SCHOOL CITY OF HAMMOND

PROGRAM AUDIT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2022

Presented by

GLOBAL CONSULTING SOLUTIONS

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1. Introduction

Global Consulting Solutions is pleased to present the School City of Hammond (SCH) Program Audit as part of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan. SCH has the potential to serve as a model of an equitable environment without opportunity gaps in student achievement. Hence, this audit report builds on SCH's legacy while recommending an equity-focused future trajectory.

The Global Consulting Solutions (GCS) Audit Team (The Audit Team) designed this district-level audit process to identify disparities in educational opportunities and analyze their relationships to student outcomes. The purpose of this audit report is to:

- Examine the existing organizational culture with an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion;

- Evaluate the district's strengths and areas for growth to ensure students have the opportunities to excel academically; and

- Assist in identifying professional development and educational interventions to reduce student achievement gaps, foster an equitable environment, and ensure success for all.

For the plan to produce the desired results, leadership must take action in a culture of commitment.

1.1 About School City of Hammond

The School City of Hammond is a thriving, progressive educational community of approximately **12,200** culturally diverse students and over **2,000** employees. The district is comprised of **12** elementary schools (grades k-6), two middle schools (grades **7-8**) two high schools (grades **9-12**) and the Area Career Center. The district also offers preschool and specialty programs. All schools are state accredited.

[1] 2020 Merrillville, Indiana demographic study.
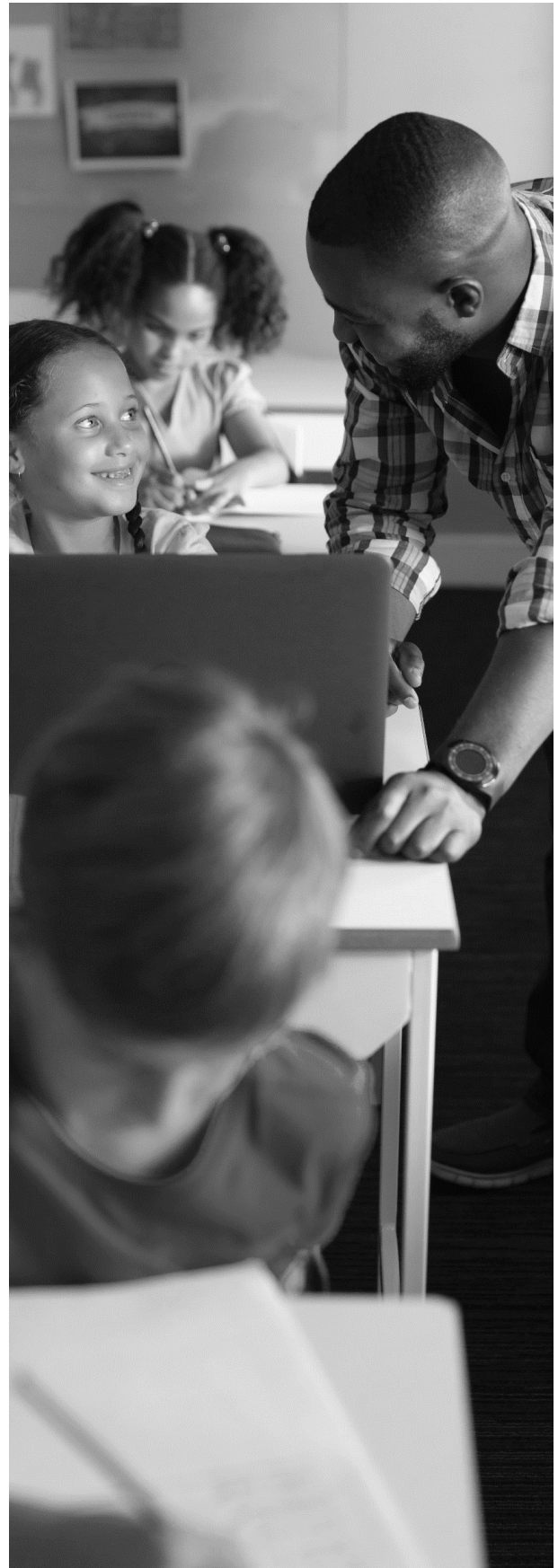
According to the 2021 SCH District Improvement Plan, the Corporation is comprised of a diverse learning community, including 36% African American, 12% White, 48% Hispanic, 0.2% Asian, 0.1% Native Indian or Alaska Native and 5% Multiracial students. According to 2021 Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) enrollment and student population data, 80% of these students are economically disadvantaged, 13% English Learners and 14%, Students with Disabilities (Table 1).

Table 1 SCH Student Demographics

Asian

0.2%

Black/Africa-American

35.6%

Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

0.0%

Hispanic

47.8%

Multiracial

4.5%

Native American

0.1%

White

11.5%
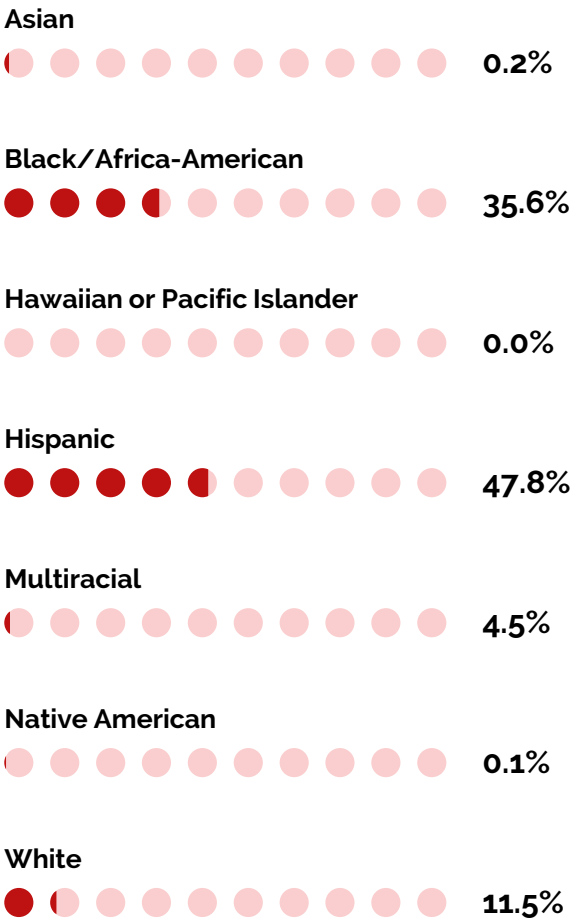
How are various student groups represented?

79.9%
Economically Disadvantaged

12.5%
English Learners

13.9%
Students with Disabilities
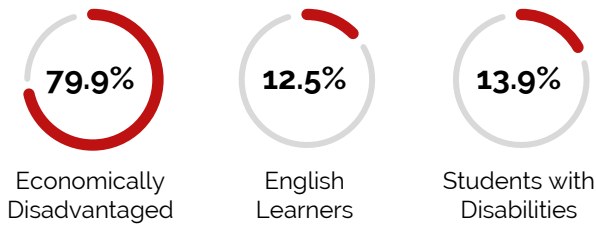
1.2 Equity analysis & academic achievement

For 2018-19, schools and corporations were assigned the better of their 2017-18 grade or the 2018- 19 calculated grade. Grades were not assigned for 2019-20 due to COVID-19. Student Achievement includes both student proficiency and student participation. Student proficiency measures whether students have met or exceeded grade-level standards and expectations. Schools and corporations receive a score based on 3 indicators:

1. Student Proficiency

2. Student Growth and Graduation

3. College and Career Readiness

The scores on these indicators are weighted to produce the final A-F letter grade, based on a 0–100- point scale. The performance on all indicators is combined to determine the overall annual performance rating of the school. The available school ratings displayed on the Indiana Department of Education website are displayed in table 2: 3 SCH schools received "B" ratings, 7 "C" ratings, 5 "D" ratings and 1 "F" rating. 10 schools are "approaching expectations" and 6 are "not meeting expectations". No schools are meeting or exceeding expectations. The School City of Hammond Corporation received a state rating of "C" which sets a consistent trend for 3 years (2017-2020).[2]

SCH schools receive a rating for each performance indicator based on how the school performs in relation to set goals. For example, the State's long-term goal for graduation rate is 93.6%, and a school's graduation rate will be compared to this 93.6% goal. All performance indicators measured in the accountability system align to long-term performance goals.

Under the federal accountability system, Indiana assigns the following ratings based on the school's performance against long-term performance goals:

• Exceeds Expectations

• Meets Expectations

• Approaches Expectations

• Does Not Meet Expectations

Table 2 IDOE School Ratings

Rating	A	B	C	D	F
# Schools	0	3	7	5	1
Performance Expectations	Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Does Not Meet	
# Schools	0	0	10	6	

1.3 Student proficiency, opportunity & achievement gaps

Student proficiency measures whether students have met or exceeded grade-level standards and expectations in English/Language Arts and Mathematics. SCH student proficiency is measured through state assessments for grades 3-12. The review of 2018-2019 Student Growth and Academic Achievement Data revealed the School City of Hammond Corporation schools have not met the expected targets for set performance goals in English/Language Arts and Math.

When disaggregating the data by race/ethnicity, the percentage of proficiency is lower on all assessments compared to the state of Indiana, though gaps appear to be closing between some student groups in a few assessment areas i.e., Multiracial and Hispanic students. All proficiency measures are below the state including Science and Social Studies, however, for Reading Proficiency, the gap between SCH and the state appears to be closing (Table 3).

English/language arts & math proficiency

According to IDOE academic achievement data, at 33%, SCH elementary and middle school students (grades 3-8) are performing below the state (48%) in (English/Language Arts) Proficiency as well as below the state at 29% in Mathematics. 10th grade students are also performing below the state in both areas, though the gap appears to be closing in both areas between the state and SCH schools in grade 10 (Table 3).
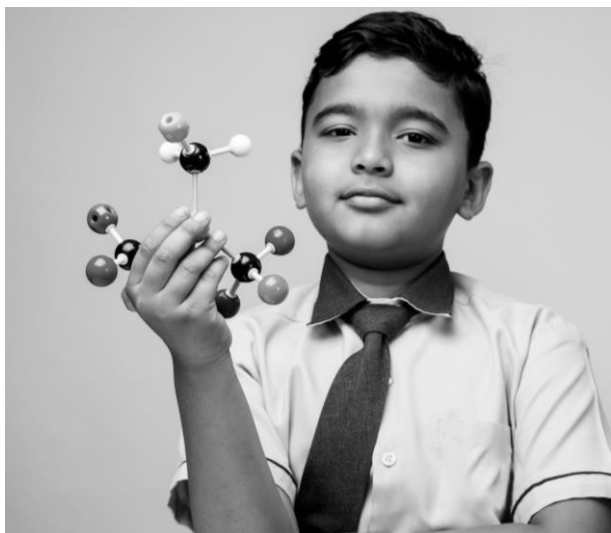
Table 3 English/Language Arts Math Proficiency

English/Language Arts Proficiency

Grades 3-8

State Average 47.9%

32.5%

Grades 10

State Average 50.9%

44.6%

Mathematics Proficiency

Grades 3-8

State Average 47.8%

28.6%

Grades 10

State Average 25.3%

17.7%

Race/Ethnicity proficiency

English/Language Arts & Mathematics

When reviewing grades 3-8 English/Language Arts disaggregated race/ethnicity data (Table 4), gaps exist between White and other ethnic groups, however the widest gaps are with Black/African American (17%) students. Gaps between Hispanic and multi-racial students appear to be closing. Wider gaps exist between economically disadvantaged, English Learners, homeless and students with disabilities compared to their high ability colleagues. Students with disabilities have the widest gap (62%). In context, SCH is performing below the state in English/Language Arts in grades 3-8.

Due to the widespread impact of COVID-19, the US Department of Education granted Indiana a waiver from annual assessment and accountability requirements for the 2019-2020 school year. Information available on the IDOE site reflects assessment and accountability determinations from the 2018-2019 school year.

Table 4 English Language Arts Race/Ethnicity Proficiency

Race/Ethnicity

Asian

N* ⓘ

Black/Africa-American

26.4%

Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

N* ⓘ

Multiracial

33.6%

Native American

38.5%

White

42.5%
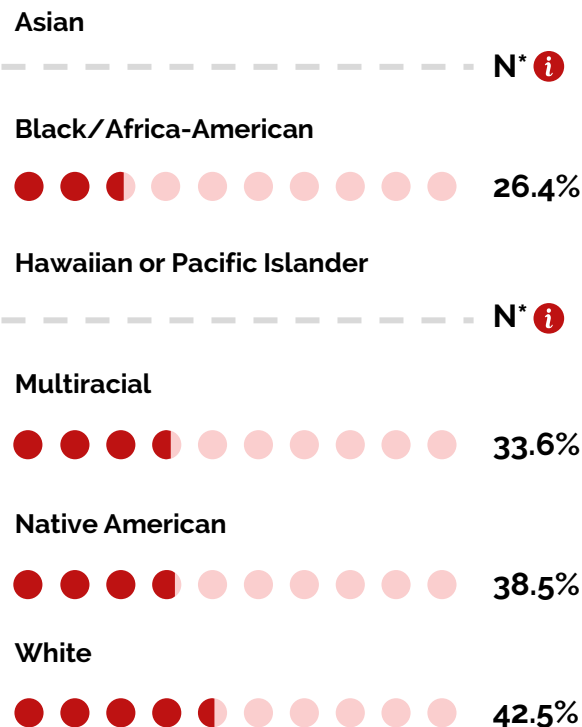
Except for African American students, gaps in grades 3-8 Mathematics are not as wide as English- Language Arts. African American students have the widest gaps at 18%. As noted with English- Language Arts performance, wide gaps exist between economically disadvantaged, English Learners, homeless and students with disabilities compared to their high ability colleagues. Homeless and students with disabilities (64%) have the widest gaps (Table 5). SCH 3-8 grade students are performing below the state in mathematics as well.

