



Ashland Public Schools Equity Audit 2022

December 15, 2022

L&P Educational Services

Co Founders & Co-Chief Empowerment Officers
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Agenda

- ❖ About L&P Educational Services
- ❖ Process and Overview of the Equity Audit
- ❖ Discuss Factors that Support Equity and Excellence
- ❖ Discuss Factors that Limit Equity and Excellence
- ❖ Share Recommendations for High-Leverage Areas for Improvement
- ❖ Q&A Session

About L&P Educational Services

L&P Educational Services helps to build the capacity, confidence, and expertise of educators to teach, lead, and sustain equitable and culturally responsive classrooms and institutions.

- ❖ We are PreK-12 and higher education practitioners.
- ❖ We have extensive review experience with a focus on learning and improved outcomes for students.
- ❖ We partner with our clients to engage all stakeholders in the process.
- ❖ We have a proven process for creating, managing, and evaluating improvement efforts.
- ❖ We are experienced providers of professional learning towards equity.

School Review Experience L&P Equity Team

10+
Districts

6
States

20+
Schools

80+
Years of
Experience

Equity Audit Process

The EA process is designed to:

- ❖ Enable all levels of leadership and staff in the district to gain a shared understanding of the quality of education currently being provided in relation to clearly articulated equity standards that define a quality school.
- ❖ Guide a process of self-reflection and directed practice.
- ❖ Develop a shared understanding within the school community of the areas that promote equity and the priorities for improving the experiences of staff and students.

Equity Audit Process *continued*

The EA process is designed to:

- ❖ Identify needs using a structured process and with reference to a clear rubric.
- ❖ Enable the district to identify common patterns of professional practice across schools so that they can better support improved outcomes for all.

Equity Audit Process *continued*

L&P Educational Services facilitated the equity audit process using an equity framework that addresses three overarching questions:

1. What does current district data reveal about achievement in Ashland Public Schools?
2. What factors do staff, students, and parents/guardians identify as contributing to achievement in Ashland Public Schools?
3. What initiatives (district-level, school-level, classroom-level) can be implemented to build cultural competency and enhance the schooling experiences of all students, staff, and families in Ashland Public Schools?

Overview: Data Review

With the support of the district, L&P Equity Specialists analyzed achievement data and examined district policies, practices, and resource allocations. Data and documentation included, but was not limited to:

- ❖ Detailed analysis on district data relative to student academic performance, enrollment based on tracking, discipline, achievement, attendance, social-emotional needs, dropout and graduation rates, involvement in extracurricular activities, special education status, and English language learner classification
- ❖ Achievement data by race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, disability status, and English language learning proficiency
- ❖ Policy review of practices as outlined in School Committee Policy Manual, Employee Handbook, and school handbooks

Overview: Data Review

- ❖ Review of literature on institutional racism in public education to identify current strategies and practices that promote or inhibit equity
- ❖ Assessment of financial resources distributed across the district in order to provide recommendations on best practice strategies for how to equitably fund schools
- ❖ Examination of targeted intervention supports for academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs to identify strengths, challenges, opportunities, and effectiveness
- ❖ Review of family and community engagement practices to provide recommendations on strategies for creating a safe and welcoming environment for all families, including families of color

Overview: Data Review

- ❖ Review of curriculum to ensure it is fully representative of APS's diverse community, to provide recommendations on how to increase representation within the curriculum, and to suggest supports for increased student representation
- ❖ Review of efforts to recruit and retain BIPOC staff in order to recommend steps to improve diverse staff recruitment and provide strategies on how to support a diverse workforce
- ❖ Assess leadership team's readiness to address institutional racism and equity. Review professional development offerings related to equity, diversity and creating schools free of bias, prejudice and discrimination.

Stakeholder Input

Given the purpose and scope of the review, L&P Educational Services' approach was focused on a high-level understanding of equity within the district by collecting stakeholder experience data and examining policies and practices.

