ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOLS EQUITY REPORT

NOVEMBER 2021

ASSESSMENT INTRODUCTION & PROCESS

Millennium Learning Concepts (MLC) is pleased to present the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment for the Orange County School District (OCS). The assessment report summary intentionally builds on the legacy of the school district while providing a recommended equity-focused trajectory for the future. This direction has the potential to transform the Orange County School District into a leader in establishing an equitable environment and eliminating opportunity gaps in student achievement.

A district-level equity assessment is a process designed to identify existing disparities in educational opportunities and analyze their relationship to student outcomes. The purpose of the Millennium Learning Concepts (MLC) Equity/Culture Assessment of the Orange County School District is (1) to examine the existing organizational culture with emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion; (2) to examine the district's strengths and areas for growth with respect to ensuring that students have the opportunity to be academically successful; and (3) to assist the district in identifying professional development and educational interventions to reduce achievement gaps and enhance an equitable environment and success for all students.

The Orange County Equity Assessment Team acknowledges the district's many successes. OCS has several equity strengths which serve as a solid foundation for future equity work (see OCS Highlights, page 30). Throughout this report is evidence that the district, school staff and leadership are extremely devoted and committed to addressing the systemic conditions that contribute to pervasive student achievement and opportunity gaps. An articulated commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion is an essential starting point. The stakeholders work to understand that all students, their families, and communities bring assets to schools, have deep strengths, and when given equitable opportunities by the educational system, are not lost in the opportunity gap.

ASSESSMENT METHODOGY

THE PROCESS

Developing this report was a collaborative process documenting a variety of data sources and information collected from multiple perspectives and sources including focus group interviews, staff and student online surveys, on site school/classroom observations, document review, as well as the OCS desk audit (October, 2021) which examines district and school documents collected prior to the district on-site school and classroom visits. This report captures those unique perspectives and translates them into a set of informed priorities for the district. Overall, the data provides a picture of the ways in which district policies and practices impact students and student achievement.

> **ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**
> - District and School Documents collected or reviewed prior to and during the on-site visit (desk audit);
> - Focus Group Interview Data from the school community, central office staff, as well as students during the district visit;
> - School/Classroom Observations. In some cases, classrooms were revisited in order to capture instructional time rather than transitional time or time when students were waiting for passing periods and therefore not engaged in instruction.
> - Staff & Student Survey- *Equity and Culture Online Inventory* to certified staff and middle and high school students.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to complete the assessment and capture an objective snapshot of the district. The MLC research team designed a set of interview questions and survey items were utilized to gather specific information addressing: equitable use of the Orange County district curriculum for planning and teaching, professional development to support teaching and learning, and the strengths and growth opportunities from numerous OCS stakeholders.

Orange County Schools Focus Group Interview, Survey, School/Classroom Observations

INTERVIEWS				SURVEYS				SCHOOL/CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS
School Staff	Students	Principals	District Staff	Teachers	Students	Principals	District Staff	
98	123	4	18	136	746	8	8	147

While the findings reflect that student and employee respondents generally approve of OCS district efforts, there are areas of opportunity for continuous advancement of diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization. This report also includes recommendations to improve equitable outcomes and experiences for the district. The recommendations should guide and inform the Orange County School District in the development of policy and organizational change as well as inform instructional and community stakeholder engagement practices that will rejuvenate the district's efforts to ensure educational excellence and racial equity for all students. Orange County Schools' equity strengths and growth opportunities are explored in further detail in the key findings of this report.

The findings of the MLC Diversity, Inclusion & Equity team indicate three foremost recommendations for the Orange County School District that can assist in creating an environment that fosters maximum achievement and success for all students. It is our hope that the implementation of the suggested recommendations that are presented in this report improves the Orange County School district's systemic focus on three areas:

Communicated Commitment to Equity
Organizational Culture & Accountability
Continuous District-Wide Professional Development:
(Equity Mindedness, Diversity, Culturally Responsive Instruction, Implicit Bias & Microaggression)

COMMUNICATED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY → ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & ACCOUNTABILITY → CONTINUOUS DISTRICT-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The following findings and recommendations will include a number of ways to leverage information from both qualitative and quantitative data to promote equity throughout the Orange County School district. Additionally, the assessment reveals room for growth of several district academic measures for specific under-represented groups of students.

KEY FINDINGS - RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of Millennium Learning Concepts reflect student and staff respondents generally approve of the school district's efforts for systemwide improvement. However, there are areas of opportunity for continuous advancement of diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization. **It is imperative that the district works to communicate a clear commitment to equity before working towards operationalizing it. It is equally imperative that leaders examine how individuals are either confirming or confronting issues of inequity throughout the district.** The recommendations below explore interrelated avenues to accomplish this.

FINDING 1	COMMUNICATED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

Systemic and mutually reinforcing policy, programs, initiatives and actions, with an aim toward sustaining an equitable learning environment should be the shared goal of the Orange County School District. This effort resolves to address the opportunity gap at every level of the organization through policy, procedure and processes.

SYSTEMIC FOCUS ON EQUITY AND CAPACITY

Review of district Strategic Plan, Instructional Framework, School Improvement Plan, School Mission and Vision Statements and instructional practices for demonstrations of commitment to equity and alignment with the district Equity Plan

DISTRICT COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

The Orange County School District has developed an excellent Equity Plan. The framework has four pillars: educational experience, equity embedded leadership, collective responsibility and equity decision making. The Equity Plan includes six goals with results statements under each goal. It shows how data will be analyzed and actionable steps with evidence of implementation. The plan provides a consistent message that equity goes beyond formal equality to fostering a barrier-free environment where all students have the opportunity to benefit equally in order to succeed and thrive. The district recently finalized a strategic plan (with involvement from stakeholders), with a new mission, vision, belief statement, and four goals each having an equity emphasis. The Board has passed several equity related Resolutions, and the district has an equity task force.

The Board has established an equity policy in an effort to eliminate racial intolerance, other forms of intolerance, inequities of opportunity, and academic disparities in the district *(Policy Code: 1030 Equity in Education).* The policy points out requirements for achieving equitable outcomes for district leadership and the OCS School Board. The teachers seemed very engaged with this policy change. Central office staff also shared that they feel under the current leadership and Board the district is very equity minded and the district is moving in the right direction. District staff commended the Board for their focus on equity and efforts towards a continuum of change, "*The school board is outspoken about equity.*" In conversations several district staff shared the sentiment that equity is in everything the district does and as a definition it is not limited to just students, but also in resources and hiring practices.

Interviewed staff shared that the district has Equity Leads, who are representatives from each school that meet with the Chief Equity Officer monthly to discuss equity and cultural diversity. School administrators and the central office

also promoted the formation of Equity Teams made up of teachers at the schools visited. The teachers felt that the admin teams at the school level took the committee seriously and allowed the committee members to steer the changes. School staff at one school shared that the Equity Leads at their school are passionate about equity and that they are encouraged to have brave, but not perfect conversations. Staff shared that they are teaching key terms and are provided resources for activities. There is an equity vocabulary that staff are directed to discuss with their students. Counselors are in the classrooms having these discussions once a week which has brought about conversations. Teachers are observing classes and meeting the conversations head on. There are fewer incidents over remarks that are insensitive. The conversations set the expectations for what is okay to discuss and staff is intentional about sharing feelings... "*Raising awareness of differences and setting expectations to have the tough conversations with staff, looking at what is going on in the world*."

EQUITY ALIGNMENT IN STRATEGIC PLAN

Consensus across the leadership groups (board members, district leaders, and district administrators) indicate the strategic plan was a critical component in developing the district's approach to equity. There is a stated Equity Emphasis for each of the four goals in the district's Strategic Plan. Some indicated there was an intentional effort to make sure faculty, principals, district administrator, and board members were included in the development of the plan as the definition of equity. The inclusive approach helped create a common language and understanding about the strategic initiatives ahead. This included the development of the mission, vision, and belief statements.

Vision: Preparing every learner for lifelong service and success.
Mission: ENGAGE, CHALLENGE & INSPIRE!
Orange County School's mission is to educate students in a safe, inclusive environment where we engage, challenge and inspire them to reach their maximum potential.

The Mission, Vision and Belief statements: Value Diversity; Put Students First; Excellence In All We Do; Prioritize Equity; Provide A Safe Environment; Serve The Whole Child; Inclusive Culture And Climate Starts With Us, Accountability and Collaborate To Do Great Work address a trajectory toward establishing an equitably inclusive learning environment

When asked how the district mission and vision statements address equity or implies the importance of equity, many interviewed staff stated that the mission and vision is newly developed. **All spoke directly to the Equity Policy, but struggled to state how the mission and vision created actions that impact equity.** Several spoke of the diverse group that helped create the mission and vision statements and expressed a lot of pride in the process. Staff at one school talked about the anxiety staff felt in efforts to develop a new mission and vision. One statement used was, "*Tension is high [from some members of the community] because of the impact of the mission and vision.*"

The reiterated response regarding the mission and vision, based on staff interviews was, *"There is not a commitment to acting on what built the mission and vision. There is no conscious effort to see it through."* One administrator shared "*Everything we put out to the community (recruitment, advertisement, etc.) says we are doing these things through an equity lens. We talk a lot about equity. But there is not a commitment to acting on that conversation.*" Another staff member described it by saying, "*It is not infiltrated throughout the whole district; we have a lot of work to do.*" Central Office staff explained, "*Moving the needle for our students will mean cultural and academic shifts needing to happen.*" Other district staff responses to how the district mission and vision statement address equity/the

importance of equity:

- *"Hiring equity person to address those concerns."*
- *"The words are in the statements; we are not achieving what we say."*
- *"Communication is spotty; most don't know or couldn't articulate the mission or how it relates to equity."*
- *"Covid highlighted the inequities in district. We are getting there."*
- *"My family chose Orange County because of the strong views "we thought" they had on equity."*
- *"I feel the superintendent supports the work."*
- *"BIPOC [Black Indigenous People of Color] not welcomed here."*
- *"Good intention but very little follow through; Fixed mindsets."*
- *"A lot on paper, but very little follow through."*

