

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the district implements any of the equity audit findings, the following is suggested for implementation:

1. District leadership distribute full report to BOE members.
2. District leadership distribute the Executive Summary (or full report) to DELT members.
3. District leadership adopt all equity audit findings utilizing an accountability framework.
4. District leadership create, implement, and progress monitor equity goal each year with accountable, measurable, and transparent features.
5. District leadership maintain the existence of DELT to collaboratively develop and progress monitor equity goals.

The findings and recommendations in this Equity Audit report are not exhaustive. It is the district's responsibility to determine next steps, and continuously progress monitor and improve toward systemic equity. Districts committed to equity understand that it involves time and resources to consistently advance systemic equity. As a practice of the Equity Audit, all findings are categorized using the *Five Strands of Systemic Equity*®. It aids districts to develop an accountability framework that is adaptable. Each of these strands are equally critical and should be pursued simultaneously. With copyright licensing facilitation and support, the district may seek additional auditor support. The district does not have to utilize the aforementioned accountability framework; however, it is encouraged that the district pursues a research-based structure that can support the multiple, systemic ways it decides to advance equity. A plan of action that allows for engagement and systemic decision-making can lend itself towards an equity lens. It is typically recommended that the district *not* pursue all of the equity findings immediately. The district could engage a prioritization of each of the findings and determine a timeline that best meets their needs. Ultimately, for the district to shift their practices with an equity commitment, they must be constantly engaged in stakeholder awareness from historically marginalized communities to identify equitable access and opportunities that benefit all students.

**SYSTEMS**

To ensure a systemic and continuous development toward advancing equity within all policies, processes, procedures, initiatives, decision-making, and fiscal responsibility.

**1.1** DEVELOP CLEAR LANGUAGE AROUND EQUITY, AND EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE IT TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

Findings & Recommendations

DELT members unanimously remarked they were at the beginning stages of developing common language around equity. A review of the district’s website showed they have an established definition on diversity, are welcoming to historically marginalized identities and have grounded beliefs, values and guiding principles around cultural responsiveness. This should be acknowledged as it speaks to the district’s work to clearly communicate its commitment to students. This understanding or acceptance, however, is not consistent among some staff and families as indicated during the focus groups. It may behoove the district to develop an equity definition or direct stakeholders to a glossary of terms related to equity as occasional, popular misconceptions around Critical Race Theory emerge. This finding should be the first action step following the audit. It can aid the district to reaffirm its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. The district may prefer to develop its own definition or adopt an established one. Either way, it will be important for the district to communicate that equity aims to remove barriers that prohibit equal access and opportunity to all students. Grounding such a definition may be helpful as the district develops intentional equity goals. DELT may be in the best position to research equity interpretations. They can identify language that aligns with their commitment to diversity, embracing all identities and principles. It is also recommended that the district post this communication on its website, student handbooks, job postings, school buildings and during in-house facilitation of PDs.

Research

Being clear on the definition and interpretation of educational equity is crucial and a framework should be employed to purposely disrupt inequities (Stembridge, 2020). It is critical that equity is not loosely defined or unknown, and that the district positions itself to develop reflection and actions to combat systemic biases, whether intentional or unintentional (Aguilar, 2020). An equity lens to decision-making will serve all students in meeting their whole needs (Roegman, et al, 2020; Bocala & Holman, 2021). School leaders have the capacity and responsibility to lead their staff in developing a vision and common language aimed to achieve equity (Diem & Welton, 2021).

**1.2** IMPLEMENT INTENTIONAL, MEASURABLE, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT EQUITY GOALS.

Findings & Recommendations

Currently, there is no equity action plan or similar that includes specific, measurable goals that are equity driven when it comes to processes, procedures, curriculum, discipline, and professional development. A plan of action on equity will clearly foster opportunities to address multiple areas of concerns brought forth during the focus groups such as class size, consistent practice of data reviews, gender neutral considerations, dual language

programming, gifted/talented access and opportunities, and proactive solutions to bullying and incidents of identity biases. With the collaboration of DELT, additional equity-focused goals can be developed and implemented that have not been identified by this audit.