Throughout the study period, L&P conducted:

- ❖ 1:1 interviews with school and district leaders
- ❖ Interviews with Curriculum Leaders and Department Chairs
- ❖ Focus groups with various stakeholders which included parents/guardians, students, community partners, School Committee members, Special Education Administrators, and district and school leaders

Stakeholder Events

Interviews:

- ★ James E. Adams, Superintendent of Schools
- ★ Michael A. Caira Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment
- ★ Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations
- ★ Jennifer Cutler, Director of Counseling & Social-Emotional Learning
- ★ Kelley St. Coeur, Principal Ashland High School
- ★ David DiGirolamo, Principal Ashland Middle School
- ★ Claudia Bennett, Principal David A. Mindess School (Grades 3-5)
- ★ Peter Regan, Principal Henry E. Warren Elementary School (Grades K-2)
- ★ Janet Twomey, Social Studies (Grades 9-12)
- ★ Jennifer Temple, English Language Arts (Grades K-2)
- ★ Jessica Kamin, English Language Arts (Grades 3-5)
- ★ Ryan Van Wyhe, English Language Arts (Grades 6-8)
- ★ Aleisha Egan, English Language Arts (Grades 9-12)

Stakeholder Events

Focus Groups:

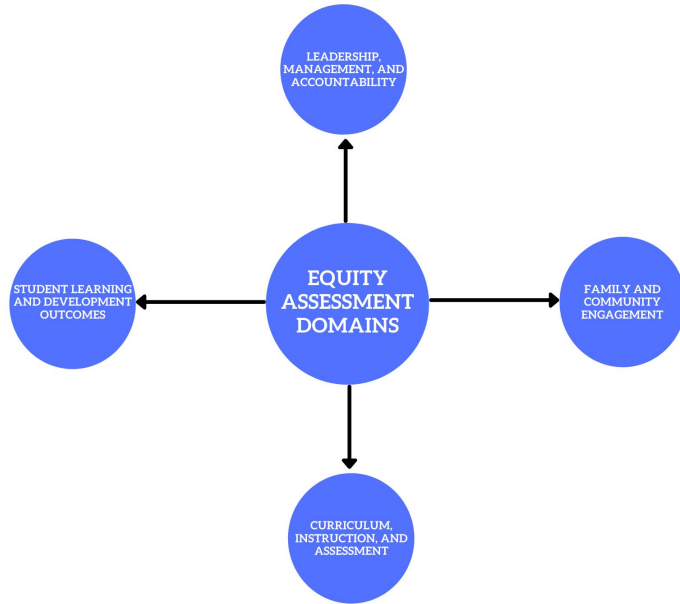
- ★ School Committee Members
- ★ Assistant Principals and Deans
- ★ District Level Leaders
- ★ Community Partners
- ★ Teachers: Elementary School
- ★ Teachers: Middle School
- ★ Teachers: High School
- ★ Special Education Administrators
- ★ Students: Grades 4-5
- ★ Students: Grades 6-8
- ★ Students: Grades 9-12
- ★ Families: Grades K-8
- ★ Families: Grades 9-12

Stakeholder Events

Q&A Sessions:

- ❖ Lori Freeman, Math Warren Elementary School (Grades K-2)
- ❖ Joanne Forrest, Science Warren Elementary School (Grades K-2)
- ❖ Kristin Fitzsimons, Math Mindess Elementary School (Grades 3-5)
- ❖ Lindsay Johnston, Science Mindess Elementary School (Grades 3-5)
- ❖ Karen Bernier, Math Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8)
- ❖ Kristen Scully, Science Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8)
- ❖ Michael Shennett, Math Ashland High School (Grades 9-12)
- ❖ Colleen Sherman, Science Ashland High School (Grades 9-12)

Equity Audit Domains



Domain 1:

Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Domain 2:

Leadership, Management, and Accountability

Domain 3:

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CI&A)

Domain 4:

Family and Community Engagement

Areas of focus:

- ❖ Factors that *support* equity
- ❖ Factors that *limit* equity
- ❖ Recommendations

- ❖ Factors that **Support** Equity and Excellence
- ❖ Factors that **Limit** Equity and Excellence
- ❖ Recommendations

