



Estill County School District

CULTURE & CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

Prepared for: Estill County Public Schools
Prepared by: Millennium Learning Concepts
March 2023



Millennium Learning Concepts

Introduction

Millennium Learning Concepts (MLC) is pleased to present the Estill County School District (ECSD) Culture and Climate Report as part of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) plan. ECSD has the potential to serve as a model of an equitable environment without opportunity gaps in student achievement. Hence, this audit report builds on ECSD's legacy while recommending an equity-focused future trajectory.

The Millennium Learning Assessment Team designed the district-level assessment 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, it is imperative that ECSD leadership moves forward in a culture of commitment.

About Estill County Schools

Estill County is located in the Foothill Region of the state of Kentucky with an approximate population of 14,406. Estill County is located in an area between the Bluegrass Region and the Appalachian Mountain areas. The Estill County School District is comprised of 6 schools. Students attend Estill Springs Elementary for K-5, West Irvine Elementary K-5, Estill County Middle School 6-8 and Estill County High School for grades 9-12. The school district includes an alternative program, Success Academy, for grades 6-12 located adjacent to East County High School. In addition, the school district is comprised of a blended Preschool/Head Start program, South Irvine P-K Center for Early Head Start through Kindergarten. The school is comprised of 173 preschool and 16 early head start students. The Area Technology Center offers a variety of programs for Estill County High School students and Powell County students. Students can study Diesel Mechanics, Health Sciences, Information Technology, Industrial Maintenance, Advanced Manufacturing, Construction Technology and other STEM Programs.¹

District demographics/diversity

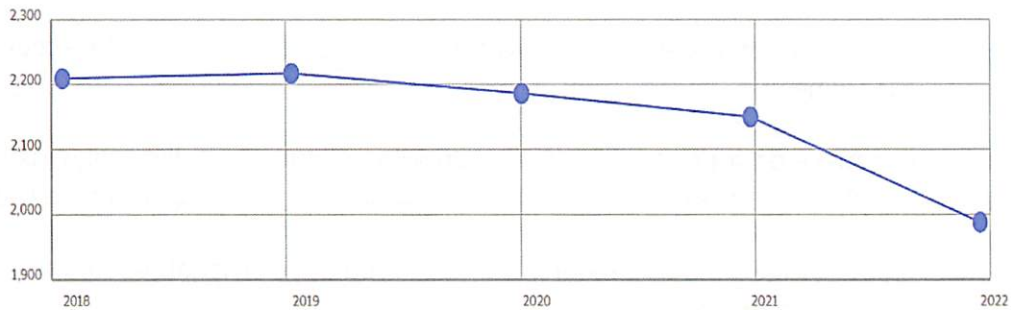
The student body at the schools served by Estill County is 96% White, 1.4% 2 or more race, 1.3% Hispanic/Latino and 0.8% other (African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander). The district's overall minority enrollment is less than 5%, and 70% of students are economically disadvantaged. 1183 of the students are female, and 1211, male. At

schools in Estill County, 1 student is an English learner, 2 students are migrants and 408 are students with disabilities. 12 % qualified for G/T services which includes Two or More Races, Economically Disadvantaged students and Students with Disabilities.²

ECSD continues to be plagued by a decreasing enrollment (fig.1). A three year review of the student population shows an average loss of 20.3 students per year in grades K-12. Trend data reveals that total district student enrollment gradually declined from 2018 -2022 (2200-1988). The district population rate for economically disadvantaged students decreased sharply from 2021-2022 (1583-1386); while students with disabilities show a gradual increase of students, 2018-2022. Total district student enrollment has gradually declined from 2018-2022.¹

Though 64% of the MCPS students are economically disadvantaged, the district maintains a relatively high attendance rate of 94%. According to prior year data, most of the school's sources of expenditure are directly provided by state and local funds.²

Fig. 1- Estill County student enrollment trends



¹ECSD District Improvement Plan Executive Summary

²2019 SAAR Summary Data www.kyschoolreportcard.com

Commendations

The MLC Assessment Team acknowledges the district's many successes. Culture and climate assessment data shows the Estill County School District has resolved to address systemic conditions that contribute to pervasive disparities in student achievement and student opportunity and stakeholder dissatisfaction. This is already resulting in meaningful student growth. ECSD's many celebrations include:

1. The MLC Assessment Team commends the Superintendent and Leadership team for commissioning the Culture and Climate Assessment.
2. Schools' staff and students were welcoming to the assessment team. Students were respectful and offered valuable insight about their schools.
3. Based on staff interviews and school observations, district leaders, school leaders, teachers are all working around the common goal of improving learning outcomes for students.
4. Unique/Intentional SEL approaches and activities are evident and implemented school wide.
5. Students develop their own goals for improvement and are encouraged to be accountable for their own learning.
6. Schools work to make data-driven structures a priority and intentionally design instruction interventions and other decisions about students and student learning based on the data.
7. Staff spoke highly of their schools' leadership and praised the district office for the support they receive for their schools and students.
8. Overall staff and students feel Estill County schools are safe due to the school safety policies and protocols that are in place.
9. The schools were welcoming and pleasant to visit, while using appropriate security protocols to ensure student safety. Parents and students visiting from the school were greeted by name and portraying a sense of community with the school.
10. Observed discipline in hallway and classrooms during transitions was exceptional. Students were polite, and most were engaged during instruction.
11. School principals are well respected and appreciated by their students and staff.

12. Most teachers believed that the district works to ensure students at a disadvantage have a fair opportunity at achieving the same goal.
13. The physical appearance of schools is evidence that students and staff take pride in their schools.
14. 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.
15. Some teachers seemed to have a wealth of knowledge in instructional practices that best fit their classrooms, based on limited observations.

Process and methodology

The MLC Assessment Team's audit process and methodology were collaborative. Team members gathered data from various Estill County Public Schools (ECPS) sources and perspectives, including:

- Staff surveys
- Student surveys
- School interviews
- School observations
- Reviews of documents
- Desk audit (February 2023)

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 ECSD desk audit. MLC utilizes 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 quantitative sources (surveys, classroom and school observations, document review, achievement gap/assessment data) also revealed a need for culturally relevant PD and resources as a finding for the equity report. Table 1 shows the data sources by type, number of sources, and description.

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.

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

Table 1 Breakdown of data sources

³Including school/district plans, professional development plans, achievement data, school/corporation improvement plans, school board policies and meeting minutes, survey data, teacher retention data, disaggregated discipline data, Kentucky Department of Education Assessment Data, KDE ECSD School/District Report Card; Faculty Counts, Profile and Equity, 2020-2021, KDE Disproportionate Measures, 2020

Type	Quantity	Description
Surveys	Certified— 60 Student (6-12)-761	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—20 Classified—6 Student— 16 Administrative—2 Central office - 3 Family-3	A unique set of questions centered around equity. The Assessment Team asked the questions. The team heard different stakeholder voices and documented the information anonymously.
School & classroom observations	21 (Elem. Middle & High)	Visible and audible observations focused on equity and culture obtained during on-site visits.
Desk audit	Detailed analysis of over 30 ECSD-provided documents and policies ³	A collection of documents, information, and data analyzed prior to the on-site visit.

Data and results

Equity Analysis & Academic Achievement

Overall summary of documents:

Estill County provided multiple data measures to determine this summary of findings. The findings were developed by looking at the KSA, MAP, ACT and behavioral data across K-12 schools in the district. When analyzing data from the sources listed above, the following areas should be noted.

Table 2 Summary of documents

	Areas for Commendation	Areas for Growth
Elementary	The mean RIT on MAP math in grades K-5 is close to or at the norm. Estill Springs is showing high performance in comparison to West Irvine. Elementary students with disabilities are showing a higher percentage of proficiency than middle and high school students.	1st and 2nd grade students are the furthest from the norm RIT.
Middle	On the KSA there is an increase in proficiency in mathematics from 2020-2021. Economically disadvantaged students hold a higher proficiency percentage in math than elementary and high school students in this category. 6th grade math has a higher number of average and above average students than below average. 6th grade and 7th grade have more average and above average students in reading.	Reading proficiency is declining. There are more low and low average students in 7th and 8th grades in math. 8th grade has more below average students in reading.
High	Average ACT score is close to the average state score.	Almost 50% of students are novice in reading and there has been a significant decline in the proficiency trend line.
District	MAP assessment scores seem to be stronger than summative assessment scores.	Novice numbers are very high for economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. Economically disadvantaged and students with disabilities have a much higher rate of behavior incidents and economically disadvantaged students are involved in 81% of incidents.

³ECSD 2023 Desk Audit

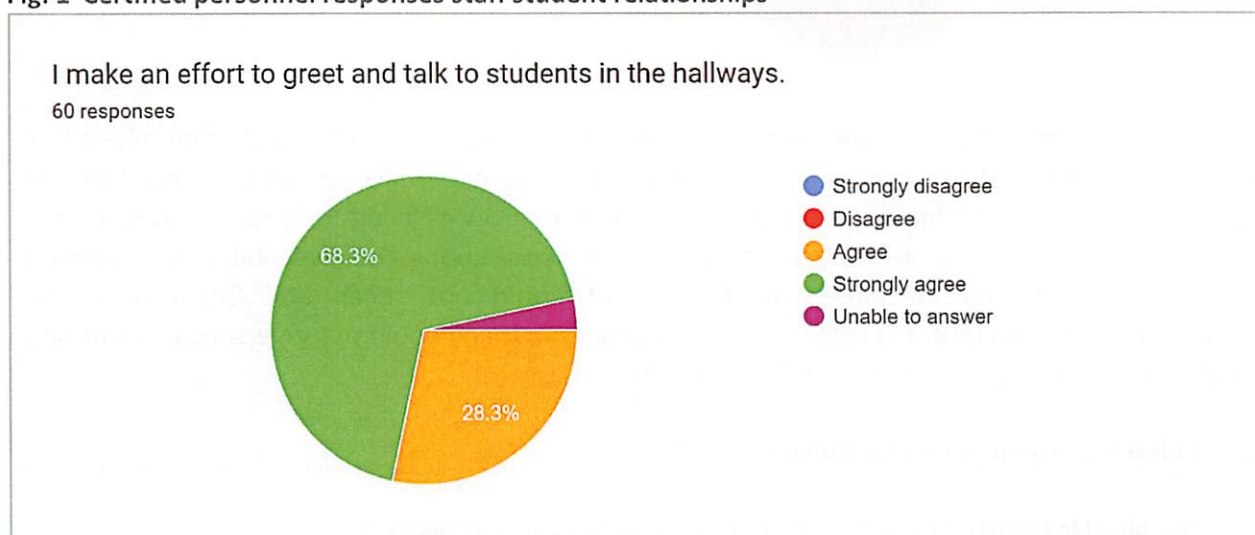
⁴KSA, MAP, ACT- [Kentucky School Report Card](#)

Overviews by stakeholder group

Certified personnel

A review of responses from certified personnel data reveals most of the participants responded with 70% and above positively to all areas except the survey items pertaining to student respect for each other, courageous conversations student bullying, and supports and resources available for overwhelmed staff. Survey responses relating to the school environment were overall positive. 92% of certified staff felt their school tries to be welcoming and understanding to parents/families, while a majority (96%) work to build relationships by greeting and talking to students. 93% of certified staff responded that their school climate is conducive to teaching and learning. Interviewed schools' staff, student and parent responses align with the survey ratings that the schools throughout the district are welcoming and warm for the Estill County school community.