Research

Consistent, reliable collection of quantitative and qualitative data allows critical analysis that can enlighten the district toward transformative shifts (Edley, et al, 2019). Through the implementation of a specific equity plan, the district may readily identify indicators to progress-monitor its culture and climate shift. A design process is feasible through an equity plan, and not a typical districtwide strategic plan. Equity must be systemic to ensure collective responsibility in disrupting inequities especially inequities encountered by historically marginalized groups (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Shields, 2018). Scholarship informs how these foundational frameworks to interrogate educational equity in hopes to disrupt injustices particularly those experienced by historically excluded groups can aid in mitigating inequities (Aguilar, 2020). Through transparency efforts and systemic plans, the district positions itself to develop collaborative, authentic actions to advance equity and intentionally disrupt explicit and implicit forms of -isms (Gorski, 2018; Bocala & Holman, 2021; Diem & Welton, 2021). Consistent, reliable collection of quantitative and qualitative data allows critical analysis that can enlighten the district toward transformative shifts (Edley, et al, 2019; Shields, 2018).

<b>1.3</b>	<b>INCREASE EMPLOYMENT RECRUITMENT EFFORTS TO ATTRACT HIGHLY QUALIFIED, RACIALLY DIVERSE AND/OR MALE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS.</b>
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Findings & Recommendations

Over the last four years, the teachers and administrators at CCSD 46 predominately identify as White females while BIPOC teachers and administrators have decreased in the same timeframe. The district may consider working on its branding, and critically evaluate how it is viewed among its current staff. An employee satisfactory survey, for instance, may be a viable option to gauge staff perception. In other words, potential candidates are often savvy, and learn about a district’s reputation, and support of its teachers and the community through multiple sources such as social media and teacher networks. If the district has a poor outlook as one that places extraneous burdens on its bilingual staff, it can deter employment interest. The challenge of a diverse school staff is one that most districts across the country face, and there is no immediate solution in sight. It will take time to diversify a staff, and the district will need to continue its efforts to make that slow progress. From *Grow Your Own* opportunities, to guaranteeing job interviews of alumni, from intentional recruitment, to building a reputation of a desired workplace, the district can anticipate a long haul in these efforts. An immediate consideration, if not already executed, is including equity-focused questions during job interviews to ensure potential employees share the district’s commitment to diversity and working with a diverse student population. The BOE racial demographic has been predominately White in the last four years, and a more diverse BOE can be encouraging to current diverse staff, their students and families as well as potential candidates. Furthermore, the low male staff represented in the data deserves attention. Approximately half of the student population identify as male, and efforts for young people

to see themselves in the adults charged with teaching them in the formal setting of school can be impactful in their learning, academic engagement and whole child development. It is not intended for the school district to aim for the staff demographic to represent the exact percentage of male students but to be mindful of high-quality candidates that are males.

Research

The benefits of a diverse staff include increased positive adult-student relationships, higher student engagement, meaningful connections to the school, mitigating access and expectation gaps, as well as improved intergroup relations, role-modeling and combating of stereotypes and biases (Wells, et al, 2016; TeachPlus, 2019; Stenbridge, 2020; Howard, 2010; Edley et al, 2019; Dugan, 2021). When cultural mismatch occurs, cultural misunderstandings may also contribute to unfavorable assumptions that impact impacting student learning and efficacy (Taylor, 2021).

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

To intentionally embed equity-driven pedagogy and practices in the curriculum, resources, instructional approaches, use and consideration of assessments and academic programming for the purpose of advancing equity for and among each student.

**2.1** EMBED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICES IN ALL CURRICULUM.

Findings & Recommendations

There are teachers that infuse culturally responsive pedagogy in their practices as mentioned by all stakeholders during the focus groups; however, it is not a universal occurrence as reinforced by the needs assessment. Additional supports, reflection on one’s biases and accountability structures can aid in a uniformed approach for cultural responsiveness. The district can examine its current curricular scope and sequence for opportunities to incorporate cultural responsiveness. In other words, carefully review a curriculum, the resources, the activities, projects and formative assessments to identify culturally responsive opportunities. Working with curriculum teams, the district can collaborate with educators that culturally responsive practices, when done correctly, are not an add-on but enclosed within the fabric of pedagogy that aims to engage students in their learning, tap into their backgrounds and experiences, and amplify their critical thinking and higher order skills.

