

# DVCEE EXCELLENCE THROUGH EQUITY QUALITY PROGRAM REVIEW



**REPORT OF FINDINGS  
JULY 2020**

July 2, 2020

To the West Chester Area School District:

Our DVCEE Equity Through Excellence Quality Review Team wishes to thank and commend all of the district administrators, board members, staff, teachers, parents/guardians, community leaders and students who participated in this Excellence Through Equity Review process in 2019-20. We greatly appreciated the open, positive and professional attitude and support displayed by all school staff and administration.

The visiting team found the administration, teachers, staff, students and parents/guardians to be most cooperative and willing to openly discuss all aspects of the school district's programs and practices- both assets/strengths and challenges. Graciousness, openness and hospitality were evident throughout the three-day visit, making our jobs much easier and allowing us to collect extensive valuable and useful information from key stakeholder individuals and groups.

Over the course of 235 individual and group interviews and classroom observations conducted in every school in the district as well as two community settings, the team collected information in a variety of areas and provided detailed answers to specific questions developed by WCASD stakeholders in advance of our visit. Team members identified observed equity-focused needs and made practical recommendations by applying their experience in the field to the on-site data collected, realizing that local conditions will ultimately determine local action.

We were pleased to have played a key role in your examination of and ongoing efforts to ensure excellence through educational equity throughout the district. We wish you continued success in what is probably the most significant challenge for today and tomorrow – educating and preparing *each* of our children for future academic and life success. This report is respectfully submitted by:

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# **INTRODUCTION**

In 2018-19 the Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence and Equity (DVCEE) initiated a new service to our member districts that was designed to support the ongoing refinement of their educational equity improvement efforts. The ***DVCEE Excellence Through Equity Quality Review*** provides a focused and detailed examination of equity in school and district policy, opportunity and practice.

*Educational equity is based on the principles of fairness and justice in allocation of resources, elimination of institutional barriers to access and opportunity, and creation of the real possibility of equality in positive academic and life outcomes for each student and between diverse groups of students. It means that students' identities will not predict or predetermine their success in our school district, in postsecondary education or in life.*

*It is based on a shared commitment to ensure that every student receives what they need to maximize that success, and that school districts are committed to assure all students' equitable opportunity to access high level and engaging learning experiences, while actively eliminating institutional barriers in district and school policy and practice that limit or deny this access.*

In the Fall of 2019 and at the invitation of Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent of the West Chester Area School District, a diverse and experienced external team of educators and specialists was convened to complete a thorough analysis of the current status of educational equity in the district.

The Quality Review and identification of the visiting team was directed by Dr. Robert L. Jarvis, Director of DVCEE and the Penn Coalition for Educational Equity in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Consultants Arthur Mitchell and Dr. Michael J. Masko served as lead researchers, and Dayna Muniz served as the key point persons for managing logistics with the district. Participating external team members were selected from current DVCEE district and school administrators.

The team members graciously gave of their time, talent and extensive practical knowledge and craft wisdom to support their West Chester Area School District colleagues in the process. The Quality Review was based on District Equity Team identification of six Focused Inquiry Questions based upon the Six Goals of Educational Equity (Bradley Scott 2008), an extensive 3-day process of district and community interviews and school and classroom observations, as well as district document

reviews, review of and triangulation of student achievement and perceptual data, and an in-depth study of current equity-related policies, procedures and practices.

This report is organized into two major sections:

**SECTION A: DATA TRENDS, THEMES AND OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS,**

contains system-wide observations, data, needs, recommendations and resources in five areas that may serve to guide school district leaders as they plan to address issues of equity in a systemic approach.

**SECTION B: FOCUSED INQUIRY QUESTIONS,** identifies specific needs and recommendations for improvement in the context of the six focused inquiry questions that were developed and provided by a team of WCASD administrators and educators who represented their District Equity Leadership Team.

Our visiting team recognizes that the scope and complexity of the recommendations will require ongoing reflection, analysis, decision-making, prioritizing, allocation of resources and integration into the *West Chester Area School District Comprehensive Plan 2019- 2022*.

We hope that results of this study and this report will provide valuable insights and direction to the West Chester Area School District as they move forward with their strategic continuous improvement efforts in enhancing the academic and life outcomes for each and every young person they serve, and reducing disparities defined by race/ethnicity, gender, ability, socio-economic status, or first language.

We expect that the district leadership will use the outcomes of this process to reinforce and celebrate their extensive assets and strengths, build upon promising and effective practices where they exist, recognize and reflect deeply on their organizational barriers and challenges, and ultimately establish priorities for future action that will most effectively address those challenges/barriers to building a system of excellence through equity that nurtures the academic and future life success of each and every one of their students.

# **SECTION A: DATA TRENDS, THEMES, AND OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **Part 1: ASSESSMENT DATA AND MEASURES OF DISPROPORTIONALITY**

Similar to many public school districts across the nation, the visiting team found that the WCASD disaggregates equity related data as they pertain to state tests. These data are made available to teachers and administrators through the On Hand Schools student data management system. The measurements, however, can be limiting towards measuring access to high quality district programming because they are only measured at a single point in time and the data yielded from these assessments is not reported until after students have progressed to the next grade level. The team found, however, recent efforts of the school district that have sought to address the limitations of the state testing system and more accurately measure access to district programming. Most notable to these efforts has been the creation of a common assessment philosophy and framework for K-12 classrooms across the school district. This is clear evidence that the district has begun to develop assessment practices that target and measure goal area one of the district’s Comprehensive Plan – *Access to District Programming*.

The school district also began in the 2017-18 school year reporting *Local Effectiveness Measures*. These locally driven data points are provided to district and building level administration at multiple points during the school year as well as for year-end reports that help drive progress towards School Board goals. The measurements indicate a number of data points that measure both student achievement and access to a variety of district programs.

### **Equity Related Achievement and Access Data**

#### **High School**

Percentage of Student Enrollment in Advanced Placement Classes

	<b>2017-18</b>		<b>2018-19</b>		<b>2019-20</b>		<b>2020-21</b>	
	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	15.46	36.81	15.53	37.95	18.07	39.94	25.88	43.57
<b>Henderson High School</b>	14.97	39.23	13.13	38.61	16.38	42.04	26.84	47.13
<b>East High School</b>	18.92	35.96	16.67	35.13	18.64	35.58	26.04	40.55
<b>Rustin High School</b>	11.76	35.34	17.24	39.86	19.67	41.93	24.19	42.67

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Accelerated Honors Courses

	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	12.08	33.48	14.16	32.70	18.49	32.71	15.94	34.45
<b>Henderson High School</b>	7.48	31.86	11.88	31.12	15.82	33.86	15.26	36.02
<b>East High School</b>	16.22	35.80	19.14	35.13	20.90	32.50	18.93	35.64
<b>Rustin High School</b>	12.61	32.79	10.34	31.93	18.85	31.74	12.10	30.43

Percentage of Junior and Seniors Enrolled in Dual Enrollment Courses

	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	.49	2.68	4.18	6.98	2.91	5.08	3.67	7.09
<b>Henderson High School</b>	1.37	2.83	3.66	8.54	2.67	4.97	2.02	3.60
<b>East High School</b>	0.00	2.96	2.33	5.79	1.30	6.10	4.60	9.98
<b>Rustin High School</b>	0.00	2.67	7.04	6.62	5.56	4.23	5.08	7.99

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Computer and/or CAD Courses

	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	3.86	8.43	4.41	9.43	7.25	10.99
<b>Henderson High School</b>	5.03	10.92	6.21	12.54	12.11	17.14
<b>East High School</b>	3.07	8.70	5.08	8.67	4.14	8.05
<b>Rustin High School</b>	3.39	5.67	.82	6.95	4.03	7.22

Percentage of Students with 16 or more Cumulative Absences

	2018-19		2019-20*	
	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	10.77	5.17%	6.25	2.80%
<b>Henderson High School</b>	12.20	4.91%	6.78	2.78%
<b>East High School</b>	8.67	4.93%	4.42	2.76%
<b>Rustin High School</b>	11.86	5.98%	8.20	2.86%

\*August 26-March 13

Percentage of Minority Students with 3 or more Level Two or Three Disciplinary Offenses

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*
<b>District</b>	4.54	5.47	10.35	6.73	5.50	3.75
<b>Henderson High School</b>	3.29	6.33	13.89	5.00	6.10	4.52
<b>East High School</b>	6.49	5.00	11.11	8.75	5.78	3.31
<b>Rustin High School</b>	3.47	4.74	5.93	6.35	4.24	3.28



Percentage of All Students with 3 or more Level Two or Three Disciplinary Offenses

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*
<b>District</b>	1.73	1.93	2.49	1.92	2.02	1.48
<b>Henderson High School</b>	1.60	1.97	2.96	1.23	2.11	1.73
<b>East High School</b>	1.99	1.89	2.75	2.52	2.66	2.03
<b>Rustin High School</b>	1.59	1.90	1.79	2.01	1.32	.69

\*August 26-March 13

**Middle School**

Percentage of Minority Students in Level 1 or Accelerated Math Classes

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
<b>District</b>	34.74	32.59	28.31	25.66	26.38	28.53	34.13
<b>Peirce Middle School</b>	34.78	33	27.78	34.78	33.33	35.57	34.18
<b>Stetson Middle School</b>	35.42	28.18	25.96	19.80	17.44	23.47	29.29
<b>Fugett Middle School</b>	34.17	36.54	31.43	22.40	25.64	23.68	37.70

Percentage of All Students in Level 1 or Accelerated Math Classes

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
<b>District</b>	70.83	69.46	64.64	62.73	62.45	61.55	63.55
<b>Peirce Middle School</b>	76.9	71.52	66.98	68.41	67.77	66.54	64.68
<b>Stetson Middle School</b>	69.03	65.75	62.97	61.67	62.06	60.49	63.11
<b>Fugett Middle School</b>	67.14	71.48	63.98	56.48	56.60	56.34	62.57

Percentage of Students in at least one Accelerated Math or English and/or Acc Honors course

	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	8.09	30.11%	10.78	30.14%	9.70	29.52%
<b>Peirce Middle School</b>	11.21	32.46%	9.38	32.62%	11.41	33.18%
<b>Stetson Middle School</b>	4.90	28.01%	10.23	27.31%	9.18	26.30%
<b>Fugett Middle School</b>	7.81	29.65%	12.71	30.08%	7.89	28.14%

Percentage of Students with 16 or more Cumulative Absences

	2018-19		2019-20*	
	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	2.85%	1.62%	1.06%	.71%
<b>Peirce Middle School</b>	.55%	1.46%	0.00	.74%
<b>Stetson Middle School</b>	5.32%	2.06%	2.88%	.81%
<b>Fugett Middle School</b>	2.38%	1.38%	.82%	.58%

