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Dear students, parents, staff, and community members,

Equity is the most essential goal of the Princeton Public School District. Educational equity is not about equality. It is not about treating all children the same. Instead, equity is about acknowledging and valuing differences and ensuring that all children have the support they need to reach their highest potential in our classrooms regardless of their race, religion, gender, sexual identification, country of origin, cultural affiliation, language spoken, learning difference, or economic background.

To be equitable requires us to remove barriers to access and barriers to achievement. Sometimes those are physical barriers; sometimes those are instructional barriers; sometimes those are economic barriers; but often they are barriers of bias.

Recognizing our own biases can be difficult for both individuals and institutions. We often need objective, thoughtful, experts to help us do the difficult work of identifying areas of strength, areas of weakness, and areas of blindness where we may not even see the perceptions and experiences of others.

During the 2017-2018 school year, the Princeton Public School District undertook an equity audit that was conducted by Marceline DuBose, an educational equity consultant who has worked with school districts throughout the nation to do this difficult work. The report we have received from the audit is honest and objective. It notes areas of strength in the district, and areas where we need to address disparities.

We hope this report will spark important conversations in our schools, in our district, and in our community. However, this report must and will lead to action. We are working with Princeton's Civil Rights Commission to form a "Study Circle" of community leaders, educators, and students who will meet multiple times this summer and fall to review the equity report in depth and begin developing meaningful action steps for us to implement.

The work ahead of us to diversify our curriculum, diversify our staff, overcome bias, and foster inclusion is not easy or quick. But we believe that by working together, by continuing to have honest conversations, and by listening to each other with humility and openness, we will be able to make the changes needed to ensure not only that every student receives an equitable education but that every student is able to practice equity in our culturally complex world.

Sincerely,
Steve Cochrane



2017-2018 Educational Equity Culture and Curriculum Audit

Prepared for Princeton Public Schools

By Due East Educational Equity Collaborative

This report has been prepared for the education community at Princeton Public Schools. It provides an equity analysis and assists the district in identifying educational equity areas of strength and areas for growth. The Educational Equity Culture and Curriculum Audit (EECCA) is intended to support broader coalitions, engagement and action for educational equity in PPS.

Executive Summary

The Princeton, NJ community is a rich wealth of cultures, languages spoken, identities, values, experiences and knowledge. Realizing the full benefits of this diverse learning community and meeting the needs of each member of the school community requires a conscious and consistent focus at the leadership and instructional levels—prioritizing systemic equity, creating and maintaining culturally responsive classrooms, building a connected community and knowing and valuing each child.

In the fall of 2017, in an effort to find ways to best meet the needs of all learners and in response to known and suspected educational inequities and gaps between the district’s mission and students’ day-to-day school experiences, Princeton Public Schools initiated an educational equity audit of the district’s culture and curriculum. The Educational Equity Culture and Curriculum Audit (EECCA) included reviews of district policies, analysis of academic and discipline data, and connected with more than 2800 PPS community members through focus groups and surveys that heard from nearly 50% of all households, all high school students, and a majority of PPS faculty and staff.

The main observations show that the district’s stated commitment to equity, strong academic outcomes, and a budding commitment to culturally responsive curriculum and instruction serve as a base on which more effort around educational equity should take place. Namely, PPS continues to see racially-predictable disparities in achievement data, a perception of disparities in discipline and academic expectations, a difference between various identities’ sense of welcoming and belonging, challenges in addressing incidents of oppression and bias, and a strong sense of academic pressure and competition.

Many of the equity concerns and findings within this report are consistent with nation-wide equity challenges that most districts are still struggling to address. Some of the findings are unique to Princeton or heightened by Princeton’s position as a top tier school district. The EECCA recognizes that the Princeton Public Schools do not settle for the academic outcomes of most districts and neither should it settle for the educational equity outcomes of most districts. Princeton Public Schools’ many academic and community resources, reputation for achievement and relatively small size make it an ideal environment to strive for both equity and excellence.

A system-wide approach should be utilized to support the development of mindsets and skillsets for equity grounded leadership and more culturally responsive practice among district staff and the broader education community should be engaged. With the support of leadership, faculty, staff, parents/guardians, and students, Princeton Public Schools can realize the full benefits of their diverse and unique community with a consistent and persistent effort to prioritize systemic equity.

Given the right resources and guidance, along with authentic action steps by the district, this community is poised to make shifts that can remedy and reverse the equity challenges present in PPS.

This audit report is intended to support community conversations, broader coalitions, engagement and action for educational equity in PPS. This report contains the following:

I. Equity Audit Findings and Detailed Data-Discussion and description for each finding along with supporting data and equity considerations:

- **Finding 1: Stated Commitment to Equity**
Mission, strategic plan, and principles serve as a road map to guide difficult decisions. However, these statements of support for equity are only as effective as the actions that support them and the outcomes that prove them.
- **Finding 2: Strong Academic Outcomes, Persistent Disparities**
Strong academic achievement across the school system aligns with the mission of the district and is an essential foundation for educational equity. However, when making comparisons between sub-groups of students, the data show disparities that merit attention.
- **Finding 3: Perception of Disparities in Discipline and Academic Expectations**
The perceptions of families, students and faculty indicate discrepancies in student behavior enforcement and discipline consequences. The majority of students and parents/guardians feel teachers hold high academic standards. However, data does demonstrate a gap between how faculty view academic expectations of students and how the rest of the school community views faculty expectations.
- **Finding 4: Welcoming and Belonging**
While there were noticeable distinctions between parents/guardians and their children's perceptions about the environment in the district, there were also distinctions among student and family responses based on various identities.
- **Finding 5: Addressing Incidents of Oppression and Bias**
Across the board, confidence in the district's responses to incidents of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressive occurrences leaves room for improvement.
- **Finding 6: Academic Pressure and Competition**
Student, parent, and faculty reports of student pressure were numerous. This competitive academic pressure will dilute or undermine educational equity efforts if those efforts are viewed as detrimental to individual goals.
- **Finding 7: Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Instruction**
When disaggregating by race, the data shows that students and families of different racial identities have different perspectives on the cultural responsiveness of district curriculum.

