District Equity Audit

Prepared for Norwood Public Schools

March 31, 2022

Equity Journey Partners

Mass insight

education & research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The equity audit report is the result of an effort initiated by Norwood Public Schools (NPS) to understand current strengths and challenges relative to diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students, families, and staff to identify opportunities for improvement and inform equity-centered strategic planning. NPS partnered with Mass Insight Education & Research, Inc. and Equity Journey Partners to conduct the equity audit from May 2021 to February 2022. The process consisted of four key phases: Equity Audit Preparation and Planning, Data and Artifact Analysis, Stakeholder Engagement, and Analysis and Presentation of Findings. NPS plans to engage in equity-centered strategic planning following the equity audit. The NPS equity audit aims to:

- ***Analyze data and gather information*** to understand current strengths and areas for growth relative to equitable opportunities for all student populations;
- Prompt reflective conversations about the current and desired state of equitable opportunities by ***examining stakeholder attitudes, experiences, and beliefs;*** and
- Identify and ***present opportunities to improve equitable practices*** to fully support NPS' diverse students, staff, families, and community.

The NPS equity audit surfaced four priority areas in which NPS already has foundational strengths to capitalize on and in which there are challenges and opportunities to improve. In order to make significant progress toward equity, NPS should:

- ➢ Establish systems, action plans, roles, and accountability structures based on a shared vision and understanding of equity,
- ➢ Ensure access to rigorous instruction with equitable supports, especially for students receiving special education services and English learners,
- ➢ Cultivate affirming and inclusive learning environments led by a diverse staff that is representative of the student body, and
- ➢ Foster a culture of affirmation, inclusion, belonging, and partnership across the NPS community

Priority Area 1: Establish systems, action plans, roles, and accountability structures based on a shared vision and understanding of equity

Foundational Strengths:

- NPS is beginning its equity journey. There is a recognition that inequities exist and there is a general desire and intent to increase equity and inclusion in NPS.
- There is momentum towards NPS's equity journey. Marked progress has been made in confronting and disrupting some inequities within the district.
- NPS already has some infrastructure in place on which to build equitable systems, plans, and processes.

Challenges:

- Challenge 1.A. There is not yet a shared vision for equity or a shared understanding of what a more equitable NPS system will look like.
- Challenge 1.B. NPS does not currently have an explicit plan for pursuing equity, rooted in a clear theory of action, with aligned strategies, action steps, measures of success, and accountable owners to achieve them.
- Challenge 1.C. Financial and operational systems lack defined, shared equity criteria, and put a higher burden on lower-income families.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate an affirmative vision for equity in NPS into the district vision that is informed by diverse and representative students, families, and community and fosters a culture of inclusion for all.
2. Define a theory of change that clearly identifies how leaders at multiple levels will enact the district vision, values, and beliefs around equity.
3. Ensure the district strategic plan includes clear equity goals, strategies that align with the vision/theory of action to achieve those goals, defined roles/responsibilities for implementation, and metrics for measuring progress towards implementation and outcomes.
4. Define and systematize an equity-based system for resource allocation and alignment.
5. Establish systems, structures, and processes for monitoring progress towards equity goals, including subgroup performance, and making adjustments based on data.

Priority Area 2: Ensure access to rigorous instruction with equitable supports, especially for students receiving special education services and English learners

Foundations Strengths:

- Clear progress has been made in programming and staffing to support English Learners.
- NPS has a core of committed, veteran special education staff working to build strong relationships with their students.
- There have been deliberate, meaningful efforts by individual staff members and teams to increase access to rigorous, culturally responsive, and advanced coursework for underrepresented students.

Challenges:

- Challenge 2.A. NPS stakeholders do not believe all staff have high expectations for all students.
- Challenge 2.B. Programs to support students with disabilities and struggling students are inconsistent and/or inadequate.
- Challenge 2.C. Support for English Learners is improving, but still lags behind needs.
- Challenge 2.D. Access to rigorous, advanced coursework and student achievement outcomes remains inequitable.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a robust RTI or MTSS program at each school level in line with state guidelines to identify and support struggling students.
2. Investigate and analyze the root causes of the overrepresentation of Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and economically disadvantaged students in special education.
3. Develop a vision for an inclusion-based special education model and identify budgetary implications for implementing it.
4. Codify special education processes, expectations, and structures, including supports for families navigating the IEP process.
5. Develop a vision and action plan for an EL program that includes Newcomer Programs, proactive staffing, and support for families.
6. Investigate and analyze the root causes of gaps in access to advanced coursework and postsecondary opportunities.

Priority Area 3: Cultivate rigorous, affirming, and inclusive learning environments led by a staff that is representative of the student body and meets the needs of all students

Foundations Strengths:

- Most administrators, staff, students, and families acknowledge that a diverse staff representative of the student population is an essential component of an equitable district.
- Recognizing the importance of a culturally proficient staff, NPS embarked on an ambitious initiative to provide administrators and faculty professional development in this area. Staff express a strong desire to continue to strengthen their cultural-proficiency knowledge and skills.
- District stakeholders recognize the need to increase access to a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum. There have been some individual efforts across the district to begin to address this need but there is not a systematic, comprehensive approach.

Challenges:

- Challenge 3.A. NPS does not have an adequate strategic plan in place to recruit, hire or retain leadership and staff that is representative of the student body. Massachusetts's competitive marketplace will require a multi-year innovative and proactive approach to achieve the desired workforce diversity.
- Challenge 3.B. NPS needs to broaden its investment in building cultural proficiency and equity knowledge and skills.
- Challenge 3.C. Curriculum does not consistently reflect all students' cultures, experiences, needs and interests.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a comprehensive vision and proactive strategic plan for recruiting, hiring, and retaining leadership, faculty, and staff that represents the diversity of the student population.
2. Continue development around staff cultural competency and equity skills with increasing attention to job-embedded opportunities for faculty and student support services, integration into performance management processes, and broadening reach to all staff with public facing and operational responsibilities.
3. Develop processes, timelines, and criteria for evaluating the cultural proficiency of curricula in each department and for revising and/or supplementing curricula as needed.

Priority Area 4: Foster a culture of affirmation, inclusion, belonging, and partnership across the NPS community

Foundations Strengths:

- Students and staff feel physically safe at school and feel there is a generally positive culture and atmosphere in school communities and across the district. This provides a foundation for efforts to ensure all students, families and staff feel more deeply affirmed, included, and that they belong.
- There are clear examples of efforts to acknowledge student identities and interests, particularly through school-based student clubs and activities, resulting in many students feeling that they have a dedicated space where they feel welcome and that they can be their full selves.

- Multiple stakeholders recognize the need to improve school and district communications with families, especially those from historically marginalized populations. There have been some efforts across the district to begin addressing this need as a result.

Challenges:

- Challenge 4.A. Most classrooms are positive and tolerant, but not all are fully affirming for all students to feel seen and embraced in school.
- Challenge 4.B. Staff, particularly those who identify as someone from a marginalized background, also experience varied levels of belonging and affirmation, and not all staff feel comfortable or clear on how to report acts of discrinimation when they occur.
- Challenge 4.C. District and schools are not yet oriented to engage families as full partners in their children's education.
- Challenge 4.D. Current systems and practices do not yet elevate the voices of all community members including staff, families, and students.

Recommendations:

1. Establish and expand opportunities to authentically acknowledge, support, and build understanding of students' individual interests, cultures, and needs.
2. Increase social emotional learning and student equity skills to ensure positive, respectful student-student interactions, and ensure teachers and staff see and appropriately address student needs.
3. Investigate and analyze the root causes of the disproportionality in discipline rates.
4. Create staff affinity spaces to support and retain staff who identify with a traditionally marginalized population (e.g., BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, staff with disabilities, and others).
5. Develop a district-wide vision and strategic plan for engaging families as full partners in their children's education, with special attention to strategies that consider those families whose home language is not English, without flexible working schedules, or who may not be able to adequately advocate in their children's interests.
6. Implement inclusive structures and practices to ensure the voice of students, families and staff are meaningfully and regularly included in the decision-making process at all levels of the district.

In conclusion, we commend NPS on taking this step to understand the extent to which it provides an equitable experience for all students, families, and staff. Orienting oneself to the results can be challenging, because it requires embracing multiple realities; for example that most people in NPS get along with and care about their community *and* that not all members of the community feel welcomed, included, and affirmed. Embracing these multiple realities – *without excuse and without overly-constraining self-criticism* – is the work ahead in pursuing the school system that Norwood deserves.

There are caring, hard-working people in Norwood, and yet the current system does not yet provide equitable experiences and outcomes for all students. The work of pursuing equity will necessarily involve disruptions, confronting challenges, trying new things, and making mistakes. It will face resistance both internally and externally. But the community's commitment to equity means persisting through these challenges to collaboratively build the schools its students deserve.

INTRODUCTION

This equity audit report is the result of an effort initiated by Norwood Public Schools (NPS) to understand current strengths and challenges relative to diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students, families, and staff in order to identify opportunities for improvement and inform equity-centered strategic planning. NPS partnered with Mass Insight Education & Research, Inc. and Equity Journey Partners to conduct the equity audit from May 2021 through February 2022. The audit included an examination of district data and artifacts; reflective conversations to understand the lived experiences, perspectives, and beliefs of the diverse NPS community; and synthesis and reporting of findings. This report is the culmination of that effort.

This section of the report outlines our philosophy of equity as a journey, key definitions and terms used frequently in the reports, additional information about Mass Insight and Equity Journey Partners, and a more detailed description of the equity audit purpose, process, and methodology.

Equity as a Journey

Increasing equity is an ongoing improvement journey that requires the engagement of all district and school staff, students, families, and community members. The equity audit supports all NPS stakeholders to individually and collectively develop an equity lens and build a strong foundation that enables all to see equity as part of their daily work. By embedding equity into daily practices, the district can further equity and inclusion in the education landscape and the lived experience of all stakeholders.

We commend NPS for making a district-wide commitment to using data to understand strengths and inequities and to continuously improve towards the district's mission of providing each student with a comprehensive and innovative education in an inclusive, safe and supportive environment.

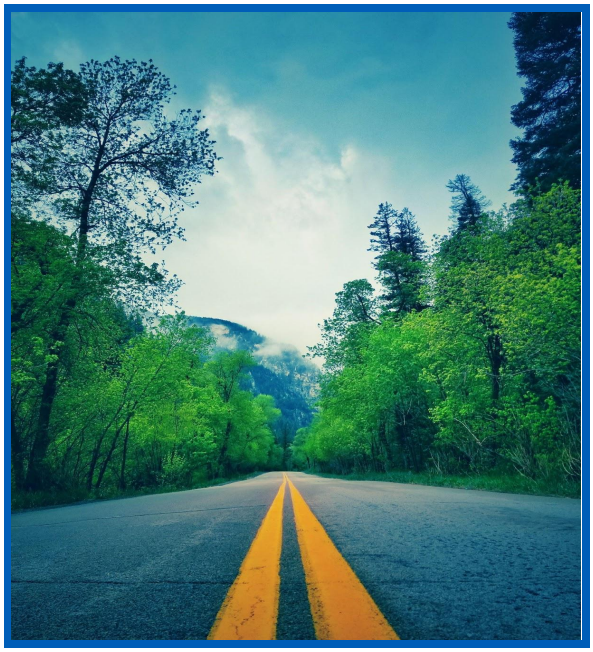


Photo by Drew Rae from Pexels

Key Definitions and Terms

Below are sample definitions for diversity, equity, inclusion, and identity, terms we use often in our report. While there are many different definitions available for these terms, the common set of definitions below can help report readers have a normed understanding of how these terms are used in this report.

- **Diversity:** All the ways in which people differ, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, cognitive styles, and more.
- **Equity:** Every child gets what they need in our schools-regardless of where they come from, what they look like, who their parents are, what their temperament is, or what they show up knowing or not knowing.
- **Inclusion:** The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued as a fully participating member. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.
- **Identity:** A person's sense of self defined by a range of social and physical affiliations and one's personal life experiences, memories, relationships, and values.

Additional terms and definitions we use include:

- **BIPOC:** An acronym for Black, Indigenous, People of Color.
- **LGBTQIA2S+**: An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and the countless affirmative ways in which people identify.
- **Marginalized populations:** groups (including but not limited to racial, ethnic, linguistic, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious, cultural, or ability groups) that experience discrimination and exclusion as a result of current and/or historical social, political, economic power dynamics or oppression from dominant groups.
- **Stakeholder:** a person with a connection to and/or vested interest in the district (for example, school and district staff, students, families, partners, and community members).

Please note: the review team aims to follow state reporting norms and terminology (e.g., English learner, Hispanic or Latino, and others). Exceptions include direct quotes and data shared with the review team using different terms or norms; the review team does not alter data or materials received in this process. If there are not clear state or district reporting norms, the review team follows organizational norms for reporting (e.g., capitalization of race/ethnicity). Therefore, while terms will largely be consistent, there may be slight differences throughout the report.

About Mass Insight and Equity Journey Partners

About Mass Insight Education & Research, Inc. and Our Commitment to Equity

Mass Insight Education & Research is a national nonprofit committed to pursuing equity in education. We envision a world in which student achievement and life outcomes do not correlate with race, ethnicity, social class or zip code. We work to bring this vision to life by partnering with state education agencies, districts, and schools to increase college and career readiness by focusing on system transformation and student success providing academic programs, research, and strategic consulting services.

Mass Insight's leadership in school transformation is nationally recognized. In 2007, Mass Insight Education & Research published The Turnaround Challenge[1], a research report and call to action that highlighted the need for intervention in America's lowest-performing schools – former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called the report, "the Bible of school turnaround." The report introduced the groundbreaking transformation zone model, which has been adopted nationally as a comprehensive school improvement strategy, and also established the framework for our school turnaround theory of action. Our theory of action puts increasing focus on the instructional core and collective responsibility for the success of all students.

We believe that if we work with state education agencies, districts, and schools to ensure schools have:

Conditions: Sufficient school-level control over people, time, money, and program to address the root causes of low performance;

Planning: Evidence-based, actionable improvement plans that address the root causes of low performance informed by a review of existing conditions and input from school, district, and community stakeholders;

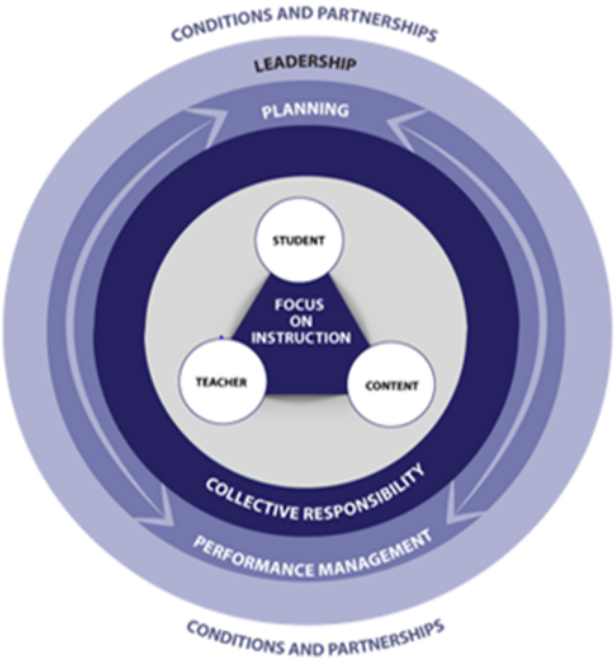
Leadership: A principal who can manage and communicate complexity while maintaining focus on the school's vision and key priorities;

Focus on Instruction: Processes and supports that help teachers work together to constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice so that students can engage in deep learning tasks;

Collective Responsibility: The school faculty and staff ensure there is collective responsibility for both the quality of instruction and student learning and success;

Performance Management: Consistent processes for using data to measure both implementation and outcomes to determine what's working and inform efforts to improve; and,

Partnerships: Partnerships that help the school meet the multiple needs of teachers and students,



[1] *Mass Insight Education and Research*. Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, Inc., 2007, *Mass Insight Education*, www.massinsight.org/resources/the-turnaround-challenge/

THEN schools will dramatically improve and student learning will increase.

Our work is organized around this Theory of Action. Mass Insight believes the school is the unit of change and improvement, and our work with schools and districts begins by understanding local strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Organizational Commitment to Equity: At Mass Insight, we believe that all students should have equitable opportunities and access to high-quality K-12 education, regardless of zip code, economic status, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, or language. Our commitment to equity is grounded in a belief that all students can achieve when provided with high-quality education and supports needed to reach and exceed common expectations. We also believe that equity and equality are fundamentally different. Achieving equity requires an intentional focus on overcoming the historical legacy of racism, discrimination, marginalization, and underinvestment that disadvantages specific groups of people. Overcoming this history requires providing different, tailored supports and resources, dismantling inequitable systems and practices, and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) orientation at the individual level to mitigate biases and prejudice.

About Equity Journey Partners and Our Commitment to Equity

Equity Journey Partners (EJP) is a network of expert, independent consultants passionate about creating equitable school communities. Our mission is to partner with school districts and their communities on their journey to become culturally proficient and equitable ecosystems that ensure students of all cultures and social identities can achieve a future inspired by boundless dreams. Equity Journey Partners provides the following services to school districts and school communities:

- *Equity Audits:* Conducting comprehensive equity audits to identify the root causes of inequitable student opportunities and recommend sustainable, effective strategies to address inequities.

- *Design and Implementation Support:* Facilitating the design and implementation of policies, processes, and practices addressing the root causes of inequities in the school community, including design and implementation of equity-based budgeting.

- *Capacity Building:* Building the capacity of schools and communities to understand, own and resolve issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging through training, coaching, and change tools.

- *Supporting Family and Student Voice:* Allying with districts to amplify family and student voice in the decision-making process.

- *Strategic Equity Planning*: Facilitating the development of strategic equity plans that include and respect all voices in the community to ensure culturally proficient and equitable change.

Essential to our partnership with school districts is the belief that equity work is a journey and we draw our organization's name from the James Baldwin quote: *"I am saying that a journey is called*

that because you cannot know what you will discover on the journey, what you will do, what you will find, or what you find will do to you." This guiding principle informs the following approach to all equity engagements:

- **Customization:** While there are shared challenges that educators experience across contexts, schools and school systems are unique; what works in one situation does not necessarily translate to a success story in another environment. We customize each engagement to match the needs of each partner's unique equity journey because effective engagement requires mindful design, not a standard packaged product.

- **Capacity Building:** The success of a plan depends on the ability to implement it with fidelity. Even well-crafted recommendations will be of little value if those responsible for implementation do not have the knowledge, tools, resources, or authority needed to make the changes. Our responsibility is to leave our partners stronger, more capable at the end of the engagement than at the outset. The project design includes a focus on building the capacity of responsible staff.

- **Learning:** As practitioners, we know that some of the best ideas are found in the system or school community, waiting to be teased out and nurtured. EJP prides itself on taking an inclusive approach to issue-solving. We bring our experience and knowledge of best equity practices to the table, but we also bring our ears. Mindful listening and collaboration lead to sustainable solutions.

- **Inclusivity**: If the goal is equity, the journey must be inclusive. An equity journey must meaningfully include all voices, particularly the voices of historically underserved populations. We cannot make assumptions about opinions and perspectives. We structure our engagements to include all voices at critical project junctures.

Equity Journey Partners was launched in January 2020 by Regis Anne Shields and Funmi Haastrup. Ms. Shields and Ms. Haastrup have been engaged in equity and inclusion work in education for two decades in various capacities. Additional information about Equity Journey Partners can be found at www.equityjourneypartners.com.

Equity Audit Purpose, Process, and Methodology

Purpose of the Equity Audit: Equitable school districts make a commitment to giving every student what they need so that they can fully access and engage in all the student opportunities that are available. The focus of equity work must be to remove the barriers that limit full participation for all students. Therefore, the purpose of an equity audit is to uncover these barriers and suggest effective ways to dismantle them, as well as to identify existing equitable practices to learn from and scale.

The NPS equity audit aims to:

- ***Analyze data and gather information*** about the district's current strengths and areas for growth relative to equitable opportunities for all student populations;
- Prompt reflective conversations about the current status of equitable opportunities as compared to its desired state by ***examining the attitudes, experiences, and beliefs of all key stakeholders***; and
- Identify and present opportunities to improve equitable practices throughout the district by ***providing recommendations designed to focus attention and resources (e.g. people, time, money, program) to fully support NPS' diverse students, staff, families, and community***.

Process and Timeline: The NPS Equity Audit spanned approximately ten months from May 2021 through February 2022,and included four key phases: Equity Audit Preparation and Planning, Data and Artifact Analysis, Stakeholder Engagement, and Analysis and Presentation of Findings. Additionally, NPS plans to engage in strategic planning following the equity audit in order to further equity and enact recommendations surfacing from the audit. Please see a brief summary of key audit activities by phase in the table below.

Phase and Timing	Key Activities
Equity Audit Preparation and Planning: *Spring - Summer 2021*	• Establish norms, expectations, and working relationships among Mass Insight, Norwood Public Schools, and key stakeholders, including sessions with students, families, and staff to prepare for the audit process
Data and Artifact Analysis: *Summer 2021*	• Identify, compile, and analyze key data and artifacts related to structures, systems, processes, and outcomes in NPS
Stakeholder Engagement: *Fall 2021*	• Collect and synthesize a wide range of experiences from students, families, staff, and community members through interviews, focus groups, and surveys
Analysis and Presentation of Findings: *Winter 2021 - Early 2022*	• Publish and present findings to NPS and the broader Norwood community
Strategic Plan: *Spring-Summer 2022*	• Use Equity Audit findings to develop an explicit strategic plan in pursuit NPS' commitment to equity

Overview of Methodology: This section provides an overview of our approach and methodology for conducting the equity audit.

Mass Insight's Equity Framework: Mass Insight examines equity through our comprehensive, system-wide equity framework. Based on national research and best practices, and our more than 25 years working with schools, districts, and states, Mass Insight identified nine equity domains around which we gather data and perspectives to understand and identify the ways in which district stakeholders experience equitable systems, structures, and practices. Please see Appendix A for more full descriptions of our equity framework domains.

The Mass Insight District Equity Audit Framework
Vision, strategy & culture - District vision, strategy, culture, and priorities reflect a commitment to educational equity and promote a district-wide culture of inclusiveness and a belief that all students can learn.
Accountability for equitable student access & outcomes - Policies, systems, and practices enable all students to fully participate in schools, programs, and activities that result in high comparable outcomes.
Governance & conditions - Clear and equitable school committee/board and central office structures, systems, processes, and practices work together to advance the district towards its vision. The district commitment to equity is reflected in governance and central office structures, systems, policies, and practices.
Focus on culturally & linguistically sustaining teaching & learning - Curriculum, materials, instructional practices, and learning environments, ensure school leaders, teachers, and other school staff constantly improve and refine rigorous standards-based pedagogy that recognizes and embraces students' identities and the district's diversity.
Student readiness to learn - The district and schools create safe, positive, and inclusive learning environments for students. Students' non-academic needs are proactively addressed so they fully engage and succeed academically.
Workforce development - Systems and processes attract, recruit, cultivate, hire, and develop new and diverse staff. All staff receive ongoing professional development that results in the retention of talented, culturally competent, and diverse workforce.
Family & community engagement - The district and schools intentionally and authentically communicate and engage with staff, families, and community stakeholders.
Finance - The district aligns and prioritizes financial resources to address district, school, and student needs and disparities.
Data - The district utilizes data regularly to identify and address inequities in the system. Disaggregated data is accessible and informs decision-making at all levels of the district and in schools.
School management - Policies, structures, and systems create the conditions needed for school success, maintain accountability for results, and enable effective school leadership.

Project Kick-Off and Ongoing Collaboration with Norwood Public Schools: Throughout the entire process, we coordinated and collaborated closely with Norwood Public Schools leadership to ensure the process moved forward in ways that would maximize inclusion and meet district goals and needs for this work. We also customized the process, tools, and resources to align with Norwood-specific context, including a deep focus on inclusion and belonging. We received regular input and feedback from NPS along the way.

In Summer 2021, to kick off the equity audit process, NPS engaged a representative group of students, families and guardians, and staff in a vision-setting work session to inform the equity audit. The group was asked to envision what will be true in a more equitable and inclusive future state of Norwood Public Schools for students, family and community members, teachers and staff, and school and district leaders. The purpose of this session was to gain initial community perspectives on desired outcomes of the equity audit process for Norwood. Please see themes emerging from this in Appendix B.

Data and Artifact Review: To begin the audit process, we gather and analyze relevant data and artifacts to understand the district's current status, approach toward ensuring equitable opportunities and outcomes, and relevant district-, school-, and student-level data and artifacts that illuminate systems, structures, and policies impacting access and equity. We use the data to inform our audit at large and to identify areas to further probe in focus groups, interviews, and surveys. Examples of data and artifacts we review include, but are not limited to:

- Vision, mission, and values statements
- District and school improvement/strategic plans, and related data for progress monitoring
- Disaggregated student outcomes (e.g. academic, attendance, discipline, graduation)
- Special populations policies and support systems
- Budget, Title fund allocations, resource and staffing allocations
- Historical district and school budgets
- District approved curricular resources, and curricular scopes & sequences
- Student handbooks, district discipline and attendance policies, and related data
- District staff demographics and tenure
- District-wide professional development plan and supporting materials
- Registration and enrollment policies and procedures

Stakeholder Engagement - Focus Groups and Interviews: Our process involved significant stakeholder engagement efforts including focus groups conducted from September 2021 to November 2021. We coordinated and facilitated interviews and focus groups with students, families, school staff, central office staff, community partners, and other key stakeholders identified in collaboration with NPS to further understand the district's current strengths and areas for growth relative to equitable opportunities for all student populations. Staff, families, and students were able to opt-in to focus groups and interviews. Student focus groups were conducted only with students in grades 6-12, and required parent/guardian permission. Teams of two Mass Insight/EJP staff conducted a majority of interviews and focus groups to ensure strong facilitation, note-taking, and identification of holistic themes/trends.

To maximize participation and representation, the review team worked with district and school leaders and staff to communicate focus groups and interview opportunities. We offered a combination of focus groups open to all, as well as affinity-based focus groups for staff, students, and families/caregivers that identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, EL, students receiving special education services). While focus groups and interviews were conducted in English, the review

team offered family focus groups in multiple languages, however, no families took advantage of focus group opportunities in languages other than English. Participation rates are below.

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
- 39 students spanning grades 6-12

FAMILIES, GUARDIANS, & CAREGIVERS
- 20 families/caregivers, representing all district schools

SCHOOL LEADERS & STAFF
- 46 school leaders, teachers, and staff, representing all district schools

DISTRICT LEADERS & STAFF
- 16 district leaders and staff

COMMUNITY LEADERS
- 5 School Committee members
- 2 Town government representatives

Stakeholder Engagement - Surveys: In addition to focus groups, we administered six surveys customized for various stakeholder groups in NPS, including district staff, school leaders (including principals, assistant principals, and deans), all school staff (including teachers and support staff), students, families, and community members at large. To maximize survey access and participation, we offered translated surveys in multiple languages for families/caregivers and community members, including in English, Arabic, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish. Student surveys were offered to middle school and high school students during the school day, and to support all students in participating, translated surveys were available for students who needed options in home languages. The following surveys were administered:

- Central office staff (English)
- School leaders, *including principals, assistant principals, deans, and administrators* (English)
- School staff (English). *All school staff were invited to complete surveys, including but not limited to teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others.*
- Families (Arabic, English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, Spanish)
- Students in Grades 6-12 (English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, Spanish)
- Community (Arabic, English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, Spanish)

Surveys were administered using SurveyMonkey beginning on a rolling schedule from October 2021 - December 2021. Surveys were designed to gather anonymous perception data that could be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other identity markers, roles, and levels. Surveys included a combination of multiple choice, matrix/scale, and open response questions. Where applicable, survey questions utilized a four point scale (*"agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree" and "extremely, mostly, somewhat, not at all")* and included neutral options (*"does not apply to me" or "prefer not to say"*). Survey instruments are linked in Appendix C.

The review team worked with district and school leaders and staff to distribute surveys through multiple communication outlets and provide regular updates on participation and representation across schools, demographics, and languages. We also extended survey completion timelines to allow for greater participation.

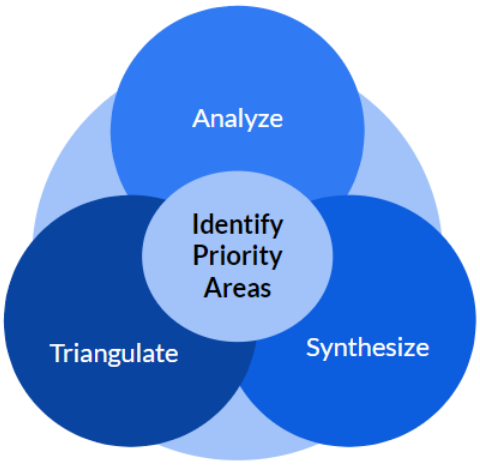
The tables to follow detail survey participation data.

Equity Audit Survey Response Count, Total* and By Race						
	Central Office Staff	School Leaders	School Staff	Students	Families	Community
Total Responses	**16**	**7**	**377**	**1312**	**417**	**61**
American Indian or Alaskan Native			0	42	6	N/A**
Asian			2	89	28	N/A
Black or African American	1		0	208	37	N/a
Latino/Hispanic	1		5	228	38	N/A
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander			0	18	1	N/A
White	13	6	298	825	281	N/A
Prefer not to answer	2	1	54	104	61	N/A
Responses to Translated Surveys	**-**	**-**	**-**	**16**	**17**	**1**

**Total responses include responses to surveys offered in all languages. Note: demographic breakdown by race may not add up to the same total, as participants were invited to select all racial/ethinic categories that apply to them.*
***Community members were not asked to provide racial demographic information.*

Equity Audit Survey Responses, Percentage By Race					
	Central Office Staff	School Leaders	School Staff	Students	Families
American Indian or Alaskan Native	-	-	.3%	3.2%	1.4%
Asian	-	-	.5%	6.8%	6.7%
Black or African American	6.3%	-	.3%	15.9%	8.9%
Latino/Hispanic	6.3%	-	1.3%	17.4%	9.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-	-	0	1.4%	.2%
White	81.3%	85.7%	81.9%	62.9%	67.4%
Prefer not to answer	6.3%	14.3%	14.6%	7.9%	14.6%

Analysis, Synthesis, Triangulation: Our methodology involves significant analysis, synthesis, and triangulation of multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data and artifacts. We analyze multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data (including disaggregated and subgroup data, as well as the attitudes and beliefs of key stakeholders) to understand the holistic and unique experiences of students, families, and staff. Then we synthesize across multiple sources of data to surface themes including commonalities and discrepancies among data sources to test developing hypotheses around priority areas. Finally, we triangulate, or cross-synthesize, themes and potential priority areas, again noting any commonalities and discrepancies that emerge in findings, mitigating potential biases in the analysis process.



The foundational strengths and challenges that we share in this report represent themes and commonalities that surfaced across stakeholder groups in focus groups, surveys, and multiple sources of evidence.

NORWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS

3,387 Students Enrolled[2]
348 Students -PK-K
1348 Students Grades 1-5
718 Students Grades 6-8
973 Students Grades 9-12

8 Schools[2]
1 Early Childhood Center (PK-K)
5 Elementary Schools (1-5)
1 Middle School (6-8)
1 High School (9-12)

299.6 Teachers (FTE)[2]

99.3% of Teachers Licensed

5-Member School Committee[3]
3-year committee member terms

District Accountability Status[2]: Substantial progress toward targets
District not requiring assistance or intervention

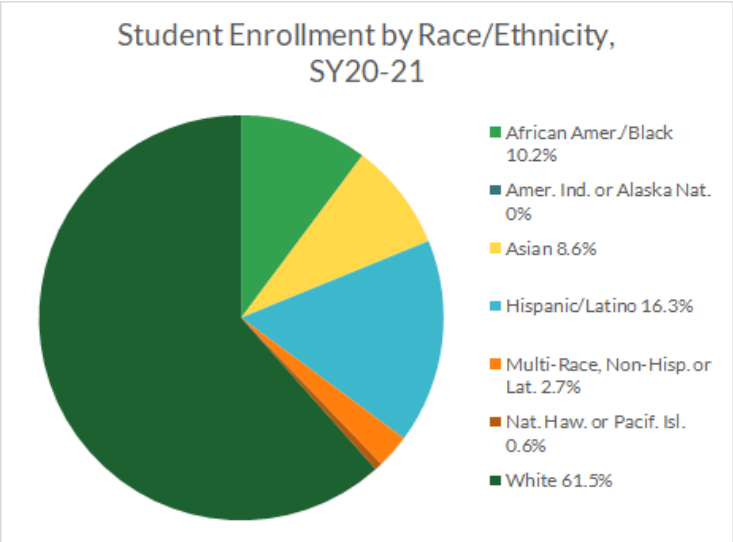
FY22 District Approximate Budget:[4] $51,800,000
(General & Grant funds only)

Student Population[2]

NPS has an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student population, with the majority identifying as White. The majority of Norwood students (61.5 percent) identified as White in SY20-21. The next largest and fastest-growing population is Hispanic or Latino students (16.3 percent), with the remaining population being:

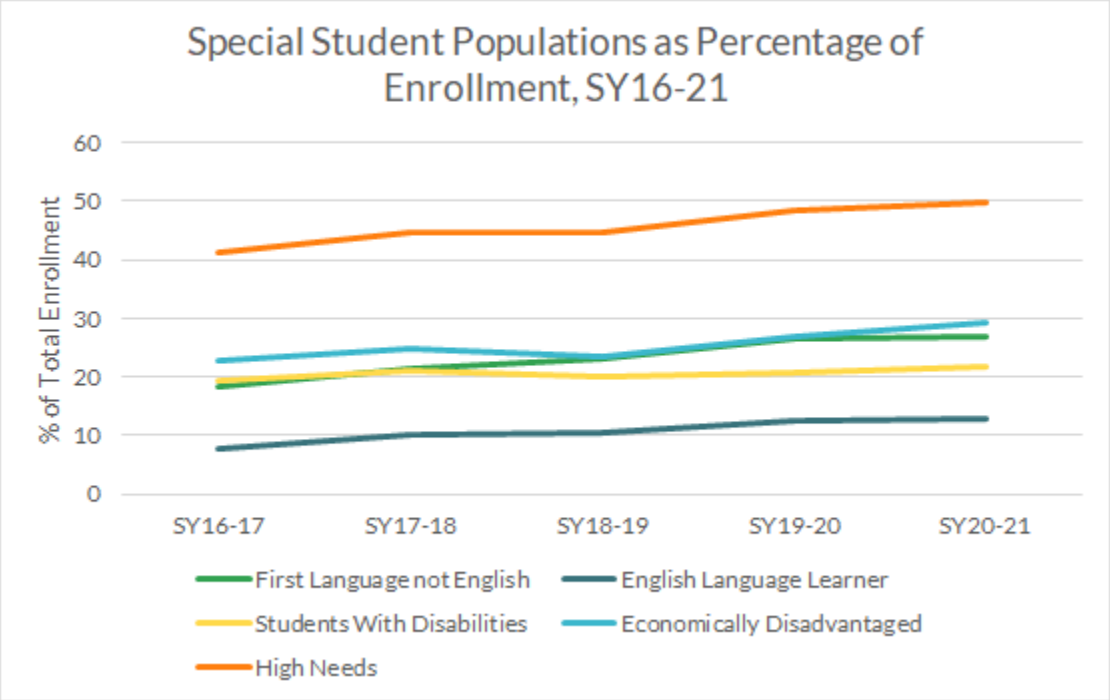
- 10.2% African American/ Black,
- 8.6% Asian,
- 2.7% Multi-Race, non-Hispanic or Latino, and
- 0.6% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

The Hispanic or Latino student population has seen an increase of 51.3 percent over the past five years. The proportion of White students in NPS, which was about 80 percent in SY09-10, has been declining steadily. Compared to five years ago, NPS also has a higher percentage of multi-race, non Hispanic or Latino students (27.7 percent increase), a higher percentage of Asian students (9.5 percent increase), and a small but rapidly growing Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander enrollment (20 students, compared to 3 in SY16-17). The percentage of African American/ Black students has remained consistent.



[2] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/
[3] Source: Norwood School Committee, 2022, https://www.norwood.k12.ma.us/sc
[4] Source: NPS Finance Department, 2021

Half of NPS students are high needs, and the five-year enrollment trend indicates increases in all special student populations[5]. In SY20-21, 27 percent of NPS students had a first language other than English, and 12.8 percent were classified as English learners (ELs, defined as students who are unable to perform ordinary classwork in English). Students with disabilities (SWDs) made up 21.8 percent of the student population, and 29.4 percent qualified as economically disadvantaged*. In total, 49.9 percent of students were designated as high needs: high needs students include any students who have disabilities, are economically disadvantaged, or have been ELs in the past two years.



The largest enrollment increase over the last five years has been ELs, whose numbers increased by 60.9 percent. Economically disadvantaged students increased by 28.6 percent, and students with disabilities increased by 11 percent. **The overall high needs population from 1402 high needs students in SY16-17 to 1690 high needs students SY20-21 (nearly 50% of current population).**

*Prior to SY14-15, MA students were identified as "low income" based on their eligibility for free or reduced price meals. Starting in that year, changes in federal and state systems introduced a new metric, "economically disadvantaged," based on a student's participation in any of several state-administered support programs[6]. In SY13-14, the low income population at NPS was 28.7 percent of students; the following year, 19.3 percent of students were identified as economically disadvantaged.

[5] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

[6] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021). Redefining low income: a new metric for K-12 education. https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/ed.html

Schools and Programs

NPS students attend eight schools: one early childhood center (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten), five elementary schools (grades 1-5), one middle school (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12)[7].

