

Board Equity and Inclusion Committee meeting

Wednesday, June 26, 2024 1:30 PM

Virtual Via Zoom

1. Call to Order

1.A. Board goals assigned to the Equity and Inclusion Committee

1.A.1. Ensure inclusion through implementing our equity lens to achieve equitable district outcomes

1.A.2. Continue to focus and prioritization of regional leadership around equity

1.B. Strategic Plan goals tied to the Equity and Inclusion Committee

1.B.1. Creating a high quality learning experience for all

1.B.2. Operationalizing systems that engage and empower communities

1.B.3. Building a culturally responsive workforce

2. Review minutes from the May 2, 2024 meeting and report on action items

3. Updates on how we are doing with the Equity in Contracting Policy

4. Measurement tools and metrics to gauge progress made on the October 2022 Equity Audit findings

Board Equity and Inclusion Committee

Thursday, May 2, 2024

2023-2028
Agency Goals

#1 – Creating a high-quality learning experience for all

#2 – Operationalizing systems that engage and empower communities

#3 – Building a culturally responsive workforce

MESD Board Equity Lens-<https://www.multnomahesd.org/board-equity.html>

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 2, 2024 by Committee Chair Ying.

- **CALL TO ORDER**

Present: Helen Ying, Chair
Denyse Peterson, Board member

Absent: Danny Cage, Board members

Administration: Heather Severns, Board Secretary
Reiko Williams, Director of Regional Equity Initiatives and Partnerships
Sascha Perrins, Assistant Superintendent

Guests:

1. **Review notes from the April meeting-** The minutes from the April 4th Committee were accepted with no changes.
2. **Develop a process and guidelines for the Land Acknowledgement/Educational Opportunity-**Members of the committee shared their guidelines. These were added to a list on a shared Google doc and reviewed.
 - a. Reiko read an article encouraging a shift to move [beyond land acknowledgement](#).
 - b. Discussion took place around broadening our guidelines to be inclusive of others who are not Native Americans but have been marginalized in our history as well.
 - c. Reiko went through the draft guidelines document and pulled out items that should be long term actions.
 - d. Denyse Peterson let the group know that there is never enough time and possibly going through professional development if the goal is to educate the Board.
 - e. Draft **Educational Opportunity Guidelines** to be taken to the Board Regular Session meeting on May 21st for review and approval.
 - i. This segment will be called Educational Opportunity and this needs to be equity focused.
 - ii. Time limit-10 minute maximum
 - iii. Includes education and encourages deeper reflection about institutional actions that the Board can engage with and support.

1. Consists of sharing of articles, videos and guest speakers to learn and respond to issues impacting native communities and other historically marginalized communities.
2. Relate to issues directly impacting students and families in Multnomah County
3. Encourages ongoing learning impacting students and families in Multnomah County
4. Connect long standing historical issues with current context
5. Encourages ongoing learning, advocacy and how the Board can support our students, staff, Board and Community from historically marginalized communities.
6. Align land acknowledgement process with the Board's role.

Longer-term actions:

- iv. Support Indigenous Organizations with specific actions
- v. Develop a plan to support Indigenous Communities
- vi. Build authentic relationships with Indigenous people, communities and organizations.
- vii. Define actions of the agency that support native students.
- viii. Create common data set.

3. Action items/next steps-For the June meeting Helen has requested the following two items.
 - a. Feedback on how we are doing with the Equity in Contracting Policy. Sascha is looking into this.
 - b. Measurement tools and metrics to gauge progress make on the October 2022 Equity Audit findings. Reiko said there will be a presentation on this in August. This may be a preliminary presentation.

Adjourn

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned 2:03 p.m. The next meeting of this committee will be June 6 at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Severns

Executive Assistant/Board Secretary

Multnomah Education Service District

Code: **DJCB**
Adopted: 7/21/20

MESD Policy on Increasing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Contracting, Procurement and Funding

The purpose of this policy is to increase wealth distribution in the economic spectrum.

