

School District U46 EQUITY AUDIT





Overview of the audit process

Overarching intent:

To determine the extent that School District U-46 is assuring equity in its treatment of all students and equal access to all services and educational opportunities.

Lens used:

- Research and the 5 Equity audit focus areas
- U-46 district policy and expectations

Scope:

- every department, school, classroom, program, and stakeholder (parents, students, staff members)

The Equity Audit represents a comprehensive analysis of how well the district leaders are defining, monitoring, and supporting equity across the system

Methodology

- ✓ documents and data reviewed on- and off-site
- ✓ surveys and interviews performed with parents, teachers, principals, board members, administrators, and students
- ✓ classrooms visited in every school site and instruction was observed
- ✓ samples of student work also analyzed for alignment



Numbers breakdown:

Personnel interviewed: 200+ teachers, administrators, and other staff

Parents interviewed: 150+

Students interviewed: 120+

Surveys offered to all who did not decline; 22,100 TOTAL responses received

- 1356 Teachers
- 805 Support Professional or Para-professional
- 119 School administrators
- 68 District administrators
- 3757 English-speaking parents
- 20 non English-speaking parents
- 1467 Spanish-speaking parents
- 13,055 students, in English
- 1475 students, in Spanish



Key areas of focus:

1. **Vision and Accountability**

- ✓ direction in policy and plans concerning vision and expectations for equity

2. **Achievement**

- ✓ academic performance by student subgroups

3. **Equity and Access**

- ✓ access to rigor, programs, and services (curriculum, program access)
- ✓ disciplinary actions, exclusionary practices, retentions



Key areas of focus:

4. Culture and Climate

- ✓ perceptions regarding bias and equity issues across the system
- ✓ perceptions regarding climate in school buildings and inclusivity

5. Curriculum

- ✓ support in written curriculum for effectively engaging and supporting diverse student population
- ✓ documents that are robust enough to support high-level learning



Written Report

- **Strengths**
 - Areas of strength and capacity in the system
- **Findings**
 - Areas where there is room to grow and improve
- **Recommendations**
 - Suggestions for action steps most likely to result in improved student learning, equity, inclusivity, and equal access

District Strengths

- Strong Board and District Leadership
- Commitment to and Support for Equity
- Dual Language Programming
- Supportive, Diverse Community
- Curriculum and Assessment Development
- Stable Financial Position



FINDINGS

Focus Area 1, Vision and Accountability

- **Finding 1.1:** Board policies have robust statements with regard to equity and a strong commitment to assuring equity. Policies need more specific expectations for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the classroom setting. Planning and plans are not fully coordinated and need greater clarity and focus, with accountability measures, if the district goals for equity are to be realized.



FINDINGS:

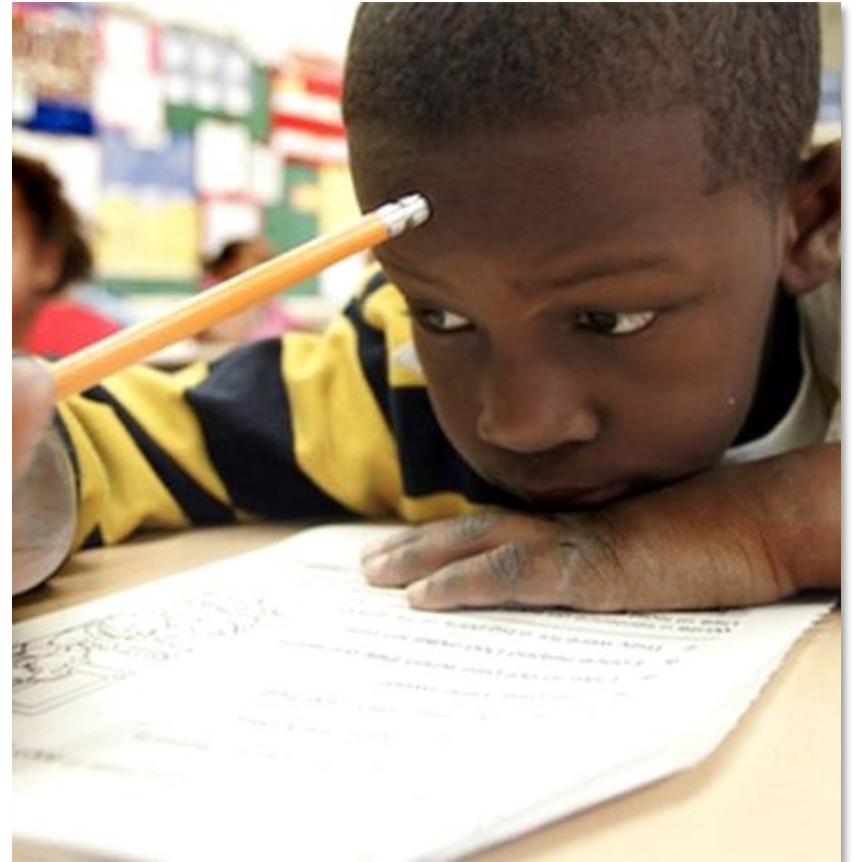
Focus Area 1

(cont.)

- **Finding 1.2:** The organizational structure, newly implemented, is sound but requires minor modifications. The structure is not fully operational and would be improved with formal systems and processes to assure fidelity to the vision and mission of the district. Job descriptions are strong but do not sufficiently specify responsibilities related to curriculum alignment, equity, and rigor.
- **Finding 1.3:** Follow-through on plans and initiatives is perceived as inconsistent. Communicating expectations and priorities to schools is challenging, and the interpretation of the district's vision, goals, and expectations at school sites is uneven. The area perceived as most needing improved communication is between the school sites and the district office.

