



Strategies to Gain Support for District Equity Initiatives

District Leadership Form

District Leadership Forum

Madelyn Bowers

Research Associate

Olivia Rios

Senior Research Manager

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Demonstrated commitment from district leadership generates district-wide engagement with equity initiatives. Administrators at profiled districts launched equity initiatives by creating standard, clear, and comprehensive definitions of equity and inclusion. These definitions reiterated the districts' commitments to creating an equitable learning environment for students as a key pillar of fulfilling the district's mission and values. Administrators at profiled districts further demonstrated their commitment for equity initiatives by hiring staff to support the initiatives, creating district and school equity committees, and integrating equity goals into the annual budget process.

Include student perspectives in equity-related professional development curricula to better engage staff. Student perspectives illustrate the reality of inequity and help teachers better understand the challenges underrepresented students face. At **District E**, students led a workshop with teachers to discuss how students experience microaggressions in classrooms across the district. Including student perspectives enables teachers to better understand the importance of creating a supportive learning environment for all students. Administrators at **District A** and **District C** created student advisory groups to include student perspectives into district-wide, decision-making processes and to guide equity and inclusion programming.

Administrators at profiled districts partner with local colleges and universities to offer expert-led training for their teachers on the needs of underrepresented students. Given the complexity of topics related to equity and inclusion, it can be difficult for administrators to create engaging, skills-based professional development internally. Administrators should look to their external community to identify strategic partnerships for development of more advanced professional development opportunities. Administrators at **District D** partner with a local college to offer cultural competency-focused, graduate-level courses that count toward teachers' continuing education requirements. At **District E**, administrators invite scholars from local universities to present on inequities in education faced by underrepresented students.

Administrators at profiled districts use surveys to gauge perceptions of progress toward equity goals. Administrators at **District D** and **District E** disseminate school climate surveys to teachers, administrators, students, and parents with an online survey platform to gauge progress on a holistic scale. These climate surveys include questions about diversity in classroom materials, whether teachers value diverse experiences and input in the classroom, and if students feel safe and supported in their school environment. At **District A** and **District D**, administrators use a free survey developed by Panorama Education to gauge students' perceptions of district-wide equity initiatives. This perception survey asks questions related to belonging, inclusive curriculum, and the quality of teaching and learning. Administrators conduct the survey twice per year to gauge progress toward district-wide equity goals.

2) Implementing a District-Wide Equity Plan

Leadership Commitment

Provide Clear Communication on District's Definition of Equity

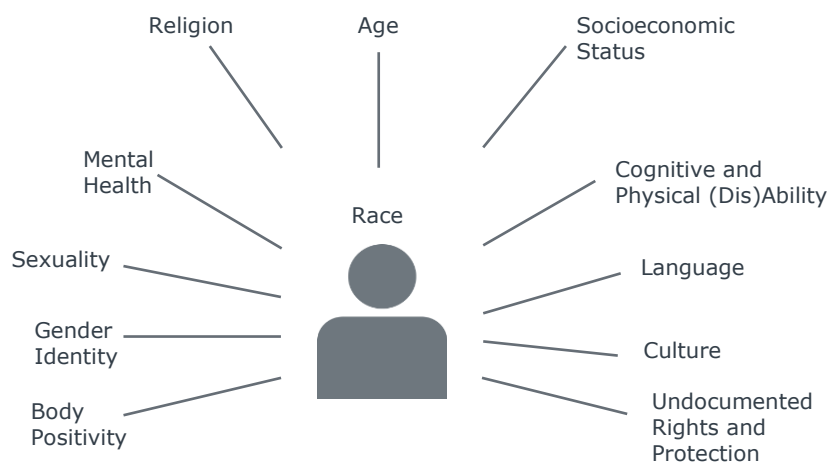
Administrators at each profiled district developed comprehensive plans for improving equity and inclusion across their districts due to changing student demographics. Each profiled district defines their approach to equity in terms relevant to their school communities and congruent with their mission and vision. Administrators should consider clearly defining their definitions of equity and inclusion topics in their district-wide equity plan. Clear, standard definitions ensure that all members of the school community understand the plan and the district's position.

Articulate the Many Facets of Identity to Expand Individual's Perception of Diversity and Inclusion

When launching any equity and inclusion initiative, district administrators will likely face criticism from individuals who perceive that initiatives serve limited population groups (e.g., students of color). The criticism often stems from a general misunderstanding of how the multiple facets of a person's identity influence their life and educational journey. A student's identity is not solely defined by their race. Other aspects of identity (e.g., socioeconomic status, mental health, gender identity) play a significant role in how a student experiences education and learning. Equity and diversity initiatives exist to create a learning environment that supports and enriches the education of all students, regardless of attributes of individuals' identities.

To help the school community understand how diversity and inclusion initiatives seek to create an equitable learning environment for all students, administrators at **District C** created a graphic to include on equity and inclusion professional development materials and community presentation materials. The graphic presents race at the center of a person's identity because others generally see and evaluate race as the first aspect of a person's identity. The graphic also illustrates other aspects of a person's identity to acknowledge that many facets of identity interact with a person's race to influence their lived experiences. The graphic provides a helpful reference point to remind stakeholders of the multifaceted nature of identity and the complex definition of diversity during equity-focused professional development sessions and broader community conversations.