II. **Recommendations-** Data indicated and informed next steps to improve equitable outcomes and experiences for students and families:

- **Recommendation 1: Community and Relationship Building**

Research shows that the most effective way to reduce interpersonal bias is through meaningful relationships. Just as the elevation of individual well-being requires a planned and purposeful approach, so too does relationship building and community well-being.

- **Recommendation 2: Build Internal Educational Equity Leadership Capacity**

An equity-oriented leader is committed to the practice of expanding their own and other's capacity to seek a vision for educational equity and creating culturally competent schools. The data in this report encourages the district to continue to develop and support equity-oriented leadership mindsets and skill sets.

- **Recommendation 3: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Educational Equity Professional Development**

In order to utilize existing district resources including educators who have a demonstrated passion and aptitude for culturally responsive teaching and educational equity, this audit recommends professional development that is designed to bolster in-district capacity by preparing a team of educators to lead peer-to-peer building-level CRT workshops.

- **Recommendation 4: Recruiting and Maintaining a More Diverse Staff**

Being a school district that values a diversity of identities, voices, and perspectives includes being a district that is made up of diversity of identities, voices, and perspectives among hired staff. The voices in this audit encourage the district to continue efforts to hire and retain teachers, administrators, and staff that reflect the Princeton community and will expose students to various worldviews.

Introduction and Background

The Princeton, NJ community is a rich wealth of cultures, languages spoken, identities, values, experiences and knowledge. Princeton Public Schools' students reflect the community; beautifully diverse, each child's gifts and needs are unique, and success looks different for each child. With an enrollment of 3,765, Princeton Public Schools student population includes students with a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Fifty-five percent of Princeton students identify as White, 20% as Asian, 13% as Hispanic, 6% as Black and 5% as two or more races. Twenty-two percent of students claim a language other than English as their first tongue, and more than 50 languages are spoken by PPS families in their homes. Realizing the full benefits of this diverse learning community requires a conscious and consistent focus at the leadership and instructional levels—prioritizing systemic equity, creating and maintaining culturally responsive classrooms, building a connected community and knowing and valuing each child. The Princeton Public Schools mission is in alignment with this focus:

Our mission is to prepare all of our students to lead lives of joy and purpose as knowledgeable, creative and compassionate citizens of a global society.

PPS builds on its mission with a focus on educational equity in Goal 3 of the district strategic plan.

Goal 3: Close the Achievement Gap

Our goal is to promote equity and access in ways that effectively eliminate the "achievement" or opportunity gap.

In the fall of 2017, in response to known and suspected educational inequities and gaps between the district's mission and students' day-to-day school experiences, Princeton Public Schools initiated an educational equity audit of the district's culture and curriculum.

In Their Own Words...

"Princeton is a very multicultural area and if you just leave kids alone and let them play/study together the world will be a much better place."—Parent

"It has been my distinct pleasure and honor to be part of our village, making a difference in the hearts and minds and lives of our children!"—Staff

Audit Design and Implementation

The PPS Educational Equity Culture and Curriculum Audit explored the following essential questions for creating and sustaining educational equity:

- Are all our students and families' day-to-day school experiences welcoming and engaging regardless of race, religion, gender, LGBTQ identities, home language, socioeconomic, immigrant, or special education status?
- Is our curriculum reflective of and relevant to the diversity of our student body?
- Does our curriculum prepare students to understand and respect the diversity of perspectives in their classrooms and society?
- Are all students achieving required academic outcomes while also being encouraged to pursue individual pathways to success?

The audit was conducted December 2017 through April 2018. A mixed methods approach was used and participants included administrators, teachers, district staff, parents/guardians, and PHS students. The audit included reviews of the district mission, strategic plan and communications regarding educational equity, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Academic, attendance and discipline data was supplied by the district in addition to the data provided by the 2016/2017 New Jersey School Performance Report. 2,780 individuals including 405 employees, 1,012 parents, and 1,363 PHS students took four distinct surveys assessing Princeton Public Schools' culture and curriculum. Additionally, a total of 106 people attended seven focus groups for parents/guardians, students, faculty and staff. Finally, all administrators attended equity planning meetings and discussions. The audit connected with nearly 50% of all households, all high school students, and a majority of PPS faculty and staff. In sum, more than 2,800 individuals contributed data for this report.

This audit will likely inspire additional questions that it cannot answer. Curiosity is a prerequisite to change and additional questions are an excellent starting point. The EECCA is intended to assist the district in assessing the habits and outcomes of the system, identifying areas of strength upon which to continue to build and areas requiring attention and adjustment. It is our hope that the review of this audit will create broader coalitions and engagement, creative approaches to increase educational equity, and provide PPS with an opportunity for collective discussions, accountability and decision making.

In Their Own Words...

"I strongly believe the school system is segregated. They should do more to implement a curriculum where children of color feel more included."

—Parent

"More representation of LGBTQ+ community is needed."—Student

General Comments

Princeton Public Schools have several equity strengths that should be mentioned and maintained. These strengths serve as a solid foundation for future equity work. Within the mission and strategic plan the district explicitly communicates a commitment to equity. A stated commitment to equity is an essential starting point, and one that is more developed in Princeton than many other districts. The district has access to many resources including proximity to Princeton University strong and an engaged and motivated community. PPS also demonstrates academic achievement across most student groups, outperforming state and national averages. Finally, in recent years the district has introduced several educational equity initiatives including early stage culturally responsive curricular changes, a focus on hiring a more diverse staff, community building opportunities and culturally responsive teaching focused professional development for administration, faculty and staff.

