

Equity In Action: An Update



Dear SCASD Community,

As our school district has closed out the 2021-2022 school year and is currently preparing for the fall, we would like to share an update about our Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) efforts to date.

As educators, our role includes so many important responsibilities with caring for and educating students. Our school district desires for *all* students to have what they need for future success. Our DEI efforts over the past year, summarized below in an update newsletter, have fit squarely into our strategic priorities for providing meaningful learning experiences and welcoming environments for all students, but we must do much more.

Our hope in providing this comprehensive equity update is to continue to work collaboratively with you, our community, in these efforts. We want to ensure that a SCASD student's identity and circumstances do not dictate their potential for success.

In the coming year, our equity efforts will be embedded in our strategic plan. We look forward to a new school year and wish you the best for the remainder of the summer.

Sincerely,

Seria Chatters
Bob O'Donnell

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In 2020, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) began notifying school districts of significant disproportionality and overidentification of students in special education programming. Prior to 2020, districts were largely unaware of this information. Upon notification, we promptly contracted two organizations to conduct a comprehensive equity audit of our processes. Although PDE was primarily focused on special education programming, we found it to be imperative that we review our system as a whole.

We recognize that the information provided below is concerning. Please know that we have been continuously working to improve our systems. We acknowledge that our actions, however inadvertent, have caused harm to our students and families, and we sincerely apologize for not addressing this issue sooner. Now that we are aware, we can do better.

Some of our work was prompted by two recent equity audits of the district, which were conducted by the Equity Literacy Institute and the Center for Education and Civil Rights. These audits highlighted the following concerns:

- Overidentification of Black students as individuals with specific learning disabilities
- Underrepresentation of Black students as gifted
- Underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in Algebra I by 8th grade
- Underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students and students with disabilities in AP classes
- Lower graduation rates for Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, economically disadvantaged, and students in special education and English Language Learner programs.
- Disproportionate discipline of economically disadvantaged and Black, Latinx, and Multiracial students regarding in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension
- Lack of representation of diverse faculty and staff when compared to SCASD's student population

To address some of these identified issues, we have taken the following steps:

Overidentification of Black Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

Our special education department has collaborated with the school psychologist team to conduct a comprehensive review of our processes for identifying students for special education services. SCASD has also reached out and connected with the Pennsylvania Department of Education for consultation and support. Additionally, we had a team of administrators attend the PDE data summit in which they received professional development on overidentification and significant disproportionality. Following the data summit, the team met with a school psychologist who provided further information on methods to remove bias from evaluative processes.

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Finally, we are reaching out to national experts as we consider integrating culturally responsive practices into our evaluative processes, which include positive behavior and intervention supports (PBIS).

Underrepresentation Identification and Supports

In 2020, we established the Equity in Student Success Initiative, in which students from marginalized backgrounds are encouraged to take on advanced course opportunities. Our work with this initiative revealed a need to start identifying students earlier in their academic careers. Therefore, we identified an individual to serve in a position to lead this initiative and they partnered with our Director of Federal Programs and Gifted Programs to help increase communication with marginalized families about opportunities related to enrichment and acceleration.



We have increased opportunities for parents to be an integral part of the recommendation process. As part of the transition to middle school, all families may now request their child be considered for the accelerated math and new science programs for sixth graders. Families can sign their child up to participate in the summer math program to be considered for this offering as their child transitions.

After a child has transitioned to middle school, this process is available to all families in the Synergy Student Information System through the course recommendation process. Families may opt to have their child considered to take advanced math options in seventh and eighth grade.

At the high school level, over the past few years, we have been using scores from the PSAT, taken in ninth grade, to identify all students who could sign up and take Advanced Placement courses. All high school families can speak with their school counselor to be considered for Advanced Placement courses, as we have removed the prerequisites from many courses.

The Equity Student Success liaison continues to support and identify students K-12 who would benefit from trying advanced course options. This individual develops plans and works collaboratively with families to support closing opportunity gaps.

