

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

Hamilton K-8 School

Novato, CA

October 2021



What is a School Equity Audit?

A school equity audit is an in depth analysis of the readiness and commitment of a school as it relates to equity in student achievement. A commitment to equity is an important part of a school's culture. Most schools claim openly their commitment to serving "all" children, and this audit analyzes the depth of commitment to that claim.

A **healthy school culture** is defined as "A school with an unwavering belief in the ability of each student to achieve success, and they articulate that belief to others in overt and covert ways. Healthy school cultures create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student" (Peterson, 2003). This report is designed to provide tangible evidence concerning a school's commitment to equity through its **policies, practices, and procedures (formal culture)**; and **beliefs and perceptions (informal culture)**. The combination of health in both areas constitutes a healthy school culture, therefore increasing the likelihood of equitable student outcomes. Inconsistency or toxicity in either area indicates a need for growth.

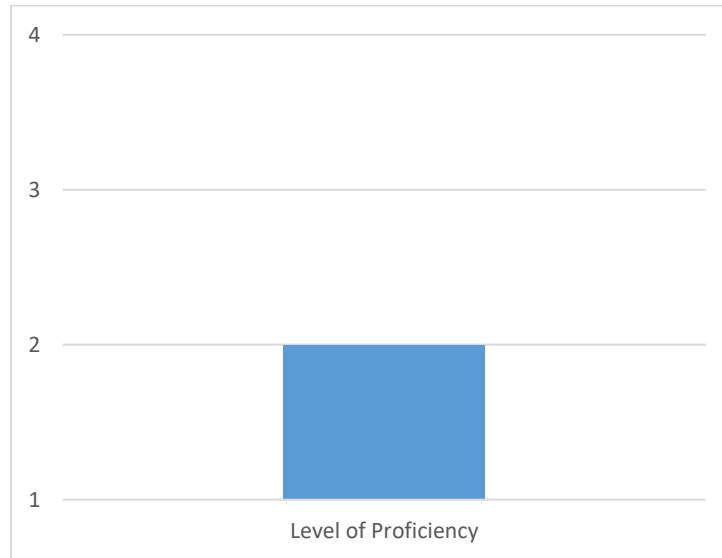
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative sample from both the teaching and non-teaching staff.

Policies, Practices, and Procedures

Indicator 1	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School has openly discussed, defined, and committed to student equity and access</p>	<p>Evidence exists that diversity and inclusion is an essential part of practice and systems</p> <p>School engages in continuous learning to improve the impact of their practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion</p> <p>School constantly monitors evidence of impact on underserved student groups and makes real time adjustments to practice</p>	<p>Staff members can clearly define their common philosophy about equity and diversity and there is philosophical consensus</p> <p>Issues of equity are frequently discussed and the collaborative dialogue leads to change in practice</p> <p>Staff members are empathetic towards underserved student populations and are eager to change their practice to meet their needs</p>	<p>Staff members can express a few common core values with little philosophical disagreement about diversity and equity</p> <p>Issues of equity are occasionally discussed and analyzed, but it rarely leads to tangible change</p> <p>Staff members are empathetic towards underserved student populations, but it does not inspire substantive change</p>	<p>Staff members cannot express any of the school's core values and wide philosophical disagreement exists about diversity and equity</p> <p>Issues of equity and inclusion are taboo and avoided</p> <p>Staff members may become hostile or deflective if issues of fairness and equity are discussed or analyzed</p>