Research

Culturally responsive pedagogy must be intentional, affirming, and explicit in its practices (Hammond, 2015; Muhammad, 2020). This is not only obvious in daily practices like cultural games, poetry, song, art, and adult self-examination, but in output as well demonstrated by social justice and community-based projects (Johnson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Blankstein et al, 2016). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) lends itself to social justice by calling for transformative calibration and evidence-based intentional learning (Chardin & Novak, 2021; Fitzgerald, 2020).

**2.2** ANALYZE THE ROOT CAUSES OF ACADEMIC DISPARTITIES AMONG BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC/LATINX STUDENTS.

Findings & Recommendation

For roughly the last three years, exception during Covid-19 pandemic, the average benchmark assessment results in reading and math for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx students have consistently been the lowest compared to their Asian and White peers. A further examination to the root cause of this outcome will need to be identified especially as the district’s racial diversity increases. Failure to get a grasp with these occurrences may continue a downward trend for an eventual majority of students not meeting or exceeding performance on these benchmarks. Coupled with the average standardized assessment scores in reading and math by Black/African American and Hispanic Latinx students to that of Asian and White counterparts reveals an alarming tread of racially minoritized students underperforming. There are many rightful critiques to one-time assessments such as limited performance opportunities of student abilities, anxiety associated with high stakes testing and biased assessments; thus, a more accurate reflection of student’s everyday performance are grades and teacher feedback. It will be crucial for the

district to uphold, and continue to reinforce, it's commitment to its diverse population by safeguarding team collaboration time, PLCs and administrator awareness of classroom instruction. It will not be enough to guarantee the time for the aforementioned to take place but to maintain high expectations of instruction and engagement, to engage in difficult conversations about biases grading, to examine meaningful homework and to employ a multitude of learner modalities. Of course, this is most feasible with a reasonable class size and/or with instructional supports, inclusive Tier 1 mindsets, appropriate interventions and family support.

Research

Any hierarchical suggestion or predictability of academic performance based on race is problematic. A call for a standard of excellence from all students is foundational to any academic setting. At the same time, attention must be paid to knowledge, skills, and cultural codes that students are expected to manifest that could impact their navigation of school expectations and assessment performances (Howard, 2010; Cart & Miller, 2020). Unfair and inequitable practices, often deeply ingrained in status quo mindsets, have caused greater duress to those whose home environment may not be easier to facilitate learning (Shields, 2018).

<b>2.3</b>	<b>EXPLORE THE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCED MATH PROGRAMMING (8<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS) AMONG BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS, HISPANIC/LATINX STUDENTS AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS.</b>
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Findings & Recommendation

There are not many students in the district's advanced math programming designed for 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Of the racial/ethnic population of students that are in the program, it is a low count. For the last three years, there have been only 3 Black/African American students in the program and no more than 14 Hispanic/Latinx students in a district whose White population have steadily decreased. Black/African American students represent 5%-6% of the overall demographic while Hispanic/Latinx pupils represent 30%-35% in SY 2018-19, SY 2019-20 and SY 2020-21; but their percentage representation in gifted programming is significantly less with 2%-3% of Black/African Americans and 8%-12% of Hispanic/Latinx students. Although it is not necessarily about exact proportionalities of overall demographic to advanced math programming, the district should interrogate this disparity. Barriers such as gifted screenings, teacher recommendations, family support and scaffolded instruction in advanced math can be reasons to the lack of racial diversity in gifted programming. It is alarming that special populations are either low or non-existent in gifted programming enrollment. First, it must be acknowledged that the district has included lower SES students into advanced math programming. Clearly, the district has identified an underserved community that can be academically challenged and not be limited by their financial means. Second, the district is aware of its shortcomings as DELT members unanimously rated itself in the lowest end of the needs assessment rubric when it came to academic programming. The vulnerability and acknowledgement are important and praised, because it allows the district to identify an area of needed improvement. Whether it's establishing a continual data review process, developing a wider protocol of rigor or a process of regular academic program audits, the district would position itself in reckoning with its access to academically talented

