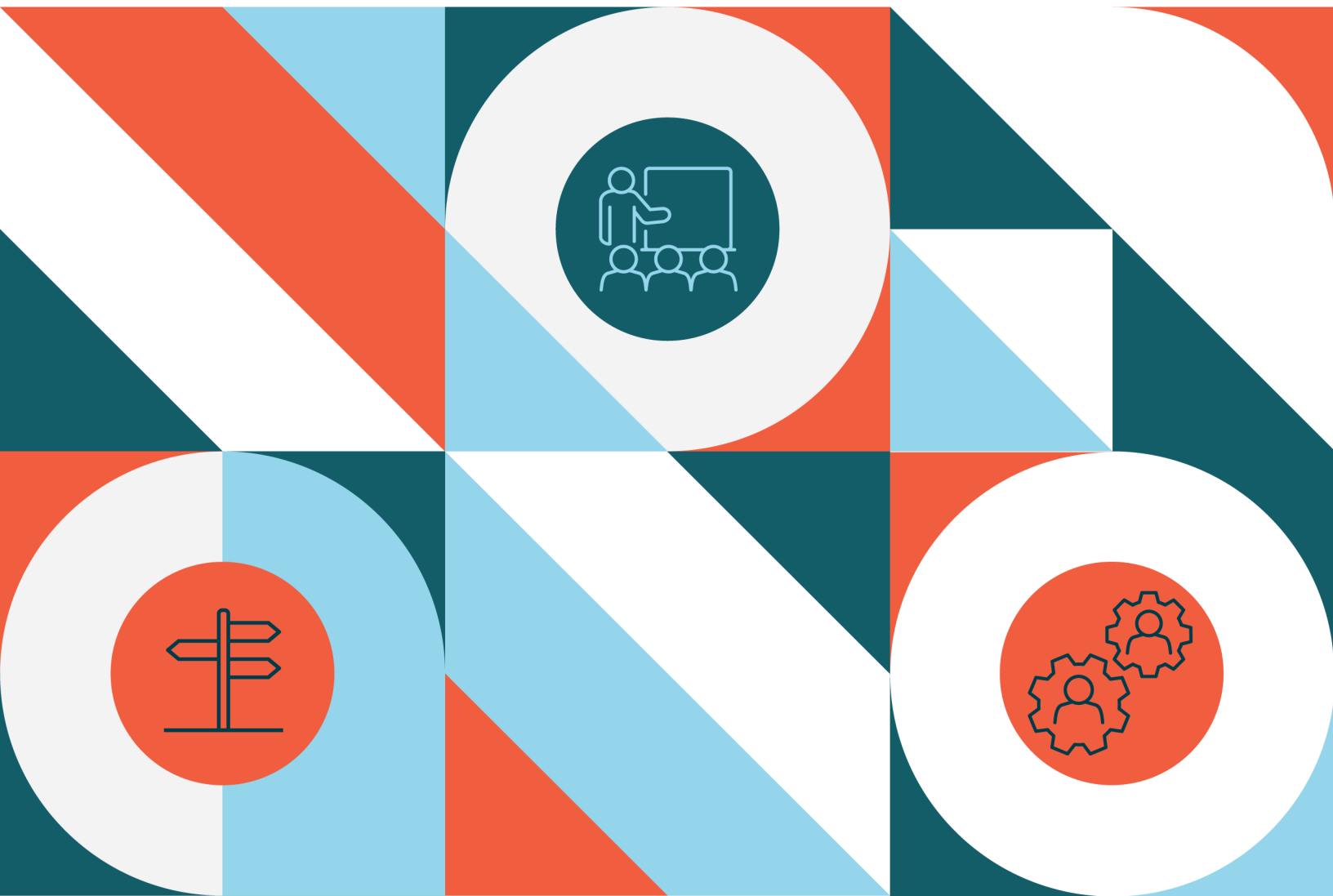


Exploring diversity and inclusion in professional development in Lower Merion School District

**LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT RESEARCH BRIEF NO. 1**

September 2022



Understanding equity in Lower Merion School District

Education Northwest partnered with Lower Merion School District (LMSD) to review district practices and policies related to building an equitable and inclusive learning environment. From late 2020 to early 2021, LMSD leadership engaged the community in a collaborative process to identify three critical focus areas to guide Education Northwest’s study.¹



Curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy



Professional learning



Staff diversity and hiring

Education Northwest will share findings from the equity review in a series of four research briefs. This first brief focuses on **professional development in LMSD**.

Exploring equity in professional development

To explore the district’s efforts to provide equity-oriented professional development, we asked the following questions:

1. How have diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities impacted teachers, staff members, and administrators?
2. How have diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development experiences impacted students?
3. How impactful are structures to support educators of color in the continuum of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development?

¹ For more information about Lower Merion School District’s commitment to equity, visit <https://www.lmsd.org/equity>

Culturally responsive data collection activities

At every phase of the study, Education Northwest sought insights and guidance from the LMSD community. In collaboration with LMSD, Education Northwest established a 12-member advisory group of parents, educators, counselors, school board members, and community leaders. The advisory group met regularly with Education Northwest to provide feedback on the study plan, inform data collection efforts, and develop recommendations for the district.

We conducted 8 **focus groups** with 42 educators and staff from LMSD. We used a purposeful sampling approach to recruit participants for focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted in person at LMSD. One consisted of 15 educators who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), another consisted of five administrators who identify as BIPOC, and one included three staff members from the human resources department. We then conducted five virtual focus groups with teachers and staff members. The focus groups were broken down by grade and role. With teachers, we conducted two focus groups at the elementary level, one at the middle school level, and one at the high school level. We also conducted one focus group with counselors. Focus groups ranged from 60 to 120 minutes.

An **educator survey** was distributed to all educators across the district. Eight hundred and sixty-six educators were invited to complete the survey, and 744 responded for a response rate of 86 percent. About 74 percent of survey respondents identified as white, 10 percent identified as BIPOC, and 16 percent elected to self-describe their racial identity.

Student and caregiver surveys were distributed to students in grades 4–5, students in grades 6–12, and caregivers for all students in the district. A total of 1,158 students in grades 4–5, 3,485 students in grades 6–12, and 1,043 caregivers completed the survey.

