in charge of more activities, that would help develop a better community within forms.”

Faculty responses in the open-ended surveys aligned similarly with student feedback. They also appreciated the ways in which students could get involved and noted a positive change under the house system, with one member sharing, “I have liked to see the SLT lead in ways that are greater than previous years.” Although the faculty had a positive response overall to the increase in student leadership opportunities, they also expressed a desire to have more specific training for all student leaders, but particularly form reps, as there was a lack of clear understanding for what role they filled in form. A faculty member explained, “Our student leaders need more training, support, and assistance in knowing how to lead younger students.” and that TCS needed a “more precise plan for expectations of student leaders (primarily Form reps).”

In the administrator interviews, they also believed that the house system provided students with far more opportunities to participate in leadership roles. They explained that the SLT was an intentional desire to move away from the former student government model where all students voted to elect their representatives (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). From their perspective, that had turned into a popularity contest with only a handful of students doing the work (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Mr. Fellows explained, “I sent out a survey to everyone from our maintenance guys all the way up to the head of school. We interviewed the students and asked them questions about spiritual leadership and their workload. Then based on that, we made the elections of the SLT” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). By changing the model of leadership nominations, it ensured that the burden of responsibility would be more equally shared across the leadership team and that faculty could better assess students’ ability to participate in and effectively lead through staff nominations and interviews.

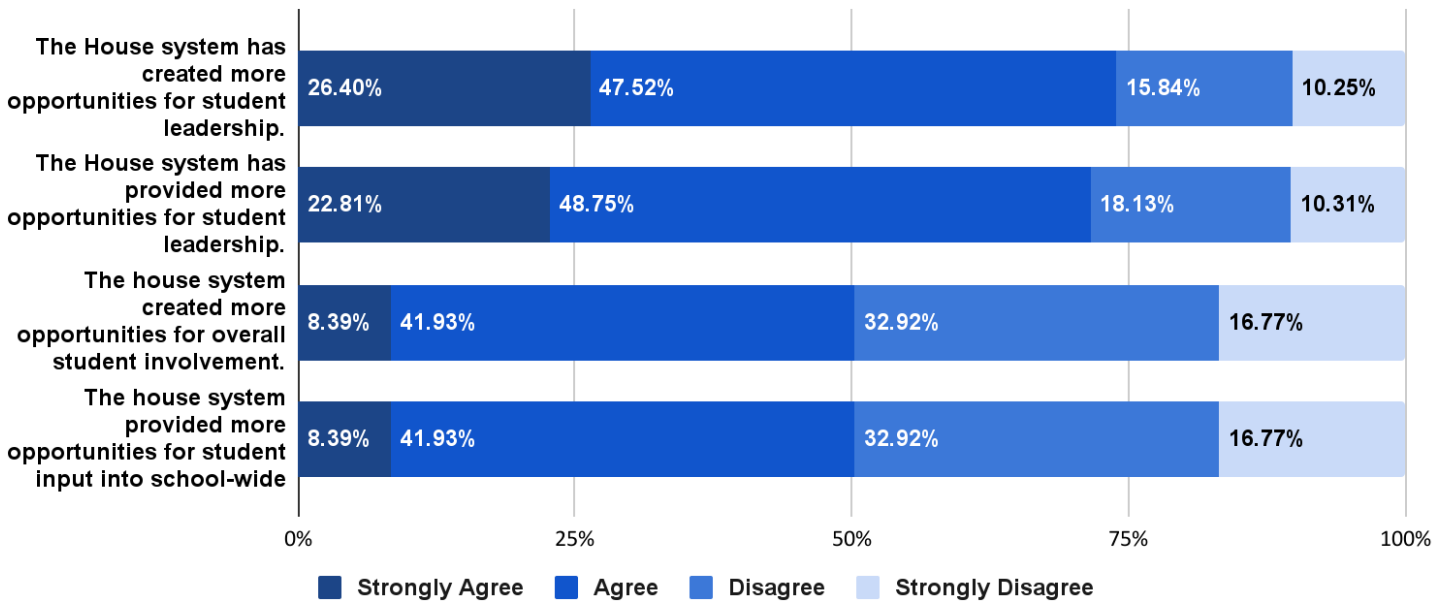
Mr. Fellows the biggest growth area he had was in how to best use the form reps (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). The administrators appreciated that the form reps did not have a clear understanding of their role during the first year of the house system. Mr. Fellows shared that for the 2023-2024 school year, “my biggest growth area is incorporating the form reps more evenly. I’m pouring a lot more of my time and attention into building up and training those 48 form reps. I think last year, they felt like they were the forgotten children. I’m doing training sessions with them, so now they know what to do. They’re they’re taking responsibility” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

Both the student and faculty descriptive statistics responses offered further data on the success of increasing student leadership opportunities. Students overwhelmingly agreed that the

house system had created more leadership positions and provided more opportunities for students to be involved in leadership roles. Similarly, faculty also believed that the house system provided more opportunities for overall student involvement. Although students and faculty noted areas of improvement for the leadership positions, the school succeeded in achieving the outcome of increasing the number of positions available to students.