\*August 26-March 13

Percentage of Minority Students with 3 or more Level Two or Three Disciplinary Offenses

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*
<b>District</b>	4.55	2.56	2.15	4.96	3.13	1.33
<b>Peirce Middle School</b>	6.52	0	1.85	2.61	3.05	1.33
<b>Stetson Middle School</b>	3.13	3.64	2.88	4.95	6.38	1.92
<b>Fugett Middle School</b>	4.2	3.85	1.9	7.2	0.79	0.82

Percentage of All Students with 3 or more Level Two or Three Disciplinary Offenses

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*
<b>District</b>	1.69	1.22	.6	1.49	1.05	.67
<b>Peirce Middle School</b>	1.3	1.31	0.63	1.10	.98	.64
<b>Stetson Middle School</b>	0.51	0.71	0.41	.65	.80	.93
<b>Fugett Middle School</b>	3.29	1.7	0.78	2.77	1.38	.46

\*August 26-March 13

## Elementary

Percentage of Students with 16 or more Cumulative Absences

	2018-19		2019-20*	
	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	2.15%	.75%	0.72%	.28%
<b>East Bradford</b>	0.00%	.23%	0.00%	0%
<b>East Goshen</b>	3.64%	1.45%	0.00%	0%
<b>Exton</b>	1.96%	.54%	0.00%	.83%
<b>Fern Hill</b>	2.63%	.54%	0.00%	.18%
<b>Glen Acres</b>	0.00%	.35%	0.00%	.17%
<b>Hillsdale</b>	.83%	1.02%	0.00%	.18%
<b>Mary C Howse</b>	1.79%	1.13%	0.00%	0%
<b>Penn Wood</b>	0.00%	.80%	0.00%	.39%
<b>Starkweather</b>	6.41%	1.04%	5.38%	.85%
<b>Westtown Thornbury</b>	2.38%	.38%	0.00%	0%

\*August 26-March 13

Percentage of Students in grades 3, 4, 5 Participating in Band, Chorus and Orchestra

School/District	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	Minority	All	Minority	All	Minority	All
<b>District</b>	40.73%	64.84%	41.90%	65.15%	53.21%	65.81%
<b>East Bradford</b>	45.16%	73.81%	42.42%	65.35%	66.67%	87.85%
<b>East Goshen</b>	61.90%	90.95%	88.89%	92.17%	77.78%	80.62%
<b>Exton</b>	56.25%	61.51%	33.33%	60.22%	56.25%	58.45%
<b>Fern Hill</b>	41.67%	52.29%	32.79%	56.69%	47.27%	59.12%

<b>Glen Acres</b>	17.78%	62.37%	16.67%	54.42%	43.59%	59.93%
<b>Hillsdale</b>	39.06%	62.87%	34.25%	65.50%	50.94%	66.22%
<b>Mary C Howse</b>	73.91%	72.49%	58.62%	64.31%	72.41%	69.91%
<b>Penn Wood</b>	46.15%	61.70%	50.00%	67.27%	38.46%	56.55%
<b>Starkweather</b>	5.41%	68.47%	45.95%	64.59%	39.13%	64.60%
<b>Westtown Thornbury</b>	48.65%	60.00%	44.44%	67.46%	46.34%	61.33%

Much of the *Local Effectiveness Measures Data* demonstrate steady gains in recent years in minority student achievement and access to a variety of academic and non-academic district programs. The district is commended for instituting policies and programs that are indeed indicating impact. At the same time, this data also reveals the on-going significant gaps in achievement and participation between minority students relative all students...a trend that is evidenced in school systems throughout our country.

Additional data made available to the visiting team reveal areas of disproportionality.

For example, the table below illustrates how the suspensions of African American and Hispanic students have been disproportionate to the suspensions of White students over the past three years.

**Discipline: K-12 Out-of-School Suspensions**

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20*</b>
<b>Total Number of Out-of-School Suspensions</b>	389	400	212
<b>Percent African American Students</b>	17%	19%	14%
<b>Percent Hispanic Students</b>	15%	12%	17%
<b>Percent White Students</b>	62%	61%	63%

\*August 26-March 13

Likewise, placements in special education for Hispanic and African American students have been disproportionate to placements of White students:

In 2018-19:

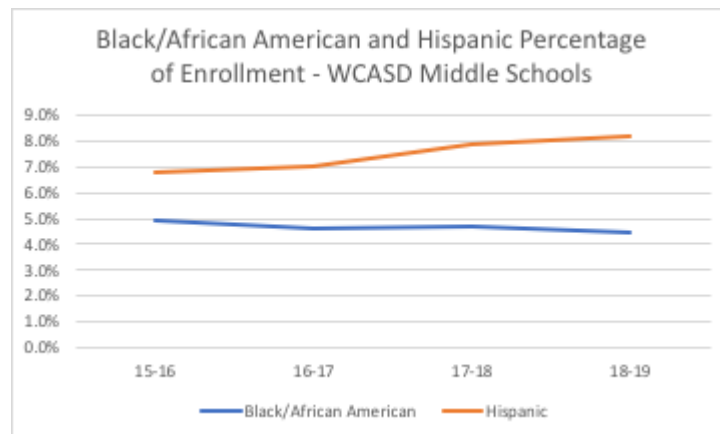
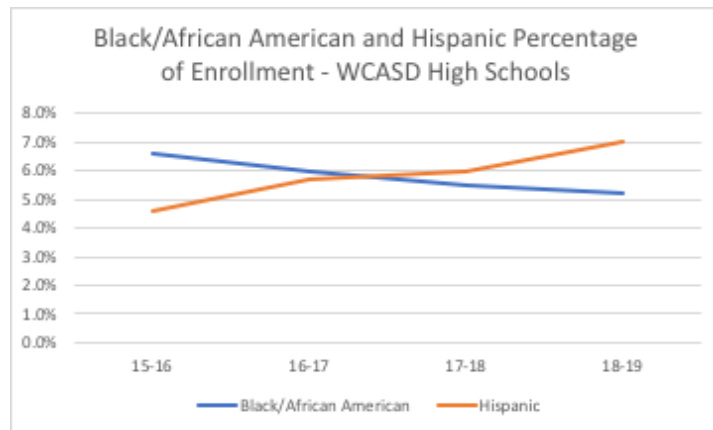
- 27% of Hispanic students were receiving special education services
- 20% of African American students were receiving special education services
- 13% of White students were receiving special education services.

**Changing District Racial Demographics**

From 2015-2017 Black/African American enrollment has shown a small decrease,

from 6.6% to 5.2 % of enrollment at the three high schools, and from 4.9% to 4.5% of enrollment at the three middle schools. The number of Black students at the middle schools decreased by 13 over three years. The number of Black students at the high schools decreased by 48 over three years. The number of Black students at the ten elementary schools decreased by 21 (from 231 to 210) over three years.

From 2015-2017 Hispanic student enrollment has shown an increase, from 4.6% to 7.0 % of enrollment at the three high schools, and from 6.8% to 8.2% of enrollment at the three middle schools.



## Recommendations and Action Steps

***Recommendation #1: Clearly identify and track data that demonstrate the effects of equity- focused interventions on disaggregated groups’ performance and outcomes over time. Within the Local Effectiveness Measures, the district should include data pertaining to gender, ability, economically disadvantaged students and English Language Learners.***

### Action Steps

- Future data collection and analysis should include disaggregated data that are nuanced in terms of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender. In order to better understand the unique performance of different racial/ethnic groups of students in the district we suggest that in future reporting that “minority” student data be further disaggregated by specific race/ethnicity group, i.e. Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, White, Multiracial and by gender.
- Strongly consider more robust and in-depth measurement of disproportionality. We recommend that the district embrace three types of calculations- see *Data Analysis Workbook: Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education*, Metro Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, NYU. Three main data tools are used to explore disproportionality data: *classification rate*, *composition index*, and *relative risk ratio*. The formulas for calculating can be applied to placements, academic performance, and discipline.

“Because of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each tool, it is best to use as many of the tools as possible at a given level. While each tool can give some information, using all three tools will create a more complete statistical picture.”

- The classification rate identifies what rate, or percentage of risk, students of a particular racial/ethnic group have of being classified as students with disabilities.
  - The composition index gives the proportion of students by race/ethnicity in a particular situation. Composition indexes are used to determine if a particular group is over- or underrepresented in special education, in a particular disability, or in a particular classroom setting.
  - The relative risk ratio gives a comparison of risk for classification of one group in relation to the risk for all other groups. A risk ratio of 1 indicates that there is equal risk. An increase in the risk ratio is indicative of increased risk.
- Collect, disaggregate, review and analyze a consistent set of key indicators to inform the school district’s achievement of equity-based outcomes. Identify key indicators that have a research-based relationship to achievement and attainment disparities. These indicators could include:

## **OUTCOME DATA**

- Student Assessments (State and Local Assessments and/or AP, IB, ACT, PSAT/SAT Participation and Performance, 21st Century Learning Skills)
- Student Grades/GPA
- Attendance Rates and Patterns
- High School Graduation Rates
- College-Going Rates/Attending First College of Choice
- College Persistence and Success

## **LEARNING OPPORTUNITY DATA**

- Enrollment Patterns in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Honors, Gifted, Math and Science Courses
  - Enrollment Patterns in Title 1-Remedial Programs, Special Education
  - Discipline Referral Rates and Consequences
  - Extracurricular Involvement
  - First Generation College-Going
- Examine the prevalent and continued use of PSSA data in MTSS and leveling/placement decisions, given the more time-sensitive and relevant local measures of learning available.
  - Use disaggregated data to examine the root causes of disproportionate representation of Hispanic and African American students identified for receiving special education services.

***Recommendation #2 Develop a transparent dashboard for these measures that draws student demographic, local achievement, participation, course enrollment and discipline information from the student information system.***

### **Action Steps**

- Make the dashboard available to all in the community and expect principals and teachers to monitor the effects of their equity-focused interventions.
- Develop and track disaggregated data on student enrollment, withdrawal and transfers. For example, what data inform the belief that the decline in the school district's Black population is a result of the decrease in affordable housing? What are students' subgroups' private, parochial, charter and school district enrollment patterns? Are more families moving out of the Borough but remaining in the district?
- More clearly indicate how and to what degree the school-based equity teams will use data in decision-making and goal setting.

## Part 2: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FACULTY, ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF OF COLOR

WCASD, like all other districts in our region, state and country, is increasingly seeking to recruit and support the retention of more teachers, administrators and staff of color. Unfortunately, although more teachers of color are being recruited across the nation, the pace of increase is slow, especially here in Pennsylvania. We know fewer young people in general, including young people of color, are considering teaching as a career and attrition rates are high, leaving growing gaps between the demand for such teachers and the supply.