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Factors that **SUPPORT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ APS has begun to honor its increasing student diversity by celebration of religious and cultural holidays observed by various student populations, the creation of diversity clubs at the middle and high school, and a ceremony in which countries of origin for all students were recognized at the high school.
- ❖ Clinical/social-emotional staffing:
 - 8 school psychologists in the district - 7 White, 1 Black female
 - 2 White female school adjustment counselors- grades 6-12
 - 13 school counselors in the district all identify as White - of the 13 only one is male

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

continued

Factors that **SUPPORT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ Safe and Supportive Schools Professional Development
- ❖ Established a Director of Social Emotional Learning
- ❖ Curricula investments that not only include materials but also professional development for staff
- ❖ Implementation of Devereux Student Strengths assessment K-5 and Developmental Relationships Survey 6-12 to monitor SEL data
- ❖ Based on DESE 21-22 data:
 - of the 6 students who dropped out, 0 (none) were Black, 1 Latinx, and 5 White
 - of the 30 students disciplined 1 was Black, 9 Latinx, and 18 White; however, 20 were male and 17 with disabilities

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Factors that **LIMIT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ English learners are often placed in classes in which they do not have the necessary support to succeed
- ❖ According to a Director, *“ELLs are presenting with trauma and challenges - none of our counselors speak another language.”*
- ❖ The AHS Handbook could be revised so as to explicitly encourage schools and staff to ensure that curriculum and instruction is inclusive, culturally responsive, and meets the needs of different learners.
- ❖ School handbooks: More explicitly acknowledging that particular student populations have unique challenges and that the school is committed to ensuring their success at the school can happen.
 - Ex. “The school community values differences and appreciates diversity.” to “The district and school leadership will cultivate cultures that foster inclusion, justice, and equity across schools so that students, regardless of background or situation, are able to thrive.”

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

continued

Factors that **LIMIT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ Staff and families see gaps in meeting the needs of diversity – the acceptance of racial slurs used by peers in school, not all staff or building leadership supporting PRIDE Day, diversity club staff volunteers left to newer staff
- ❖ Information about the high school course placement process is only available in English.
- ❖ The language within the high school course descriptions suggests tracking within the ELA courses. The word “challenge” is only used in the honors’ description.

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Recommendations

- ❖ The district would benefit from revisiting its middle school math placement processes.
- ❖ Revisit the district's middle school math grouping practices. Consider de-leveling middle school math, particularly beginning in 6th grade as students transition from elementary school.
- ❖ Develop a proactive and strategic approach to meeting the needs of their English language learner population.
- ❖ The district would benefit from employing a unified approach to creating classroom, school and district cultures in which all students felt supported, believed in and therefore included.

Domain 2: Leadership, Management, and Accountability

continued

Factors that **SUPPORT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ As students transition into the next grade-level building, administrators discuss all students, and counselors discuss specific student cases.
- ❖ The district is currently in the early stages of revisiting and updating the strategic plan. School committee member stated: *“We are starting the process to revisit the strategic plan, with equity goals in mind.”*
- ❖ School committee members and district level employees have attended professional learning sessions related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Domain 2: Leadership, Management, and Accountability

Factors that **LIMIT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ Although district leaders have discussed a new vision for equity across the district, this vision has not yet been clearly articulated or communicated to all stakeholders.
 - Staff, students, parents and community partners expressed a need for a more fully formed equity plan and parent groups hoped their participation in these focus groups was a step toward creating a strategic and cohesive diversity, equity and inclusion plan.
- ❖ The district's human resource webpage lacks clarity around hiring educators of color.
- ❖ The district's Employee Handbook is perhaps the area of greatest need and potential for growth as it pertains to the mission of the district. The district could outline and confirm their vision for equity in this handbook, which could provide guidance for the schools under Ashland jurisdiction.

Domain 2: Leadership, Management, and Accountability

Recommendations

- ❖ Update job descriptions to include anti-bias and gender-neutral language for all job postings.
- ❖ Create and define a metric of success so as to assess progress in diversifying the teacher candidate pool.
- ❖ APS should look into creating an equity statement to ensure including job applicants understand both Ashland's commitment to equity and how this commitment aligns with this institution's overall goals of being inclusive.
- ❖ The district should also examine the role of the course weighted ranking system itself at the high school in bringing about equitable outcomes for students.

Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Factors that **SUPPORT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ Curricula are aligned to state frameworks or Common Core Standards.
 - Elementary and middle school science courses follow the MA frameworks.
 - The elementary schools use Lucy Calkins Units of Study which are aligned with Common Core.
- ❖ AHS offers a variety of core academic courses at the honors and Advanced Placement levels.
- ❖ AHS offers a variety of electives: Mathematics of Investing, Web Design, Game Design, App Design, Robotics, and Makerspace Leadership.
- ❖ Elementary report cards contain both “content” standards and “practice” standards in mathematics. The elementary literacy report cards are standards aligned.
- ❖ The district is providing professional development to teachers in several areas including content-based learning, book studies, movie discussions, and DEI training.

Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

continued

Factors that **SUPPORT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ The 2022-2023 budget conveys a commitment to serving English learners. In spring 2022, the district hired a Director of English Learning.
- ❖ There seems to be a well-understood connection between the funding that is available to plan a budget and the needed expenditures for programs like special education.
- ❖ Elementary mathematics provides a yearly pacing calendar, as well as benchmark assessments and open-ended tasks. It is unclear to what extent classroom discourse, student agency, and eliciting student thinking is visible and prioritized.
- ❖ High school teachers are engaged in an antiracist book group, and have a running list of texts to consider when diversifying their curriculum.

Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Factors that **LIMIT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ The taught curriculum in schools is not yet culturally responsive to the community of students and families that are being served.
- ❖ Student and staff focus groups shared that the district is not meeting all student needs.
- ❖ District documents evidence little discussion of data as a means of reviewing policy and spurring student outcomes.
- ❖ Math placement from grade 5 to middle school utilizes the previous year's MCAS score as one of its criteria.
- ❖ The middle and high school report cards are not standards-based.

Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Recommendations

- ❖ Continue to diversify the mentor texts and themes used across grade levels, particularly the author's race and gender in the high school's texts.
- ❖ Revise the district's report cards. Design standards-based report cards for middle and high school students. Revise the elementary report cards so that Social Studies grading references student performance related to specific learning standards, including nonfiction literacy skills, instead of generic knowledge/skills.
- ❖ Expand and diversify the honors course offerings to Senior students.
- ❖ Provide targeted professional development around instructional supports for English learners.
- ❖ Investigate patterns of parental opting for in-district, versus out-of-district special education student placement.

Domain 4: Family and Community Engagement

Factors that **SUPPORT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ APS leaders formally collaborate with two social justice alliances in Ashland: Ashland Is United (AIU) and Ashland Residents for Equity and Action (AREA).
- ❖ The district has established a closer affiliation with the Ashland Public Library in which more culturally relevant books in different languages have been added to the catalog.
- ❖ The district has a Director of Counseling and Social Emotional Learning, who maintains a website focused on SEL for the APS community.
- ❖ APS has increased human resources to support the district's growing English learner population and their families, including the hire of a Director of English Learning.
- ❖ The Ashland Parent Information guide indicates that parents are encouraged to participate in partnership with Ashland schools via membership in several school/district-supporting organizations.

Domain 4: Family and Community Engagement

Factors that **LIMIT** Equity and Excellence

- ❖ Although the district has begun engaging with community groups and building a stronger relationship with the public library, there are currently no codified plans for family and community engagement.
- ❖ Student feedback is not formally used by the district. When matters arise, it is not common practice for the district to consult with students or include student voice in decisions.
- ❖ Focus group participants (parents and community members) recognized a lack of parental engagement. *How can the schools do a better job of engagement* was asked on more than one occasion.

Domain 4: Family and Community Engagement

Recommendations

- ❖ Increase translation services.
 - Announcements, auto calls, and text messages should be available in the languages of parents/guardians
 - Translation links on the calendar of events
 - All digital assets (policies and procedures) at the district level should be easily accessible to families who speak the languages reflected in Ashland schools

Questions?

Ashland Public Schools ~ Equity Audit 2022

Thank you!

L&P Educational Services

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