

EQUITY AUDIT/NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR HOLLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Background Information

After representatives of Holland Public Schools (HPS) attended a meeting with East Lansing Public Schools in January 2013 to better understand their journey in addressing achievement gaps, Superintendent Brian Davis scheduled a follow-up meeting with Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews of Michigan State University's Department of Teacher Education on February 28, 2013 to discuss the district's efforts to address racial equity, socioeconomic status, and opportunity for all learners in HPS. Dr. Carter was joined by Dr. Muhammad Khalifa of MSU's K-12 Educational Administration Department and Bernadette Castillo of the department of Teacher Education in a conference call meeting with Superintendent Davis and members of Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance (LEDA).

The Achievement Without the Gap Action Plan for HPS reveals that children of color and children of low socioeconomic status achieve statistically below their white peers. Achievement gaps are present in the elementary grades and widen as students enter secondary school. Additionally a review of referrals at the secondary level indicates that students of color and low-income students are receiving discipline referrals at a disproportionate rate to their non-white peers. Furthermore, some of these same students are underrepresented in advanced/honors courses and dual enrollment and overrepresented in remedial and credit recovery programs in the district. The district has begun to put in place a plan to audit current data, practices, and expected outcomes for all learners, involving multiple stakeholders. To this end, HPS recognized the need for an Equity Audit/Needs Assessment to determine how best to move forward with meeting the needs of all learners in the district and partnered with Dr. Carter Andrews and her colleagues to complete an Equity Audit/Needs Assessment in the district. In February and March of 2014, the five-person assessment team a) interviewed all principals and assistant principals in the district; b) conducted interviews with a representative sample of teachers at each school; c) conducted focus groups with three types of student groups at schools for students in grades 6-12; and, d) surveyed students in grades 6-12, staff, administrators, and parents across the district. Three doctoral students in the College of Education at Michigan State University assisted Drs. Carter and Khalifa in collecting and analyzing the data for the audit.

Assessment Purposes

1. To understand the factors that contribute to achievement inequities in Holland Public Schools and identify areas of significant achievement differences (e.g, race, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.). This includes identifying home, school, classroom, and individual-level barriers to high academic performance.
2. To assist the district in identifying professional development and educational interventions to reduce achievement gaps and enhance school success for all students.

Assessment Questions

Three questions are suggested to drive this assessment:

1. What does current district data reveal about achievement inequities in Holland Public Schools?

2. What factors do staff, students, and parents identify as contributing to achievement inequities in Holland Public Schools?
3. What initiatives (district-level, school-level, classroom-level) can be implemented to build cultural competency and enhance students' schooling experiences in Holland Public Schools?

General Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to conduct the audit. Data was conducted via survey administration, online data analysis, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. See Table 1 for total number of sample participants in qualitative and quantitative data collection. Appendix A provides a breakdown of the sample demographics.

Table 1. Total Number of Sample Participants in Audit Data Collection

Qualitative Data Collection	
Individual Teacher Interviews	N=79
Student Focus Group Participants	N=168
Administrators	Principal (n=7) Assistant Principals (n=7) Counselor (n=1) Superintendent (n=1) Central Cabinet Team Member (CCT) (n=6)
Quantitative Data Collection	
Staff Survey	N=182
Student Survey	N=1,600
Administrator Survey	N=8
Parent Survey	N=633

Overview of quantitative data. **Administrators.** Only 8 administrators participated in the survey, and this led to restrictions on our quantitative analysis. We hope more will engage the survey, but if not, we will analyze this data in the final report. **Teachers.** A total of 182 teachers completed the survey—1.6% Black, 9% Latino, and 61% White. **Parents.** A total of 633 parents completed the survey; 390 white, 93 Latino, 11 Black, and they were in predominantly educated with a B.A. or higher, and middle-aged. **Students.** 1,600 students started the student survey; however, 1,218 students completed the survey, 76% of the total—5% Black, 32% Latino, 4.5% Asian, and 13% Multiracial.

Why the 8 Focus Areas

After careful analysis, findings were categorized according to 8 topic areas related to students', staff, administrators', and parents' overall opinions of Holland Public Schools and specific perceptions of factors contributing to achievement and discipline gaps for students: 1) school culture and climate; 2) school-community relations; 3) thoughts on achievement gaps; 4) thoughts on discipline gaps; 5) accepting/marginalizing student identity and voice; 6) culturally relevant school leadership, teaching, and curriculum; 7) discriminatory behavior and practices;

and, 8) teacher rating and expectations. What follows is an overview of major themes in each topic area based on the qualitative and quantitative data findings.

School Culture and Climate

Students

Students reported their schools to be safe, comfortable and welcoming learning environments. Opinions varied when referring to specific school buildings and relationships between adults and students in those buildings. For example, students at New Tech made comparisons between their school environment and that of Holland High. “There’s more of a community feel at New Tech.” One student stated, “I like New Tech, cause I get to be who I am.” There was a shared sentiment in the New Tech student focus group that the small numbers and strong relationships between teachers and students made the school more “community-oriented.” These students were less enthusiastic about teachers at Holland High. Similarly, student opinions about teachers and other aspects of schooling were less favorable at other buildings. Most often students reported mixed reviews about teachers, reporting that some teachers have “favorites” and others are “very rude.” One student at Heights stated, “They don’t understand us. They don’t care about our opinions.” While not a sentiment held by all students interviewed, many students reported similar opinions about teachers. This affected their overall perceptions of the school culture and climate.

Findings also revealed that students in the African American and Latino student focus groups overwhelmingly reported negative perceptions of adults, specifically teachers, identifying them as “bullies” (a Latino student), as people who “get frustrated easily,” and as creating a hostile learning environment. One African American male stated that a teacher “picks on me for no reasons. He talks negatively about me to other students and teachers.” This was not the perception of all teachers, but these perceptions are important to note as common across student focus groups.

The quantitative data also confirmed much of the qualitative findings. Overall, students had moderately favorable opinions of school culture and climate (M=3.67). When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, survey data indicated that Hispanic/Latino students had the highest opinions of school culture and climate (M=3.75), which means they had the most positive feelings overall about school culture and climate. Black students had the least positive feelings about school culture and climate (M=3.41). Multiracial (M=3.60) and American Indian students (M=3.55) also had less favorable feelings than Whites (M=3.63) but had more positive attitudes than Blacks.