Table 5 Grades 3-8 Mathematics Student Proficiency

Economically Disadvantage

28.8%

English Learners

23.7%

Foster

20.0%

High Ability

78.5%

Homeless

14.8%

Military Connected

18.2%

Migrant Family

N* ⓘ

Students with Disabilities

14.6%

English/Language arts- grade 10

A review of grade 10 English/Language Arts (Table 6) disaggregated race/ethnicity data revealed even larger gaps between White and other ethnic groups. The widest gaps are with Black/African American students (33%). 15%-16% gaps exist between Hispanic and multi-racial students and White students. Even wider gaps exist between economically disadvantaged, English Learners, homeless and students with disabilities compared to their high ability colleagues. English Learners (61%) and Students with disabilities (70%) have the widest gap. However, based on IDOE Achievement and Accountability Data Report, in context, SCH 10th grade students are performing just 6 percentage points below the state in English/Language Arts.

Table 6 Grade 10 English Language Arts Race Ethnicity Proficiency

Race/Ethnicity

Asian

N* ⓘ

Black/Africa-American

31.1%

Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

N* ⓘ

Hispanic

47.9%

Multiracial

48.0%

Native American

N* ⓘ

White

63.9%

MATHEMATICS- Grade 10

Table 7 shows SCH 10th grade Multiracial students are performing slightly above White students in mathematics. Gaps between Hispanic students and White and Multiracial students are 9%; while Blacks/African American students are lagging further behind at 18%. Wide gaps exist between economically disadvantaged (28%), English Learners (40%) and students with disabilities (36%) when compared to high ability students. SCH 10th grade students are performing below the state (7%) in mathematics.

Table 7 Grade 10 Mathematics Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity

Asian

N* ⓘ

Black/Africa-American

9.8%

Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

N* ⓘ

Hispanic

19.1%

Multiracial

28.0%

Native American

N* ⓘ

White

27.7%

GRADUATION

Graduation data measures whether students successfully completed all requirements to move on from high school. Diploma strength measures whether students completed the requirements of Indiana's Core 40 diploma designation or higher. Based on IDOE Graduation Data, at 81 %, the SCH 4- and 5-year average graduation rate is lower than the state average (87%), and a downward trend from the 2017-2018 school year. While multiracial students perform well in several academic areas, this group has the lowest graduation rate (75%) compared to other reported s tudent groups' graduation rates which are above 80%. In addition, multiracial students, along with White students have the highest dropout rates. The overall dropout rate is 9.4%, which is above the state's rate. Students with disabilities graduation rate is 66%. Diploma strength for SCH (79.6) is slightly above the state (79.1%).3

Table 8 Diploma Strength

Student graduating within 4 Years

State Average 87.0%

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ◖ ○ **81.1%**

Diploma Strength
State Average 79.1%

● ● ● ◖ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **79.6%**
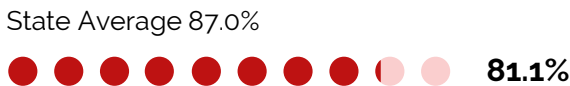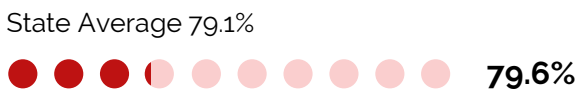
At 83%, the majority of SCH diplomas are Core 40 compared to the state's 51%. Only 2% SCH students received General diplomas.

Table 9 Types of Diplomas

General

State Average 9.0%

● ◖ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **1.9%**

Core 40
State Average 50.8%

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ◖ ○ **83.2%**

Honors
State Average 40.3%

● ◖ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **14.9%**

Waiver Graduates
State Average 0.2%

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **0.0%**
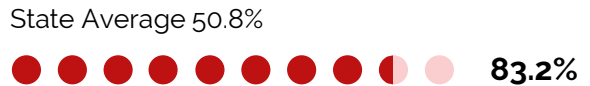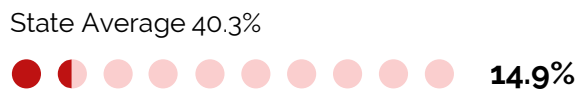
Almost all student racial groups double the number of Black/AA Honors students, with Hispanic and White students garnering the highest percentages. Students with disabilities almost tripled the number of general graduate diplomas (Table 10).

Table 10 Diploma Designations

STUDENT GROUP   GRADUATE DIPLOMA DESIGNATIONS %

Rating	GENERAL	CORE 40	HONORS	WAIVER GRAD
Asian	N	N	N	N
Black/AA	1.5%	89%	9%	0
Hawaiian/Pac. Islander	N	N	N	N
Hispanic	2.2%	80%	18%	0
Native Am.	N	N	N	N
White	2.1%	79%	19%	0
Economically Disadvantaged	2.2%	83%	15%	0
English Learners	2.5%	93%	5%	0
Students w Disabilities	6.3%	92%	2%	

1.4 SCH discipline & disproportionality in suspensions

Table 11 Student Suspensions

Out of School Suspensions

Asian

●●●◐○○○○○○ 3.1%

Black/African-American

●●●◐○○○○○○ 12.5%

Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

-- -- -- -- -- -- -- N* ⓘ

Hispanic

●●●◐○○○○○○ 5.5%

Multiracial

●●●◐○○○○○○ 8.9%

Native American

●●●◐○○○○○○ 5.9%

White

●●●◐○○○○○○ 5.8%

Student Groups

Economically Disadvantaged

●●●◐○○○○○○ 8.5%

English Learners

●●●◐○○○○○○ 4.8%

Students with Disabilities

●●●◐○○○○○○ 12.7%
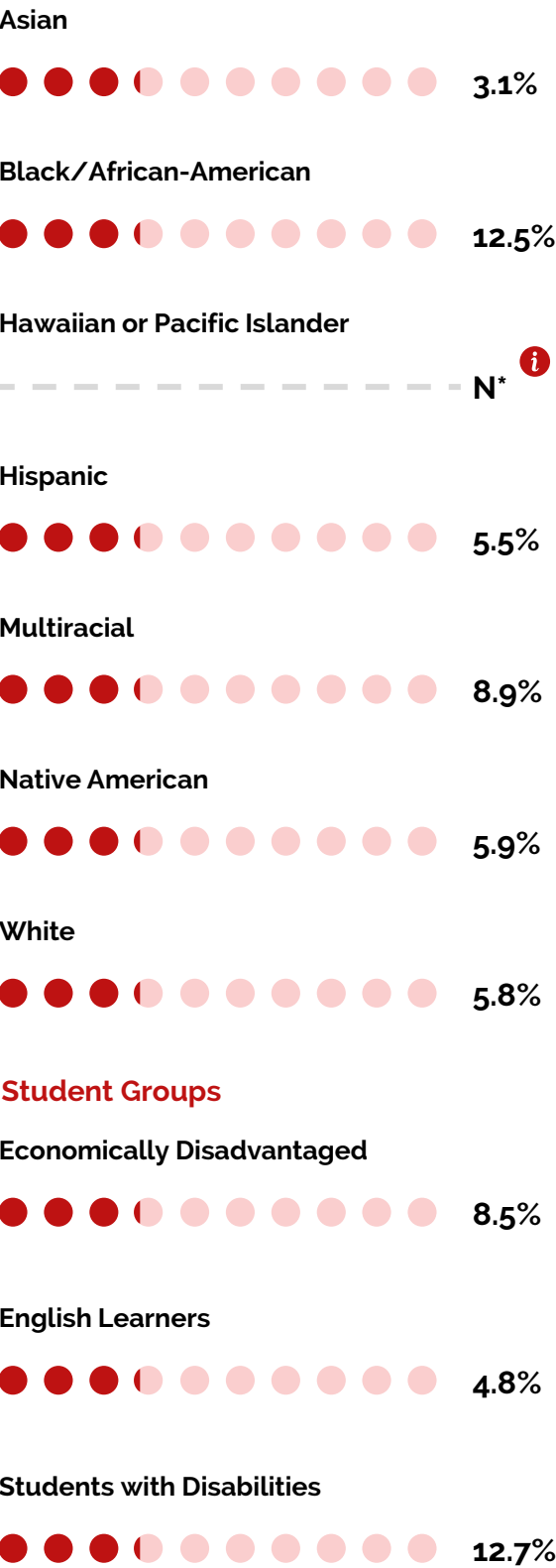
The data graphic (Table 11) shows that the suspension rate for almost every diverse student group is higher than that of White students. African American students have the highest rate of suspensions in both in and out of school suspensions. Nearly 40% of the in-school suspensions were for African American, Hispanic and Multiracial students while only 7% were for white students. Similarly, 38% of out of school suspensions were related to diverse students. The highest suspension and expulsion rates are among African American, multiracial, students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students, though expulsion rates are lower overall.

1.5 Commendations

The Audit Team acknowledges the district's successes. The Equity Survey data shows SCH has a strong desire to address systemic conditions that have led to gaps in student achievement among various student groups. Effort and attention to improve these conditions will further eliminate disparities in opportunity and stakeholder dissatisfaction. Student growth, in many cases, was seen and observed by our audit team. SCH's many successes include:

- School staff, students and leadership are commended for the welcoming spirit and attitude shared with the program audit team. Students addressed audit teams with "Welcome to our School".

- Most teachers and classified staff members feel respected and appreciated by their principals.

- Most school principals are well respected and appreciated by their students and staff.

- The 2021 SCH Improvement Plan includes an emphasis on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

- Recently established Diversity, Equity and Inclusion professional development and training for entire staff including addressing unconscious bias and microaggressions in the classroom.

- The physical appearance of schools (including interior and external grounds) shows evidence that staff and students take pride in their schools. Most schools are filled with appealing, student-centered displays and artifacts that support student learning and build a sense of community that adequately represents the student population.

- Most students feel they are important to the teachers and building principals that serve them.

- Administrators, teachers, and classified staff members genuinely care about their students and shared a desire to participate in consistent, ongoing training to assure they are meeting the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of their students.

- The majority of certified staff have a trusting relationship with one another (teacher to teacher). Most speak highly of the ability to support each other.

- A number of classrooms are filled with content anchor charts and visual representations of learning.

- Most teachers seemed to have a wealth of knowledge in instructional practices that best fit their classroom.

- School/classroom interviews and observations revealed student to student, and student to teacher relationships and interactions are for the most part, positive. Students transitioning between classes were respectful of each other and visitors. In classrooms, overall, teacher and students maintained good rapport.

2. Process and methodology

The SCH Audit Team's audit process and methodology were collaborative. Team members gathered data from various SCH sources and perspectives, including:

Parent/family surveys;

Staff surveys;

Student surveys;

School interviews;

School observations;

Reviews of documents[4;] and

Desk audit (September 2022).

The SCH audit report is a collaborative process documenting a variety of data sources. The report findings are based on triangulated data and information collected from multiple perspectives and sources including focus group interviews, staff and student online surveys, on site school/classroom observations, document review, as well as the SCH desk audit. GCS auditors utilize the data triangulation method as a way of cross-checking the assessment findings i.e., to validate data through cross-verification from more than two sources.

For example, a wide variety of comments are collected during the staff focus group interview component of the assessment process. After a series of focus group interviews are conducted, patterns and commonalities are identified across all responses. Examination of interview comments may reveal a majority of staff shared a desire for more culturally relevant training and curriculum resources. A review (triangulation) of other qualitative and qualitative sources (surveys, classroom and school observations, document review, achievement gap/assessment data) also revealed a need for culturally relevant professional development (PD) and resources as a finding for the equity report.

A cross-section of comments, artifacts and other information, including the voices and unique staff perspectives (both positive and negative) of the school community, are presented to the district as part of the overall assessment report. However, the equity report is composed of informed priorities, findings and recommendations for the district based on validated, cross-referenced (triangulated) sources. The equity report captures a comprehensive snapshot of the district and provides a picture of how district policies and practices impact students and student achievement.

Breakdown of data sources

Type	Quantity	Description
Surveys	Family– 315 Leadership– 100 Certified– 89 Classified–18 Student (K-5)-166 Student (6-12)-47	A unique set of questions aligned to different stakeholders. Stakeholders that answered them include certified staff, classified staff, students, families, and district leadership. They submitted answers anonymously.
Interviews	Certified–109 Classified–69 Student–115 Administrative–47 Central Office & Board of Trustees -28	A unique set of questions centered around equity. The Audit Team asked the questions. The team heard different stakeholder voices and documented the information anonymously.
School observations	Elementary– 26 Middle– 13 High–47	Visible and audible observations focused on equity and culture obtained during on-site visits.
Desk audit	Detailed analysis of over 50 SCH-provided documents and policies[6]	A collection of documents, information, and data analyzed prior to the on-site visit.

