TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

Olive 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.

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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 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation
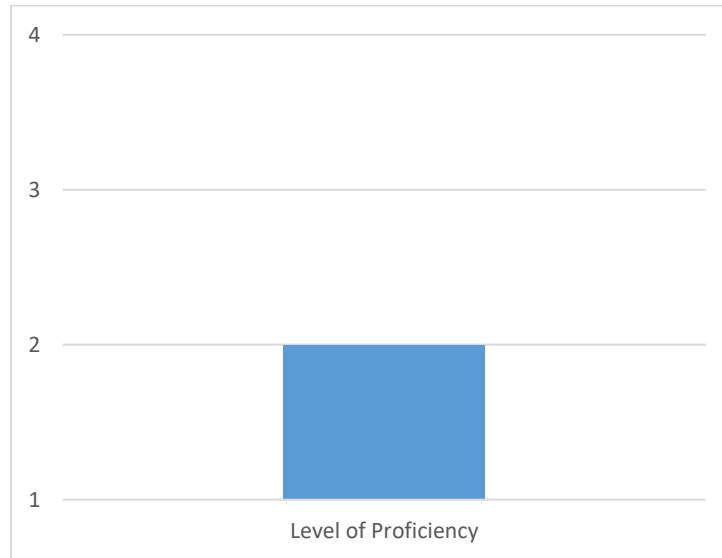
- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a "Non-Discrimination" clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- Interviews revealed that a common narrative shared among staff members is that "Olive is the most diverse school in the district." Some interviewees shared this statement as a point of pride and others shared this statement as a perceived obstacle to progress. It appears that perceptions about student diversity should be reconciled openly so that the staff speaks with a united voice on this topic.
- Interviews revealed a frustration among both teachers and non-instructional staff about the special education identification process at Olive and the overrepresentation of students of color.

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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
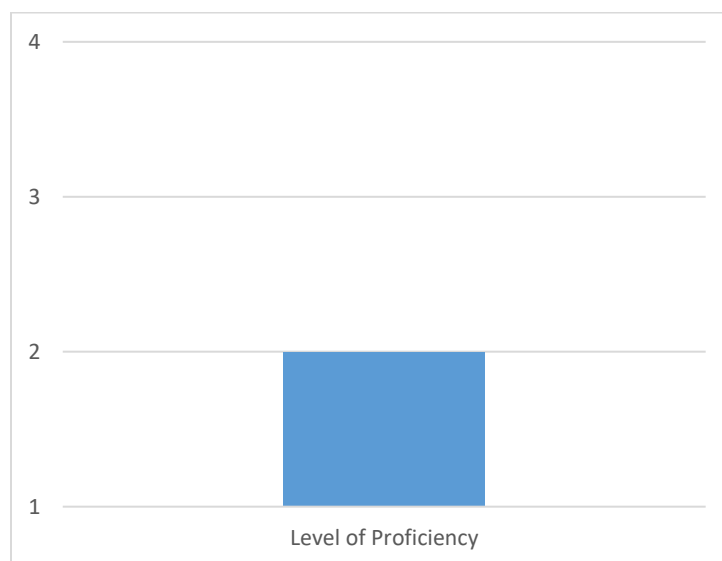

- Interviews revealed a tremendous polarization of perceptions about student equity at Olive. Some claimed that Olive is known throughout the district as an example of equity and inclusion, and others expressed great frustration about the lack of diversity in the school GATE program and overrepresentation of Latino students in special education. Some interviewees provided specific data concerning these disparities.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 40% in proficiency on state achievements tests for Latino students, when compared to white students in both math and reading.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 50% in proficiency on state reading achievement tests for Latino students on math and reading achievement tests when compared to Asian students.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 40% in proficiency on state achievement test for students of poverty, when compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged, in both math and reading.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, students with disabilities performed at a rate similar to the performance of Latino students in reading and math.