The audit also highlights a number of areas requiring attention and adjustment. The audit reveals an individualistic and academically competitive environment. This environment contributes to and sustains many of the inequities persistent in PPS. The audit also indicates that curriculum and instruction in the district emphasizes a traditional narrative and should be expanded to include more content and learning materials that are reflective of and relevant to the diversity of perspectives, histories, values, and identities in the student body and society. Finally, the audit reveals room for growth on several academic measures for certain sub-groups of students.

Princeton Schools' equity strengths and challenges are explored in further detail in the [seven key findings](#) of this report. The report also includes [four recommendations](#) to improve equitable outcomes and experiences for students and families.

Note: Due to the relative availability of high school level data and the cognitive and communication abilities of high school age students, this audit leans heavily on the experiences and outcomes for students of Princeton High School. It is important to recognize that while PHS student data provides much of the foundational data for this audit, this is not an audit of PHS. In a small community such as Princeton, the high school serves as both a leader and a reflection of the system as a whole. The data strengths and deficiencies represented within this audit are a commentary on-- and the responsibility of-- the whole education community.

In Their Own Words...

"I have had the pleasure of working in a great environment. However, I feel as if I work for two different districts depending on who walks through the door."
—Faculty

"I am excited about the changes on the horizon with PPS but would like to see more done. Less talk, more action."
—Parent

Finding 1: Stated Commitment to Equity

Princeton Public Schools' commitment to a child-centered mission, equity-focused strategic directions, and principles are an excellent start. Having these foundational statements is an important building block for educational equity. The mission, strategic plan, and principles serve as a road map to guide difficult decisions. They are a form of communication with the entire community about what the schools stand for and strive for. These values and goals are most explicitly stated in the district's strategic plan:

Goal 3: Close the Achievement Gap

Our goal is to promote equity and access in ways that effectively eliminate the "achievement" or opportunity gap

And the PPS equity principles:

- To be color brave – not color blind
- To provide access to academic and extra-curricular opportunities to all – without barriers and with support
- Committed to building a diverse staff reflective of our student body
- Committed to building and broadening the cultural responsiveness of our staff, students and families, specifically, our ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people from all cultures and backgrounds
- Committed to building, supporting, and regularly revising a high quality, diverse curriculum that is representative of the world and of the multiple narratives of the human experience
- Committed to communication with families that is open, responsive, reciprocal, inviting, sensitive, and inclusive
- Committed to examining our data objectively, courageously, diversely, and regularly
- Committed to upholding a Code of Conduct that is reflective of cultural differences and encompasses universal expectations of care, kindness, and restorative justice
- Committed to getting to know our students as individuals and as learners and to being responsive to them in our teaching
- Committed to practices that cultivate empathy and to the creation of a community in which everyone feels they belong

However, as the following findings will demonstrate, these statements of support for equity are only as effective as the actions that support them and outcomes that prove them. There remains a need for responses to established educational inequities in the district that are similar to those that plague districts across the country.

In Their Own Words...

“I think Princeton in general is very good at putting a progressive façade on things and never really does the hard work to get there.”—Parent

“Looking forward to seeing the results and more importantly the actions and strategies that will be implemented to meet our district goals!”
—Faculty

Finding 2: Strong Academic Outcomes, Persistent Disparities

Strong academic achievement across the school system aligns with the mission of the district and is an essential foundation for educational equity. Princeton Public Schools show strong academic outcomes when looking at the entire student body. These include a four-year graduation rate of 97%, SAT participation rates of 92%, and 79% of the district's students meeting or exceeding expectations on the English Language Arts/Literacy section of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment.

Princeton has higher graduation rates than the state average for every sub-group of students. Black students' four-year graduation rate in Princeton is over ten percentage points higher than the NJ state average for Black students. Participation in advanced coursework is also robust. Across the student body a healthy percentage of students participate in advanced courses, and several subgroups of students are well represented in advanced courses in comparison to national averages. For the 2017/2018 school year, this includes exceptional participation among LEP students (at 74%), multiracial students (at 94%), and economically disadvantaged students (at 38%).

When making certain comparisons between subgroups of students, the data show disparities that merit attention. Traditionally underserved students have uneven or lower achievement rates on a variety of measures. These include:

- Lower graduation rates than the district average for economically disadvantaged students (at 87%), students with disabilities (at 91%) and English Learners (at 92%).
- Students meeting or exceeding expectations on the English Language Arts/Literacy section of the PARCC assessment drops for Hispanic students (at 55%), Black students (at 43%), economically disadvantaged students (at 42%) and students with disabilities (at 44%).
- Discrepancies in advanced coursework participation rates: 61% of Asian students participate in advanced courses, 51% of White students participate, but the participation rate decreases to 30% of Black students, 13% of Hispanic students, and only 12% of students with an IEP participating in advanced courses.

In Their Own Words...

“As the parent of a student who is academically strong, I share my friends’ concerns that the high school focuses too much on students like him and [doesn’t] do much for the average student.”
—Parent

“Teachers can do a better job understanding students’ perspectives and creating a design of teaching that benefits everyone.”—Student

- The New Jersey Department of Education defines chronic absenteeism as being absent for 10% or more of the days enrolled during a school year. For the district as a whole, 18% of students were classified as chronically absent. That number jumps to 24% for Hispanic students, 26% for Black students, 25% for economically disadvantaged students, and 22% for students with disabilities. Student attendance is an area for examination and improvement; the district does not meet state level attendance goals for any group of students.
- For the 2016/2017 school year, 16% of PPS students had an IEP. Only 5% of Asian students and 7% of LEP students had an IEP. Comparatively, 35% of economically disadvantaged students, 30% of Black students and 33% of Hispanic students had an IEP. District, school, and classroom policies and practices should be examined for their impact on potential over-representation and under-representation of certain student groups.

In Their Own Words...

“In PPS there are high expectations for some students depending if they are high achieving, socio-economic while others feel left out and not valued. There are not enough offerings for special ed. students and ELL students of lower socioeconomics.”

