

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

Lu Sutton 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.

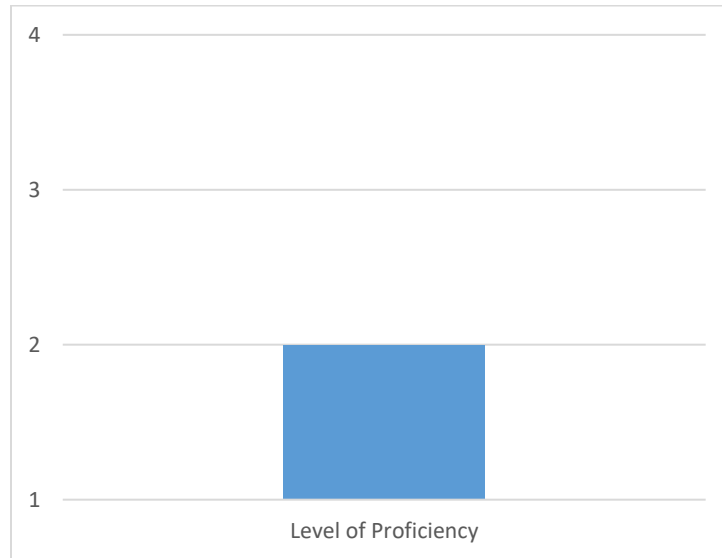
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative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

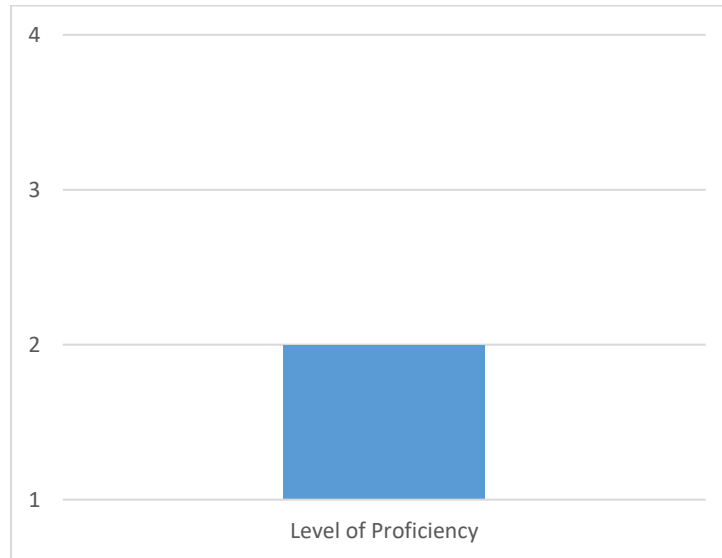


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination” clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- Staff interviews revealed that student cultural and linguistic diversity are considered school strengths.
- Culturally diverse symbolism exists within the school environment (i.e. LGBTQ acceptance symbols)
- School racial and SES achievement gaps are very large and there is no longitudinal evidence or trend data to support achievement equity that has been publically published or made available for public consumption.

| 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 stakeholders 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

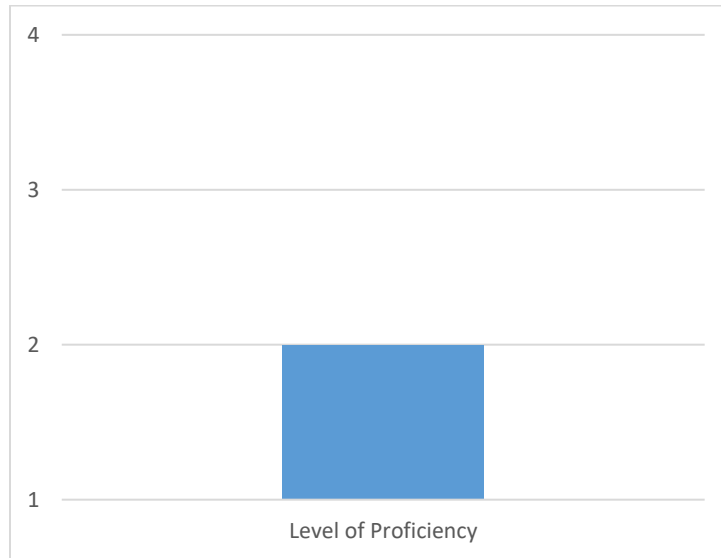


- School appears to be versed in the analysis of formative learning data and many named the school's Student Success Team as a school strength.
- Student performance data, as reported by the state of California, revealed that at least a 30% gap in proficiency in both math and reading when comparing Latino students to white students at Lu Sutton 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 Lu Sutton between 2016 – 2019.
- Student performance data, as reported by the state of California revealed that students with disabilities consistently achieve proficiency rates at least 30% lower than students without disabilities in both math and reading at Lu Sutton between 2016-2019.
- Despite the development and implementation of a comprehensive intervention system both academically and socially, achievement gaps have continued to remain consistently large.