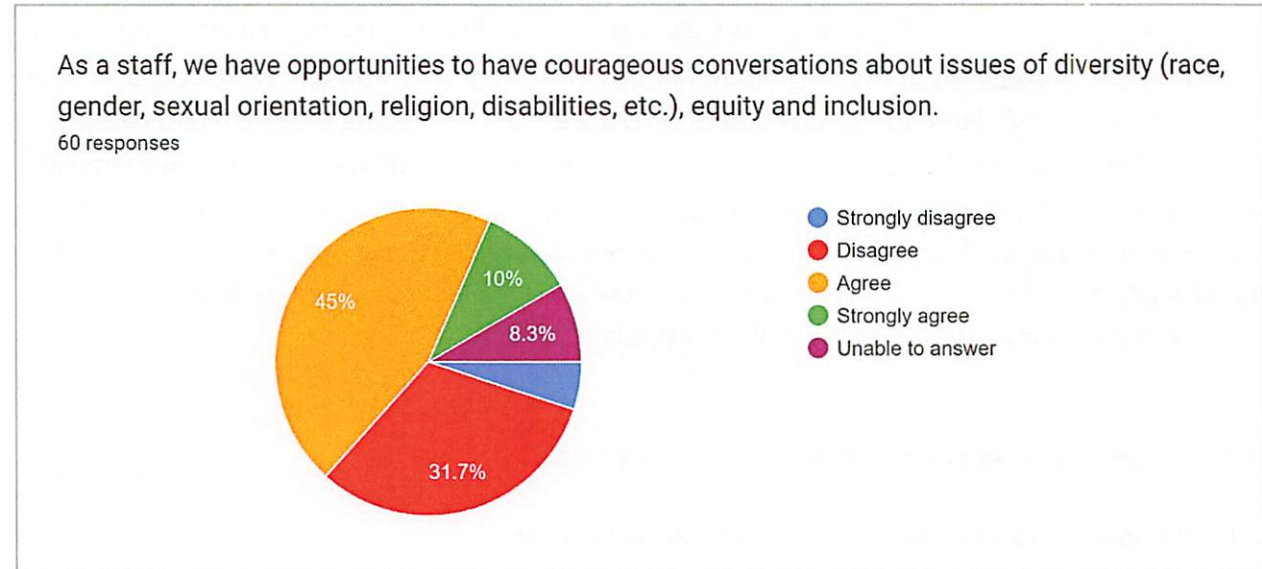
Fig. 1 Certified personnel responses staff student relationships



99% of staff members feel comfortable working with students and families from different backgrounds. Survey items related to racial/ethnicity, diversity and culture revealed 93% of certified staff responded positively (agree/strongly agree) to having an awareness of how their own racial/ethnic and cultural background affects perceptions and values of others. 85% of certified staff communicated their school values diversity and works to make sure everyone feels included regardless of background or difference. Though school/classroom observations revealed a lack of diversity presented throughout some ECSD schools, staff positively rated the presentation of positive images for people from a variety of backgrounds, races and cultures in their schools. Some division surfaced when asked if staff have opportunities to have courageous conversations about issues of diversity including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion

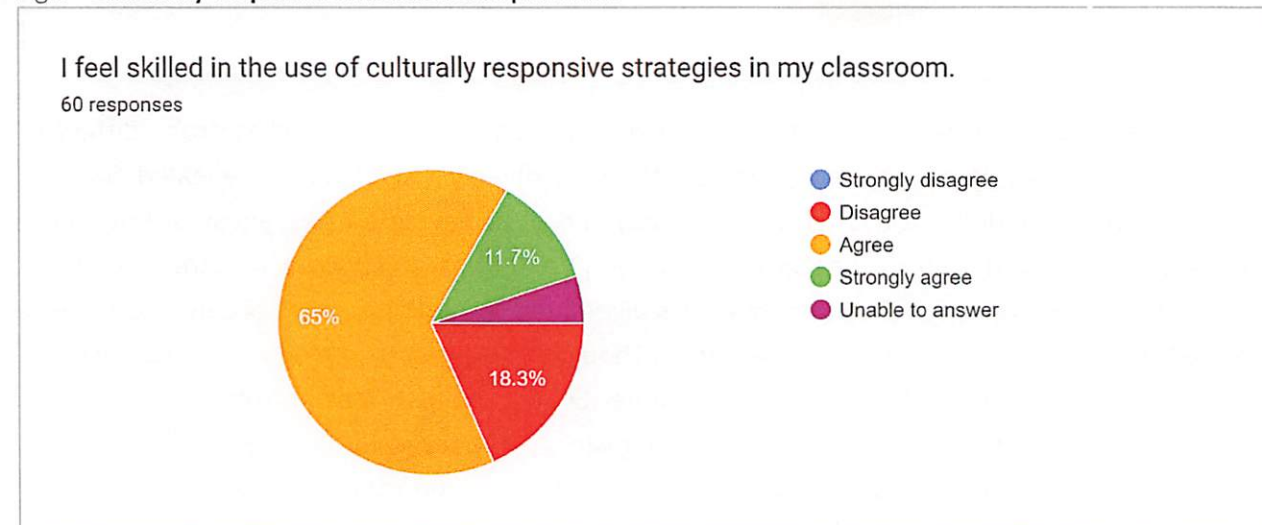
disabilities, etc. While 55% agreed to feeling comfortable having courageous conversations about diversity, another 40% of staff disagreed or was unable to answer.

Fig.2 Racial/ethnic cultural perceptions



When asked about culturally responsive instruction, 77% of surveyed certified staff members feel skilled in using culturally responsive instructional (CRI) strategies while 72% of certified staff said they are offered meaningful professional development to grow as a culturally responsive, trauma sensitive teacher. This is in contrast to staff interviews about the availability of culturally responsive professional development. Most staff could not recall any CRI professional development, define culturally responsive instruction and many could not give specific examples of how CRI is integrated in lessons and instruction.

Fig.3 Culturally responsive instructional practices



The majority of staff responded that they understand the procedures to report allegations of inequity which are dealt with in a timely sensitive manner. While 85% of staff responded that their school presents positive images of people from a variety of backgrounds, races and culture, this was not observed throughout all schools. In alignment with interview responses, staff surveys indicated most staff believe all faculty and staff at their schools have high academic and behavioral expectations for all students. Interviewed students too felt that their teachers and school leadership have high expectations for them. In reference to the academic gaps between student populations, 71% of staff agree/strongly agree that the school has a realistic, strong plan in place to address achievement gaps (fig. 4).

Fig. 4 Addressing achievement gaps

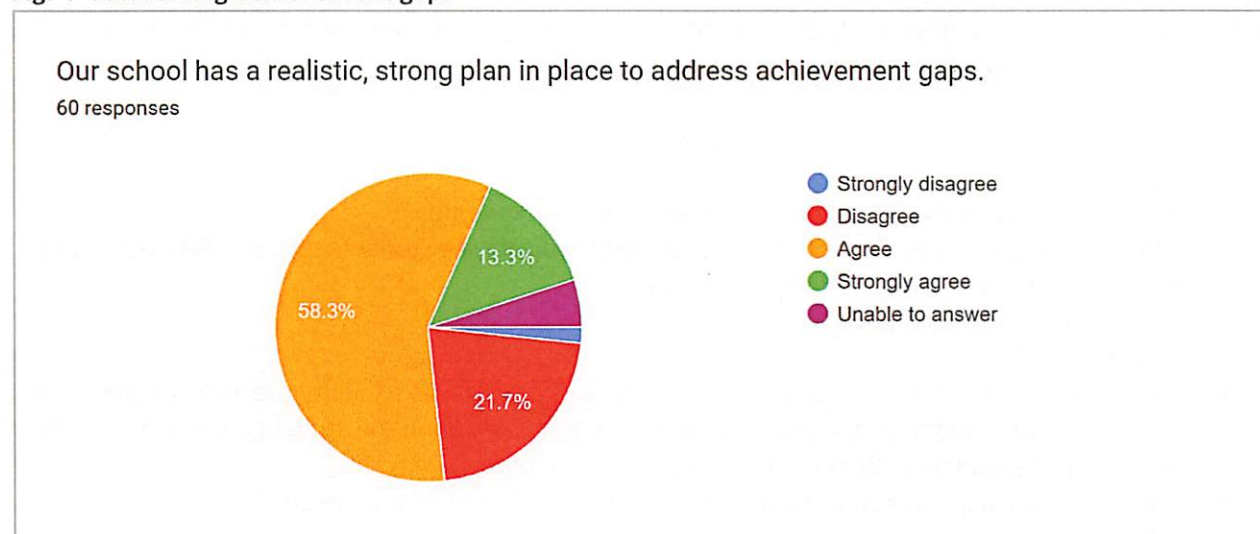
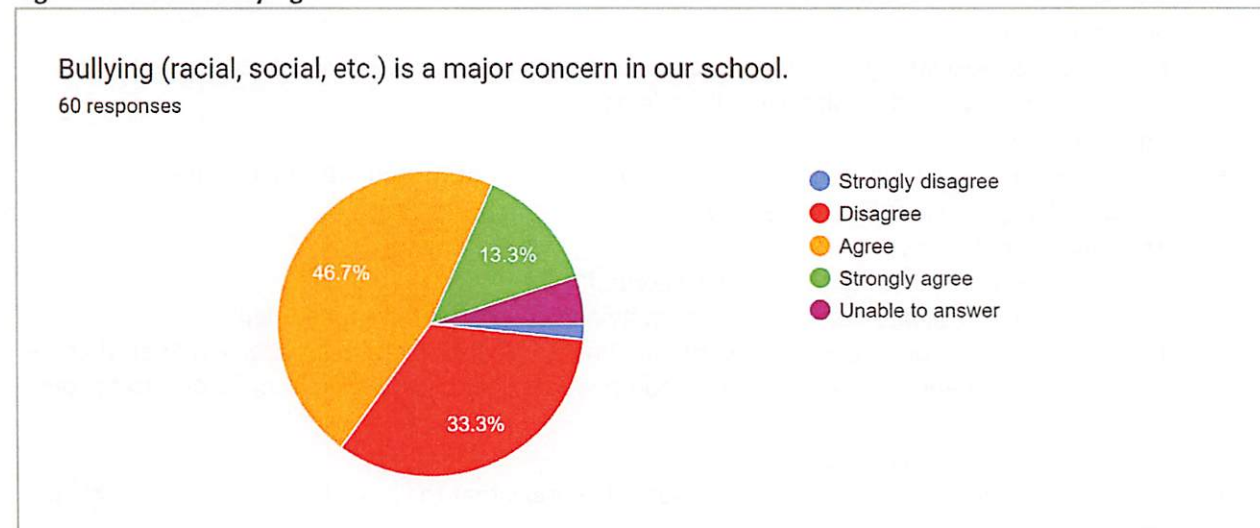


Fig. 5 Certified bullying



According to the certified survey half of the certified staff responded that bullying is a major concern in their school (fig. 5), which is in alignment with student survey responses One certified staff member stated, *“There is quite a bit of bullying that goes on behind the scenes (in the upper grades) that doesn't seem to be addressed enough.”* The majority of certified staff (79%) responded that they have a positive, proactive school-wide discipline plan that is consistent and is fairly applied across schools. 65% of students responded that teachers are consistent and fair when it comes to discipline in the classroom. Most interviewed staff and students also responded positively to the question.

