

# TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

## School Equity Audit

**Rancho Elementary School**

**Novato, CA**

October 2021



## What is a School Equity Audit?

A school equity audit is an in depth analysis of the readiness and commitment of a school as it relates to equity in student achievement. A commitment to equity is an important part of a school's culture. Most schools claim openly their commitment to serving "all" children, and this audit analyzes the depth of commitment to that claim.

A **healthy school culture** is defined as "A school with an unwavering belief in the ability of each student to achieve success, and they articulate that belief to others in overt and covert ways. Healthy school cultures create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student" (Peterson, 2003). This report is designed to provide tangible evidence concerning a school's commitment to equity through its **policies, practices, and procedures (formal culture)**; and **beliefs and perceptions (informal culture)**. The combination of health in both areas constitutes a healthy school culture, therefore increasing the likelihood of equitable student outcomes. Inconsistency or toxicity in either area indicates a need for growth.

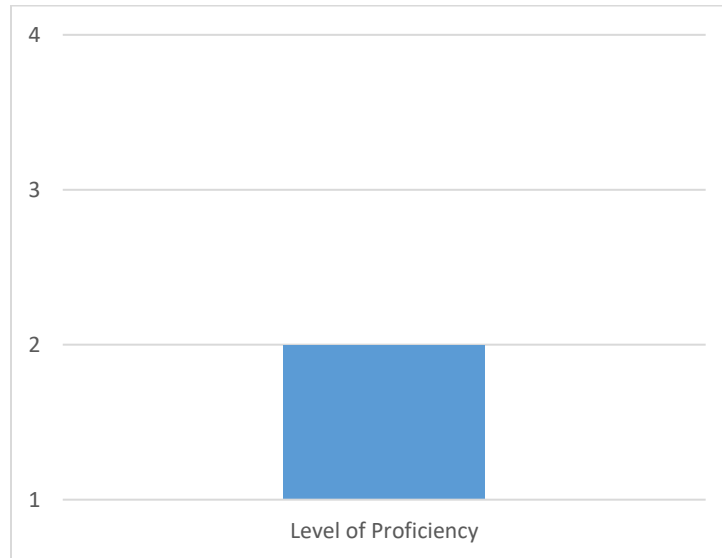
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative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

## Policies, Practices, and Procedures

Indicator 1	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School has openly discussed, defined, and committed to student equity and access</p>	<p>Evidence exists that diversity and inclusion is an essential part of practice and systems</p> <p>School engages in continuous learning to improve the impact of their practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion</p> <p>School constantly monitors evidence of impact on underserved student groups and makes real time adjustments to practice</p>	<p>Staff members can clearly define their common philosophy about equity and diversity and there is philosophical consensus</p> <p>Issues of equity are frequently discussed and the collaborative dialogue leads to change in practice</p> <p>Staff members are empathetic towards underserved student populations and are eager to change their practice to meet their needs</p>	<p>Staff members can express a few common core values with little philosophical disagreement about diversity and equity</p> <p>Issues of equity are occasionally discussed and analyzed, but it rarely leads to tangible change</p> <p>Staff members are empathetic towards underserved student populations, but it does not inspire substantive change</p>	<p>Staff members cannot express any of the school's core values and wide philosophical disagreement exists about diversity and equity</p> <p>Issues of equity and inclusion are taboo and avoided</p> <p>Staff members may become hostile or deflective if issues of fairness and equity are discussed or analyzed</p>