School	Grades Served	SY20-21 Enrollment
George F. Willett Early Childhood Center/ Little Mustangs Preschool Academy	Pre-K to K	348
Charles J. Prescott Elementary School	Grades 1-5	258
Cornelius M. Callahan Elementary School	Grades 1-5	221
Balch Elementary School	Grades 1-5	294
F. A. Cleveland Elementary School	Grades 1-5	329
John P. Oldham Elementary School	Grades 1-5	246
Dr. Philip O. Coakley Middle School	Grades 6-8	718
Norwood High School	Grades 9-12	973
Total District Enrollment		**3,387**

Students in grades 1-5 are enrolled in their neighborhood elementary schools. The Prescott School and the Balch School, serving neighborhoods in the southwest part of Norwood, have the highest percentages of students whose first language is not English (45.7 and 52 percent, respectively, compared to an average of 27.1 percent for the other three schools). Asian students make up 33.3 percent of the student population at Prescott (compared to an average of 6 percent for the other four schools), and the Balch is 36.4 percent Hispanic or Latino (compared to an average of 11.8 percent for the other four schools). The Balch also has the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students, at 49 percent (compared to average of 27.4 percent for the other four schools).

[7] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

EQUITY AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

About the Priority Areas

Equity audit findings are structured into priority areas, which are areas in which NPS already has some foundational strengths to capitalize on and in which there are challenges and opportunities to improve. Within each priority area we share a set of foundational strengths, challenges, and recommendations. Please see more about each of these in the graphic below.

Priority Areas
Areas in which the district has foundational strengths to build from and in which there are opportunities to address challenges to continue to improve

Foundational Strengths	Challenges	Recommendations
Actions the district has taken to further equity; foundations to build upon; progress points and areas of momentum	Gaps, difficulties, and/or needs that if addressed can help improve equity and inclusion for all; impact not yet realized	Opportunities for improvement and next steps the district can take to develop a strong strategic plan and continue on its equity journey

Recommendations in this report are intended to set up for the next phase of strategic planning, and as such, are formatted as themes, questions, and focus areas to pursue in that planning process. This is intentional, and as the district moves towards next steps for planning, there will be support and additional opportunity to involve stakeholders to identify more specific next steps and action plans.

The NPS Equity Audit surfaced four priority areas.

- Priority Area 1: Establish systems, action plans, roles, and accountability structures based on a shared vision and understanding of equity
- Priority Area 2: Ensure access to rigorous instruction with equitable supports, especially for students receiving special education services and English learners
- Priority Area 3: Cultivate affirming and inclusive learning environments led by a diverse staff that is representative of the student body
- Priority Area 4: Foster a culture of affirmation, inclusion, belonging, and partnership across the NPS community

Priority Area 1: Establish systems, action plans, roles, and accountability structures based on a shared vision and understanding of equity

"As a parent, I believe achieving equity in NPS is important because every child and adult deserves to have the things they need to be successful and to have their voices amplified." - NPS Family Member

"As a school committee member, I believe achieving equity in NPS is important because my #1 responsibility in this role is student achievement. This means all students deserve access and opportunity that meet their individual needs, and that respect and support their culture, identity and strengths." - NPS School Committee Member

Foundational Strengths for Priority Area 1:

Norwood Public Schools is beginning its equity journey. There is a recognition that inequities exist and there is a general desire and intent to increase equity and inclusion in NPS. Stakeholders recognize that the Norwood community demographics have changed over time, with increased diversity across multiple lines, including race, language, and socioeconomic status—and that as a result, the district needs to work differently to embrace and support the richly diverse community of Norwood so every student receives what they need to succeed. Stakeholders at all levels also reported that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted inequities across the district, and leaders expressed a belief that it is the district's responsibility to address those inequities. There is substantial consensus among NPS staff of the importance of pursuing equity at the individual and systemic level, and a widely shared desire to develop the mindsets, practices, and policies to achieve that goal. This provides a strong foundation on which to build, and suggests that the district is poised to take more substantial steps towards equity.

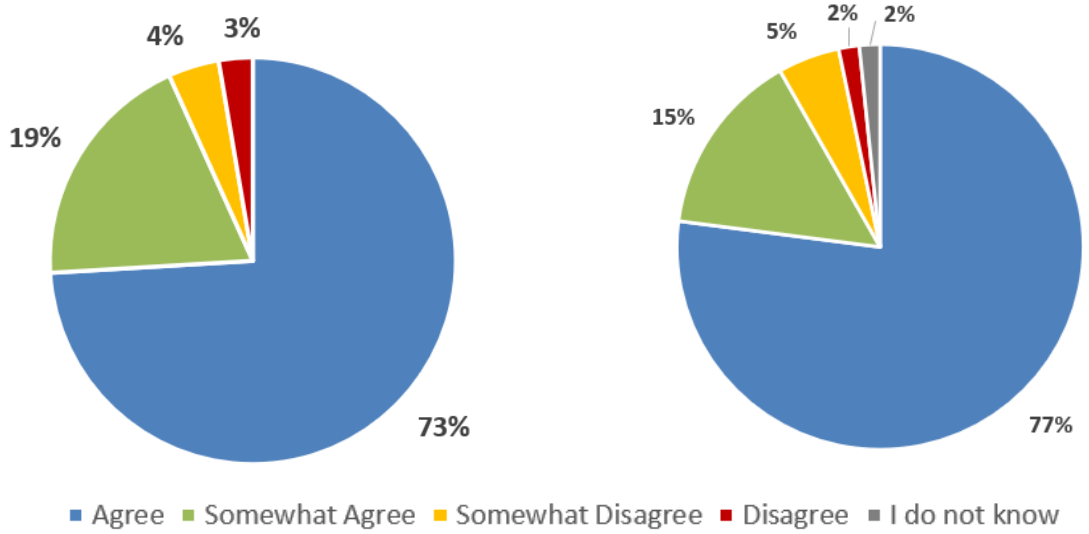
In June 2020, the NPS School Committee published its Anti-Racism Resolution to "guarantee that racist practices are eradicated, and diversity, equity, and inclusion is embedded and practiced for our students, families, faculty, and staff." To enact the resolutions, the Norwood School Committee launched a series of efforts including (a) policy revisions and adoption of new policies; (b) curriculum and instruction updates; (c) student, family, and community engagement; (d) professional development of staff; and (e) embedded trauma-informed practice.

In summer 2021, NPS launched an equity and inclusion audit to gain a clear understanding of its current strengths and areas for growth regarding equitable opportunities for all students, based on extensive stakeholder input and engagement, and data and artifacts review. The audit results in a set of actionable recommendations for improving equitable practices and informs an equity-focused strategic planning process to equip the district with a plan that focuses attention and resources on supporting Norwood's diverse students, staff, families, and community. To kick off the equity audit process, NPS engaged a representative group of students, families and guardians, and staff in an equity audit vision-setting work session. There is not yet a formal vision for equity in NPS, and staff and stakeholders in audit vision-setting and in focus groups expressed a desire for more information about what the district can do to improve, and highlighted a need to continue and sustain existing efforts to understand and improve equity.

A majority of staff and community members participating in the audit agree that equity work is important. As shown in the charts below, a majority of school staff (92%) agree or somewhat agree that "It is important to spend time and resources thinking about identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) in order to provide a high quality education for all students." Similarly, community survey results show that a majority of community survey respondents (92%) believe it is important that "the Norwood Public Schools offer equitable opportunities for all students to succeed, regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, language, immigration status, and physical or mental ability." Additionally, only 33% of community respondents agree, and another 33% somewhat agree, with the statement "I believe the Norwood Public Schools are effectively supporting the varied needs of all students, particularly those in the most challenging circumstances," signaling that the broader community also recognizes the importance of NPS providing equitable experiences for all students.

Staff* Survey: It is important to spend time and resources thinking about identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) in order to provide a high quality education for all students.

Community Survey: I think it is important for the Norwood community that the Norwood Public Schools offer equitable opportunities for all students to succeed, regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, language, immigration status, and physical or mental ability.



**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others.*

Staff at multiple levels share that bright spots for the district are the intention to be more equitable, the commitment to students, and developing levels of comfort in understanding how to be more culturally responsive. Staff in surveys and focus groups shared:

- "We are trying our hardest to be thoughtful and reflective; not perfect yet."
- "School does a good job. Over [the] last years [we] have seen more inclusivity."
- "NPS is the most well-equipped and committed to making sure that the relationships are occurring each day. Teachers believe in the partnerships between home and school."

- "I know the faculty feels like we're doing a great job, but I'd like to know if the kids feel this way. Do the kids feel the impact of what we're doing? Are we meeting their expectations? Do they feel included? Could we be doing better?"
- "There's varying degrees of comfort discussing this. In my ten years, there are far more people who are much more comfortable talking about this [equity]."

There is momentum towards NPS's equity journey. Marked progress has been made in confronting and disrupting some inequities within the district. The district's initial steps towards a more inclusive and equitable future have led to improvements particularly in supports for many English learners, improved outcomes for Hispanic/Latino students (including improved high school graduation rates and positive trends in discipline data), and attention to inclusive learning environments and pedagogy. While these efforts are not yet complete, they reflect the clear commitment of many NPS staff and stakeholders. With this solid foundation, important work is already underway at multiple levels.

Prior to the equity audit, the district initiated several steps to begin to understand and examine biases and inequities at the individual and systems levels and create more inclusive spaces for all students, including efforts to critically review and revise policies and practices at multiple levels with a growing lens on equity and inclusion. The School Committee supported the Superintendent and district leadership with their efforts to undertake this equity review and is in the process of reviewing all School Committee policies with an equity lens. School Committee members shared that they understand the need to use an equity lens in reviewing and setting policy, and as a result, they have already revised policies to be more inclusive. For example, the committee recently revised their gender identity policies to be more inclusive of non-binary students, family members, and staff. Additionally, the district has engaged in a multi-year partnership with the Highlander Institute to increase the capacity of all staff in Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy. In the 2020-2021 school year, NPS trained all staff in the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). See more on strengths and challenges related to staff development in Priority Area 3.

Students, families, and staff shared examples of how the district and individual schools have already worked to increase cultural competence, equity, and inclusion for all students. For example, Norwood High School revised policies to increase student access to advanced courses (e.g., Advanced Placement, Honors) and Coakley Middle School revised policies to increase student access to accelerated math. Staff at one elementary school also described a staff book club which discussed systemic racism. Students, families, and staff shared additional examples of district efforts to celebrate cultures through world language nights and to establish high school global studies programming.

NPS has made some material investments to meet student needs, including hiring additional adjustment counselors to provide direct support to students. Notably, in response to the growing English learner (EL) population, and recognition by NPS staff and leaders that the district was not meeting the needs of its ELs, the district made a critical hire of an experienced English language learner coordinator and hired additional EL teachers and paraprofessionals. The district also initiated an English Learner Parent Advisory Committee (ELPAC), and launched a newcomers academy at the high school for students new to the United States to receive individualized support. These actions have already led to meaningful progress in serving ELs, and the percentage of Norwood ELs making progress on the ACCESS assessment has exceeded the state average in recent years.

NPS already has some infrastructure in place on which to build equitable systems, plans, and processes. For example, finances are carefully coded and monitored, providing a clear starting point for developing equity-based financial criteria. There is a district-level data lead, and staff report having access to data for analysis around a variety of measures, which is essential in supporting all staff to use data to monitor progress towards equitable student access, outcomes, and other indicators of progress and impact. There are some routines and schedules in place for curricula review and purchasing, which provides a baseline opportunity to build from as the district works to ensure that curricular materials are representative of student needs, interests, identities, and cultures. Additionally, there are shared templates, timelines, and some review processes for the development of district and school improvement plans. School leaders describe making efforts to ensure alignment of school priorities to district priorities, which are foundational for developing and implementing plans and systems of accountability explicitly focused on equity and inclusion.

Challenges for Priority Area 1:

Challenge 1.A. There is not yet a shared vision for equity or a shared understanding of what a more equitable NPS system will look like.

Most individuals speak highly of Norwood as a welcoming and caring community in focus groups and survey responses. However, students, families, and school and district staff report that there is not yet a district-wide understanding of and recognition of all individual identities and cultures and, **while the district has taken steps to revise policies and practices, many stakeholders perceive that default district systems and structures are often oriented towards white, middle class, Christian norms.** The starting assumption for many policies and practices is a student who is White, Christian, economically stable, English-speaking, heterosexual, and cis-genered. Deviations from this starting assumption are then treated as special cases to accommodate. As a result, staff, families, and students express that some experience a culture of "otherness" rather than belonging, particularly those newer to Norwood without long generational ties to the community. Though there are efforts to increase inclusion, not all cultures and identities are affirmed, resulting in gaps in inclusion for students, families, and staff.

Staff comments from focus groups and surveys include:

- "I believe that Norwood continues to be a very white-christian centric place where we are just starting to truly be deliberate about including other cultures into the fabric of our schools."
- "I see students of diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, identities, etc. working together in my own classes and elsewhere, though there are exceptions. As a white, straight, cis American woman, I am the norm."
- "There is a culture of 'otherness' here. There is a need for some to find an 'enemy.' There is a great deal of pushback regarding inclusivity of other cultures, religions, traditions, and pushback when trying to start conversations."
- "This is Norwood. Demographics are changing on multiple fronts, and there is a history of white, Irish, Catholic community that has been resistant to change. A lot of this plays out in the community at large, not always in NPS, but it does impact district progress."

A notable student survey comment:

- "The school does a good job at including people regardless of group, but only focuses on inclusion from groups that are common."

Family comments from focus groups and surveys include:

- "This town has a reputation for not being accepting of 'outsiders' who don't have long time family ties to the town."
- "I'd appreciate it if more of an effort were made not to generalize that everyone celebrates Christian holidays, roots for sports teams, goes on vacations, and does the other 'typical' 'American' things. Norwood is diversifying, families have varied customs, interests, and circumstances, and families move here from varied places where they developed different day-to-day routines. Families move here, continuing these different patterns, and assimilating as they're comfortable, able, and/or willing to do."

In particular, one example of default systems that students, families, and staff overwhelmingly brought up as an area of need was awareness and respect for multiple cultural and religious customs. Stakeholders shared that uncertainty and tension about how and what to celebrate often means cultures and holidays simply aren't celebrated or discussed.

NPS does not yet have an articulated equity vision around which to acknowledge and include all cultures and build districtwide understanding and investment in what a more equitable and inclusive NPS system will look like. Author Doug Meyer-Cuno describes why a compelling, shared vision has the potential to do and why it matters[8]: "A vision statement should have the ability to inspire and motivate others around a concept or idea. It can establish a benchmark, provide line of sight, direction, and where the organization wants to be in a set period of years. The purpose of setting a vision is twofold: it is there to create a long-term strategy for where the company is going; secondly, it is meant to align everyone around the company's direction… A vision should establish something on the horizon that is out of our comfort zone, challenging us to stretch ourselves while being somewhat attainable. It should clearly indicate the direction in which you want to move towards. This allows others to invest in the future with an understanding of their purpose as an employee."

Without a clear and affirmative vision for equity, there are mixed levels of understanding and investment in the district's equity work. It is unclear if there is a shared understanding among the broader school and Norwood community of why equity work matters and what it really means for every child. While a majority of staff and community believe equity work is important (as demonstrated with earlier survey data), levels of investment in the district's equity work still varies, which raises the potential for some pushback as the district progresses.

While there was general agreement in community survey results that an equitable system is a laudable goal, many respondents believe that change is not necessary and that NPS is already in a place where all students are included and receiving needed services. Some responses also indicate a sense of uncertainty about or resistance to change, including fear about shifts in resources; a desire for equal, not equitable treatment; and placing blame on families. For example, some community members shared:

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[8] Doug Meyer-Cuno, ForbesBooks, Is a Vision Statement Important (2021), https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2021/02/24/is-a-vision-statement-important/

- "Instead of breaking students up into groups based on all of these different and constantly changing criteria (and treating any students differently based on these arbitrary groups), I would suggest that you strive for an environment where everyone is treated equally regardless of whatever group they fall in. Of course not every student comes from the same background, but to pre-judge and assign solutions based on immutable characteristics seems misguided at best, especially if this is a proactive effort to get ahead of the way schools have been throw[n] into the political crossfire in the last couple of years. My basic feedback would be this: Don't overthink it. Create a policy that says that students will be treated equally no matter who they are, and commit to providing enough resources on an individual level to make sure every student has a chance to succeed."
- "I think that people should get what they need as long as it doesn't take away from the majority of the student body. If one category of student needs gets all the resources than the rest of the categories start to fail."
- "I feel the ability to partake in an equitable scholastic environment is present in our schools. Unfortunately, not all partake in what is available which seem[s] to be the biggest hurdle."

While most families participating in the audit were supportive of the district's efforts to be more equitable and inclusive, some participants were less supportive of equity efforts and/or uncertain about what it means for their children and families. There is an opportunity to clarify what equity work means for students and families, and to involve families in developing a more full vision for what a more equitable NPS will look like and what it will take to get there. Some family survey respondents expressed a belief that pursuing a more equitable state would mean "reverse discrmination," and others expressed a belief that issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are home responsibilities. For example, some families shared:

- "Stop discriminating on the basis of race and using equity as an excuse to discriminate against white students."
- "I feel that there is a lot of favoritism in all the schools for the children who are less fortunate or the troubled children. They should all be treated equally!"
- "Just let my kids be students and let our community worry about structure, culture, and needs?"
- "Be less political and serve the public and community without overreach. Lose the agenda. Focus on real academia. Stop polluting young minds with CRT. Stop the obsession with gender sexuality."
- "I believe they are all doing a great job. I do believe that there are some matters that I don't believe the schools should be teaching. Some matters like race and religion should be left at home and be taught to by parents like it used to be. One of my children is at the [School] and he is an extremely hard worker. The efforts have to come from the families, what you put into it is what you get out of it."

Although school staff are largely supportive of the district's equity work, some staff do not yet see the connection between acknowledging all aspects of students' identities and improving support for all students to achieve high outcomes, or believe the district has already achieved an equitable and inclusive state. Eighty percent of staff respondents already characterize their school climate/culture as extremely or mostly "inclusive". There is not yet a shared understanding of what equity work means for all teachers and staff, or how multiple aspects of individuals' identities impact staff's ability to form meaningful relationships with students that acknowledge all of who they are and how they seem themselves. Additionally, not all staff have a broad understanding of diversity that recognizes and values all of the ways in which individuals differ (e.g., race, ethnicity,

gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, cognitive styles, and more); some discussed diversity only in terms of race or ethnicity. For example, some staff shared:

- "I feel we are talking too much about race, ethnicity, religion, etc and not accepting students for WHO they are, no matter what. A person is a person is a person…"
- "Please focus on other areas where you may think we could improve on. Equity is not one of them. We treat every student and staff member with respect regardless of race and gender. Focusing on this is causing everyone to focus on race at the expense of everything else. It is causing more harm than good. Let's treat all students with respect and educate all students regardless of what color their skin is!"
- "There are students and faculty members who are resistant to equity work which makes it hard to feel like you are making a difference with this work. It is also a challenge when you feel like there's more that you can be doing to make students from marginalized communities feel more included but you don't want to upset anyone who feels like this work is unimportant. I have done a lot of work and research to improve my practice and I still have a ways to go. I want more concrete guidance on what equitable practices look like in my classroom. It makes me worry when I think about individuals who don't think we even need to be having these discussions. We have a long way to go and I don't even know what the finish line looks like."
- "When we were participating in staff [professional development] we had to read different articles and watch movies about racism. Multiple white teachers made comments that this never happens here or that they have never discriminated against a student because of their color. They didn't even try to take the time to think about any incidents that have happened or interactions they have had. I have worked in multiple school systems and I can say that it happens all the time. I can recall thinking something to myself and caught myself and then had a conversation in my head about how I was being racist. I believe that if many of the staff from this school had to go to an inner city and observe a class they would not last long and if they did they would realize how racist they are (unconscious bias). Many teachers I have noticed do not believe or agree with unconscious bias and that is going to cause a lot of issues in the future if the minority, lbgtq, and other populations continue to grow."

Challenge 1.B. NPS does not currently have an explicit plan for pursuing equity, rooted in a clear theory of action, with aligned strategies, action steps, measures of success, and accountable owners to achieve them.

There is an emerging and expanding view among Norwood stakeholders that building an equitable learning community is critical to the future of the district and town, but there are not yet the explicit plans in place to realize this ambition. Independent and ad hoc efforts to make individual classrooms, experiences, curricula, or teams more equitable are observed in many parts of the district, but there is not yet an intentional design to marshal all the district's resources in a coordinated way to make substantial, systemic progress toward equity. The lack of a coordinated plan with clear strategies and accountability structures can be observed at each leadership level of the district.

At the central office level, the district has an approved strategic plan guiding operations, but that plan is not explicitly designed to achieve equity. Without clearly defined systems, goals, and measures of success, there is inconsistency in the extent to which central office staff seek to embed progress toward equity in their work, and individuals are left to make their best judgments

about their practices. While the independent efforts observed were all made in good faith, and did at times lead to more equitable practices, they were not part of a larger, coherent plan. The district's efforts in undertaking this equity audit and the strategic planning to follow represent a clear commitment to developing that comprehensive plan.

At the school level, school leaders demonstrate a mindset and desire to improve equity and inclusion, but the extent to which they have clarity in their specific role in driving it varies. There is limited evidence of school leaders being held explicitly accountable for pursuing equity.

Among schools, there is evidence of more advanced analysis, discourse, planning, and action at schools serving older students (e.g. high school and middle school). Individual teachers, for example, discussed ways they were working to make their communities more inclusive, including explicitly asking students their pronouns, critically analyzing curricula, investigating access to advanced coursework, and engaging students in critical discourse around current events.

Staff cite positive, proactive leadership as a key factor in making progress toward equity. One high school staff member said on a survey that the principal there has been "an instrumental force in pushing positive change in these areas in the high school and within the district. I think Central Office leadership needs to do more to support this work." A high school teacher in an interview described working with colleagues to make their teaching and curriculum more culturally responsive and said, "When there has been pushback, we have had unified support from the department chair, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. I was pleased that the superintendent, in his convocation speech…was encouraging us to push culturally responsive teaching. He said if we got pushback, give parents his email. That made me feel very supported from top down that I'm continuing to evolve and push curriculum."

Without a comprehensive, coherent plan, however, this progress has been inconsistent. Staff at the elementary school level are more likely to demonstrate an understanding of equity akin to tolerance, kindness, and courtesy.

Much like the district's strategic plan, school improvement plans (SIPs) for individual schools do not provide a clear, comprehensive strategy for achieving equity. All schools have school improvement plans and there is a general orientation that district and school plans should align and drive improvement efforts. Additionally, there is evidence that schools are embedding a focus on cultural competence and inclusion into their efforts to improve, and some school leaders in focus groups also talked about aligning their improvement plans to district priorities without prompting. For example, one leader shared that they added diversity of PTA into their plan, and another talked about "the budget needs to meet our SIP goal."

It is evident that the district is aiming to be intentional in aligning school and district strategic efforts including a focus on cultural responsiveness. All eight schools' improvement plans published to the district website include mission, vision, and/or values, and at least one explicit priority, goal, or action step that focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion or cultural relevance/responsiveness. However, the level of detail across SIP priorities, goals, action plans, and evidence of plan implementation varies. Current school plans are two-year improvement plans developed to span 2020-2022. There is variation in how schools approached or revisited their plan at the mid-point. Some schools included notes or updates on their progress from prior improvement plan goals and activities that spanned multiple years, while others appeared to create new action plans for the year. Currently published plans reveal that of eight SIPs:

- six plans include priority areas, and one school indicated alignment to strategic initiatives but didn't name the priorities;
- six plans include goals, and one school indicated the priority areas as goals, but didn't list separate goals;
- six plans include explicit references to alignment to district strategic priorities;
- six plans include action plans or activities, and one lists some updates that may include activities; and
- five plans include demographic data and MCAS/accountability data.

School councils are nominally responsible for identifying priorities and areas of concern related to the progress of all students by examining data on student performance and achievement. School improvement plans indicate that principals should submit these "to the Superintendent of Schools after extensive consultation and review by the School Council." There is not evidence that School Councils are currently fulfilling this function, however. See more on School Councils in Priority Area 4.

At the classroom level, without a clear plan and defined systems of accountability, progress on equity is currently largely contingent on individual teacher mindsets and actions. While the district has made important investments in professional development around culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, there are not clear plans and accountability structures for manifesting that training in the classroom. Currently, staff are required to *attend* professional development, but whether or not they *implement* what they are learning is largely at their discretion, resulting in inconsistent progress staff-wide.

Staff members are eager to see more rapid progress and acknowledge this lack of accountability. In a focus group, one teacher said, "Anytime there is strategic planning and an amazing presentation, then the tricky part is what is the buy-in. The only way this will be successful is if there is the buy-in. I don't know how successful the buy-in will be, and then will anything else change?" Another staff member said, "People want to know (a) that the district is committed to this and (b) what are our look-fors for success and how do we know we are making a change?"

The district does not have a systematic or comprehensive approach for using data to identify or monitor student opportunity gaps or belonging gaps, or to monitor system-wide progress toward shared equity goals. Data practices are on a school-by-school basis, with no district-wide structure to monitor equity. While the district has adequate data to monitor traditional student achievement metrics, metrics for equity data are not yet defined or monitored, including, but not limited to student belonging and social-emotional metrics, teaching quality metrics, and family and community belonging and participation metrics.

The strategic plan does not prioritize the role of data in improving student performance. Data use is only mentioned in *Strategy 3.1: Implement a professional learning system by using PLCs, data teams, tiered supports and project-based learning*. The Process/Change Benchmark that relates to this strategy, *3.1.1 Provide teachers with routine professional learning time to analyze student data, review long-term plans and collaborate with peers*, has not yet been started. The existence of an established data coordinator role positions the district well to quickly implement more robust data analysis routines; the coordinator currently provides the district and schools with performance data on an ad hoc basis rather than through recurring cycles and systems.

Challenge 1.C. Financial and operational systems lack defined, shared equity criteria, and put a higher burden on lower-income families.

Current financial and operational systems do not have explicit, shared criteria for ensuring equity in those areas. In budgeting or resource allocation, for example, leaders use their best judgment and make good faith efforts to be equitable, but there isn't a defined method for how they do this or how they make decisions about resource allocation.

Central office staff are fairly confident that they effectively allocate resources to schools based on need and context. On a survey, 42% of responding central office staff agree and 50% somewhat agree with the statement that "The district effectively differentiates resources and support to schools based on school needs and context (e.g., prioritizing low-performing schools, high need subject areas, or schools serving large populations of historically marginalized students)."

However, when school leaders were asked about a specific allocation issue, staffing, they did not feel resources were allocated equitably. Seventy-one percent of school leaders disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement that "District staff placement decisions prioritize low-performing schools, high needs subject areas, and schools with large populations of students from historically marginalized backgrounds."

While there are clear systems for financial coding and documenting school allocations, there are no written procedures or formulas to guide the allocation of budget resources, both personnel and non-personnel, to schools. Resource allocation is generally guided by a combination of past practice, conversations between central office and principals about school needs, and a subjective notion of fairness and equality across schools. Equity budget metrics (such as dollars/per pupil and FTEs by school need and student programs) based on an all funds budget (general fund and grants) are not used to understand if allocations are equitable. However, the Finance Department's budget processes are well positioned to produce these equity metrics with only minor adjustments to practices. Staff, families, and community members voice concerns about inequitable distribution of resources by school and by student need. These concerns are often based on observation and personal experience. Greater transparency in the budget process, especially methodology for school allocations and allocation by student need, will facilitate greater stakeholder understanding on how NPS factors resource allocation into its equity vision.

School size drives variability in funding by elementary. Because student enrollment varies across elementary schools (by almost 50% between the largest and smallest school), school size becomes a large driver of funding variation across elementary schools, with the smallest elementary school, Callahan, being the highest funded on a per-pupil basis and Cleveland, the largest school, being the lowest funded per-pupil.

Dollars Per Pupil by School Size (21-22 Allocation Based on Enrollment)

(not including Special Education and EL resources)

School	Enrollment 10/1/21	$/pp above lowest $/pp	% of funding above lowest
Callahan	221	$1,3683	20%
Oldham	246	$419	6%
Prescott	258	$252	4%
Balch	294	$942	14%
Cleveland	329	-	-

When positions are allocated to schools equally, smaller schools are funded more on a per-pupil basis than larger schools. For example, the principal position and administrative clerk position, two positions required for every school, are more costly at smaller schools on a per pupil basis because there are fewer students. These positions make up 17%, or $232, of the per-pupil difference between Callahan and Cleveland. Small schools are more difficult to staff efficiently and often drive funding inequities. At the Callahan there are 10.7 students for every staff member (not including special education and ELL) and at the Cleveland there are 12.8 students for every staff member. At the Callahan there are 13.8 teachers for every student and at the Cleveland there are 15.4 teachers for every student.

Student to Staff Ratios of Elementary Schools
(21-22 Staff Allocation Based on 20-21 Enrollment)*

School	Students per staff member	Students per teacher**
Callahan	10.7	13.8
Balch	11.6	14
Oldham	12.3	15.7
Prescott	13	16.4
Cleveland	12.8	15.4

*Does not include special education teachers or EL teachers.
**This column does not include reading specialists or interventionists, or self-contained students.

Small schools will almost always be more expensive than larger schools. Variability in funding by school is not by definition inequitable. Equitable does not mean equal. Variability in funding must be deliberate and support the district's equity vision.

As NPS develops funding formulas to reflect its equity vision it should also look at how it funds grade levels and student needs. In the 2021-2022 all funds budget (not including Willett or special education and EL funds) high schools are funded at the highest level, 10.8% higher than elementary schools. If the high school athletic program is included, high schools are funded 21.2% higher than elementary schools. Coakley MIddle School is funded approximately 9.9% higher than elementary schools. While districts often fund middle and high schools more than elementary schools because of the additional services offered and graduation requirements, NPS should continue to understand its cost drivers and ensure that variation reflects its equity vision.

Students in special education programs are funded at over $13,300 more than general education students and students receiving English language services are funded approximately $2,900 more than general education students. Because special education students and EL students receive additional services often dictated by laws, variation is to be expected. As with grade level variation, NPS should understand cost drivers and ensure the level of variation reflects its equity vision.

Shared definitions of equitable funding and clear philosophies on how resources are allocated will be critical to achieving systemic equity in Norwood.

Low-income students and families do not have equitable access to programs, resources, and materials in NPS. Low-income families face substantive barriers to access core components of a public education.

The financial model for many of the programs and activities in Norwood is built on an assumption of economic stability among families. The default assumption is that a family *can* pay a fee, and the onus is then put on low-income families to do the extra work of navigating school systems to request a possible waiver. Middle-to-upper class economic positions are treated as the norm, and variations from this norm are treated as the "other" that requires accommodation.

Because these costs are generally structured as flat fees, they function as a regressive tax on families, since the flat fees will represent a much larger share of a low- or middle-income family's income than a high-income family's. A growing population of lower-income students in the district means an increasing number of families will encounter these regressive fees. Examples of this paradigm include transportation, athletics, music, and extracurricular activities.

According to the NPS website, NPS charges families $300 per student per year, with a $750 cap, for students to access bus transportation to school. There is a $25 discount per student for registering and paying by mid-July. Students in grades 1-6 who live more than two miles from their school are entitled to free transportation by law, and NPS provides free transportation to all kindergarteners as well.

Families may apply for a reduced rate of $150 per student per year (with a $12.50 discount for paying by mid-July). However, this rate is not applied automatically for students eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Families are required to spend time and resources gathering required documentation, including documentation of their IRS tax return, unemployment compensation, alimony, child support, supplemental security income, disability, foster care, non-custodial parental income, and unearned income, gifts, and family support. The transportation section of the NPS website indicates that applicants may make copies of their waiver documentation at the transportation office, for a fee of $0.25 per copy. NPS has made efforts to reduce the need for families to do duplicative work, including allowing families to approve the nutrition program sharing documentation with the transportation department to document financial need.

NPS's bus registration form states that NPS does not accept cash for the bus fee, posing an additional challenge for unbanked families, and the NPS transportation website's FAQ Page says it only accepts lump sum, up-front payments for transportation, another burden for low- and middle-income families managing cash flow.

In addition to transportation, NPS charges fees for programs including athletics and extracurriculars. In one area, instrumental music, some instruments are available to be borrowed or rented from the school, while others require the family to obtain the instrument on their own. The result is that some instruments become de facto markers of income, with some sections of instruments being disproportionately comprised of low-income students.

While staff consistently express a desire not to have money be a barrier preventing student participation (indeed, multiple staff members said that not only were fee waivers available in their program area, but that they approved every waiver they received), systemically, the onus for removing that barrier is placed on the low-income students and their families, who may not have the time, capacity, systemic fluency, or resources to meet the requirements of a waiver request.

Even for families who don't technically qualify for financial assistance, the total number and scale of fees in NPS can be daunting. A family with two middle or high school aged children, each of whom participates in athletics and extracurricular activities, could easily expect to pay $1,000 in fees every year to access core functions of their public education.

In a focus group interview, a parent said, "having been in many districts, I've never had to pay for as much stuff as we do in Norwood. The bus, agenda books, shirts, this and that…There shouldn't be a dollar amount on every single thing. Just because I don't qualify for SNAP doesn't mean my family doesn't need help."

Financial inequities manifest in other ways in addition to service fees. Several stakeholders in focus groups and interviews cited PTOs and supplemental fundraising as a driver of economic disparities. Parents report that there is significant variation in the amount of money different school communities are able to raise, and that those funds are used to subsidize the materials and resources of more affluent schools.

A comment from the family surveys captures this reality: "There should not be separate PTOs at the elementary schools. The PTO should be for the whole community enrichment. As a former Prescott student as well as a parent, the funds for the PTOs should be gathered and divided between all the schools equally. The community as a whole would be stronger. It absolutely takes a village. I feel terrible that the Balch students struggle to know the same Norwood as I have known. And worse I didn't recognize that sooner."

Zoning boundaries for elementary schools in Norwood align closely with socioeconomic patterns in the town, reinforcing and replicating residential segregation patterns. This means some schools have a significantly higher average level of family income and wealth than others. Decentralized PTOs and fundraisers institutionalize these inequitable economic concentrations and provide material advantages for higher-income schools. One boundary for Balch Elementary, the elementary school with the highest proportion of students of color and low-income students in the district, is the MBTA train tracks, on the other side of which families are zoned mostly to Cleveland Elementary.

The inherent inequities in school boundaries aligning with socioeconomic patterns came up among nearly every group interviewed, including school staff, families, and community members.

A staff member comment:

- "Another issue is the socio-economic diversity and inequities. For example, the Balch School: it needs the most repair and is in the poorest section of town. The middle school is also having some issues with equity. The elementary experiences are not equitable which creates inequities when they get to middle school."

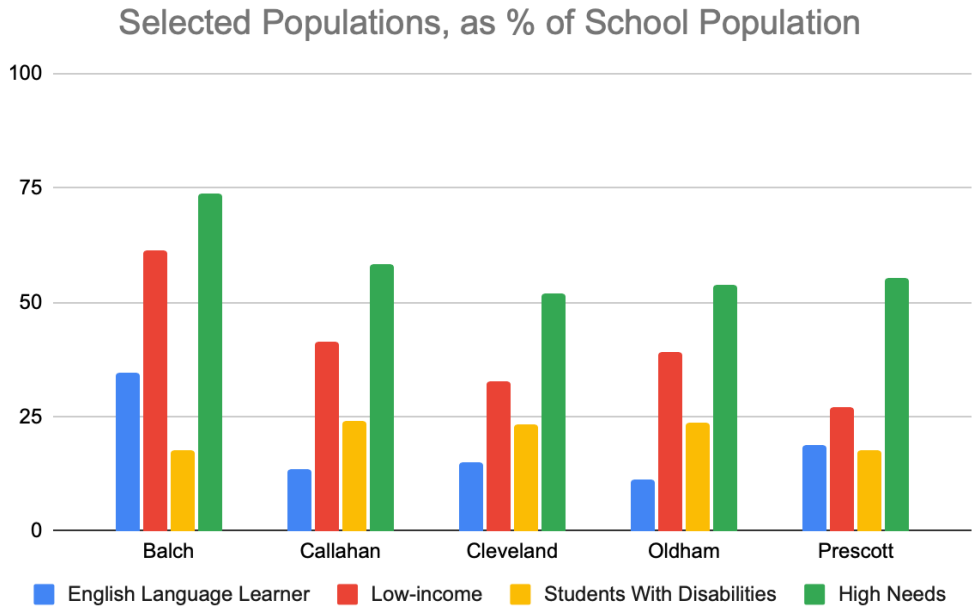
Community survey comments include:

- "Stop the discrimination of neighborhood schools. Generations have known the Balch as the foreign kids' school with all of the poor people. How do you stop racism when you teach it by how you populate the school system. Why does a small town like Norwood even have a South Norwood, it is code for the poor and people of color. There has never been a map saying North Norwood but for 150 years we still have South Norwood. It is systemic racism in my opinion…I believe NPS elementary neighborhood schools foster a racist and classist environment by only exposing children to people like them from their neighborhoods."

- "There is absolutely no equality between elementary schools. The Balch and Callahan are poorly supplied and extremely neglected. It's absurd that Coakley will be replaced before either Balch and Callahan. The conditions of these elementary schools [are] horrible and unacceptable!! If the town actually wants to work towards equality then they should start at these schools."
- "Children from less than affluent families are treated differently than monied families. The Balch school is over 100 years old and decrepit, yet we hear of schools in more affluent neighborhoods needing replacement."