Aspects of Identity Included in District C's Graphic



The graphic helps administrators deepen the conversation with the school community about equity and inclusion challenges that the district faces. Administrators include the graphic at the beginning of both their equity inventory and handbook and provide all teachers and administrators with a handout to keep.

Garner Early Support for Equity Initiatives from District and School Leadership to Foster Broader Engagement

Strong commitments from top district administrators for equity initiatives generate wide-spread support across the school district to make the initiative a success. Commitments from the school board and superintendent provide equity initiatives with resources and attention that promote equitable and inclusive learning environments across the district. At profiled districts, superintendents and other district leadership identified equity as a key area of improvement for the district and chose to launch district-wide equity initiatives as a response.

District C, District D, and District E successfully created and sustained momentum around improving equity and inclusion in their districts because district administrators demonstrate their support for equity and inclusion across the district. District leaders identified equity and inclusion as focus areas for each district and continue to work closely with equity departments to support ongoing initiatives and projects.

Demonstrations of Leadership Commitment to Equity Initiatives at Profiled Districts

Superintendent's Diversity Committee

In 2010, district administrators at **District D** created a diversity committee that works directly with the superintendent to address the district's equity issues. The committee leads conversations and creates recommendations to further the district's commitment to diversity and equity and remains a key component of district-wide decisions.

Integration of Equity into Strategic Plan

The superintendent at **District C** intentionally incorporated equity and inclusion topics throughout the district's 2017-2022 strategic plan to illustrate their commitment to improving equity across the district.

Hiring Senior Diversity Administrator

Top district administrators at **District E** hired a Director of Diversity Advancement and included the position on the superintendent's leadership team. The director facilitates conversations about equity and inclusion in all district decisions and discussions.



Beyond support from district leadership, administrators at profiled districts also note the important role of supportive school-level administrators, who ensure that the expansion of equity efforts beyond district policies and into classrooms.

Create District- and School-Level Committees to Support Equity Goals

Equity committees can help expedite and deepen the district's implementation of programs and initiatives that support equity goals. These committees, that include district stakeholders and community members, serve to guide district-level policy in various equity and inclusion areas. Equity committees can be created at the district or school level. Membership at profiled districts is generally open to all (i.e., no election process) and members self-select into sub-committees they would like to support. Equity committees provide a valuable opportunity for district administrators to connect with parents, teachers, and community members on topics related to equity and inclusion.

Contacts at **District A** note that advisory boards, equity committees, or other groups of change-leaders should include various stakeholders with a diverse range of perspectives and experiences to help reduce bias and better achieve equity. Administrators should consider recruiting individuals from various backgrounds (e.g., life experiences, work experiences) from all stakeholder groups (i.e., faculty, teachers, student, parents, broader community) when creating diversity committees.

Examples of Diversity Committees at Profiled Districts



District C

- District-wide committee formed in 2016
- 50 members
- Members include students, teachers, staff, and parents
- Sub-committees include: Religion, Community and Family Engagement, Hiring and Retention, Measuring Progress, Professional Development, and Student Agency
- Committee meets twice per month



District D

- Optional school-level committees formed in early 2010s
- Beginning in 2018, each school mandated to create an equity committee
- 5 to 12 members per school
- Members include teachers, staff, and administrators (effective 2019, all equity committees will include student members)



District E

- District-wide committee formed in 2010
- Members include teachers, staff, and parents
- Committee meets once per quarter
- District-wide committee formed in 2015
- 30+ members
- Members include teachers and staff
- Sub-committees include: Cultural Affairs, LGBTQ+ Rights and Support, Professional Development, and Family Engagement
- Committee meets once per month

Dedicate Staff to Equity and Inclusion Initiatives

Administrators at all profiled districts created equity and inclusion departments to support district-wide efforts to improve performance in these areas. Equity departments range in size from two staff members to sixteen, depending on district size and the needs identified by the district. Establishing a department focused on supporting equity initiatives allows districts to fully commit to improving educational equity and inclusion throughout the district.

Integrate Equity Conversations into The Budget Process

Administrators at **District E** intentionally incorporate equity topics in every budget discussion to apply an equity lens to the budget process. Administrators work to ensure that the budget process integrates the district's commitment to equity and to demonstrate that the district purposefully allocates funding to support equity goals. This integration helps administrators identify earmarked funds to support district equity goals and ensures the district focuses on long-term equity goals.

Similarly, district administrators at **District A** and **District C** ensure equity and inclusion initiatives receive funding by allocating equity and diversity departments with sizeable budgets to achieve their annual goals.

At **District B**, administrators struggle to find support for equity initiatives due to many other initiatives competing for attention and funding. Contacts note that ideally equity topics and outcomes would be included in every district-wide and school-level program initiative, and therefore there would not be as much pressure to find earmarked funding for separate equity-focused professional development and resources.

Implementation Practices to Gain Support

Use District Success as a Primer for Equity Discussions

Administrators at **District E** began discussions about equity and inclusion in 2015 by hosting forums about the strengths of the district. District administrators celebrated the district's achievements in student outcomes, increases in some test scores, and other recent improvements. Overall, the district performs well, but administrators also shared that the data illuminates inequities in student outcomes.

