

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

School Equity Audit

San Jose Middle 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.

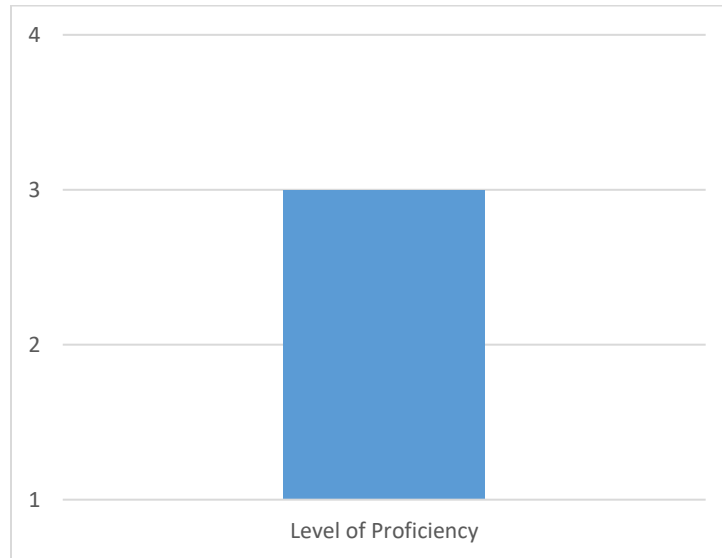
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative 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 3 Fully Functional

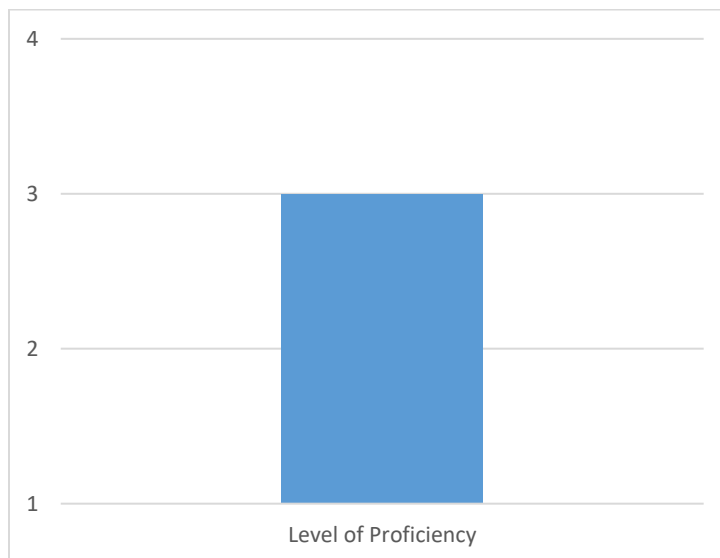


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination” clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- School has produced and published a comprehensive school improvement plan with a focus on equity and targeted improvement. The plan appears to be data-driven and includes survey data and action items intended to tangibly improve school performance in very specific areas.
- A review of the state academic achievement data reveals that the achievement gaps at San Jose are very large and persistent. They are widest in the areas of race, socio-economic status, and students with disabilities.

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

Indicator 2

Rating: Level 3 Fully Functional and Operational of Development and Implementation