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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
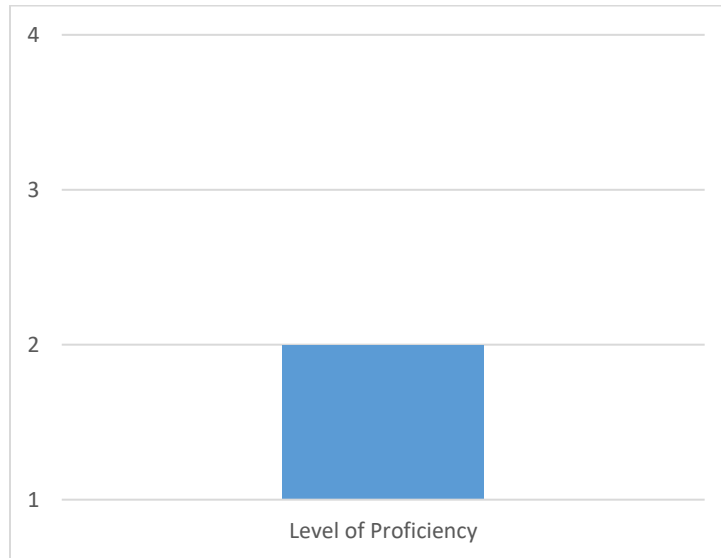

- Interviews revealed that many teachers at Olive are endeared with their students and embrace the presence of diversity. I am not sure, based upon the review of student performance data that the appreciation for diversity has moved beyond surface recognition.
- Interviews revealed a pretty significant philosophical polarization. Some interviewees revealed that there is a strong sense of racial and socio-economic privilege that has become a blind spot to self-reflection and having uncomfortable conversations about equity and opportunity. Other interviewees felt that the Olive staff goes above and beyond the call of duty and they are very effective in their practice, despite the presence of poverty and other student life obstacles.
- Interviews revealed that some teachers passive 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. Restorative Justice).

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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
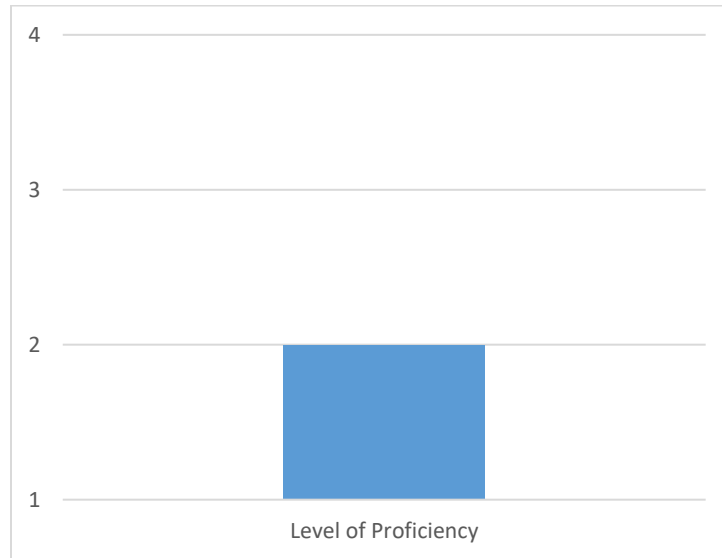
- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Staff interviews and surveys revealed that school and district professional development do not adequately prepare them to improve their practice as it relates to equity and diversity. Many described feeling greatly unprepared to adequately respond to the diverse cultures and language needs of many of their students.
- Staff interviews revealed that many staff members worry that the philosophical political polarization that exists in the greater society, is negatively impacting the diversity initiatives of the staff.
- School principal could cite very specific and disturbing areas of disparity at Olive, including the school's GATE program, Special Day class, and overrepresentation of Latino students in remediation/intervention groups. She appears to have a strong sense of data literacy and the staff would benefit from a regular reflection on the statistical reality of these disparities and the connection of professional development to build capacity.