Teachers

Interviews with the teacher sample across the district revealed that most teachers describe their school culture and climate as “welcoming,” “safe,” and “warm and nurturing.” At West, a teacher noted that every day during announcements the principal will say to students “remember, we love you.” Teachers noted that there is an awareness of difference and diversity in the buildings, but not enough is done to celebrate this diversity or identify strategies for challenges that arise in a culturally diverse learning environment. At Holland High a teacher talked about being saddened that there are not more students of color in advanced classes, wishing that there was more of a perception of “if you want to try, go for it.” Several teachers noted that their building has a culture of high expectations for students and staff and that staff are collaborative

and committed to meeting the needs of students. However, some teachers acknowledged that they or others often lower their expectations for students who have challenging home lives. For example one teacher stated, “sometimes I can find myself, and I know I’m not the only one, but I have a student who has an extremely hard home life and I feel like sometimes I don’t give him as much homework as the rest” (East teacher). A teacher at Heights noted that more collaboration between staff and the district would be useful. An East teacher stated that the class contract has helped to guide a high standard to which students tend to rise. Another East teacher stated that staff members have “a pretty open dialogue,” and East is the “hardest working group” in the district.

Overall teachers described their relationships with students as “pretty positive,” but had varied things to say about parent-teacher relationships. Teachers spoke honestly about their individual relationships with parents and how this might affect school culture and climate. “Sometimes I don’t contact parents quickly enough when things go bad” (JF teacher). Many teachers acknowledged that they could do more to reach out to parents in general and contact them more frequently to report positive things about their children. Several teachers noted the transient nature of families as a factor prohibiting their ability to keep constant contact. Also, having a phone number or email address for families was noted as difficult.

The staff at VR Tech and New Tech are unique in that those are smaller schools, and teachers in those buildings described the culture and climate as very community-oriented. Students do not self-segregate, and teachers are able to work one-on-one with students rather than lecture in class due to the smaller class sizes. A VR Tech teacher stated, “I love them. I love our staff”; this teacher noted that administration has allowed teachers to apply their expertise and initiate change.

Staff surveys revealed that overall teachers had a positive outlook toward school culture and climate ($M=3.94$). When disaggregated by race, Asian teachers had the most favorable opinions of school culture and climate ($M=4.21$), followed by Whites ($M=4.02$), Hispanics ($M=3.89$), and Blacks ($M=2.38$). There were racial differences in how staff felt about school culture and climate, with Asians having the most positive feelings, followed by Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks. It should be noted that the sample sizes for Asian and Black staff were small for the survey.

Administrators

Administrators’ perceptions of school culture and climate mirrored many of the sentiments of students and teachers. Some principals described a culture of mistrust amongst their staff; “they’re not quick to jump in and have each other’s back.” Because this is a union environment, “some staff will not do a single thing that they are not paid to do” (CCT). Some principals and CCTs shared this sentiment. Also there is a new teacher evaluation instrument being used this year, and there is a lot of new leadership in the district; one principal credits these factors as adding to a culture of mistrust. Some principals who are newer to the district or new to their building find themselves trying to develop the trust of the teachers. In other cases principals report a culture where there is “real intense effort to make everyone feel comfortable and like they belong” and that “the staff is very supportive and protective of each other.” In buildings where the staff is smaller, principals confirm that the culture is accepting and inclusive of various types of students. However, principals do confirm that teachers are more likely to blame students and families for low academic performance and also hold lower expectations for some students. As one principal stated, “teachers care, but lower expectations for some

students.” Another principal stated, “the staff began to blame students and see deficiency in students as opposed to thinking through how they might best serve students.”

When asked about student-teacher relationships, several principals described their staff as caring. However, in one building this caring can be a fault when teachers lower their expectations to the detriment of students. Another principal stated that students of color often say their perception is that adults do not treat them with respect as often. While there are some good student-teacher relationships, many students feel disconnected from their schools and “marginalized and oppositional toward the schooling because of how they are treated.” The reflections of CCTs on school culture and climate further underscored what building principals had to say. One CCT stated, “there is still a pretty pervasive mentality that kids that don’t fit the traditional mold are viewed as kind of ‘those kids’”. This administrator noticed this phenomenon most often with students with disabilities where staff talked about them in an Othering way. These students are also referred to as ‘SPEDs’ in the district, a label that is not flattering.

School-Community Relations

Teachers

When discussing parent-teacher relationships many teachers described their individual relationships with parents as “mostly positive.” Teachers recognized that many of their parents are working multiple jobs or single jobs that have challenging hours for engaging in school activities. Teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with parents and families varied by school. Some teachers characterized the differences in relationships as dependent on which families want to be involved. A Holland High teacher stated,

“the parents that wanted to be involved are involved. But the parents that don’t care, the calls, the leaving messages, the no callbacks, the, it’s very frustrating and that’s where I feel like from home, this is a team effort. It’s the school the parents and the kids. It can’t be just one or two; it’s got to be all three in order for it to work.”

A teacher at East described parent-teacher relationships as really strong. She believed the teachers “get to know the parents really well.” Yet she also alluded to the lack of connection between the community/parents and the school. Some teachers perceived that collaborative relationships between teachers and students as weak. For some there is a sense that teachers get blamed by parents (at times) for students’ lack of high academic performance. Yet there are other teachers that see the community as largely responsible for the lack of achievement among students. However, schools have made strides to be more accommodating to more parents. For example, a teacher at East explained that concerts have incorporated Spanish in an effort to include more families. A teacher at Holland High explained that she has made attempts to meet parents off campus to “diminish a potential threatening feeling or authority feeling,” but few parents showed up.

While the majority of teachers recognized that they could do more to make connections with community partners in ways that could enhance student learning, some teachers commented on efforts they have made to do this. A teacher at New Tech spoke of how she and her teaching partner have utilized a local conservationist and meteorologist in the classroom. They have also

had students Skype with a scientist in Laos. Another teacher at West spoke of the Kids Hope program and its efforts to provide mentors from the community to students. Another teacher spoke of efforts she has made to collaborate with outside organizations like the local library and the Boys and Girls Club to build networks for her students. We also learned of partnerships with local churches and volunteer nurses.

The quantitative data indicated differences in how staff viewed their relationship with parents and community members. For example, when asked if they agreed with: “*my school tries to include diverse families in school activities*”, 66% of Black staff disagreed, 39% of Latino staff disagreed, but only 12% of White staff disagreed with the statement. Even more starkly, when asked if “*teachers in the school respect students’ cultural differences*,” all of the Black teachers disagreed, and 22% of Latino teachers disagreed. But only 7% of White teachers disagreed with this statement.

Students

Another perspective on school-community relations came from students. Some students talked about their parents’ perceptions of the schools. From the perspective of students these were mixed. In a Latino student focus group at East, there was agreement that parents liked the school because it was safe and teachers were positive. Some students stated their parents found it hard to maintain good communication with the schools for reasons such as financial challenges that prohibited parents traveling to the schools (i.e. lack of gas money). Still others reported that their parents had negative opinions about the schools based on a sibling’s previous experience. Still other students reported their parents had bad experiences with teachers and administrators: “My mom or grandma doesn’t like this school because the teachers and administrators give them a snotty attitude” (Black student, East).