Underrepresentation in Gifted Identification and Services

Our updated universal screening for the gifted process, which mirrors that of a formal gifted multidisciplinary evaluation, looks at every third grader in the district and their cognitive and

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academic abilities. School teams when making recommendations are notified of students from marginalized populations so they can consider potential masking factors. Masking factors can be defined as any secondary attribute that may prevent systems for regularly recognizing giftedness (e.g., disability, race, language barriers). Our district has developed an additional screening process for students in other grades that may need their data reviewed.



In 2021, the district continued to improve communication with families related to gifted and enrichment services through targeted phone calls and private and small group meetings discussing options related to middle school math

transition and universal screening results. General gifted and enrichment services, universal screening, and transition activities will continue to be shared throughout the community next school year with the help of the Equity Student Success Initiative.

Graduation rates

Both equity audits used SCASD's 2018-2019 academic year to report graduation rates. Due to the pandemic, 2018-2019 was the last year that we were in school and not impacted by COVID-19.



Moving forward, we will continue to work closely with our administrative team to create a graduation plan for students who are at risk of not graduating. Our Equity Student Success Liaison will work collaboratively with the high school counseling team and administration to implement methods to ensure that students from marginalized groups are meeting graduation requirements as they progress through their academic careers.



Disproportionate discipline

At present, we work to ensure that parents and guardians are a part of the disciplinary process through parent communication from the classroom teacher, administrator, or counselor via in-person contact, phone, or email. Our aim is to collaborate with parents to ensure each incident is handled within the guidelines of our student handbook. However, we recognize discipline may ultimately be needed at times.

In the future, we hope to align our disciplinary procedures and processes, from kindergarten to 12th grade, to be restorative in practice. We have reviewed each of our handbooks and integrated restorative processes in an effort to repair harm earlier in the process and reduce the

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likelihood of repetitive referrals. We aim to implement the revised handbook during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Diversification of our faculty/staff

In our continuing efforts to hire more diverse staff members within SCASD during the 2021-2022 school year, we hired 35 highly-qualified employees of color. Our latest report shows:

Research has shown that hiring a more diverse faculty can positively impact the academic performance, reading and math test scores, and graduation rates of all students. Additionally, a more diverse faculty has been shown to lead to lower discipline rates, higher attendance rates, and a more positive school climate. Our aim is to work toward ensuring our faculty demographics match our student demographics. We want to ensure each student experiences the positive impact of being able to see themselves in their teachers as we know that representation matters.

- Faculty
 - Hired 11 new faculty members of color
 - Current total 3.0% or 20 out of 663
- Paraprofessionals
 - Hired 15 new paraprofessionals of color
 - Current total 8.4% or 26 out of 311
- Other employees
 - Hired 1 security staff member (high school - out of 2 positions)
 - Hired 3 substitute teachers (22 out of 215, 10.2%)
 - Hired 4 after-school and summer programming staff (26 out of 304, 8.6%)

Additionally, we have hired a part-time Human Resource manager to assist with the recruitment and retention of our diverse faculty/staff. This individual will work collaboratively with the Director of Equity and Inclusivity to continue to develop strategies to improve access in our hiring and recruitment process.

Furthermore, we continue to be a member of the [Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium](#) to use toolkits aimed at supporting and retaining a diverse workforce. Activities include mentoring opportunities and small group gatherings, and we also have contracted with a professor who specializes in supporting diverse employees.

School Climate

We continue to work diligently to positively impact school climate districtwide. We recognize a multi-pronged approach is needed to specifically address concerns brought forward by students and families.

Professional Development

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We continue to work with a specific group of teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and staff identified as Equity Advocates. Equity Advocates meet on a monthly basis and receive professional development focused on how they can impact their classroom and school environment in equitable ways. In April 2022, elementary equity advocates participated in a 2-hour workshop led by the Center for Education and Civil Rights. This workshop focused on helping them connect the work they do in classrooms with district policies and procedures that support diversity, equity, and inclusion

On Jan. 18, 2022, all faculty, staff, and administrators across the district participated in a day-long conference focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dr. Chatters opened the conference with a keynote focused on helping each employee identify how equity applies to their work. SCASD partnered with Samantha King, from the Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania who provided training for all elementary faculty and staff focused on supporting LGBTQ students. Our final keynote was Sara Ahmed, author of *Being the Change*. Sara focused on concrete ways all faculty and staff could put their diversity, equity, and inclusion into action in their classrooms.

