

# Equity audit indicates D-99 has made gains in diversity

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**DOWNERS GROVE** – Community High School District 99 is making strides in its diversity initiatives, as well as efforts to recruit employees of color, according to results of the district's equity audit.

Rob Lang, a member of the district's diversity and inclusion council, delivered a presentation to the school board Nov. 16 highlighting gains and areas of opportunity.

The group was designed to engage in talks about recruitment, retainment, professional learning and the atmospheres created at District 99 schools.

Lang said it's clear that the work of the council is important.

"We want them to engage in school work," Lang said, referring to students of color. "We want them to learn. We want them to be able to do that without constantly trying to figure out how to navigate different environments. We want them to bring their authentic selves to school."

District officials partnered with the DuPage County Regional Office of Edu-

cation to enlist a researcher to conduct an equity audit, a tool used to assess diversity, equity and inclusion in schools. The process involved assembling a team of staff members to discuss areas of pride and opportunities for the district.

"There's some systemic things that we really need to inspect," Lang said.

For example, District 99 is striving to break patterns in the areas of discipline, academic programming, assessments and attendance to curb predicted outcomes for student success-based demographics.

Lang said officials have worked hard to ensure outcomes for student success are not predicated by race, gender, income or disability.

The report also indicates that District 99 made gains in the areas of hiring practices, Advanced Placement enrollment, changes in curriculum and professional learning.

The report goes on to indicate there is little to no variability displayed in the district's graduation and attendance rates when comparing students of different backgrounds with one another.

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The report shows a downward trend in how often disciplinary measures are applied to students of color and students from low-income households, stabilization in the number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement and Technology Center of DuPage courses, and differences in the dropout rates based on student demographics.

The equity audit provided a set of recommendations and is derived using background and quantitative and qualitative data.

Lang said the report provides an indication of what steps the district can take to address issues in diversity and equity.

The recommendations outline how the district should consider an increase in communication and visuals related to equity work, increase staff diversity, evaluate curriculum for anti-bias language and representation, focus on staff culture, decrease predictability in discipline and academic programming, adopt an equity strategic plan and plan for another equity audit.

District 99's efforts to diversify staffing has faced its share of challenges since the spring, officials said.

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented many career fairs from being held. Consequently, Lang said

the district didn't get the chance to do targeted recruitment.

However, the district still adhered to best practices.

Lang said the pandemic did not halt District 99's efforts to address issues of diversity and equity. For example, students, staff and administrators have continued, albeit virtually, to engage in conversations on equity and inclusion.

Lang, who is white, said the district's equity team and the diversity committee were merged into one entity. The two groups underwent a bit of reorganization last year, which, in turn, led to the establishment of a new diversity and equity council to have larger group discussions.

As for the student body, the Illinois School Report Card indicates that during the 2019-20 year, 65% were white, 17% Hispanic, 8% Black, 7% Asian and 3% two or more races.

The previous year, the demographic breakdown of the student body at District 99 schools was 64% white, 9% Black, 17% Hispanic, 7% Asian and 3% two or more races, according to Report Card data.

The demographics for District 99 teachers break down to 94.1% white, 2.1% Black, 3.1% Hispanic, 0.3% Asian, 0.2% two or more races and 0.3% Pacific Islander, according to the Illinois School Report Card for the 2019-20 academic year.