District administrators used the differences in student outcomes uncovered by the data to begin discussions about equitable and inclusive learning environments. This allowed teachers and administrators to approach equity and inclusion challenges from a place of success, believing that because the district experienced success in other metrics, they could overcome equity challenges in similar ways. A focus on the district's strengths established a positive perspective of success and helped to generate buy in from the school community for equity initiatives.

Use Consistent Resources to Help All Administrators Develop a Common Understanding of District Equity Goals

Contacts highlight the importance of administrators across the school district having a shared understanding of the district's equity goals. Administrators at **District D** invited administrators from across the district to participate in a book study to help guide the district's equity and inclusion framework. Administrators asked all school- and district-level administrators to read *The Global Education Toolkit for Elementary Learners* by Becky Mladic-Morales, et.al.

Participants discussed the book’s lessons as a group and provided administrators with practical ways to incorporate the lessons into their school curricula and events. This exercise served as one of the first equity and inclusion-focused professional development trainings. District administrators used the book study to facilitate further discussions on redesigning curricula to be more culturally relevant and inclusive. The book study helped to create a common understanding of culturally-relevant and diverse curricula between administrators to help generate support for district-wide equity initiatives.

In 2016, administrators at **District E** spent the year working with teachers and staff to understand their own biases as educators and the cultural identity of each school and the district. This time, focused on creating a shared understanding of the district’s mission and population of students and families, helped staff and teachers understand how and why equity and inclusion topics directly impact student learning. By starting with a shared understanding, district administrators can more easily garner support from teachers and school administrators for equity and inclusion initiatives and programs.

Develop Clear Equity and Inclusion Frameworks to Share with Teachers, Administrators, and Staff

Prior to establishing professional development opportunities to support equity goals, administrators at **District C** created an equity inventory, which clearly defines the district’s four equity focus areas and key indicators of individual, department, school, and district-wide performance in competencies within each focus area. The inventory reflects a grading rubric, with three levels of ability in each competency, and each focus area contains seven to ten competencies.

Excerpts from *District C’s Equity Inventory*

Focus Area: Governance, Organization, Policy, and Self-Reflection		
Approaching	Developing	Practicing
Educators make little or no attempt to improve their own discipline policies and practices.	Educators attempt to evaluate and improve their own discipline policies and practices.	Educators evaluate and equitably improve their own discipline policies and practices.
Focus Area: Climate, Culture, and Self-Reflection		
Approaching	Developing	Practicing
Educators have limited ability to meaningfully and respectfully interact with students, peers, and families from diverse backgrounds.	Educators attempt to meaningfully and respectfully interact with students, peers, and families from diverse backgrounds.	Educators have the ability to meaningfully and respectfully interact with students, peers, and families from diverse backgrounds.
Focus Area: Teaching, Learning, and Self-Reflection		
Approaching	Developing	Practicing
Educators do not know about the diverse backgrounds of students and families.	Educators attempt to learn about the diverse backgrounds of students and families.	Educators are well-informed of the diverse backgrounds of students and families.
Focus Area: Family and Community Engagement and Self-Reflection		
Approaching	Developing	Practicing
Educators do not mobilize liaisons to help families navigate the school system.	Educators make attempts to mobilize liaisons to help families navigate the school system.	Educators mobilize liaisons to help families navigate the school system.

School equity committees complete the inventory twice each year to gauge each schools' and the district's progress toward equity goals. Administrators map district-wide and school-level professional development opportunities to competencies within this framework, which illustrates administrators' commitment to improve cultural literacy and competency for all staff. The framework also enables teachers to identify their own professional development needs based upon competency deficiencies.

Administrators at District C used their equity inventory to create a 25-page equity handbook, which provides strategies to practice the competencies in each focus area. Administrators developed the handbook by researching how other districts approached holding their teachers and staff accountable for achieving equity goals. The equity inventory and handbook serve as useful guides for teachers and administrators to understand the district's expectations and how exactly to meet those expectations.

3) Professional Learning Opportunities on Equity and Inclusion

Initial Professional Development

Begin Equity and Inclusion Trainings with District and School Leadership to Secure Buy-in

Administrators at **District B** and **District C** offered professional development to administrators prior to the districts' full implementation of equity and inclusion initiatives. Administrators at District C offered recurring monthly training for district administrators for three to four hours with a hired facilitator on equity and inclusion topics. At District B, administrators first incorporated professional development sessions on topics related to equity, inclusion, and cultural proficiency into training for school-level principals during regular in-service days. By establishing support for equity and inclusion from district and school leaders, administrators ensured that those leaders would support larger professional development opportunities for teachers and staff.

Use District-Wide Professional Development Opportunities to Introduce Topics in Equity and Inclusion

To launch a district commitment to creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students, administrators should consider offering full-day, district-wide professional development that introduces topics in equity and inclusion, defines common terms, and describes the district's commitment and efforts to achieve long-term equity goals. Administrators at **District A** and **District E** worked with experts in the equity and inclusion field to create large-scale professional learning opportunities to help administrators, teachers, and staff become familiar with equity and diversity topics.

Administrators at District A worked with a consulting agency to develop a two-day training session, offered monthly, to educate teachers and staff on equity issues, common terms and definitions, and impacts of educational inequities on student outcomes. The training sessions serve as an opportunity for teachers to assess their cultural and racial competency to identify areas for improvement. Administrators designed these sessions to complement a portfolio of resources that administrators at District A recently developed.

