

Addison Central School District Action Team Final Recommendations and Report August 2023

The Addison Central School District (ACSD) Action Team offers the following final report, including recommended strategies and action steps to advance the ACSD school board's three major strategic goals. We developed these strategies and action steps with the intention of implementing them over the course of five years under the guidance of a district staff implementation team. The recommendations are informed from the prior work of an Advisory Committee comprised of diverse community members, a several-month series of meetings of the full Action Team and invitations to school community stakeholders, reviewing input and data collected to-date by the district, and our own deliberations to find the actionable items that will have the greatest impact while addressing inequities within our district. The Team also offers a short list of actions that we identified in our work that advance the district's goals and can be implemented immediately and with minimal cost or system redesign. Thank you for engaging a diverse team of our school community to develop these recommendations for our community.

BACKGROUND & PROCESS

ACSD Strategic Plan 2022-2023 Overview

The Addison Central School District (ACSD) is currently designing a new, equity-informed strategic plan that will prioritize the success of every student. The final strategic plan is anticipated to be reviewed and approved by the ACSD school board in the early fall of 2023. There have been many opportunities for students, families, staff, and community members (stakeholders) to help shape the direction of a strategic plan. You may find additional information on the timeline, initial work by the 2022 ACSD Advisory Committee on Equity, and work completed to date on the district's [strategic plan webpage](#).

ACSD Strategic Plan Action Team

The ACSD Action Team was comprised of students, parents, staff, administrators, and community members. Particular attention was given to selecting members who hold underrepresented identities (ex: Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, people living in poverty, people living with a disability, etc.). The committee had 15 members. 4 students, 3 parents/caregivers, 3 educators/staff, 1 principal and the Director of Equity and Student Services, Director of Finance and Operations and Director of Teaching and Learning.

The ACSD School Board and school district tasked the Action Team with:

- Reviewing the work of the Advisory committee, district data, and inviting other stakeholders in to advise on where ACSD is doing well and where we are falling short to meet the diverse needs of our community.
- Drafting strategies and action steps that identify the greatest leverage points that ACSD can act upon to meet the [Board's strategic goals and vision/mission \(adopted October 2022\)](#), while using the district's equity definition as a lens in their analysis.
- Sharing draft recommendations with the ACSD Board for consideration and approval.

ACSD Action Team Process

The Team met from January 2023-June 2023. ACSD hired consultant Emma Mulvaney-Stanak of EMStrategies to plan and guide the committee's work. The Team first began by forming as a

group and electing co-chairs (one student and one adult) to help serve as leaders and liaisons to the district. The group then began to review the work of the 2022 ACSD Advisory Committee and ACSD board. They also reviewed data and input collected to-date by the district through surveys and community meetings. The Team began to create an initial list of strategies and action steps from their analysis that aligned with the three primary goals. Additional stakeholders were identified to help explore gaps in knowledge and insights in how the district could deepen its work to address inequities within the topic areas of the three goals. Those stakeholder groups included school community members with a perspective and/or lived or professional experience on:

- Current resource allocation within the district
- Poverty and socioeconomics
- Marginalized identities
- Special education and students living with disabilities

The Team spent the final three meetings deliberating on the additional feedback received from stakeholders and refining its recommendations. They used an [equity rubric](#) planning tool to help identify strategies and action steps that would leverage the biggest impact on existing inequities while engaging as much of the school community as possible.

Throughout the Team's work, the group worked to intentionally design meetings and ways to engage participants with best practices for youth-adult partnerships. This included holding youth advisory meetings where youth were in the majority to help advise the ACSD consultant and staff on ways to continually improve our work together.

Minutes from each of the Team's meetings can be found on the district's [strategic plan webpage](#). These documents include a summary of who met with the Team from various stakeholder community groups.