After collecting the data, the Audit Team applied a variety of quantitative and qualitative analyses to understand the degree of equity in SCH. Collected data and results of the analyses are presented in the next section.

4Including school/corporation strategic plans, professional development plans, achievement data, school/corporation improvement plans, school board policies and meeting minutes, survey data, teacher retention data, disaggregated discipline data, Indiana Department of Education Assessment Data, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rvA4cSmMZe0qD7Dx94p1G6lql9-mzqjx

3. Data and results

3.1 Overviews by stakeholder group

3.1.1 Certified personnel

A review of responses from certified personnel data reveals more than half of the individuals agreed on nearly all topics. Most certified staff responded favorably to feeling safe and having a strong sense of belonging in their schools. 88% of certified staff responded to making efforts to welcoming parents and caregivers while a majority (98%) work to build relationships by greeting and talking to students. 81% of certified staff communicated their school values diversity and works to make sure everyone feels included regardless of background or difference.

Figure 1 Certified personnel staff student relationships

I make an effort to greet and talk to students in the hallways.

89 responses

- ■ Strongly disagree 0.7%
- ■ Disagree 0.7%
- ■ Agree 66.3%
- ■ Strongly agree 31.5%
- ■ Unable to answer 0.7%
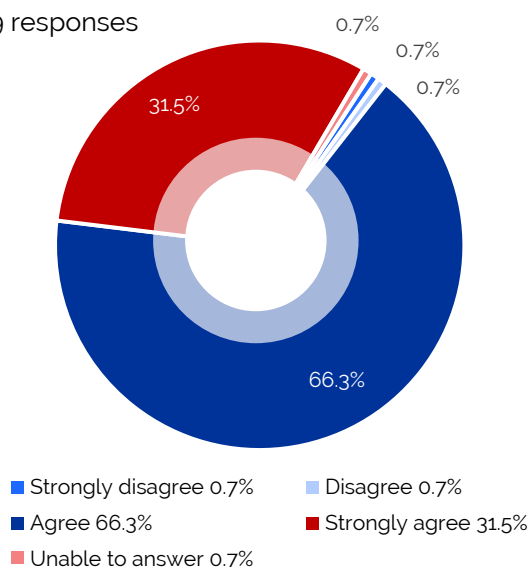
Surveyed certified personnel shared clear split opinions and areas of concern for consistent and fairly applied school-wide discipline plans, culturally responsive, trauma sensitive professional development opportunities and ensuring staff gets what they need to be successful in their job from school administration.

Figure 2 Certified personnel consistent fair schoolwide discipline plan

A positive proactive school-wide discipline plan is applied consistently and fairly across this school.

89 responses

- ■ Strongly disagree 6.5%
- ■ Disagree 6.5%
- ■ Agree 16.9%
- ■ Strongly agree 29.2%
- ■ Unable to answer 41.6%
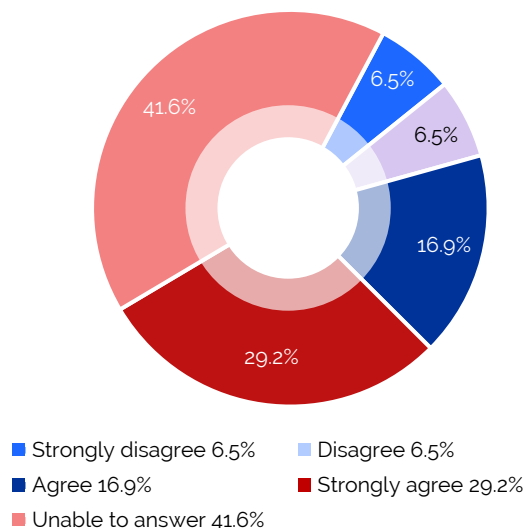
63% of surveyed certified staff feel skilled in using culturally responsive strategies while only 43% of certified staff said they receive feedback from leadership on culturally responsive instructional practices. In contrast 63% of leadership staff responded to providing instructional support on culturally responsive instructional practices. 67% of certified staff receive meaningful professional development on culturally responsive practices.

Figure 3 Certified personnel culturally responsive practices

I feel skilled in the use of culturally responsive strategies in my classroom

89 responses

- Strongly disagree 13.5%
- Disagree 5.5%
- Agree 5.5%
- Strongly agree 27%
- Unable to answer 49.4%
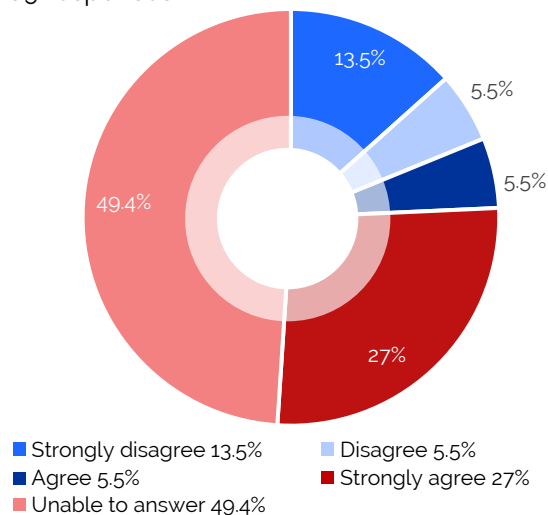
Little more than half of SCH certified staff feel valued and listened to by the administration as well as having opportunities to participate collaboratively in school decision making.

Figure 4 Certified feel valued & listened to

Staff member feel valued and listened to by the school leadership and administration

89 responses

- Strongly disagree 14.6%
- Disagree 3.4%
- Agree 19.1%
- Strongly agree 23.6%
- Unable to answer 39.3%
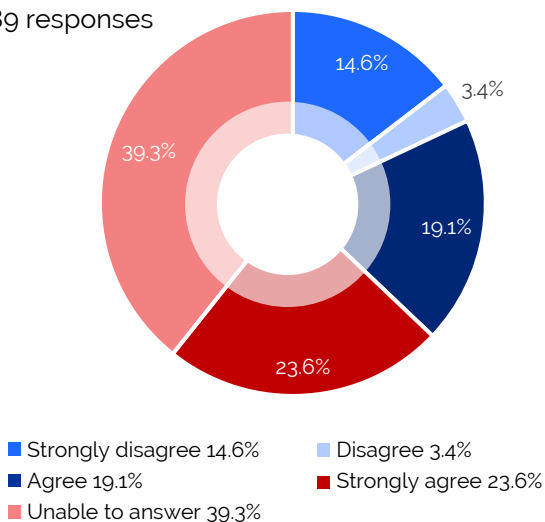
Survey responses also reveal that only 56% of staff communicated SCH has the appropriate resources in place to help teachers who are feeling overwhelmed, or who are struggling emotionally or psychologically with secondary traumatic stress.

Certified staff responses to survey questions:

In alignment with certified staff interviews, most staff seemed to have a fairly good understanding of equity in response to the end of survey questions. When asked about equity and their schools' biggest strength, staff used terms such as inclusiveness, equity discrepancies, fair and equitable opportunities and cultural empathy. Certified staff responses to the schools' largest areas for growth are quality professional development, staff responses included, treating all schools equitably, supportive administration and more parent participation.

3.1.2 Classified personnel data

Survey data gathered from classified personnel reveal a common trend similar to certified personnel data. Classified staff overwhelmingly work to build relationships with SCH students. 100% of classified staff responded that they make efforts to greet and talk to students. Other classified staff responses were split almost evenly for all questions. Only 50% of classified staff feel valued and respected as a staff member. 72% responded that school leadership gives staff opportunities to participate in decision making for the school.

Figure 5 Classified feeling valued and respected

I feel valued and respected as a classified staff member.

18 responses
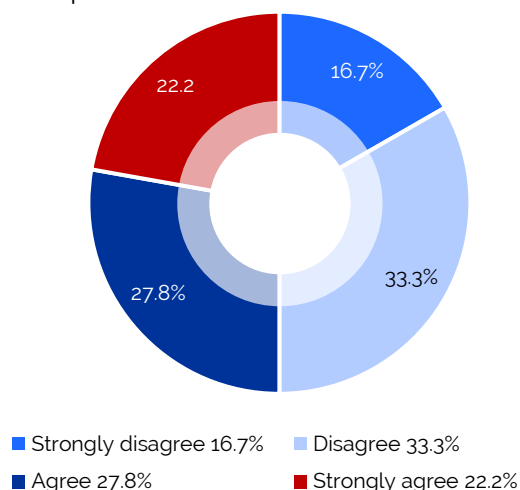
- Strongly disagree 16.7%
- Disagree 33.3%
- Agree 27.8%
- Strongly agree 22.2%

Classified staff responses to survey questions:

When asked about the school's biggest strengths in regards to equity, classified staff gave responses related to equitable outcomes: equality in discipline, staff diversity, personalized learning and more professional development. For areas of growth, classified staff listed more staffing and staff diversity, student discipline, input on school and district challenges and personalized learning for students. In alignment with certified staff only 50% feel valued and respected as a staff member.

(Classified staff represent a wide range and number of employees from several work areas, i.e., cafeteria, transportation, maintenance, clerical, etc.)

3.1.3 Other staff member data

At the end of interviews, the Audit Team asked staff members if there was anything else they would like to add to the interview. Some responses follow:

- "We are stumbling over so many roadblocks. We look for help from the district, but it just doesn't come."

- "It is like we are on a sinking ship. Teacher friends can't help because they are on the same sinking ship. We are drowning. We beg for help, but no one will throw us a lifeline."

- "The superintendent is a hard worker and we feel his support. However, not everyone working in his office is as helpful. Some are too far removed from the classroom and don't know what the reality is from a classroom."

- Several honors graduates had incredibly positive things to say about a new administrator Staff hadn't heard that kindness in a long time and felt it spoke to their admin's ability to connect to students.

- "Communication from higher-ups needs to be more concise to lower levels. Reply to emails and be cognizant of the tone of emails. The directives from downtown come last minute. We don't always know what is happening. We don't feel like there is any communication. There is no transparency".

- "The district is on the right path."

- "There are practices that are detrimental to students (attendance changes, violence, etc.), need more opportunities to address the issues of the African American population."

- "Let schools order their books; there are not enough books; some of the class sizes impede learning. We are down to 1 teacher's aide for Early Childhood Education (ECE) classes; Consultants are used to find subs and it's not working.

- "Speaking of equity-I don't think the schools are treated equitably. Some schools don't receive as much from downtown as others. Downtown is invited to events but we never see them. Our students and staff are important too. They tell us they can't attend but other schools say there are people from district at their events."

- "We work very hard. Go above and beyond and doing what we can to help our kids. This is a very rough profession and we're doing the best we can."

- "I'm not sure I feel like I am part of a team. There is a disconnect. So much going on. There appears to be discord downtown, don't think they're getting along; so many turnovers. Also, I think we need more Science and Social studies courses instead of an intense focus on only Reading and Math. Also, our kids need to have sports activities."

- "I won't work anywhere else. Many of their families and kids have gone through the school and they love where they work."

- "The Latino population isn't represented…the materials, books and [language] translation aren't what it should be. I have not heard any conversations about diversifying the staff. I know people who don't understand the Latino culture and they might look down on people and things. I think that it is hard because I see a lot of students who don't speak or read English. They are not being serviced. Maybe they need more LDP teachers. There should be a little bit more focus on Latino culture and language. There are probably other languages here that need a translator. Sometimes there are cultural differences.

- One interviewee stated and recognized there is growing concern in the community and the school district that students aren't maximizing their potential. The impact of Covid has resulted in learning loss for students and reduced sense of wellbeing among staff. The schools do not reflect the diversity of the student population. The district should make data driven decision making a priority across all departments.

3.1.4 Student data (K–5)

K–5 student survey data shows, overall, that nearly 80% of students responded favorably to all survey questions. K-5 students at SCH are positive about attending school, believe their teachers and principals care about them and feel safe at their school. 86% of K-5 students feel a sense of belonging to their school.

Figure 6 K-5 responses belonging to your school

I feel that belong in my school

164 responses

■ Yes 86.%   ■ No 7%   ■ I don't know 7%
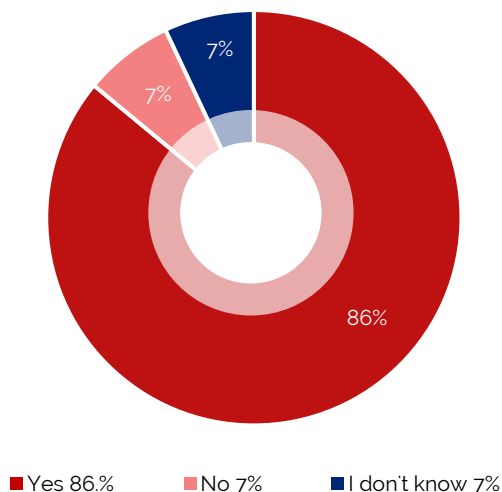
When asked about bullying, 73% responded that adults in the school knew about bullying and their principal helps when bullying issues arise. Almost 30% of students responded that adults did not know about bullying in their school and are not aware of a safe way to report bullying.