The MESD serves a vulnerable population unlike other school districts, and understands that its students learn in many ways through specifically designed curriculum for their learning abilities. It is important that staff who teach, lead, empower and mentor be reflective of the student population served. The MESD's role is to build confidence in its students and fully prepare them for a future of self-sufficiency and independence by modeling diversity, equity and inclusion for them.

This policy, rooted in the greater Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Plan, is a tool for the MESD to meet its commitments to create broader community engagement and increase contracting with the Minority, Women, and Emerging Small Business (MWESB) community and other underrepresented communities.

Create Broader Community Engagement

The Board believes that broadening community engagement will further develop relationships that allow Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work to take root. The Board hereby commits to developing broad, equity-centric relationships through engagement with the MWESB community and other underrepresented communities.

The Board therefore authorizes the Superintendent to engage with minority communities to:

- Publicize information about the MESD, its mission, its needs and its opportunities in diverse, community-focused media outlets.
- Network with and, develop partnerships with, offer expertise to and collaborate with the MWESB community.
- Collaborate to develop a Scholarship program for underrepresented MESD students furthering their Education following High School.

Additionally, the Board therefore urges the Superintendent to engage with MESD employees to:

- Encourage volunteerism from parents and business partners in MESD programs,
- Offer job opportunities to minorities, women and disabled veterans, and
- Review contracts, including labor agreements, to foster living wage agreements.

Increase Contracting Opportunities for the MWESB Community

To deepen the MESD's commitment, The Board hereby directs the Superintendent to develop a targeted goal for MESD contract and procurement selection processes that demonstrates response from members of the MWESB community at all threshold levels. MESD commits to an aspirational goal that 15% of the MESD's contract and procurement selection processes demonstrate response from members of the MWESB community at all threshold levels.

The Board therefore authorizes the Superintendent to cause the following:

- Develop and promulgate procedures that focus on practices encouraging inclusion of the MWESB community and other underrepresented communities.
- Engage in conversations with certified MWESB firms, local MWESB Organizations, disabled veteran organizations and individual business community leaders to encourage them to tailor their offerings to the MESD's needs.
- Assist MWESB firms with understanding the ESD's contract selection and procurement processes.
- Use the state COBid certified Firms Directory for a resource.

Report Progress to the MESD Board

The Board desires that the MESD strive to increase diversity, equity and inclusion on an ongoing basis.

The Board therefore directs the Superintendent to:

- Develop administrative regulations to implement these commitments, and
- Make quarterly reports to the Board on the progress of the MESD in these areas.

Acknowledgement by the MESD Board

The Board shall publicly acknowledge those community members and staff members who have committed to achieving high standards pursuant to this policy.

END OF POLICY

Legal Reference(s):

[ORS 334.125](#)

Multnomah Education Service District Equity Audit Findings

Report prepared by The Leadership Academy

October 2022

Equity Audit Findings – Overview

To help Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) better understand its ability to achieve equitable outcomes for all students and to establish strategic priorities to advance equity, The Leadership Academy collected stakeholder perspective through focus groups. **Across 9 focus groups, the following themes emerged:**

How do staff describe MESD's beliefs, values, and assumptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion? In what ways do they see these impacting how the organization operates?

- Staff noted recent actions that suggest that the organization is prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as growing staff diversity. Staff would like to see more actions taken to help make these priorities a reality.
- Staff hear messages from MESD leadership that diversity, equity, and inclusion are organizational priorities. While they see and hear leadership state this commitment, there is a perceived disconnect between what is stated and how it is operationalized.

What are the knowledge and skills that MESD staff need in order for the organization to be diverse, equitable and inclusive?

- Staff identified cultural competency and the ability to both embrace discomfort and to interrupt biased statements and actions as important skills for MESD staff.
- Focus groups participants also named the importance of staff buy-in and individual commitments to creating a more equitable and inclusive organization.

What types of professional learning and support do staff need to develop the knowledge and skills needed to help MESD be diverse, equitable and inclusive?