FINDINGS: Focus Area 2, Achievement

- **Finding 2.1:** Overall, district achievement is declining, and large gaps are present in the achievement across schools and among student demographic groups.
- **Finding 2.2:** Locally developed common assessments in mathematics and English language arts are good measures, but do not consistently align with the state standards or with the state assessments. Teachers' use of these assessments is not reliable.
- **Finding 2.3:** While students participate in many national, state, and local assessments, student assessment data from those assessments are not used or are not used effectively to improve student learning and achievement.



FINDINGS: Focus Area 3, Equity and Access

- **Finding 3.1:** The district has established systems and processes to improve equity and access to instruction and special programs and supports for all students, but these processes are not all consistently implemented, and some have not resulted in improved access. The dual language program is a bright spot for the district and the community, although expectations for the program's implementation are not clearly defined.



FINDINGS:

Focus Area 3,

Equity and

Access

(cont.)

- **Finding 3.2:** The district budget process is well-managed but not explicitly linked to district goals and priorities, and resources do not clearly flow to areas of greater need. Facility planning is underway to address declining enrollment, aging and inequitable facilities, and the economic isolation of students in certain buildings.
- **Finding 3.3:** Instructional practices observed in classrooms are not reflective of district vision, beliefs, and expectations. Cognitive demand of activities is low, and only limited differentiation was observed. Professional development, while plentiful, is inadequately focused on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and on ensuring that all district students have a high-quality learning experience. The teacher contract limits the district's ability to ensure adequate professional development.

FINDINGS: Focus Area 3, Equity and Access



Finding 3.4: Student work artifacts requiring standards mastery mostly required higher-order thinking skills, but contexts tended to be of the least engaging types. Evidence for multicultural curriculum and opportunities for student voice and choice were low across the majority of content areas. Disparities exist in cognitive demand, engaging contexts, expectations for mastery, and access to curriculum between schools, classrooms, and special populations.

FINDINGS: Focus Area 4, Culture and Climate

- **Finding 4.1:** Despite public and written commitments by the Board and district leaders to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the district, cultural blindness persists throughout School District U-46. Courageous conversations about discrimination, equity, and bias occur, but not as frequently as needed, and discriminatory practices and microaggressions toward staff, students, and parents are not consistently addressed. The climate and culture within buildings varies widely, with staff and students reporting perceptions of great inclusivity and acceptance to perceptions of a non-inclusive and unsafe environment for some. Training and in-depth discussions are needed to promote the understanding of and appreciation for diversity that are critical to ensuring a climate that fully reflects inclusivity and a bias-free educational environment. Systems for reporting and dealing with instances of bias are not in place.



FINDINGS: Focus Area 5, Curriculum

- **Finding 5.1:** The written curriculum, although comprehensive in scope for literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades K-6, is not comprehensive in the core subjects for grades 7-8 and 9-12. The quality of the curriculum for all grade levels is strong in specifying learning objectives, but does not have adequate suggestions for strategies, resources, and student engagement activities that assist teachers in scaffolding and differentiating their instruction. On-level performance of the learning objectives is not clearly defined. Unit assessment items vary in alignment to the learning standards.



Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Vision, accountability, and planning

Re-define the core vision and mission of the district in the new strategic plan, collapsing the new plan with the existing Equity Plan to support greater clarity and consistency throughout the district. Simplify goals and priorities to align with the board's Call to Action and clearly define the district's expectations for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the everyday work of teaching and learning. Develop policy to direct curriculum management functions in all U-46 schools.



Recommendation 2: Capacity for Attaining District Goals and Priorities

Clarify responsibilities of all positions within the organizational structure to improve consistency, accountability, and follow-through on meeting the district's mission and goals and on implementing the Strategic Plan and other district plans. Train and develop all district personnel in understanding and implementing board expectations for diversity, equity, and inclusion and for the teaching and learning process. Improve consistency and follow-through in the district by establishing clear procedures across all departments and at all levels of the system and require assigned tasks to be monitored for completion. Re-calibrate the appraisal processes to more closely align with observed practice.





Recommendation 3: Curriculum and Assessment Design and Delivery

Expand curriculum to more clearly define student learning goals and on-level performance. Include more comprehensive and specific suggestions for activities, resources, and approaches that meet diverse learner needs and to ensure greater equity in learning scenarios. Revise and expand current assessment tools to more deeply align with state tests and to provide teachers with frequent and specific feedback on students' progress in mastering the curriculum.

Recommendation 4: Building an Inclusive, Bias-free Culture and Climate

Improve Access to Resources and Support Services and Continue to Build an Inclusive, Bias-Free Culture and Climate in all District Schools. Monitor data in all district schools on student access and achievement, including discipline, retention, and dropout data. Regularly collect feedback from students, staff, and parents regarding climate and equity and inclusion issues. Improve outreach to parents, families, and caregivers and develop proactive relationships in the community. Continue with current plans to expand early childhood to allow all incoming students access over the next five years.



Recommendation 5: Aligning Budget Development Practices to Board Priorities and Commitments

Support the commitments, priorities, and pillars of the district in the budget development and management process, ensuring that resources (financial and human) are allocated according to need to all district schools. Develop formulas for assessing the differing levels of need of school sites, taking donations and parent/community support into account, in an attempt to level the playing field for the neediest students. Use data to determine program effectiveness and validity, and tie budgetary decision making to program performance.