Education Northwest conducted **document review** of several resources provided by LMSD that describe district professional development offerings for educators in 2020 and 2021. These experiences are described in the appendix.

Key findings

In this section, we describe the existing diversity, equity, and inclusion² professional development offered by LMSD. We start by describing the district’s context. Then, drawing from focus groups and the districtwide survey, we detail staff perceptions of the extent to which diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development meets the needs of educators. In the last section, we describe student experiences of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development. LMSD staff and administrator perspectives from interviews and open-ended survey responses, as well as select closed-ended survey questions, are presented throughout the brief.

District context

“The biggest thing that I’ve taken away from our diversity, equity, and inclusion (professional development) is speaking first to understand, and then to be understood. A lot of these kids come with so much. The trauma-informed care piece is understanding that somebody might not have had breakfast this morning and that’s why they’re acting the way they’re acting. It’s not a personal vendetta or anything like that. And just understanding and patience with kids.”

– LMSD educator focus group participant

LMSD has worked to improve the number and quality of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development sessions in the district over the past several years. For example, in 2020–21, one of the primary goals of professional development for the year was to “improve cultural proficiency and anti-racism practices and instruction throughout our system.” Dedicated diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development (e.g., cultural proficiency training) is offered at many districtwide in-service days, and topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are often incorporated into other learning opportunities. More information about recent diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development offerings can be found in the appendix.

² Diversity is the presence of difference that may include race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. Equity is positioning resources based upon each individual student’s needs. Inclusion is engaging, valuing, and respecting all groups (students, parents, caregivers, community members, and other educational stakeholders) and including all groups as equal partners in the education process.

Focus group participants said that implementation and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the district is supported by the Ad-Hoc Committee on Equity and Anti-Racism, Committee to Address Race in Education (CARE), and the Achievement Imperative Taskforce.

In surveys, we asked educators to identify the number of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development offerings they participated in during 2020–21. Nearly all educators (97%) participated in some form of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in 2021–22 (figure 1). Most educators (80%) attended between one and four sessions.

Figure 1. Most educators attended 1–4 professional development sessions covering diversity, equity, and inclusion in the past year



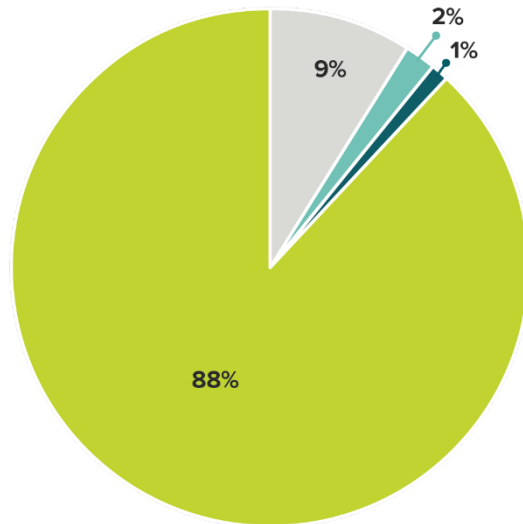
Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 695)

The opportunity to participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development, among other factors, has fostered an environment where most educators (88%) said in surveys that culturally responsive practices are very important when working with students (figure 2).

Figure 2. Most educators said culturally responsive practices are very important when working with students

How important are culturally responsive practices when working with students?

● Somewhat important ● Slightly important ● Not at all important ● Very important

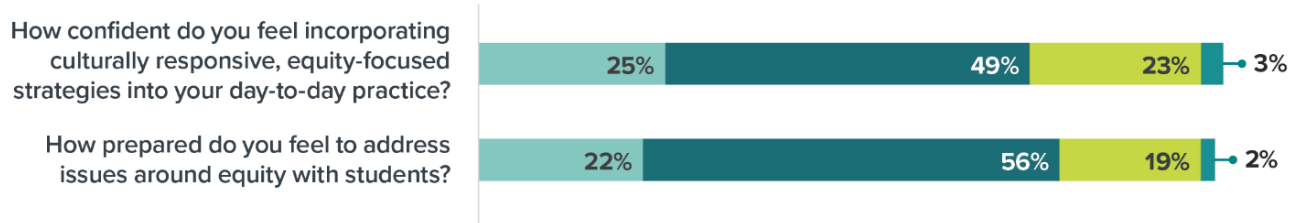


Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development has also supported educators’ confidence and preparation in diversity, equity, and inclusion topics. Most educators felt somewhat or very confident (74%) and somewhat or very prepared (78%) to focus on equity in their classrooms (figure 3).

Figure 3. Most educators felt somewhat confident and prepared to focus on equity in their classrooms

● Very ● Somewhat ● Slightly ● Not at all



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

Feedback on diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development

“I believe that the professional development offerings at LMSD in regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion are thoughtfully planned out and organized. I do not have any suggestions for improvement at this time.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

Education Northwest asked focus group and survey participants to reflect on their experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in the district. In the survey, educators were asked open-ended questions, including “What would make the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development more useful for your role?,” “What would make the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities easier to implement into your practices?,” and “What additional diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development would you like LMSD to provide?” Focus group participants reviewed the feedback from survey participants and provided additional context. These discussions focused on the extent to which diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in the district is serving the needs of educators and the extent to which the district's professional development opportunities reflect effective practices, such as focusing on content, collaborative teaching, and inclusive coaching and expert support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In focus groups, educators described the important role that district-led Professional Responsibility Profiles (PRPs) play in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in the district. The PRPs offer a chance for staff to listen and actively engage in conversation around important diversity, equity, and inclusion topics. One focus group participant said, “The two-hour PRPs have been a wonderful opportunity to have a conversation and to listen and the presenters ask questions, and then we respond.” Some educators also focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion during their flexible five-hour Collab professional development opportunities. Additionally, focus group participants and survey respondents said that ongoing professional development focused on **cultural proficiency**, **microaggressions**, and **courageous conversations**³ as well as **gender-expressive training** was useful for supporting students.

³ [Courageous Conversation™](#) is a protocol for engaging, sustaining, and deepening interracial dialogue that aims to help individuals and organizations address racial disparities.

“About 10 years ago we had some sociocultural identities training. I was a trainer for that. It was a topic in the district. There was a two-hour professional development that all staff members engaged in, so we had a common language and frame of reference. However, it seems like the focus has shifted over time, away from that. So, it would be great to get back on track with that.”

