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Vancouver Public Schools

Equity Assessment

Date: May 6, 2021

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Vancouver Public Schools (VPS) enlisted The Valbrun Consulting Group (TVCG) and UPD Consulting (UPD) to facilitate an equity assessment. This review of existing policies, practices and structures is intended to help the district to eliminate barriers and provide equal educational opportunities to historically underserved and marginalized populations.

We acknowledge that, in initiating this process, VPS has demonstrated prioritization and awareness of the need to address matters of diversity, equity and inclusion and a willingness to acknowledge and name systemic inequities as a barrier to cultural change. Furthermore, VPS shows a commitment to developing a theory of action, analyzing systems of inequity, engaging in shared reflection and action planning, and using clear evidence and transparency to frame the implementation of next steps.

This equity assessment is framed using the Public Education Leadership (PELP) Coherence Framework and is organized to follow its key elements in addressing the challenges across all aspects of the district: culture, structures, systems, resources, and stakeholders. Our final recommendations center around scaling promising practices; developing a culture of equity, identifying equity goals, objectives, and a racial equity theory of change; adopting a more equitable funding formula, and planning for the known and unknown complexities of managing change as the district clarifies its vision for the future.

Key Findings

PELP Area 1: Culture

VPS reflects an awareness of the importance of cultural differences and a willingness to address inequities based on differences. However, there is a tendency to highlight commonalities across cultures that can mask important cultural differences in values, perceptions, and behaviors. The district needs to do more to support individual and organizational growth in adopting intercultural practices.

Develop a Culture of Equity

KEY ACTIONS:

- Adopt an equity lens with laser focus on opportunities for equitable student access and participation in high quality programming.
- Develop a shared meaning and understanding of equity, in theory and in practice, such that the equity framing influences all systems.
- Build capacity of district leadership and the community to better understand the equity imperative and the impacts of race, class, power, and privilege on marginalized student groups

PELP Area 2: Structure

The district collects and reports on several types of diversity related data, some of which are made available to the public. While VPS has proactively partnered with several outside groups to identify and recruit a more diverse staff, there is limited transparency around how the district capitalizes on its diversity through inclusive practices. As such, qualitative data are devalued, and the use of such data, especially for accountability, is inconsistent. Furthermore, VPS's workforce is not reflective of its student population, and there remains a lack of transparency around hiring and promotion practices to increase necessary representation.

Identify Equity Goals, Equity Objectives, and a Racial Equity Theory of Change

KEY ACTIONS:

- Identify the theory of change that explains the beliefs that will drive the strategy for equity in Vancouver Public Schools.
- Name equity leadership actions tied explicitly to the district's vision, mission, and values.
- Incorporate equity goals as the bedrock of the strategic plan.

PELP Area 3: Systems

VPS has a professional learning emphasis that is supportive of the work necessary for strong cultural identity formation, and its teaching and learning framework is particularly relevant for integrating culturally responsive practices into the development and evaluation of the VPS instructional core. The district has a wide range of academic and career-oriented opportunities at its schools. However, many professional learning opportunities are not grounded in an equity framework; there is no clear district-wide definition of equity, and the teaching and learning framework does not explicitly name specific cultural differences. In addition, there are significant disparities in groups of students receiving highly capable services, in enrollment at designated magnet schools, and in access to AP and IB programs, among others.

Build Internal Capacity

KEY ACTIONS:

- Engage in conversations and professional learning opportunities explicitly tied to building capacity related to race, class, and equity, utilize tools and protocols to develop equity in leadership practice so that all stakeholders can support equitable outcomes and have the tools to disrupt inequities.
- Develop a learning centered culture that understands and can confront practices that reproduce disparities in student outcomes across demographics.
- Develop a clear district-wide equity agenda for student success that can be articulated by all and interrupts inequitable practices with distinct structures and processes across the various systems.

PELP Area 4: Resources

There are no significant differences in school per pupil budgets related to student needs, and core and supplemental curricular materials are strong and support effective learning strategies. But budgets should more equitably meet the needs of students at the school level instead of districtwide uniformity, and supplemental school funding tends to be higher for schools with fewer low-income students. There is also need for the district to develop and apply criteria for the review and approval of supplemental materials produced by, and representative of, more diverse voices and experiences.

Adopt a more Equitable (vs. Equal) Funding Formula

KEY ACTIONS:

- Consider school finance reforms that provision additional resources in higher need settings to address student performance outcomes and reduce opportunities gaps for students of colors, students with disabilities, second-language learners, and students living in poverty.
- Align financial investments to ensure that high need students have equitable access to other resources which include a high-quality rigorous curricula, effective culturally responsive teaching, and safe and supportive culture-rich learning environments.
- Provide leaders with earned autonomies to consistently allocate and utilize resources that promote equity and access for all students.

PELP Area 5: Stakeholders

The district has demonstrated a commitment to listen to the wide range of individuals that make up a school community. However, district stakeholders perceive race-based advantages at VPS, families have varying levels of knowledge about how to access opportunities and resources, and there is a perceived inconsistency among stakeholders in VPS implementing trauma-informed practices, restorative justice, and racial incident protocols in the school setting. Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity from VPS leadership on its equity concerns to the larger community.

Plan for the known and unknown complexities of managing change as VPS clarifies its vision for the future

KEY ACTIONS:

- Ensure full and equitable participation in decision-making, action planning and next steps.
- Co-design, with district and school staff and community members/stakeholders, the equitable systems and structures to enact upon the theory of change.
- Identify and communicate identified opportunities, and plan for possible challenges to implementation.
- Commit to an equity progress reporting structure for progress monitoring and information sharing.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful for the guidance and support from the outgoing Superintendent, Steve Webb, and the commitment to bridge these efforts of incoming Superintendent, Dr. Jeff Snell.

We greatly appreciate the close collaboration of the district champions of this work, Dr. Mike Stromme, Deputy Superintendent, Mrs. Janell Ephraim, Chief Equity Officer, as well as members of the district leadership.

We would also like to thank the Members of the School Board, Co-Design Team, Equity Advisory Committee, Discipline and Equity Steering Committees, school leaders, students, instructional and non-instructional staff, and parents who provided us their feedback.

Many thanks to the staff who granted us access to data and the translators who supported focus groups. We would also like to express our gratitude to those that we did not get the opportunity to meet during our engagement, but whose voice laid the foundations for having these conversations by elevating the need for equity within Vancouver Public Schools.

UPD Consulting (UPD) and The Valbrun Consulting Group collaborated to prepare this report.

UPD Consulting is a minority-owned public sector management consulting firm with broad experience with large, urban school districts across the country in organizational change management, strategic and action planning, and implementation support. UPD has conducted several districtwide needs assessments that center antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The Valbrun Consulting Group is a woman-owned, minority enterprise, Educational Consulting firm that offers support in the areas of strategic planning, strategy management and organizational development, specifically to support school districts as they advance initiatives to address equity challenges, increase cross-cultural understanding, and support the accomplishment of goals to lead for equity, create equitable learning environments, mitigate opportunity gaps, and manage change for results that improve outcomes for underrepresented populations of students.

Introduction and Summary

Vancouver Public Schools (VPS) engaged the services of The Valbrun Consulting Group (TVCG) and UPD Consulting (UPD) to facilitate an equity assessment to closely examine and better understand the complex systems that inform student success. The findings of this report are informed by a large body of research,[1] although the data collection and analysis are primarily framed using the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework.

The Framework assists with achieving coherence by:

- Highlighting elements that can support or hinder effective execution of an equity strategy
- Recognizing the internal interdependencies among district elements
- Identifying forces in the environment necessary to implement key action steps for equity

Figure 1. PELP Framework
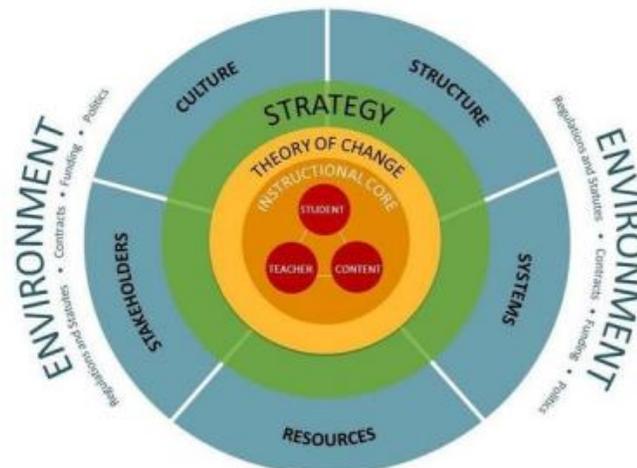
Source: Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), *PEL-010 Note on the PELP Coherence Framework*, revised 2011.