Indicator 1

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

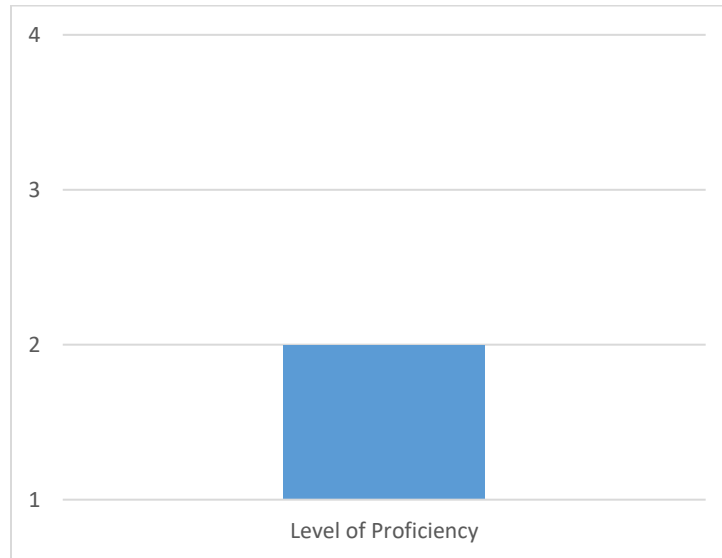


- School has declared in slogan and dogma a commitment to diversity and equity. School website states that the school is “Committed to academic excellence, inclusivity and social justice, global citizenship, leadership, and self-advocacy”. I could not find evidence of how these goals are being defined, measured, or monitored.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination Clause”
- A link to the district Title IX policy was present on school’s website.
- Teacher interviews revealed that the staff appears to collectively be interested in diversity and inclusion, but cultural competency and sensitivity of the staff can’t currently facilitate full cultural inclusiveness.
- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School walkthrough revealed token acknowledgment of non-Western European culture (i.e. mosaic of tiles in Spanish language), but most symbolism reinforced the dominance of white culture (i.e. California History mural)

Indicator 2	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School regularly collects, analyzes, and acts upon equity data both academically and socially</p>	<p>School collects, analyzes, and openly shares disaggregated student performance data with all stakeholders including parents and the community</p> <p>School uses unpleasant student performance data to engage all school stake holders both internally and externally</p> <p>School staff members accept the validity of the performance data to inspire change in both their individual and collective practice, including parents and the community at-large</p>	<p>School seeks, embraces, and values the insight gained from disaggregated student performance data in their improvement efforts</p> <p>School staff members seek unpleasant student performance data to provide insight into critical areas of need for school improvement</p> <p>School staff members accept the validity of the performance data to inspire change in their individual practice</p>	<p>School recognizes the value of disaggregated student performance data, but does not collect it frequently</p> <p>School staff members accept unpleasant student performance data and are empathetic towards students from underserved student groups</p> <p>School staff members accept the validity of the performance data, but does not inspire them to change their practice</p>	<p>School does not recognize or value the need to collect and analyze disaggregated student performance data</p> <p>School staff members become hostile when presented with unpleasant student performance data</p> <p>School staff members challenge the validity of any performance data that does not validate current practice</p>

Indicator 2

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

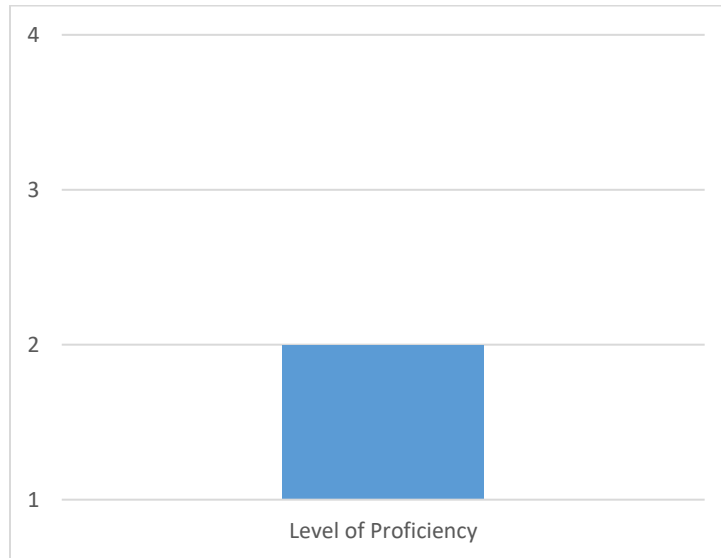


- School collects, analyzes, and acts upon equity data in the middle school advanced math (Algebra) track.
- School recognized that 100% of students in Algebra were white, and decided to open pathways at the 7th grade level to intentionally steer more students of color into the advanced math pathway. This is a recent decision, and longitudinal data is not available yet.
- School recognized that the district policy, requiring an entrance exam to have access to Algebra was disproportionately affecting non-white and non-Asian students.
- A review of the school website, and other publically accessible platforms does not provide access to equity data or any plan of improvement linked to the collection and analysis of equity data.

