

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

Novato High 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.

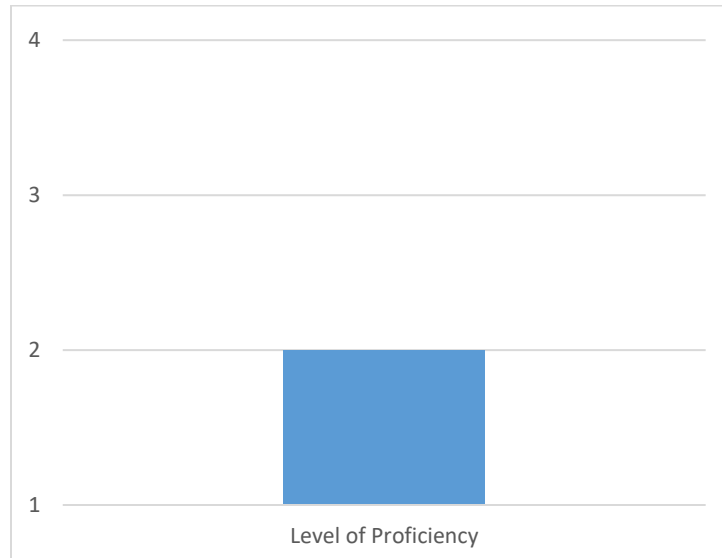
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative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

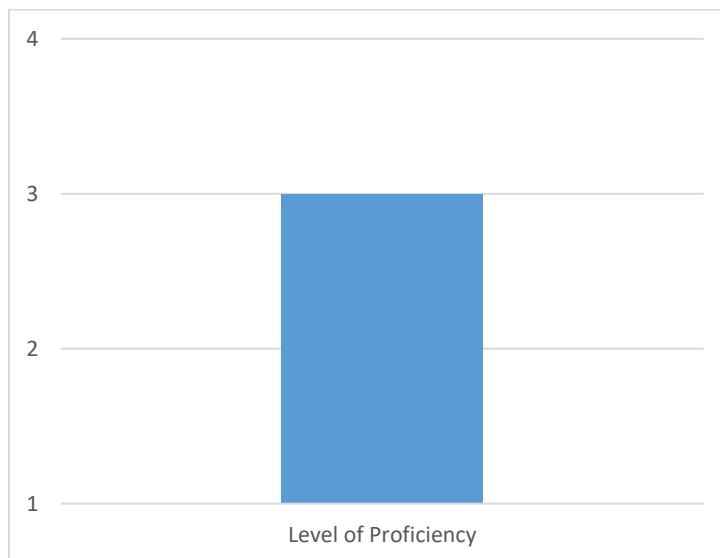


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination” clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- Some symbols of systemic commitment to inclusiveness exists (i.e. LGBTQ flag and symbols).
- School has produced an open Advanced Placement enrollment policy, but I could not find evidence of increased diverse representation linked to this policy.
- School WASC report reveals an ability to collect and analyze large sets of achievement and equity data. Unfortunately, most of the statistical evidence of equity has not significantly improved over the last five years, especially for English Learners and Latino students
- Interviews, from very diverse stakeholders, agreed that the “rhetoric of equity” is stronger than the “commitment” to actualize equity at NHS. There is significant polarization about the importance and prioritization of equity. One interviewee described the school’s equity philosophy as “socially Darwinistic.”

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 3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation

