CONSORTIUM FOR
EDUCATIONAL
CHANGE

Equity and Excellence Scan

St. Charles Community Unit School District 303

St. Charles, IL

Spring 2022

Consortium for Educational Change

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Definition of Equity and Excellence in Schools

For the purpose of this scan and report findings, the definition of equity and excellence in schools is:

- Every student has access to the quality teaching, resources, opportunities and supports that they need to be successful in the short and long term;
- Student demographics do not predict school success;
- Fairness and inclusion are consistent hallmarks of the mission and system priorities; and
- Attention is paid to adult opportunities and support in implementing and facilitating equity and excellence.

Purpose

The Consortium for Educational Change (CEC) partnered with the team in **St. Charles Community Unit School District 303** to analyze indicators of equitable programming and processes for meeting the needs of all students. The scan was designed to share findings with the district, along with recommendations to remove systematic and systemic patterns of inequity. The purpose of the Equity and Excellence Scan process is to assess and understand three elements in some depth:

- The current successes and challenges of the programming vision, goals, policies, structures, and instructional practices aimed at promoting equity.
- The overall climate and culture among faculty as it relates to operationalizing the vision, goals, policies, structures, and instructional practices aimed at promoting equity.
- Opportunities for possible enhancements and future support for equitable programming and practices.

Outcomes

The CEC team has synthesized the results of the questionnaire and focus groups into a Findings Report for the district. CEC's reports identify patterns, themes, and characteristics of culture and implementation rather than random, individual or specific instances. No one is quoted by name and we avoid any use of references to people except in a positive way. The report is focused on assessing ways in which the systems can be enhanced to promote equity.

Organization of Report Findings

This report details the process, recommendations, key findings and supporting questionnaire data.

CEC uses the *Building Equity Taxonomy*[1] as a foundation for their process. This report organizes the findings based on the five levels of the taxonomy, which include:

1. Physical Integration
2. Social and Emotional Engagement
3. Opportunity to Learn
4. Instructional Excellence
5. Engaged and Inspired Learners

Process Overview

In April 2022, representatives from the Consortium for Educational Change conducted **51 focus groups** that included a total of 292 participants. (See the breakdown below.) The process used questions based on the *Building Equity Taxonomy*.

Participant involvement by stakeholder group was as follows:

> *District Leaders:* 7 focus groups: 43 participants
> *Parents:* 11 focus groups: 137 participants
> *Students*: 5 focus groups: 55 participants
> *Staff:* 28 focus groups: 57 participants

Commentary was coded to identify both themes[2] and divergent viewpoints.

Supporting data was taken from the questionnaire that was administered in March 2022. The respondent data from the survey follows:

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[1] Smith, D., Fray, N., Pumpian, I., & Fischer, D. (2017). *Building equity: Policies and practices to empower all learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

[2] A theme is similar commentary that emerged from at least two different types of stakeholder groups (i.e., parents and students, staff and students).

Students: **3,618** (98% of the respondents were from the middle school and high school)

 13.13% Hispanic or Latino
 1.13% Black or African American
 0.17% American Indian or Alaskan Native
 9.56% Asian
 0.08% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 72.25% White
 3.51% Multiracial

Staff: **828** (72.8% certificated, 21.3% classified, 5.7% administration; representation from all schools)

 4.95% Hispanic or Latino
 0.36% Black or African American
 0.85% Asian
 84.9% White
 1.45% Multiracial
 0.48% Other
 7% Prefer not to say

Families: **2,526** (representation from all schools)

 8.23% Hispanic or Latino
 1.31% Black or African American
 0.08% American Indian or Alaskan Native
 5.92% Asian
 0.16% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 70.39% White
 3.62% Multiracial
 1.03% Other
 9.26% Prefer not to say

District Recommendations and Supporting Themes

The following set of recommendations are based upon evidence collected and designed as an asset-based approach to support the systems and structures of District 303. The recommendations focus on factors that contribute to or interrupt good intentions around equity and excellence in public education and make suggestions for refinement.

The **Priority Recommendations** are important in building and/or sustaining a rich school-community culture for narrowing school-based disparities. These recommendations are broad, will require district level dedication and commitment, and will affect all buildings.