At District E, administrators invited scholars from a local university to speak to teachers and administrators about equity and inclusion issues in primary and secondary education. Scholars led sessions on topics in equity and inclusion (e.g., implicit bias) by providing foundational knowledge on the topic, discussing practical strategies to address the issue in teaching practices and classroom environments, and facilitating guided reflections on the session.

The guided reflections provide a space for teachers and administrators to discuss the information provided, strategies profiled, and impacts of the issue on students' educational experiences. This reflection time encourages teachers to critically examine their teaching practices, beliefs, and classroom policies for instances of inequity and exclusion. The reflection time also provides an opportunity for support in redesigning problematic practices (e.g., reconsidering how to handle discipline issues with students of color).

Administrators in the curriculum department of **District D** host three optional equity and inclusion-related professional development days per school year. In 2018, the sessions centered around student and teacher relationships, with a focus on supporting underrepresented students. Administrators work to illustrate the impact of equity issues on student learning to encourage staff to attend these optional training sessions. Administrators tailor outreach to teachers by considering the different audiences (e.g., math department, physical education) and which topics and strategies would be most interesting to them.

Prepare Equity Leaders to Navigate Difficult Conversations to Increase Support of School-Based Equity Efforts

Administrators at **District C** act as consultants to school equity committees to support trainings for committee members on how to facilitate productive and effective professional development for other school staff. Administrators created a series of four professional development sessions for school-level, equity committee leaders across the district to support school-level implementation of the equity inventory and handbook. The sessions serve as knowledge-sharing opportunities for equity team leaders across the district. These sessions help equity committee leaders network and share lessons learned from implementing equity initiatives within their schools.

Beyond networking and knowledge-sharing, administrators also train equity committee leaders in how to lead equity conversations and generate support for initiatives with other teachers and staff. Administrators began the 2018-2019 school year with a professional development session centered around having difficult conversations on equity and inclusion topics. Administrators introduced a popular book, *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn Singleton, which they asked equity team leaders to read throughout the year and discuss at subsequent professional development sessions.

The book contains activities and strategies that administrators asked equity team leaders to implement with their school-level teams as well as other teachers and staff. Administrators chose the book to increase equity committee leaders' confidence in handling challenging conversations about equity topics in their school community. Upon finishing the book, administrators plan to have participants identify a few strategies for navigating these complex conversations.

Ongoing Professional Development

Integrate Equity Discussions into All Professional Learning Opportunities

To fundamentally change the culture of a district, administrators should consider integrating conversations about equity and inclusion into each professional development opportunity offered to teachers and staff, regardless of topic and audience. Contacts at profiled districts note that incorporating equity and inclusion conversations into all professional development opportunities helps engrain the creation of equitable learning environments into the culture of the district. This also demonstrates administrators' commitment to these issues.

Administrators at **District B** include discussions about equity and inclusion in district-wide trainings related to another district priority, trauma-informed care. Integrating conversations related to cultural competency and bias into these trainings help frame conversations on the impacts of equity on a broader scale.

At **District C**, administrators invite equity leaders from across the district to attend monthly meetings with district leadership (e.g., assistant principals, principals, deputy superintendents, superintendent) to share their teams' efforts to improve equity and inclusion in their school community. These sessions help administrators understand how others in the district implement the district's equity initiatives and what successes and challenges others face during implementation.



Dedicate Existing Professional Development Time to Equity-Related Topics

By integrating equity and inclusion-focused professional development sessions into the regular professional development calendar, administrators can guarantee that most teachers learn strategies to further equity and inclusion initiatives across the district without having to convene teachers at a separate time. At **District E**, administrators dismiss students for the afternoon every Wednesday to allow teachers to participate in professional development sessions, department meetings, and school-wide assemblies. Administrators dedicate about five of these Wednesday half days every year to equity-related professional development and allow school administrators to choose the equity topic most relevant to their school community.

Ensure Professional Development is Interactive and Skills-Based to Promote Engagement

To create relevant and impactful professional learning opportunities related to equity, administrators should consider creating interactive and skill-oriented professional development. Informative professional learning can help staff establish baseline knowledge about a topic and should be used during initial sessions to introduce basic concepts related to equity. However, teachers and staff will likely struggle to make classroom-level adjustments to their teaching practices without concrete strategies that they can bring back to their classrooms.

Moreover, administrators should approach all equity and inclusion-focused professional development from a growth mindset instead of focusing on the skills and competencies that teachers may lack. Administrators should not employ professional development that shames individuals for their lack of awareness on equity and inclusion topics. Administrators should instead develop or choose professional learning that highlights how teachers can use their strengths to develop new skills to support equitable and inclusive learning. Administrators should encourage participants to challenge their current practices and grow their understanding of student learning, diversity, and cultural competency. Through technology, partnerships, and creative approaches, district administrators can create engaging professional development opportunities for teachers and staff on district focus areas in equity and inclusion.