– LMSD educator focus group participant

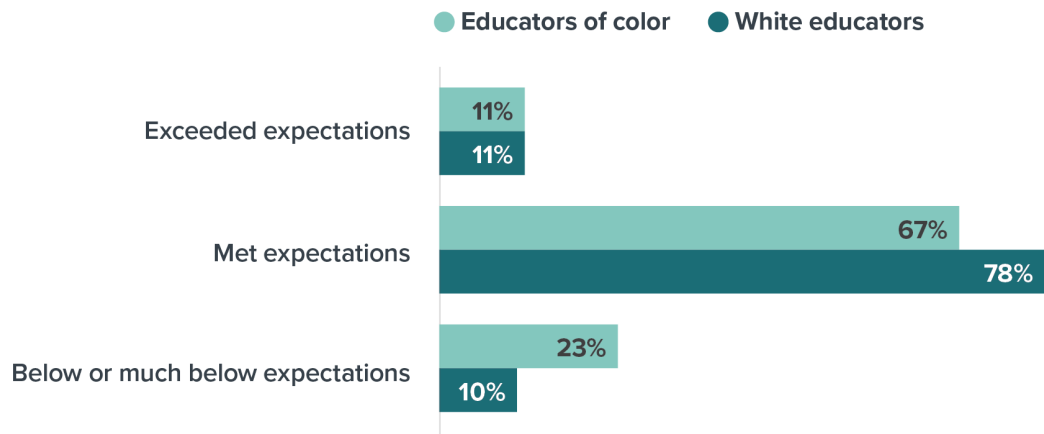
Overall, educators were positive about their diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development experiences, though educators of color were slightly less positive.

In districtwide surveys, Education Northwest asked educators to reflect on their experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development. Education Northwest looked at differences between educators of color and white educators to better understand how racial and ethnic identity may influence educators’ experiences of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development.

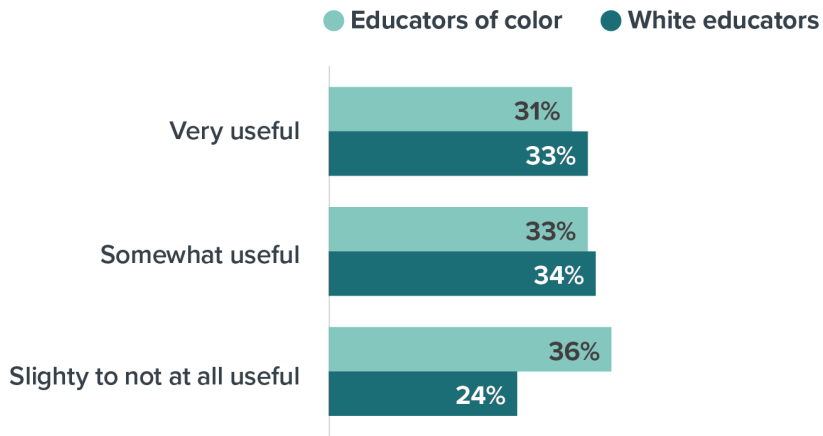
More white educators than educators of color felt that the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development offered by LMSD **met or exceeded their expectations** (78% of educators of color and 90% of white educators; figure 4). Similarly, fewer educators of color (64%) found the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development somewhat or very **useful** compared to white educators (76%). About three quarters of all educators felt that the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development offered by LMSD was somewhat or very easy to **incorporate into practices**.

Figure 4. Most educators felt that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development met or exceeded expectations

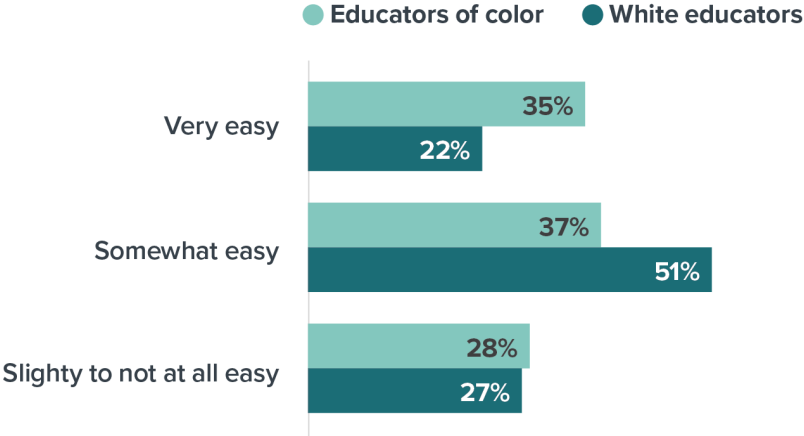
To what extent did diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development from LMSD meet your expectations?



How useful have the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities been for your role at LMSD?



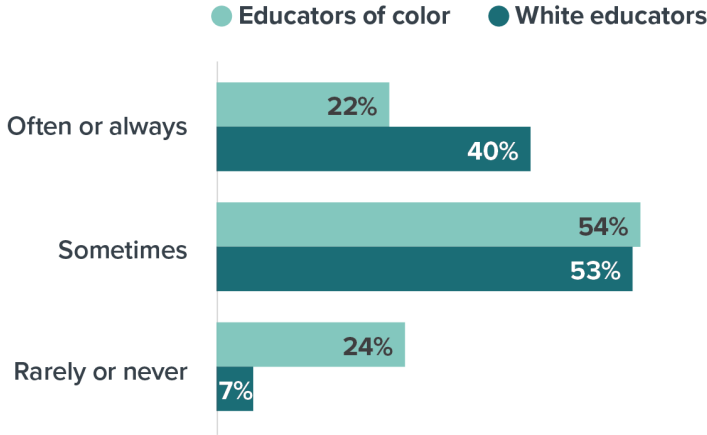
How easy has it been to incorporate learning from diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development into your practices at LMSD?



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 654)

Most educators also said that the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development sometimes helps them **explore new ways to promote equity** in their practice; however, fewer educators of color (22%) said they often or always felt the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development helps them explore equity compared to white educators (40%; figure 5).

