

Westerly Public Schools Equity Audit Report

Public Consulting Group LLC
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Acknowledgements

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About Public Consulting Group (PCG)

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) is a management consulting firm that offers technical assistance, strategic planning, professional development, financial management, systems development, and other management advisory services to public sector clients. Established in 1986, PCG has consistently delivered on its motto of “*Solutions that Matter.*” Our education practice is committed to helping schools, school districts, and state education agencies strengthen their performance, streamline their operations, and improve their programs and instruction so that all students have what they need to succeed.

Public Consulting Group (PCG) Commitment to Educational Equity

Equity demands that we consider the needs of each student, with a discerning eye towards students who are historically marginalized or held to low expectations, often due to cultural and linguistic diversity, identified disability, or gender identity. Our equity audit work is part of PCG's enduring commitment to supporting equitable practices in districts and schools.

For more information, please see [Equity Education Services: Assess, Implement, and Maintain - PCG | Public Consulting Group.](#)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2022, Westerly Public Schools (WPS) contracted with Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) to conduct an independent, external Equity Audit. The audit in WPS was designed to examine areas of the school system's operations—its policies, practices, and programs—through the lens of equity with the goal of identifying structural and programmatic barriers that inhibit an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

To advance WPS's equity efforts, the district sought a partner organization to conduct an external audit that would develop a set of customized recommendations, grounded in WPS's data, and help the district proactively address implicit and explicit bias and foster a safe, supportive, and inclusive education environment where each student feels valued, challenged, and prepared for the future.

PCG used the following definition for the purposes of guiding this work:

Educational Equity means ensuring all students receive equitable opportunities for successful outcomes.

This Equity Audit takes a step toward expanding the conversation within the district and builds on equity work at Westerly High School undertaken in recent years by the Westerly School Community.

EQUITY AUDIT FRAMEWORK

Equity Audits have gained momentum as a strategy for school systems to systemically examine their policies, programs, and processes, and determine actionable steps for the correction of potential inequities. A range of conceptual frameworks have emerged to guide this work.

The framework and guiding questions PCG used for this Equity Audit come from our synthesis of research-based evidence and extensive experience. The overarching question the audit seeks to answer is:

“How do the policies, practices, and programs in Westerly Public Schools promote and sustain educational equity?”

The audit framework seeks to answer the driving question by examining WPS's operations and education service delivery in five focus areas highlighted in the table below. Within each core domain, PCG considers the following guiding questions to identify assets and gaps that propel or inhibit achieving system goals.

Figure 1. Equity Audit Framework and Guiding Questions

Equity Focus Area	Guiding Question(s)
District Policies and Practices	<p>To what extent do the policies, practices, and actions of leadership in WPS promote a diverse, equitable, and inclusive district?</p> <p>How are student outcomes and program participation patterns linked to student characteristics and demographics?</p> <p>Are student discipline practices consistent, transparent, and equitable for all students?</p>
Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development	<p>How do human resources policies and practices in WPS support hiring and retaining a diverse workforce?</p> <p>How does WPS professional development support equity, diversity, and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination?</p>
Student Culture and Climate	<p>To what extent is the culture and climate of WPS welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of each student?</p>

Family and Community Engagement	To what extent are the family engagement efforts of WPS inclusive, collaborative, and equitable?
Curriculum and Instruction	To what extent is the curriculum review process inclusive and focused on equity and ensuring equitable representation for each student? To what extent do instructional practices in the district focus on improving academic and social outcomes for each student?

STRATEGIES ANALYSIS AT-A-GLANCE

PCG has conducted a **strategies analysis** for each focus area of the Equity Audit investigation: District Policies and Practices, Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development, Culture and Climate, Family and Community Engagement, and Curriculum and Instruction. The strategies analysis aims to provide readers with a high-level overview of the presence or absence of equity-centric core practices stemming from evidence-based strategies.

PCG provides evidence-based strategies and the desired outcomes for each of the focus areas. Strategies were developed by PCG through extensive best practices research and our organizational expertise in executing equitable practices with fidelity. The Core Practices column describes elements needed to execute the aforementioned strategies. The strategies listed in each table are not exhaustive of all potential strategies that a district could adopt towards becoming an equitable and inclusive learning environment. However, it is the assertion of PCG, as backed by research and former experience, that the list of strategies presented in the tables are beneficial in meeting the desired outcomes. Lastly, we indicate in the final column whether the core practices were observed in Westerly Public Schools fully, partially, or not at all. These determinations were made based on the data amassed from the various sources as described in Chapter 3. Methodology and throughout the report. A “no” designation does not necessarily mean a particular strategy does not exist in the district, it simply indicates that PCG did not observe this practice through any aspect of data collection or analysis.

Figure 2. Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance Template

Desired Outcome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of desired outcome(s) based on the focus area 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome(s)</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No

REPORT TERMINOLOGY

There are several terms and acronyms used throughout this report that require definition and clarification within the WPS context. Some terms that appear throughout the report include:

Achievement Gap: The difference in academic performance between different ethnic and racial groups, income levels, gender identities, and learning abilities.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

DEI: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Differently Able: Students with disabilities who receive special education and related services according to an individualized education program (IEP) or services plan under Part B of IDEA.

District Leaders/District Leadership: This term is used throughout the findings in this report to refer to individuals in leadership roles in schools and in central office. Examples include: Principals/Assistant Principals, Deans, Department Chairs, Department Directors, and members of the Superintendent's Leadership Team. If a finding references "School Leadership/School Leaders" it only includes those district leaders who are school based (e.g. Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans).

Economically Disadvantaged: This term is used synonymously with Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible but is used throughout the report when referencing state data for consistency with state reporting.

ES: Elementary School

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible: Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch program as reported by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

HS: High School

HMI: Students and/or families of historically marginalized identities, i.e., persons in the LGBTQIA+ community, differently abled students, etc.

MS: Middle School

Multilingual Learner (MLL): Defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education as encompassing all children and youth who are, or have been, consistently exposed to multiple languages. It includes students known as English language learners (ELLs) or dual language learners (DLLs); heritage language learners; and students who speak varieties of English or indigenous languages (WIDA Guiding Principles 2019).¹ The MLL count includes students who have exited MLL programs within the previous two years.

Opportunity Gap: The disparity in access to the inputs, experiences, and resources needed for each student to be academically successful.

PCG: Public Consulting Group LLC

PD: Professional Development

RICAS: Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System

RIDE: Rhode Island Department of Education

Students with Disabilities: As defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education, students with an IEP or 504 plan.² This term is used synonymously with Differently Able but used throughout the report when referencing state data for consistency with state reporting.

WPS: Westerly Public Schools

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The report is organized in 10 chapters:

¹ Rhode Island Department of Education. "Glossary." *Multilingual Learners (MLLs) / English Learners (ELs)*.

² Rhode Island Department of Education (August 18, 2022). "ADP User Guide." *Rhode Island Assessment Data Portal*.

- **Chapter 1** introduces this report.
- **Chapter 2** describes the current context of the Westerly Public Schools community including enrollment and population trends.
- **Chapter 3** describes the audit methodology including our approach to this work and our data collection and analysis processes.
- **Chapter 4** outlines PCG's priority recommendations for WPS.
- **Chapters 5-9** present key findings divided into the focus areas of the framework: 5. District Policies and Practices; 6. Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development; 7. Culture and Climate; 8. Family and Community Engagement; 9. Curriculum and Instruction. Each chapter opens with a brief description of select research-based best practices, Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance, and then presents key findings from the audit and recommendations.
- **Chapter 10** details PCG's conclusions from conducting this Equity Audit.

2. WESTERLY PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMUNITY

BACKGROUND

Westerly Public Schools (WPS) serves approximately 2,370 students in grades Pre-K through 12th grade in six schools including one inclusion preschool, three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school. The district also has a Transition Academy for students with special needs between the ages of 18 and 22. The Transition Academy was not included in the analysis for this equity audit. Two elementary schools receive Title I funds. Additionally, Westerly High School offers Career and Technical Education programming, including nine pathways. Westerly is home to a diversifying community, with many families who have lived in the district for multiple generations, as well as families who are newly settled in the area. The students in Westerly Public Schools are predominantly White (79%). The second largest racial student group is Hispanic / Latinx (9%). Three percent of the Westerly student body have been identified as multilingual learners, and 30% of the student body is eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.³ The district is governed by a School Committee with seven members who are elected at-large, with no member serving more than two consecutive 4-year terms.

CONTEXT

In December 2021, the Westerly School Committee approved Westerly Public Schools' Equity Statement, in alignment with and support of the district's mission statement, *To create an inspiring, challenging, and supportive environment where students are encouraged and assisted in reaching their highest potential.*⁴ The detailed Equity Statement declares: *At WPS, equity means that all students are ensured the support, resources, and assistance they need to excel at their full potential. WPS is intentional, purposeful, and strategic about honoring all people because of and regardless of their differences. Simply put, every student gets what every student needs.* The Westerly School Committee also included in this statement further details about "What We Believe" and "What We Need" to achieve the aforementioned equity-focused vision for WPS.⁵ The district determined a critical step toward achieving this vision was to assess Westerly Public Schools' core education functions from an equity lens to answer the question, "How can we do this better?"

In June 2022, Westerly Public Schools issued a request for proposals from qualified vendors to conduct an independent Equity Audit of the district. In October 2022, Westerly Public Schools hired Public Consulting Group to conduct an external audit of district practices through an equity lens. The goal of this audit is to capture the current state of WPS as relates to equity and identify steps needed to ensure equitable opportunities for successful outcomes for each student served by Westerly Public Schools.

STUDENT, SCHOOL, AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

An initial step towards understanding educational equity in Westerly Public Schools is to examine student racial and ethnic characteristics and high needs status across the district. PCG used data from SY2018-2019, SY2019-2020, SY2020-2021 and SY2021-2022 to provide a comprehensive district snapshot and identify enrollment trends over the previous four years.

Student demographics in the district have remained relatively consistent over the past four years. Two changes of note are the decline in enrollment, from 2,738 in 2019 to 2,378 in 2022, and the decline in

³ Rhode Island Department of Education (2022). "Public Schools Enrollment Dashboard." *DataCenter*.

⁴ Westerly Public Schools (2023). "Committee – School Committee."

⁵ Westerly Public Schools (Approved December 8, 2021). "Equity Statement."

students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, from 36% in 2019 to 30% in 2022. The figure below represents elements of the demographic makeup of Westerly Public Schools from 2019 to 2022.

Figure 3. Westerly Public Schools Demographics (2019-2022)⁶

Year	N	African American or Black	Asian	Hispanic or Latinx	White	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaska Native	Two or More Races	Multilingual Learner	Differently Abled	Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible
2018-19	2,738	1%	3%	8%	80%	<1%	2%	7%	2%	16%	36%
2019-20	2,648	1%	2%	9%	79%	<1%	2%	7%	3%	17%	35%
2020-21	2,433	1%	2%	10%	78%	<1%	1%	7%	3%	18%	34%
2021-22	2,378	1%	2%	9%	79%	<1%	1%	7%	3%	17%	30%

Please note: The race and ethnicity percentages reported above may add up to more than 100%. This is in effort to accurately include marginalized groups in our breakdown of the Westerly student body. While RIDE may report a subgroup as 0% when there are fewer than 0.5% of students, PCG chooses to represent those students with the <1% designation.

In SY2021-22:

- The district is majority White (79%), 9% Hispanic or Latinx, 7% Multiracial (two or more races), 2% Asian, 1% African American or Black, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and less than 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- Approximately 30% of Westerly students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. At the state level, 41% of all students qualify. Neighboring districts have lower rates of free and reduced-price eligible students: Chariho – 17%, South Kingstown – 13%, Exeter-West Greenwich – 12%, Narragansett – 11%.
- Approximately 17% of the district's students are differently abled. This rate is similar to the Rhode Island state average of 16%. Neighboring districts demonstrate similar rates: Narragansett – 17%, Chariho – 15%, Exeter-West Greenwich – 13%, South Kingstown – 12%.
- Three percent of the district's students are multilingual learners. This rate is significantly lower than the state average of 11%. Neighboring districts have similarly low rates: South Kingstown – 2%, Exeter-West Greenwich – 1%. Narragansett and Chariho multilingual learner rates are not reported.

⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education (2022). "Public Schools Enrollment Dashboard." DataCenter.

3. METHODOLOGY

From October 2022 through February 2023, PCG conducted an Equity Audit of Westerly Public Schools using a mixed-methods approach. The findings and recommendations are based on our analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the course of the audit. These data sources and our approach are described in greater detail below.

AUDIT APPROACH

PCG's project management approach to the audit is collaborative—we act as an outside agent, with an objective perspective, working alongside WPS leadership to identify challenges and provide recommendations for improvement including a roadmap for future action.⁷ PCG built frequent touchpoints into the project plan with project leaders from WPS to foster communication and collaboration, seek clarification and additional information, share preliminary findings, and collect feedback.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To provide a comprehensive understanding of equity in WPS, PCG developed a research design for the audit that collected data from multiple sources. A complete list of data sources reviewed can be found below.

Figure 4. Data and Document Sources for Westerly Equity Audit

	Curriculum and Instruction	Culture and Climate	Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development	Family and School Community Engagement	District Policies and Practices
8 Leadership Interviews	X	X	X	X	X
Focus Groups	X	X	X	X	X
Open Feedback Forms		X	X	X	X
Community Participation Information <i>(provided by WPS team)</i>		X		X	
Equity Initiatives <i>(provided by WPS team)</i>		X		X	X
Curriculum Documents <i>(provided by WPS team)</i>	X				X
Family Engagement <i>(provided by WPS team)</i>				X	
Student Engagement <i>(provided by WPS team)</i>		X			X
Data Reports <i>(provided by WPS team)</i>		X	X		X

⁷ Donis-Keller, C., Meltzer, J., & Chmielewski, E. (2013). "The Power of Collaborative Program Evaluation, A PCG Education White Paper." PCG Education.

Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) (provided by WPS team)					X
Reports, Policies, and Practices (provided by WPS team)			X		X
Open Feedback Responses (Online Feedback form provided to focus group registrants)		X		X	
Professional Development (provided by WPS team)				X	X
Human Resource Materials (provided by WPS team)			X		X
Disproportionality Information (provided by WPS team)					X
Demographic Counts			X		X
Rhode Island Department of Education Data Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment • Graduation • RICAS Achievement • Advanced Coursework Participation 			X		X

Data and Document Analysis

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis

PCG used both the case study research design and a phenomenological research design when analyzing qualitative data collected from interviews, focus groups, and open survey responses. The case study approach is used to investigate an unknown, contemporary issue or to find a better understanding of a process in which several variables are pertinent to the case.⁸ Researchers use the phenomenological approach to grasp the stakeholder experience and the meaning making of the experience.⁹ The emotion of “onlyness” is also considered when making meaning of individual experiences of marginalized persons. “Onlyness” refers to feeling alone, or feeling like one of few, and centers around a heightened awareness of the self in relation to one’s surroundings.”¹⁰

The analysis of quantitative data in this equity audit is primarily contained to descriptive analyses. This means that PCG reports summary statistics (sums and averages) pertaining to pieces of quantitative data throughout this report.

⁸ Glesne, C. (2010). “Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.” *Allyn and Bacon*, 4th edition.

⁹ Creswell, J.W. (2013). “Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.” *Pearson*, 4th edition.

¹⁰ Ruggiano, C. (2022). “Adapt and Serve the Community: Voices of Families of Youth of Color in Predominantly White, Rural Communities.” *The Rural Educator*, 43(1), 54-73.

Population Characteristics, Programs, and Achievement and Outcomes Analysis

PCG collected and analyzed a range of student, school, and district data. PCG retrieved school- and district-level student data including characteristics, enrollment, course taking, achievement outcomes, and socio-economic status from the Rhode Island Department of Education website. Westerly Public Schools also provided PCG with additional data that was not publicly reported, including IEP assignments and disciplinary data.

Population and program trends are important equity indicators of the extent to which there is overrepresentation of any group. Student performance data were analyzed to provide a comparative examination of performance by students disaggregated by demographic characteristics.

Document Review

WPS provided PCG with relevant district documents to better understand district operations and organization, including policies and procedures. PCG also collected and reviewed district and school websites. An inventory of the documents collected for the study can be found above in Figure 4.

Focus Groups and Interviews

PCG conducted interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders including students, parents and guardians, teachers, school leaders, central office staff, and members of the Westerly School Committee. PCG worked with district leadership to conduct community-wide outreach to stakeholders, in English and Spanish, to encourage participation.

WPS engaged in targeted outreach to staff, parents/guardians, and students to promote participation in the focus groups. PCG also organized focus groups specifically for students, staff, and families who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, or with another historically marginalized identity (HMI). Separate focus groups for BIPOC and HMI were created as a means to encourage open dialogue. Research has shown having more homogeneous groups, like BIPOC groups and other historically marginalized identities, often allows participants to feel more comfortable discussing their experiences because other participants may have had similar experiences. Shared experiences may then lead to more in-depth conversations among participants.¹¹ Moreover, homogeneous groups are also used to minimize differences in status and authority which may limit or deter participation. "It is commonly recommended that participants within a focus group should be homogeneous, so as to minimize differences in status or power and to prevent the discussion being dominated by higher-status members of the group. However, if such differences in status or power nonetheless occur, they may further limit the ability of some members to influence the discussion."¹²

Interviews were conducted virtually, while most focus groups were conducted in person in Westerly Public Schools buildings. Participants in the family focus group were offered the option of participating in English or Spanish. Participation in interviews and focus groups was voluntary. In total, 85 individuals participated in these community conversations.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted between December 2022 and February 2023. Focus groups were organized by role-alike groups, including:

- Middle School Students

¹¹ Urban Institute. "Focus Groups."

¹² Sim, J. & Waterfield, J (July 16, 2019). "Focus group methodology: Some ethical challenges." *Quality & Quantity*, 53(6), 3003-3022. [Springer Link](#).

- High School Students, including a dedicated group for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and other historically marginalized identities
- Teachers and Paraprofessionals
- School Leaders
- Families, including a dedicated focus group for families of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and other historically marginalized students

Focus group and interview questions were developed by PCG based on the Equity Audit framework. Each interview and focus group included general questions asked of all stakeholders as well as questions specific to participants' roles. Questions in both the focus groups and interviews were centered on perceptions of equity and the district educational experience. Interviews lasted 45 minutes and focus groups lasted 45-60 minutes. PCG took formal notes during all stakeholder engagements which were later coded according to themes aligned with the Equity Audit framework. Individual responses to PCG's questions are confidential and will not be attributed to specific participants.

4. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create an equity-focused Professional Development plan.

This plan should include the following:

- a. Data used as part of the decision-making process to offer selected PD. Examples include student surveys, academic achievement rates, graduation rates, discipline rates, etc.
- b. Expected short- and long-term goals for all equity learning. Examples include short term goal of 90% of WHS staff will participate in implicit bias trainings between Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 with 80% proficiency in understanding and interrupting bias as measured by self-reporting tool and student survey. An example of a long-term goal is 90% of all WHS staff will participate in implicit bias trainings and be proficient in understanding and interrupting bias by Spring 2025 as measured by self-reporting tool and student survey.
- c. Expected outcomes through student, teacher, staff, and community data. Examples of potential data include student surveys, academic achievement rates, graduation rates, discipline rates, etc.
- d. Resources needed to support the implementation of plan. Examples include roles of persons who will spearhead the PD Plans for district and school-based initiatives.

2. Develop or select and utilize an explicit equity decision-making lens for all decisions made within WPS.

Adopt an equity decision-making framework through which all decisions are reviewed. In order to end individual, institutional, and structural racism and bias in the district, all leaders must consistently and intentionally apply an equity-lens to every decision made. When making decisions within WPS, leaders should ask, “Who is being well served, and who is left out or harmed by the new policy, practice, or program?” It is easy to say that all decisions will be made with equity in mind, but without an explicit Equity Impact Analysis tool, protocol, or framework, it is highly unlikely that the district can stay true to the vision.

This recommendation also involves the development of training and guidance for utilization and application of equity tools by all staff members.

3. Develop systems and strategies that use data to guide the work of recruitment, hiring, and retention in the district.

WPS is already tracking a wealth of information about applicants and staff members. To make this data more effective in the effort to diversify the district’s workforce, WPS needs to set up systems and expectations for the use of this data and actively use it to inform recruitment strategy. The use of data should include:

- a. **Tracking the demographic information of all applicants** to the district from the point of application through the interview and hiring process. These data can illuminate points in the processes where candidates of color may drop out and can allow the district to examine the factors that affect the progress of candidates of color in the hiring process. This data can also highlight the greatest area of need and focus for recruitment activities.
- b. **Tracking the demographic makeup of the staff at each of the schools** in the district to prioritize hiring to reflect the student body in each school. By transparently tracking and sharing data related to the workforce diversity in comparison to the student diversity at each school, the district can build incentives and structures to support schools to close their representation gaps.

- c. **Tracking the retention and advancement of staff members by demographics.** This kind of explicit tracking and communication of trends and findings over time not only shows the district's commitment to retaining a diverse workforce, but also allows the district to pinpoint schools, roles, or departments that may need more support in developing strategies to retain and develop staff of color.

5. DISTRICT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND POLICIES.

Guiding Question: To what extent do policies and processes in WPS promote a diverse, equitable and inclusive district?

Research-Based Best Practices: Leadership, Policies, and Practices

“At its foundation, school leadership for equity is grounded in efficacy, action, and reflection... Leaders for equity are educators who gracefully stand for others, demonstrate courage, and take risks to forge improvement. They are grounded by the confidence that they are doing the right thing. They participate in reflection on their practice in accord with others. Leaders for equity are focused on the significance of their work and are motivated by learning in action.”¹³

Today’s school and district leaders must have the ability and willingness to facilitate courageous conversations about change and to clearly explain the combination of new supports and expectations that will be in place to support that change. They also must maintain the resolve to hold steady and remain focused on implementing and monitoring the chosen strategies despite pushback and discomfort. Effectively leading significant change focused on equity means accomplishing stated goals despite opposition inside and outside the school district. It is important for district leaders to recognize which groups might feel a loss of power or influence if changes focused on equity occur and minimize their opposition by creating an inclusive process where all voices are heard.¹⁴

Role of the School Committee in Promoting Equity

The school committee plays a critical role in developing a culture of equity, inclusion, access, and belonging by defining the district’s mission, vision, and core values. School committees also lead by setting policy that clearly defines what they see as the priorities for school district operations and implementation by the Superintendent as well as the entire district staff. Equitable opportunities for successful outcomes expand when district policies are grounded in the needs of students and are responsive to the local context. School committees also ensure the values and priorities they have defined are reflected in the annual budget they build and present to the community.

In addition to leadership, the school committee is responsible for ensuring the Superintendent and leadership team execute the vision for equity and the established priorities. Moreover, being actively engaged with the community is critical. Leading with an equity lens will create substantial positive change for the entire community. Therefore, school committee members should create opportunities for listening and responding to community input.

Vision for Equity

Developing a clear, explicit, and bold vision for district-wide equity is essential because it communicates to both internal and external stakeholders within the school community that achieving equity is a core priority of the Westerly Public Schools. A district vision not only describes a direction or goal, but also the means

¹³ Association of California Administrators (2018). “Promoting Equity in K-12 Schools for school leaders.”

¹⁴ Spiro, J (December 2017). “Leading Change Handbook.” *The Wallace Foundation*.

of accomplishing it. The vision guides the work of the organization. It is a picture of the future for which people are willing to work collaboratively to attain.¹⁵

Having a vision that explicitly identifies equity, as opposed to more broad statements that encompass all students, is essential. When a vision for equity is not clearly articulated, it is more likely that students of color and students of other historically marginalized identities will continue to be marginalized as a result of policies and district norms. Therefore, district leaders must collaborate with school leadership, teachers, students, families, and community members to foster commitment to a vision centered on equity. In addition, school committee members, as key decision-makers, need to apply the equity vision when creating practices and policies to achieve equity for every student in the district. When a vision statement for equity is explicit, it provides the foundation for setting goals; functions as a guide for the district's structures, policies, and norms; and empowers the district to move forward toward equity.¹⁶

Equity Action Plan

When implementing significant changes that affect all stakeholder groups associated with a district or school, designing an action plan is essential to clarify expectations and hold relevant stakeholders accountable. It is difficult to achieve a systematic approach to improvement without a collaboratively designed action plan.

An action plan:

- Provides an opportunity for reflection,
- brings representatives of diverse stakeholder groups together,
- clarifies and communicates objectives,
- builds consensus and understanding,
- creates ownership and accountability,
- sets a specific timeline, and
- identifies metrics for success.

District and school leaders must instill confidence and trust in stakeholders through clear, transparent, and frequent communication. When there is not clear and consistent communication, especially when a serious incident occurs, stakeholders will fill in the missing pieces through hearsay, rumors, and assumptions to create their own narrative. Words have the power to either instill doubt and mistrust or to unite the community and dispel false narratives. Building trust and uniting a community begins with leadership providing accurate information and communicating that information with purpose, frequently.

Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As a first step in addressing inequity within a district, many school districts hire a DEI Director. This person is charged with examining the landscape of equity within a district and subsequently working to remove barriers that prevent student success and well-being. However, the assumption that one person can resolve inequities within a district that have been in place for many years is not realistic. Equity efforts cannot be one person's job, especially when that person does not possess the power to change

¹⁵ Méndez-Morse, Sylvia (1993). "Vision, Leadership, and Change," Issues About Change, 2 (3). SEDL.

¹⁶ Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2002). "What Do You Call People With Visions? The Role of Vision, Mission and Goals in School Leadership and Improvement" Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration, 9–40. Springer Link.

policies and hold every member of the school district accountable for their actions. Every person who interacts with children in a school system plays an integral role in addressing inequity within the district.¹⁷

Many DEI Directors understand they will face opposition and resistance especially as they identify and vocalize inequities within their district. DEI Directors are hired with the goal of changing outcomes within the district and therefore should not be fearful of the repercussions that may occur from doing their job well.

For district leadership, it is critical to think about systems of support that a DEI Director needs to be successful. Questions focused on a systems approach for DEI Director may include:

1. Where is the DEI Director in the central office hierarchy? Is it clear to other staff that they have decision making power within the district?
2. Have the roles and responsibilities of a DEI Director been distributed to all staff members and stakeholders to ensure a systemwide acknowledgement of the work?
3. Does the role of the DEI Director create professional development that staff are held accountable to attend? Who will hold people accountable for the implementation of culturally responsive practices (i.e., principals, DEI staff, superintendent)?
4. How will the DEI Director be empowered to ensure that a DEI lens is being applied to all decision-making at both the district and building level?

Strengths to Build On: Leadership, Policies, and Practices

- **District leadership has a dedicated commitment to the work of educational equity.** Stakeholders across WPS agreed that leaders throughout the district are vocally committed to the work of equity, have the strong desire to work towards equity as a district, and actively strive to make WPS a more equitable and inclusive place.

Many stakeholders expressed that the WPS Superintendent has done an excellent job of making his values around equity and inclusion clear.

Included in this finding is the Westerly Public Schools Equity Statement, which was approved and adopted in December 2021. While there is a lack of explicitly equity-focused language in the district's broader mission and vision statements, this equity statement serves as a strong supplement to those, and as a foundation to build off of in the future.

- **The district has a culture of looking at data on a regular basis.** Leaders and staff across WPS discussed the importance of data collection and use to inform the work of the district. Having this mindset and expectation already in place will allow the district to more easily launch the focused and targeted work that will come out of this audit.
- **Engagement in this Equity Audit.** Stakeholders across the district cited conducting this Equity Audit in WPS as an important step in identifying equity issues within the district and subsequently creating a multi-year plan to address them. Opening the district up to a variety of voices from school committee members, administration, teachers, parents, and students, ensures all stakeholder groups are heard and valued.

¹⁷ Buchanan-Riveria. E (July 29, 2020). "[Want to hire a DEI Officer? Here is what to know first.](#)" *ASCD Blog*.

- WPS is a resource-rich district committed to meeting student needs.** A consistent theme across stakeholder interviews and focus groups was that WPS does not have challenges with accessing resources and is eager to support student needs as they arise. An example cited included providing instruments to students who couldn't otherwise afford them. However, stakeholders also emphasized that this resource distribution is not set up in a systematic way and is almost always in one-off or student-specific circumstances.

Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance: Leadership, Practices, and Policies

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district leadership, including the School Committee, leads with an equity lens and promotes equity through explicit policies, decision-making, and communications in every aspect of their work. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards this outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of what we might see in a district effectively utilizing this strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
A clear commitment to equity in district communications, documents, and policies	Equity and inclusion are explicitly stated in the district's mission, vision, and core values		X	
	Official district policies, including school committee policies, include explicit expectations for equity and inclusion			X
	Equity is included as an expectation in decision-making in all aspects of the district's work			X
	Stakeholders across the district's community understand and can articulate the district's vision for and commitment to equity			X
	The district has a stated equity-focused decision-making tool			X
A clear commitment to equity in district staffing, actions, and decisions	District-wide and school-based priorities and action plans are focused on equity			X
	The district leaders and school committee consistently utilize an equity-focused decision-making tool in all aspects of their work			X
	Staff and leaders across the district are held accountable for progress towards equity benchmarks			X
	The DEI Director, or similar role, is empowered as a leader and decision-maker and has the resources and support to be successful			N/A
	District leaders are able and willing to facilitate hard conversations and stand for equity-focused decisions in the face of pushback		X	
	When conflict or pushback arises, district leaders rely on equity-centered tools and values to make decisions		X	

Opportunities for Growth: Leadership, Practices, and Policies

- **No clear, shared, or understood equity vision in WPS.** The district's current mission and vision does not explicitly mention equity or inclusion. A consistent theme across interviews and focus groups was a lack of understanding of a clear vision for equity in the district or a denial that an equity vision exists in WPS. Many of the participants who were aware of an equity vision shared that this vision is different depending on who you ask or where you look.

In addition, across stakeholder groups there was a lack of understanding of foundational equity concepts and definitions. Many stakeholders invoked “equality” or “fairness” when discussing equity, which is a misunderstanding of the concept. This aligns with the perception shared by many stakeholders that community members are on board with equity until it is believed that something is being taken from their students.

- **District leadership is seen as inconsistent and often reactionary.** Stakeholders often shared the perception that equity work looks completely different across school buildings as well as district departments. Relatedly, several participants expressed the perception that the district reacts to incidents as they arise but there is a lack of systemic or strategic action based on needs or best practice. Families and students in particular shared perceptions that WPS leadership only addresses incidents of bias or other equity-related issues after they have taken place.

There was also a consistently shared perception of reluctance of school-based staff to have difficult conversations or to communicate around topics related to equity. Some stakeholders shared the belief that this reluctance stems from a fear of community backlash. One district leader shared: “I’m guilty of not speaking up when I know I should because I don’t want my face and name to be dragged through the mud. I am upset with myself for sometimes not being as vocal publicly as I wish I had been.” Another leader agreed, stating: “Sitting in silence is not how I raised my children, but it’s what I am doing now because it affects my whole family when I speak up.”

- **No one is owning the work of equity in Westerly.** While it is important that equity is seen as the responsibility of everyone, the lack of focus in the work is evident in the inconsistent nature of much of the efforts to date. Without an individual or team whose sole or primary focus is the development and coordination of equity-focused strategies, the district's ability to move the needle on the work is limited.
- **District lacks equity-focused policies and goals.** PCG was unable to find the words “equity” or “diversity” in any WPS policies, including school committee policies and district goals and plans. Currently, the WPS Strategic Plan does not explicitly identify equity as a priority area, nor are there specific equity-focused goals or metrics.¹⁸ Additionally, there is no separate action plan specifically focused on equity. The lack of explicit equity-focused language in goals and policies makes it difficult for WPS to set expectations across the community for moving equity work forward. By laying the foundation of the district's priorities through goals and policies, WPS will be able to more strategically target resources and personnel.
- **Equity-driven decision-making and progress monitoring.** Core decisions are not consistently made with an equity lens. There is no comprehensive equity-based framework guiding decision-making at the district level. In addition, while WPS has worked to establish a culture of data monitoring and use across the district, school and district leaders shared the perceptions that this use of data stops before digging into more equity-focused areas, such as deeper root cause

¹⁸ Westerly Public Schools. “[2016-2020 Strategic Plan](#).”

analyses. In addition, school and district staff shared that there is a common understanding that everyone will look at data in their roles in WPS but there is a lack of follow-through or expectations for the use of this data for tracking or adjusting practices.

- **Fear of oppositional community members is hindering district's ability to promote equity.** A common theme that emerged from conversations and survey responses across stakeholder groups (including staff, students, and administrators) was that community members who oppose equity have significant influence over equity-related district-wide decision-making. In particular, school-based staff and leaders shared a fear of certain individuals and groups who have previously verbally attacked WPS staff members online and during school committee meetings and how that has impacted many people's willingness to engage in hard conversations or more explicitly equity-focused topics.
- **Community mindsets are a barrier to the work of educational equity.** Across interviews and focus groups, stakeholders shared concerns about entrenched mindsets in the broader Westerly community. Some examples include:
 - Pervasive feelings of resistance, citing "how we have always done it here;" and perceptions of equity as taking things away from students;
 - Community value placed on how long you have lived in the town leading to othering and exclusion of families, students, and staff who have more recently arrived;
 - The perception that many Westerly residents believe the broader community is inclusive, and that every Westerly student comes to school from the same background and lived experience.

Many stakeholders talked about their perception that deep-seated mindsets against equity are held by some community members who have been in Westerly for generations. While acknowledging that having a close-knit community is a strength, stakeholders from all conversations discussed a perceived reluctance for the Westerly community to acknowledge change or issues and a denial of the need for different strategies or supports.

- **Resources could be used more effectively.** Westerly is a well-resourced district, but district leaders expressed the need for clear procedures and standardizations of practices in order to communicate and connect families and staff with resources. In addition, several concerns related to resources and distribution were raised by stakeholders, including:
 - Perceptions that resources are available but are not being used intentionally or systematically;
 - Well-intentioned resource interventions have had unintended consequences (an example cited: by providing free lunch to all students who needed it, this unintentionally put a spotlight on those students because they all received the same meal at lunch time which was isolating and embarrassing).

One district leader expressed frustration that they had a wealth of resources but that any time they tried to shift allocation processes to be more equitable, there has been massive community backlash.

Recommendations: Leadership, Practices, and Policies

1. **Set a clear vision and common language for equity across WPS.** In order to affect any change in WPS regarding equity, the district needs to first clarify, define, and communicate an explicit vision

for equity in WPS. While the existing Equity Statement is a strong first step, this should be developed further. Important elements of this process include:

- Define and communicate how WPS's existing vision, mission statements, and goals align to a comprehensive equity vision.
- Engage a diverse range of stakeholders to contribute to and build a shared equity vision that all can rally around. Student voices should be actively included throughout the process. Making an explicit effort to connect with stakeholders will lead to stronger relationships with all stakeholder groups and better buy in.
- Place the equity vision statement front and center throughout the district. It should be placed in all public places and included on the website home page, in every school, at the district office, on communication materials, in multiple languages, etc.
- Include definitions of terms and expectations for how and why they will be used in WPS.

2. Develop or select and utilize an explicit equity decision-making lens for all decisions made within WPS. Adopt an equity decision-making framework through which all decisions are reviewed. In order to end individual, institutional, and structural racism and bias in the district, all leaders must consistently and intentionally apply an equity-lens to every decision made. When making decisions within WPS, leaders should ask, "Who is being well served, and who is left out or harmed by the new policy, practice, or program?" It is easy to say that all decisions will be made with equity in mind, but without an explicit Equity Impact Analysis tool, protocol, or framework, it is highly unlikely that the district can stay true to the vision. This also involves the development of training and guidance for utilization and application of equity tools by all staff members.

3. Set expectations for all members of the WPS community. Adhering to the equity goals and strategic actions of WPS should be an expectation set for all community and staff members. There are three major elements to this recommendation:

- Revise all district-level policies and processes to clearly define expectations for the use of data in reviewing and revising practices from an equity lens on an ongoing basis.
- Develop a messaging and communications guide for all members of the WPS to establish common language and responses.
- Create explicit explanations of how the district expects teachers to handle difficult conversations and the ways in which the district will support teachers in the face of pushback.

Consistent, comprehensive trainings and learning resources and opportunities should be developed and directly tied to all expectations.

4. Undertake a resources-specific equity review. WPS needs the immediate development and implementation of standard decision-making and process documentation from an equity lens. In the longer term, the district should consider undertaking a full resources-specific equity review. Elements would include:

- A facilities equity analysis that looks at facilities quality, quantity, and availability by student subgroups;
- A student needs analysis by building and classroom that looks at building- and classroom-level analysis of student populations, student resource and learning needs, cross-walked with an analysis of financial resources and staff assignments, including staff qualifications and experience.

5. **Embed equity into district-wide strategic plan/strategic goals.** Given WPS's current strategic plan was initially developed for 2016-2020, we recommend that the district engages in a strategic planning process intentionally involving diverse voices from across the WPS community. Equity-focused metrics should be embedded within each of the priority goal areas of the plan. In the meantime, the current strategic plan should be reviewed by a representative group of stakeholders and updated to reflect the district's evolving equity goals. Use disaggregated data to measure progress.

SECTION 2: STUDENT DISCIPLINE

Guiding Question: Are student discipline practices consistent, transparent, and equitable for all students?

Research-Based Best Practices: Student Discipline

When looking at student discipline as a measure of educational equity, disproportionality occurs when students from one racial, gender, or other demographic subgroup are disciplined at markedly higher rates than their peers. Many studies have shown over different samples and years that Black students and male students are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers.¹⁹ Research by the Indiana Education Policy Center shows that despite the disproportionate rates of disciplinary referral for African American students, there is no evidence that these students act out more frequently than their White peers.²⁰ Disproportionality in disciplinary referrals have significant negative impacts on disciplined students, especially students of color. Teachers may hold negative assumptions about the ability, aspirations, and work ethic of students who are disciplined more often, therefore impacting the students' opportunities for success in the classroom.²¹ Similarly, research shows a strong correlation between suspensions and low achievement and dropping out of school.²²

The U.S. Department of Education has created guidance for district and school leaders and stakeholders to promote improvements in school discipline grounded in best practices research. The guidance is organized by three guiding principles and subsequent action steps:²³

Guiding Principle 1: Create positive climates and focus on prevention.

Action Steps:

1. Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates.
2. Prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports.
3. Promote social and emotional learning.
4. Provide regular training and supports to all school personnel.
5. Collaborate with local agencies and other stakeholders.
6. Ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers' roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.

Guiding Principle 2: Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors.

Action Steps:

1. Set high expectations for behavior and adopt an instructional approach to discipline.

¹⁹ Rudd, Tom (February 2014). "Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline: Implicit Bias is Heavily Implicated." Kirwan Institute Issue Brief, 1-8. *Ohio State University*.

²⁰ Skiba, Russell (June 2000). "The Color of Discipline. Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment." Indiana Education Policy Center, 1-26. *Indiana University*.

²¹ Rudd, Tom (February 2014).

²² Ibid.

²³ U.S. Department of Education (2014). "Departments of Justice and Education Issue School Discipline Guidance to Promote Safe, Inclusive Schools." *Office of Public Affairs*.

2. Involve families, students, and school personnel, and communicate regularly and clearly.
3. Ensure that clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences apply for misbehavior.
4. Create policies that include appropriate procedures for students with disabilities and due process for all students.
5. Remove students from the classroom only as a last resort, ensure that alternative settings provide academic instruction, and return students to class as soon as possible.

Guiding Principle 3: Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

Action Steps:

1. Train all school staff to apply school discipline policies and practices in a fair and equitable manner.
2. Use proactive, data-driven, and continuous efforts, including gathering feedback from families, students, teachers, and school personnel to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences.

Student Discipline Risk Ratio Analysis

The section below examines data on student discipline in Westerly Public Schools disaggregated by student characteristics of race and gender. One of the analyses included is a calculation of risk ratio which is used to compare student groups in discipline referrals to examine whether students from different subgroups are disproportionately represented.

This risk ratio analysis method compares the likelihood of a student in a certain demographic subgroup to have a particular educational outcome to the likelihood that students of all other demographic subgroups will have the same outcome. To calculate risk in educational settings, the risk of a particular outcome for students in one racial or ethnic group (numerator) is divided by the risk of that same outcome for children in all other racial ethnic groups within the same setting (e.g., school or LEA) (denominator). The example below illustrates this calculation using disciplinary referrals.

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{Risk} \\
 \text{Ratio}
 \end{array}
 =
 \frac{
 \begin{array}{c}
 \text{Number of students from a subgroup with a discipline referral} \div \text{the total} \\
 \text{number of students in the data set from that subgroup}
 \end{array}
 }{
 \begin{array}{c}
 \text{Total number of students with discipline referrals excluding the same} \\
 \text{subgroup} \div \text{total number of students in the data set excluding the subgroup}
 \end{array}
 }$$

Numerator
of students from a demographic subgroup with a discipline referral ÷ the total number of students in the school from that demographic subgroup
Ex: # of Hispanic or Latinx students with a disciplinary referral ÷ # of all Hispanic or Latinx students at the school
Denominator
of students with a discipline referral excluding the same demographic subgroup ÷ total number of students at the school excluding that demographic subgroup
Ex: # of students with a disciplinary referral excluding Hispanic or Latinx students ÷ # of total students at the school excluding Hispanic or Latinx students

A risk ratio of 1.0 means there is no association between the student's demographic group and their likelihood of receiving a disciplinary referral. A risk ratio of 2.0 or greater indicates a risk of overrepresentation in disciplinary referrals, while a risk ratio of less than 1.0 indicates possible underrepresentation. Student subgroups with fewer than ten (10) students in the school were excluded from this analysis.

Strategies Analysis at-a-Glance: Student Discipline

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district ensures fairness, equity, and continuous improvement in applying discipline practices. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
Discipline policies that are consistent, equitable, and align with restorative justice practices	The district has a discipline matrix that standardizes clear and consistent disciplinary policies			X
	Administrators and teachers are proficient in applying a district-wide discipline matrix			X
	No student demographic groups are disproportionately represented in students who are disciplined			X
Creates positive climates and focus on prevention	School staff are trained to apply school discipline policies and practices in a fair and equitable manner			X
	Administrators use proactive, data-driven, and continuous efforts, including gathering feedback from families, students, teachers, and school personnel to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences		X	

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district ensures fairness, equity, and continuous improvement in applying discipline practices. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
	The district provides regular training and supports to all school personnel regarding discipline			X
	The district prioritizes the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports	X		
	The district promotes social and emotional learning	X		
	The district uses restorative disciplinary practices		X	
Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors	There are high expectations for behavior and school and district leaders have adopted an instructional approach to discipline	X		
	Families, students, and school personnel are involved and communicated with regularly and clearly		X	
	Clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences apply for misbehavior		X	
	Disciplinary policies include appropriate procedures for students with disabilities and due process for all students		X	

Key Quantitative Findings: Student Discipline

District-wide Discipline

The following data was provided by the Westerly Public Schools for the 2021-22 school year for all six schools in the district. This analysis includes all types of infractions (e.g., inappropriate behavior, interrupting class, excess tardiness, tobacco/alcohol, etc.) that resulted in an in-school or out-of-school suspension (cited as “disciplinary referrals” in the following analysis).

Figure 5. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Race/Ethnicity: 2021-22

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Hispanic or Latinx	255	22
Two or more races	206	19
White	2,077	93
Total	2,665	147

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 6. Discipline Referral Risk by Race: 2021-22

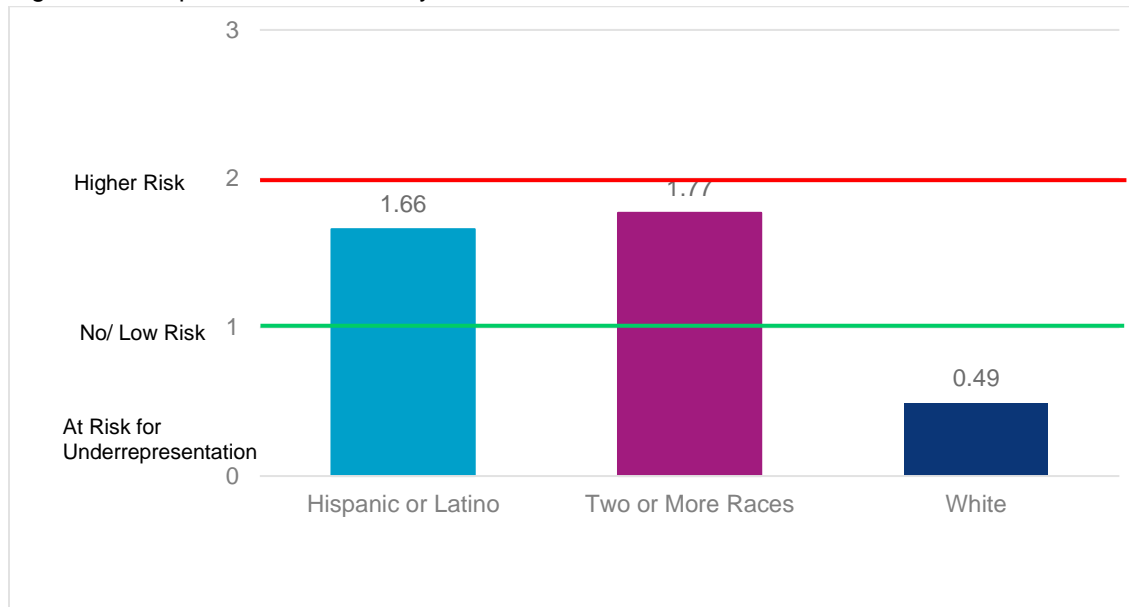


Figure 7. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Gender: 2021-22

Gender	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Female	1,302	64
Male	1,358	83
Total	2,665	147

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are gender non-binary students.

Figure 8. Discipline Referral Risk by Gender: 2021-22

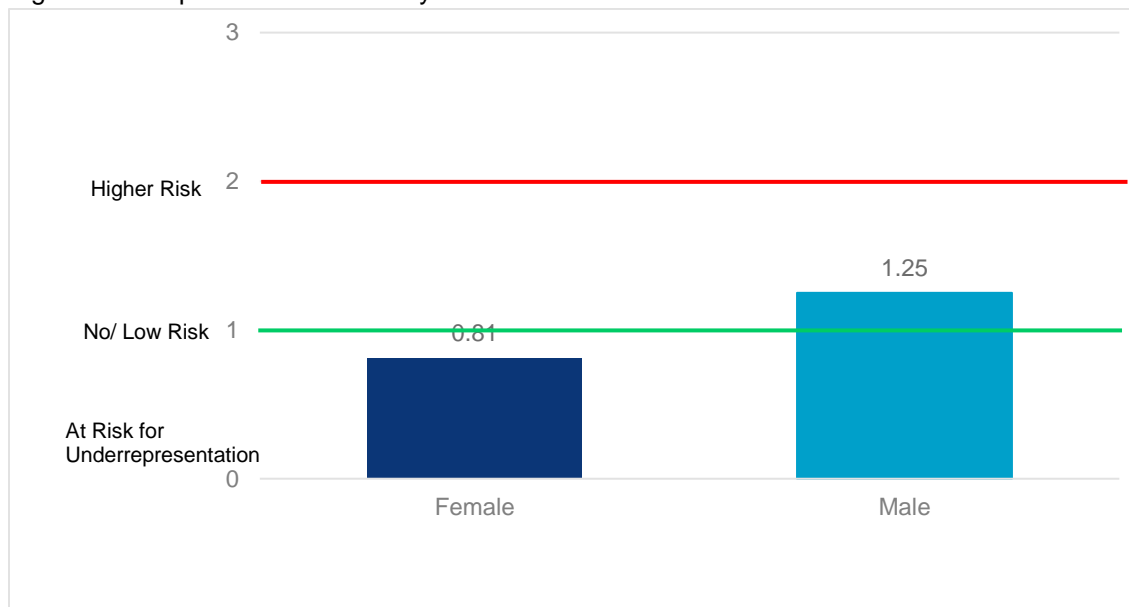


Figure 9. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Learning Status: 2021-22

Learning Status	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Differently Abled Students	515	34
General Education Students	2,150	113
Total	2,665	147

Figure 10. Discipline Referral Risk by Learning Status: 2021-22

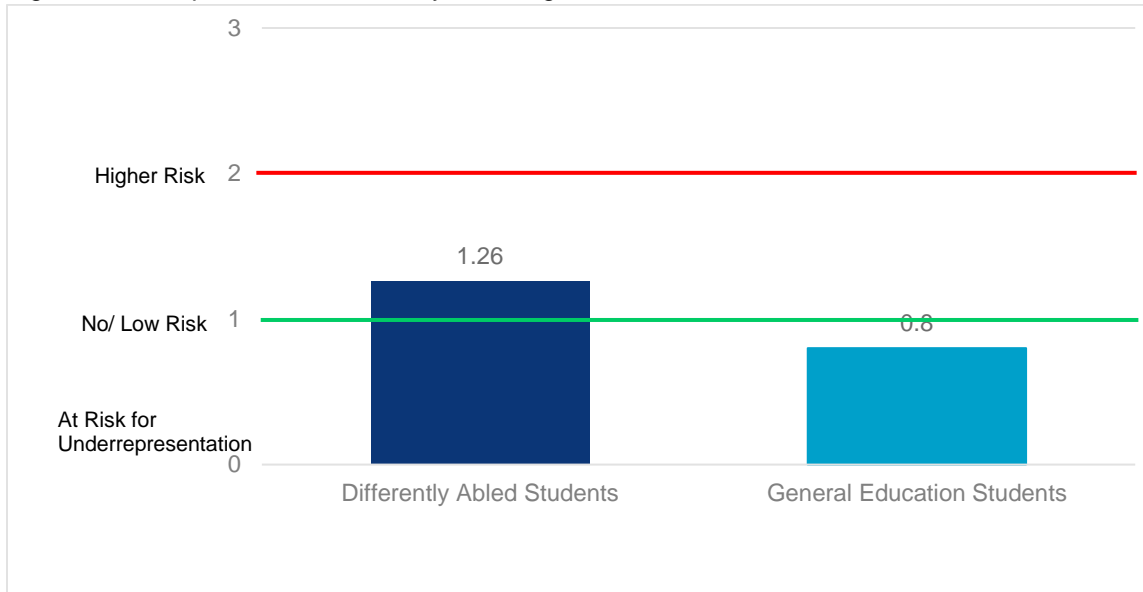
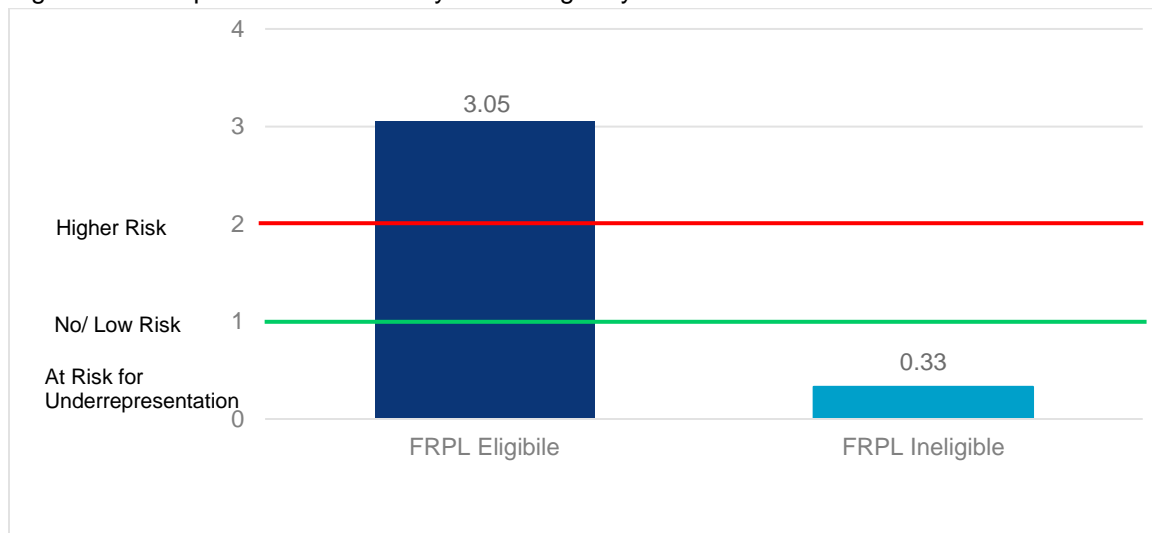


Figure 11. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by FRPL Eligibility: 2021-22

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
FRPL Eligible	943	92
Not FRPL Eligible	1,722	55
Total	2,665	147

Figure 12. Discipline Referral Risk by FRPL Eligibility: 2021-22



Discipline Risk Ratio Analysis:

- Hispanic or Latinx students have **1.66 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Multiracial students (two or more races) have **1.77 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Male students have **1.25 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Differently abled students have **1.26 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Free and reduced-price lunch eligible students have **3.05 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.