It is no surprise that suburban districts like WCASD are eager to increase teacher and administrator diversity, given what we know to be its significant benefits to students. Being taught by teachers of color offers benefits to all students, and especially to students of color, in the following ways:

- Studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color. Scholars cite improved reading and math test scores, improved graduation rates, and increases in aspirations to attend college.
- Students of color can experience social-emotional and nonacademic benefits from having teachers of color, and both students of color and White students report having positive perceptions of their teachers of color, including feeling cared for and academically challenged.
- Teacher diversity may also benefit teachers of color who experience feelings of isolation, frustration, and fatigue when there are few other teachers of color in their schools. Increasing teacher diversity may improve satisfaction for teachers of color and decrease turnover, a key contributor to teacher shortages and school instability. (Carver-Thomas, Learning Policy Institute, 2018)

### Equitable Hiring Practices

Currently the district HR Director reports the following demographic data relative to interviews and hiring of racially diverse teachers over the past six years:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Hires</i>
<b>2013-2014</b>	7	<b>1</b>
<b>2014-2015</b>	13	<b>3</b>
<b>2015-2016</b>	20	<b>5</b>
<b>2016-2017</b>	54	<b>6</b>

<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>10</b>

In 2014-15, the district interviewed for two principal positions with four out of six minority candidates (3 Black and 1 Hispanic). Ultimately, one of the Black candidates was hired.

In 2016-17, the overall number of Black applicants increased from 13 to 20, and Hispanic 22 to 28 from the previous year. In 2017 the overall number of Black applicants increased from 20 to 54 and the overall pool of minority applicants increased from 54 to 62, and of the 46 new teachers hired for the district 8 (17%) were minority candidates.

In 2018-19 there were 27 candidates of color interviewed for teaching positions and of that group 8 were hired. It was reported that of the district's 1026 professional employees 75 were people of color (7%). This reflected an increase from the 2016-17 school year when the district employed 49 educators of color (5%).

We commend the district and its HR director and district administrators for their efforts over the past six years in developing key strategic recruitment and hiring initiatives that are paying dividends in increasing numbers of more racially diverse teachers and building-level administrators and staff applying, being interviewed, and being hired:

- Formalizing district-wide recruitment and hiring practices and annually reviewing and refining these practices and procedures- getting beyond informal and relationship-dependent practices of the past that discouraged diversity in hiring
- Diverse teacher recruitment efforts in Pittsburgh and Ohio
- On-going participation in DVCEE Educators of Color Recruitment Fair and Job Postings
- Screening ALL applicants of color for a potential interview
- The district practice that reimburses Instructional Aides and Support Staff 50% of college/university tuition for returning to school to get degrees and certification. Five of twelve of staff taking advantage are non-white.
- Long Term Substitutes/Instructional Aides are “basically guaranteed an interview”
- Setting 20% per year targets for increasing diverse professional staff and accomplishing that goal over the past six years as reported by the HR Director
- Principals’ commitment: see high levels of interest of candidates once they get in the door
- Partnerships with West Chester University, Immaculata and Neumann and recruitment at other Philadelphia region colleges and universities
- Utilizing connections with Black sorority and fraternity system



## Challenges:

- Distance, transportation and/or relocation challenges for potential candidates living in Philadelphia
- Low entry salary for newly certified teachers (second lowest among Chester County districts) lowers competitive edge with other local districts for highly qualified and skilled candidates- related to collective bargaining agreement (*note – the second year salary increases significantly and is more in line with other regional salaries.*)
- Dearth of candidates in high need areas: Math/Science, Spanish, Special Education, Technical Education
- Recruiting out of state candidates due to licensing/certification reciprocity challenges with PA Department of Education policies and practices
- Losing diverse employees to open administrative/higher-paying positions in other districts

## Recommendation and Action Steps

**Recommendation: Continue the district’s commitment to hiring diverse staff that reflects the WCASD community.**

### Action Steps

- Make publicly visible the Board’s and District’s commitment to equity and diversification of professional staff and make and make public and transparent your successes for example on the district website and in regular communications to the West Chester community.
- As central office administrative positions come open, strongly consider strategies for filling those with minority candidates.
- Consider additional staff support in HR that might target energies in seeking diverse candidates.
- Consider working with legislators to extend reciprocity certifications with other states to increase the candidate pool. (*Currently Pennsylvania does not certify a teacher unless that teacher has completed the PA requirements for certification*).
- Consider a more robust candidate/employee information management system. The demographic data on applications, interviews, hiring and retention were not easily accessed.
- As the “standard interview questions” are reviewed, consider, consider expanding questions that get to all candidate’s deep understanding of equity and demonstration of culturally responsive behaviors in practice
- Consider development of focused “grow your own” efforts with your students of color in middle school/high school career planning to nurture and support their potential interest/experiences in teaching/education as a career

- Raise diversity recruitment and retention challenges with future collective bargaining agreements
- Consider developing robust partnerships with local universities with the express purpose of strengthening the pool of talent from which the district can hire
- Examine the pathways that new teaching hires may come through (student teaching, substitutes, teaching assistants) and determine whether the pathways are fully accessible to all candidates
- Ensure that “fit” and issues around district culture are not barriers to employment.

### **Part 3: DEFINING EQUITY FOR WCASD AND MAKING EQUITY A DISTRICT PRIORITY**

#### **Commendations:**

We commend the Board and Superintendent and his team for their long-standing and ongoing commitment to equity. The district was a founding member of the Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence and Equity (early on the Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium) and has been an active member for the past 16 years. Moreover, for nearly 20 years the school district has contracted annually with the Pacific Education Group for support and co-facilitation of their district-wide equity induction program. Equity has a prominent place in the WCASD Comprehensive Plan 2019-2022 and the 2019-2020 School Board Goals. The first of the three goals in the WCASD Three-year Comprehensive Plan 2019-2022 addresses equity:

*Expand access to comprehensive district programming to provide equitable opportunities for all students.*

We further commend the Board and Superintendent of Schools for planning for the future by commissioning this Excellence through Equity Quality Review.

#### **Challenges**

Our many interviews have revealed that WCASD staff have different understandings of the meaning of equity. In many cases, equity is understood as racial equality, to the partial or total exclusion of other markers of student identities, e.g., gender, disability, first language, home culture, economic status, etc.

The School Board equity goal is the last of six goals:

*The Board will support programs that promote and ensure equity for all students.*

While it is commendable that the Board has elevated these issues, equity goals of the board or the school district should not be stand-alone goals; they cannot be realized outside of the other goals and initiatives of the school district. Rather, equity goals need to be present, prominent and meaningful in every aspect of the district's aspirations and stated goals.

Strategy 2 for Comprehensive Plan Goal Area One states:

*Engage diverse stakeholders to develop a coherent and aligned K-12 local system of assessments to determine whether we are providing equitable opportunities for all students.*

While this strategy is necessary to assess equitable opportunity, the school district currently lacks a strategy to identify, assess and address equitable outcomes beyond racial measurements.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

***Recommendation #1: Develop an equity-focused theory of change and logic model.***

### **Action Steps**

- Engage in the analysis and development of an evidenced-based report that parallels the recommendations in the document, *Building for Equity: A Design for Inclusive School Redesign* (2020) recently published by the Boston-based nonprofit, the Center for Collaborative Education-see citation in reference section. As part of their framework, they include, in what they call their Community Driven Process, an Equitable Redesign Cycle.

The four phases of that redesign cycle are:

- Establishing Our Team
- Rediscovering Our Community
- Envisioning the Change
- Implementing for Equity

***Recommendation #2: Revisit the WCASD Three-Year Comprehensive Plan: 2019-2022 to include strategies and action steps that identify, assess and address equitable outcomes for students.***

### **Action Step**

- Move Equity from being a stand-alone goal to being the lens through which the

WCASD community views the world, makes decisions and does its work. A facilitated board and administration retreat that is specifically focused on this topic could accelerate that process.

***Recommendation #3: Continue WCASD School Board support and development of equity related policies and practices.***

**Action Steps**

- Develop a sustainable public WCASD Board District Resolution/Statement of Commitment to Equity
- Adopt public statements of urgency and commitment, regular decision and policy making through an equity lens, equitable resource allocation, effective communications, community advocacy, and monitoring of disaggregated student performance and outcome data the WCASD Board can provide critical framing and sustainability for the district's equity- focused planning and action.
- Invest in the Board Director's own on-going professional learning around equity, diversity and cultural proficiency in concert with district leadership and staff development.

**Part 4: CURRICULUM and ORGANIZATION**

**Commendations**

For nearly two decades the West Chester Area School District has demonstrated a strong commitment to exploring, learning about, and addressing issues of diversity and equity, with the mission of "educating and inspiring students to achieve their personal best." We commend the school district leaders for their longstanding commitment to semi-annual "Beyond Diversity" training for professional staff through the Pacific Education Group.

Training is provided by nine school district affiliates using a train-the-trainers model. This training has opened educators' eyes to differences, has brought the unconscious to consciousness, has developed better listeners and has created more empathy. At the same time, Beyond Diversity lacks a framework for relating the professional learning to instructional planning and preparation, classroom environment, teaching and learning, and other professional responsibilities.

We commend the school district for the establishment and support of the DELT (District Equity Leadership Team) that provides leadership and expertise from each of the district's schools.

Individual teachers have modified their planning and preparation, the classroom environment,

and instruction to embed equitable practices. We observed some instructional materials that reflect cultural and racial diversity, and some instructional practices that serve to address barriers to students' learning and growth.

The high school Course Section Guide 2020-2021 includes a second semester optional English course for seniors that is one of five semester courses that are required for CCP and Honors level students to complete their English requirement., *African American Literature*, and two social studies electives, *African American History*, and *Hispanic Cultures*. These courses are described as follows:

- African American Literature .5 credit/semester course  
*This course seeks to understand the Black experience through texts written by African American authors. Students will encounter a variety of literary genres, including novels, short stories, poems, and plays. Readings cover a wide band of history, from slave narratives to the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights movement, and the 21st Century Black experience. Issues of race, equity, and culture will be foregrounded as we investigate the historical struggle of African Americans.*
- African American History .5 credit/semester course  
*This course examines the experiences of African-Americans in the United States and their role in shaping the nation's history from colonial America to the present day.*
- Hispanic Cultures .5 credit/semester course  
*This course examines the experiences of Hispanics in the United States and their role in shaping the nation's history from pre-colonial America to the present day.*

In 2019-20, the African American Literature course was scheduled for first time in at least a decade at all three WCASD high schools. It will also run in 2020-21 at all 3 high schools. African American History and Hispanic Cultures courses have not run with much regularity as the course requests have been extremely low.