- Staff asked for more intentional opportunities to discuss race and diversity with colleagues to build their skills and practice these conversations.
- In addition to practicing hard conversations, staff report that they want to hear more from MESD leadership about what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean for the organization and how they fit into the organization's vision and goals.

What do conversations about race, equity, and inclusion look like within MESD? How would staff like to see conversations about race, equity, and inclusion addressed?

- Staff report that they either are not engaged in conversations about race, equity, and inclusion or if they do happen, it is often within specific departments or sites. Students similarly described that these conversations are not happening in all classrooms.
- Both staff and students expressed that these conversations should be taking place.

What obstacles, if any, do staff face in having more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion within the organization? What would need to change within the organizational culture to encourage more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion?

- Staff may be hesitant to discuss race, diversity, and equity due to fear of conflict or discomfort.
- Staff expressed that such open conversations do not take place because there is not any dedicated time or space to have these conversations within the organization.
- Some staff noted the impact of the current racial/ethnic staff makeup on having open conversations about race, diversity, and inclusion.

In what ways, if at all, does MESD show that it is important to recruit, hire, retain, and promote a diverse staff reflective of the demographic diversity of the students it represents? In what ways does it not signal that this is important?

- Staff expressed that they have recently seen more diverse hiring and called for an even more diverse workplace, one that is more reflective of the students it serves.
- According to some staff, they have seen issues with staff retention. Some attribute this to a disconnect between a stated organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how that commitment is currently operationalized.

What is staffs' current understanding of how promotions and advancement happen in MESD? What perceptions do staff have about what is needed to do to get promoted? What do staff need to do/who do you need to know to advance? Are there discrepancies in career advancement among any racial/ethnic/gender identities?

- Many staff named the impact that personal connections have on promotions and career advancement.
- Some staff stated that processes for promotions and advancement often feel unclear, and in some cases, limited.
- When asked specifically about any discrepancies that they may notice in career advancement among any racial/ethnic/gender identities, staff explained that these discrepancies may exist more within school buildings.

Have staff experienced or witnessed situations where there seemed to be invisible or hidden rules or policies in place—or where the rules seemed constantly to shift?

- Some staff have witnessed inconsistent decision-making, where rules and decisions seem to be applied differently across staff.
- Other staff report that they have not personally experienced any unspoken norms or shifting expectations. This was often true for staff who are newer to the organization or who work in an isolated environment.

What would make MESD a more welcoming, culturally responsive, and equitable organization?

- Staff report that they would like to see more concrete actions being taken to prioritize equity, diversity and inclusion across the organization.
- Staff also asked for additional opportunities for training and practicing difficult conversations, particularly for new employees.
- With such a large and spread-out organization, staff requested more space for networking and cross-organizational connection.

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Introduction

Headquartered in Portland, Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) is one of 19 Education Service Districts in Oregon. MESD provides a wide variety of programs and services, such as school health services and special education support, to school districts in Multnomah County. MESD has 642 staff members, including educational assistants, school nurses, certified teachers, school administrators, therapists, specialists, and support staff.

Multnomah Education Service District has partnered with The Leadership Academy in an effort to better understand its ability to achieve equitable outcomes for all students and to establish strategic priorities to advance equity. To gather broad input on the current state of equity¹ within MESD and to surface learning needs for staff, The Leadership Academy is conducting an Equity Audit. The audit is focused on professional development needs and staff diversity.

To establish the current state of equity in these areas, The Leadership Academy, with the cooperation and assistance of Multnomah Education Service District, collected stakeholder perspective through focus groups. Focus groups focused on staff of color specifically. In September 2022, a total of 9 focus groups were conducted with 33 staff of color and 4 students. Focus groups were conducted in role-alike groups, including administrator, school health assistants, new employees, tenured employees, teachers, educational assistants, and members of the Equity & Inclusion Advancement Committee.

In addition to focus groups, data from the MESD Employee Satisfaction Survey conducted in April 2022 was also reviewed.

The pages that follow provide the high-level findings, reflecting those perspectives raised by a majority of stakeholders. Appendix A provides additional information on the audit process, including a breakdown of the audit phases, and data collection and analysis methodology. Appendix B includes the questions asked in the focus groups.