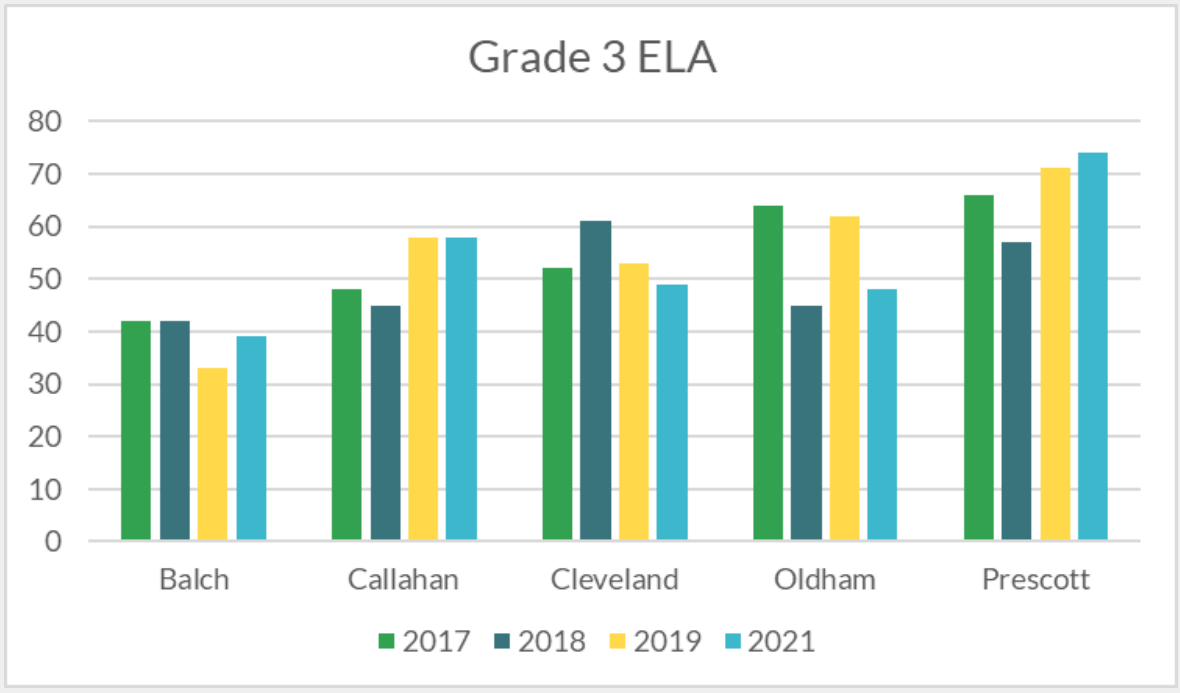
Perceptions of inequities among elementary schools are backed up by data. Zoning boundaries that align with socioeconomic patterns predictably result in inequitable concentrations of low-income students, English learners, and High Needs students in certain schools, and student academic outcomes vary considerably from school to school.

Elementary School Data from 2021-2022:[9]



MCAS Results by School[10]**:**

[9] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/
[10] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/


Grade 3 ELA
80
70
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10
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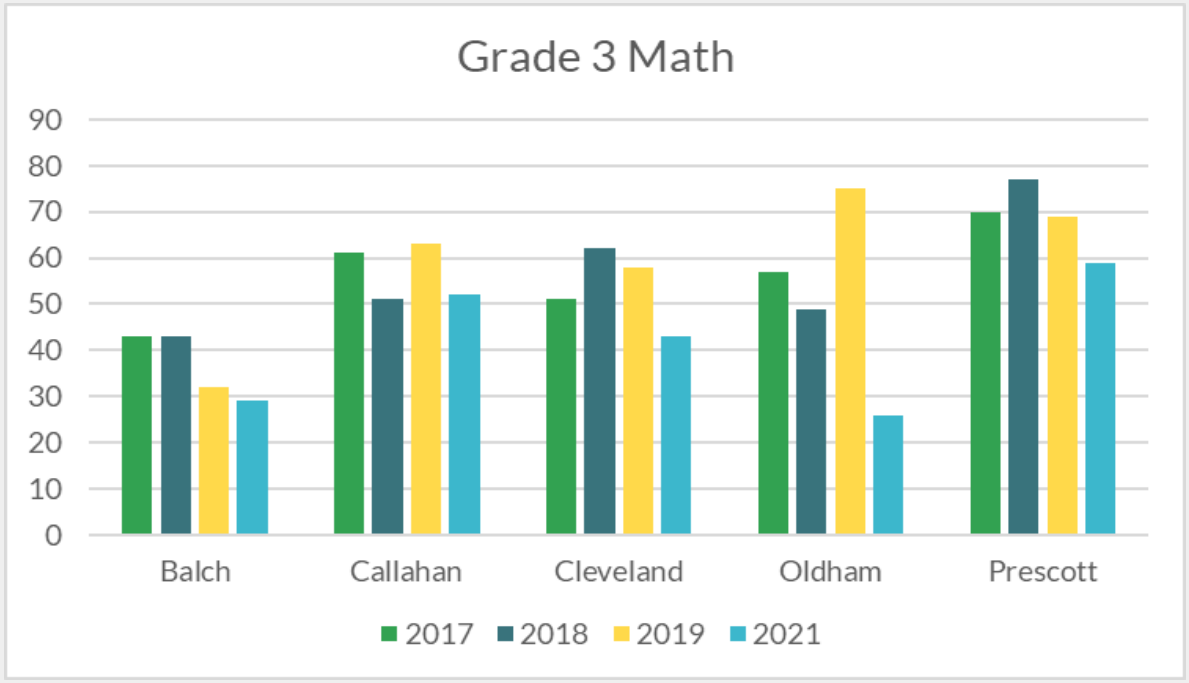
Balch
Callahan
Cleveland
Oldham
Prescott
2017
2018
2019
2021


Grade 3 Math
90
80
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Balch
Callahan
Cleveland
Oldham
Prescott
2017
2018
2019
2021

Recommendations for Priority Area 1:

1. Integrate an affirmative vision for equity in NPS into the district vision that is informed by diverse and representative students, families, and community and fosters a culture of inclusion for all.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Engage stakeholders (including students, families, staff, and traditionally marginalized populations) to integrate equity more explicitly in the district's vision.
- Examine national and local examples of equity-focused visions to understand how others have approached equity vision-setting.
- Remain focused on the inspirational and what will be true for all stakeholders in a more equitable and inclusive future state (not focused on what won't be true, e.g., gaps).
- Support department and school leaders to understand, align their vision and/or mission statements, and communicate the district vision.

2. Define a theory of change that clearly identifies how leaders at multiple levels will enact the district vision, values, and beliefs around equity.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Collaboratively define a clear hypothesis for how it will make substantial progress toward equity ("If we do a, b, and c, then x, y, and z will happen").
- Define who is accountable, how, at each leadership level, from central office, to school leader, to classroom levels and integrated roles into a continuous performance system.
- Define what equitable practices look, sound, and feel like.

3. Ensure the district strategic plan includes clear equity goals, strategies that align with the vision/theory of action to achieve those goals, defined roles/responsibilities for implementation, and metrics for measuring progress towards implementation and outcomes.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Engage in a structured strategic planning process to identify desired outcomes, develop the strategies that will lead to those outcomes, and define the measures of success that will be monitored to track progress.
- Define clearly and explicitly who is accountable for which outcomes at each leadership level.
- Build capacity of all department and school leaders to lead collaborative, inclusive, and data-driven planning processes in support of the district's vision, mission, and goals.

4. Define and systematize an equity-based system for resource allocation and alignment.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Develop the values and overarching philosophy that will guide resource allocation.
- Investigate equitable financial and operational guidelines, formulas, and principles from other districts.
- Define explicit criteria and formulas for allocating specific resources, including personnel and materials.
- Investigate the legacy and impact of elementary school attendance boundaries.

- Overhaul the district's approach to charging and collecting fees.

5. Establish systems, structures, and processes for monitoring progress towards equity goals, including subgroup performance, and making adjustments based on data.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Develop a list of metrics to track progress to goals in collaboration with central data staff.
- Create a calendar for the review and analysis of specific data.
- Develop the routines, processes, and habits for effectively analyzing and responding to data at each leadership level.

Priority Area 2: Ensure access to rigorous instruction with equitable supports, especially for students receiving special education services and English learners

"As a student, I believe achieving equity in NPS is important because not only is school the foundation of learning, it should become a place in which a student feels as if they are able to grow, learn, express, and succeed with no limitations." - NPS Student

"As a teacher, I believe achieving equity in the NPS is important because it is a basic human right to educate all students/children and to provide them with the opportunity to learn and grow." - NPS Staff Member

Foundational Strengths for Priority Area 2:

Clear progress has been made in programming and staffing to support English Learners (ELs). Staff at all levels of the district have recognized the growing need for resources to support ELs and have made deliberate efforts to better meet those needs.

NPS recently hired an English language learner coordinator, whose job is to oversee EL programming across the entire district and to evolve programming and staffing to foster an equitable experience for ELs. Plans are in the works to evaluate staffing needs, establish new EL programs, and provide PD to staff.

As the numbers of ELs in the district has risen substantially in recent years, central office staff and leadership have responded by increasing the number of EL educators and paraprofessionals in school buildings. School staff have responded positively to this increased support.

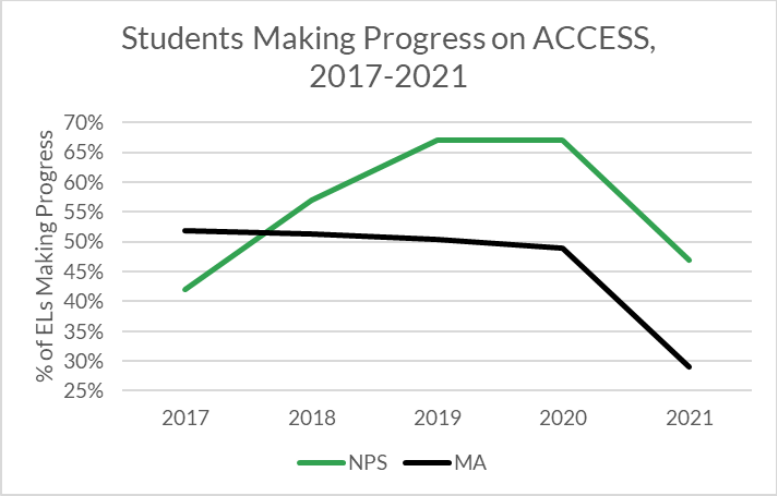
Norwood's first newcomer program was established at the high school, with intentions to expand to other schools as well. This crucial program provides supports for students who are new to the United States and who have significantly limited or interrupted formal education.

General education teachers express gratitude for the partnership of their EL colleagues, and a desire to continue their own cultural competency development to support all students.

While there are areas for improvement in the EL program (described in the Challenges section to follow), ELs have made progress in their performance on language acquisition assessments in recent years[11]. Language acquisition progress is measured annually using the ACCESS test across four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ACCESS progress, or the successful meeting of a student's target, is based on expected cohort growth for students who have been in the US for a similar period of time and who achieved a similar ACCESS score the previous year. In the two years before the pandemic, 2019 and 2020 (before a statewide drop in ELs' growth in

[11] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022). ACCESS for ELLs Results. https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/results.html

2021 due to pandemic restrictions), two-thirds (67%) of ELs were demonstrating progress annually, and numbers before that had been rising.



NPS has a core of committed, veteran special education staff working to build strong relationships with their students. While there are areas to improve within the special education program overall, the district benefits from a stable core of veteran special educators who demonstrate commitment to serving their students and collaborating with general educators.

In focus groups, general education teachers said, "We have great special education teachers. They're very strong and we collaborate with them daily with lesson plans and with the children," and "I have a co teacher this year who's a special education teacher in my…course. He's been a fabulous support. He knows these students, he's known them since day one when they were freshmen, and he has the best relationship with them, really understands their needs. He's been very receptive to answering my questions or explaining something to me."

There have been deliberate, meaningful efforts by individual staff members and teams to increase access to rigorous, culturally responsive, and advanced coursework for underrepresented students. Individual teachers and teams of teachers have recognized these inequities in access to advanced coursework and have begun proactively to address them in ways that could readily be accelerated with systematic support.

One teacher in a focus group shared "there was a time where you could walk down the hallway and, based on the racial makeup in the classroom, take a pretty educated guess as to what the class level was. Last year we taught mixed-level honors level classes. We made a concerted effort to encourage students to move up, and had more explicit conversations with students."

Another teacher described efforts to disrupt inequitable access to honors and advanced math pathways: "It's typical to start accelerating students in math in 7th grade. Three of nine math classes are accelerated based on performance or *perceived* performance in 6th grade. We had a yearlong conversation last year that got rid of 7th grade accelerated math. We've changed the requirements to be more flexible. What we're trying to commit to is truly targeting and supporting students of diverse backgrounds so they can be successful in these classes in order to increase the proportion of students of color in 8th grade accelerated [math]. Of 80 kids, 50 are in accelerated

math and it is currently much more diverse. There are many different needs among students which requires me to change what I'm doing. But I think of it as a positive to give more kids access to accelerated math. Once you're in accelerated math, you're locked in and it's a pathway to continued honors level math."

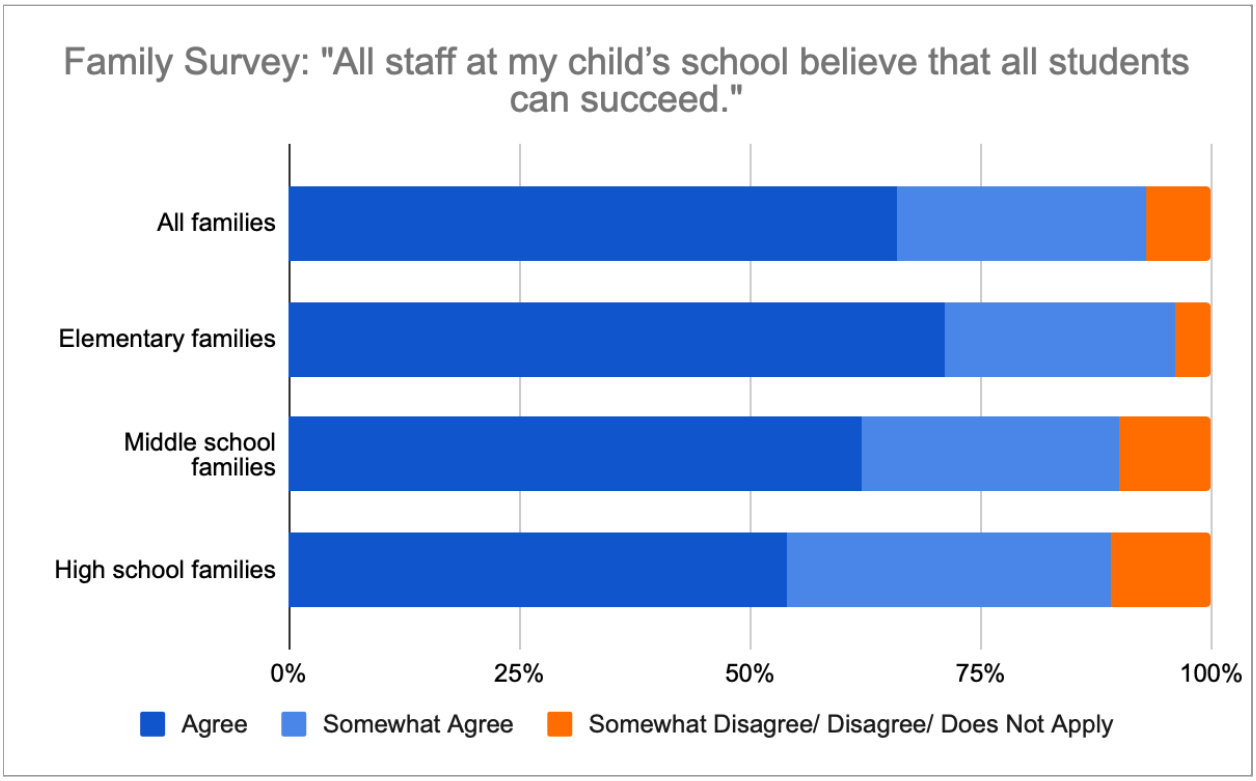
Teachers are critically examining which students are being put on which tracks and working to disrupt systems that have excluded many students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities from accessing advanced coursework. Thoughtful efforts like these to pursue equity serve as an example for broader change, and illuminate the desire among many staff to pursue it.

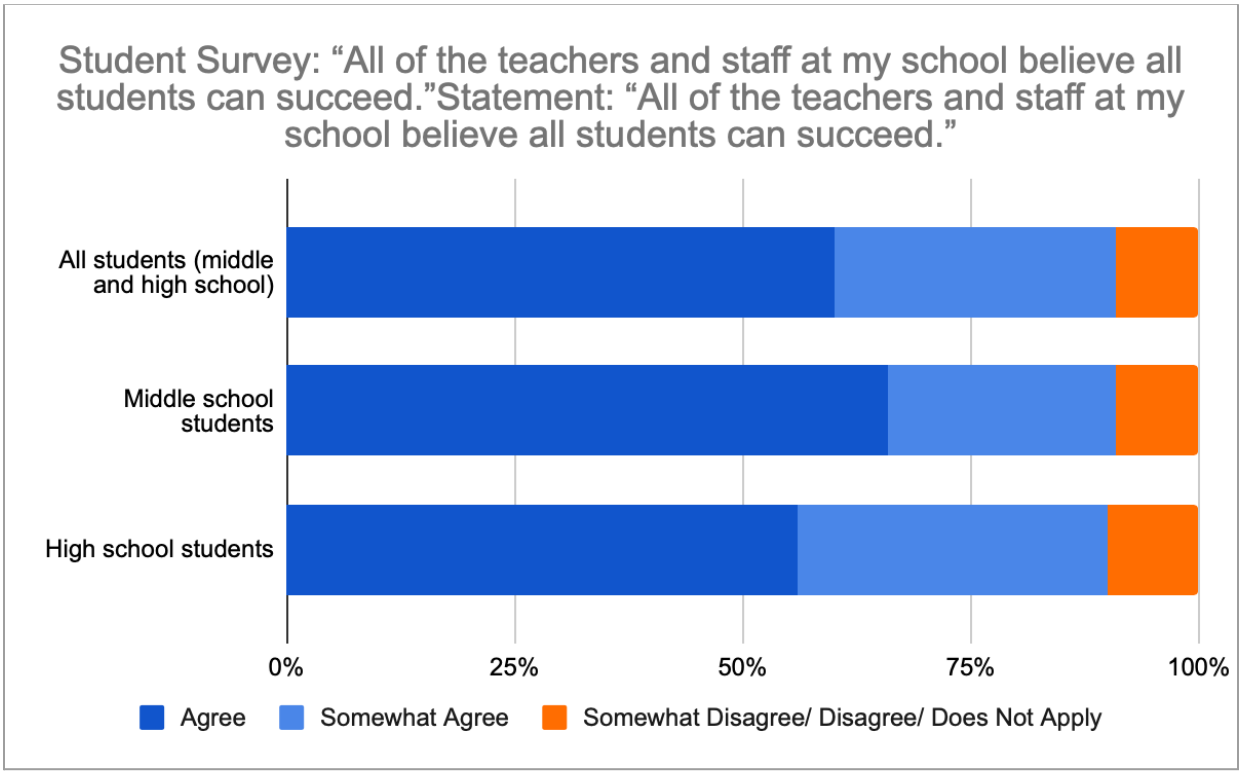
Challenges for Priority Area 2:

Challenge 2.A. NPS stakeholders do not believe all staff have high expectations for all students.

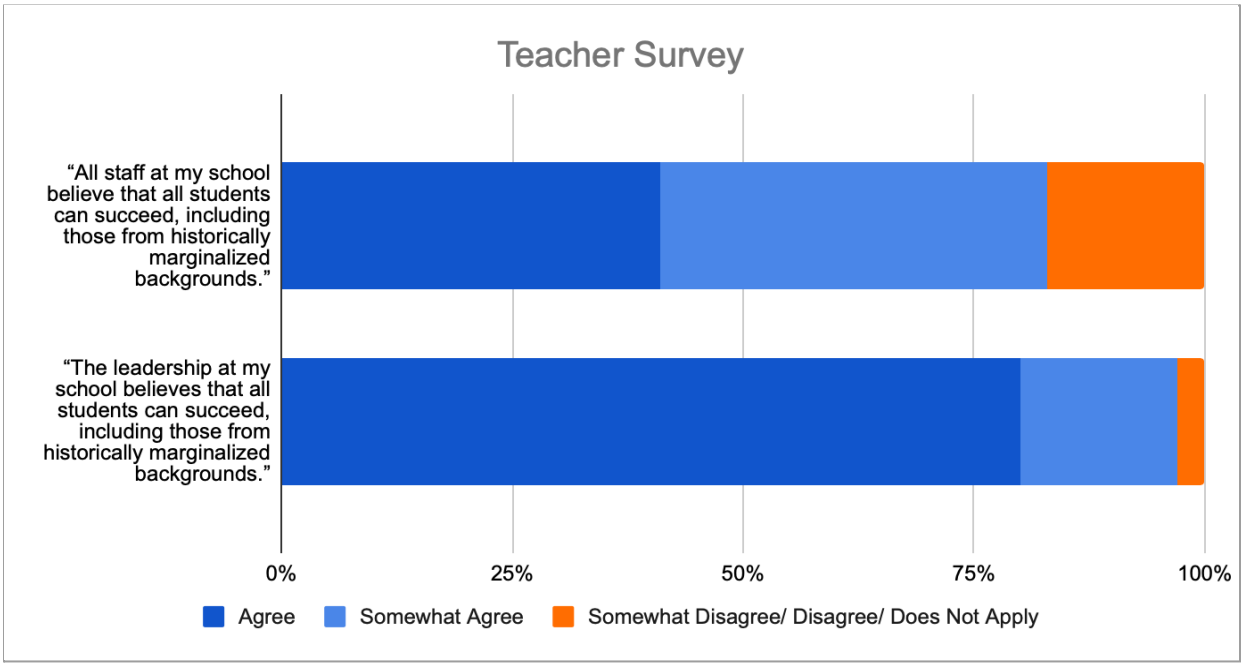
A foundation of an equitable school system is a shared belief that all students can achieve at high levels, and a commitment to hold everyone—students and staff alike—to high expectations. **Across NPS stakeholders, there is not consensus that all staff have high expectations of all students**. Lowered expectations for some students or groups of students can contribute to disparities in outcomes ranging from academics to discipline.

Families and students are more likely to believe that all staff members believe in the potential of all students.





Teachers and staff, however, are not nearly as optimistic as students and families in believing that all of their colleagues hold high expectations for all students. On a survey, teachers were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the following two statements:



School leaders (including principals, assistant principals, deans, etc.) were asked to respond to the same statement about the staff members in their schools and likewise do not believe that *all* staff believe in *all* students. **One hundred percent of school leaders somewhat agree with the statement "All staff at my school believe that all students can succeed, including those from historically marginalized backgrounds."** This is an important data point given the broad exposure administrators have to the many staff across schools.

These responses show uncertainty among staff about the beliefs of their colleagues. These quantitative data are supported by anecdotal commentary by staff in open-ended survey questions and focus groups that demonstrate a concern among many teachers that not all their colleagues have high expectations for all students. Comments illuminate concerns about staff blaming parents and families for school performance, staff operating with implicit or explicit biases, and staff generalizing about students based on things like race, ethnicity, or economic status.

Staff survey comments include:

- "Present leadership is very pro student. Some staff are still operating on preconceived notions or past experiences with various cultures."
- "I think some teachers make judgments based on where students live or where they came from."
- "These are not formally talked about. Some older teachers do lump learners by background into can do and can't do. I don't even think they realize they are doing it."
- "The general belief is that all students have the potential to succeed but outside factors, such as parenting, play a role that the schools cannot control."
- "The way some staff speak about students makes me believe that they don't believe all students can succeed."
- "I know that admin is very supportive. However some teachers make assumptions based on students' identity (ELL, IEP, etc)."
- "The administration is fantastic but a lot of the teachers don't believe in all the kids. I think many teachers are too quick to write kids off."
- "Go back to the 'those kids' and the 'bad kids' that teachers talk about. I want every student in this building to feel empowered and able to take on positions of leadership (at home, in the community, at their jobs, at school beyond NHS) and it is not clear to me that all the teachers or even most of the teachers in this building feel that way. That some kids are 'good enough', I want all kids to feel that they have potential to do big and important things."
- "While the administration is positive and vocal, some teachers are also vocal about their belief that some students cannot or are not successful because of their background."

However, not all staff members share these concerns, and many do believe that they and their colleagues all have high expectations for all students.

Staff survey comments include:

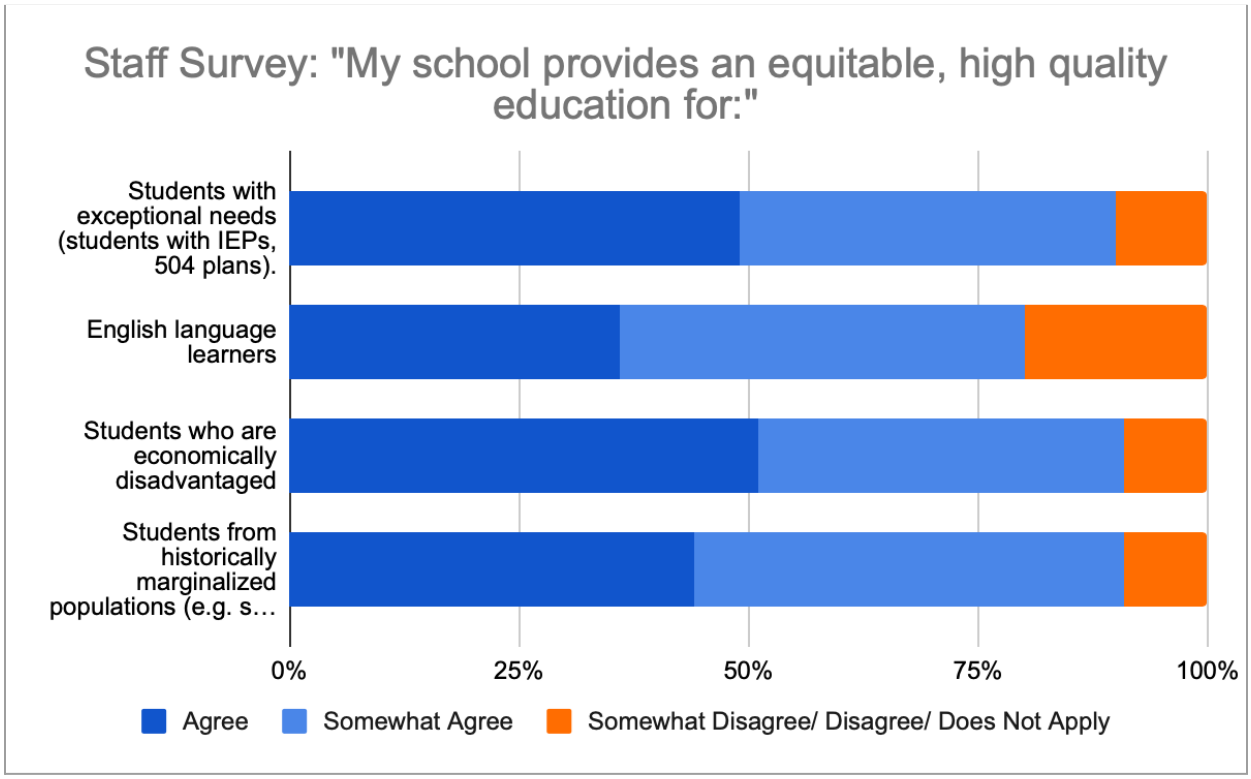
- "I believe the staff here sees each student as an individual who can succeed regardless of background."
- "The teachers and staff have always been dedicated and committed to ensuring that all students receive the best possible education and experience in school."

- "I have witnessed my colleagues having the same expectations for success of all students, while also recognizing how the cultural experiences of various students might influence the way that they learn."
- "We've had a 'All children can learn' mentality since I started in Norwood."
- "I have never encountered anyone in Norwood who doesn't feel that students can achieve regardless of their background."
- "All teachers and admin work tirelessly to help all students succeed."
- "I witness each day how staff and administration work to ensure that all students and fellow staff members are supported and have what they need to thrive."
- "Staff and administrators cheer the successes of any student. I strongly feel that anyone opining differently doesn't see the full picture. The staff here cares deeply in a way that is sometimes immeasurable by quantitative data."
- "Out of all the faculty / staff I have worked along side with for many years, we all agree that all students can be successful."

While perceptions vary, there is concern among a share of staff members that students are not uniformly held to high expectations across the district, and that not all staff believe that all students can achieve at high levels.

Challenge 2.B. Programs to support students with disabilities and struggling students are inconsistent and/or inadequate.

Data show that many specific subgroups of students in Norwood are not yet receiving an equitable education. Staff assessments of overall programming also support this conclusion.

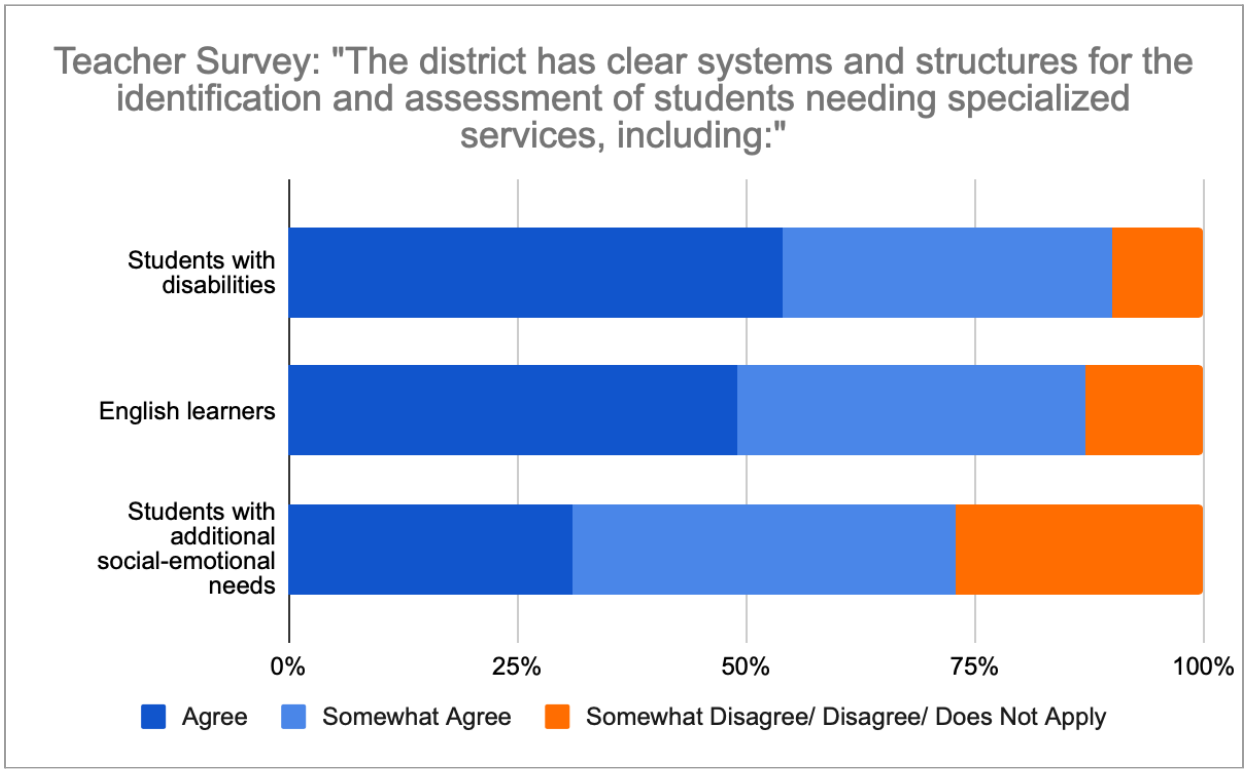


**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others.*

A lack of consistent, robust Response to Intervention (RTI)/Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) programs across the district means struggling students aren't universally getting the support they need. Without clear systems to identify struggling students and to provide them with differentiated tiers of support based on their needs, students and teachers are faced with a binary choice of programming: general education or special education.

This means that there are likely some students who would benefit from additional supports, but aren't receiving them, and that some students who would qualify for special education services may be overlooked. It also means that there are likely some students who would be successful with a middle-tier-level of support who are instead put into special education programs because that middle tier does not exist reliably. Students who are identified for special education support, but who might have been successful with a lower level of support, may end up persisting in a special education track for years. As one special educator said, "There is no RTI to catch them before they become special education. We qualify students who don't necessarily qualify, but there's nowhere else to put them."

Yet, a majority of teachers agree with the statement "The district has clear systems and structures for the identification and assessment of students needing specialized services, including students with disabilities." The lack of consistent RTI/MTSS systems and the current overrepresentation of low-income students and students of color in special education, however, suggest a need for alignment around what clear, effective systems and structures should be in place.



Current systems and practices result in a significant overrepresentation of Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and economically disadvantaged students in Norwood's special education population. Nearly a third of Norwood's economically disadvantaged students are identified as special education.

Percentage of subgroup receiving special education services (IEP) *Data from 2018-2019[12]	
Overall	**19%**
Asian	7%
Black	27%
Hispanic/Latino	21%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	29%
White	19%
Two or more races	23%
ELs	16%
Economically Disadvantaged	31%

Students receiving special education services are often pulled out of the general education classroom, or confined to "inclusion" sections. There is evidence of inconsistency in expectations around the extent to which students should receive special education services in the general education classroom versus in a pull-out setting. Special education teachers report that most general education teachers are committed to collaborating with them to include students receiving special education services in the general education classroom as much as possible; yet, they also report that some colleagues are not aligned in their commitment to an inclusion model.

On the staff survey, one staff member wrote, "Many regular education teachers feel that students that need support don't belong in the classroom to receive those supports, but rather should be pulled out of the room to receive them," and in a focus group, a special education teacher said, "There are some superstars who share the belief that everyone should be in the classroom, but then I have other colleagues who say, 'this kid has an IEP [and] should be taught outside the classroom'...It's heavily weighted to keep the kid in the room; very few teachers want them pulled out."

Overall, staff report significant, but not universal, commitment to an inclusion model of special education, with important gaps to be closed.

One high school student who receives special education services described their experience being isolated to one specific section of students: "I see the same 30 kids all day in my class. I don't know 70% of my grade. If it was more integrated I think I could make more friends."

[12] Source: NPS Data Team, "2018-2019 Data Analysis"

A lack of organizational and systemic clarity leads to staff uncertainty and confusion about processes and resources. Special education staff report organizational turmoil in recent years, with multiple changes in structure and leadership personnel. Staff are glad to have a director of student services in place now, but many also believe the loss of a department chair position for special education has been detrimental to their work and their students' success.

There is a lack of clarity around the realities of money in special education programming. Some special education staff perceive pressure to minimize the amount of spending on special education programming, to direct students to certain settings, or to be conservative in identifying students for services. Others report a sense that there isn't enough money available for special education, or confusion over whom to ask for various resources. One teacher expressed a belief that students weren't included as much because they received more money if they were pull-out.

Staff report feeling overextended and stretched too thin to provide the supports that their students are entitled to.

Comments from special education staff in focus groups:

- "I feel like I can't ask for money or resources from the [special education] department. If I go to the principal, I might find it. But I go and buy it myself. When writing an IEP I hesitate to spend money, I try to think of an alternative."
- "I think there's an underidentification because of money. I think there's a limit to resources; there's never any money for special education and it's our job to get things. We've been given a list of things we can get, but we have never gotten anything from the district office."
- "The department head is now again a teacher. A few years ago we needed large print novels, but nobody knew how to get these. No one knew how to buy them. So teachers are using their own money to buy the books themselves. Teachers are using their own money. In ten years, we've had three special education directors…I['ve] been asked once in ten years, 'what do you need?'...We get these things ourselves. Other department heads take care of this, and teachers go to them. There's no process to purchase things."
- "We are stretched so thin so often. We can't give struggling learners what we want to give them. And then we need to fix problems. Lots of kids suffer. They don't receive an equitable education because we don't have the time."
- "There are different amounts of teachers per room across the different schools. There are not fair caseloads across the board; it doesn't seem to be evenly distributed."
- "There is no one fighting for our kids at the department level. When there are issues of compliance, who is fighting for these kids? Some kids are getting a para covering - there is no compliance. When there are four kids in the classroom when there is only a para - that's out of compliance. My third time sitting in a meeting and saying the same thing with no change."

Central office staff members disagree with many of these characterizations and report that sufficient financial resources are available to support students receiving special education services. Analyses of resource allocation show significantly higher levels of spending per pupil on special education students. However, the varying perceptions and confusion among special education staff members demonstrate a need for clear communication and alignment. Special education staff report confusion and concern on topics ranging from resource acquisition processes to the amount of money special educators get as a stipend relative to general education teachers.

Special education staff communication with parents is inconsistent and often privileges families with time, resources, and systemic fluency. Both staff members and families report that communication with families about IEPs and special education services can be limited in scope and confusing in nature for those not fluent in special education legal jargon.

Family members report strikingly inconsistent experiences with special education staff and programs. Some report wonderful relationships and clear communication with educators about their children's needs and progress. Others report exasperating efforts to advocate for their students and unreliable communication from schools. One parent in a focus group said, "Last year we asked for an evaluation and it turns out [our child] has a reading disability. The resources in Norwood are so few. They don't have the dollars to meet the students' needs. The reading teacher comes to a class and can only take the 'bottom 3' so my son doesn't get services because the student need is so great…And he never got picked up by an RTI group."

Special education teachers describe special education processes as being often inaccessible to families.