Other certified staff data

At the end of the survey, staff was asked about their school's biggest strengths and biggest areas for growth in regard to equity. Some responses follow.

In regard to equity, what are the school's biggest strengths?

- “Inclusion.”
- “Most of the kids come from similar socio-economic backgrounds.”
- “We have very well-educated teachers who mostly want to see students succeed. We have many tools at hand just in our staff that could be used.”
- “Student Choice is encouraged.”
- “Acceptance.”
- “Judgement of students is not based on their background. All students are held to the same standards and expectations. If there is a problem that is affecting the students' performance, we try to help the student overcome this and find ways to cope.”
- “Teachers have high expectations and assist all students based on their needs.”
- “Teachers.”
- “Many of our teachers use curriculum that is culturally responsive, relevant, and modern. The school as a whole is focused on doing our best to minimize the achievement gaps.”
- “The staff tries to be inclusive of everyone.”
- “Special Education.”
- “My school's biggest strengths in regard to equity is working to meet individualized student needs.”
- “Universally strong relationships with all students.”
- “Equality of sexes.”
- “Our student resource center does a good job of reaching out to students and families.”
- “PBIS is helping to ensure student equity.”
- “Treating students fairly.”
- “Treating everyone fairly regardless of background.”
- “There are some teachers that care about equity and are a safe space for students.”
- “I think our school does a great job of meeting students where they are, whether that be educational or otherwise. We try our best to provide students with the opportunities to become successful.”
- “We try to be equitable across the board.”
- “There have been a movement to put personnel in areas that they excel at instead of past history hires.”
- “As a staff, I feel that we are representative of our student body from a socioeconomic standpoint

in that we do come from many backgrounds ourselves. I also feel that we have a good number of staff who are from the area and understand the issues that our students face daily within our community."

- "Discipline and rewards seem to be applied universally to all students regardless of background."
- "Everyone has equal opportunities."
- "We have very welcoming and kind staff and teachers. I feel that mostly everyone is fair and treat all students equally."
- "Our school has equitable rules, guidelines, and procedures in place."
- "Providing each student with the materials (chrome books, sometimes school supplies) they need for learning."
- "Understanding that 'equity' results largely from personal effort."

In regard to equity, what are the school's biggest areas for growth?

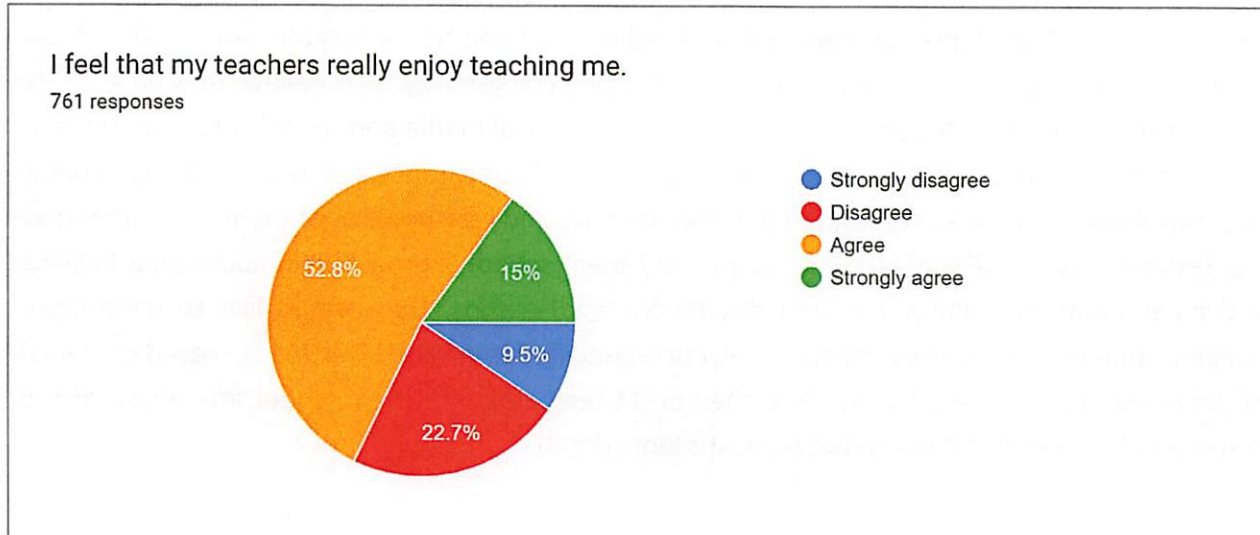
- "Differentiation."
- "Acknowledging that DEI is a destructive concept designed to offer excuses for a lack of individual effort or individual ability."
- "We focus a lot on math and reading, which are important but many of our students come to school for other areas. When we deprive them of their passions, school becomes very frustrating for them."
- "Students need to be more understanding of each other and where they come from. I feel like they have forgotten how to talk to other students and are rude majority of the time to those who fall outside of their friend groups."
- "Students need help understanding that all students do not have the same background and it's okay to have different perspectives."
- "While we are doing our best to minimize the achievement gaps, we need to not forget our students who are on level and above. At times, we focus so much on those who are not on level that we lose the students who are performing well. There needs to be a place for them to continue to grow."
- "There is quite a bit of bullying that goes on behind the scenes (in the upper grades) that doesn't seem to be addressed enough."
- "We simply lack diverse representation and therefore experience."
- "Diversity in curriculum."
- "Rigor."
- "More training and consistent implementation."
- "Representation may be lacking, but that is also due to the lack of diversity within our school when compared to other communities."
- "Students bullying others that are different."
- "I think we could offer more diverse literature, especially in the library."
- "I believe there are members of staff who may belittle mental struggles students may be going through, especially if those students are of the LGBTQ+ community."
- "Even with discipline and PBIS in place, we have troubled students who have repeated offenses."
- "Hiring teachers from the area to incorporate core values of society."
- "I do feel that issues related to race are semi-frequent in our school, which is totally disproportional to our student populations. I also feel that issues of gender and sexuality are sometimes addressed

- from an overtly conservative, heteronormative perspective.”
- “Removing biases to apply rules to all students regardless of race, socioeconomic status, and/or sexual orientation.”
 - “Treating the “someone’s” (teachers kids, student athletes, students with well-known family in the community) like everyone else. And also, not rewarding “troubled” students for their poor behavior (including students with IEP’s) because they turn around and brag about it and other students want to act out to get the same treatment. And recognizing that students with IEP’s are OUR students and those teachers are OUR teachers. And FMD students are our students and need to be included/greeted/congratulated/visited/valued like everyone else.”
 - “Closing the gap and creating support for all staff and students; including Special Education and FMD classrooms. Special education staff and students are falling behind due to the lack of supports available. “In addition to that, student behaviors do not receive the same punishment or award. Student’s consequences are based on who they are and that is not fair.”
 - “The disciplinary expectations in the school are not equitable. Some students are disciplined for bad behaviors while others are rewarded and looked at as being impressive by other students. The way students are disciplined do not align with the weight of the poor behavior. Two students may do similar “crimes,” but their punishments are very different based on who the student is.”
 - “SPED/FMD students and staff not being seen as part of our school.”
 - “Ensuring the procedures to report inequities is clear and straightforward.”
 - “Bullying, discipline/follow-through, classroom management/consistency across all classrooms, consequences, mental health!”
 - “Adapting teaching styles to the students learning style.”
 - “We are not recognizing or challenging our GT students. We also need a place for our students who cannot function behaviorally in a regular education class. We do not have a place for those students other than ISS, which is not a long-term solution for those students that need extra help.”