Figure 7 K-5 adults knowing about bullying

The adults in my school know about the bullying.

164 responses

■ Yes 72.6%   ■ No 13.7%   ■ I don't know 13.7%
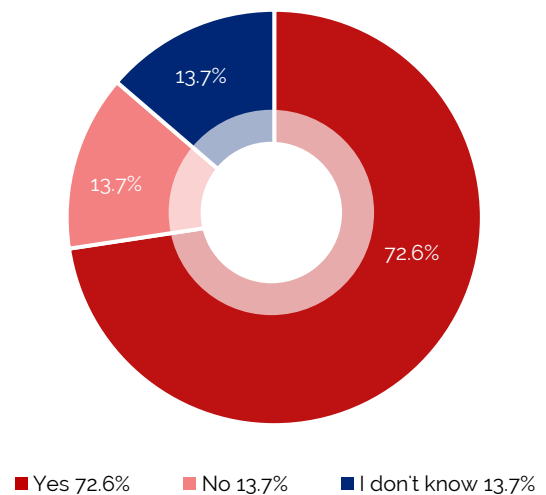
3.1.5 Student data (6–12)

 Most 6-12 student survey data responses were favorable concerning their teachers working to create positive classroom environments. 70% responded that administrators care about them regardless of their ethnic background. 62% responded that their teachers care about them while almost 40% disagreed. In contrast to K-5 students, only 68% of SCHS 6-12 grade students responded that the school creates a sense of belonging and only 60% feel a part of the school community.

A stark contrast to K-12 is seen in 6-12 responses to bullying. Though bullying of any degree is a concern, bullying appears to be much more of an issue for grades 6-12 than K-5. Most responses to bullying are split between positive and negative for 6-12 grade students. 60% of 6-12 students responded that adults are aware of the amount of bullying in their school, believe they have a safe way to report bullying and that building administrators address bullying consistently. At least 40% of 6-12 students disagreed. 63% would like to have more teaching and discussions in class about bullying related issues.

Figure 8   6-12 adults aware of bullying

The adult in my school are aware of the amount of bullying that goes on between students n my school.

47 responses

- ■ Strongly disagree 27.7%   ■ Disagree 13%
- ■ Agree 51.1%   ■ Strongly agree 8.5%
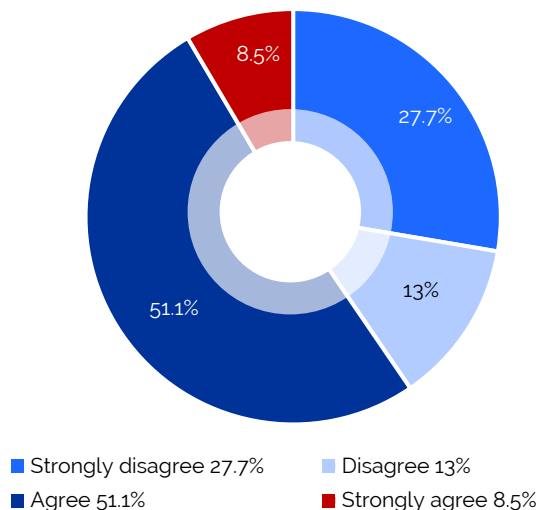
3.1.6 Other student data

At the end of the GCS student survey interviews, students responded to the question, "Is there anything else that you feel is important to share?"

Middle/High:

- "Smaller enrollment/community. Too many students compared to their old school. Improve announcements and information distribution to students. Would prefer more social media, emails, audio announcements to keep them updated on school information."

- "The schools are not a safe place for students learning and the staff isn't friendly."

- "School needs better class passing structure to eliminate all the fighting, this is terrible."

- "Everything is fine in my perspective."

- "Favoritism is a very strong thing going on in sports and needs to be addressed."

- "Bathrooms being closed....so many students in the hallways."

3.1.7 District leadership data

Comparable to certified and classified staff survey responses, 84% of district leadership makes an effort to be welcoming towards SCH parents/caregivers.

When reviewing survey data, there appears to be some consensus of comradery and collaboration at the district leadership level; 70% feel a sense of belonging, 75% communicated that they feel comfortable talking to their supervisor without fear of repercussions and 81% feel that leadership cares about their personal well-being. However, only 56% responded they feel valued and listened to by the central office leadership and administration, which aligns with some leadership interview responses. This growth area is a trend across the schools and appears to filter down from central office and spreads to other SCH employees, ultimately affecting students.

Figure 9 Leadership valued & listened to

I feel valued and listened to by the Central Office leadership and administration.

100 responses

- ■ Strongly disagree 22%   ■ Disagree 22%
- ■ Agree 42%   ■ Strongly agree 14%
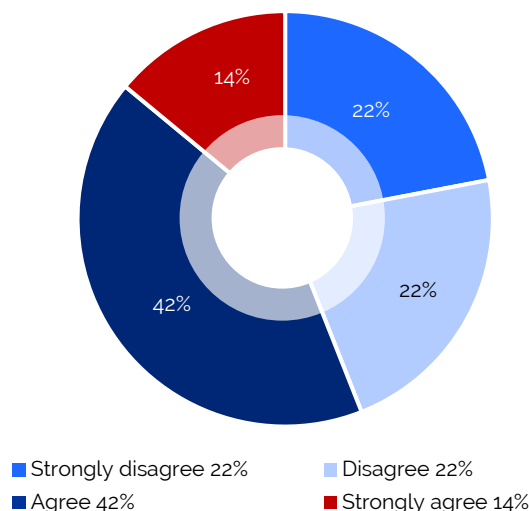
3.1.8 Family data

Families in SCH have an overall positive outlook for all survey questions related to communication, trust, school culture and school involvement. Each question has a higher positivity rate than negative. 84% of surveyed parents responded that they feel welcome at their child's school and 73% trust the school staff and administration.

Figure 10 Families trust school staff and administration

I trust school staff and administration.

313 responses

- ■ Strongly disagree 8.3%
- ■ Disagree 5.4%
- ■ Agree 13.1%
- ■ Strongly agree 40.9%
- ■ Unable to answer 32.3%

3.1.9 Other Family Data

Family survey responses to questions:

When asked about the school's biggest strengths in regards to equity at the conclusion of the family survey, families responses related to equitable outcomes: acknowledging equity, equal respect, communication, diversity, inclusion, welcoming environment and celebrating cultures. For areas of growth regarding equity, families' responses included communication, White/Caucasian recognition as a race, addressing bullying, diversity, more African American and Latino American studies, family involvement, consistency in celebrating diversity, and teacher support.

3.1.10   Survey Data Summary
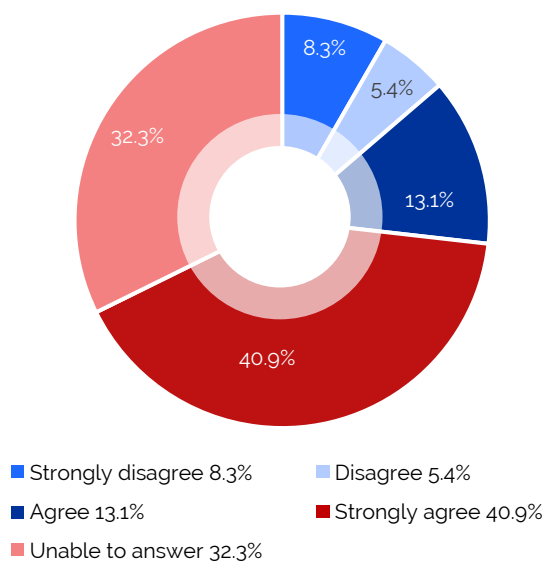
Trends across certified and classified staff, leadership, students and families reveal positivity in the areas of positive, welcoming environments, building relationships and valuing diversity. Certified and classified staff, leadership and most families seem to have some knowledge of equity and equitable environments.

 In contrast to K-5 students, only 68% of SCHS 6-12 grade students responded that the school creates a sense of belonging and only 60% feel a part of the school community. 86% of K-5 students feel a sense of belonging to their school.

A stark contrast to K-12 is seen in 6-12 responses to bullying. Though bullying of any degree is a concern, bullying appears to be much more of an issue for grades 6-12 than K-5. Most responses to bullying are split between positive and negative for 6-12 grade students. 60% of 6-12 students responded that adults are aware of the amount of bullying in their school, believe they have a safe way to report bullying and that building administrators address bullying consistently. At least 40% of 6-12 students disagreed.
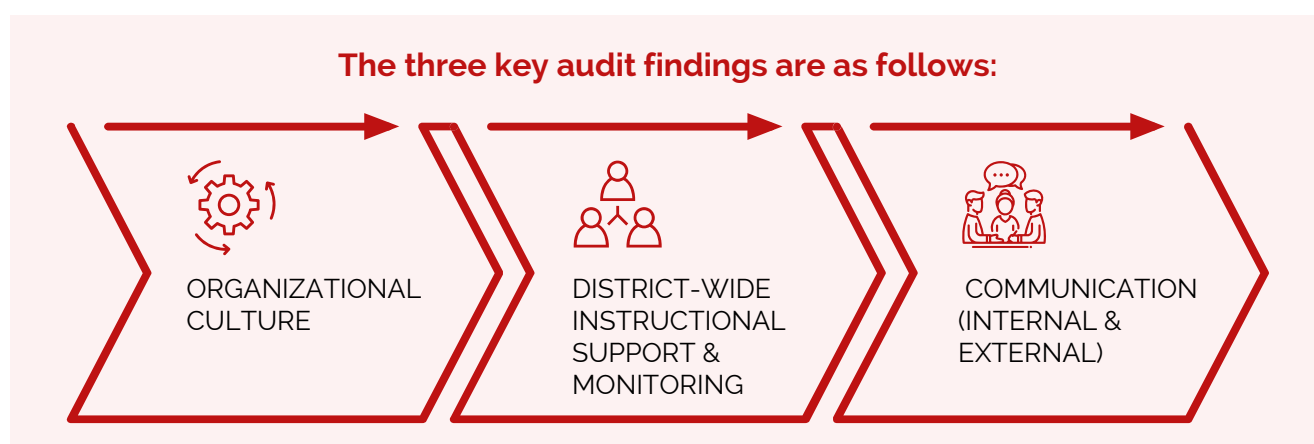
91% of certified, 89% classified and 97% leadership staff responded favorably to having an awareness of how their own racial/ethnic and cultural background affects their own perceptions and values.

4. Key findings and recommendations

The intent of this report is to translate stakeholder perspectives into an objective, individualized priority plan for SCH based on qualitative and quantitative research methods. Overall, the analysis shows how district and school policies and procedures impact students and student achievement.

The Audit Team's qualitative and quantitative data findings and analysis revealed growth opportunities to further SCH's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In this report, they are grouped under the Audit Team's three key findings. These key findings suggest ways SCH could promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, they reveal opportunities for improving school academic measures for underrepresented student groups.

The three key audit findings are as follows:

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

DISTRICT-WIDE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT & MONITORING

COMMUNICATION (INTERNAL & EXTERNAL)

While the overall survey data findings reflect that stakeholders generally approve of SCH efforts, there are still opportunities for the advancement of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) within the schools. In addition to three key findings, the Audit Team recommends additional improvements to realize equitable outcomes and experiences for students and families. Leaders should incorporate these DEI recommendations into a broader organizational change process based on study findings. It is imperative that SCH communicate a clear commitment to DEI before working towards operationalization of these goals. It is equally crucial that leaders examine how individuals confirm or confront inequity issues.

4.1 KEY FINDING 1 - ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is composed of beliefs and expectations shared by members of an organization. Organizational culture consists of common norms, values, and beliefs of individuals within that group. Organizational culture determinants include an organization's structure, leadership, mission, and strategy.

4.1.1 DEI alignment in school improvement

Although each school operates with its own practices, themes across the buildings were clear when it came to organizational culture. When asked specifically about the district mission and vision, no one could recite either. Someone stated, "We work with the district so that we can be in compliance." Depending on work location and employee job role, there appears to be a disconnect regarding the district mission and vision statements. Staff said principals and select teachers were a part of the review process for the district mission and vision.

A new mission was recently developed for SCH with the involvement of a small committee of different stakeholders. While the new mission is in place, there is also a disconnect between the written version and its implementation. Many feel as though it was just created and never communicated. This is both a negative process for internal and external communication. No one was able to state the mission, nor its purpose.

Staff were unable to recite the district mission and vision, however there was an overall understanding that the district and mission were in the stages of development as well as that it is shared by the principals during meetings and during the morning announcements. Interviewees stated that it is always what is best for students and taking care of every child. However, principals stated that the communication about the mission from the district is concerning.

"Vision and mission are communicated through the principal and assistant principal"

"Board meeting approved new mission and vision; principals have seen it but not staff"

"In the past, the mission and vision was basic, but they are working now to make it more inclusive"

"Mission is trying to succeed and get them to where they are and where they need to be"

"Probably could communicate a mission and vision but it is not on paper"

"I feel the school is on the same page but stakeholders have not been brought together to communicate it to everyone"

One school indicated that their school mission and vision process was inclusive, and staff worked on it as a team, however; most teachers and classified employees had no idea what the mission and vision statements were at the district, nor the school level. A few people interviewed thought the mission and vision were about more community engagement, more SEL support, and project-based learning. Staff responses:

"This is the first year in quite a long time where there has been feedback given on the mission and vision."