Interactive and Engaging Professional Development Strategies

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaborative inquiry | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Panel discussions | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Book studies |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Case studies | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-reflection and discussion | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participative online training |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Simulations | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Off-site workshops | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Round tables |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group dialogue and discussion | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classroom observations | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peer-led workshops |

Throughout the 2018-2019 school year, administrators at **District A** offered monthly viewings of films that explore topics in racial equity. Each month features a different film, and viewings occur after school to maximize the availability of teachers and staff to participate. Each viewing concludes with a facilitated discussion about themes presented in the film and how they relate to the district's racial equity initiatives.

Use Technology Platforms to Create Interactive, Self-Paced Training

To further demonstrate their commitment to interactive professional development, administrators at **District A** recently designed an online portfolio of resources to introduce topics related to educational equity and inclusive environments, with a focus on racial equity. The portfolio aims to build a foundational understanding of equity and inclusion topics and how they relate to education, classrooms, and curricula for teachers and staff with limited racial consciousness. Administrators made this portfolio of resources available online for all teachers, staff, and administrators to access.

District A's Equity-Resource Portfolio Details



Each module takes 20-30 minutes to complete.



All modules are interactive in some capacity (e.g., self-assessment, identifying inequities in scenarios).



Module topics include the difference between equity and equality, definitions of common terms, identifying problematic behavior and language, understanding implicit bias, and clarifying district protocols and procedures on creating equitable learning environments.



Each module provides real-life strategies that teachers can implement in their classrooms and interactions with students.

The self-paced portfolio includes guides, interactive assignments, and suggested reading materials organized by topic into modules. Contacts note that the portfolio helps teachers prepare for more intensive conversations around race and equity in future professional development sessions by providing an opportunity to engage with basic cultural competency resources. The online aspect of the portfolio also allows teachers and staff to engage with materials according to their needs and learning speed, which provides valuable flexibility to users.

Partner with Local Colleges and Universities to Access Equity Experts for Reliable and Consistent Training

Given the complexity of topics related to equity and inclusion, it can be difficult for administrators to create engaging, skills-based professional development internally. Administrators should look to their external community to identify strategic partnerships for development of more advanced professional development opportunities. Administrators at **District E** and **District D** partnered with local universities to offer professional development to teachers and staff.

At District E, administrators invited scholars from a local university to speak to teachers and administrators about equity and inclusion issues in primary and secondary education during initial, district-wide professional development.

At District D, district administrators forged deep partnerships with local colleges and universities to support the district’s equity and inclusion initiatives. Administrators leveraged these partnerships to create their Professional Development Academy for teachers and staff. Through the college partners, administrators offer on-site professional development courses for licensed staff and provide each staff member with a voucher for one free course per year. The courses offered can count toward a teacher’s continuing education credits and teaching certificate renewals or can be applied toward a graduate degree program.

District D’ Professional Development Academy

Partnership Details

- Administrators negotiate with colleges and universities to purchase course vouchers at a reduced price.
- Administrators offer each teacher one course voucher per school year that the teacher can use on any equity-related course.
- Courses are college credit-bearing and can count towards certificate renewals, continuing education credits, or a graduate degree at one of the partner institutions.

Course Details

- Courses cover a wide range of topics within equity and inclusion, and course topics vary each semester.
- Approximately five courses offered each session.
- Sessions run throughout the fall, spring, and summer.
- District administrators or college professors teach courses.
- Offered in person, online, or a hybrid of both to support the needs of teachers, but participants complete most coursework independently.
- Meet in-person at least twice per course for two hours after school.
- Opportunity to audit courses for teachers who do not want to fully commit to course.



Examples of Courses Offered at *District D'* Professional Development Academy

Building Diverse Text Sets

Teachers identified an issue or theme in their curricula that lacked diverse reading materials, identified resources of all media (e.g., novels, comic books, short stories) written by diverse authors to support the theme, and presented their diverse text sets to the class. Participants left the course with over ten different text sets on a variety of topics to supplement their classroom resources.

Religious Diversity

The course instructor invites leaders from various faiths to discuss traditions, beliefs, and cultural norms within the faith and the impacts of these traditions on students' academic performance. For example, a priest from the Church of the Latter-Day Saints discussed the cultural tradition of youth attending seminary in the morning before school, and how the practice may impact students' performance in the classroom throughout the rest of the day.

Teaching Social Justice in the World Languages

This course provides strategies for incorporating social justice themes and principles into world language curricula. The final project for this course asks participants to integrate social justice lessons into their courses during the following semester.

Culture of Affluence

This course discusses the unique emotional and mental challenges faced by students from upper-middle or high-income families using a supporting text, *The Price of Privilege* by Madeline Levine.

Course Details:

- District administrators worked with an instructor in the district's world languages department to offer this course.
- Together, they designed the curricula, found supporting texts, and created assignments for participants.
- This course is eight hours of in-person meeting time, with the coursework to be completed independently by participants.
- Activities include reading the anchor text, developing lesson plans, and discussing topics with other participants and instructors online.

Beyond continued professional learning, the courses help teachers move up the pay scale as they acquire additional knowledge and skills to become more effective teachers. The Professional Development Academy demonstrates the district's commitment to enabling teachers with practices to create equitable and inclusive learning communities for all students, and hundreds of teachers enroll in courses annually.