ACTION TEAM MEMBERS

Alixis Williams, 9th grade student MUHS
Aislynn McGill, 10th grade student MUHS
Camila Blanco, 12th grade student MUHS
Chad Fredette, 12th grade student MUHS
Samantha Paine, parent Shoreham and MUHS
Jess Vennable-Novak, parent Mary Hogan
Linda January, parent Bridport
Ben Long, MUHS math teacher and parent
Kelly Landwehr, Lead Nurse and parent
Meg Baker, Pre-K Coordinator and parent
Bjarki Sears, Principal Salisbury School
Esther Charlestin, MUMS Dean of Culture and Climate
Nicole Carter, Director of Equity and Student Services
Caitlin Steele, Asst. Superintendent of Teaching and Learning
Matthew Corrente, Director of Finance and Operations
Staff + Consultants
Emily Blistein, Director of Communications and Engagement
Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, Consultant
Lisa Ryan, Advising Consultant

Vision and Mission Statements (Updated October 2022)

Our vision is for all ACSD students to reach their full learning potential, have a sense of belonging in our schools, and enrich our community and the communities where they live in the future.

Our mission is to provide high-quality, equitable, and varied learning environments that inspire a passion for learning and growth among our students.

ACSD Equity Definition (Adopted October 2022)

Educational equity means that our schools provide each student with a high-quality, universally designed, and culturally responsive curriculum. It also means students will be able to access programs and services that meet their needs. Our students succeed when we are responsive to their academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.

Educational equity means valuing various identities because diversity enriches our school community. This includes, but is not limited to, identities based on race, ethnicity, religion, family economics, class, geography, ability, language, sexual orientation, gender, immigration status, or initial proficiencies.

Educational equity requires ongoing efforts to identify, acknowledge, and disrupt inequitable practices in our district. It requires us to acknowledge our biases as individuals and as a district. We also must commit to making changes to address inequities to improve outcomes for all students.

ACSD adopted an equity policy (C29) in 2020, which includes a more detailed equity definition and implementation statement. The policy can be found on the district policy [website](#).

ACSD Board Strategic Goals (Adopted October 2022)

- ***BELONGING.*** *Everyone will feel safe, welcomed, and included in our schools and the district. Students and families will be able to engage with the school system in valuable ways.*
- ***ACCESS.*** *ACSD will allocate resources to address students' needs across the district in equitable, sustainable, and fiscally responsible ways. ACSD will maintain infrastructure and facilities that support varied learning and successful outcomes for all of our students.*
- ***SUCCESS.*** *ACSD's learning environment will inspire a passion for learning and value diverse identities and abilities, while preparing our students to make positive contributions to the community and beyond.*

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS

Goal 1: [Belonging] Everyone will feel safe, welcomed, and included in our schools and the district. Students and families will be able to engage with the school system in valuable ways.

Strategy 1: Build a system for universal wellbeing, positive culture, and a sense of belonging based on evidence-based practices that support youth.

Action Steps:

- A. Expand learning opportunities outside of school by prioritizing JEDI (Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) education for all school community members in partnership with JEDI education professionals.
- B. Create restorative communities, proactive practices, and policies by implementing a human-centered versus rules-centered system of conflict resolution for the entire school community.
- C. Create student-centered systems where staff intentionally check-in with students and use tools such as affinity spaces to promote student well-being. Provide staff training to promote student connection. Encourage students' agency to develop these systems and tools.
- D. Ensure all school spaces and experiences are welcoming and create a sense of belonging to marginalized school community members—students, staff, families, and community. Invite marginalized community members to inform how to create these spaces and experiences.

Strategy 2: Elevate and prioritize students' mental health.

Action Steps:

- A. Starting in PreK, develop appropriate understanding of mental health among students. Offer differentiated mental health support based on students' needs.
- B. Train teachers and staff to help identify students that may need mental health support. Include teachers and staff in support plans.
- C. Support staff to understand, support, and celebrate the diverse make-up of the ACSD community. Designing support systems that are culturally responsive to our community.
- D. Recognize that mental health for the majority of students is most supported by choosing to implement approaches to learning that provide students with strong and consistent relationships.
- E. Prioritize age appropriate sensory, movement, outdoor time, and creative experiences, into the school day from PreK to graduation.

Strategy 3: Put students who traditionally and historically experience marginalization first when engaging in decision making and planning.

Action Steps:

- A. Amplify and celebrate student voice and experiences, especially diverse and historically marginalized students.

- B. When there is a district or school-wide decision to be made, use an equity rubric¹ to examine if the decision benefits marginalized students/school community members. Ensure it does not contribute to inequities experienced by marginalized people.
 - C. Provide and match families with support needed to negotiate the school systems. Consider family mentors, advocates or liaisons, parent advocacy groups, and district welcome resources.
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Goal 2: [Access] ACSD will allocate resources to address students' needs across the district in equitable, sustainable, and fiscally responsible ways. ACSD will maintain infrastructure and facilities that support varied learning and successful outcomes for all of our students.