Student data (6-12)

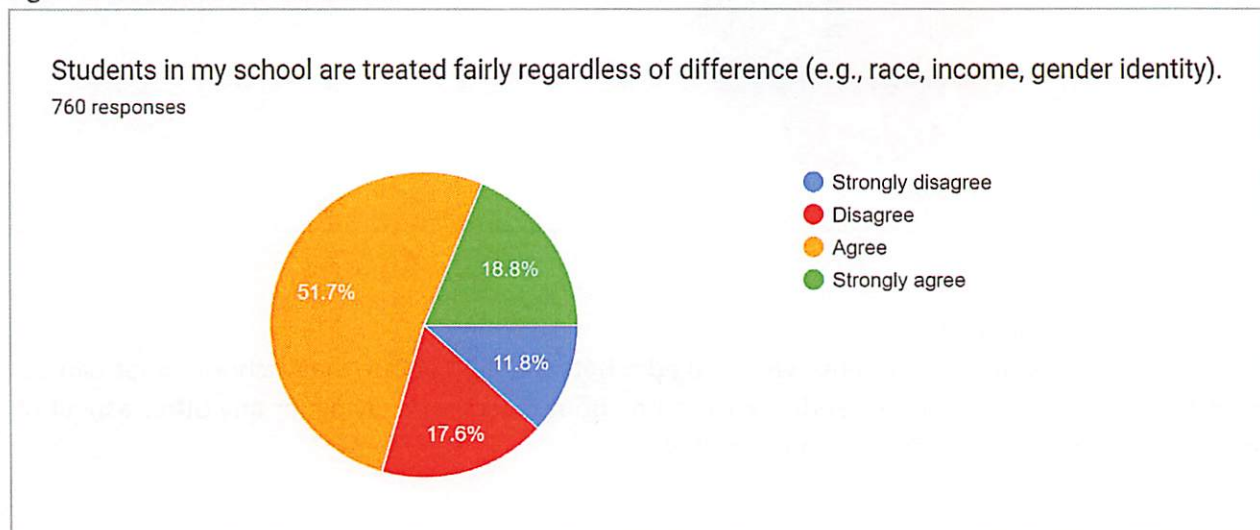
When students responded to their school culture as it related to positive classroom environments, most 6-12 student survey data responded favorably. Most 6-12 grade ECPS students (above 80%) feel their school is welcoming, believe teachers care about them regardless of ethnic background and feel safe at their school. 75% responded that their administration creates a sense of belonging for all students, yet 26% of ECPS students don’t feel they are part of the school community or feel a sense of belonging. Areas where students responded with less positivity included *consistent and fair discipline, student voice, bullying and school pride*. Student responses to the survey pertaining to teacher perceptions and school/classroom experiences may warrant attention. At least one third of students (245 of 761) responded they didn’t believe their teachers enjoy teaching them, make learning fun and engaging, give fair treatment (race, income, gender), hold high expectations or motivates students or prepares them to meet challenges of life. (fig.6)

Fig. 6



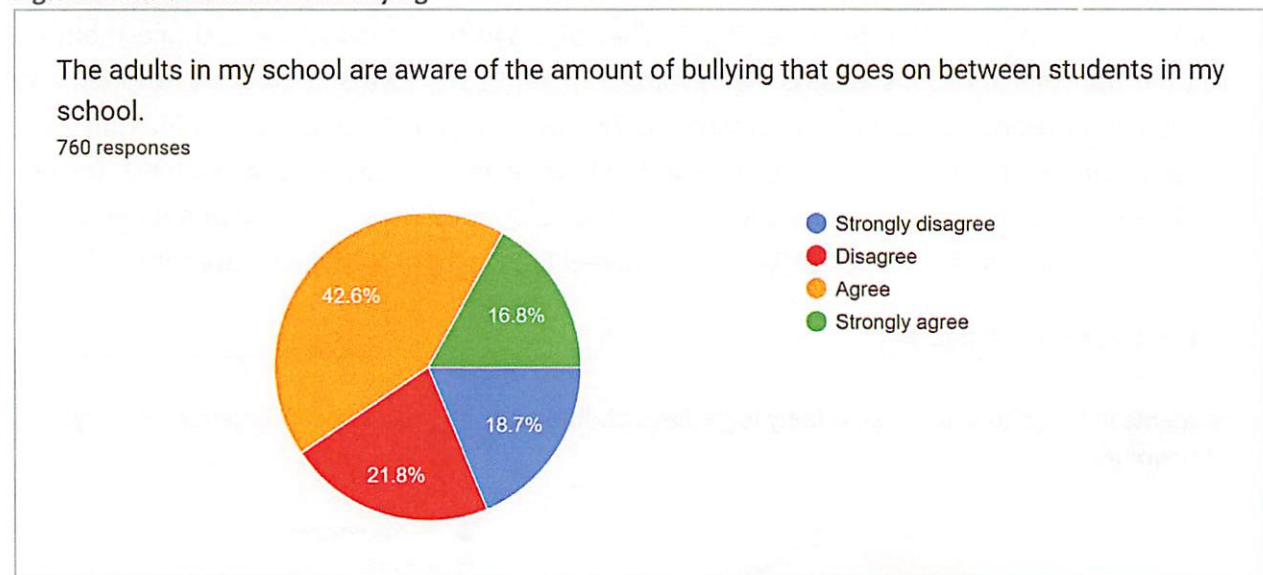
However, higher percentages (above 89%) of students responded that their teachers give them lots of encouragement and positive feedback. They also say their teachers encourage them to share their opinions and ideas in class. Survey items related to culture and diversity- Though not observed in classroom visuals in some classrooms, 73% of surveyed students responded that they have opportunities to learn about, discuss and celebrate differences among students (racial, cultural, family background) in school and almost 69% responded that teachers connect teaching to students' cultural backgrounds. 76% of students feel ECSD school staff value diversity.

Fig. 7 Fair treatment of students



Bullying appears to be an area of concern throughout ECSD. There is an apparent contrast between student face-face interview responses and student written and survey responses (Pgs. 17-18). 60-70% of surveyed students responded that teachers/building administrators are aware of the amount of bullying in their school, and address bullying consistently. 72% believe they have a safe way to report bullying. Students rated physical, social, social media and racial/cultural bullying as being a problem while gender/sexual orientation, physical appearance and verbal bullying as being major problems. They also responded that the hallways and restrooms as areas in the school they feel less safe. While 66% of students responded their school is proactive in addressing bullying and have sufficient bully prevention discussions and lessons, they would like to have more teaching and discussions in class about bullying related issues. 41% (310 of 761 surveyed students) of surveyed students responded that they don't feel adults in their school are aware of the amount of bullying that goes on between students (fig.8).

Fig.8 Adults awareness of bullying



Other 6-12 student data

At the end of the survey, students were asked what they like about their school, what can be improved and any concerns or feedback to share about diversity, bullying, or any other aspect of your school experience. Some responses follow.

Please describe 1-3 things you really like about your school.

- "Teachers."
- "My friends."
- "The people, the classes, the work."
- "The food the teachers and band."
- "1. The teachers 2. The students 3. Sports."
- "The teachers. the welcoming people who work in the office, and all of our extra curriculum activities."
- "Teachers, Classes and Staff Members."
- "We have gym a lot. we have good food and learning skills."
- "Friends, learning ,pizza days."
- "I like that we can do different things in our school."
- "1. I like the school's food and their options 2. I like the schools staff 3. I like the schools teachers."
- "One thing that I like about my school is that they keep us safe. Another thing is that they stop bullying and fights. And one more is that i like the teachers and staff."
- "It's fun, it helps me learn a lot more than i did at my old school, i feel like i belong here."
- "I like that if you have a problem you can talk to anyone about it. I can relate how to we learn in a new way every day. And last I like how we are allowed to go outside if it not cold or rainy for rewards."
- "The teachers are nice, not much bad happens, and got good friends."
- "social interaction with friends and grill cheese sandwiches."
- "The people in it. good teachers, learning good."
- "Teachers classes Chromebooks."
- "I like that i have a lot of real friends."
- "My friends, food, class."
- "I don't like anything about this school."
- "1. the people. 2. the way people treat you. 3. the teachers."
- "Close to my house, small, not dangerous to go to, nice teachers."
- "I really like the teachers and school staff in general."
- "Teachers, lesson's, and getting to see my friends."
- "My classes, my friends, sports."
- "The vocational school, the help with students and going to college."
- "The community, the teachers, the classes."
- "Teachers, pep rallies, and basketball games."
- "Some classes are calm."

Please describe 1-3 things you think could improve your school.

- "Nothing."
- "Everything."
- "Letting us have our phones at the end of classes or free time."
- "Better food."
- "Bullying."
- "Some of the rules."
- "1. Fighting 2. Bathroom problems 3. Bullying."

- "Not putting our hands on people, less fights, and better disciplinary things."
- "How much fights goes on or the graffiti in the bathrooms."
- "Allowing people in their lockers in between periods(you can ask for permission but I don't know."
- "Stop bullying, Be nice to each other, and care for each other."
- the building the roof and the crack in the outside wall."
- "1. I think the school should improve the student behavior."
- "Things i can think of to improve our school is that there should be more sports activity."
- "Bigger lockers."
- "Uniforms, a longer lunch, and a girls soccer team."
- "I think we could improve freedom."
- "Bullying. making fun of people. not nice comments."
- "Less bad stuff, teach more about bullying, and group work."
- "Better food, better toilet paper, more drug searches."
- "Bullying and fights."
- "Better food, more encouraging words, stop bullying."
- "If teachers would actually listen to our problems."
- "Stops more bullying, more freedom, more reward."
- "Better mental health, different grade levels sit together at lunch, how teachers treat kids."
- "People being nicer, people being more friendly, and less bullying."
- "Let all grades do stuff together, let all grades sit together at lunch, and have a break every day."
- "Better surveillance, harsher punishments, and stricter rules."
- "Not bullying, people being nice."
- "It's not very fun, people are mean, very stressful."
- "Mental health, teachers minding their own business, don't be racist."
- "Bullying, food, amount of language arts assignments."
- "The way students treat teachers."
- "More teachers more 1on1`time."
- "Teachers make rude comments, students are held accountable but teachers are not."
- "The way staff treats students, the bullying, being accepting to all students no matter (sexual orientation, gender, social status, etc.)."
- "The amount of bullying."
- "Have a wider variety of classes, Have teachers who actually do their job and teach, More of a push to get rid of bullying."
- "Better food, more diversity, better bathroom policy."

Please describe any concerns you have or feedback you want to share about diversity, bullying, or any other aspect of your school experience.

- "There are some fights and kids have thrown things in the urinal."
- "That there are a lot of fights."
- "I think kids should not bullying because they don't know what could be going on in their life"
- "Bullying is a way to put be down and can hurt their feelings and make them want to quit doing something cause what someone else says about them."

- "A concern that i have is why is there so many fights."
- "One of my friends was being bullied and she starts to not come too school because of it
- "Where we have had fight in school."
- "Vaping."
- "Teacher don't help with our mental health they only make it worse."
- "We need better lunches and that's about it."
- "Have really had worry about that stuff."
- "Better food."
- "Some concerns I have is the amount of bullying focused on LGBTQ+ students in school. Many of my friends are LGBTQ+ but they know that they can't tell anyone besides people they trust."
- "(Like me or other friends.) We live in Kentucky so this is kind of unavoidable. Country people are usually very racist, anti LGBTQ+, or both."
- "It is not nice to bully."
- "This school needs a higher level of education and the kids need to be better informed about "Love and being prepared for the real world. To conclude, JESUS LOVES YOU."
- "The chocolate milk is chunky. Safety, racism. people saying the n-word without any punishment."
- "Bullying is not handled the same in situations. sometimes it is overlooked."
- "Staff members need to start taking bullying serious, and not push students away when they report bullying. This includes all schools in America. If school staff would pay attention to their students and listen maybe students wouldn't harm themselves of others."
- "Kids who bully the most don't get reprimanded but the kid who gets bullied will get in trouble for trying to stand up for themselves."
- "Bullying is a big problem in our school, and no one has really done anything to stop it."
- "If you're going to send out a survey like you're genuinely concerned about the mental, physical, and educational quality/care students that attend this school receive actually do something that is going to help in a positive way rather than sweeping all of the very obvious problems and issues under the rug <3"
- "There are not a lot but there was a lot of bullying."

