TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

Lynwood Elementary School

Novato, CA

October 2021

Solution Tree

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
School has openly discussed, defined, and committed to student equity and access	Evidence exists that diversity and inclusion is an essential part of practice and systems School engages in continuous learning to improve the impact of their practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion School constantly monitors evidence of impact on underserved student groups and makes real time adjustments to practice	Staff members can clearly define their common philosophy about equity and diversity and there is philosophical consensus Issues of equity are frequently discussed and the collaborative dialogue leads to change in practice Staff members are empathetic towards underserved student populations and are eager to change their practice to meet their needs	Staff members can express a few common core values with little philosophical disagreement about diversity and equity Issues of equity are occasionally discussed and analyzed, but it rarely leads to tangible change Staff members are empathetic towards underserved student populations, but it does not inspire substantive change	Staff members cannot express any of the school's core values and wide philosophical disagreement exists about diversity and equity Issues of equity and inclusion are taboo and avoided Staff members may become hostile or deflective if issues of fairness and equity are discussed or analyzed

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Indicator 1

Rating: Level 3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation
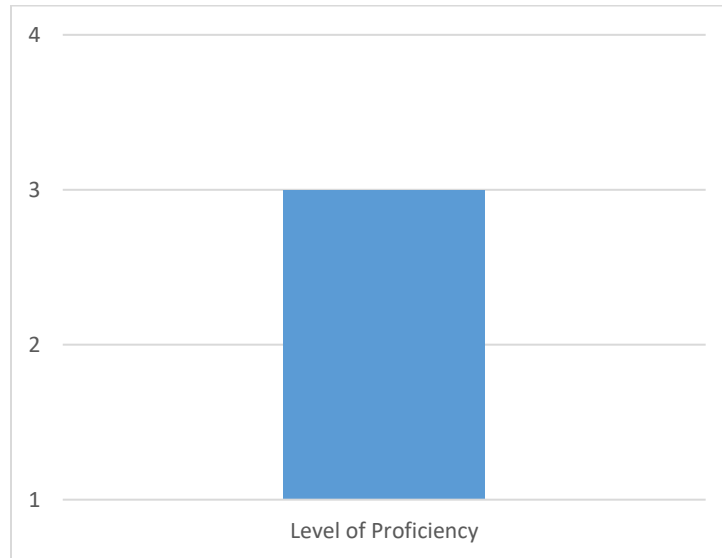
- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a "Non-Discrimination" clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- School has invested in infrastructure to systemically address the needs of students in need of support, including an active English Learner Advisory Committee, an active MTSS Coordinator and team, and several grant-driven programs to address student social and emotional needs.
- The school environment reflects a respect for the diversity of Lynwood student cultures and it appears to be integrated into the school culture.
- Despite infrastructure to address student achievement gaps, student performance is still predictable along racial, language, and income status.

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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
School regularly collects, analyzes, and acts upon equity data both academically and socially	School collects, analyzes, and openly shares disaggregated student performance data with all stakeholders including parents and the community School uses unpleasant student performance data to engage all school stake holders both internally and externally 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	School seeks, embraces, and values the insight gained from disaggregated student performance data in their improvement efforts School staff members seek unpleasant student performance data to provide insight into critical areas of need for school improvement School staff members accept the validity of the performance data to inspire change in their individual practice	School recognizes the value of disaggregated student performance data, but does not collect it frequently School staff members accept unpleasant student performance data and are empathetic towards students from underserved student groups School staff members accept the validity of the performance data, but does not inspire them to change their practice	School does not recognize or value the need to collect and analyze disaggregated student performance data School staff members become hostile when presented with unpleasant student performance data School staff members challenge the validity of any performance data that does not validate current practice