**Figure 11**

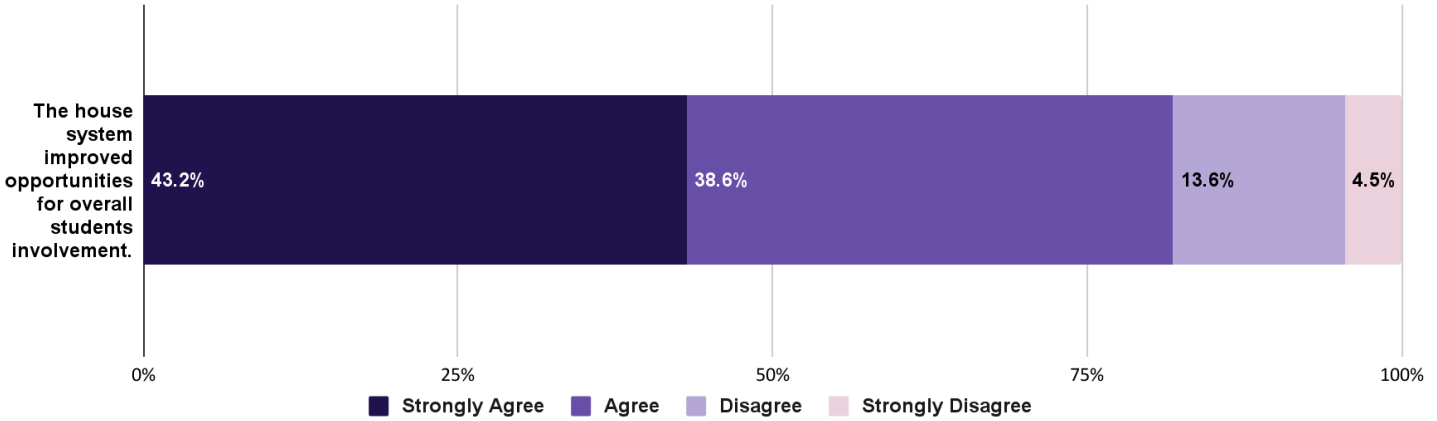
*Student Survey Items Aligned to Increase Student Leadership Development Opportunities*





**Figure 12**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to Increase Student Leadership Development Opportunities*



***Cultivate Smaller Communities Through Daily Grade Form Levels***

The house system specifically grew smaller communities within the daily form levels, where students in the same house and grade meet together first thing in the morning. In a review of both the student and faculty surveys, descriptive statistics, and the administrator interviews, TCS successfully achieved this outcome, particularly in the relationships between students and their form advisor. Both students and faculty heralded the opportunity to spend time together and develop close and meaningful relationships with other students and their form advisor.

In the open-ended survey feedback, students praised the inclusion of form and seminar, including those that derided other parts of the house system. One student concluded, “Form and seminar are the only good parts of the house system.” For students, it allowed them to form relationships with others in their grade and house, and provided a routine start to each day. Because of the focus on relationships and spiritual development rather than academics, form became a safe space for students to ease into their day, and to care for one another on a deeper level. One student illuminated that the surprising blessing of the house system was, “my form

teacher and our form's chemistry. I have grown so close and learned a lot about the people in my form and got to learn and experience a lot of things with them, as well as just the forms and seminars where we laughed about things.” Another student explained that the house system helped with the challenge of, “feeling that trinity is all about academics. To wake up and go straight to first period only to take a test is rough. Going to form at the beginning of the day really sets everything up.”

