

# TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

## School Equity Audit

**Sinaloa 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.

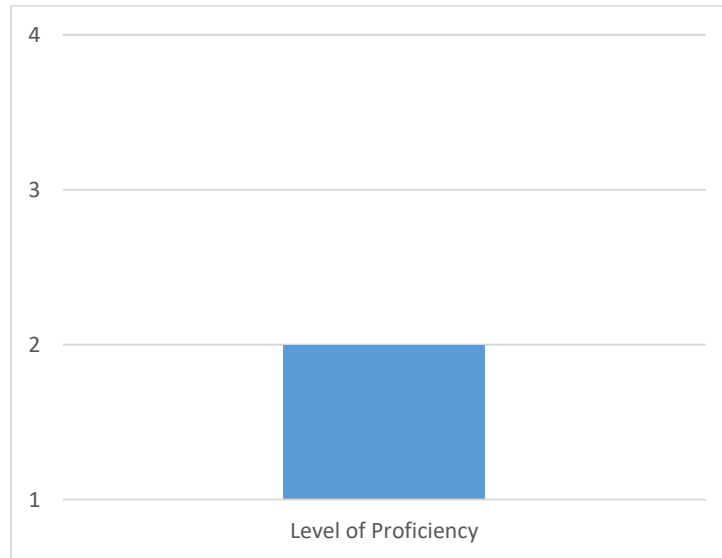
The formal culture will be rated on a four-point rubric for five different indicators, based upon data collected in various forms. The informal culture will be analyzed based upon a staff survey given to all professional staff members (see appendix A) and formal interviews conducted with a representative 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 2 Limited Development or Partial Implementation

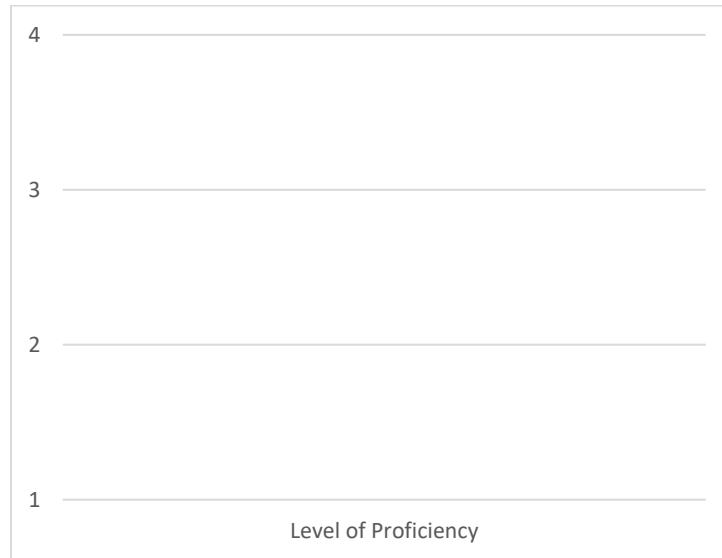


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- School website contains a “Non-Discrimination” clause.
- School website contains a link to Title IX Anti-Discrimination information.
- Some symbols of systemic commitment to inclusiveness exists (i.e. LGBTQ flag and symbols)
- Interviews revealed that both teachers and leadership are aware of pockets of lack of tolerance present within the ranks of professionals at Sinaloa. One interviewee described it as a battle between “equity warriors and equity deniers.” This kind of philosophical polarization can make equity planning and execution difficult.

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

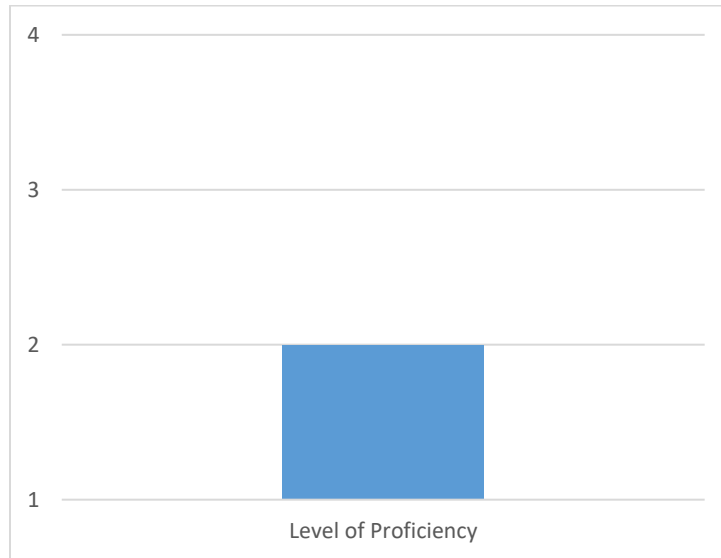


- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 30% in proficiency on state achievements tests for Latino students, when compared to white and Asian students, in both math and reading.
- The state of California reports that between 2016 – 2019, a gap of at least 50% in proficiency on state reading achievement tests for African-American students, and a gap of at least 40% in math achievement tests, when compared to white and Asian students 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 students in reading on state achievement tests.
- Interviews revealed that both teachers and non-instructional staff are at least anecdotally aware of the gross achievement disparities and many pointed to deep philosophical divides among the staff, and at the district level, concerning diversity and inclusion.