Data summary & trends

1. Trends across certified staff and students reveal positivity in the areas of positive school environments. Interviewed schools' staff, student and parent responses align with the survey ratings that the schools throughout the district are welcoming and warm for the Estill County school community
2. 85% of staff responded that the school values diversity and works to make sure everyone feels included regardless of background or difference, yet 26% of ECPS students don't feel they are part of the school community.

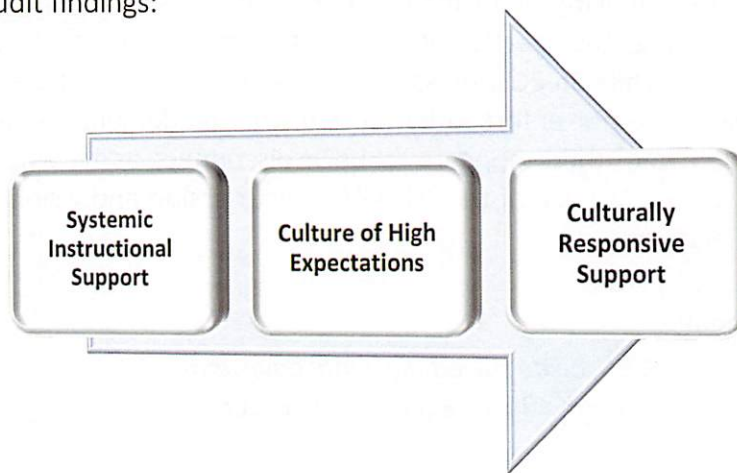
3. According to the MLC Certified Staff Survey, though school/classroom observations revealed a lack of diversity presented throughout some ECSD schools, staff positively rated the presentation of positive images for people from a variety of backgrounds, races and cultures in their schools.
4. Certified staff responses to culturally responsive instruction is in contrast to staff interviews about the availability of culturally responsive professional development. Most staff could not recall any CRI professional development, define culturally responsive instruction and many could not give specific examples of how CRI is integrated in lessons and instruction. (77% of surveyed certified staff feel skilled in using culturally responsive instructional (CRI) strategies while 72% of certified staff said they are offered meaningful CRI and equity professional development).
5. The majority of certified staff (79%) and students (65%)responded that they have a positive, proactive school-wide discipline plan that is consistent and is fairly applied across schools. Most interviewed staff and students also responded positively. However, discipline was an area of less positivity in the equity survey among students and in the written survey responses staff commented about the inequity of how discipline procedures are conducted across the district. (p.13)
6. Student responses to the survey statements pertaining to teacher perceptions and school/classroom experiences warrants attention. At least one third of students responded they didn't believe their teachers enjoy teaching them, make learning fun and engaging, demonstrate fair treatment (race, income, gender), hold high expectations, motivates students or prepares them to meet challenges of life.
7. 78% of staff responded that their administration creates a sense of belonging for all students and 85% feel the administration cares about all students regardless of their ethnic background, yet 22% of MCPS students don't feel they are part of the school community.
8. According to the survey responses, over half of the certified staff responded that bullying is a major concern in their school, which is in alignment with student survey responses . Almost half surveyed students responded that the adults in their school are not aware of the amount of bullying that goes on between students in my school.
9. 80% of surveyed staff responded that staff and faculty have high academic expectations for all students at their school. One third of surveyed students (226 of 761) disagreed.

Key findings and recommendations

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

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

The three key audit findings:



While the overall survey data findings reflect that stakeholders generally approve of ECSD efforts, there are still opportunities for the advancement of DEI within the schools. In addition to three key findings, the Assessment 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 ECSD 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.

Finding 1- SYSTEMIC INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

A comprehensive and systemic approach that ensures all students have an equal opportunity to learn. Instructional learning supports are the resources, strategies, and practices, that address student barriers and re-engage disconnected students. Systemic Instructional Support aligns initiatives based on goals and student needs. In addition, it helps teachers and administrators make connections between their work and the district goals.⁴

Within the framework of school-wide instructional coherence, all instructional components must work effectively and efficiently together to support the common instructional mission of the school. All of the processes, procedures, protocols, events, and actions within an organization must be aligned in the same direction of improving student academic achievement. It is imperative that the school/district mission statement become the guiding force for the daily interactions and decisions. Course offerings, staff recruitment and retention, instructional practices, and student engagement programs should align and grow from the mission statement.

Based on stakeholder interview responses, the vision/mission statement is not utilized to provide direction in strategic decision making or to focus on creating powerful systems that promote equitable solutions in closing the persistent gaps of opportunity, access, achievement, expectations, and resources. While an ECSD mission and vision exist, it can be assumed that the mission's values and beliefs are not enforced by most district leadership. Depending on work location and employee job role, there appears to be a disconnect as to whether employees throughout the district have knowledge of the school/district mission and vision statements and how it supports student learning.

The ECSD mission statement is:

We provide the educational environment through which "Every Child Succeeds."

The ECSD Vision:

Become a District of Excellence by providing a high-quality education for all students in a safe and supportive environment.

According to the Estill District Improvement Plan, this statement goes beyond knowing every child will succeed but that every child is destined to do something great. Though there is emphasis on a quality education, success, and safe, supportive environment, the present district mission and vision statements are lacking in language referring to the ECSD commitment to diversity, school

⁴Fullan, Coherent School Leadership: Forging Clarity from Complexity, 2021

culture, educational equity (equity, equitable access, eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps, racial disparities, racial inequities, etc.). Some individual school websites included mission statements that were generic to their schools but few made connections to the district mission. Some school mission statements referred to safety and supportive environment, and student transitions. However, some used language directly related to culture and equity (inclusion, data driven instruction, learning culture). Various school websites also included Family Resource Center mission statements.

A district mission/vision statement could not be located on the opening district webpages but is found under a quick link tab of the page. When asked about the school's vision and mission for student learning, overall, interviewed staff could not clearly communicate/articulate the mission and/or vision. They basically described what they do as a school to support students. It is evident that the majority of staff had little knowledge of their mission/vision statements. All interviewed staff knew they had one and knew it was posted or included on newsletters and brochures but struggled to articulate the mission, vision or any of its components. Some even responded that they didn't know. Other staff comments:

- *"We have one. I don't know what it is word for word."*
- *"I actually don't know knowledge of it."*
- *"I helped write it. I do know, it's in our CSIP I don't know verbatim. It's about high-quality learning."*
- *"Being on track and communicating expectations."*
- *"Communicating expectations 'creed' is recited daily."*

Classified Staff:

- *"We provide the building blocks."*
- *"I know we have one. It is on our Thursday letter."*
- *"We review it every week. I can't say it, but we have one."*
- *"Say it in a statement every morning 'I'll always try my best...' (chant)"*

While school leadership could not articulate the district mission statement fully, they were able to articulate some of its components, *"I don't know it word for word, but it's about opportunities for students to learn and address what the child needs."* Another responded, *"We believe each child has a destiny to be and do something great; the ability to make a difference."* Mr. * recites it and models it."

Parents' overall consensus was that the mission and vision may have been communicated in the initial first day documents sent home but they could not say for certain. Others said they could not recall hearing or seeing it anywhere.

A review of ECPS documents, including school plans, archived messaging, school campus information, etc. revealed few communications included language aligned with the district mission statement or to an equitable learning environment for the school community. The district Staff and Student Handbooks include the district mission statement.

According to the district website, The Estill County School District has created a strategic plan for improvement over the course of three years. Six Key Core Work Processes were used to identify growth areas in each school. Each goal is identified by a number associating it with a certain Work Process. The plan includes little/no connections to culture, equity or DEI.

Overall, the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan is well organized and the 30/60/90 Plan is intentionally in line with the CDIP goals and progress measures. The use of the Clarity for Learning work is a strategy backed with research and a thorough way to reach standard depth. The plan for distribution of funds is shared across content areas. but there is concern about the logistical process of this work. However, the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan is not integrated with terminology connected to a district wide commitment to equity and diversity.

As ECSD begins transformational work, the equity lens will need to be explicitly and intentionally woven throughout the planning processes and subsequent documentation of the school. It is recommended that a standardized protocol be developed to ensure that common language and understanding around issues related to equity are disseminated throughout the district.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FOR DIVERSE STUDENTS

The learning environment

Systemically looking at climate, culture and the learning environment for students at ECSD, the majority of interviewed staff and students revealed an overwhelming positivity to being a part of their school communities. Several talked about how well they got along with their co-workers and school leadership. Most included their enjoyment of working with their students. Students talked about their personal connections with their teachers and said they like their teachers. Leadership talked about the pride in their schools and how much they liked the support from the central office and appreciation of the district liaisons for each school that is a direct link for communication and resources for the schools.

One school is located in an older elementary school building; however, staff and community have designed the area into a learning environment that inspires staff, students and families. Student spaces are light, airy, and filled with student work as well as art, living plants, goldfish and music. Student workspaces are grouped desks, cushions, or bouncies mostly arranged in circles. Each

classroom is set up based on what is necessary to meet their learning objectives.

Staff shared that everyone goes all out to make events and programs fun and successful for the students. They gave examples of events where everyone took ownership to make it a great success. As an example, they discussed the Book Blast event in detail. They said administrators join in everything that goes on at the school. Their schools are positive and upbeat. Opinions are valued. One group talked about how staff dealt with redistricting. They explained how teachers were afraid they would have to leave and their desire was to remain at Estill. Many of them moved to a different grade and were fine with that as long as they could stay at the school. The commented several times about how much they loved their school. They felt they belonged there. They said, *"Every day is a big day here!"* Staff comments:

- *"We work together very well here. We have a very good working relationship."*
- *"For our Parent- Teacher conference night, we had 80-90% participation. We also use REMIND and Dojo to communicate with our parents."*
- *"Supportive environment, Family Atmosphere."*
- *no one feels isolated, everyone helps each other, felt like there are a lot of trust."*
- *"Administration is always supporting the staff and making sure they have what is needed. Treated like a professional. Love the kids."*
- *"Close staff even at different grade levels. Everyone is always sharing. Working in teams and collaboration. Happy!"*

Classified Staff

- *"I feel like we work together really well. We have lots of community partners."*
- *"Our parent involvement has gone down due to COVID and the world we now live in. "*
- *"How well we work together is to benefit the school as a whole. We have 2 teachers for every 10 students. We use paras because of guidelines. The paras are paid assistants but not nearly enough."*
- *"We have 3 volunteers at this time but before COVID we had several."*
- *"The students. Love working with the little ones."*

Parents are appreciative of the timely two-way communication from the schools not only conveying negative news but good news pertaining to student behavior. They also liked that staff attend students individual and team play/ performances.