The survey questions posed to students that measured school-community relations were consistent for each race, but were most telling by language group. For example, when asked if “*my school tries to include my family in school activities*,” students who only spoke English at home agreed 50% of the time, but students who spoke Spanish or Arabic did not agree with this at all. Another interesting statistic that came from the student survey is that only 2 students in the entire district identified their homes as one that frequently speaks Spanish at home. Given the large number of Latino students in the district, this suggests that students might be socially distancing themselves from part of their language identity.

Principals

Principals mostly talked about parent perceptions of the schools as it related to school-community relations. In one building there is an initiative to establish a Home-School Liaison to help strengthen relationships between schools and families. In another building, a parent survey revealed that 97% of parents have positive perceptions of the school. Low responses related to having a good understanding of the academics in each content area and being able to adequately support their children in those areas. Another principal acknowledged that there is little to no outreach, no responsive way to engage the community in HPS. Those white, higher-SES families who are privileged have a greater voice in school. Still another principal identified the need for communication to improve between parents and schools. The reflections of CCTs revealed variation in parent perceptions of the schools. Some CCTs find parents to be positive about the schools, while others described parents as feeling unwelcomed in certain buildings.

Some efforts toward parent involvement were described as “one hit wonders.” Schools are able to get parents involved for an event, but sustained involvement is difficult.

Parents

The summarized survey data did not show significant differences regarding School-Community Relations, likely due to the low sample sizes of African American, Multiracial, and Other parents. When individual responses were reviewed, significant differences appeared and indicated that Black, and to a lesser extent Latino parents have more negative views than Whites regarding school-community relations. For example, when asked if they agreed that “*teachers only call me when there is a problem with my child*,” Black (64%) and Latino (46%) parents mostly agreed, whereas White (29%) parents were less agreeable.

Thoughts on Achievement Gaps

Teachers

Interviews with teachers revealed that while many acknowledge that there are achievement gaps in the district, some did not or had not seen the data to support it, and others were hesitant to characterize those gaps by race/ethnicity. Of the factors mentioned, teachers discussed student-, school-, and structural-level factors contributing to academic achievement gaps in HPS. At the student level, issues of attendance and truancy are significant as well as lack of student motivation to perform well. A Heights teacher noted that the district/schools could do better to follow up on trancies. Additionally many parents are operating in what many teachers referred to as “survival mode,” and are simply unable to provide the type of academic support at home that their children need. Those students who have involved families, participate in extracurricular activities, and have overall support perform better academically than those students who do not have these things in place. However, it should be noted that a common theme across the teacher interviews was a sense of blaming students and families for students’ academic underperformance. Teachers used language like, “they just don’t care” to refer to students and parents, primarily low-income parents. Teachers were less likely to take ownership for any part of the achievement gap. One West teacher stated “there is only so much you can do on this end of it.”

At an environmental level, teachers noted that poverty contributes to gaps, because it limits students’ access to outside resources or basic needs. Related to an earlier point – because parents are struggling financially there is less time to help students with homework and engage the schooling process in a variety of ways (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, regular communication with teachers and administrators, etc.).

At a systems/structural levels, teachers noted that there is not enough support in the schools for children who do not come in with foundational skills. Students come in with “man, many holes” in their skill base (New Tech teacher). Some teachers alluded to the practice of social promotion taking place, recognizing that curriculum gets more difficult for students and so achievement gaps grow because students are not prepared. This creates a “culture of apathy” amongst students (JF teacher). The district could become more stringent on holding kids back (Heights teacher). Another teacher at JF believed that greater rigor in the curriculum might help close gaps. Other teachers noted that gaps were evident in the academic performance of students of different racial groups. Teachers noted racial patterns in who was represented in GT programs and AP courses. A Holland High teacher characterized this issue as many students at the middle

school level not even being prepared to think of themselves as honors students. Perhaps advanced courses are not being marketed to students effectively. Several teachers noted gaps in all areas (e.g., racial/ethnic, language, SES). Some teachers noted gaps in who is being referred to and placed in special education, characterizing it as being “over eager to diagnose.”

Many teachers believe their colleagues are committed to closing achievement gaps, but they need help and suggestions on how to do it. A teacher at New Tech noted, to close gaps, “we need to think differently . . . build relationships . . . [look at] commonalities in language, in expectation in all of our classrooms . . . and to think differently about community outreach . . . I don’t know what that looks like, but that is needed.” Other teachers noted that to close gaps staff needs to explicitly address how culture affects learning. Some teachers have heard their colleagues make negative comments about students, such as “kids are lazy.”

Survey findings revealed that many similarities exist between the qualitative and quantitative data. For example, a number of measures revealed that the teachers held deficit understandings of students as they blamed students and families for academic underperformance and disciplinary issues. The racial background of teachers did not play a role in staff responses. Also, only 27% of teachers agreed that students of color are “*encouraged to enroll in advanced placement and honors classes.*” This indicates a problem with teacher expectations for student learning. A couple of the other most telling items were questions about teacher expectations of students of color. When asked if *teachers had lowered expectations of students of color*, 60% of teachers disagreed. Yet when asked if *students have equal access and opportunity to advanced/honors courses*, 50% of teachers agreed. Less than half of all Black and Latino students agreed with questions that asked if they were *encouraged to take challenging and extra curricular courses.*

Students

Across interviews with adults and students, it is a common theme that there is unequal access to advanced curriculum and enrichment programs in the district. Students, teachers, and administrators acknowledge that in most buildings where gifted and talented (GT) programs are present, the student population in those programs is primarily white and Asian. Yet in a few buildings the racial demographics were more balanced in GT courses. Students believe differential treatment of students contributes to the achievement gap in the district. Some students believe that those students who are identified as GT “get treated better. They are all white” (Black student, East). In the Latino student focus group at Holland High, students uniformly responded that teachers, and especially counselors, encourage their participation in AP courses. In the Latino student focus group at East, students reported that Latinos do not enroll in AP classes for social reasons. Their identity is threatened by participating in advanced classes with majority white students. These students believe that Latino students are equally capable but do not enroll in upper-level courses due to either real or perceived social-cultural pressures. Issues such as language barriers, particularly for immigrant students, are also at play.

From the student perspective – lack of caring teachers contributes to the achievement gap. Teachers can spend more time explaining material thoroughly and treating students fairly in the classroom. There is some quantitative support for this as well; for example, when asked if “*I am encouraged by teachers and counselors to take challenging academic courses at my school,*” Black students agreed 44% of the time, but White students agreed 56% of the time. This is an indication that higher expectations might be held for some students more than for others.

Administrators

Administrators confirmed that many of the same factors contribute to academic achievement gaps in HPS: racial disproportionality in GT programs (“there are some buildings in the district where there are 0% students of color in gifted and talented”); families struggling to survive financially; lack of mentoring and adequate academic support for struggling students; lack of awareness on the part of students of the “hidden rules” for being successful in school; lowered teacher expectations; overrepresentation of boys of color and lower-SES students in special education; inequitable opportunities to quality preschooling; and, scheduling issues that deny students access to core curriculum that they need. And many of the same students are in the achievement gaps: students of color, students living in poverty, and students with disabilities (CCT).