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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 |
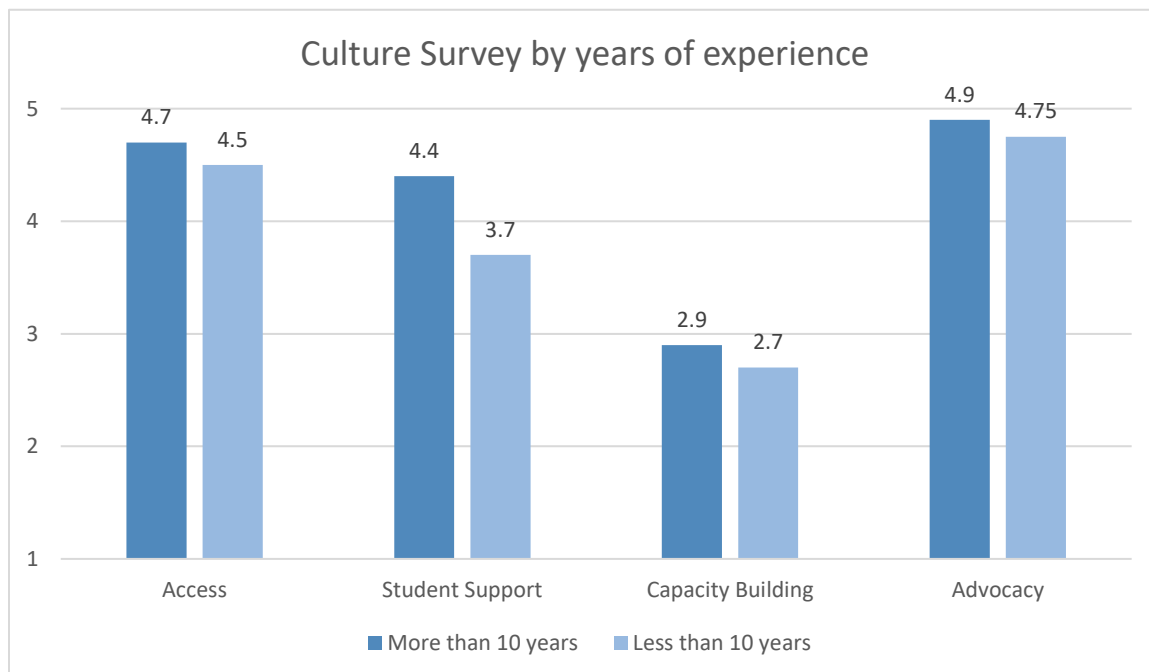
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Indicator 5

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

Level of Proficiency
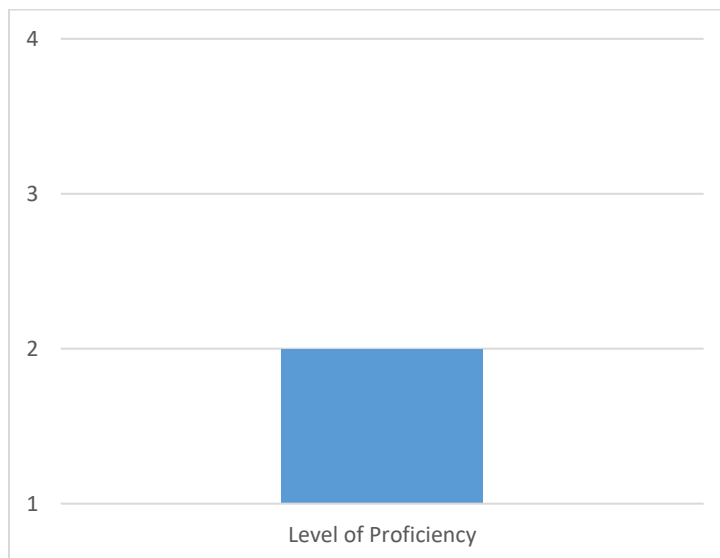
- District has agreed to diversity initiatives and programs (i.e. Restorative Justice), but I could not find evidence of strategic implementation or any data or evidence directly linked to implementation.
- Interviews revealed that Olive staff members are generally concerned about student equity, but interviewees could not articulate any systemic effort to produce equity besides traditional support systems available to all students, like counseling, RTI, and special education.
- Lack of resources was a common theme during interviews. The perception is that Olive is doing the best job possible given their resource allocation.
- A review of the school website and other public documentation did not reveal any formal plans, programming, or systemic efforts to advance the cause of equity. Without any experimentation, and a system of data collection and analysis, action research is nearly impossible