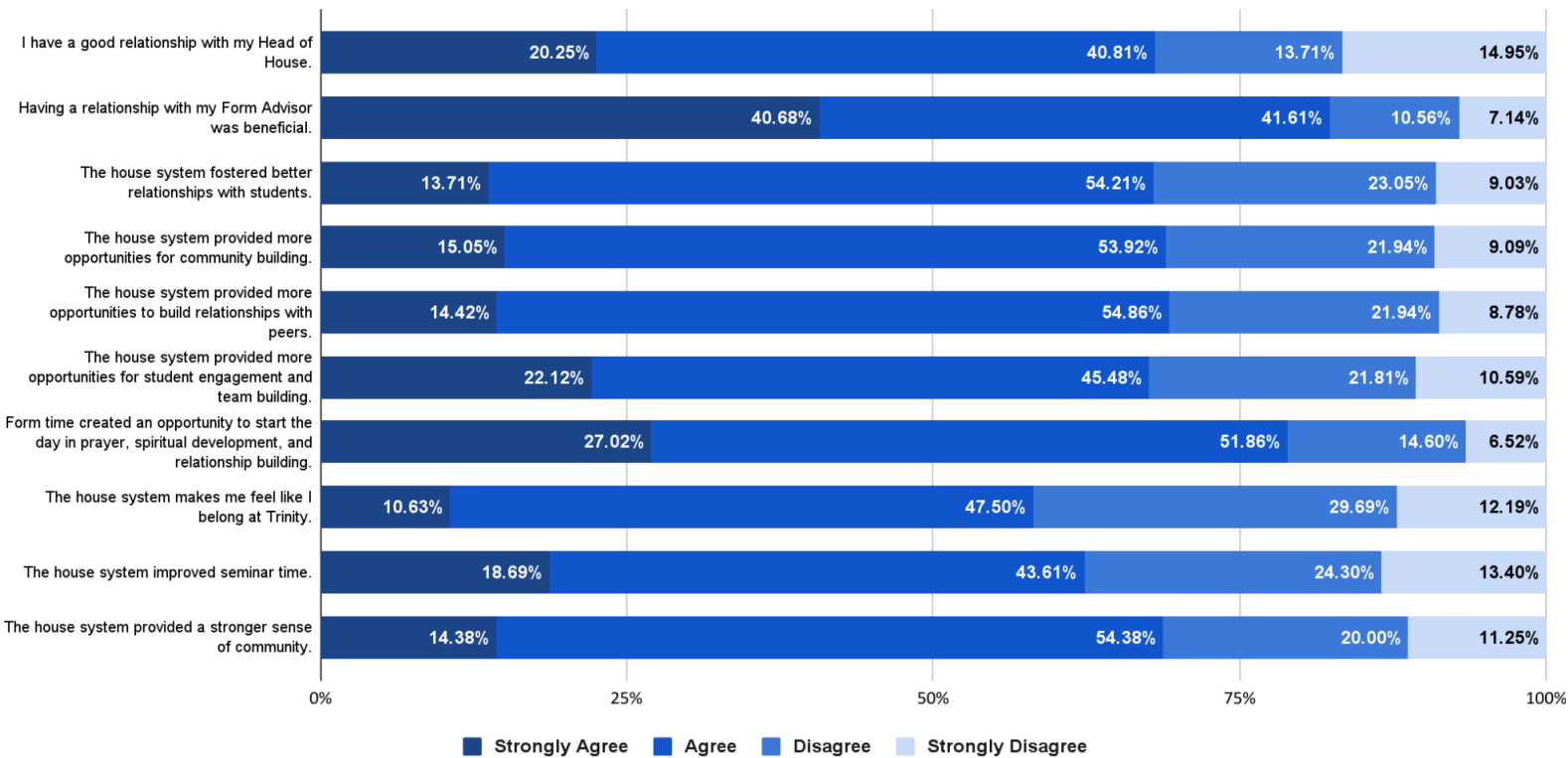
Faculty echoed the same sentiments in their open-ended feedback. Nearly all faculty praised the use of form times as incredibly important in the development of smaller communities within the school. One faculty member expressed, “Community building has been the most effective use of form time.” Students formed relationships with one another and it became a safe environment for many to be more vulnerable and in community with others. Another faculty member conveyed, “It has been a great opportunity for students to have a firm foundation upon which to start each day. I have seen the relationships within my Form grow, and they have grown accustomed to praying with and for each other. I love form time and think it is a great addition to the school day.” Form time allowed students to be known by their teachers and fellow students and the regular, predictable time each morning has benefited students by giving them “a great chance to catch their breath and have a moment to be seen, rather than jumping into academic time.”

Student responses also provided descriptive statistics that indicate TCS successfully achieved this outcome. The data demonstrates that found the house structure provided a meaningful impact to cultivating smaller communities and spiritual/relational development through forms. Students appreciated fostering better relationships with peers, and that the house system positively impacted the TCS community and made students feel like they belonged at Trinity. In

addition, students also found the relationship with the form advisor particularly beneficial, which all contributed to TCS achieving the intended outcome.

**Figure 13**

*Student Survey Responses Aligned to Cultivating Smaller Community Through Daily Grade Level Forms*



In the administrator interviews, they also believed that the house system served a key role in cultivating smaller communities within the school. Mr. Fellow reiterated that the goal of the house system is to provide those smaller communities because “there [was] no time for [students] to check in with a teacher at the start of the day (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Ms. Miller further shared that through the house system, these smaller communities are happening organically. There were students who felt disconnected in a

grade that was further disconnected from one another and the school. Kids were withdrawing last year left and right. These students got together and asked the TCS administration if they could get together and pray for each other, and during one session, 39 students showed up (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Ms. Miller concluded that "[Students are] praying over each other in small groups. It's happening, and [I'm] just giv[ing] them space. They are doing it with each other" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023).

### ***Increased Awareness of Accountability to Following the School Rules in Daily Form Time***

According to a review of the student and faculty open-ended surveys, descriptive statistics responses, and the administrator interviews, the school achieved this outcome; however the data provided interesting feedback on the perception of success from the student and faculty perspective. According to student's open-ended responses, they did not see much impact on peer accountability, and that it may have helped in some ways, but that they did not clearly see the impact. According to student responses in the descriptive statistics, the house system did not improve dress code accountability, but it did improve student's perception of their own accountability to those in their house and respect for others in their grade, as well as an improvement in fostering peer accountability. While students did not indicate an observation of improved peer accountability, they did note an improvement in personal accountability when asked that specific question.