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[1] This assessment is additionally grounded in best practices and evidence-based research, including *Building Equity: Policies and Practices to Empower Learners* (Smith et al., 2017), which outlines a taxonomy that focuses on equitable practices and outcomes that support critical standards of equity in school districts. We also look to the work of Curtis (2009) in *Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching*, where the authors explore three core competencies of high-performing school systems: understanding what the work is—a deep understanding of the core business of facilitating learning, a vision of what that looks like, and an awareness of where the system is in relation to that vision; knowing how to do the work—a theory of action for improving instruction, a focus on key strategies, and effective alignment of resources; and building the individual and organizational "habits of mind" that foster continuous improvement. The work of Bryk and colleagues (2015*) in *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* also supports our findings to ensure that measurement strategies are change tied explicitly to a working theory of practice improvement.

At the center of the framework is the instructional core, which is defined as the relationship between teachers and students in the presence of content. Strategy is then the broad set of actions a district deliberately takes to provide capacity and support to the instructional core with the objective of raising student performance across all student subgroups. The Framework suggests that gaining coherence among actions at the district, school, and classroom levels will make the strategy more powerful and sustainable, resulting in more equitable learning environments.

This assessment addresses several critical questions to guide VPS in its equity journey including:

- To what extent are district leaders able to identify inequitable policies and practices?
- To what extent has the district examined the effect of systemic inequities over time?
- To what extent does the district know and understand where it is in the change process and how best to move across the *Continuum to Becoming an Anti-Racist, Multicultural Institution*?[2]

To unpack the critical questions above, we have analyzed the key commitments and assets across the five areas of the PELP framework:

Table 1. PELP Key Questions

PELP Area	Key Questions
Culture	- In what ways does the district support organizational culture that cultivates inclusion and diversity among staff, students, and families? - Does the district confront discrimination of all kinds and address it systematically and in a manner that does not uphold the comfort of the most privileged as a priority? - To what extent does the district develop relational trust building?
Structures	- To what extent are roles and responsibilities defined in order to emphasize equity and accountability? - To what extent are leadership teams diverse? - To what extent are the perspectives of those experiencing the problems informing decisions, especially about inequitable practices? - To what extent is power shared?

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[2] Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization. Adapted from original concept by Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman, and further developed by Andrea Avazian and Ronice Branding; further adapted by Melia LaCour, PSESD. https://philanos.org/resources/Documents/Conference%202020/Pre-Read%20PDFs/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf

PELP Area	Key Questions
Systems	- Are systems for functions such as career development and promotion, compensation, student assignment, resource allocation, organizational learning, and measurement and accountability performed with a racial equity lens? - To what extent does the organization invest in the cultural competence of people and teams and their ability to use a racial equity lens on the design and redesign of systems? - Are the people and teams who perform these functions diverse?
Resources	- Does the district include intentional planning for the equitable distribution of resources in all forms? - Are resources allocated to bring to life instructional designs that support student outcomes through culturally responsive pedagogy? - How are partnerships formed and external funding utilized to support the equity?
Stakeholders	- Does the organization include plans to ensure that stakeholders from marginalized groups have a voice in decision-making and are key participants and collaborators in shaping the organizational strategy? - To what extent are the voices and perspectives of those situated farthest from the opportunity involved in the problem-solving process? - Does the district account for community engagement and partnerships that are an active representation of equity concerns and the valuing of diversity within the community?

Ultimately, we hope the findings and recommendations from the VPS equity assessment will inform the development of an equity plan and defined implementation priorities aligned to the district's commitment to ensuring equity and identifying and eliminating barriers to inclusion.

Please note: While this report highlights select pieces of the quantitative analysis, the full set of visualizations can be found in the supplemental report. The supplemental report additionally highlights quotes from a variety of focus group participants.

Methodology

Data Analysis

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data provided the information needed to begin to understand the culture, structures, systems, resources, and stakeholders that relate to and lead to equitable and inequitable practices and outcomes at VPS.

VPS staff and stakeholders provided our team with data related to the following categories: student demographics, workforce composition, family and community engagement, student engagement, student achievement, professional learning, funding and resource allocation, curriculum, and culture and climate. To the extent possible, the TVCG/UPD team disaggregated student-related data by race and ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and English language proficiency, and staff-related data by race and ethnicity and gender. To protect the identity of students, data was suppressed (e.g., withheld) when there were fewer than 10 individuals represented in the group. Our team conducted analysis to understand whether there were differences across schools and subgroups of students and staff. To gain additional context, we added questions to the annual Culture and Climate Surveys.[3] For student and parent surveys, added questions focused on creating identity-safe learning environments, investing in mental health and restorative practices, and experiencing defined culture, clear communication, and co-created expectations. For staff, questions focused on communication, respect, and perceived advantages.

The quantitative data were complemented by the qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, and review of key documents as requested. The qualitative data provided important information about the context of VPS and the experiences that might not be reflected in the quantitative data.

Data and initial insights were shared with the Co-Design Team, a group of Vancouver Public School staff members, and the Equity Advisory Committee, a group of community members, who provided insights, direction, and feedback throughout the assessment process.

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Listening Sessions

Interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions were conducted with district leadership, instructional staff, non-instructional staff, school leaders, parents, students, and other key stakeholder groups. Beyond asking participants about their experience within the VPS community, these sessions were designed to provide a safe space to have conversations about antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. In total, we spoke with 239 individuals.

Our protocol across stakeholder groups was consistent among adult participants, while youth participant questions varied slightly to facilitate age-appropriate discussions. When needed, the

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[3] The number of responses for the Culture and Climate Survey across stakeholders is: Students = 3,358, Parents = 6,115, Staff (VEA, JPC, Noncertificated) = 1,484, Staff (VEA) = 825, Staff (JPC) = 200 Staff (Noncertificated) = 459

district provided interpreters to accommodate for language and technology needs. All sessions were also conducted with confidentiality and anonymity for participants.

Examples of questions asked to stakeholders are listed below:

- How, if at all, does your school define equity?
- How does your school district work toward equity?
- What beliefs or practices must VPS change to be more equitable?

Our focus group process involved transcript-style note taking. In our analysis, we not only identified where most participants expressed similar experiences and ideas, but also highlighted outliers to provide richer context to our ultimate findings and recommendations. Where appropriate, we also pulled out anonymized, direct quotations from participants so that the voice of the stakeholders can be elevated and heard.

Table 2. Focus Group and Interview Participation

Role Category	Number of Sessions	Number of Participants
School Board/District Leadership	15	46
Instructional/Non-Instructional Staff	18	61
School Leaders	7	46
Students	6	14
Parents	27	72

Findings

Our findings are organized by the five PELP areas: culture, structure, systems, resources, and stakeholders. For each area we have included promising practices (e.g., current actions that should be continued and expanded to build a more equitable VPS) and areas of improvement (e.g., current actions that should be revisited and modified to build a more equitable VPS).

PELP Area 1: Culture

Key Questions: In what ways does the district support organizational culture that cultivates inclusion and diversity among staff, students, and families? Does the district confront discrimination of all kinds and address it systematically and in a manner that does not uphold the comfort of the most privileged as a priority? To what extent does the district develop relational trust building?