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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	2	4.6
Student Support	2.4	4.1
Capacity Building	3.9	2.8
Advocacy	2.6	4.8

Culture Survey by years of experience

Category	More than 10 years	Less than 10 years
Access	4.7	4.5
Student Support	4.4	3.7
Capacity Building	2.9	2.7
Advocacy	4.9	4.75

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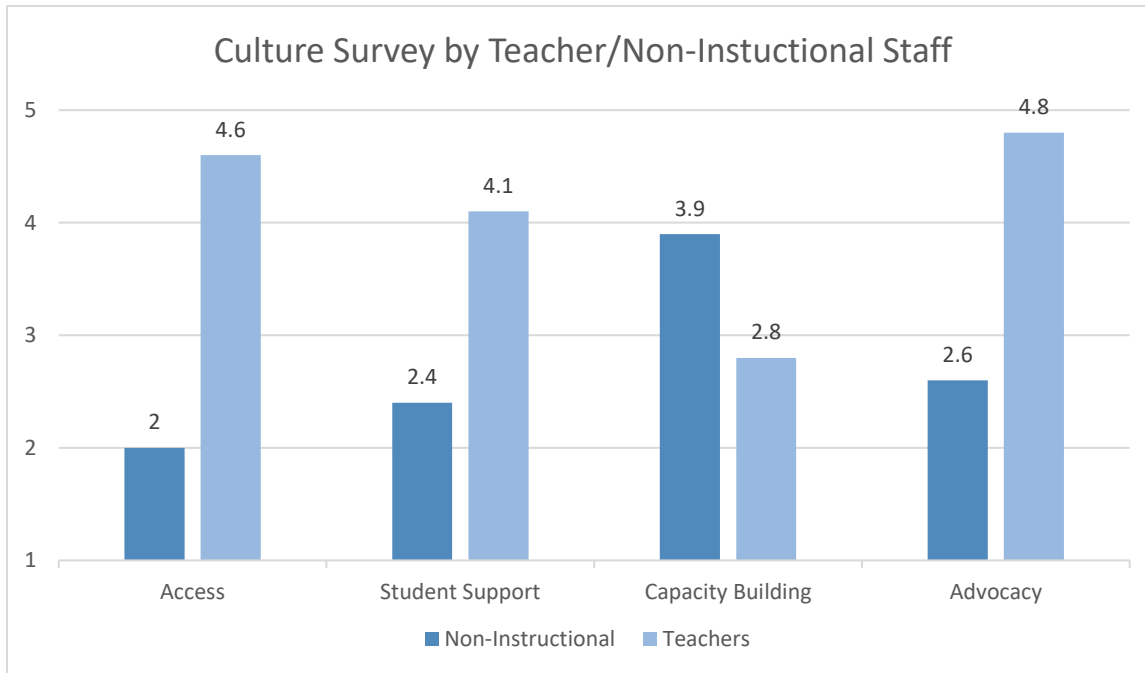
Access

Key Findings:

A significant gap exists between perceptions about student access to rigorous opportunities between instructional and non-instructional staff members, with instructional staff members rating this area much more favorably.

Interviews revealed that both teaching and administrative staff possess very different views about equitable student access. The dominant theme among the staff was that access is earned through demonstration of proficiency. The non-instructional staff expressed a belief that greater access to opportunity is the key to improved proficiency. This difference needs to be reconciled before deeper equity work can be advanced.

Interviews revealed a universal concern about student support for student social and emotional needs. Nearly all interviewees felt that the school was grossly understaffed in the area of counseling and social and emotional support. The perception is that this barrier contributes to fewer students being ready for rigorous academic opportunities.