# Indicator 1

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

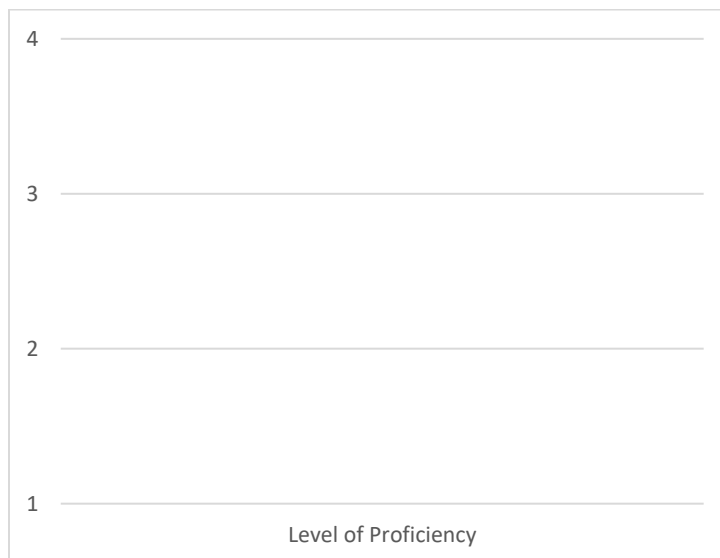


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination” clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- Some symbolic evidence of a philosophical commitment to equity (i.e. “Novato Stands United Against Hate” and “Everyone is Welcome Here”)
- Interviews revealed there is some residual philosophical disagreement about the decision to convert Rancho from an exclusive “lottery” school to a neighborhood school. Most report that most deficit thinking is communicated by staff members who wish the school was more selective than inclusive.

Indicator 2	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School regularly collects, analyzes, and acts upon equity data both academically and socially</p>	<p>School collects, analyzes, and openly shares disaggregated student performance data with all stakeholders including parents and the community</p> <p>School uses unpleasant student performance data to engage all school stake holders both internally and externally</p> <p>School staff members accept the validity of the performance data to inspire change in both their individual and collective practice, including parents and the community at-large</p>	<p>School seeks, embraces, and values the insight gained from disaggregated student performance data in their improvement efforts</p> <p>School staff members seek unpleasant student performance data to provide insight into critical areas of need for school improvement</p> <p>School staff members accept the validity of the performance data to inspire change in their individual practice</p>	<p>School recognizes the value of disaggregated student performance data, but does not collect it frequently</p> <p>School staff members accept unpleasant student performance data and are empathetic towards students from underserved student groups</p> <p>School staff members accept the validity of the performance data, but does not inspire them to change their practice</p>	<p>School does not recognize or value the need to collect and analyze disaggregated student performance data</p> <p>School staff members become hostile when presented with unpleasant student performance data</p> <p>School staff members challenge the validity of any performance data that does not validate current practice</p>

## Indicator 2

Rating: Level 1 Little to No Development and Implementation

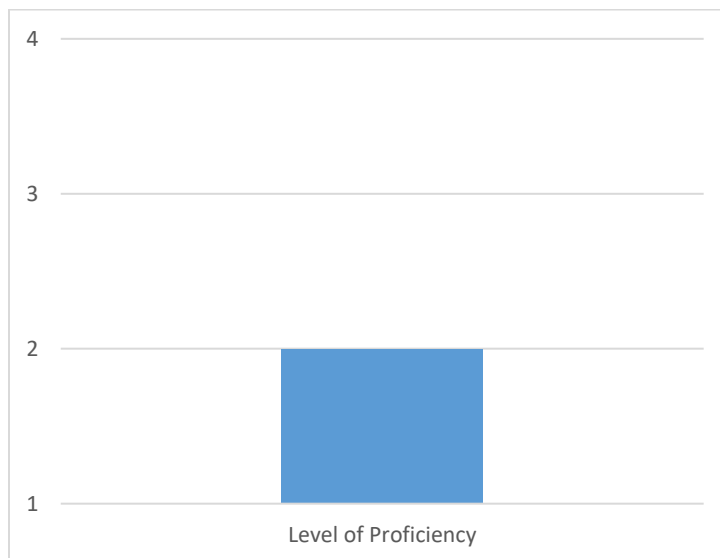


- California academic testing data shows that between 2016 – 2019, a gap in proficiency in both math and reading of at least 30% exists between Latino students and white students.
- California academic testing data shows that between 2016 – 2019, a gap in proficiency in both math and reading of near 40% exists between Latino students and Asian students.
- California academic testing data shows that between 2016 – 2019 students with disabilities outperformed Latino students and students of poverty in both math and reading.
- Interviews did not record one reference to the achievement disparities above, and a review of public records did not reveal any formal strategic plan to close these gaps.
- Interviews revealed that 80% of interviewees rated the school as **exemplary** in their pursuit of equity.