PROMISING PRACTICES

Based on themes from the focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and the data from the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)[4], the culture at VPS reflects an awareness of the importance of cultural differences and a willingness to address inequities based on differences. To have so many VPS stakeholders emphasizing the importance of becoming a multi-cultural and anti-racist organization is a promising first step in ensuring the district continues to move through the *Continuum of Becoming an Anti-Racist Multi-Cultural Organization*.[5] Relatedly, it is significant that the cohorts that participated in taking the IDI, scored lower in Minimization (57 percent vs. 68 percent) and higher in Acceptance (29.4 percent vs. 13.5 percent) and Adaptation (8.4 percent vs 2.4 percent) than the national average.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- **The IDI Score indicates that the group's primary orientation toward cultural differences is within Minimization, reflecting a tendency to highlight commonalities across cultures that can mask important cultural differences in values, perceptions, and behaviors.** Although the majority of participant's scores fall within the Minimization orientation and reflects an organizational culture that may over-emphasize similarities and universal values relative to important cultural differences, it is also important to highlight that many leaders in VPS operate from an Acceptance and Adaptation mindset

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[4] The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a psychometric tool or instrument developed by Milton Bennet and Mitchell Hammer to describe the way we make sense of cultural commonalities and differences. Each "primary orientation" on the Intercultural Development Continuum describes a mindset or worldview associated with commonalities and differences. Bennet and Hammer bucket the mindsets into two categories: a Monocultural Mindset and an Intercultural or Global Mindset. When individuals within an organization take the IDI and receive their results, they gain insight into their own values and attitudes towards cultural differences and can begin a journey to developing greater intercultural competence using the Intercultural Development Plan (IDP).
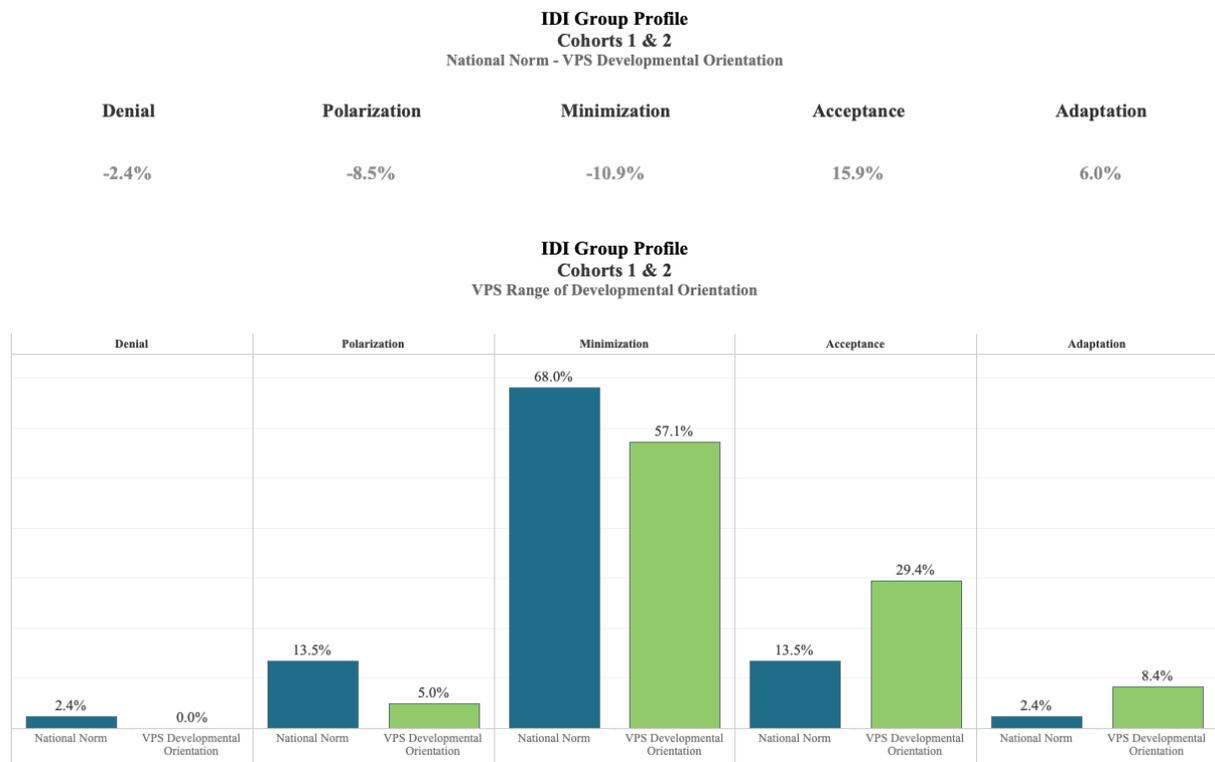
[5] *Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization*. Adapted from original concept by Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman, and further developed by Andrea Avazian and Ronice Branding; further adapted by Melia LaCour, PSESD. https://philanos.org/resources/Documents/Conference%202020/Pre-Read%20PDFs/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf

that can be leveraged in creating systemic change in the district. Taking the assessment itself, no matter where one falls on the continuum, can be a valuable learning opportunity for reflecting on one's level of cultural competency, but leaders with higher levels of cultural competency are vital change-agents that can help the district make policy decisions that are informed by an intercultural mindset.

- **The district must support the growth of both individuals and the organization to adopt intercultural practices that advance to an adaptation orientation and beyond through conscious inclusion.** This effort includes promoting internal learning, supporting services to students and families, and creating and supporting systems of accountability to affect social change both internally and externally.[6] In addition, the district must work to build a culture that recognizes commonalities and embraces differences, welcoming and valuing differences with an accepting and open stance, with respect and a willingness to adapt to a wide array of cultural differences.

Figure 2. IDI Group Profile Cohorts 1&2

IDI Group Profile
Cohorts 1 & 2
National Norm - VPS Developmental Orientation

Denial	Polarization	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation
-2.4%	-8.5%	-10.9%	15.9%	6.0%

IDI Group Profile
Cohorts 1 & 2
VPS Range of Developmental Orientation

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[6] This recommendation is built off of the Self, Relationships and Systems framing, which is loosely based on the work of Margaret Wheatley and Tim Dalmau (1983) who argue that an organization is made up by the processes of how work gets done, the relationships that make up those processes and how the individuals of an organization think about themselves and each other.
https://emss.mpls.k12.mn.us/uploads/wheatley_s_circles.pdf

PELP Area 2: Structure

Key Questions: To what extent are roles and responsibilities defined in order to emphasize equity and accountability? To what extent are leadership teams diverse? To what extent are the perspectives of those experiencing the problems informing decisions, especially about inequitable practices? To what extent is power shared?

PROMISING PRACTICES

Data Use: VPS espouses a strong desire to ensure that its actions, particularly around equity-focused work, are informed by data. The district collects and reports on several types of data including items outlined in its strategic plan, diversity of its workforce, and student demographics. Some information is made publicly available.[7]

Workforce: General aspirations around the VPS workforce are to hire the best employees to support the VPS mission: providing an innovative learning environment that engages and empowers each student to develop the knowledge and essential skills to become a competent, responsible and compassionate citizen. The district's understanding of the need for a diverse workforce is reflected in its affirmative action goals and the discussions about the need for a more diverse workforce that reflects the student body. This sentiment was also reflected across several staff who participated in interviews and focus groups throughout the equity assessment process. Several staff are optimistic about the potential to systematically improve diversification efforts, particularly given perceived support from the new superintendent.

VPS has partnered with organizations including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB)'s Grow Your Own Initiative[8], and Educational Service District 112 (ESD 112)'s Workforce Diversification Group[9] to identify and pursue opportunities to recruit a more diverse staff. Many of the current posted job descriptions seek candidates with the ability to effectively communicate with, appreciate, and/or work with individuals, students, and/or communities from diverse (racially, socioeconomically, linguistically) backgrounds. Interview questions include checks for indicators including passion for kids, fairness, mutual respect, diversity, justice, culturally responsive, lifelong learner. Compensation data indicates that most staff are paid at levels in the salary range for their roles and all groups of staff receive the same cost of living adjustments (COLA).

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Data Use
- **Limited transparency and democratization of data exists.** Promoting and working toward equity requires transparency and accountability. VPS is often uncomfortable sharing data that demonstrates a need for improvement, as expressed by several

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[7] https://vansd.org/wpdm-package/design-ii-chapter-2-goal-area-progress-reports/?wpdmdl=19187&ind=1593637101830

[8] https://www.pesb.wa.gov/innovation-policy/grow-your-own/

[9] https://www.esd112.org/news/esd-u-works-toward-greater-educator-workforce-diversification-in-wa/

stakeholders that we heard from in the focus groups. The district does publish performance data[10] by school which allows the public insight to learning milestones, demographics, and assessment performance, but climate survey data are not made publicly available. Developing a robust data governance structure is essential for using data ethically and equitably. Data governance conversations can also help the district's collection, definition, and management of data. But developing these practices must intentionally bring a diverse set of voices to the table, including those most impact by a data-related decision. In addition, ensuring that participants have access to results of data grants the VPS community the opportunity to know if and how their input is being used. It also supports efforts for accountability around the work that the district internally and externally prioritizes.