¹ Equity is defined as each person, regardless of circumstances, is given what they need to thrive and be successful. Equity with a focus on race is emphasized as race intersects with all other inequities, but we recognize that there are disparities among other characteristics and contexts.

Equity Audit Findings

The data and feedback collected through the Equity Audit focus groups are meant to reflect the current state of equity within Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) in the areas of professional development and staff diversity. Themes that emerged repeatedly across focus groups serve as the findings. Excerpts of near-verbatim notes from focus groups are presented (in *italicized*) text to illustrate each theme. It is noted throughout the findings where data from the April 2022 MESD Employee Satisfaction Survey confirmed or disconfirmed the focus group data.



Please note that we recognize the data do not comprise all experiences and events within the organization and are not meant to be comprehensive. The small sample size and specific time period present limitations. We urge readers to take an inquiry stance with this report's data, using data to spur reflection, additional questions, and action.

How do staff describe Multnomah Education Service District's beliefs, values, and assumptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion? In what ways do they see these impacting how the organization operates?

With diversity and equity as stated priorities in MESD's [2021-23 strategic plan](#), focus group participants were first asked about the beliefs, values, and assumptions that impact how these priorities are lived within Multnomah Education Service District. Across focus groups, staff made note of the messages they hear from MESD leadership that diversity, equity, and inclusion are organizational priorities. While there are recent actions to back this up, such as growing staff diversity, staff would like to see more done to help this commitment live in their daily work.

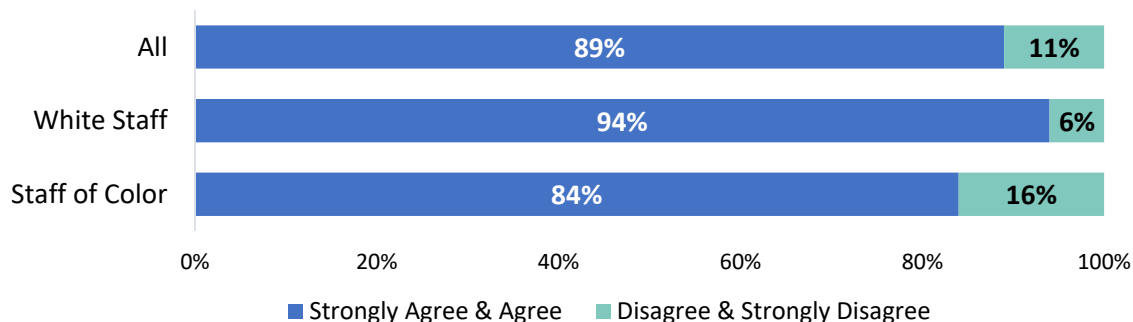
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion are Becoming Organizational Priorities: More than one half of focus groups (5 of 9 focus groups) report that they have recently seen specific actions that would indicate that diversity, equity, and inclusion becoming priorities for MESD. In particular, staff cited a noted increase in staff diversity. They also stated that there is more work to be done in order to make these priorities a reality.

- *"We actually see people of color being hired. There is actually visual proof of this."*
- *"I see a lot of diversity in the schools I work with. It's transforming right now and progressed from when I first got here. A lot of schools have been moving towards diving into diversity and being a part of it. In my opinion we still have a ways to go, as we have 50 years of oppressive values, but I do believe we are on the right path."*
- *"I think they [leadership] believe in equity and inclusion. I think these things are there, but I think it's a work in progress. The equity piece, we serve a lot of BIPOC kids and I think we should represent who we serve and I know that's what they are working towards."*
- *"I believe the organization is on the right track to include all of these [diversity, equity, and inclusion] ...There is more diversity now more than in the past."*
- *"There has been an attempt for growth since [2016]. Seeing changes and is hoping that things are truly changing and it's not just a trend."*

Leadership Commitment: Another way in which focus group participants (4 of 9 focus groups) see that diversity, equity, and inclusion are becoming organizational priorities is in the messages they hear from MESD leaders, particularly Superintendent Coakley.