Comments from special education teacher focus group and surveys include:

- "Some parents have money and are well-informed, know what to ask. There is a special education district organization. Big gap in parents who know what they can get done… Some parents know their kids struggle but there is no one to tell them you should request testing or give them the information they need."
- "Many parents don't understand the IEP process and don't access [online platform]; we have translators there for reviews but it's not a great service so it can be challenging."
- "Some parents are just trying to make ends meet. They don't know their rights. We give them the 20 pages of paper with procedure notices. Some don't speak English. It's not equitable between educated parents."

On the family survey, of 417 respondents, 133 responded to the optional open-ended response prompt, "If you are a family member of a student(s) with an IEP or 504 plan, please describe how you are engaged, supported, and made aware of your child's growth and progress." Below is a sampling of the wide range of their responses, both positive and negative.

Sample **positive** open survey responses to the prompt "If you are a family member of a student(s) with an IEP or 504 plan, please describe how you are engaged, supported, and made aware of your child's growth and progress."
"The staff assigned to help in IEP are always reaching out, informing me and updating me along the way."
"Again, the support and constant helpful attitude of [NAME] helps my son. I am in frequent contact with her and [NAME] and am fully engaged in the education process and progress."
"My child is on an IEP and I do have a generally positive outlook on engagement and support."
"My child has a wonderful Academic Support teacher. We are in constant communication."
"Our team is often in touch with us regarding our child's progress and any issues they are facing"
"I am consistently updated with my child's progress and expectations. I am also asked for my opinion on my child's needs."

“My child's team are very active and keep me in the loop in all areas of my child's learning plan. And any difficulty that may have come about.”
“Our IEP team is amazing!”
“I get a sheet sent home in his folder every day that I sign & return.”
“They are on top of our meetings and majority of the teachers are present and our experience has been nothing but great.”

Sample **negative** open survey responses to the prompt “If you are a family member of a student(s) with an IEP or 504 plan, please describe how you are engaged, supported, and made aware of your child’s growth and progress.”
“Child diagnosed with ADHD 2 years ago - never received an IEP or 504 plan and have had zero feedback from school or adjustment counselor since original meeting. We've learned not to depend on the school for anything.”
“IEP - we feel engaged but do feel like we have to work for it. I worry that families with less resources are not able to have as much IEP support as we have received.”
“We were somewhat discouraged with the lack of communication/help at [SCHOOL NAME] matching the services of our child's I.E.P.”
“Through too infrequent IEP meetings that are pro forma and do not go into enough depth as to what supports should be in place. In addition, as a parent, we do not know what we do not know and rely on the school and districts to help us navigate the school process, and the district could do a MUCH better job of helping families to understand what is possible and as well as their rights under the law.”
“I have not received any feedback or follow Up on IEP this year yet. I have to ask for input. My child has gotten some of the help he needs but the teachers/specialists are overloaded and the case load at [SCHOOL NAME] means kids aren’t given the attention or time they need.”
“We often have to request meetings, including a transition meeting at the end of 8th grade. Guidance counselors have been responsive but as mentioned before, there can be a disconnect between the IEP and 504 and what the teachers do. Our child also kept forgetting to go to his services but we were not informed for a while. “
“Unfortunately this has been a very negative process for us in which many legal and procedural deadlines were not met. Tests were not given correctly or miss labeled. We were denied help because our child was not the neediest in the class although testing showed disability. Even trying to get a 504 plan in the beginning was very hard and we were not supported as people do not believe my child had the needs he had.”
“I am not pleased with the level of communication that I receive for my child. I feel like I need to reach out to her special ed. teacher if I want any information and I feel like it should be the other way around.”
“At the middle school level, engagement is not great. We were told that our meetings weren’t a priority because our child wasn’t “failing academically.”
“IEP meetings feel like a checkbox with a predetermined outcome instead of an active conversation. It seems like the staff's focus is on the district as a whole, i.e., what services they have and how limited those are. Parental concerns tend to be dismissed with stock answers despite evidence.”

The experiences of family members suggest that the extent to which families are engaged meaningfully as partners in their child's special education plan and services varies from staff member to staff member and there is not a consistent set of expectations and practices for family engagement in special education districtwide.

Academic access and outcomes for students receiving special education services remain inequitable, as is outlined in Challenge 2.D.

Challenge 2.C. Support for English Learners is improving, but still lags behind needs.

Norwood has seen substantial growth in its EL population. While the district has taken steps to respond to that growing population, including increased staffing and hiring an English language learner coordinator, current systems are not sufficient fully to meet current and projected needs. According to an analysis of language preferences in Aspen (a data platform used by the district), families in Norwood list 40 different languages as preferred languages for written communication, including 10 or more respondents indicating preferences for each of the following: Albanian, Arabic, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tamil.

Growth in English Language Learners in NPS[13]	
2017-2018	10%
2021-2022	12.7%

Like other areas of the district, the default assumption in most school settings is that children speak English fluently, and those who don't are treated as the exception to be accommodated. A program built from the assumption that many or most students did not speak English fluently would look very different from the current status quo in Norwood.

There is inconsistency in students receiving the EL service minutes they should. A central office staff member acknowledged that "we're not meeting our service minutes in four out of five elementary schools." There is every reason to expect the share of students needing EL services to continue to grow in Norwood, but current staffing and programming is not set up to meet that growth. Staff at the district and school level understand this reality, and efforts have already been made to address it including increased staff.

The current EL program leans too heavily toward a pull-out model, rather than an inclusion model, meaning language learners are missing out on substantial classroom time. Another central office staff member said. "I think our model's probably outdated a little bit. We've kind of outgrown ourselves…It's basically a pull-out model and the first ones that get attention are level 1 and 2s, the neediest levels. We're realizing that 3s and 4s aren't getting the recommended time for direct EL support."

While a newcomer academy has been created at the high school, and at least one more is in the works for another level, there aren't yet newcomer programs available to every age group.

[13] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

Additionally, the existing newcomer program is nearing capacity, and does not include native language speakers among staff for all the languages students speak, particularly Spanish and Portuguese which are the two primary languages of students in the program. During the fall, teachers often relied on students to support them in interpreting in class.

Communication with families who do not speak English remains a significant challenge for all staff in the district. Staff across functional areas describe the challenge they face in ensuring that communications are accessible to all of the district's families. NPS has a very low percentage of staff members who fluently speak the languages their families speak, and so staff members rely on various tools and technologies to fill the gap.

There is not yet evidence of a districtwide strategy to solve this challenge. Staff members use a hodgepodge of tools and strategies. Many use Google translate, a tool that is helpful but imperfect, and others reference translation services that are available on an as-needed basis, like "Telelanguage" or apps like Talking Points. These strategies tend to be on an individual or team-by-team basis. Some teachers proactively ensure their newsletters are translated into different languages, while others include a link to Google translate for the families to access on their end. Staff also employ creative day-to-day pragmatic strategies like pairing a bilingual student with a language learner to help support learning. More on communication and engagement strategies is discussed in Priority Area 4.

In addition to their formal responsibilities as educators, EL staff often feel called on as de facto case managers in support of the varying needs of their students. Both EL and general education staff report that EL staff members are often called on to go above and beyond their formal job descriptions in support of their students. Because they are tasked with supporting language learners, they are often the go-to person when any issue arises. EL staff report that they take on these challenges out of a commitment to their students, but the extra demands make it difficult to meet all their responsibilities. As one EL staff member said, "ELL teachers often act as a catch-all for parent needs, transportation issues, etc. Happy to do it but there's not a lot of time."

This reliance on EL staff as case managers for students who are language learners is exacerbated by the lack of diversity of the Norwood staff. Staff members report significant gaps in cross-cultural understanding, and often do not have the knowledge or skills to support language learners effectively. A lack of staff familiarity with effective EL inclusion models and insufficient cultural competence may also lead to a lack of investment. As one general education teacher said, "In a previous district I worked in, most students were students of color and most were immigrants and that was the norm. Here it's 'ESL kids are not my kids.' I've heard this way more than in other districts. Especially with a growing and diverse demographic."

With a growing EL population, all teachers will need to develop the skills to successfully affirm their students and help language learners access their curricula and instruction. As a central office staff member noted, while there are requirements for teachers to receive training on supporting ELs, for many teachers that training occurred many years ago, and the district will need to provide the training, development, and accountability to support teachers in learning and implementing strategies to support ELs effectively.

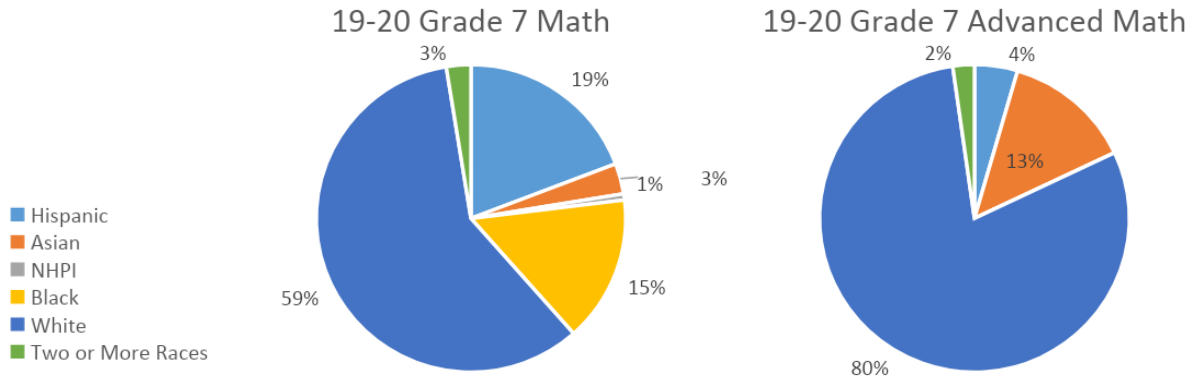
Academic access and outcomes for ELs remain inequitable, as is outlined in Challenge 2.D below.

Challenge 2.D. Access to rigorous, advanced coursework and student achievement outcomes remains inequitable.

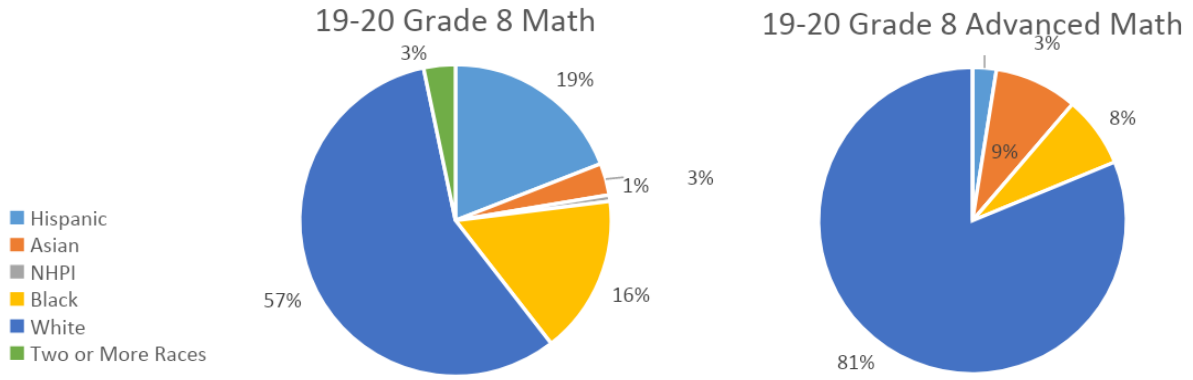
NPS students do not have equitable access to rigorous, advanced coursework. There are disparities in access to NPS' most rigorous and advanced coursework in the middle and high schools along lines of race, gender, and IEP status.

For example, students of color have not had equitable access to advanced math courses in middle school and high school in NPS. Because a student's access to Accelerated Math in 7th grade plays a large role in determining their ability to access honors and Advanced Placement (AP) math courses in high school, disparities in 7th grade math enrollment are predictors of disparities in high school math enrollment.

In the 2019-2020 school year, White students comprised 65% of the population at the middle school, but made up 80% of 7th graders in Advanced Math. Meanwhile, that same year, Hispanic students and Black students made up 14% and 12% of the middle school population, respectively, but represented just 5% and 0% of students in 7th grade Advanced Math, respectively.[14]



The distribution looked similar in 8th grade math.



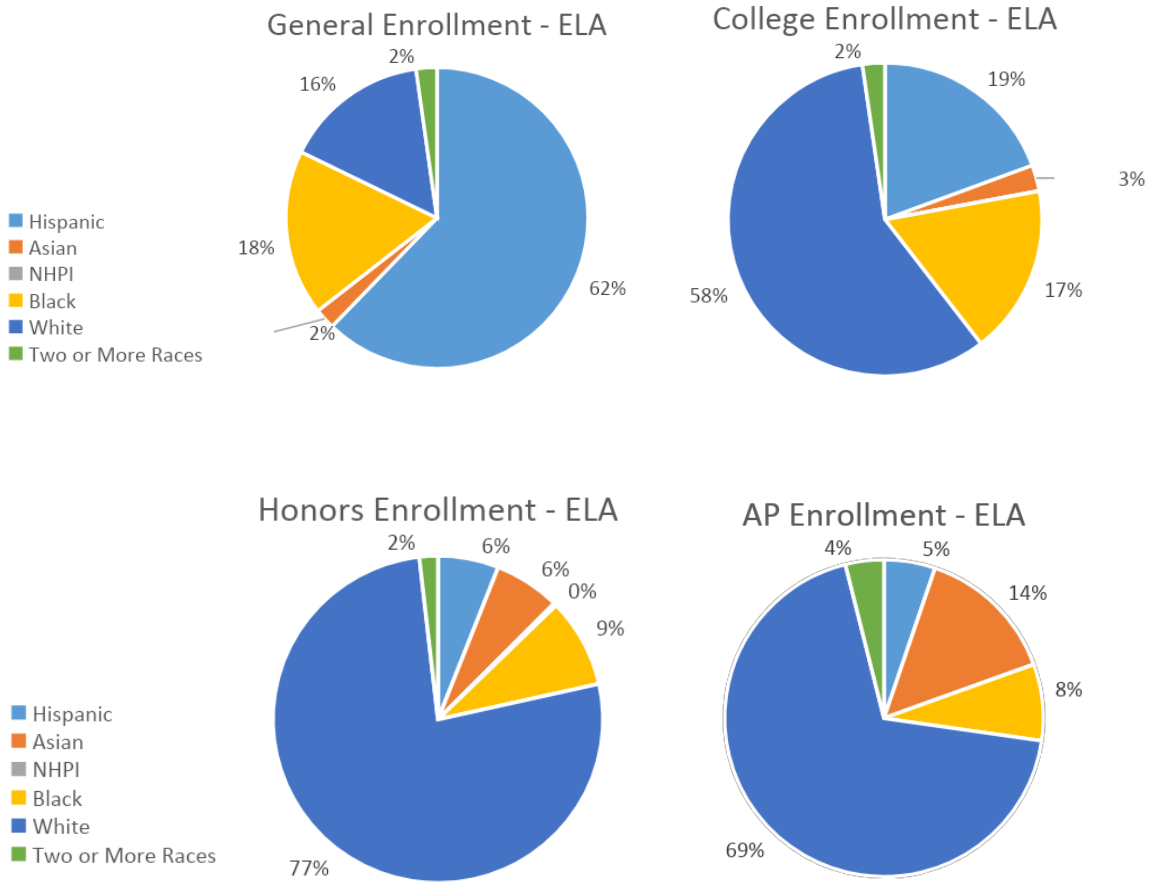
[14] Source: NPS Data Team, "2017-2018 through 2020-2021 CMS & NHS Math Data Analysis"

The picture was similar at the high school level that year, with Hispanic students making up 15% of all math students, but just 3% of Honors math students and 8% of Advanced Placement (AP) math students. Black students made up 13% of all math students, but 6% of Honors students and 8% of AP students.

As discussed in the Foundational Strengths section above, many teachers and staff are acutely aware of the inequitable access to advanced courses students have historically had in NPS and are beginning efforts to address the issue.

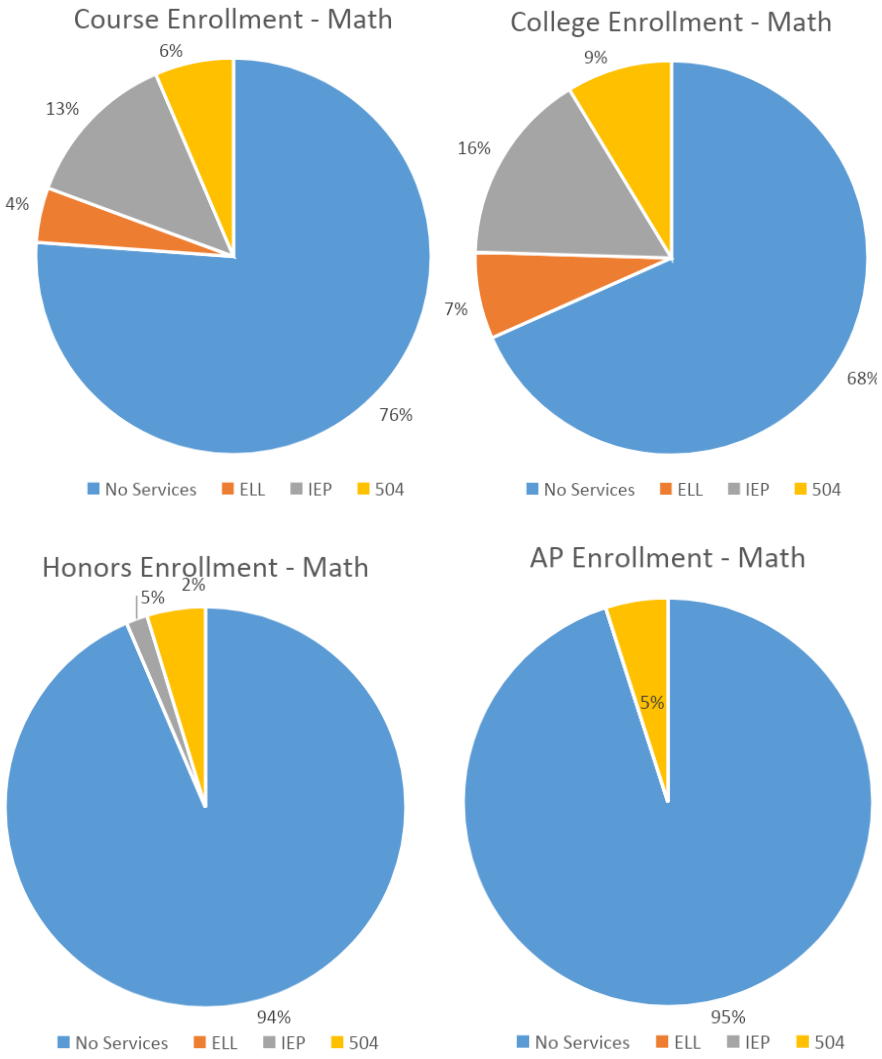
While math is used as an example here, it is illustrative of inequitable access broadly across departments. While there are differences among some departments and even some courses, the overall trend is clear[15].

Similar trends are observed for high school ELA courses, as seen in the charts below.



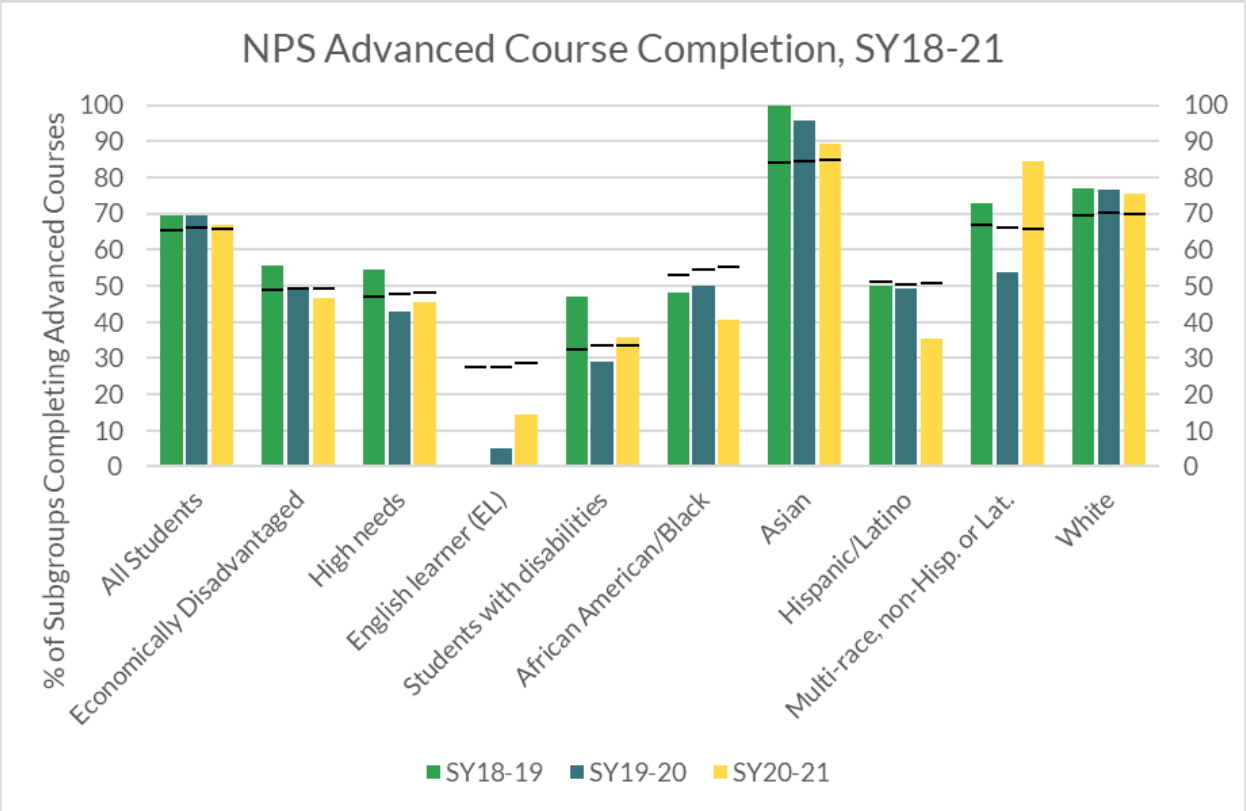
In addition to race and ethnicity, there are disparities in access to rigorous, advanced coursework for students receiving special education services and English Learners[16].

[15] Source: NPS Data Team, "2019-2020 Data Analysis"
[16] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/



The graph to follow depicts NPS advanced course completion from SY18-SY21. Just over two-thirds (66.8-69.5%) of 11th- and 12th-grade students at Norwood High School complete advanced courses (including dual enrollment, honors, and Advanced Placement) each year, similar to the Massachusetts average of 65-66% (MA rates are denoted by the black lines on the graph).

Completion varies notably by racial/ethnic subgroup, however; in the last three years, an average of 95% of Asian students completed advanced courses, 76.3% of White students, 46.3% of African-American/Black students, and 44.9% of Hispanic or Latino students. Less than half of high needs students complete advanced courses (47.7% overall), including 50.3% of economically disadvantaged students and 37.3% of students with disabilities. ELs are low in number (19-28 students in each of the last three cohorts of grades 11 and 12), but complete advanced courses at very low rates, fewer than five each year.



*Note: The black line on each bar of the graph represents the state average for that subgroup

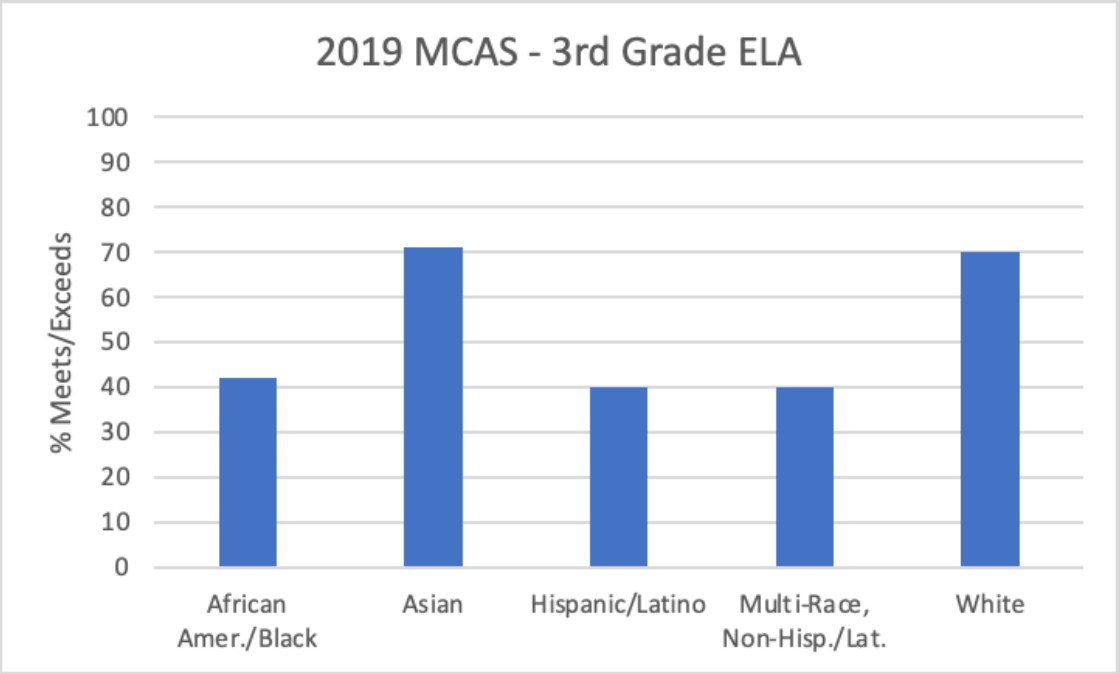
Leaders from central office to schools to classrooms will need to investigate the root causes of these disparities, which could include factors like implicit bias in grading and course recommendations, structural determinants of course sequence or "tracking," systemic fluency of students and families with respect to advanced coursework, and preparation for rigorous coursework in middle and elementary schools.

In addition to targeting *access* to advanced coursework, NPS staff will need to focus on *success* in advanced coursework. At older grade levels, outside tutoring for advanced courses is not uncommon for financially secure families. The district will need to ensure supports are in place not only to allow students to access advanced courses, but to thrive in them.

Current policies, practices, and systems are not yielding equitable achievement outcomes for students from marginalized backgrounds. Enrollment in advanced course work at the secondary level is just one symptom of broader systemic inequities. Disparities in student achievement along lines of race, economic class, and IEP status begin in the early years and persist through high school.

District metrics for nearly every major indicator reflect disparate outcomes for students along these lines. NPS continues to struggle to achieve equitable levels of achievement for its most marginalized students. In addition to outcome measures, NPS has significant discrepancies in data reflecting student experiences, including school discipline data.

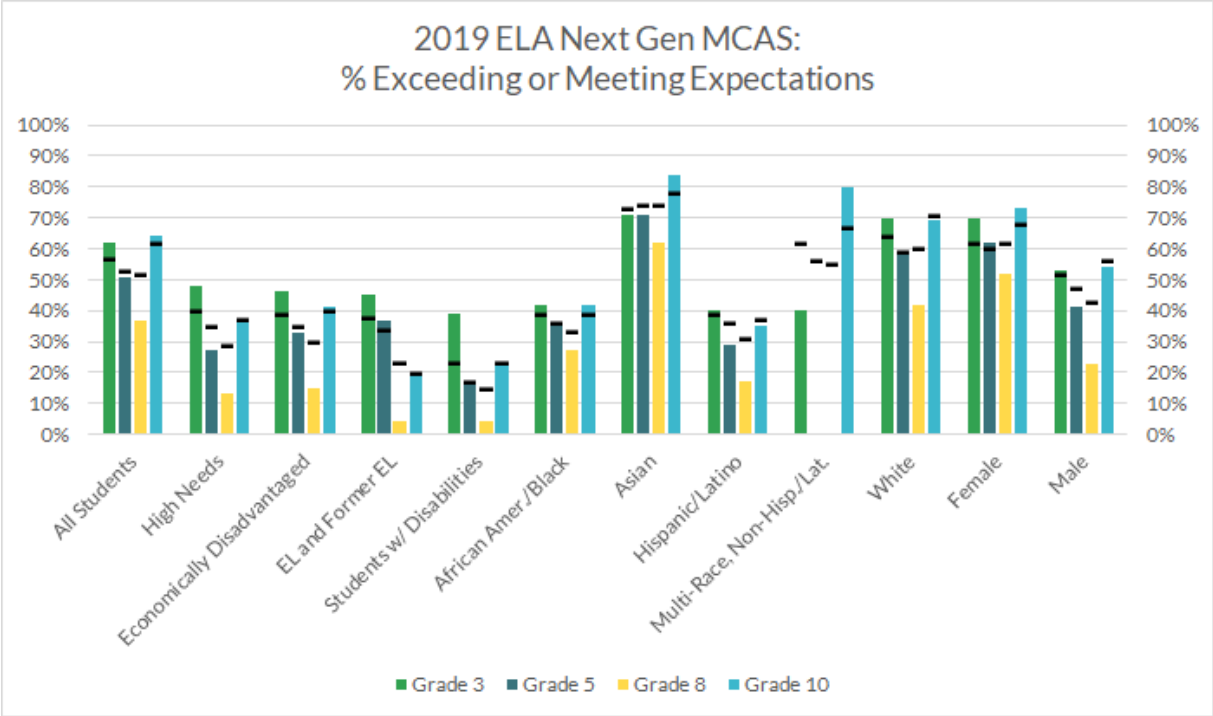
Disparities along racial and ethnic lines begin early on in NPS[17]:

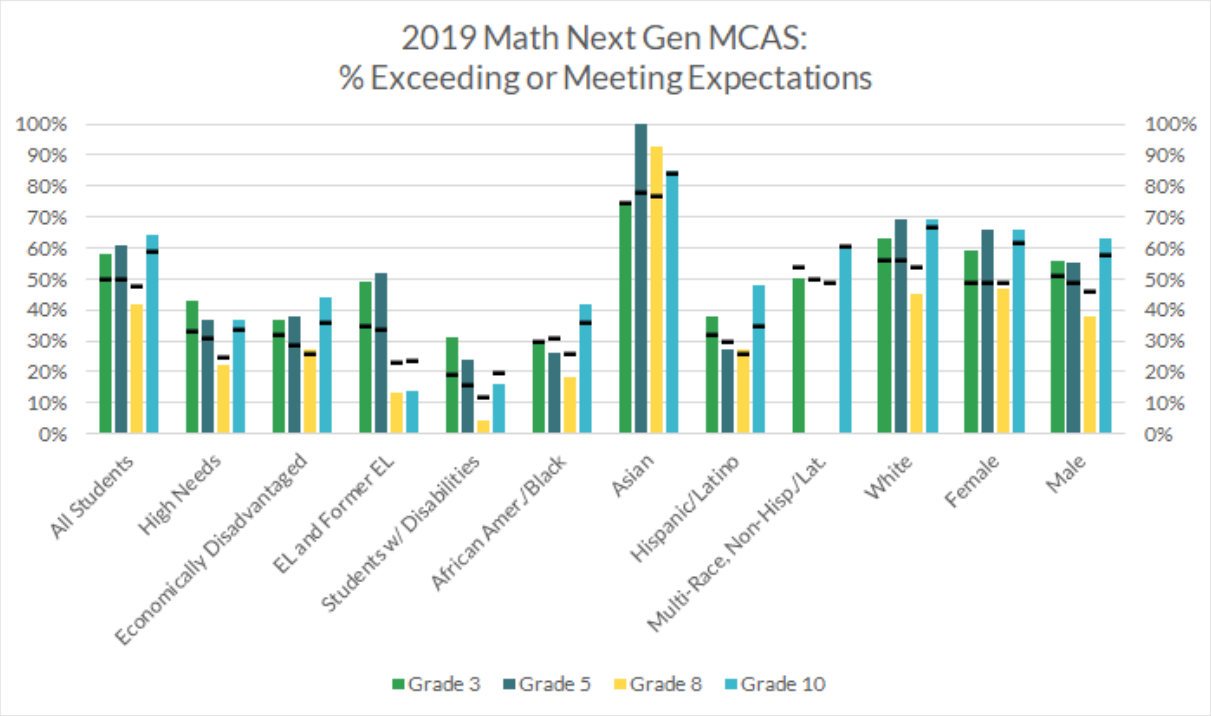


Without strong RTI/MTSS systems in place, it is unlikely that gaps that begin this early would close as cohorts of students proceed through the NPS system. These gaps persist over time and across subject areas, as seen in the MCAS data to follow.

MCAS results from 2019 in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 (chosen as first, last, and transition testing milestones) show that high needs subgroups achieve Meeting Expectations or Exceeding Expectations at lower rates than their peers, and that many gaps increase as grades go up. High needs students overall achieve benchmarks at rates of between 14-15 percentage points (3rd grade) and 27 percentage points (10th grade) lower than district averages in both ELA and mathematics. For students with disabilities, the range is 23-27 percentage points lower in 3rd grade and 41-48 percentage points lower in 10th grade; 19-22% of 10th grade students with disabilities met MCAS benchmarks in 2019. African-American/Black students, Hispanic or Latino students, and multi-race, non-Hispanic students tend to perform lower than their peers, and Asian and White students tend to perform higher. Additionally, female students outperform male students in all four grade levels, by 17-29 percentage points in ELA and 3-11 percentage points in mathematics.

[17] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/





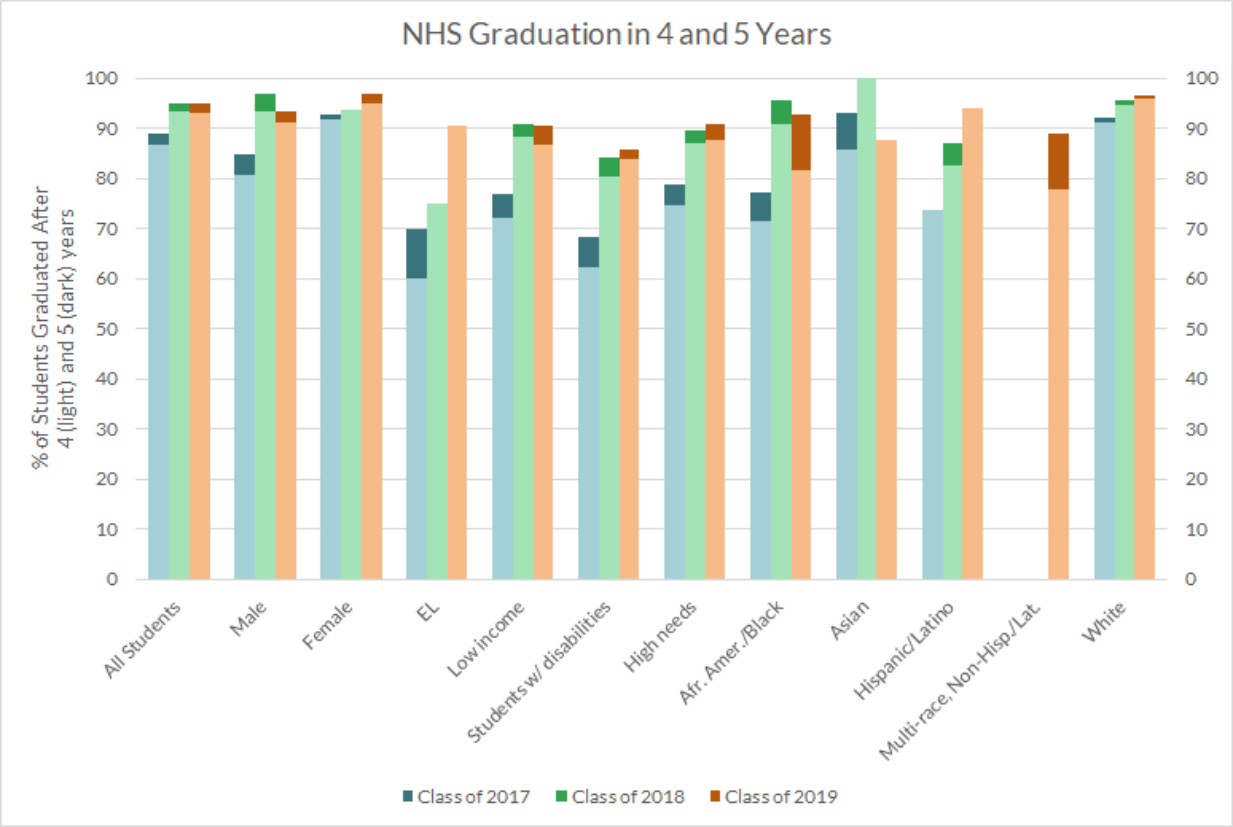
*Note: The black line on each bar of the graph represents the state average for that subgroup

As NPS explores strategies to close the achievement gap, it should explore and address the root causes of chronic absenteeism for its historically marginalized populations. At the elementary level 30% of students who identify as Hispanic/Latino are chronically absent and make up 20% of

all chronically absent students[18]. While this gap closes slightly at the MS and HS the rates of chronic absenteeism are of concern and more than likely contributing to the achievement gap.