Figure 5. Most educators felt that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development helps them explore new ways to promote equity in their practice

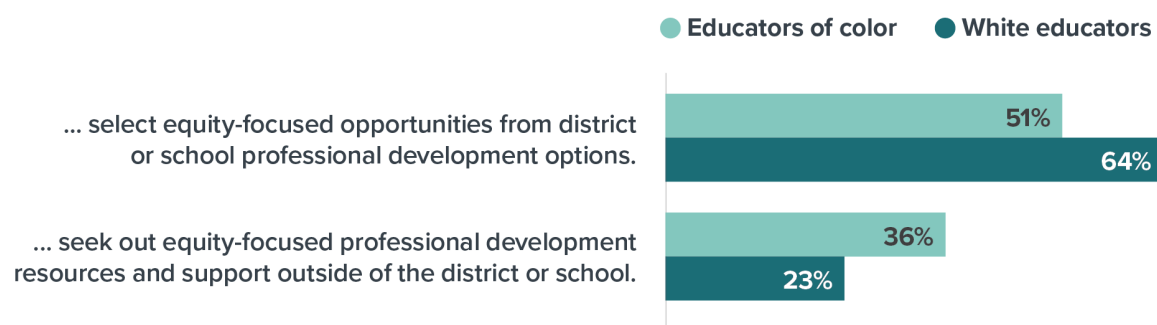


Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 627)

Differences in the way educators of color experience diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in the district may impact how often they choose diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development when they have other options. In surveys, Education Northwest asked educators how often they **chose diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development from available options**. Fewer educators of color than white educators choose diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development within their school or district (51% compared to 64%), but more educators of color than white educators sought diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development outside their school or district (36% compared to 23%; figure 6). In open-ended responses, educators asked for professional development to be tailor to their existing knowledge.

Figure 6. Most educators selected equity-focused opportunities from professional development options within their district and school

Educators “often” or “always” ...



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD educator survey (n = 672)

In an open-ended survey question, we asked what would make diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development at LMSD more useful. Seventy-three of 470 respondents said they were **happy with LMSD diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development** and/or had no suggestions. When asked what would make diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development easier to implement, 87 of 424 respondents felt they **had everything they needed to implement what they learned** in their diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development and/or had no suggestions. Other feedback and suggestions appear in the recommendations section of this brief.

Relationships are key to successful diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development.

“I can think of two excellent conversations I’ve had in the district regarding diversity. One was focused on microaggressions, what they were, and examples. We had many opportunities for breakout conversations. The conversations with peers in those breakout sessions stuck with me. I don’t know how many years ago that was, but that was very worthwhile for me and really informed my knowledge of cultures and perspectives in a significant way. That was very meaningful to me.

Another opportunity was when I was just with other [similar educators]. ... We did a lot with courageous conversations ... We all come from different backgrounds, but it was very worthwhile to hear perspectives and to work through those conversations with one another. It was very time intensive, but it was very worthwhile.”

– LMSD educator focus group participant

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development offers opportunities for educators to explore sensitive topics with colleagues. Research shows that while these experiences can be uncomfortable for educators, group discussion can help educators overcome these feelings (Dee & Penner, 2017). Focus group and survey participants said that **strong relationships with colleagues** are a necessary foundation to begin these conversations.

Focus group participants said that engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development alongside individuals they already knew—such as grade-level teams, content area teams, or professional learning communities—helped them focus on the topic. Educators felt that they got the most out of these sessions and could share more about their own experiences than with a large or new group.

“A lot of sessions require a level of trust and connection with the people you are talking to. I value the discussions we’ve been able to have with people from middle and high school and other schools as it opens more dialogue from more perspectives. But ... I need to be comfortable with the group because I need them to know who I am at the core. I feel like things I say could be misinterpreted if people don’t know me and it makes me less inclined to share.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

In districtwide diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development where familiar groups were not available, educators preferred small group experiences that offered opportunities to get comfortable with others in their group over large group discussion. However, most would still prefer to engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in groups with which they already have relationships.

Relevant and active diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities support educator learning.

In the survey, Education Northwest asked participants, “What would make the diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities easier to implement into your practices at LMSD?” Nearly one-third of open-ended survey responses (139 of 424) said that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development that includes **specific lessons, strategies, and resources** was most useful in preparing them to implement what they learned in the classroom.

“[I would like] anecdotal examples and/or practical demonstrations of teacher behavior that is culturally responsive and engaging.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

Focus group and survey participants said that active learning that includes **opportunities for practice and observation** helps them implement their diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development learnings.

“[I would like] concrete strategies, watching people that have mastered lessons run them, a list of guiding questions to discover biases I might have.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development is most effective when it is personalized for different learning needs.

Focus group and survey participants said that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development is most effective when it can **apply to each individual**. They said diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development was most relevant when personalized in three ways: by grade band and/or content area, by different student identities, and by level of diversity, equity, and inclusion understanding.

DIFFERENCES BY GRADE BAND AND CONTENT AREA

Educators in both the surveys and focus groups said that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development is most impactful when there is some differentiation for grade band and content area. For example, kindergarten teachers requested diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development focused on actions they could implement in their classrooms with young learners. Additionally, some educators wished they better understood ways to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their math and science classes.

“[diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development would be easier to implement] If we were given opportunities to meet with our specific discipline to discuss, brainstorm and create learning opportunities.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

INCLUDING MULTIPLE STUDENT IDENTITIES IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Educators in focus groups and surveys said that while diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development on racial, ethnic, and gender identities has been important for their learning, they wanted to better understand how to engage multiple student identities (e.g., neurodivergent students, English learners) in addition to current DEI focus areas.

“I'd say that 75 percent of the teachers I work with have no clue how to teach a language learner and don't really feel a need to learn. A lot of people have good intentions but don't have any resources or knowledge to do so ... When it comes to language learners, there's very little professional development that's ever given to teachers about sensitive things, and things that you can't ask, and things you shouldn't assume, and all this stuff.”

– LMSD educator focus group participant

PERSONALIZED BY LEVEL OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION UNDERSTANDING

Focus group and survey participants said it is especially important that educators with less knowledge or commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion implementation have professional development that is catered to their needs and abilities.

“At some point, training must provide a useful assessment to help determine where we all stand on the continuum of diversity, equity, and inclusion as it pertains to knowledge, skill, and practice. One-size-fits-all programs are deterring faculty from staying connected to the trainings.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

Continuity and consistency allow for greater depth of diversity, equity, and inclusion learning.

