

# TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

## School Equity Audit

**San Ramon Elementary**

**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.

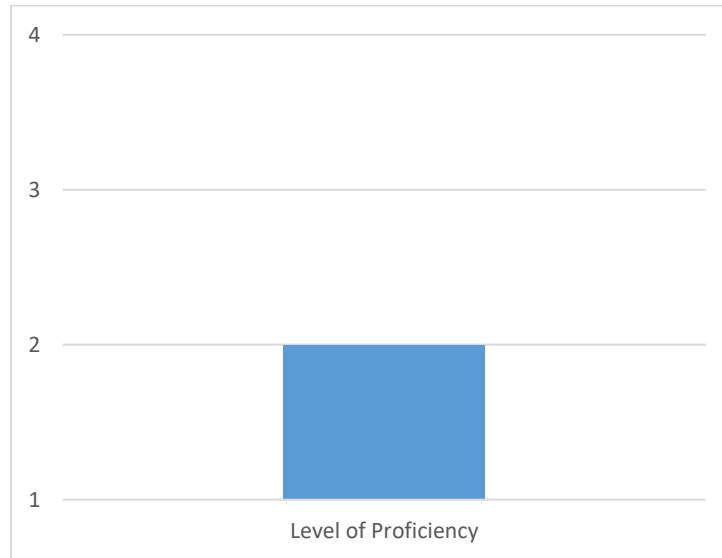
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative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

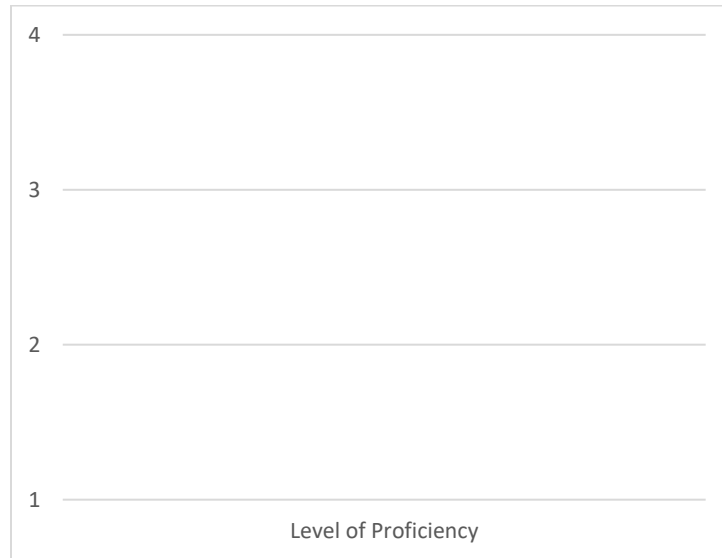


- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination Clause”
- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Interviews revealed that educators at San Ramon universally believe that students should have access to rigor and opportunity, but interviewees consistently voiced concern about access for English Learners and Students with Disabilities.
- Interviews revealed that the staff felt that they were trending in the right direction on equity and that they need more resources, particularly in the area of student intervention to fulfill that promise.
- Teachers of all experienced levels agreed that the school principal is an advocate for equity and actively pursues equity at San Ramon.

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 1 Little to No Development and Implementation

