

2019-20
DVCEE Excellence Through Equity Quality Review
West Chester Area School District



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the invitation of Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent of the West Chester Area School District, a diverse and experienced external team of educators and specialists was convened on January 29-31, 2020 to complete a thorough analysis of the current status of educational equity in the district.

The Quality Review and identification of the visiting team was directed by Dr. Robert L. Jarvis, Director of DVCEE and the Penn Coalition for Educational Equity in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Consultants Arthur Mitchell and Dr. Michael J. Masko served as lead researchers, and Dayna Muniz served as the key point person for managing logistics in collaboration with the district. Participating external team members were selected from current DVCEE district and school administrators.

We highly commend the district for its long-standing commitment to educational equity as the foundation for excellence, and its on-going commitment to reflection and improvement. We hope that results of this study and this report will provide valuable insights and direction to the West Chester Area School District as they move forward with their strategic continuous improvement efforts in enhancing the academic and life outcomes for each and every young person they serve, and reducing disparities defined by race/ethnicity, gender, ability, socio-economic status, or first language.

We expect that the district leadership will use the outcomes of this process to reinforce and celebrate their extensive assets and strengths, build upon promising and effective practices where they exist, recognize and reflect deeply on their systemic barriers and challenges to equity, and ultimately establish priorities for future action that will most effectively address those barriers to building a system of excellence through equity that nurtures the academic and future life success of each and every one of their students.

The report of the visiting team is organized into two major sections:

SECTION A: DATA TRENDS, THEMES AND OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Including system-wide observations, performance data, needs, recommendations and resources in five areas that may serve to guide school district leaders as they plan to address issues of equity in a systemic approach. Key recommendations include developing constructive strategies for:

- Clearly identifying and tracking data that demonstrate the effects of equity- focused and strategic interventions on disaggregated subgroups' performance and outcomes over time. Strongly consider more robust and in-depth measurement of disproportionality.
- Developing a transparent dashboard for these measures that draws student demographic, local achievement, participation, course enrollment and discipline information from the student information system.
- Developing an equity-focused theory of change and logic model and revisit the WCASD Three-Year Comprehensive Plan: 2019-2022 to include strategies and action steps that identify, assess and address equitable outcomes for students.
- Continuing WCASD School Board support and development of equity related policies and practices.
- Integrating and elevating the role/position of Supervisor of Equity and its responsibilities into the school district organizational structure as well as into curriculum, instruction and school life.
- Reviewing and revitalizing the equity-based work of principals, the DELT and school-based equity teams.
- Continuing the district's commitment to hiring diverse staff that reflects the WCASD community.
- Ensuring that the K-12 curriculum reflects the cultures relevant to the school district's diverse population and all students' understandings of equity and social justice.
- Ensuring that all K-12 teachers plan and conduct lessons that demonstrate knowledge of students' interests and cultural heritage.
- Reviewing the current Beyond Diversity training in order to broaden and deepen its reach, impact, and sustainability as a model for change.
- Identifying and addressing current school and district practices which increase the likelihood of further marginalizing students of color and alienating their parents, and to partner with parents of color in educating the staff on marginalization and its effects.
- Ensuring students in the ELD program have equitable access to the core curriculum and programming.
- Building upon the relationship with Latinx families, the successes of the Padres

Latinos program, and enhancing the Spanish language hotlines at four district schools.

SECTION B: FOCUSED INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Including specific needs and recommendations for improvement in the context of the six focused inquiry questions that were developed and provided by a team of WCASD administrators and educators who represented their District Equity Leadership Team. Key recommendations include developing constructive strategies for:

- Developing a common language and a common understanding of what equity and student-centered holistic practices are. Communicating to all stakeholders a more inclusive definition of equity, stressing that equity is about inclusion, access, opening doors of opportunity and necessary support for each individual child and historically underachieving student groups.
- Ensuring teaching and learning that is culturally responsive, meaningful and engaging for all students.
- Identifying interrelated responsibility, accountability and action steps as they pertain to creating more student-centered instructional environments at each level of responsibility (administration, teachers, staff).
- Creating more direct avenues of communication between schools so that positive actions and successes can be shared, and where appropriate, implemented consistently.
- Providing more meaningful outreach and support to diverse parents/caregivers. Developing plans and resources that purposefully and explicitly engage and partner with historically marginalized families to support efforts in enhancing the academic and social development of their children.
- Ensuring that financial resources and transportation are not barriers to participation in extracurricular, after school and evening activities.
- Providing more intensive professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction and student engagement for all professional staff members with an increase in accountability through administration oversight.
- Providing targeted learning experiences to students regarding the meaning and impact of microaggressions, inappropriate comments, slurs, gestures, etc. with the goal of eliminating derogatory comments.
- Ensuring that support staff are included in more equity related professional development opportunities.
- Increasing consistency in teachers' communications of expectations for high levels of academic success for historically underachieving students at each academic level, especially in Career and College Prep (CCP) level courses.
- Ensuring that information for parents is disseminated by the district to all families in an equitable manner
- Explicitly addressing the systemic issues that are root causes for

- underrepresentation of students of color in higher level and gifted programming.
- Addressing issues of implicit bias so that increasing numbers of faculty and staff members shift away from a deficit mindset and build authentic relationships with students based on mutual trust and respect.
 - Ensuring proportional representation of all student groups in high-level courses and academic programs.
 - Enhancing de-tracking efforts and improve horizontal and vertical articulations across academic disciplines in order to have purposeful distinctions for each course. This is a systemic issue, as subtle ability grouping that occurs at the elementary level has an impact on class placement decisions at the middle school level, which later affect students' access to higher-level courses at the high school level.
 - Ensuring that students of color feel welcome and affirmed when participating in higher-level courses.
 - Creating a systemic practice of collaboration among building administration in order to capitalize on the strengths of building leaders and teachers who can share ideas and build upon promising practices. This can help to reduce or eliminate the inconsistencies that exist across buildings regarding class placement decisions and practices for ability grouping.
 - Exploring expanded student support services.
 - Defining the roles and expectations for the Equity Teams at all levels district-wide, and providing additional administrative support to the school-based equity teams.
 - Identifying improved pathways for understanding, fostering, and nurturing student voice and empowerment to ensure it is taking place in authentic ways at every level.
 - Establishing a Principal's Advisory Board at each secondary school for students to express their voice to building administration.
 - In order to provide meaningful and impactful professional development on equity, developing a consistent understanding of what "equity" means throughout the district, across all buildings and employee groups, as well as the community.
 - Developing and delivering professional learning on the district-developed definition of equity and that is targeted toward personal and professional learning goals for all staff members.
 - Providing access to continued professional development that ensures that the district's definition of equity is reflected in all aspects of system.
 - Developing a process to implement and support progress towards goals and expectations at the district and building levels.

The full report provides additional context, research findings and evidence for the above recommendations, as well as suggested action steps for each of the recommendations.