The **Taxonomy Level Recommendations** focus in on specific indicators within each foundation of an equitable school system. These recommendations may apply to some or all schools or grade levels. District administration, principals and their leadership teams should determine which of these recommendations apply to their schools and programs.

CEC acknowledges that these topics often evoke strong emotions and at times tension. The report is intended to share information to open up conversation; to create a discussion that is not about blaming, not about winners and losers, but instead about how the school community can together reach desired outcomes. Collaborative efforts, based on mutual respect, will be required to fully meet the aspirations shared by all of the stakeholders who participated in this process. The **St. Charles Community Unit School District 303** has incredible assets that can be galvanized into collective action.

Priority Recommendations

1. Acknowledge the role that the complex systems and structure of public education play in creating racialized disparities. Use evidence-based indicators to hold the system accountable to create the conditions where all children and their families can thrive no matter their race, identity, or income level.
    o Review the district's mission and vision, as well as their decision-making processes to assure and ensure that equity, fairness and inclusion are consistent hallmarks of District 303's norms, policies and practices.
    o Reduce placing blame on students, families, race, culture or religion by focusing on the inequities in the system, which perpetuates systematic oppression.
2. Continue developing, communicating and managing District 303's equity initiatives, including the continuation of the District 303 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee by both the district and each individual school:
    o Frame the work of these initiatives as efforts to continue to unite. The focus should be on seeking all perspectives and constructing outcomes designed to achieve the desired civil rights for each and every student.
    o Identify effective equity policies, practices and programs currently existing in some schools and empower principals and their leadership teams to make them consistent across all schools in the district (i.e. Advancement Via Individual Determination [AVID])
    o Elevate the voice of all students as key contributors. As the targeted end user, students represent a critical perspective in these solutions.
3. Provide all staff members with professional development designed to:
    o *increase their basic knowledge of the cultures of the students who attend school in this district;*
    o *learn and implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices;*
    o *understand the impact of poverty on academics and resilience;*
    o *increase racial/cultural sensitivity and identify and reduce the impact of implicit biases;*
    o *expand their skill set in addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students;*
    o *increase their knowledge and skills in supporting the schooling and emotional health of students whose gender identification is different from their birth gender, and communicating effectively with their parents as well.*
4. Develop strategies and make intentional efforts to recruit, hire and retain administrators, teachers and support staff to diversify staff by color, ethnicity, race, and gender.
5. Expand upon the current school-family engagement opportunities to enhance accessibility and equitable parental and community governance. Audit current efforts to see where expanded representation is still required.

6. Establish clear communication channels that are consistent across the district and from the district office to each individual school and throughout the community with clear and concise messaging. Triangulating the messages between District-School-Student/Parent can create cohesion for families, especially when they have children in more than one District 303 school.
   o Increase efforts to support and assist families entering the district with clear information about policies and procedures, access to existing resources, and training in the use of platforms available to parents.

Recommendations Organized by Taxonomy Levels

KEY: *Strengths (GREEN), Opportunities for Growth (RED),* Direct Quotes from Respondents (BLACK)

Level 1 Physical Integration
Broadening our Lens: Including & Integrating

Recommendations

- Establish authentic opportunities for the District 303 school community to listen and learn from one another. The data collected would suggest a significant desire across all interest groups for a more equitable system, but there still exist siloed experiences and a competitive sense for resources and belonging. Disarm a zero-sum game by intentionally creating space to broaden each other's lens as a community. Explore collaboratively the meaning of equity and inclusion; providing an opportunity for each school community member to feel valued, heard, and respected.
- Continue efforts to support the needs of low-income families. Poverty is one of the key determinants of disproportionality and disparity in school systems. Identify and eliminate policies and practices that have the potential to stigmatize students and ultimately undermine good efforts. (e.g. ESL and Gen Ed students playing separately during recess, different food/food lines for students receiving free or reduced priced lunches, including naming the food differently)
- Create a strong sense of community in every school for all students and families. Audit the current climate, by building, in tone and meaningful relationships spanning from the time a student leaves their home to entering the school buildings to back at home. Each adult that students and families encounter are a factor in the overall sense of community and should be reviewed consistently.