“There is a pervasive mentality or mindset of some staff members that we are here to serve the high achieving, middle class and I don’t necessarily know if I would say white, but that tends to be the white kids. I don’t think it’s necessarily a conscious thing. I think it’s more of a ‘When I started my career, I was teaching all white kids and all middle class kids and since then things have changed significantly but I haven’t gotten any training or support myself for my own behaviors” (CCT).

As one principal noted, “the problem is very serious, but there has been little follow up until now. Teachers are in a state of denial and anger when the topic comes up.” Teachers feel like they are being blamed for achievement gaps, and there aren’t good interventions in place to address many of students’ academic, social, and emotional needs. A CCT noted that expectations play a big role; it is important to set a high bar and find ways to scaffold students to get there. The need for a “viable curriculum that will help all students meet high standards” will be necessary to close achievement gaps (CCT).

Parents

The survey data revealed a number of findings. Overall, the mean for parents’ responses on questions about the achievement gap was 2.4. This indicates that parents held neither definitively positive nor negative attitudes regarding the achievement gap in HPS. When analyzing specific responses, parents’ thoughts regarding differences in achievement differed by race. For example, when asked if teachers expect less of minority children at school, White parents disagreed more frequently—at roughly 7% of the time, but Latino parents (17%) and Black parents (36%) were more likely to agree. Other measures revealed that parents perceived encouragement for their children to take advanced courses differently. For example when asked if “*teachers recommend that my child take gifted and talented classes,*” Whites (54%) agreed more often than Latinos (43%) and Blacks (36%).

Thoughts on Discipline Gaps

Teachers

A common theme in the teacher interviews regarding discipline gaps related to the lack of clear policies and procedures for how offenses should be handled and what the consequences should be based on the type of offense. A JF teacher stated, “there’s a lack of discipline and follow-through, so students feel they can ‘slip through.’” This was a common sentiment across the interviews. A Heights teacher described students as getting away with too much and being sent to the office without consequences. In-school suspension is not an option; there are no good programs in place throughout the district to address discipline. Teachers’ perceptions of who is being disciplined varied across the school buildings. In some cases teachers did not think racial disproportionality in referrals or suspensions was an issue. “Discipline is a result of a lot of how kids were raised” (JF teacher). A Holland High teacher hesitantly noted, “. . . I hate to say it but I feel like it stems from home life. I see a lot of that. And you know the kids that don’t have a stable home life are the ones who act up and want any kind of attention.” The same teacher noted that discipline is getting better at Holland High with the new principal in place. Procedures have been more streamlined. Several teachers believed discipline issues arise because students struggle academically. Other teachers believe “consequences [are] too extreme for the actions” (New Tech teacher).

In other cases, teachers did identify racial disproportionality in discipline referrals and punishments or in discipline referrals but felt like punishments were equally applied. A Holland High teacher noted that behavioral gaps exist with Black students, particularly males, and special education students being highly targeted for suspension and expulsion. The teacher recognized that staff has been having good conversation about discipline to determine “what’s going on here,” and examining the differences in soft referrals (e.g., disrespect, talking in class) and hard referrals. While one teacher at East stated that school has very few discipline problems, another stated that issues do exist and that teachers are frustrated with the lack of effective response once students are referred to the front office. Many teachers believe more training and support in regards to positive behavioral support systems and classroom management would help.

Survey findings revealed that teachers held some problematic views on the discipline gap. For example, despite the views of some minority parents, only 20% of teachers felt that racism was a serious problem. This and other measures of the survey indicated that teachers are in denial about issues concerning race. Despite the discipline gaps that exist in HPS, over 50% of the teachers believe that students are disciplined fairly in the district. And 73% of the teachers felt that they respected students’ cultural differences.

Students

Overwhelmingly students identified punishments as being different for Mexican and Black students than for white students. Across student focus groups the Black students perceive that they are discipline more than any other students. “Black are the worst, then Mexicans, then whites. White students are always allowed to do things that Black students are punished for” (Black student, East). One student contributed this to lack of cultural understanding on the part of adults: “our [Black students] cultures are different, and that’s why we respond differently to confrontation” (Black student, New Tech). In the New Tech all-Black student focus group students perceived black and brown students as being suspended for minor offenses and white students as not being suspended for major offenses. For example, students perceive that in a

fight between a student of color and a white student, the student of color is more likely to get suspended even if the white student initiated the fight or committed the same offenses. Students also believe that certain students have become targets for discipline (Heights racially diverse student focus group). Some kids are labeled “bad kids.” This label is applied more often to students of color and boys than girls. The “bad” label precludes a student from ever being able to escape harsher punishments.

Students also perceive that teachers have a difficult time managing their students. Some students in the Heights racially diverse student focus group stated that teachers shame their students, telling them to “shut up” or asking them to leave the classroom never calling them back into the room. In the East racially diverse student focus group, students also reported that teachers will yell at certain students for no reason. “They tell you off or kick you out of class.” “They get angry and start yelling at us” (Latino student, East). While many students blamed discipline gaps on the actions of teachers and other adults. Some students did identify students’ poor choices as the reason for their harsh consequences. While students do acknowledge discriminatory treatment in discipline referrals and punishments they also acknowledge student individual responsibility for one’s actions.

Despite the fact that 60% of teachers felt that students were disciplined fairly in their school, only 48% of Latino students agreed, 42% of White students, and 23% of Black students agreed with this question. This indicates that a majority of all students, but a disproportionate majority of Black students feel that HPS are unfair learning spaces. Fairness has been closely linked with hostility (i.e., hostile climate) in research literature.

Administrators

Principals and CCTs spoke of teacher rigidity and lack of knowledge about positive behavior interventions as contributing to gaps in discipline by race and ability. Teachers’ low tolerance for minor infractions leads to severe consequences when unnecessary. A CCT stated, “classroom management is something that worries me. Our discipline trends are alarming. I think we’re very quick to send kids out of the classroom and provide discipline and not doing a great job of, clearly, not defining expectations, teaching expected behaviors and acknowledging when we see expected behaviors. I think as an organization we tend to be very reactive and pretty punitive.” A principal acknowledged that discipline gaps are a serious problem, and identified Black and Latino males and Latinas as targeted. You hear from teachers that “the black male is too confrontational, and I don’t know how to deal with that. Black females are loud. Latino males are quiet, looking scary in the back of the room,” and Latinas are fighting. There was general agreement that there is disproportionality by race in suspension (“it should be mostly Caucasian kids that get referred first, based on numbers”), yet several principals acknowledged that there are no resources to support having an in-school support room in the buildings for misbehavior or for after-school detention. One principal noted that parents are concerned that children are being disciplined differently by race. The culture of blaming students persists (as mentioned earlier).