Strategy 1: Create Data-informed, equity-based resource allocation systems.

Action Steps:

- A. *Fiscal Management Systems.*
 - a. Create an equity-informed budget² preK-12 by using weights and other metrics to factor in small schools and equity needs of students by researching other district's approaches.
 - b. Identify and remedy inequitable approaches to accessing resources within schools.

¹ACSD is still developing its understanding and consistent use of equity as a concept across the district. This includes understanding how to use tools that help address inequities and proactively move the district towards more equitable outcomes. Rubrics are often used in public education settings. The Team recommends ACSD seek additional resources and models from other districts or professionals to find a **decision making equity rubric** that works well for ACSD's size and capacity. The Team's objective is for the district to consistently use a rubric tool by district and building leaders when making decisions and have it be well understood by those who use it.

² **Equity based budgeting** is a concept ACSD should seek additional resources, models, and case studies to learn how such tools are used effectively. The Team learned the Burlington School District uses an equity based budgeting process, which may be a useful reference point. The Team recommends using weights and metrics as part of the calculations to inform such a budget. The group did not have the expertise or time to explore these concepts in more detail. However, they suggest looking to the State of Vermont education funding weights formulas to begin to understand how weights could be developed to fit ACSD's needs. The team's objective is to encourage the board to move away from per pupil budgeting that does not account for the unique needs of individual students who may need more resources to be successful (Goal 2). The group also encourages the board to challenge concepts of "zero sum" thinking where funding one new initiative would directly mean another initiative would be cut or initiatives are set up to compete against each other. Building a budget committed to student access and equity requires analyzing the budget across all budget items so the district can prioritize what needs to be funded to meet the strategic plan goals. It will also allow the district to identify new areas where additional revenue can be raised in creative ways.

- c. If students are not able to access the services they need in their elementary school, consider a criteria-informed, equity-informed school placement³ at another school within the district.
- d. Optimize resource access and allocation to move the district towards a more unified and “one community” structure⁴ and culture.
- e. Create an equity-based rubric⁵ for assessing the district’s programs and systems.

B. Equitable Staffing

- a. Develop a strategic staffing model among the schools. Look at recruitment and retention strategies for staff, especially during challenging times.
- b. Provide students with access to medical services by having at least a minimum of one full time nurse at each school and adequate medical and support staffing.⁶
- c. Look at positions (ex: mental health) that need to be paid on a different scale than teachers to more effectively recruit and retain.
- d. Diversify educator and staff workforce. Specifically, hire BIPOC teachers and administrators and understand the importance of all youth/families seeing BIPOC educators/leaders.

³ The group’s objective is to encourage the district to be clear and consistent with **school placement** criteria it would use to allow students to be placed in schools other than the school in their town. The group also noted there are many reasons why a student would benefit from school placement ranging from special education services, language access, students living between multiple households, and experiences of harassment/bullying. The Team encourages the district to examine its current school placement criteria and other school district placement models to find the best approach. They also encourage the district to be careful not to create criteria that would create more inequity for a student/family such as unmet transportation needs.

⁴ The group observed schools within the district act very independently of each other which contributes to a lack of **community and continuity** throughout the district. The group encourages the board and district to consider the multiple ways the district can work to unify programs, systems, and approaches to delivering education separate from school consolidation. In particular, things such as joint fundraising across elementary schools for student activities and/or a consistent staffing model between schools would begin to address inequities between schools. Other efforts, such as one athletic team name across the district and efforts to bring elementary classes together for projects, can support more successful transitions for students between elementary and middle school.

The Team wanted to note that ACSD’s continued conversation about **school consolidation** and the needs of small schools may present conflicting approaches for how to advance equity based decision making, especially related to budgeting resources. The Team did not have the time to adequately explore the question of consolidation and there are conflicting opinions among the group (and larger community) on whether the district should pursue it. However, the Team did agree the board and district should proactively dialogue about consolidation with the school community, as it is a critical part of how ACSD defines equitable outcomes for its students.

⁵ See decision making equity rubric footnote.