"We are headed in the right direction, but there will be follow-up."

"I think it's about successful support of students in the environment to make sure all students are successful.

"It's inclusive."

"It's on the website and in the student handbook."

"I have no idea what the mission says."

When central office leaders were asked about the mission and vision statement and how these statements facilitate equitable opportunities for all students, the responses referenced the recent process to create the existing missions statement. Some leaders had only heard the statements were changed, while others were part of the initial process to formulate the statements. After receiving copies of the new statements, leaders were asked to reflect and discuss the potential impact the statements can have on the direction of the corporation.

The SCH Superintendent articulates a focus on academic achievement and strong commitment to DEI on the SCH Administrative webpage reflected in one of the SCH beliefs: That all Hammond students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, ability, primary language, gender, citizenship status, sexuality, or faith, deserve a world-class education that addresses their individual needs, while also providing opportunities to develop their gifts. The Note from SCH displayed on the Indiana Department of Education's District Profile Overview webpage states: The School City of Hammond embraces its diversity and communicates consistently high expectations. SCH provides a rich and challenging learning environment that encourages academic excellence and the development of talents that prepares students to make positive contributions to our world.

The 2021 SCH Improvement Plan does include an emphasis on DEI. The plan includes deliberate, intentional language and strategies to create educational equitable learning environments. Goal 1 addresses culturally insensitive practices and Goal 2 focuses students' academic and behavioral SEL needs. The plan goal was supported/managed by the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Champion (DEIC) and the Multi-tiered System of Supports District Coordinator. The remaining goals support academic achievement, SEL needs, academic behavior and student growth and proficiency as well as action steps and monitoring processes.

Staff said SCH is also in the process of developing a Strategic Plan. The Superintendent communicated the process and next steps with all stakeholders through scheduled meetings and Facebook. Within this process, a new mission, vision, core values and priorities were formulated. Next steps are addressed regularly and action plans were developed around 6 district priorities. Input was solicited from all stakeholders through informational meetings and surveys.

As the SCH begins transformational work, the equity lens will need to be explicitly and intentionally woven throughout the planning processes and subsequent documentation of the district. Implementation of existing ideas and plans is critical to meet stated goals and objectives.

4.1.2 Welcoming school climate

According to the SCH certified survey, 88% of certified staff responded positively to the statement- Our school makes an effort to be welcoming, understanding and kind towards parents/caregivers. Overall, SCH's campuses are clean, welcoming and positive. Most schools are bright with vivid colors and the physical spaces and classrooms are organized for movement and interaction. Students and teachers cordially greeted the team while walking through hallways. 86% k-5 and 73% 6-12 grade students responded that their teachers work to create a positive classroom environment. For the most part, schools' staff were very complimentary of their colleagues and families, indicating that the climate of the schools they work in is supportive and welcoming.

SCH office staff at schools were friendly, warm and welcoming to parents and visitors, as observed upon entrance to the schools. Staff shared that they communicate with home and parents through memos, newsletters, notices about the students' progress and sponsor class events for family participation. Interactions between and among staff in hallways, common areas and class transitions at most schools were noted as cordial, positive and respectful.

When certified and classified staff members were asked what they liked most about working in their schools and district, the common theme was their coworkers and their students. Multiple teachers described their schools as "family" or "close-knit." Additionally, most teachers stated that their school-level administrators were supportive of the work that they were doing. At several schools, staff indicated that administrators take as much extra work and stress off the teachers as possible. Certified staff at most schools believe that building administrators put the students first. One teacher said, *"I love everything students, community, and families."* Other responses included:

Staff:

- "I enjoy having students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures."
- "Get along with colleagues and feel supported."
- "Tight-knit community."
- "Small building. Everyone feels like family."
- "Very supportive school administrators."
- "School leadership is easy to talk to. They have an open-door policy. The same cannot be said about the district administration."
- "The students, people I work with, administrators, counselors and teachers are on the same page about helping kids."
- "Administrators bend over backwards to support."
- "I like that it is diverse," with more African American students and more female students."
- "Collaboration between teachers and students. We get to teach each other stuff all the time."
- "As a new teacher, I had so much support!"
- "Master teachers mentor others."

Leadership:

- "It's a family-oriented district. They care about the students and the families."
- I like that everyone is represented. We're very diverse and making an impact on our students.
- "Knowing that you have in impact—when you fix something, and kids can use it and you see that look on their face. The flexibility—I've been able to do different things. Challenger Program was a highlight watching the kids engage—that was just fun.
- "The administration and teachers sold me on the school. The administration team is cohesive and works together. District level as well. During the first administration meeting, I was invited to join a text messaging group. I am amazed at the resources and support from the district."
- "I've worked in this district my entire career. I've worked with strong mentors. We work really well together; also, our students."

Classified staff:

- "I like my office team. I really enjoy the office team. I enjoy working with them. I really enjoy working with the families and have an idea what they want. I enjoy our families. I enjoy helping."
- "My administrators are approachable, and I feel like I can go to them with anything. There is good collaboration with them."
- Staff and teachers work well together.

Families (from GCS Survey Responses):

- "They are kind people who let you know what's going on with your child whether bad or good
- "Everyone has been welcoming and supportive of my son and it is a night and day transformation that he has gone through in just a week. I am incredibly thankful and relieved that the school is so on top of their game and doing such great things!!!!"
- "I've been pleasantly surprised with the environment of the school. I'm actually happy my child is there."
- "Staff are helpful."
- "Many of the staff members and a few teachers do not make you feel welcome."

Students:

When discussing what they liked most about their schools, students mentioned the relationships that they had formed with some of their teachers and the relationships with their friends. Students said that these factors motivate them to come to school each day. Students also stated that school faculty and staff are kind and welcoming. Additionally, students appreciated the teachers' feedback and the opportunities to improve their abilities.

- "Everyone gets a chance of freedom here. Students feel like they are coming to work each day rather than school. You can be yourself here. Hands on experience in what we will do in our career."

- "Recess aids greet us at the door and tell us 'Good Morning!'"

- "My friends are the only reason that I come to school. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't come period"

- "Everyone is treated with kindness and respect."

- "They give us feedback and allow us to correct our mistakes."

- "They respect me, make me feel welcome, and make me happy."

- "Everyone that works here is respectful and nice."

When district level leadership was asked about the corporation's strengths, the common themes were: a diverse community, a desire to change, and a willingness to learn. The themes emerging for weakness included: trust, communication, diverse workforce, student focused/centered, and limited or no follow through on initiatives.

Though students at most schools communicated they feel welcomed and respected at their school, multiple students at one school shared they do not feel that their school is welcoming. The students interviewed commented that they felt unsafe and uncomfortable at school because of frequent school student-student conflicts and the lack of discipline and structure.

- "I feel unsafe to be here."

- "Fights happen a lot."

- "There is a lot of cyberbullying."

- "There is a lot of drama ("relationships, fighting, Instagram pages where they post pictures of you to make fun of you.")

Though 88% of certified staff agree/strongly agree that their school makes an effort to be welcoming, understanding and kind, some interviewed groups felt their school needs to improve in this area. Some Staff do not believe that they have a sense of community. They feel that the stress from extra responsibilities, due to Covid, and the lack of human resources to take on some of the school responsibilities has negatively impacted the sense of community that should exist within the district level. When asked about a welcoming school environment, staff replied:

- Exhausted post covid because of the lack of time to collaborate and engage in PD."

- "There is work to be done on climate and culture. "At the very bottom of it all is a feeling of stress."

- "Trauma is a huge piece for my kids. We are not doing trauma informed practices in our classrooms because adults are traumatized themselves."

- "Resources need to be poured into the elementary level, because as the gap gets wider, we get further behind. Most of my 3rd graders can't read. Looking at research, getting kids at this level toread and have resources filtered in, the gap will close."

- "We are in a sad place right now. Covid and school shootings happened to change the dynamic for outside people in buildings, field trips are no longer, allergic reactions to food ended the room parties. It's sad to see where we are right now."

- "We want to create more socializing outside of the school building to create a sense of community with staff. Teachers don't feel they can say anything at school board meetings anymore."

A common trend emerged when classified and certified staff members were asked about the least thing liked about the school district. Overwhelmingly staff said communication is an area in need of much improvement. School employees feel that the tension is creating unhappy staff and this causes the adults to be less patient with the students. Staff said fighting among district leaders is evident and the lack of solidarity is not good for the district. Several staff stated that ideas from district leaders are good ideas, but there is no time, training, or resources to effectively roll out the many initiatives (books, PD, human capital- certified teachers and instructional assistants). Random, unexplained changes to the professional development/collaboration times and grading and attendance policies have created gaps in accountability for families, students, and staff. Other staff responses:

- "Downtown mandates a lot without support and the results of covid learning gaps - learning results are low

- "Lack of materials/ supplies. The curriculum we have is not equal to other schools in the district."

- "Great ideas, but no time for roll out."

- I wish everything was transparent. I feel like there are too many secrets. Secrets about safety.

- "Lack of parent support."

- "Consistent change"

Central office leaders also referenced the need to move beyond the hot topic discussion and utilize the collective efforts of all leaders to reduce siloed approaches to solve problems. Leaders felt this would build trust. They further referenced the need to establish accountability for all.. Finally, leaders emphasized the need to use data to establish targets and then provide the resources (human and fiscal) based on needs to improve student achievement and growth. Schools must see us as a collective voice willing to serve alongside them, *"We can no longer stand on the sideline."*

When asked about what students liked least about their school, there was a multitude of responses that ranged from locker sizes, unorganized transitions between classes, and student-student interactions. Some students shared that they needed more preparation for college and assistance with scholarships. Students stated that, *"They leave us in the dark about how to follow up on concerns and scholarships."* One student group also stated that they would like a *"Psychiatrist in the school, one that you can talk to openly instead of the school counselor and principal. Sometimes you need someone to talk to."* Student responses included:

- "The building is old."
- "We need more books; school is short on equipment not enough resources."
- "The food in the cafeteria needs to be better."
- "We need more time to get our work completed."

District leaders discussed the need to balance the salary schedule to ensure employees are paid based on experience, role, and responsibility. Several leaders indicated there are unfair hiring and job task assignments. They further indicated concern about the number of FMLA cases increasing as it relates to faculty and staff emotional stress.

4.1.3 Equitable learning environments

School/classroom observations throughout the district revealed that many classrooms displayed welcoming signs, artwork, and other artifacts. Most schools displayed a variety of student work with feedback, projects, academic and behavioral expectations. In most, but not all schools, the diversity of students was reflected on classroom walls and most classrooms spoke to or addressed the cultural diversity of students' identities, languages, nationalities, and home cultures. Materials in many classrooms made connections to students' lives outside of school and supported cultural relevance reflective of the diversity of the students and staff in the building.

In most classrooms, the learning environment is organized as evidenced by routines and agendas detailing activities throughout the class. Students are learning in a variety of classroom configurations throughout the school. Some teachers have developed clear plans with specific activities intended to support student learning. Most classrooms were organized for teaching and learning in terms of lesson planning that depicts the use of core and supplemental resources with respect to a wide range of diverse people and perspectives.

Most classroom libraries contained books with diverse genres, content, people, and perspectives. Current, proficient student work, and resources reflecting diversity and different ethnicities were observed throughout most classrooms. A variety of visual aids and props, including graphic organizers to support student learning were observed in some, but not all classrooms. Vocabulary and word walls were posted in some classrooms. Several students used chrome books in classes.

4.1.4 DEI in curriculum & instruction

The SCH school community, as well as some surveyed families, appeared to have a general understanding of equity. Some responses were uncertain, but most were able to relate responses or give examples of what equity looked like. Most staff could identify and/or articulate a definition of educational equity, equitable resources and what learning looks like in an equitable education environment. Staff seemed to have an understanding of equity regarding ensuring that all students had access to materials/supplies. Sometimes there was confusion in distinguishing between equity and equality. Several referred to the equality vs equity illustration of the students needing different support to watch an activity over a high fence. In defining equity, some teacher interview groups defined equity as it pertains to academic differentiation and Response to Intervention (RTI), although some defined equity as equal access to resources. A common theme was that the teachers interviewed didn't feel they had the resources or staff to provide equitable student experiences. Additionally, it was mentioned that they made district staff aware and, according to them, district administration didn't provide additional staffing, resources, or training to ensure that students were receiving equitable experiences. Other staff responses about defining equity include:

"Fairness across the board."

"Meeting the needs of every group. Some may need more than others."

"We are not getting the support that we need in RTI. We are trying to get them while they are young."

"Everyone receives the same quality, regardless of gender, color, culture, or religion."

"In my classroom, each student has a voice. Some students need more attention than others."

"In the classroom, give each student what they need. For example, reading lessons and groups are adjusted to meet each kid's needs."

"I don't even know."