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Indicator 2

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation
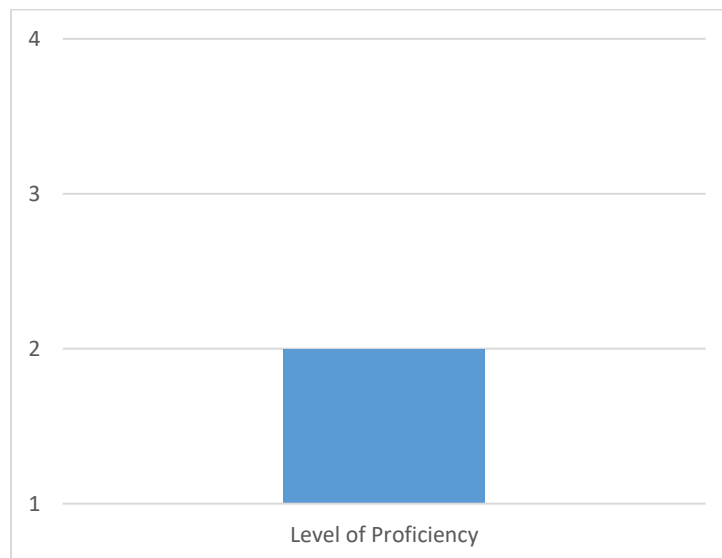
- School appears to gather evidence on student performance in multiple areas and analyzes that data and considers it when making decisions, especially in the areas of MTSS and social and emotional screening and support.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 25% in proficiency on state achievements tests for Latino students, when compared to white students in reading and 40% in math.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 20% in proficiency on state reading achievement tests for students of poverty when compared to non-economically disadvantaged students in reading and 40% in math over the same period of time.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, students with disabilities outperformed Latino students, students of poverty, and English Learners in reading and math on state achievement tests.
- Despite robust investment in data collection efforts and experimentation, achievement gaps have not trended in a positive direction over at least the last five years.

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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
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	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 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 Discussion of bias openly or privately stimulates intellectual dialogue focused on improving equity efforts and external stakeholders are included	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 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 Discussion of bias openly or privately stimulates intellectual dialogue focused on improving equity efforts	School staff generally accepts that bias exists both consciously and unconsciously but is generally uncomfortable with analyzing it personally or collectively Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias will result in enlightenment, but rarely change in practice or behavior Discussion of bias openly or privately results in discomfort, but generally stimulates self-reflection and empathy	School staff believes that they are individually and collective free of bias and any attempt to assess this reality is personally and professionally disrespectful Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias results in hostility towards the initiator Discussion of bias openly or privately results in deep discomfort and potentially hostility

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Indicator 3

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

Level of Proficiency
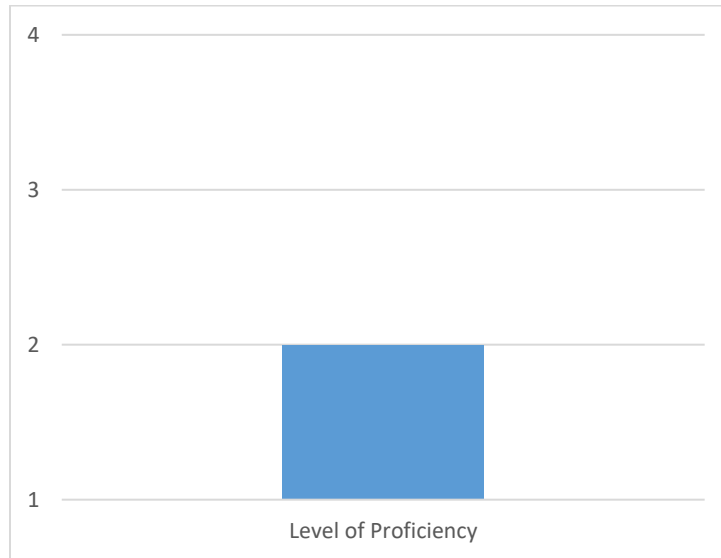
- Interviews revealed that the staff believes that the current principal and leadership team are very equity minded and that they push their thinking about fairness and equity on a regular basis. Some interviewees voiced concerned that not all staff members are comfortable or even agree with challenging traditional ideologies and strongly held beliefs about students.
- School environment reflects a respect for the diverse student population of Lynwood. The library, and other common spaces, provide a robust variety of educational material that shows a respect for its multi-cultural student population.
- Interviews revealed that many staff members were concerned about staff turnover and the socialization of large numbers of new educators. The concern was not based on the fact that the staff members were new, the concern was based upon the challenge of developing a universal staff philosophy and collective commitments without the advantage of staff longevity.
- Interviews revealed that the staff is generally comfortable, both formally and informally, addressing deficit language and deficit thinking as it relates to students.