Disproportionality in Discipline Referral Counts

The above risk ratios look at the demographics of the individual students who received a discipline referral during SY2021-22, regardless of how many referrals each student received over the course of the year. This risk ratio looks to answer the question: “What is the risk of a student of a certain demographic group to receive at least one disciplinary referral over the course of the year as compared to his or her peers?” Another way to look at this disproportionality is to look at the total *number* of discipline referrals given across student demographic groups.

The below table contains the percentage of discipline referrals given by subgroup compared to rate of disciplinary referrals across the entire student body. Student demographic groups with fewer than 10 students are not included in the data below. We show that Hispanic or Latinx students, multiracial students, differently abled students and FRPL eligible students are overrepresented amongst students who were disciplined in SY2021-22.

Figure 13. Disciplinary Referrals by Student Demographics: District-wide 2021-22

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent Receiving Disciplinary Referrals
All Students	6%
Hispanic or Latinx	9%
Two or More Races	9%
White	4%
Female	5%
Male	6%
Differently Abled Students	7%
FRPL Eligible Students	10%

Key Qualitative Findings: Student Discipline

Student discipline practices emerged as a significant theme across focus groups, interviews, and open survey responses.

- **Growing practice of data usage in the district.** Teachers, paraprofessionals, and district leadership mentioned the emerging data-driven culture in Westerly Public School. Several practices have been implemented to examine achievement data to identify student needs and form intervention plans. These established practices will lend themselves well to expanding the data-digs to include disaggregated discipline data. This will ensure that no student subgroups are disproportionately overrepresented in disciplined students.
- **Prevalence of bullying.** Students, parents, and guardians shared perceptions of the bullying culture in schools in Westerly. This ranged from physical altercations to students getting hassled in the hallways between classes. One student remarked that “you can’t go to a class without getting a comment at you. In the hallways, people will say mean things. There is not a day that it doesn’t happen.” In certain instances, these remarks were targeted at student’s race, sexuality, or disability.
- **Lack of teacher response to bullying.** Parents, guardians, students, and district leadership shared the perception that some teachers are ill-equipped to handle bullying incidents in their classroom. Some stakeholders held the belief that teachers were turning a blind eye to bullying occurring in their classrooms and choosing not to address discriminatory comments. Others believed that teachers are unaware of the bullying.
- **Strict attendance policies.** Students, parents, and staff in the district noted that there are strict attendance policies at the middle and high schools. One staff member noted that “the attendance protocol at the high school is very punitive and disproportionately impacts BIPOC students.” These policies may be well-intended but could be further limiting students’ engagement with school.
- **Lack of anonymity.** Students, teachers, and district leadership shared the perception of a lack of anonymity in reporting instances of bullying. Those who shared this also referenced the close-knit community of Westerly and the hesitation to elevate problems to teachers and building leaders due to their relationships with other staff, parents, and community members.

Recommendations: Student Discipline

1. **Examine current disciplinary policies and practices from an equity lens to detect for biases and inconsistencies.** The review of discipline data finds that FRPL eligible students are far more

likely to receive a disciplinary referral than their non-eligible peers. WPS should re-examine discipline policies to promote a clear, fair, and appropriate approach to determining consequences for misbehavior. Specifically, revisit the attendance policy keeping in mind the socioeconomic situations that some Westerly students are experiencing. Not all Westerly students have access to consistent transportation to school, or having competing responsibilities during the school day that may limit their school participation. Attendance policies should be aimed at maximizing in-school time for students.

- 2. Conduct professional learning on restorative discipline practices and conflict resolution between students.** Restorative discipline practices shift the focus away from the mainstream punitive discipline which functions to create feelings of shame and embarrassment and restrict learning opportunities from students who act out by removing them from the classroom environment. Punitive discipline often backfires on students who are acting out, often amplifying the problems that led to the original infraction. Successful restorative discipline gives students the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, reflect on where their behavior came from and learn from the experience. Additionally, equipping teachers with the toolkit to recognize and address bullying between students will go far in classroom maintenance and providing all students with safe spaces.
- 3. Leverage discipline data.** Continue to build upon the strong data focus of the district; discipline data should regularly be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and learning ability to identify student groups that are over or under-represented in discipline referrals. This will inform the district about any need to revisit and revise disciplinary policies and professional learning gaps. District leadership should communicate findings from the review of discipline infraction and referral data to staff of all levels.
- 4. Review and refine the process for anonymous and accessible reporting.** Providing an easy-to-use tool, like a mobile app with options to report an incident or access resources for help, could empower students to speak up about issues in the community and improve school climate. WPS should develop a plan for including anonymous reporting for race-based harassment and incidents of bias in a reporting system that would not compromise student anonymity or allow for staff biases and loyalties to inform their responses to incidents.

SECTION 3: STUDENT OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO ADVANCED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Guiding Questions: How are student outcomes and access to advanced learning linked to student characteristics and demographics? What tiered support strategies are offered for positive student outcomes?

Research-Based Best Practices: Student Outcomes

Dr. Wayne Hoy and his colleagues suggest that connecting three important characteristics of schools can produce a potent and positive influence on academic achievement, even in the face of low socioeconomic status, previous performance, and other demographic variables such as school size or minority enrollment. Hoy's definition of "academic optimism" is grounded in social cognitive theory and positive psychology. It embraces the following characteristics:

1. **Academic emphasis** – the extent to which a school is driven by a belief system that includes high expectations for students to achieve academically.
2. **Collective efficacy of the faculty** – the belief that the faculty can make a positive difference in student learning.
3. **Faculty's trust in parents and students** – faculty, administrators, parents, and students cooperate to improve student learning; trust and cooperation among parents, teachers and students influence student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices.²⁴

The shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty has the capacity to help students achieve, and that the students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them in the effort—in brief, a school-wide confidence that students will succeed academically. A school with high "academic optimism" believes that faculty can make a difference, students can learn, and achieve high levels of academic performance. Findings from research showed that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' academic optimism and students' academic achievement.

²⁴ Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). "Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement." Working Paper. *The Ohio State University*.

Strategies Analysis at-a-Glance: Student Outcomes and Access

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district is driven by a shared belief system that emphasizes high expectations for all students' academic achievement. All students are active participants in their learning experiences and receive the support they need to succeed. All students have access to enriching extracurricular opportunities. District decision-making is driven by ongoing analysis of student level data. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
The district offers professional learning on implicit bias for school staff and administrators to combat potential bias that affects students	School staff and administrators are proficient in recognizing and countering their own implicit biases		X	
	School staff and administrators are proficient in recognizing and countering their colleagues' implicit biases			X
There is clear communication from the district that there are high expectations for academic achievement from all students	District has explicit language in their strategic plan and other relevant materials affirming that all students in the district are capable of high academic achievement	X		
The district has strategies to prioritize closing the achievement gaps and opportunity gaps between student subgroups, ensuring that every student has access to supports and services they need to be successful in school and beyond	There are no significant gaps between student demographic groups when analyzing performance on the state standardized test			X
	There are no significant differences in graduation rates across student demographic groups			X
The district has strategies to ensure equitable enrollment of students in advanced coursework	Enrollment in advanced classes is representative of the student body			X
District policies for IEP assignments follow consistent evaluation rubrics developed from an equity lens	No student demographic group is disproportionately represented amongst students with IEPs			X
The district has systems in place for students to share input to inform school and	There are clear, accessible, well-known channels and opportunities for students to give feedback to	X		

Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district is driven by a shared belief system that emphasizes high expectations for all students' academic achievement. All students are active participants in their learning experiences and receive the support they need to succeed. All students have access to enriching extracurricular opportunities. District decision-making is driven by ongoing analysis of student level data. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
district decision-making/be actively engaged in their education experiences	inform classroom-, school-, and district-level decisions			
	School staff routinely engage in PD on effective practices to incorporate student voice into daily classroom instruction			X
	Students are aware of and utilize opportunities to connect with teachers and seek additional support, whether academic or non-academic	X		
The district has a strategy to promote equitable access to extracurricular activities	Students from low-income families can participate in extracurricular activities at reduced or no cost	X		
	After-school transportation is provided to all students participating in an after-school enrichment activity (sports, music, theater, academic support)		X	
	Information regarding extracurricular activities is shared widely in an easily accessible location to all stakeholders, including non-English speaking families		X	
The district has processes in place and a designated data team responsible for analyzing student-level data related to access to advanced coursework, achievement outcomes, and access to extracurricular opportunities	Data team routinely examines data from advanced course enrollment, AP performance, SAT participation, SAT performance and state assessment scores to understand which students are being underserved	X		
	Data team routinely examines data from IEP and 504 assignments to identify disproportionality amongst student subgroups		X	
	Data team routinely examines discipline data to identify disproportionality amongst student subgroups		X	
	Findings from data team are routinely summarized and presented to school and district leadership	X		

Key Findings: Student Outcomes

Student Assessment Outcomes District-wide Trends 2018 – 2022

In 2018, the Rhode Island Department of Education introduced the new Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics for grades 3-8. PCG examined gaps in outcomes between all students and identified subgroups on RICAS tests from 2018 to 2022.²⁵ Due to the RICAS being administered in the spring, we exclude data from 2019-20. The years analyzed were SY2017-18, SY2018-19, SY2020-21 and SY2021-22. In the following section, we employ terminology for identified subgroups that were used for statewide reporting.²⁶ The terminology used by the Rhode Island Department of Education includes “students with disabilities”, “economically disadvantaged students” and “English Learners” to refer to differently abled students, FRPL eligible students and multilingual learners, respectively.

On both assessments in 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic, Westerly students demonstrated a drop in proficiency rates. From 2019 to 2021, proficiency for all students in Westerly dropped by 15-percentage points on ELA and by 20-percentage points on mathematics. Gains were made in 2022; the all-students proficiency rate improved on both ELA and mathematics by 4 percentage points and 12 percentage points, respectively. In 2022, 41% of all students were meeting or exceeding expectations on ELA, and 30% of all students on mathematics. The following longitudinal analysis shows that students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic students, Black or African American students, American Indian and Alaska Native students, and multiracial students have been consistently underperforming on standardized assessment when compared with their peers.

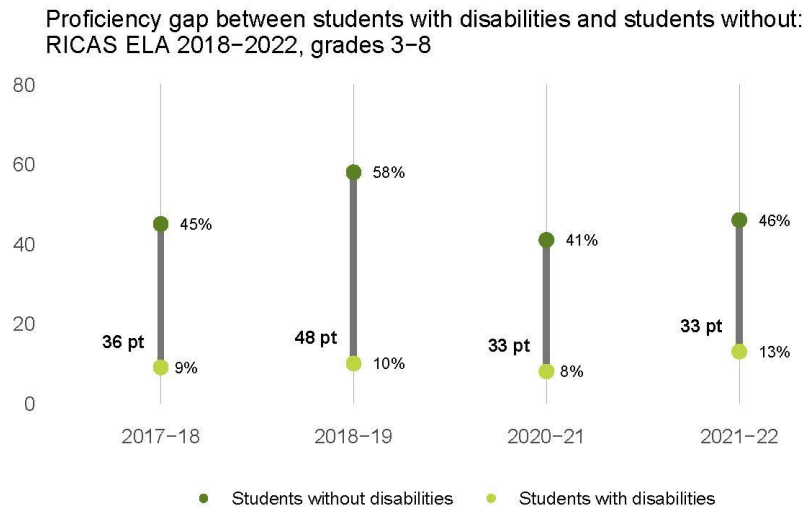
Students with Disabilities

The proficiency gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities on the ELA assessment has been significant over the previous 4 tests, hitting a 48-percentage point gap high in 2019. Students with disabilities demonstrated smaller losses over the COVID-19 pandemic than the students without disabilities rate. However, in 2021 only 8% of students with disabilities were meeting or exceeding expectations on ELA. From 2021 to 2022, the students with disabilities proficiency rate and the students without disabilities proficiency rate both increased by 5 percentage points. On the mathematics exam, the proficiency rate for students with disabilities has been relatively unchanged over the previous 4 tests, ranging from a high of 10% in 2018 to a low of 8% in 2022. In 2022, there remains a 26-percentage point gap between the rate for students without disabilities and the rate for students with disabilities. Data was unreported for the subgroup in 2021.

²⁵ Rhode Island Department of Education. “ADP.”

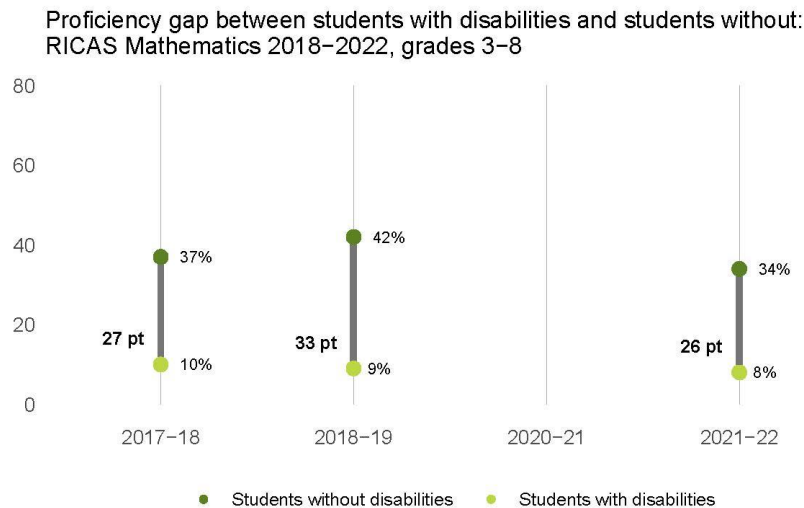
²⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education (June 2, 2022). “[Data Collection Specifications – Enrollment](#).”

Figure 14. Gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 15. Gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

English Learners

The proficiency rate for current English Learners (ELs) on the ELA assessment is consistently and significantly lower than the proficiency rate for not English Learners, ranging from 25-percentage points to 29-percentage points in the years analyzed. Current ELs demonstrated sizable gains in proficiency from 2021 to 2022 jumping 8-percentage points, twice the 4-percentage point gain demonstrated by not-ELs. In 2022, 17% of current ELs were meeting or exceeding expectations on the ELA assessment. Data for the current ELs was unreported for the 2018-19 RICAS. The proficiency gaps on the mathematics exam between current ELs and not-ELs are smaller, with only a 3-percentage point difference in 2022. Despite

demonstrating mathematics learning losses over the COVID-19 pandemic, EL students made impressive gains in 2022, jumping from 6% proficiency in 2021 to 27% proficiency in 2022.

Figure 16. Gap between current EL students and not-EL students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8

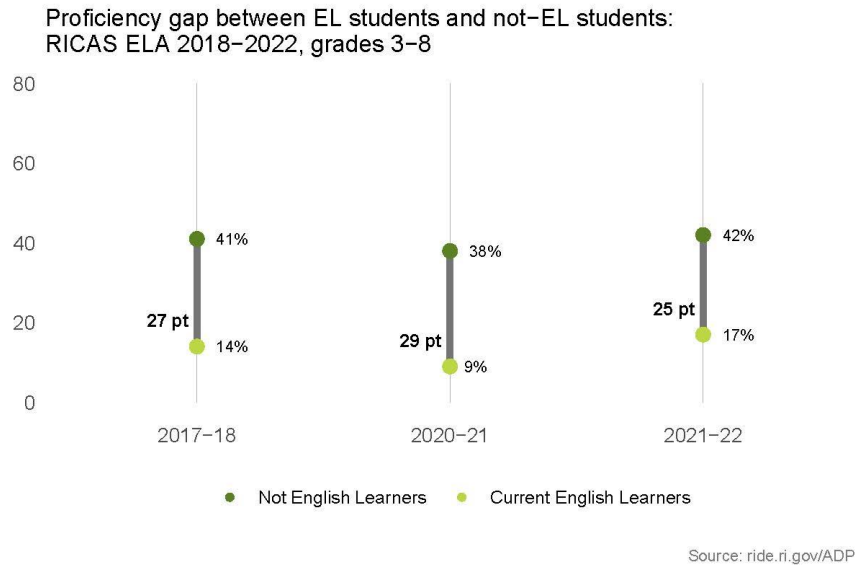
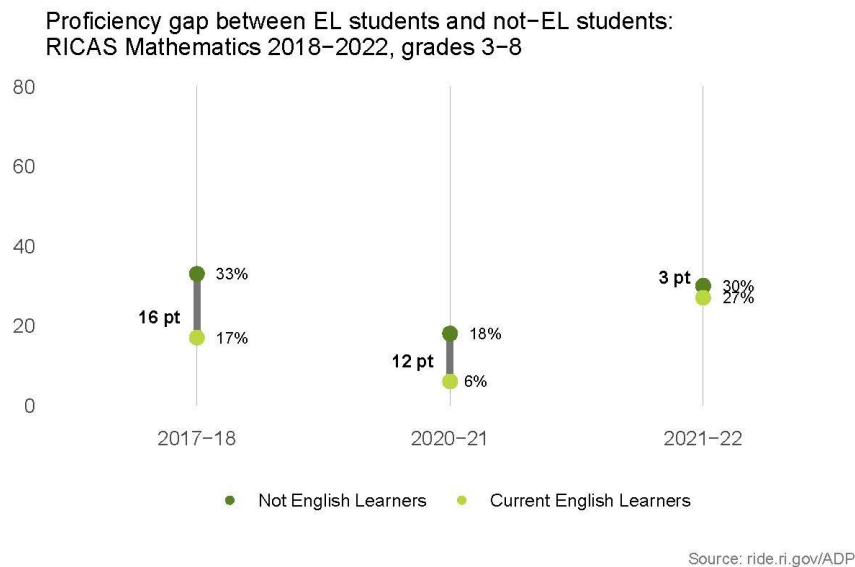


Figure 17. Gap between current EL students and not-EL students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Economically Disadvantaged Students

The proficiency gap between economically disadvantaged students and not economically disadvantaged students on the ELA assessment has been within the 19-23 percentage point range for the previous 4 tests. The losses seen over the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2019 to 2021, for economically disadvantaged students mirrored those of not-economically disadvantaged students (16-percentage point drop, and 17-percentage point drop, respectively). Both subgroups made gains in 2022; a 7-percentage point increase

for economically disadvantaged students and a 5-percentage point increase for not-economically disadvantaged. In 2022, 29% of all economically disadvantaged students were meeting or exceeding expectations on the ELA assessment. On the mathematics assessment, economically disadvantaged students demonstrated smaller losses from 2019 to 2021 than not economically disadvantaged students; however, in 2021 only 8% of economically disadvantaged students were meeting or exceeding RICAS mathematics expectations. Gains were made by both subgroups in 2022; a 10-percentage point increase for economically disadvantaged students, and a 16-percentage point increase for not economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 18. Gap between economically disadvantaged students and not economically disadvantaged students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8

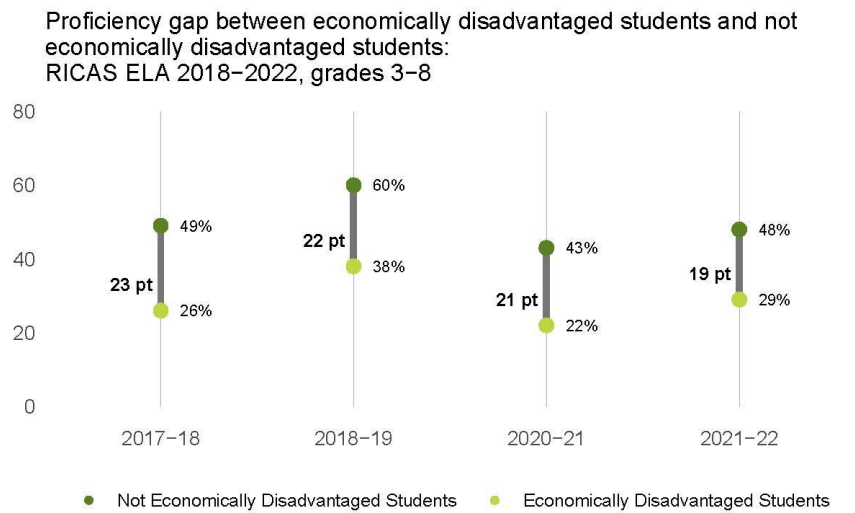
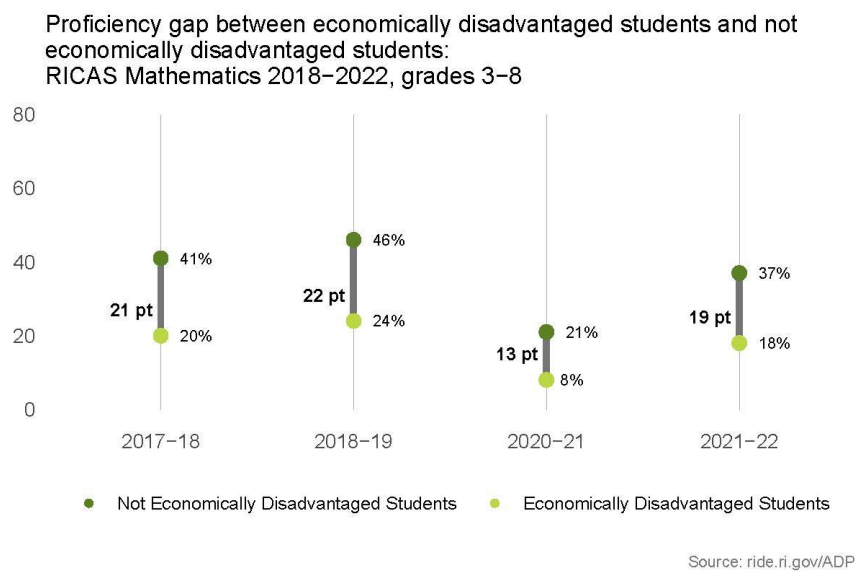


Figure 19. Gap between economically disadvantaged students and not-economically disadvantaged students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Hispanic or Latinx Students

The proficiency gap between Hispanic students and all students on the ELA assessment has been less than 10-percentage points for the previous 4 tests, with a low of a 6-percentage point difference in 2019. Similar to the all-students rate, the Hispanic student proficiency rate fell over the COVID-19 pandemic (18 percentage point from drop 2019 to 2021) and made up some losses in 2022 (increasing from a 28% proficiency rate in 2021 to a 34% proficiency rate in 2022). Similarly on the mathematics assessment, the Hispanic student proficiency rate has followed a similar trajectory to the all-student rate. In 2021, only 13% of Hispanic students were demonstrating math proficiency, and 18% of all students were. In 2022, 21% of Hispanic students demonstrated math proficiency, 9-percentage points below the all-student rate of 30% proficient.