| 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

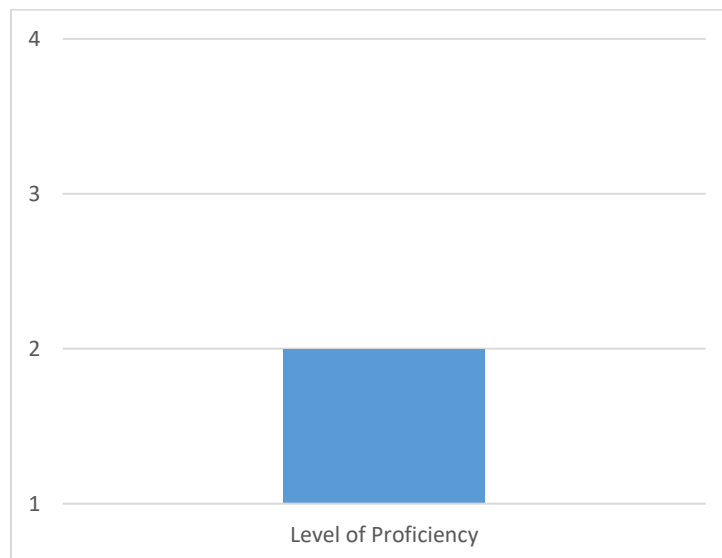


- Most staff members described Lu Sutton as a “family environment” and feared that uncomfortable conversations about equity and inclusion might threaten the close-knit climate.
- Staff appears to have embraced the linguistic diversity of their students and parents and view it as a point of pride.
- Student diversity was cited as a school strength during interviews and appears to be a common philosophy.
- Interviews revealed that some faculty members are concerned that the staff’s understanding of student diversity is surface level, and they voiced concern that a deep dive into unconscious bias might peel back the onion of civility and cause friction.
- Racial and socio-economic student academic achievement gaps appear to be rigid and unchanged, despite the staff’s stated appreciation for diversity and diverse cultures.

| 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

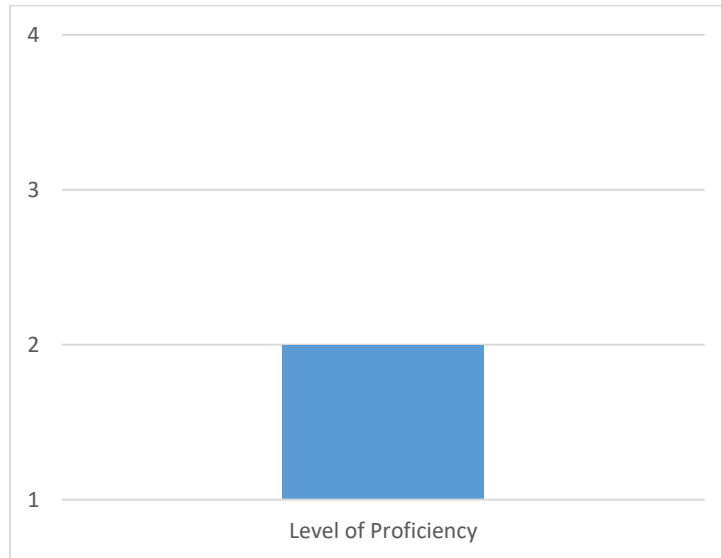


- Staff perception of professional development and professional development opportunities appear to be much more favorable at Lu Sutton when compared with the rest of the district.
- Interviews with both teachers and non-instructional staff reveal that there is a collective belief that leadership at both the school and district level will be responsive when requests for specific training are processed.
- Interviews revealed that there is some concern that training and professional development opportunities that challenge assumptions and expose unconscious bias should be expanded and made a higher priority at both the school and district level.
- Data on student performance has yet to show an increase in equitable achievement connected to a specific training or innovation.