Staff and students throughout the schools struggled to think of any areas they disliked about the schools. Responses included too much emphasis on meetings, issues with being different from other schools and having to adjust to district decisions and working with challenges that go along with working in an older building. One school administrator said since they have their own regulations their school is very different from the other schools.. Sometimes the school gets lost in blanket decisions for the district and they have to adjust and make it work. The administrator

said it would be better if everyone understood their school is different. The administrator added that Central Office does listen to them. Most students responded they would like to have less bullying and better lunches.

Educational & classroom equity

To assess if the staff understood the definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion the assessor used the definitions from the *Equity and Culture Assessment Guide* for Diversity and Inclusion. Equity is “Fairness and appropriateness of treatment based on student needs rather than group identity.”

Trends across certified staff and students reveal positivity in the areas of positive school environments. Interviewed schools’ staff, student and parent responses align with the survey ratings that the schools throughout the district are welcoming and warm for the Estill County school community.

Though most ECSD staff struggled to define educational equity, many could give examples of how they try to individualize instruction based on student needs. Some staff spoke of equity in the classroom by referring to race, Black History Month, and giving students an “equal” education. One teacher mentioned differentiating in “subtle” ways in her classroom. Some examples missed the mark as explaining equity. Some said they group students and have pullout for students who need extra help. Some said to include all students and provide opportunities for all students to be successful. Staff comments:

- *“Every child getting everything they need to be successful.”*
- *“We meet the students’ needs.”*
- *“Everyone knows what is going on with the students and staff.”*
- *“Everybody gets what they need. I don’t like the word, fair.”*
- *“I need to know what students are learning.”*
- *“Treating everyone fairly not leaving any students out. Example: Different students have different needs.” “I always try to get students involved who are alone and don’t have many friends. We also group students when they need interventions.”*

Leadership comments:

- *“Equity, I think we provide opportunities to make each child successful.”*
- *“Give them what they need. “Build in those experiences. If they need language give them what they need to communicate so they will have a better chance.”*

Equity in school and classroom discipline

When reviewing classroom equity, as far as discipline is concerned, overall staff conveyed their

school discipline is addressed fairly. Interviewed teachers, classified staff and school leadership communicated that behavior was not an issue at all. They discussed the procedures in place to deal with any problems. Schools have implemented PBIS and its strategies. They said most of the discipline is positive behavior reinforcement through rewards and one-one conversations as well as building relationships with students. Staff have MTSS meetings to analyze data and discuss any issues. Staff responded that the relationships they build with students and how much the students know they care helps with misbehavior, *"Most students are embarrassed if they get into trouble; We have lot in place to address discipline."* Economically disadvantaged and students with disabilities have a much higher rate of behavior incidents and economically disadvantaged students are involved in 81% of incidents. (pg. 7)

The majority of certified staff (79%) and students (65%) responded that they have a positive, proactive school-wide discipline plan that is consistent and is fairly applied across schools. Most interviewed staff and students also responded positively. However, discipline was an area of less positivity in the equity survey among students and in the written survey responses about areas for growth in the district, staff commented about the inequity of how discipline procedures are applied across the district. (p.13)

One teacher disagrees with the premise of PBIS because according to the teacher, it seems to be against deterring behavior and students don't know the expectations. The teacher said though behavior is handled fairly it could be more effective, *"Personally, I think we need to crack down a bit."* Staff and students at some schools said behavior at their schools is not the worst but there could be some improvement. One teacher shared in the written staff survey responses that students who generally get in trouble, look forward to going to our AER room, *"That room would better serve them if it was more of a rehabilitation room that helps students understand why they are in there, how to correct their actions, and how to not get back in that room."*

The preschool acknowledged that they approach discipline much differently than regular school. They said they don't have a lot of behavior issues and that they use PBIS strategies and techniques. Staff do a lot of talking and building relationships with their students and use more positive reinforcement through PBIS, which is used throughout the school; *"For instance, we have warmie fuzzies that we give students when they are exhibiting positive behavior. We all have warmie fuzzies and can give them to any students when we catch them being good, kind or helpful. Students collect these and add to their class bucket and when full they receive a class party. Students also receive other things like popcorn parties, smores parties, etc. once a month as incentives for good behavior."*

Staff also commented:

- *Students who are diverse are bullied, called names, and cannot learn properly because of others. Students lack empathy/apathy.*

- *"I think it's addressed fairly, but I don't agree with our system here. PBIS seems to be against deterring behavior. Kids don't know the expectations."*
- *"Done fairly but not as effective as it should be."*
- *"Yes, we have schoolwide PBIS. We praise a lot and remind them a lot. Behavior here is not the worst. Could be some improvement."*
- *"Personally, I think we need to crack down a bit."*
- *"I use Second Steps to help set expectations. In preschool we don't see a lot of bad behavior but we do have unwanted behavior. Everything is handled on an individual basis."*

School leadership said they prioritize relationships with students in order to discipline in a fair and effective manner. They also created a school-wide reward system for good work and attendance. The classified staff stated there is an atmosphere of belonging in the school and every student has a trusted adult. Similarly, the classified staff members feel as if the relationships at this school are integral and important and that all adult stakeholders feel happy and supported.

Parents shared they had no concerns about school discipline. They said that their children haven't had any issues or concerns other than that of repeat students being disruptive in classes. Some staff mentioned repeat students' behavior in classrooms and schools throughout the district as well.

School safety & bullying

Systemically, ESCD is recognized as being very safe by staff, students and families. All stakeholders talked about policies and procedures each school has in place for a safe learning environment. One staff group said they have just improved their doors and buzz in system. Another said their staff and leadership are adamant about emergency protocols at the school. All said they have frequent practice sessions in case there is an emergency.

Most students too said they feel very safe at school and mentioned protocols like locked doors, front office sign in and several said their teachers and/or principal look out for them. All Parents feel that their children are safe and cared for at school by staff and students alike. Community and staff familiarity are the major reason that parents feel that their children are safe, *"Sending our children to school is like sending them to extended family."*

When it comes to bullying there appears to be a systemic (districtwide) concern. According to the survey responses, over half of the certified staff feel that bullying is a major concern in their school, which is in alignment with student survey responses. Almost half of surveyed students responded that the adults in their school are not aware of the amount of bullying that goes on between students in my school.

There is an apparent contrast between student face-face interview responses and student written and survey responses. Some interviewed students reported bullying as not being much of a concern, however the student written responses in the equity survey (pgs. 16-18) tells quite a different story, though 60-70% of surveyed students responded that teachers/building administrators are aware of the amount of bullying in their school, and address bullying consistently. Any amount of bullying, especially noting that almost half of students responded that school staff and leadership are not aware of the magnitude of bullying, should be of concern.

The students state that there is a mutual relationship of respect between the teachers and the students, but that the teachers are not aware of all of the bullying that ensues. Students rated physical, social, social media and racial/cultural bullying as being a problem while gender/sexual orientation, physical appearance and verbal bullying as being major problems. They also responded that the hallways and restrooms as areas in the school they feel less safe. While 66% of students responded their school is proactive in addressing bullying and have sufficient bully prevention discussions and lessons, they would like to have more teaching and discussions in class about bullying related issues. 41% of surveyed students (310 of 761 surveyed students) responded that they don't feel adults in their school are aware of the amount of bullying that goes on between students.

Systemic SEL

Systemic SEL (Social Emotional Learning) is an approach to create equitable learning conditions that actively involve all Pre-K to Grade 12 students in learning and practicing social, emotional, and academic competencies that are important for success at school and in life.⁵

The benefits of social and emotional learning (SEL) are well-researched, with evidence demonstrating that an education that promotes SEL yields positive results for students, adults, and school communities. When students have supportive relationships and opportunities to develop and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across many different contexts, academic learning accelerates. Hundreds of studies offer consistent evidence that SEL bolsters academic performance (Durlak,2011, Taylor 2017, Wiglesworth 2016).

All staff talked about the overwhelming assistance they get from the dedicated Guidance Counselor in support of their SEL program. They were very appreciative of having the Guidance Counselor at their schools. All students have guidance at least once a week and the counselor shares strategies and lessons in PLCs, as well as coping techniques and de-escalation strategies. She has a short curriculum, " Red Door" that is also integrated in classroom instruction. Central Office provides schools with a Special Education director. Several staff members and leadership responded that the Special Education director is very helpful. Overwhelmingly school staff and

leadership said they get whatever resources and assistance from the central office, especially assistance from the Special Ed Director. School staff said their school leadership is very supportive, listens to them and work to get any resources needed for their classrooms and students. School staff and leadership comments:

- *"The central office is very helpful to our school."*
- *"Any resources needed for SEL is given."*
- *"We're happy to have our own counselor. She has SEL lessons with our staff and students and checks how students are feeling each day through activities (The Color Monster) and classrooms have "Behind the Little Red Door" Social Emotional Activities, once a week."*
- *"We have our own Guidance Counselor and she is very dedicated. All students have guidance at least once a week and the counselor shares strategies and lessons in our PLCs, as well as coping techniques and de-escalation strategies."*
- *"I use 2nd Steps in my classroom, which use rules and modeling to help students learn. Central Office provides us with the Special Ed director who is very helpful. The central office team came over and helped us with logistics on the first day. We have a guidance counselor that sees each class once per week. She interacts with students and has mental check in every morning with all students."*

To support students staff shared that they use pullout to address student issues, Program Harmony, PBIS, MTSS, Character Ed., Handle with Care, Trauma Informed Care and practices from SEL training. Staff also said there are processes and procedures in place for support.

Professional development

Staff could not give specific professional development offerings pertaining to equity, the immersion of equity into classroom instruction or culturally responsive instruction. Staff at the preschool said most of their PD is geared toward preschool mandates and regulations through Berea Regional Training.

Staff at one school said they have participated in two district professional development days and two school-based professional development days each year. Each campus decides what the PD focus is and how their staff can attend sessions. PBIS for training staff on positive behavior intervention strategies is a focus at the high school level. PLCs is a focus at the middle school level. They also shared that "Clarity for Learning" (John Hattie) was offered as were content standards PD and bullying prevention training sessions. The PD focus is on feedback for students, learning intentions and success criteria. A host of PD is on content standards, trauma informed care, bullying, social emotional learning and PBIS.