Indicator 3	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School engages in activities that seek to identify, assess, and confront personal and collective bias among staff members as it relates to equity and diversity</p>	<p>School staff accepts and does not challenge the concrete existence of bias and discrimination and it is willing to analyze and understand their personal and collective biases while engaging internal and external stakeholders</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias is considered progressive and the staff embraces the evidence, leading to concrete changes to policies and practices</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately stimulates intellectual dialogue focused on improving equity efforts and external stakeholders are included</p>	<p>School staff accepts and does not challenge the concrete existence of bias and discrimination and is collectively willing to analyze and understand their personal and collective biases</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias is considered progressive and the staff embraces the evidence in its attempt to improve equitable student outcomes</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately stimulates intellectual dialogue focused on improving equity efforts</p>	<p>School staff generally accepts that bias exists both consciously and unconsciously but is generally uncomfortable with analyzing it personally or collectively</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias will result in enlightenment, but rarely change in practice or behavior</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately results in discomfort, but generally stimulates self-reflection and empathy</p>	<p>School staff believes that they are individually and collectively free of bias and any attempt to assess this reality is personally and professionally disrespectful</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias results in hostility towards the initiator</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately results in deep discomfort and potentially hostility</p>

Indicator 3

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

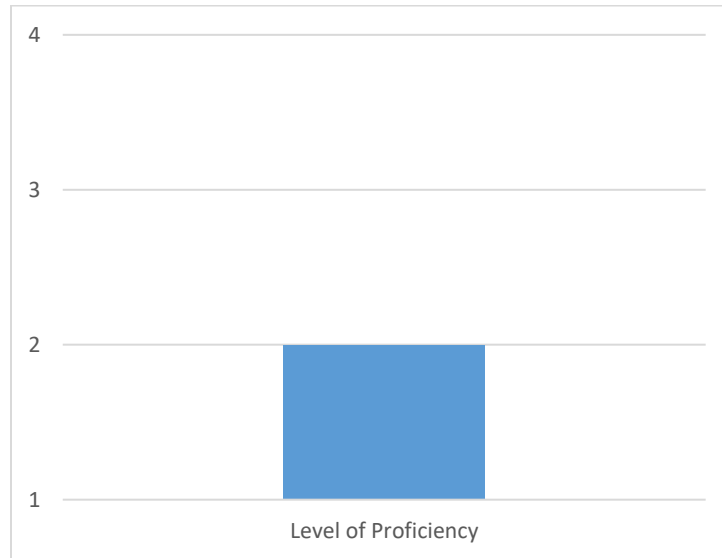


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Staff interviews and surveys revealed that school and district professional development do not adequately prepare them to improve their practice as it relates to equity and diversity. Many described feeling greatly unprepared to adequately respond to the diverse cultures and language needs of some of their students.
- Staff interviews revealed that many staff members worry that the philosophical and political polarization that exists in the greater society, is negatively impacting the diversity initiatives of the school. Some described discussing issues like privilege, immigration and language issues, and race tend to cause more division than unity, so therefore they are generally avoided.

Indicator 4	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School invests in professional development and other resources that improve the capacity of educators to improve their practices to serve diverse populations and improve equitable outcome</p>	<p>School leadership recognizes that improving staff capacity in practices that improve equity and inclusion are essential to the school's core improvement efforts and allocates significant resources to improve teacher capacity in these areas and they regularly collect data to analyze the impact of their investments in teacher capacity and practice</p> <p>School staff embraces training to improve their individual and collective practice in the areas of equity and inclusion, and they view the training and resources as vital to the school's improvement efforts and they regularly collect data to monitor the impact of the changes in their individual and collective practice</p>	<p>School leadership recognizes that improving staff capacity in practices that improve equity and inclusion are essential to the school's core improvement efforts and allocates significant resources to improve teacher capacity in these areas</p> <p>School staff embraces training to improve their individual and collective practice in the areas of equity and inclusion, and they view the training and resources as vital to the school's improvement efforts</p>	<p>School leadership recognizes the need to promote practices that improve equity and inclusion as important, and provides limited resources or isolated opportunities dedicated to improving teacher capacity in these areas</p> <p>School staff is open to training to improve practice in the areas of equity and inclusion, but they do not recognize the need to develop in these areas as essential and view the training opportunities are novel or non-essential</p>	<p>School leadership does not view practices that promote equity and inclusion as important and little to no resources are dedicated to improving teacher capacity in these areas</p> <p>School staff does not value training to promote practice in the areas of equity and inclusion and can become hostile when presented with professional development or resources</p>