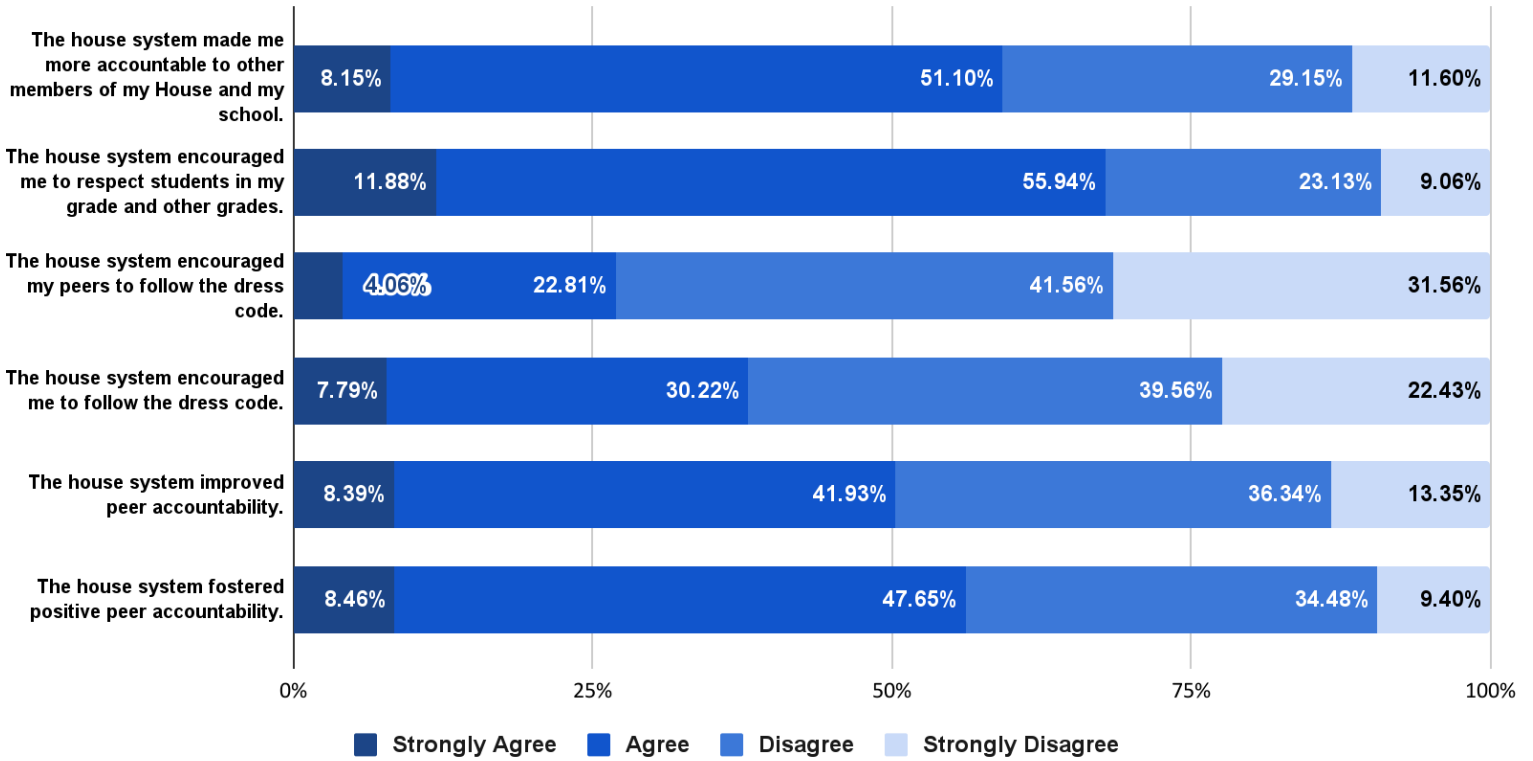
Faculty in the open-ended survey did not directly address increased awareness of school rules. There were several questions in the descriptive statistics indicating that TCS achieved this outcome. According to the data, faculty noted a marked improvement in positive peer accountability, as well as a positive impact on the number of disciplinary actions and adherence to

dress code. For both students, and faculty, the house system did have an impact on adherence to school rules.

In the administrator interviews, they shared additional data that was not available to other faculty. Mr. Fellows noted that in the 2021-2022 school year, as an assistant principal, many of the teachers were drowning with behavior challenges and disruptions in class (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). Because of his position, he was the principal that received those calls for assistance from the teacher. He further shared that during the 2022-2023 school year, which was the first year under the house system, “a data point that you wouldn't get in the survey was the behavior was drastically down on big behavior[al] things and suspensions. We can track how many emails we get from faculty and staff members to do with behavior. We were drowning” (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). From the administrator’s perspective (e.g. those that served as a principal and were responsible for addressing student behavior), they noted a substantive decrease in behavioral issues and students following the rules, which they directly attributed to the house system.