Accepting/Marginalizing Student Identity and Voice

Teachers

Findings from teacher interviews indicated that teachers acknowledge students throughout the district need academic, social and emotional support. However, the degree to

which this is provided to students varies across buildings. Some teachers identified themselves as being the type of teacher that regularly responds to these needs while others discussed feeling helpless in being able to meet many or all of their students' needs. Teacher spoke of the need for schools to do more via family-school partnerships and school-community partnerships to build culturally inclusive learning environments and affirm the cultural identities of their students and families. Affirming student identity and voice is deemed an area in need of significant improvement throughout the districts. More often than not, the teachers who worked in smaller buildings, such as VR Tech and New Tech, perceived themselves as more often affirming student identity and voice. One example was given by a teacher at Heights of graffiti that is displayed throughout the halls to help the students feel welcomed and take ownership of their education.

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that their school—including students as well as people in various professional roles—respected students' cultural differences. For example, 73% agreed that teachers respected students' cultural differences. Moreover, 70% of teachers felt that the administrators respected cultural differences, and that 75% of office staff respected students' cultural differences.

Students

Students' perceptions of whether adults affirm their opinions and ideas or marginalize them varied. In smaller buildings, such as VR Tech and New Tech, students identified teachers and other staff members as caring about them and more open to their ideas and opinions about their learning. Students also felt like they could be themselves and express their own identities in these learning spaces. In the more traditional schools students were less positive about teachers' openness to their voices and identities and wanted teachers to be more caring, less stereotypical and biased and more willing to provide support in the learning process.

The survey data suggested that students did not always feel that teachers respected students' cultural differences. For example, while White and Latino students mostly agreed (Latinos, 70% and Whites, 76%), only about 51% of Black students agreed. Similar trends followed when asked a similar question about office staff and other students, although all groups held more positive attitudes regarding administrators' respectfulness.

Administrators

A CCT noted that findings from a 7th grade survey that was previously administered indicated that “students do not feel that their needs are met. They don't feel that they have a sense of belonging in the school[s].”

Culturally Relevant School Leadership, Teaching, and Curriculum

Teachers and Students

Most of the teachers interviewed did not speak on the matter of teaching and curriculum as being culturally relevant. In a few cases teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) spoke of their awareness of differing levels of language proficiencies and cultures and noted the importance of the relational piece in the Hispanic culture (example, Holland High teacher). A New Tech teacher stated, “. . . curriculum is important, but my focus is on getting kids to think

‘bigger picture’ . . . to see real world application.” Generally, there was very little discussion of curriculum, pedagogy and practice as relevant or responsive to the cultural identities of students.

Survey findings indicated that many teachers agree that they enact cultural responsiveness. However, there were differences among groups in the staff. White (M=4.04) and Latino (M=3.92) teachers were more favorable of their demonstration of cultural responsiveness than Black (M=3.10) teachers. However, from the perspective of students’ individual survey items revealed some concerns with culturally relevant teaching and curriculum. Overall, students were moderate in their opinions of culturally relevant curriculum in their schools (M=3.29). For example, despite the fact that more Black (62%) and Latino (57%) students expressed that they “enjoy learning” than students overall (43%), they still lag behind academically in the district. This indicates a problem with culturally relevant schooling. Student views about the school representing diverse perspectives in the curriculum, and about teachers, administrators, and office staff respecting diversity also suggested some issues with cultural responsiveness.

Principals

Principals report having high expectations for their staff and students. Many of the principals described their leadership style as servant-leadership. “I try to empower people, and then help them own the leadership and the direction. . . . I try to do servant leadership . . . and I’m an honest leader. I try to communicate very well.” One principal had initiated programs in his buildings to glean student feedback on academic progress (Visible Thinking/Teaching for Understanding) and help staff better understand the links between ethnic and cultural attributes and differences in learning styles. Others have used the exploration of data to help staff better understand where achievement inequities are situated and how to go about addressing them. Another principal described her efforts to affirm student voice and identity in the building by strengthening the types and structure of clubs available. Another principal focused this year on “get[ting] routines and procedures under control” and initiated an effort to respond to teachers’ sense that they were being under-recognized in the learning context. Principals did not speak explicitly about curriculum as culturally relevant or responsive. A CCT noted that the district has made improvements to the curriculum so that all students at the same grade level receive similar instruction, but this is not necessary indicative of cultural relevance or responsiveness. Another CCT noted that the district needs training on cultural issues to better meet the needs of students.

Discriminatory Behavior and Practices

Students

Similar to comments mentioned in the Thoughts on Discipline Gap section, students identified differential treatment as an example of discriminatory behavior and practices by teachers and other adults in school buildings. This ranged from managing behavior in the classroom to access to academic support in the classroom. For example, a student in the JF Latino student focus group discussed needing extra help this year with this school work but not being able to get it; thus his grades dropped from the As and Bs that he was earning the year prior. In many cases students perceived teachers’ behaviors and practices as racist. In the Black student focus group at East, 7 of the 8 students felt that teachers made a “Black comment” to them and felt that they had been teased because of their race by teachers: “they make fun of you if you don’t live with your mom” or of “how Black students talk.” In the racially diverse student

focus group at East, a Latino student stated “their discipline is more harsh on us (Latinas) as it is on the white kids; they are expecting us to behave in a certain way.”

The student survey data was also informative regarding discriminatory practices in HPS. For example, students reported on the various types of discriminatory practices that they experienced. Nearly 49% of students felt that they experienced name-calling or teasing, and 31% felt that lies and false rumors had been spread about them. In terms of the frequency of discrimination, 18% felt that it was at least a daily occurrence, 31% weekly, and 24% felt it occurred at least once per month.

Teachers and Principals

Teachers and principals did not speak of explicit discriminatory practices and behaviors that are occurring in the schools to prohibit the success of any students. One principal stated that some adults’ language and behaviors toward Black and Latino students targets them in negative ways. Some teachers have been heard saying, “that person doesn’t fit here” if they don’t conform to norms in the community. For the most part, principals’ talk of discriminatory behavior and practices was illuminated in their discussion of their thoughts on academic and discipline gaps.

Parents

While on average, the rating for discriminatory behavior was 3.13, the quantitative data revealed that Black and Latino parents had less favorable views about discriminatory behavior and practices in the district than did the White parents. In other words, Black and Latino parents generally agreed that it was more of a problem than did White parents. For example, when asked if teachers expected less of minority children, 36% of Black parents agreed, and further, 55% disagreed that “*teachers treat all children equally.*” This should be considered with other qualitative and quantitative findings on deficit opinions of students of color.