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



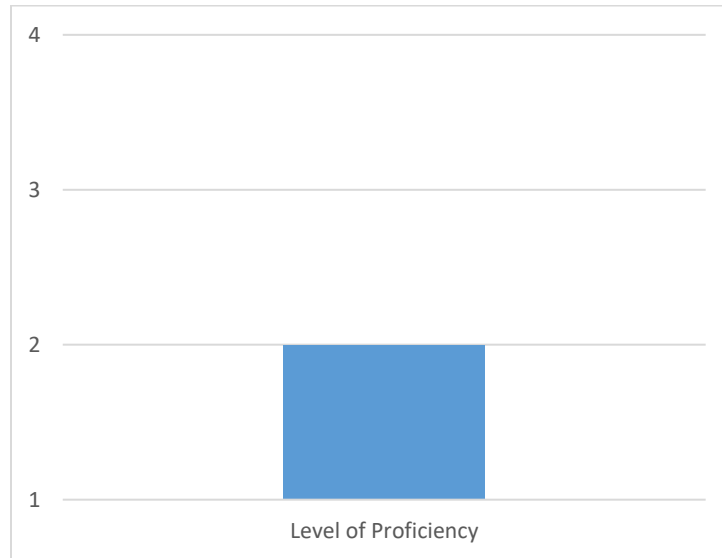
- Interviews revealed that many teachers have high expectations of student performance. It was also clear that many felt it was the administration's job to make students adhere to those expectations instead of earning engagement and stimulating intrinsic motivation through changing practice.
- Interviews revealed that a significant number of interviewees felt that some of their colleagues would not feel comfortable engaging in activities that would make them reflect on issues like race, income, and personal bias.
- Interviews revealed that some teachers passively 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).
- Gathering and publishing specific achievement data and strategic, long-term planning and monitoring of progress appears to be a critical need in order to improve on this indicator. People appear to be working hard and they seem very sincere, but have yet to meet the standards of strategic improvement.



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

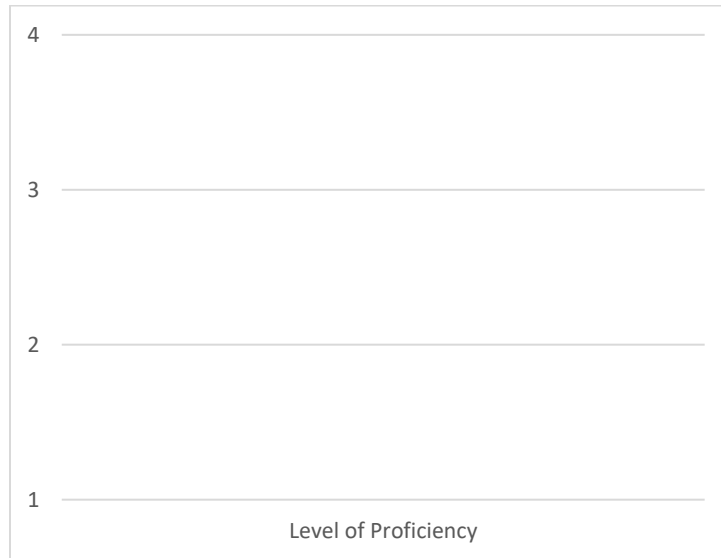


- School and district have invested in initiatives like Ethnic Studies curriculum and resolution, Equity Imperative, Anti-Racist Resolution, and Restorative Justice. Evidence of implementation or impact of any of these initiatives could not be found.
- Staff interviews and surveys revealed that school 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 at Sinaloa. Many described the new principal as “equity minded,” but he has yet to clearly establish his philosophical footprint at the school concerning diversity and equity in a way that has resulted in tangible change.