Indicator 3	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School engages in activities that seek to identify, assess, and confront personal and collective bias among staff members as it relates to equity and diversity</p>	<p>School staff accepts and does not challenge the concrete existence of bias and discrimination and it is willing to analyze and understand their personal and collective biases while engaging internal and external stakeholders</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias is considered progressive and the staff embraces the evidence, leading to concrete changes to policies and practices</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately stimulates intellectual dialogue focused on improving equity efforts and external stakeholders are included</p>	<p>School staff accepts and does not challenge the concrete existence of bias and discrimination and is collectively willing to analyze and understand their personal and collective biases</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias is considered progressive and the staff embraces the evidence in its attempt to improve equitable student outcomes</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately stimulates intellectual dialogue focused on improving equity efforts</p>	<p>School staff generally accepts that bias exists both consciously and unconsciously but is generally uncomfortable with analyzing it personally or collectively</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias will result in enlightenment, but rarely change in practice or behavior</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately results in discomfort, but generally stimulates self-reflection and empathy</p>	<p>School staff believes that they are individually and collectively free of bias and any attempt to assess this reality is personally and professionally disrespectful</p> <p>Any attempt to reveal or confront institutional bias results in hostility towards the initiator</p> <p>Discussion of bias openly or privately results in deep discomfort and potentially hostility</p>

## Indicator 3

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation



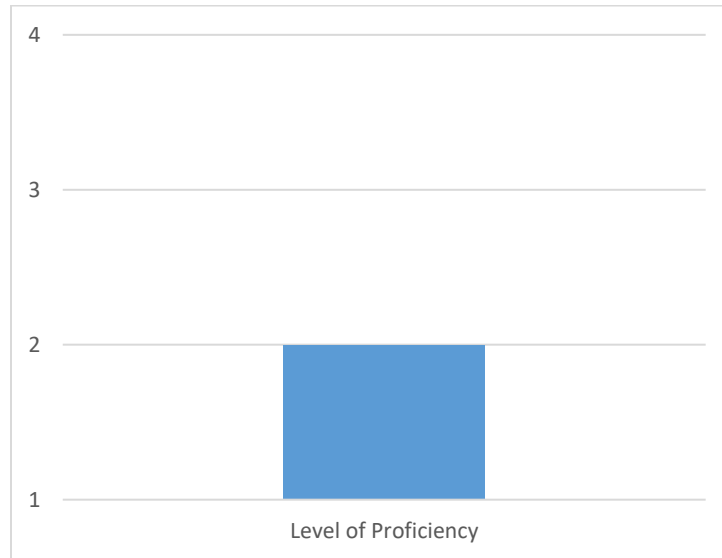
- Interviews revealed that many teachers have high expectations of student performance. It was also clear that many felt it was the administration’s job to make students adhere to those expectations instead of earning engagement and stimulating intrinsic motivation.
- Interviews revealed that many staff members feel that Rancho’s comparative performance to other schools in Novato (generally higher) can produce a culture of complacency and satisfaction and make uncomfortable or challenging conversations more difficult. This reality provides a shield for some and justifies avoiding conversations about equity and inclusion
- Interviews revealed that professional development offered at the school and district level has not properly prepared them or challenged them in the areas of improving their practice to respond to a diverse student population.
- Interviews revealed that some staff members are appalled by some of the private conversations overheard from some of their colleague that some described as “racist, xenophobic, and privileged.” The willingness to confront these types of ideologies appears to be a significant obstacle to a true focus on equity.