During the past year the district has begun to address the pervasive need to develop more coherent subject area curriculum and instructional frameworks and guides that embed diverse perspectives and content beyond race. In particular, the 60 members of the "Innovative Teaching and Learning Group" have provided models for the development of culturally relevant teaching.

Responsibility for leading, planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and evaluating equity related initiatives for the entire school district rests with the Supervisor of Equity position

which was established in 2015-16. The Supervisor of Equity also is responsible for K-12 English language and world language learning. The establishment of this position and the selection of a talented, industrious, knowledgeable and experienced leader are signs that the school district takes equity seriously.

The visiting team recognizes the school district's commitment and plans to introduce a challenging framework for future professional development that extends beyond reliance on workshops and a focus on issues of institutional racism. As the "Personalized Professional Learning Plan" is initiated in 2020-2021, action plans will need to be instruction-based, ongoing, job embedded, and educators will require a deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

Furthermore, we commend the school district leaders for their visible and ongoing support for teacher/professional Equity Teams at each of the sixteen schools in the West Chester Area School District. Each school has developed initiatives and set goals that are equity related, and the number of participants in each school-based team has grown during the past few years. In many cases we were able to observe the direct impact of equity teamwork through student interviews and through classroom observations. As stated on the school district web site,

"Each school has an Equity Team to foster a district-wide and site-based climate and culture that demands and supports systemic equity and improved student achievement for every student. Since 2009, the district has been recognized for its work to close the academic achievement gap between students of high performing groups, and historically underperforming groups of students."

## **Challenges**

While the school-based equity team initiatives and goals are intended and designed to be responsive to individual school cultures, we observed little evidence of a regular culture of convening/collaborating among schools beyond the recent initiative that convenes equity teams district-wide to share promising initiatives and challenges.

It appears that the degree of principal leadership, advocacy and support for equity goals varies substantially from school to school, and the degree of influence of that building's equity team is closely related to the degree of principal engagement and leadership. Furthermore, staff indicated that more monitoring of progress toward goals and recognition of achievement of goals by school district leaders is desirable.

The Supervisor of Equity position suffers from a lack of visibility and a lack of authority within the school district leadership structure.

Organizational fragmentation and unconnected lines and levels of accountability currently hamper the potential of the Supervisor of Equity position. The only reference to the Supervisor of Equity on the WCASD web site is a listing of the position and its e-mail link among ten other Academic Program Leaders on the K-12 Curriculum web page.

During a review of the middle and high school course guides, we found few explicit references to the representation, history, perspectives and culture of diverse ethnic groups, as well as issues of equity and social justice in the secondary curriculum.

We commend the district for making available to students optional and elective courses that focus on African Americans and Hispanics. Because the descriptions of other courses across the curriculum 9-12 do not reference African Americans or Hispanics, it is unclear to what extent all high school students are expected to read texts written by African American authors or examine the history of minorities in America.

Furthermore, the framing of the African American experience as an “historical struggle” and the focus on experiences of African Americans and Hispanics “in the United States” suggest that the course outlines for these optional/elective courses may benefit from broader and Pan-American perspectives.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

***Recommendation #1: Integrate and elevate the role/position of Supervisor of Equity and its responsibilities into the school district organizational structure as well as into curriculum, instruction and school life.***

### **Action Steps**

- Address the needs and recommendations of this report through broad-based and ongoing participation of central office leaders, in coordination with the leadership of the Supervisor of Equity.
- Better align the work and authority of the Supervisor of Equity with the work of principals. For example, some school districts have designated an Equity Director or Principal of Equity who works alongside elementary and secondary principals and who reports to the superintendent of schools or an assistant superintendent of schools (e.g., Reading S.D., North Penn S.D., Allentown S.D., Abington School District, Red Clay, DE School District, Burlington County, NJ Technical Institute and Special Services District)
- Task the Supervisor of Equity with providing an equity filter on all aspects of school and school district life through direct contact and consultation with the eight members of the

superintendent's cabinet.

- Task the Supervisor of Equity to coordinate the work of the school-based equity teams with the work of the six academic supervisors who report to the Director of Teaching and Learning.

***Recommendation #2: Review and revitalize the equity-based work of principals, the DELT and school-based equity teams.***

**Action Steps**

- Create a structure to align school-based equity plans with school district goals.
- Develop a mechanism by which there is clear accountability for the goals and evaluation measures for school-based equity plans.
- Use school-based equity teams as peer coaches to promote the use of an “equity lens” in the daily work of educators.
- As a part of walk-through, supervision and observation procedures, include evidence of the use of an equity lens in planning and preparation, classroom environment and instruction.
- Require all principals to actively engage and participate in their equity teams and to lead and facilitate communication of equity goals, obstacles, case-studies and progress across schools so that educators from different schools learn with and from one another.
- Take steps to promote ownership of the school's equity effort by the entire staff in each school, not just the equity team.

***Recommendation #3: Ensure that the K-12 curriculum reflects the cultures relevant to the school district's diverse population and all students' understandings of equity and social justice.***

**Action Steps**

- Review and revise West Chester Area School District policies and administrative regulations that direct and guide curriculum development, materials selection and lesson planning as a foundation for culturally relevant curricula from which all students, regardless of racial or ethnic background, can benefit.
- Assess internal capacity and build capacity where needed in order to develop culturally inclusive curricula and employ culturally responsive pedagogy.
- Apply the cultural lens in the revision and selection of curricular materials; making sure culturally and linguistically diverse groups' contributions are highlighted.
- As K-12 curriculum renewal proceeds, and as planned course outlines are revised,



allow a diverse group of students and parents to review each proposed planned course outline to ensure that they represent and are culturally relevant to the diverse student population.

- Ensure that all units of study and courses, but particularly social studies and English offerings K-12, include the representation, history, perspectives and culture of diverse ethnic groups, as well as issues of equity and social justice, and the development of students' cultural competence.

***Recommendation #4: Ensure that all K-12 teachers plan and conduct lessons that demonstrate knowledge of students' interests and cultural heritage.***

#### **Action Steps:**

- Design and be intentional about creating classrooms and learning spaces that are physically and culturally inviting and inclusive.
- Include a focus on culturally responsive instructional practices and pedagogy as the "Personalized Professional Learning Plan" is introduced in 2020-21.
- Continue providing job-embedded professional learning related to Danielson *Framework for Teaching* Domain 1, Components 1b (Demonstrating Knowledge of Students) and 1c (Setting Instructional Outcomes).

***Recommendation #5 Review the current Beyond Diversity training in order to broaden and deepen its reach, impact, and sustainability as a model for change***

#### **Actions Steps**

- Identify the competencies and dispositions that the district equity training is intending to build in all employees of the WCASD
- Develop a playbook that describes the equity-based professional learning options that are based on a clear and comprehensive framework for relating the professional learning to instructional planning and preparation, classroom environment, teaching and learning, and other professional responsibilities.
- Reconsider the role of the affiliates and their relationship with DVCEE.
- Provide equity-based professional learning options with more depth that include, but go beyond, the focus on race, to include intersectionality with language, gender, and special needs. (Please see references to the Cultural Proficiency framework of Randy Lindsey and his associates in our resources section for framing future PD)
- Provide ESL teachers with the opportunity to support the work of general education teachers.
- Create opportunities for school board members to be included in equity-based

professional learning

- Provide equity-based professional learning options with closer ties to the particular assignments and needs of teachers, education professionals, principals and support staff.
- Provide equity-based professional learning options that promote awareness of implicit bias and cultural sensitivity in curriculum and instruction.
- Provide clear and consistent strategies to include diverse students in advanced classes.
- Develop and use a better tracking system for individual participation in equity- based professional learning.

## **Part 5: PARENT AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS WITH MARGINALIZED GROUPS**

*Marginalization at the individual level results in an individual's exclusion from meaningful participation in society.* Marginalized groups can include non-white individuals, women, LGBTQ, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities. In this context, the WCASD was particularly interested in knowing about the marginalization of Black/African American and Latinx/Hispanic students and their families.

### **Commendations**

There is a growing and diverse Latinx community at WCASD and our interviews highlighted that many Latinx/Hispanic families appreciate the superintendent's engagement with their community and partnership with Padres Latinos, a community organization that provides a cultural and communication bridge between parents and the school district. The organization holds meetings once a month and assists the school district with Spanish language robocalls as needed.

Of particular merit is the Spanish interpretation program that was rolled out as response to needs surfaced by the group. For this program, the district has contracted on a part- time basis with the founder of the organization to provide Spanish interpretation services on the school hotlines for 4 schools.

Despite these improvements, Latinx parents shared that interpretation services are not automatically offered or advertised for larger events (open houses, etc.) and this omission makes it difficult for some Latinx families to participate fully in the life of the district.

### **Challenges**

Parents of color identified several persistent and pervasive barriers that they and their

children encounter on a frequent basis. Although the school district has partnered with community centers and included parents of color in advisory boards, parents of color feel that they have to constantly “fight for their children” to receive equitable treatment and to navigate the complexities of school processes, school culture, and academic placement decisions. Some of these barriers include:

- Persistence of stereotyping that results in marginalization
- Practices that implicitly target students of color for discipline or attendance infractions
- Insufficient or delayed communication to parents regarding academic placement
- PTA meeting and parent conference schedules that exclude parents because of their work schedules
- Underrepresentation of students of color in advanced courses or gifted education
- Perceived overrepresentation of students of color among students identified for special services
- Little diversity in the professional, instructional, and academic support staff
- Unawareness of biases and microaggressions in daily school life
- Lack of cultural awareness in the curriculum and cultural responsiveness instruction

It is important to recognize that the Latinx community at WCASD is not homogenous and care should be taken to not make generalizations about the community or to conflate their concerns with those of other English Language Learners. This concern was highlighted by a number of parents that shared that assumptions about their children’s English proficiency, economic status and citizenship were made by district employees.

There are over 40 languages spoken in the WCASD community and the district serves over 400 English Language Learner students. From our interviews, we learned that WCASD’s English Language Development (ELD) program is growing. We heard from parents about their frustration with the practice of routing students towards ELL programming if families share that they speak a second language during registration. We also heard from parents of ELL students that the registration process upon entering the district was difficult to navigate. For example, the [Help Document](#) is a static document (PDF) that is provided only in English and cannot be translated using the WCASD website’s translate function.

Parents also expressed their concern about reduced access to gifted education in the lower grades for students that speak another language at home or are part of the ELD program. We observed that teachers in each school are aware that English language learners may be denied access for higher level courses and are working to correct that.