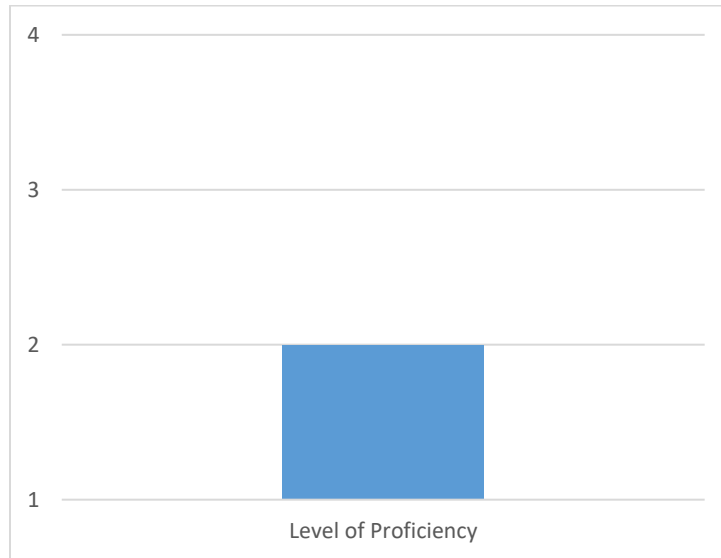


- School seems to have an active and engaged School Site Council.
- Evidence of a comprehensive plan to measure current realities (both academically and socially), reflect on strategies and systems, and set specific improvement goals exists and is published for public review and consumption.
- School appears to gather evidence on student performance in multiple areas and analyzes that data and considers it when making decisions.
- Though San Jose appears to have produced a system of collecting and analyzing equity data, the evidence of student performance has shown that achievement and opportunity gaps for students of color appear to be very robust and persistent.
- 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 reading and Asian students in math.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 60% in proficiency on state reading achievement tests for African-American when compared to white students, and 60% when compared to Asian students in math over the same period of time.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, students with disabilities and students of poverty outperformed African-American and Latino students in reading on state achievement tests.

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

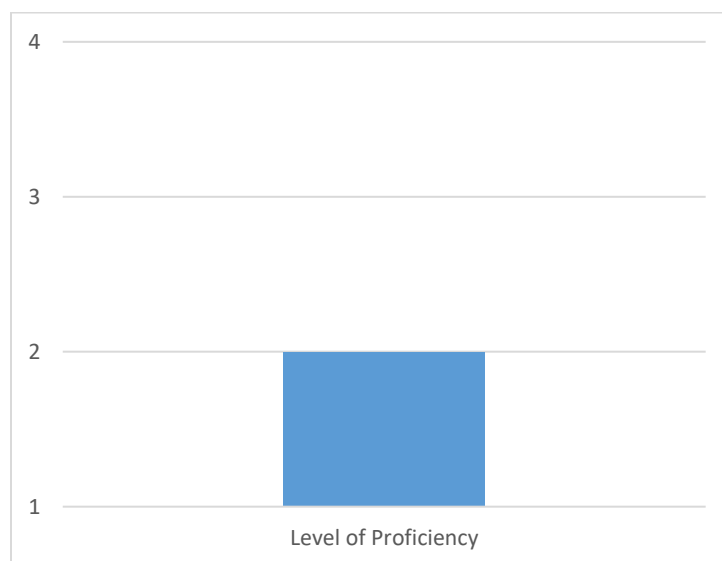


- School collects data and student and parental perceptions and addresses the feedback in the form of a formal plan, with goals, objectives, and strategic initiatives.
- Interviews revealed that many staff members are frustrated because it appears that the rhetoric of equity is not translated into practical application. Most interviewees were open and philosophically agreeable to the concept of equity, but many viewed this task as external (parents, students, or district) instead of their professional obligation.
- School has engaged in experimentation aimed at disrupting inequity, including Scorpion Success, Homework Support, and intervention classes. These systems will struggle to produce equity if they are not implemented within an environment of high teacher efficacy.
- Interviews revealed that the staff believes that the current principal and leadership team are very equity minded and that they push their thinking about fairness and equity on a regular basis. Some interviewees voiced concerned that not all staff members are comfortable or even agree with challenging traditional ideologies and strongly held beliefs about historically underserved students.