- **Quantitative data are valued more than qualitative data, and intersections in disaggregated quantitative data are not consistently used.** Though the district emphasizes the importance of data in its work, the data referenced are often quantitative data. To ensure that the district is understanding and valuing the full breadth of data that must be used for decision-making, qualitative data are and will continue to be a critical source of information to provide the rich narratives behind inequities that quantitative data reveals. Given the demographics of the district and the data that are collected, not all experiences will be accurately reflected in the quantitative data, particularly the data that are made publicly available, due to the need to protect individuals' privacy. There are also limitations to quantitative data, such as small sample sizes that may remove the breadth of lived experiences. For example, though the district may monitor attendance data, the data are across the entire district and not disaggregated based on characteristics such as socioeconomic status, language, or race. Disaggregating data and using qualitative data will provide the district with additional information to understand the unique needs of its community's various populations.

- **The owners and use of data are not well defined.** Internally, data are collected but it is not always clear which information is used and if and how it is used to make decisions that support equitable outcomes and experiences for members of the VPS community. As we heard from a teacher, "[there was] no requirement that we did not do anything with it, no direction provided. (Look at that, what do you think). Now there is a state requirement for progress in reduction in discrepancy. [We] have had a huge reduction in the amount of discipline. There is some accountability now, but in the past, it was more about it being interesting." While some data has a clear pathway (e.g., collected, analyzed, reported, used to make adjustments), a more robust data governance structure can provide clarity around the accountability of data. Identifying data owners and stewards, and defining data standards for system interoperability are all part of an effective data governance structure. Our assessment also reveals opportunities for individuals involved in the collection and analysis of data to reflect on their own identities and biases that they bring to the work.

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[10] https://vansd.org/performance-data/

"There is an abundance of data being collected, but there is no system in place to formulate the data in a consumable way. Things get overlooked and go unaddressed."

Vancouver Public Schools Teacher

Workforce

- **Concrete goals and accountability regarding diversifying the VPS workforce must strengthen.** The district reviews a range of data points as part of its affirmative action plan. The plan includes three goals that are explicitly related to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce that mirrors student gender and race/ethnicity, increasing minority workforce, and increasing the female workforce among custodians. These data are shared with some of the administrators involved in hiring, but hiring teams are not held accountable to anyone outside of Human Resources. While the plan outlines progress points, staff noted that there is not a cohesive and broadly understood strategy for reaching the goals and ensuring accountability. For example, while VPS has taken steps to recruit staff from outside of the Vancouver and Washington areas to increase diversity, to ensure the efficacy of these external recruitment efforts, the district will need to assess the prospect pools in its recruitment areas (e.g., Which states have diverse recent graduate and professional populations that are needed in Vancouver?) and determine whether the states from which it is recruiting have the people they are seeking.

- **The VPS workforce is not reflective of the VPS student population and current recruitment efforts require more attention.** 85 percent of all VPS staff are White non-Hispanic individuals. While the zip codes that comprise the district are 76 percent White non-Hispanic, only 56 percent of the VPS student body is White. Roles that had disproportionately higher numbers (e.g.., more than 15 percent of staff of color) include security (21.7 percent), Pro-Tech (20 percent), and transportation mechanics (18 percent). Interview and focus group participants consistently expressed a need for greater diversification among staff.[11] Increasing the diversity of current staff will increase capacity to meet the needs of a diverse student population (e.g., provide language services) and allow VPS students to have an educational experience where they learn from and with a diverse group of adult staff. The district hopes to improve its efforts to develop talent and recruit VPS graduates. This is evident in programs such as the Careers in Education program of choice;[12] however, VPS students of color currently do not have consistent opportunities to see themselves reflected on the VPS staff, which poses a challenge to seeding long-term efforts to have a diverse workforce. Anticipated

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[11] 75 percent of the VPS workforce is female. Women are twice as likely as men to be elementary teachers (21.06 percent of women and 10.55 percent of men) and men are twice as likely as women to be secondary teachers (15.86 percent of women and 31.25 percent of men). Men are more likely than women to be employed in custodial (13x), maintenance (33x), secondary teacher (2x), security (8.5x), technology assistant (3x), secondary associate principal (3.8x), elementary principal (3.6x) roles.
[12] https://vansd.org/choices/careers-in-education/

updates to HR data systems present an opportunity to collect and analyze data about the number of VPS graduates who become staff members.

● **Transparency around hiring and promotion practices for staff must increase.** While positions are posted on the website, a common theme among interviewed staff was the tendency for hiring through known networks and hiring for fit perpetuates the challenges of having a diverse workforce. In some cases, seniority is weighed more heavily than qualifications for a role. This is also a perceived impediment to hiring for staff of diverse backgrounds and who meet the needs of students as heard in the focus groups (e.g., tenured staff who are not bilingual may be hired for roles that have a bilingual qualification). Teacher mentors are a helpful resource for staff development, but school building leaders play a large role in the promotion and sponsorship of staff. Additionally, there is not a clear natural and known ladder for several positions. Without consistent mentoring and sponsorship across and within schools and departments, there will continue to be opportunities for staff to experience and perceive inequities in the hiring and promotion processes.

Figure 3. Hispanic Representation Among VPS Principals/Associate Principals
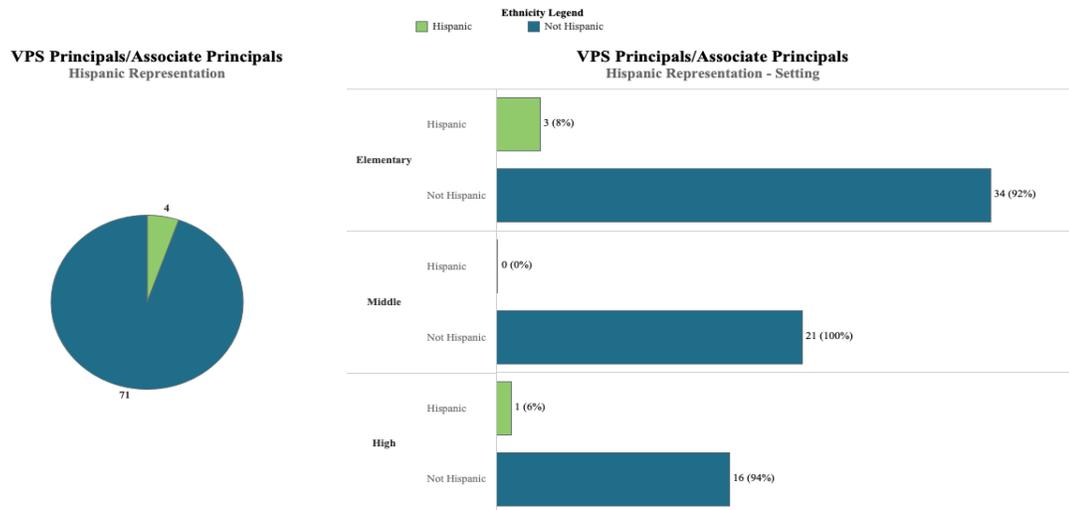
● **While nearly all employees are paid within the designated salary bands for their roles, the group with the highest proportion of people of color had the lowest overall percentage wage increase between 2015 and 2018.** Pro-Tech staff comprise 5.85 percent of the VPS workforce. They are the group with the highest proportion of staff of

color (20 percent), do not have a union, and received the lowest overall percentage wage increase between 2015-2016 through 2017-2018 school years.[13]

- **VPS must further examine reasons that staff leave the district**. 70 percent of VPS staff have been employed by the district for at least five years. The district conducts exit surveys for most staff when they leave, and data is disaggregated by race, role, and reason for exit. Of staff who indicated primary reasons for leaving in the 2019-2020 school year, the stated reasons included family/personal reasons, job stress/burnout, school or department climate, and management or supervision.[14] If it is not already a practice, VPS should examine exit survey data in companion with climate survey data and qualitative feedback to gain additional insights regarding reasons for exit trends over time. In addition to exit survey data, there is a need to gather candid perspectives more intentionally from remaining and exiting staff about why people leave. Interviews and focus groups with current staff highlighted the lack of a welcoming environment for staff who are not from Vancouver and the tendency for staff of color to feel the need to leave VPS to get promoted. In examining the environment, VPS could consider climate survey insights such as the 2019-2020 survey's highlighting that the 20 percent of Hispanic non-certified building staff agreed that "My school respects different aspects of my identity," compared to all other racial groups, who range in agreement from 50 percent to 100 percent.[15] If VPS aims to recruit a more diverse workforce, it must consider and address these perspectives to retain the diverse workforce.

"We work in a system that's traditional female, White, and upper class. They believe often that students of color do not value education. I am half [ethnicity]. When I worked at [school] it was very diverse and high poverty. The person who is teaching may not be representative of the student body…. The baby step we need to use to get the student to feel like they are welcome here. We have a system of checking boxes and bias."

