



Livingston School District

Equity Audit Addendum Report 02/06/2023

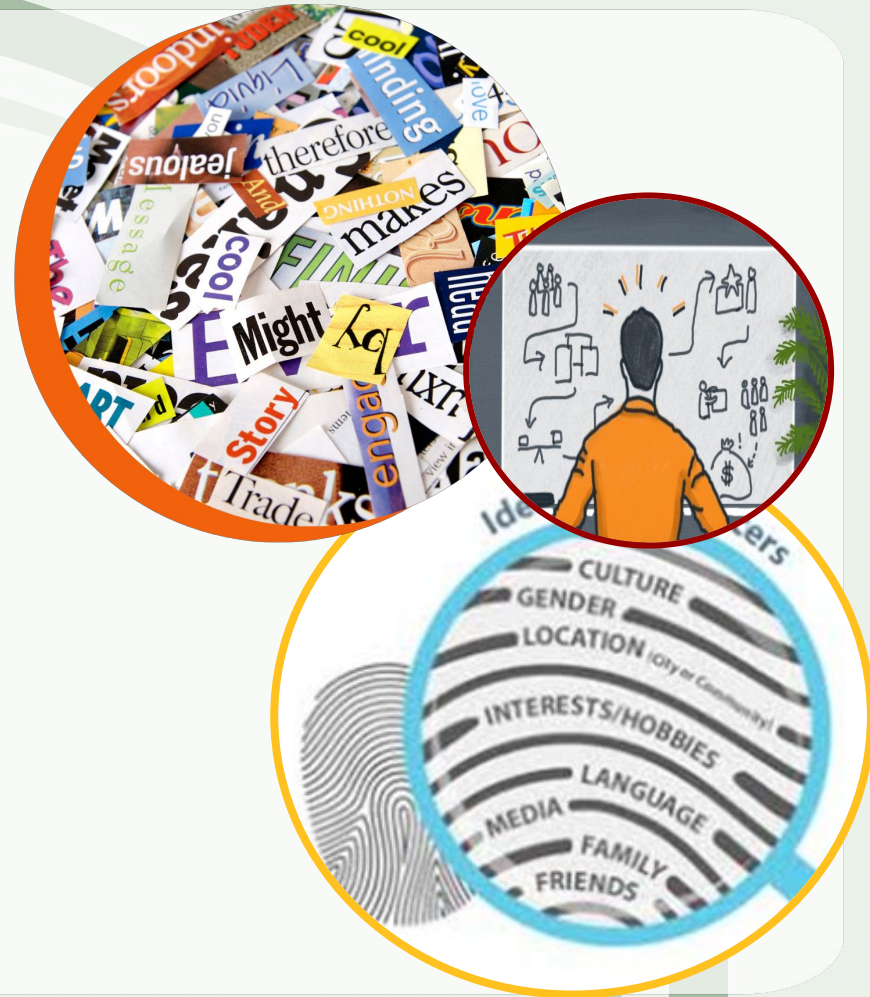
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Our Charge:

Livingston Public Schools RFP: After several years of focused work in diversity, equity, and inclusion we must now try to get a comprehensive globalview as to how that work is paying off,and areas that need more attention. We need to know what is working well,where there are gaps,and what our priorities should be as we work to move forward as quickly and effectively as possible.

Our Guiding Questions:

- What is the impact of DEI work to-date?
- Is the district DEI work program rich, but impact poor?
- Is the work we are doing making a difference?
- Is it implemented with fidelity?
- How do we best communicate and engage with the community to articulate the work we are doing and make it more visible?
- Are we doing enough to share what's happening in the DEI area?