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

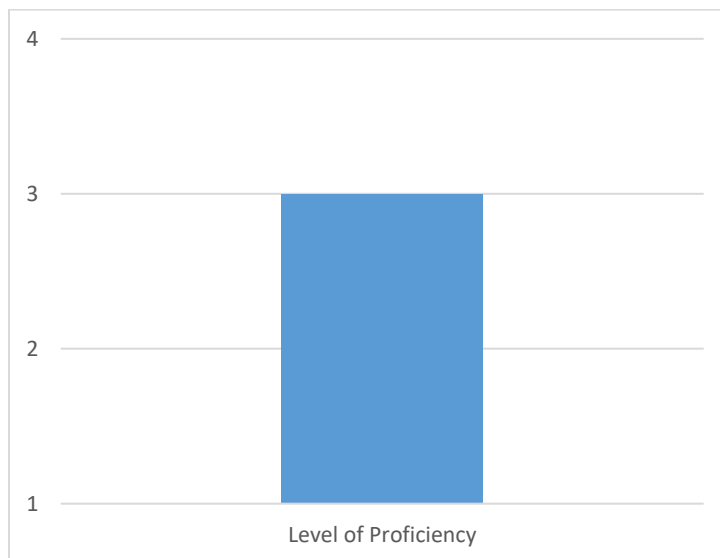


- Interviews revealed that many teachers have high expectations of student performance. It was also clear that many felt it was the administration's job to make students adhere to those expectations instead of earning engagement and stimulating intrinsic motivation through professional practice.
- School/District investment in professional development is abundant, but most felt they did not push or disrupt the issues of deficit thinking and unconscious bias. Many also expressed the difficulty of trying to attend meaningful professional development experiences offered after school or on their personal time.
- Interviews revealed that some teachers passively 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).
- Interviews revealed that some staff members observe micro-aggressions among some of their peers if subject matters deal with race, poverty, immigration, or parent involvement if it does not match their political or social belief systems. They reported that this reality undermines the potential effectiveness of equity strategies before they are even implemented.

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
<p>School community engages in action research in their attempt to promote equity and inclusion</p>	<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

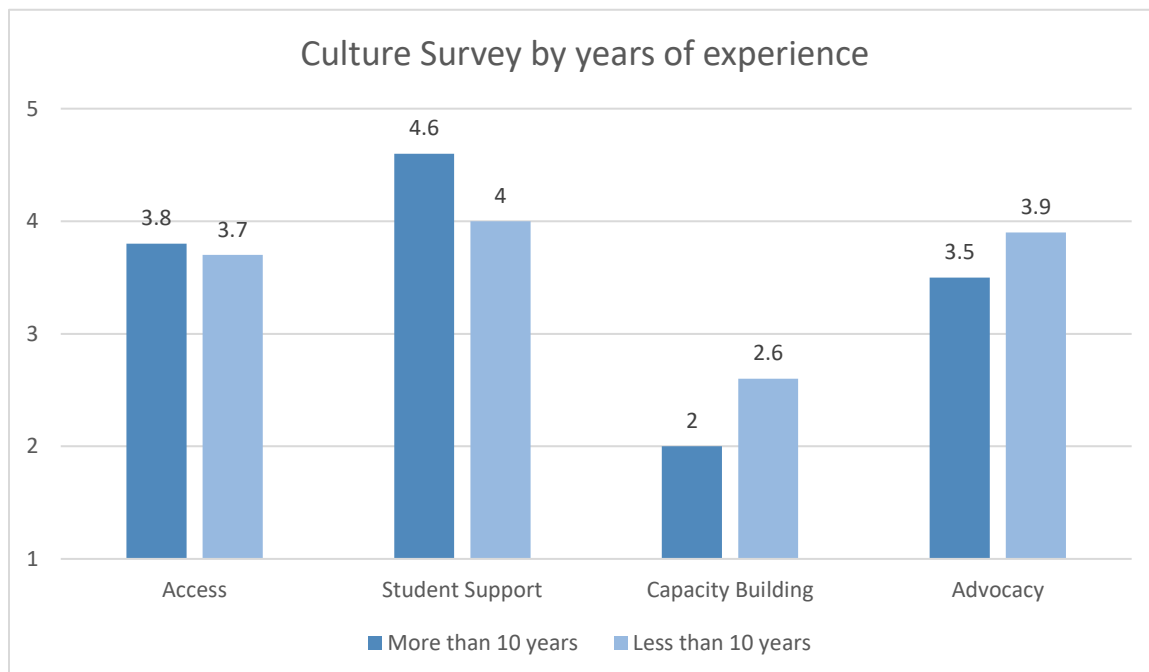
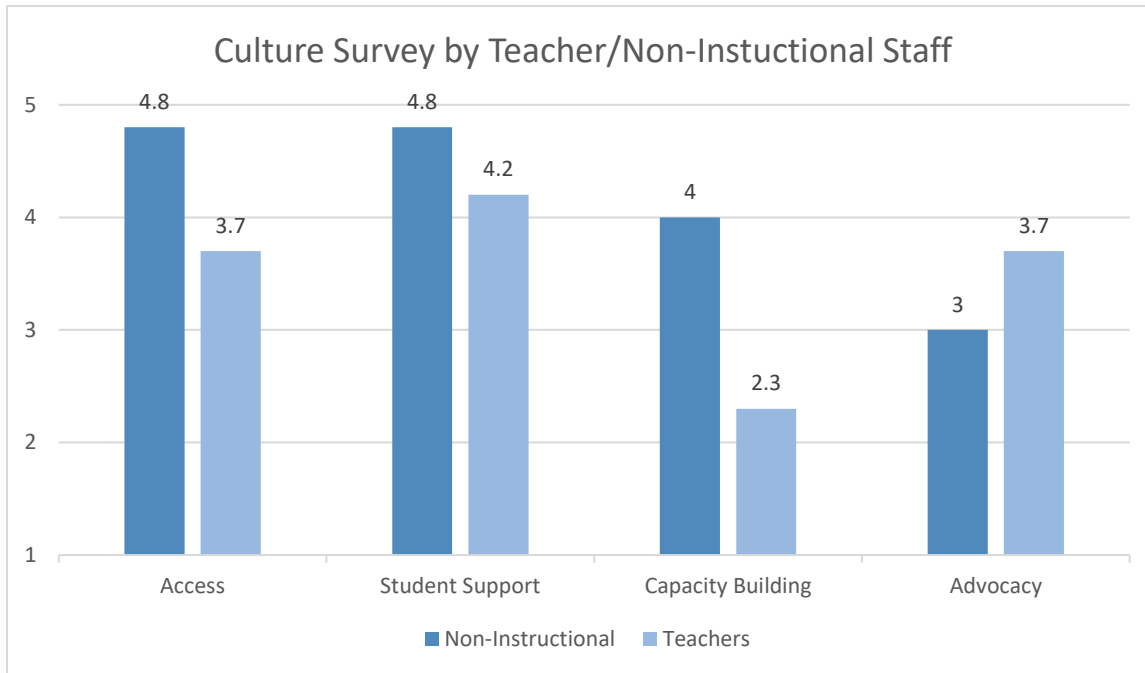
Rating: Level 3 Fully Functional and Operational Level of Development and Implementation



