

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

Loma Verde Elementary 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.

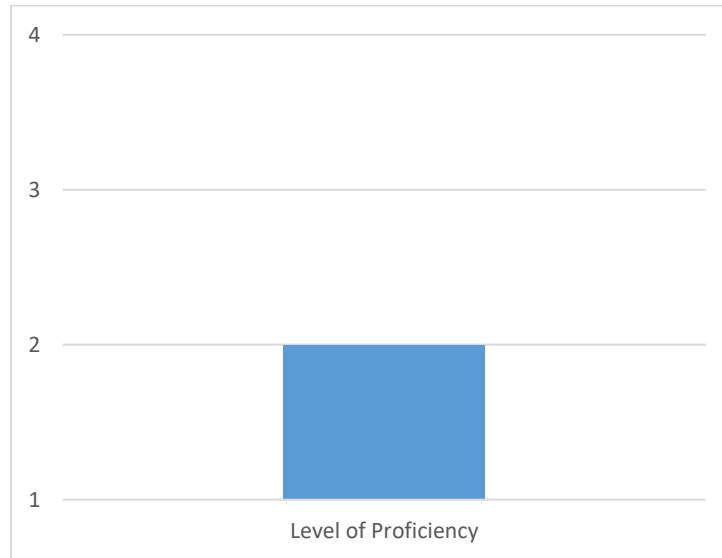
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative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

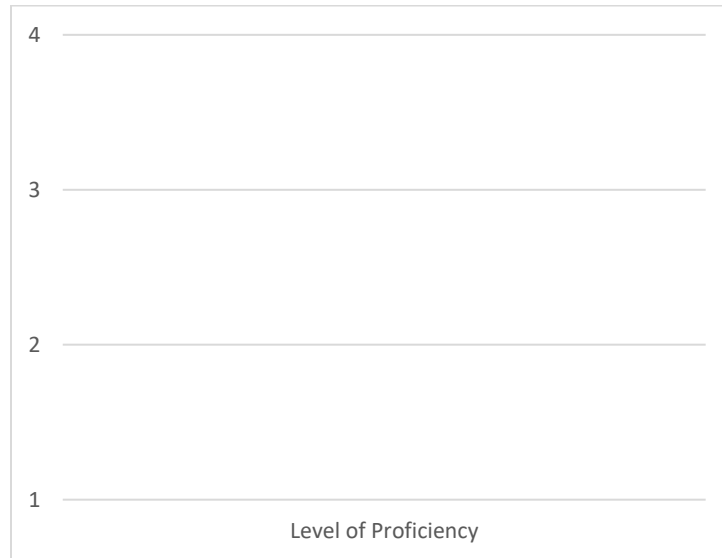


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination” clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- Staff interviews reveal philosophical consensus and agreement on the idea of equity and inclusion, but most felt that the school did not practically apply the belief and that achievement is easily predicated along racial and socio-economic lines.
- School walkthrough revealed that culturally-responsive and diverse symbolism are almost non-existent outside of token recognition of non-Western European cultures and cultural experiences.

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 1 Little to No Development and Implementation