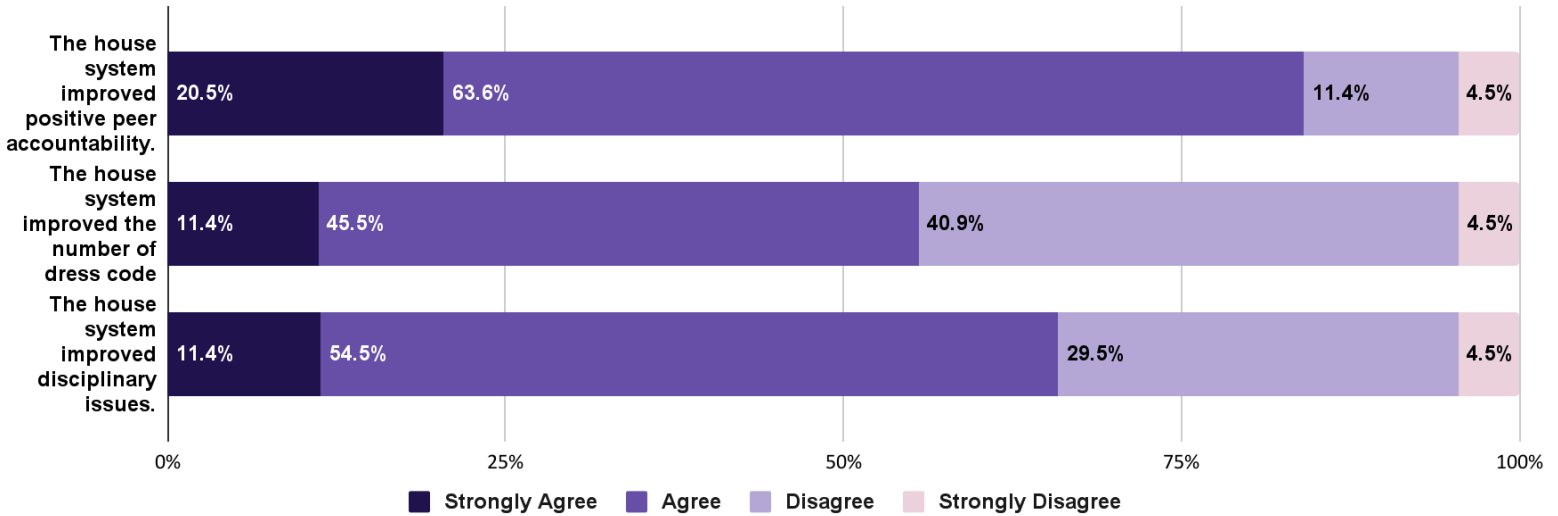
**Figure 14**

*Student Survey Responses Aligned to Increased Awareness of Accountability to Following the School Rules in Daily Form Time*



**Figure 15**

*Faculty Responses Aligned to Increased Awareness of Accountability to Following School Rules in Daily Form Time*



***Increase Service and Connection Opportunities for Students Within House***

According to a review of the student and faculty open-ended surveys and the administrator interviews, the school achieved the outcome of increasing service and connection opportunities for students within their house. The house system provided a structure of intentionality that benefited many students. In the open response feedback, students noted a variety of specific ways the house system created connective opportunities, especially the way in which it brings people together from a variety of backgrounds to form new and sometimes surprising friendships. One student shared that through the house system, “We are now spending time with people we wouldn't necessarily see other ways, so [a surprising blessing is] getting to know new people.” Many students shared a similar view that the house system brought together many diverse groups and offered an opportunity to expand friends' circles in ways not possible in previous years.

Students also appreciated the opportunity to complete school service projects together—the Souper Bowl and Operation Christmas Child. These are two projects focused on encouraging students to serve others and give back to the community. The Souper Bowl collected good donations for families in need in the local community during the holidays, and Operation Christmas Child allowed students to fill shoe boxes with presents for kids who would otherwise not receive Christmas gifts. Both of these events focused on a desire by the school for students to serve others and put their faith into action. While some students called these out specifically as a good opportunity to serve, many responses expressed a desire for my ways to serve both inside and outside of the school.

In faculty open-ended responses, they reflected a similar theme to the students, appreciating the opportunities that students have had to connect with one another in different ways through house competitions and events, to the daily forms. In particular, they noted the quiet places where students could get work done. One faculty member expressed, “It has been good to have a consistent space where I know the students who are in my seminar. Some of them do work, some watch YouTube, but it's been very calm and structured, which I think is a success.” The faculty responses appreciated the opportunity for students to have a predictable space to be able to focus and get work done and viewed this as beneficial to helping increase connection opportunities for students.

In the interviews with administrators, they shared a great appreciation for the fact that students desired more opportunities to serve. They noted that they had seen this feedback as well, and while they would love to incorporate more service opportunities for students, it is difficult to implement given all that is already going on at Trinity. Mr. Fellows explained, “I love that they want this, but Trinity does a lot already. There were so many things going on that actually form



advisors were coming to me saying "I'm asking parents for things every five seconds" (K. Miller and C. Fellows, personal communication, October 17, 2023). While administrators would like to do more to support additional service events for these students, they need to figure out a way to make it scalable, so that it fits within the existing event calendar and does not overwhelm students, faculty, or parents.