The district should be commended for their work towards providing accessible materials and providing interpretation services for families. However, more work can be done to improve the

interpretation services.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

***Recommendation #1: identify and address current school and district practices which increase the likelihood of further marginalizing students of color and alienating their parents, and to partner with parents of color in educating the staff on marginalization and its effects.***

### **Action Steps**

- Maintain and intensify efforts to shift educators' focus from equal opportunity to equitable outcomes for students of color.
- Identify and lessen practices that implicitly target students of color for discipline or attendance infractions
- Improve communication to parents regarding academic placement
- Develop PTA meeting and parent conference schedules that may enable increased participation by parents whose work schedules currently conflict with these meetings and conferences.
- Continue to address the absence or underrepresentation of students of color in advanced courses and gifted education.
- Establish a Spanish language phone chain for each school.
- Analyze the relative PTO fundraising capacity of each school, in conjunction with a school district budget analysis to determine which, if any, schools are marginalized in terms of resources.
- Consider the role and capacity of the West Chester Area Education Foundation to support the school district's equity initiatives.

***Recommendation #2: ensure students in the ELD program have equitable access to the core curriculum and programming***

### **Action Steps**

- Develop a thorough home language survey that explores families' proficiency and experiences with English to assist with the placement process. From our interviews, parents and community members highlighted the intake process at Fern Hill Elementary School as a model that can be replicated.
- Ensure that a primary language contact is available in each school for parents.
- Train teachers and education specialists regarding the use of interpreter services.
- Train interpreters on culturally relevant communication.

- Implement policies that ensure equal access to higher level classes.
- Review testing and placement policies and work on communication protocols to inform parents of ELL students of the gifted programs available in the district.

***Recommendation #3: Build upon the relationship with Latinx families, the successes of the Padres Latinos program, and enhance the Spanish language hotlines at four district schools.***

**Action Steps:**

- Continue the outreach efforts in the community to get a better picture of the diversity of their Latinx/Hispanic students and families.
- Extend the Spanish hotline service to all district schools to better serve students and families.
- Expand the inclusion of families in district meetings and school events whenever possible by offering interpreting services and by advertising meetings in the home language.

## **SECTION B: FOCUSED INQUIRY QUESTIONS**

### **INQUIRY QUESTION #1: HOLISTIC PRACTICES FOR ALL STUDENTS**

#### ***To What Extent Do WCASD Educators Enact Holistic Practices for All Students?***

“**Holistic practices** are culturally responsive and provide students with social and emotional connections that support academic achievement.”

#### **Commendations**

##### **Elementary Schools**

The ten elementary schools incorporate numerous practices that are culturally responsive or that provide students with social and emotional connections.

Examples of these include:

- Small group instruction to meet the academic needs of struggling students
- A Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program
- Elementary Guidance Counselors who have been trained in trauma informed care
- Mental Health Counselors who visit the elementary schools once a week
- RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) to assist in classrooms
- Elementary secretaries and custodians recognize the importance of welcoming students into the building and consider themselves to be members of the educational team

Elementary teachers and schools embed fun activities and celebrations throughout the student experience. Each elementary school takes its own approach to recognition and celebration of cultural observances.

Visiting team members observed some classrooms where seating was thoughtfully planned to ensure that students learn and work in mixed gender and racial/ethnic groups. We are not sure that this is a commonly shared or pervasive practice.

A new procedure encouraged 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to level up or instead of leveling down when recommending grouping assignments for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Leveling is based on PSSA and PVAAS data and is completed in January and February of the fifth-grade year. With the full inclusion of PA Common Core State Standards in the PSSA beginning in 2013, PSSA scores dropped significantly across the state.

##### **Middle Schools**

WCASD leaders worked with a Middle School Leveling Committee (teachers, counselors and administrators) to review the middle school leveling trends following the change in the PSSA, and their analysis revealed that the number of students being placed into higher level courses had diminished since 2014. As a result, the plan to level up was introduced.

- Educators with whom we spoke in all middle schools expressed a strong desire for a deeper commitment to equity-based work.
- Members of the Equity Teams interviewed in buildings expressed a desire to have greater impact with their colleagues.
- Each middle school is creating opportunities for students of color to come together in affinity group settings.
- Students in all buildings discussed the equity groups that they are invited to be part of as positive efforts to help them become more engaged in student body life and break down cultural barriers.
- The middle school building leaders are committed to the district leveling-up practice and support teachers with instructional implementation.

## **High Schools**

- Students have the opportunity to meet in formalized affinity groups which support their ethnic and cultural identities.
- Teachers and principals reported that a recent in-service day allowed students to explain to teachers what they would like to see in their relationships with them. In October, a principal's student advisory group engaged teachers and staff on how certain behaviors can build or destroy trust.
- One principal stated that he sets the tone for zero tolerance for racism. The principal communicates that all should be made to feel welcome and comfortable in the school environment. Interviews with students and support staff at this high school provided evidence of a positive school culture and strong student-teacher relationships.
- Administrators at another high school stated that there has been a focus on social-emotional learning and building relationships over the past few years; the administration has led school-wide focus on courageous conversations about mental health and relationships; this year the focus has been on how to build trust and relationships, particularly with teachers and students. Interviews with support staff provided further evidence of a very accepting school environment.

## **K-12**

High school, middle school, and elementary school classrooms have an abundance of resources and academic materials.

## Challenges

### Elementary Schools

In an interview, some staff expressed that they are not held accountable for completion of the school district's social-emotional learning program, "Second Steps." A teacher stated Some teachers shared that "No one knows whether it's done or not." Implementation seems to vary by school. Some elementary teachers appeared disconnected from the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) work and/or equity work in their schools.

Elementary school support staff apparently have not been engaged in equity PD and in an interview, some expressed a desire to be included in future equity trainings.

There is evidence of students in some schools learning with instructional materials and literature that reference diverse cultures; however, we observed inconsistency across elementary schools. For example, *Escape from the Great Earthquake* deals with issues of Asian immigration and discrimination in an historical setting, and is used in some of the district's elementary schools.

Several dynamics appear to hamper the potential for full engagement and participation of all families and their children in school life. These include:

- Some school staff attribute observable segregation in the cafeteria or at recess, to students' self-selection based on neighborhood.
- In an interview, some elementary school parents reported that volunteers must have clearances, and some families have identified the time and cost of obtaining the clearances as a barrier to greater parent involvement. In the same interview, elementary school parents observed that homeroom parents are often mothers and are primarily white.
- Several elementary principals identified a need for additional support in engaging the involvement of parents with children of color.
- Numerous elementary students have stopped participating in school activities due to transportation and financial reasons. Children stated, for example: "I don't play the trumpet anymore because my mom can't afford it." "My dad said he can't take me to orchestra practices so I'm not in it anymore."
- Because of the time they spend on the bus, the elementary children who live in the borough often arrive at school late and do not have an adequate amount of time to eat breakfast at school. They are the last to arrive and are rushed to class. Some teachers allow them to eat in class and others do not.
- School leaders and teachers identified lack of transportation as a barrier to inclusion in



after school activities. Staff shared that they believe that some students, especially students of color, do not participate in some activities due to a lack of resources and a resistance to asking for financial support.

- Another elementary school principal observed: “There are no activity buses. The core group in the Borough does not have access to activities.”
  - Elementary school teachers at one school shared: “The lack of buses and the cost exclude poor students from school plays and science explorers. The principal and parents arrange carpools to pick up kids.”
  - Elementary school teachers at another school observed: “The PTO pays for field trip buses. Rehearsal for Honors band/chorus/orchestra is at 8 a.m., and some children can’t participate because they have no ride. After school sports leaders try to connect kids with other kids so that they will have a ride and can participate.”
- The lack of interpreter services in every school.

### **Middle Schools**

- Some equity teams reported that their work is generally seen as an initiative as opposed to an overarching frame for teaching and learning. Administrators could all articulate their roles in the work in their schools but the degree to which they were leading and supporting the work varied across schools. The teachers interviewed could not describe a coherent plan for the equity work.
- The MTSS strategies appear to be disjointed and lack plan and focus.
- The focus of MTSS appears to operate from a deficit mindset.
- The three MS buildings had very different perspectives and readiness for student interventions and application of MTSS.
- There was little discussion about or consideration of enrichment and student growth.
- A disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic students are disciplined. This was stated by students as well as principals.
- Student equity groups discuss issues of inclusion and race in isolation, but there are few, if any discussions at the larger grade or student body levels.

### **High Schools**

- The level of academic support often depends solely on the individual teacher. Students and their teachers expressed a desire for a more consistent level of academic support across the faculty.
- Empirical data consistently demonstrate, and perceptual data reinforce that a

disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic students are disciplined. This was stated by students as well as principals.

- Student affinity equity groups often discuss issues of inclusion and race in isolation from the general student body, but there are few, if any discussions at the larger grade or school levels.
- While principals expressed a shared vision of trust and relationships before academics, many high school teachers feel they are responsible only for academic content, not social/emotional connections.
  - Many high school students are feeling a high level of anxiety in AP classes. A student noted: “They think you should put your mental health aside and just focus on academics. I have been told my mental health is not an excuse.”
  - A high school parent group felt there is not a holistic approach to teaching and learning at the high schools. They feel decisions are driven solely by academics.
- Limited professional learning time and numerous initiatives can serve as barriers to teachers’ exploration of materials, which are developmentally appropriate and support culturally responsive instruction. Curriculum coordinators expect improvement during the planned curriculum revision process.

## **K-12**

- Multiple stakeholders across school levels consistently voiced concern about the impact of “Borough” students being transported to other schools, namely that transportation of students who live in the ‘Borough’ from their neighborhood into other schools has a negative effect on student’s feelings of inclusion and their learning. Borough students must wake up earlier, spend more time on the bus, are the last students to arrive at school, and have little or no time for breakfast at school. These factors heighten the probability of disciplinary and attendance issues and lessen the probability of parent involvement.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

***Recommendation #1: Develop a common language and a common understanding of what student-centered holistic practices are.***

### **Action Steps:**

- Include all staff in professional development opportunities pertaining to this goal (administrators, principals, teachers, and support staff, etc.)
- Explicitly request and offer training opportunities for contracted staff (food services, transportation, paraprofessional supports).
- Collaboration between central administration and school principals/leaders to develop a common language, “look-fors,” and best practices.

***Recommendation #2: Identify interrelated accountability and action steps as they pertain to creating a more student-centered instructional environment at each level of responsibility (administration, teachers, staff)***

**Action Steps:**

- Continue to track and monitor practices for course assignments for 6th grade students.
- Ensure that there are consistent understandings and implementation of important practices such as MTSS and SEL
- Identify school-wide, student-centered instructional practices to focus on at each level and fully immerse in them
- Establish and monitor accountability measures

***Recommendation #3: Identify better pathways for understanding, fostering, and nurturing student voice and empowerment to ensure it is taking place in authentic ways at every level***

**Action Steps:**

- Equity committees at the MS and HS level need to ensure that students are fully included as co-equal partners in creating the desired school culture-climate- environment and not just in event planning.
- District-wide opportunities and events that bring students of color together in order to build their leadership capacity should be considered.
- The school district should explore the possibility of partnership with West Chester University in order to develop and sustain near-peer mentoring and relationship building with university students, especially students of color.