	ES		MS		HS	
	As a % of all Chronic. Absent	As a % of Subgroup	As a % of all Chronic. Absent	As a % of Subgroup	As a % of all Chronic. Absent	As a % of Subgroup
Hispanic	30.2%	19.8%	20.5%	14.6%	25.9%	19.4%
Asian	14.5%	15.1%	3.9%	7.3%	7.1%	11.4%
Black	9.2%	9.4%	15.4%	13.3%	13.5%	13.8%
White	41.5%	7.7%	57.7%	9.7%	49.6%	9.8%

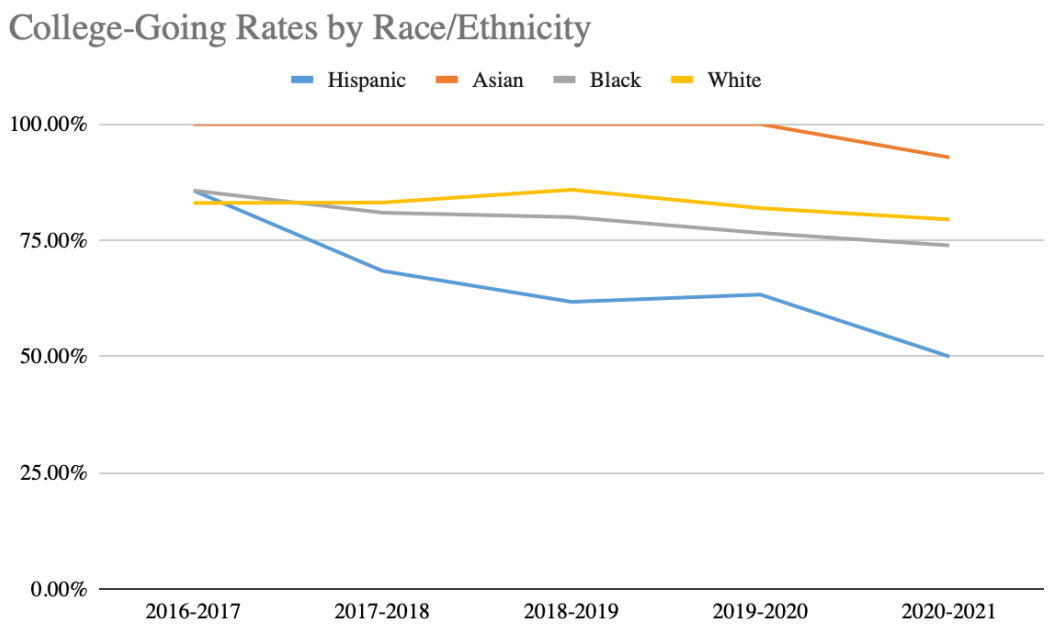
While gaps still exist in the 4- and 5-year graduation rates for Norwood students, those rates have increased across the board, with notable progress in graduation rates for Hispanic/Latino students[19]. A comparison of 4- and 5-year graduation rates shows that some subgroups have higher percentages taking a fifth year, including African American/Black students, low income students, students with disabilities, and high needs students. In the chart below, the light color is the percentage of students who graduated in four years, and the darker color is the additional percentage of students in that cohort who graduated in the fifth year.



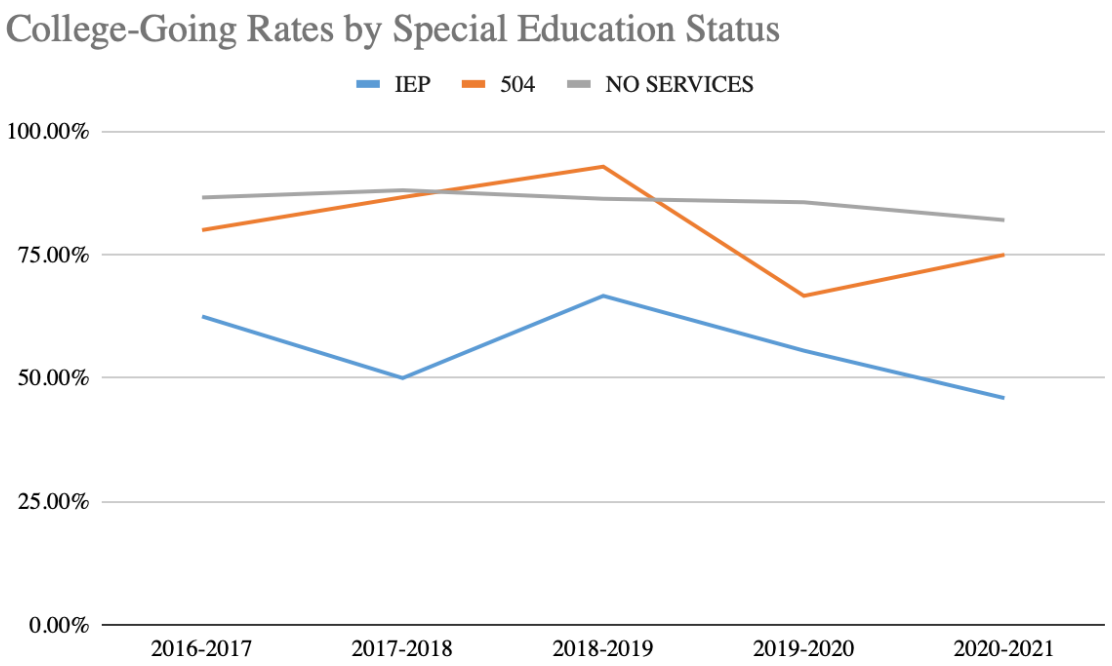
[18] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

[19] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

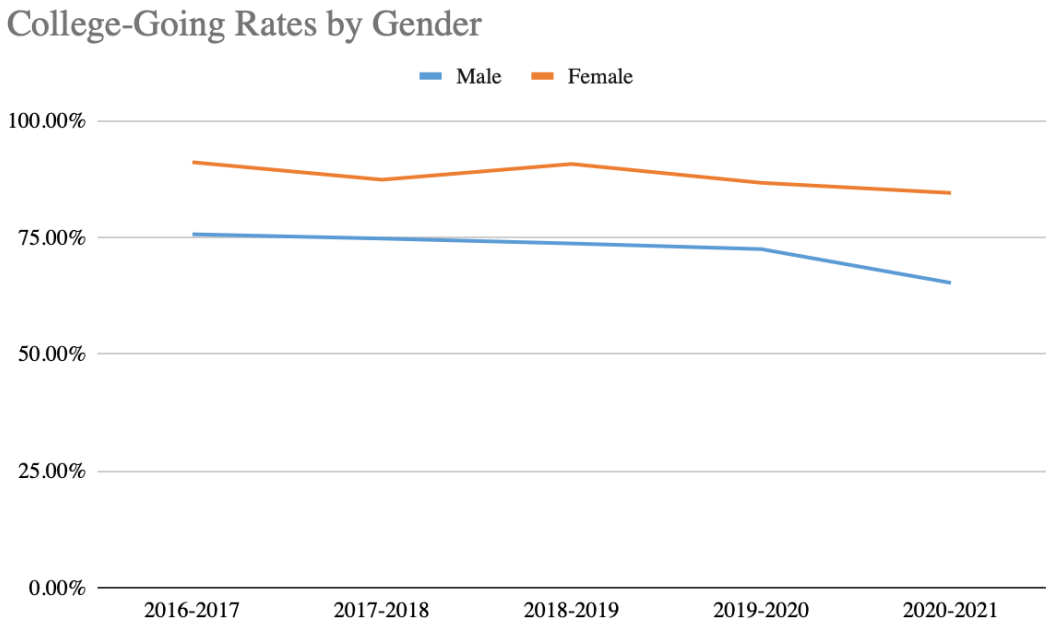
However, there are still significant, and in some cases widening, gaps in terms of college attendance along racial and ethnic lines[20].



Disparities in college-going rates are also observed between students receiving special education services and their peers, and between girls and boys. As noted above, girls also significantly outperform boys on MCAS assessments and tend to be overrepresented in advanced courses in Norwood.



[20] Source: NPS Data Team: "Graduate Data Analysis"


College-Going Rates by Gender
Male
Female
100.00%
75.00%
50.00%
25.00%
0.00%
2016-2017
2017-2018
2018-2019
2019-2020
2020-2021

Recommendations for Priority Area 2:

1. Establish a robust RTI or MTSS program at each school level in line with state guidelines to identify and support struggling students.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Conduct comprehensive research on best practices in systems of student support. A starting point could be the resources provided on the MA DESE website:
    - MA Department of Education Tools for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
    - MA Department of Education Safe and Supportive Schools Implementation Guide
- Ensure the RTI/MTSS program addresses academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs, including attention to attendance, on-track indicators, and measures of progress.
- Define the roles, responsibilities, and processes for establishing, conducting, and monitoring RIT/MTSS programs.
- Clearly delineate the roles of different staff and departments with respect to these systems, including general education teachers, special education staff, counselors, administrators, central office staff, and support staff.

2. Investigate and analyze the root causes of the overrepresentation of Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and economically disadvantaged students in special education.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Continue and deepen professional development on culturally relevant and sustaining practices and implicit bias for all staff to support staff in understanding the racialized way in which they might be interpreting "intelligence," behavior, and classroom success.
- Execute a proactive plan to recruit and retain a diverse staff (see Recommendations for Priority Area 3).
- Leverage strong RTI/MTSS programs to identify potentially struggling students and intervene before referral to special education.
- Integrate demographic analyses into RTI/MTSS processes to identify trends and barriers to remove.
- Analyze staff referrals to special education each year to identify trends among staff members or departments.
- Audit prior evaluation and referral processes for evidence of bias and missed opportunities.
- Include cultural competence as a required skill set for psychologists and other evaluators.

3. Develop a vision for an inclusion-based special education model and identify budgetary implications for implementing it.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Use model programs and exemplars to define the ideal inclusion model for NPS, including the role of special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and general education teachers.
- Identify personnel, schedules, and materials needed to implement an ideal inclusion model.
- Develop and implement a strategy for securing appropriate funding from the board, town, and state.
- Audit current actual inclusion/pull-out service minutes for students at each school to identify opportunities for greater inclusion.

- Identify strategies to include students at the secondary level in a wider array of course offerings outside of specific special education sections.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals and provide them with clear oversight and accountability.
- Develop a professional development plan for general education teachers on how to effectively collaborate with special education teachers to include students in the general classroom.

4. Codify special education processes, expectations, and structures, including supports for families navigating the IEP process.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Publish a transparent and widely available description of a special education funding philosophy, processes for acquiring resources for special educators, and up-to-date budgets for special education resources.
- Clearly delineate processes, roles, responsibilities, and supports for special education staff members with respect to both their school administration and central office.
- Create an Advocate position to help families navigate the evaluation and IEP process.
- Define clear communication expectations for members of a special education team, including service providers and liaisons.
- Establish a formal council of parents of students receiving special education services to be a conduit between families and the district.

5. Develop a vision and action plan for an EL program that includes Newcomer Programs, proactive staffing, and support for families.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Develop short-, medium-, and long-range projections for EL populations in Norwood.
- Create staffing models aligned to projections.
- Create and implement a vision for an inclusion-based EL program where appropriate.
- Establish Newcomer Programs at each grade band level, with a focus on hiring staff who are fluent speakers of languages spoken by students and families.
- Develop a professional development plan for general education teachers to help them effectively partner with EL staff and support ELs in accessing classroom content.
- Communicate clear expectations and processes for supporting the social-emotional and material needs of all students, *including ELs*, so that EL staff are not de facto case managers

6. Investigate and analyze the root causes of gaps in access to advanced coursework and postsecondary opportunities.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Complete an analysis of the root causes of disparate enrollment in advanced courses along lines of race, class, ability, language, and gender.
- Compare and contrast advanced course enrollment and completion data.
- Compare and contrast advanced course data with graduation rates and college-going rates to analyze current supports for students in advanced courses.
- Identify the supports needed to help students thrive in advanced courses, including in-person support, material resources, and systemic fluency.

Priority Area 3: Cultivate rigorous, affirming, and inclusive learning environments led by a staff that is representative of the student body and meets the needs of all students

"As a student, I believe achieving equity in the NPS is important because growing up is one of the most crucial times of a person's life...and influences when growing up shape their beliefs and mindset as they reach adulthood." - NPS Student

"As an educator in NPS, I believe achieving equity is important because everyone deserves to be seen, understood and genuinely known in order to know what they need to fully engage in learning." - NPS Staff Member

Foundational Strengths for Priority Area 3:

Most administrators, staff, students, and families acknowledge that a diverse staff representative of the student population is an essential component of an equitable district. There appears to be a strong consensus across focus groups, interviews, and surveys participants consistently around the importance of diversifying NPS school faculty.

Comments from survey and focus groups respondents include:

- A student self-identifying as BIPOC: "I think if they included more black and african american teachers it would be easier for me to be able to learn with people I can connect with. Not saying white teachers are bad its just I feel like when every history or any discriminatory facts come around they feel as though they are on eggshells."
- A community member: "Hire Black and Indigenous folks of marginalized genders to help attain and sustain equity. This can't happen if there are no Black or Indigenous teachers, administrators, board members, etc. - and *this* can't happen unless we make sure our community and our schools are not just safe spaces, but brave spaces."
- A family member: "Hire more teachers and aids of color. Many of the elementary schools are mostly white educators who are female." "Representation among teachers and staff is important too, for students in different demographic groups. Do they see people of all different genders, ethnicities, races etc. in teaching and leadership positions?"
- A staff member: "We could be hiring a more diverse range of talented people, so students from marginalized histories can see themselves here, and feel more comfortable knowing they have role models here that look like them."
- A district administrator: "I hope that NPS will install a plan for more diverse hiring and retention. We have an extremely low percentage of non-white teachers and admins, and when students can't see themselves in the authority figures, it isn't good for them."

Research indicates positive outcomes for BIPOC students when there is a match between the race and ethnicity of students and their teachers. Evidence suggests that when a Black student has a teacher of the same race there is a small but meaningful impact on student reading and math test

scores.[21] When White students are more likely to have the same-race teacher they disproportionately benefit,[22] as is the current situation in NPS. A recent study indicates that having a Black teacher for one year in elementary school increased the likelihood that Black students would complete high school (reducing dropout rates by 39%) and raised college-going aspirations.[23] In addition, emerging research in California indicates that 11th and 12th-grade Hispanic/Latino students with a Hispanic/Latino teacher have fewer unexcused absences, especially for those students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch services, migrant students, and students who experienced chronic absenteeism the year before. This relationship is the strongest when LatinX students had the same-race teacher for the first period of the day.[24]

Recognizing the importance of a culturally proficient staff, NPS embarked on an ambitious initiative to provide administrators and faculty professional development in this area. Staff express a strong desire to continue to strengthen their cultural-proficiency knowledge and skills.

In response to NPS's changing student demographics, the district as well as individual schools and staff recognize that a culturally proficient staff is critical to providing an equitable education. The most ambitious effort is the district's partnership with the Highlander Institute (https://highlanderinstitute.org). Over the past two years NPS has engaged the Highlander Institute to provide professional development around their "Culturally Responsive & Sustaining Pedagogy Framework." In the 2020-2021 school year, the Highlander Instituted provided professional development for administrators and, in the 2021-2022 school year, this professional development was expanded to include four cohorts of teachers (one for preschool, two for elementary, and one for middle and high schools) composed of six professional development workshops supported by eight professional learning community sessions. At the time of this report, NPS was working with the Highlander Institute on how to continue to build on this foundation during the 2022-2023 school year. The district has also engaged in important professional development with World Savvy (www.wordsavvy.org) and around Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Schools and groups of teachers have also undertaken laudable individual efforts to increase their cultural proficiency capacity. For example, in 2020-2021 NHS engaged the Anti-Defamation League (www.ADL.org) to provide two three-hour professional development sessions addressing cultural proficiency and equity topics including: how implicit bias and white privilege can manifest itself in educational practices, increasing an understanding of racism and anti-racism, strategies in support of students who have experienced racial trauma, and how a traditional curriculum might perpetuate systemic racism. Another example of building cultural proficiency capacity, is the professional development at the Callahan school on culturally responsive practices, an initiative that is supported by a five-year grant.

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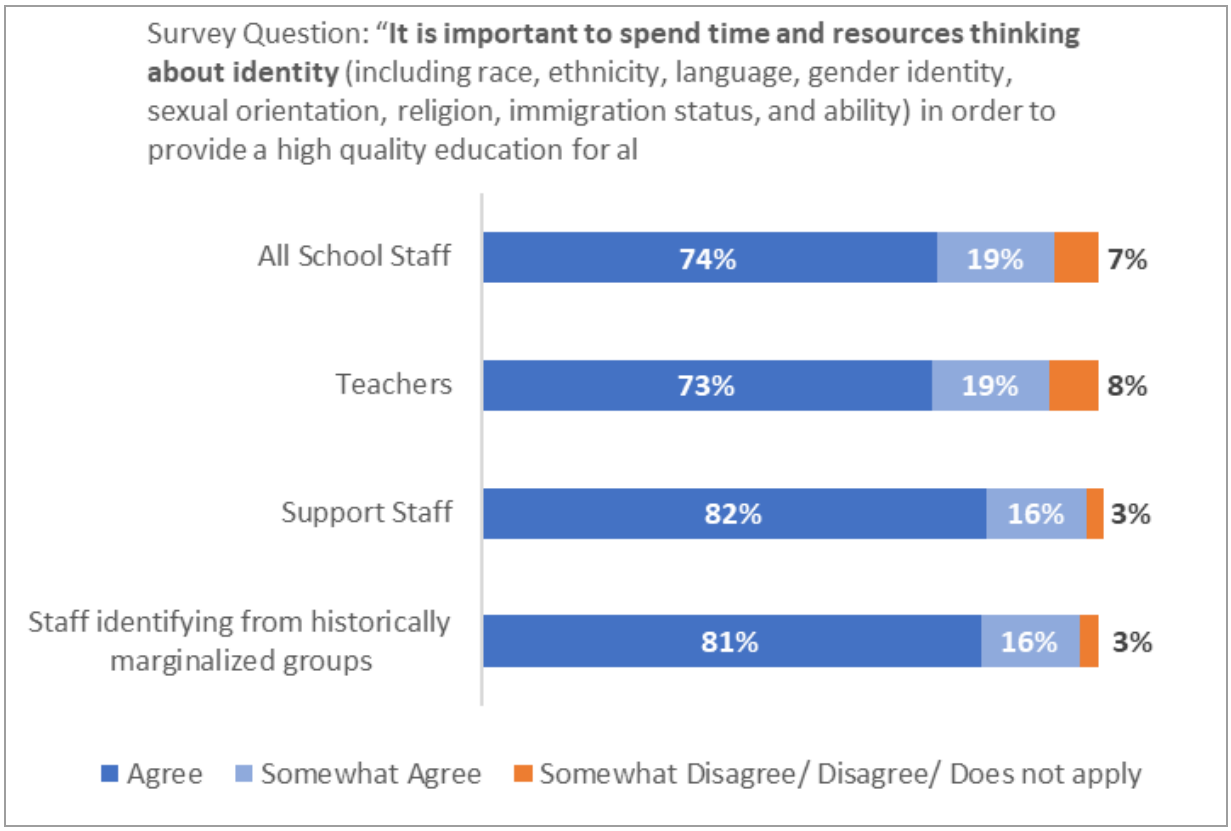
[21] Dan Goldhaber, Roddy Theobald, and Christopher Tien, Phi Delta Kappa Professional Journal for Educators, Why We Need A Diverse Teacher Workforce (2019), https://kappanonline.org/why-we-need-diverse-teacher-workforce-segregation-goldhaber-theobald-tien/

[22] Constance A. Lindsay, Carolina Education Review, The Power of a Black Teacher (2020), http://ed.unc.edu/2020/09/08/the-power-of-a-black-teacher/

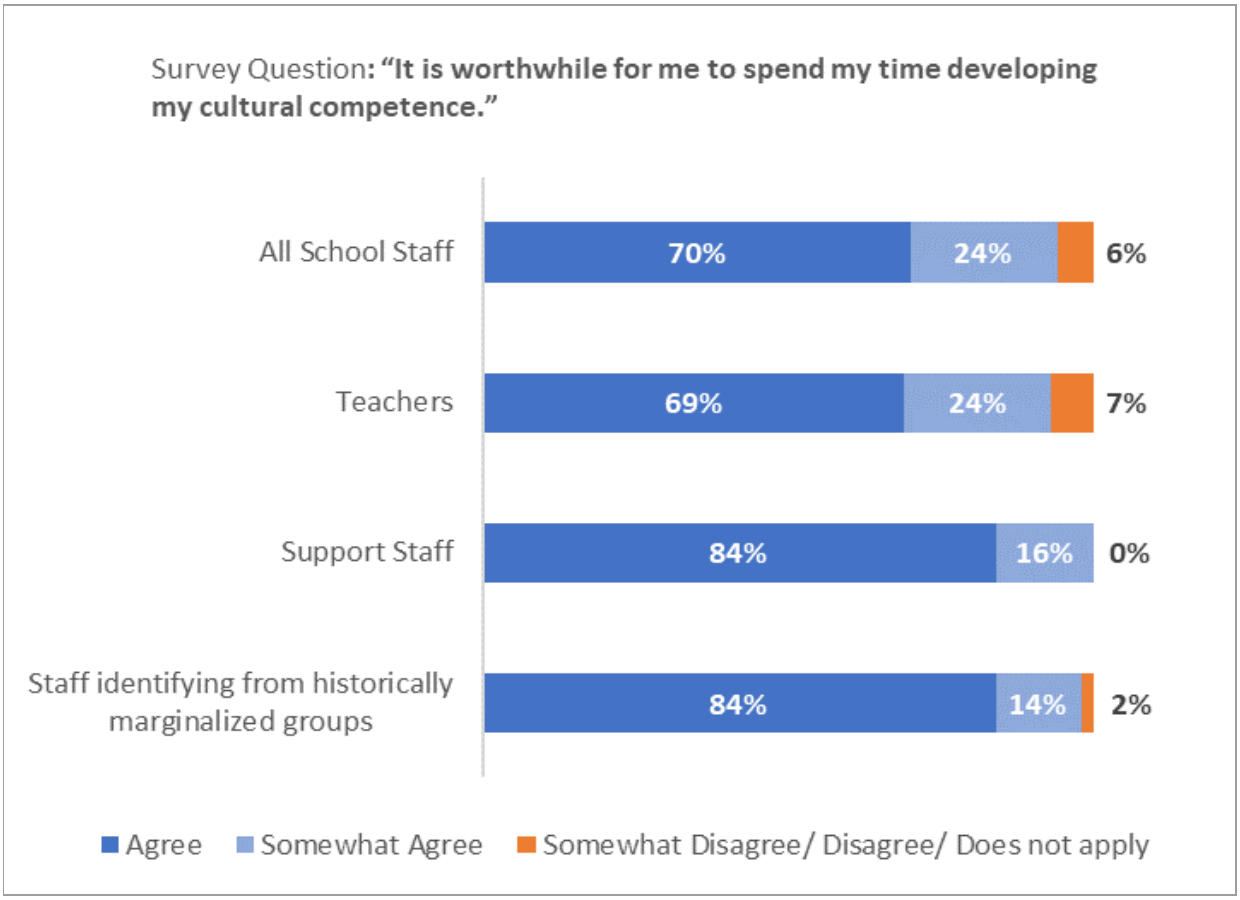
[23] Seth Gershenson, Cassandra M. D. Hart, Joshua Hyman, Constance Lindsay, Nicholas W. Papageorge, National Bureau of Economic Research, The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers (2021), https://www.nber.org/papers/w25254

[24] Michael A. Gottfried, Penn Graduate School of Education, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (2021), http:www.gse.upenn.edu/news/california-district-study-finds-latinx-students-latinx-teachers-attend-more-school

School staff, especially school support services staff, have articulated both a need and desire for additional support to improve their cultural proficiency and equity knowledge and skills. This enthusiasm suggests staff are primed for growth in a competency they already believe is important. As the two charts to follow show, most school staff understand that the road to becoming a culturally proficient educator requires deep exploration of identity, and continuous investment in cultural competence. Interestingly, support services staff are more interested in improving their knowledge and skills than teachers, and support staff and school staff who identify as a member of a historically marginalized group have the strongest interest in developing their cultural competence knowledge and skills.



**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others. School staff completing the survey who are not teachers are included in the Support Staff category.*



**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others. School staff completing the survey who are not teachers are included in the Support Staff category.*

District stakeholders recognize the need to increase access to a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum. There have been some individual efforts across the district to begin to address this need but there is not a systematic, comprehensive approach.

In interviews, focus groups and surveys, stakeholders stressed the need to provide a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum. A sampling of comments include:

- From a student: "With the book, there is not a lot of diversity. In English class, they are white authors. There are not a lot of books written by people who are like us. It's always white people who are the main characters, or rich people. And some people can't relate to it."
- From a staff member: "One thing I hear is that these students feel frustrated that there isn't more representation of what I may be like to be gay and be a teenager. For our kids who identify as something other than straight, they want to have more texts that include stories about non-straight kids. They don't want to be the "other" but want to be just another teenager. Avoid those things that make them seem different. This is just one piece of their identity and theyre just teenages going through the same things otherwise."
- From a central administrator on their hopes for the audit: "I hope there is a clear plan for the curriculum that is not based on colonizer mentality and white supremacy. That curriculum speaks to all identities."

- From family members: "I think it is very important that students are able to see themselves and their families reflected in the curriculum and that the conversations that happen in the classrooms (including everyday language) are inclusive." " I asked [my child] whether she read books about families and she said not really. Then I asked if her teachers talked about "moms and dads" and she said yes. I asked her how that made her feel and she said "weird" and I said why and she said "because we only have one boy in our family". She knows that her family is different and we talk about our unique family at home but she needs to have this reinforced at school in a heteronormative society and her peers need it too."

There are laudable but sporadic efforts across the district. Curriculum leaders use the "Text Inventory Tool" from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with staff to review materials prior to purchase and use. ELA has adopted a new literacy program and at the high school level both the history and ELA departments have taken some steps to diversify the curriculum materials. There are also efforts by committed teachers across the district. For example, staff reported: "We have an outstanding reading director in our school. Constantly bringing in books on diversity. She pulled me aside to talk to me about a book I was teaching that doesn't portray native americans in a good light."

The professessional development through Word Savvy is helping teachers make lessons more globally competent. One teacher commented: "I had PD through World Savvy - about taking our lessons and curriculum and finding ways to make them more globally competent. Even this year introducing MacBeth, wasn't just Shakespeare and the globe theater. Let's talk about leaders who make bad decisions, how does that affect us. Looked at real life examples of people who wanted power and what happened when they got it. Watching Macbeth become more and more corrupt and connect it back to real life corruption around the world. They come back and synthesize how to think about how they can take action as citizens of Norwood. "

Challenges for Priority Area 3:

Challenge 3.A. NPS does not have an adequate strategic plan in place to recruit, hire or retain leadership and staff that is representative of the student body. Massachusetts's competitive marketplace will require a multi-year innovative and proactive approach to achieve the desired workforce diversity.

NPS administration and faculty is not yet representative of its students and families. The following table shows that in 2020-2021, teachers and administrators were overwhelmingly White with few teachers or administrators that identify as African-American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian. Other than racial/ethnic and gender identity, NPS and MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education do not routinely collect student or faculty demographic information on other social identity groups.

Race/Ethnicity Profile of Students, Teachers, and Administrators - 2021-2022
% of District Total[25]

Race	Students (As of Oct. 2021)	Teachers (End of Year 20-21)	Administrators (End of Year 20-21)
African American	12.2	0.64	2.7
Asian	7.7	0.32	0
Hispanic	23.1	1.92	0
Native American	0.1	0	2.7
White	58.6	97.12	94.6
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.7	0	0
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	3.0	0	0

As described above under Foundational Strengths, there is a strong desire across all stakeholders to have a leadership and staff that is representative of the student population. NPS acknowledges the need for a more diverse workforce, embedding Process/Change Benchmark 1.4.5 "Increase the diversity of our workforce to reflect the diversity of our student population and meet their cultural needs" under Strategic Objective 1.4: "Recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified candidates while creating leadership opportunities and building capacity within our staff" in the current NPS Strategic Plan. Unfortunately there is no vision or comprehensive plan to make this a reality and very little progress has been made toward this Process/Change Benchmark. In its 2021-2022 progress report, NPS indicates that this Benchmark is 50% complete with the only accomplishment noted an application to the Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education (MPDE), a coalition of cities and towns interested in diversifying their workforce (www.mpde.org). The district is currently on the membership waitlist for MPDE.

NPS's approach to recruiting all teachers is traditional and limited with no apparent differentiated strategy to recruit teachers who identify as African-American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian or who meet other specific needs such as native speakers for the newcomers academy. Currently, the district uses the School Spring platform (www.schoolspring.com) to post open positions and recruits at Bridgewater State. Neither the district vacancy postings nor its website indicate its goal to diversify the workforce. This traditional and limited approach has yielded very few non-White candidates as shown in the table to follow.

[25] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022). School and district profiles.http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

Applicants for Teacher Vacancies
From 1/21/21-11/17/21[26]

Race	% of all teacher applicants
None Provided	9.24%
A. Indian/Native Alaskan	0.00%
Asian	3.33%
Black or African American	1.97%
Hispanic or Latino of any Race	3.45%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.00%
White	81.53%
Two or More Races (Not Hispanic)	0.49%

NPS school staff, school leaders, and central office administrators generally do not feel that NPS is doing enough to recruit and hire a diverse staff. Only 28% of school staff agree and 39% somewhat agree with the statement "My district and school are intentional in recruiting and hiring a talented staff that is diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status and ability," while 32% of respondents somewhat disagree or disagree. There is less enthusiasm among school leaders for district efforts with only 14.3% of school leaders agreeing and 57% somewhat agreeing with this statement, while 28.6% somewhat disagree or disagree with the statement. When asked specifically about the support they receive in the hiring[27] process to diversify staff, school leaders have a more negative response with 57% responding somewhat disagree or disagree with the statement "I have the support I need to ensure my school hiring process results in diverse and qualified candidates." Administrators in the central office are more optimistic on district efforts with 42% agreeing and 21% somewhat agreeing with the statement, although 35% still somewhat disagree or disagree.

Massachusetts's competitive marketplace will require a multi-year innovative and proactive approach to achieve the desired workforce diversity. Many school districts in Massachusetts are looking to diversify their teaching force, and staff in NPS acknowledge how challenging these efforts can be. As of January 2022 MPDE had 42 member districts, including many cities and towns in Norwood's vicinity, with a waiting list of interested districts. In Massachusetts in 2019-2020 only 3% of all teachers identified as African-American/Black, 2% identified as Asian and 3% identified as Hispanic or Latino, while 92% identified as White.

Recruiting, hiring and retaining a high-quality workforce will be a heavy lift in terms of time and budget resources. NPS will need to take a close look at its salary structure. One educator commented "To reach more BIPOC applicants, [we] need to pay a living wage… [Boston Public Schools] is more likely to get diverse applicants because of what it offers compared to NPS." Any recruiting and hiring plan will need to be very strategic, innovative, and proactive, one that goes beyond traditional human resource recruiting and hiring functions. As one administrator remarked: "We also need to really go out there and get teachers from traditionally marginalized populations. This includes LGBTQIA+, teachers of color, from different religions, etc. We need to think outside the box on things like hiring bonuses after the first year of good performance, affinity

[26] Town of Norwood, School Spring Report (1/21/21 - 11/17/21)
[27] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022), www.doe.mass.edu/

groups and putting together a district wide hiring task force who is focused on recruiting the best teachers to come to our district and be representative of our student body."

NPS has recently merged its Human Resources functions with the Town of Norwood, including the functions of recruiting and hiring. It is still too early to understand if this merger will be effective in supporting NPS's strategic objectives. As NPS creates its strategic plan for this work, it needs to evaluate the merger with the Town of Norwood and determine what strategic aspects of recruiting and hiring need to remain under the auspices of NPS.

Challenge 3.B. NPS needs to broaden its investment in building cultural proficiency and equity knowledge and skills.

Although NPS has made a commendable investment in culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy professional development, this is only a start. There is still a significant need for staff (across all levels and positions) and leadership to continue to develop cultural competency and equity knowledge and skills.

Staff need to continue to build awareness around their beliefs, norms, and values to understand and address how implicit bias impacts both disproportionate student discipline rates as well as gaps in student achievement. Research suggests that implicit bias shapes educator-student interactions in the classroom and school. Understanding and mitigating the impact of implicit bias is one strategy that can help NPS narrow student outcome gaps. Evidence shows that implicit bias influences students' course performance as well as influences educators' non-verbal behaviors in the classroom with a preference for white students. Some NPS educators and administrators comment on the need to guard against implicit bias in grading practices: "I would like to see more oversight in grading policies, etc. within the school. Department heads need to work harder to make sure all their staff treat students equitably" and "Some practices in grading need to be examined to promote more equitable opportunities."

As described further in Priority Area 4, African-American/Black and Hispanic/Latinostudents are disciplined at disproportionately higher rates than White students. African American/Black students make up just over 10 percent of the student body, yet represented 25.8 percent of the disciplinary actions over the past five years. The disproportionate discipline rates may indicate what researchers have long implied, Black students don't misbehave more than other students, but their behaviors are judged differently. Recent evidence shows that (pro-White/anti-Black) implicit bias could play a role in this disproportionality[28] and this could also be the case in NPS.

Survey and focus group comments from students who self-identify as BIPOC include:

- "Since 6th grade, the minorities have more outgoing or aggressive personalities. The teachers tend to pick on us more. The teachers go to the minority kids instead of going to the white kids. Maybe it's because we're louder than other kids but teachers always come to us if there is a problem."
- "The hat system because teachers would tell me to take my hat off but I would see other kids with hats on all day without being asked to take it off."
- "I would like for the school to not be as sexist because I am covered up and still get dress coded. I also wish teachers would tell everyone to put their masks up instead of targeting

[28]Dhaliwal, Tasmania K. et al, "Educator bias is associated with racial disparities in student achievement and discipline" Brown Center Chalkboard, Brookings Institute, July 20, 2020.

some kids because I had my mask down when I was putting on something for my lips while a group of white students passed by with their masks all the way down their chin."

Survey and focus group comments from school leadership and staff include:

- "I believe that all of our teachers bring bias and past knowledge into their unconscious beliefs, norms and teaching."
- "Some staff equate economic backgrounds with academic performance."
- "Some people can't help but bring long standing opinions and beliefs inherent biases to the table."
- "I think some teachers make judgments based on where students live or where they came from."
- "...staff show mild micro-aggressions unconsciously towards marginalized groups such as ELLs and students of color."
- "Our staff believes in our students, but may not know how their biases impact their actions."

Staff need to increase their knowledge about their students' cultural norms, values, and beliefs and use this knowledge to further student engagement. Research is clear that student engagement is a robust predictor of student performance and behavior. Students who demonstrate high levels of engagement in school are more likely to earn higher grades, have better attendance, and have lower dropout rates. There is evidence that students' engagement steadily declines over the course of school, beginning in kindergarten and accelerating significantly over the transition from middle to high school. It is most severe for boys, African-American/Black and Hispanic or Latino youth, and children in poverty. Research shows that many school practices can contribute to this decline.[29] One contributing factor is the strength of the teacher-student relationship. In school districts like NPS where staff is not yet representative of the student body, educators must be culturally competent to build the trusting educator-student relationships necessary for engagement. Culturally competent educators have knowledge about their students' experiences and cultures and approach student relationships in culturally respectful and mindful ways. One staff member noted "It's about a lot of little things…an awareness of my role in being a white woman teacher. Just being aware of what that means to students of different backgrounds. Making sure I understand my place and how they might see me."

Results from family surveys indicate that NPS still has work to do in building a culturally competent staff. Only 58% of family survey respondents agree and 31% somewhat agree with the statement "My child's school supports them in a way that recognizes and embraces their background, culture, experience, and identities," falling to only 46% agreement and 26% somewhat agree for family members who identify as African-American/Black and 48% agreement and 29% somewhat agree for those who identify as Hispanic or Latino. Families remarked:

- "How many times students of color - the teacher doesn't know my name. Need to make sure that each student is know[n] on an individual level."
- "Some of these teachers in Norwood don't see the kids in front of them. They say "I don't see color.'"

When there is a gap between staff and student cultures and identities, school structures and classroom practices need to provide opportunities for educators and students to connect on a personal level. Educators must understand that personal connections with students are critical to

[29] Fredricks, Jennifer, "Eight Myths of Student Engagement", Corwin, 2014

student success. Many administrators and educators do, and many make the effort to, know their students personally.

- "I would say in addition to making every student feel seen, it starts day one building relations. If a student doesn't feel a sense of connection, that you are there for them, they're not going to connect, [it] hinders their academic experience."
- "At the beginning of the year, a lot of us use surveys. Even before that I try to share a lot about me. I find if they have a better understanding of me, my background, there can be a lot of connections we might not have noticed. Living in the town I can get to a lot of school functions, get to as many as I can."
- " That there are genuine meaningful relations forming with students. By and large each staff member is committed to developing strong relationships."

One administrator did note at least one barrier to forming these relationships: "skill versus capacity. Every teacher has the skills to make the connections with students. It's more about what does a 6.5 hour day allow us to do."

Unfortunately, many students feel their teachers don't really know them in deep or authentic ways. Twenty-three percent of student survey respondents agree and 45% of students somewhat agree with the statement "My teachers know me and understand my personal interests and dreams." Interestingly, there is little difference in survey responses with regards to race/ethnicity or middle and high school; comments about the need and their desire to create stronger teacher-student relationships came from students of all races and ethnicities. This finding is described further in Priority Area 4.

Student survey comments include:

- "To help me have a better educational experience I think that having a strong student-teacher relationship is important. I think teachers should make an effort to get to know their students in order to be able to help them with the best of their abilities."
- "I need the school to actually listen to its black students. I feel we need more black representation in this school. There is only one black teacher here in this school and she is barely seen. Teachers confuse two black students who look nothing alike but can remember every white student who share the same similar features."
- "I would like the school to improve on getting to know the students better, I don't feel like I have any relationships with my teachers this year."
- "I guess teachers should be more interactive with students, and not just talking all class long and expect students to be excited for class. Teachers have to be fun with students and make them excited for class and touch their hearts."
- "I think being mindful of students' positions in their personal life can help teachers understand kids more."
- "I think Norwood schools should learn more about their students instead of just meeting them one week and teaching."
- "One on one teacher to student time is very limited and needs to be improved."