⁶ The Team made this recommendation based on stakeholder feedback on the critical physical and mental well-being of students. The Team recognizes staffing levels in small schools can be a challenging balance. The group encourages the district to examine how equity based budgeting and challenging “zero sum” thinking can reimagine how past staffing decisions often are made, e.g. one new position means the loss of a pre-existing position. Also, there was some disagreement about the recommendation of a minimum full time nurse at every school among the group due to concerns about negative impacts on other staff positions being cut.

- e. Create a hiring process that uses an equity lens, accounts for implicit bias in hiring, and prioritizes skills/expertise among applicants' inclusion/equity knowledge and practices.
- f. Be transparent about the logic, funding sources, and school-level and district-level decision making process behind staffing levels in each school. Use equity rubric⁷ in these decisions.
- g. Wrap equity into staff supervision and evaluation systems.

Strategy 2: Collect, analyze, and report on resource allocation data.⁸

Action Steps:

- A. Collect data necessary to inform equity-based decisions in the district and align decision making based on data.
- B. Prepare an annual report to the Board. Specifically address initiatives and feedback on initiatives for:
 - a. School Buildings
 - b. Staffing
 - c. Marginalized identities
 - d. Poverty
 - e. Special Education
 - f. PreK
 - g. After School
- C. Integrate data into fiscal management and staffing systems.
- D. Analyze system responsiveness and favor those that are quick and responsive, vs. sluggish, especially related to addressing issues of harm and inequity, but also special education (efficient response), mental health. Minimize red tape.
- E. Include an Equity Narrative in the Budget Book detailing historical process, annual intentional progress, budget effects, and next year goals.
- F. Evaluate and address whether our after school and preK programs meet community needs. Address equity gaps in collaboration with community partners.

Goal 3: [Success] ACSD's learning environment will inspire a passion for learning and value diverse identities and abilities, while preparing our students to make positive contributions to the community and beyond.

Strategy 1: Identify and address systemic barriers that affect student success in every classroom due to but not limited to, primary language spoken, socioeconomic status, disability status, or marginalized identities.

Action Steps:

⁷ See decision making equity rubric footnote.

⁸ When conducting assessments and analyzing data, the Team recommends the district use culturally competent and equity-informed practices. This includes using a variety of tools to collect data and feedback from the school community.

- A. Leverage staff knowledge and skill to support general education teachers to adapt and strengthen lesson plans and investigate inconsistencies in classrooms.
- B. Use modeling to better anticipate students' needs for accommodations in learning, address inconsistencies in the referral process for special education, and reduce the stigma for special education students.
- C. Increase accessibility of curriculum by using evidence-based tools and strategies most effective for all students regardless of ability.

Strategy 2: Build capacity for culturally responsive practices by bringing in voices to help diversify the curriculum, facilitate difficult or courageous conversations, and put diverse resources into the community.

Action Steps:

- A. Offer role-appropriate professional development for teachers, staff, and administrators that creates a responsive and inclusive environment. Add more family education and provide them resources about diversity and culturally responsive communities.
- B. Improve and use year-round diverse curriculum content that reflects different cultures, marginalized identities, and socio-economic privilege. Offer curriculum in inclusive, safe, and engaging ways for all students, especially for students with marginalized identities. Create a consistency in curriculum between schools. Seek and incorporate student feedback on curriculum improvements. Incorporate state's new District Quality Standards and Education Quality Reviews from AOE (Act 1, 2019).
- C. Create accountability for all staff based on their role and responsibilities in the district in creating an inclusive and responsive environment.

Strategy 3: Provide multiple pathways for students that are equally dynamic and celebrated to assure student success.

Action Step:

- A. Establish consistent grading practices, allowing for effective analysis of fairness and equity in assessment.
- B. Continue to value and enhance celebrating student success beyond traditionally celebrated high achievements in sports, grades, and college placement.
- C. Ensure all pathways are seen and valued as equally viable and vibrant options beginning in elementary school. This includes access to outdoor time, unified arts subjects, and alternative learning environments.
- D. Make flexible pathways, including early college, more accessible to students during the transition to the start of high school.
- E. Better utilize the career center and introduce it to families and students before high school.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES TO CONTINUE OR IMPLEMENT

The Action Team heard several ideas and feedback from the school community for practices that should be continued, strengthened or implemented. Some of these suggestions are more immediate steps the district is already doing or could implement without requiring significant investment or system changes. These recommendations will better support multilingual families where English is not the primary language and/or where literacy is limited, families experiencing poverty, and families with students with disabilities. The Action Team narrowed the list of suggestions to the following:

1. Use a variety of proactive engagement tools with families, staff, and students, including surveys, texting, virtual meeting options, and flexible meeting times.
2. Use a variety of tools including texting, email, phone and written communication, to communicate regular updates that are short, direct and use plain language.
3. Continue to provide economic support to students who need it to participate in activities such as sports, music, etc., and systemize it across the district to create consistency and equitable access.