Include Students' Perspectives in Professional Development to Illustrate the Importance of Equity

Administrators at profiled districts include student perspectives in equity-related professional development curricula for staff. Student perspectives illustrate the reality of inequity and help teachers better understand the challenges underrepresented students face. Administrators highlight the importance of including the student voice into professional development sessions on equity and inclusion topics because these topics deeply influence the daily educational experience of students. Student voice

also adds an intimate view of equity and inclusion issues for teachers and staff, especially staff that may be resistant to learning about equity issues.

At **District D**, district administrators created a video featuring a compilation of interviews with students from each school. Administrators asked students how they experience microaggressions during the school day, how stereotypes impact their ability to learn, and how implicit bias influences their learning. Administrators also asked if students felt supported by teachers and administrators.

District leadership shared the video with administrators, teachers, and staff throughout the district. Specifically, administrators aired the video for teachers in a school with low student diversity and low staff participation in equity-related professional development. The video screening was the most well-attended professional development session for teachers and staff at that school, as the students' stories appealed to and resonated with teachers. Administrators used this video to begin discussions across the district of how teachers can better support their students, and many teachers were surprised to see students from their school talking openly about the challenges they faced.

At **District E**, students led a workshop for teachers during a professional development session to discuss the educational experience of three distinct student groups—students of color, English Language Learners, and LGBTQ+ students. Students first explained the goals of the session, then separated teachers into three groups, and led 25-minute presentations on the unique needs and experiences of each student group.

Participants rotated through each presentation, and at the conclusion of the workshop, the entire group discussed key lessons for culturally-responsive teaching practices. Like at District D, it was a powerful experience for teachers to hear first-hand how students experienced discrimination in their classrooms and the diverse perspectives of different student populations. These sessions gave staff a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by underrepresented student groups and how teachers can better support those students.

Invite Students to Participate in Decision-Making Processes and Lead Workshops to Support Student Agency and Voice

Providing students with the opportunity to participate in and support equity initiatives allows students to practice valuable presentation, self-advocacy, and communication skills. Furthermore, it empowers students to affect change in their school communities.

At **District C**, secondary students can join a student advisory group to support district-level equity and inclusion conversations and decisions. The group, with around 25 student members, serves as a representative voice of students across the district and allows administrators to better understand the challenges students face.

Students attending any of the middle and high schools in **District A** can join a student group called Students Organized Against Racism (SOAR). SOAR enables students to share thoughts, concerns, and knowledge about racism and its impact on the school community. Students participating in SOAR work with school administrators to influence school-level decisions, policies, and professional development. Students in SOAR often hold workshops and events to educate teachers and staff on equity and inclusion issues in their schools and share their experiences as a part of the school community. Most importantly, SOAR allows students to be

active participants and social-change agents in the district's efforts to create an equitable and inclusive educational community.

Include Student Voice in Community Events About Equity and Inclusion Topics

Administrators at **District A** and **District D** often include underrepresented students from across the district in panel discussions on equity and inclusion at community-wide events. Administrators actively seek underrepresented students from all backgrounds, including low-income students, students from different faith backgrounds, LGBTQ+ students, and students of color. By inviting students from across the district and from many backgrounds, administrators prevent the school community from misunderstanding equity and inclusion topics to be issues facing one segment of the student population.

Addressing Challenges

Monitor Teachers Disengaged from Equity Training and Provide One-on-One Support

While many teachers find professional development helpful to identify how their actions impact students and how they can better create an inclusive classroom, profiled districts report resistance from some teachers regarding equity-focused professional development.

Administrators at **District E** work one-on-one with teachers who are resistant to addressing the district's equity and inclusion-related challenges. Administrators keep track of teacher attendance at equity trainings and follow up with teachers who consistently do not attend. Administrators and disengaged teachers meet to discuss the teachers' concerns about equity topics and challenges they face when implementing equity strategies in their classrooms. Administrators may reach out to the teacher directly to invite them to attend an upcoming professional development training or observe teachers' classrooms and discuss areas for pedagogical improvement.

At **District C**, district administrators work more closely with schools least engaged in equity initiatives and provide additional consulting support to equity team leaders in those schools. Administrators hope that, over time, teachers will see the value in becoming culturally competent instructors and will approach all aspects of their teaching career with an equitable and inclusive lens.

Use Peer Support to Engage Teachers' Resistant to Equity Initiatives

At **District E**, contacts note that teachers who attend equity-focused training sessions may become knowledgeable about equity issues and comfortable with discussing and practicing strategies with peers and administrators. These teachers, often champions of equitable and inclusive learning, can become confident in identifying other teachers' problematic classroom environments, teaching strategies, or curricula. These supporters may encourage disengaged teachers to work more intentionally to create a learning environment that supports all students. Knowledgeable teachers may volunteer to mentor disengaged teachers, which often proves to be more effective in garnering support from disengaged teachers than forcing them to attend a professional development training.

4) Assessment of Equity and Inclusion Initiatives

Metrics

Create Annual Objectives to Measure Progress Toward District-Wide Equity Goals

Administrators at **District A** and **District C** identify objectives for the equity department to track progress toward district-wide equity goals. These goals serve as the framework for the districts' initiatives and programs each year.

At District A, administrators in the equity department create measurable, achievable goals each year focused on specific areas of equity and inclusion. These administrators work with executive department leaders across the district to create goals related to equity and inclusion topics to increase accountability for these efforts. For example, administrators from the equity department worked closely with administrators from the human resources department to create concrete goals to increase staff diversity and to retain existing staff of color.