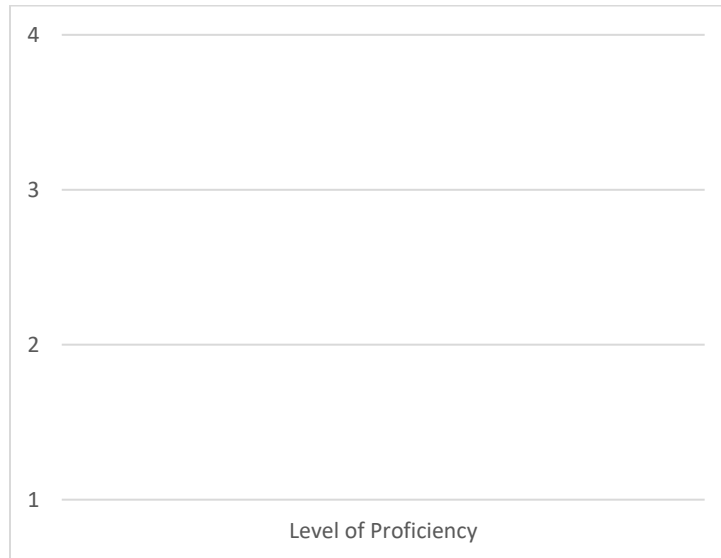


- The school has produced and published a thorough and comprehensive analysis of school performance. The data is disaggregated and measures multiple points of impact both academically and socially.
- The school's WASC self-study report documents several data-driven protocols and improvement initiatives. Concrete, written plans for improving impact on English-Learners, Latino students, and students of poverty are documented in this report with measurable targets of improvement.
- A review of student performance on the CAASPP academic exam revealed that English Learners achieved proficiency at a rate at least 65% lower than English Only students in ELA and at least 35% lower in math over the last five years.
- A review of student performance on the CAASPP academic exam revealed that Latino students achieved proficiency at a rate between 25%-35% lower in ELA and at least 25% lower in math than white and Asian students over the last five years.
- There are some disparities in the area of student discipline, but the school's reported number of incidents is far below the national norm, and the school does not appear to have a culture of punishment.
- A report provided by an outside agency revealed some disturbing campus arrest data. African-American students, who make up 3% of enrollment, accounted for 23.6% of arrests and Latino students, who make up 38% of enrollment accounted for 52.7% of arrests

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 1 Little to No Development and Implementation

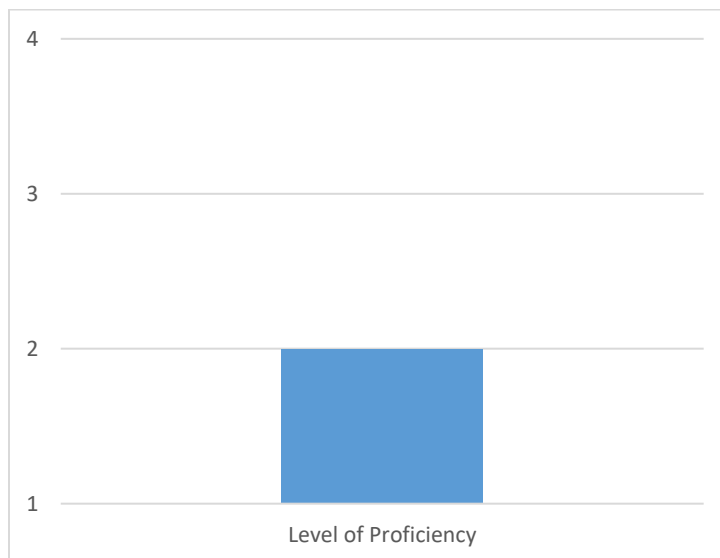


- Interviews revealed that the school’s greatest challenge was to move from “discussing” equity to “acting” upon equity. The interviewee sample was carefully selected to reflect the diversity of the faculty, and each participant cited that this was one of the school’s top challenge in achieving a more equitable environment.
- School has created some infrastructure to address a paradigm shift towards equity at NHS (i.e. Restorative Justice). Unfortunately there was little evidence that these attempts have had any material impact on equitable student outcomes.
- Interviews revealed that a significant number of interviewees felt that some of their colleagues would not feel comfortable engaging in activities that would make them reflect on issues like race, income, and personal bias.
- Interviews revealed that some teachers passively aggressively subvert changes in practice because of personal conflicts or professional disagreement. This reality is a barrier to fully taking advantage of the resources and practices devoted to assisting student growth and development (i.e. Open Enrollment in AP).