opportunities. A final alarming revelation in the dataset analysis is that there have been no EL students in the reported three years that have been enrolled in the advanced math programming. Obviously, a language barrier is not indicative of cognitive development. In other words, a proficient English speaker is capable of rigor in a non-dominant English locale. The challenge lies in the instruction of the rigor being in English. The same low representation exists among students with an IEP when twice-exceptional pupils may be missing out on this rigorous opportunity. The district should consider academically talented opportunities in lower grades to increase its participation by the time students are ready for advanced math in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### Research

Students that believe in themselves in certain situations such as belonging to an Honors and AP class are likelier to succeed (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). A common element in schools where a large percentage of students performed at high academic levels are low expectations for students of color is considered one of the most egregious forms of structural racism in schools (; Aguilar, 2020). Yet, homogenous ability grouping reveals that Asian and White students have considerable advantages. This is a national epidemic. The Office of Civil Rights has consistently reported disproportionate representation of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx students in gifted programming, even when socioeconomic status and classroom environments are similar. This is indicative of systemic structures and individual biases that may be unintentionally selective of White and Asian students for gifted identification. There must be critical understanding of the distinction of non-bias versus anti-bias in student tracking and its impact on equity (Mickelson, 2020).

**STUDENT VOICE, CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

To consistently seek students’ feedback and experiences, and nurture a positive, authentic, and meaningful organizational culture and climate.

**3.1 | ESTABLISH A STUDENT EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE.**

Findings & Recommendations

In focus groups, students reported numerous incidents of microaggressions, biases, disrespect and exclusion based on identities. Some students indicated that adults were unaware of these situations. To cultivate a sense of belonging, the district could be proactive by developing a student equity advisory committee where frequent check-ins with students occur, anti-bullying conversations can take place and listening and responding to student concerns can be prioritized.

Research

Fostering student voice is at the heart of equity. Intentional nurturing, input and co-creation from historically marginalized students that have been harmed by educational institutions, is critical. By centering the often-negated experiences of marginalized populations, it emphasizes overdue attention and action (Smith et al, 2017; Gomez et al, 2020).



**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

To provide a continuum of professional learning and growth opportunities for all staff in pursuit of fully understanding and infusing educational equity in all aspects of schooling.

**4.1 PROVIDE ROBUST TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY.**

Findings & Recommendations

Quality, professional learning opportunities with all staff on equity, biases and other interrelated content can support relationship-building with students, culturally responsive pedagogy and introspection. It also became clear from staff focus groups respondents that they desire training on equity topics as well as trauma-informed and identity language and understanding to them.

Research

Equity requires understanding to inequities and how it manifests in schools. Related equity topics can be complex and all of it requires introspection (Dugan, 2021; Tatum 1997; Dweck 2007). It is a constant cycle of learning, and with that comes limited understanding and experiences to the depth of equity and inequities (Tatum, 1997; Dweck, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gorski, 2018).

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AS AGENCY**

To partner with families and the community for authentic opportunities to serve the students, the school(s), and the district.

**5.1 | ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE.**

Findings & Recommendations

Similar to the need for a student equity advisory committee, the district can amplify its transparency and connection to underrepresented groups through the development of a community equity advisory committee. This committee can serve several purposes as the district deems necessary. It can range from feedback from historically marginalized identities on ways to continually foster a welcoming school for all to anti-bias approaches when it comes to homework policies, academic support at home, systemic processes and communication to the community.

Research

A community-development model serves as agency for continual intellectual and human growth (Stefanski et al, 2016; Ishimaru, 2020). Families can be levers in the education of their child(ren). School-community collaboration has proven to empower active participation and investment in the education of children. Meaningful partnerships between schools and the community it serves are necessary for justice and liberation among minoritized people (Costanza-Chock, 2020).