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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
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	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 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	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 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	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 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	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 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

Indicator 4

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Development
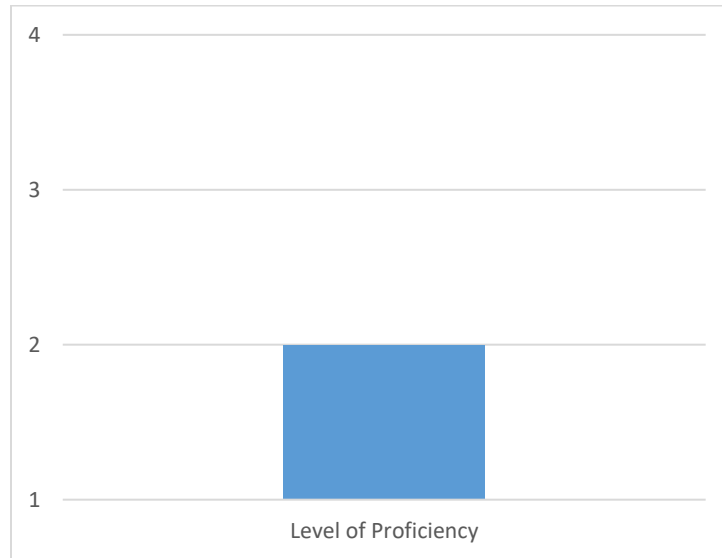
- School/District investment in professional development is abundant, but most felt they did not push or support the issues of deficit thinking and unconscious bias. Many also expressed the difficulty of trying to attend meaningful professional development experiences offered after school or on their personal time.
- Interviews revealed that many teachers are frustrated with being asked perform at a high-level in a full, dual language immersion program when they are not Bi-Lingual certified. This reality was not expressed with any level of malice, but was expressed out of a concern that they cannot fully meet the needs of their students.
- Interviews revealed that many Lynwood staff members feel that the professional development and growth opportunities do not match the needs of the students at Lynwood and they often find the experiences less than enriching because of the unique needs of their students.
- ELD support and training was consistently identified as the top training and capacity need of the Lynwood staff.

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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	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 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	Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion are addressed strategically and professionals collaborate and implement substantive changes to policies and practices 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	Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion result in surface-level or non-invasive experimentation that results in no substantive change in student outcomes 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	Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion stay at the conversational phase and never translate into change of policy or practice. 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

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Indicator 5

Rating: Level 3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation
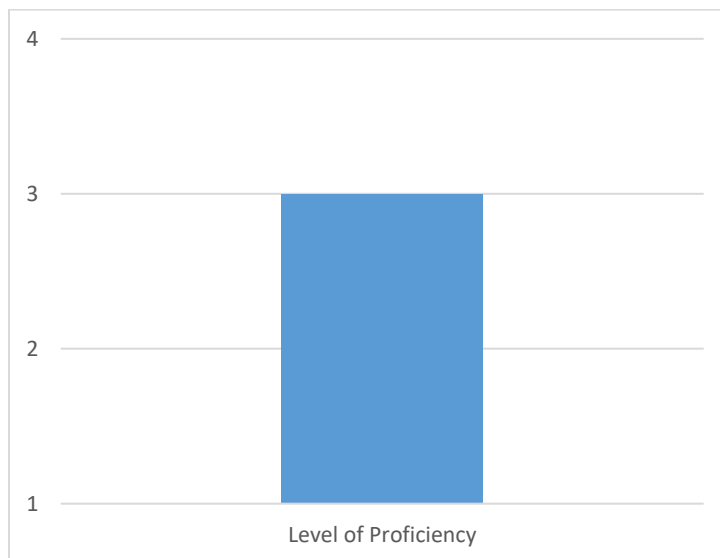
- School partners and plans with community to procure resources to promote diversity and equity and improve equitable learning outcomes (i.e. SEL Coordinator).
- School analyzes, plans, and implements policies aimed at meeting students social and emotional needs (i.e. ACES After-School program).
- School analyzes, plans, and implements policies and strategies aimed at meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of students (i.e. "Dia de Los Muertos" display, multi-cultural learning material, and communication delivered to students and parents in multiple languages)
- School analyzes, plans, and implements policies and strategies aimed at meeting the diverse learning needs of their students (i.e. Maker's Space learning room focused on the STREAM methodology)
- Though the experimentation and innovation at Lynwood are impressive, there is still a lot of room to grow in the area of student academic achievement.

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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.