Figure 20. Gap between Hispanic or Latinx students and all students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8

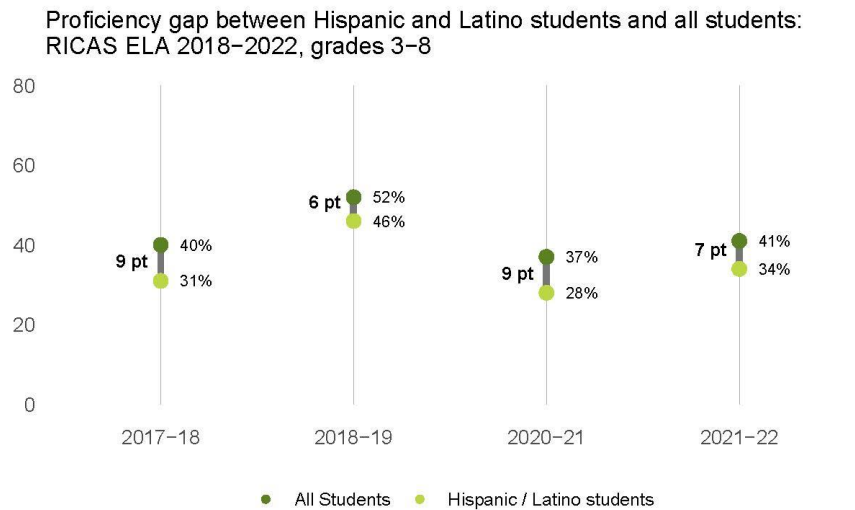
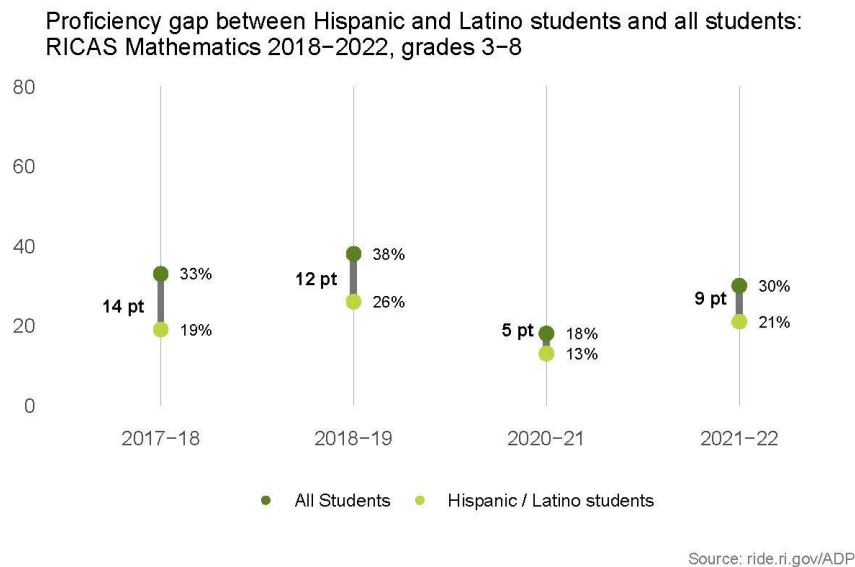


Figure 21. Gap between Hispanic or Latinx students and all students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Black and African American Students

RICAS data for Black and African American students was unreported for the 2021 and 2022 assessment. On the ELA assessment, Black and African American students have a significantly lower proficiency rate than the all-students rate: there was a 24-percentage point difference in 2018 and a 26-percentage point difference in 2019. In 2019, 26% of Black or African American students were meeting or exceeding expectations on the ELA assessment. On the mathematics assessment, only 5% of Black or African American students demonstrated proficiency in both 2018 and 2019. In 2019, there was a 33-percentage point gap between the proficiency rate of Black or African American students (5%) and all students (38%).

Figure 22. Gap between Black or African American students and all students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8

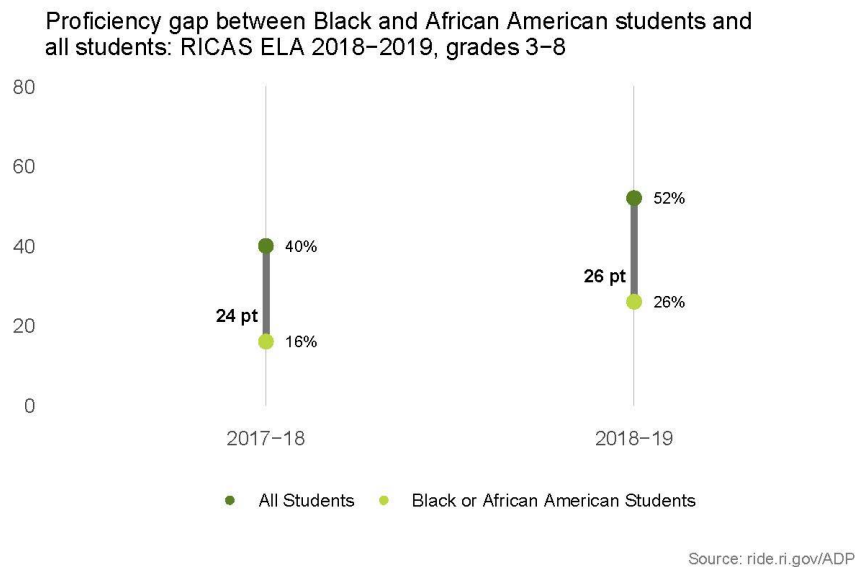
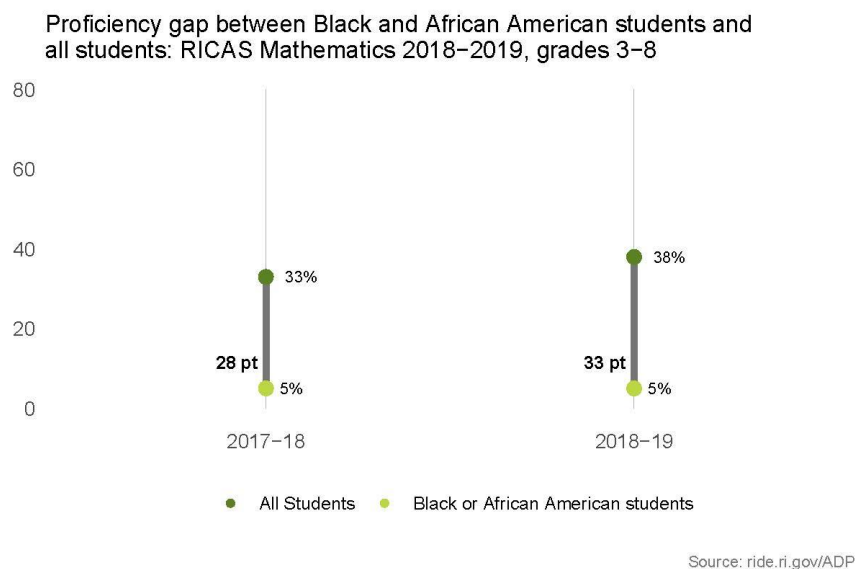


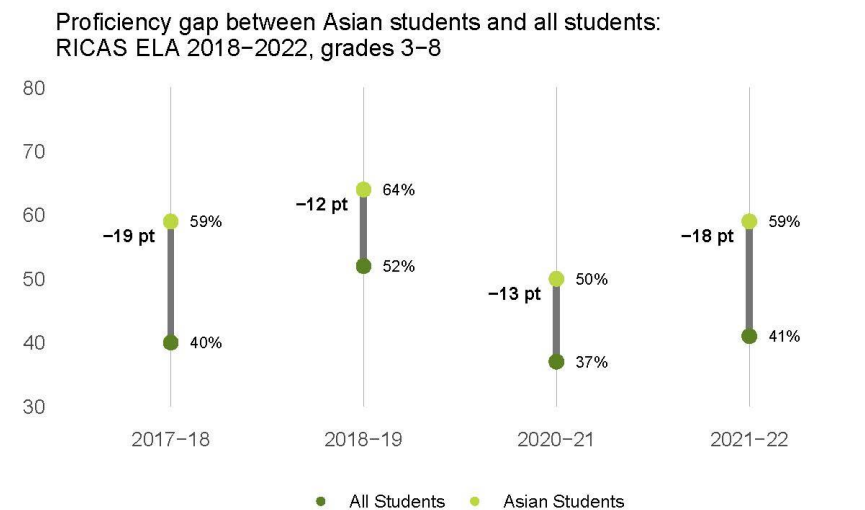
Figure 23. Gap between Black or African American students and all students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Asian Students

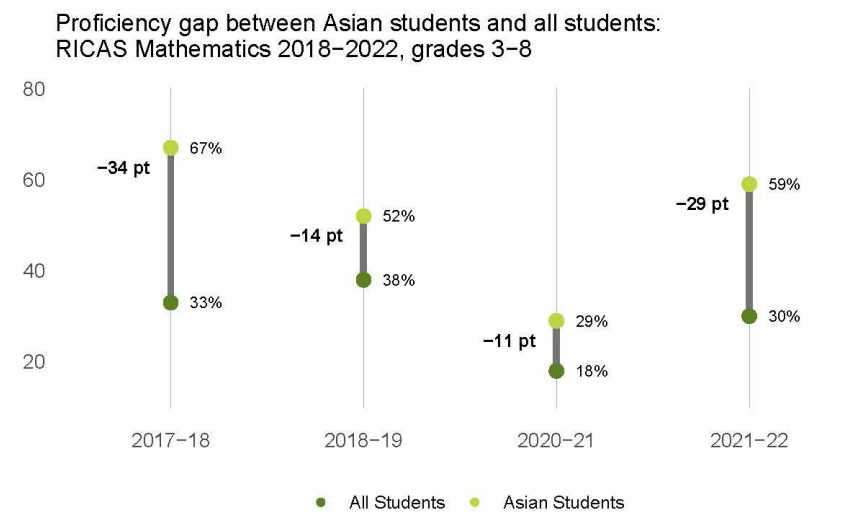
Asian students have consistently achieved a higher proficiency rate on the ELA and mathematics RICAS tests when compared to the all-student rate. On the ELA assessment from 2019 to 2021, Asian students' proficiency rate dropped 14-percentage points, similar to the all-student proficiency rate which dropped 15-percentage points. Asian students were able to make up ground in 2022; the Asian student proficiency rate jumped 8-percentage points from 2021 to 2022, double the 4-percentage point gain in the all-students rate. In 2022, 59% of Asian students demonstrated proficiency on the ELA assessment compared to 41% of all students. On the mathematics exam, the Asian student proficiency rate was dropping in the years before 2022; from 67% proficient in 2018 to 52% in 2019 to 29% in 2021. However, significant gains were made on the most recent assessment; in 2022, 59% of Asian students were meeting or exceeded expectations on mathematics compared to 30% of all students.

Figure 24. Gap between Asian students and all students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, gr. 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 25. Gap between Asian students and all students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, gr. 3-8

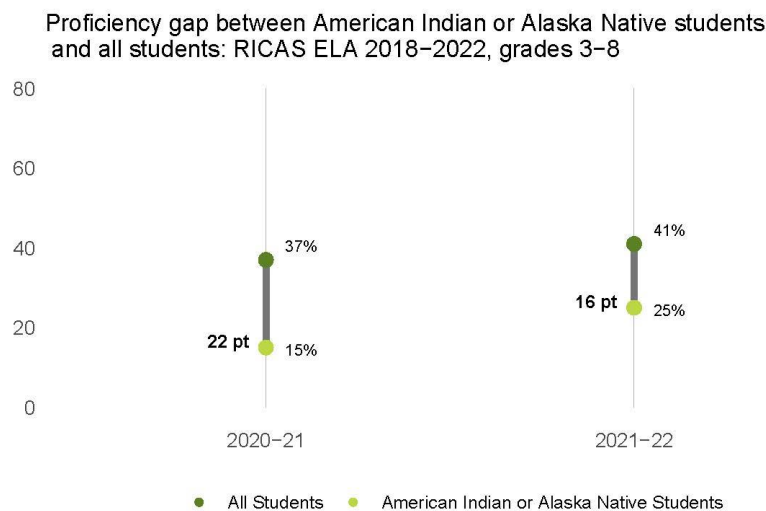


Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

American Indian and Alaska Native Students

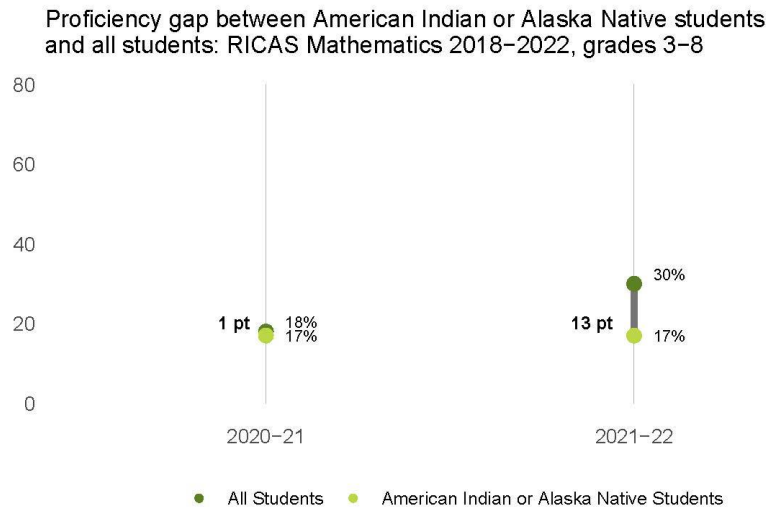
RICAS data for American Indian and Alaska Native students was unreported for the 2018 and 2019 assessment. There is a significant gap between the proficiency rate for American Indian and Alaska Native students and all students on the ELA assessment in the years reported (22-percentage point gap in 2021, 16-percentage point gap in 2022). In this time, the proficiency rate for American Indian and Alaska Native students jumped 10-percentage points, from 15% proficiency in 2021 to 25% proficiency in 2022. This was more than double the gains seen in the all-students proficiency rate over the same years. On the mathematics assessment, American Indian and Alaska Native students demonstrated no gains from 2021 to 2022, the proficiency rate was 17% for both 2021 and 2022. In 2021, there was only a 1-percentage point difference between the proficiency rate for American Indian and Alaska Native students and for all students, but in 2022 the gap grew to a 13-percentage point difference.

Figure 26. Gap between American Indian/Alaska Native students and all students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8.



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 27. Gap between American Indian/Alaska Native students and all students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8

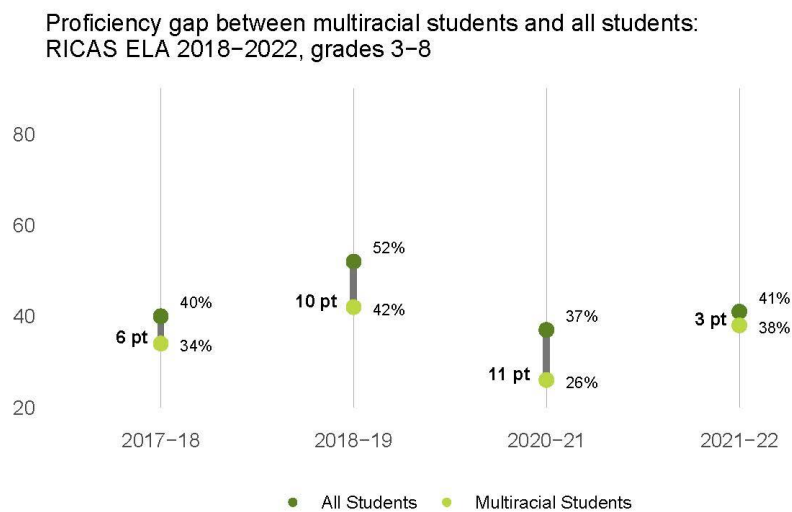


Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Multiracial Students (Two or More Races)

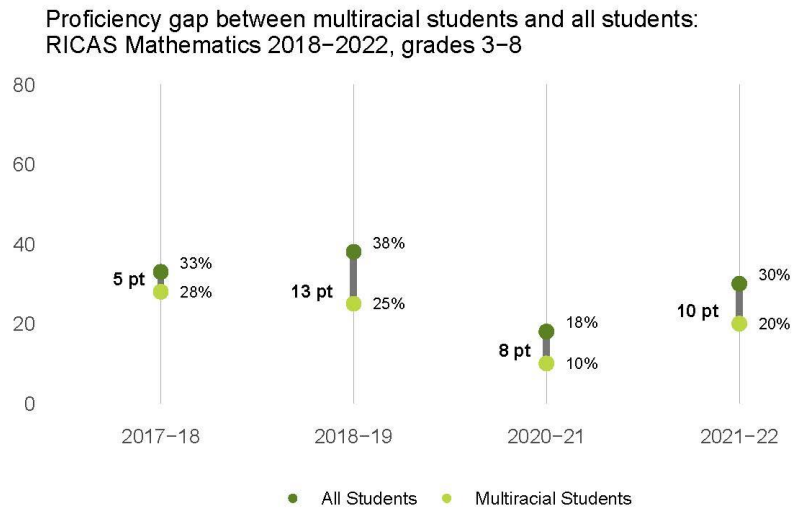
Over the previous 4 ELA assessments, the proficiency gap between multiracial students and all students has been at or below an 11-percentage point difference. The four-year high of an 11-percentage point difference occurred in 2021, when the proficiency rate for multiracial students hit a low of 26%. Progress was made the following year: in 2022, 38% of multiracial students were meeting or exceeding expectations on the ELA assessment, compared to 41% of all students. On the mathematics assessment, the proficiency rate for multiracial students had been falling until 2022: from 28% proficient in 2018 to a low of 10% proficient in 2021. In 2022, 20% of multiracial students demonstrated proficiency on the mathematics assessment, compared to 30% of all students.

Figure 28. Gap between Multiracial students and all students: RICAS ELA SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8.



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 29. Gap between Multiracial students and all students: RICAS Mathematics SY2017-18 to SY2021-22, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

There are large gaps in proficiency between several demographic groups in comparison to all students. An overview of side-by-side proficiency gaps for the last school year is presented below for grades 3-8.

Figure 30. Proficiency gaps between select student groups in grades 3-8 in comparison to all students for the 2021-2022 School Year.

Student Groups	In Comparison to...	
	All Students, grades 3-8 2021-2022 ELA	All Students, grades 3-8 2021-2022 Math
White Students	+2	+2
Students with IEPs	-28	-22
EL Students	-24	-3
Economically Disadvantaged	-12	-12
Hispanic or Latinx	-7	-9
Asian	+18	+29
American Indian or Alaska Native	-16	-13
Multiracial	-3	-10

Please note: **Positive numbers** indicate the number of percentage points this demographic is scoring **higher than all students**. **Negative numbers** indicate the number of percentage points this demographic is scoring **lower than all students**.

Recommendations: Student Outcomes

- 1. Continue frequent data-digs.** Continue using data to prioritize closing the achievement gaps and opportunity gaps between student subgroups, ensuring that each student has access to the supports and services they need. Further dig into student performance data, summer school program enrollment data, advanced course enrollment and achievement, CTE enrollment and performance (by pathway/cluster), all disaggregated by student subgroup.
- 2. Review academic support offerings outside of classroom instruction time.** WPS currently has a late bus after school every day for students participating in activities. Ensure that all students

have equitable access to academic supports, such as homework club and after-school support from teachers. Ensure that transportation is available for all students participating in after-school activities that end at times after the late bus, and that transportation is provided for school-based events that take place on the weekends (i.e., school dances, testing, fundraisers). Survey the demand for additional support offerings and identify additional personnel needed to meet the demand. Communicate academic support offerings widely to counselors, parents, students, and teachers via messaging platforms and the school websites, translating materials in multiple languages.

Research-Based Best Practices: Access to Advanced Learning

The US Department of Education's Elementary and Secondary Act defines gifted and talented students as those who "give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities."²⁷ However, research consistently shows that children of color and children in poverty participate in gifted programs at lower rates than White and Asian and wealthy students.²⁸ A recent study from Vanderbilt University and the University of Florida found that students from high-income families are seven times more likely to land in gifted programs than their other classmates with similar reading and math scores.²⁹ There has long been concern that high-ability students from underserved populations, those who are limited English proficient, disabled, or from minority or low-income backgrounds, are consistently underrepresented in advanced classes and in programs for students identified as gifted. While many districts have made improvements in identifying and serving a broader range of advanced students, there is still a lot of room for improvement to ensure that all high-ability students receive appropriate gifted or advanced education services to meet their needs.³⁰

Students have different needs and abilities that must be addressed in every classroom. However, the practice of tracking students may not be the answer to support stronger academic growth given the inequalities of opportunities resulting from that practice.³¹ Most times, tracking leads to an unequal educational experience. Students who experience advanced classes are often taught enriched, challenging content, focused on creativity and problem solving while students not receiving those opportunities are often given lessons which include a reliance on low level worksheets and memorization.

Advanced Placement Test Taking

The table below shows that students of color, students eligible for FRPL and male students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement enrollment at Westerly High School.³²

²⁷ Title IX, Part A, Definition 22 (2002). "Elementary and Secondary Education Act."

²⁸ Siegle, D (2019). "Inequity Persists in Gifted Programs. *National Institute of Gifted Education*." *Institute of Education Sciences*.

²⁹ Grissom, J & Redding, C (2016). "Discretion and Disproportionality: Explaining the Underrepresentation of High-Achieving Students of Color in Gifted Programs." *AERA Open*.

³⁰ National Association for Gifted Children. "Identifying Gifted Children from Diverse Populations."

³¹ Wells, C. L (2018). "Understanding issues associated with tracking students in mathematics education." *Journal of Mathematics Education*, 11(2), 68–84.

³² Rhode Island Department of Education (2021-22 school year).

Figure 31. Advanced Placement Course Participation by Student Demographics: Westerly High School (2021-22)

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent of Students Enrolled in Advanced Coursework (2021-22)
All Students	43%
White students	44%
Students of color	35%
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible students	20%
Male students	37%
Female students	48%

Please note: Percentages were calculated using only data for students in 11th and 12th grade at Westerly High School. Interpretation: Of all male students in grades 11 and 12, 37% of them were enrolled in advanced coursework in the 2021-22 school year, compared to 43% of all 11th and 12th grade students who enrolled in advanced coursework.

High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates

PCG analyzed graduation rate data for School Year 2020-21, which is the most recent data published by RIDE at the time of this report.

The following table shows that multiracial students, FRPL eligible students, differently abled students and male students graduate at lower rates than the cohort average.³³

Figure 32. Graduation Rates by Student Demographics: Westerly High School (2020-21)

Student Demographic Subgroup	Graduation Rate	Drop Out Rate
All Students	95%	2%
White	95%	1%
Hispanic or Latinx	100%	0%
Two or More Races	80%	10%
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible	92%	3%
Differently Abled	75%	4%
Male	93%	2%
Female	98%	1%

Data retrieved from Rhode Island Department of Education DataCenter: [High School Graduation Rates Visualization](#). Please note that certain student subgroups are unreported in this table due to small cohort sizes. RIDE policy on minimum cell size for reporting data stipulates that if the number of students is less than 10 for any group(s), it will not be publicly reported. For more details on RIDE graduation rate calculations, see the RIDE methodology.³⁴

Special Education

When looking at the rates of students who are assigned IEPs as a measure of educational equity, disproportionality occurs when students from one racial, gender, or other demographic subgroup are assigned IEPs at markedly higher rates than their peers. Overrepresentation and misidentification of students for IEPs poses a threat to a students' educational opportunities. Students who are misidentified with learning disabilities are likely to be exposed to a less rigorous curriculum, lower expectations from

³³ Rhode Island Department of Education (2021-22 school year).