- School collects data and student and parental perceptions and addresses the feedback in the form of a formal plan, with goals, objectives, and strategic initiatives.
- School website features innovations like Spanish-Speaking San Jose moms engaged in cultural activities to enrich the experience of students.
- School improvement plan identifies specific areas of action and plans to promote diversity and equity and improve equitable learning outcomes.
- Despite all of the infrastructure that has been thoughtfully developed and implemented, the academic achievement gaps at San Jose are alarmingly high. The next level of improvement is to facilitate professional dialogue about impact that stimulates self-reflection and engagement in improvement of current plans or the production of brand new plans and interventions.

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 between perceptions of student access to rigorous opportunities with non-instructional staff rating this area more favorably than instructional staff members.

Interviews revealed that non-instructional staff members tended to believe that students should receive unrestricted access to rigorous academic opportunities as a strategy to improve the school's equity focus. Teachers tended to believe that student access to rigorous academic opportunities should be conditional based upon effort, interest, and demonstration of competence.

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

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. I would recommend openly discussing the data and creating some very tight norms about disagreement. Conflicting ideologies and subversive disagreement appear to be major barriers to tangible progress in student equity.

Maintaining a positive climate and a healthy school culture are not mutually exclusive ideas. Although, on a path of growth to becoming a healthy school culture, there will be a few "climate" bumps in the road. The most important conversations are sometimes the hardest, but when we all have the same goal (All Means All) we can move beyond the conversation.

Student Support

Key Findings:

A significant gap exists between perceptions about the effectiveness of student support efforts and systems, with non-instructional staff rating this area more favorably than instructional staff members.

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.

Non-instructional staff members were more specific and comprehensive in their description of school support services and appeared to be generally more optimistic.

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:

A significant gap exists between perceptions of professional capacity and professional development with non-instructional staff rating this area more favorably than instructional staff members.