Vancouver Public Schools Teacher

PELP Area 3: Systems

Key Questions: Are systems for functions such as career development and promotion, compensation, student assignment, resource allocation, organizational learning, and measurement and accountability performed with a racial equity lens? To what extent does the organization invest in people and teams' cultural competence and their ability to use a racial equity lens on the design and redesign of systems? Are the people and teams who perform these functions diverse?

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[13] VPS Frequently Asked Questions about Contract Negotiations. https://vansd.org/frequently-asked-questions-about-contract-negotiations/
[14] Affirmative Action Report 2019-2020.
[15] 2020-2021 Staff Climate Survey

PROMISING PRACTICES

Professional Learning: Although many of the equity-focused professional development initiatives in the district are relatively new, there are several components that will serve VPS in its journey to becoming a more equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist organization. Promising practices of note are the emphasis on the importance of self-reflection, speaking from one's own cultural experience as foundational for cultural identity formation, having difficult conversations with diverse stakeholders, and introducing courageous conversations around topics like White fragility, systemic racism, and unconscious bias (among many others) and books such as *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*.

Instructional Practices: VPS's adoption of the University of Washington's Instructional Framework and Teacher Evaluation Rubric is commendable for investing in their instructional core through cutting edge, evidence-based resources. The "5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning" framework will be foundational for the district's work on integrating a focus on equity into their instructional practices. The recent additions and revisions of version 4.5 of the "5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning" framework is particularly relevant for integrating culturally responsive practices into the development and evaluation of the VPS instructional core. The addition of "student identities and experiences" in the guiding question on student engagement is not only relevant for "reducing the impact of stereotype threats," as the framework says, but also for scaffolding the learning of diverse students in culturally responsive and relevant ways. While this assessment was not able to review instructional practices in person due to COVID-19, it is clear from our review that there is an emphasis on student voice, classroom environment, and culture within these frameworks.[16] It is especially relevant for future initiatives to cultivate culturally responsive educators that are attuned to the specific cultural differences that make up their respective classrooms across the district.

Student Engagement: VPS' stated mission is "Excellence in Education: In partnership with home and community, Vancouver Public Schools provides an innovative learning environment that engages and empowers each student to develop knowledge and essential skills to become a competent, responsible, and compassionate citizen." VPS has a wide range of academic and career-oriented opportunities at its schools. Goals in recent strategic plans have included efforts to expand these opportunities to broader ranges of students. Though a small sample, 14 students participated in interviews and focus groups as part of this assessment. Several students expressed the belief that their teachers were supportive, and some expressed that students have opportunities to share their opinions. The most consistent collection of data on student experience is the annual climate survey.[17] Additional student engagement data on topics

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[16] In the review of instructional practices at VPS, the equity review team was provided access to the CEL 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning teacher evaluation tool and to 2018-2019 teacher effectiveness ratings, by district and school, on the Focused and Comprehensive evaluations conducted by evaluators. Initially, the plan was for the equity review team members to be on-site engaging in classroom walkthroughs with district leadership. This plan proved to not be prudent because of issues associated with the pandemic.

[17] 3,358 students completed the 2020-2021 survey in part. 2,254 students completed the 2020-2021 survey in full.

including enrollment, attendance, assessments, and graduation data is available in the supplemental report.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Professional Learning

- **Many learning modules focused on important concepts, like culturally responsive education and anti-racist pedagogy, without grounding them in a larger equity framework or connecting them to a broader cultural competency model**. The challenge of introducing complex and difficult topics in isolation from a larger framework is that participants in various places in their cultural competency journey, and at varying levels of racial identity formation, will experience the learnings in divergent ways ranging from defensiveness, confusion, and resistance to being engaged, challenged, and motivated to action.
- **A district-wide definition of equity and clearer direction on actionable ways to put equity concepts into practice in their classrooms is necessary.** And similarly, there is a need to make clearer connections between equity and other core concepts in the learning modules.
- **Beyond conceptual work, there are opportunities to experiment with culturally relevant and culturally responsive best-practices with an inclusive and constructive community of practice.** At the same time, we recognize that VPS is at an early stage of their equity journey, so it is natural that the professional development offered so far is largely focused on introducing and defining key terms, concept building from subject matter experts (e.g.., Dr. Yemi Stembridge and Dr. Zaretta Hammond's work) and creating common language in the district.

Instructional Practice

- **Although the 4.0 and 4.5 versions of the "5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning" framework includes the goals of equity, inclusion and culturally responsive practices, the framework does not explicitly name specific cultural differences or the power dynamics of race, gender or socio-economic differences that impact teaching and learning.** The advantage of using rubrics that include the role of cultural differences at a high, or general level is that districts, schools, and educators are given a broad framework that allows them to integrate the respective cultural identities that shape their cultural context. The challenge, however, is that the power dynamics or specific cultural differences that shape student engagement can get lost in the micro-dynamics that make up the relational element of the student-teacher-classroom dynamic.
- **Focused and Comprehensive teacher evaluations conducted by evaluators must include a review of equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive instructional elements.** Specific indicators of teacher equity consciousness must also align to the district expectations and professional development provided to teachers by the district.
- **The district must develop a culture where all educators work on being culturally self-aware and understand how that shapes the way they show up in classrooms.** Teachers should also have deeper value and respect for the different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating and learning, different traditions and values

represented in their students and families. Developing greater fluency with strategies for effectively teaching across lines of difference and racial awareness will allow teachers to design relevant educational experiences for students, adapt curricular as needed, and shape the dynamics of cultural interactions and relationships within the classroom environment.

Student Engagement

- **Students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities are disproportionately less represented in highly capable services.** Only 24 percent of students receiving highly capable services are students of color.[18] However, nearly 45 percent of all VPS students are students of color. This could suggest a bias in talent identification and inequitable access to services.

- **Designated magnet schools have higher rates of retaining students than traditional schools but students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities are disproportionately less represented in their enrollment.** Overall, magnet schools have had the highest rates (at least 82 percent) of consecutive enrollment (students who are enrolled for at least two consecutive years) over the last three years. Consecutive enrollment for Black students at traditional schools is 67 percent while it is 100 percent at magnet schools. For Hispanic students, it is 75 percent at traditional schools and 89 percent at magnet schools. The most comparable consecutive enrollment rates are for White students (79 percent at traditional and 87 percent at magnets) and Asian students (84 percent at traditional and 87 percent at magnets).

- **There is an inverse relationship between the number of AP/IB courses available at traditional high schools and the schools' enrollment of students of color, low-income students, and English Language Learner (ELL) students.** At the two schools with more than 20 AP/IB courses offered (Columbia River and Skyview), the percentage of White students enrolled is higher than the district's total percentage of White students enrolled.[19] Fort Vancouver and Hudson's Bay, the two schools with the highest Hispanic, Black, and Pacific Islander populations, only offer 11 AP/IB courses each.[20]

- **Students have different views on the level of support and respect provided by their learning environment.** Students who participated in focus groups generally expressed positive feelings about their schools' and teachers' ability to make students feel welcome and have equal opportunity within the school. However, in the 2018-2019 school year, 62 percent of Black high schoolers agree (45 percent) or strongly agree (17 percent) that their school is an encouraging and supporting place to learn whereas the rate is 70 percent and above for other groups. Black high schoolers also had the lowest rates of agreement that the feedback they receive from their teachers helps them learn and that it is easy for them to get extra help with schoolwork when they need it. Meanwhile Asian students tend to have the highest agreement in response to these

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[18] https://vansd.org/highly-capable-services/

[19] The Districtwide percentage of White students is 54 percent (Source = Washington OSPI District Diversity Report). The difference between districtwide and school-wide White student enrollment for Columbia River and Skyview are 17% and 12% respectively.

[20] Magnet schools that serve students in grades 9-12 offer 7-9 AP/IB courses and the alternative high school offers no AP/IB courses in the 2020-2021 school year.

statements. In the 2020-2021 school year, less than 50 percent of students who identify as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander agree with the statement, "School staff members respect different aspects of my identity." Additionally, students in focus groups noted LGBTQIA+ students' disparate experiences with staff—some students felt accepted while others lacked support from staff.