—Faculty



Finding 3: Perception of Disparities in Discipline and Academic Expectations

There were 51 suspensions during the 2016/2017 school year; 82% of those suspensions were for objective offenses such as plagiarism, drug paraphernalia, or bringing a weapon to school. Eighteen percent of the suspensions were for subjective offenses such as vulgarity, intimidation, or disobedience. A review of the suspension data shows that Hispanic students (30% of suspensions) and Black students (28% of suspensions) are overrepresented in comparison to their representation of the student body. White students (30% of suspensions), and Asian students (8% of suspensions), are underrepresented in comparison to their percentage of the student body.

Based on survey and focus group data, the perceptions of families, students and faculty indicate that there may also be discrepancies in student behavior enforcement and discipline consequences.

- While 91% of faculty agreed with the statement *“I enforce behavior standards equally; my students receive equitable disciplinary consequences,”*
- Only 40% of district staff agreed with the statement *“I feel like the school treats all students equally when disciplining students.”*
- Only 36% of all students and 47% of all parents/guardians agree with the statement *“I feel like the school treats all students equally when disciplining students.”*
- Black students (at 26%) and multiracial students (at 22%) along with Black parents (at 36%) are the least likely to agree that all students are treated equally when disciplined.

The majority of students and parents/guardians feel that teachers hold high academic standards and believe in each child’s highest potential. The reporting stayed relatively consistent across racial groups and special education status. The data does demonstrate a gap between how faculty views their academic expectations of students and how the rest of the school community views faculty expectations.

- Ninety-three percent of faculty agreed or strongly agreed that they *“hold equally high academic standards”* for all their students.
- Comparatively, 71%, 69%, and 50% respectively of students, parents/guardians, and other staff agreed that teachers *“hold high standards,” “believe in my child’s highest potential,”* and *“hold equally high standards for all students.”*
- When asked about their colleagues only 66% of faculty agree or strongly agree that their colleagues *“hold equally high academic standards for all students.”*

In Their Own Words...

“African-American children who misbehave are often treated as troublemakers more quickly and harshly than white students who may be equally disruptive.”—Parent

“We need more equality with all races when it comes to discipline”—Student

“Students of color and students with disabilities are disciplined with harsher consequences and suspended more frequently than general education students of higher socioeconomic backgrounds.”—Staff

Finding 4: Welcoming and Belonging

The EECCA examined students and families' feelings of being welcomed and belonging in the Princeton schools. Across all groups PPS received high marks from parents/guardians who were more likely to report feeling welcomed and belonging at school than students were. Additionally, parents/guardians were more likely than students to report agreement that all students are included and valued at school. Finally, parents/guardians were also more likely than students to agree that a diversity of perspectives and cultures are valued at PPS. The differences in parent/guardian and student perspectives raise several questions:

- What is the difference in daily experience with PPS for parents/guardians whose surveys represented K-12 enrollment and students whose surveys represented PHS enrollment?
- What is the difference in the experience of attending school during an extracurricular event (parent/guardian lens) versus the experience of attending school on a typical school day (student lens)?
- How much do parents/guardians and students communicate about day-to-day experiences at school?

While there were noticeable distinctions between parents/guardians and their children's perceptions about the environment in PPS, there were also distinctions among student and family responses based on various identities.

"My family feels welcome and comfortable coming to school."

- All at 59%, Black, multiracial and Indigenous American/Alaskan Native students were least likely to agree;
- White students (at 80%) and Asian students (at 72%) were most likely to agree.

"I feel welcome and comfortable coming to my child's school."

- Black parents/guardians (at 79%) and multiracial parents/guardians (at 83%) were least likely to agree;
- Hispanic (at 91%) and Special Education (at 87%) parents/guardians were most likely to agree.

"I feel like I am included and I belong at my school."

- Students who selected other gender (at 48%) or gender non-conforming (at 46%), and Indigenous American/Alaskan Native (at 35%) were least likely to agree;
- White (at 77%), male (at 76%) and Asian (at 75%) students were most likely to agree.

In Their Own Words...

"Diversity is what makes Princeton, Princeton! And I think the schools reflect that, celebrate that and encourage that. I am White and English speaking, so perhaps I don't have the perspective of some other families." —Parent

"I feel more targeted in a negative way because of my race and gender. I also feel that this school shies away from addressing topics concerning my race and the way people that look like me are treated." —Student

Students were more likely to agree that they personally are included and belong at school than to agree that all students are included and valued at school. The prompt *“I feel like all students are included and valued at school”* received low levels of agreement (ranging from 14% to 40% agreement) from all groups of students.

Parents/Guardians in general were more positive in their feedback to the prompt *“I feel like all students are included and valued at school.”*

- Black parents/guardians (at 51%), and those who selected “other race” (at 54%) least likely to agree;
- Hispanic (at 74%), Multi-racial (at 74%), and Asian (at 70%) parents/guardians were most likely to agree.

“I feel like a diversity of perspectives and cultures are valued at PPS.”

- Multiracial (at 34%) and Black (at 37%) students were least likely to agree;
- White (at 60%) and Asian (at 60%) students were most likely to agree.

“I feel like a diversity of perspectives and cultures are valued at PPS.”

- Black parents (at 47%) and were least likely to agree;
- Asian (at 80%) and White (at 76%) parents/guardians were most likely to agree.

PPS has three full-time professionals working directly with students and families in the role of liaisons. The liaisons focus on removing barriers and leveraging services to support students. There is a family liaison for each level of the school system, and two speak fluent Spanish and work closely with the Hispanic community.

On a number of measures Hispanic and Special Education families were significantly more likely to agree to statements of feeling welcomed and belonging than other families of color and traditionally marginalized groups. This outcome supports continuing to support the work of family liaisons and supportive services for special education families, and perhaps expanding capacity to meet the needs of more families.

In summary, the data exploring feelings of welcoming and belonging in PPS show that Black, multiracial, and Indigenous/Alaskan Native students and families are least likely to feel welcomed, included and valued in Princeton Schools. White and Asian students and families are most likely to feel welcomed, included and valued in Princeton Schools.

In Their Own Words...