Administrators at District C choose two areas per year to focus their training and efforts, with each year laying the foundation for the following year's focus areas. These focus areas help administrators create specific goals for each school year to further the equity and inclusion work at the district.

District C's Equity Focus Areas

2018-2019	Racial Literacy and Cultural Competency, & Culturally Relevant Leadership
2019-2020	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, & Culturally Relevant Climate
2020-2021	Student Agency, & Culturally Relevant Curriculum
2021-2022	Family and Community Engagement, & Community Collaboration and Integration

Administrators at District C also use their equity inventory, which clearly defines the district's four equity focus areas and key performance indicators in competencies within each focus area, as an annual assessment of progress toward the district's equity goals. School-level equity committees complete the inventory each year, and administrators use the results to gauge each schools' and the district's progress toward equity goals. Equity committees often use input from other teachers and administrators to get a holistic view of the schools' efforts in each competency.

Identify Quantitative Metrics to Track Progress Toward Equity Goals

Administrators should consider establishing standard metrics to measure the district's progress toward equity goals. While changes in some metrics (e.g., disciplinary infractions) can be difficult to attribute directly to improvements in professional development, tracking changes in relevant, specific metrics will help administrators clearly articulate the value of equity and inclusion initiatives and identify opportunities for growth.

Administrators at **District B** expelled significantly fewer students since launching their equity plan in 2016. Prior to 2016, contacts note that the district saw many students experience frequent disciplinary issues that required suspension and ultimately expulsion due to repeat offenses. Since beginning equity conversations

across the district and trainings for school leadership, administrators noticed a significant drop in expulsions. Administrators have not expelled any students due to frequent disciplinary issues since 2016.

Contacts explain that this could illustrate that, though limited in scope, the cultural competency and equity training for principals mitigated some of the biases that principals bring to disciplinary actions. The reduction in expulsions could also be evidence of fewer disciplinary referrals by teachers, who participated in multiple conversations about cultural competency and bias in their trauma-informed care training. The reduction could also be evidence of fewer disciplinary issues by students overall, which may be contributed to feeling more connected to teachers and the school environment.

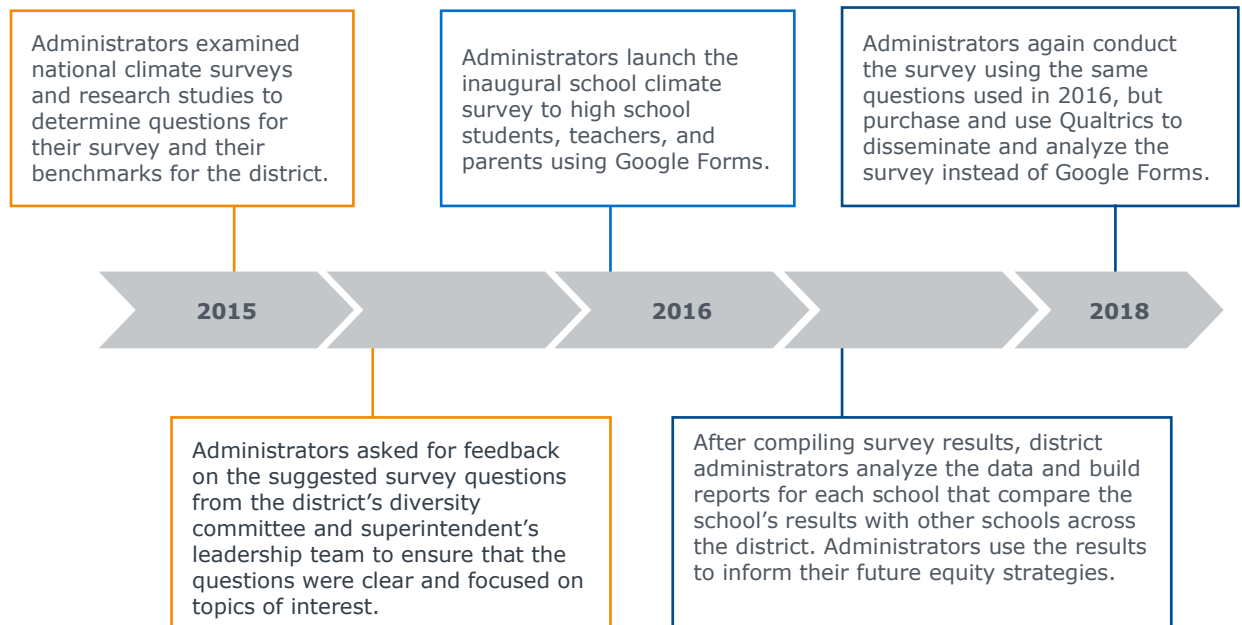
Surveys

Use School Climate Surveys to Gauge Perceptions of District-Wide Progress Toward Equity Goals

Administrators at profiled districts use school climate surveys to gauge perceptions of progress toward equity goals. These climate surveys include questions about diversity in classroom materials, whether teachers value diverse experiences and input in the classroom, and if students feel safe and supported in their school environment. Administrators disseminate surveys to teachers, administrators, students, and parents with an online survey platform. At **District E**, administrators primarily use their state-mandated annual school climate survey to gauge progress toward an equitable learning environment.