Indicator 4

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

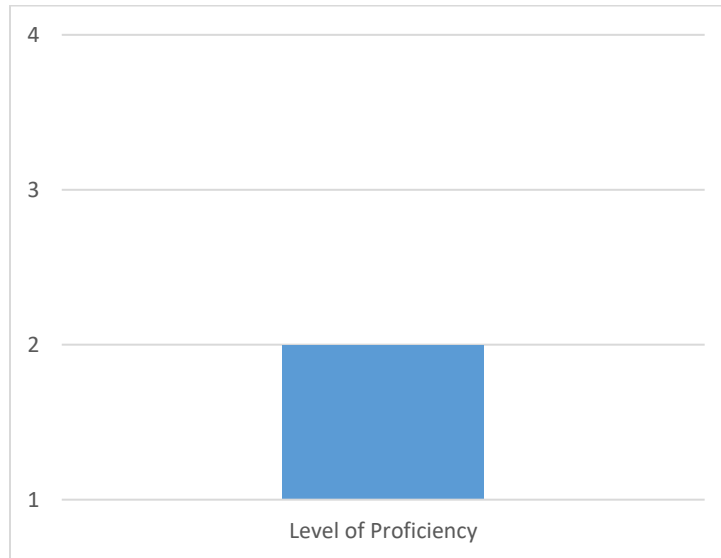


- Analysis of staff surveys revealed that their prime area of frustration is their diversity and inclusion efforts relate to issues of training and resources.
- School has engaged in restorative justice training, but there is little evidence of meaning implementation or data collected to monitor the impact.
- Interviews revealed that professional development opportunities are abundant, but rarely substantively connect with diversity and inclusion efforts. Some stated that even when great opportunities for professional growth present themselves, they are typically after-school and child care and other personal logistics present a problem.
- A visit and review of the material in the school library reveal that the presence of diverse literature is extremely limited and fails to move beyond “tokenism.”
- School website and other publically accessible artifacts did not capture authentic diversity in student opportunities, curriculum, resource, or coursework. Most links were generic information or links to district templates.

Indicator 5	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School community engages in action research in their attempt to promote equity and inclusion</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion are addressed strategically and professionals collaborate and implement substantive changes to policies and practices and both internal and external stakeholders are included in the discussion and implementation phases</p> <p>Suggestions or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion is based upon concrete evidence and research and the staff fully and sincerely engages at both the individual and institutional levels and data is collected on a frequent basis to inform the impact of the experimentation</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion are addressed strategically and professionals collaborate and implement substantive changes to policies and practices</p> <p>Suggestions or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion is based upon concrete evidence and research and the staff fully and sincerely engages at both the individual and institutional levels</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion result in surface-level or non-invasive experimentation that results in no substantive change in student outcomes</p> <p>Suggestions or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion results general curiosity and partial investment at both the individual and institutional levels</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion stay at the conversational phase and never translate into change of policy or practice.</p> <p>Suggestion or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion are met with resistance at both the individual and institutional levels</p>