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

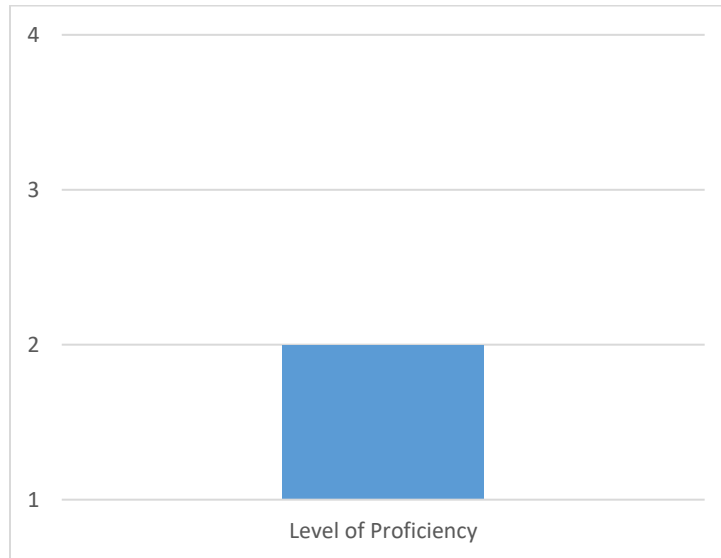


- Staff perceptions about professional development in general was low according to all indicators analyzed for this assessment (surveys and interviews).
- Many cited escalated stress and unprecedented instability caused by the ongoing pandemic as a significant factor in their general perception of professional development.
- The school has a teacher leadership team who collaborates with central office about issues of professional development.
- Interviews revealed that school leadership and non-instructional staff members are deeply concerned about the school's academic intervention system, and there is some frustration about instructional staff's implementation of training that they have already received in this area.
- 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 many 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 at NHS.

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

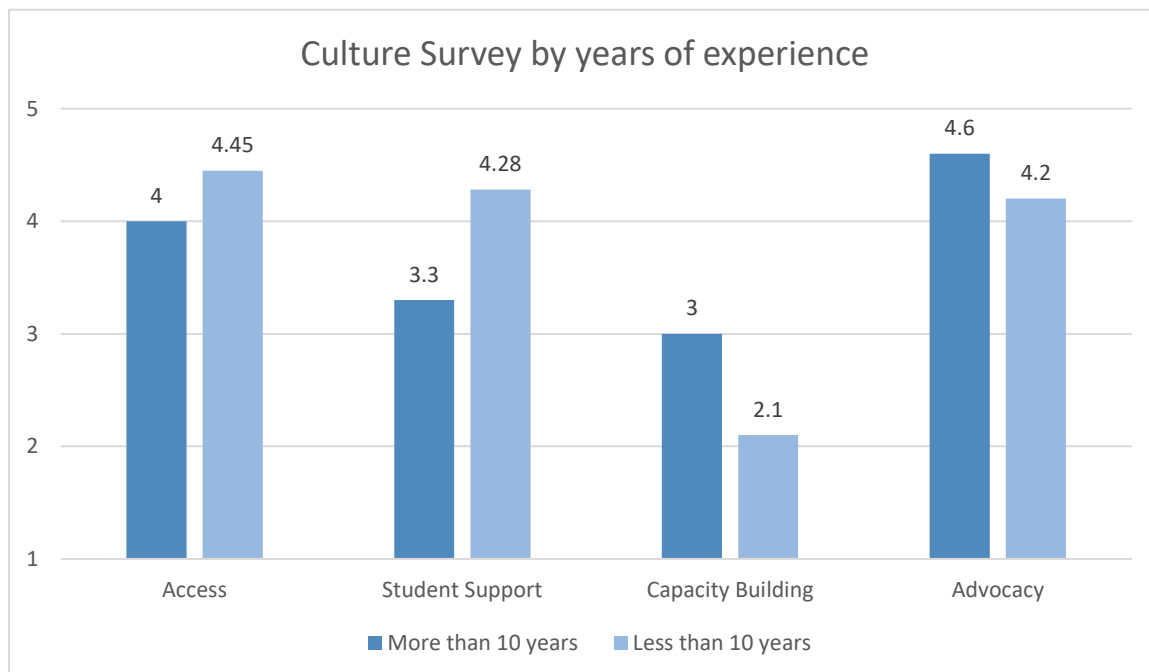
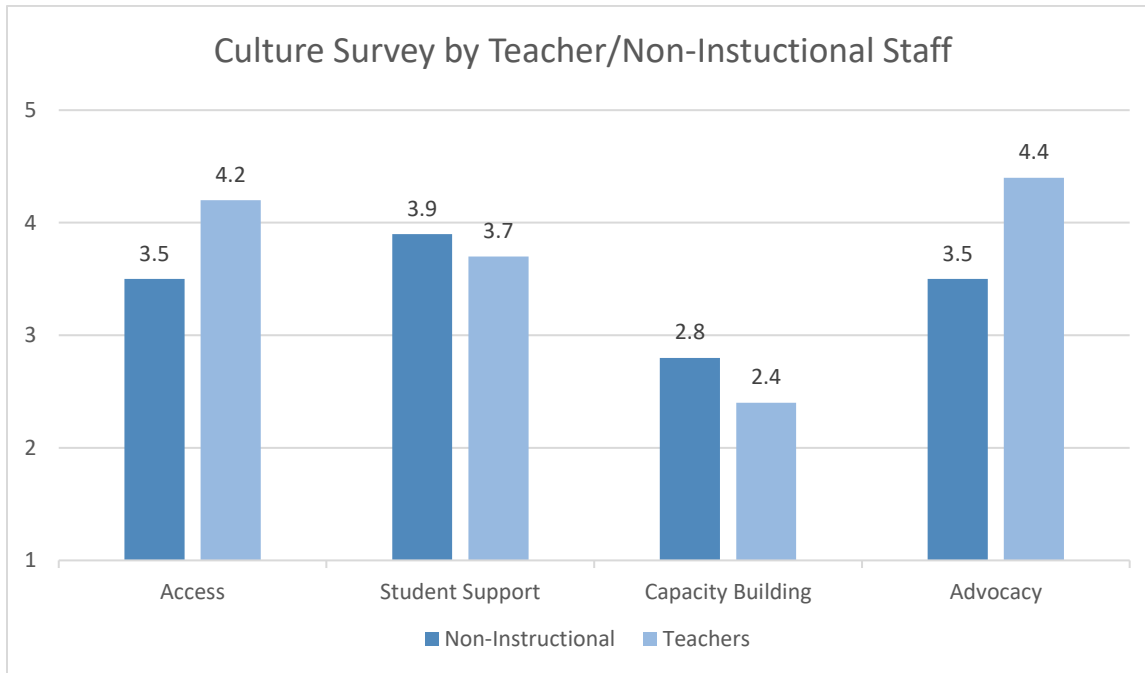
Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation



- School has several committees and policies aimed at reducing student disparities both academically and socially (i.e. Restorative Justice, AVID, and Link Crew).
- The school has produced evidence of its ability to gather data, analyze data, and produce experimentation and action research aimed at improving impact. Interviews revealed that many stakeholders are unaware of critical equity data and are not verse in the data that drives school change and experimentation.
- Philosophical differences about improvement at NHS may be producing a wedge in the action research area. Interviews revealed that there is a strong set of polarized ideas about student improvement. Some feel that staff efficacy and intentional construction and implementation of better policies and practice are the catalysts to student improvement. Others feel that more student compliance and assimilation to current structures and expectations provides the most effective pathway to student improvement and equity. Until this conflict is resolved, it will difficult for NHS to develop, implement, and fully benefit from 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:

A significant gap exists concerning perceptions about student access to rigorous opportunities, with instructional staff rating this area more favorably than non-instructional staff.

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

Interviews revealed a concern, especially among non-instructional staff, that students were not being encouraged and intentionally groomed to get access to the school's many academic and social opportunities. As a result disproportionate access exists along the lines of race, income, and home language.

Unlike many staff interviews, the NHS staff appeared to be passionate about their stance for or against expanded opportunities for access to rigor. Some lamented over the slow-pace of equitable student representation in rigorous opportunities, and others applauded this reality as a sign of protecting high expectations and tradition.

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:

Reaching a philosophical consensus about access and opportunity is critical to move NHS's equity efforts forward.