Staff need to develop the knowledge and skills around diversity, identity and equity issues to have meaningful conversations with students. It is difficult for an educator to develop trusting, personal relationships with students if they don't have open, informed, and honest conversations about issues that are important to students. This is especially true when some students may be more savvy about some of these topics than the adult.

Survey responses indicate that staff is not confident that their colleagues are comfortable having diversity, identity, and equity conversations with students; school leadership is less confident than their staff in the comfort level of their school colleagues.

Survey Respondent	Survey Question	Survey Responses		
		Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree/ Disagree
School Leader	"My staff are comfortable having conversations involving identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) with students."	**0%**	**29%**	**71%**
School Staff*	"My coworkers are comfortable having conversations involving identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) with students."	**21%**	**48%**	**31%**
Students	"My teachers are comfortable having conversations involving identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) with students."	**48%**	**37%**	**15%**

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Individual staff members are more confident in their own ability to have these conversations with students, while perceptions of their colleagues' ability/comfort to have similar conversations are lower. While only 21% of staff agree and 48% somewhat agree that their colleagues are comfortable having identity and equity conversations with students, 38% indicated that they individually are comfortable and 42% somewhat comfortable having these conversations. This percentage is higher at the high school and middle school with 50% of middle school staff and 46% of high school staff indicating that they are comfortable having these conversations with students. This finding aligns with the roll-out of the Highlander PD beginning with leaders, as well as the school-based professional development with ADL with high school staff. Students agree with school staff on this issue; school staff is not completely comfortable discussing issues of identity with them.

As the table above indicates, less than half of student respondents agree that teachers are comfortable having these discussions with students. The lack of teacher comfort also came up in student focus groups and surveys. When asked what they would change at school, one student responded: "Teachers not being afraid to talk about race, sex, sexual orientation and others."

When asked about teachers' comfort level speaking to students about identity issues, many students indicated that it depended on the teacher:

- "Depends on the teacher. Some teachers have made it pretty clear they're open about topics like these. There are others where I don't think they're biased, but they don't bring it up."
- "If we bring it up, they'll probably talk about it, but if we don't bring it up, probably won't talk about it."
- "Gonna be honest, think it depends on the teacher. A lot of teachers make it very comfortable and make it very open. Other teachers the atmosphere is different. Shuts students down. Not as open."
- "Bad thing because there are a lot of people in this school who are just kind of in terms of students that are just mildly transphobic or homophobic, just annoying that we don't talk about it a lot. Teachers might not think it's super important whereas I think it's super important."

Having conversations with adults about identity, diversity, and equity issues is different than having conversations with students. In professional development, special attention needs to be paid to the structure and language of student conversations. Administrators and staff comment:

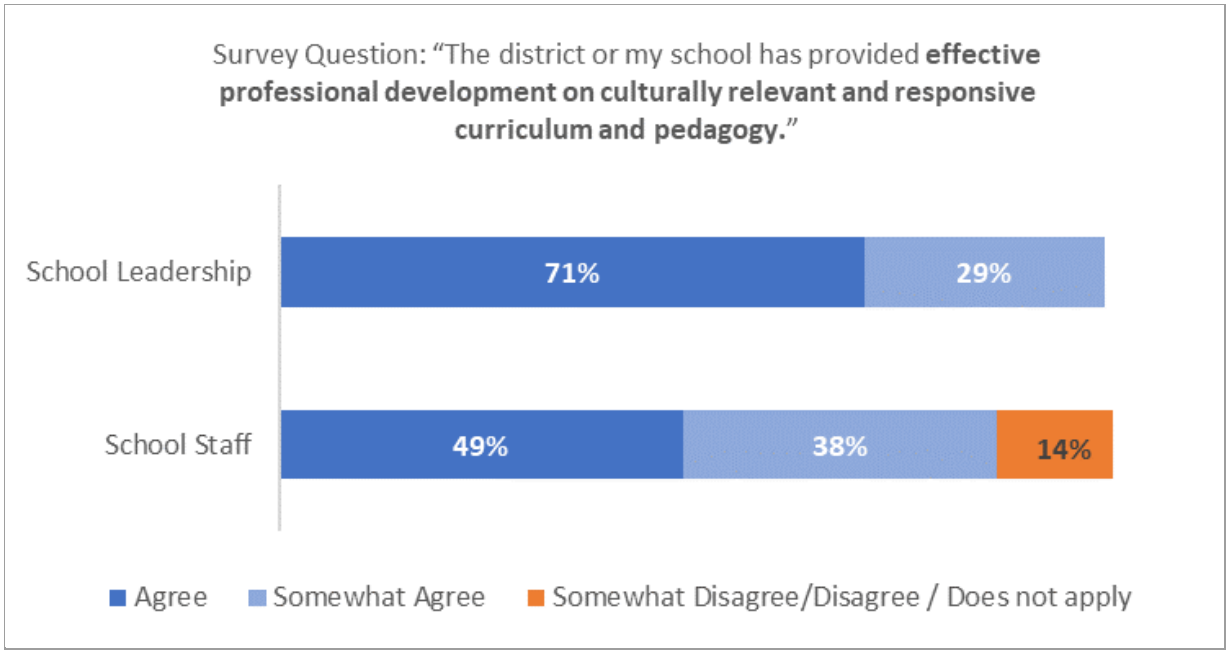
- "One area that still needs support is providing teachers with tools and resources to have courageous conversations with kids about things like race, sexual orientation, gender identity etc. At the elementary level, this probably looks like establishing text sets of anchor literature to springboard conversations but also support teachers in those conversations. I think many teachers personally believe and practice equity but also don't feel totally comfortable leading those conversations and don't see it as 'their place' to do so. This is not to blame but rather identify an area where we, as a district, need to provide support."
- "Also supporting teachers in having tough conversations when things come up. That's one thing that's come up from the CRISP training - how do I talk about a student who as two some-sex parents? Kids take their cues from teachers. Building capacity of teachers can make kids feel more welcome."
- "I've had parents that are lesbian..and I have had questions like why does so and so have two moms and I'm just like 'I'm not going there.' I feel like we haven't been trained enough in those situations. I just approach it as everyone's families are different. Some of us live with grandparents or aunts or whatever. It's a family."

While many leaders and educators have found the district-sponsored professional development on culturally relevant and responsive curriculum and pedagogy effective, some feel there is room for improvement. Many educators express the need for job-embedded professional development and practical strategies for the classroom. The table below shows that most school leadership perceive the district professional development to be more effective than school staff do, though many comments from staff demonstrate appreciation for the impact the professional development has had in their classroom:

- "The training we have done with ADL and Highlander has helped me to connect even better with my students. It has had a very positive impact on my classroom."
- "I think just everyone [is] more aware. Everyday everybody is trying to look at things with a lot of different lenses and be mindful of. We've done a lot of work with our own implicit

biases. I think that the work has been incredibly helpful with how staff treat staff and how staff treat students. "

- "I think our work with Highlander is really valuable. People don't realize when you have a culturally responsive class it is good and affirming for everyone."



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In focus groups and surveys staff provided suggestions for improvements to professional development. Many of these comments focused on the need for more time and a deeper focus on job-embedded strategies. Comments include:

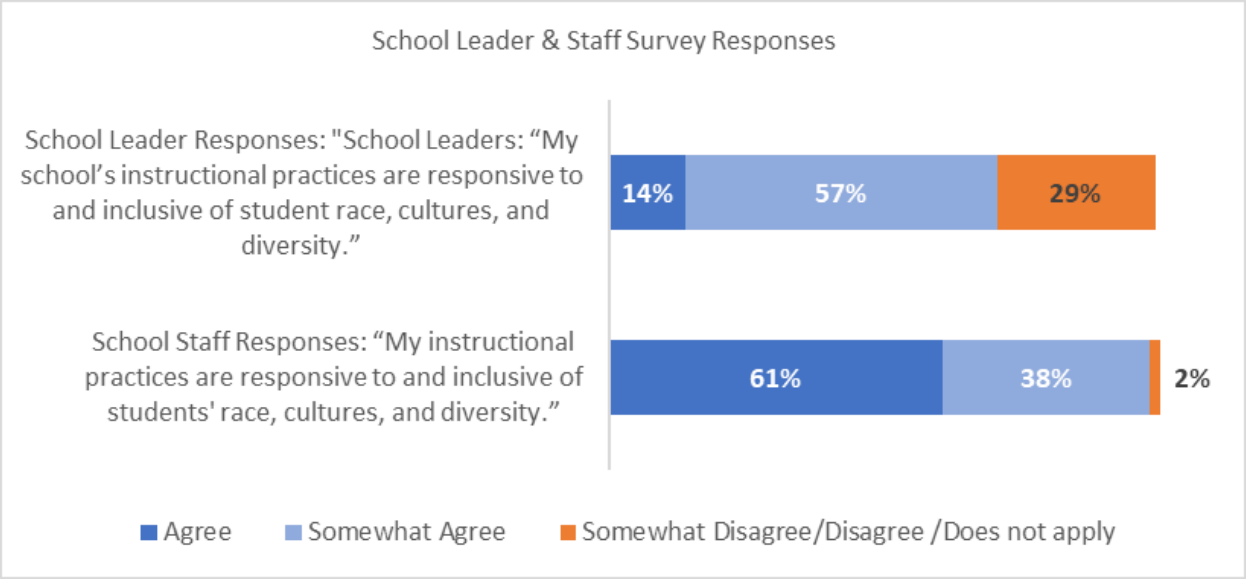
- "We have been given countless professional development about culturally responsive practices. These are generally about not behaving in a racist way. These programs are well intended but are surface level at best, repetitive, and do not give us tangible things to use in the classroom."
- "Some professional development topics have been focused on cultural responsiveness but the format of the PDs has not been conducive to meaningful discussions. There has not been enough time given to thoroughly get into this topic." and "Additionally, I feel the district has taken on too many initiatives at once and that it would have been more effective to take each new initiative a step at a time (UDL, World Savvy, Highlander)."
- "While I feel we have had a strong start to incorporating culturally relevant practices, teachers also need pre-scheduled time (perhaps designated PD time) in order to plan for and actually implement these practices in a way that will be meaningful to our students."
- "We receive a lot of great professional development but we need more time to implement our learning in the classroom. It seems like we are expected to take it right back to the classroom when we need weeks, months, if not a full year to dig deeper and create a curriculum that is effective."
- "Well here's what happens in Norwood. They train a few teachers at the high level, and then they're supposed to come back and teach us. We're never effectively trained. It's not

a knock on my colleagues. It's just they have to bring it back and cram it all into 2 hours and we can't even remember the name of it. Let's get properly trained, get resources to back it up."

NPS will receive a more formal evaluation from the Highlander Institute to inform the future design and content on the professional development. As NPS looks forward, it should consider incorporating practical classroom strategies for educators.

Staff is fairly confident that their instructional practices are responsive to and inclusive of students' race, cultures, and diversity. Staff level of confidence may reflect the beginning of the district's work with World Savvy and the Highlander Institute as well as the work on UDL (Universal Design). This staff self-assessment may not be an accurate measure of the cultural relevance of instructional practices, as professional development in this area has just begun.

The chart below shows that the level of staff confidence is greater than that of school leadership.



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When asked about work to develop culturally relevant and responsive curriculum and pedagogy, school leaders commented:

- "...we have a huge mountain to climb."
- "So everyone knows it is important but we don't see all tackling it. Those that do tackle it are doing the low hanging fruit stuff."
- "Everyone is on board and wanting to do the work but we are only at the start."
- "People think they are doing it - best intentions but they don't really understand the depth of what this encompasses."
- "Not just 6 workshops and staff are good to go. It takes PD on all sides - willingness to grow, workshops, people of color as your boss, etc."

Below is conversation from a student focus group that is a powerful illustration of the need to build educators' cultural competency knowledge and skills:

- Interviewer: Tell us how your learning experiences and learning tasks are inclusive of your identities, experiences, interests, cultures, abilities, and needed learning supports.
- Student A: We learned about slaves and stuff like that. I get annoyed when we're learning it because a lot of people look at me.
- Student B: It was during a history lesson about what happened with slaves and the other students looked at the Black kids in the class. Even the teacher would do that. They would stare at me for like five seconds.
- Student C: They tend to look at you for the answer because you have more experience with it. The first people they would look at are the minority kids in the class.
- Student D: Last year we were learning about Asian Americans and I felt like everyone was looking at me and it wasn't fun. I don't like learning about my race because they always look at me. Obviously they don't mean it in a bad way, but it still feels really uncomfortable. My teacher wasn't a bad teacher, but I don't think they noticed.
- Student E: It depends on who the teacher is. If stuff like that happens, then he notices right away. He'll point out that there are other students in the class and you don't have to look at her for the answers.
- Student A: I feel like if [the teachers] could see the students looking at Black students, they could speak up and tell the other students to not look at us in that way.

Staff and leadership need to both increase their knowledge of equity, diversity, and inclusion concepts and build their capacity on how to have honest and informed conversations about these issues with colleagues. Reflective and open dialogue with colleagues on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion is an effective way to build awareness about one's beliefs, values and norms, the first step in becoming a culturally competent educator. Open and reflective conversations require a level of comfort and trust among participants. The level of comfort among colleagues necessary for this learning may not exist at all schools.

School staff report that there is some discomfort in having discussions about issues of social identity with colleagues. Only 50% agree and 38% somewhat agree with the statement "I am comfortable discussing issues with other staff members involving identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) even when they may be challenging." In parallel to varying comfort levels with having student discussions, individual staff members are more confident in their own ability to have these types of conversations with colleagues than they are in their colleagues' ability to have these conversations. Only 34% agree and 46% somewhat agree that their colleagues are comfortable having conversations about identity and diversity with colleagues. Staff members' perceptions of their colleagues' comfort levels vary across schools by about 10%. Staff reported:

- "It's very uncomfortable for a lot of staff, and to delve deep to identify and describe [these issues]. It's triggering for a lot of people; the level of discomfort is palpable."
- "I think that as a staff we're missing a lot of the language needed to have this conversation. To be comfortable or willing to talk about their identity that may be different than a largely white, upper middle class group of teachers. It opened my eyes to how much personal work we need to do."
- "Staff can have difficulty understanding and listening to each other. This can lead to conflict."
- "There are too many small groups within staff. More team building needs to be done for the entire staff."

- On Highlander training: "It's good training, you can feel the level of discomfort [when they engage in the training], it makes the training weird, and make me wonder what we're going to get out of it if it starts out defensive. Even if there's no physical response, there's an emotional response when the trainings are announced. Many of our staff are not comfortable with it. If they could move on to something else, they probably would."

School leadership is much less confident in their staff's ability to have these conversations with each other, with none agreeing, 29% somewhat agreeing and 71% somewhat disagreeing with the statement "My school staff is comfortable discussing issues with each other involving identity (including race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and ability) even when they may be challenging."

This district needs not only to focus professional development on building knowledge but also on building equity skills that foster honest and open dialogue. In addition, the district must carefully and deliberately structure any professional development dealing with diversity, equity, and inclusion to be safe and embracing spaces that include robust group norms and protocols for dialogue and sharing. Professional development of this nature requires both time and commitment.

The reach of cultural competency training needs to extend beyond leadership and educators to all staff, including administrative staff that interact with families and the public as well as operational staff that make critical decisions impacting families and students of different races, cultures, and social-economic status. Many school districts tend to focus professional development efforts on educators and administrators. However, unlike many other professional development topics, cultural competency and equity skills need to extend beyond teaching staff to administrative and operational staff. Administrative staff are often the first face that families see and operational directors and staff, such as food services and transportation, are responsible for decisions that have enormous equity consequences. Cultural competency training is especially important in communities like Norwood where the demographics have changed so rapidly that staff at all positions and levels no longer represent the student body.

Staff member comments in surveys and focus groups reflect the need and desire for cultural competency training at all levels:

- "Training for administrative assistants on all different types of families and sexuality. We are the first face that families see. Training for world knowledge and how to handle different situations. Someone comes to them from a different country if they don't have a passport - what do I do? Some training for different life situations."
- "We must ensure that all staff (public facing staff such as secretaries included) are engaged in any work moving forward. I also believe that we, as a district staff, are fully capable and ready to move the district forward. The CRSP work with Highlander has shown that people are chomping at the bit to engage in this important work to move our district forward."
- "There is no training on different cultures or norms and how to interact with family or students."
- "The missing group in the current PD are secretaries - the face of the school."

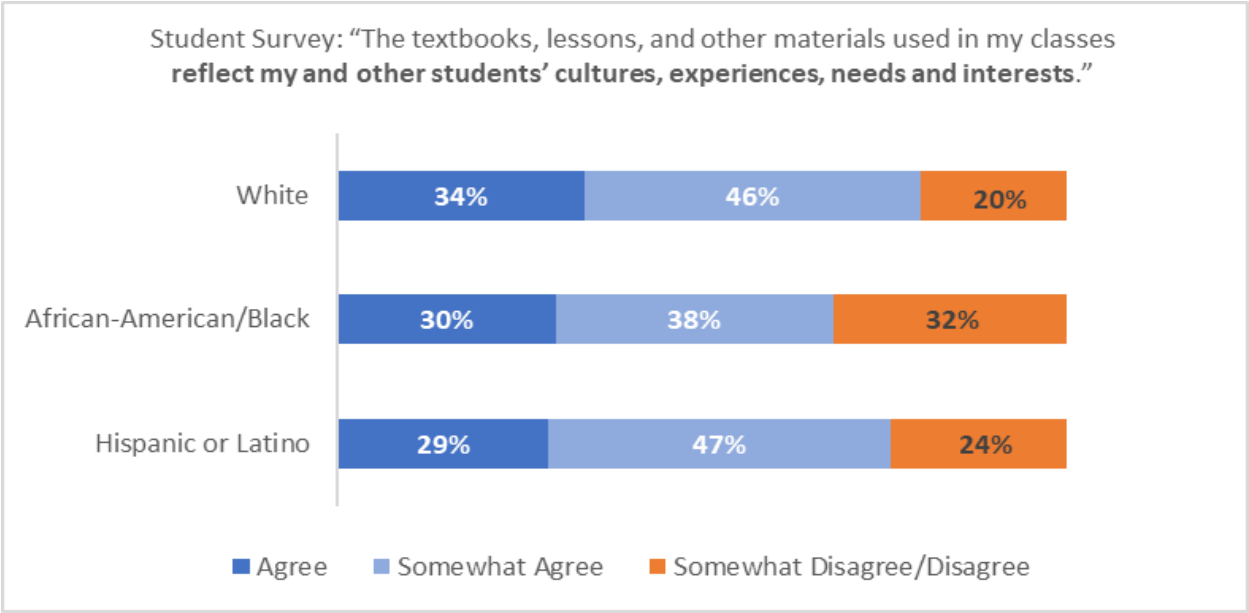
Family surveys also reinforce the need for a more culturally proficient staff, including administrative staff. While 79% of all family survey respondents feel ***welcomed and affirmed*** and 15% feel ***somewhat welcomed and affirmed*** at their child's school, family members who identify as African-American or Black and Hispanic or Latino are not as comfortable, with African-American

or Black families reporting feeling ***welcomed and affirmed*** at rates of 64% and ***somewhat welcomed and affirmed*** at rates of 22% and Latino families reporting feeling ***welcome and affirmed*** at rates of 66% and ***somewhat welcomed and affirmed*** at rates of 16%, respectively. One family member who identifies as Black commented, "Honestly in the past I felt as if I was stigmatized. I witnessed a Caucasian parent in front of me checking in their child and the staff were so friendly to them. When it was my turn, the smiles disappeared and they returned to their duties as if I wasn't important…"

Challenge 3.C. Curriculum does not consistently reflect all students' cultures, experiences, needs and interests.

Challenge 2 above discusses the connection between student engagement and student outcomes, noting that many school practices impact the level of student engagement for African-American/Black and Hispanic or Latino youth. Another practice that impacts student engagement is whether students can see themselves and their varied and intersectional identities mirrored in the curriculum in positive and multiple ways.

In both surveys and focus groups, students who identify as members of historically marginalized groups are clear that they do not see themselves in the curriculum, and students who identify as White agree with their peers' perspective.



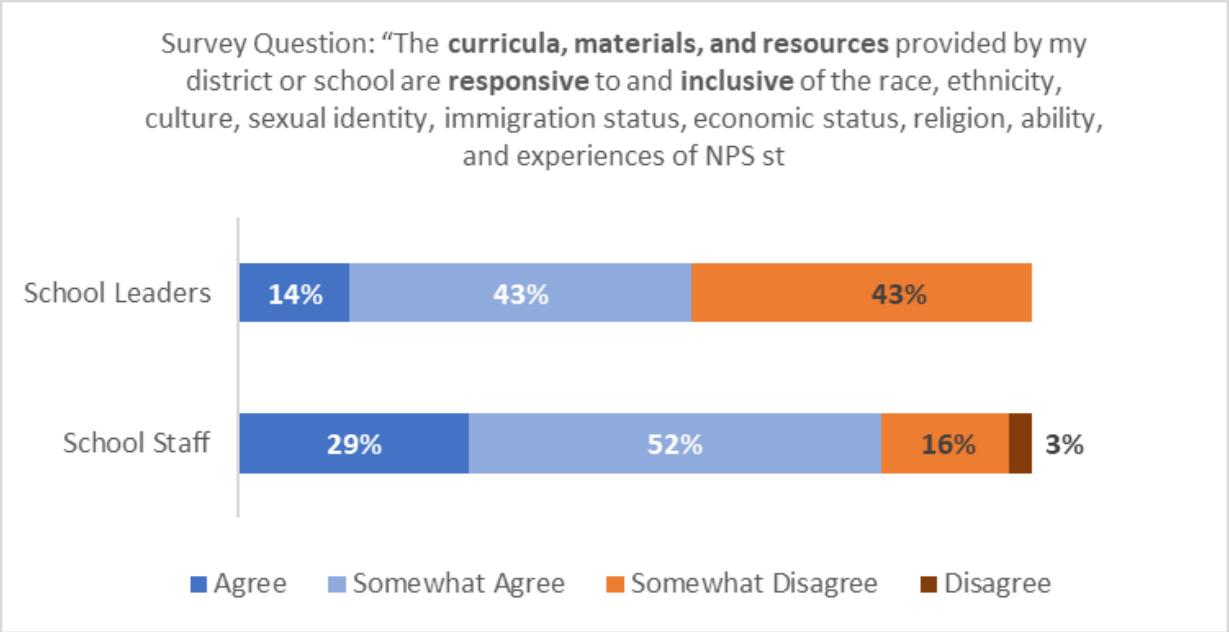
Note: The student survey did not collect demographics around gender identity, sexual orientation or other identity groups.

Students comments from surveys and focus groups include:

- "Mostly focus on mainstream education, don't really talk about different marginalized groups much."
- "Yeah we don't really speak about different cultures around the world as much."
- " I don't see people like me in the learning materials."
- "In English, make us read. To kill a mockingbird. But that is written by a white author, and her take on black history, but should have made us read a book with a black author for black history."

- "I have to go searching a lot for LGBTQ+ books. They're not a lot in the school. Annoying, sad."
- "I would also like some classes to be less centered around Christianity such as history although it is necessary sometimes. I am not christian and it can make it more difficult for me to understand and succeed in the class when I have a completely different religious experience."
- "With the book, there is not a lot of diversity. In English class, they are white authors. There are not a lot of books written by people who are like us. It's always white people who are the main characters, or rich people. And some people can't relate to it."
- "Black history month, learning about the same people, very repetitive, but the same people. I want to dive deeper but [it's] the same thing every year."
- "I think as students we need to learn about what's going on outside of the classroom. We are at the age where shielding us from reality isn't helping with preparing us for the real world. We need to have uncomfortable conversations and address the issues of the world even if it doesn't pertain to Norwood."

Staff and school leadership agree with students that curricula, instructional materials, and resources are not yet representative of the student body. The staff response to this survey question varies widely across schools from 15% to 42% of staff indicating they fully agree.



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As mentioned above in Foundational Strengths, there have been some laudable efforts to begin to create a more representative curriculum and instructional materials. However, efforts are not comprehensive or systematic, with no clear effort to understand the vertical and horizontal alignment and with most efforts coming in the subject areas of ELA, social studies, history and world language. Some educators have also noted that some of this work has been on the edges rather than integrated into the curriculum. Educators have commented:

- "...our curriculum is not reflective of diverse perspectives. We are teaching the canon. There are more and more families that are raising valid complaints and year after year the students do not feel connected. The way we are being told to handle it is that we're being told to pair shorter writing pieces or poems or short stories that are more representative of the student population with standard texts that are in the canon. The problem with this is that the core required text hasn't changed. We are almost still "othering" the other literature we are teaching. Also some of the care text that we teach is still "othering" marginalized groups in how these groups are portrayed."
- "Depends on [the] department. Our humanities groups do much better than STEM areas. Think that's because curriculum in STEM is 'this is what it is'; History and English are multi-faceted."
- "We are slowly including more inclusive voices and perspectives but they are ancillary texts rather than the core curriculum we teach."

Staff has also identified roadblocks to providing access to a rigorous culturally relevant curriculum - the investment of both time and money - as well as the mindset of some of the staff.

- "We're giving a lot of voice to a lot of different groups and cultures. And addressing social inequities that are happening around the word and in our own community. It's a lot of work and collaboration. Throwing out the old curriculum allows this to happen. It's a bit of a nightmare in terms of the amount of work to take on but exciting as well."
- "Problem is in the classroom libraries, we each have 300-400 books, and to replace them all is costly."
- "It comes down to teacher beliefs. We need to get the teachers on board. Some are deeply ingrained in what is taught, what is the curriculum. Our work is to help teachers think differently about that."

Recommendations for Priority Area 3:

1. Develop a comprehensive vision and proactive strategic plan for recruiting, hiring, and retaining leadership, faculty, and staff that represents the diversity of the student population.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Develop a value proposition for why high-need and BIPOC administrators and educators would want to work in NPS and identify and prioritize changes required by the value proposition. Include staff from targeted identities in developing the value proposition.
- Research best practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining high-quality staff and administrators. Start with the resources on the MA DESE web site:
    - National Models for Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Educator Workforce (https://www.doe.mass.edu/teach/NationalModels.html) and
    - Promising Recruitment, Retention Strategies for a Diverse Massachusetts Workforce (https://02f0a56ef46d93f03c90-22ac5f107621879d5667e0d7ed595bdb.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/20460/uploads/42376/DESE_Teacher_Diversification_Guidebook20201118-17362-2c45lz.pdf)
- Clearly define NPS and the Town of Norwood roles and responsibilities with respect to recruiting, hiring and retaining, with NPS taking a robust strategic role.
- Allocate the needed staff and time resources to enacting the plan, considering what is feasible in the short, mid, and long-term.

2. Continue development around staff cultural competency and equity skills with increasing attention to job-embedded opportunities for faculty and student support services, integration into performance management processes, and broadening reach to all staff with public facing and operational responsibilities.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Develop a multi-year professional development plan that includes a staff development scope and sequence for developing and applying cultural competence and equity skills.
- Ensure school based and district data teams are meeting regularly to review data by subgroups to understand opportunity and outcome gaps. Where appropriate implement implicit bias mitigation strategies.
- Engage students in a design process to create practices and structures that provide opportunities for teachers and students to develop more personal relationships.

3. Develop processes, timelines, and criteria for evaluating the cultural proficiency of curricula in each department and for revising and/or supplementing curricula as needed.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Conduct a culturally relevant curriculum audit in schools and libraries to understand strengths and gaps in representation. Include educators as critical partners in this audit.
- Develop a data bank of culturally relevant materials (books, media, videos, podcasts, etc.) for teachers to use.
- Include in long-term school-based professional development support for teachers to continue to develop culturally relevant pedagogy skills.

Priority Area 4: Foster a culture of affirmation, inclusion, belonging, and partnership across the NPS community

"As a student, I believe achieving equity in NPS is important because students should feel welcomed and be allowed to be themselves without being judged." - NPS Student

"As a parent/community member I believe achieving equity in NPS is important because each child deserves dignity, caring in the learning process, opportunity to learn to the best of their ability as a whole person, and a sense that they matter and are valued as individuals and within the community...and because it strengthens the whole community." - NPS Family/Community Member

Foundational Strengths for Priority Area 4:

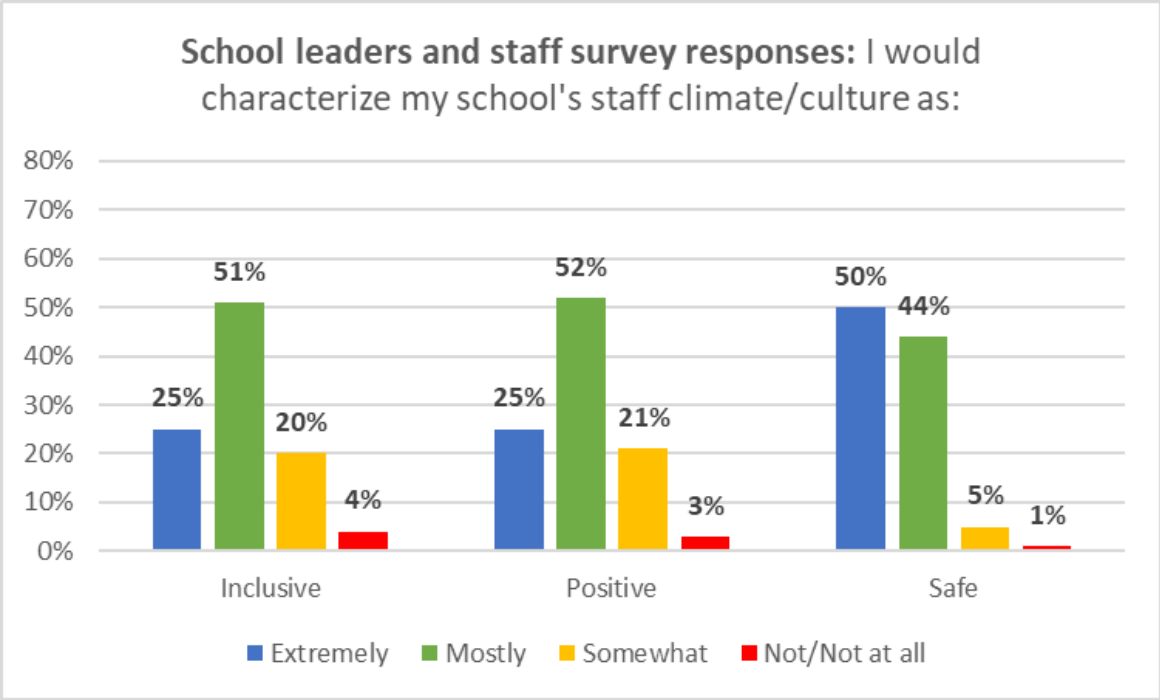
Students and staff feel physically safe at school and feel there is a generally positive culture and atmosphere in school communities and across the district. This provides a foundation for efforts to ensure all students, families and staff feel more deeply affirmed, included, and that they belong. Staff in focus groups and surveys shared generally positive experiences with NPS, noting that the district has high levels of staff retention. Many school staff expressed that they have positive relationships with other staff members and a collaborative environment. Stakeholders shared that staff are more willing to have courageous conversations around race and identity as the district has prioritized training to build cultural competence; though there is still room for improvement as discussed below in Challenge B. Staff shared that there is an intent and a desire to continue to learn about different cultures and how to best meet the needs of their diverse students. Interest in and willingness to improve, along with a sense of support from peers and leaders to do so, are necessary foundations for staff to move beyond positive intentions to enacting more inclusive and equitable practices.

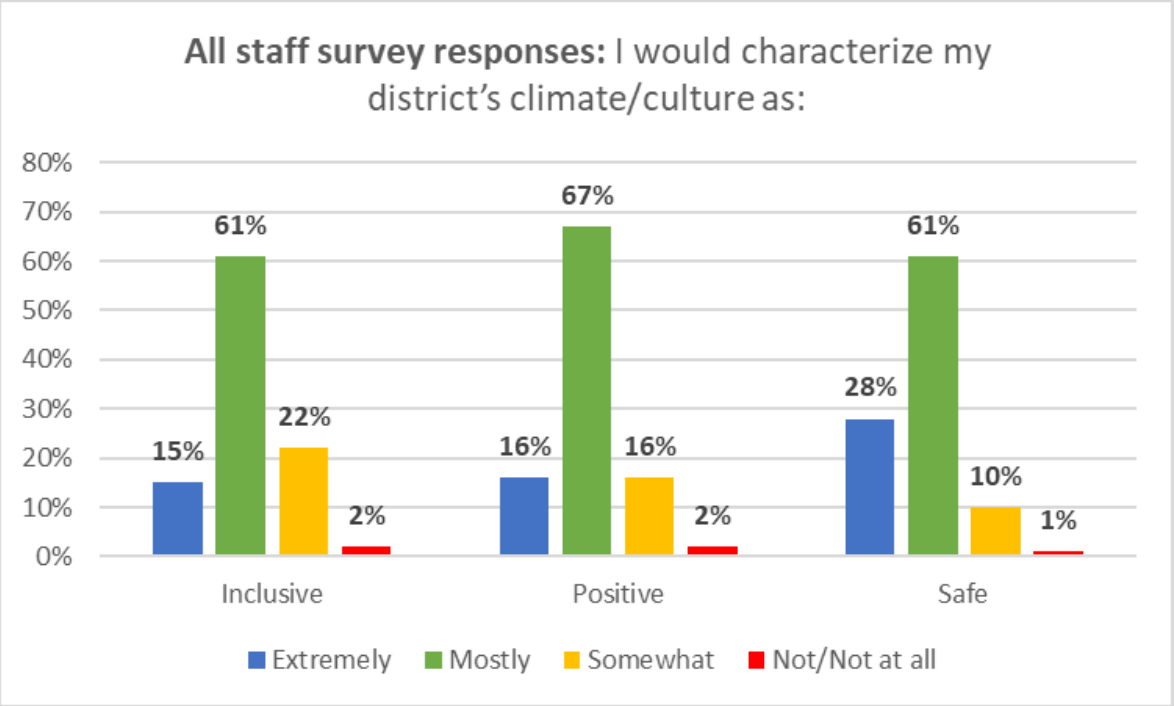
Safety - Staff largely believe the district's culture is safe. Ninety-four percent of school staff survey respondents characterized their school's staff climate/culture as extremely or mostly safe, and 89% of all staff characterized the district's climate/culture as extremely or mostly safe. Of staff survey respondents who self-identify as someone from a historically marginalized background, 94% characterized the district as extremely or mostly safe.

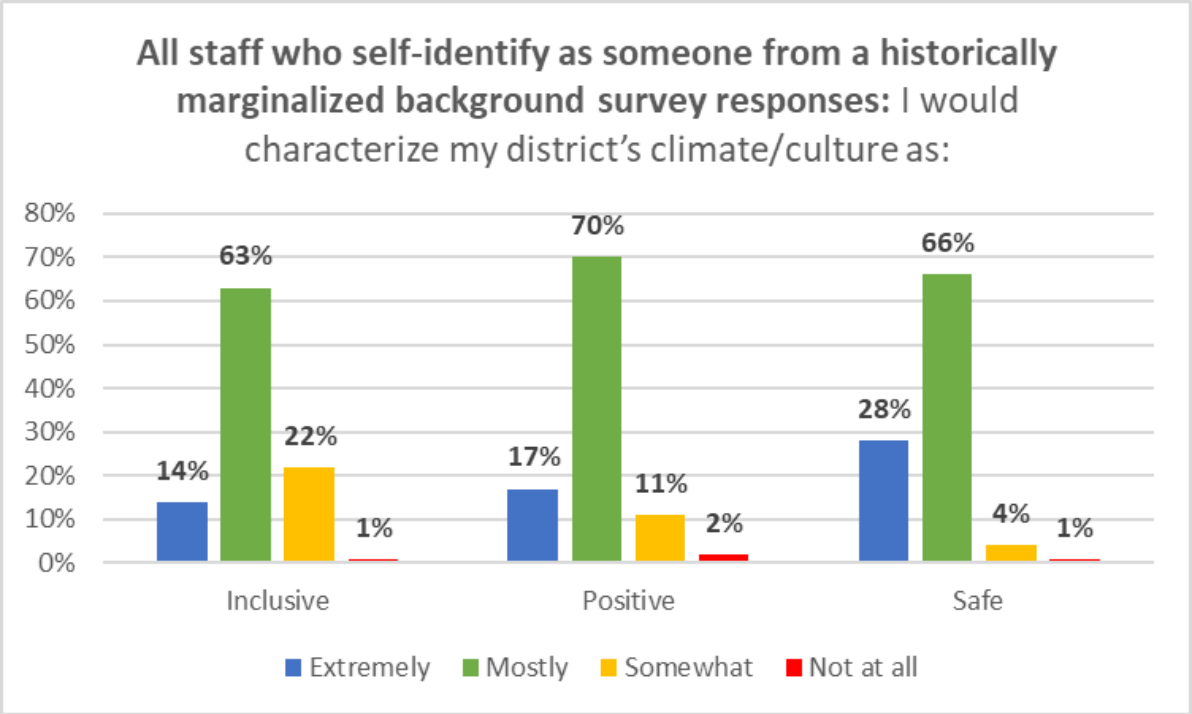
Positivity - A majority of staff believe the district culture is positive. Seventy-seven percent of school staff survey respondents characterized their school's staff climate/culture as extremely or mostly positive, and 83% of all staff characterized the district's climate/culture as extremely or mostly positive. Staff who self-identify as someone from a historically marginalized background characterized district positivity as higher, with 87% of survey respondents indicating the district is extremely or mostly positive.

Inclusivity - A majority of staff believe the district culture is inclusive. Seventy-six percent of school staff survey respondents characterized their school's staff climate/culture as extremely or mostly

inclusive, and 76% of all staff characterized the district's climate/culture as extremely or mostly inclusive. Similarly, 77% of staff who self-identify as someone from a historically marginalized background characterized district climate/culture as extremely or mostly inclusive. However, staff share there is still room to improve levels of inclusivity for all staff as described in Challenge B to follow..