Indicator 5

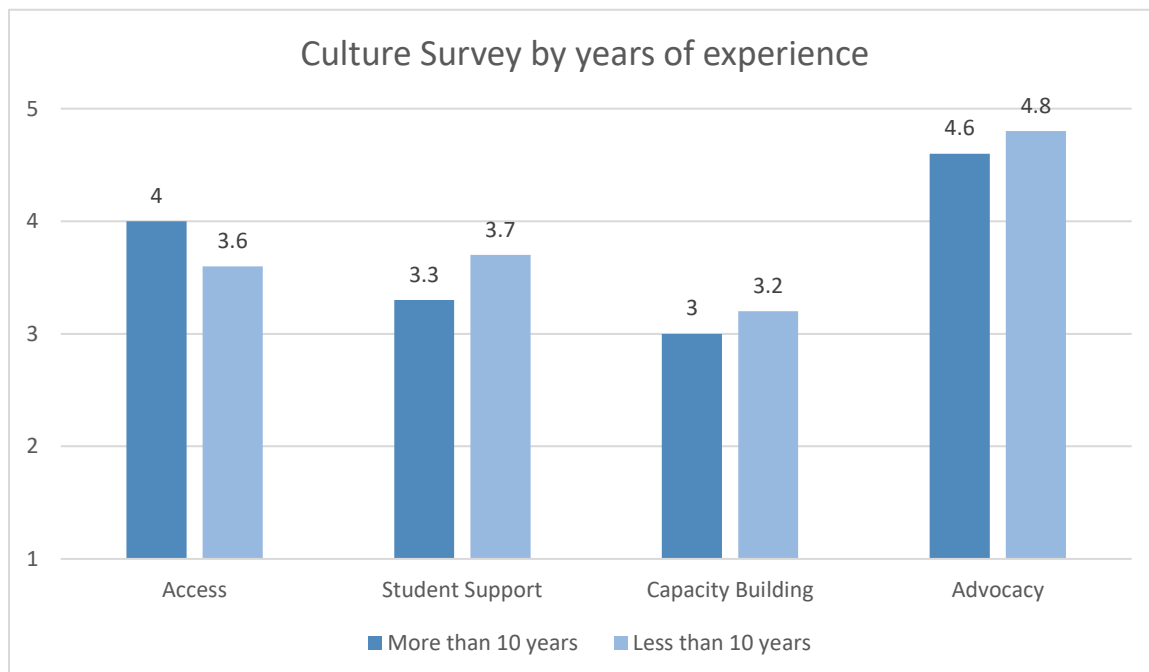
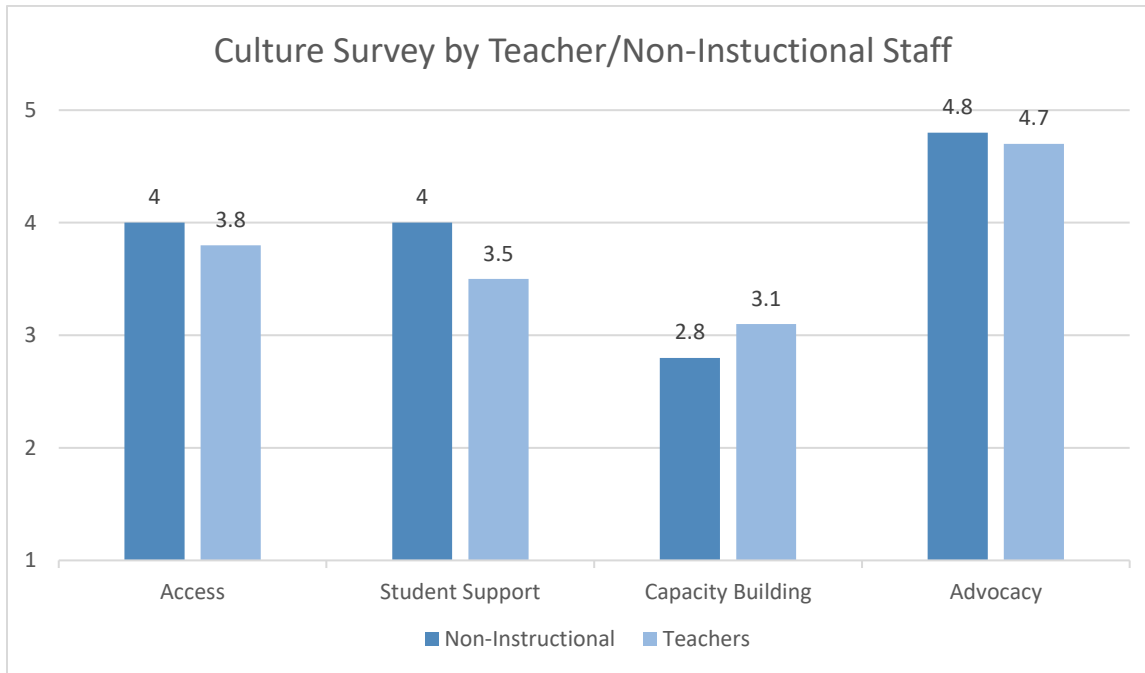
Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation



- School initiative to promote more diversity in advanced math (Algebra) is a promising form of action research.
- School has engaged in restorative justice training, but there is little evidence of meaning implementation or data collected to monitor the impact.
- District diversity initiatives are written and outline specific action steps, but there is no data or evidence to confirm implementation at Hamilton. .
- California state academic testing results between 2016 – 2019 reveal at least a 40% gap in student proficiency in both math and reading, when comparing African American and Latino student scores to the scores of white and Asian students. This information had to be gathered by analyzing reports on the state department of education website and was neither publicized nor acknowledged in any school or district document or correspondence. This data should trigger an entire series of system changes and action research.