⁹Wolfe,2022

Clark, Sorgenfrei, McBride, - Early Intervention Foundation

Staff comments:

- *"Would like to see more content PD."*
- *"We were told to get PD on their own."*
- *"No district PD sessions. PBIS PD offered at the building level."*
- *"It is school focused, not district wide. PBIS in person PD but no follow up."*
- *"PD during the summer to be implemented during the year. Sources of strength has been started."*
- *"We can suggest, but it is planned for the staff. Tried to send Science teachers to PD, but there was nothing available. The school plans all of the hours."*
- *"Have not had training. "*
- *"Really appreciated the district instructional coaches."*
- *"We do have multiple opportunities to attend trainings inside and outside the district. If we want to attend anything it would not be a problem."*

School & district resources

Interviewed staff acknowledged the poverty throughout the county. They shared that not everyone has money to be on the basketball team, cheerleading, etc., so they get on a different track. *"It is a poverty county."* They stated that they felt everyone had what they needed to teach and if they needed additional, it wasn't a problem. They felt the district and school administrators were very supportive in meeting their needs. One school shared the district and school administrators work hard to continuously improve things such as technology support.

The Assistant Superintendent is their school liaison and the Instructional coaches were very helpful. They use google forms to pick what PD they want to attend. Statement from a teacher: *"If you look for it, ask for it, you usually get it."*

According to several staff responses, their school and district administrators get them what they need for their students to have equitable resources and experiences. Teachers said they are given training resources on Social Emotional Learning to use with students. Counselors are tasked with addressing the needs of students experiencing trauma. The concern is that the resources were shared with little follow up on how to use the tools effectively. Chromebooks are given to all students. Central office works hard to repair any broken devices. Schools receive some free supplies and resources to help students advocate for themselves academically and socially. Staff talked about district mechanisms to help students learn to cook and do laundry. The consumer economics course is an elective for students who need those life skills. The YSC has a cooking class after school whereas students are given the ingredients and they have a Google meet on Thursday where the kids join and cook dinner together for the family.

Overwhelmingly school staff and leadership said they are appreciative for getting whatever resources and assistance from the central office, especially the Special Education Director. Another interviewed group said their school leadership is very supportive, listens to them and work to get any resources needed for their classrooms and students. One school principal talked about the support from the central office and her appreciation of the district liaisons for each school which is a direct link for communication and resources for the schools.

There is a training provided for teachers in SEL. Counselors were freed of some of their duties to focus more on SEL with individual students. A therapist comes to work with students. Student ambassadors were recruited last year to help, but not this year. Staff also is appreciative of their Resource Centers. Administration uses the available resources to meet student needs by ensuring every student that needs additional support receives it either through intervention or after-school tutoring.

"Staff from the central office have come over and given everyone a duty-free lunch. They take over teacher responsibilities while teachers eat with our peers. It's not scheduled, they just come over and do it."

ECSD Staff Member

Staff explained that the math and reading coaches from the district ensure that they get needed materials and resources. However, some stated that there are no CRI resources in the school and that any CRI materials are created by the teachers. The school has provided professional developments in the areas of: trauma and care, social-emotional learning, and PBIS.

When asked about staff well-being, they said they believe the central office recognizes issues teachers have, especially after COVID and working with students. They said, Staff from the central office have come over and given everyone a duty-free lunch. They take over teaching responsibilities while teachers eat with our peers, *"It's not scheduled, they just come over and do it."*

Related Reading

1. Gorsky Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap (Multicultural Education Series) 2nd Edition
2. Griner, A. C., & Stewart, M. L. (2012). Addressing the achievement gap and disproportionality through the use of culturally responsive teaching practices. *Urban Education*, 48(4), 585- 621

Finding 1 Recommendations

1. Review, revise and update current ECSD mission/vision/strategic plans and organizational goals to reflect 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. (Fullan, 2017)
2. Based on survey response and feedback, bullying appears to be a concern for all focus groups. A district-wide bullying prevention program is needed that incorporates 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. ECPS 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.
3. Discipline rules, policies and procedures should be consistently and effectively implemented to promote a safe and orderly learning environment.
4. There does not seem to be an understanding of what equity means throughout the Estill School System. Broadening the scope of what constitutes equity and the groups it might affect, including micro-populations and students in poverty, would be beneficial.

Finding 2 Create a Culture of High Expectations

Having high expectations means believing students should always strive to achieve their best. Raising expectations is not about being strict or a micro-manager. It's quite the opposite. By raising your expectations, students will work hard whether you're watching them or not. The goal is to create a classroom culture of hard work and self-belief.⁷

Most interviewed staff and leadership 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. Staff also said they deal with a lot of low expectations from the home and some students are seen as not caring about learning. Some, but not all classroom observations revealed rigorous instructional practices through experiences like the utilization of effective questioning techniques, experimental problem solving, and project-based learning. 80% of surveyed staff responded that staff and faculty have high academic expectations for all students at their school. One third of surveyed students (226 of 761) disagreed.

Research demonstrates that students live up (or down) to our expectations. When we expect our students can learn and will succeed- they do. When we have low expectations... well unfortunately they meet those as well. This is because our beliefs and underlying biases infiltrate all the teaching decisions we make and the learning environments we create.

Hollingsworth, 2021

Student responses to the survey pertaining to teacher perceptions and school/classroom experiences warrants attention. At least one third of students responded they didn't believe their teachers enjoy teaching them, make learning fun and engaging, give fair treatment (race, income, gender), demonstrate high expectations or motivates students or prepares them to meet challenges of life. However, higher percentages of students responded that their teachers give them lots of encouragement and positive feedback. They also say their teachers encourage them to share their opinions and ideas in class.

Staff at one school said that high expectations are shared through the "I can" statements and at staff PLC sessions administrators expect to see high levels of instruction and planning. They try to communicate expectations daily. In addition, report cards and letters of concern are sent home. Some staff also said they have a tremendous number of kids who do not care about learning, "Credit recovery is a problem. Kids who are behind in a grade level or in danger of not graduating are the only ones who should be in credit recovery, and they should be in the room all day, not in and out."

⁷Burnage, 2019

When students are absent, a letter is sent and there is a process to communicating attendance issues. Other responses:

- *"I think the majority of staff here have high expectations for our students. Our students have high needs and we try to work with kids on an individual basis, be more challenging and expect more."*
- *"We have a lot of students who don't have a lot of drive." "Motivation is definitely lacking." "Trickles down from above down." "Looks at data weekly and credit recovery classes for students who are failing."*
- *"A big change from middle school to here." "Rigor has been successful as long as teachers are working and not just failing kids."*
- *"Yes, we all have high expectations for our students."*
- *"I think every school has high expectations, so they do better. I want the kids to go to college."*
- *We expect all our students to work toward their goals and be responsible for their success.*

Parents comments:

- *"Expectations should be higher. My child never has homework."*
- *"Too much focus on negative students in the classroom and not enough on students making effort."*
- *"Not enough academic differentiation in methods of teaching, or assignments."*

Classroom observations revealed that high expectations and appropriate questioning strategies to engage and motivate students are lacking across some classrooms. The assessment team observed rigorous, challenging and engaging instructional and assessment practices in some classrooms. Students were on task and following teachers' instructions but assessors observed few students asking questions, leading activities, or students assuming leadership roles throughout the classroom at most schools.

Some academic expectations were posted, along with behavioral expectations in classrooms and hallways. Most classrooms have learning targets, student expectations, learning goals and progress charts. Classroom and hallway observations revealed students are encouraged to be accountable for their own learning (posted goals and progress charts). Bathroom expectations were also posted at the entrance to the bathrooms.

Having high expectations of pupils is all well and good, but without a plan to make changes it is unlikely to lead to much. If we genuinely want to raise our pupils' game we need to be clear about what the standard is, show them what we expect and then support them in getting it right.

Enser, 2022

Related Reading

1. Jensen, Eric (2022) Teaching with Poverty and Equity in Mind
2. Hammond, Zaretta (2014) Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Finding 2 Recommendations

1. 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.
2. Increase engagement, rigor, and higher expectations within the instructional day to hold all students accountable to what is being learned.
3. Consistently utilize questioning techniques that will engage students in higher-level thinking.
4. Create opportunities within the instructional day for students to engage in productive struggle to develop grit and creative problem-solving skills that are needed to matriculate through school and everyday life.
5. Add posters/materials within the classrooms, and hallways throughout the school that display DEI where students see themselves. Post current proficient student work to help students reflect on their work, learn from each other's work and is meaningful to the curriculum, i.e., a piece that follows the lesson rubric. Posted student work does not have to be perfect.
6. Address culturally responsive instruction to not only target student achievement but to prepare students for life outside the communities they live, so they will understand future classmates, work colleagues, and community member where they live.
7. Assure that 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.

Finding 3 CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SUPPORT

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 materialize.⁹

A critical question that emerges in a high poverty school district encompasses how to effectively improve the educational experiences for all stakeholders to decrease the achievement and opportunity gaps among low and high socioeconomic student groups? Barriers caused by poverty and a lack of cultural responsiveness in the school setting have been listed in extant research as reasons why students living in poverty struggle with academic achievement. Academic failure and achievement gaps plague high-poverty school districts. Culturally responsive pedagogy provides an opportunity for educators to bridge the gap caused by poverty and educational disparities.¹⁰

Staff as a whole had little awareness of culturally responsive instruction. Staff had some knowledge of using culture related topics in their instruction, however responses did not communicate a full knowledge and understanding of Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) or what it looks like in the classroom. Though classroom observations revealed culturally responsive strategies are used in some classrooms, it is uncertain if strategies were intentionally integrated to impact student learning through a cultural lens. Some staff acknowledged the poverty of their students and said they adjust their instruction to make sure students are exposed to other diversities and cultures.

There were different responses when staff were asked about culturally responsive teaching practices. When asked about culturally responsive instruction immersion in lessons and the school curriculum some staff addressed the number of minority students in the schools and related CRI to student diversity.

⁹Zaretta Hammond, 2017

¹⁰McKinney, 2022

Staff shared that you can “*count the number of minority students on one hand.*” They added there was no diversity on one campus and only one minority on another campus. One teacher ended the interview session by stating that the school is diverse in their socioeconomic status rather than race and that they do not use a lot of cultural resources because it does not apply to the demographics of their students. Students from diverse backgrounds are either adopted or from foster care. Other staff comments:

- *“Culturally responsive instruction means a lot of things. We are here in Eastern Kentucky and need to be respectful of that and incorporate that in what students are learning incorporated with other things we bring in. Like books from other cultures and talk about different people and how they live.”*
- *“We have mostly Caucasian students. A suggestion from one of our teachers was to have someone in every classroom that looked like them. We have materials and activities that represent different cultures.”*
- *“We expect all our students to work toward their goals and be responsible for their success. Culturally responsive instruction means a lot of things. We are here in Eastern Kentucky and need to be respectful of that and incorporate that in what students are learning incorporated with other things we bring in. Like books from other cultures and talk about different people and how they live.”*
- *“Making all students feel welcome” and “knowing the background of each student”*

Staff did not fully explain how they align lessons from the curriculum to the students’ social communities to make it more contextual and relevant. Some teachers talked about how they develop their lessons around the students they have in their classrooms. Some said they have to bring in different resources and materials to make their instruction relevant for their students.