Focus group and survey participants said that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development that allowed them continued opportunities to go deeper into a specific topic was the most useful for their personal and professional growth. One focus group participant said, “[LMSD] tends to do things for right now, for tomorrow versus doing things for two years from now, three years from now, five years from now.”

“I feel like our professional development, it just feels like there's new initiatives every single year ... And one, people's memories are short; two, we go back to what we know what our experiences were; and then three, we've got new staff coming on every year. So, if your message doesn't continue throughout, it just starts to make you a little dizzy.”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

Focus group and survey respondents said they look forward to seeing the ways in which the district's new diversity, equity, and inclusion director can foster continuity in learning.

An affirming culture is crucial to diversity, equity, and inclusion learning.

Focus group and survey participants described the importance of culture to support diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in the district. Educators said that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development was most effective when they had dedicated time and resources to participate as well as administrative support. They said this was especially important in the current sociopolitical context.

DEDICATED TIME AND RESOURCES

Educators wished that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development did not feel like "one more thing." One focus group participant said, "It's probably just from the last two years [during the COVID-19 pandemic], but everybody seems exhausted. I definitely agree with getting people involved. But I think it needs to be something that's done within our school day, and not something that's viewed as extra."

Educators of color said they were often made to feel they were responsible for other educators' learning in this area. Therefore, having dedicated time and resources was particularly important for these educators to ensure they are appreciated and compensated for their efforts.

"You do feel an obligation to represent, to do more for your marginalized group. You just do, and when you're not doing it, you feel like, 'I'm doing something wrong,' and that's a heavy burden to bear. Then as you put yourself in those positions to do the work, people see you're there to do the work and dump a lot more on you. Then you start to resent the work. What's the balance? Then oftentimes the district will be like, 'Oh, you want to do this? Go right ahead. We want you to do it too, but we're not even going to discuss payment for the work.'"

– LMSD focus group participant

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Most focus group participants and some survey respondents said their administrators supported their diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development and subsequent efforts to implement what they learned. This administrator support made many participants feel that diversity, equity, and inclusion was at the core of their work in the district.

“The fact that the district has always supported the core principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion has made it feel like it was okay to advocate for the core ideas with my students and that it wasn't ever controversial. I actually learned after we began our trainings that some districts/states believe that diversity, equity, and inclusion is controversial! I appreciate LMSD!”

– LMSD educator survey respondent

However, some participants said their administrators did not have all the tools they needed to support teachers. One focus group participant said that administrators do not just need access to more diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities; they also need to be invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development: “I mean sitting right here next to me while I talk about my trauma experiences so they understand.” Additionally, educators need a clear message from both school and district administration that diversity, equity, and inclusion is not another item on a list of competing priorities. Participants said administration could better support them by “carving out that quiet time and space so people can talk human to human and listen.”

Accountability for diversity, equity, and inclusion work

Survey respondents suggested that the district needs accountability for diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure all educators implement what they learn in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development. However, focus group participants said this was complicated because diversity, equity, and inclusion is challenging to observe and because it can be difficult to enforce diversity, equity, and inclusion accountability without reinforcing unhealthy power dynamics. One focus group participant said, “We don't need any like wardens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, standing over you, telling you, ‘Hey, you should do this for diversity, equity, and inclusion.’ ... That's not helpful at all.” However, others suggested looking more closely at the Danielson framework⁴ used for accountability to see where elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion can be included.

⁴ <https://danielsongroup.org/framework/>

Support in the current sociopolitical context

In focus groups, educators discussed some of their struggles with situating their diversity, equity, and inclusion learning within the broader sociopolitical context. Educators said that recent experiences with politicized learning environments sometimes made them hesitate to approach diversity, equity, and inclusion topics. For educators who were previously comfortable in diversity, equity, and inclusion, this discomfort extended to activities they felt comfortable doing in the past. They described the importance of clear school and district administrator support to help them navigate the current environment.

“I’m also hearing people say, ‘You can’t go a night without watching the news and hear about critical race theory and how people are banning books.’ ... Everyone has said that the district is backing us. We do need to know, what do you stand for? We need clear bullets. What do you stand for? What can we say? ... [Because] you don’t want to be that teacher, you don’t want to be that person that does the wrong thing and then everyone is against you ... It’s an interesting time to live. Some of the conversations I was comfortable having five years ago, now I’m like, ‘Ooh, wait.’ That thought is in the back of my mind, ‘Ooh, I don’t want to be on the news talking about this.’ It’s just ... I don’t know. I think we just need to know where we stand and what [the district] will back us on.”

– LMSD educator focus group participant

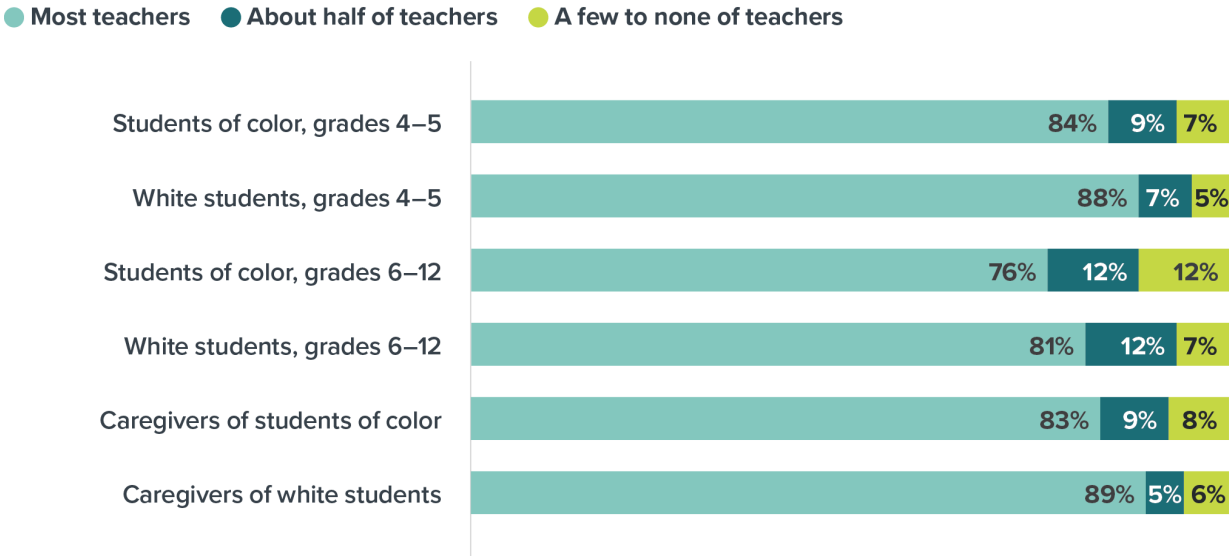
Student experience of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development

The goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in LMSD is not only to ensure educators learn and feel supported, but also to ensure that students receive equitable education. Educators who practice culturally responsive instruction ensure that their students feel connected, respected, and supported in their classrooms (Muñiz, 2020). They also maintain high expectations for all students.