³⁴ Rhode Island Department of Education (April 2019). "Rhode Island Graduation Rates – The Cohort Formula." eRide Information Services.

teachers, and will have fewer opportunities to successfully transition to postsecondary education.³⁵ Misidentification can also have social consequences; students may suffer from lower self-esteem³⁶ and face racial separation in classrooms.³⁷ Additionally, once a student is misidentified for an IEP, they are unlikely to ever leave the special education program for the remainder of their academic career.³⁸

The following data comes from a risk ratio analysis on students with IEPs in Westerly Public Schools for the 2021-22 school year.

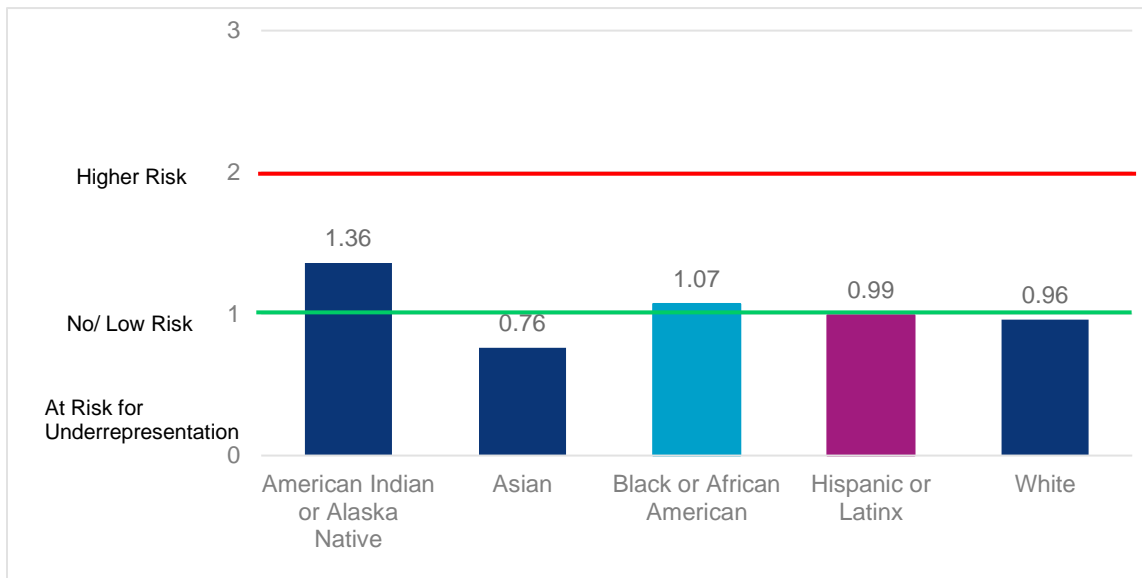
District Wide IEP Risk Ratios

Figure 32. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
American Indian or Alaska Native	112	29
Asian or Pacific Islander	114	17
Black or African American	107	22
Hispanic or Latinx	255	49
White	2,077	398
Total	2,665	515

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Multiracial students.

Figure 33. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity



³⁵ National Education Association (2007). "Truth in labeling: Disproportionality in special education."

³⁶ Pavri, S. & Luftig, R (2001). "The social face of inclusive education: Are students with learning disabilities really included in the classroom?" *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 45(1), 8–14.

³⁷ National Education Association (2007).

³⁸ Ibid.

Figure 34. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	1,302	185
Male	1,358	328
Total	2,665	515

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are gender non-binary students.

Figure 35. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender

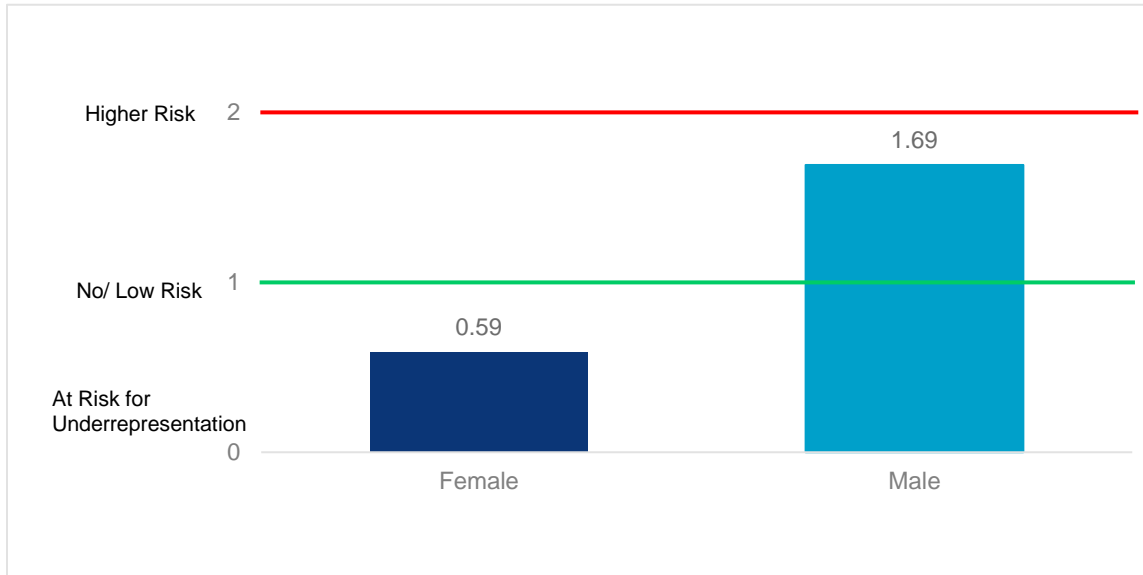


Figure 36. Number of Students with IEPs by FRPL Eligibility

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with IEPs
FRPL Eligible	943	250
Not FRPL Eligible	1,722	265
Total	2,665	515

Figure 37. IEP Assignment Risk by FRPL Eligibility

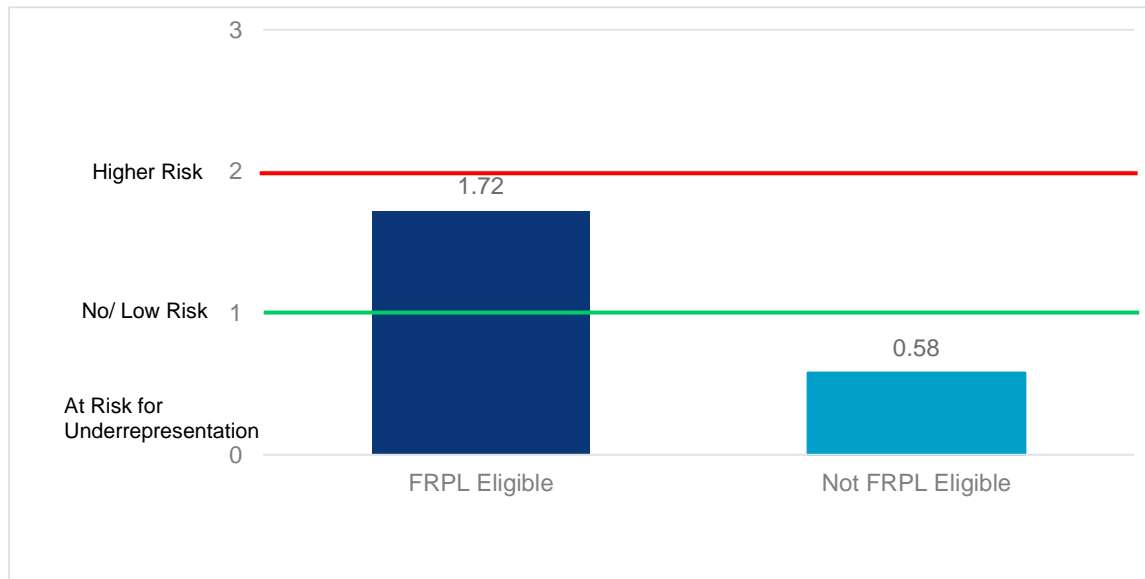
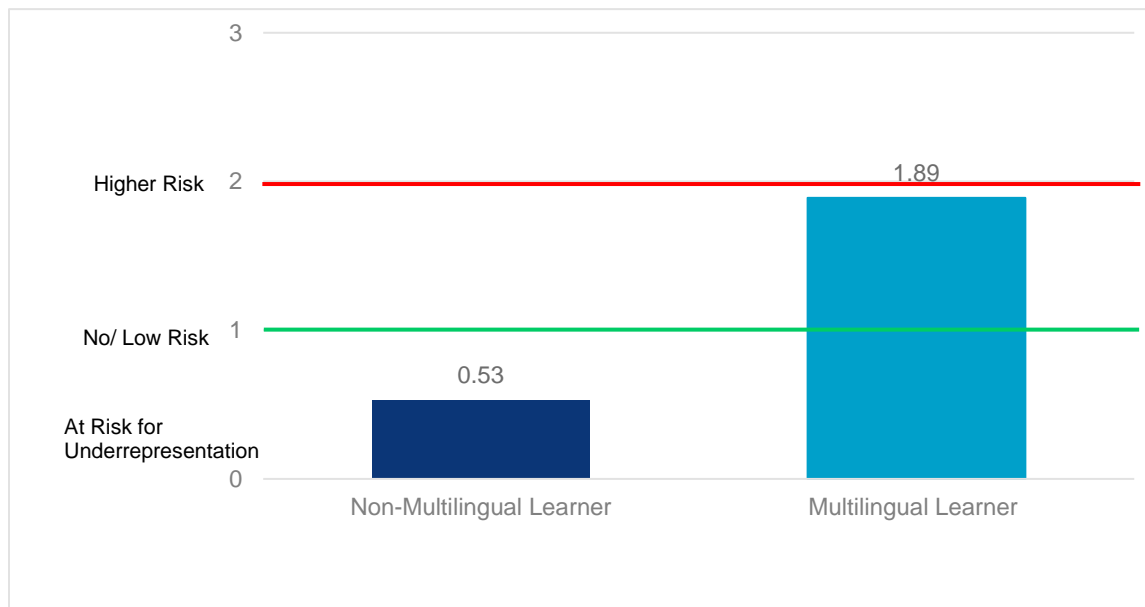


Figure 38. Number of Students with IEPs by Multilingual Learner Status

Multilingual Status	All Students	Students with IEPs
Multilingual Learner	96	10
Non-Multilingual Learner	2,569	505
Total	2,665	515

Please note: The 96 Multilingual Students in this analysis include students who have moved out of MLL status but continue to be monitored under the MLL program in the district.

Figure 39. IEP Assignment Risk by Multilingual Learner Status



District-wide in Westerly Public Schools:

- American Indian or Alaska Native students are **1.36 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Asian students are **0.76 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Black or African American students are **1.07 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Hispanic or Latinx students are **0.99 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- White students are **0.96 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Female students are **0.59 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Male students are **1.69 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch are **1.72** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.
- Multilingual learners are **1.89** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the district.

Elementary Level IEP Risk Ratios

Figure 40. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
American Indian or Alaska Native	41	16
Asian or Pacific Islander	46	11
Hispanic or Latinx	105	26
White	782	219
Total	1,015	279

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Multiracial and Black or African American students.

Figure 41. IEP Assignment Risk by Race at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

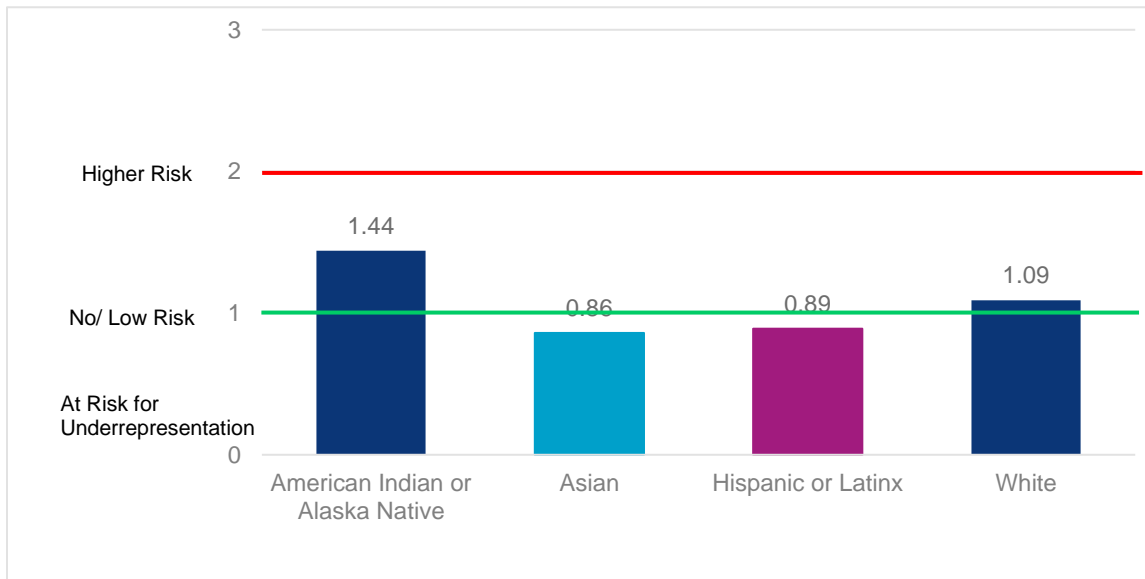


Figure 42. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	477	97
Male	537	182
Total	1,015	279

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are gender non-binary students.

Figure 43. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

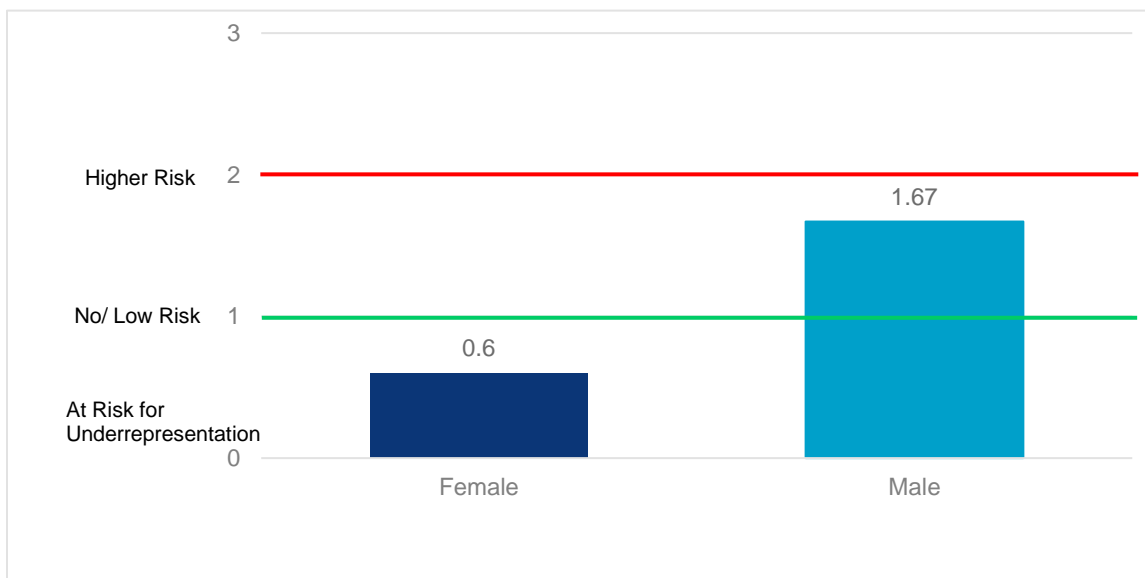
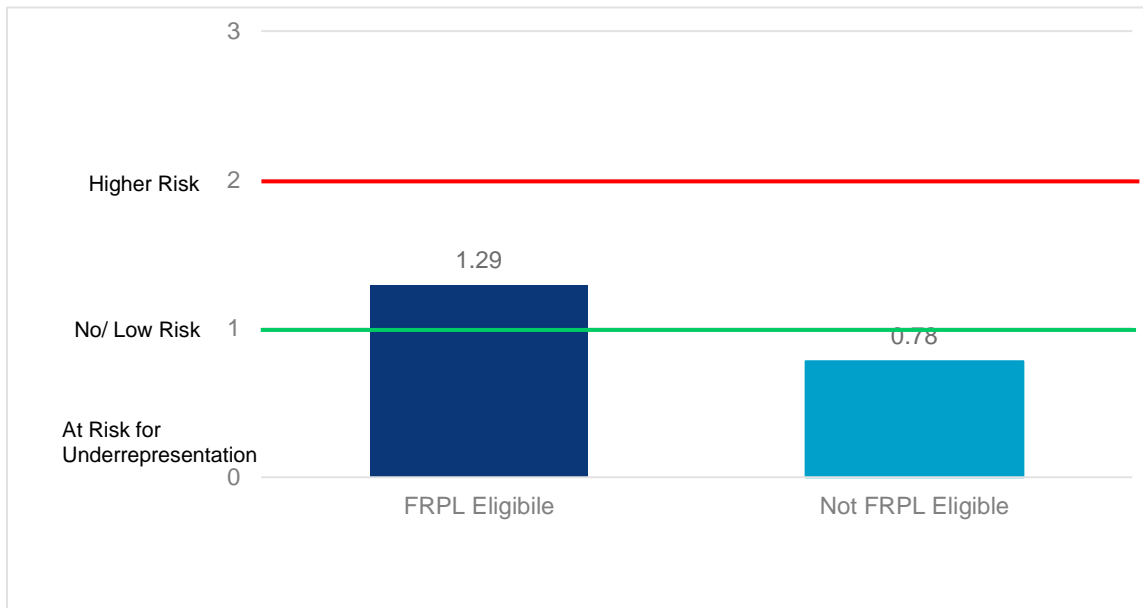


Figure 44. Number of Students with IEPs by FRPL Eligibility at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with IEPs
FRPL Eligible	375	120
Not FRPL Eligible	640	159
Total	1,015	279

Figure 45. IEP Assignment Risk by FRPL Eligibility at the Elementary and Pre-K Level



In elementary and preschools at Westerly Public Schools:

- American Indian or Alaska Native students are **1.44 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Asian students are **0.86 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Hispanic or Latinx students are **0.89 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- White students are **1.09 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Female students are **0.60 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Male students are **1.67 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch are **1.29 times** more likely to have an IEP than all other students in elementary and preschool.

Middle School and High School IEP Risk Ratios

Figure 46. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity at the Middle and High School Level

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
American Indian or Alaska Native	71	13
Black or African American	66	15
Hispanic or Latinx	150	23
White	1,295	179
Total	1,650	236

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian and Multiracial students.

Figure 47. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity at the Middle and High School Level

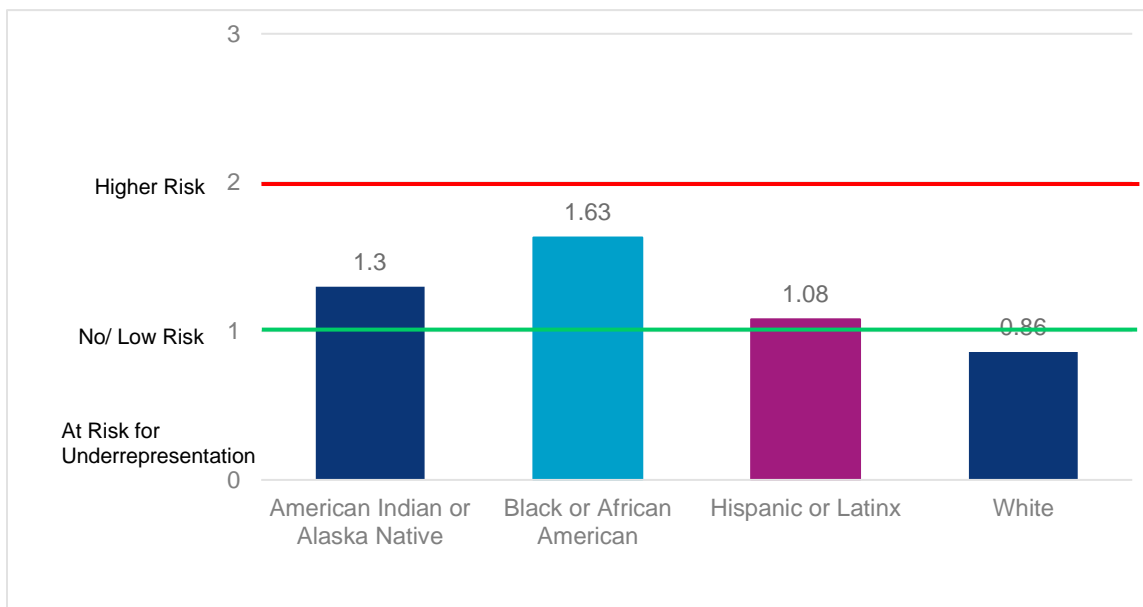


Figure 48. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender at the Middle and High School Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	825	88
Male	821	146
Total	1,650	236

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are gender non-binary students.

Figure 49. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Middle and High School Level

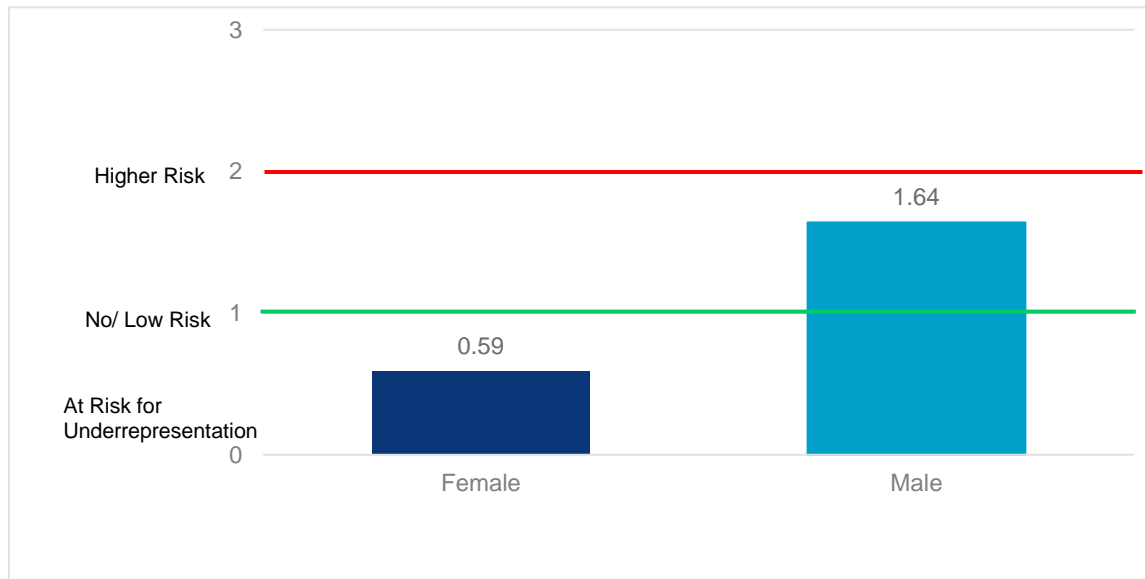
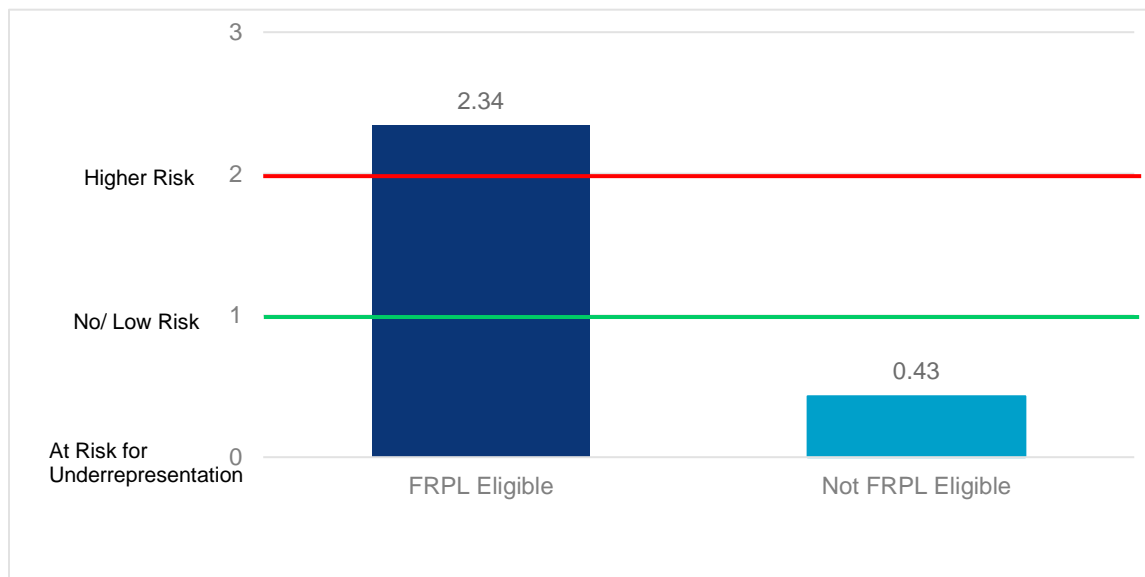


Figure 50. Number of Students with IEPs by FRPL Eligibility at the Middle and High School Level

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with IEPs
FRPL Eligible	568	130
Not FRPL Eligible	1,082	106
Total	1,650	236

Figure 51. IEP Assignment Risk by FRPL Eligibility at the Middle and High School Level



In Westerly High School and Westerly Middle School:

- American Indian or Alaska Native students are **1.3 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the middle school and high school.