- **Disparities in discipline rates for students with disabilities, African American, Native American and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students exist.** An audit by the Office of the Attorney General and UCLA highlighted that students with disabilities, African American, Native American and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students had disproportionately high rates of discipline and subsequent days of lost instruction. The district has begun to take action on the recommendations resulting from that audit. Discipline was a common area of inequity raised by staff who participated in focus groups and interviews. There is not significant evidence of buy-in from school leadership in the practices recommended nor the fundamental premises that inform their work. Inclusion throughout the school can also be achieved through more outreach to student organizations, break down cliques, and openly discuss acceptance for student identities by adults.
- **With the exception of Asian students, students of color have lower attendance rates than White students. The difference in attendance rates between middle and high school is largest for Hispanic and Pacific Islander students.** Staff indicated that the district has made progress on improving student attendance rates. There was a drop in the percent of students with at least a 90 percent attendance rate for all subgroups at the high school level (compared to middle school attendance rates), the most for groups with lower ELA and Math achievement as well lower access to deeper learning opportunities/highly capable services.

Figure 4. Student Attendance Rates by Race/Ethnicity
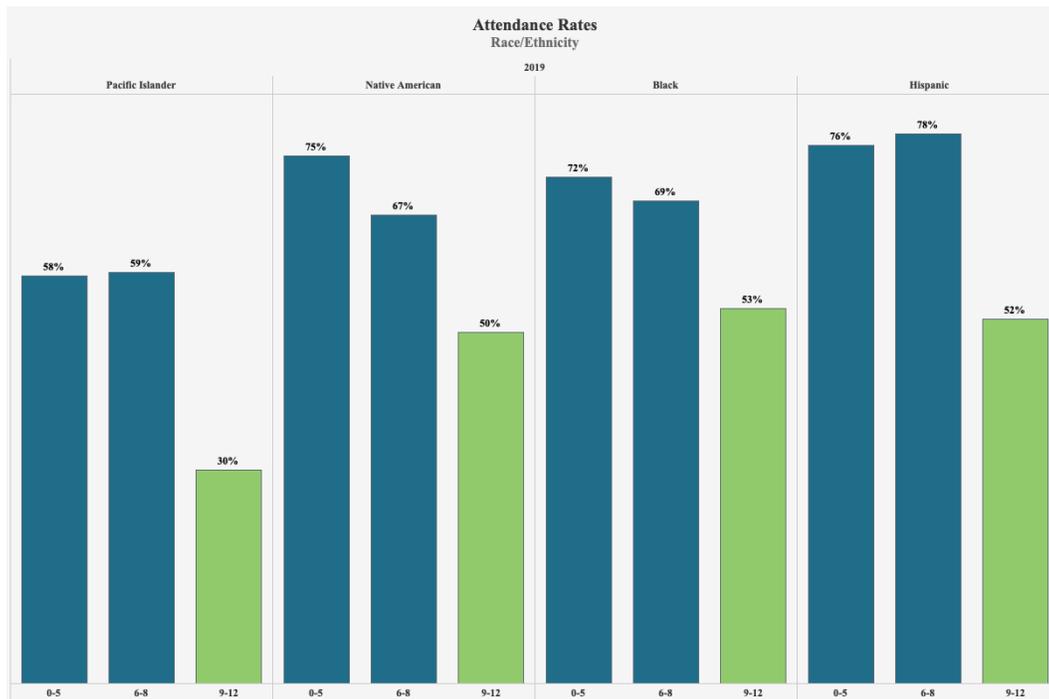
- **Graduation rates and attendance rates are not consistent across racial and ethnic groups.** Asian, Black, and multiracial students have had graduation rates of at least 90 percent. Examining the causes for lower attendance rates yet high graduation rates may support the district's ability to ensure that the learning environment, resources, and supports enable all graduating VPS students to benefit from an improved and positive VPS experience.

> ## "We deplete our resources on boutique schools when really we should be making sure every student is getting a rich experience."
> *Vancouver Public Schools District Leader*

PELP Area 4: Resources

Key Questions: Does the district include intentional planning for the equitable distribution of resources in all forms? Are resources allocated to bring to life instructional design that support student outcomes through culturally responsive pedagogy? How are partnerships formed and external funding utilized to support the equity?

PROMISING PRACTICES

Fiscal Analysis: In terms of the fiscal distribution, the analysis did not reveal significant differences in school's annual per pupil budgets, related to student needs. Some of the largest annual per pupil budget amounts were found at schools with smaller total student enrollments and varying student demographic profiles, particularly percentages of low-income students.

Curriculum: A review of the core and supplemental ELA and math curricular materials revealed a standard-based approach to skill development in these areas. The content and illustrations within the textbooks reflect gender and racial diversity and some diversity of thought and perspective. (to be delete... a fair level of diversity.) The material supports effective learning strategies, including cooperative learning, and allows for teachers to differentiate to meet learning needs of students. The district offers a variety of supplemental resources in ELA, which might allow for teacher flexibility and student choice based on interest.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Fiscal Analysis

- **There is a need for consideration beyond uniform school budgets.** Utilizing best practices research as well as VPS staff recommendations to design school budgets that more equitably meet the needs of students at the school level instead of districtwide

uniformity is a systemic change that has the potential to substantively enrich the learning experiences for all VPS students.

- **Supplemental school funding tends to be higher for schools with fewer low-income students.** The range of PTA revenues collected for 2019-20 spanned from $0 at several schools to a maximum total of $11,250. The fiscal distribution analysis revealed that the largest supplemental (PTA) revenues were found year over year at schools with the smallest percentages of low-income students. Chinook and Franklin were outliers for 1) some of the largest total PTA revenues collected in 2019-20, 2) lowest percentages of low-income student enrollment for traditional elementary schools, and 3) some of the lowest annual per pupil funding from the district. This finding highlights an opportunity to further evaluate the role and presence of supplemental school funding, and how supplemental funding sources can be utilized to achieve more equitable learning experiences for all VPS students.

- **Greater use of resource monitoring systems for equitable spending with vendors is possible pending state legislation changes.** Tracking systems do not exist for vendors by racial representation (e.g., minority-owned and women-owned business enterprise (MWBE) status). If state legislation is changed to allow collection of MBE vendor information, there is an opportunity for VPS to examine the diversity of its vendors based on factors other than lowest bid.

- **Deferred maintenance amounts are analyzed at the district-level instead of school-level making it difficult to analyze if funds are being spend equitably.** Deferred facilities maintenance is not currently tracked at the school-level. Several schools recently underwent facilities improvements. COVID has highlighted the need for quality school buildings that offer a safe learning environment for all students. Maintaining a school-level database for tracking deferred maintenance costs can enable VPS to provide more safe, comfortable, and equitable learning experiences for all its students.

Curriculum

- **Supplemental resources can be curated to bring to life instructional design that is supportive of culturally responsive practices.** Recognizing that state departments of education and school boards are key decision-makers and influencers on public school curriculum, and that the review and selection of core materials at the local, district and school levels is a closed process, we see an opportunity here. These resources should support age-appropriate development of diversity of thought and perspective, racial awareness through a focus on identity, self-awareness, inclusion, privilege, social justice, and anti-racism.

- **The district can provide supplemental materials produced by, and representative of, diverse voices and experiences.** Assuring representation by women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA, etc., can elevate the experiences and contributions of these groups to our society. As part of this effort, the district's supplemental instructional material review committee must engage criteria for review and approval of supplemental materials that are relevant to the diverse groups within the school and district community.

PELP Area 5: Stakeholders

Key Questions: Does the organization include plans to ensure that stakeholders from marginalized groups have a voice in decision-making and are key participants and collaborators in shaping the organizational strategy? To what extent are the voices and perspectives of those situated farthest from the opportunity involved in the problem-solving process? Does the district account for community engagement and partnerships that are an active representation of equity concerns and the valuing of diversity within the community?

PROMISING PRACTICES

Through this assessment process, the district has demonstrated a commitment to listen to the wide range of individuals that make up a school community, which must continuously serve as the foundation of this important work. There are also instances in which we heard students reflect that their teachers explicitly and openly communicate and affirm the multiplicity of their identity intersections (e.g.., a student who identified as non-binary explicitly mentioned feeling supported by their teacher). In addition, although a new initiative, the Equity Action Committee includes voices from student and parent communities of color, and families whose children have special needs and presents an opportunity for the district to continue to embed processes to shift decision-making power to community members.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- **Stakeholders with historically less power need their voices centered.** Currently, stakeholders have expressed a mixed level of voice. For instance, we heard that teacher turnover significantly affects the student experience and has been reported to affect parent trust in educational outcomes. While hiring practices must be separately addressed, community review for hiring and promotions of staff is part of the effort that the district can make to shift decision-making power to community members. For example, no more than 38 percent of parents from any racial demographic group agree with the statement, "Parents of color have an influence in how decisions are made at the school level," with American Indian parents agreeing at a rate of 14 percent and White parents agreeing at a rate of 18 percent. We see similar trends in response to the statement, "Parents of color have influence in how decisions are made district wide," with the maximum agreement rate for any racial demographic group at 38 percent, and agreement rates for American Indian and White parents at 14 percent and 18 percent, respectively.