At **District D**, administrators surveyed high school students and all teachers and parents in 2016 to gauge equity perception data in areas like teaching and learning, safety, relationships, and classroom environments. Administrators intend to conduct the survey every two years to gauge long-term progress toward creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

Climate Survey Creation Process at *District D*



District administrators work with school principals to create a survey plan for each target population, and in 2018 the survey was completed by 2,700 respondents. Contacts report that staff response rates doubled between the 2016 and 2018 surveys and attribute this increase to the survey plans they created with school administrators

This climate survey allows administrators to track progress toward equity and inclusion goals across the district and within each high school, which helps identify areas for future growth.

Example Questions from *District D'* Climate Survey



Teachers

How often do you incorporate the experiences and perspectives of the below groups into your lesson plans? (Options include rarely, sometimes, and frequently)

- Women and Girls
- Diverse Religious Groups
- People of Color
- LGBTQ+
- Indigenous Peoples



Students

How often do your teachers include diverse backgrounds and perspectives in the classroom? (Options include rarely, sometimes, and frequently)

When administrators first conducted the survey in 2016, they noticed discrepancies between the perception of equitable learning environments in the answers of students and teachers. While teachers reported often including diverse perspectives in the classroom, students reported that teachers did not often include diverse perspectives in the classroom. This discrepancy opened the door for district-wide discussions about how to better support teachers as they try to incorporate more diverse perspectives into their classrooms in noticeable ways to improve students' perceptions.

Use Student Perception Surveys to Assess Student Engagement and Sense of Belonging

Administrators at **District A** and **District D** use a [free survey created](#) by [Panorama Education](#), an educational consulting company, to assess students' perceptions on nineteen topics including the quality of teaching and learning, school engagement, and sense of belonging. Administrators use the Panorama Student Survey to gauge students' perception of belonging and the districts' movement toward an inclusive learning environment. Administrators at both profiled districts distribute the digital survey to students in grades three through twelve each fall and spring.

Administrators at District D use the student perception survey alongside their climate survey to gather district-wide data on their equity and inclusion efforts. Administrators first administered the student perception survey in November 2018 and plan to create professional development opportunities to address areas for growth identified by the survey. Administrators note that they will administer this survey twice per year for the foreseeable future to gather longitudinal data on the direction of the district and movement toward equity and inclusion goals.

Administrators at District A administered the student perception survey twice annually for the last three years and found that distinct student populations continue to feel disconnected from their learning environments and disengaged from the curriculum. District administrators work with school administrators to identify disengaged student populations and then hold focus groups to more concretely define the challenges students face in their school environments. By listening to student concerns through the survey and then holding focus groups to identify the causes of issues, administrators not only encourage students to advocate for themselves but also work to target specific student concerns across the district.

Teacher Evaluations

Integrate Equity and Inclusion Expectations into Teacher Evaluations for Individual Accountability

Administrators at **District E** incorporate equity and inclusion expectations into teacher evaluations to provide standards of individual accountability related to the district's equity goals. For example, administrators could highlight inclusive classroom environments as an area for improvement on teacher evaluations for those not already incorporating these efforts into their work.

Indicators of Teacher Effectiveness Related to Equity at *District E*

<p>Focus Area: Classroom Engagement</p>	<p>Teacher creates, models, and promotes an atmosphere of respect, responsibility, and safety to all that is conducive to learning.</p> <p>Attributes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive rapport and social interactions • Respect for student diversity
<p>Focus Area: Professional Responsibilities</p>	<p>Teacher engages families to promote positive home-school relationships, communicates effectively, and exhibits sensitivity and respect for cultural, social, economic, and learning diversity.</p> <p>Attributes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution to a positive school climate • Family and community engagement • Respect for cultural differences • Culturally responsive communication

Contacts at **District D** note that administrators intend to combine their state's framework for teacher evaluation with the district expectation of teachers to create an equitable learning environment. This strategy proves to be a powerful tool to promote wide-spread engagement with and integration of district-supported classroom strategies that support equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at the member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What resources do administrators at contact districts commit to equity initiatives?
- What professional development strategies for staff do administrators at contact districts employ?
 - When did contact districts begin equity training?
 - What topics do equity-related professional development strategies at contact districts cover?
 - How are these professional development strategies implemented at contact districts?
- How do administrators at contact districts involve students in equity-related professional development strategies?
- How do administrators at contact districts ensure teachers and staff develop and maintain equitable learning environments for all students?
 - Do contact districts offer ongoing professional development sessions?
 - Do contact districts include equity-related observation metrics in teacher evaluations?
- How did administrators at contact districts garner teacher and staff buy-in for equity initiatives?
 - Have administrators at contact districts met resistance from their staff when providing professional development on this topic?
 - How have contact districts handled staff that do not want to learn about equitable practices in education?
- What metrics do contact districts use to assess progress toward equitable education district-wide?
- Do administrators at contact districts consider their district-wide equity initiatives to be successful?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB’s internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed district-level administrators who oversee diversity and equity initiatives at public school districts.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

District	State	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Washington	20,000
District B	Pennsylvania	15,000
District C	Washington	22,000
District D	Ohio	17,000
District E	Connecticut	17,000