Another administrator shared that the mission and vision statements are written in a neutral stance *and stated, "I am not sure if that is in the mission. We are the infancy stage of common understanding of what equity is. We have an awareness, but it is not operationalized."* **The consensus from administrative interviews revealed that the district mission statement is written and implied but not consistently communicated and not consistently practiced throughout the district.**

EQUITY ALIGNMENT IN INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Orange County Schools' Instructional Framework draft is aligned with the Equity Plan and captures OCS's guiding principles and belief that all students should have access to an excellent education in an equitable and inclusive environment. The document states that the framework ensures equity in access and consistency in teaching, meaning all schools have the resources needed to promote equitable outcomes and all students have equal access to the "Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum." **Review of the Instructional Framework document does not reveal clear evidence of specific instructional strategies or support for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.** District leadership and administrative team members indicated that the school district is at the beginning stages of implementing an equity-based approach to teaching and learning. This transition is helping facilitate the move from a *"siloed or top-down management system to a shared learning or accountability approach."*

EQUITY ALIGNMENT IN SCHOOL MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

A random review of the district's school websites reveals all schools have developed their own mission statements, core values and belief statements, which are loosely connected to the district's Strategic Plan's mission statement. School mission statements and belief statements included general language; safe and nurturing environment, community partnerships, productive global citizens, etc. More closely aligned with culture and equity were terms such as culture of mutual respect, rigor and building relationships located in some statements. Neither the district nor the schools' mission and vision statements are located on the opening website homepages. Though recent school improvement plans don't include mission and vision statements, a review of district documents revealed mission and vision statements are found in the 2018 Comprehensive Reports *(Curriculum & Instruction / Home (orangecountyfirst.com)*

The focus on strong academic achievement, across the district at the school level, aligns with the district mission and vision. When asked about their school's mission and vision for learning, overall, interviewed school staff were unanimous in their response about having a mission and vision for student learning and success. Some teachers

were able to share some vocabulary or phrases related to their school mission and vision. Some teachers stated that they were familiar with their school's mission and vision statements, but they could not recite them verbatim.

Most teachers believe that there is room for improvement in the communication of their school's mission and vision by school administration. Teachers are reminded regularly what some school's values are through closed captioned video announcements, in emails, at staff meetings, and on school notes and memos. **In short, the mission and vision are communicated by school administration indirectly.** Several interviewed teachers said that despite the mission and vision appearing in some memos, emails, announcements, and at faculty meetings, they could not recall exactly what it is. They said, however, that they understood the general message and could paraphrase the school's mission and vision. **Some teachers also stated that there is a need for clarification of the meaning of their school mission statement.**

According to several teachers, the school's mission and vision are included in reading materials for faculty and staff**, but these were not observed in all of the schools**. Many of the classrooms did not have the school's mission statement or vision clearly posted. The few classrooms that had them posted were upper grades in one of the elementary schools and one of the high school classrooms. Neither were the vision and mission posted in the hallways or in the front offices.

There are no systems in place reflecting how school staff engages with the district mission and vision to assure it is living, shared, and used to guide decisions about programming, staffing, interventions, and curriculum and instructional practices. Teachers were not sure if the school missions aligned with the district mission. Two schools' staff stated their mission and vision statement and goals are being revised. One school shared that their students on each grade level have their own mission statement based on student success and excellence. The mission was developed from the school's theme and hashtag for the year and was posted on each classroom door. Students knew the logo mantra. **It is unclear whether teachers are truly communicating the overall district mission and vision.**

Several, but not all, schools interviewed said their mission is connected to the district mission (growth mindset, student social skills, students first, college and career ready students, growing in equitable ways). An observed school had the district mission, vision and value statements posted in the front entryway. Staff shared that they tried to be upfront and incorporate mission and vision on everything they do, core instructions, MTSS and PLC's , and school wide equity team; **"It is woven in everything we do."** Other staff responses when asked about the school mission and vision and student learning:

- *"I know we have one, but I'm not certain about what it says."*
- *"It did change this year."*
- *"I helped write it 5-6 years ago; not sure if it's been updated."*
- *"We talked about changing it due to our changing staff and student population."*
- *"It has to do with student safety."*
- *"Developing the whole child."*
- *"We even had to get up in our meeting and recite it."*
- *"Something about social and emotional learning."*
- *"Empowering students to inspire change."*
- *"It's part of our school improvement plan."*
- *"Our plan is to revise it."*

- *"Not sure that we have one…. and if so, I am not sure where it is posted any way".*
- *"Students are first and kept in the forefront"*
- *"I have no idea?"*
- *"Not sure because it's not posted"*
- *"We have had 3 different admins in 3 years, so…"*
- *"We are really trying to model our mission and vision- we just love our students and do the best we can do"*
- *"I am new here; I am not sure."*

A common trend running through all interviewed schools is a commitment to do what is needed for student success. Though, overall, staff were not certain of the specific language or content of the mission and vision. When asked about the schools' mission and vision for student learning, staff shared that everything they do is based on student support and helping students be successful. Staff talked about dual language classrooms, removing barriers to student learning, bridging pathways between home and school, parent community outreach, the step-up challenge and data analysis. A plus for one elementary school is having a bilingual principal.

Overall, the district's mission and vision for student learning, equity, and cultural responsiveness is not clearly communicated to all stakeholders. Most staff believe the mission and vision at the school level focuses on global learning and equity for all students. Teachers assume the district vision and mission involve equity because it has been mentioned for the past 2-3 years at the opening of the school year and the district equity leader has given surveys to staff, students, and parents/guardians about equity.

INSTRUCTIONAL EQUITY EMBEDDED IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

District and administrative team members communicated that instructional growth and achievement data is utilized "inappropriately" to determine if a school is growing or showing success. For example, annual state testing data is compared to current interim assessments which use different measures to determine growth. In some cases, this is done by Board members instead of district team members or local school leadership, according to staff interviews.   **This disconnect in the use of data according to district, administrative team, and Board members is providing misinformation and decision-making that is not anchored in equity-based practices**. To ensure the effective and informed decision-making by the Board, the district should lead data collection, disaggregation, reporting, and analysis ensuring common language and practices are consistently practiced.

In addition, interviews with district administrative and leadership team members indicated school improvement planning protocols are inconsistent across the district. The use of student performance data disaggregated to inform instruction is at the beginning stages. Administrative team members are beginning to engage in conversations to facilitate support for student growth and achievement at the school levels.   Some district leadership and administrative team members indicated there is a push for intentionality to move all schools forward, while others expressed a "*heavy hand*" approach has created division. **Reviewed School Improvement Plans did not provide equity focused goals to close gaps for subgroups nor did they address most of those components of the Social Emotional Learning Framework.**

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Most interviewed staff displayed a good understanding of educational equity and could describe what equity looked like in their classrooms. Overall the responses to the meaning of educational equity included, everyone getting what they need and not every student needs the same things. Most staff defined educational equity, in their own words,

as providing leverage to those who don't have resources, filling in the gaps, and differentiating. One staff group stated that at their school, they start from a deficit view, *"We are passionate about gaps and how to best serve kids."* Staff were able to give examples of what equity looks like in their classrooms: *Collaboration at PLC meetings; Giving space to all voices and backgrounds; Flexible instructional times; Culture representation in lesson planning; Ensuring everyone gets what is needed to be successful; Realizing that our students come from different backgrounds and not minimizing their differences, backgrounds and cultures; High expectations; Scaffolding and Examples of students doing well.* Another definition given by a teacher; *"Educational equity is shining a light on and removing predictability of who succeeds and who doesn't in instruction by having the mindset that all students are capable of learning…"* **What all of interviewed staff had in common when discussing educational equity was that they all believe that it involves ensuring that students of all demographic groups have access to the necessary resources for learning.**

Most staff related educational equity to resources or observance of holidays in their classrooms. Teachers said that they not only integrated themes, such as "Indigenous Peoples Day" into their lessons but held discussions and allowed them to be led by those students who identified directly with them. Students agreed (at one particular school) that there is a surplus of books for everyone to "see themselves in". Sports and other clubs were open to and fair for all.

Topics where educational equity could be of impact, are lessened by work sheets or "quick video slides" on morning announcements. At one school in particular, students shared that there is a lack of equity in classrooms. One student expressed, *"I just realized, they don't care about me."* A need for educational equity awareness was observed when students who have questions, such as, *"Why is it still being taught that Christopher Columbus discovered America*?" The teacher's response to her was that it is too controversial to dispute what has been given by the district to teach and that she was not interested in what more could come from that. Respect between teachers and students was noted as very fair, but "*The frustration felt from having substitutes is breeding disrespect*." Other staff responses:

- *"Educational equity- making sure all students get the same opportunities and support and rigor."*
- *"Students are held to high expectations in the classroom."*
- *"Not pigeon-holing students giving the opportunities to everyone."*
- *"Enrichment material is open to everyone in the room."*
- *"I serve students, I don't serve labels."*
- *"Students who need the extra support, whether classified or not."*
- *"Some kids need one home visit, others need more than that", and "opportunity in academics."*
- *"Started whole class enrichment to capture more students with backgrounds."*
- *"Trying to close the gap earlier then testing age."*
- *"Conversations over deficit mentality require reflection."*
- *"Catch students early; improved AIG identification and diversity as well."*
- *"Meeting children where they are and giving them not the same expectations, but high for all."*
- *"They can do it but with supports."*
- *"Representation in class literature reflects the world."*
- *"Current events -exposing every child to grade level material but giving the support they need to be successful." "Taking in account everyone does not show up the same, but create a safe space to share."*
- *"The definition is lost when we don't recognize we are all people... value others."*
- *"Signs don't mean there is equity. Getting to know the learners regardless if they like the learner or not."*
- *"Equity is having all students get the same treatment, consequences and chances."*

In most classrooms both fairness and inclusion were observed. Most observed teachers treat students fairly by calling on minority students and white students alike during class discussions. When students needed help, they all received additional support from the teachers, assistants and each other. One teacher assigned classroom helpers in a random way by spinning a wheel of names. In another classroom, students were partnered with each other for Think/Pair/Share. The pairs were racially integrated. Other examples of educational equity observed throughout the district included: Teachers working with students in small groups; Tutorial learning; Classroom stations; High expectations; Variety of media, technology, and supplemental materials; Variance of instruction; Classroom arrangement; Bulletin boards and displays representing racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds' Cooperative learning; Closed captioned video studies in English and Spanish; Options for access for most students.