- Black or African American students are **1.63 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the middle school and high school.
- Hispanic or Latinx students are **1.08 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the middle school and high school.
- White students are **0.86 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the middle school and high school.
- Female students are **0.59 times** as likely to have an IEP as all other students in the middle school and high school.
- Male students are **1.64 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in the middle school and high school.
- Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch are **2.34 times** more likely to have an IEP as all other students in elementary and preschool.

Key Findings: Access to Advanced Learning

- **Differing expectations of students by teaching staff.** Students, district leadership, and teaching staff shared the concern that teachers have biased expectations about their students based on their skin color, what part of town they are from, who their family is, or through what they have heard from other teachers. These low expectations are detrimental to student's growth, opportunities for advanced learning, and sense of self. On the flip side, some school and district leaders shared the perception that teachers will provide too much help to these students, unintentionally lowering the standard for achievement. This is similarly harmful to students.
- **Access to advanced learning depends on parent involvement.** District leadership and school leadership expressed the concern that some district practices benefit students whose parents are active advocates in their education. This is inequitable for students with parents who do not have the ability to be as involved in their education. For example, stakeholders from the middle school shared concerns about selection into pods being dictated by teacher relationships with parents.
- **Promoting under-prepared students.** Teachers shared the perception that there is a longstanding practice of promoting students to the next grade regardless of if they are prepared to advance. This can be harmful to students who are already struggling and get moved up to the next grade for several years in a row.
- **Supports for multilingual learners.** Teaching staff shared the concern that MLL students are not provided with the proper supports needed to be successful. Staff mentioned that there are a limited number of bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals, and that these students are placed into interventions to check boxes, rather than to fulfill their individual needs.
- **Hyper-focus on test scores and STAR rating.** Teaching staff shared the perception that there is a hyper-focus on test scores in the district, due to declines in recent years. Such scrutiny may be contributing to the loss of viewing the whole child and addressing social emotional needs of students in their classroom, beyond just academic performance.

Recommendations: Access to Advanced Learning

1. **Provide professional learning on implicit bias for school counselors, teachers, and department leaders.** This will help staff to understand implicit bias and learn ways to counter bias in recommending students for advanced learning opportunities or programming as well as improve the classroom experiences of students of color and FRPL eligible students.
2. **Leverage data in decision-making.** Establish clear, data-driven processes for recommending students for advancement to the next grade and selection into advanced coursework and/or tracking. Ensure that these policies are communicated in an accessible way to families and students regarding opportunities and requirements to participate in advanced courses. Clarify the process for overrides and ensure that this process does not implicitly favor students who have strong parent advocates.
3. **Regularly review enrollment data for advanced courses.** This data should be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as well as English proficiency, FRPL eligibility, and disability status to inform gaps in student access to advanced course taking. Enrollment data should also be compared with students requesting to be enrolled in advance courses to address any disproportionality in access.
4. **Use data to monitor the identification/classification of students as needing an IEP.** Ensure that no student group is over-represented. Regularly disaggregate student-level data by race/ethnicity, multilingual learner status, and FRPL eligibility, as feasible and appropriate, to inform decision-making and establish follow-up activities.
5. **Review the tiered interventions and supports for MLL students** including how many dedicated FTEs are available to MLL students and how to identify and accommodate student-specific needs in the intervention plan.

6. TALENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND DEVELOPMENT

SECTION 1: TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Guiding Question: How do WPS policies and human resources practices support hiring and retaining a diverse workforce?

Research-Based Best Practices: Talent Recruitment and Retention

All students benefit from having teachers of color. Research shows that when taught by teachers of color, students of color have better academic performance, improved graduation rates, and are more likely to attend college. Students of color also benefit from higher teacher expectations and from seeing members of their own race/ethnicity as role models in positions of authority.³⁹

While students of color receive the greatest benefits of having teachers that look like them, diversity benefits everyone. With a more diverse workforce, students are exposed to multiple perspectives. They may have an increased sense of civic engagement and improved problem-solving, critical-thinking skills, and creativity.⁴⁰

Extensive research explores the impact teachers of color have in directly affecting students, but there is additional evidence to suggest that increasing teacher diversity also benefits teachers of color who are already working in the field. In several qualitative studies, teachers of color expressed feelings of isolation, frustration, and fatigue when they were one of few teachers of color in their schools, experiencing pressure to represent their students to colleagues. This suggests that increasing the diversity of the teaching force may also lead to improvements in teacher satisfaction and decreased teacher turnover, a key contributor to teacher shortages and school instability.⁴¹

Recruitment

Districts that effectively recruit teachers of color often use the following strategies:

- **Data-driven, targeted strategies.**⁴² Utilizing data to determine who is underrepresented in their workforce and to forecast their staffing needs allows districts to create marketing campaigns that appeal to candidates of color, are specific to the positions, and highlight the benefits the district has to offer.⁴³
- **Strategic institutional relationships.** A large majority of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs are White. To recruit teachers of color, districts must build relationships with faculty members and administrators from local and national institutions that enroll a diverse student body.

³⁹ Villegas, A. M., & Irvine, J. J. (2010). "Diversifying the teaching force: An examination of major arguments." *The Urban Review*, 42(3), 175-192.

⁴⁰ Wells, A. S., Fox, L., & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016). "How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students." *Education Digest*, 82(1), 17-24.

⁴¹ Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). "Teacher Turnover: Why it Matters and What We Can Do About It." *Learning Policy Institute*.

⁴² American Institutes for Research. (2016). "Talent management strategies: District self-assessment checklist." *Center on Great Teachers & Leaders, Equitable Access Support Network*.

⁴³ Bireda, S., & Chait, R. (2011). "Increasing teacher diversity: Strategies to improve the teacher workforce." *Center for American Progress*.

Districts can also partner with alternative teacher preparation programs, which are more likely to serve people of color, to identify and recruit teachers.⁴⁴

- **Relationship-based recruitment.** To recruit teachers of color, districts should work to build personal relationships with students of color at institutes of higher education and leverage existing relationships in the district to extend outreach beyond individual networks.⁴⁵ Building relationships months before a job is posted, forming relationships on campus and through visits to the district, and identifying internal connectors in the district who can use their broader networks can help districts develop and deepen relationships with individuals and communities of color.⁴⁶

Hiring

Districts that effectively select and hire teachers of color often use the following strategies:

- **Advertise and hire early.** Districts should publish vacancy notices early in the process and hire early in the process. Districts may be able to generate a large applicant pool through early and effective recruitment. Ideally, half of the district's new teachers should be hired at least a month before the end of the prior school year.⁴⁷
- **Engage existing educators of color in the process.** The authentic involvement of teachers of color in the recruitment and selection of new candidates is another way that districts effectively select and hire teachers of color. Providing opportunities for candidates to interact with other teachers of color may help them feel more welcome and connected during the hiring process.⁴⁸
- **Actively counter implicit bias.** Implicit racial, ethnic, and cultural biases shape definitions and measurements of effective teaching.⁴⁹ To counter this, districts should train administrators and teachers who are involved in hiring to recognize implicit bias and use behavior-based interviewing techniques to reveal candidates' experience, knowledge, and strengths to increase the hiring of culturally and linguistically diverse teacher candidates.

Retention

Districts that effectively retain teachers of color often use the following strategies:

- **Strategically and intentionally place teachers of color in schools.** Teachers of color are more likely to be placed in schools with weak organizational conditions, poor leadership, and difficult working conditions, which increases the likelihood of attrition. Before placement, districts should consider the organizational conditions of the school, the strength of the school's leadership team, and overall fit, as well as how assignments are aligned with new hires' content expertise.⁵⁰
- **Design and implement high-quality induction and early support for new teachers of color.** Dealing with low expectations for students, lack of support, inequity in school policies, micro-aggressions, and bias leads to feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction, and burnout, especially among

⁴⁴ Simon, N. S., Johnson, S. M., & Reinhorn, S. K. (2015). "The challenge of recruiting and hiring teachers of color: Lessons from six high-performing, high-poverty, urban schools." *Harvard University, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Project on the Next Generation of Teacher.*

⁴⁵ Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). "Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color." *Learning Policy Institute.*

⁴⁶ Simon et al. (2015).

⁴⁷ Levin, J., & Quinn, M. (2003). "Missed opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms." *New Teacher Project.*

⁴⁸ Bireda & Chait. (2011).

⁴⁹ Chalkboard Project. (2017). "TeachOregon: Lessons learned, promising practices, and recommendations for the future."

⁵⁰ Ingersoll, R., May, H., & Collins, G. (2017). "Minority teacher recruitment, employment, and retention: 1987 to 2013." *Learning Policy Institute.*

teachers of color. Districts should provide new teachers of color with the opportunity to work collaboratively with other educators, participate in support groups for new teachers, and be mentored by trained, qualified colleagues – particularly other teachers of color.⁵¹

- **Build the capacity of school leaders to improve working conditions.** Dissatisfaction with school leadership leads to high turnover rates among teachers of color. Districts should offer ongoing professional learning opportunities for school leaders to develop the skills to support diverse students and staff members and support teachers of color to become school and district leaders. Districts may also wish to nurture leadership that promotes inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance throughout the school; invests in mentorship and leadership opportunities for educators of color; and ensures autonomy and respect are provided to teachers of color.⁵²

Strengths to Build On: Talent Recruitment and Retention

- **Workforce data systems.** Westerly has a data system in place that captures staff racial, ethnic, and gender demographics with reports easily pulled to facilitate the disaggregation of data. This system also allows for the capture of snapshot and longitudinal data on these elements of the district's workforce diversity. The district has a similar data system that captures demographic information about applicants to the district and can track their progression through the interview and hiring process.

Tracking detailed staff and applicant data, including demographic information, is an important step in prioritizing and increasing workforce diversity in the district, and should be utilized to forecast staffing needs and track progress towards district goals.

- **Human resources capacity.** Westerly has a dedicated Human Resources team, including a staff member focused on talent acquisition and recruitment. This capacity means that WPS is well positioned to implement equity-focused strategies and move the needle on workforce diversity in the district.
- **Efforts to standardize.** Recently the WPS Human Resources department has worked to develop clear guidance on the application, screening, and hiring process for positions in the district. Use of standardized processes and multiple measures of evaluation for applicants are important elements of an equitable hiring process.

⁵¹ Rogers-Ard, R., Knaus, C. B., Epstein, K. K., & Mayfield, K. (2013). "Racial diversity sounds nice; systems transformation? Not so much: Developing urban teachers of color." *Urban Education*, 48(3), 451–479.

⁵² Konoske-Graf, A., Partelow, L., & Benner, M. (2016). "To attract great teachers, school districts must improve their human capital systems." *Center for American Progress*.

Strategies at a Glance: Talent Recruitment and Retention

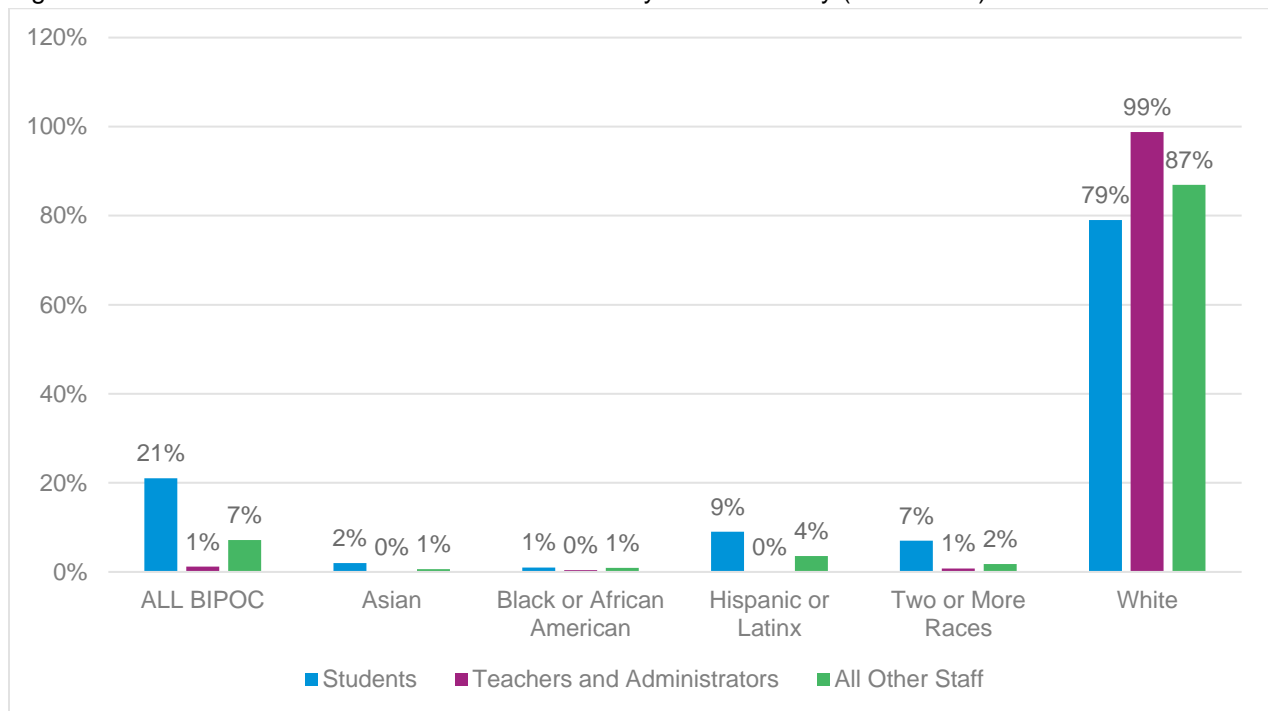
Desired Outcome: The District employs evidence-based, equity-centered recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies that yield a workforce that is representative of the diverse identities of the student population.				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies to effectively move towards this outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of what we might see in a district effectively utilizing this strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
Equity-focused district-wide recruitment strategy	Job postings and recruitment materials are posted in a variety of places, especially places targeted at diverse educators			X
	Language in job descriptions has an explicit equity/workforce diversity focus			X
	Partnerships with local educator preparation programs/institutes of higher education			X
	Partnerships with alternative certification programs (e.g., Teach for America, AmeriCorps)			X
	District-led pipeline programs (e.g., Grow Your Own programs, "TA to "BA" programs, internal alternative certification programs)			X
	Utilization of existing internal networks and individuals in recruitment		X	
	Half of the district's new staff is hired at least a month before the end of the prior school year			X
Data-driven targeted recruitment strategies	Explicit goals around workforce diversity and hiring			X
	Data tracking systems that include demographic information for applicants and hires	X		
	Data is consistently analyzed and used to inform recruitment and hiring strategies and practices			X
	Consistent tools/processes and protocols for application review, interviews, and hiring decisions		X	
	Equity-focused questions and expectations for applicants			X
Actively counter implicit bias in recruitment and hiring	Training for hiring and recruitment teams on implicit bias			X
	Application and interview materials that are explicitly anti-bias (e.g., rubrics, interview questions)			X
	Diverse voices and participation in interview and selection processes (clear roles for families and students)			X

Desired Outcome: The District employs evidence-based, equity-centered recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies that yield a workforce that is representative of the diverse identities of the student population.				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies to effectively move towards this outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of what we might see in a district effectively utilizing this strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
Intentionality in staff placements and deployment	Equity-centered policies around deployment decision making			X
	Intentional placement of diverse educators in communities			X
High-quality induction and early support for new staff	Consistent, robust, role-focused onboarding practices and procedures for all new staff		X	
	Support groups for new staff			X
	Mentorship programs that pair trained, qualified colleagues with new staff			X
	Intentional pairing of mentors and mentees among diverse staff			X
Improving working conditions for diverse staff	PD for school leaders explicitly focused on building their capacity to improve working conditions and identify and address microaggressions and discriminatory language and actions among staff			X
	Transparent opportunities for leadership roles and training, especially for staff of color			X
	Affinity groups for all staff including groups by role/job alike groups and affinity groups by personal identity			X
	Clear and consistent policies and practices for addressing discriminatory behaviors among staff		X	
	Formal structures and systems for requesting funding/resources for external learning and development opportunities		X	

Talent Recruitment and Retention Contextual Analysis

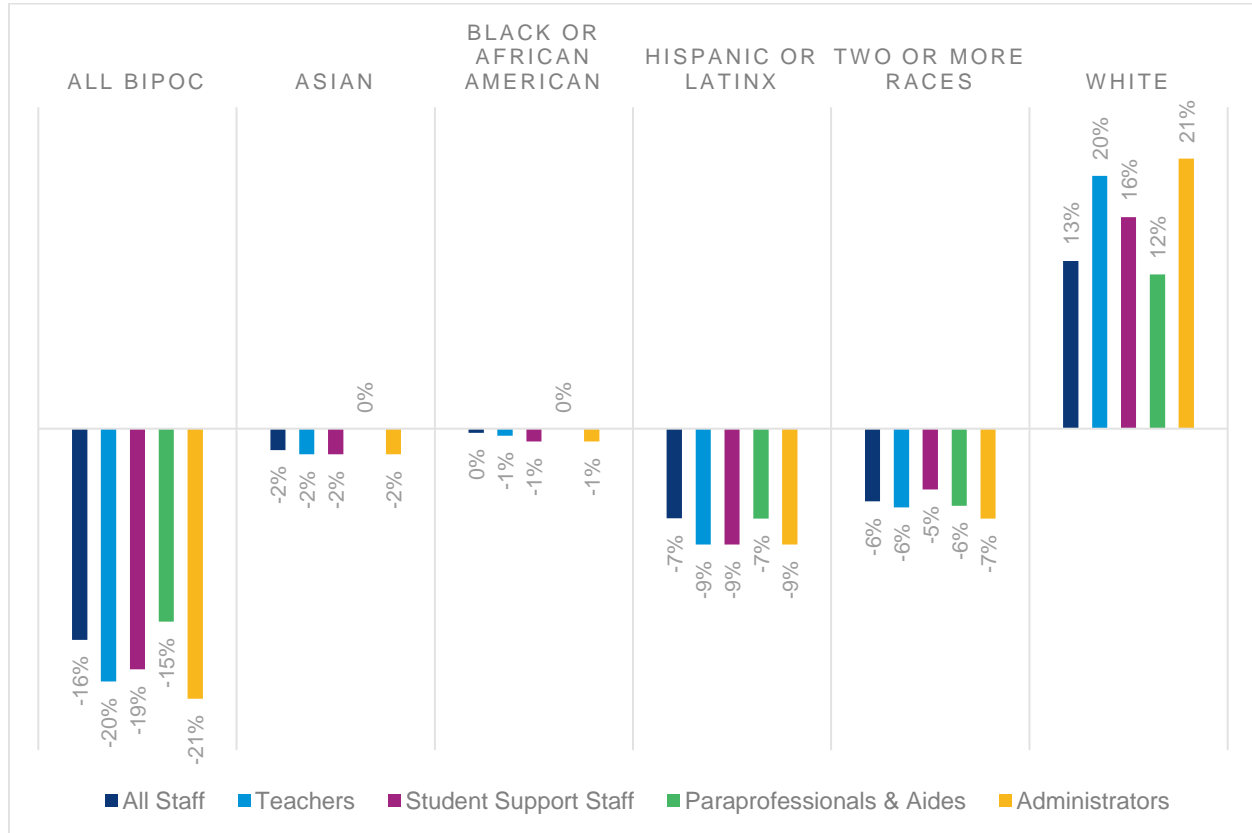
The following data were provided by the district from WPS's internal talent management system. The "Teachers and Administrators" category includes the following positions: Teacher, Substitute Teacher, Department Chair, Director, Principal/Assistant Principal, Dean, Superintendent, etc. The "All Other Staff" category includes all other positions in the district such as: Paraprofessional, Classroom/Student Aide, School Nurse, Psychologist, facilities positions, Coordinator, Executive Assistant, Athletic Coach, and Secretary.

Figure 52. Districtwide Student Enrollment and Staff by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)



The “Student Support Staff” category includes positions such as Counselor, Psychologist, Speech Language Pathologist, Nurse, and Librarian. The “Paraprofessionals and Aides” category includes positions such as Paraprofessional, Classroom Aide, Lunch Aide, Recess Aide, and Classroom Assistant.

Figure 53. Percentage Point Gap Between Student Enrollment and Staff Role by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)



When looking at the representation gaps between BIPOC students and staff, the largest gaps are between students and teachers, and students and administrators. The smallest gaps across each of the demographic categories are between students and paraprofessionals and aides.

Due to the small numbers of BIPOC staff members in the district, a single hire or resignation has an oversized impact on retention rates in the district. Because of this, we were unable to conduct a retention and attrition proportionality analysis.

The data below was provided by WPS and includes individuals who applied to any role in the district. It is important to note that this data represents individual applicants, regardless of the number of applications they submitted to the district.

Figure 54. Applicant Progress Through the Hiring Process by Race (2021-22)

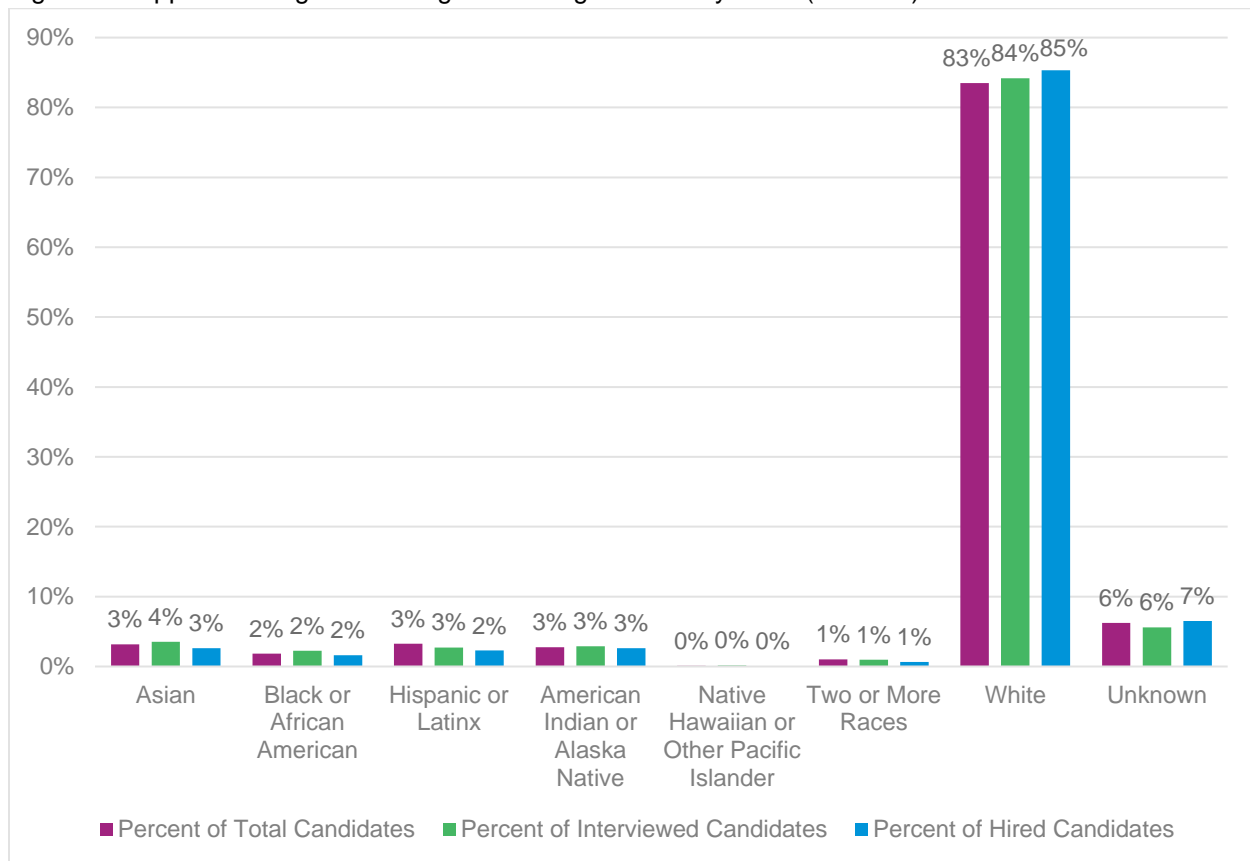


Figure 55. Applicant Progress Through the Hiring Process by Race: Teacher and Administrator Positions (2021-22)

Teacher and Administrator Positions	All Candidates		Interviewed Candidates		Hired Candidates	
Total	356	--	216	--	96	--
Asian	12	3%	5	2%	1	1%
Black or African American	5	1%	3	1%	1	1%
Hispanic or Latinx	16	4%	9	4%	4	4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	8	2%	4	2%	2	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Two or More Races	4	1%	3	1%	1	1%
White	298	84%	186	86%	83	86%
Decline to Identify	18	5%	9	4%	5	5%

Figure 56. Applicant Progress Through the Hiring Process by Race: All Other Positions (2021-22)

All Other Positions	All Candidates		Interviewed Candidates		Hired Candidates	
Total	625	--	409	--	211	--
Asian	19	3%	17	4%	7	3%
Black or African American	13	2%	11	3%	4	2%
Hispanic or Latinx	16	3%	8	2%	3	1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	19	3%	14	3%	6	3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0%	1	0%	0	0%
Two or More Races	6	1%	3	1%	1	0%
White	521	83%	340	83%	179	85%
Decline to Identify	43	7%	26	6%	15	7%

Opportunities for Growth: Talent Recruitment and Retention

- Commitment to diversifying the district's workforce.** While the desire to increase the diversity of Westerly's workforce was a positive theme throughout conversations with school and district leaders, the district lacks clear and transparent language and expectations for what this looks like in action. District and school leaders expressed a lack of direction from district administration to seek out diverse candidates and a sense of resignation about the diversity of their candidate pool. Several school leaders stated that, due to Westerly's location, there was nothing that could be done about the candidate pool. In addition, no retention strategies were mentioned during stakeholder interviews and focus groups.
- Training and learning needs.** Throughout interviews and focus groups, school and district leaders expressed a desire for more and more frequent training regarding equity in hiring.
- Lack of equity focus in recruitment and hiring materials, processes, and policies.** An important factor in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce is making sure the district's commitment to equity is explicit and transparent. While the importance of equity and a desire to be equitable were themes throughout the conversations with stakeholders, current job descriptions include no language regarding equity, diversity, or inclusion. Similarly, the district provided example interview questions and rubrics for the hiring process but equity and diversity are not mentioned in any of the materials or suggested questions.