Within the feedback, there was a clear expression of an appreciation for the current opportunities to connect with others and participate in the existing service projects. For faculty, they particularly appreciated the ways in which the house system created a quiet space for students to connect and complete work. For students, they enjoyed all of the new and diverse friendships that formed from the house system, as well as the events, competitions, and specific service opportunities available to them. The house structure did increase service and connection opportunities for students relationally and practically, achieving the intended outcome.

### ***Summary of Findings on TCS Logic Model Outcomes***

Through an examination of student and faculty feedback in open-responses surveys, descriptive statistics, and administrator interviews, I examined each logic model outcome the school hoped to achieve within the first year of the house system. The data demonstrated that TCS overwhelmingly achieved each of the intended outcomes, and in some areas, has already applied lessons learned for the first year to improve the model going into the second year under the house system. Based on this evidence, it appears the house system positively impacted all of the stated outcomes in the school's initial logic model.

## **Recommendations**

In the section that follows, I provide six recommendations for consideration to improve the house system based on a review of the available data. In some instances, the school has already taken steps to implement recommendations; however, these recommendations can potentially further areas of growth for the school and aid others as they think through implementing a house system. These recommendations reflect the feedback from Trinity students and faculty and focus on their areas of concern.

### **Recommendation 1: Focus on the creation of intention, inter-grade community.**

While students appreciated the intentional relationships that form and houses provided, they expressed a desire to have more intentional interaction across individual grade levels. This could be accomplished in a number of ways including through reimplementation of Day Away or allowing students more flexibility in choosing houses, switching houses, or more flexibility to interact across houses. TCS administrators have already taken steps to address this recommendation based on feedback from students. They are looking for ways to continue to improve the relationships for students within grades and recognize the importance of fostering not just the vertical relationships through the house system, but also horizontally across grades and houses.

### **Recommendation 2: Elevate the role of form reps so students feel empowered to have a voice in leadership.**

Students largely appreciated the opportunity to have more options to participate in leadership roles; however, they struggled to feel like they had a voice in the process that mattered. By elevating the role of form reps and more clearly defining their roles, this can help students feel

like they have more of a say in the elections of student leaders. TCS administrators recognized that under the first year of the house system, form reps did not have clear expectations or an understanding of their role. They are taking proactive steps to meet with the form reps more regularly and ensuring that form advisors can use them more effectively to empower students to have a voice in the system.

**Recommendation 3: Continue to seek creative ways to engage students on the dress code.**

Students expressed frustration with the dress code and expressed a desire for more casual dress days. Administrators appreciated the student feedback and shared that the dress code remains an area for improvement. The school took steps to involve students more in the dress code process, including making them a part of an improvement team that introduced new dress code options, as well as providing more options for hair styles and shoes. In addition, school administrators held chapel and other smaller sessions with the upper school students to discuss the dress code and hear student feedback. Uniforms will remain a requirement at the school, and the administration can continue to seek creative ways to involve students in understanding the reason for the dress code and help standardize some of the enforcement across faculty members.

**Recommendation 4: Incorporate additional non-athletic events into the House tournaments.**

Students enjoyed many of the events (dances, quiz bowl, service opportunities) within the house system, but some expressed a desire for more non-athletic event options. TCS can seek to incorporate additional events that are both athletic and non-athletic in nature to reach a broader set of students. Administrators recognized this desire, and incorporated a debate into the house events, which provided an opportunity for different students to shine. While there is a desire to do more events that focus on non-athletic skill sets, finding options that can involve a wide number of

students remains a challenge; however, the school is continuing to reevaluate the options available to ensure they reach the broadest number of students.

**Recommendation 5: Help teachers better understand the requirements of serving in a house leadership role.**

Faculty serving in leadership roles developed meaningful relationships with students; however, serving as a form teacher required more work than expected. TCS can provide more up front knowledge and expectations to teachers to help them understand the level of commitment required of these positions. TCS also took steps to address this recommendation and focused their adaptive goal on teacher wellbeing. While it is an evolving recommendation, they recognize that with the amount of work required for advisors and others serving in leadership roles, it is important to ensure that they are fostering faculty's sense of wellbeing. They have invested in teachers this year through more formal mentorship, yoga classes, worship and devotionals, and other opportunities to encourage faculty members.

**Recommendation 6: Formalize the key components of form instruction and help advisors understand the variety of ways that form can look.**

Faculty expressed some frustration with the differences between the forms. This led to inconsistent application of rules and expectations of students. TCS can help formalize form instruction and provide faculty with more resources prior to the school year to help them understand what a typical form looks like and level set student behavior (such as visiting other forms and dress code policies) to ensure a uniform approach to policies.

TCS administrators appreciated this feedback from the faculty members and took steps to address some of the concerns. Administrators also shared that they desire for forms to look

different, based on teacher and student personality. One method of addressing this recommendation was to provide form advisors with a copy of the same devotional, and to meet intentionally with the form advisors to help them understand what the school wanted form to accomplish, and how this could look different for each teacher. The combined approach of a shared devotional and intentional mentorship for form advisors seems to be providing the meaningful direction those faculty members desired, and is a good area for future exploration of how to mentor faculty leaders in the house

## Conclusions

This research examined student perception of belonging at Trinity Christian School, based on an analysis of student and faculty end of your survey data and administrator interviews. TCS established the house system during the 2022-2023 school year in an effort to foster student belonging and create a positive learning environment for their students. Through this work, I identified three key indicators of belonging in schools—supportive adult, belonging to a positive peer group, and school environment. In addition, I also examined the schools logic model to assess short term outcomes based on their implementation of the house system.