***Recommendation #4: Develop plans and resources that purposefully and explicitly engage marginalized families to partner with and support efforts for the academic and social development of their children***

**Action Steps:**

- Nurture development of new diverse parent coalitions that support excellence as an outreach to parents and a resource for the district
- Broaden the work with Hispanic/Latinx families and ensure that each building has a specific plan for their full inclusion
- Establish regular school or community-based parent forums in order to maintain an open dialogue to enhance the effectiveness of school support programs and interventions

***Recommendation #5: Ensure that financial resources and transportation are not barriers to participation in extracurricular, after school and evening activities.***

**Action Steps:**

- Develop a district policy and guidelines (to include sponsorships, parent groups, business partners) that will ensure that financial resources and transportation are not barriers to equitable participation in extracurricular activities.
- To provide transportation for after school and evening activities- have each school create a committee to develop a plan for full participation and access based on the district policy and guidelines.

**INQUIRY QUESTION #2: EQUITABLE PRACTICES AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CULTURE**

***How Does the WCASD Encourage Educators To Assume Or Avoid Responsibility For Creating And Maintaining Equitable Practices And Promoting A Safe, Inclusive School Culture And Environment?***

***“Equitable practices ensure students have what they need to succeed.”***

**Commendations**

- Strong and committed leaders at WCASD are willing to address the need for more equitable practices. Interviews with many district and building leadership professionals indicated that they are committed to finding solutions that will yield more equitable practices across the district and within schools. While acknowledging both the difficulty and complexity of an equity-focused agenda, they recognize that ensuring equitable practices needs to be at the forefront of the district work and all other initiatives.
- The majority of school and school district leaders are intensifying efforts to develop more and better professional development to help staff address equity.
- There is a general sense that staff members are committed to creating a safe, caring, and nurturing environment for students.
- The district has been very supportive of the Padres Latinos community organization in an effort to support Latinx families across the district.

**Challenges**

- The district focus on equity is too narrowly focused on race, while some of the schools have a more expansive focus.
  - The primary vehicle for equity conversations is through the 2-day Beyond

Diversity training and equity teams. This work is based on the work of the Pacific Education Group, which centers equity issues in regard to race.

- The school district and its 16 schools lack consistency in equitable practices in terms of leadership, expectations, messaging, and application.
- Some parents and families continue to feel marginalized and that they lack the information needed to make more informed decisions for their children.
  - Some parents believe that there are disparities in access to information and involvement. Teachers, parents and community members conveyed the reliance on informal networks as places to learn about the culture and practices of the district and the schools.
  - Newly arrived families in the district often have a difficult time navigating the website as an information portal and are not aware of the informal channels of communication.
  - Some parents expressed frustration with the inconsistencies across schools with regard to communication and relationship building with families.
  - There is a perception that some schools show little interest in hearing from or communicating with parents, particularly parents of color.
- Traditional methodologies for instruction lack sufficient opportunities for all students to be actively engaged.
  - Visiting team members often observed a lack of student-to-student interaction, excessive teacher lecture, directed learning, note-taking, etc.
  - Elementary classroom student teacher ratios of more than 26 to 1 give the teacher less time to teach.
- Students of color are underrepresented in gifted programs and in higher-level classes and over-represented in special education and lower level courses.
- In interviews, some students reported a pattern of hurtful and/or inappropriate questions, comments, slurs, gestures. These students shared examples of hurtful comments and interactions with peers and a lack of response from staff.
- Middle and high schools lack examples of student work in the classrooms.
- Exhibitions, demonstrations of mastery, posters, and visual celebrations of diversity can serve as reminders of student expectations and student achievement that are more meaningful than test scores.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

***Recommendation #1: Create more direct avenues of communication between schools so that positive actions and successes can be shared and implemented consistently.***

### **Action Steps:**

- Utilize existing meetings and structures (such as: principals' meetings) to
- share information.
- Reserve meeting time to specifically address new initiatives, training and other equity related topics at all cross-district meetings.

***Recommendation #2: Provide more intensive professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction and student engagement for all professional staff members with an increase in accountability through administration oversight.***

**Action Steps:**

- Plan professional development on student engagement, direct instruction, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.
- Ensure that classroom walkthroughs provide targeted feedback on differentiated instruction and student engagement to teachers.

***Recommendation #3: Provide targeted instruction to students regarding the meaning and impact of microaggressions, inappropriate comments, slurs, gestures, etc. with the goal of eliminating derogatory comments.***

**Action Steps:**

- Implement practices such as restorative practices, peer mediation, and counselor led groups to increase awareness and accountability before incidents occur.
- Provide training to teachers and staff on effectively addressing these incidents when they happen.
- Consider tracking follow-up measures after these incidents occur and analyze data to monitor progress.

***Recommendation #4: Ensure that support staff are included in more equity related professional development opportunities.***

**Action Step:**

- Host mixed groups of support and teaching staff at trainings to build trust and rapport.

***Recommendation #5: Increase consistency in teachers' expectations for high levels of academic success at each academic level, especially in Career and College Prep (CCP) level courses.***

**Action Steps:**

- Building leadership can provide support in increasing teacher awareness of the importance of holding high expectations for all students.
- Develop accountability measures and track disaggregated data for a longitudinal view of academic levels and their outcomes.

***Recommendation #6: Ensure that information for parents is disseminated by the district to all families in an equitable manner***

**Action Steps:**

- Together with a focus group of recently arrived families, review areas of the school district website to improve ease of navigation for those who are unfamiliar with school district procedures and communications.
- Expand to other schools the family mentoring programs and informal parent networks that exist in some schools.
- Create communications that use parent-friendly language, accommodations, translations, etc. for flyers, meetings, announcements, etc.
- Provide transportation, interpreting services, childcare or other accommodations for parent meetings to increase parent attendance at district meetings and forums.

***Recommendation #7: Communicate to all stakeholders a more inclusive definition of equity, stressing that equity is about access, opportunities and support for each individual child.***

**Action Steps:**

- Share examples of inequitable experiences by various groups to illustrate where work needs to be done.
- Provide professional development opportunities that address equity issues for different student groups defined by e.g. gender, gender identification, learning differences, poverty/economic disadvantage.

**INQUIRY QUESTION #3: TRACKING, ABILITY GROUPING AND PLACEMENT DECISIONS**

***What WCASD Mindsets, Policies and Practices Contribute To Inappropriate Tracking, Ability Grouping And Placement Decisions For Different Groups Of Students?***

**Commendations**

## Elementary Schools

Elementary teachers are using differentiated instruction and small group learning to avoid ability grouping and segregation in their classrooms.

## High Schools

- Principals at all three middle schools are focused on underrepresentation in higher level courses. They are meeting with 5th grade teachers to review recommendations in hopes of resolving students being placed in lower levels who could 'level up'. Principals articulated that there is a clear district priority to resolve significant underrepresentation in the access to and enrollment in higher- level courses and the gifted program for students of color at the secondary level. Teachers in each school are aware that English language learners may be denied access for higher-level courses and are working to correct that.
- The three high schools eliminated the lowest level of courses over a three-year period.
- The percentage of all students and the percentage of minority student enrolled in AP courses increased.
- The percentage of juniors and seniors registered for dual enrollment courses has improved from 5.08% to 7.09%
- The percentage of minority juniors and seniors registered for dual enrollment courses has improved from 2.91% to 3.67%.
- The percentage of all students enrolled in Accelerated Honors courses did not change, while the percentage of minority students enrolled in Accelerated Honors courses increased significantly.

See following tables from a document entitled [High School Achievement Measures \(updated 11/12/19\)](#)

### ***Percentage of Students Enrolled in Advanced Placement Courses:***

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
<b>District</b>	36.81	37.95	40.68
<b>Henderson High School</b>	39.23	38.61	42.38
<b>East High School</b>	35.96	35.13	37.26
<b>Rustin High School</b>	35.34	39.86	42.18

### ***Percentage of Minority Student Enrollment in Advanced Placement Classes***

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
<b>District</b>	15.46	15.53	19.49
<b>Henderson High School</b>	14.97	13.13	17.61



East High School	18.92	16.67	21.26
Rustin High School	11.76	17.24	20.17

***Percentage of Juniors and Seniors Enrolled in Dual Enrollment Courses***

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
District	2.68	6.98	4.81
Henderson High School	2.83	8.54	4.94
East High School	2.96	5.79	5.30
Rustin High School	2.67	6.62	4.23

***Percentage of Minority Juniors and Seniors Enrolled in Dual Enrollment Courses***

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
District	.49	4.18	2.13
Henderson High School	1.37	3.66	1.30
East High School	0.00	2.33	1.27
Rustin High School	0.00	7.04	5.77

***Percentage of Students Enrolled in Accelerated Honors Courses***

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
District	33.48	32.70	33.14
Henderson High School	31.86	31.12	33.86
East High School	35.80	35.13	33.44
Rustin High School	32.79	31.93	32.12

***Percentage of Minority Students Enrolled in Accelerated Honors Courses***

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
District	12.08	14.16	19.49
Henderson High School	7.48	11.88	14.20
East High School	16.22	19.14	24.14
Rustin High School	12.61	10.34	21.01

- Beginning with the graduating class of 2021, the three high schools have phased out class rank for seniors. Class rank systems often have a hidden assumption that academic success is a scarce commodity available only to a select few students that is achieved through competition that sets one student against another. The WCASD has encouraged and recognized academic excellence for all students.

- The superintendent of schools and school district leaders are aware of and eager to address pervasive and deep-seated issues of equity, including:

## Challenges

### Elementary Schools

- In some cases, the means of identifying students for inclusion in special education and gifted programs results in racial segregation. The visiting team observed disproportionate number of students of color in some special education classes, and a disproportionate number of white students were observed in some gifted classes, for example:
  - One gifted classroom was observed to have 8 students, all white.
  - One gifted classroom was observed to have 10 students, all white.
  - One special education classroom was observed to have 7 students, all students of color.
- Principals said that teachers are evolving in their understanding of levels of intervention and that there were not consistent conversations around implementation of MTSS.
- Elementary principals do not provide the same level of support to their school equity teams.
  - Some of the principals seem to be involved in the equity leadership teams and are involved in the professional learning in their schools. Other principals are not as active as equity leaders.