Themes

Students generally have access to the same level/quality of physical resources and support; however, access to the same level/quality of instruction is uneven and varies across the district.

Most schools and school staff encourage and facilitate heterogeneous grouping of students and equitable access wherever possible, but there are exceptions that need to be addressed.

Students are encouraged to interact and engage respectfully with classmates who are different from them.

Families of all backgrounds are included, welcomed and valued at most schools, but there are exceptions where reported micro aggressions, disrespectful behavior, or overall concern around allocation of resources was reported by parents, students, teachers and

administrators. A sense of feeling valued and respected is lacking across racial and ethnic groups.

- *Parents of Hispanic heritage shared specific instances of staff behaviors that are troubling, including staff mistaking parents for a nannie, staff requiring that the "victim" of bullying behaviors be the one to remedy the problem or staff being unaware that children with Hispanic surnames are not all Mexican.*
- *LGBTQ+ students (and in some instances their parents) reported bullying behavior and/or name calling along with micro aggressions coming from classmates or teachers, or when from a classmate, ignored or minimized by an adult.*
- *Several instances of "micro aggressions" that are offensive to African Americans were mentioned. One student reported, "There are definitely micro aggressions happening behind the scenes." (i.e. students and adult staff touching/making negative remarks about the hair of African-American students)*
- *Several parents, staff, and students of various ethnicities and backgrounds expressed concern over perceived separations of some students in some schools based on ethnicity or spoken language.*
- *One Caucasian parent expressed that equity and inclusion efforts are important but that "the far swing we are seeing feels like my kids are being erased."*

Stakeholders expressed a sense that "knowing how to advocate and/ or be loud for things" is what is needed in District 303 to get access. Some expressed concern around resources, opportunities, and recognitions being disproportionate across buildings, subgroups (special education, English language learning, identities) or culture. All stakeholders communicated a strong commitment to ensuring excellence and access.

Efforts to include all cultures, ethnicities and religions in learning materials, displays and celebrations continue to increase in buildings and classrooms. Parents, in particular, expressed the desire to have a more diverse teaching staff and educator understanding.

Supporting questionnaire data:

"Yes" and "To a great extent" response percentages.

Question	Student	Family	Staff
Our school is committed to an excellence education for every student.	81%	92.5%	87%
Our schools make students and families feel welcomed and valued.	73%	77%	83%
Parents/ students are regularly asked for feedback.	42%	52%	53%
Students are encouraged to respect and interact with students from different backgrounds.	79%	71%	69%
School resources are distributed fairly.	NA	NA	67%

Level 2 Social and Emotional Engagement

Welcoming climate, Safety, Restorative practices

Recommendations

● Continue the work of integrating social emotional learning standards throughout the district and schools. Identify and support students' social-emotional and mental wellness needs collectively; ensuring this is the responsibility of all adults in the system.
● Provide opportunities for students, families, and staff to build connectedness and learn about each other's culture, identity, and experiences at all schools.
● Review behavior and discipline practices at each school to ensure consistent and effective implementation of policy. Use of responsive, restorative disciplinary practices to address any bullying or safety (mental and physical) incidences between students is highly recommended.

Themes

Student culture and climate is viewed as very positive at the elementary school level, but is viewed as less so at the middle and high school levels.

Some relationships between various groups within District 303 have been built on trust:

- *Student-Staff relationships for the most are quite positive. Students frequently expressed the feeling that their teachers do care about them; students were less positive about relationships with their counselors and/or social workers. "I know over 12 students who have come into student services during a hard time or mental breakdown, and were turned away for whatever reason. They were told to come in another time, and felt it ridiculous they must schedule a time to sort through their mental difficulties related to school."*
- *Student-Student relationships were generally viewed as positive;*
- *Staff-Staff relationships: many administrators, teachers, and classified personnel expressed both positive and negative feelings towards one another as well as about their schools and their district; Some negative feelings appear to be caused by incomplete, inaccurate and/or non-existent communication.*
- *Staff-Parent Relationships were, for the most part, viewed quite positively at all levels (elementary, middle and high school) and that is a real asset to the district.*

Most students (and their parents) believe that they have a strong connection with at least one trusted adult at school that they can go to if they are having a problem.