Staff shared that for the most part, school and central office administrators offer support to high needs students to provide equitable resources in the form of technology and materials. One interviewed staff member said, "Equity is weaponized, used whenever people want something." Most staff agreed that the school leadership was very supportive of their efforts for an equitable learning environment. **Many shared they would like to have more support in line with training on equity and on-going support for implementation...** "*We have had some equity training but wish it was more in-house. We also need help with our Spanish speaking students; many are crammed on buses, sitting in the floor...How is that equitable?*" In our interviews, **all school staff were very complimentary of the Chief Equity Officer, the district superintendent and their commitment to an equitable learning environment.** They said on the central office level they get any assistance and resources needed. "*She always has our backs.*" When asked about the primary strengths of the district in ensuring an equitable education for all students and what needs to occur to strengthen efforts to improve equitable experiences, access and outcomes for students and staff, responses included:

- "I don't know if there is support, but I know I don't feel comfortable talking about it. The effort and energy to be successful is not there."
- "I don't think that ___ supports equity because a student was denied the opportunity to deliver a speech in Spanish. The decision is not equitable."
- "Constantly in the forefront, asking teachers to evaluate what they are doing and to look at more critically."

Concerning the equitable distribution of resources for schools, the majority of district leadership and administrative team members noted the allocation is based on equality. Most district leadership identified with not having an understanding of the equity definition. Some administrative and district staff indicated neither the Board nor the district allocates resources based on need. In some cases, the allocation is based on first come first served or if one gets a particular resource the others should receive the same.

It is imperative that the Orange County School District strives to build a culture of district leadership commitment to involvement in establishing trusting relationships with stakeholders. Clear, concise communication efforts promoting fair and just practices and policies to establish a diversity, equity, and inclusive culture and eliminate educational inequities should be embraced by the entire district community.

Although district leadership promotes a vision of a positive district-wide culture, this vision has not permeated throughout the district. A culture in which students, staff members, and parents/guardians have come together as a learning community has not been established. Interview responses portray the entire district as seldom being solicited or empowered in collective decision-making. It is imperative that the Orange County School District continue to build district-wide commitment and involvement, as well as establish trusting relationships that support one nonnegotiable fact: Students come first, and their individual success and achievement is the bottom line.

Based on school and district focus group interviews, OCS struggles with building relationships, creating effective and sustainable communication with all district stakeholders, and fostering effective and continuous dialogue centered on improving the teaching and learning environment. Structures for a culture of systemic (district-wide) accountability, including collaboratively developing district-wide goals, outcomes, monitoring progress, and fostering a culture of systemic accountability for the success of all students, with the mindset that the entire district community is responsible for student achievement, have not been established. This includes student accountability for their own success. A district administrator stated, *"Infusion of federal funds are helpful but the accountability is yet to be seen based on the strategic plan. The Board does plan on holding folks accountable to that."*

WELCOMING AND EQUITABLE ENVIRONMENTS

Overall, teachers believe the school climate is positive, especially for elementary school students. School climate was noted as *"family like", "welcoming", "a good spot"* and morale was high in most schools. However, in two visited schools the environment was not as welcoming and slightly chaotic. There was no bell system to dismiss classes and teachers expressed a lack of equity in any personal planning time, due to having to cover other teachers routinely. Two schools reported their school's climate with terms like *"toxic, cliquish, fearful, backstabbing and/or divided"* and *"We feel distrusted by school administration and patronized and devalued."*

Most students also said their schools are friendly, accepting, warm and they share a sense of belonging there. According to the Millennium Learning Concept (MLC) Orange County Equity Survey 90% of students agree/strongly agree that their school is welcoming to all students, parents and community members. 93% of surveyed teachers respond that they make an effort to ensure a welcoming environment for students. Respectful, caring acts were observed at several schools. At one school when a sobbing student felt comfortable enough to approach the principal about an incident during her breakfast, the principal stopped and handled the issue in a non-accusatory, respectful manner. Staff said that overall, most students are compliant, friendly and respectful.

A staff member shared that though there are minor staff conflicts in her school, once micro-aggressions come out, staff is comfortable enough to confront the issue; students see this and it helps them deal with conflicts when they

arise. Another staff member shared that the campus tries to welcome the Hispanic community but is not as welcoming for the black families, *"No consideration of time they need to spend working."* Welcoming environments for communities and families are demonstrated through back-to-school nights, school emails, and direct teacher emails. Food distribution and other monthly activities help keep the school community connected. Sports at one school is a thriving connector in the community.

High school teachers feel that many of their students don't love the school or feel ownership or a sense of community, *"There is no school pride."* There is also a great deal of "teacher burn-out" for high school teachers, however, so staff morale leaves much to be desired. One teacher blamed the decline in positivity on COVID. Another says the less-than-ideal climate is due to, "a lack of respect for teachers' personal time." Other factors teachers mentioned are high turnover in the school's administration positions, lack of consistency in policies and practices, and changing norms. **Most teachers generally have a great deal of respect for the administrators at their school** and even said many of their shortcomings are a result of the central office/district not treating administrators well. The interviews conducted with teachers were candid and teachers seemed eager to open up about their concerns and issues. They were very hopeful that our conversations would lead to positive changes for their students and themselves.

Most students said that they respect and enjoy their teachers, as well as their friends. Teachers check on them regularly and ask if they are okay. Many of the interviewed students said most of their teachers will sit down and talk with them and help with their work. Student responses included:

- "None of our teachers will treat you bad for no reason."
- "Leaders are very accepting."
- "Our principal is the best. She plays music, friendly and dances around. I think she should get a raise."
- "We aren't happy when we have a sub."
- "A few of our teachers aren't happy. They are sarcastic and take everything personally."
- "No, our school is not welcoming for *ALL* students. Our teachers try to model equality and diversity, but if you are an athlete or involved in active clubs, then you feel welcomed, but not all students feel welcomed."
- "[Our school] wants to be welcoming to all, but they cannot uphold the ideal, specifically with Black and LGBTQ students."
- "Our teachers are our mentors, and they give a sense of belonging."
- "Rules are lost in translation; COVID rules or efforts to support students who might feel different are not consistently applied."
- "Students of color are not represented in AP (advanced placement) classes."
- "Being an athlete or in student government makes it easier to belong here; I don't know how kids who do not or cannot participate in extra stuff make it here."
- "They [the district] say they want to hear our voice, but no action follows"
- "There are lots of rules in this school, but they are not taken seriously."
- "Our teachers are less available to us than they used to be because of all their other responsibilities."

Based on interviews the LGBTQ community feels that there is no equity for their population, both staff at one school and students at other schools share these same feelings. There is a plea for equity in treatment, literature and acknowledgement.

The community and families are invited and welcomed by many of the schools, especially the high school. Parents are welcomed to the school family during parents' night. Spanish-speaking parents are welcomed by staff members who also speak Spanish. The PTSO plays a role in ensuring that families and parents feel at home on campus. Parents are invited to enroll in the PTSO, but there is not much flexibility in scheduling meetings. School events now have various delivery options for families. Families can opt to attend events virtually or in person. Parents and students who do not speak English are invited to attend school events by bilingual staff who act as translators.

Several administrators also believe their schools are very welcoming to parents and community, citing the high level of parental involvement in the schools from the more economically sound and connected parents. Staff feel that more effort could be made to include families of color in the school community. Suggestions included, *"Parent and student organization should have fundraisers that are not a challenge for all parents to participate in."* The fundraisers require raising a great deal of money to receive rewards. Kids without access to financially solid adults are not able to participate.

Diversity in hired staff, at most schools, was observed and reported to be unequal. One school's population was primarily Hispanic and there was only one Hispanic teacher who taught and spoke the language in the school. **An important step to fostering an environment that is truly equitable, accessible, and welcoming to all students is staff diversity.** According to OCS data, the number of total minority classroom teachers has increased from 13.2% in 2019-2020 school year to 15.7% in 2020-2021 school year. The African American classroom teacher population is 10% while the African American student population is at 14%. The percent of African American teachers has steadily increased over the past four years. The largest gap between classroom teachers and students gap lies in the Hispanic workforce, the number of Hispanic teachers is only 3% compared to the student population of 25.63% *(OCS Desk Audit, OCS Staff Demographic Report).*

COMMUNICATION

Though an array of external communication efforts is common throughout the district, staff interviews conveyed a strong desire for the Board and top administration to be more transparent in OCS communications. Transparency to stakeholders meant both access to information as well as the presentation of the "full picture" around district issues. It is uncertain if a district written comprehensive communication plan to ensure continuity and expansion of communication efforts exists.