"Equal footing"

Most school-level administrators seem to have some understanding of what equity in education means. Additionally, they were able to provide programs, resources, and examples of how the school is attempting to create an equitable school environment. School administrator responses included:

"Equity provides the resources students need to reach similar goals or achievements. Equity is trying to find out what individual students need to be successful. The school provides equitable experiences to a phenomenal extent, from the emotional/social support, the resources, and the many people gifted in providing support."

"Equity means everyone can get to the finish line, but how they get there is different. Our school has a high English Second Language (ESL) student population, so all our communication is bilingual. All students get free lunch, breakfast, and 30 minutes of intervention or enrichment. The staff is treated pretty much the same across the board."

Staff discussed several examples of what equity looks like in their classrooms. Examples of how equity is represented in SCH included human capital in some schools in the form of additional counselors, and student support specialists. Academic support in the form of tutoring, advance programs and dual credit/early college programs, virtual course options, and PLATO courses are available for students needing to repeat a course. Staff said they make an effort to assure activities and programs are equitable to everyone; male, female, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American. Everyone is welcome to participate in all team sports, "We don't cut except in basketball. Pre-season training is available. Girls wrestling and boys' volleyball are sports offered for students this year." Equity in funding comes from Title funding, however; staff said there are not enough consumable math books for all students, and teachers must make copies of the books for students. Science and social studies books are outdated. Tutoring is also offered for English Learner (EL). students. Black Student Union, a Hispanic club, LBGTQ club and supports for students are available. Other examples shared by staff:

"I have a lot of students that are special education students; everyone has the same opportunity. As far as the school goes, everyone is given a chance. There is a girl on one of the athletic teams. Also, there is a hearing-impaired student on a team, and there is a sign language interpreter to communicate with the student. The new principal is trying to move the staff past cliques. He is trying to get people to serve on committees from all across the board."

"Equity is making sure that someone gets what they need to succeed. In my classroom, students need chances to further their development. Not every kid has time to work on their development after school, so I am setting up times after school when students can stay and work. I have also developed various ways that students can submit assignments. I am not quite sure what the school does, though. I know they all get Chromebooks. They also provide breakfast, but I am not sure if it is free or not, though."

Staff said equitable opportunities are lacking in instructional materials for students and enough staff to support the needs of students and schools. According to the teacher interviews, most school-level administrators are working with the resources available to provide as much equity to their students as possible. However, it did become apparent that it is perceived that central office staff does not support the school faculty/staff in providing equitable experiences to students. Additionally, the perception is that district-level administrators do not respond to requests from school faculty/staff when requesting additional resources to provide equitable experiences. It is also perceived that central office staff is not spending enough time in the schools to know what they need.

- "The need drives decisions…but we don't know how that is necessarily determined or what data is used."

- I didn't have enough books for my students. Even kids on my roster before school started don't have what they need."

- "We have one pallet of paper for the rest of the school year."

- "The school distributes resources equally. Certain 'downtown' people will help tremendously.

- "If it is happening, I am not seeing it. I don't feel kids should pay a rental fee to use some school equipment. I know every student gets a Chromebook, but I am not sure if they get any other supplies. I also didn't feel that students should have to pay a fee to use a locker. Teachers have an equally divided classroom budget."

- "Our student population is predominantly African American and Hispanic. The tools we receive from school administrators allow us to be aware and sensitive to the many cultural differences."

- "Central office just sends emails about PD opportunities. The central office needs to be more involved.

When asked about how decisions are made to allocation resources (physical and human), central office responses indicated a top-down approach or assignment driven. Recently district leaders were asked to adopt schools to determine support and to be more visible in the school buildings. The idea was welcomed and those participating found it to be valuable. Central Office leaders felt the visibility would help build relationships and minimize the traditional central office and school divide. Further discussion indicated a need for a common practice for school level engagement.

Leaders reported various ways they are offering support, typically based on their area of concentration or focus. When asked if leaders came together to report on what they are seeing in schools, the response was, "rarely." Leaders felt it was their responsibility to advocate on behalf of the schools. They see this initiative as an opportunity to serve and support. Some leaders expressed the necessity to have follow up meetings to make sure there was a collaborative effort of support. Regarding an equitable approach to resource allocation, outside of the federal program allocations, most resources were given to each school as an across-the-board approach. When asked if there was a way to assess needs to determine allocations, the federal formula was referenced. Some leaders expressed the process is forthcoming because they knew the federal dollars allocated to support learning during the pandemic would be ending.

Most students feel that all students have equal opportunity to participate in school clubs and activities. They have a variety of clubs and opportunity to start their own clubs. Students believed that clubs represented diversity and issues in their community in clubs such as: BSU, Bible club, and religious clubs. One student said, "Everyone gets an equal chance," However another student in the group added that they needed more preparation for college and assistance with scholarships. Students stated, "They leave us in the dark about how to follow up on concerns and scholarships."

Other common themes quickly emerged when discussing equitable opportunities for students in some interview groups. Students stated that extracurriculars are exclusive to girls, but no boy equivalents exist; *"Girls have Girls on the Run and Girl Scouts. Boys don't have anything just for boys". They told us they were going to work on starting soccer, but nothing came of it." Another student added," It's equal opportunity; I think all kids can be in any clubs they want; student council too." Staff stated that all students can sign up for clubs based on their academic grades.*

Family responses on equity and equitable opportunities from the GCS Family Survey included celebrating all cultural diversity, treating all students with mutual respect, treating students fairly and outreach for developing relationships. Only 59% of families responded positively that their school provides opportunities to strengthen their child(ren)'s cultural identity.

4.1.5 Culturally responsive pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy is the deliberate, mindful, and caring ways in which instructors bring potential learners to a place in which they can engage in learning. In this process instructors recognize, appreciate, and respect the cultural assumptions and experiences that learners bring to the learning place and find ways of navigating and negotiating difference to ensure that credible and authentic learning materializes.[6]

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

A review of SCH triangulated data reveals some discrepancy between survey and interview responses with awareness and implementation of culturally responsive instruction (CRI) in some classrooms and schools throughout the district. Though in the certified staff survey, 77% of staff agree/strongly agree to the statement- "I feel skilled in the use of culturally responsive strategies in my classroom," based on staff interviews, some staff did not have a good understanding of culturally responsive instruction (CRI) or if it was integrated within the curriculum and instruction with intentionality. Most interviewed staff conveyed familiarity with culturally responsive instruction. As with educational equity, staff gave varied responses to explain the meaning of culturally responsive teaching.

Most staff members could adequately define culturally responsive instruction and relate the definition with what was actually happening in their classrooms. Interviewed staff also offered many responses to what culturally responsive instruction looks like. At their core, most answers revolved around recognizing, respecting, and informing students about the cultural differences and heritages of the various cultures represented in their school. Almost every teacher and administrator interviewed mentioned celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. Demographically, most students enrolled in SCH are Hispanic. Other cultures are present within the student population, but many teachers and administrators didn't mention celebrating different cultures.

Teachers did say that the district office supplies information and resources on various cultures but they don't feel that they have adequate training on CRI. Staff responses included:

"We have honest discussions, meetings, and a committee working to be more culturally responsive."

"We get a lot of resources from the district."

"We do have time to build relationships."

"Make sure that all cultures are represented and welcomed."

"We have some resources. The librarian has been purchasing more books from various cultures.

[6]Glass, 2019

Most administrators communicated that they embrace culturally responsive instruction and acknowledged the impact of culture on how students learn and grow. They said the key is using that understanding to direct teaching. They also said the district staff does a phenomenal job. There is open communication about cultural needs. One administrator said, "*Culturally responsive instruction embraces the different cultures in the building. We celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and Mexican Independence Day. We also make some of our announcements in Spanish. We do not shy away from conversations and the opportunity to learn about different cultures. Also, we stopped gender grouping. There was a boy who wasn't sure how he identified. He wasn't comfortable always lining up with the boys but didn't fully identify as the opposite gender either. So, we stopped lining up by gender to make them feel more comfortable.*"

During classroom observations, the audit team observed practices conducive to culturally responsive pedagogy (learning reflections, modeling, student choice, student- teacher feedback, higher order-critical thinking skills, open-ended questions, learning reflections) in several classrooms. In some observed classrooms, instruction was aligned to clear posted objectives and students were observed completing authentic work with some rigor and higher order-critical thinking at depth of knowledge level two and three. Staff engaged students through the utilization of graphic organizers, learning charts, class projects, visuals, videos, and audio support. Some intentionally included references to the classroom diversity through relating lessons to certain photos or through picture book storytelling.

In contrast, other school/classroom observations revealed experiences not conducive to culturally responsive instruction included a lack of evidence during instructional time of planning or the implementation of research-based teaching strategies for various learning styles from a culturally diverse and global perspective, students on their cell phones during class and not engaged in the lesson, classroom disruptions, disengaged students and teachers remaining seated at desk with little/no interaction with students.

Some school hallways included authentic student work with feedback (critiques from students and staff). Some classrooms displayed rubrics/scoring guides to let students know what they needed to do to meet the standard. One group of students had scoring guides to reference at their desks while working. Staff shared, "Expectations do not seem to be consistently high. COVID threw all teachers a curve ball. They are relearning how to teach and learning their new students." "Special Ed. and Gen. Ed. Teachers have different expectations. Students have teachers who allow behaviors in one setting that isn't accepted in another."

The assessment team observed rigorous, challenging and engaging instructional and assessment practices in several classrooms. Students were on task and following teachers' instructions but assessors observed few students asking questions, leading activities, or assuming leadership roles throughout the classroom. GCS acknowledges that student and teacher behavior is often modified by the presence of the audit team and more observation time would be necessary to determine if this is a system issue. 87% of K-5 surveyed students responded that their teachers make learning fun, while only 57% of grades 6-12 surveyed students responded that their teachers make learning fun and engaging. Only 55% responded their teachers enjoying teaching them.

Most interviewed staff communicated that they believe most teachers have high expectations for all students, but little/no specific evidence of staff ensuring high expectations (academically or behaviorally) for all students were given. Only a few classroom observations revealed rigorous instructional practices through experiences like the utilization of effective questioning techniques, experimental problem solving, and project-based learning, however, 73% of students agree/strongly agreed to the GCS survey statement, "Most of my teachers have high expectations for ALL students (not just some students.)" In interviews most students said their teachers show that they have high expectations for them by giving them challenging work and encouraging them to do their best. In the GCS Family Survey, one parent responded that the school needs to "*set high expectations for our students to excel academically.*"

Other classroom observations revealed some, but not all classroom teachers are using appropriate questioning strategies to engage and motivate students to accelerate learning.

4.1.6 Social and emotional learning (SEL)

At the building level, SEL seems to be strong. Elementary schools throughout the district follow the PBIS framework, which is attributing to the success of students. Staff members commented that every morning with an SEL lesson and all students have an opportunity to connect with each other and their teacher on a personal level. Every month, there is a new district-wide theme emphasizing a specific character trait.. Schools regularly recognize students and staff in order to keep morale high. However, multiple staff members feel that the district should provide more resources to support SEL for students and staff. Specifically, they would like to see the district improve and communicate their long-term staffing priorities in this area, as well as provide PD and resources specific to trauma informed practices. Staff comments:

"We had an MTSS coordinator. Her vision was to have student support service specialists in every building. She resigned a week ago, so now we do not have one. I do not know if the district will replace her."

"Our grant for counselors ran out."

"I feel like we need more resources and support when it comes to trauma informed practices and needs of students."

"We don't know how to deal with trauma care."

Staff commented they feel unprepared and would like to receive training on implementing required programming, or have access to staff (counselors, etc.) who understand and are trained in social emotional learning strategies to support students and to ensure implementation is impactful. There is an expectation that teachers meet with students daily, using the "Character Strong" resources. Some teachers are not clear on the connection between SEL and Trauma Informed Care strategies and referrals for special education services. They feel that adults are experiencing trauma also and their needs aren't addressed, "Compare it to putting the oxygen mask on yourself before your children on the plane."

Staff in some schools did not feel that during the last two years they received the support when they asked for help. School level educators want district administrators to, *"Spend time in a kindergarten classroom and see what it is like; one school is on tier 1 for SEL, and there is no plan to reach Tier 3. There are lessons shared on asking the right questions, but teachers aren't qualified to guide the discussions after opening up the wounds and the expectation is that teachers meet with students daily."*

4.1.7 School and classroom discipline

Student behavior district-wide is a common concern. There are major issues with consistent application of behavioral consequences. Several school staff stated the discipline is not equitable and that all incidences are not addressed the same. Many teachers feel as though they spend more time correcting behavior than teaching. They feel bound by the code of conduct, but shared concerns about its ineffectiveness and the lack of alignment with Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) structures. Teachers feel as though there are not real consequences for students or staff when an issue arises. One stated *"it all depends on the kid or the adult to figure out how to handle the discipline situation".* Other staff responses on district-wide discipline included:

- "The Code of Conduct is not take seriously and no one knows how to use it since it was created by the district and we aren't able to change it."

- "The district tells us to write our behavior documentation in a Google sheet instead of directly into the online platform."

- "I have worked in this school for 16 years and I am scared to step into the hallways. They are dangerous for kids and adults."