The Westerly School Committee's policies have no language regarding diversity or equity in recruitment and hiring. The lack of specific language in these policies limits the district's ability to set goals and prioritize the recruitment and hiring of diverse educators and staff, despite the known benefits and need expressed by many stakeholders.

- Limited recruitment reach.** The current recruitment reach is limited and does not engage the diverse educator candidates the district wants. External recruitment for open positions in the district is mostly limited to postings on the district's website. A review of other hiring sites targeted at educators of color did not find any job openings for Westerly.

The district does not have strategic partnerships with any local educator preparation programs, and the pipeline of candidates to teaching positions is dominated by WPS alumni, according to school and district leaders.

- **Inconsistent hiring practices and processes.** Individual school leaders and department heads are responsible for their own hiring processes and while the district has begun to develop standardized processes and procedures, school leaders expressed a lack of knowledge of those tools. School leaders hire for open positions independently of one another and shared that they were unaware of how their colleagues across the district approach recruitment and hiring.

Recommendations: Talent Recruitment and Retention

4. **Communicate expectations and responsibilities regarding diversity and equity in every job description, all recruitment materials, and in staff evaluation documentation.** This includes a clear definition of the district's vision and goals for equity and the expectations and responsibilities for each position in the district in helping to reach them.
5. **Set explicit, measurable, value-aligned goals around the diversity of the Westerly Public Schools workforce.** By transparently communicating a district-wide commitment to increasing the diversity of the workforce, the district will set itself up for success by opening the door for departments and schools to embed similar goals in all aspects of their work as well as allowing for concrete steps like dedicated funding to diversity initiatives across the district.

Embedded in this recommendation is the need for School Committee policies and agreements to provide support for the district in this work when external resistance is exerted. School Committee policies and practices should be revised to explicitly state the district's focus on workforce diversity and prioritization of equity and diversity in recruitment and hiring. This strong language will provide a foundation upon which the district's goals can build.

6. **Develop systems and strategies that use data to guide the work of recruitment, hiring, and retention in the district.** WPS is already tracking a wealth of information about applicants and staff members. To make this data more effective in the effort to diversify the district's workforce, WPS needs to set up systems and expectations for the use of this data and actively use it to inform recruitment strategy. The use of data should include:
 - **Tracking the demographic information of all applicants** to the district from the point of application through the interview and hiring process. These data can illuminate points in the processes where candidates of color may drop out and can allow the district to examine the factors that affect the progress of candidates of color in the hiring process. This data can also highlight the greatest area of need and focus for recruitment activities.
 - **Tracking the demographic makeup of the staff at each of the schools** in the district to prioritize hiring to reflect the student body in each school. By transparently tracking and sharing data related to the workforce diversity in comparison to the student diversity at each school, the district can build incentives and structures to support schools to close their representation gaps.
 - **Tracking the retention and advancement of staff members by demographics.** This kind of explicit tracking and communication of trends and findings over time not only shows the district's commitment to retaining a diverse workforce, but also allows the district to pinpoint schools, roles, or departments that may need more support in developing strategies to retain and develop staff of color.
7. **Increase the scope of teacher recruitment.** Prioritize job postings in sites and communities that are targeted at teachers of color such as:
 - Diversity in Ed

- Nemnet Minority Recruitment
- Latinos for Education
- National Alliance of Black School Educators
- National Association for Bilingual Education
- Handshake.⁵³

Westerly should also explore developing an internal recruitment program in which current teachers and leaders are given a stipend to serve as a point of contact for educator applicants to the district. These recruitment ambassadors could attend job fairs (as public health regulations allow), be tasked with posting jobs on social media and on job boards, could answer questions via email or live chats, host presentations on applying to and working for Westerly Public Schools, and more.

8. Develop partnerships with local educator preparation programs with diverse student bodies.

Engage with students early in their careers to build relationships, communicate expectations of and benefits to working in Westerly, and support their eventual applications and hiring. Local educator preparation programs and alternative certification programs with significant BIPOC enrollment include:⁵⁴

- American International College (1123 students, 64% BIPOC)
- Bridgewater State University (1536 students, 62% BIPOC)
- Central Connecticut State University (368 students, 25% BIPOC)
- Relay Graduate School of Education (168 students, 74% BIPOC)
- Rhode Island College (505 students, 18% BIPOC)
- Stonehill College (223 students, 60% BIPOC)
- Teach for America Rhode Island (34 students, 35% BIPOC)
- University of Connecticut (608 students, 27% BIPOC)

9. Engage in implicit bias training for all staff involved in hiring and evaluation. Every person in the district involved in interviewing, hiring, or evaluating staff should participate in implicit bias training to ensure that everyone has a baseline understanding of recognizing bias and what to watch for in conducting processes like these.

Embedded in this recommendation is for Westerly to set clear guidelines and expectations for the makeup of hiring teams at the school level. Several district and school leaders stated that these hiring teams do not represent the demographic makeup of their school communities. The district needs to set policies and protocols for ensuring that hiring teams are representative of WPS communities.

10. Develop community building and support opportunities specifically aimed at BIPOC staff members. Setting up structures in which new educators of color can learn from the experiences of veteran educators of color can go a long way towards retaining and developing a more diverse workforce. The district could stipend a teacher leader to coordinate regular, offsite opportunities for educators of color to gather, network, discuss common struggles, and organize discussions about topics relevant to the community.

⁵³ Handshake is a free job board that many IHEs are using for their career services. While this is not explicitly diversity focused, WPS has the opportunity to reach a wide range of students and alumni from programs with high rates of diversity.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Education. "2022 Title II Reports National Teacher Preparation Data. Title II Higher Education Act."

SECTION 2: TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Guiding Question: How does district professional development support equity, diversity and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination?

Research-Based Best Practices: Talent Development

Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges within a school or district. To be effective, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation that includes feedback to ensure it responds to educators' learning needs. Educators who participate in professional development then must be expected to apply their new knowledge and skills to the work of teaching and learning.⁵⁵

Defining and designing effective professional learning opportunities for educators is vital to the effective classroom implementation of new knowledge, skills and strategies that lead to increased learning for students. When designed well, professional learning is interactive, sustained, and customized to a teacher's needs. It encourages teachers to take responsibility for their own learning and to practice what they are learning in their own teaching contexts. Conferences, the one- or two-day professional learning sessions prior to the start of a new school year, and one-time workshops are good opportunities for awareness, connecting educators to the latest in research or to introduce new knowledge and strategies, but they cannot change practice in the classroom.⁵⁶

Moreover, professional development opportunities within schools and districts often ignore discussions about culturally responsive practices. Professional development is more than ensuring that educators receive the technical skills, such as creating lesson plans, developing assessments, implementing instructional strategies, necessary to function in the classroom.⁵⁷ Educators must also acquire a foundational understanding of equity-oriented practices by developing and cultivating critical consciousness and critically reflecting on their professional growth and practice in order to create effective learning opportunities for each student. Equity oriented practices are those which critically examine all aspects of the learning environment including educators' beliefs and attitudes about difference as well as instructional practices and materials.

In December 2020, Learning Forward updated their Standards for Professional Learning.⁵⁸ The standards have embedded equity throughout their new framework. Specifically, they include the following as a condition of success and as a transformational process:

- **Equity Foundations:** "Educators establish a vision for equitable access to high-quality professional learning, create structures to ensure such access, and sustain a culture that supports the development of all staff members;" and
- **Equity Drivers:** "Educators reflect individually and collectively to identify and address their own biases, support and collaborate with diverse colleagues, and cultivate beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors that accelerate ambitious outcomes for all educators and students."

As a national leader in setting standards for professional learning, Learning Forward has created the expectation that equity must be a foundation and driver for all professional learning in schools and districts

⁵⁵ Mayes, H. (2010). "Why Professional Development Matters." *Learning Forward*.

⁵⁶ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (March 2020). "[Professional Learning Guidelines for Student Success](#)."

⁵⁷ Bay, U., & Macfarlane, S. (2011). "Teaching critical reflection: A tool for transformative learning in social work." *Social Work Education*, 30 (7), 745-748. *Monash University*.

⁵⁸ Learning Forward. (December 5, 2020). "[Revised Standards for Professional Learning Discussion Draft](#)."

throughout the country. Moreover, the Illinois State Board of Education adopted new [Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards](#)⁵⁹ to prepare future educators to teach diverse students. ISBE's [Diverse and Learner Ready Teacher](#) (DLRT) Network developed the standards, which educator preparation programs in colleges and universities will integrate into their course content and field experiences by October 2025. Forward looking districts will begin aligning their own professional development to the new standards to support the new teacher workforce entering their district. The new Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards include:

- Self-reflect and gain a deeper understanding of how their life experiences affect their perspectives.
- Understand that systems in our society create and reinforce inequities.
- Learn from and about their students' cultures, languages, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their students' lives.
- Value students' feedback and leadership.
- Support and create opportunities for student advocacy.
- Develop relationships with families and the community.
- Curate the curriculum to include and represent a wide spectrum of identities.
- Ensure the diversity of the student population is represented within the broader learning environment.

Developing a plan for effective professional learning starts with analyzing student achievement data to define student learning needs and then identifying the teacher knowledge and skills required to address those needs. Teacher professional learning outcomes are defined by improved professional practice, but the long-term goals focus on improved student achievement targets.⁶⁰ An effective district-wide professional development plan should identify student learning needs, the evidence that supports these identified student needs, and the adult learning needs that will enable educators to support student success in meeting these needs. Long-term professional development plans for district, building and individual plans should be aligned and focused on student learning outcomes supported by improved educator practice.

An effective district-wide professional development plan⁶¹ includes the following:

- Identifies student and educator learning needs.
- Specifies who will benefit from the professional learning.
- Identifies learning outcomes, benchmarks, and observable/measurable evidence of change in teacher practice and student learning.
- Specifies the learning opportunities and sustained follow-up planned to support implementation (at the district and building level, plans should include the differentiated learning opportunities that will be offered for educators).

⁵⁹ Illinois State Board of Education (December 16, 2020). "[Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards for All Educators](#)."

⁶⁰ Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W.-Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. (2007). "[Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement](#)." U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest.

⁶¹ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020).

- Identifies resources needed to support the professional learning.
- Identifies how professional learning will be offered and evaluated.

Strengths to Build On: Talent Development

- **Teachers and administrators have participated in training** on equity topics, as described in interviews with central office and school-based staff. These have included:
 - Bias
 - Gender Identity
 - Cultural Humility
 - Anti-Racism
 - Culturally Responsive Teaching
- **WPS has engaged internal and external providers** to share information which allows multiple and different vantage points to develop teachers and administrators.
- **The attendance rate of teacher participation** reflects most teachers are participating in professional development offerings. The majority of equity trainings are attended by teachers at a rate of at least 95%.
- **Equity PD is part of current teacher requirements.** WPS has offered professional development as part of teachers' Professional Learning Units.
- **Most of the equity-centric professional development is mandatory.** Of the 14 professional development offerings, 12 were mandatory for teaching staff and/or administrators.

Talent Development Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders have access to learning content about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. • All district support staff (district/central offices, food services, administrative personnel, facilities personnel, transportation personnel) and School Committee members are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice. • Instructional staff and school leadership (teaching assistants, teachers, coaches, school leaders) are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice. • Student and staff data inform professional development offerings. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
District offers professional learning	PD/Learning is offered in several formats, i.e., in-person, webinars, self-paced courses, group activities, book	X		

Desired Outcomes:

- All stakeholders have access to learning content about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- All district support staff (district/central offices, food services, administrative personnel, facilities personnel, transportation personnel) and School Committee members are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice.
- Instructional staff and school leadership (teaching assistants, teachers, coaches, school leaders) are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice.
- Student and staff data inform professional development offerings.

Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
in various methods, times, settings, and communicates options to all stakeholders, where applicable	sessions, independent learning, college courses, conferences			
	PD/Learning is offered at various and multiple times, i.e., before, during, and after school; lunch, recorded webinar for viewing at any time		X	
	PD/Learning is offered in various settings, i.e., teacher Learning Communities, school conferences, school PD days, afterschool committees, etc.		X	
	District markets/communicates equity-centric learning opportunities in various platforms; shares information widely based on the target audience i.e., school website, flyers, bulletin boards, school announcements, emails, meetings, etc.		X	
District requires all personnel to have, at minimum, a foundational understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging topics with the use of accountability measures	Staff are required to participate in foundational DEI&B courses	X		
	Support staff have shown proficiency in foundational DEI&B topics as demonstrated by required accountability measures			X
	Instructional staff have shown proficiency in foundational DEI&B topics as demonstrated by required accountability measures			X
	Instructional staff have shown proficiency in DEI&B topics as related to instructional practices, as demonstrated by required accountability measures such as earning teacher credits or follow-up activities		X	
District offers professional development based on student and staff data	District uses benchmarks to determine which staff are required to participate in trainings			X
	District uses student data to inform the types of PD to offer and require		X	
	District uses staff data to inform the types of PD to offer and require		X	

Desired Outcomes:

- All stakeholders have access to learning content about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- All district support staff (district/central offices, food services, administrative personnel, facilities personnel, transportation personnel) and School Committee members are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice.
- Instructional staff and school leadership (teaching assistants, teachers, coaches, school leaders) are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice.
- Student and staff data inform professional development offerings.

Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
	District has a district-wide goal of staff participation and proficiency in DEI&B topics			X
	District monitors participation rates for all staff	X		
	District monitors proficiency rates for all staff			X
	District includes mechanism to gauge participant feedback of professional development offering	X		

Opportunities for Growth: Talent Development

- **Follow-ups for professional development.** There are not clear definitions of requirements for teacher PD follow up. As described in the professional development overview document completed by the district, follow ups include “applied in curriculum” or “reflection questions.”
- **There are limited professional development opportunities for staff other than teachers, i.e., office staff, district staff, and school leaders.** The majority of professional development is provided for teachers.
- **Equity-centric PD does not have clear benchmarks towards an overall district equity goal.** Currently, there is no system wide plan or tracker of what PD is being taken and which data is driving the professional development offerings.

Recommendations: Talent Development

11. Require additional, foundational DEI&B PDs for all staff. Several stakeholder groups echoed the need for professional development in equity. Specifically, family focus group participants, student focus group participants, and individual interviewees all noted the need for professional development of school staff and leadership. Stakeholders asked for the following types of trainings for school and district staff:

- Support of MLL students
- Implicit Bias, i.e., Bias based on family last names, past student behavior (see Chapter 6. Culture and Climate for more information)
- Socioeconomic Bias

- Neurodiversity
- Teacher Expectation
- Foundational equity course (i.e., explaining difference between equity and equality)

12. All equity-centric PD should have a requirement to provide evidence of content learned through one or multiple methods. This will ensure lessons learned in professional development are implemented with fidelity in the classroom. Evidence of learning might include lesson plans, student work, self-reflection journals, etc. The district should regularly analyze and use the data collected from participants to determine strengths and improvements needed for attendees.

13. Assist teachers in understating their role in equity. One or more stakeholder groups described the lack of interest by some teachers to engage in equity work as “they don’t see it as part of their job” because they have been at Westerly so long and it “wasn’t an earlier requirement.” As a result, continual conversations about data, disproportionality, and student experience should occur with teachers individually and in group settings.

14. Create an equity-focused Professional Development plan. Include the following:

- Data used as part of the decision-making process to offer selected PD. Examples include student surveys, academic achievement rates, graduation rates, discipline rates, etc.
- Expected short- and long-term goals for all equity learning. Examples include short term goal of 90% of WHS staff will participate in implicit bias trainings between Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 with 80% proficiency in understanding and interrupting bias as measured by self-reporting tool and student survey. An example of a long-term goal is 90% of all WHS staff will participate in implicit bias trainings and be proficient in understanding and interrupting bias by Spring 2025 as measured by self-reporting tool and student survey.
- Expected outcomes through student, teacher, staff, and community data. Examples of potential data include student surveys, academic achievement rates, graduation rates, discipline rates, etc.
- Resources needed to support the implementation of plan. Examples include roles of persons who will spearhead the PD Plans for district and school-based initiatives.

15. Learn from WPS families. Families can be a great resource for explaining what equity and inequity means to their household and experience. As equity varies from family to family, it is important that educators, staff, and leadership understand the needs of families. Being explicit in asking for information to provide students with equitable opportunities is imperative to meeting the academic needs of each student.

16. Provide trainings in multiple modes, levels, and times. To help ensure maximum participation in trainings and promote accessibility to non-instructional staff, PD should be offered at varying times, in different modalities (i.e., online, webinar, in-person, independent learning, etc.), and for different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced).

7. CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Guiding Question: To what extent is the culture and climate of WPS welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of each student?

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES: CULTURE AND CLIMATE

District and school culture and climate play a critical role in setting the tone for how students, families, and staff are included and welcomed in the community. According to the National School Climate Center, “school climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.”⁶²

A positive school climate impacts all community members. Numerous research studies have demonstrated the association between a positive learning environment and greater student achievement, social emotional well-being, students' sense of agency, and students' sense of connection to the school community. In positive learning environments, teachers are more empowered and have a greater sense of efficacy in their roles.⁶³ Creating and sustaining a positive school climate also involves engaging parents and families of all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, helping them feel connected to the community in culturally and linguistically inclusive ways.⁶⁴

A synthesis of school climate literature highlights several practices essential to sustaining a positive school climate that promotes equity, including:

- Open and inclusive communication accessible to all community members (students, families, and staff).
- Employing an asset-based view of diversity.⁶⁵
- Proactive culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement practices and partnerships.⁶⁶
- Supportive, reciprocal relationships (between teachers and students, teachers and their peers, and students and their peers).⁶⁷
- Institutional structures, norms, and expectations in place to sustain a positive school climate.⁶⁸
- Use of restorative disciplinary practices.⁶⁹
- Creating a sense of belonging among students and staff.⁷⁰

A recent REL Northwest report (2019) elaborates a similar set of practices, and emphasizes “leading through collaboration and by example”:

“The policies and actions of school leaders influence school climate, how staff members interact with students, and teachers' classroom management practices. All stakeholders should have the goal of promoting a welcoming and caring school

⁶² National School Climate Center. “What is school climate and why is it important?”

⁶³ Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D' Alessandro, A (2013). “A Review of School Climate Research.” Review of Educational Research, 83(3), 357-385. *Sage Journals*.

⁶⁴ Mapp, K.L. & Bergman, E (2019). “Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships.” *Dual Capacity*.

⁶⁵ Hyler, M.E., Carver-Thomas, D., & Wechsler, M & Willis, L (January 12, 2021). “Districts Advancing Racial Equity (DARE) Tool.” *Learning Policy Institute*.

⁶⁶ Mapp & Bergman, (2019); Thapa, A et al (2013).

⁶⁷ Thapa, A et al (2013)

⁶⁸ Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M (September 1, 2018). “Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success.” *Learning Policy Institute*; Bryk, A.S and Schneider, B (March 1, 2003). “Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform.” *Educational Leadership* 60 (6), 40-45. *ACSD*.

⁶⁹ Hyler, et. al (January 12, 2020).

⁷⁰ Blad, E (June 2017.) “Students' Sense of Belonging at School Is Important. It Starts With Teachers.” *Education Week*; Allen, K. (August 9, 2019). “5 Ways to Boost Students' Sense of School Belonging.” *Monash University*.

climate for all students – a major component of which is building and sustaining a culture that embraces diversity (something that requires strong leadership and a shared commitment to equity among all staff members) ... [which also] requires the collaboration and engagement ... of parents and students.”⁷¹

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON: CULTURE AND CLIMATE

- **WPS offers several activities and clubs.** These include the WHS Alliance Club, Choose to Include Initiative, and SMILE Club. All initiatives share the intention of supporting students from marginalized groups such as the LGBTQ+ community and special education:
 - WHS Alliance Club: “We are a confidential, non-judgmental, loving support network that works to educate, inspire and empower a community of acceptance of individuality; it’s where being yourself is just that—a place to be you.”⁷²
 - Choose to Include at WHS: “I pledge to look for the lonely, the isolated, the left out, the challenged, and the bullied. I pledge to overcome the fear of difference and replace it with the power of inclusion. I Choose to Include!”⁷³
 - SMILE Club: “The S.M.I.L.E. program is an afterschool enrichment program geared to increase the numbers of underrepresented and other educationally underserved students who graduate high school well prepared to enter higher education and pursue careers in science, math, engineering and technology (STEM).”⁷⁴
- **There are students who feel they have access to assistance from teachers.** Many students from all student focus groups described opportunities to obtain extra help and support from teachers. Participants described instances in which they felt comfortable talking to teachers to get assistance. Interviewees also noted teachers’ availability and dedication to working with students.
- **There are opportunities to voice student thoughts and/or ideas.** As reported by interviewees, WPS offers the following for student inclusion and voice: Student Council, student representative to school committee and school improvement team, surveys in school, students on the transformation team, advisors to the principal. As mentioned by students, they can also provide input for classroom norms and rules.
- **One or more parents feel special needs students are being supported.** As mentioned in two of three family focus groups, there are families who feel their special education students have been included in the school experience and were supported by the school principal.

⁷¹ Nishioka, V, Williams, J, & Jaffery, Z (April 2019). “[Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline.](#)” *Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest*, 8.

⁷² Westerly Public Schools. *WHS Alliance Club*.

⁷³ Westerly Public Schools (October 16, 2019). “[Choose to Include Pledge Day.](#)”

⁷⁴ Westerly High School. “[WHS Student Activities 2018-19.](#)”

STRATEGIES ANALYSIS AT-A-GLANCE: CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students of Westerly have a sense of belonging, feel welcomed and heard in classes, broader school campus, and school-sponsored events. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
District maintains a positive school climate for students with mechanisms in place for continued improvement	Affinity clubs are made available and sponsored at all schools, where age appropriate		X	
	A variety of school-sponsored social events are offered and accessible to all students	X		
	Students feel welcomed at school and at school-sponsored events		X	
	Participation in extra-curricular activities is accessible to all students	X		
	Students feel included at school and at school-sponsored events		X	
	Teachers have high expectations for all students		X	
	Student voice is part of the decision-making process		X	
	Students' sense of belonging is encouraged and supported, i.e., respectful relationships with teachers and other students		X	
	Culturally responsive teaching, messaging, and practices are used to engage students		X	
	Students feel physically and psychologically safe at school and school-sponsored activities		X	
	Students feel heard at school regarding their academic, emotional, and social needs		X	
	There are district and/or school wide mechanisms in place to ensure students are heard		X	
	Students are aware of district and/or school wide mechanisms in place to ensure students are heard		X	

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH: CULTURE AND CLIMATE

- There have been reports of racial incidents resulting in BIPOC and historically marginalized families not feeling welcomed or supported.** As described in BIPOC and HMI family focus groups, open feedback responses, and all student focus groups, there have been multiple incidents including children being called racial slurs by other students as well as harassment and bullying of LGBTQ students.
- Students have access to opportunities based on parental involvement.** As described in an interview, while several activities and offerings are available at WPS, some children will not participate in these offerings because their parents are not aware of them. "All students don't have the same info or access based on parent involvement," as described by a WPS stakeholder. As mentioned in the all-families focus group, "parental limitations should not affect accessibility of their

child's school experience. Some parents may not know how to access resources, which supports their child is eligible for, and be versed in advocating for their child. The lack of information creates barriers and inequities in the school experience."