There is need for an intentional, thoughtful, and carefully planned communication "system" to be put in place to successfully disseminate critical information to the many diverse audiences of the school community– internally and externally. High quality communication should be both carefully planned and the result of everyday interactions. It is an on-going process. High quality communication rests on a mutual respect built between the school, or school system, and its various stakeholders. Improvement in communications would further strengthen a positive learning environment and promote a more collaborative culture on which all stakeholders could build, especially teachers and students (*Cooper 2019).*

Some school visits and interviews revealed there is a disconnect between the schools and the district in reference to communication and the dissemination of information. For example, the message about our team's visit was interpreted in various ways by the different schools. Thus, our team was greeted with different levels of readiness. Some staff and students noted that they see inequitable practices in communication between the district and some

schools. Staff expressed a sense of needing to have relationships with the *right* district personnel to move action steps forward. Information is sent via email communications from the district in an inconsistent manner. Parents may receive news of district updates at the same time or before administrators and teachers. There is a perception that the level of stress that all school staff feels is not understood or felt by the district, *"Strained communication has affected the school climate this year."*

The assessment team encountered varied results related to communication in general between the community, schools and central office. Some stakeholders indicated that communications have improved from previous years, while a few faculty members indicated that communications were just adequate. Staff interviews reveal that not all staff members feel completely informed about what is going on at their school and don't feel connected to other schools in the district. Staff responses included:

- *"I hope that we have actions steps to move the needle and create change."*
- *"Actions beyond words without putting additional stress on teachers."*
- *"People have been penalized for giving opinions about what's needed in the past."*
- *"We are holding on to things of the past; through various leaders that empowered us but may not be best for us. They still function in their silos and unequitable structures that got them to where they are now. Still a lot of work adults need to do on how we treat one another."*
- *"We're not inviting everyone to the same cookout; we point it out for the kids but we do not practice it.*
- *"I would love for the reverse to happen. Adults do it, then we show students how."*

When central office staff and board members were asked about communication, trust and collaboration with the district schools, responses were varied, but most spoke of the district being a work in progress. The staff said they are working on the district's negative connotation. One administrator said the district has been working on addressing past negativity and strengthening efforts to improve equitable experiences, access and outcomes for students and staff. The superintendent has been working during the past two years to be service-oriented and is aware of the district's political landscape. **It is evident the district has encountered backlash and discord in ongoing efforts to implement an equitable learning environment** *(political division, intentional backlash toward equity work, political opposition around covid-stance, hate groups attending meetings)*. **District and administrative team members expressed concern of misinformation provided by external stakeholders (parents, community) about the implementation of an equity-based education program.** A staff member responded*, "Communication is very limited; groups of people that hate people of color running your school (i.e., [extremist group] showed up to football games)"*

DISTRICT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE
Staff also stated there is not a culture of trust and open, honest communication throughout the district.
Several staff shared the district was not healthy, was toxic and not functioning well*, "We are getting better. Now at a 2, but was a 0 (5point scale)."* Staff and Board responses about district inclusive culture included:

- "There is a lack of trust and support as a whole and the teachers need more time to complete all of the tasks being asked and grow professionally."
- "I do not feel particularly supported in overall person-to-person interactions district-level interactions, but I do by select individuals. It is also concerning to observe interactions with others and to understand just how much unprofessional chatter occurs openly to and about other colleagues."

- "Communication with staff has been strong this year. Making efforts to have bilingual secretaries in every school."
- "I know I have a bias toward "good ole boy" mindset, but top leadership is separate from the masses-Like a new world order-a clear division. This is why we have communication lapses."
- "No trust in leadership."
- "We have to change the culture of the district (it is really bad)."
- "Sign-up sheet to meet you with no meeting room."
- "New curriculum rolled out but no communication on PD."
- "In order to change the culture, the leadership has to change."
- "Couple of situations I would not have ever expected to respond in that matter. Efforts put in to support someone else that was not supportive of students was immense; Very threatening and condescending."
- Central office culture: "Not healthy, but functional: Favoritism is prevalent; They end up not having the tools they need because they were just put in the position."
- "Information gap for community members of color."
- "If favoritism ever stops, we could really work together to see things get done."
- "Poor communication; minimal opportunity."
- "Clickish pockets."
- "If not for groups, there are people that would not interact at all."
- "We are not equitable as a central office. How could we present and speak on equity as a district?"
- "Relationships and transparency are not there."
- "We say we value everyone, but we do not value everyone respectively."
- "It is clear who has power and who doesn't have power."
- "There is a lot of hurt in our district."
- "The mindset of the old voices can be scary."
- "Long history of being a toxic environment, but I think Dr. Felder is working to improve it."
- "She has had a difficult time of trying to build relationships because of the communal climate."
- "Also, we have been operating in a crisis (recovery mode)."
- "So much potential to see a lot of success."
- "It's really rough right now. It is very toxic. It doesn't feel safe a lot of the time, I do not care who you are."
- "Limited to make a decision based on gender, race, etc."
- "I can't make decisions without additional approval; what happens is nothing moves."
- "They have allies with the superintendent."
- "Teams are pitted against each other; Often feels like we are working against one another."
- "Communication is so disjointed so schools feel it as well."
- "Inconsistency with leadership."
- "Inequities that happen between staff members; ability to grow (politics)."

Among the district and administrative leadership, members felt the district is shifting toward a service and support strategy with schools, including their own accountability to offer quality and timely support. **Having central office viewed as a collaborative organization is too in the beginning stages.** Other team members were concerned some school level administrators were not held accountable. However, only 55% of principals feel supported and resourced by the district in addressing equity and culture (MLC Orange County Equity Survey). Responses to how effective departments in the central office are at collaborating to support schools:

- *"No, this is where we miss the mark. There is too much money not equally distributed."*

- *"Collaborative-Superintendent wants to hear what we have to say."*
- *"I think that...because of the top-down mentality; Are we collaborating with decision making or are we making a decision and collaborating on how to get the decision out to schools."*
- *"Siloed for sure: Building set up is not conducive for collaboration; We do not have a protocol for meetings or who is included for meetings."*
- *"If you are not in the meeting or connected to a meeting, it tends to be exclusionary."*
- *"No, there are no processes in place."*
- *"Needs to be trust in the position making the request."*
- *"Micromanaging and hoops to jump to get things done in an efficient timeline."*
- *"Resources are not equitable."*
- *"I would hope things are coming from a place of fear and not from bad intention."*
- *"When things happen, we are notified (statements, form letters, getting out in front of conversation)."*

Other interviews revealed teachers do feel supported by the district and school board when parents raise concerns about equity or other topics. Issues regarding gender identity and sexuality are taboo, according to teachers, so administration support needs improvement in this area. Teachers also said they would like more training on how to navigate heated discussions about race and politically charged topics in their classes.

Most students expressed a general sense that the district disregards current issues facing students and teachers because "*students are frustrated, and teachers are overworked*." **They expressed frustration with being prompted to voice concerns to school administration, district leaders and the school board and getting little response, follow-up, or change.** Other student voices:
- *"We don't have the tough conversations as a school in general, different perspectives that allow a student to exist, opposing viewpoints are hidden as devil's advocate or free thought."*
- *"IB program theory of knowledge have controlled discussions."*
- *"Difficulty with admin acknowledge and being accepting."*
- *"Not a lot of communication, there seems to be a savior complex, trying to fix high school."*
- *"Lack of transparency of what admin is really doing, band-aid statements- not always informed, nothing being communicated for preparation."*

Staff were for the most part complimentary of school leadership, stating they are devoted to assisting staff and students and being "advocates for student learning." Some approaches mentioned were: Ensuring staff and students have needed resources; Revising school policies and practices that negatively impact student learning; Working with tier 3 behavior students; Addressing bias in student referrals; Ensuring certain policies and procedures are in place to address issues fairly; and Increasing staff diversity. At one school, it was observed student and staff needs were addressed immediately as the leadership staff steered their laptops on carts around the halls, classrooms and common areas throughout the day (office on wheels). Most staff and students are observed communicating with leadership in real time, "This way leadership has eyes everywhere at all times." **Leadership at all schools were observed as being highly visible throughout their respective schools.**

Professional Development on diversity, equity, inclusion and culturally responsive instruction for all employees must be strategic and continuous. The training should be mandatory and held multiple times throughout an academic year. This will ensure active engagement of all employees, maintain the culture of diversity, equity and inclusion, and demonstrate the Orange County School District's overall commitment.

DISTRICT SUPPORT & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development with a focus on increasing equity, cultural competency and culturally responsive instructional practices will validate and help staff understand how a lot of what they do naturally is culturally responsive teaching. **However, staff need systemic training on how to make culturally responsive pedagogy intentional.** Staff at some schools stated they don't receive much support from the district when it comes to culturally responsive teaching. Based on interview responses and survey comments, **there is a need to further educate the district on the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion and culturally responsive instruction.** This awareness is extended to students and all stakeholders; however, **it is imperative that OCS ensure the clear immersion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in professional development offerings.**

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

Culturally responsive instruction is a pedagogy that acknowledges and embraces students' cultures, languages and experiences - and relates them to classroom learning. Culturally responsive teachers are actively aware of the various cultural backgrounds present in their classrooms, and act as a facilitator of lessons that can resonate with each (Guido,2021).

Findings indicate that some, but not all, curriculum and instruction throughout the district emphasize a focus on creating a culturally responsive environment. A review of the OCS disaggregated data highlights the need for practices and pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning…a pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures and offers equitable access to education for students from all cultures.

DISTRICT DATA

Based on a review of district achievement data, the Orange County School District continues to see racially-predictable disparities in achievement data and a perception of disparities in discipline and academic expectations. In the year 2018-2019, the district had two elementary and two high schools rated 'B'; three middle and four elementary schools rated 'C' and one elementary rated 'D'. In both high schools, there were disproportionality rates between White students and subgroups' passing scores for Biology EOC, ACT/SAT and NC Math 3 *(North Carolina Public Instruction)*.