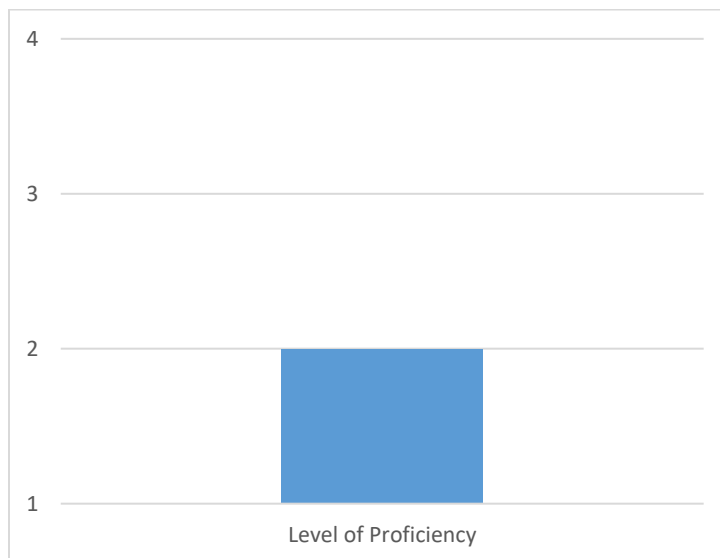


- A review of the school website, and other publically accessible platforms does not provide access to equity data or any plan of improvement linked to the collection and analysis of equity data.
- Student performance data, as reported by the state of California, revealed at least a 30% gap in proficiency in both math and reading when comparing Latino students to white students at Loma Verde between 2016-2019.
- Student performance data, as reported by the state of California, revealed a gap of at least 30% in both math and reading when comparing students based upon parental income at Loma Verde between 2016 – 2019.
- Student performance data, as reported by the state of California revealed that students with disabilities consistently achieve proficiency rates at least 40% lower than students without disabilities between 2016-2019.
- The statistical reality of achievement disparities at Loma Verde was not communicated during any of the formal interviews.

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

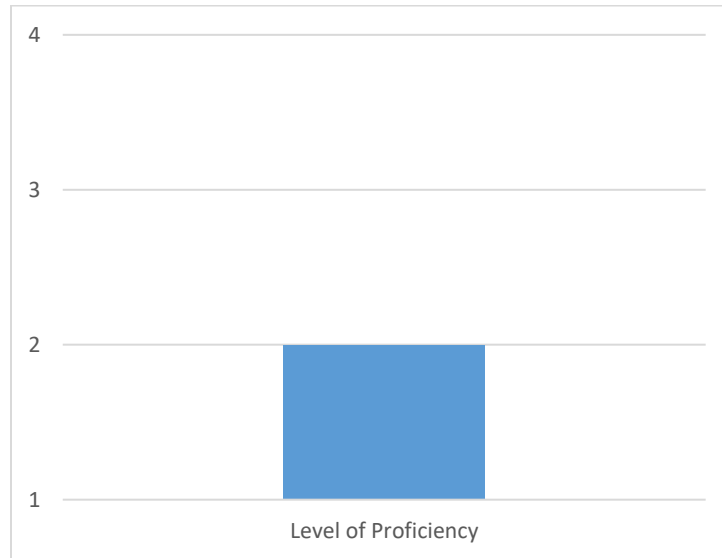


- Interviews revealed that many teachers have high expectations of student performance. It was also clear that many felt it was the administration’s job to make students adhere to those expectations instead of producing engagement and stimulating intrinsic motivation.
- Interviews revealed that many staff members feel that Loma Verde’s comparative performance to other schools in Novato (generally higher) can produce a culture of complacency and satisfaction and make uncomfortable or challenging conversations more difficult. This reality provides a shield for some and justifies avoiding conversations about equity and inclusion.
- Interviews revealed that the prevailing narrative about equity is that students who do not succeed at Loma Verde aren’t prepared for the rigor, or do not have enough home support to fully benefit from the opportunities offered at the school.
- Most staff members described Loma Verde as a “family environment” and feared that uncomfortable conversations about equity and inclusion might threaten the close-knit climate.