In surveys with students in grades 4–12 and caregivers of students of all ages in the district, we asked them to reflect on their or their students’ experiences in the classroom. Most LMSD students and caregivers felt that students are respected by and connected to teachers at their school (figure 7).

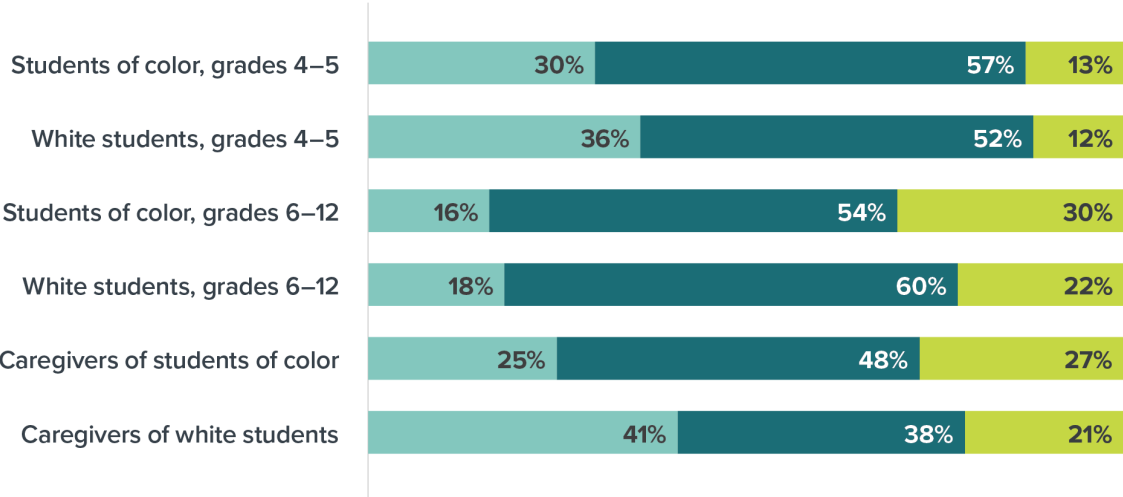
Figure 7. Most LMSD students and caregivers felt that students are respected by and connected to teachers at school

How many of your (your student's) teachers are respectful towards you (your student)?



How connected does your child feel to the teachers at this school?

● Extremely connected ● Somewhat connected ● Slightly to not at all connected

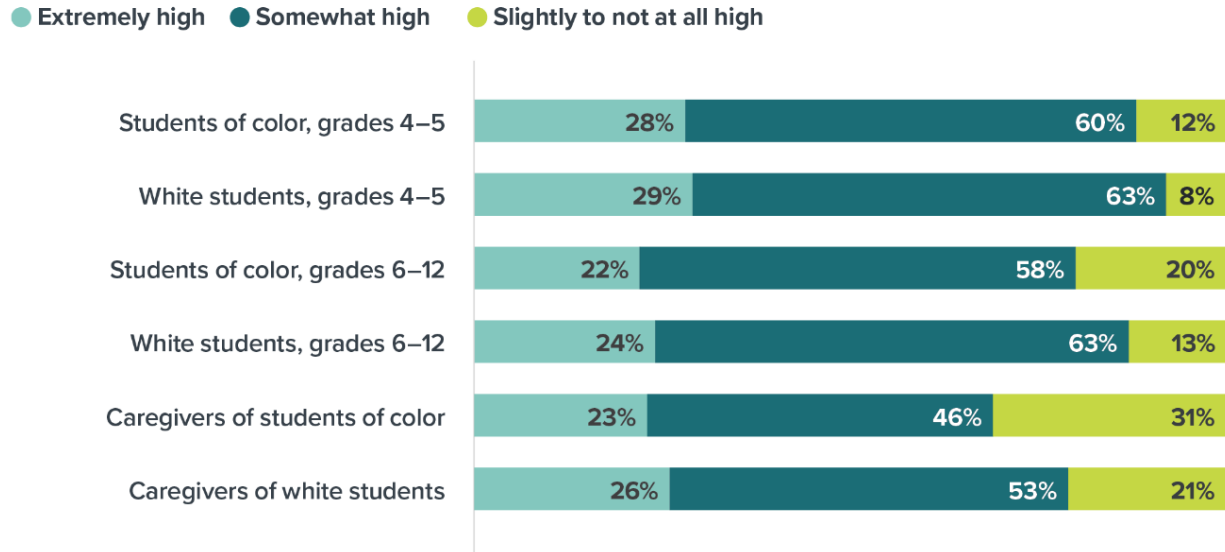


Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD survey for students in grades 4–5 (n = 1,158), survey for students in grades 6–12 (n = 3,485), and caregiver survey (n = 1,043)

In addition to helping students feel respected and connected, diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development can ensure that all students feel empowered by their teachers. Teacher support is crucial for student success (Diamond et al., 2004), yet subject-specific racial stereotypes can influence educators’ expectations for students (Cherng, 2017). In surveys, most students and caregivers said they felt that their teacher has high expectations of students (figure 8). However, fewer caregivers of students of color felt that teachers have high expectations for their students.

Figure 8. Fewer caregivers of students of color felt that teachers have high expectations for their students

Overall, how high are your (your student's) teachers' expectations of you (your student)?