### Secondary Schools

- Middle and high school teachers stated that they observe an underrepresentation of students of color in AP and accelerated honors courses, an overrepresentation of students of color in special education, and an overrepresentation of White students in programs for the Gifted. The visiting team's observations of various middle and high school accelerated honors classes support these statements, for example:
  - In a middle school, the Gifted program included only three students of color (2 Black and 1 Hispanic).
  - A 9th grade Honors Biology 1 class included 26 students, 25 White and 1 Latino
  - In a high school, we observed 1-2 students per class who are non-White in upper level courses, and a high number of students of color in special education classes.
- In interviews, some students and parents stated that the current practices, beliefs, and structures for course selection diminish opportunities for students of color. These parents and students recognize that attention has been paid to de-leveling and the names of courses; however, they perceive a bias among some faculty and staff that students of color are less capable or less willing to do higher level work students and are reluctant to

- recommend placement of students of color in higher level courses.
- In interviews with students of color in each of the middle schools, the students talked about messaging to them that they can't handle the challenge of higher-level courses, for example "My teacher said I would struggle so she wouldn't want to put me through that." One African American student who made the honor roll every semester stated that she was not recommended for a higher-level course and didn't understand why. Students reported that they are intimidated to go to teachers to request to be leveled up. Each year they have been in the same level and there has been no encouragement to move up in a class.
  - African American students believe that the majority of them are placed in some of the lower-level classes because of their teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to succeed.
  - Middle school students also questioned the nature of work in parallel leveled classes. A student stated: "Accelerated is like level 2, they just use the next grade level books. Level 2 is almost like level 1- they get less homework. A lot of kids move down a level to avoid homework."
    - Concern regarding practices, belief and structures for course selection and placement were prevalent among parents we interviewed, for example:
    - English Language Learners are seldom tested for gifted education because screening for gifted takes place in Grade 2.
    - Parents of English Language Learners are not aware of gifted education: "If you don't ask, you don't know what you don't know. It took me years to understand the system, and it should not take years."
  - Some students of color perceive that they are treated differently.
    - Middle school students commented that they feel uncomfortable in higher-level courses because they may be the only student of color in the class. In our interviews with students of color in higher-level courses, the students often stressed their discomfort with being the only person of color in the room, teachers' doubts about their ability, or their being singled out.
    - Some students of color at the high schools expressed that they do not feel comfortable accessing higher-level classes because of the concern of being the only student in the class and often being made to feel like an outsider. For example:
      - "I am one of the only Hispanic students in accelerated or AP classes. It's kind of uncomfortable because everyone is going to be judging if I should be there."
      - Several students reported that they are often called on to answer questions when topics related to African Americans are presented. For example:
        - "I'm the only Black student in accelerated math and I'm expected to know everything about race."
        - "I am the only black student in AP classes. I don't pay attention to it unless we are talking about race, then everyone stares at me."

- Some students reported that they are made fun of, exposed to inappropriate comments when dealing with movies surrounding race. As an example, minority students were teased by peers when watching the film *Roots*.
- Some students reported that there is a culture of making inappropriate comments about students of color that go unaddressed by the adults, which creates the perception that it is acceptable.

## **K-12**

Parents identified numerous areas in which their children’s learning and growth should be enhanced. In particular:

- Parents expressed that they believe staff have the perception of students with IEPs as “trouble-makers” and “delinquents.”
- Parents feel as though they need to fight to get access to AP courses for their students.
- Parents reported that they do not always understand the system, which makes it difficult for them to advocate for their students. Furthermore, they perceive a lack of transparency from the schools regarding parental agency regarding tracking.
- Parents reported that ELs are not tested for gifted services.
- Parents reported that schools are not consistent with their practices.

The decision-making processes for student placement are problematic.

- There was a lack of clear understanding about how students are placed in class aside from teacher recommendation. PSSA and PVAAS data are used, but objective criteria that would alleviate subjective decisions or counteract implicit bias are lacking. Some administrators shared that they use only quantitative data for making decisions about student placement and student ability groupings.
- Teachers and administrators appear to rely solely on quantitative data for making decisions about student placement and student ability groupings; however, they seem to have a limited understanding of the impact of implicit bias on the data that are being used for these decisions.
- There is inconsistency across schools in terms of their efforts to develop equitable practices that will have a direct impact on the policies and practices related to grouping and placement decisions. Teachers and administrators’ deficit-oriented attributions of student performance seem to influence their instructional decision-making, resulting in fewer opportunities for students to engage in curricula and be intellectually challenged.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

Recommendation #1: Address issues of implicit bias so that more faculty and staff members shift away from a deficit mindset and build authentic relationships with students based on mutual trust and respect. This is a systemic issue, because subtle ability grouping that occurs at the elementary level has an impact on class placement decisions at the middle school level,

which later affect students' access to higher-level courses at the high school level.

**Action Steps:**

- Explore issues of implicit bias and develop an understanding of the impact of bias on decisions for students regarding interventions, grouping, and evaluations.
- Use the “Reframing Process” to unearth and challenge the deficit paradigm (Weiner, 2003); teachers and administrators need to reframe the problem. As Molnar and Lindquist (1989) explain, the Reframing Process has four steps:
  - Describe the problem behavior in neutral, observable terms.
  - Identify positive characteristics or contributions the individual makes. This part of the process is often challenging because we are so frustrated and angry that we cannot see the individual's strengths.
  - Create a new, positive perspective on the individual—a frame that you can articulate in a short sentence.
  - State the new frame to the person and act on it. Do not refer back to the previous frame.

***Recommendation #2: Enhance de-tracking efforts and improve horizontal and vertical articulations across academic disciplines in order to have purposeful distinctions for each course.***

**Action Steps:**

- Visit other school districts that have successfully de-tracked and identify a plan to further reduce the number of low-level courses.
- Several students and staff stated that the primary distinction among accelerated, honors, and regular middle school courses is the amount of homework that is assigned. Establish clear and differentiated desired results, formative and summative assessments, curricula, lesson plans and instructional materials that will provide the foundation for teaching and learning in different levels.

***Recommendation #3: Explicitly address the systemic issues that are root causes for underrepresentation of students of color in higher level and gifted programming.***

**Action Steps:**

- Have on-going training on the understanding and impact of implicit bias on student relationships and student performance that is specifically related to faculty and staff having lower expectations and rigor for students of color.
- Support faculty and staff in adding the right supports for minoritized students in higher level and gifted courses.

- Implement a multi-tiered system of support consistently across schools that is focused on placement utilizing not only academic data, but other sources of data that addresses barriers for students to level up. This is often done during course recommendation at the secondary level, but could be done in a more authentic, ongoing way for students K-12.
- Train staff on better utilizing formative assessment to support students in their classrooms.

***Recommendation #4: Ensure that students of color feel welcome and affirmed when participating in higher-level courses.***

**Action Steps:**

- Provide training for faculty and staff to increase their cultural proficiency, including a focus on whiteness and the impact of white privilege on cross-cultural interactions (between staff and students).
- Provide staff with strategies for communicating and supporting students in authentic and meaningful ways.
- Continue efforts to hire and retain a more diverse faculty that allows students to see individuals who look like them and are teaching some of these higher-level classes.
- Provide training on culturally responsive classrooms and teaching and include accountability measures.

***Recommendation #5: Create a systemic practice of collaboration among building administration in order to capitalize on the strengths of building leaders who can share ideas and building practices. This can help to reduce or eliminate the inconsistencies that exist across buildings regarding class placement decisions and practices for ability grouping.***

**Action Steps:**

- Building principals can participate in collaborative work sessions, where they bring specific topics to discuss and at these sessions, they should share ideas and recommendations from their schools that are deemed successful practices.
- Establish an expectation for building principals to have consistency in their practices regarding placement decisions and ability grouping – with central office administration providing guidelines for these procedures (with input from building administrators).

**INQUIRY QUESTION #4: IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND IMPLICIT BIAS**

## ***How Do Institutional Racism and All Forms of Bias Impact The Lives Of Diverse WCASD Students? How Do Institutional Racism and Implicit Bias Impact The School Community?***

**“Institutional racism** includes policies and practices that are supported by power and authority and that benefit some and disadvantage others. **Implicit bias** includes attitudes, stereotypes and unintentional actions (positive or negative) towards members of a group merely because of their membership in that group.”

### **Commendations**

- Students in classroom observations were engaged with their teachers and peers in small group settings and many mentioned opportunities for second chance learning.
- LGBTQ students mostly are supported at the high school level.
  - All of the high schools in the district have strong Gay-Straight Alliances, and high school teachers, students, and support staff all report support of LGBTQ students.
  - All of the high schools addressed recent controversies over graduation gowns. Using the same color robe for all students can avoid further stigmatization of students.
- The school district has an ongoing commitment to provide equity training for staff.
  - Student diversity teams have participated in staff professional development,
  - Diversity in school has been a focus of professional learning and book discussions.
  - Training has included strategies for teachers to deal with difficult situations.
- Bullying is addressed at the elementary level.
  - Students report that adults address bullying issues and that their guidance counselors are approachable. Groups in classrooms change often, so that students learn and interact with all of their classmates. “Buddy Bench” is popular with students. At East Bradford Elementary School, “Discussion Mondays” provide students with scenarios of “what would you do?”
- Many students experience a sense of belonging and safety. Students feel empowered to speak up and feel supported by administrators. “When kids let us know there are barriers to participating, we find a way.” Students are more accepting than in previous years, and they have benefitted from a positive school culture and improvements and inclusion of low SES students. Students feel a sense of belonging through activities and clubs, and homework club. It is easy to start a club and students readily take advantage of this opportunity.
- While many elementary schools have multicultural books and posters and incorporate read-aloud of multicultural books, teachers K-12 have different levels of awareness regarding cultural/religious holidays and their impact on and importance to students. One

parent recommends planned and coordinated culturally diverse programming all year across all schools in the district.

- School and district leaders desire to include all parents.
- Some PTO meetings are scheduled at alternating day and evening hours. Social workers help to make parents feel welcome, and new families are matched with another school family to navigate the support process. Parents who speak Spanish have the assistance of Padres Latinos, a Spanish language phone line for help, and course selection nights in Spanish. Focus groups have benefitted Indian parents. Attendance area exceptions are possible.
  - Parents identified a need for a diverse pool of teachers, especially African American male and female. Suggestions included encouragement by high school career counselors to students of color to enter the education field. Black teachers feel an extreme responsibility toward students of color AND to educate white students. Some support staff of color report that they feel included in their school community.
  - In order to ensure consistent recruitment of minority candidates and hiring practices, an annual half-day retreat for all administrators on hiring practices takes place in the summer.