Culture Survey by Teacher/Non-Instuctional Staff

Category	Non-Instructional	Teachers
Access	4.8	4.6
Student Support	4.5	4.8
Capacity Building	4	3.8
Advocacy	4.7	4.9

Culture Survey by years of experience

Category	More than 10 years	Less than 10 years
Access	4.8	4.5
Student Support	4.8	4.9
Capacity Building	3.5	4
Advocacy	4.9	4.9

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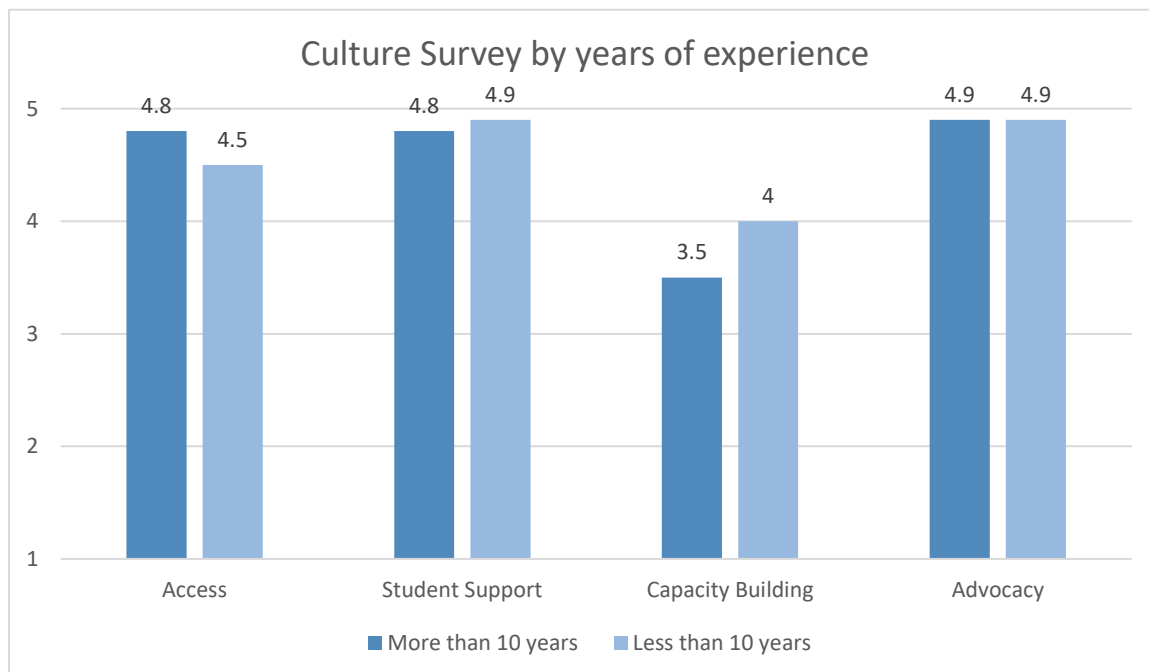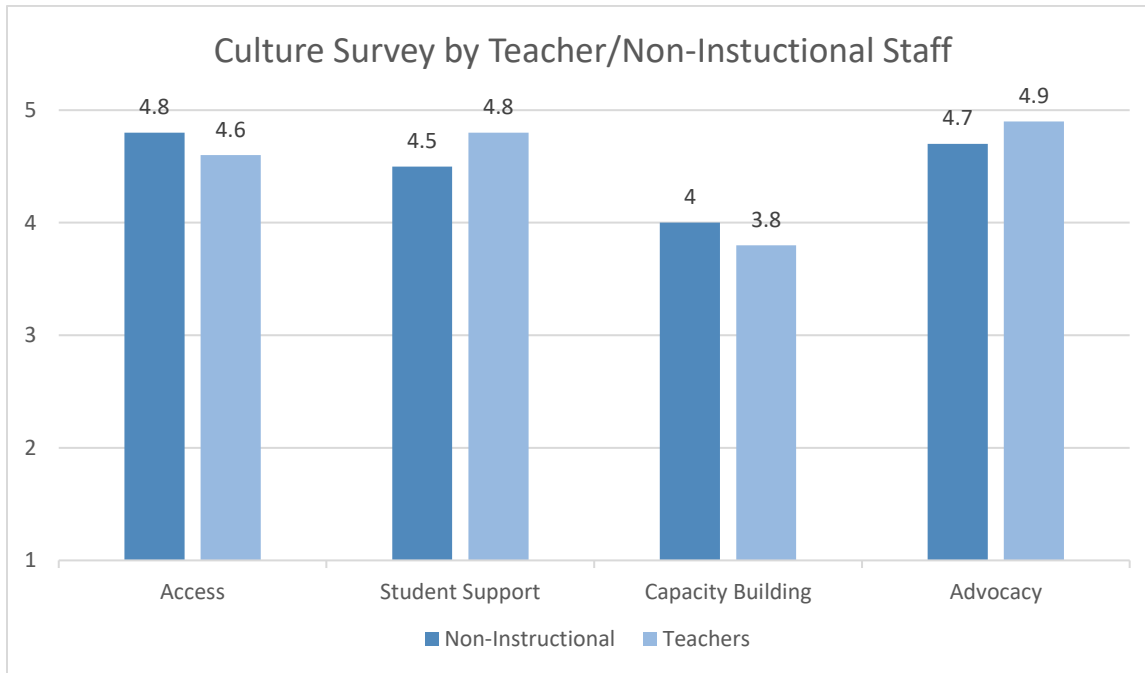
Access