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 Development

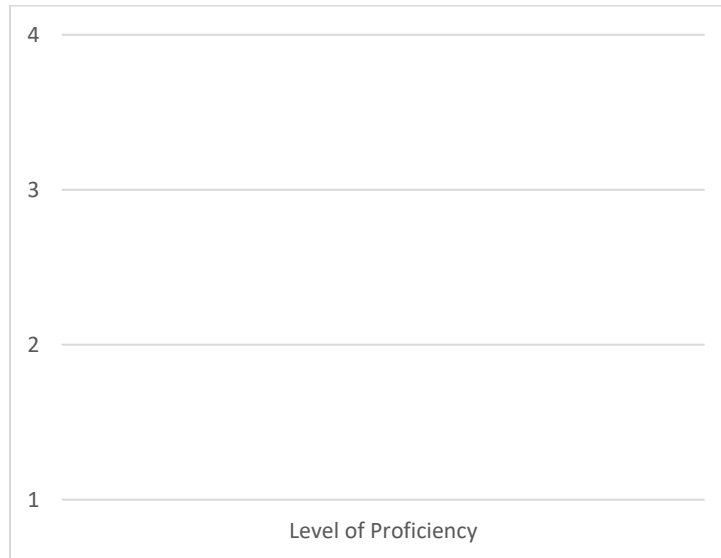


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Staff interviews and surveys revealed that Loma Verde staff members collectively do not feel that school and district professional development 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 needs of many of their students, especially in the area of English language development.
- 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 staff. Some described discussing issues like privilege, immigration, language issues, and race tend to cause more division than unity, so therefore they are generally avoided.

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
School community engages in action research in their attempt to promote equity and inclusion	<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

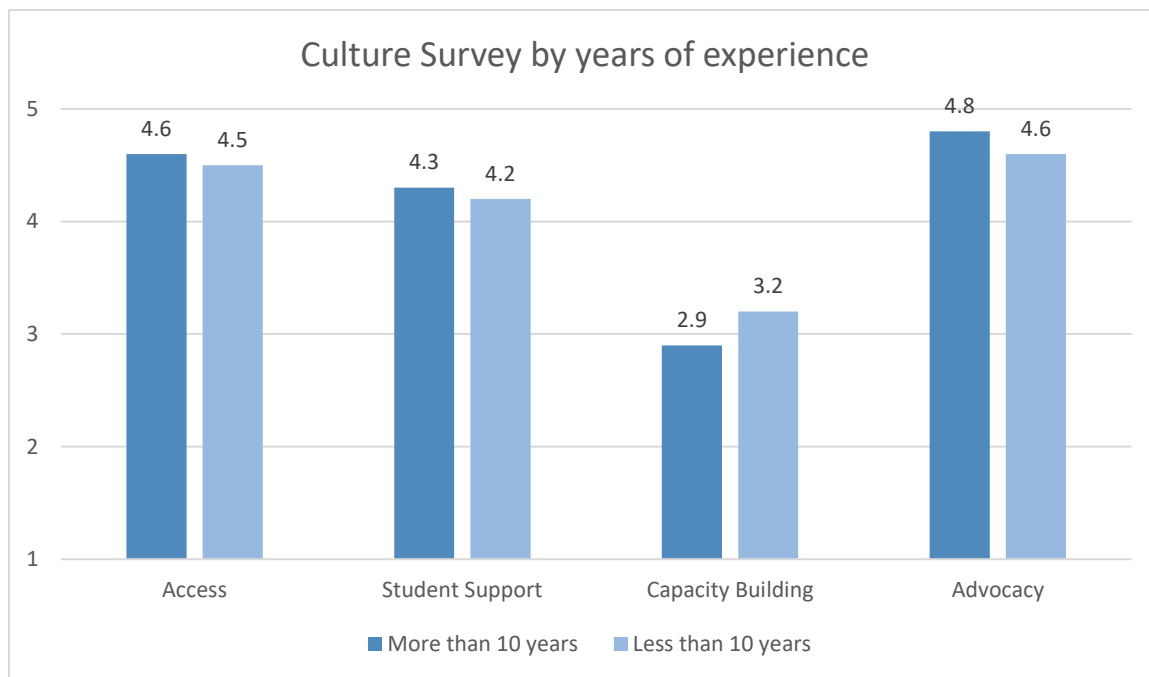
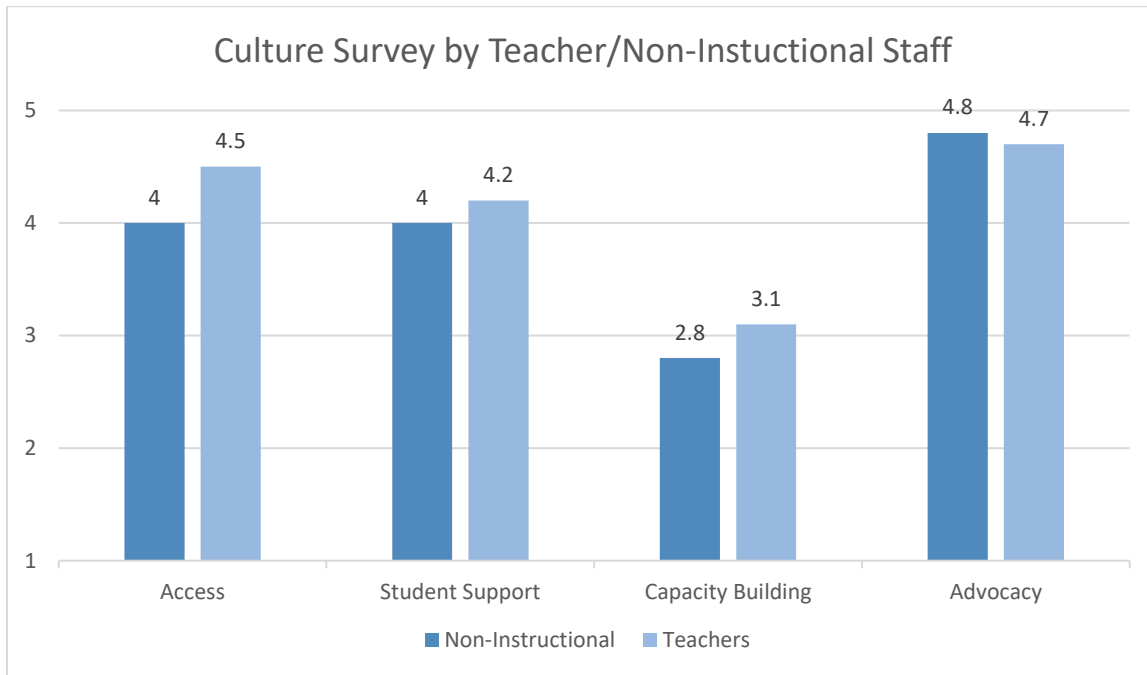
Rating: Level 2 Little to No Development and Implementation