A review of the ECSD disaggregated data (pg.7) 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 ECSD 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. Most staff could not recall any CRI professional development, define culturally responsive instruction and many could not give specific examples of how CRI is integrated in lessons and instruction.

(77% of surveyed certified staff feel skilled in using culturally responsive instructional (CRI) strategies while 72% of certified staff said they are offered meaningful CRI and equity professional development).

Classroom observations reveal that teaching and learning are occurring in classes. Standards were being taught, assignments were directly aligned to the learning targets and teachers expected students to complete the work. During classroom observations, the assessment 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, student choice, learning charts, class projects, visuals and cooperative grouping.* Some intentionally included references to the classroom diversity through relating lessons to website photos, the use of virtual experiences or through picture book storytelling.

OBSERVED CLASSROOM PRACTICES CONDUCTIVE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTIVE

* is a unique place designed specifically for early learners where they encounter a variety of learning experiences. The school is located in an older elementary school building; however, staff and community have designed the area into a learning environment that inspires staff, students and families. Student spaces are light, airy, and filled with student work as well as art, living plants, goldfish and music. Student workspaces are grouped desks, cushions, or bouncies mostly arranged in circles. Each classroom is set up based on what is necessary to meet learning objectives. The school is comprised of a total of 189 students.

The * staff is very proud of the In-door Gross Motor Room. Teachers were interacting with all 13 students by assisting them with their tasks or roaming and conversing with other students. One teacher was teaching a smaller group of students their phone numbers. In another classroom the guidance counselor was working with students seated in a circle on the floor. The teacher presented the lesson with an I CAN statement, *"I can be kind and helpful."* The classroom included a variety of puppets and toys representing diversity and cultures. All students were compliant and attentive during the observation. Teachers constantly praises students-*"Very good, Everyone listens so nicely, Good job."* Teachers in 2 classrooms reminded students of earlier lessons to activate students' prior knowledge.

Most classrooms had lesson plans , learning targets, schedules, I can statements and student goals and progress charted posted. Classrooms also had the Creative Classroom Curriculum Philosophy posted. There are lots of student groupings and seating arrangements. Each classroom had a variety of learning centers (Art, Sensory, Math, Reading, Music). In some classrooms students had assigned classroom tasks,

passing out folders, collecting student work, etc.

Students were challenged to higher levels as experienced in teacher questioning techniques, *"If you were a songwriter, who would you write about, and why."* Students were encouraged to respond using the terms, agitated, frustrated and disappointed. Students also displayed sculptures and models of their work. Personal, classroom and school mission statements were posted in classrooms and hallways. The front entrance area displayed the South Irvine learning Center vision, mission, values and beliefs.

Classroom observations revealed some classrooms had little student work posted, and some bulletin boards were generic and not instructional related. In addition, some classrooms and hallways lacked diverse representation of all students, as well as some classroom libraries. However, it should be acknowledged that most observed classrooms were rich with anchor charts, resources, and on-task students. The environment was calm and students were focused. While the teacher worked with students, other students were working independently. There were posters representing diverse populations and representation of diversity and inclusivity covering the walls. The students believe that their books and lessons represent the diversity within their community. Parents acknowledged there are different cultural backgrounds and concerned there is not enough academic differentiation in methods of teaching, or assignments.

Hallways-Student work was located throughout the hallways, some included teacher/student comments or acknowledgements. Hallways were also filled with a variety of student work and school related messaging; Voice level zones, lift off goals, Stop bullying, Toni Morrison quote and poster of stars representing different races.

Finding 3 Recommendations

1. 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.
2. Provide more in-depth professional development opportunities with practical follow-up sessions, plus instructional materials to support work with students. Ensure professional development is continuous, sustainable, and job-embedded and includes follow-up support, feedback, and reflection.

Focus Recommendations

1. Review, revise and update current ECSD mission/vision/strategic plans and organizational goals to reflect 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 (Fullan).
2. Make available 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 opportunities with practical follow-up sessions, plus instructional materials to support work with students. Ensure professional development is continuous, sustainable, and job-embedded and includes follow-up support, feedback, and reflection.
3. Based on survey response and feedback, bullying appears to be a concern across 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. ECSD 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.
4. Explicitly and regularly monitor all student populations to close the achievement and opportunity gaps that exist between student groups and their peers. The aforementioned data results (pg-7) highlight the need for systemic “research-based best practices” and initiatives that, if implemented with fidelity, can make a difference in improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap. Culturally responsive instruction holds the greatest promise of closing students’ learning gaps by helping them rapidly build their brainpower or what many call *intellectual capacity*.⁸

⁸Zaretta Hammond, 2019

Data Analysis Recommendations

Recommendations for Goal 1-Create a district level team to dive deep into the Clarity for Learning work and curriculum revision process. This will create a “top down” approach while also building consistency and trust within the schools. This team could then coach school level leaders and essentially train the trainers. Schools would create instructional leadership teams to invest in this work while also working through the curriculum development process. Funds could be used to pay stipends to the instructional leaders for the significant time that will be invested. The processes should be woven into summer and school professional development hours for the leaders which will free up PLC time to focus on instructional data.

Suggested resource: Kentucky Department of Education Curriculum Development Process

Recommendations for Goal 2-Science and Social Studies teaching and learning should be lateral across all grades in order to truly be successful. While it is not as large of a priority in other grades in relation to assessment expectations, the professional learning and standard deep teaching must happen at all levels. Create some sort of instructional ladder to determine connections across grade levels. Provide different levels of professional learning to anyone who may be teaching these standards. Determine a HQIR (High Quality Instructional Resource) that creates cross-curricular connections between content areas.

Suggested resource: There are many online resources that are available to use to research HQIRs

Recommendations for Goal 3-Intentionally plan the New Teacher Academy to be effective and supportive for teachers in year 1, 2, or 3. This could also include teachers who are not new to the profession but new to the district. Mentors for the program should be trained to be effective instructional coaches and models. The program should have an inclusive measure for alternatively certified teachers as well as enough support to recruit and retain teachers. Professional learning should contain culturally responsive learning as well to serve the subgroup students thoroughly.

Recommendations for Goals 5-7-Determine effectiveness of teachers in all areas. Provide intentional development for those whose data does not support growth and/or goals. Analyze data to determine areas within each building that should take priority.

Suggested resources: Online search of other districts/states whose new teacher plans are thorough and include multiple layers of support

30/60/90:

Plan is intentionally in line with the CDIP goals and progress measures. Consider creating an accountability plan to align. Who is responsible? Is there a calendar timeline? What are the specific action items to adhere to? Who is aware of the plan and how are they supporting the work? Reconsider your reading and math goal to separate the assessments into different goals for a narrower focus on each content area. Determine your identification process for summer school students as well as set an overall goal and focus for the program in relation to the needs assessment.

Other Considerations

1. Consider making the development of each school's mission statements a priority and reviewing the statement regularly with students, staff, and parents via a variety of mechanisms. The school mission and vision should be visible (school opening webpage signs, letterheads, etc.) and communicated (meetings, media, etc.) often so that all stakeholders are supportive and knowledgeable of the school/district's purpose. The school mission statements should be aligned with the district mission statement.
2. Staff well-being- need for self-care and feelings of being overwhelmed were themes in staff interview responses. Consider ways to improve culture and climate in these areas to buffer against potential burn-out of faculty and staff. Create safe space for teachers and staff to voice their concerns and needs through anonymous surveys, include staff with campus wide decisions, embed restorative practices within master schedule where students and staff may cultivate a caring classroom community through sharing and giving students voice.
3. Having a diverse community of students, teachers, staff and senior level administrators is one explicit way to demonstrate diversity, equality, and inclusion is a priority at ECSD. Additionally, to build a sustainable culture of such, intentionally recruiting and hiring a diverse population of teachers and other staff is central to this recommendation. In support of intentionally recruiting a more diverse workforce is assessing and upgrading the ESCD's current hiring practices. This includes a review of the hiring process, job descriptions and interview procedures.

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.
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5. Gomez, J., Rucinski, C. & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2020). Promising pathways from school restorative practices to educational equity. Journal of Moral Education.
6. Gorsky, Paul C. (2017) Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap (Multicultural Education Series) 2nd Edition.
7. Gullo, Gina; [Implicit Bias in Schools \(Eye on Education\), 2018.](#)
8. Hammond, Zaretta (2014) Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students
9. Jensen, Eric (2022) Teaching with Poverty and Equity in Mind
10. 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.
11. Miranda-Wolff, A., (2022). Cultures of Belonging: Building Inclusive Organizations That Last. Harper Collins Leadership
12. 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/>

Action planning

(The school or district team should complete this section.)

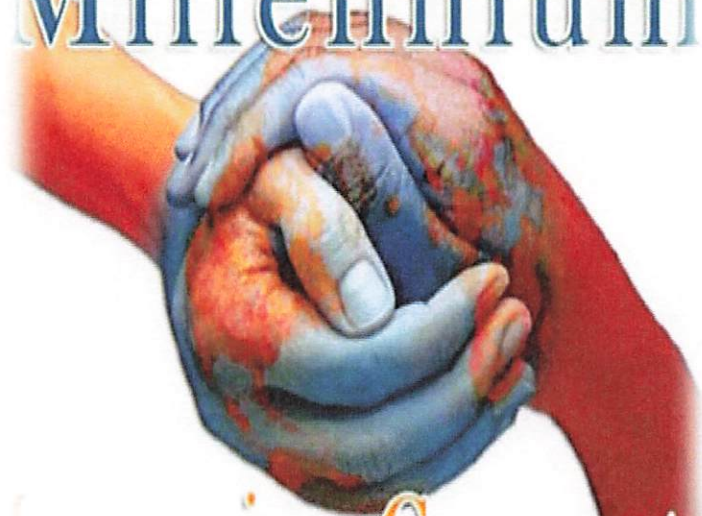
Opportunity for Growth:

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

1 Acknowledgements

Millennium Learning Concepts and the MLC Assessment Team would like to thank the Estill County School District for their hospitality and cooperation. We trust this report will assist in the implementation of your district's diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. We believe that by addressing these recommendations, the ECSD leadership will be better prepared to implement equity, diversity, and inclusion goals with fidelity.

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