Students overall also believe their school environments are positive and supportive. **There are clear examples of efforts to acknowledge student identities and interests, particularly through school-based student clubs and activities, resulting in many students feeling that they have a dedicated space where they feel welcome and that they can be their full selves.** At the middle school level, students and staff describe having a diversity, equity, and inclusion club, as well as the creation of a nonbinary bathroom. At the high school level, students and staff describe affinity-based and DEI-focused student groups, including the Gay-Straight Alliance and A World of Difference (AWOD), programming from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) that provides anti-bias training for students and empowers student leaders to train peers and build awareness of different identities to promote more inclusive enviornments. Students also share that there are programs available to support them with career preparation, such as the alternative program and innovation pathways, which provide more independent and tailored experiences for students with specific career interests. Students and staff recognize that efforts to be inclusive can continue to improve, and many express a desire to continue, expand, and promote spaces, clubs, and activities that align with and support students' identities and interests.

Student comments from focus groups and surveys include:

- "Staff makes students feel very included no matter their identity by clubs and activities."
- "Learning about social issues is really important. A lot of marginalized people don't feel there's someone to connect to. [It] lets them know other people care about these issues."
- "From AWOD I've learned a lot about myself and other people. But I think it's needed for everyone."
- "[There are] many clubs that you can be a part of that you can express yourself."
- "We have an inclusion club, we have had a mental health speaker come for an assembly, and the principal always is giving us reminders about it."
- "I am in AWOD. We educate other students about equality, race, bias - I feel we could expand that more. We only teach freshmen right now."

- "As someone in the LGBTQ community, I like seeing my teacher put pride flags up and it makes me feel welcome."
- "I have a transgender friend. He cannot go into the male bathroom because they say he's a male student when he isn't….The staff [made] one bathroom for non-binary. They should add more to the building."
- [About the alternative program] "If you're not going to college, it helps you build your career and not waste your time."
- "NPS brought up the idea of Innovation Pathways - I was interested…. I want to go into the medical field. A lot of work we do helps us learn about the medical field. Gives us one up on other kids going into college. We get to work with Harvard, doctors, [and] hear about specialties. It's very interesting."

A few notable family comments include:

- "I do see a real embracing of students with special needs in music programs and concerts."
- "They [the district/schools] have gone above and beyond to be inclusive and welcoming."

Multiple stakeholders recognize the need to improve school and district communications with families, especially those from historically marginalized populations. There have been some efforts across the district to begin addressing this need as a result. Family members generally feel welcomed and affirmed at their children's school with 79% agreeing and 15% somewhat agreeing with the statement "Given my individual identity (including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, language, immigration status, and ability) I feel welcome and affirmed in their school." However, there are some discrepancies in levels of agreement across racial and ethnic subgroups further discussed in the challenges to follow. There is a growing recognition of the need to build strong family-school-district relationships in support of student learning, though efforts are new and limited in scope. The changing demographics in NPS, especially the growing population that identifies as Hispanic or Latino as well as students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, has forced NPS to recognize the insufficiency of its approach to family engagement and supporting infrastructure and seek opportunities for improvement.

There is recognition that the response has been limited, a desire to do more, and evidence of initial actions. NPS recently brought on grant-funded family liaisons, and created a central registration for all new NPS students and caregivers. This is an important first step, as central registration can be a family member or caregiver's first introduction to the district and a source of critical information about and access to district services. The registration process now includes translated forms and increasingly translated handbooks. There is recognition that the district needs to continue to refine the registration process ensuring sufficient and real-time interpretation services, comprehensive translation (while the forms are translated, the website information leading to the forms is not) and include public-facing staff (not just in the registration center) in cultural competency trainings so they can better serve families and caregivers of cultures and social identities other than their own.

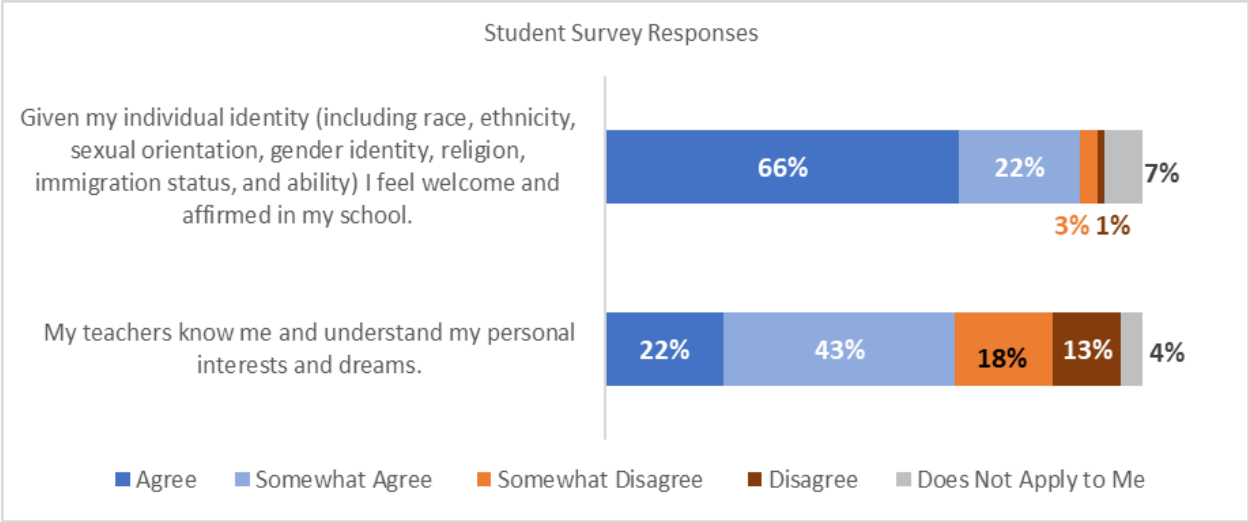
During the early months of the pandemic, the district was proactive in ensuring equitable access to technology and access to the internet at home. All students in grades 1-12 received devices they brought home. Families without proper internet access could contact the district and they worked with local cable/internet companies to provide internet to those families. The district continues to set aside a budget every year to purchase wi-fi hot spots for families in need. Although this was an accomplishment, the support for at-home technology use was not robust.

Challenges for Priority Area 4:

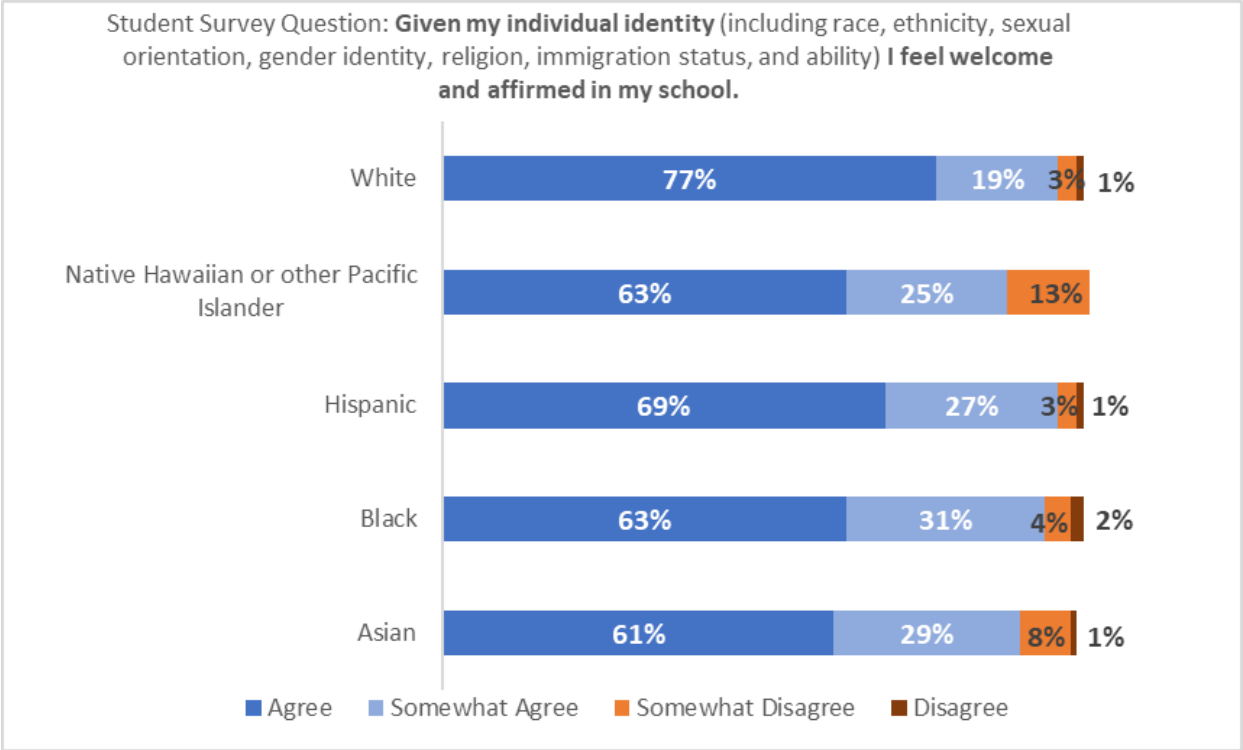
Challenge 4.A. Most classrooms are positive and tolerant, but not all are fully affirming for all students to feel seen and embraced in school.

While students report an overall positive perception of their school and teachers, there is an opportunity to strengthen culture so all students feel safe, seen, and that they belong. This sentiment surfaced in focus groups and survey results.

The survey responses below show that 66% of students agree and 22% somewhat agree that they feel welcomed and affirmed in school, which is a strong foundation. However, the student responses to the second survey question depicted below show that when asked if they believe their teachers know them more deeply, students' levels of agreement drops to 22% agreeing and 43% somewhat agreeing - signaling an opportunity to deepen student-staff relationships and increase students' sense of belonging.

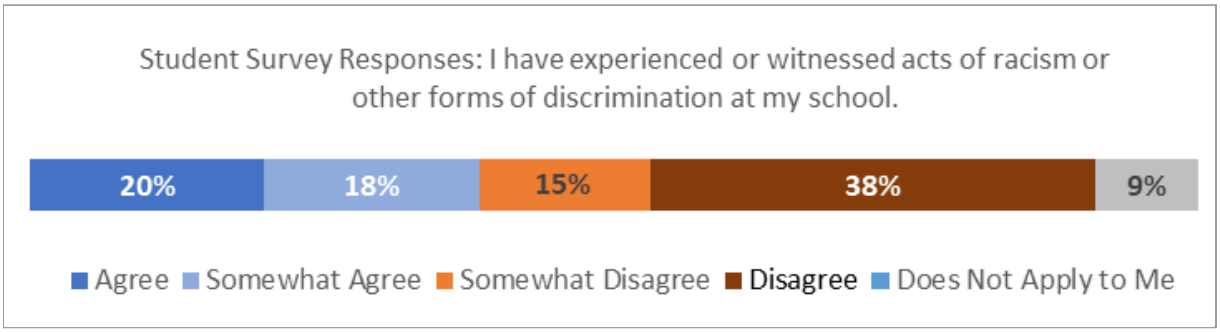


While students overall have a generally positive view of their schools, there are some discrepancies between how students who identify as BIPOC, students who identify as LGBTQIA2S+, and those from traditionally marginalized populations experience their learning environment compared to peers. The chart to follow shows student survey results by race in response to the question: "Given my individual identity (inclduing race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, immigration status, and abilit) I feel welcome and affirmed in my school. Levels of agreement are slightly lower for students who self-identify as Native Hawaiin or Pacific Islander, Asian, and Black.



Students report a culture of joking, harassment, and discrimination among students based on sexual orientation, race, and gender identity, particularly in hallways, bathrooms, and other non-classroom spaces. Many students describe witnessing or experiencing forms of discrimination, racism, and homophobia—issues they share aren't noticed by or talked about enough by adults in the building. While 38% of student survey respondents report having experienced or witnessed acts of racism or other forms of discrimination (20% agree and 18% somewhat agree), 40% of school staff report never observing and 35% report rarely observing acts of discrimination (implicit or explicit) against others in the district or at their school. This means that 25% of staff have seen acts of discrimination, and there are many acts that remain unseen and unaddressed by adults.

Thirty-eight percent of student survey respondents agree or somewhat agree with the statement "I have experienced or witnessed acts of racism or other forms of discrimination at my school."



Student comments further describe that while most teachers are supportive in classrooms and affirming of student identity (e.g., some teachers use student pronouns), they don't always notice or effectively address discriminatory language or behavior. Additionally, students report that when it comes to discussing issues of race or identity, and students feeling a strong sense of belonging, "it depends on the teacher." Students report some teachers are comfortable having conversations about identity, while in other rooms, it is not discussed.

Student focus group and survey open response comments include:

- "I feel like I can totally be myself, but I don't feel embraced. Out of 1-10, I feel 8. Being embraced is seeing a lot of inclusion; seeing people like myself. It also makes me feel uncomfortable when people talk about my ethnicity and race right next to me, not in the most positive light."
- "There's a lot of racial things going around especially in the 8th grade. Teachers aren't saying enough. Racial slurs all over the place."
- "It's mostly the students, not the staff. Some students are not as respecting of other people's genders or pronouns. Or their ethnicity in general. It's more homophobic or racial slurs."
- "There are a lot of people in this school who are just kind of - in terms of students - that are just mildly transphobic or homophobic, just annoying that we don't talk about it a lot. Teachers might not think it's super important whereas I think it's super important."
- "I get called the f-slur a lot. They think it's funny. It's not a joke. Majority of boys in my class like to use my sexuality as an insult- oh you're gay. I go by any pronouns so they use words that aren't pronouns."
- "There is a lot a racism and homophobia in our school."
- "Many students at this school are openly racist and homophobic and do not care. Many boys also sexually harass girls here and make them feel uncomfortable."
- [When asked what the district could improve] "Discussing discrimination, especially homophobia and ableism."
- "I don't see any bullying or exclusion, but I don't feel like there are measures to prevent it either."
- "I think the whole school should all talk about bullying."
- "There are lots of fights, bullying, the teachers not watching, etc."
- "I think they could talk about racism more so people understand it better."
- "My classroom is a safe space but there is no lessons about how to act or be a good person."
- "It's the small place between comfortable and uncomfortable." (on the tension between how students treat each other)
- "I want the school to have more accommodations for special needs and address social issues in the school."

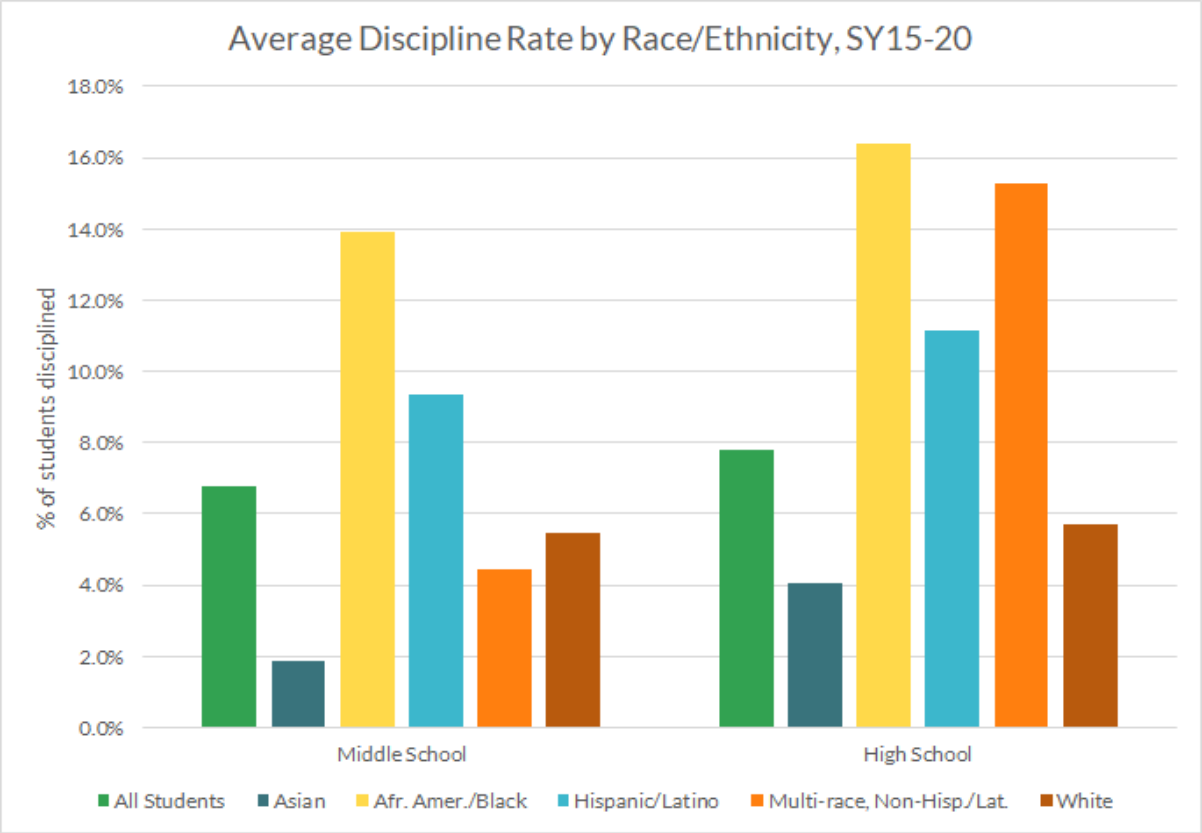
An examination of student data reveals decreasing discipline incidents rates overall, but continued disproportionality for marginalized subgroups. There has been an effort in NPS to reduce discipline rates and disproportionality in discipline, yet there is a need for continued work to create fully inclusive and affirming environments—and to close gaps.

At NPS, students from several marginalized subgroups consistently experience discipline at higher rates[30]. (The charts below display the average discipline rates by subgroup over the most recent five years of available data in order to capture overall trends.)

Students from economically disadvantaged families are about twice as likely to experience discipline as the student body overall, with 12.5 percent of economically disadvantaged middle school students and 15.2 percent of high school students disciplined on average over five years. Students with disabilities are disciplined at even higher rates, at 15.2 percent in middle school and 20 percent in high school. ELs are disproportionately disciplined in middle school (an average of 10.2 percent over five years), but not in high school.

African-American/Black, Hispanic or Latino, and multi-racial students are disciplined at substantially significantly higher rates than other racial and ethnic groups. African American/Black students in particular are disciplined at rates of 13.9 percent in middle school and 16.4 percent in high school. African American/Black students make up just over 10 percent of the student body, yet represented 25.8 percent of the disciplinary actions over the past five years.

[30] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020). School and district profiles. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/



Total discipline incidents[31] at NHS fell 43% from 2017-2018 to 2019-2020 from 958 incidents to 554 incidents. At NHS, in 2017-2018, only 11 students were cited for discipline issues for bullying and harassment related to identity. This dropped to 6 students in 2018-2019 and only 1 student in 2019-2020. At the middle school, 18 students were cited for discipline issues related to bullying and harassment in 2017-2018. This dropped to 13 students in 2018-2019 and only 5 students in 2019-2020. The bulk of discipline incidents occur in the category of "DISRUPTING CLASS - Disorderly Conduct, Displays Affection, Dress Code, Electronic Devices, Insubordination, Obscenity, Other Offenses, Skipping Class, Tardiness, Truancy, Violation of Rules," 90% of all incidents in 2017-2018 and 85% of all incidents in 2019-2020. Determining incidents in this category can be subjective and impacted by educators' and administrators' implicit bias. Despite a decrease in overall discipline incident rates, disproportionality remained fairly constant for Black students. The discipline incident rate for Hispanic students as a proportion of all incidents rose by over 5%, a trend the high school should monitor.

The trend is similar at the middle school level. Total discipline incidents fell 70% at CMS from 2017-2018 to 2019-2020 from 601 to 181. The bulk of discipline incidents occur in the category of Disrupting Class, with 87% of all incidents in 2017-2018 and 81% of all incidents in 2019 - 2020. Disproportionality in discipline fell only slightly for Black students. Similar to trends at the high school level, discipline incidents increased by 5% for Hispanic students in middle school.

[31] Source: NPS Data Team, "CMS & NHS Discipline Data"

% of all Incidents in Disrupting Class

Race/Ethnicity	NHS		CMS	
Year	**17-18**	**19-20**	**17-18**	**19-20**
Hispanic	9.28%	14.65%	13.85%	17.12%
AI/AN	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Asian	1.20%	1.83%	2.66%	0.68%
NHPI	0.00%	0.00%	0.19%	0.68%
Black	38.80%	34.78%	31.88%	28.08%
White	47.95%	45.54%	49.53%	51.37%
Two or More Races	2.77%	3.20%	1.90%	2.05%
Total	100.00%	100.00%		

Students and families also report discrepancies in discipline practices, particularly naming that dress code policies and implementation of those policies can make female students feel targeted or uncomfortable. Dress code violations are not reported as a separate line item in discipline data, but a review of student handbooks reveals that while language is theoretically gender-neutral, in practice these descriptors may apply more frequently to girls' clothing. Students report experiencing the dress code as being applied more stringently to girls. For example, the NHS student handbook says, "students are asked to refrain from wearing excessively short clothing, excessively revealing hemlines, excessively tight clothing, or clothing that allows the overexposure of a person's thighs, chest, or stomach." The handbook goes on to list apparel that is not allowed including bare midriffs, see-through tops when underwear can be seen, and visible undergarments of any kind (boxers, shorts, thongs, bras). Students report that implementation of the policy targets female students, and that when dress code infractions are called out in front of others, it draws even more attention to female bodies in ways that create discomfort.

Comments from student focus groups and survey responses include:

- "The dress code--I don't like that. Girls who are more developing tend to get dress coded more than girls who aren't as developed. Boys don't get dress-coded as much."
- "In some ways the dress code makes sense in terms of what's right to wear to school, but the people that made the dress code should pay attention to what's in style. Also, male teachers tend to dress code more than the female teachers. With male teachers, now you're looking at me, so you shouldn't be looking at me like that."
- "I would like for them to make school more equal, as of updating dress code since it mostly a[p]plies to girls and it is not fair."

Comments from family focus groups and survey responses include:

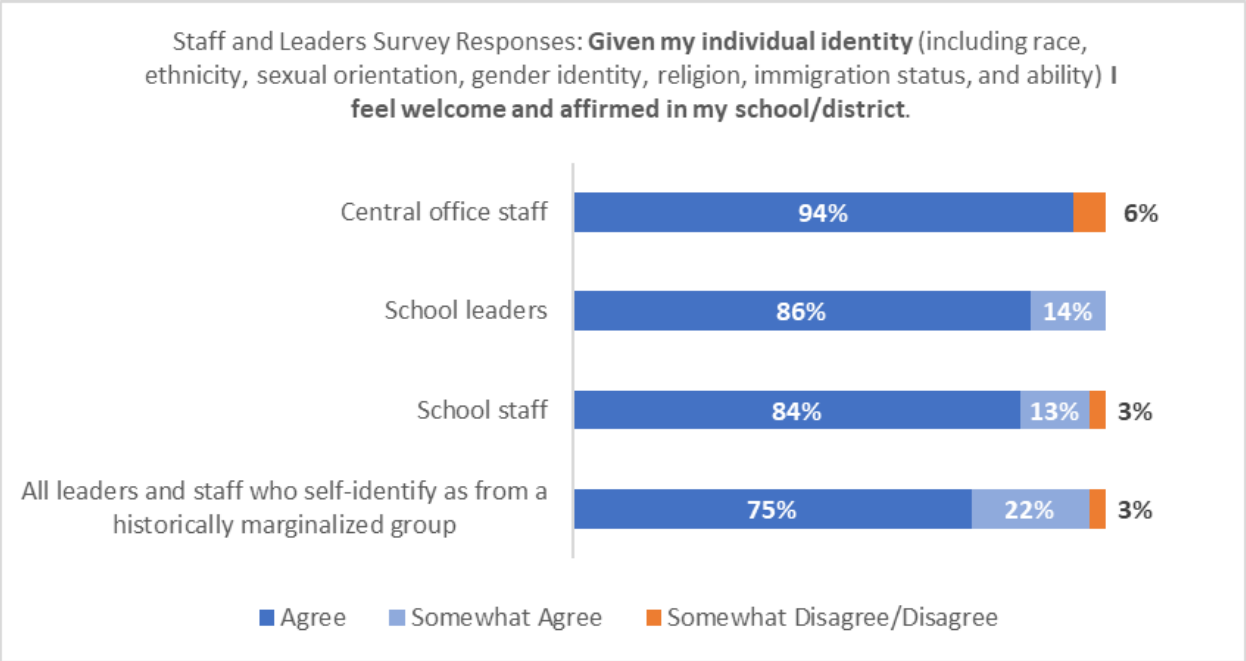
- "We feel included... however it seems that some of the female students at [school] are not treated the same as others. It came to my attention that my daughter and her friend were wearing very similar outfits (both tank tops) and her friend (who happens to be a bit more developed) received a dress code violation and my daughter did not. This has happened on more than one occasion and seems that her friend is being unfairly targeted due to her development. If they are both wearing clothing that is not permitted then they should BOTH receive code violations, not just the child with a developed body."
- "Treat kids fairly especially in terms of discipline. If 3 kids misbehave all 3 kids get disciplined the same and fairly."

While families feel they and their children are generally welcomed and affirmed by NPS schools, survey responses reveal they are less positive about their children being supported in ways that embrace their backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Families are more optimistic about the general nature of inclusion at schools than their children and school leadership.

- Family members generally feel that their children are welcomed and affirmed at their schools with 75% agreeing and 15% somewhat agreeing with the statement "Given my child's individual identity (including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, language, immigration status, and ability) they feel welcome and affirmed in their school."
- When specifically asked about whether they believe the culture/climate of their child's school is inclusive, only 36% feel that their child's school was "extremely inclusive" as opposed to 47% "mostly inclusive" (a sum total of 83%) and 17% as "somewhat" or "not at all" inclusive. Agreement with their child's school being "extremely" inclusive falls to 28% for families who identify as African-American/Black, and 31% of these respondents feel their child's school is only "somewhat" inclusive or "not at all" inclusive.
- Students have a slightly less optimistic picture of their school climate than their families with only 26% indicating that their school is extremely inclusive and 21% indicating that their school is "somewhat" inclusive or "not at all" inclusive. There are no notable differences across race/ethnicity in the student responses.
- School leaders are somewhat more optimistic than parents with 100% agreeing with the statement that their school's student climate/culture is extremely or mostly inclusive, though that includes only 29% of school leaders who characterize student culture as "extremely inclusive," slightly lower than families/caregivers.
- Digging deeper, fewer family respondents feel their child is supported in a way that recognizes their identities, with only 58% agreeing (and 31% somewhat agreeing) with the statement "My child's school supports them in a way that recognizes and embraces their background, culture, experience, and identities," falling to 46% agreement (26% somewhat agree) for family members who identify as African-American/Black and 48% (29% somewhat agree) for those who identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Challenge 4.B. Staff, particularly those who identify as someone from a marginalized background, also experience varied levels of belonging and affirmation, and not all staff feel comfortable or clear on how to report acts of discrinimation when they occur.

While staff feedback about NPS is generally positive, there are still staff who do not feel fully safe, positive, or included, particularly those from marginalized populations. Staff largely feel welcome and affirmed in the district, with highest levels of affirmation from central office staff (94% agreement), compared to School leaders (86% agreement) and school staff (84% agreement). However, staff who self-identify as someone from a historically marginalized background overall felt less welcomed and affirmed in the district, with only 72% agreeing.



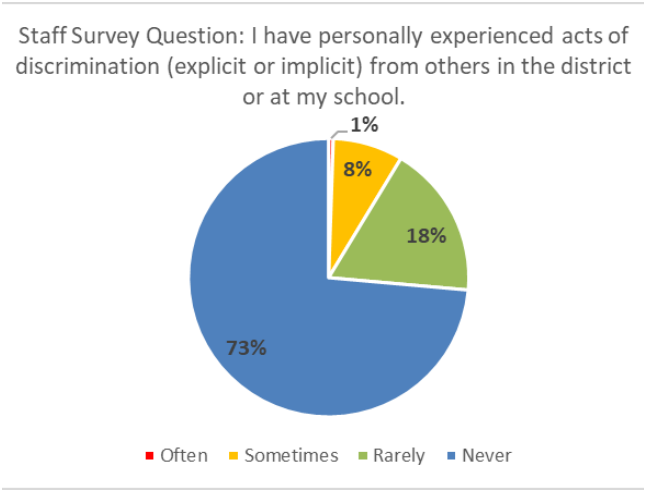
**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others. School leaders include responses from principals, assistant principals, deans, and other school leaders.*

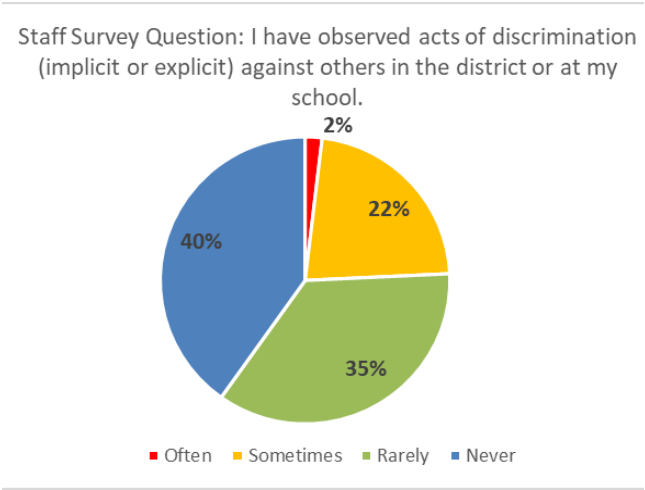
Staff comments from focus groups and surveys include:

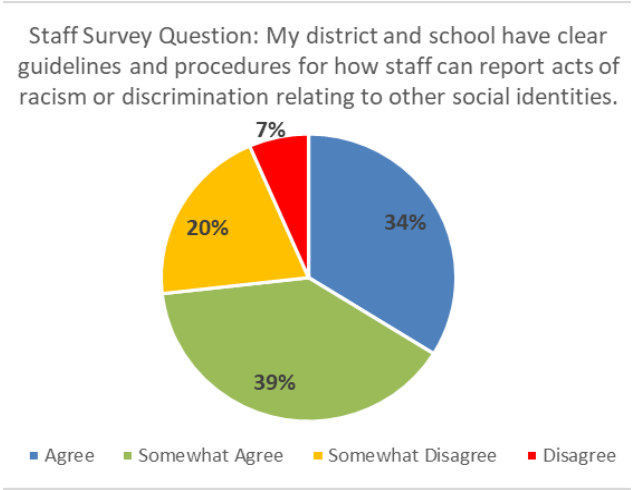
- "As an lgbtq+ individual I do feel welcome most times but there are some comments made by community members (not directed at me but they are not aware of my sexuality) that make me feel uncomfortable."
- "Not all staff are fully inclusive. Some don't even realize it."
- "Lots of NPS staff work here and stay here, and it can feel uncomfortable to feel a sense of place or belonging or have a voice there [if you are new to the community] when there is such a strong culture that already exists."
- "It can be very shocking, and when you have to repeatedly address different departments, organizations, communit[ies] that don't look like you, it is a constant reminder that you don't fit."

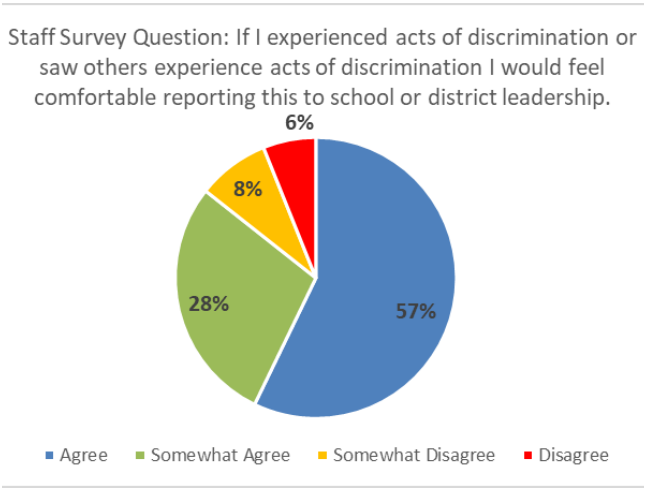
While a majority of staff report having never (73%) or rarely (18%) experienced acts of discrimination, a greater percentage of staff report having observed acts of discrimination. Just over half of staff survey respondents (57%) agree with the statement "If I experienced acts of discrimination or saw others experience acts of discrimination I would feel comfortable reporting this to school or district leadership," and another 28% somewhat agree. However, only 34% of staff survey respondents agree, and another 39% somewhat agree, that there are clear guidelines for reporting racism or discrimination.

The charts to follow depict staff survey responses to questions regarding observations and experiences with acts of descrimination and comfort in responding to issues that arise. Note: staff survey questions asked staff to respond based on their overall experience and it is possible that responses may differ if focused solely on students or solely on staff.









Challenge 4.C. District and schools are not yet oriented to engage families as full partners in their children's education.

Research shows that *meaningful* and *regular* family engagement in a child's education can contribute to student success. Family engagement can improve grades, test scores, attendance and social-emotional skills, and this is especially true for those students who are often less likely to succeed. This type of engagement includes but moves beyond one-way communication (such as sending home report cards and using student management systems like Aspen) and traditional engagement strategies such as annual family-teacher nights, school events, and PTOs. The heart of a robust family engagement strategy is the teacher and family partnering around the educational core - teaching and learning. Families should be engaged in meaningful ways to actively support their children's learning and development. Family engagement must be a core component of educational goals such as student achievement and school readiness.

Norwood has not made sustained investments in family engagement a strategic priority. In NPS's Mission Statement, Vision Statement, and Core Values, family engagement is not explicitly named as a priority. Coverage of this critical area is implied in the Core Value 5: Productive

Community Partnerships. Community partnerships and family engagement can require very distinct strategies with very different purposes, and when family engagement is grouped together with community partnerships without intentional strategies for each, the importance of family engagement to student success can become diluted or lost in district efforts.

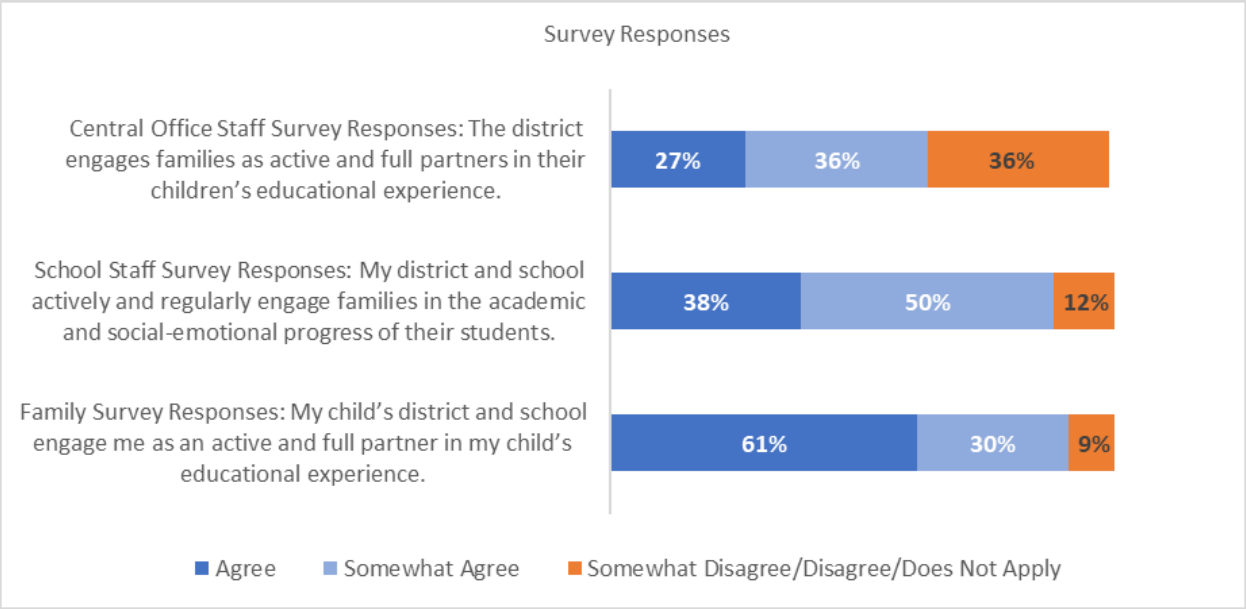
Strategic priorities require sustained investment and resources at central office and school levels. The district's Strategic Plan (2019-2024) does include one Strategic Initiative (5.3) focused on family engagement: "Build meaningful connections with families to support, build trust and create an authentic learning community that values a strong partnership between schools and families." While the district dashboard indicates this initiative is 62% complete (as of January 2022) this initiative is limited in scope and does not include any best practice family engagement strategies for schools or teachers.

At the district level there does not appear to an individual who is the steward of family engagement, nor does there appear to be an active Title I parent committee. However, the new English language learner coordinator is in the process of reinvigorating the state-required EL parent committee. There is no evidence of district guidance or expectations for schools or teachers on effective family engagement and there has not been any significant professional development offering for family engagement strategies in recent years. Family focus groups and survey responses have reported that the level of engagement varies by school and teacher.

The lack of focus from the top translates into limited prioritization at the school level. Only a few schools include family engagement as a priority area in their School Improvement Plans, and when prioritized many of the family engagement strategies articulated tend to focus on events or efforts to integrate new families into the community. While these are laudable activities that can provide opportunities to connect with families, these strategies are peripheral to the educational core and do not address family engagement as a critical strategy for student academic or social-emotional achievement.