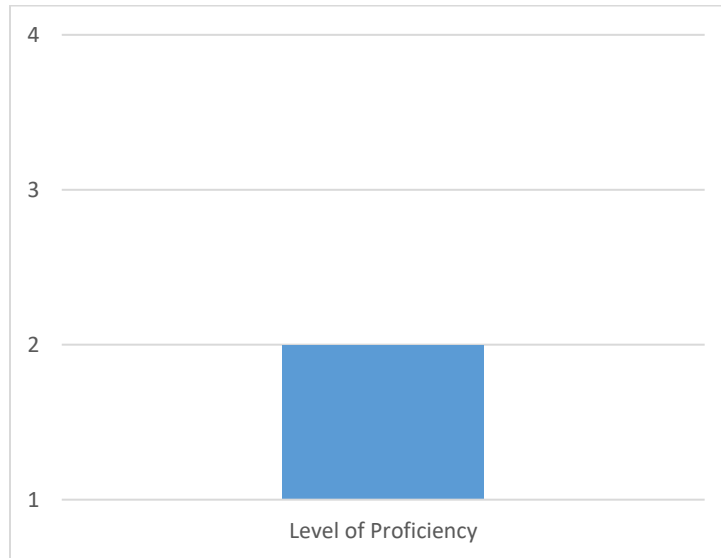


- State performance data between 2016 – 2019 show consistent achievement gaps in both math and reading between white and non-economically disadvantaged students compared to Latino students and students from economically disadvantaged homes. The gaps in proficiency have been at least 30% and no evidence could be found linking a strategic plan for improvement related to this data.
- State performance data between 2016 – 2019 show consistent achievement gaps for students with disabilities compared to students without an IEP. The gap has hovered around 40% and no evidence could be found linking a strategic plan for improvement related to this data.
- State performance showed that students with disabilities outperformed Latino students in reading, while white students of poverty outperformed Latino students over the last five years in both math and reading.
- Interviews reveal that every interviewee gave a favorable response when asked about equitable student opportunities and equity in student achievement, but none could articulate their current achievement reality in any concrete way.

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



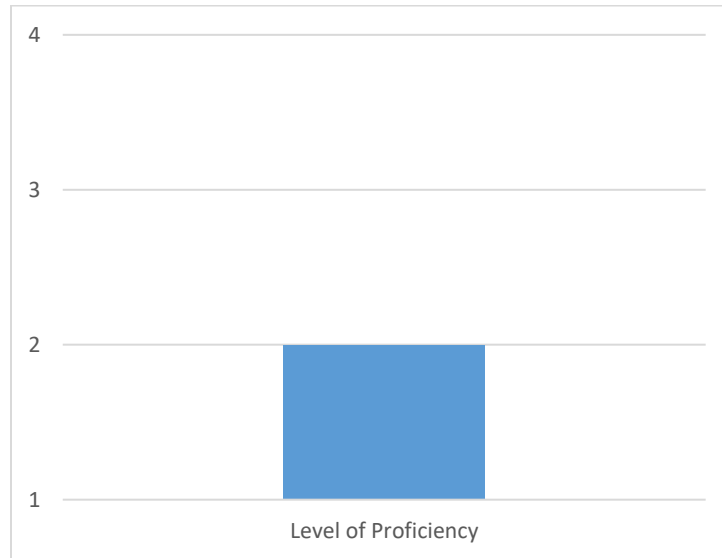
- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Staff interviews and surveys revealed that many staff members feel greatly unprepared to adequately respond to the diverse cultures and language needs of many of their students.
- Staff interviews revealed that many staff members believe that the fact that San Ramon consistently performs above the district and state average on standardized tests has created a sense of complacency.
- Staff interviews revealed that many staff members feel that the impact of “white privilege” is strong at San Ramon. Many informal conversations tend to focus on the deficits of students that do not achieve academic excellence and their families tend to be vilified and described as the root of their struggle.



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

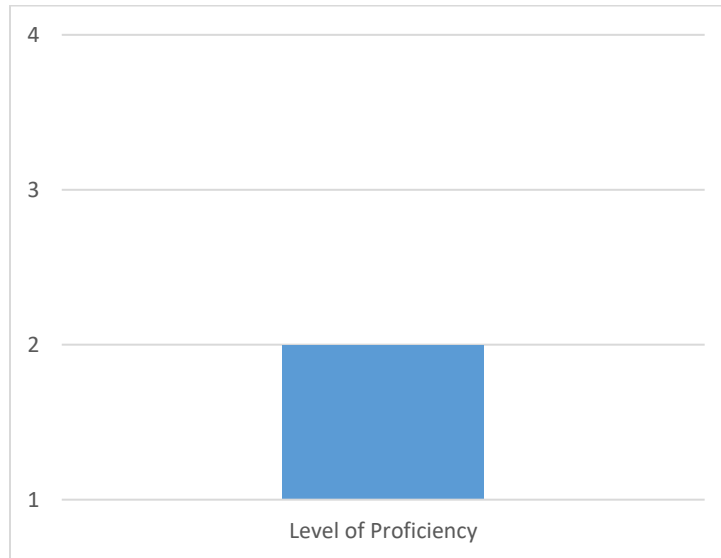


- Analysis of staff surveys revealed that their prime area of frustration in San Ramon’s diversity and inclusion efforts relate to issues of training and resources.
- Interviews revealed that professional development opportunities are abundant, but rarely substantively connect with diversity and inclusion efforts. Some stated that even when great opportunities for professional growth present themselves, they are typically after-school and child care and other personal logistics present a problem.
- A visit and review of the material in the school library reveal some intentional and deliberate attempts to promote diverse reading and learning material.
- School walkthrough revealed a formal acknowledgement of “Hispanic Heritage Month” and the presence of multi-lingual communications, celebrations, and student acknowledgment.