## Challenges

- Biases exist in assigning students to programs and courses.
  - In interviews, the visiting team heard a consistent refrain of what “those kids” can and can’t do.
  - In the elementary schools, Black children are overrepresented in Tier 2 and Tier 3 of MTSS. Some parents perceive that the special education referral process and the delivery of appropriate services is cumbersome and slow and perceive implicit bias with respect to students with IEPs and discipline referrals. Parents also noted the lack of transparency in communication.
  - Children of color are overrepresented in special education (see data on p. 20). Our observations suggest that children of color may be underrepresented in gifted programs. The only screening for admission to gifted programs takes place in second grade, and families who transfer into the school district have to know to ask for the screening. The leveling process relies too heavily on teacher recommendation and suffers from stereotyping. In the high schools, students of color are overrepresented in Career and College Prep courses.
- Parents perceive an expectation that they are responsible to solve problems or reach out for assistance.
  - The onus for inclusion of their children is sometimes placed on parents; however, parents don’t always feel included in the conversations around equity and parents of color are underrepresented in PTOs.



- In interviews, some parents whose children have transferred into the school district stated that they don't know where to begin to help their children, and that they have a sense that teachers feel uncomfortable reaching out to parents of color whose children may be struggling academically. Over reliance on information provided on the school district website creates a barrier for some parents who are not able to navigate the website and/or are not familiar with educational jargon.
- Teaching and learning are over reliant on direct instruction that appears biased and not culturally responsive
  - During observations, visiting team members observed an overreliance on worksheets and rote learning in several schools, as well as assessment practices that do not distinguish between formative and summative assessment and that don't take the readiness of students into consideration
  - In an interview, some parents reported that some teachers insist that they "don't see color."
- Bullying and derogatory language can inhibit student belonging.
  - Parents hear about derogatory language, e.g., "Boys will be boys" and references to "Sped students." Not all kids are accepting of kids with differences or special needs, for example some students make fun of Indian students for bringing their own food to school. Middle school students report experiencing bullying. The name of the Gay-Straight Alliance was changed to avoid bullying.
- There is a perceived lack of support for low income students and their families
  - The absence of transportation for before or after school activities prohibits participation on the part of some students, in particular low-income students. While waivers of activity fees are provided, low-income students/parents are unaware of how to request a waiver or want to avoid the stigma of having to place a request.
- Students can feel isolated in their different cultural, ethnic, and racial groups.
  - While clubs that support differences are supported and encouraged, members of those clubs are very isolated. Additional attention is needed to the treatment of struggling students.
  - Some gender biases are evident, particularly in high school sports.
- Parents perceive biases in the redistricting processes
  - As part of future redistricting planning, discussion on equity in redistricting has been contentious.
  - In interviews, some parents expressed concern that redistricting has resulted in students being bused around to balance the numbers of students who have applied for free and reduced lunch services. Some parents indicated that they were reluctant to apply for free and reduced lunch services, because they feared that it would result in transfer of their children to school outside their neighborhood. Some parents perceive that certain schools have a reputation as

“country club” schools that do not welcome “inner city kids.”

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

### ***Recommendation #1: Explore expanding student support services***

#### **Action Steps:**

- Address climate and representation when it comes to children with disabilities
- Ensure that mental health supports are available to all students
- Re-organize gifted screening to include more than just second grade; examine the gifted instruction delivery process (e.g., co-teaching is occurring in some areas).
- Reconsider student sorting/tracking practices and necessary support for students “leveling up”, particularly at the middle school level.

### ***Recommendation #2: Provide additional administrative support for the school-based equity teams***

#### **Action Steps:**

- Include support staff in equity teams
- Building leaders need to be more actively engaged members of their equity teams
- Building leaders need opportunities and venues to share their promising practices

### ***Recommendation #3: Provide more meaningful parent outreach and support***

#### **Action Steps:**

- Consider transportation for before and after school activities
- Make fee waivers explicit and make clear that free-reduced lunch status is not needed
- Embed Google translator in all web-based communication
- Build culture of inviting families into schools to provide support
  - Affinity groups for families
  - Focus on representation in PTOs

### ***Recommendation #4: Ensure learning is meaningful and relevant for each student.***

#### **Action Steps:**

- Improve teachers' cultural proficiency in instructional planning and their responsiveness to their diverse students
- Communicate high expectations for success to all students
- Provide clearer expectations from administration:
  - Ensure and monitor high-quality, student centered instruction that is not focused on worksheets and teacher lectures.
  - Expectations and support for differentiation, particularly for students who are English Learners (EL)

## **INQUIRY QUESTION #5: VOICES OF HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED STUDENTS AND FAMILIES**

### ***What Methods and Practices Are In Place To Ensure That The Voices Of Historically Marginalized Students And Their Families Are Included In The WCASD District Programming?***

“**Marginalized Groups** can include non-white individuals, women, LGBTQ, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities. In this context, the WCASD is particularly interested in knowing about the marginalization of Black/African American and Latinx/Hispanic students and their families. **District Programming** includes all curriculum, events, activities, planning, procedures and culture that are available to students and their families.”

### **Commendations**

- School Board directors are aware of the need to address equity issues.
  - There is a desire on the part of the board to hear student voices: “A voice for every student.” was the campaign slogan for one board member.
  - Board members want to ensure that the student school board representatives reflect the diverse student voices of the school district.
  - School board members acknowledge that “It is easier for us to talk about poverty and socio-economic status than race.”
  - School board members stated that “We need to go ‘beyond diversity’ and beyond the 2-day training.
  - There is a desire for the school district leadership to take equity into account during redistricting.
- Students and staff expressed appreciation for measures for enhancing inclusionary practices for all students in school life.
  - New students are welcomed formally by students, teachers, and administrators.
  - All schools support clubs and activities for all students.
  - Several students said, “It’s easy to start a club here.”

- o There are many programs and supports in place for students who are LGBTQ. There is evidence of support in many (not all) classrooms, e.g., pride flags.

## **Challenges**

- Parents noted that there are shortcomings in the efforts to ensure that voices of historically marginalized students and their families are included in the WCASD district programming. In particular, historically marginalized students and their families would benefit from ongoing and age-appropriate instruction about the education system in general, about formal and informal school procedures and practices, about school culture and about educational jargon.
- There are disparities in the roles, responsibilities, and perceptions of the Equity Teams in each school building.

## **Recommendations and Action Steps**

***Recommendation #1: Ensure proportional representation of all student groups in high-level courses and academic programs.***

### **Action Steps:**

- Address perceived overrepresentation of historically marginalized students in special education programs.
- Address underrepresentation of marginalized students in high-level academic programs and courses.
- Administrators should conduct equity walks in order to further their understanding and perceptions of various levels of rigor and expectations of students.
- Address teachers' fears of liability as related to identifying students for special education services

***Recommendation #2: Define the roles and expectations for the Equity Teams at all levels district wide.***

### **Action Steps:**

- Create and implement a communication plan for building and district goals district wide.
- Include all staff (teachers, support staff, custodians, bus drivers, etc.) in equity related professional development.
- Expand the membership on Equity Teams to include students, parents, and community members

***Recommendation #3: Establish a Principal's Advisory Board at each secondary school for students to express their voice to building administration.***

**Action Steps:**

- Allow students to discuss current issues directly with the principal.
- Ensure that all student voices are represented.
- Rotate student representation throughout the school year.

**INQUIRY QUESTION #6: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY**

***What Methods and Practices Are in Place To Provide Ongoing, Meaningful Professional Development On Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?***

**Commendations**

- The school district has a strong history of diversity/equity training and is ready to take steps to strengthen the staff's expertise in and application of culturally relevant pedagogy.
- There is a clear expectation that there should be a focus on equity in building level professional development. Equity team members and select staff shared that they had some positive trainings on equity (Courageous Conversations, Beyond Diversity Training, books studies, Work with Thom Stecher, and Dr. Tyrone Howard). Staff recalled the LEAD training from 20 or so years ago and
- its positive effects for students. Some school leaders have focused building- based professional learning on relationship-building and social-emotional learning as an entry point to a larger conversation about equity.

**Challenges**

- Several teachers indicated they would like more professional development on culturally responsive teaching and instructional practices. Staff display a lack of clarity on equity. Feedback gathered suggests that equity is often understood in terms of race only. Staff also reported inconsistencies in the implementation of professional development. Because educators can opt in to participate on their school's equity team, there is a sense that that equity work and initiatives are optional.
- Custodians and support staff have had limited exposure to professional development and would appreciate inclusion in future equity-related professional learning.
- A database of staff trainings is not complete, making it challenging to determine which staff members have attended required professional development.

## Recommendations and Action Steps

***Recommendation #1: In order to provide continuous professional development on equity, develop a consistent understanding of what "equity" means throughout the district, across all buildings and employee groups, as well as the district community would allow for systemic learning.***

### Action Steps:

- Establish a shared definition of equity for the district.
- Communicate the definition clearly to all stakeholders (students, support staff, professional staff, and families).

***Recommendation #2: Develop and deliver professional learning on the district-developed definition of equity and goals for all staff members.***

### Action Steps:

- Include all components of equity that the district identifies in their definition or commitment statement.
- Ensure ALL staff (Contracted employees, Support Staff, Professional Staff) hear this message through a professional learning experience that is on-going, clear and direct.
- Avoid relying exclusively on a train the trainer model or use of equity teams for district-wide equity initiatives to ensure that all stakeholders hear the same message and develop a common understanding. This will avoid staff feeling like they have to be the "race police" or avoid sensitive topics to avoid alienation within their school community, avoid placing the burden on the shoulders of selected staff (staff of color), and may encourage more professional staff to join the equity teams.

***Recommendation # 3: Access to continued professional development that ensures that the district's definition of equity is reflected in all aspects of professional learning.***

### Action Steps:

- Need to identify types of resources to expand and support the equity learning for teachers, support staff and administrators beyond race. Some resources should include the Cultural Proficiency frameworks by Randall Lindsey and his associates and Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain by Zaretta Hammond
- Provide building administrative teams with sustained training on the cultural proficiency model.

- Encourage all building leaders to more actively participate in and support their equity teams.

***Recommendation #4: Develop a process to implement and support progress towards goals and expectations at the district and building levels.***

**Action Steps:**

- Provide opportunities for building teams to coordinate their efforts and collaborate as they seek to address equity challenges and increase equitable practices based on local needs in their individual schools.
- District should establish a protocol for all buildings to share their approaches and progress and develop shared accountability measures and protocols
- District should establish a protocol to share district-wide expectations, themes and needs with each other and the broader West Chester community. And take time to share current best practices, successes, failures, and challenges.
- Establish a systematic approach to deliver these expectations to building equity teams.
- Develop a process to ensure measuring progress toward meeting these expectations and provide support.
- Create a process to empower building leadership and teams to determine how these goals will be met at the building level.
- Provide opportunities for building and district level reflection towards goals (Vertical reflection K-12, feeder reflection, etc.)
- Establish a yearly schedule or process to do this work with clear intentions.

# **DVCEE EQUITY READINGS AND RESOURCES FOR K-12 TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

## **DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY- CULTURAL PROFICIENCY AND EQUITY TEAM DEVELOPMENT**

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Common Sense Education Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Resources for

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