Indicator 4	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
<p>School invests in professional development and other resources that improve the capacity of educators to improve their practices to serve diverse populations and improve equitable outcome</p>	<p>School leadership recognizes that improving staff capacity in practices that improve equity and inclusion are essential to the school's core improvement efforts and allocates significant resources to improve teacher capacity in these areas and they regularly collect data to analyze the impact of their investments in teacher capacity and practice</p> <p>School staff embraces training to improve their individual and collective practice in the areas of equity and inclusion, and they view the training and resources as vital to the school's improvement efforts and they regularly collect data to monitor the impact of the changes in their individual and collective practice</p>	<p>School leadership recognizes that improving staff capacity in practices that improve equity and inclusion are essential to the school's core improvement efforts and allocates significant resources to improve teacher capacity in these areas</p> <p>School staff embraces training to improve their individual and collective practice in the areas of equity and inclusion, and they view the training and resources as vital to the school's improvement efforts</p>	<p>School leadership recognizes the need to promote practices that improve equity and inclusion as important, and provides limited resources or isolated opportunities dedicated to improving teacher capacity in these areas</p> <p>School staff is open to training to improve practice in the areas of equity and inclusion, but they do not recognize the need to develop in these areas as essential and view the training opportunities are novel or non-essential</p>	<p>School leadership does not view practices that promote equity and inclusion as important and little to no resources are dedicated to improving teacher capacity in these areas</p> <p>School staff does not value training to promote practice in the areas of equity and inclusion and can become hostile when presented with professional development or resources</p>

## Indicator 4

Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Development

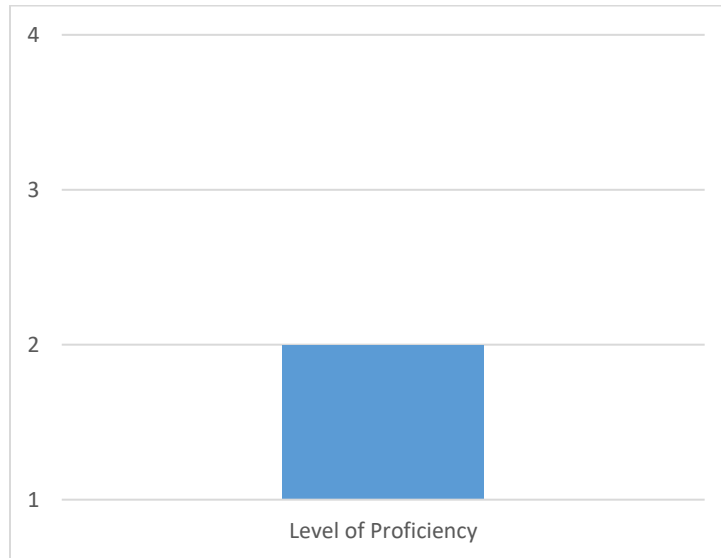


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Staff interviews and surveys revealed that school 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. Some described discussing issues like privilege, immigration and language issues, and race tend to cause more division than unity, so therefore they are generally avoided.

Indicator 5	4 Exemplary Level of Development and Implementation	3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation	2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation	1 Little to No Development and Implementation
School community engages in action research in their attempt to promote equity and inclusion	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion are addressed strategically and professionals collaborate and implement substantive changes to policies and practices and both internal and external stakeholders are included in the discussion and implementation phases</p> <p>Suggestions or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion is based upon concrete evidence and research and the staff fully and sincerely engages at both the individual and institutional levels and data is collected on a frequent basis to inform the impact of the experimentation</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion are addressed strategically and professionals collaborate and implement substantive changes to policies and practices</p> <p>Suggestions or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion is based upon concrete evidence and research and the staff fully and sincerely engages at both the individual and institutional levels</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion result in surface-level or non-invasive experimentation that results in no substantive change in student outcomes</p> <p>Suggestions or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion results general curiosity and partial investment at both the individual and institutional levels</p>	<p>Issues and concerns about equity and inclusion stay at the conversational phase and never translate into change of policy or practice.</p> <p>Suggestion or attempts to change individual or collective practice in the promotion of equity and inclusion are met with resistance at both the individual and institutional levels</p>