| 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

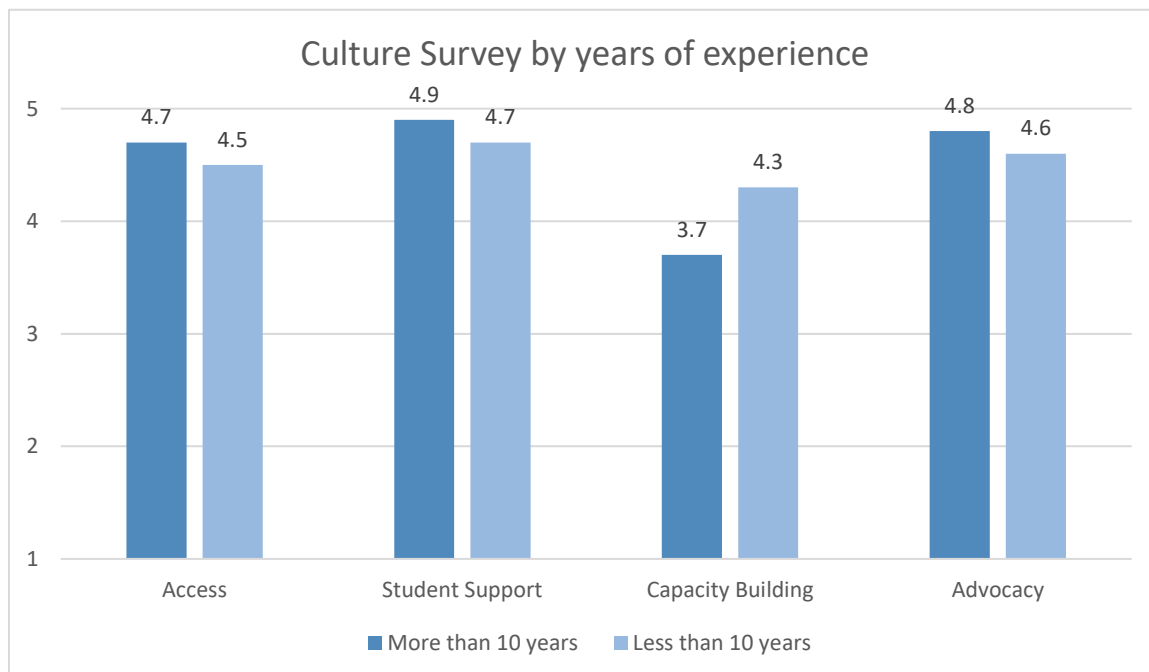
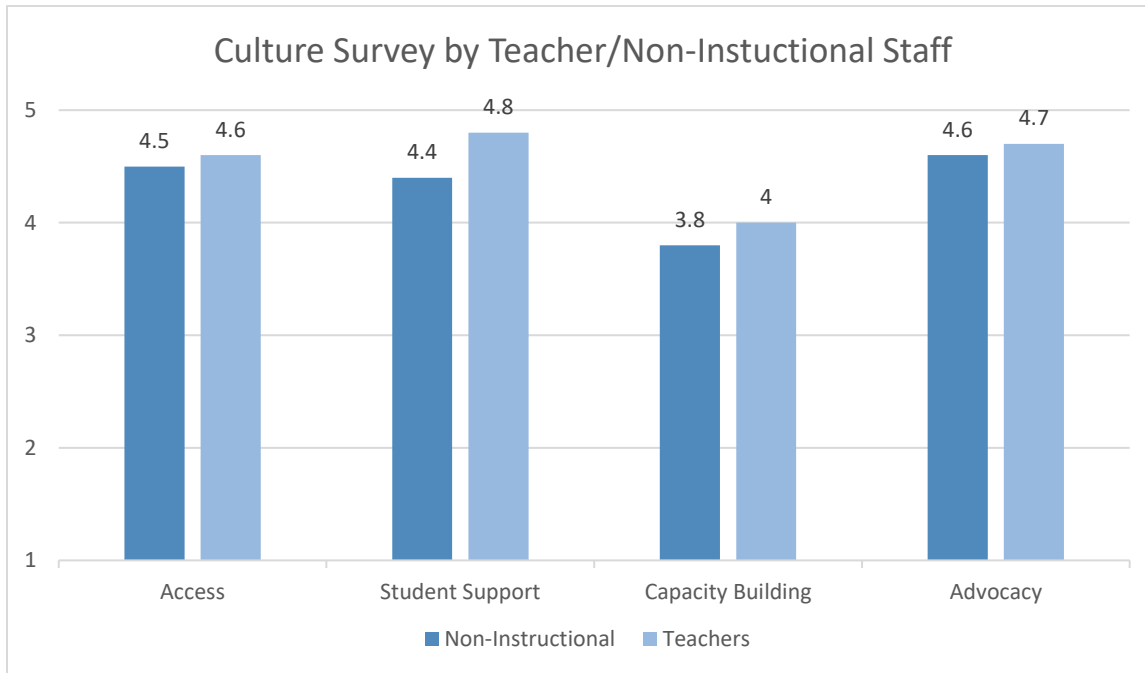
Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation



- 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.
- There is formal evidence of a robust set of formal interventions at Lu Sutton including the Student Success Team, SEL Specialist and Counselor, Special Ed resource specialists, and formal reading interventions.
- No formal plan could be found that strategically develops, implements, and monitors the tangible elements of equitable achievement.
- Though there is evidence of comprehensive systems of general student support and intervention, student achievement gaps remain large, especially for Latino students, students of poverty, and students with disabilities.

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 at the schools, but many teachers expressed that those opportunities should come with conditions of readiness.

Interviews revealed a universal concern for access for English learners and students with disabilities. Many cited shortages in the special education department and lack of political or lobbying influence of parents of poverty as primary reasons for underrepresentation in rigorous opportunities.

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

Interviews revealed that discussions, even disagreements, about issues concerning students are normal at Lu Sutton, and the staff universally views this as a strength.

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.

Willingness to engage in critical conversations is a major asset in any organization, but it is especially important in a school. I recommend expanding this school strength and moving the conversation to a data-driven conversation that closely monitors student's progress and grows into a willing to change practice based upon objective evidence.

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.

Interviews revealed that the staff is very active and aware of student support services. Efficacious discussions appear to be a norm and every interviewed party appeared to be optimistic about the Lu Sutton staff's ability to meet student needs.

Interviews revealed a positive perception about the school principal as an instructional leader and her ability to strategically lead school improvement.

Interviews revealed some concern about deficit thinking among staff members about students as it relates to race, poverty, and English mastery, but most stated that this was rare.

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 systemic response to student academic or behavioral support needs.

Investment in systems that monitor individual student progress will enable Lu Sutton to more effectively monitor the impact of their intervention systems.

Capacity Building

Key Findings:

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

Surveys revealed that the perceptions about professional development and capacity building at Lu Sutton is much more positive than the district average in this area.

Interviews revealed that there is some concern about strategic support for new teachers, especially in the area of professional development to build capacity to support struggling students and students who lack home support.

Interviews revealed that staff members and leadership believes that the school district is responsive to their needs and is an asset in providing support and professional development.

Recommendations:

I recommend that Lu Sutton develop a professional development plan that directly links their disaggregated student performance data to research based/affirmed trainings to build staff capacity in the identified areas. Professional development is most effective when it is directly linked to authentic staff needs.

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 and they could pinpoint specific acts of advocacy. Every interviewee voiced the participation in advocating for social and emotional needs of students as it related to lobbying for more counselors and counseling for troubled students. Many voiced being vocal about improving the school's RTI structure.

Interviews revealed that the staff feels that the administration runs a "tight ship." They appreciated their level of organization and prompt communication and feedback.

The staff at Lu Sutton seem to be genuinely concerned about all students and appear to be eager to improve. There appears to be a lot of activity and structures, but the data that I gathered and was given direct access to does not reflect a breakthrough in indicators of equity as of yet.

Recommendations:

The development of a strategic, data-driven, continuous school improvement protocol is essential to improve in this area. The staff at Lu Sutton 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.

I recommend that the staff read and discuss Lorna Earl and Steven Katz's book [Leading School in a Data Rich World](#) to enhance their efforts to create academic and social equity and Lu Sutton.

Summary

The school culture at Lu Sutton appears to be highly student-centered and optimistic. They appear to have a strong knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and they have produced some impressive systems. The will to be an egalitarian school appears to be intact, but the data has not yet positively correlated with their intentions. 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:

- The development of data systems that constantly measure and monitor student performance should drive all equity-centered decisions. The staff appears to be willing and committed to being participants in producing an equitable environment, and they need data to inform that desire.
- The perception about professional development and professional learning appear to be positive at Lu Sutton. I recommend that the school develop a professional development plan that informs their equity efforts.
- 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. I also recommend openly sharing and collaborating with the parents and the community concern the schools equity plans and progress.
- 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.
- 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 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.

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