Perceptions

The teachers and non-instructional staff were given a survey to complete. The questions were organized into four categories based upon the four pillars of equity (Liberation Mindset); **Access, Student Support, Professional Capacity, and Advocacy**. Teachers and non-instructional staff answered questions on a 5 point Likert scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The data is shown below in two charts. One chart shows the data broken down by teacher or non-instructional staff. The other graph shows the data sorted by years of experience.



Access

Key Findings:

No significant gaps were found between perceptions about student access to rigorous opportunities.

Interviews revealed that both teaching and administrative staff believed that students should get access to the best opportunities the school has to offer, but many teachers expressed that those opportunities should come with conditions of “readiness.”

Interviews revealed that some teachers are concerned that the rhetoric of “inclusion and access” does not match the reality. Many cited the gross disparities in Hamilton’s advanced math track.

Teachers in general expressed an awareness of the lack of equity in opportunity at Hamilton. It was also revealed that openly dialoguing about touchy topics like race, language, and poverty are barriers to equity planning. Many stated that they avoid uncomfortable conversations to preserve a “family atmosphere” among teachers.

Covid 19 concerns and student physical absence from school for more than a year seems to cause hesitation in universal commitment to expanding rigorous academic opportunities.

Recommendations:

Regularly gather, analyze, and set measurable goals to monitor academic inclusion efforts. It appears that the staff is philosophically and professionally open to the concept, but they have not invested in the systems to plan, implement, and monitor growth towards this end.

The intentional commitment to steer more students of color and students of poverty into the advanced math track is very admirable. This effort can be a spring board for championing equity in other areas. The teacher concern about student “readiness” can only be achieved with intentional efforts to increase preparation. Equity does not generally occur naturally.

Student Support

Key Findings:

The survey found a significant gap between perceptions about student support between classroom teachers and non-instructional staff, with non-instructional staff rating this area more favorably.

There appeared to be a strong split in philosophy about student support based upon grade levels (elementary vs. middle school) and leadership. Many teachers felt that social and emotional needs of students were most pressing, while other felt that the lack of a strong, coordinated academic support system was the school's greatest need. All parties agreed that shortages in certified and qualified staff members in counseling, as well as instructional, presented a huge challenge.

Grave concerns about the student's social and emotional needs were articulated by all stakeholders interviewed, coupled with a concern with the lack of social and emotional support staff members to meet these escalated needs. Counselor and counseling services were identified as critical needs.

Interviews revealed some concern about deficit thinking among staff members about students related to race, poverty, and English mastery.

Recommendations:

I recommend a renewed commitment to the PLC at Work process. Review the construction of collaborative teams and invest in time, training, and resources to get consensus on universal learning targets, formative assessment, and a system response to student academic or behavioral support needs. Without a framework, support will be random, suggestive, and largely ineffective.

Courageous Conversations About Race by Glenn Singleton will provide a basis for addressing different theories (both conscious and subconscious) about race and other constructs of deficit thinking. Developing the ability to get comfortable with these topics, for the benefit of students, will be very helpful in improving school culture.

Capacity Building

Key Findings:

The survey revealed no significant gap in the feelings about capacity building and professional support.

This was the lowest favorability rating of all of the assessed areas and it deserves attention at the school and district level. Many expressed a difference in opinion about what central office believed were important areas of professional development, compared to what the teaching staff believes are important to consider for training and professional development. This difference in opinion appears to have skewed Hamilton teachers' opinion of district lead professional learning.

Interviews revealed that differences in personal political and social theories among staff members have hindered a robust effort to truly produce professional development opportunities that push the personal, social, and professional beliefs and practices of teachers.

Recommendations:

The dominant theme in surveys and interviews was the power struggle with central office about how Hamilton can improve. I recommend a structured and focused dialogue between the Hamilton leadership team and central office to map out the next 3 to 5 years of school improvement. This dialogue should be data-driven and strategic in its focus on professional development, initiatives, and resources necessary to move Hamilton to the next level of performance.

Resolute action by leadership at the school and district level will demonstrate that equity is a core value of the school district and not an issue up for political debate.