“We’ve lived in many different areas of the country and settled on Princeton for many reasons including academic excellence and its appreciation for true diversity. We have not been disappointed. Being a multiracial family, this is important to us.”—Parent

“I think this school needs major fixing in the department of racial, sexuality, and other personal issues. It needs to be addressed that everyone has issues and needs to feel like they belong.”—Student

Finding 5: Addressing Incidents of Oppression and Bias

Across the board, confidence in the district's responses to incidents of racism, sexism, homophobia and other oppressive occurrences leaves room for improvement. Only 57% of students, 64% of parents, and 26% of faculty agree or strongly agree that if they report a concern, their concerns will be addressed. Consistent with previous findings, there are discrepancies among responses based on various identities.

In response to the prompt *"If I report experiencing a racist, sexist, homophobic or other oppressive occurrences, the adults at school will support me and address my concerns,"*

- Multi-racial (36%), gender non-conforming (38%), and Black students (37%) were least likely to agree;
- Male (65%), Asian (61%), and White (59%) students were most likely to agree.

In response to the similar prompt, *"If I or my child report experiencing racist, sexist, homophobic or other oppressive occurrences, the staff at school will support us and address our concerns,"*

- Black (49%) parents/guardians were least likely to agree;
- Hispanic (79%), Asian (64%), and Special Ed (64%) parents/guardians were most likely to agree.

The data also continues to illuminate the gap between faculty perceptions and student perceptions. While 91% of faculty agreed with the statement *"When students report experience with racism, sexism, homophobia or other forms of marginalization I believe them and help them create justice for themselves and others,"* only 57% of students report that they believe if they voice a concern it will be addressed. While explanations for this gap in perceptions should leave room for the impact of district policies, procedures, and administration decisions, this data indicates there is room to build understanding and trust within the student/teacher relationship.

Student Story— "As a gay teenager, I get a lot of quiet hate from many of the boys in the school, but when I try to tell anyone about it, I get dismissed like the problem really wasn't that serious. It hurts but I guess it's like a blessing in disguise because I have become numb to hate like that. Looking back at my two and a half years here, a 14, 15, 16-year-old who was just figuring out his sexuality should not be greeted at a new school with that. It has caused some mental problems for me because right now, I don't even accept myself as gay, and it makes me cringe to even say those words out loud."

In Their Own Words...

"There have been recent incidents at the school and in the world that I felt should have been addressed at school and weren't."
—Parent

"This school needs to address sexual misconduct and racist actions in a more appropriate and direct manner."—Student

"I feel that the district should be more proactive than reactive to incidents in school."—Faculty

Finding 6: Academic Pressure and Competition

Student, parent/guardian, and faculty reports of student pressure were numerous and reinforcing. The data emphasizes that students find themselves busy, under pressure and in competition with each other. This academic pressure has an impact on the individual well-being of each student, but also has an impact on the well-being of relationships and the entire learning community. Comments from all groups illustrated the corrosive impact academic pressure is having on student-to-student relationships and within student/teacher/family relationships. During one of the focus groups, an academically successful student described her experience in Princeton as “a small town full of big people.” When asked to elaborate she shared that the ambitions of her classmates are “big;” students are competitively focused on their individual goals, making it difficult to form strong bonds and friendships.

While this level of pressure culminates at the high school level, each level of schooling before high school is also aligned to prepare students for the academic expectations of high school. Faculty reported feeling pressure from students and parents/guardians to make exceptions for or prioritize certain students. Parents/guardians report the competitive and stressful impact on their students due to other families utilizing additional tutoring and pressing schools for additional support.

Parent Story-- “In order to survive at this school, you have to speak up, stand up, and take initiative otherwise you will drown and there will be no one to help you. So the child or parent who can do this will succeed. I can only imagine how much more difficult this would be if a parent did not speak English as the primary language, or was [not knowledgeable] or apathetic for some other reason.”

In Their Own Words...

“The values of our district are more about being exclusive instead of inclusive.”—Parent

“PHS provides a good learning environment but it is very competitive.”—Student

“I have noticed that it is the parents and the students who have the money, power, influence, etc. who have their voices heard.”
—Faculty

The data indicates a need to balance the level of influence that parents/guardians have. This was not a specific line of inquiry in the equity audit design, but emerged within the focus groups and in open comments. This feedback illustrates that some groups of parents/guardians are able to influence classrooms, schools, and even the district in the best interest of their own child, while other groups of parents/guardians are less connected and under-supported.

The findings regarding academic pressure and competition are significant and reinforce the district's decision to have a mission that focuses on shaping schools that are places where *every child is known, where joy and purpose are woven into... learning*. The findings are also important to this equity audit because a competitive environment such as is reported in PPS will dilute or undermine educational equity efforts if they are viewed as detrimental to individual goals and ambitions. Faculty may feel pressure to teach a fast-paced, traditional curriculum. Families and students who are most connected and highly resourced will be able to navigate the system to secure the best educational supports. These habits of the system leave some students with a smaller share of the educational resources and exacerbates both academic and environmental inequities that have been outlined throughout this audit.

Parent/guardian voice is an essential element in creating systemic equity. Well-resourced, supported and connected parents/guardians can be a powerful voice to press and provide support for equity shifts that are in the best interest of most students. Parents/guardians can also be a formidable barrier to equity shifts in policies and procedures that may benefit most students while asking for small sacrifice from a few. For both individual student success and systemic equity, it is important that the district hear from and be responsive to all parents/guardians in an equitable way. In order to balance parent/guardian influence the district needs to ensure fair, open, equitable and collaborative relationships with all parents/guardians.

Achieving equity within a school community requires that members of that community are sensitive to the needs of others and willing to put forth effort and share resources so that each member of the community is well served and finding success. Academic pressure and competition distract a school community's focus from equity and can ultimately serve to undermine efforts to achieve equity.

In Their Own Words...

"The pace is relentless and there is no room to develop social skills, leadership skills, etc."