No Place for Hate



For the third year in a row, our high school and Delta middle and high school programs have participated in No Place for Hate, a school climate initiative focused on educating the student body in ways to support their peers. The Delta Program has garnered the honor of being named No Place for Hate for 3 years in a row. State High has been named No Place for Hate for 2 years in a row.

This year, both of our middle schools participated in No Place for Hate during the 2021/2022 school year. Next year, we will be working collaboratively with elementary schools to participate in No Place for Hate as well.

Student Voice in School Climate Initiatives

In February of 2022, an altercation and display of hateful language and symbols had a significant impact on our school and community climate. Through our work with students, we recognized we needed to go beyond our current school climate interventions. We reached out to the US Department of Justice and partnered with their Community Relations Office to hold a day-long



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event focused on uplifting student voice. Forty diverse high school students came together and participated in SPIRIT (Student Problem Identification and Resolutions of Issues Together). At the conclusion of the events, each small group of students selected two students to represent their group on a newly formed group called the SPIRIT Council. The aim of the SPIRIT Council is to have the group work collaboratively with administrators in some decision making processes. State High administrators have fully embraced the council and have started to work closely with them to support student communications.



LIFT Every Voice

Two diverse high school students, motivated by the incident in February, approached the Office of Equity with concerns. The students wanted to develop more ways to uplift the voices of diverse students. In April of 2022, the students worked collaboratively with the office to create an event titled Lift Every Voice: A Cultural Celebration. Diverse students across the high school came together to recite poetry, dance, perform spoken word, and sing. Approximately 900 State High students attended. The State High administration has committed to have this event occur every year.



Our Culture, Our Voices Panel Series

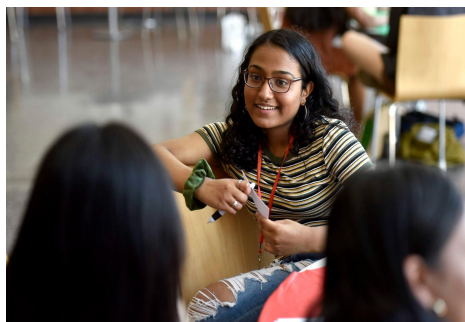
Starting in September of 2021, the Office of Equity developed a new series called *Our Culture, Our Voices*. The purpose of these events were to come together with diverse community members to learn more about one another. Each event was co-facilitated by students who identified similarly to the community members they were interviewing. These panels were recorded and open to the community. We started by hosting a panel on Latinx community members, [APIDA community members](#), [Black community members](#), and community members who identified as transgender. Each panel provided opportunities for representation, connection, and support. We will continue this series in the 2022-2023 school year.

Peer Advocates and Jr. Peer Advocates Program

Our peer advocates program, established in 2019, continued throughout the pandemic via online platforms. The Social Justice Summer Institute is going on its fourth year of

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implementation. This year, over 60 students applied to become a peer advocate. Each year the program brings in approximately 30 new students. Peer advocates continue to support their school through the facilitation of the Equity Leadership Summit, Mental Health Summit, and the peer counseling program.



Last year, we started the Jr. Peer Advocates Program for rising 5th-grade students. These students are selected by elementary principals and work alongside school counselors to support their school.

Looking Ahead

In closing, we believe that we have made strides to improve our systems along equity and inclusivity lines. However, we realize that we have much work left to do. At present, we are revising our multi-year strategic plan with community input to address discipline and academic disproportionality more specifically in our goals, measures and practices. Our hope is to develop a more streamlined plan to better meet the needs of our increasingly diverse needs of our students through continuous improvement of our leadership and teaching practices.



Another addition being planned is a districtwide dashboard that will track the progress we're making to achieve more equitable practices within our school system. This resource will show, among other data, information about enrollment and demographics, academic achievement and school climate.



We will continue to prioritize our diversity, equity and inclusivity efforts, as we know this will be an ongoing effort for us. In the coming years, we will continue to seek a more equitable and inclusive district with this definition in mind:

“Educational equity, inclusion and belonging means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential.”



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