Through my research, I determined that the house system fostered students' sense of belonging aligned to the three indicators identified through my literature review. In addition, the school successfully achieved each of the shop short term outcomes identified in their logic model. The research revealed areas of particular success, which included the development of relationships between students and dedicated faculty, forming of new and deepening of existing relationships, and the ability for students to participate in new opportunities to include leadership roles and house events. The research also provided areas of growth potential for the school, particularly around the dress code, expectations of the student and faculty leadership within the house system, and a desire for more intentional inter-grade relationships amongst students.

As this was a study on the first year of implementation, I could only assess the school based on the available data. Areas for future inquiry could include an assessment of previous survey data to determine successful means of fostering student belonging prior to the house system, sorting data by grade to understand specific feedback from each of the upper school grade levels, and conducting a multi-year study on the house system at the end of the school year to identify trends over time. Research could also include additional interview data and focus on

dedicated engagement with students and additional faculty to get more detailed feedback that may not be readily apparent in the survey. Overall, the house system did meet the indicators of belonging, based on student perception, and helped provide a meaningful structure by which students felt more connected to one another and the school.

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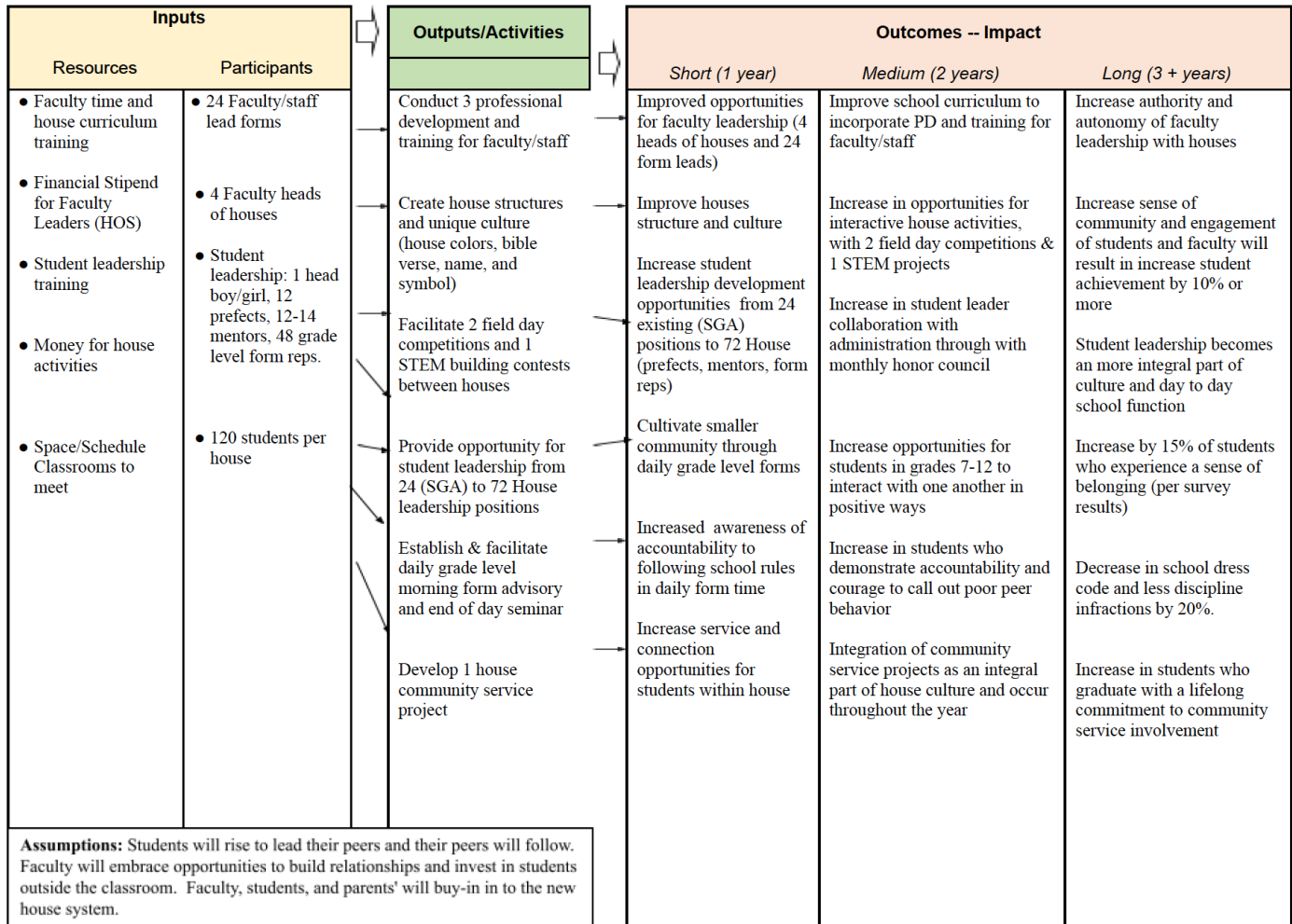
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Appendices: Instruments