Teacher Rating and Expectations

Students and Teachers

When asked their opinions of teachers in the student focus groups, many students spoke of the lowered expectations that teachers exhibit toward students of color and students who have been labeled as ‘bad kids.’ This resulted in differential treatment by teachers. Some of the comments were race-loaded and others were not. For example, a student in the all-Black focus group at East stated, “they think that Black students cannot do better. . . . but if they help us do better, we can. But they bring us down. They don’t help us.” A student in the all-Latino focus group at East stated, “some teachers set different expectations for different students Like for the like, the less, the most disrespectful kids, they set the bar lower than the kids that are respectful.”

Despite the mixed perceptions that students have of teachers, teachers see themselves as working really hard for students, “bending over backwards” (Holland High teacher). An East teacher stated, “I try to instill an enthusiasm and love for learning and I love first grade for that.” Teachers feel overwhelmed with work and need more staff support to get everything done. Teachers overwhelmingly noted that strong student-teacher relationships, high expectations, building self-esteem, and positive behavior interventions are all necessary for student success. “I’m all about relationships” (Heights teacher). Lack of strong relationships with students makes

it more difficult to teach content, engage students in the academic process, and develop positive academic outcomes for students. A New Tech teacher stated, “I feel very strongly that students in my room will learn if we have a strong relationship . . . pushing kids to think about their future.” Some teachers noted that more time is needed to re-teach and reinforce skills so that students “get it.” One JF teacher noted, “I push hard. As hard as I can. To get them to try to do their best. Keep trying to demand to get more out of them without them becoming totally frustrated.” Many teachers believe in differentiating instruction and making sure everyone can be successful no matter what their level of experiences; however, from the student perspective this is not always demonstrated by teachers.

While the staff survey data does not indicate significant differences in teacher expectations of students, individual item responses suggest some concerns. For example, when teachers were asked if they had lowered expectations for non-white and economically disadvantaged students, they agreed 19% and 23% of the time respectively. From the parents’ perspective, Whites had the most favorable view, followed by Blacks, and then least favorable, Hispanic parents. But in individual responses, 18% of Black parents agreed with the statement: “*teachers have low expectations of my child,*” whereas 9% of Latino parents agreed, and only 4% of Whites agreed. This indicates that there are differences in how expectations are perceived among various stakeholders. Data also indicated the White students are more likely to be encouraged in to challenging or advances academic classes, which also indicates teacher expectations of students.

Appendices

I. Parent Survey Summarized Data

Parent Gender				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	104	16.4	16.4	16.4
F	395	62.4	62.4	78.8
M	134	21.2	21.2	100.0
Total	633	100.0	100.0	

- Sixty-two percent the parental survey respondents were females

Parent Ethnicity				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
White	380	60.0	71.7	71.7
Hispanic	93	14.7	17.5	89.2
Black	11	1.7	2.1	91.3
American Indian	1	.2	.2	91.5
Asian	12	1.9	2.3	93.8
Other	15	2.4	2.8	96.6
Multiracial	18	2.8	3.4	100.0
Total	530	83.7	100.0	
System	103	16.3		
Total	633	100.0		

- Sixty-two percent of the parental survey respondents self-identified as white and 14.7 as Hispanic Latino

Parent Age Groups					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
20 to 30 years old	28	4.4	5.3	5.3	
31 to 40 years old	190	30.0	35.8	41.1	

41 to 50 years old	223	35.2	42.0	83.1
51 to 60 years old	82	13.0	15.4	98.5
61 or older	8	1.3	1.5	100.0
Total	531	83.9	100.0	
System	102	16.1		
Total	633	100.0		

- Thirty-Five percent of the parental survey respondents were between the ages of 41 and 50 years of age

Overall Scale Scores for Parent Sample

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SCC	501	2.10	3.70	2.8886	.26558
DBP	524	1.50	4.75	3.1193	.53518
SCR	517	1.40	4.20	2.8847	.39750
TAG	523	1.00	5.00	2.4570	.73472
TDG	519	1.50	4.75	3.6556	.46291
ASI	519	1.60	3.80	2.7383	.32055
CRSL	510	1.00	4.20	2.7302	.46470
TRE	516	1.00	4.60	3.2132	.40538

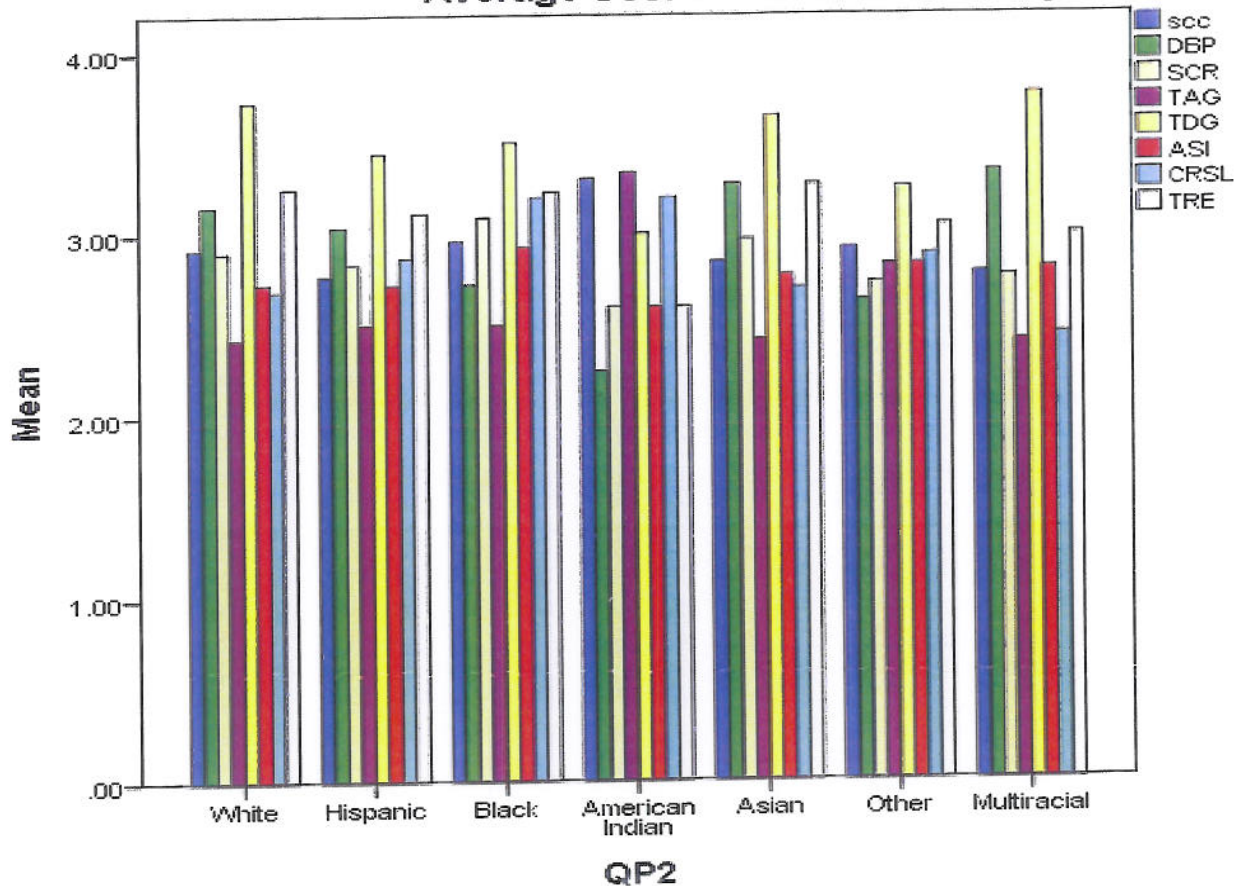
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Parent Ethnicity Scores by Scale