Many teachers feel somewhat competent in identifying and addressing issues regarding students' mental and/or emotional health, but they would welcome continued training in this area. "I think teachers definitely need professional development and/or training in this area."

All school-based staff (administrators, teachers, support and ancillary staff) expressed a desire to participate in job embedded cultural competence training. "We have a lot to learn about how to engage diverse families. We have big hearts, but we have a lot to learn when it comes to reaching out and teaching diverse cultures."

The district has ensured all schools have different supports for social emotion wellness for students.

The district has invested in programs that support SEL strengths such as Second Step, Capturing Kids Hearts and ACES, all of which help to create a safe, healthy learning environment. Additional efforts could be dedicated to mental wellness to support the needs in schools.

Supporting questionnaire data

"Yes" and "To a great extent" response percentages.

Question	Student	Family	Staff
Students feel physically safe at school.	78%	84%	76%
Students feel emotionally safe at school.	65%	74%	62%
Students feel they belong at school.	66%	79%	63%
Students (staff) know what to do (or whom to contact) if a student's (or friend's) mental health or well-being are in question.	83%	50%	79%
Students have at least one adult in school who cares about, supports and mentors them.	80%	76%	75%
Staff members are aware of their own identity and strive to learn about the cultures, experiences and identities of the students and their families.	66%	48%	53%
Students are held accountable for their behavior.	90%	60%	38%
Staff is consistent with discipline across the school.	62%	48%	33%

Level 3 Opportunity to Learn

Access to learning opportunities, Support, Human & social capital

Recommendations

● Review and correct any of the areas where the schools can provide full access to the highest quality programs, instruction and/or resources that is currently a challenge due to scheduling. This includes considering ways to provide students who do not have access to early morning transportation for morning enrichment activities.
● Expand access to high rigor courses for all students in all schools and communicate broadly. e.g. "QuestBridge" "Challenge by Choice" "Infinity"
● Ensure that the policies and procedures for ESL/Bilingual placement are clearly communicated and properly implemented by staff.
● Improve outreach and embedding expanded representation at the schools aimed at including all cultures, races, ethnicities throughout the school year.
● Develop ways to partner with LGBTQ+ persons and nontraditional families to support and ensure choice and voice is included in school-based decisions.

Themes

District 303 currently has several systems and structures in place to support instructional excellence across their schools; but how they are monitored and/or implemented is sometimes seen differently across various groups from both administrators as well as teachers and classified staff members.

Currently, no school-based stakeholders expressed strategies for reaching out to promote equity either across the community or for their families.

Many students referred to opportunities, in several of their classes, to demonstrate what they are really good at. They also talked about the many varied kinds of extracurricular activities they can participate in and projects that are community-minded and community-based (i.e Making a Difference and Too Good for Drugs). Students frequently mentioned the fact that many extracurricular school activities happen either before or after school. This often prevents the participation of some students with familial obligations, work situations and/or transportation problems.

Many parents appreciate communications from their children's teachers about ways to help their children at home; but some mentioned having to hire a tutor and wondered what the

parents do who cannot afford such an expense; others said that because not everything is translated into a child's home language that makes it harder for them to help their child.

Some elementary, middle and high school parents say that information about children struggling or falling behind is not communicated in a timely manner and they often are not alerted until it is too late to prevent struggle or failure.

Not all students have equal access to challenging classes, or the scaffolding and differentiation practices to support their success with such instruction.

According to staff and parents, not all teachers have (or communicate) high expectations and/ or consistent expectations for all students. On this subject: Teachers shared, "I think we try to... what an "A" at one school is not the same at another school, different curriculums and it is not consistent." "Behaviorally, we do not have high enough expectations for students. We allow students to do too much as far as showing disrespect for school and teachers." Parents voiced parallel comments on consistency: "Depends on the teacher and the rapport they have with one another."

Supporting questionnaire data

"Yes" and "To a great extent" response percentages.