—Parent

"To accomplish the equity that is expected, we need to as a school and community, do less. If we are to accomplish the depth for our curriculum there simply isn't time enough to do all that is required."

—Faculty

"This is sort of like a private public school."

—Staff

Finding 7: Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Instruction

Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction emphasizes content and learning materials that are reflective of and relevant to the diversity of perspectives, histories, values, and identities in the student body and society. Culturally responsive teaching de-centers dominant narratives and traditional instructional practices of the school by growing curriculum to include customarily absent narratives and an array of instructional practices proven to better serve a diverse body of students.

PPS is in the early stages of expanding curriculum and instruction to become more culturally responsive. These efforts include:

- On-going diversification of literature and exposure to authors and stories from a variety identities and perspectives
- Adjustments to the third grade Princeton History curriculum, which now looks at themes in Princeton to see change over time and acknowledges the history of slavery in Princeton
- Middle school units that include a focus on social justice, implicit bias, and looking at underrepresented figures and ideas in United States history
- A US history course taken by all 9th graders that includes a unit on how to talk about race
- A pilot course during the spring of 2018 at PHS entitled “Racial Literacy” (Sixteen students signed up for the elective for Spring 2018; next year the number is 40.)
- Culturally responsive teaching is expanding. (For example, during 2016/2017 a teacher in the English department at PHS wrote a unit, ordered the books and taught The Bluest Eye. This year two more teachers are teaching this unit.)

The data shows that faculty feel they are providing culturally responsive curriculum in their classrooms.

- Ninety-three percent of faculty agreed with the statement *“My teaching and curriculum affirms and values multiple perspectives.”*
- Eighty percent of faculty agreed with the statement *“I utilize a variety of culturally relevant materials, resources, and voices within my curriculum and classroom.”*

These are important additions to the traditional curriculum and could be considered reflective of the “Additive Approach” on James Banks Model of Multi-cultural Curriculum Integration. The additive approach includes adding literature or concepts to the existing base curriculum as a unit or activity without fundamentally changing the basic design, expectations or assumptions of the curriculum.

In Their Own Words...

“Neither my gender identity nor my sexual identity are reflected whatsoever in the curriculum. It’s really difficult just not seeing myself reflected at all.”—Student

“We wish there is more learning about the world, either in history, culture or geography, Asia in particular, to equip students with the knowledge and understanding required by the increasingly globalized world.”
—Parent

Regarding culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, the data shows that parents/guardians were significantly more likely to report that the curriculum at school *“teaches about a variety of cultures, histories, and perspectives”* than students were. Seventy-one percent of all parents were able to agree with the statement while only 56% of all students agreed with the statement.

When disaggregating by race, the data shows that students and families of different racial identities have different perspectives on the cultural responsiveness of PPS curriculum.

- Black (at 40%), Hispanic (at 39%), and multiracial students (at 37%) were least likely to agree that PPS curriculum is culturally responsive.
- White (at 59%) and Asian students (at 57%) were most likely to agree that PPS curriculum is culturally responsive.
- Black parents/guardians (at 56%) were least likely to agree that PPS curriculum is culturally responsive.
- Hispanic (at 76%) and White parents/guardians (at 73%) were most likely to agree that PPS curriculum is culturally responsive.

In response to the prompt *“I feel like my culture, values, and history are represented in the curriculum at school”*

- Multiracial (at 16%) and Black students (at 28%) were least likely to agree;
- White students (at 60%) were most likely to agree.

In response to the similar prompt *“I feel like our family culture, values, and history are represented in the curriculum at school”*

- Black parents/guardians (at 37%) were least likely to agree;
- Hispanic (at 65%) and White parents/guardians (at 64%) were most likely to agree.

Surveys and focus groups examining student and family perspectives illustrate a gap between faculty perceptions and student and family perceptions and demonstrate that there is a desire for more culturally responsive curriculum and instruction at PPS.

It is evident from the student and parent/guardian feedback that continued and deepening efforts by PPS to transform the curriculum/instruction to be more reflective of and relevant to the dynamic identities of PPS students should be a priority of the district.

In Their Own Words...

“In history classes when they talk about African-Americans they only talk about slavery. We’ve been learning about slavery all our lives.”
—Student

“My otherwise reticent 8th grader comes home from JW wanting to discuss issues of class, sexual orientation and racial imbalances at school in ways that are thoughtful and show that he is engaging these issues with peers and teachers. Bravo!”
— Parent

Moving Forward: Recommendations

“Have we made progress in these areas? Yes. Is there still work to be done? Yes.”—Staff Member

“Important work lies ahead. Not where we need to be as a community on these issues, but wonderful and essential that the district is taking it on. Thank you.”—Parent/Guardian

Despite the equity challenges outlined within this culture and curriculum audit, there exists a vocal, capable and motivated community. At the closing of one of the parent/guardian focus groups, participants were asked to share one word that describes their feelings about educational equity in Princeton Public Schools. A father who attended the session said he was “skepti-hopeful.” He went on to explain that he was concerned, even skeptical that meaningful changes could be made, but also based on the direction he sees the district heading, he is hopeful. The theme of “skepti-hopeful” repeated across many of the focus groups and the survey comments. “Skepti-hopeful” reminds us that an engaged and motivated community (including families, students, faculty and staff) is available to PPS to advance equity within the district. Given the right resources and guidance, along with authentic action steps by the district, this community is poised to make shifts that can remedy and reverse the equity challenges present in PPS. The following recommendations are idea generators, a starting point and not a definitive action plan. Responses to this audit should be generated and supported by the community.