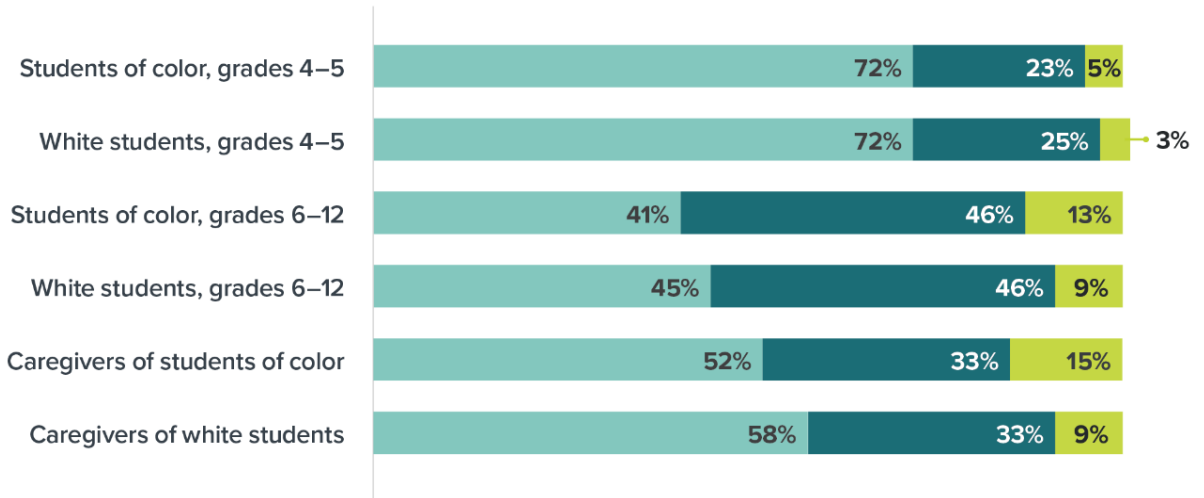
Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD survey for students in grades 4–5 (n = 1,158), survey for students in grades 6–12 (n = 3,485), and caregiver survey (n = 1,043)

Most students and caregivers felt that teachers encourage students to do their best; however, slightly fewer caregivers of students of colors felt this way compared to caregivers of white students (figure 9).

Figure 9. Slightly fewer caregivers of students of color feel that teachers encourage students to do their best

How much do your child's teachers encourage your child to do their best?

● Encourage my child a tremendous amount ● Encourage my child some ● Encourage my child a little to none



Source: Education Northwest analysis of LMSD survey for students in grades 4–5 (n = 1,158), survey for students in grades 6–12 (n = 3,485), and caregiver survey (n = 1,043)

Recommendations

While survey responses indicate that educators generally feel positively about their experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development in LMSD, educators provided several recommendations to improve professional development opportunities. To make sense of their recommendations, Education Northwest reviewed the key findings from surveys and focus groups with the study advisory group.

The recommendations, described in detail below, align with the Learning Policy Institute’s research-based core features of effective professional development: opportunities for feedback and reflection, collaboration and space for teachers to learn together, modeling of effective practice, coaching and expert support, active learning, content focus, and sustained over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021). More broadly, recommendations also included creating positive conditions to support diversity, equity, and inclusion continuous improvement in the district.

Relationship building

SMALL GROUPS

Opportunities for feedback and reflection are a central component of high-quality professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Focus group and survey participants said that the relationships they built through small group discussion focused on feedback and reflection were key to enhancing their learning from diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Research recommends that districts provide dedicated **space for teachers to learn together** through collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021). This dedicated time for collaboration supports continuous relationship building, a critical element of successful professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Lieber et al., 2009). Educators suggested extending their learning from diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development through ongoing meetings with professional learning communities. They said they could use these spaces

to collaborate with colleagues to identify high-quality educational practices aligned with their diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development.

TEACHER LEADERS AS COACHES

Relational approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion learning can occur through **coaching and expert support** (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021). Focus group participants said this could include more traditional coaching positions but also requested that LMSD offer opportunities for teachers to serve as leaders and coaches to help their peers implement learnings from diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development. This would allow educators to get to know each other over time and have hard conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Relevant and active learning

ACTIVE LEARNING

Opportunities for sense-making are crucial for professional learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Educators requested **relevant, hands-on learning** experiences that allow them to dive deeper into diversity, equity, and inclusion content through experiences.

MODELING OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Educators' exposure to diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in action can make a clear difference in their learning (Soto & Marzocchi, 2021). Educators said they needed to **see effective practices in action** to better understand how to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion interventions in the classroom.

Personalized learning

CONTENT FOCUS

Professional learning is enhanced when educators can connect new knowledge to personally relevant topics and lived experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021). Educators requested more **content-based diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development** focused on specific disciplines, grade levels, and student needs.

Consistency and continuity

CONSISTENCY IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development to be effective, learning must be **sustained over time** (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021). Educators need intensive, sustained educational opportunities to learn (Cobb & Jackson, 2011). Focus group and survey participants said consistent opportunities to continue investigating topics in more depth were necessary for learning. Educators requested that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development be aligned across their experiences in the district. One focus group participant said, “People keep referencing that impactful two-hour PRP, but a lot of that work is also carried over through the CARE Committee ... And then at each building level, there's different initiatives and things here to build that relationship at a building level.” They suggested that diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development would benefit from “more consistency and less silos.”

CONTINUOUS DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PD THROUGH INTENTIONAL PLANNING

Focus group and survey participants said the district needed an intentional approach to planning diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development so that experiences could build on each other, allowing participants to go deeper into each topic as the year goes on. One focus group participant suggested approaching diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development how they would conduct curriculum mapping for their classroom.

“I wonder if it's about systemic change. When you think about a flow chart with curriculum mapping, you say, ‘Okay, what's the vertical articulation, the horizontal articulation?’ And you map all that out from a senior level, and you put it all on a huge board. And then what is the goal? And work backwards from there. You start to implement cultural a paradigm shift. And what does that take? And work with the professionals to make a five-year actionable plan that really makes it the fabric. Because I think while we're having this conversation, what I'm really hoping is that how do we shift? Right? So from the seniors, what do they want? What is the shift that they want? Have they done any mapping of this themselves, is what I'm curious to know.”