Reminders

- *We don't claim to have found the "truth", but we do uncover and share perspectives- which gives us a direction to look deeper*
- *Much of what seems like a "negative" is not necessarily so.... It may be a lack of communication- you may have the right stuff, but folks are not taking it up*
- *While we talked to a lot of people, we can only report on those who respond- which often skews towards folks who have a concern to raise*
- *For the addendum, we revisited the focus groups, and conducted new interviews with 3 parents and 10 current or former staff*
- *The "concerns" identified are based on the perception of participants, but are not "verified as fact" - that is the work that remains to be done, to uncover and understand the origin of those perceptions*
- *The purpose of the equity audit- is not punitive, nor should it be weaponized- it is meant to help all stakeholders in the district engage in a process of continuous improvement. If we are to build a humanizing system, we have to ALL work together to repair, restore, and build trust and communication.*



The Addendum

Special Education: Perceived Concerns Named by Audit Participants

- ❑ OoD students not included in district and school communications and events
- ❑ Fear of retaliation if advocating for child's needs resulting in less opportunities or services
- ❑ Lack of programming/supports for neurodiverse students- all or nothing approach
- ❑ Access to courses/electives that are not required or do not meet graduation requirements
- ❑ Overrepresentation by race in self contained classrooms
- ❑ Staff turnover, especially at Burnett Hill
- ❑ Bullying of neurodiverse students
- ❑ Lack of co-curricular opportunities
- ❑ Treated as "less than" for not performing to high achieving standard

Special Education: Recommendations

- ❑ Address inclusion of OoD students
- ❑ Add specific focus on treatment of dis/ability and neurodiversity in climate and culture- ensuring that students understand that as an issue of bullying, and that adults support and address such concerns
- ❑ Explore the perception of an "all or nothing" approach to supports and opportunities, and address structures or policies that contribute to this
- ❑ Examine placement data to ascertain if there is over-representation in self contained classrooms, and if so, address the biases that may be informing that outcome
- ❑ Create a transparent and open environment for safe communication and collaboration with families- build, or restore, trust.

Source:

review of existing focus group and interview data, and phone calls with 3 additional parents

The Addendum

Source:

Phone/zoom calls
with 10 current or
former employees

Retaliatory Culture: Perceived Concerns Named by Audit Participants

- ❑ Favoritism: Who you know changes outcomes
- ❑ Retaliation: Negative evaluations, write-ups, or changes to position/assignments
- ❑ Threats: “not graduating” if posting in Black at Livingston
- ❑ Language: That conveys disrespect for families, or staff
- ❑ Climate: Insider/outsider status
- ❑ Areas of concern: HIB, discipline, SPED services and supports, staff turnover

Retaliatory Culture: Recommendations

- ❑ Create a [humanizing environment](#)- for staff, families, and students - shift from punitive to restorative, from behaviorist to humanizing
- ❑ Shift away from “gotcha” and “protect the status quo” to a culture of [radical feedback/critique](#)
- ❑ Shift to “I don’t know, but let’s figure out how to help”, rather than relying on systems of evaluation and judgement - [develop an equity mindset](#)

The six characteristics of an Equity Mindset

curiosity
commitment
critical consciousness
complexity
collaboration
creativity



What's next?

While the audit is done, and the final report shared, **your work is just beginning.**

Now the district, via administrative teams, district departments, individual school teams, equity councils, parent groups, and board committees will have to **engage with the findings, ask more questions, and come up with strategies to respond to the recommendations.**

Who needs to be involved, and how you might imagine taking on the **challenge of each recommendation.**



The Challenge, and the Opportunity

Livingston Public Schools is a good school system. Overall, students fare well on academic and co-curricular standards, behave as expected, and succeed in completing their schooling and progressing to college and career. The district does not have any significant areas of disproportionality, and most faculty and staff see it as a good place to live and work, contributing to high levels of staff retention in most instructional and support services areas. Changing demographics have created some tensions, and the district has responded by increasing its attention on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion. There are challenges and occasional incidents that are addressed, but outcomes are good.

Livingston has the opportunity to be a national model for this work - leaning into the challenge of how to prepare students at the next level and to address the covert, rather than the overt.

- **How do we support all of our students to be engaged members of a diverse, global community?**
- **How can we be a model space in which everyone can be their whole and complete self, and feel welcomed, included, and valued, as they are?**
- **How do we address, rather than ignore, the global and political conflicts that divide and polarize our communities, leaning into the hard conversations?**



Recommendations:

District Level

The single biggest challenge for the district is to create the organizational structures and supports that allow the students, faculty and staff, and community members to engage with and implement the recommendations in their interpersonal interactions, classroom, building, and team settings.