Advocacy

Key Findings:

The survey results reveal no significant gap in perception between teachers and non-instructional staff.

Interviews revealed that most staff members believe that they are robust child advocates, but they could not pinpoint any specific act of advocacy academically. There was some evidence of advocacy for social and emotional needs of students as it related to advocating for more counselors and counseling for troubled students.

Interviews revealed a concern that economically affluent and politically influential parents do not want equity and they are happy with the “status quo” of achievement dominance for white and Asian students in the school and in the district.

Interviews revealed that a culture of “fear” exists within the school and within the school district. Many expressed apprehension about “rocking the boat” for fear of tangible retaliation or repercussion from people in authority. Though no one could name a specific incidence, this narrative appears to be a common one.

Recommendations:

The development of a communication protocol that would allow any staff member to speak freely to leadership, without fear of repercussion, would be very helpful in promoting vertical collaboration and problem solving in Novato USD.

I recommend that the staff representatives meet with member of district office on a regular basis to create a culture of cooperation and problem-solving. This dialogue should be regular and all staff members should get access to the minutes and all important documentation.

Summary

The school culture at Hamilton School is similar to many schools with the same structure and student population across the United States. The faculty appears to be very hard-working and competent. They appear to deeply care about the well-being of their students. But, like many schools, there is a general lack of urgency to strategically build policies, infrastructure, and provide resources to forward the objective of student equity. The impact of Covid 19 must be considered when reviewing the results and recommendations of this assessment.

In order to improve the school's equity efforts, I recommend the following:

- Understanding and utilizing strategies to build consensus, both publicly and privately, when there are philosophical differences about the direction of the school. Subversive resistance is dangerous because it is hidden and nearly impossible to address because of the private and confidential nature of the dissent. Those who disagree with the direction of the school need a safe space to disagree, but they also need to provide logical alternatives and not just be adversarial. I also recommend the use of pilots to test theories before scaling up to full school implementation.
- The availability of substantive, disaggregated student performance data is a huge deficiency. People tend to place their effort in areas that are assessed, measured, and monitored.
- Action research, in the area of increasing access to advanced math in the middle school is admirable and promising. I recommend that this experiment be closely monitored and efforts adjusted based upon evidence of impact. This type of experimentation should be duplicated in other curricular areas, and if successful, Hamilton can become a lighthouse school for the rest of the district.
- Cultural proficiency and responsiveness can improve relatively quickly if made a school wide priority. As stated in the report, the school environment, curriculum, and instructional material do not reflect the diversity of the student population. Awareness and a strategic and intentional focus in this area is usually sufficient to improve this area.
- Focus heavily on the strategic implementation of the PLC process. Interviews revealed that the staff in general had a healthy perception of PLC, but I am concerned that they do not understand the process and the interdependence of the 4 PLC Questions. Meeting and PLC are not synonymous. I suggest picking a grade level or department to do a deep PLC dive, and use them as a pilot for scaling up to school wide implementation.
- Professional development coordination between the school and district office can improve greatly. Interviews revealed that teachers have a desire to improve their abilities to meet the diverse needs of their students, but they struggle with how to make that happen practically. I would recommend that the district professional development department collaborate with schools to make sure that each staff member has access to quality diversity related professional development.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. I believe that students should be given unlimited access to advanced academic opportunities.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

2. I believe that the teaching staff is most responsible for providing academic support.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

3. I feel that I receive proper training before being asked to implement changes to my practice.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

4. It is the school staff's obligation to advocate for change when serving underachieving students.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

5. Special education students deserve the same opportunities as regular education students.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

6. When students fail to meet academic expectations, the staff should organize interventions.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

7. We have a strong system of teacher training and development.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

8. If we feel strongly about a policy or innovative practice that is more beneficial for the student body; we should implement that policy, even if there is strong internal or external opposition.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

9. We should consistently review our performance data and strategically plan to provide more access to opportunity for underrepresented student groups.

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

10. When a student fails to show adequate growth, we should first reflect on our practice.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

11. Our school invests in teacher development and resources that support student learning.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

12. Our faculty speaks with one voice and student learning dominates our professional dialogue.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

Demographic Information:

I have been an educational professional for :

- 0-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21+ years

Position:

- Classroom teacher
- Counselor
- Social Worker/Psychologist
- Instructional Aide
- Administrator