Ethnicity	SCC	DBP	TAG	TDG	ASI	CRSL	TRE	SCR
.	2.88	3.05	2.93	3.25	3.05	3.04	3.50	2.90
White	2.92	3.16	2.42	3.73	2.73	2.69	3.25	2.90
Hispanic	2.77	3.04	2.50	3.44	2.72	2.87	3.11	2.83
Black	2.96	2.72	2.50	3.50	2.93	3.20	3.23	3.09
American Indian	3.30	2.25	3.33	3.00	2.60	3.20	2.60	2.60
Asian	2.85	3.27	2.42	3.65	2.77	2.70	3.27	2.97
Other	2.91	2.63	2.82	3.25	2.83	2.88	3.04	2.73
Multiracial	2.78	3.33	2.41	3.76	2.80	2.44	2.99	2.76

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Average Scores for Parent Survey



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Student Survey Findings Summary

II. Student Survey Summarized Data

Student Primary Language				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Spanish	353	22.0	31.2	31.2
Mandarin Chinese	10	.6	.9	32.1
Arabic	10	.6	.9	33.0
Korean	6	.4	.5	33.5
Native American	1	.1	.1	33.6
French	5	.3	.4	34.1
English	745	46.5	65.9	100.0
Total	1130	70.6	100.0	
Missing System	471	29.4		
Total	1601	100.0		

Student SES				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	497	31.0	31.0	31.0
Paid Lunch	484	30.2	30.2	61.3
Free Lunch	531	33.2	33.2	94.4
Reduced Lunch	89	5.6	5.6	100.0
Total	1601	100.0	100.0	

Student School Attendance				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Middle School	646	40.3	52.7	52.7
High School	579	36.2	47.3	100.0
Total	1225	76.5	100.0	
Missing System	376	23.5		
Total	1601	100.0		

Student Survey Findings Summary

Student Ethnicity				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Black	60	3.7	4.9	4.9
Hispanic	391	24.4	32.1	37.0
White	468	29.2	38.4	75.5
Native Hawaiian	7	.4	.6	76.0
Asian	54	3.4	4.4	80.5
American Indian	11	.7	.9	81.4
Multiracial	163	10.2	13.4	94.7
Other	64	4.0	5.3	100.0
Total	1218	76.1	100.0	
Missing System	383	23.9		
Total	1601	100.0		

- The demographic breakdown for the student sample was 29.2 white students, 24.4 Hispanic/Latino and 10.2 Multiracial

Overall Scale Scores for Student Sample					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SCC	1277	1.00	18.39	3.6671	.82086
PRR	1258	1.00	5.00	3.7758	.62618
TRE	1245	1.00	5.00	3.5659	.82490
ASI	1234	1.00	5.00	3.4343	.57415
CRS	1217	1.00	5.00	3.2935	.73169

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Student Survey Findings Summary

Ethnicity by Survey Scores

Ethnicity	SCC	PRR	TRE	ASI	CRS
.	3.87	3.61	3.79	3.48	3.11
Black	3.41	3.69	3.54	3.62	3.43
Hispanic	3.75	3.84	3.67	3.55	3.31
White	3.63	3.78	3.51	3.33	3.29
Native Hawaiian	3.66	4.09	3.59	3.41	3.69
Asian	3.68	3.78	3.59	3.44	3.37
American Indian	3.55	3.71	3.76	3.41	3.10
Multiracial	3.60	3.71	3.44	3.43	3.22
Other	3.67	3.71	3.53	3.31	3.22

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Hispanics/Latino students had the highest school climate scores across ethnicity groups

Student Survey Findings Summary

School Level

QSE63	SCC	PRR	TRE	ASI	CRS
.	3.84	3.56	3.80	3.51	2.83
Middle School	3.74	3.81	3.63	3.45	3.35
High School	3.57	3.75	3.49	3.41	3.24

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- Middle school students had higher scores on each of the measures assessed for this population

SES

QSE66	SCC	PRR	TRE	ASI	CRS
	3.76	3.73	3.54	3.32	3.24
Paid Lunch	3.66	3.86	3.53	3.38	3.34
Free Lunch	3.66	3.73	3.61	3.52	3.28
Reduced Lunch	3.61	3.71	3.53	3.38	3.18

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Student Survey Findings Summary

Language

QSE73a	SCC	PRR	TRE	ASI	CRS
.	3.78	3.75	3.70	3.53	3.35
Spanish	3.73	3.82	3.63	3.53	3.28
Mandarin Chinese	3.62	3.93	3.95	3.51	3.72
Arabic	3.00	3.27	2.64	2.93	2.65
Korean	3.56	3.87	3.61	3.73	3.57
Native American	3.70	3.86	3.63	2.88	3.20
French	3.42	3.51	3.28	3.30	2.96
English	3.63	3.77	3.52	3.38	3.29