– LMSD educator focus group participant

Affirming culture for diversity, equity, and inclusion

Finally, educators suggested continuing to develop an affirming districtwide culture to support continuous improvement in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. One way this could occur is by giving educators opportunities to set goals, alongside their supervisors, to determine their diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development path. Professional learning can be improved if the recipient takes an **active role in identifying activities and goals** (Thurlings et al., 2013). This ensures that educators feel empowered in their learning and can get the most out of their professional development.

“[Educators need] time, space, and feeling like you have some buy-in and a voice, rather than things are being done to you, rather like you're building it together.”

– LMSD focus group participant

Additionally, educators suggested engaging school and district leadership more in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development to help align experiences and expectations around diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice.

References

- Bates, C.C., & Morgan, D.N. (2018). Seven Elements of Effective Professional Development. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(5), 623–626. doi: [10.1002/trtr.1674](https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1674)
- Cherng, H. Y. S. (2017). If they think I can: Teacher bias and youth of color expectations and achievement. *Social Science Research*, 66(2017), 170–186.
- Cobb, P., & Jackson, K. (2011). Towards an empirically grounded theory of action for improving the quality of mathematics teaching at scale. *Mathematics Teacher Education and Development*, 13(1), 6–33.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Schachner, A., & Wojcikiewicz, S. (with Cantor, P., & Osher, D.). (2021). *Educator learning to enact the science of learning and development*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/859.776>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/effective-teacher-professional-development-report>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R. C., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. National Staff Development Council.
- Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2017). The causal effects of cultural relevance: Evidence from an ethnic studies curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), 127–166. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216677002>
- Desimone, L. M., & Pak, K. (2017). Instructional coaching as high-quality professional development. *Theory into Practice*, 56(1), 3–12.
- Diamond, J. B., Randolph, A., & Spillane, J. P. (2004). Teachers' expectations and sense of responsibility for student learning: The importance of race, class, and organizational habitus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 35(1), 75–98.
- Kraft, M. A., & Blazar, D. (2018). Taking teacher coaching to scale: Can personalized training become standard practice? *EducationNext*, 18(4), 68–74.
- Lieber, J., Butera, G., Hanson, M., Palmer, S., Horn, E., Czaja, C. ... Odom, S. (2009). Factors that influence the implementation of a new preschool curriculum: Implications for professional development. *Early Education and Development*, 20(3), 456–481.

- Muñiz, J. (2020). *Culturally responsive teaching: A reflection guide*. New America.
https://newamerica.org/documents/5724/Culturally_Responsive_Teaching_A_Reflection_Guide_2021_WAMBwaO.pdf
- Snow-Renner, R., & Lauer, P. (2005). *Professional development analysis*. Mid-Content Research for Education and Learning, 11.
- Soto, R. C., & Marzocchi, A. S. (2021) *Learning about active learning while actively learning: Insights from faculty professional development*, PRIMUS, 31:3-5, 269-280, DOI:
[10.1080/10511970.2020.1746449](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511970.2020.1746449)
- Thurlings, M., Vermeulen, M., Bastiaens, T., & Stijnen, S. (2013). Understanding feedback: A learning theory perspective. *Educational Research Review*, 9, 1–15.

Appendix

Lower Merion School District had two primary goals for professional development in the 2020–21 school year.

1. Improve and expand effective use of data to efficiently identify and address any achievement and opportunity gaps for students throughout our system.
2. Improve cultural proficiency and anti-racism practices and instruction throughout our system.

Education Northwest analyzed professional development documents from the district. Table A1 describes some professional development opportunities that clearly relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion (diversity, equity, and inclusion). In addition to the offerings described below, other professional development opportunities allowed professional learning communities to connect on a range of topics, which could include topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Table A1. diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development offerings from LMSD in 2020–21

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development	Description of professional development
<i>April 2020</i>	
Supporting students with individualized needs Focus: Executive functioning	Executive functioning defined. How do these needs present in an online format? Strategies and suggestions for supporting students with executive functioning needs.
Supporting students with individualized needs Focus: Anxiety/emotional support needs	Anxiety defined. How do these needs present in an online format? Strategies and suggestions for supporting students with emotional support/anxiety-related needs.
Supporting students with individualized needs Focus: English learners in distance learning	Focus on high-quality materials and resources, essentializing instruction.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development	Description of professional development
Understanding COVID-19 through a crisis response	Led by nationally certified PREPaRE trainers. Understanding the impact of the current crisis; review of the historical context of pandemics as a crisis event; strategies for successfully supporting students, families, and educators during this crisis; tips on how to navigate a conversation with an emotionally charged person; and recognizing how grief and loss impact our response and recovery to this crisis.
August/September 2020	
District cultural proficiency (K–12 faculty and staff)	
Breakout sessions for cultural proficiency teams (K–5 and 6–12)	Scope, depth, call to action: evaluating, leading, and implementing building action plans.
Trauma-informed practices (K–12 faculty and staff)	
Anti-racism in social studies (grade 6–12 social studies teachers; optional for English language arts teachers)	
October 2020	
No specific diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development described	
November 2020	
Newsela: Self-paced (<i>on demand for grade 6–12 educators</i>) - Cultivating culturally responsive teaching	Objective: Develop skills and understanding using curriculum resources that personalize learning, engage students, and improve culturally responsive teaching.
January 2021	
No specific diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development described	
February 2021	
Equity focus breakout groups (K–12 unified arts teachers; K–5 foreign language in elementary school teachers)	Move into job-alike departments to review and develop resources designed to improve equity and student experiences. Guiding questions provided to support professional learning communities; team determined how/where to share a bank of resources focused on increasing equity and improving student experiences.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development	Description of professional development
Suicide prevention and trauma-informed practices (<i>K–12 teachers</i>)	
K–5 cultural proficiency: CP4Kids lesson 2	
Teaching the kingdom of Aksum (<i>grade 6 social studies teachers</i>)	
Teaching stamped (<i>grade 8 social studies teachers</i>)	Curriculum work that included guaranteed lessons for all students in 8th grade social studies.
Cultural proficiency (<i>grade 6–12 educators</i>)	

Source: This information is based on analysis of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development documents provided by the LMSD district office, as well as focus groups with LMSD staff members.

For questions about this research brief, please reach out to the Education Northwest study author.

Ashlie Denton, *Principal Researcher*

ashlie.denton@ednw.org