Most teachers have their own classroom rules and hallway behavior expectations They said, "We model the behavior we want to see. We feel the child is the driver of their own education. We're here to encourage and guide." Though some staff said they would like to see more consistency with discipline, they have procedures in place to effectively handle discipline issues.

In contrast, based on staff and leadership interviews, discipline was the dominant area of contention impeding instruction and draining staff morale. Secondary settings are struggling with the unique situation of consolidating schools and doing so just after coming off of more than a full year of eLearning. It is apparent that students and staff feel strongly that student discipline was the number one challenge of the transition. It was difficult for students to feel a sense of pride in such an environment and it does not appear that administrators received much support for handling the emotional transition of consolidating schools, staff, and neighborhoods. Several staff talked about the lack of communication concerning what happens when a student is pulled from the classroom for behavior. The resolution is not communicated. They also said students can't use their cell phone in the classroom, but there is no guidance for what to do when a student breaks the rules. Other comments:

- "I feel that principals go by the code of conduct, but will not do anything else because they are afraid of stirring the pot. They are afraid of parents."

- "It is not always effective. When kids come down to the office, they seem to hang out in the office, then come back without the issue ever getting resolved."

- "African American students and Latino students are expelled most. Special Education can be a big one too for understandable reasons. We haven't addressed some cultural issues…no one sits down and says, 'Hey, what's going on,' … we could really make a difference in our expulsions…we have been able to get the numbers down…I've seen that students who were put up for expulsion in elementary school and then again in middle school and then again in high school…the question is what are we doing wrong at that point? We need a plan for when they come back, and we don't have that…that's when everything gets silent".

- "Rules may make sense, but they are not being enforced consistently."

Students at some schools shared that they see incidences of discipline issues at their school that take away from their learning. Most students felt that the school rules were fair and that there was a reason for all the rules. However, they did not feel that the consequences were the same. Students stated that staff members had favorites. Students felt that there was a sense of respect in the school.

The discipline data graphic (Table 11) shows that the suspension rate for almost every diverse student group is higher than that of White students. African American students have the highest rate of suspensions in both in and out of school suspensions. Nearly 40% of the in-school suspensions were for African American, Hispanic and Multiracial students while only 7% were for white students. Similarly, 38% of out of school suspensions were related to diverse students. The highest suspension and expulsion rates are among African American, multiracial, students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students, though expulsion rates are lower overall.

4.1.8 School safety and bullying

Staff and student interviews and school/classroom observations reveal most schools have safety protocols in place as evidenced by posted schoolwide and classroom procedures for student behavior, adherence to team/school schedules and class transitions. Staff/adults are also visible in most hallways and common areas during class transitions, as well as morning attendance and during school dismissal. However, in two schools the front staff did not ask the audit team for ID right away. One of the secretaries commented, "I guess we should" when asked about ID for check-in. Many classroom doors in the building were open or not locked. One building administrator asked which group we were (two groups were visiting for the day) as opposed to having us introduce ourselves to verify our identities.

Most students shared for the most part, they feel safe at their schools. They also talked about the safety protocols set at their respective schools. They feel comfortable that their teachers and other school personnel look out for them.

Bullying appears to be an issue of concern for several students groups. Most interviewed students shared that the teachers are not aware of the bullying that takes place at their schools. According to student interviews, some bullying is, "Bad and some is very bad in some schools." When asked if the adults in the building are aware of the amount of bullying that takes place, one student responded, "Yes, the staff gets bullied too." The student was referring to the way staff members are often treated by some of the students. Other members in the interviewing group agreed with this comment. Students stated that teachers are not aware of bullying when it occurs because it will make it worse for the victim. Students stated that the bullying presentation was amazing and that bullying has slowed down. Student survey data (Figures 7& 8) also revealed that bullying is an extreme concern. Overall, students do not feel that adults are aware of the bullying, nor is addressed consistently. Other student comments included:

"People are scared to tell adults about bullying. They feel like if they say something then the problem will get bigger"

"No, maybe bullied during Freshman year, that is when it usually happens because you are new to the school and feel it the most from the older kids"

"I fear that students know where I live, I feel uncomfortable that kids know where I live."

One interviewee stated and recognized there is growing concern in the community and the school district that students aren't maximizing their potential. The impact of Covid has resulted in learning loss for students and reduced sense of wellbeing among staff. The schools do not reflect the diversity of the student population. The district should make data driven decision making a priority across all departments.
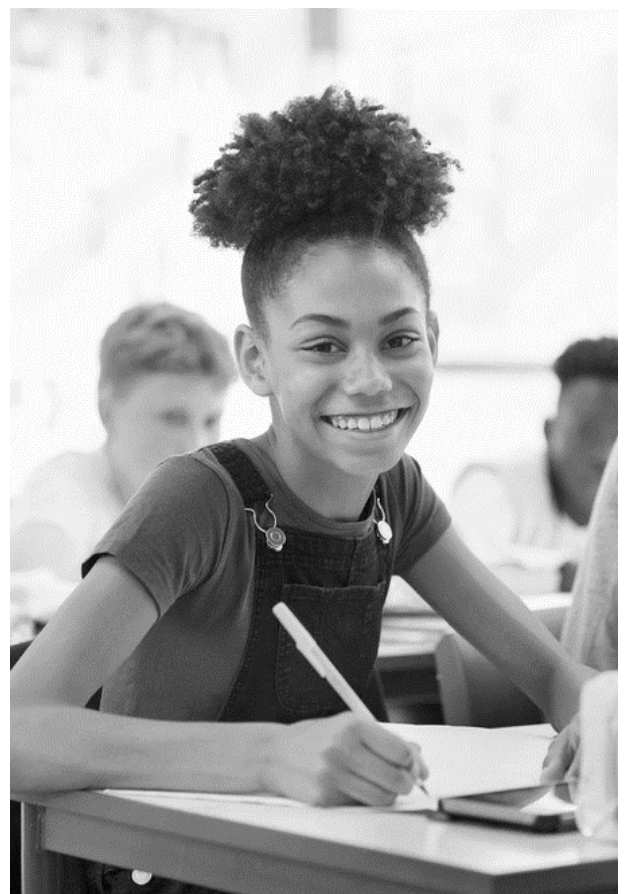
4.1.9 RECOMMENDATIONS (priority recommendations)

- Make the diversity, equity and inclusion mission critical. Review, implement and update (as needed) current SCH mission/vision/strategic plans and organizational goals to demonstrate greater depth and commitment in support of substantive diversity and inclusion institutional culture change. In addition, implement this process in every area of the institution e.g., departments, programs, projects, etc.; each should have mission/vision/strategic/goals consistent with and reflective of the organization. Create mechanisms for accountability. A good mission supports strong culture…Strong culture sustains the mission.[7]

7Fullan, 2015

- Based on survey response and feedback, bullying appears to be a major concern for all focus groups. A district-wide bullying prevention program is needed. This program should incorporate training for all employees on preventing, recognizing, and responding to bullying. There should be workshops or awareness sessions for all students. In addition, continue to empower the student advisory council. SCH leaders can obtain valuable insight and assist in building student engagement and belonging, as well as addressing bullying, the quality of food, restrooms, and school pride expressed by students in open comments that should be reviewed and addressed. Examine how students become a part of the student council, if applicable.

- Discipline rules, policies and procedures should be consistently and effectively implemented to promote a safe and orderly learning environment, especially for the middle school.

- School-wide instructional and behavior expectations are clearly defined and there is a consistent way to hold students and staff accountable with school-wide and class- wide incentives embedded based on data obtained from the SEL surveys.

- The Board of Trustees to sponsor annual retreat including attendance from Superintendent and key Cabinet members. The annual retreat is when the board has the time and breathing room to have deeper strategic conversations with central office leadership. The retreat is a time for board members to reconnect with each other, build trust, get re-inspired about the mission, and build confidence in their role contributing to that mission.

Additional RECOMMENDATIONS

- Dialogue is needed about what intentional, standard based instruction that is culturally responsive looks like. A discussion of lessons to determine their effectiveness is important. Are the curricula and standards accessible to all students? From this discussion, begin to make plans to intentionally engage teachers in preparing/ designing/monitoring the impact of culturally relevant lessons using rubrics so that students will know if their work is good and can answer how they know their work is good.

- Increase engagement, rigor, and higher expectations within the instructional day by using a randomizer within the tools section of the promethean board (simple popsicle sticks or wheel of names) to hold all students accountable to what is being learned.

- Once the greatest obstacles have been identified to achieving your district-wide mission/vision goals, seek consultation to help overcome these obstacles and to address culture and climate issues. This help would need to be directed to the leadership of the schools and district. With intentional focus, this is an area that can be directly impacted very quickly. Consider deeper partnership with businesses or community constituents.

4.2 KEY FINDING 2 - DISTRICT-WIDE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT & MONITORING

Staff actions and interactions play a significant role in an equitable school. The way staff members interact with each other and with students, parents, and families impacts the climate of each building and each child's achievement. Providing staff with adequate training, resources, and support is vital to school quality.

Through large districts, schools have more autonomy when it comes to curriculum and instruction. This was a positive comment from a teacher when asked about something she likes about working for SCH. "I like that we have autonomy with what we teach." A commonality across classroom observations was the use of iReady on student technology. This creates a uniform platform for data collection.

Equity seemed to come up in every discussion which poses an extreme problem for those not getting or having what they need to provide instruction. Several staff members mentioned the Special Education students' inequities. In certain schools there is only one certified special education teacher to provide legal services to over 40 students, which does not allow the students to get appropriate help based on their disability.   One teacher is expected to service every grade level in her school with only one paraprofessional to support her. In one interview it was stated "Our SPED teacher services every grade with just her and one person while other schools have 3 SPED teachers and less students to service." Another staff member stated "Schools have different resources and personnel based on the community of the school. The district has even taken my paras and sent them to a more affluent school based on numbers.   Special Education services aren't based on the number of IEPs."

A teacher also mentioned a number of students who should be placed in the Step Program due to the IEP is in general education classes and on her caseload. There are more RTI staff at schools whose community has the same number as others but contains a different population of kids.   Some schools have multiple RTI personnel to provide tiered instruction while others have one. Interestingly, no one interviewed mentioned anything about instructional practices other than the lack of staff needed to provide an equitable experience for all students. Other staff comments:

"Survival of the fittest."

"I'm doing the job of 4 SPED teachers."

"Our identified students are failing because we don't have what we need to provide them equitable instruction."

Staff feel that district curriculum planning has not been consistently effective across all subjects. They said that the district curriculum in math is appropriate for the needs of their students. It appears that the staff members had more buy-in with the effectiveness of the math curriculum due to it being developed amongst a group of teachers, building administrators, and with representatives from the publishing company. They feel that the current math curriculum allowed them to address areas where the previous curriculum was weak and that there is room for flexibility on the pacing of units so teachers can make adjustments based on student performance.

In contrast, staff did not feel as strongly about the ELA curriculum. It was explained that a district committee had started curriculum planning, but was interrupted in completing it due to COVID. Central Office explained that the solution was to engage an outside company to assist with completing the ELA curriculum. The ELA curriculum was described as confusing and hard to follow. There is also concern that the only training on the current ELA curriculum took place in the summer of 2020, so teachers hired since have not received training. They also feel that the curriculum is not strong enough in the area of differentiation and meeting the needs of diverse learners. Staff that were interviewed are confident that the district's ELA curriculum is not being implemented with fidelity and that schools in the district that are performing notably above the district average are doing so because of individual teachers who are strong in understanding how to teach the standards in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Several 6-12 grade students felt that the curriculum was appropriate for the diversity of the students it serves and that they had opportunities to learn real-world skills and information. Staff at the secondary level felt they would benefit from district guidelines in regards to expectations for planning times (as it relates to individual plan time versus departmental plan time intended to work on curriculum).

Staff said that students' ability to retain instructional knowledge is highly impacted by their social and emotional health. Post-Covid, schools are dealing with mental health more than ever. When instruction is the top priority of schools, districts should be able to provide them with the social and emotional support to work in unison with the teaching and learning. SCH purchased an SEL curriculum for all schools to use for the 22-23 school year. While the purchase was appreciated, there was no training or information on how to implement it in the classrooms. Teachers feel as though they are "checking a box" but aren't doing so in the right way. Teachers also feel that with the diverse population they serve there should be opportunities to enhance their culturally responsive instruction. One principal mentioned their desire to have the district provide development in order for the increasing Hispanic population to feel welcome in her school. When asked if she had what she needed to support trauma informed practices, an administrator stated, "No ma'am. None. That is such a daily struggle for us. We have kids who are deeply in trauma. I spend a lot of time researching how to handle these situations."

While SCH brought in Student Support Specialists to bridge social emotional health and instruction, the overall structure is not nearly as effective as it needs to be. One middle school has only 1 guidance counselor for her 900 students. While she is able to provide crisis support, she is too busy with other managerial tasks to support students in any other way. One person stated, "Support isn't equitable across schools. The high school has 8 counselors and I have myself. Our staff isn't at capacity to meet those needs. It takes away their instructional time when they are having to deal with other SEL related issues or concerns." Other comments included:

"We don't have a guidance counselor."

"Our SSS is doing the best she can."

"Our social worker is on-call. These issues outweigh instruction the majority of the time."