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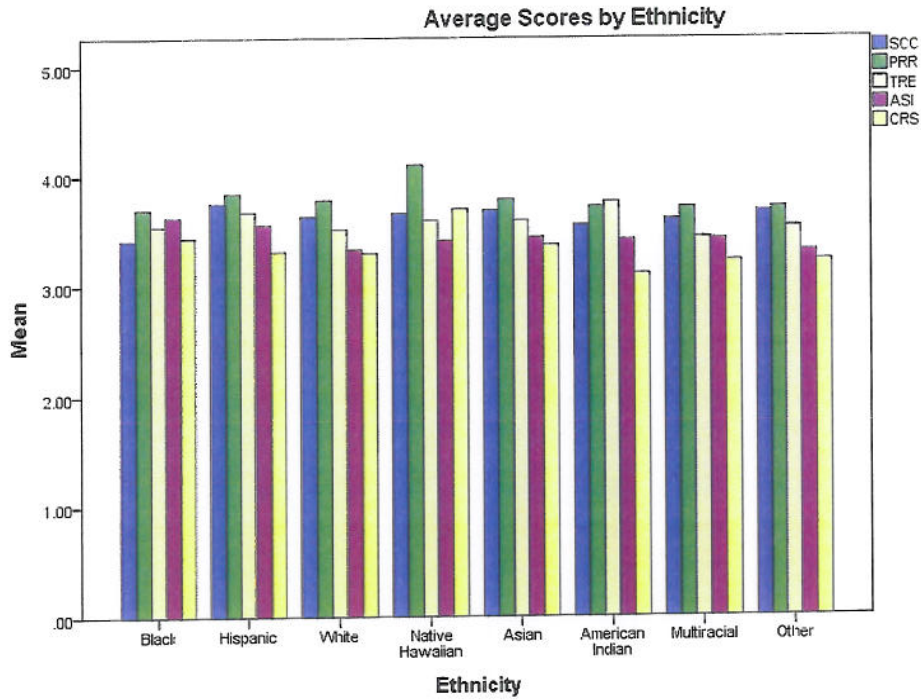
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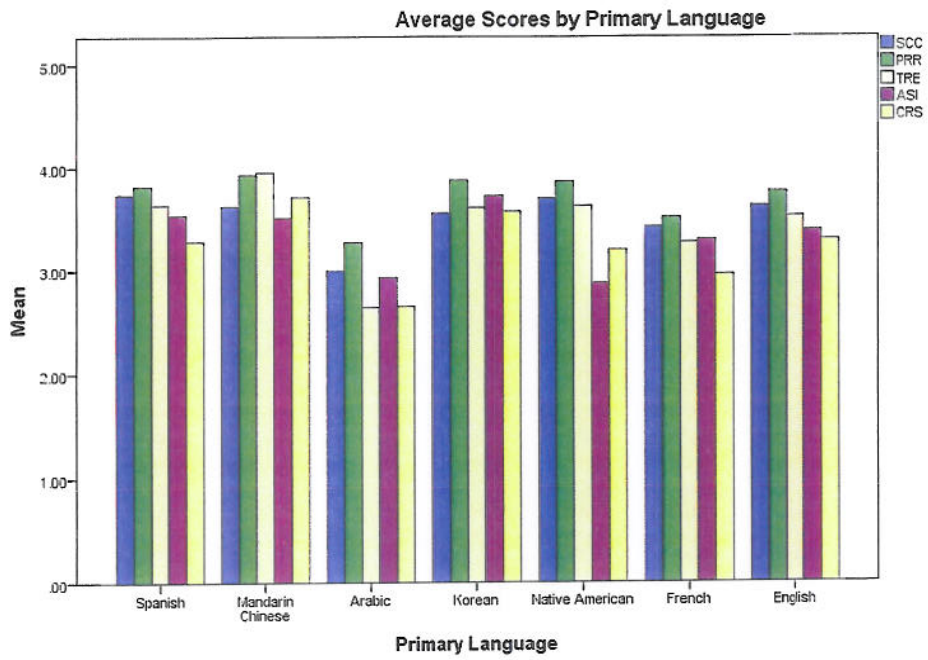
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Student Survey Findings Summary



Staff Survey Findings Summary

III. Staff Survey Summarized Data

Staff Ethnicity Demographics

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Black	3	1.6	2.2
	Hispanic	17	9.3	14.5
	White	112	61.5	95.7
Valid	Asian	2	1.1	97.1
	Other	3	1.6	99.3
	Multiracial	1	.5	100.0
	Total	138	75.8	100.0
Missing	System	44	24.2	
Total		182	100.0	

Overall Scale Scores for Staff Sample

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
scc	175	1.00	5.00	3.9433	.64709
TAG	153	1.00	5.00	3.1300	.58585
CRSL	147	1.00	5.00	4.0246	.56802
TDG	148	1.00	5.00	3.2297	1.15083
Valid N (listwise)	145				

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*CRSL = Culturally Relevant School Leadership, Teaching, Curriculum

*TRE = Teacher Rating and Expectations

Staff Survey Findings Summary

Ethnicity by Survey Scores

Ethnicity	SCC	TAG	TDG	CRSL
.	3.85	3.39	3.57	4.24
Black	2.38	2.33	3.33	3.10
Hispanic	3.89	3.24	3.44	3.92
White	4.02	3.09	3.13	4.04
Asian	4.21	2.83	3.50	3.93
Other	3.96	3.24	3.50	4.13
Multiracial	4.14	4.00	4.00	4.29

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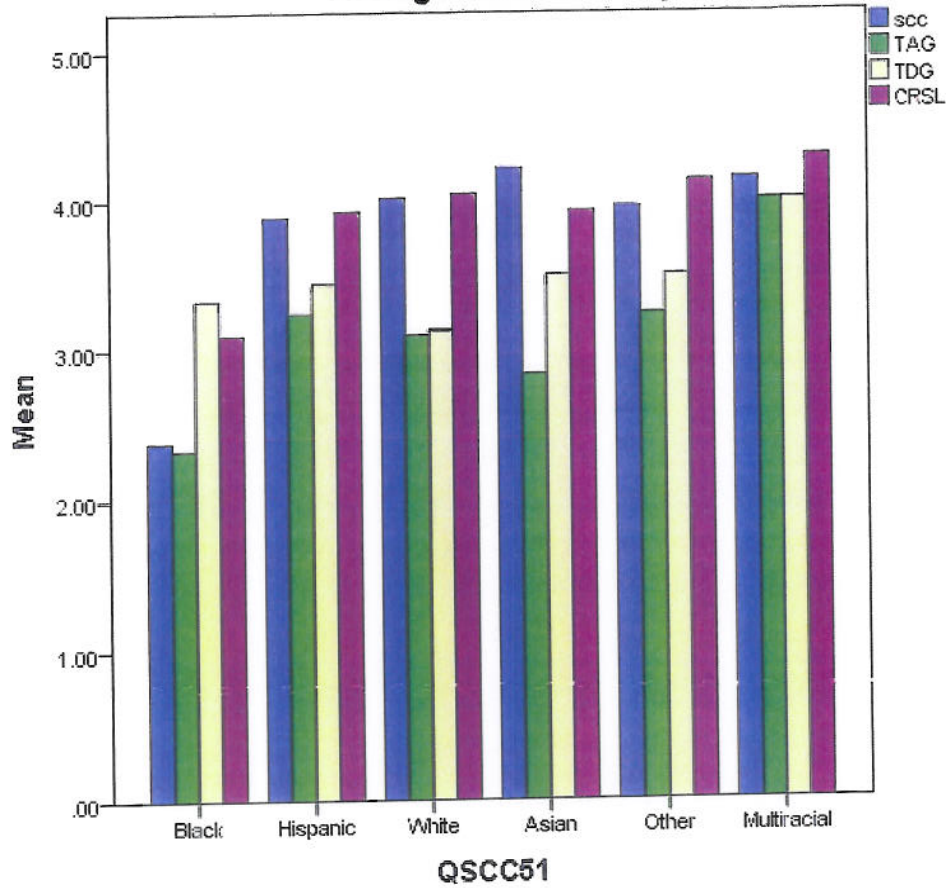
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Staff Survey Findings Summary

Average Scores Staff by Ethnicity



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