In addition to engaging the community in equity leadership, the data from the audit point to four important future directions to address PPS’ equity challenges:

- 1) Community and Relationship Building
- 2) Build Internal Educational Equity Leadership Capacity
- 3) Culturally Responsive Teaching and Educational Equity Professional Development
- 4) Recruiting and Retaining a more Diverse Staff

“What’s going to happen with this report? Can you make things happen?? People want to see something happen.”—Student

“I feel hopeful about this process. I have an overall appreciation of working in a place that would take steps to improving the general climate of our schools.”—Staff Member

Recommendation 1: Community and Relationship Building

“I would like to see more ongoing dialog on racial literacy and racial justice for parents and for students. Not just having “the conversation,” but learning ways to have the conversation. We need safe, empathetic events and spaces to talk and listen and we need help from experts on how to have these conversations, not just after incidents of racism, but as a part of an ongoing, caring, sustainable dialogue that we can be proud of and that would implicate us all as stewards and caretakers of the spirit and values of PPS.”—Parent/Guardian

The PPS mission and strategic plan have a stated and established focus on child well-being. The data from the culture and curriculum audit indicate that the district focus on well-being is important and should be expanded to include community well-being. Achievement of PPS’ equity goal in the strategic plan and equity principles require community wide interdependence. They lean on the belief that “I am my brother and sister’s keeper” and “we are in this together.” Research shows that the most effective way to reduce interpersonal bias is through meaningful relationships. Just as the elevation of individual well-being requires a planned and purposeful approach, so too does relationship building and community well-being. The first recommendation of this audit emphasizes a district wide focus on the creation and support of a caring, inclusive, and participatory school community.

There are infinite approaches to building relationships and community. The following are suggested:

- 1) **Emphasize common PPS identity, purpose, and ideals:** Along with academic achievement, and child wellness, the district should emphasize shared identity and ideals regarding equity. This emphasis can happen through community communication strategies ensuring it is publicly recognized that everyone is valued and supported in Princeton Public Schools; we are each other’s teammates in success and we are stronger for our differences.
- 2) **Expand Policies and Practices to Better Address Bias Incidents:** Provide learning opportunities for students, staff and community to better understand individual, unconscious, and systemic bias, including how to recognize and redress bias. Update policy and code of conduct statements regarding Anti-bias expectations. Provide multiple avenues for individuals to report incidents/experiences of bias. Provide trained professionals who can work with those who report a bias incident find the most appropriate and empowering resolutions. Utilize restorative justice methods to address incidents of bias in a structured way.
- 3) **Provide regular opportunities for service and cooperation:** Encourage interdependence throughout the school community and students’ years with PPS. Interdependence can be emphasized many ways, including by pairing older and younger students for mentoring and academic support, having students or schools serve the Princeton community, offering opportunities for collaborative and cooperative work. Through these opportunities, students will develop wider and richer relationships and learn the skills of collaboration.
- 4) **Community dialogues and community building activities:** These can be as undemanding as family film nights or as thoughtful as intergroup conversations where individuals from a variety of racial, ethnic and cultural groups meet to talk openly in a safe and structured environment about personal experiences with race and discuss ways to address inequity in the school community. Adding an advisory program at the secondary levels is another avenue for creating meaningful relationships among students and between students and adults during the school day.

“We need to create time and space to talk to each other in order to learn about each other and our lives. Otherwise assumptions and biases will continue to exist.”—Faculty

Recommendation 2: Build Internal Educational Equity Leadership Capacity

“This definitely feels different because the Superintendent is very comfortable talking about race and racism.”—Staff Member

“I have 22 years in Princeton. When I first came here a lot of the conversation was about the haves and the have nots. In the 22 years, the conversation shifts but never changes.”—Faculty

The data in the EECCA Audit encourages PPS to continue to develop and support equity-oriented leadership structures and mindsets and skill sets. School leadership is an ongoing and vital component in creating and sustaining equitable school systems. Any PPS equity-oriented leadership development plan should include positional leaders (School Board, Superintendent, building admin., and directors) and informal leaders (faculty, staff, students and families). In an equitable district all positional and informal leaders have the knowledge, skills, and *will* to cultivate equity in their spheres of influence. Developing and supporting equity leadership at all levels will fortify the district’s existing equity work and kindle new equity initiatives. The plan to develop and support sturdy effective equity leadership should include on-going development for:

- School Board
- District level leaders
- Building Leaders

Additionally, it is recommended that the district create **site-based equity teams** (admin, faculty, staff, students, and families) that convene regularly for the purpose of site-based equity guidance. Development of site-based equity teams encourages shared responsibility for school outcomes, respects and utilizes the existing educational equity passion and aptitude within the school community and taps into the exponential impact of distributive leadership acknowledging *“Many hands make light work.”—John Heywood*

As the district develops an equity leadership professional development plan, it is recommended that the plan include a focus on the following mindsets and skill sets:

1. An equity-oriented leader is committed to the practice of expanding their own and other’s capacity to seek a vision for educational equity and creating culturally competent schools. Equity-oriented leaders communicate the importance of and parameters for educational equity.
2. An equity-oriented leader ensures educational opportunity and access are distributed fairly—no person is denied learning opportunities, resources, or affirming educational experiences due to race, class, home language, gender, or any other factor.
3. An equity-oriented leader applies an equity lens to all school practices, policies, and procedures, and equitably allocates school resources.
4. An equity-oriented leader creates and maintains a school culture that is culturally responsive and engages families and community members within the school community.
5. An equity-oriented leader supports high levels of learning with the academic supports need to reach them for all groups of students.
6. Equity-oriented leaders respond to and redress biases and inequities by understanding and addressing them at their roots and sustain equity efforts long-term.
7. An equity-oriented leader reflects on their own practice and their impact on the success of all staff and students.

Recommendation 3: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Educational Equity Professional Development

“I would love teacher training on best practices in discussing social justice issues (race, gender, etc.) in our classrooms at all grade levels. I think many teachers (including myself) want to talk about these issues but worry they will say the wrong thing.”—Faculty

The indications from the equity audit support an investment in educator development for culturally responsive practice. The academic and student experiences found in the EECCA audit show gaps between intended curriculum and instruction and equitable student learning, engagement and feelings of belonging. The perceptions highlighted in this audit show gaps between faculty perceptions and student/family perceptions about how welcoming PPS schools are and how culturally responsive the curriculum and instruction are.