- *"When I think about what I know about our super and what he has said to us directly, it's clear that equity and inclusion is high priority. From the super as well as what MESD communicates."*
- *"Our superintendent has been clear that equity for MESD means leading with race. I think it was important that he was specific about that."*
- *"Equity and inclusion have been one of the more open and outward beliefs and mission statements. When I came in and onboarded at MESD, it was directly said to me. It was appreciated how forward it's been and how any ideas or thoughts around it have been heard and taken seriously."*

Survey Artifact: The majority of staff (89%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: *MESD supervisors and management are committed to equity and anti-racism*. White staff (94%) were more likely to agree with this statement than staff of color (84%).



"More talk than action": While focus group participants report hearing leadership state a commitment to prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, more than one half of focus groups (5 of 9 focus groups) described a disconnect between that stated commitment and how that commitment is being operationalized.

- *"There is a wide range of what I see. How do we convert it into our daily work? Do we have agency wide stance on what we see? There's less clarify and more confusion. For example, if an employee in the building has an issue, there's no systemic level on how to address that from what I've heard. Big picture is there, but then what does that look like systematically or on a daily basis?"*
- *"Organizational leadership seems committed, but on the ground the equity work is more under development (because of the decentralized nature of the organization)."*
- *"There has been a major shift over the years but not 100% sure it changes at high rates of impact... no impact on full agency, still on individual level, honoring beliefs and values but not as an agency.... Not seeing a trickledown effect to students."*
- *"More talk than action."*

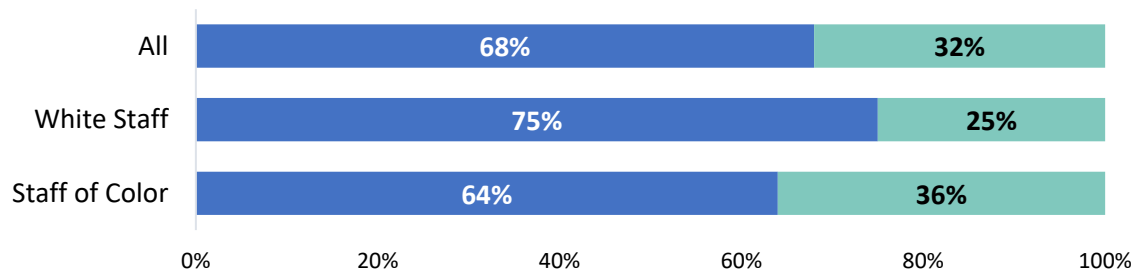
What are the knowledge and skills that Multnomah Education Service District staff need in order for the organization to be diverse, equitable and inclusive?

To help operationalize MESD's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, these values must translate into the organization's daily work. Therefore, focus group participants were asked to identify the knowledge and skills that staff would need to help bring diversity, equity, and inclusion to life. Staff identified cultural competency, the ability to interrupt biased statements and actions, embracing discomfort, and personal commitment to creating a more equitable and inclusive organization.

Cultural Competency: Most focus groups (6 of 9 focus groups) identified cultural competency as an important skill for MESD staff. Cultural competency is broadly defined as the ability to live and work effectively in culturally diverse environments. It involves self-awareness, an understanding and appreciation for other cultures, a knowledge of societal inequities, the skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people in different contexts, and the skills to foster equity and inclusion².

- *"They need to be knowledgeable with different races and cultures and backgrounds because we are not all the same. Once everyone is able to differentiate that, it makes everything different."*
- *"Acknowledging and respecting people's perspectives and understanding what racism and equity mean."*
- *"Having curiosity, interest and understanding of diverse groups as well as having flexibility when encountering different people to make adjustments so that we can work together in a way that will be compatible for everyone... Everybody in one culture is not the same, so we need to have a broader understanding of what that means. You have personal culture as well as community culture and national culture."*
- *"Cultural competency is really huge... you have to be willing to listen and learn. I can't just kick the door in and expect things to be my way."*

Survey Artifact: About two-thirds of staff (68%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *Professional Development opportunities at MESD adequately prepare staff to meet the needs of diverse students and families*. White staff (75%) were more likely to agree with this statement than staff of color (64%).