This was the lowest recorded area among teachers. A year of virtual instruction and the challenge of re-socializing students who have been away from a physical school environment for over a year has produced a stress issue. Many teachers expressed that they are not opposed to training and professional support to improve their impact on students, but many felt that they were on the verge of burnout and strategic training was a secondary priority.

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 training during school and many cited issues with child care and personal obligations which restrict their ability to take advantage of after-school learning opportunities.

Non-instructional staff interviews revealed that they felt fortunate to have the resources and professional support they currently receive and the school’s improvement efforts would advance if the staff was more optimistic and engaged with professional growth opportunities.

Recommendations:

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

Advocacy

Key Findings:

A significant gap exists between perceptions about staff advocacy, with instructional staff rating this area more favorably than non-instructional staff members.

Interviews revealed that most staff members believe that they are robust child advocates, but they could not pinpoint any specific act of advocacy academically nor could they cite any evidence about positive impact. It appears that the instructional staff at San Jose are genuinely concerned about the academic and social well-being of their students, but the concern has not translated into effective and tangible advocacy.

Interviews with non-instructional staff revealed some frustration with lukewarm implementation of improvement efforts. The consensus shared was that the staff's understanding and commitment to their collective efficacy is generally symbolic and ceremonial. Many expressed a desire to truly reform school traditional systems and practices, but they were concerned about the level of consensus among the faculty.

Recommendations:

San Jose has produced and published a comprehensive data driven plan to improve their culture and practice to promote equity. Interviews revealed that there is not collective enthusiasm or agreement about formal plans nor is there a universal understanding of the statistical impact of the plan. I recommend a regular, data-driven dialogue and review of school improvement with a strong focus on data.

I recommend that the staff read and discuss Lorna Earl and Steven Katz's book, ***Leading Schools in a Data Rich World***, as a handbook for facilitating data-driven school improvement discussions.

Summary

The school culture at San Jose Middle School appears to be trending in the right direction in the areas of equity and inclusion. School leadership gathers evidence, reflects on current realities, and makes concrete plans for school improvement. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of evidence of positive impact as of yet. 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.
- Create a professional development plan that is directly linked to the indicators of student equity so that the staff will intrinsically understand the necessity of specific changes.
- I recommend a school wide focus on increasing the staff's data literacy as it relates to indicators of student performance and training in school improvement frameworks to create a structure for effective school improvement.
- I recommend the strategic implementation and monitoring of current initiatives like Restorative Justice. Frameworks and strategies have been produced, but there is little evidence of impact.
- Cultural proficiency and responsiveness can improve relatively quickly if made a school wide priority. The school environment, curriculum, and instructional material do not reflect the diversity of the student population. Awareness, and a strategic and intentional focus in this area is usually sufficient to improve this area.
- Focus heavily on the strategic implementation of the PLC process. Interviews revealed that the staff in general had a healthy perception of PLC, but I am concerned that they do not understand the process and the interdependence of the 4 PLC Questions. Meeting and PLC are not synonymous.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. I believe that students should be given unlimited access to advanced academic opportunities.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

2. I believe that the teaching staff is most responsible for providing academic support.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

3. I feel that I receive proper training before being asked to implement changes to my practice.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

4. It is the school staff's obligation to advocate for change when serving underachieving students.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

5. Special education students deserve the same opportunities as regular education students.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

6. When students fail to meet academic expectations, the staff should organize interventions.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

7. We have a strong system of teacher training and development.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

8. If we feel strongly about a policy or innovative practice that is more beneficial for the student body; we should implement that policy, even if there is strong internal or external opposition.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

9. We should consistently review our performance data and strategically plan to provide more access to opportunity for underrepresented student groups.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

10. When a student fails to show adequate growth, we should first reflect on our practice.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

11. Our school invests in teacher development and resources that support student learning.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

12. Our faculty speaks with one voice and student learning dominates our professional dialogue.

5

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

Demographic Information:

I have been an educational professional for :

- 0-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21+ years

Position:

- Classroom teacher
- Counselor
- Social Worker/Psychologist
- Instructional Aide
- Administrator