Figure 5. Perception of Parents of Color in Decision Making

% Agreement Among VPS Parents

Race ● American Indian ● Asian ● Black ● Hispanic ● Multi-Racial ● Pacific Islander ● White
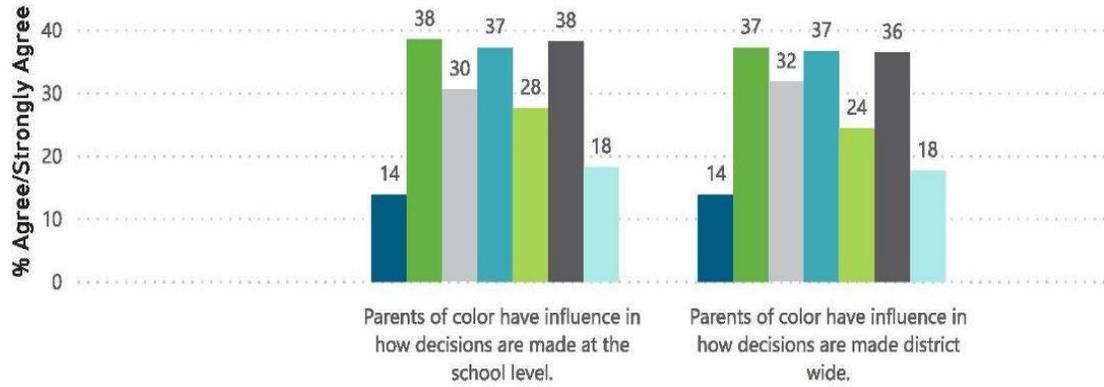
- **Stakeholders perceive race-based advantages at VPS.** At least 75 percent of students from all racial demographic groups agree with the statement, "People have an advantage at Vancouver Public Schools due to the color of their skin." 100 percent of Jim Parsley Center (JPC) staff that identify as Black or Hispanic agree that "People have an advantage at VPS due to the color of their skin."[21]

Figure 6. Perception of Advantage by Color of Skin

% Agreement Among VPS Students

Race ● American Indian or Alaskan Native ● Asian ● Black or African American ● Hispanic ● Multi-Racial ● Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ● V

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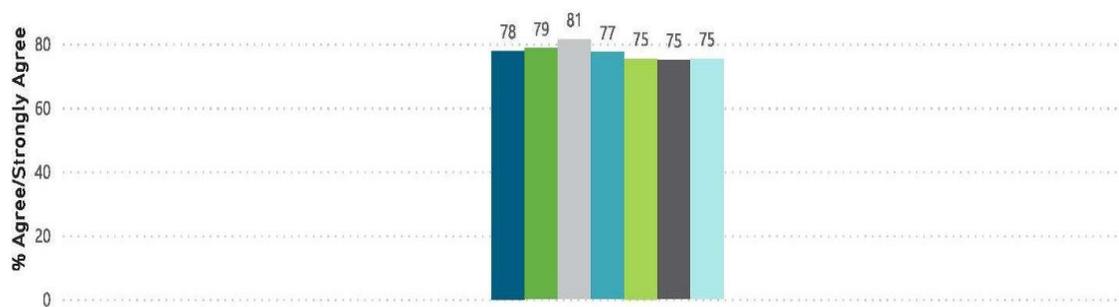
[21] 2020-2021 Student Climate Survey

- **Families have varying levels of knowledge about how to access the opportunities and resources available through VPS**. VPS offers several choices for students. However, information about those opportunities is not always known by families and community members. While the district has made attempts to improve students' access to opportunities and resources (e.g., expansion of Family and Community Resource Centers, offering virtual information sessions for magnet application cycles) there is room for improvement in ensuring that families have the information needed to ensure that their students can access and experience VPS' offerings. Relatedly, there is a great need for translation services (e.g., through dedicated translators on staff and increasing existing translation of materials for parents and students) to ensure that families whose first language is not English are welcomed and aware of important information that will support their child(ren)'s educational experience at VPS.
- **Students and families desire an open dialogue to discuss current events that are controversial and thought provoking for the school community.** Trauma is often a daily occurrence for marginalized communities during unprecedented violent crimes. These tragedies provide an opportunity for community members to co-design curriculum and engage in content. Currently, VPS families and instructional staff report inconsistency in implementing trauma-informed practices, restorative justice, and racial incident protocols in the school setting. No more than 57 percent of students from any demographic group (by race) agree with the statement, "When my peers or I misbehave, there are opportunities for us to repair the harm we may have caused to the community." Across racial demographic groups, 32 percent to 55 percent of parents agree that, "When my child or his/her peers misbehave, there are opportunities for them to repair the harm they may have caused to the community," with lowest agreement among American Indian and Multi-Racial groups.[22] During assimilation and avoidance of these incidences, the school system misses opportunities to value diversity and develop empathy in the school community.
- **District leadership can provide clarity on its equity concerns to the larger community.** These efforts would also include resources for families to learn outside of the school community and a clear articulation of the district's priorities and accountability measures for community partners to understand. This effort would then be echoed in the representation of diverse community partners to support the equity vision of the district.

"There is a fear among families of color about getting involved [in the Vancouver Public Schools community] and families need to trust the people they are connecting to within the district."

Vancouver Public Schools Parent

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[22] 2020-2021 Student Climate and Culture Survey

Recommendations

In *Building Equity*, the researchers ask that we imagine a school in which the student body represents the diversity of human experience and that educational programs and supports are informed by and sensitive to the social and emotional needs of all students. In such a community, students are fully engaged in their own learning, opportunity gaps are addressed by removing the barriers to equity, and instructional excellence is not the aspiration—it is a cultural norm designed to support every student to discover their passions and have opportunities to achieve their goals. That too should be the vision for an equitable school district.

We hope the district continues to examine the areas of improvement as outlined in the PELP coherence model.[23] To do so requires developing strategies to permeate the systems, structures, patterns, events, and behaviors that the assessment findings reveal. As strategy scholar and teacher Stacey Childress describes, strategy is "the deliberate set of actions an organization chooses to pursue to achieve its objectives. These deliberate actions are puzzle pieces that fit together to create a clear picture of how people, activities, and resources of an organization can work effectively to accomplish a collective purpose."[24]

As strategy is developed to enact upon these recommendations, we recommend that you consider:

- Does the strategy account for community engagement and partnerships that are representative of the equity concerns and valuing of the diversity within the VPS community?
- Does the strategy include intentional planning for the equitable distribution of resources?
- Does the strategy support an organizational culture that cultivates, confronts discrimination, and builds relational trust?

At the center of the PELP Framework is the instructional core. As the district considers each of the following recommendations, we ask that you do so centering the impact to students and teachers and the ways in which they engage with content. Centering this will ensure that the implementation experience will be grounded in improving the conditions for teacher quality and student learning as you work across all elements to develop a theory of change that addresses the equity imperative at VPS.

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[23] Smith et al. (2017). *Building Equity: Practices and Policies to Advance all Learners*. ASCD.
[24] Childress, Stacey (2004). *Note on Strategy in Public Education.* Harvard University.
https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel011p2_modified.pdf

Figure 7. PELP Framework

Source: Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), *PEL-010 Note on the PELP Coherence Framework*, revised 2011.

Achieving educational equity is complex, challenging, and critical. To support a district-wide improvement strategy after this equity assessment, VPS should prioritize the recommendations listed below to build on the momentum of the equity assessment in ways that draws on research to accelerate its improvement efforts toward transformational change, focuses on incremental improvement and growth, maintains interdependence, engages cross functional team collaboration, and develops capacity to innovate, evaluate and reflect.

Scale Promising Practices

Many practices referenced in this report reflect the district's demonstrated commitment to create pathways and experiences where all views, beliefs, identities, and cultures are integrated into VPS practices. Across the five elements of the PELP Framework, there are several practices that must continue to scale, particularly ones that center the voices and perspectives of students of color. It is critical that the district continue to leverage and devote resources to these promising practices to influence the larger environment in which the school district is situated.