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

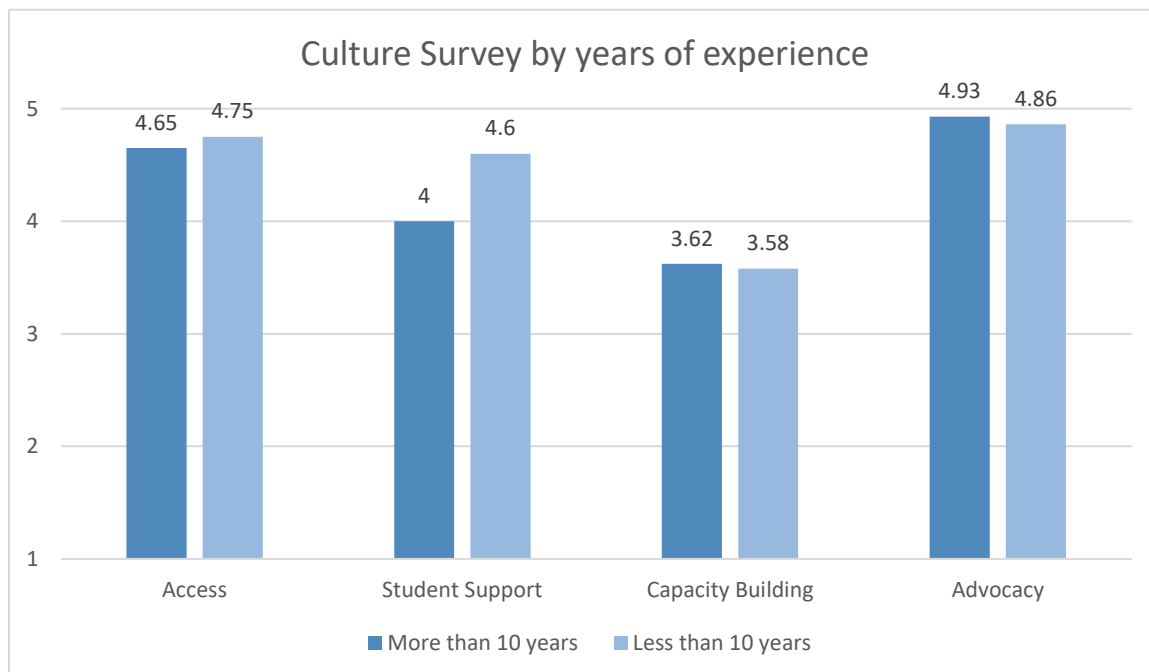
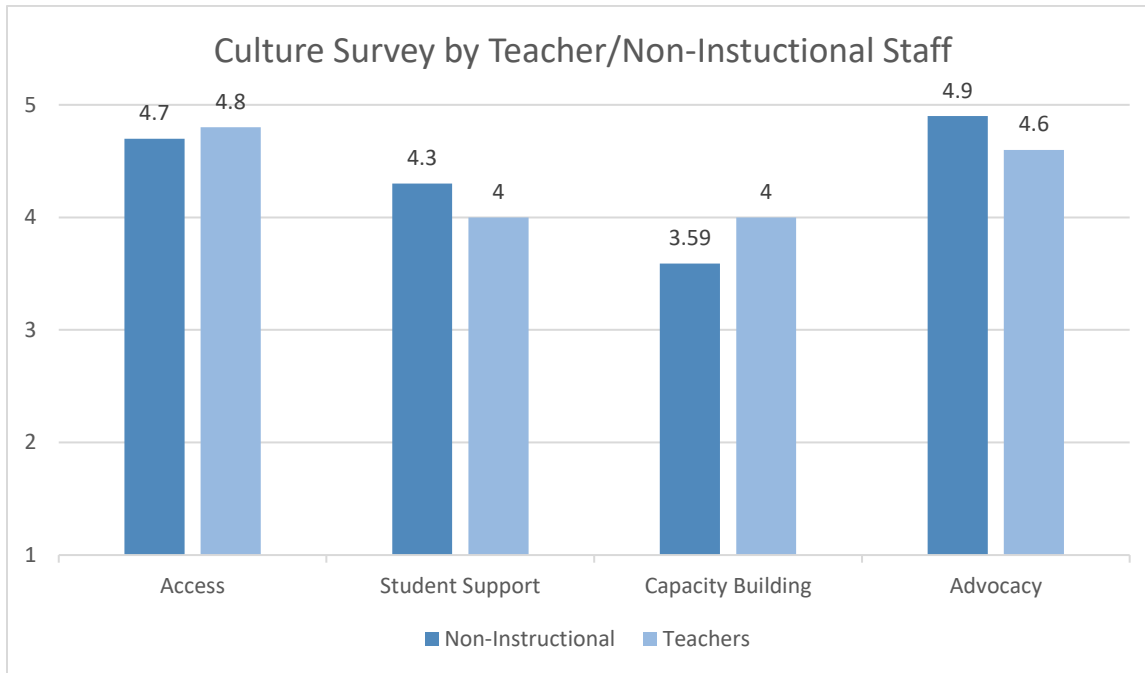
Rating: Level 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation



- School has engaged in restorative justice training, but there is little evidence of meaning implementation or data collected to monitor the impact.
- District diversity initiatives are written and outline specific action steps, but there is no data or evidence to confirm implementation.
- School professional staff appear to be very concerned about the resources necessary to properly implement an academic and behavioral intervention system for their students. Lack of resources and structure were cited as the top obstacles. This demonstrates that the staff understands their student's needs and desire more resources and support their existing systems and create new ones.
- State achievement data in both math and reading do not show a significant positive impact from the current intervention systems over at least the last five years.

## 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:

No significant gaps were found between instructional and non-instructional staff in the area of perceptions of student access to rigorous opportunities.

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

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

Maintaining a positive climate and a healthy school culture are not mutually exclusive ideas, a school can achieve both. 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’ll overcome the tough conversations. It will also accelerate unified implementation of school improvement decisions when everyone knows that topics will not be avoided. This is an important theme in this audit, and if acknowledged and addressed, can help your team unify.

# Student Support

## Key Findings:

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

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

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

RTI was often described as inadequate and in need of overhaul. Many felt that a systemic revamp and a serious change in approach is necessary.

Interviews revealed some concern about deficit thinking among staff members about students as it relates to race, poverty, and English mastery.

## Recommendations:

I recommend a renewed commitment to the PLC at Work process. Review the construction of collaborative teams and invest in time, training, and resources to get consensus on universal learning targets, formative assessment, and a system response to student academic or behavioral support needs. Without a framework, support will be random, suggestive, and largely ineffective.

**Courageous Conversations About Race** by Glenn Singleton will provide a basis for addressing different theories (both conscious and subconscious) about race and other constructs of deficit thinking. Developing the ability to get comfortable with these topics, for the benefit of students, will be very helpful in improving school culture.

# Capacity Building

## Key Findings:

The survey revealed no significant gap in perceptions about capacity building and professional support between instructional and non-instructional staff members.

This was the lowest recorded area, of all of the surveyed areas, and deserves attention. Many expressed a difference in opinion about what central office believed were important areas of professional development as compared to what the teaching staff believes are important to consider for training and professional development. This difference in opinion appears to have skewed San Ramon's 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 San Ramon can improve. I recommend a structured and focused dialogue between the San Ramon 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 Ramon to the next level of performance.



# Advocacy

## Key Findings:

The survey results reveal no significant gap in perception between teachers and non-instructional staff.

Interviews revealed that teachers, of all experience levels, tend to view monitoring of professional practice as “distrust” or “meddling.” The phrases “I wish that they would just trust the teachers, we are the experts” was a dominant theme in interviews. The lack of strategic improvement goals and efforts can intensify this type of vague and hyperbolic language. Monitoring feels like oppression if there are no universal achievement targets.

Interviews revealed that most staff members believe that they are robust child advocates, but they could not pinpoint any specific act of advocacy where their collective voice led to tangible change 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.

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

I recommend that the staff read and discuss Patrick Lencioni’s book ***The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*** to enhance their courage among their colleagues and to understand the natural challenges in creating a unified team, and ultimately a unified school.

## Summary

The school culture at San Ramon School does not appear to differ from the culture of schools of similar size, make-up, or demographic. The school staff is well-trained and highly knowledgeable in their subject matter and their students perform at or above the average academic performance of students in Novato USD and across the state of California. Equity appears to be a common philosophical desire, but data over the past five years do not correlate with effective equity strategies. 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:

- Gather disaggregated evidence of student performance in all critical areas and use it to design systems, strategies, and resources to truly achieve student equity
- 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 San Ramon staff members will get down to the root of the problem to separate legitimate concerns from power struggles.
- 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 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. Awareness, and a strategic and intentional focus in this area is usually sufficient to improve.
- Address deficit staff perceptions; especially as they relate to race, poverty, and disabilities. The staff appears to be in need of strategies to facilitate difficult and courageous conversations. The staff should be comfortable confronting ideologies that might hinder their optimistic perception of student capacity.
- 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