One interviewed group discussed a concern that the 6th grade at the elementary level is a huge challenge. They said the district is working on redesigning recess for 6th graders as aids can't deal with the present arrangement. Since this has caused a power struggle with kids, they are creating new opportunities for staff to work with younger students or get additional academic support when needed. Staff shared that it is frustrating since they had to create this on their own, and not with the help of district office.

4.2.1 Staff Training/Professional Development

The district indicated that professional development is a large component of the SCH vision. When asked about those opportunities, staff were not able to identify the professional development. Certain schools provide PD in house, though teachers do not see the importance or significance of those. Similarly, other than bias training, some staff were not able to identify culturally responsive training that they have taken part of, or a time when someone in a leadership position supported their personal or professional growth. An instructional leader stated, "Hmm… I know we have a PD plan somewhere, but I'm not exactly sure what's in it. I do know it aligns with our School Improvement Plan." New teachers in the district feel as though there is a lack of training and support and no onboarding is provided for initiatives mandated at the district level. A special education teacher said, *"Everything is difficult for me. I need a mentor and don't have one."*

One administrator discussed the professional development their teachers have been receiving and mentioned that literacy, standards, and data analysis were a priority for professional development for their staff. In contrast, another administrator noted that the professional development director had resigned and that their team had not received previously scheduled professional development. Additionally, the focus of the professional development was vastly different. Neither administrator discussed the process that was in place to ensure the implementation of strategies after professional development.

Interviewed staff could not identify any specific professional developments that have addressed educational equity. Additionally, teachers are unaware of the district processes to ensure the implementation of professional developments they have attended. Like interviewed administrators, several staff shared the literacy PD focus. Other staff shared that they have the "generic City School Hammond PD" and take bits and pieces of it. They said some PD is helpful like the PD on "PowerSchool and Schoology". They have an advisory board that provides ideas and input too. Staff comments:

- "The biggest PD push has been about literacy. There has been some for math, but literacy has been big. Some PD has been on standards and analyzing data. There has been a lot of support for ELL students."

- "Small group PD. We were supposed to have cultural training. The staff has not had equity training. There is no process to measure the effectiveness of any PD we have participated in."

- "When COVID hit, we were out of school for a full year. When we returned, there was a construction project, so we haven't gotten a lot of PD. The district practices are to just report to administration."

- "There is no follow-up on PD."

Staff communicated that the only source of formal CRI training was conducted when the previous Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) district employee facilitated a book study with staff on CRI and Learning Styles. There was no follow-up to the training. The instructional coach, assistant principal, and principal meet weekly to determine professional development needs and next steps at one school. Not every school has an instructional coach, because schools can determine how to use their Title funding. Teachers make learning relevant to all students. Some social studies teachers make the learning relevant to students in terms of comparing learning and living environments. One teacher stated that *"the only way I know anything about CRI is from the book study offered by a district person last year. By the end of the study, there were only 6 people in the book study group."* Other comments about CRI professional development:

"CRI is to make sure all learners are receiving what they need to be successful in the classroom."

"If it's addressed, it's in social studies; since it's not tested, it is skipped in some classes at 6th grade - work is needed with that quotation marks at the end of the quotes."

"Teachers do not buy-in because they feel the district is hypocritical because they do not treat each other with respect but want the teachers to give up a Saturday to attend PD and the board members do not.

"Wonders" (upper grades) and "Amplify" (primary grades) are two diversity programs offered in schools."

4.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Central office should include the building level administration in discussions and decisions much earlier in the process.

- Hold frequent professional development sessions that meet staff needs. Sessions should be intentionally focused on culturally-responsive teaching, equitable instruction, and social-emotional learning strategies.

- Provide more in-depth professional development strategy with opportunities with practical follow-up sessions, plus instructional materials to support work with students.

- Ensure the professional development plan is continuous, sustainable, scalable, job-embedded and includes follow-up support, feedback, and reflection.

4.3 KEY FINDING 3 - COMMUNICATION (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

Strong, effective communication is the cornerstone of any successful organization.[8]

Based on all focus group interviews, SCH struggles with creating effective and sustainable communication with all stakeholders, and fostering effective and continuous dialogue centered on improving the teaching and learning environment. Structures for a culture of systemic school/district-wide accountability (with the mindset that the entire school community is responsible for student achievement) have not been established. This includes assuring students' accountability for their own success.

Staff stated that this is a large district and that things get lost in translation. One staff focus group shared that some school level communication could be better, however, communication is not the best from administrators in the central office. On the school level, staff spoke about the lack of communication between staff and leadership concerning consequences for student behavior. Frustration flares when the resolution is not communicated. According to interviewees, mixed messages are also received from the district:

- "Communication is a challenge when questions are not addressed"

- "Receive conflicting communication from the district"

- "The district struggles with effective communication and a robust strategy is needed from all stakeholders. We need more storytelling for our constituents to understand what we're doing well and where we're investing resources to address challenges."

Internal communication between schools depends on the topic. While teachers feel supported and respected by each other, the opposite was said about the communication between staff and administration. Teachers said they do not feel empowered to speak up or stand up for what they desire, nor do they feel there is a line of mutual cooperation. Teachers are not able to communicate for instructional purposes due to lack of time. Teachers who may be mentoring new staff members feel as though they aren't making a difference. While relationships between peers are cordial, there seems to be a disconnect between teachers and administrators at some schools.

One administrator feels as though it's always a competition. She says there is a rift between teachers and administrators and absolutely no unity between the schools. The word "segregated" was used multiple times, as well as "lack of recognition and lack of protection. Staff shared that communication between the central office and schools is almost non-existent.

8Thornley, 2019

Many staff stated that "Communication is a huge issue. Things get sent at the last minute and we are punished if they aren't finished." Many mentioned "unreasonable deadlines, outlandish

requests, and ridiculous timelines." Elementary schools brought up the transition of 6th grade back into their schools. They believe the plan was not thought through thoroughly. Many believe that the central office didn't take into consideration the 200 plus students in their buildings with the same amount of space, and most importantly didn't provide instructional resources to go with the students. They said the communication of the plan didn't come until the very last minute, leaving building leaders in a panic to prepare.

Staff said that a new student platform was mandated by the district leadership but no clear communication was offered on how to use the system. Some mentioned the lack of communication about finances, either giving the budget too late or not being upfront about the entire budget when it was first awarded.

Central office leaders indicated the need to build trust and open communication without fear to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders. Leaders discussed the concepts of a collaborative and shared leadership experience. For example, most leaders who participated in the mission and vision development indicated this was a collaborative process. Stakeholders were invited and involved in the development of the mission and vision statements. Leaders noted the large crowd dwindled to a small work team but all stakeholders were given the opportunity. Other leaders referenced, hearing limited information about the process to develop a new mission and vision statement. The leaders referenced communication may have been a factor in the lack of information shared. Regarding shared leadership opportunities the majority of the central office team described shared leadership as a discussion point but with limited implementation. Leaders referenced putting things on paper without follow up or meetings to discuss next steps, appear to be the norm. Because of this practice collaboration on projects is limited.

During staff discussions about communication, a common topic of conversation was the merging of schools. Many stated that the school system did not properly prepare the community for this merge and didn't realize the impact it would have on the outside community. Because of this, racial issues were brought to the surface and have created more problems than expected. One teacher mentioned the work the school has to do to rebuild the reputation of SCH. She said, "The community has always been divided but now with the equity issues happening in the school system people are continuing to lose faith." Administrators feel as though they receive no recognition or respect from the community because they are not receiving it from the district leaders. One mentioned a Facebook group where parents continually misrepresent the schools and the district has not addressed it, despite the negative and sometimes misleading conversations happening.

In addition, school-level administrators at another school expressed that communication from the district office is an area that needs improvement; *"For example, this audit schedule was asked for just a couple of days ago. Second, there are unrealistic expectations, such as the documentation requirements in PowerSchool (every intervention-academic and behavioral)."*

Administrators shared that there are communication errors that happen frequently from the district office. In order to give all of the projects the attention that is needed for success, it would be helpful if the deadlines were spread further apart and notice given as to when things need to get done. One administrator expressed frustration with new principals not knowing enough about Hammond and how it works, resulting in chaos in regards to discipline and respect. They said district office and school leadership need to be more open minded in taking feedback and making stakeholders a part of the process. Other comments:

- "Every teacher should be giving the same assessment; it would be nice if the whole district was on the same page."

- "The district office needs to be more involved in what is happening at the school level; I only hear from my district support person three times a year."

"District office," "downtown," or "central office" was a common theme in every interview group. The chief complaints were the lack of transparency and communication. Staff talked about consistent change and disorganization throughout the district. Staff commented:

- "There is a lack of communication about school-wide procedures. I am not sure who to ask if I don't know something. It is chaotic between class times, and the kids usually come in late to class. The school is teacher-driven, and there is a lack of communication between the administration and teachers. I don't feel like the school supports me."

- "The district just approved a mission and vision. They are trying to be more student focused, improve communication and transparency with stakeholders so there is no question what is going on in the SCH, and create an environment of support and trust."

Staff also spoke about being overburdened with extra demands from downtown (district office) that is taking time and planning away from instruction and helping students.

- "Last year was hard. District mandates added to stress."

- "I also think the Superintendent realizes communication needs improvement and is working on it."

Additional staff comments give the sense that communication at the district level is challenging, causing chaos to trickle down to buildings and into classrooms. Staff members also feel that directives are made with little time for implementation. Some comments describe that there is no consideration for the work and deadlines that staff members are already striving to meet when district level demands are put on them. In alignment with staff survey responses, staff responded that oftentimes, little to no input is sought outside of district level administration when decisions are made. They feel that if district leadership would get input from administrators or teachers working in the buildings, they could make more effective decisions in terms of student achievement.

Only 54% of surveyed certified staff feel valued and listened to by school leadership/administration while 51% feel that school leadership gives staff the same opportunities to participate collaboratively in decision making for the school, 42% disagreed to these statements. Also, aligned with interview responses of discord with the central office, only 56 % of surveyed leadership agree/strongly agree that they feel valued and listened to by the district leadership and administration.

In the GCS survey, most families responded favorably to regular, explicit communications with staff and schools involving academics, behavior and communication efforts in family native language. School/classroom interviews and observations revealed student to student, and student to teacher relationships and interactions are for the most part, positive. In most schools, students interact with other students in a positive, respectful manner and most were well behaved, engaged with the daily lessons and focused on learning. Students transitioning between classes were respectful of each other and visitors. In classrooms, overall, teacher and students maintained good rapport

4.3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make the discipline of communication a priority. Staff members are ambassadors for SCH. Many of them live in the community, and many have close relationships with SCH parents. While they might not agree with all district-level or building-level decisions, they are more likely to support them—or at least not disparage administration and board members for making the decisions—if they are informed.

- Create a strategic communication strategy that produces meaningful, cohesive messages that are specific for each stakeholder community. Communications should be viewed as a district function and an essential factor in achieving SCH's district-wide goals. A clearly defined communication plan will guide when, where, how, who and what messages are delivered. Within the communication strategic plan should include an approval process and calendar to avoid communication fatigue.

- Use the district website or social media tools to convey the status of goals, strategies, and action steps on at least a quarterly basis.

- Central Office should include the building level administration in discussions and decisions early in the process.

Global Consulting Solutions acknowledges the unprecedented "teacher fatigue" and frustration that is not unique to SCH, but a national trend. This sentiment is likely to have impacted some of the survey responses and interview responses quoted in this report. Although open and honest, there appeared to be relief and appreciation in the effort to sit down with multiple stakeholders and listen to these concerns.

5   Research and extended reading

1 American Institute of Research. (2018) Educational Equity: Identifying Barriers and Increasing Access. Retrieved from: https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Equity.pdf

2 Blair Mann, "Equity and Equality Are Not Equal," The Education Trust, March 12, 2014.

3 Blankstein, Alan, Excellence Through Equity: Five Principles of Courageous Leadership to Guide Achievement for Every Student, 2016.

4 Fullan, M. (2015). The Moral Imperative of School Leadership. Corwin Press.

5 Gomez, J., Rucinski, C. & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2020). Promising pathways from school restorative practices to educational equity. Journal of Moral Education.

6 Gullo, Gina; Implicit Bias in Schools (Eye on Education), 2018.

7 Kramarczuk Voulgarides, C., Fergus, E., & King Thorius, K. A. (2017). Pursuing equity: Disproportionality in special education and the reframing of technical solutions to address systemic inequities. Review of Research in Education, 41(1), 61-87.

8 Miranda-Wolff, A., (2022). Cultures of Belonging: Building Inclusive Organizations That Last. Harper Collins Leadership

9 20 judgments a teacher makes in 1 minute and 28 seconds- How Implicit Bias Creeps into the Classroom, Ball 2018. https://hechingerreport.org/20-judgments-a-teacher-makes-in-1-minute-and-28-seconds/

6   Action planning

The school or district team should complete this section.

Opportunity for Growth:

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

7   Acknowledgements

Global Consulting Solutions would like to thank School City of Hammond for their hospitality and cooperation. We trust this report will assist in the implementation of SCH's diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.   We believe that by addressing these recommendations, the SCH leadership will be better prepared to implement equity, diversity, and inclusion goals with fidelity.

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