- A review of documents and artifacts provided for this assessment, along with publically published documents, did not reveal any school driven experimentation developed specifically to promote equitable achievement at Loma Verde.
- District has agreed to diversity initiatives and programs (i.e. Restorative Justice), but I could not find evidence of strategic implementation or any data or evidence directly linked to implementation.
- Interviews revealed that Loma Verde staff members are generally concerned about student equity, but not could articulate any systemic effort to produce equity besides systems available to all students like counseling for social and emotional needs and RTI.

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:

A significant gap exists between perceptions of student access to rigorous opportunities between teachers and non-instructional staff, with teachers viewing this area more favorably.

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

Interviews revealed that the perception of access is different from the reality of rigorous access. There appeared to be a philosophical split between those who wanted unrestricted access to rigor as a precondition of achievement, compared to those who believed that opportunities should be based upon demonstrated readiness and desire.

Though many interviewees stated a general philosophical agreement with expanding opportunities, few were aware of the current state of equity in their school. 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.

Maintaining a positive climate and a healthy school culture are not mutually exclusive, a school can actually achieve both. When a school is on the path of growth to becoming a healthy school culture, there will be a few “climate” bumps in the road. The most important conversations are sometimes the hardest, but when we all have the same goal (All Means All) we’ll get over the tough conversations. It will also accelerate unified implementation of school improvement decisions when everyone knows that topics will not be avoided. This is an important theme in this audit, and if acknowledged and addressed, can help your professionals become more unified and drive experimentation.