Though many interviewees stated a general philosophical agreement with expanding opportunities, few were aware of the current state of equity in their school. It was also revealed that openly dialoguing about touchy topics like race, language, and poverty are barriers to equity planning. Many stated that they avoid uncomfortable conversations to preserve a "family atmosphere" among teachers.

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

Recommendations:

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

In order to get more comfortable with discussions about sensitive topics like race, poverty, disabilities, and language, I recommend that the Olive staff develop a protocol for facilitating uncomfortable conversations. The more they are able to speak authentically, the easier it will be to build systems that support equity.

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Student Support

Key Findings:

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

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.

An important philosophical difference exists in the area of student support. One portion of the staff (stronger in non-instructional staff) believe that the school could be more effective and efficient in their use of current support resources and the biggest issue they face is deficit thinking and a reluctance to address blind spots about equity. There is another portion of the staff (stronger among instructional staff) that Olive is underfunded and under-resourced, when compared to other schools in Novato, and that they are doing an exceptional job given this unfortunate reality.

All parties agreed that social and emotional support for students was inadequate.

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.

I recommend a collaborative dialogue with central office to factually address the perception of neglect and underfunding of Olive compared to other schools in the district. If true, the disparities should be addressed with more intentional support of Olive School and Olive students. If untrue, the Olive staff will be forced to take a look at the efficiency and effectiveness of their current systems.

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 in the feelings 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 was important areas of professional development as compared to what the teaching staff believes is important to consider for training and professional development. This difference in opinion appears to have skewed Olive teachers' opinion of district lead professional learning.

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 Olive can improve. I recommend a structured and focused dialogue between the Olive 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 Olive 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.

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

When asked about the strengths of Olive School, every interviewee used phrases like "doing what is best for children; committed and loyal staff; student-centered, and making student-centered decisions." It is admirable that the staff views this area as one of their primary strengths. It is a concern that the indicators of performance show an alarming set of disparities in the areas of ELA and math along the lines of race, poverty, disability, and home language.

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. This narrative does not compliment the description of the staff as "student-centered" and "child advocates"

Recommendations:

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

Professional development in the areas of collective teacher efficacy and parental partnerships would help shape the collective ideology of the Olive staff in the area of advocacy. Often educators do not understand the power of their advocacy and how they can influence the effective advocacy of parents and the community.

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Summary

The school culture at Olive Elementary is similar to schools with the same structure and makeup. The professional staff appear to truly value their school and their students. The curricular and instructional expertise of the staff appear to be stellar. White and Asian students tend to thrive at high levels academically, but Latino students, students of poverty, and students with disabilities tend to perform much worse. The staff appears to have some philosophical difference about how to create equity and this disagreement is hindering the impact of current structures and it is an obstacle to the future development of better structures. 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. 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. Though the staff appears to be very congenial and affable, there are deep philosophical divides that need to be confronted to advance the equity agenda. *Fragility* and *denial* about the presence and cause of achievement disparities appear to exist at Olive, and I recommend consulting best practice to confront and remove these barriers.

- The perception about the effectiveness of professional resources and professional development needs to be explored. The survey area with the biggest disparity was in this area. An open dialogue between central office and Olive staff members will get down to the root of the problem in order to build consensus about genuine and concrete concerns about training and building capacity.

- 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, aligns resources, and monitors and reports progress is essential to improve achievement gaps that have been static for years.

- Cultural proficiency and responsiveness can improve relatively quickly if made a school wide priority. The school environment, curriculum, and instructional material do not reflect the diversity of the student population. Awareness, and a strategic and intentional focus in this area is usually sufficient to improve this area.

- Focus heavily on the strategic implementation of the PLC process. Interviews revealed that the staff in general had a healthy perception of PLC, but I am concerned that they do not understand the process and the interdependence of the 4 PLC Questions. Meeting and PLC are not synonymous. I suggest picking a grade level to a deep PLC dive, and using them as a pilot for scaling up to school wide implementation.

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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

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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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