Appendix A: Trinity Christian School Logic Model



**Appendix B: Student Survey Descriptive Statistics Indicator Alignment**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Sense of Belonging Indicator</b>	<b>Logic Model Outcome</b>
The house system has fostered better relationships with students.	321	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The house system provided more opportunities for community building.	319	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The House system has provided more opportunities to build relationships with peers.	319	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The House system has created more opportunities for overall student involvement.	321	Belonging to a positive peer group	Increase student leadership development opportunities
House events provided more opportunities for student engagement and team building.	321	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
Form time created an opportunity to start the day in prayer, spiritual development, and relationship building.	322	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The House system has made me more accountable to other members of my House and my school.	319	Belonging to a positive peer group	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The House system has encouraged me to respect students in my grade and other grades.	320	Belonging to a positive peer group	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The House system has provided a stronger sense of community.	320	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The House system makes me feel like I belong at Trinity.	320	Belonging to a positive peer group	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The House system has created more opportunities for student leadership.	322	School environment	Increase student leadership development opportunities
The House system has provided more opportunities for student leadership.	320	School environment	Increase student leadership development opportunities

The House system has provided more opportunities for student input into school-wide decisions.	322	School environment	Increase student leadership development opportunities
The House system has improved seminar time.	322	School environment	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
The House system has positively impacted Trinity's culture.	320	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
The House system has fostered positive peer accountability.	319	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The House system has improved peer accountability.	322	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
Volleyball tournament	320	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Service competitions: Operation Christmas Child/Souper bowl drive	319	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
November Madness	321	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Capture the chicken	321	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Quiz bowl	320	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Kickball tournament	321	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Chess tournament	320	School environment	Improve houses structure and culture
Homecoming week	321	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Homecoming dance	200	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
The House system has encouraged my peers to follow the dress code.	320	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The House system has encouraged me to follow the dress code.	321	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time

House assemblies	321	School environment	Improve houses structure and culture
Beginning of the year House Day (formerly Day Away)	321	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
Fall dance	155	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
I have a good relationship with my Head of House.	321	Supportive adult	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms
Having a relationship with my Form Advisor was beneficial.	322	Supportive adult	Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms

**Appendix C: Faculty Survey Descriptive Statistics Indicator Alignment**

<b>Survey Item</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Sense of Belonging Indicator</b>	<b>Logic Model Outcome</b>
The house system improved the sense of community.	44	Belonging to a positive peer group	Improve house structure and culture
The house system improved opportunities for overall students' involvement.	44	Belonging to a positive peer group	Increase student leadership development opportunities
The house system improved communication regarding upcoming events, expectations, etc...	44	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
The house system improved disciplinary issues.	44	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The house system improved communication with administration.	44	School environment	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership
The house system improved communication with your Head of House.	44	School environment	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership
The house system improved overall workload.	44	School environment	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership
The house system improved positive peer accountability.	44	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The house system improved the number of dress code violations.	44	School environment	Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time
The house system improved opportunities for faculty leadership.	44	School environment	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership
The house system improved sense of belonging	44	School environment	Improve house structure and culture
The house system improved relationships with students.	44	Supportive adult	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership
The house system improved collective student mentorship.	44	Supportive adult	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership
The house system improved time to address student needs.	44	Supportive adult	Improved opportunities for faculty leadership



**Appendix D: Sense of Belonging Qualitative Indicator Alignment**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Supportive adult	School staff that dedicate their time, interest, attention, and emotional support to students.	It helped create a better relationship with form teacher
Belonging to a positive peer group	A stable network of peers.	I grew closer to my friends.
School environment	The physical environment and psychosocial climate	Building community amongst different friend groups to create better relationships in the grade and having a communal competition people can bond over.

**Appendix E: Trinity Christian School Logic Model Outcome Alignment**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Improved opportunities for faculty leadership	Dedicated faculty in leadership roles within the house system	Faculty member served as head of house or form lead
Improve houses structure and culture	House colors, bible verse, name, and symbol, or other areas improved as a result of the house system	Unique characteristics intended to identify a house as a differentiator (mention of house colors, name, attribute, etc.), or specific feedback related to house impact on the school environment
Increase student leadership development opportunities	Develop new leadership roles for students within the house system	House leadership roles for students (prefects, mentors, form reps)
Cultivate smaller community through daily grade level forms	Intentional community in smaller groups of students and faculty through regular meetings with grades and their student leader	Form, grade level interaction, small group community
Increased awareness of accountability to following school rules in daily form time	Student and faculty leadership highlight importance of following school rules in form time	Accountability, following rules, better understanding of rules
Increase service and connection opportunities for students within house	Students engaged in service opportunities as demonstrated through earning of service hours	Service hours, community service, service opportunities