According to the OCS Desk audit document, Equitable Opportunity-Achievement/Opportunity Gaps & Disproportionality- the NC Report Card data reports that across a 7 year trend, of state testing data, in Orange County Schools: the North Carolina End of Grade scores of Black, Hispanic, Students with Disabilities, Economically Disadvantaged, English Language Learners, Students in Foster Care and Students who are Homeless are consistently below the 40th percentile in Reading and below the 50th percentile in

Math. The scores for Students with Disabilities have consistently been the lowest of the student groups. Although achievement for all students has been flat, Orange County Schools' White, Economically Advantaged students outperform similar students in many districts across the state. Although the graduation rate is steady for many subgroups, there are some discrepancies for some student populations specifically students with disabilities (SWD) at 76%, ELs 82% and economically disadvantage at 86%. The percentage of SAT participation for OCS is 53% compared to the state at 43%; percentage of AP passing exams is also higher for the district at 66% compared to the state at 58% and the IB percentage passing exams is 92% for the district compared to 74% for the state. *(NC School Report Cards 2019-2020)*

Additionally, the district continues to see trends in disproportionality of behavioral consequences for African American, Hispanic and Economically Disadvantaged students, especially when it comes to suspensions and in-school removals. Black students were 6.7x times more likely than White students to receive a short-term suspension. The percentage of school-based complaints for Black students is at 61% for a district wide population of 14% of African American students. *(Racial Equity Report Card, Southern Coalition for Social Justice)* (https://www.orangecountyfirst.com/Framework%2 0and%20Goals%20English.pdf).

It was observed that when asked about culturally responsive instructional practices, staff provided different responses, a few appeared to be unsure. Some said their schools are welcoming and accepting of everyone and connected these attributes to culturally responsiveness. **For the most part, school staff could explain what culturally responsive teaching is and give examples of its implementation in their classrooms and throughout their school.** Teachers shared that they take the time to learn the students individually and their backgrounds, while others talked about teaching different cultures in the classrooms and incorporating them into their lesson plans. According to one teacher, culturally responsive teaching is "...*considering who is in your classroom and making sure their needs are met and they have access to appropriate tools for success."* Another teacher stated *"Culturally responsive teaching is acknowledging the diverse cultures present in your classroom so they can be represented and lessons can reflect their identities."* Other staff responses included:

- "Teaching that is inclusive for all cultures beyond classrooms."
- "Look out to see the world and the differences. Representation matters."
- "Teaching kids to think critically about what they are learning."
- "Teaching from other perspectives other than the local majority focus on global majority."
- "Make sure other voices are heard across the curriculum. Knowing what your students are bringing to the classroom every day. In their own voice."
- "People are complicated. We don't all fit in a box."
- "Can't think of intentional effort for culturally responsive teaching."
- "In observation rubric there is some language about equity, cultural and SEL."
- "Had a couple of trainings a couple times through the year last year.
- "We need to build an understanding of what culturally responsive teaching is and is not with staff and community."
- "We need to know the students in front of us, not their race, but their personal story."

The team observed the use of highly engaging strategies at some schools, but those observations were too

rare to determine systemic effectiveness in carrying out the intended classroom instructional practices. These classrooms could serve the district for replication for research based, high quality instruction and high levels of engagement.

<u>School/Classroom Walkthrough Observations revealing positive culture and implementation of culturally responsive instruction in several classrooms:</u>

Leadership support for culturally responsive teaching came in different forms. Bilingual language classes, even at the elementary level, was one way the district supports the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. There were also posters, displays, and signs in the hallways and classrooms in Spanish as well as English. The team also had the opportunity to witness teachers exercising culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms on their visits. One teacher spoke to Hispanic students in Spanish and taught Spanish words that were relevant to what they were learning. In a different class a teacher was interviewing another teacher who was a special guest. They talked about her interests which led to a discussion about Asian cuisine and foods that come from Asia. **Most of the teachers, through observations and interviews, were aware of the cultural differences of their students.**

Teacher/staff interviews revealed that some teachers modified or redesigned instruction for students when they identified gaps in student learning. Some teachers stated that they provided meaningful and timely feedback to students such as one-one instruction and continuously checking for understanding. **Those observed classrooms using teacher/student involvement and interaction, learning groups/centers, collaboration etc. revealed more of a sense of community. Teachers engaged students in challenging, high interest work. Lesson learning targets, essential questions, learning expectations and current student work were a part of the student learning. In these classes it is noted that students are well behaved, eager to learn, attentive and enjoying the lessons.**

Other Classroom Observations of Positive Cultures and Culturally Responsive Instructional Practices:
  - Guest reader knew students by name and addressed them without regard to their individual background.
  - Students interact with students in a positive and respectful manner. Students observed assisting each other with class wide work.
  - Adults interact with students in a positive manner. Teacher observed talking with students in soft tone while answering questions.
  - Students on task and focused, highly engaged teacher, students observed working together, class wide activity that incorporated money & pronouns. "GIMKIT Strategy Game"
  - Visual countdown timer that keeps students on task and aware of time to transition to next activity.
  - No teacher desk in the classroom. Teacher observed sitting on the floor with students, on their level, assisting them with the work.
  - Class wide activity with seamless transition to partner work.
  - Adults exhibit knowledge of individual students.
  - Research-based teaching strategies on various learning styles are incorporated in teaching. Pumpkin song with movement to enhance memorization and learning.
  - Students interact with students in a positive and respectful manner. Students were participating in a collaboration with 3rd graders "book buddies."

- The fidget stools are a resource that all students would benefit from. Equitably, it is a missed opportunity not equipping other classes with the stools (where applicable).
- High level of engagement and interaction between teacher and student, room has plenty of visuals, no space left unused.
- Lessons related to social justice issues were observed at the high school level.
- Some school libraries displayed an impressive amount of diversity in featured books.
- Some teachers had problem-solving visual aids displayed in their classrooms. Pictures and drawings of historical figures and their accomplishments were displayed on the walls in the form of posters and student work.
- There were community announcements in the form of posters on the walls in many of the schools visited.
- The bulletin boards were intentional and displayed learner work.
- In the classroom there was a sign that showed "behavior expectations" for various parts of the building. These signs were on display in each classroom and in the hallway.
- A few of the classrooms highlighted books that showed diverse characters. The students were engaging in independent work while the teacher worked in small groups. The learners that worked independently did collaborate with each other, but took redirection from the teacher.

<u>School/Classroom Walkthrough Observations that did not reveal positive cultures and implementation of culturally responsive practices:</u>

Staff members communicated that many colleagues lack the skill and knowledge to create culturally relevant units of study and lesson plans. According to the MLC Equity Survey 89% of Principals responded that as an instructional leader they feel skilled in the use of culturally responsive strategies, while 53% of teachers disagreed to the statement *"I feel skilled in the use of culturally responsive strategies in my classroom."*

The overwhelming response of students was "no" when asked if they feel they are earning the information and life skills needed to deal with the real world now and after they graduate. Some students mentioned that they would like to learn about taxes, credit cards, saving and banking accounts. **According to several students in three focus groups interviewed, the master schedule is designed so that *most* students have access to all course offerings.** However, the students felt that while they do have access, they are not able to take certain courses because of the academic "tracks" that dictate their student schedules. For example, one student in a group said that while he requested a finance course as an 11th grader, his guidance counselor advised him and insisted he not take that class as it was "not an honors level class, so it would negatively affect my GPA."

All student groups interviewed talked about the lack of students of color representation in honors classes. High school staff communicated that they are trying to increase the amount of participation in International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement classes by minority students.

Classroom observations and some staff interviews reveal low expectations for students. Some interviewed staff expressed concerns that there is a lack of high expectations from teachers for all students- *"There is a "knowing-doing gap" as it relates to high expectations for students across every classroom. Teachers think they are setting high expectations for all students, but they are not doing that with all students."* These

teachers shared that they demonstrate high expectations in their classrooms through practices, such as *challenging questioning techniques, targeted lesson development, differentiated instruction or multiple learning styles.* Other staff said they are meeting grade level expectations according to state standards and moving toward the standards, making sure that every child has access to grade level and enrichment instruction. Staff shared that the IB program is the model for academic excellence whereas every learner is able to meet the workload. They stated that there is discussion about strategies to help students catch up, but feel it's up to the teacher to identify and encourage more learners.

At one school when asked what high academic expectations look like for their school, teachers shared not only what they are, but what expectations should be. In interview conversations, some teachers shared that in theory the expectations should be that all students are capable of succeeding, that all students can and should participate equally in class discussions and practices, and that teachers and students should have a growth mindset. **Teachers realize that a growth mindset must be held by teachers, students, families, and administration in order for students to achieve success**. They said that the reality is that expectations are not the same for all students, the school focus is improving test scores rather than individual growth, and teachers are not allowed to grade students harshly. The teachers added that the higher expectations are largely set and held by students and faculty only. For this reason**, it was communicated that expectations are inconsistent and are not particularly high for minority students.** In fact, according to the teachers, grades are set, or "capped" so that 50% is the minimum score teachers are allowed to give, no matter what the actual performance level of the student.

Other Classroom Observations that did not reveal of positive cultures and culturally responsive Instructional practices:
- Students disengaged; Heads resting on desks
- The walls did not reflect the school culture. The classroom norms with lesson plans displays on wall monitors or on the white boards were not consistent in all classrooms, some teachers appeared to adjust because of our presence and lost track of the lesson being taught.
- Some consistent patterns were observed that indicated there is a need to increase equity in the hallways and in the classroom in the form of wall displays to improve cultural awareness, such as: posters, books and material about equity and more culture diversity inclusion throughout the entire school. The walls did not reflect the school culture.
- Not all teachers posted standards and/ or "I can" statements. I did not see any teachers referring to Lesson Essential Questions that were posted in the classroom.
- The classroom norms with lesson plans displays on wall monitors or on the white boards was not consistent in all classrooms, some teachers appeared to adjust because of our presence and lost track of the lesson being taught.
- No diversity (ability, class, gender, race) of students is reflected in the images on walls in some observed schools. Plenty of white space is available on walls for additional images representing diverse background of students in the school. More visuals would also make the room visually appealing and welcoming.
- Few staff posted the school's mission and vision statements in classrooms or throughout the schools.
- Diversity in class resource materials depended on the teacher varied across school classrooms.
- Some teachers had progress charts, but not many.