Across all stakeholders, there is agreement that NPS needs to improve family engagement in their children's educational experience. Family engagement in NPS tends to lean toward traditional engagement strategies, such as events, volunteering, and PTOs, that aren't directly related to their student's success and achievement.

As shown in the chart to follow, school staff and central office staff believe there is room for improvement in engaging families. The perception of staff about the quality and consistency of family engagement varies by school, ranging from 26% to 43 % of staff that agree with the survey question "My district and school actively and regularly engage families in the academic and social-emotional progress of their students."



**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others.*

Interestingly, while school staff collectively believe the district and their school do not actively and regularly engage families, individual staff members have a more positive impression of their performance in this area. Fifty-four percent of school staff agree with the statement "I engage families as active and full partners in their children's educational experience" compared to only 38% agreeing and 50% somewhat agreeing that their colleagues actively and regularly engage families. Elementary staff in particular assess their individual performance higher than their colleagues, ranging in the low 70% of staff agreeing with this statement. Middle and high school staff are more circumspect about their individual performance, with only 47% of middle school staff and 39% of high school staff agreeing with this statement.

Without district guidance or expectations around family engagement practices, individual staff members and school leadership lack common, objective criteria for success around which to evaluate their performance. NPS uses the MA DESE Teacher Evaluation Rubric which includes a standard (Standard III) devoted to "Family and Community Engagement." MA DESE reports that in 2019-20, of the NPS teachers evaluated 11.7% were rated Exemplary and 86.5% were rated Proficient. MA DESE does not report ratings by individual Standard. While this equity audit does not assess teacher evaluation systems, there is a potential disconnect between how central administration and staff assess their own performance in this area in focus groups and surveys and what constitutes proficiency on the rubric.

Family survey respondents have a more favorable perspective about family engagement in the district than staff and central office administration. Sixty-one percent of family respondents agree with the statement "My child's district and school engage me as an active and full partner in my child's educational experience," over 20% higher than school staff and 30% higher than central office administration assessment of family engagement. It is important to note that responses should be understood in the context of survey participants' expectations and exposure to more robust and inclusive district and school models of family engagement. "Engagement" was not defined and it is unclear how family respondents interpreted this term.

In focus groups, family members noted that family engagement varied by school and teacher. Some parents reported effective family engagement by teachers. One family member noted, "The first grade teacher does a great job of keeping [the parent] in the loop. On Friday, she sends a recap of the week and includes 'ask your child these questions.'

However, family focus group and survey respondents are generally looking for more consistent personal interactions with teachers about their child's needs and progress, a more proactive and interactive approach by teachers and schools to engagement, more consistent and informative communication about classroom activities and learning, and guidance on how to support their child's learning. In response to the survey question "My input and feedback are valued by school staff and administration," only a little over half (56%) of family respondents agree while 32% somewhat agree.

Survey and focus group comments from family members include:

- "Offer more opportunities for families to participate in the learning process."
- "Provide more information as to what is going on in classes."
- "I would say there is room for improvement there. We've experienced a lot where I have reached out first and let them know the needs of my son and kind of reach out and asked when I noticed things."
- "They could maybe hold more meetings between teachers and families beyond just parent-teacher conferences. Beyond those, I don't really feel involved in how my son is doing in school (academically and behaviorally)."
- "Once children enter middle school most of the communication comes from the principals - it would be nice to hear more from teachers regarding what would be helpful for us to be discussing at home, issues that arise in the classroom, support or resources. We as a family have involved conversations about what is going on around us and we would like to build on our conversations by using real-life experiences. We are only hearing our children's perspectives on the discussion."
- "I get zero communication from my daughter's 2nd grade teacher. That's why I said I think she is on track because I have no communication. I have received two emails: to schedule the parent teacher conference and a welcome/supply list at the beginning of the year."
- "We need to understand that many people didn't have the same experience with school that we did. We physically need to get out into the community and build those trusting relationships."

These findings are supported by student perceptions of family engagement. Only a little over half (52%) of students agree with the survey question "My school makes sure my family knows what I learn about in school and how well I am doing in my classes," with 31% somewhat agreeing with the statement.

The structure of current traditional engagement strategies tend to favor families who have flexible work arrangements, strong and long-term social networks in Norwood, similar cultural norms as NPS staff, and the information and ability (including language) to advocate for their child's interests. One staff member made this comment about why traditional engagement strategies no longer work: "In Norwood we are waiting for people to come to the school. School has to go to them. You have got to train teachers and do home visits, be a presence…Meet people where they are. Having some of those concessions - maybe you can't make it to school, but let's go to you." Family member comments about this inequity include lack of representation in PTAs, lack of accommodations for working families, and ineffective communication.

Family survey and focus group comments about this inequity include:

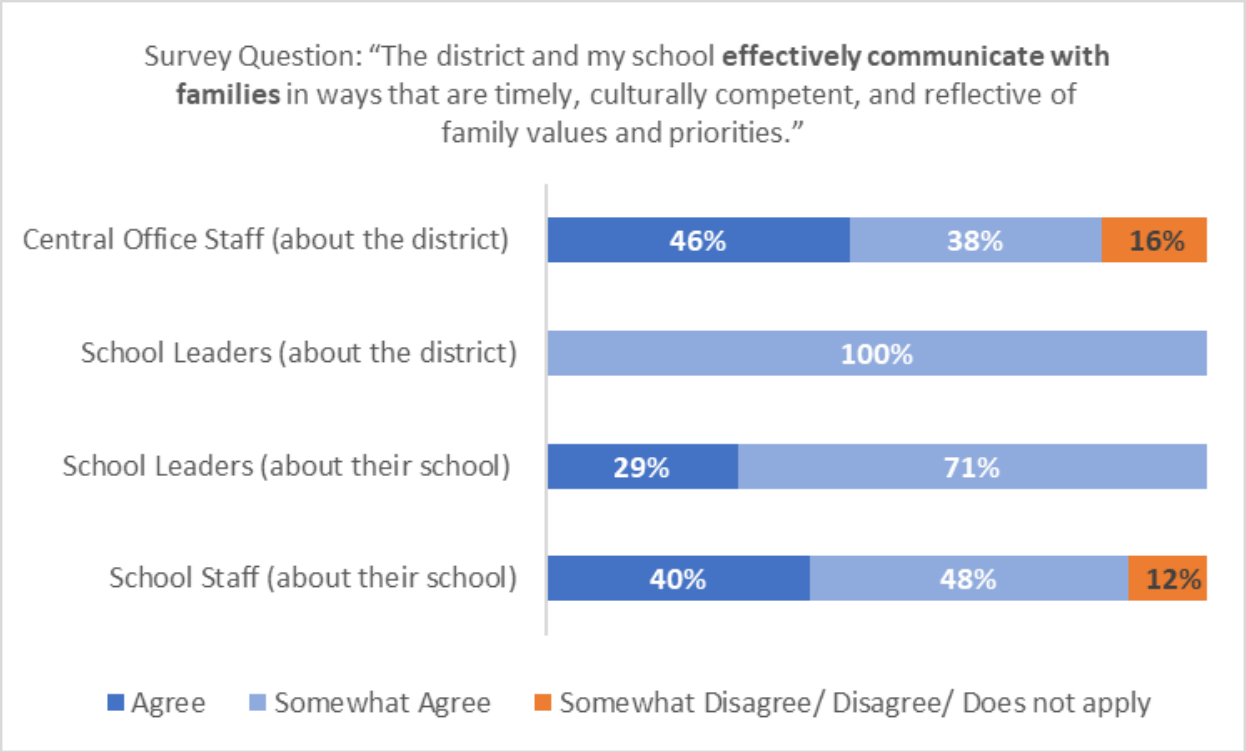
- "I would like to see PTAs reach out to specifically invite families of color and families for whom English is not the first language to participate in activities. Although my children attend a very diverse elementary school, the parents who are most involved are all white. It would be good to reach out and invite others to participate rather than waiting for folks to show up."
- "Especially for the new immigrants to the states, the beginning is hard to understand how the system works, so meeting with student's teacher and the principal, it might help…I was struggling to understand..many things as school systems are different country to country."
- "Vary the day of the week- some meetings are held so those of us who also have some evenings we work may be able to participate."
- "More consistent communication with teachers, admin staff and parents. They can't support our differences if they don't know our differences."
- "There is also an assumption that most families have a parent who does not work outside the home. I know most staff are working parents although I realize many of them live and work in Norwood. I suggest administration, and staff, reflect on how the short notice and lack of information would impact them if it was coming from their child's school and they did not work and live in the same community so policies and routines were unfamiliar and/or new. There need to be ways for parents and parents who need childcare to attend meetings or events to get more involved."
- "I am not super involved [in the PTA]. It is typically moms that are full-time moms. Not sure how accessible to working parents."
- "Including parents that want to be a part of the school. There is too much favoritism for parents that have friends that are closer to the administration and so new families or parents of younger students are never included in deciding things like being a classroom parent."

This lack of equitable engagement strategies has real consequences for students and families. NPS staff articulate some of these consequences:

- "Students are being placed in classes that do not meet their needs. Students who don't have parents to advocate for them get left behind."
- "For students to move into a different section (up or down) a parent has to reach out. Students from marginalized populations often have families who are less involved or unlikely to reach out on their own."
- "Not affording students the same opportunities if parent input is required for a decision to be made."
- "I feel more needs to be done within the school community regarding making sure all families are included in after-school activities, programs and groups. I wonder if all families feel included. Do families of varying backgrounds have a community support system to turn to in order to ask questions and get their children involved in things outside of school?"
- "Conferences and back to school are difficult for non-native speakers."

Current district, school and teacher communication to families are variable in consistency and quality and often do not take into consideration families who may not share the same language, culture or norms as staff and administration, and families without strong and long-term social networks in Norwood. Effective communication is the foundation of a family engagement strategy. Without effective communication at all levels of the district, families cannot be full partners in their child's school or education. As the table below shows, school staff, school leaders

and central administration agree that there is room for improvement in communicating with families both at the district and school level. There is no district guidance or expectations for schools or teachers on effective communication and not surprisingly, family focus groups and survey responses report that communication varies widely by school administration and teacher, with one school reporting only 25% of staff agreeing (54% somewhat agreeing) with the survey statement that their school communicates effectively.



**Please note school staff may include teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, secretaries, custodians, food services, nurses, counselors, and others. School leaders include responses from principals, assistant principals, deans, and other school leaders.*

The district tends to rely on their website and Facebook page for family communication. Some family members in focus groups and surveys have reported the website as difficult to navigate and not always up-to-date. The website has a translation feature allowing access to families with limited English fluency although it does not appear that all linked information is translated, including critical forms such Covid-19 consent forms. Some forms have been translated and can be found on the website through links, such as transportation forms. Linked information such as the district strategic plan and newsletters are also not translated. The pages for Athletics are not linked to this translation feature and this information is unavailable on the website to families with limited English fluency. The Facebook page does not appear to have a translation feature.

The impact of ineffective communication strategies is that some families feel disconnected, left out and frustrated. It also creates the opportunity for miscommunication, with families and community members relying on information from informal sources outside of NPS, as well as their own social networks.

Focus group comments from family members include:

- "Don't see school committee emails, would love to see those. I am part of Progress Norwood, so I see those. That was just by chance, someone saying 'hey floor this to get more information.' So again have to be in a clique or know someone who can share information or you're left in the dark…Try my best to stay connected because I can't get to school since I am teaching. Kind of a scavenger hunt."
- "Yeah, I feel like if I want more information I can find it, but….I have to look in many places, NPS, Facebook, and the Friends of Norwood Public Schools, which is a different page….I have to search many places to find info."
- "A lot of families are getting input from sources that aren't necessarily reliable. If we hear a trigger word and we think we know it is about political beliefs but maybe it is about something else, it is hard to strip that away. Need very clear and straightforward ways for school districts to communicate goals and outcomes and an opportunity to provide input."
- "I would not know much if it wasn't for Progress Norwood."

Schools rely on newsletters and their websites for family communication. School websites are linked to the district website, so the translation feature is available except for linked resources which can be of critical importance. Families report that some principals put out newsletters, although families report that this does not appear to be a consistent practice, and when included on the website as a link or PDF it is not translated. One family member remarked "Provide communication! [The school] does not provide insight from the principal or classroom teachers. A weekly newsletter or anything letting us know what's going on at the school would be nice. The only communication provided is from the PTA regarding fundraisers and family events."

Student handbooks are an important source of information for both students and families. The 2021-2022 school year student handbooks have been updated, and translated versions are available on the district website. It is unclear if families that require translated Student handbooks are aware of this resource, understand its importance, or can navigate the website to find the Handbooks. School handbook provisions that reference family involvement tend not to include provisions for accommodations for non-English speakers, family culture or conditions, ability or access to information. In addition, school handbooks also tend to use the term "parent(s)" when referencing families. This term does not acknowledge the concept of alternative family and guardianship structures and can be othering.

Another result of ineffective communication is that the children and families from historically marginalized groups often are not aware of opportunities or events. Only 46% of family survey respondents agreed and 38% somewhat agreed with the statement "I am aware of the district and school resources available to support students and families," with only 33% of respondents who identify as African-American or Black agreeing (and 25% somewhat agreeing) with this statement. In comparison, 52% of respondents identifying as Hispanic or Latino agree (and 29% somewhat agree) with this statement.

Comments of family members from surveys and focus groups include:

- "As a non-Norwood native family, we find the lack of information at the beginning of the school, each year about various school-specific policies, typical of the assumption that everyone is from Norwood and already knows how things work. Every year each school has an entire grade of students attending for the first time and not all of those students have older siblings already at the school. New families do move to Norwood each year." and "...there is a lack of specific communication about the who/what/where/when/

why/how with various events, as there seems to be a mindset throughout the district that people already know because the town/school has done something a certain way for years. To engage and welcome families, specific, frequent, and clear communication about activities/schedules/expectations/opportunities are critical."
- "Sometimes information is so last minute… so it is hard for families who work."
- "On the education part I think Norwood does a pretty good job especially on the special education side… I do see - don't know how to fix this - but like moms talking on the playground friendships form of moms who are home. Social basis as opposed to educational, we could do some work including other families and all inclusive events."

Staff members agree that school and teacher communications often leave out some families, including families who are new to Norwood or not connected to the established social networks:

- "I feel within the daily life of school we work together as a staff to be inclusive of all students and we try to communicate in a variety of ways with families. I feel more needs to be done within the school community regarding making sure all families are included in after-school activities, programs, and groups. I wonder if all families feel included. Do families of varying backgrounds have a community support system to turn to in order to ask questions and get their children involved in things outside of school."
- "We do not communicate well with families. Most teachers are only willing to email. This is likely not reaching families on challenging schedules or ones that don't have the tech and reading literacy required to communicate effectively via email."
- "Families who do not speak English are not always considered in communication."

Communication challenges particular to families with children receiving special education services and families without English fluency are discussed in Challenge 2.A.

Challenge 4.D. Current systems and practices do not yet elevate the voices of all community members including staff, families, and students.

At all levels of the district governance and leadership, there is a need to improve systems and practices to ensure that all voices inform decisions and policy making and are welcomed and honored.

In a recently reviewed and updated School Committee policy[32] (School Committee Powers and Duties, reviewed and updated 11/5/2020), the School Committee sees as one of its functions: "providing adequate and direct means for keeping the local citizenry informed about the schools and for keeping itself and the school staff informed about the needs and wishes of the public." Building from this commitment, there is an opportunity to improve. Examples include:

- Members of the public may appear at meetings virtually or provide written comments through email or hard copy. Email appears to be an accommodation for those who cannot attend the meeting person. A review of the past year of School Committee meeting minutes show that few members of the public take advantage of the opportunity to provide School Committee input at regular meetings.
- It does not appear from public information that there are any translation services for members of the public who may need them or any accommodations for individuals with hearing or other impairments that may limit their ability to participate virtually. The form used to request to speak at a School Committee meeting is only available in English and

[32] Source: NPS School Committee Policy Manual,, https://www.norwood.k12.ma.us/sc/school-committee-policy-manual

does include the ability to request an interpreter or other accommodation necessary for participation.
- Minutes for meetings for all school committee meetings are available on-line but are not translated. Videos are available also on-line.
- School Committee policies are not translated and accommodations are not made for those with visual impairment or who may not be able to access more complex documents.

The central administration is fairly confident in their openness to other voices in their decision-making process with 75% of the respondents either agreeing (37.5%) or somewhat agreeing (37.5%) with the statement "Central office provides school leaders and staff with opportunities to provide feedback to the district about the services and support they provide, which informs decision-making." However, school leaders have a less positive view of their ability to influence the central administration in the decision making process with only 57% agreeing (14%) or somewhat agreeing (43%) and 29% somewhat disagreeing with the same statement.

At the school level there are no formal structures for staff, family, community and student (when appropriate) input into decision making. While MA DESE encourages districts and schools to use school leadership or governance council structures to include these voices. Families, school leadership, and staff did not talk about school councils playing a meaningful role in school-based decision-making. School staff don't feel fully included in the decision making process with 30% of respondents somewhat disagreeing or disagreeing with the statement "District and school leaders actively seek my input to inform decision-making" and only 21% of respondents agreeing and 49% somewhat agreeing with the statement. While this survey question does not distinguish between district and school leader efforts to include staff in the decision-making process, results at the school level vary widely. At one school only 9% of staff agree (45% somewhat agree) with this statement and 46% somewhat disagree or disagree with the statement while at another school 31% of staff agree (50% somewhat agree) with the statement and only 19% disagree with the statement.

Some school staff feel that their input is not always welcome at the school or district level and the environment is not always a safe space to share:
- "Disagreement or suggestions are not always encouraged. Access to administration is limited."
- "I feel like my principal asks for input, but the Superintendent and other administrators make it look like we are giving input but the decision is actually already decided."
- "My principal seeks input from staff but I do not believe as a while, our district seeks input from teachers. Decisions are made without getting teachers' input on a variety of issues."
- "I don't think classroom teachers are given comfortable venues through which they can voice their ideas and opinions. We complete surveys and feedback but it is not always evident where that information goes or how it is used and/or if it is factored into decision making."
- "Major changes that directly impact faculty have been implemented without faculty input in the last year. These include the decision to remove bells to mark class start and end times, and the decision made in the spring to allow any student to submit any missing work from any point in the year for full credit."

Families also don't feel fully included in the decision-making process. In response to the survey question "My input and feedback are valued by school staff and administration," a little over half (56%) of family respondents agreed while 32% somewhat agreed. Although students were not

surveyed on this issue, there are currently no structures in place for the School Committee or central administration to regularly use student voice in the decision making or policy making process. However, the School Committee is taking steps in this direction. At the December 15, 2022 Committee meeting the idea of having student representatives on the school committee was raised and is currently scheduled to be brought before the Committee in the Spring of 2022. In focus groups some students expressed the importance of student voice. One student commented "Personally, I feel like one of the best ways teachers and administrators can help students is by letting students have space to share and have a voice. A lot of decisions are made because teachers think they know what is best, but I think having groups like this where we collaborate with teachers is going to open up a lot of ways to improve our school." One teacher commented that NPS "tends to have very little representation of marginalized populations in student bodies such as student councils, class officers, etc."

As the School Committee, central office, and schools design and implement practices to include stakeholder voice, they must ensure that these practices are inclusive of all voices, including those from historically marginalized identity groups. Recently the School Committee, district and schools have made efforts to include voice in the decision making process - The Middle School Project, school start time initiative, and family surveys for this equity audit. NPS and the School Committee made intentional efforts to incorporate the voices of staff, families, and students in two significant projects that will impact all families and students in the district, the Middle School Project and the school start time change initiative. The Middle School Project is soliciting input from the Norwood community in a number of different ways, including public forums, many of which were well-attended. The school start time project conducted surveys of families/caregivers, students, and staff to gather input into a potential change in start time, with over 1500 survey participants. However, demographics of participants in forums and surveys for both projects were not collected and so it is unclear voices of stakeholders from historically marginalized groups such as low-income families and families whose home language is not English were included in decision making. For the Middle School Project, there is no evidence of strategies to facilitate the inclusion of these voices at forums, such as through translation and interpretation services, transportation services, or child care support.

District and school leaders employed more traditional efforts (primarily inclusion in weekly newsletters) to engage families in responding to surveys and participating in focus groups. This traditional method resulted in a low response rate for surveys and low participation rates for focus groups, especially with families who identify their race as other than White and families who are not fluent in English. As a result, the range of their voices were not always included.

Recommendations for Priority Area 4:

1. Establish and expand opportunities to authentically acknowledge, support, and build understanding of students' individual interests, cultures, and needs.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Examine current affinity-based and DEI-focused student groups availability, participation rates, and potential barriers to access (e.g., in school versus afterschool).
- Understand what stduent's want and need to feel their individual interests, cultures, and needs are acknowledged, supported, and understood.
- Explore evidence-based models for affinity and/or identity based spaces, as well as opportunities to learn about individual interests and cultures.
    - For example, a starting point for students who identify as LGBTQIA2S+ could be the resources provided by the MA DESE Safe Schools website: https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/.
- Intentionally communicate, expand access to, and maintain these spaces over time, regularly using data to understand their effectiveness and impact.

2. Increase social emotional learning and student equity skills to ensure positive, respectful student-student interactions, and ensure teachers and staff see and appropriately address student needs.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Develop or adopt a vision, framework, and/or curricular scope and sequence for social emotional learning that outlines how students and staff are supported at all levels.
- Seek opportunities to build all students' understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion to eliminate discriminatory joking and behaviors.
- Develop all staff understanding of and comfort in recognizing and addressing discriminatory joking and behaviors, especially student-student interactions in common spaces and classrooms.
- Equip family members with resources to extend these conversations at home.

3. Investigate and analyze the root causes of the disproportionality in discipline rates.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Continue and deepen professional development on culturally relevant and sustaining practices and implicit bias for all staff to support staff in understanding the racialized way in which they might be interpreting "intelligence," behavior, and classroom success. (See recommendations for Priority Area 3).
- Analyze staff referrals for disciplinary action each year to identify trends among staff members or departments.
- Regularly examine and revise behavior, dress code, and discipline policies, practices, and implementation. Include an examination of the student experience and student input.
- Provide all staff with training and support in enacting behavior, dress code, and discipline policies and practices consistently and equitably.
- Explore and integrate evidence based strategies for positive behavior management, restorative practices, and trauma-informed practices.

4. Create staff affinity spaces to support and retain staff who identify with a traditionally marginalized population (e.g., BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, staff with disabilities, and others).

Key activities and steps might include:

- Survey staff to understand the need and desire for specific affinity group types, formats, and goals.
- Conduct comprehensive research on best practices and benefits of affinity spaces.
- Engage staff to develop a plan for implementing affinity spaces that align with the goals outlined. Consider who will have access to what types of spaces/groups, when and how groups will engage, who will be accountable for their implementation, and how to monitor and improve effectiveness over time.

5. Develop a district-wide vision and strategic plan for engaging families as full partners in their children's education, with special attention to strategies that consider those families whose home language is not English, without flexible working schedules, or who may not be able to adequately advocate in their children's interests.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Conduct comprehensive research on best practices in family engagement and communication. A starting point could be the resources provided on the MA DESE website:
    - https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ta/presentation-materials/family-community-engagement-resources.html
- During strategic planning, acknowledge the importance of family engagement to student success and ensure that family engagement is a core component of educational goals.
- Engage families and educators in the research and design process, with particular emphasis on including those families whose home language is not English, without flexible working schedule, with special needs children or who may not be always able to adequately advocate in their child's interest.
- Consider the role of district, school and educator in family engagement and how these responsibilities will be resourced and supported to ensure success.
- Continue to provide, and expand access to, information/materials in multiple languages and modes of communication.

6. Implement inclusive structures and practices to ensure the voice of students, families and staff are meaningfully and regularly included in the decision-making process at all levels of the district.

Key activities and steps might include:

- Consider including student representatives on the School Committee and a student advisory council for the Superintendent.
- Reinvigorate the district-wide Parent Title I and English Language learners committees.
- Design and implement a system-wide network of School Councils that meaningfully include the voices of staff, students (when appropriate), families and community members in school-based decision making. A starting point could be the resources provided by MA DESE at https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/schoolcouncils/default.html.
- Consider annual culture and climate surveys for students, families and staff.

CONCLUSION

Undertaking an equity audit is an effort to understand the extent to which a district is providing an equitable experience for its students, families, and staff. Orienting oneself to the results can be challenging, because it requires one to embrace multiple realities simultaneously: that most people in Norwood Public Schools get along well with another each day *and* that not all members of the community feel safe and affirmed; that real progress has been made in supporting English Learners *and* that ELs are not consistently thriving; that that there is a strong sense of pride and support in the town of Norwood *and* that this culture can be experienced as exclusive.

Embracing these multiple realities – *without excuse and without overly-constraining self-criticism* – is the work ahead in pursuing the school system that Norwood deserves. There are caring, hard-working people in Norwood, and yet the current system does not yet provide equitable experiences and outcomes for all students, including many students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners.

In order to make significant progress toward equity, Norwood Public Schools should:

1. Establish systems, action plans, roles, and accountability structures based on a shared vision and understanding of equity,
2. Ensure access to rigorous instruction with equitable supports, especially for students receiving special education services and English learners,
3. Cultivate affirming and inclusive learning environments led by a diverse staff that is representative of the student body, and
4. Foster a culture of affirmation, inclusion, belonging, and partnership across the NPS community

Norwood is a growing and evolving place. The school system that may have made sense for the community in decades past is not the school system that will best serve the community into the future. Specifically, a system that takes as its default setting students who are White, who are economically stable, who are Christian, who are English speakers, and who do not have disabilities, while treating those outside this default as "others" to be accommodated, will not be the equitable system the community strives for.

Instead, stakeholders at all levels must constantly ask themselves what would be different if they were to start from different assumptions. What would be different about policies that started with the assumption that families did not have extra money and time to spare? What would be different about buildings that started with the assumption that students spoke a wide array of languages at an array of proficiency levels? What would be different about classrooms that started with the assumption that students live in a diversity of family structures? What would be different about programs that started with the assumption that every child in Norwood can achieve at high levels?

The work of pursuing equity will necessarily involve disruptions. It will involve confronting challenges, trying new things, and making mistakes. It will face resistance both internally and externally. But the community's commitment to equity means persisting through these challenges to collaboratively build the schools its students deserve.

APPENDIX

A. Mass Insight Equity Framework Descriptors

Mass Insight believes the school is the unit of change and improvement, and our work with schools and districts begins by understanding local strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Our research-informed Theory of Action describes in greater detail the various aspects of education systems we believe support the structures, policies, practices, and actions necessary for school leaders and staff in order to develop, implement, and sustain improvements. Our equity audit framework, below, serves as an outline of our process for understanding the current reality and the extent to which equity is experienced by district stakeholders (staff, students, families, partners and community members).

Domains	Highest Performing District Descriptors
Vision, strategy, and culture: District vision, strategy, culture, and priorities reflect a commitment to educational equity and promote a district-wide culture of inclusiveness and a belief that all students can learn and succeed.	The district has an inclusive organizational culture that welcomes, respects, and values the identities and perspectives of all students, families, staff, and the district community regardless of racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, sexual orientation, gender, and age differences. District leadership sets and models high expectations, and all district staff accept responsibility for the success of all students and hold each other accountable. The district has a strategic plan aligned to the district mission and vision that addresses district conditions and challenges. The plan explicitly addresses data-informed disparities in student performance and success and provides opportunities for aligned staff development and stakeholder cultivation. Each strategy is grounded in a clear theory of action that describes the desired change and expected impact. The district has a process for communicating, managing, and monitoring plan implementation and tracking and reporting on impact.
Accountability for equitable student access and outcomes: Policies, systems, and practices enable all students to fully participate in schools, programs, and activities that result in high comparable outcomes.	District policies, systems, and practices reflect a commitment to equity and accountability for the success of all students, particularly focusing attention on marginalized student populations. Schools are held accountable for ensuring that all students can succeed. In addition to complying with laws and regulations, the district ensures that services for special student populations (e.g. English learners, students with IEPs or 504 plans, and gifted/talented students) are of the highest quality. As data on academic achievement and other student outcomes are disaggregated and analyzed, there is high comparable performance for all identifiable groups of learners, and performance gaps are virtually non-existent. District and school practices reflect ongoing monitoring of disaggregated student success indicators (e.g. early warning system for students' academics, behavior, attendance, etc.), particularly for marginalized populations, and intentional steps are routinely taken to address disparities through a tiered system of supports (e.g. MTSS model). The district differentially supports schools to provide all students with equitable opportunities, unobstructed entrance, involvement, and full participation [access + inclusion] in all school programs and activities, understanding that not all schools and students need the same support and resources.
Governance and conditions: Clear and	District governance structures prioritize stakeholder equity through the district's vision and strategic plan. The school committee/board and central

equitable school committee/board and central office structures, systems, processes, and practices work together to advance the district towards its vision. The district commitment to equity is reflected in governance and central office structures, systems, policies, and practices.	office regularly examine systems, structures, policies, practices, and data to identify and address inequities and biases. The superintendent and district leadership prioritizes the success of marginalized populations in establishing goals, making decisions, and collaboratively organizing support to schools. Central office departments implement clear and equitable structures, systems, processes, policies for addressing school and student needs, and coordinate services and communication with schools and staff across offices. District departments differentiate supports and conditions (i.e. people, money, time, program) to align with school needs and prioritize marginalized populations. Specifically, ● District financial allocations reflect its mission, vision, and strategic priorities. Projections of revenues and expenses are data informed and reliable, and the majority of funds follow students, and prioritizes marginalized populations. The district budget process equitably appropriates financial resources to school and student needs, as informed by data. ● Principal supervisors are trained in best practices in instructional leadership and coaching and provide principals with high-quality coaching and job-embedded professional development aligned to district and school priorities. ● The district uses key performance indicators, including input from school staff, students, and families, to measure the effectiveness of district office functions. ● The district supports schools and teachers with the development of instructional practices and curricula that recognize marginalized populations and are inclusive of all students' identities and interests. ● The district has an early warning system for ensuring students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional developmental needs are monitored, identified, and supported internally and/or externally by partners. ● The district provides guidance to schools for managing internal and external partnerships and evaluating their effectiveness in supporting student and family needs. Partnerships with local and regional organizations are developed to bridge gaps in outreach and resource allocation.
Focus on culturally and linguistically sustaining teaching and learning: Curriculum, materials, instructional practices, and learning environments ensure school leaders, teachers, and other school staff constantly improve and refine rigorous standards-based pedagogy that recognizes and embraces students' identities and the district's diversity.	The district has a vision and plan for ensuring high-quality, standards-aligned, rigorous instruction for *all* students in *all* schools. Instructional staff are professionally developed and have the curricular and instructional resources necessary to deliver instruction in learning environments that are inclusive of and validates students' identities, experiences, needs, and interests and connects to students' cultural schema to maximize their learning opportunities. Instructional staff have the time, support, and resources needed to plan culturally and linguistically sustaining units, lessons, and assessments, and the time, support, and resources to use aligned assessment and evaluation data to inform, improve, and refine their instruction. The district has a system of instructional support for schools that prioritizes marginalized student populations to ensure equitable access and opportunity so students receive the necessary academic interventions, enrichment, and remediation programming.

Student readiness to learn: The district and schools create safe, positive, and inclusive learning environments for all students. Students' non-academic needs are proactively addressed so they fully engage and succeed academically.	The district supports schools' implementation of policies, systems, and practices that create positive, inclusive, and welcoming classroom and school environments. Schools and school staff embrace and recognize diversity and students' unique identities. As a result, all students feel safe, valued, cared for, supported, and like they belong in their school. The district and schools have systems and practices to monitor, identify, and address students' social-emotional, engagement, mental health, and developmental needs. Internal processes and structures, as well as partnerships, collaboratively connect and provide students and their families with resources, interventions, and support services to enable all students to fully engage in learning.
Workforce development: Systems and processes attract, recruit, cultivate, hire, and develop new and diverse staff. All staff receive ongoing professional development that results in the retention of talented, culturally competent, and diverse workforce.	The district has a non-discriminatory approach to attract and recruit a highly diverse workforce that is reflective and inclusive of the community and student population. The district and the talent office have a set structure to grow and cultivate prospective hires and coordinate efforts to provide needed testing and certification support. The talent office and school leaders are collaboratively engaged in the recruitment, outreach, interview, and selection process. The talent office accurately forecasts workforce needs and has structures that result in a strong, diverse candidate pool for each opening. The district supports new teachers with induction and mentoring during their initial years in the classroom. District-sponsored professional development is practice-based, differentiated by role, and emphasizes the development of cultural competence. The district has systems for identifying and developing an internal pipeline of school leaders (e.g. principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and department chairs) and recognizes staff contributions and high performance. The district encourages and supports the creation and facilitation of inclusive spaces for diverse staff (staff of color, immigrant staff, LGBTQIA+, staff with disabilities, bi-lingual, etc.). The district provides schools with the necessary resources and tools to create safe and positive work environments that support staff retention. The staff evaluation process recognizes strengths, supports areas of improvement, and monitors cultural competency. The district uses evaluation data to identify, develop, and retain staff aligned with district values.
Family and community engagement: The district and schools intentionally and authentically communicate with and successfully engage students, families, and community members.	The district has multiple strategies for communicating and engaging with students, families, and community members to better understand systemic inequities and the work of creating more inclusive and just educational experiences. District interactions and communication demonstrate cultural competence and respect for linguistic and cultural/ethnic identities and diversity. Student, family, and community input and feedback is routinely sought in multiple ways, analyzed, and utilized to inform district and school decisions. Family and community communication and cultivation efforts yield increased participation and engagement.
Data: The district utilizes data regularly to identify and address inequities in the system. Disaggregated data is accessible and informs decision-making throughout the district.	District information systems are current, accurate, and used by school and district staff to inform decisions. District departments collect, review, and utilize qualitative and quantitative data to drive district-level decisions and to monitor, identify, and address inequities and disparities in the system. Disaggregated school and student progress data is regularly examined at district and school levels to identify and address disparities in school, staff, and student performance and access. Staff receive training and resources to

	accurately gather, analyze, and make decisions from qualitative and quantitative data sources.
School management: District policies, structures, and systems enable school leaders to create the school-level conditions that align people, time, program, and money to ensure the success of all students.	District systems support principals in the development of coherent equity-focused school improvement plans (SIPs) that are data informed and support the success and needs of all students and prioritize marginalized populations. Principals are held accountable for both the implementation of their school improvement plans and the success of all students. Principal supervisors work with principals to develop leadership capacity and support ongoing management of SIPs to ensure successful implementation and desired outcomes. Principals have the authority to create staff configurations, design positions, hire candidates, and implement an induction process in alignment with the school's instructional model, needs, and SIP priorities (e.g. principals place high-performing teachers to serve high-needs students). All teachers and support staff receive accurate and specific feedback to improve their professional practice through the evaluation process. Evaluation data is utilized by the principal for staffing decisions (e.g. placement and retention). Principals have the authority to make changes to the school schedule to include time for PLCs/CPTs, interventions, and/or other school-based professional development or instructional activities so the school can meet the needs of all students. Principals have sufficient understanding of and control over their budgets so they can allocate resources to meet school and student needs, prioritizing marginalized populations. The school budgeting process is clear, data informed, and differentiated by school needs. The principal has the authority to align the school's financial resources with SIP priorities. The principal has sufficient authority to shape instructional approaches, and the authority to make programmatic choices and select partners and related services to advance the school's mission and meet the needs of all students, prioritizing marginalized populations.

Note: descriptors contained within the Mass Insight's equity audit framework are informed by national research and best practices including, but not limited to 1) Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices from Boston Public Schools, and 2) the Intercultural Development Research Association.

B. NPS Equity Audit Kick-off Visioning Session Themes

In Summer 2021, to kick off the equity audit process, NPS engaged a representative group of students, families and guardians, and staff in a vision-setting work session to inform the equity audit. The group was asked to envision what will be true in a more equitable and inclusive future state of Norwood Public Schools for students, family and community members, teachers and staff, and school and district leaders. The chart below summarizes themes emerging from the discussion that helped inform the equity audit.

	What will be true in a more equitable and inclusive Norwood Public Schools?			
	Think & Feel	Do & Say	See	Other
Students	*Students will feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe to be their authentic selves and be affirmed and supported for who they are	*Students will be more engaged in school, participate in more activities, and learn more about others	*Students will collaborate across lines of difference with respect and kindness. Teachers will show genuine concern for each student.	*We'll have a welcoming environment where everyone accepts and enjoys each other *No tests on religious holidays
Family & Community	*Families/community members will feel a sense of belonging and welcoming. They will feel a sense of pride and they can truly be themselves *Some families may resist change	*More families will want to participate in school activities. *They'll feel a sense of community and that their child is safe.	*A diverse group of students will see themselves reflected in staff and curriculum *Appropriate resources and transportation for all students	*More resources
Teachers & Staff	*Teachers will be able to be their authentic selves. *They will be aware of their own biases and confident in their ability to speak to students on a range of issues	*Staff will openly embrace difficult conversations and feedback to grow and won't refer to students as "good" or "bad"	*There will be diversity in content, conversations, and activities that result in increased student engagement	*Constant reflection and growth *More diversity in honors courses
School & District Leaders	*Staff will feel supported and safe in leading an equitable district	*Staff will support individuals honestly and in consideration of their perspectives	*Diverse groups of students and staff interacting with respect and understanding *Resources/transportation	*More diversity and less fear of the unknown

C. NPS Equity Audit Survey Instruments

To gather stakeholder input during the audit process, Mass Insight administered the following NPS Equity Audit Survey Instruments (linked for reference):

- Central office staff (English)
- School leaders (English)
- School staff (English)
- Families (Arabic, English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, Spanish)
- Students (English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, Spanish)
- Community (Arabic, English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, Spanish)

Please see additional information about our methodology in the introduction of the report.