Key Findings:

No significant gaps were found between perceptions of 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 some expressed concerns that English Learners are often excluded from the best opportunities.

Interviews revealed that there are a significant number of staff members who feel that the student's social problems/challenges are an insurmountable barrier and hinders the students' opportunity to fully benefit from rigorous academic opportunities.

Though many interviewees stated a general philosophical agreement with expanding opportunities and were fully committed to the school's language immersion program, many felt that inadequate staffing and staff capacity are obstacles to fully realizing the potential of this program.

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.

Collaborate regularly with the district office to intentionally improve the practice and pedagogy of educators practicing within the language immersion program.

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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. 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.

School has invested in very unique and progressive ways to address student needs socially, culturally, and academically.

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.

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Capacity Building

Key Findings:

The survey revealed no significant gap staff 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 what the teaching staff believes is important to consider for training and professional development.

Turnover of central office leadership, which can lead to different theories about systemic improvement was cited as a major barrier to the Lynwood staff's confidence in district led professional development. Many felt that the unique needs of the students at Lynwood should drive professional development funds and efforts, especially in the area of ELD.

Interviews revealed that "initiative fatigue" is a dominant theme in informal conversations. Many also cited that a shortage of substitute teachers made it difficult to have access to trainings and support that they deemed necessary to improve their professional effectiveness.

Recommendations:

The dominant theme in surveys and interviews was the power struggle with central office about how Lynwood can improve. I recommend a structured and focused dialogue between the Lynwood 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 Lynwood to the next level of performance.

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Advocacy

Key Findings:

The survey results reveal no significant gap in perception between teachers and non-instructional staff. This area scored highest of all of the assessed factors.

Interviews revealed that most staff members believe that they are robust child advocates, and they work hard daily to address barriers that many staffs and schools do not have to address in other areas of Novato.

The staff appears to be fully aware of the socio-economic and language challenges at Lynwood and the consensus articulated during interviews is that they feel alone and in most cases, they are the first and only line of advocacy for their students. Many expressed frustration at the general community perception of the school. Most felt that racism and class-bias are at the heart of the misconceptions.

Interviews revealed some frustration with parents as it relates to their active participation in their child's educational experience. Lack of parental involvement was the most frequently voiced frustration during interviews.

Recommendations:

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

I would highly recommend that the school leadership team develop a public relations plan that intentionally and strategically seeks outlets to share positive narrative about the school that might not be currently shared. The school's active engagement in properly branding itself will help to change the general narrative and produce a sense of pride among the school staff, students, parents, and community.

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Summary

The school culture at Lynwood appears to be one of genuine concern and budding efficacy. The school has some very unique academic programs and the staff has consistently engaged in action research aimed at meeting the needs of their student population. The major concern is that despite those efforts, academic achievement growth is still stagnant and achievement gaps are large. 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.
- The perception about the effectiveness of professional resources and professional development needs to be explored. Collaboration between Novato district leadership and the staff at Lynwood would greatly improve the construction of professional development experiences that would improve the staff's capacity to meet the needs of their students, especially in the area of multi-lingual and multi-lingual and multi-cultural education.
- 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 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, monitors implementation, and reports progress is essential to improve achievement indicators that have been stagnant for years.
- The school is engaged in a lot of exciting action research. I suggest that each program or policy be closely monitored in order to measure, analyze, and adjust practice based upon very specific achievement indicators.
- I highly recommend the development of a school public relations team, or integrate public relations into the focus of the school site leadership team.
- 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.

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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 :

o 0-2 years

o 3-4 years

o 5-10 years

o 11-20 years

o 21+ years

Position:

o Classroom teacher

o Counselor

o Social Worker/Psychologist

o Instructional Aide

o Administrator

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