- There was nothing displayed that showed the teachers were integrating cultural learning.
- Several students shared that some, but not all, books, lessons and clubs represent the diversity of people and issues in their community.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The topic of Social Emotional Learning, or SEL, generated a variety of answers from the teachers. Some teachers said that SEL is a priority at their school, which is communicated by the administration. Other teachers said that SEL is taught, but is not a priority and not tailored to fit students' needs. Either way, **social emotional learning is being addressed at all of the schools visited.** An elementary teacher said that *"...admin. supports students by having Spanish liaisons and that a school spirit is encouraged."* Most teachers stated that they feel supported by the district and the school board when it comes to social emotional learning. Teachers shared that when parents complain about SEL topics, the central office *"...has our back."* Support included:

- Emails with SEL resources and documents
- Training for social worker and guidance counselors
- Utilization of guidance counselor and social worker to conduct group meetings and intervene with students.
- Training that taught strategies for dealing with stress

Other school staff struggled to share any support and resources given by the central office. They were not sure of how central office was involved directly, but did recall that current professional development was regularly centered around SEL.

Staff shared that making personal connections with students is the main objective of social emotional learning at all levels. **The central office supports this, but there are some missing components. One issue is SEL lessons are planned, but the necessary resources to dive deeper are not provided**, according to interviews. At the high school level teachers stated that the SEL lessons they are given targets elementary-age students rather than teens. **This exposes a disconnect between the central office and teachers who are teaching the SEL curriculum. There is a lack of understanding of what older students need for emotional support.** Teachers also found the scheduling problematic. SEL is at the end of the day for high school students, which doesn't allow for making deeper connections and having related discussions. Observations revealed a concept called "Flex Time" at the high school. During flex time students could use one of the designated common areas to do independent work, socialize, or even play games. This allows students to self-select activities to engage in for their own social-emotional health.

While culturally responsive teaching and social emotional learning are different concepts, some staff explained that parents have conflated the ideas, concerned that social emotional lessons might contain discussions about culture, race, etc. Classroom observations and staff interviews revealed individual teachers, or selected staff are expected to create curriculum and/or lessons for designated social emotional learning time without training.

Some staff said they have taken more sick days than the usual number of days at this point in the school year. In response, **the district directed principals to count/monitor and discourage staff absences but did not**

offer additional social emotional support for staff. This type of directive suggests that the district needs methods of being made aware of the climate and the social emotional needs of the teachers. 89% of principals and 65% of teachers disagree/strongly disagree that supports are available for them when struggling with their emotional or mental well-being *(MLC OCS Equity Survey).* The district has a Social Emotional Culture and Climate Framework embedding trauma informed care as well as MTSS, literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy, academy challenge and high expectations. **Information regarding how those elements were going to be implemented were not found on the district website. The reviewed documents including school improvement plans did not provide equity focused goals to close gaps for subgroups and did not address most of those components of the Social Emotional Learning Framework**.

DISCIPLINE

Some schools reported that consequences don't exist (for any of the students). This sentiment was expressed by many staff and students. A different school described how African American boys receive a harsher punishment than do other ethnicities for the same behavior. They said teachers (not substitutes) are necessary in order to keep routine and discipline consistent and students expressed that the lack of teachers is really taking a toll on learning and school climate.

When it comes to school discipline, many teachers believe that there is a fundamental lack of consistency at most of the schools visited. They stated that there are no "set standards for everyone, all the time." Teachers shared that discipline was not fair or equitable at their school for a variety of reasons. The main reason discipline was not equal, according to teachers, was that discipline is largely left to the teachers. Some teachers are strict, while others are not, so **for students how their infractions are handled depends on the luck of the draw**- *"Students are given consequences in some classes and not in others for the same offenses."* Teachers were mostly uncomfortable with using blanket statements about how school administrators handle discipline issues at their school. Most teachers are not sure how school leadership ensures fair discipline- *"All are well-intentioned, but a defined, structured system for schoolwide discipline is lacking."*

The majority of students felt their school actively promotes a sense of community and belonging for all students, which aligns with the MLC Equity Survey results. According to survey results, 81% of students feel they are a part of the school community contrasted with teachers 79% and principals, only 33% feel a sense of belonging in the district. A few students felt that school rules make sense and are fair, but most did not. Some staff stated that when it comes to school discipline, teachers believe that there is a fundamental lack of consistency. Some even said discipline is not being addressed at all. Other staff said it depends on who is administering the discipline. A teacher said *"The students don't feel like discipline is fair across the board, but as a teacher, I think it is, because the African American AP will go to bat for the students."* When asked about the fairness of school rules and if all students get the same consequences for breaking the same rules interviewed student responded:

- "No, they give detention for being late."
- "White privilege used to the fullest."
- "Don't know, probably not."

- "No, absolutely not. The athletic coaches care about the football team and making sure their team is there for practices. If someone is making racist comments toward me, why do I need to be the problem solver?"
- "No support for people who are being harassed, victim blaming."

BULLYING AND SAFETY

Several students also talked about instances of bullying throughout the district. **Most students acknowledged that bullying exists and have either experienced or know someone who has experienced bullying. The majority of students do not believe staff are aware of the amount of bullying that takes place in their school** which aligns with the MLC Equity survey responses-58% responded that the adults are aware of the amount of bullying in their school, while 74% responded most teacher address bullying in the classroom if noticed. **Some students also feel bullying isn't taken seriously by staff and is often brushed off.** Teachers acknowledged that there is some bullying, but say most are minor and not malicious. 92% of teachers responded to the MLC Equity survey that the majority of students in their school are respectful and kind towards each other.

Some students felt that administration and teachers don't do enough to address instances in which students use derogatory language or racial slurs against each other (as a joke). According to multiple student responses, teachers tend to ignore these instances in which some students of the same racial group use certain words with each other. Ironically, though most of these students did feel a sense of belonging, they admitted that they think their sense of belonging is borne out of their popularity, athletics and extroverted behavior. When interviewed students were asked if they believe adults are aware of the amount of bullying that takes place in their school, students responded:

- "No, they know it's going on, but they don't know the amount."
- "They think because we are in high school, that we can handle the situation ourselves."
- "If we go to the counselor, they want to put us into some kind of program, they suppose that something is wrong, when you express things are going on at home, they assign you to a social worker, so no one wants to go to administrators."
- "No, guidance department is quite removed, the mental health pieces are insensitive, don't seem like they care, general- very removed approach."
- "The resources are not appropriate for high school (just tell the person to stop), they are out of touch."
- "Victim blaming-numerous sexual assaults across multiple school districts, back in school with no prevention strategies, there is a predator on our campus and we are worried about Tik-Tok challenges."
- "Traumatic experience, no further action taken; gag order."
- "Hands off approach from principal."
- "No true buy-in from admin, things are created as check boxes, Yes, we did it."

Some students shared examples and instances where teachers have offered suggestions or helped them understand their school work better. Another student shared *"There are some good teachers, freshman year experienced racism from teachers, struggling in Spanish, one teacher was trying to help her staff find ways to make them feel like they belong there and is a part of the campus;* Another student also said, *"Trial*

and error to find the people who are going to be accepting, finding those specific groups that are safe. I have some teachers who I wouldn't turn to if having issues."

Staff and students, for the most part, shared they feel safe on the campuses. Most teachers feel that their school is safe due to the protocols that are in place and executed consistently. The assessment team observed school wide procedures for practices such as walking in a straight line on the right side of the hall, adherence to team schedules, class transitions and student behavior. When students arrive in the morning, adults are posted and are visible at various locations to provide safe entrance into the building. Staff/adults are also visible in hallways and common areas during class changes as well as during school dismissal. Doors are locked to promote safety and provide barriers for intruders. **Noted is all visited school buildings are clean, safe and mostly orderly. However, the assessment team was not required to sign in or provide ID upon entry at all campuses.**

EQUITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Equity professional development was noted by some as always in a planning phase, however never done "inhouse" whereas at other schools, it was reported to be a topic in PLC's and in the review of data at staff meetings. One school noted that prior to Covid, equity professional development was conducted on Mondays & Tuesdays. Procedures in place to ensure the implementation of strategies after professional development was reported to be very few, if any. Professional development for equity was not one that many staff members could remember. Staff mentioned IDRA training provided by the district- *"We have a survey going out to staff by the equity team; staff will go out to the community to get a feel for how they are perceived."* One school staff mentioned training and equity cards purchased through a vendor (Beyond Diversity) by the district to help teachers learn their students and their experiences better, *"We received equity training from "Beyond Diversity" but there have been no checks [follow-up] or next steps."* Staff shared that there is a preferred need for real equity training (outside of zooms, and recorded videos to watch at their leisure) to address district inequities.

Staff at one school stated, that prior to COVID, the staff had equity professional development training regularly. **However, this was the only school that spoke of regular equity professional development.** Though it caused slight division initially, their consistency in meeting has brought about major changes in the school with teacher/teacher relationships and teacher/student relationships. Another school's focus on equity was the creation of an enormous equity wall, a huge mural in the main hallway, where staff of every ethnicity shared who they were, where they were from, what they believe and what their lives have been like and are presently. **This was powerfully presented** in poem form.

At the conclusion of teacher and principal surveys, participants were asked what are the greatest strengths of your district and what are the areas for greatest need of improvement in the district? Central office staff and students were asked similar questions in interviews. Following are some of the captured responses.