NHS staff members have access to a large amount of disaggregated student performance data. I am concerned that the presence of large amounts of data has not translated into data-informed decisions. I recommend that school leadership consider investing in professional development that increases the data literacy and the application of data in the change process.

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.

A review of the school's website revealed that several systems of support exist at NHS, including Restorative Justice, AVID, and a mentoring program. While conducting a campus walkthrough, signs of these supports for students were not observed, and staff interviews did not produce any reference to the supports mentioned above.

RTI was often described as inadequate and in need of overhaul, especially by school leadership and non-instructional staff members. 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 the feelings about capacity building and professional support.

This was the lowest recorded area and 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 as compared to what the teaching staff believes are important to consider for training and professional development. This difference in opinion appears to have skewed NHS teachers' opinion of district lead professional learning.

Interviews revealed that the school had a Teacher Leadership Team that is charged with coordinating teacher needs, including professional development. Only one interviewee mentioned this team and it is unknown how much influence they have in shaping professional development for NHS teachers.

Interviews revealed that "initiative fatigue" is a dominant theme in informal conversations. The stress of the Covid-19 pandemic was cited for why many teachers at NHS are on "survival mode." This was the primary reason given for a general apathy towards training and professional development.

Recommendations:

The presence and influence of the Teacher Leadership Team, as it relates to professional development, should be reviewed. If staff representatives are collaborating with central office about issues of professional support important to NHS teachers, communication efforts need to be improved so that the NHS staff is aware of the process of choosing and developing PD efforts. .

Advocacy

Key Findings:

The survey results reveal a significant gap in perception between teachers and non-instructional staff in the area of student advocacy.

Interviews revealed the most common concern among non-instructional staff was the slow nature of change at NHS. Despite being confronted with compelling evidence to change, the perception of those interviews revealed that they believed that equity was not a strong priority at NHS and most faculty members are satisfied with the status quo.

Interviews revealed that most teachers believe that they are robust child advocates, but they could not pinpoint any specific act of advocacy academically. The confidence of advocacy was not nearly as strong among teachers with less than 10 years of experience as revealed in interviews and survey data.

External agencies have gotten involved in the issue of disproportionality in student arrests on campus based upon race. None of the interviewees cited this as a prevalent topic of discussion at NHS.

Interviews revealed that the staff feels that the administration runs a “tight ship.” They appreciated their level of organization and prompt communication and feedback. Most of their praise appeared to be in the areas of school management and none mentioned a vision for the future and a pathway to improvement. 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 or collective practice.

Recommendations:

I recommend that the NHS staff engage in a periodic, collective dialogue about achievement disparities. This dialogue should include an analysis of current experimentation and the impact of those experiments as it relates to closing disparities. I am concerned that the staff may be confusing increased activity with tangible improvement.

I recommend that the school leadership team engage in a periodic dialogue with community partners. There has been external pressure to address certain disparities at NHS and a collaborative relationship with these agencies would create allies instead of adversaries.

Summary

The school culture at NHS is similar to many large, comprehensive American high schools. The school offers many opportunities, and the students have a choice to engage or not engage with those opportunities. Most students excel both academically and socially at NHS. Unfortunately the level of success can be most accurately predicted by student race and home language. 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. 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 perception about the effectiveness of professional resources and professional development needs to be explored. The school has a teacher leadership team tasked at collaborating about teacher needs, yet many cite that the professional development offered in Novato does not meet their specific needs.
- I recommend that the school invest in staff development in data literacy and data informed school improvement decision making. The school's data collection efforts are impressive, but very few interviewees could articulate the substance of the school's performance data or connect it to school improvement efforts.
- I recommend that the NHS staff continuously review the impact of current equity efforts like Restorative Justice.
- I recommend that the staff engage in professional training and experiences that help them confront philosophical polarizations about race, income, and student language. This concern was a dominant themes during interviews.
- I recommend that the school leadership engage in a collaborative dialogue with community agencies that present disparities that ill-effect certain NHS student population (i.e. Campus arrests). A regular dialogue, along with the ability to produce concrete evidence of improvement can turn community groups into robust advocates.
- 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 department to do a deep PLC dive, and using them as a pilot for scaling up to school wide implementation.

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