- **Students do not always feel heard.** Among student focus group participants and open feedback responses, there was a perception that there are many opportunities to provide student input, however the input is not acted upon because administrators "don't want to listen to students or admit that something could be changed."
- **There is a perception that some teachers contribute to a poor school climate.** As described by one or more interviewed stakeholders and student focus group members, there are teachers who are described as "rude" and "saying things that were offensive" to students. Teachers have also been perceived as the biggest resistance to implementing change.
- **There is a perception that several student groups are not feeling supported.** One or more leadership interviewees mentioned groups of students who are not being provided full support, such as students struggling academically, special education students, Latino students, and students of color:
 - "I think we need to do more work around kids that struggle when we don't have a program that meets their need."
 - "We struggle to really move forward with some students who are really not successful. Struggling with our SPED population with their standardized testing. Our Latino students too, both of those subgroups"
 - "Lack of support for kids who need extra support."
 - "Need more help supporting Sped Ed kids – our biggest equity gap is our students with disabilities."
 - "Beyond poverty and color, it is the same for students with disabilities as well. Adults say "what did you expect" when those kids fail. We don't do a good job helping SWD achieve at high levels. A belief that SPED kids can't achieve."
 - "There are not a lot of role models for our students of color."
- **There is a perception of teacher bias by various stakeholders.** Across interviews, open feedback responses, BIPOC and HMI family focus groups, and all student focus groups, participants named biases held by teachers.
 - Last Name Bias: As reported in interviews, BIPOC family focus group, and the WMS student focus group, there is a last name bias possibly due to the small, intransient nature of the town. If a teacher has a student that misbehaves or "they don't like", then all the children from that family are treated differently. The reputations of former family members follow the current student throughout their educational experience.
 - History Bias: As reported in the student focus group, students feel administrators may make judgments about students based on their disciplinary history.
 - Socioeconomic Bias: As described by interviewees, teachers have the perception that students from the "poor section" of town are not expected to succeed academically.

- Outsider Bias: As reported by interviewees, there is discrimination against people who were not born and raised in Westerly. This bias was named by one or more stakeholders as the “Westerly Way” to describe people who grew up in Westerly or have been there for years.
- Ability Bias: As reported by interviewees, there is a bias towards special education students and their ability to be successful.

RECOMMENDATIONS: CULTURE AND CLIMATE

1. **Require administrators and teachers to participate in an implicit bias professional development course with accountability measures.** The Harvard Implicit Bias test is a common tool used to gauge implicit bias across a myriad of identities. Requiring professional development in which an implicit bias test is used as data may be helpful in assisting teachers with their understanding of their own biases and how their bias affects students. Moreover, WPS leadership can explore a professional development option in which individual teacher data such as grades, discipline referrals, and parent contact is disaggregated by student subgroup to explore the potential disproportionality between students of different subgroups.
2. **Seek ways to promote teacher support of all students.** To help incentivize support of all students, WPS can offer a program that helps support student performance at all levels. For example, a metric should be used to gauge growth for students who need additional support, such as lower performing students. Teachers can administer a baseline assessment. After a specified amount of time, the same assessment can be used to track growth. Similarly, a metric to gauge proficiency for grade level material and beyond can be used for students who are high performing. Items to be decided upon and determined are:
 - Which metrics will be used to gauge proficiency and growth?
 - What incentives will be offered to WPS teachers?
 - How often will students be assessed for growth or proficiency?
 - Who will be responsible for spearheading this initiative?
3. **Encourage teachers to have high expectations for all students.** As mentioned in student focus groups, some students feel teachers have high expectations for them. However, school leadership interviewees have described instances in which some teachers have low expectations for specific subgroups of children, namely low performing students and students whom teachers view as less capable. The Spring 2022 Panorama survey data for secondary schools supports the claim of leaders, as 32% of students surveyed did not respond favorably to the questions regarding “School Rigorous Expectations.” Notably, when asked, “Overall, how high are your teachers’ expectations of you?” Of students surveyed, 31% stated somewhat high, 4% stated slightly high, and 2% not high at all. As reported by interviewees, teachers have different expectations for children based on that child’s last name, socioeconomic status, Westerly connections, and ability level. WPS leadership can explore a professional development option focused on the importance and application of high expectations for all students.
4. **Create additional programs to support students.** Provide opportunities for diverse community partners to engage with marginalized students. WPS can partner with culturally diverse organizations to mentor and support students, for example, fraternities and sororities such as the

Divine Nine or other chapters of national mentoring organizations who are willing to mentor students virtually if they are unable to participate in person.

5. **Increase opportunities for student voice in areas valued by students.** Formalize communication channels and protocols for students to actively provide input to school and district leaders. Ensure these opportunities are widely known and accessible to all. Continuing to administer a district-wide survey for middle and high school students (such as the RIDE Panorama tool) with questions about culture and climate, student leadership, and student voice, including open response options, can help capture a wide range of input and inform effective future two-way communication between students and school leaders. Establish a practice of regularly sharing survey findings and resulting action steps to show students how their input is taken seriously and is used to inform decision-making at classroom, school, and district levels. This will empower students to continue to share their perspectives about how to improve their educational experiences.
6. **Have an anonymous reporting system.** To safely report harmful identity-driven behavior or incidents from adults and/or students, WPS can enact an anonymous electronic based reporting system in which students can report information. Text applications and web-based forms are helpful tools.

8. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Guiding Question: To what extent are the family engagement efforts of WPS inclusive, collaborative, and equitable?

RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A synthesis of school family engagement literature⁷⁵ and PCG experience highlights several practices essential to family engagement that is inclusive, collaborative, and equitable including, but not limited to:

- Codesign model of engagement between educators and families.
- Proactive culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement practices and partnerships.⁷⁶
- The identification of prospective parent leaders who are representative of their diverse families, including all forms of diversity, such as socio-economic, racial/ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and gender identity.⁷⁷
- Institutional structures, norms, and expectations in place to sustain inclusive family engagement.
- Families are seen as important and integral to the student experience with multiple roles i.e., advocates, collaborators, co-creators, knowledge holders, influencers, participants, supporters, models.⁷⁸
- School districts are welcoming and inclusive, i.e., family cultures are recognized, taught, and celebrated; communication is clear and transparent; barriers to participation are actively removed.

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **WPS has a family engagement policy for Title I schools** entitled WPS Policy No. 2600: District Title I Parent and Family Engagement. As shown in Family Engagement documents provided by the district, all Title I schools have a policy for the engagement of families including the allocation of a parent liaison role and various resources.
- **Families can attend School Committee meetings and share their views in an open forum.** As described by School Committee members, the open forum allows families to express their views and provide insight to the managing School Committee.
- **Translation services make more information available to families.** Currently, WPS offers translation services for all information sent to families to ensure the community is provided information in their native language.
- **Families have participant and collaborator roles in the district:**
 - Families as Collaborators
 - Parent-Teacher Conferences

⁷⁵ Bergman, Eyal & Mapp, Karen L. "Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement." *Carnegie Corporation of New York*.

⁷⁶ Mapp & Bergman, (2019); Thapa, A et al. (2013).

⁷⁷ Bergman, Eyal & Mapp, Karen L.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

- School Improvement Team: The team gives recommendations to principal about hiring, assists the principal in creating the school improvement plan, reviews the annual school budget
- Parent Teacher Organization
- Families as Participants
 - Freshmen First Night (WHS)
 - Open House (all schools)
 - WHS Showcase/CTE Night
 - School Team Meetings
 - Bulldog of the Month (WMS)
 - Band & Chorus Concerts – Winter and Spring (WMS)
 - Spelling & Geography Bee (WMS)
 - Athletic Events (WMS)
 - Promotion Ceremony (WMS)

STRATEGIES ANALYSIS AT-A-GLANCE: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WPS offers equitable family engagement through inclusive engagement activities and collaborative systems between WPS and families. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
District has a family engagement system that fosters supports, flexible engagement options, shared input, and coordination between families and schools	There is transparency and flexibility from school staff regarding communication and collaborative efforts with families to support learning and success		X	
	Staff view family engagement as an asset, i.e., families' home culture and home language are valued by the school district		X	
	District has a living family engagement plan, co-created by families and district			X
	Staff engage families in several roles including co-creators of knowledge, resources, participants, collaborators, i.e., families are involved in providing input into making important decisions within the school district		X	
	Families feel included, welcomed, and valued at school and at school-sponsored events.		X	
	Culturally responsive messaging and practices are used to engage families		X	
	Family engagement is viewed as a core element of equitable education practices		X	

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WPS offers equitable family engagement through inclusive engagement activities and collaborative systems between WPS and families. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
	Family engagement efforts are sustained with resources and systems		X	
	District seeks participation of prospective parent leaders who are representative of their diverse families, including all forms of diversity, such as socio-economic, racial/ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and gender identity		X	

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **There are no clear guidelines for membership on the School Improvement Team.** The largest school decision-making committee consisting of families is the School Improvement Team. While there are clear expectations for family/parent representation in policy, currently there is no written process of how membership is decided upon and how members are chosen.
- **There are limited culturally responsive methods of communication in action.** As described by interview and focus group participants, WPS offers the following forms of written communication: newsletter, emails, text application, and team letters. For families who may be looking for live feedback or more frequent in-person touchpoints, the current modes of communication are not sufficient. Suggestions for parent interaction include in-person or virtual round tables with leadership or community events in which leaders answer questions in a less formal environment.
- **There is a perception that some teachers do not view families as partners.** As described by interviewees, families, and open feedback responses, families have experienced a lack of interest and commitment from some teachers to build a partnership to support their student's education. Families stated a lack of information regarding school resources has created challenges in their child's educational experience.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Provide community members the opportunity to talk to different School Committee members.** This includes the School Committee members outside of their voting area. The "We are Westerly" campaign can include round table conversations between 1-2 School Committee members with 7-10 community members who are not part of the School Committee members' voting district to have more intimate and intentional dialogue about the challenges faced by those communities. Currently, as mentioned by teacher focus groups and interviews, community members do not have a clear understanding of what happens in different parts of the Westerly community. Leveraging conversations with School Committee members who can then inform their constituents may help the broader community understand each other and their respective needs.
2. **Ensure all members of WPS staff have an asset-based view of family engagement.** WPS should provide professional development for staff regarding the role of family as integral parts of the WPS landscape, beyond serving as volunteers. The professional development should also

include mindsets about family engagement shifting from the sole responsibility of families to a shared responsibility of families and schools. During interviews, several members of WPS described the importance of family engagement and named one barrier to engagement as biased staff: "...some educators having pre-conceived notions about parents and the familial support that kids have at home. They think that if kids live with a single parent, then the parent doesn't value education..." Lack of family engagement does not definitively mean families are not involved in their child's education at all; it might mean families do not see the benefits of trying to engage with their child's school or they feel unwelcomed. These families may then use other means to support their child's academic future, such as outside tutoring and external programming. It is imperative each WPS staff member understands their role in and the importance of engaging every family to avoid such misperceptions and feelings of disconnection.

3. **Create a family engagement plan co-created between teachers, leadership, and families.** To support authentic family engagement, a plan can be created to help foster and sustain engagement. A family engagement plan consists of:

- Who is responsible for engaging parents, i.e., the parent liaison
- How families will be engaged
- Metric to gauge engagement
- Expected outcome of the engagement.

Each school should ensure there is representation from each demographic group of their student population.

4. **Engage with the community *in* the community.** To encourage broader community participation, explore hosting Westerly events off site at other venues closer to different parts of the community. For example, curriculum and family nights may occur off campus to help alleviate socioeconomic barriers that limit families' participation at traditional events housed on campus. Leverage current partnerships with local vendors to host events at malls, sporting events, etc. Ask the community where and when they are available and make efforts to meet them there and then.
5. **Intentionally include cross sections of families as participants in committees and school initiatives.** Create groups that require representation from all demographics of the community and provide each person with voting power to make decisions. Demographics include socioeconomic status, race, gender identity, ethnicity, ability, language (MLL), etc. One vote per member of the community is intended to ensure no one person has more power or control than others.
6. **Offer additional ways to provide feedback to and from families.** For example, virtual participation in School Committee meetings allows families to participate from where they are, eliminating some barriers to participation like transportation. Moreover, School Committee members can offer monthly office hours (virtually or in-person) to hear directly from families.
7. **Create clear guidelines for membership in the School Improvement Team.** Create a written process of how community members can join the School Improvement Team. Ensure each member is representative of the diversity of the community, i.e., special education status, socioeconomic levels, race and ethnicity, gender identity, language (MLL students), etc.
8. **Ensure families understand the "how" of equity.** Specific information can be provided on the school website and marketed broadly to describe how equity will be infused in all aspects of Westerly Public Schools to help families understand all staff of WPS are responsible for ensuring each child is provided an equitable opportunity for success. Teachers should include equity in all

information about curriculum and classroom learning sent home to families. Ensuring families understand how equity is part of every aspect of WPS, rather than perceiving DEI as a separate entity and initiative, can support district leadership's role in supporting all members of the WPS community through equity work.

9. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Guiding Questions: To what extent is the curriculum review process inclusive and focused on equity and ensuring equitable representation for each student? To what extent do instructional practices in the district focus on improving academic and social outcomes for each student?

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Research has shown that an equity approach to curriculum design benefits all students, not just students or teachers of color.⁷⁹ When the teacher workforce is diverse and curricula include stories, history, and characters from various backgrounds, children will thrive. For children of all ages and levels of development, equity in curricula can do three critical things:

1. Enrich language, reasoning, writing, discussion, and literacy skills by creating opportunities for conversations from different perspectives and challenging belief systems.
2. Increase engagement among students by helping them feel connected to a curriculum that honors their story and background.
3. Improve school climate and safety by giving students a sense of belonging and collective responsibility in the classroom.

A curriculum that misrepresents history or does not introduce opportunities for students to engage positively in their own learning can be a disservice to students. However unintended, the consequences may be disengagement, a lack of connection, identity issues, and low self-esteem. What happens in the classroom can have a lasting effect on the social emotional well-being of every child.

The companion to an equitable curriculum is culturally responsive instruction. As outlined in Gloria Ladson-Billings' framework for culturally responsive teaching, best practices match responsive instruction with equitable curriculum,⁸⁰ which refers to the extent to which the collection of texts, resources, student and teacher materials reflect the following:

1. Diverse perspectives and materials that represent voices from people with diverse cultural backgrounds.
2. Emphasis on a multicultural view of content, with discussion around power structures, who holds power, and who does not have access.
3. Equitable representation of positive and significant figures in history, science, mathematics, literature, and other content, among people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, highlighting achievements of people who are not part of the dominant culture.
4. Consideration for exploring how the laws and systems pertaining to topics that are being explored may impact different racial/ethnic groups, and other social and cultural groups, in different or disproportionate ways.
5. Units that include lessons that recognize intersectionality – being identified by oneself or others as belonging to one or more racial/ethnic, gender, socio-economic, religion, or other cultural identity,

⁷⁹ Wells, A., et.al (2016). "How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students." *The Century Foundation*.

⁸⁰ Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165.

that is either marginalized or underrepresented in positions of authority – compounds the adverse effects of discrimination and disproportionality.

6. Supports for culturally responsive teaching practices, with specific resources to foster conversations around challenging materials that are respectful of cultural differences and classroom diversity.
7. Activities and resources that promote social justice awareness and responsible action among students.
8. Affirmative development of self-identity and appreciation of diversity in the school climate, with intent to influence societal contexts.

Student learning is best experienced in an environment where curriculum is representative of, inclusive of, and relevant to the lived cultural and social experiences of students so that stronger connections are being made between what is being taught and what is learned. An equally important factor is that students view civic and historical context and events from multiple perspectives, particularly those of people groups who have been marginalized, oppressed, underrepresented, and silenced.⁸¹⁸²

An equitable curriculum is both standards driven and culturally relevant. Standards are designed to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need in order to be successful in college or careers once they leave school. Rhode Island measures student performance on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) through the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS). For students to succeed on the RICAS, the curriculum must be aligned with the standards that are tested. However, for students to connect to these standards, the curriculum needs to be interesting and relevant to the student. Culturally responsive instruction is not about focusing on holidays or special events, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Black History Month, but rather focusing on the current culture lived by students throughout the entire school year, including their family, heritage, and history. Researchers such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and Sonia Nieto have found that when standards are taught in a culturally relevant way, students are more likely to learn the curriculum.⁸³

Strategies that develop equitable teaching skills build the educators' ability to support each student's individualized learning needs. Specifically, teachers acquire skills that improve their instructional delivery such as differentiation, effective strategies for connecting material to student culture, and cooperative learning. Moreover, educators acquire learning strategies that help them engage and support all students for example, presenting content from multiple perspectives/voices, providing opportunities for independent exploration, and incorporating student choice.

In Geneva Gay's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*, she defines culturally relevant pedagogy as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them; it teaches to and through strengths of these students".⁸⁴ Culturally responsive teaching looks at differences as an asset rather than a deficit.

Gay describes culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

- Acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups.

⁸¹ Camcia, Steven P. & Zhu, Juanjuan. (2012). "Synthesizing Multicultural, Global, and Civic Perspectives in the Elementary School Curriculum and Educational Research." *The Qualitative Report*, 17(103), 1-19.

⁸² Gay, G. (2018). "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice." *Teachers College Press*.

⁸³ Linton, C.W. (2011). "Equity 101- The Equity Framework." *SAGE Publications*.

⁸⁴ Gay, G. (2018).

- Builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences.
- Uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- Teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages.
- Incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.⁸⁵

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- **Curriculum review process.** Many district leaders and educators praised the detailed processes that WPS has developed for reviewing and discussing curriculum. The district places importance on data reviews and provides shared planning time for collaborative work across grade levels and teams.
- **Curriculum diversification.** In focus groups, several high school ELA teachers discussed the efforts to center equity in the curriculum review process. They shared that the review process was aligned with new standards from RIDE for diversification of and representation in the curriculum.
- **Process for stakeholder input on curricular or instructional materials.** The district has a thorough and standardized way for individuals to submit concerns about curricular or instructional materials. Having a standard way to report and track these concerns is an important foundation for ensuring transparency and consistency of decision-making. However, it is unclear the process for assessing or responding to the concerns filed.

STRATEGIES ANALYSIS AT-A-GLANCE: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are represented by and reflected in the materials used in the classroom. • Students are engaged and active participants in their learning. • Teachers employ culturally responsive practices in curriculum-related decision-making and instruction. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
The district uses equity-centered curricula	The district uses an equity-centered tool for curriculum selection.		X	
	Diverse stakeholder input, including that of students, is included in the curriculum selection process		X	
	District curriculum includes diverse and multicultural perspectives		X	
	District curricula reflect the identities and lived experiences of the student population		X	

⁸⁵ Linton, C.W. (2011).

Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are represented by and reflected in the materials used in the classroom. • Students are engaged and active participants in their learning. • Teachers employ culturally responsive practices in curriculum-related decision-making and instruction. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in Westerly?		
		Yes	Partial	No
Educators employ culturally responsive practices in the classroom	Teachers are provided training in culturally responsive instruction practices		X	
	Teachers practice differentiated instruction in the classroom, i.e., multiple intelligences, learning styles, etc.		X	
	Teachers solicit input from students about their reflections on and connections with classroom lessons		X	
	Teachers present opportunities for student choice in the classroom		X	
	Teachers acknowledge and address the power structures that exist between themselves and their students, and amongst the students, based on their unique intersectional identities		X	
	Teachers feel empowered to teach diverse topics in the classroom and have support from the school/district administration to do so			X

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- **Efforts to diversify the curriculum are inconsistent.** While high school ELA teachers discussed the efforts to center equity in the curriculum review process, other teachers shared that equity has not been centered in the curriculum review and development processes in other subject areas and grade levels.
- **Unclear goals for embedding equity in curriculum and instruction.** While the district has provided shared time for curriculum review, educators and leaders shared that the expectations are not clear or explicit for how that time should be used, what actions should come out of the data work, curriculum planning, and how instruction should be modified based on these data reviews.
- **Fear of backlash stops educators from including equity-focused materials or tackling equity-focused topics in the classroom.** In alignment with the finding in Chapter 4. District Policies and Practices, teachers and school leaders consistently shared reluctance to engage with any equity-related topics due to fear of repercussions in the community. Several educators cited the stripping of school and classroom libraries as examples of this, sharing that either they chose to remove or were told by leadership to remove any books that could be perceived as controversial in order to avoid backlash.

Teachers stated that they are not comfortable or do not feel well-equipped to facilitate conversations with students around equity and challenging topics like race. Teachers, district leadership, and School Committee members shared the need for formal district policy around

engaging in these conversations so that all staff feel supported without fear of retribution or backlash.

- **Curriculum maps developed by WPS do not contain DEI or other equity-focused language.** PCG reviewed curriculum maps for ELA and K-8 Math. The maps were developed by curriculum coordinators and other district leaders and educators and are aligned with RIDE's Selecting and Implementing High-Quality Curriculum Materials framework. However, the curriculum maps and recommendations do not include or reference the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) tools provided by RIDE.
- **There is a lack of recognition of all equity concepts in classroom contexts.** When asked about what they look for regarding equity when they walk into a classroom, several school leaders mentioned physical equity (chairs that fit students) and student engagement in lessons. While these are important elements of inclusion and classroom culture, school leaders did not discuss concepts related to ensuring that students with historically marginalized identities are reflected in classroom materials and discussion or techniques for engaging students equitably in lessons. Relatedly, when asked about equity in curriculum, elementary teachers shared things like "learning around the world" units which are often surface level introductions to different cultures and do not address deeper issues and concepts of equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. **Revise the curriculum cycle process to incorporate a greater number of voices from diverse stakeholders and ensure a transparent process.** Revise the curriculum cycle process to ensure it encompasses a transparent process and a diverse group of stakeholders. There is already a solid foundation for the curriculum review process in place including content being reviewed, phases of work, and timelines, but transparency and communication is lacking. For example, there are limited opportunities to collect feedback from stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, teachers) through surveys or focus groups regarding perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum before the review process begins. That creates an opportunity for more representation from interested parents to be on the curriculum review committees as well. In addition, there is also an opportunity to add a section to the WPS website for curriculum review information and updates including curriculum committee members, meeting agendas/minutes, and School Committee progress reports. When the curriculum website section is developed, explicitly communicate about the site in newsletters and at School Committee meetings to make certain interested internal and external stakeholders are updated on the committee's progress.
2. **Select and utilize an equity-focused curriculum review tool in all curriculum review processes.** Each content area is in the process of revising or developing curriculum maps aligned to the RIDE Curriculum Frameworks. It is critical that the curriculum writers, such as curriculum coordinators and WPS teachers who are developing or revising new curriculum maps, use an equity lens through the process. Including a tool such as the *Seven Forms of Bias in Instructional Materials* checklist into the map is an important step, as well as adding a calibration process. The calibration process should include other staff members, who are not writers of the curriculum maps, to review the work using the checklist and a focus on equity. WPS could also use the CRSE tools developed and provided by RIDE, but the district should communicate the clear expectation for their use and inclusion in the process.
3. **Set clear expectations and provide trainings on utilizing data to deliver and develop equitable instruction.** To move the needle on providing instruction for every student through an equity lens, the district needs to clearly communicate the expectations on utilizing data for teachers and provide trainings and other resources to support teachers in doing so.

- 4. Provide training on culturally responsive practices and differentiated instruction.** Many educators and school leaders expressed a need for deeper understanding of the implementation of equitable instructional practices. School leaders and evaluators need concrete training on the criteria for an equitable classroom. Teachers need concrete training on strategies for building and maintaining an equitable classroom.

10. CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by WPS related to equity and inclusion are those shared with many school systems across the country. The key findings and recommendations presented in this report are grounded in the thorough analysis of data collected for this audit and are drawn from research-informed strategies and best practices recognized to improve equity and student outcomes. We believe that a commitment to carry forward the recommendations in this report and the active engagement of a wide range of stakeholders in the planning process and implementation will position the district well to provide an inclusive and equitable education for every student in Westerly Public Schools.

Enacting change, the kind of change that will fundamentally improve outcomes of all students, and especially those from historically marginalized groups, requires focus, a strong vision from the Superintendent and School Committee enacted by district leadership staff, an appropriate allocation of resources, mandated professional development, and clear, non-negotiable, accountability measures. This type of reform will require the involvement and commitment of every staff member, family, and student.

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