Question	Student	Family	Staff
Teachers have high expectations for (all) students.	76%	70%	68%
Staff members know my (child's) strengths and growth areas, and use that information to challenge and support me/ my child.	60%	63%	NA
The staff encourage family involvement in school events and decision-making.	61%	51%	52%
Students participant in a variety of activities during and before/ after school.	78%	69%	69%
Staff members regularly examine data to identify whether there is a relationship between student demographics and class placement.	NA	NA	36%

Level 4 Instructional Excellence

Clarity, Challenge, Feedback, Professional learning

Recommendations

- Maintain and increase the visibility of classroom, library, and school-based materials that are representative of multiple cultures and ethnicities.
- Assure instruction in all classrooms incorporates adaptive and inclusive practices to guarantee that all students experience quality core instruction. Every classroom should be ready to meet any student's needs with the highest level of instructional excellence.
- Provide appropriate professional learning opportunities for all classroom staff (certified and classified) that build their technical, intellectual, and adaptive skills.

Themes

Teachers and students report little to no differentiated instruction, but do say that students have opportunities for collaborative learning and often work in mixed ability groups with peers.

There needs to be more diverse, challenging courses offered to all students. Challenging offerings for various types of intelligences are currently not widespread or available to a diverse student body. "High achieving students can be found in many areas. The real question in the end is: 'How do we meet all kids' needs?'"

Students say that their teachers make sure that they know what is expected of them in each lesson and some teachers use rubrics to assure that they know what good work "looks like." Most teachers encourage all students to work hard and do their best in every subject

Supporting questionnaire data

"Yes" and "To a great extent" response percentages.

Question	Student	Family	Staff
Students can take/ are taking classes that are challenging and meaningful.	66%	72%	65%
Students know what they are learning and why it is important.	66%	58%	55%
Students know how to be successful in their classes.	81%	64%	57%
Teachers support students based on their needs and learning goals.	74%	69%	72%
Grades and progress reports provide students and families with	71%	56%	64%

a clear understanding of what students know and the skills they have mastered.			
Teachers use (and have access to) resources that represent a diversity of identities, experiences, and perspectives in classes.	68%	50%	46%
Teachers participate in and lead strong collaborative practices, like professional learning communities.	NA	NA	69%

Level 5 Engaged and Inspired Learners

Student voice and aspirations

Student self-directed learning

Recommendations

- To achieve successful implementation of current and newer trends in pedagogy (e.g. critical thinking, solving real-world problems, student-directed learning), provide all employees with meaningful, job-embedded professional development; consistency and accountability should be part of an implementation plan.
- Work to engage all stakeholders in developing self-directed learners, including parents of all student from different backgrounds, educational needs, cultures, and ethnicities to ensure ownership.
- Intentionally build equitable access and opportunity to amplify the talent of students; leveraging their strengths and unique characteristics within their school programming at every grade level.

Themes

Teachers in some schools (mostly elementary) spoke of high quality collaboration in Professional Learning Communities, but across all focus groups, the need to improve communication and collaboration (at all levels of District 303 operations) was a repeated issue.

There were several examples of leadership and learning opportunities for students that embraced newer pedagogical approaches to inspire learners, but these were not well known or implemented in a systemic or strategic manner. Most stakeholders spoke highly of the examples and indicated a strong desire to see expanded models for every District 303 student.

In middle and high school student focus groups, very few spoke about having the opportunity to demonstrate either their talents, interests, or goals for their future. Very few students were able to connect their learning with the outside world; nor did they talk about having a vision for the future.

Supporting questionnaire data:

"Yes" and "To a great extent" response percentages.

Question	Student	Family	Staff
Students have opportunities to participate in a wide range of leadership activities within the school.	73%	44%	45%

Students are expected to complete learning plans that are linked to their interests, skills, goals, and aspirations.	68%	43%	37%
Students can make decisions about what, when, where, how and with whom they learn.	65%	27%	21%
Students are solving real-world problems in their communities.	53%	25%	23%
Students are encouraged to think about their future.	74%	47%	63%
Teachers have an opportunity to participate in professional learning on personalized learning and student agency.	NA	NA	44%