TEACHERS:
Strengths
- The teachers are the strengths. We hold this together.... when administration and central office is chaotic. We are professionals who care about teaching the kids and do the best we can.
- The district seems to be well funded. The school board seems to support teachers. The COVID response was informed by science. There was little staff turnover, but that is likely to change going forward.
- A strong Superintendent.
- Forward thinking, district policies reflect inclusive practices
- Welcoming of new staff, extracurricular offers to students.
- Still trying to identify strengths.
- Sense of family & caring about all students.
- An awareness/acknowledgement of inequities - starting the hard conversation to make changes that disrupt racism/systemic injustices towards minorities (gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality).
- We are making efforts to improve equity in our district but do not always implement things with fidelity or with check ins.
- The constant work to make things better for students and staff.
- We have a social worker in every school. Mental Health services are available to students. We have Dr. Keeling who is amazing. The district is attempting to be more equitable.
- Our school board's commitment to equity.
- Our district has an Equity Director, which has been a great thing to help move the work forward. Our district also has a Bd of Ed who is thoughtful, deliberate and willing to listen.
- Our teachers are amazing.
- A great strength in my district is that many people want to embrace equity and diversity. From the BOE, district-level, administration-level, teacher-level, and student-level, we have many people who value this ideal. Another strength in my district is that we are small and can more easily implement, evaluate and collaborate on these types of changes and shifts. My district does not seem to be under-funded. I see that we have resources that could be used to do this work.
- Committed teachers who work hard to provide excellent instruction and loving care for ALL students

Areas for Improvement
- Following through with what you say. There can be weeks without a response, or maybe never.
- Diversity training
- This is after our contracted hours and at the least convenient time for teachers. Again, they didn't ask for teacher's best availability they put it at a time where we wouldn't show up because we're exhausted.
- Time for teachers to plan, grade, and collaborate.
- Culturally Responsive and Trauma informed teaching (need PD)
- Faculty should reflect our student body. We need more diverse faculty members at this school. We need to provide families were more opportunities to be involved in our school. More connections need to be made with families and students that come from diverse backgrounds. Also, rules need to be consistent and fair among all students in the population. We need more ELA resource

- teachers to assist with the growing population of students. We need to hire a graduation coach to assist students in meeting achievement gaps
- Involve all staff in changes that effects and affects us, by sending out surveys asking our thoughts & opinions
- The equity conversation needs to keep going, and I think we need to extend it to grading policies as a district. Like everyone right now, we need people to fill positions, too.
- Communication is poor, at best. Central Office has its own agenda. Many decisions seem reactionary and rushed. Committees are formed and programs initiated and then they are never heard from again.
- Making shifts in staffing to make workloads as reasonable as possible to retain teachers/staff.
- I don't know about district-wide, but my school needs a discipline plan and needs to hold all staff accountable for doing their jobs (arriving on time, being prepared, following guidelines, etc.) We lacked procedures at the beginning of the year, not related to covid procedures, and still lack them into the second quarter.
- Professional Development Restorative Practices (rather than a closed white mindset that opposes change) Administrative support (very difficult to connect with principals and poor communication from them)
- True equality for everyone, not just one or two populations.
- Clear communication of expectations and time provided for planning and professional development. We also are in DESPERATE need of more assistants for classroom support.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:
Strengths
- Community (parents and taxpayers) support schools. New strategic plan. Caring and thoughtful school board.
- Some district administrators are very helpful and responsive.
- We are small, and it allows the opportunity for each school to be known on a different level than in larger districts. It is nice to have direct lines of communication within the district office.
- The size of the district allows for greater personal conversations of growth if trust is developed.
- Leaders doing what they can to improve the quality of education for all OCS students.

Areas for Improvement
- Too many reform efforts are in place at the same time. Some reform efforts did not include principal input. Some reform efforts are not clear on school expectations or what is required of them until deliverables are due.
- Principal meetings are "business" meetings and do not complete the agenda items listed because they run out of time. We need principal staff development to occur in our meetings or hold a second meeting per month to do PD only. We are not a learning organization until this happens.
- Built-in time for teacher PLCs during the school day. In secondary schools, it is impossible to have common planning times built in the master schedule for the tested subject areas. Teachers are not meeting regularly and when they do it is for a short time as many teachers have kids they need to pick up from daycare or other parent duties.
- Trust, Communication, and Planning
- There is so much inter-department disorganization/politics for us to be so small and so accessible to one another. I understand that we have a united instructional vision to be A and B schools by 2026, but I do not feel that we have a clear path to achieve that vision, specifically within instructional practices and our organizational culture.
- I think the largest and most pressing need that we have is to take a deeper and more intentional

step towards equitably serving our schools (funding, staffing, resources, etc…).
- We cannot proceed with an equal distribution of resources in schools that vary so much in student population, size, needs, and staffing.
- There is a lack of trust and support as a whole and the teachers need more time to complete all of the tasks being asked and grow professionally

CENTRAL OFFICE (from staff interviews/conversations)
Strengths
- One of the wealthiest counties in NC, top 5 in school funding
- Wonderful people willing to support; hope there is more of them than the negativity
- Boards focus on Equity
- New mission and vision, recent finalization of a strategic plan, belief statement, 4 goals. Each goal has equity emphasis; seeking alignment
- Hope that equity is in everything we do (all children); giving all children what they need
- First area district that has a policy focused on equity (started by community/concerned parties)
- Board policy, resolution, equity officer, strategic plan, equity plan, equity task force
- We have to grow in every area, but our fundamental strength is that the intention is there.
- Quorum of board desiring equity
- Superintendent that would fight the devil for the students.
- Under Dr. Felder and current board, we are very equity minded.
- Principals are receptive and positive to work with.
- I feel good when I come here: I leave feeling rewarded and want to come back.

Areas for Improvement
- Trust in leadership
- The intentional backlash toward equity work
- Hate groups attending meetings and being disruptive
- Poor communication; minimal opportunity
- Clickish pockets
- Better staff collaboration; "If not for groups, there are people that would interact at all"
- Voiced Weaknesses
- We are just starting to actually do the work
- The mindset of the old voices can be scary
- Winning people over when they do not want to be won
- We are losing people especially diverse people; Retention issue/recruitment issue.
- Disenchanted with the overall attack on public education.
- We have to put things we talk about into action.
- We have to change the culture of the district (it is really bad).
- In order to change the culture, the leadership has to change

STUDENTS
Strengths:
- I have a decently large number of supportive teachers who are kind and make me like learning. Our school has a free accessible cafeteria. We have a nice building and band program.
- Not sure
- I like the teachers. My AP teachers are very knowledgeable, supportive, kind, and inspiring, well-put-together people and mentor figures.

- They have very good math teachers.
- Some teachers are very respectful. Most teachers keep me engaged
- Mostly everyone here is kind to other people (but not everyone)
- None
- Some of the teacher listen to things we have to say let us talk to them some even if it's an issue at home or at school, they stop bulling people do, they give us a warning if we get a little too loud.
- Very calm not much bullying but some people do inappropriate things or comments
- They teach us about different cultures and they also have don't make fun of people with different sexual orientations (some people)
- I like the community, the teachers and students, and how everyone fits in.

Areas for Improvement

- It seems that there is a lot of isolation of certain students at school. I've only recently realized it, but I myself am often ignored by other students, which I believe to be racially motivated. Though, I recognize this is socially influenced, which may make this difficult to solve.
- Bullying awareness.
- Personally, I have dealt with multiple bad students and nothing has happened, they have verbally hurt me or scared me and it makes me unsafe to see these kids not have any punishment for their actions.
- 1- more regulation of troubled students (people who bully, people who have been reported) 2- a safer place for kids in LGBTQ2+ community 3- give a better understanding of life after high school
- Monitor the online things that happen in school
- Also, the school should inform people and students way more about AP classes, the future, and college. I had to figure out the importance of taking AP classes for myself without ever being told to or informed about it by the school. Me being an ESL student and immigrant also contributed to this.
- As a white male, I don't face much discrimination, and I take many AP classes. Therefore, I need to be humble and admit that I do not know enough about diversity issues to make useful claims and statements. I will say that a larger diversity of students needs to be informed about AP classes, and that ESL students should receive more respect from teachers and staff. Comments I made when I first moved to the US may have come across as stupid. Teachers would make fun of me for that and not give me the help I needed. This needs to improve, and race and diversity should be talked about more in classes and in the curriculum.

Orange County Schools Budget and Finance Review

In order to truly determine if a district is providing resources equitably for all students, it is necessary to analyze spending of district resources for each subgroup of students. As part of our equity assessment, we planned to complete such an analysis for the Orange County North Carolina School District.

Our planned deliverables included the following:
(1) Equity Finance Plan
(2) Finance Technical Assistance Plan

Our intent was through the analysis of current and prior year district spending by school, program, department, and grants, to determine the academic return on investment toward the goal of equity based on student demographics. This would allow the completion of our first planned deliverable.

In order to perform this analysis, there was a need to be provided the total number of students for each identified subgroup, including the students involved in each program offered by the district and its schools; such as career and technical, college prep, gifted, magnet programs and etc. In addition, we needed current and prior year actual spending as would be reported by in routine financial statements and related budgets for each school and program as mentioned above to analyze.

We were unable to obtain the financial statements in the appropriate format. It is evident that the systems and structures for such reporting are not currently available and need to be developed. Without the ability to complete the equity finance plan, it is not possible to develop corresponding budgeting procedures based on equity.

It is suggested that the district develop and prepare financial reporting for each school and program with corresponding student demographic information to ensure the analysis can be completed. Ultimately this would allow for corresponding budgeting procedures. It is generally suggested that each district maintain an equity scorecard to report student access and participation in all programs by student subgroup. Spending for these programs can then be correlated to determine spending equity by subgroup. Also, budgeting procedures can be set up to ensure the equitable allocation of resources and then correspondingly, actual expenditures can be tracked and compared against the budget.

ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS:

1. The Orange County School District has developed an excellent Equity Plan, including an equity infrastructure, equity policy and a Chief Equity Officer. The OCS Equity Framework has four pillars: educational experience, equity embedded leadership, collective responsibility and equity decision making. The Equity Plan has six goals with results statements under each goal. It shows how data will be analyze and actionable steps with evidence of implementation. The plan provides a consistent message that equity goes beyond formal equality to fostering a barrier-free environment where all students have the opportunity to benefit equally in order to succeed and thrive.

2. The Orange County School District has an average attendance rate of 94.78 percent this school year, according to data from the OCS Accountability Department. The four-year graduation rate at 91% is higher than the state at 88%.

3. The schools, and district as a whole, have amassed distinctive accolades including, 2021 EC Teacher of the Year, OCS Wells Fargo nominee Principal of the Year. The district has received the Excellence in Financial Reporting award for 6 years in a row. In addition, the district received 9 Blue Ribbon awards and recognized for excellence by the NC School Public Relations Association for the 2019-2020 school year. In recent years, Orange County students have competed both academically and athletically at district or state levels.

4. Every interviewed school honored their leadership, whether they were in favor of changes that have had to be made or not.

5. OCS accomplishments include an equity policy approved on February 2019. The district has also included a goal to identify and address academic disparities and inequities in access to and success in programs and opportunities where data analysis will be conducted, equity audits on literacy, teaching and learning and AIG will take place, and learning labs and tutoring will be provided to support students. The goal also includes research and implementation of culturally relevant and sustain educational models and instructional practices that yield academic success (OCS Equity Plan 2020).

6. The district devised an equity initiative whereas representatives from the schools meet with the district Chief Equity Officer monthly to discuss equity and cultural diversity. The teachers seemed very engaged with this change in policy and felt that the administrative team at the school level took the committee seriously and allowed the committee members to steer the changes.

SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Orange County Public Schools District has many assets to build upon. District and school staff bring a plethora of skills and talents to the school community. It was evident throughout the equity assessment across the OCS district, that there is a core team of educators who are profoundly committed to the equity endeavor. The Orange County School District is rich with strength. Some specific strengths and successes to build upon are listed below.

1. ## DISTRICT CULTURE

   Enlist the entire school community to work toward building a supportive, respectful and trusting district work culture focused around the established equity and strategic plan to further commit to goals and develop high quality connections.

2. ## COMMUNICATED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

   Communicate a clear and convincing message that diversity, equity, and inclusion are inextricably linked to the academic mission Make diversity and inclusion mission critical. Review, revise and update current OCS mission/vision/strategic plans and organizational goals to reflect greater depth and commitment in support of substantive diversity and an inclusive institutional culture change. In addition, implement this process in every area of the institution e.g., departments, programs, projects, etc.; each should have mission/vision/strategic/goals consistent with and reflective of the organization. **Create mechanisms for accountability**.

3. ## DISTRICT-WIDE COMMUNICATION PLAN

   Make internal communication a priority. **No communication effort will be successful if employees feel disenfranchised, confused, or uninformed.** Staff members have the ability to make or break the image of their school district. Employees should be provided with the information, tools and training to become ambassadors for the district. While they might not agree with all district-level or building-level decisions, if they're well informed and involved in the processes they are more likely to support them or at least not disparage administration and Board members for making the decisions.

   - Create a communication plan to share the mission vision, goals, strategies, action steps, and performance measures with the board, staff, parents, and community.
   - Design a communication flow chart at the district level to share accurate information with stakeholders in a timely manner (mission/vision/district focus areas/new information).
   - Use the district website and/or other combinations of social media tools to transparently communicate on a quarterly basis an update on the status of goals, strategies, and actions steps.

4. ## CONTINUOUS DISTRICT-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

   Implement system-wide evidence-based professional learning programming in culture responsiveness and courageous conversations on race, ethnicity, LGBTQ and other identities;

effective interventions related to identity-bullying, discriminatory behavior, implicit bias and microaggressions; and communication; understanding of child and adolescent development and its relationship to academic achievement. **PD should be continuous, sustainable, job embedded and include follow-up support, feedback and reflection.**

5. CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

System wide implementation of culturally relevant instruction is needed to offers a means of equitable access to education for students from all cultures and to disrupt racially-predictable disparities in achievement data, disparities in discipline and academic expectations.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM

Based on survey response and feedback, while bullying appears to be addressed to a certain degree in Orange County Schools, it is still a problem. **A district-wide bullying prevention program is needed.** This program should incorporate training for all employees on preventing, recognizing, and responding to bullying. Additionally, there needs to be workshops or awareness sessions for all students. In addition, if not already established, consider a Student Advisory Council: select student leaders from various grades and schools to meet with school and district administration. OCS leaders can obtain valuable insight and assist in building student engagement and belonging, as well as addressing bullying, the quality of food, restrooms, and school pride, expressed by students in the open comments that should be reviewed and addressed.

OPPORTUNITY & ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Develop a district comprehensive, cohesive and clear action plan to implement culturally responsive teaching, including identifying specific instructional strategies for culturally and linguistically diverse learners and goals to close gaps for subgroups and effectively eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, as well as to address **disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions for students of color.** Reductions in office referrals, suspensions and/or expulsions increases student access to valuable instructional time.

SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

Examine Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) which is an approach to running classrooms in a way that is culturally responsive for all children, not simply for racial/ethnic minority children. More than a set of strategies or practices, culturally responsive classroom management **provides a framework for educators to build knowledge, mindsets, attitudes, dispositions, and practices necessary for academic and social success**. It is a natural extension of culturally responsive teaching which uses students' backgrounds, rendering of social experiences, prior knowledge, and learning styles in daily lessons (Milner, 2019).

Consistency is Key. Consistency is what holds together any discipline or behavior plan. A consistent implementation of any discipline plan must be monitored so that instruction is paramount for learning to occur.

TEACHER & STAFF DIVERSITY

Having a diverse community of students, teachers, staff and senior level administrators is one explicit way to demonstrate that diversity, equality, and inclusion is a priority at OCS. Additionally, to build a sustainable culture of such, intentionally recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse population of teachers and other staff is central to this recommendation. Creating an organizational culture of diversity and inclusion will aid in retaining current diverse staff and with recruiting of additional staff. In support of intentionally recruiting a more diverse workforce is assessing and upgrading the OCS's current hiring practices. This includes a comprehensive review of the hiring process, job descriptions and interview procedures.

STAFF WELL-BEING

Lack of communication, need for self-care and feelings of being overwhelmed were resounding themes in both survey data and comments; particularly for teachers and central office personnel. **OCS may work to consider ways to improve culture and climate in these areas to buffer against potential burn-out of faculty and staff.**

RESEARCH & EXTENDED READING

1. Blair Mann, "Equity and Equality Are Not Equal," The Education Trust, March 12, 2014.
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3. Cleveland, Roger C.; Powell, Norman W.; Saddler, Sterling; and Tyler, Tiffany G. (2009) "Innovative Environments: The Equity Culture Audit: An Essential Tool for Improving Schools in Kentucky," Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning: Vol. 7, Article 6.
4. Flores, A. (2007). *Examining disparities in education: Achievement gap or opportunity gap?* University of North Carolina Press.
5. Gullo, Gina; Implicit Bias in Schools (Eye on Education), 2018.
6. Singleton, Glenn E.; Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools, October, 2014.
7. 20 judgments a teacher makes in 1 minute and 28 seconds- How Implicit Bias Creeps into the Classroom, Ball 2018. https://hechingerreport.org/20-judgments-a-teacher-makes-in-1-minute-and-28-seconds/

District/School Action Plan

Opportunity for Growth _____

Barrier to Success	Action Steps to Overcome Barrier	Timeline/Person(s) Responsible
	1. 2. 3.	
	1. 2. 3.	
	1. 2. 3.	

OVERALL SUMMARY POINTS FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

With a unified vision, combined with the professional spirit of collaboration and a focus on: *Communicated Commitment to Equity, Organizational Culture and Accountability and Continuous District-wide Professional Development*, the leadership, in conjunction with faculty, staff, students and parents have a real opportunity to transform the Orange County School District. It is our hope this report offers real suggestions and guidelines to be truly innovative in planning for continuous improvement.

1. Continue to do what is right for all children. Even though there are risks, it is the right thing to do.

2. With leadership guidance, train teams to make an impact on high-needs students starting with formulating meaningful relationships.

3. Take the "Big Rocks" from the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Report and brainstorm how they will be incorporated into the District and School Improvement Plans. Monitoring and implementing the important issues will bring about the desired results.

IN CONCLUSION

The MLC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Team wishes to thank the staff and leadership for their hospitality and cooperation. Everyone involved in the process was polite, helpful, and receptive to our visit. It is hoped that the report will provide assistance to the implementation of the Orange County School District's equity, diversity and inclusion goals.

The assessment team believes that by addressing these recommendations, the leadership of the Orange County School District will be better prepared to implement the equity, diversity and inclusion goals with fidelity. In order for this plan to produce the desired results, it must happen within a culture of commitment.
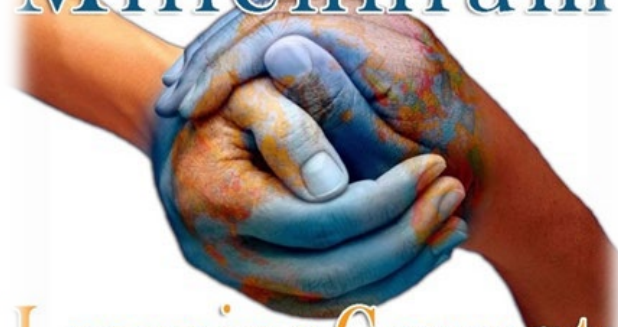
MILLENNIUM LEARNING CONCEPTS, LLC
465 Skyview Lane
Lexington, KY 40511
859.420.8032
drcleveland@millenniumlearningconcepts.org
www.millenniumlearningconcepts.org