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

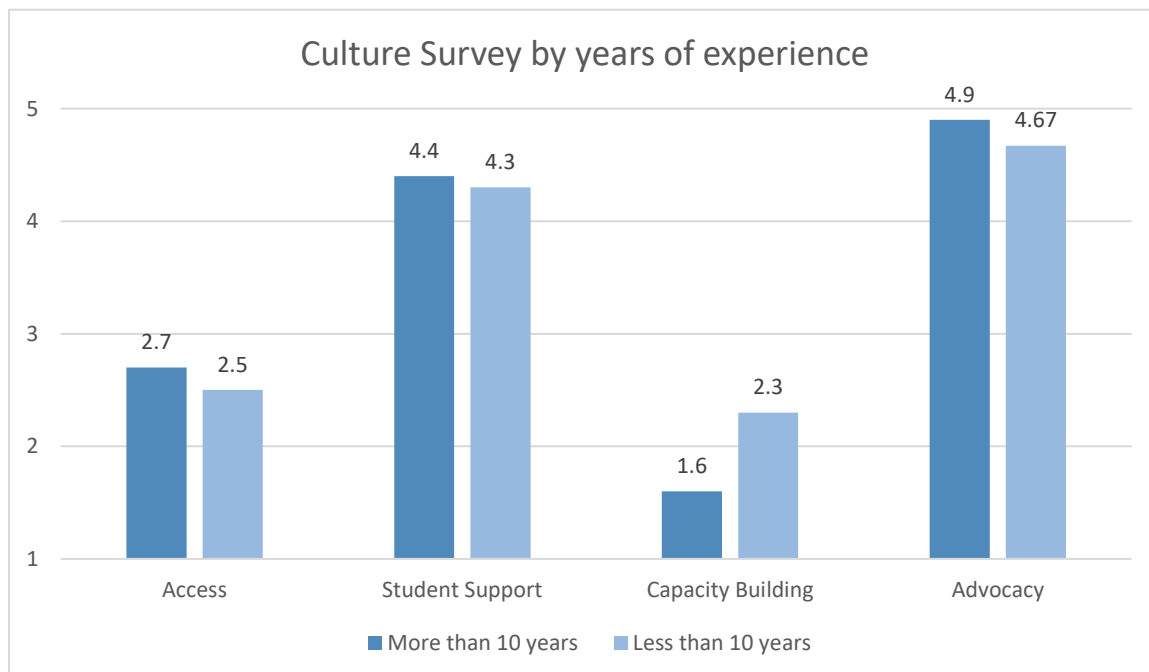
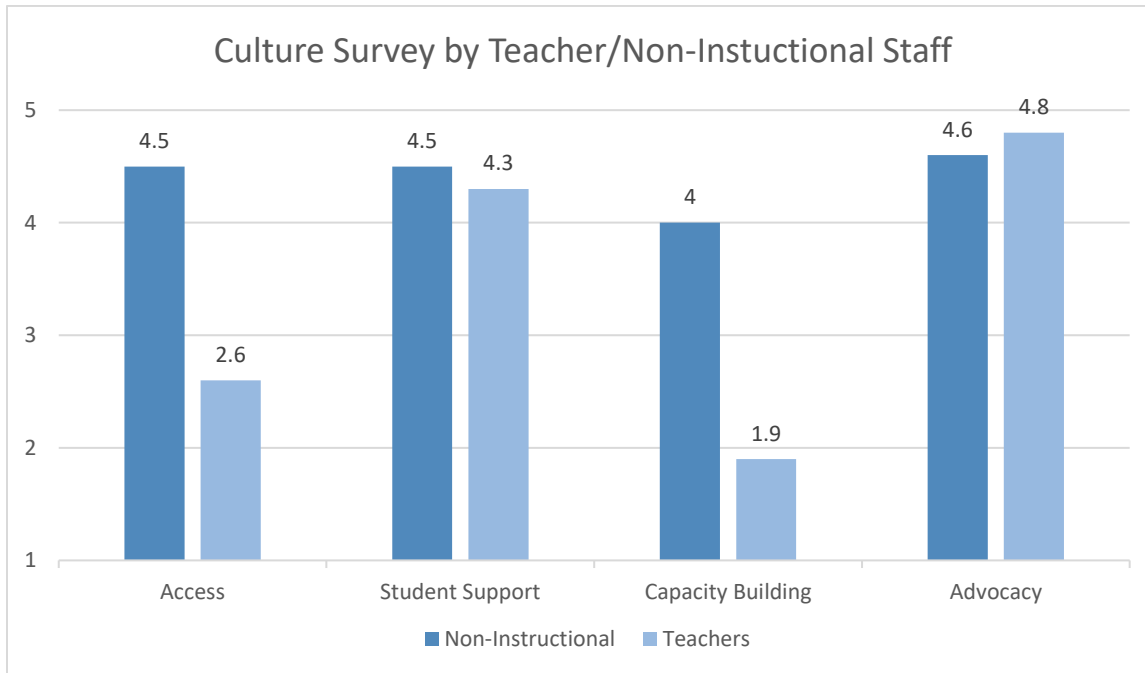
Rating: Level 1 Little to No Development or Implementation



- District has agreed to diversity initiatives and programs (i.e. Restorative Justice), but I could not find evidence of strategic implementation or any data or evidence directly linked to implementation.
- Interviews revealed that Sinaloa staff members are generally concerned about student equity, but not could articulate any systemic effort to produce equity besides systems available to all students like counseling for social and emotional needs and RTI.
- A review of the school website and other public documentation did not reveal any formal plans, programming, or systemic efforts to advance the cause of equity. Without any experimentation and a system of data collection and analysis, action research is nearly impossible.