Glossary of Terms Used

Affinity Space: An affinity space is a physical or virtual space intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations. The purpose of an affinity space is to provide a positive, affirming environment for groups, often those who feel marginalized, to come together and engage in open and honest dialogues.⁹

Bias: A form of prejudice that results from our need to quickly classify individuals into categories.¹⁰

Cultural Competency: Cultural competency involves an ability to increase one's awareness about personal biases, assumptions, attitudes and worldviews; specific knowledge of cultures, history, worldviews, languages, and diverse experiences; and a repertoire of skills that allow one to effectively intervene in personal and professional domains.¹¹

Equity: The fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is necessary to provide equal opportunities to all groups.¹² Also, see ACSD's educational equity definition on page 2 of this report.

Equity Rubric: A comprehensive tool with a series of categories, questions, and/or criteria to help people better understand equity and make decisions that result in more equitable outcomes.

Flexible Pathways: Flexible Pathways are any combination of high-quality expanded learning opportunities, including academic and experiential components, which build and assess attainment of identified proficiencies and lead to secondary school completion, civic engagement and postsecondary readiness. Flexible pathways allow students to apply their knowledge and skills to tasks of personal interest as part of the personalized learning planning process.¹³

Implicit Bias: Negative associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold and affect our understanding, actions and decisions; also known as unconscious or hidden bias.¹⁴

Inclusion: Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.¹⁵

⁹ University of Southern California, Diversity, Access, and Equity Affinity Space

¹⁰ University of Washington, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary, 2023.

<https://environment.uw.edu/about/diversity-equity-inclusion/tools-and-additional-resources/glossary-dei-concepts/>

¹¹ University of California Davis, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary, 2023.

<https://diversity.ucdavis.edu/dei-resources/glossary>

¹² University of Washington.

¹³ Agency of Education, Flexible Pathways Resource Handout, 2023.

https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-plp-what-are-flexible-pathways_0.pdf

¹⁴ University of Washington.

¹⁵ Racial Equity Tools, Glossary, 2023. <https://www.raciaequitytools.org/glossary>

Justice, diversity, equity, inclusion (JEDI): A more detailed summary of the ways aspects of diversity and equity work together. Justice refers to a goal of vision for social change that requires redressing past inequities. Equity refers to a practice where people receive resources they need to participate in society. Diversity is the difference between people, things, and experiences. Inclusion is the practice of valuing unique experiences and contributions people have to offer.¹⁶

Marginalization: A social process by which individuals or groups are (intentionally or unintentionally) distanced from access to power and resources and constructed as insignificant, peripheral, or less valuable/privileged to a community or “mainstream” society. This term describes a social process, so as not to imply a lack of agency. Examples of marginalized groups include, but are by no means limited to, groups excluded due to race, religion, political or cultural group, age, gender, or financial status.¹⁷

Multicultural Competency: A process of embracing diversity and learning about people from other cultural backgrounds. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world and an openness to learn from them.¹⁸

Restorative Practices: Restorative practices are used in schools to foster an equitable and positive school culture. Restorative practices focus on strengthening relationships and connections between individuals, both youth and adults, in a school community. Restorative practices offer schools an alternative to traditional disciplinary actions that center on punishment for misbehavior and breaking rules.¹⁹

¹⁶ Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio, JEDI Frequently Asked Questions, 2023.

<https://www.diversitycenterneo.org/jedi-frequently-asked-questions/>.

¹⁷ Racial Equity Tools, Glossary, 2023. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

¹⁸ University of Washington.

¹⁹ Designing for Equity in Next Gen Learning, Restorative Practices in Schools, 2023.

<https://www.nextgenlearning.org/equity-toolkit/school-culture>