Develop a Culture of Equity

KEY ACTIONS:

- Adopt an equity lens with laser focus on opportunities for equitable student access and participation in high quality programming.
- Develop a shared meaning and understanding of equity, in theory and in practice, such that the equity framing influences all systems.
- Build capacity of district leadership and the community to better understand the equity imperative and the impacts of race, class, power, and privilege on marginalized student groups.

Given that equity work is focused on undoing all the systems that unfairly disadvantage marginalized students across various identity intersections (e.g., race, socio-economic status, gender, disabilities), we recommend that VPS adopt an equity lens into the DNA of the district so that the "VPS Way" becomes synonymous with a commitment to every student's success. Since systems are the inevitable result of policies created from cultures, VPS should focus their initial efforts on developing a more expansive, district-wide, definition of equity that aligns with the local culture, history and mission of the district and its diverse stakeholders.

This definition of equity should be a more expansive, district-wide, definition of equity that aligns with the local culture, history and mission of the district and its diverse stakeholders and include specific diversity focus areas that are most relevant to the staff and student populations VPS serves, as well as the many ways those differences affect the flourishing of all VPS stakeholders. These areas include but are not limited to student and family voice, an inclusive work culture, psychological safety, culturally representative curriculum and classrooms, student engagement, and classroom management policies. Building on the district's current work in emphasizing the importance of cultural identity formation will be vital for ensuring that everyone in the district feels included and responsible for creating changes.

As a part of this equity assessment, many VPS leaders participated in taking the Intercultural Development Inventory as an individual level cultural competency assessment and a reflection of the cultural mindset that shapes the district's culture. Given that most participants scored within Minimization, we recommend that the district focus its cultural competency efforts with an understanding that many people operate from a mindset that is more comfortable focusing on cultural commonalities more than differences, committed to equality over equity efforts and may be fearful of work that seeks to change the status quo.

Identify Equity Goals, Equity Objectives, and a Racial Equity Theory of Change

KEY ACTIONS:

- Identify the theory of change that explains the beliefs that will drive the strategy for equity in Vancouver Public Schools.
- Name equity leadership actions tied explicitly to the district's vision, mission, and values.
- Incorporate equity goals as the bedrock of the strategic plan.

The equity assessment provides an opportunity for the district to begin designing equity goals and objectives. Given the vast information provided in the report, it is important for stakeholders across the district to prioritize which areas to pursue first. The Co-Design Team presents an opportunity for the district to leverage structures that have emerged from this work. After defining the goal areas, the group can begin to develop preliminary strategies and measures of success that can later get incorporated into a district-wide strategic plan. These components should ultimately connect with the district's explicit theory of change that lodges a commitment to racial equity and is developed with the community the district serves.

By developing a holistic framework that connects the various initiatives in the district to an overarching equity framework, district leaders can make connections between the current initiatives on cultivating cultural competency, restorative practices, social and emotional learning, culturally responsive education, and anti-racist pedagogy.

The district should define the racial equity outcomes it hopes to achieve, identify the needed change from existing practices as evidenced by the data in this report, and develop a plan to address barriers to change across its systems, policies and practices.

Build Internal Capacity

KEY ACTIONS:

- Engage in conversations and professional learning opportunities explicitly tied to building capacity related to race, class, and equity, and utilize tools and protocols to develop equity in leadership practice, so that all stakeholders can support equitable outcomes and have the tools to disrupt inequities.
- Develop a learning centered culture that understands and can confront practices that reproduce disparities in student outcomes across demographics.
- Develop a clear district-wide equity agenda for student success that can be articulated by all and interrupts inequitable practices with distinct structures and processes across the various systems.

While there is clear enthusiasm for equity work across stakeholders, the district must continuously work to build the internal capacity of all its community members. Members across the VPS community must feel empowered to learn collaboratively and resist the temptation to fall back to the status quo. Creating tailored "learning journeys" for school leaders, central office administrators, and teachers to reflect on the findings of the equity assessment can provide an opportunity for participants to develop a shared language around race and racism. Building a community of practice will also respond to the desires reflected in the assessment to help members recognize the structures and cultures that maintain white power and privilege and change the systems that perpetuate these inequities.

We also recommend that professional development opportunities build on some of the conceptual work that is ongoing around culturally responsive education and anti-racist pedagogy. An important next step after creating common language around complex topics is to offer opportunities to experiment with the instructional core in a safe, inclusive learning environment. For example, an experiential session where participants are tasked with creating lesson plans and activities that are infused with various cultural values (e.g., individualism versus collectivism) can be transformative for educators in seeing what equity could look like in their day-to-day interactions with students.

In addition, we recommend that VPS use current instructional policies and teacher evaluations as on-going capacity-building resources themselves, by integrating the current evaluation tools with evaluation rubrics that have an explicit focus on anti-racist, multi-cultural and equity-

centered teaching practices. The Leading for Racial Equity[25] rubric is one example of a resource that can help expand current teaching practices beyond universal strategies to more culturally responsive and culturally relevant norms. Since educators are already being evaluated by their ability to differentiate instruction, scaffold student learning, ask deep questions, and assist students in their respective meaning-making of the curriculum, VPS should find ways to embed the principles of culturally responsive teaching in their evaluation tools. This process ensures that educators have actionable strategies that incorporate the diverse cultural identities, learning styles, and cultural values that shape students' experiences in the classroom and school building.

Finally, moving beyond a culture of symbolic change, or Minimization, will require investing in the instructional core's ability to apply the principles of cultural competency in the way educators greet students, organize the structure of the classroom, represent student cultures in curriculum and classroom visuals and foster an inclusive community where all students feel safe, valued, and respected in all their differences. Given the added challenge of included metrics around anti-racism, equity, and cultural responsiveness in teacher evaluation, it is imperative that VPS include educators in the process so that there is a common understanding of these core concepts and a sense that equity rubrics are not punitive but serve as collective efforts to make every VPS classroom as inclusive as possible.

Adopt a more Equitable (vs. Equal) Funding Formula

KEY ACTIONS:

- Consider school finance reforms that provision additional resources in higher need settings to address student performance outcomes and reduce opportunities gaps for students of colors, students with disabilities, second-language learners, and students living in poverty.
- Align financial investments to ensure that high need students have equitable access to other resources, which include a high-quality rigorous curricula, effective culturally responsive teaching, and safe and supportive culture-rich learning environments.
- Provide leaders with earned autonomies to consistently allocate and utilize resources that promote equity and access for all students.

As the district considers the inequities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, we would encourage VPS to seize the opportunity to reassess and reexamine how to better account for student needs with adjusted weighting for high needs students and students who may not have been previously identified but are now impacted by factors such as housing insecurity.

While this might initially be made possible by leveraging Federal dollars, such as through the CARES ACT, for technology and wrap-around services, we encourage finance reforms and practices for long-term investments to address greatest needs both as identified now, as well as in the future.

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[25] https://www.kipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/KIPP-Equity-Glossary_071520.pdf

Plan for the known and unknown complexities of managing change as VPS clarifies its vision for the future

KEY ACTIONS:

- Ensure full and equitable participation in decision-making, action planning and next steps.
- Co-design, with district and school staff and community members/stakeholders, the equitable systems, and structures to enact upon the theory of change.
- Identify and communicate identified opportunities, and plan for possible challenges to implementation.
- Commit to an equity progress reporting structure for progress monitoring and internal and external information sharing.

A school district's equity process consists of successes, failures, progress, and lessons learned. Organizational transformation is challenging, and it is even more difficult because antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion work does not have a universal destination. There are no "experts" who can tell us the steps; however, the process does require the full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural, and economic groups to determine how to continually refine how equity will be achieved. Like any comprehensive change process, VPS's equity journey will be non-linear and iterative. Part of the responsibility of the district leadership will be to maintain transparency about progress (and shortcomings) across its equity goals along the way.

That transparency will help build awareness of the need for change and bring about the desire in others to not just be part of the change, but to know how to be a driver of the change and reinforce change along the way. This ownership and enactment on the part of all change agents, creates investment, accountability, and ownership, rather than simply seeking the "buy-in" of impacted stakeholders.

The district should commit to data collection (specific to equity) and ongoing monitoring as in iterative process tied to accountability for achieving identified indicators of success to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to equity, which measures results rather than just outputs. This should include plans for ongoing data collection and analysis that includes public sharing of progress, short-term results, and necessary mid-course corrections.