## 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 about student access to rigorous opportunities. Non-instructional staff members are much more optimistic about this area than instructional staff.

Interviews revealed that teachers at Sinaloa are pretty polarized in their perceptions about unlimited access to academic rigor. Some interviewees stated very clearly that they believed that access is the foundation of equity. Others were equally committed to the idea that access to rigor and advanced opportunities had to be “earned” through demonstration of interest and capacity. Teacher surveys were equally as polarized in this area.

Non-instructional staff members appeared to be more optimistic about the current and future state of equitable access at Sinaloa. One interviewee stated that people “needed to relax because Rome was not built in a day.” The huge divide in perception about this reality is significant.

Most teachers appear to be keenly aware of the opportunity gap at Sinaloa, though most could not articulate it statistically. Many expressed concern about remedial and intervention courses “being full of students of color.” Quantifying and discussing this reality should advance coherence.

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.

Sinaloa professionals appear to be at a crossroads between flabbergast and apathy. The regular collection, discussion, and analysis of student access data should clear up ambiguity in this area. Organizational improvement begins by seeking and confronting brutal facts.

# 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 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 shortage of social and emotional support staff members to meet these escalated 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.

Sinaloa staff members seem to have a good grasp on the academic needs of their students, but they struggled to articulate the impact of current systems.

## 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.

Professional development in the area of RTI (both academic and social) should help guide the school's intervention efforts. Everyone appears to be in favor of student support, but few could articulate the practices and the systems most likely to produce the expected outcomes.

# Capacity Building

## Key Findings:

The survey revealed a large gap in the perception about capacity building and professional support. Non-instructional staff was much more optimistic than instructional staff members.

This was the lowest recorded area in all sections and deserves attention. Many expressed a difference in opinion about what central office believed were important areas of professional development compared to teachers. The consensus among teachers was that training should be strategic and tailored to each campus, and offered at a time most convenient for the teacher.

The ideas of “burnout” and “feeling overwhelmed”, especially two years into a pandemic, seem to influence pessimism about professional development and systemic support. Many expressed the fact that they are simply “surviving.” They did not seem apathetic to the idea of professional growth and improvement, just currently stressed out due to current social and work circumstance.

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



# Advocacy

## Key Findings:

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

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

Interviews revealed that most interviewees saw themselves as strong child advocates, but some had doubts about their colleagues' sincerity and commitment.

A critical ideology emerged during interviews that revealed that a significant number of staff members do not feel that student advocacy is their responsibility. Many pointed to the apathy and lack of influence of parents as the primary reasons for student struggle.

## Recommendations:

The development of a strategic, data-driven, continuous school improvement protocol is essential to improve in this area. The staff at Sinaloa seems to value order and compliance as the major indicators of school success. Without a consistent connection of evidence of student learning and a connection to school improvement and monitoring progress, the staff will not know if they are improving or not.

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

## Summary

The school culture at Sinaloa Middle School is very similar to many suburban, middle class middle schools. The teachers at Sinaloa appear to be highly qualified in their areas of instruction, the school is structurally sound, and most students perform above the norm on state standardized tests. There appears to be a wide disparity in staff perceptions about equity and some real systemic holes in creating an infrastructure to produce 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. Those who disagree with the direction of the school need a safe space to disagree, but they also need to provide logical alternatives and not just be adversarial.
- I recommend the strategic implementation and monitoring of current initiatives like Restorative Justice. Frameworks and strategies have been produced, but there is little evidence of impact.
- The tremendous philosophical polarization among staff members concerning equity must be confronted in a constructive manner. I would recommend the protocol outlined in the book **Crucial Conversations** as a framework for facilitating this meaningful meeting of the minds. As long as there is a mix of “equity warriors and equity talkers” the schools’ large achievement gaps will remain intact.
- 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. The achievement gaps at Sinaloa are large and disturbing and a collaborative effort is needed to confront them.
- 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.
- Focus heavily on the strategic implementation of the PLC process. Interviews revealed that the staff in general had a healthy perception of PLC, but I am concerned that they do not understand the process and the interdependence of the 4 PLC Questions. Meeting and PLC are not synonymous. I suggest picking a department to engage a deep PLC dive, and to use 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