Student Support

Key Findings:

The survey did not find a significant gap between perceptions about student support between classroom teachers and non-instructional staff.

During interviews, there was a universal consensus that Covid 19, and the year of virtual instruction for students caused strain on their students both academically and socially and many expressed deep concern about how the school and district should respond.

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.

RTI was often described as inadequate and in need of overhaul. Many felt that a systemic revamp and a serious change in approach is necessary.

Interviews revealed some concern about deficit thinking among staff members about students as it relates 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 perceptions about capacity building and professional support.

This was the lowest recorded area in all sections and deserves attention. Many expressed a difference in opinion about what central office believed were important areas of professional development compared to the staff at Loma Verde. Many interviewees expressed feeling unprepared to respond to student cultural differences and the needs of students who lacked home resources and parental support.

Interviews revealed that because Loma Verde historically performs better than many of the schools in the district on state assessments, they should be left alone. Many used the phrase “trust the teachers” repeatedly. This is ironic given the fact that the school has experienced massive achievement gaps in many academic areas for at least the last five years.

Recommendations:

The dominant theme in surveys and interviews was the power struggle with central office about how Loma Verde can improve. I recommend a structured and focused dialogue between the Loma Verde 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 Loma Verde to the next level of performance. I suggest that the dialogue begin with an acknowledgement that improvement, especially in the area of academic equity, is important and all parties are partners in this endeavor.

Advocacy

Key Findings:

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

Interviews revealed that all segments of the faculty believe that they are strong advocates for equity, but very few could articulate collection action or examples of active advocacy.

Interviews revealed that most staff members share a deep appreciation for curriculum and academic excellence. The dialogue about professional practice and structures are robust. Loma Verde faculty members have a good grasp on issues of pedagogy.

A significant number of interviewees looked at improvement as an external exercise (parents, students, board of education, etc.) as opposed to the mandate of the professional staff, requiring change in their individual and collective practice.

Interviews revealed some concern about the social and political influence of some of the school's most affluent parents. Many expressed concern that the affluent parents' ability to "lobby" authority and manipulate policy for their children's benefit (especially in the areas of advanced learning opportunities) creating a scary challenge to their job security if they chose to advocate for a more egalitarian path.

Recommendations:

The development of a strategic, data-driven, continuous school improvement protocol is essential to improve in this area. The staff at Loma Verde seems to value order and compliance as the major indicators of school success. Without a consistent connection of evidence of student learning and a connection to school improvement and monitoring progress, the staff will not know if they are improving or not.

A collaborative process should be created that allows teachers and school personnel the opportunity to petition central office and the board of education as it relates to issues of equity, with a guarantee of anonymity and protection from any form of retaliation.

Summary

The school culture at Loma Verde School seems to function well for most students. The staff appears to possess a strong level of professional capacity and curricular knowledge. The staff appears to philosophically agree with the concept of equity, but very little evidence could be found to support strategic planning or deep implementation. The impact of Covid 19 must be considered when reviewing the results and recommendations of this assessment.

In order to improve the school's culture, 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 are essential elements of organizational improvement. 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.
- I recommend the strategic implementation and monitoring of current initiatives like Restorative Justice. Frameworks and strategies have been produced, but there is little evidence of impact.
- The improvement of systems of disaggregated data collection, analysis, and action have to improve greatly in order for Loma Verde to fulfill its equity pledge. There appears to be a general sense of satisfaction because of the school's comparative performance to other schools in the district on state academic test. Intrinsic commitment to equity is a major need.
- The development of a powerful guiding coalition of teachers and administrators, that organizes evidence of performance, makes short-term and long-term achievement goals, and aligns resources and monitors and reports progress is essential to closing equity gaps which appear to have remained large over at least the last five years.
- Cultural proficiency and responsiveness can improve relatively quickly if made a school wide priority. 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.
- 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.

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