## Indicator 5

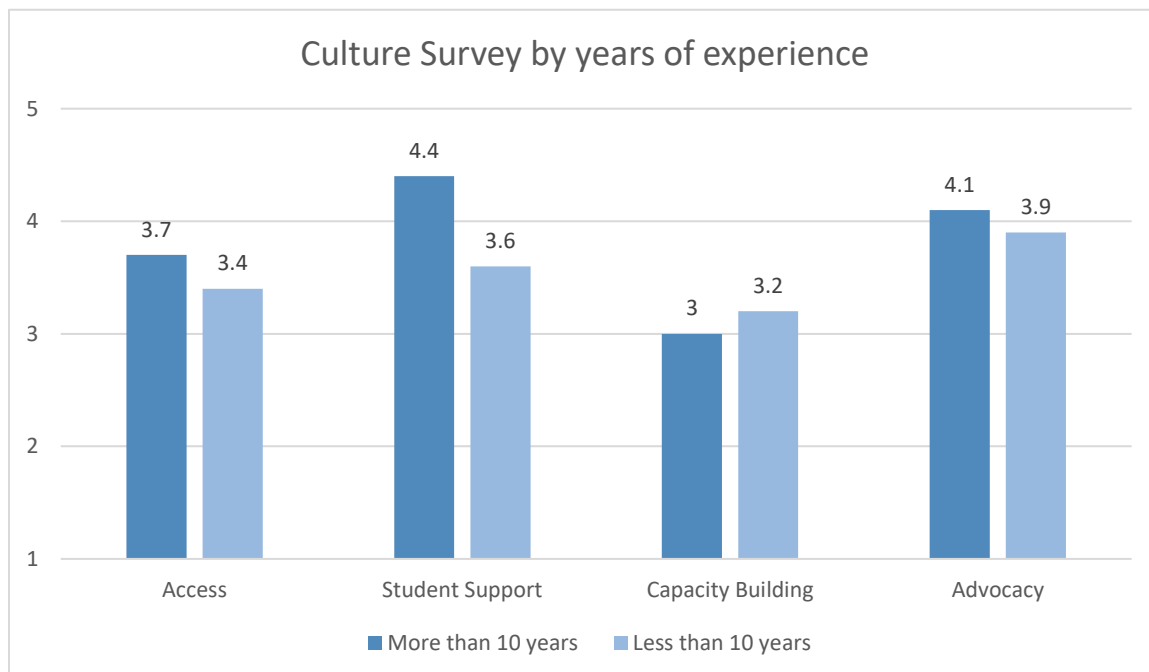
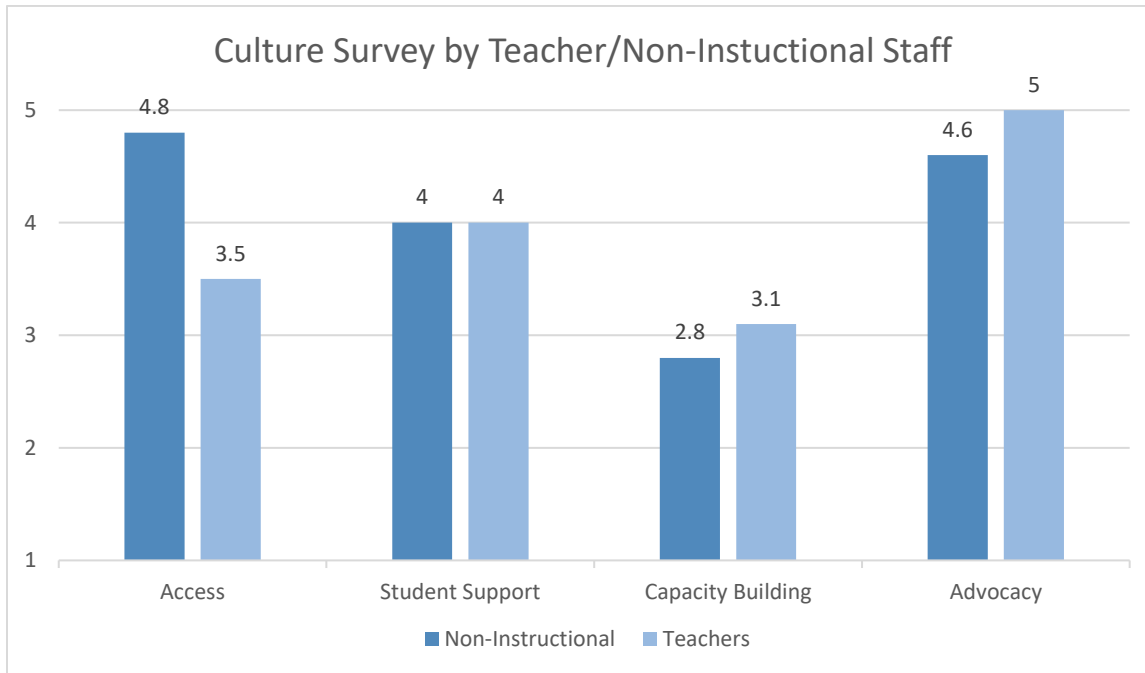
Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation



- School achievement data would reveal that most Rancho students thrive academically. Teachers appear to have a strong knowledge of the curriculum and generally effective instructionally.
- Systems of student support and intervention exist, and students are strategically identified and provided extra time and academic and social support.
- Interviews revealed that teachers are concerned that most of their students identified for extra time and support are student of color. There was also concern voiced about this issue not being openly discussed.
- Though several systems of student academic support exists, there was no data reviewed that validated in achievement disparities, especially for students of color and students of poverty.

# 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 in perceptions about student access to rigorous opportunities. Non-instructional staff members rated this area much higher than classroom teachers.

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

Interviews revealed a deep philosophical divide among the teaching staff concerning access and opportunities for students of color. While many teachers felt that the school was doing all that it could to provide opportunities for all students, others cited experiences of overt racist and xenophobic dialogue among their peers.

Though many interviewees stated a general philosophical agreement with expanding opportunities, many teachers expressed concern that students of color and students of poverty dominated their lower track and intervention groups. I could not find data to validate or refute this claim.

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.

Open and productive discussion about philosophical differences, with the goal of achieving some form of consensus, is one of the essential characteristics of a healthy culture. Differences of opinion about race, social class, immigration status, and other critical student experiences can have a profoundly negative effect on students. Reaching consensus about mitigating those differences and creating a united front will advance the cause of equity.

# Student Support

## Key Findings:

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

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

Grave concerns about the student's social and emotional needs were articulated by all stakeholders interviewed, coupled with a concern with the lack of social and emotional support staff members to meet these escalating needs. Counselor and counseling services were identified as critical needs by nearly all interviewed parties.

RTI was often described as inadequate and in need of overhaul. Many felt that a systemic revamp and a serious change in approach are necessary, especially because most of the students identified for support were students of color.

## 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 perception 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 Rancho 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 Rancho can improve. I recommend a structured and focused dialogue between the Rancho 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 Rancho to the next level of performance.



# Advocacy

## Key Findings:

The survey results revealed a significant gap in perception between teachers and non-instructional staff, with teachers viewing this area more favorably than non-instructional staff.

Interviews revealed that teachers commonly describe themselves as “highly knowledgeable”, “highly collaborative”. “willing to do whatever it takes.” Though I do not doubt the truth or authenticity of these statements, the facts remain that tremendous achievement gaps between students have existed for at least the last five years without any signs of a positive trend towards equity.

Interviews revealed that most staff members believe that the principal is very equity minded and is truly concerned about all students.

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.

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:

The development of a strategic, data-driven, continuous school improvement protocol is essential to improve in this area. The staff at Rancho 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. Being genuinely concerned about student well-being is not synonymous for advocacy and positive impact.

## Summary

The school culture at Rancho is generally a culture of high student expectations. The teaching and administrative staff appear to be very knowledgeable and most students thrive academically and socially. There are some philosophical, structural, and pedagogical concerns as it pertains to their collective pursuit of student equity. 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.
- The systemic commitment to gather, analyze, and respond to concrete evidence of student equity should provide a major boost to the school's equity efforts. Everyone appears to be philosophically open to the concept of equity, but no one that I interviewed could concretely communicate their progress, or lack of progress, towards their equity goals.
- The development of a powerful guiding coalition of teachers and administrators, that organizes evidence of performance, makes short-term and long-term achievement goals, and aligns resources, and monitors and reports progress is essential to improve achievement indicators that have been stagnant 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. Collectively moving beyond the school's history as a "lottery" school, and accepting and embracing the current reality will help the school embrace the students that they have, instead of lamenting over the loss of the students that they used to have.
- 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.
- 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.

# 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