- ❑ *Theory of action*
- ❑ *Ongoing evaluation of the impact of DEI*
- ❑ *Balance individual school autonomy with district vision*
- ❑ *Expand the district level DEI team*
- ❑ *Continue curricular changes*
- ❑ *Partner with community/cultural organizations*
- ❑ *Share power and voice with students*

By domain: General DEI

- Continue to **define roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the adults involved in the DEI work**- while the equity coach position is new, it is important for them to spend time figuring out their roles, how they can have impact, how they work with their building administrators, and what time is dedicated to their work.
- Develop a set of **clearly defined goals for each equity team** to help the district measure its progress over time and begin to break down the perception that the work being done is performative in nature.
- Develop a **clear plan for rolling out DEI work in a structured, somewhat uniform manner** across the district, beginning with foundational equity work focused on developing equity literacy.
- **Begin DEI work with the adults**, expanding the work to include much deeper levels of reflection that should, over time, aid in the development of an “equity mindset,” a mindset through which all decisions can be made.
- Be sure to **include non-certificated staff** in this work.



By domain: Climate and Culture



Students

- Commit to **increasing transparency** behind the decision-making process and **elevating student voice**.
- Increase staff comfort with and **confidence in discussing issues of diversity and social justice**, leading to more meaningful conversations in classrooms, particularly *Community*.
- Attention should be paid to **adult responses to student behavior issues**, with intentional focus on bullying or perceived bullying, an issue raised by both students and parents. This should help restore trust between students and adults in the district.
- Work should be put into **ensuring that students understand that their words have weight and words can hurt others**.



By domain: Climate and Culture

Staff

- Intentional work must be done to **overcome the “retaliatory culture” and “favoritism”** that staff perceives is present in the district. Whether real or imagined, this culture inhibits risk-taking, silences important student-teacher conversations, and decreases staff retention. There is no greater threat to the potential to grow and improve in pedagogy, curriculum, or DEI work than a compromised professional culture.
- Aligned with the student recommendation above, increase **consistency of response to student misbehavior**. While confidentiality plays a significant role in matters of student discipline, it is also important for staff to understand the administrative philosophy behind student discipline and see that philosophy applied consistently.



By domain: Academics

- **Review guidelines** for how and when new and returning students can enroll in honors, AP, or other advanced level classes and programs. **Include staff, students, and families in this process.**
- **Make use of those educators who are committed to and passionate about DEI** work to lead the way in the area of professional learning, curriculum development, and data review and analysis.
- **Increase representation of the student body** in textbooks, media centers, and other classroom and school materials and resources.



- **Close the gap** between the reality that the district has developed a comprehensive, age-appropriate multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) with the resources necessary to provide students with three tiers of intervention, and the fact that **many of the family and staff didn't know it, couldn't articulate it, and aren't sure what to do with it.** Clarity about who is responsible, what is the criteria for each level, how to determine curriculum gaps or gaps in learning vs learning disabilities were noted concerns from staff. Many families have the perception that you are either in or out of special education, and don't seem to have an understanding of the levels of intervention.

By domain:

Communication and Family/Community Collaboration

- Be intentional when building teams to address school or district concerns; include participants from different backgrounds to **ensure diversity of voice**.
- Provide **time and space for building leaders** to better understand DEI concepts and mindsets and collaborate about strategies they are using in their buildings to advance DEI efforts.
- Closely **monitor responses to incidents targeting any minority group** in the district to ensure a consistent level of response.
- Develop systems to **share appropriate information** with students and families when serious incidents impact the school or community.
- Provide **parent associations and the PT Council with development work** to ensure the engagement of diversity within their group.
- **Reach out to community partners** representing residents from diverse backgrounds to encourage their involvement in school activities. In the absence of a staff that is representative of student demographics, this helps to provide a more diverse group of role models with whom students can interact.
- Investigate or develop a mechanism to **track family involvement** in school activities.



Questions & Comments





Thank you Livingston!

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