Skilled, culturally responsive teaching is one of the most important components of student success. If educators do not have the experience or expertise they need to reach and teach all students, equitable outcomes for student engagement and achievement will continue to be elusive. The EECCA audit recommends quality professional development focused on culturally responsive teaching, development of faculty mindsets and skillsets for more culturally responsive practice. Certain teaching capacities and actions are needed to facilitate learning in a way that is equitable to all students. These capacities and actions include the ability to:

- Recognize there are multiple cultures/perspectives in classrooms and school.
- Recognize biases and inequities in materials, classroom interactions and outcomes
- Reject deficit views regarding culture; instead embrace the richness that comes with diversity.
- Adjust curriculum, instruction and materials to engage students and support academic success.

In comparison to the “Additive Approach”, James Banks advocates for a “Transformative Approach” to multi-cultural curriculum integration. The transformative approach goes beyond peripheral additions to existing curriculum, instead questioning the basic cannon of knowledge and assumptions of the curriculum, transforming both to be more inclusive in deep and broad ways.

The EECCA audit recommends **System-wide professional development for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) sustained by solidified internal networks of expertise and support.**

In order to utilize existing district resources including educators who have a demonstrated passion and aptitude for culturally responsive teaching and educational equity, this audit recommends professional development that is designed to bolster in-district capacity by preparing a team of educators to lead peer to peer building-level CRT workshops. Site based expertise, existing relationships and peer leadership can be utilized to support efficient district-wide development of mindsets and skillsets for more culturally responsive practice. Each PPS school should convene a team of educators and administrators, develop their equity coaching and peer facilitation skills, prepare these instructional leaders with content knowledge and facilitation skills to strengthen colleagues’ CRT practice.

Recommendation 4: Recruiting and Retaining a more Diverse Staff

“All my teachers are white.”—Student

“I would like that there are more teachers of color that my children could see as models. This makes a lot of difference in the education of children who are not white.”

“This initiative should include an assertive strategy to not just hire but retain more staff and especially teachers of one or more of the following: bilingual/multilingual, first generation immigrant, first generation college educated, diverse identities i.e. LGBT, African-American males, to name a few.”—Staff

Being a school district that values a diversity of identities, voices, and perspectives includes being a district that is made up of a diversity of identities, voices, and perspectives among hired staff. The qualitative data showed a repeated call for a more diverse, more representative staff. The district is working on broadening the racial diversity of the staff in the Princeton Public Schools. In previous school years, 86% of the staff in the PPS were white. Fourteen percent were educators of color. This year,

- Of the 85 new staff hired district-wide, 44% were educators of color.
- The district hired 33 teachers. Eleven (or 33%) were educators of color.
- The district hired four new administrators. Three (or 75%) were educators of color.

This hiring profile represents a substantial shift in business as usual, and is an important beginning. To continue these efforts, in the spring of 2018 the head of human resources spent a week visiting historically Black Colleges and Universities and other institutions throughout the South that have high percentages of pre-service teachers of color.

The voices in this audit encourage the district to continue efforts to hire and **retain** teachers, administrators, and staff that reflect the Princeton community and that will expose Princeton students to various role models and world views.

In addition to continuing current efforts to diversify PPS staff, the EECCA audit recommends the following approaches:

- **Connect with the PPS community:** Connect with high school students who are considering teaching as a profession and provide financial and academic support along with professional mentoring with the hope they will return to PPS to teach. Connect with existing paraprofessionals of color and support their progress toward licensure and classroom practice. Communicate district openings through students and family communications so that the district is connecting with the networks that families have.
- **Staff of Color Affinity Group:** Start a staff of color affinity group that provides mutual support, voice and agency for staff of color. This method has been utilized in other districts to retain staff and to provide important feedback to the district on practices, policies, procedures, curriculum, etc.
- **Assess Hiring, Evaluation, and Employee Discipline Practices for Bias:** Assess the policies and practices of the district related to staffing such as resume screening, interview protocols and questions, staff evaluation metrics, and employee discipline practices for biases that may be inhibiting both the hiring and retention of a diverse staff.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this audit is to provide an equity analysis and assist the education community of Princeton Public Schools in identifying areas of strength and areas for growth regarding educational equity. In particular, it explored four essential questions regarding creating and sustaining educational equity:

- Are all our students and families' day to day school experiences welcoming and engaging regardless of race, religion, gender, LGBTQ identities, home language, socioeconomic, immigrant, or special education status?
- Is our curriculum reflective of and relevant to the diversity of our student body?
- Does our curriculum prepare students to understand and respect the diversity of perspectives in their classrooms and society?
- Are all students achieving required academic outcomes while also being encouraged to pursue individual pathways to success?

Multiple perspectives were gathered from more than 2,800 individuals and academic, attendance, and discipline data supplied by the district to compile this report.

The main observations show that the district's stated commitment to equity, strong academic outcomes, and a budding commitment to culturally responsive curriculum and instruction serve as a base on which more effort around educational equity should take place. Namely, PPS continues to see racially-predictable disparities in achievement data, a perception of disparities in discipline and academic expectations, a difference between various identities' sense of welcoming and belonging, challenges in addressing incidents of oppression and bias, and a strong sense of academic pressure and competition.

The district could address the identified areas for growth by generating solutions in collaboration with the community at large and by moving forward with four recommendations indicated in the EECCA:

- Community and relationship building,
- Building internal equity leadership capacity,
- Professional development around culturally responsive teaching and educational equity, and
- Recruiting and retaining a more diverse staff.

A system-wide approach should be utilized to support the development of mindsets and skillsets for more culturally responsive practice among district staff and the broader education community should be engaged. With the support of faculty, staff, parents/guardians, and students, Princeton Public Schools can realize the full benefits of their diverse and unique community with a consistent and persistent effort to prioritize systemic equity.

Given the right resources and guidance, along with authentic action steps by the district, this community is poised to make shifts that can remedy and reverse the equity challenges present in PPS.