² Goodman, D. (2020). Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion: A Framework for Individual and Organizational Change.

Embracing Discomfort: Another skill mentioned by focus groups (5 of 9 focus groups) is the ability to embrace discomfort and to interrupt biased statements and actions.

- *“Discomfort is part of the work. How do we help staff understand that discomfort is necessary, and that discomfort is not a negative thing?”*
- *“People need to develop knowledge and skills around feeling safe interrupting non equitable statements. What are ways that people can say between colleagues ‘that makes me uncomfortable’ or ‘that statement was racist’?”*
- *“We need to know and learn how to appropriately approach a subject without being offensive to anyone.”*

Staff commitment: In addition to cultural competency and the ability to embrace discomfort, 4 of 9 focus groups spoke to the importance of staff buy-in and personal commitments to creating a more equitable and inclusive organization.

- *“You can have a moving train but if everyone is not moving in the same direction, it’s not going anywhere. I think these things come about subtly and in a way that people who are feeling offended by what they’re seeing. Creates resentment and a sense of not feeling connected. This is something like buy in, kind of like the chicken and the egg.”*
- *“In order to change, there’s going to have to be individual work.”*

Participants referred to the importance of MESD leadership’s public modeling of their own commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in helping build organizational buy-in.

- *“Admin buy-in is important... rather than saying we believe in equity; how do we help people understand what that means and how do I identify it for someone? It should start at the leadership level.”*
- *“It truly comes from the top. I think when you have an administrator who is progressive and working towards being anti racist ... it is reflected in your staff.”*

What types of professional learning and support do staff need to develop the knowledge and skills needed to help Multnomah Education Service District be diverse, equitable and inclusive?

As a follow up, staff focus group participants were also asked to identify the types of supports that are needed to help staff develop cultural competency, the ability to both embrace discomfort and to interrupt instances of bias, and build buy-in. According to focus group participants, intentional opportunities to discuss race and diversity with colleagues and additional communication from MESD leadership about what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean for the organization would be helpful.

Encouraging Conversations: More than one half of staff focus groups (5 of 8 focus groups) asked for more intentional opportunities to discuss race and diversity with colleagues in order to build their skills and “normalize” these conversations.

- *“Building the capacity and normalizing talking about race would be fundamental for what we are trying to do.”*
- *“We want to be able to say the right thing. We want understanding so folks can deep dive on their own ... educators always want concrete examples. Need space to practice...”*

- *"It would be nice to have our team sit down and read some of the books coming out about equity and topics that affect our kids very much. Just to be able to have the conversations because I think it is important for our teachers to know not only where we stand but to see other people's perspectives and grow as a team."*
- *"We should absolutely be having this conversation. It is for a lot of people; it is a touchy subject, but I think in smaller groups having the conversation within the classroom or as teachers and then broadening it from there."*
- *"Designated time is key."*

Communicating an Organizational Vision: In addition to practicing hard conversations, participants in more than one half of staff focus groups (5 of 8 focus groups) would like to hear more from MESD leadership about what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean for the organization and how those fit into the organization's vision and goals.

- *"What is MESD's stance or response on racism? We really need more clear positions. How does this message get translated across the board? How do we make sure everyone is not surprised when we start talking about and centering race as we do in all our different roles?"*
- *"Tangible skills and information needed rather than saying, 'we believe in equity.' How do we help people understand what that means? Should start at leadership level so they know how to identify an inequitable situation and figure out what to do about it."*
- *"Understanding, what does racism and equity mean, what does it mean to our agency? How are we supporting this? What safe spaces are we creating for our staff of color?"*

What do conversations about race, equity, and inclusion look like within MESD? How would staff like to see conversations about race, equity, and inclusion addressed?

An important step in MESD's equity journey is the ability and opportunity for staff to have meaningful conversations about race and identity. Therefore, focus group participants were asked to describe what these conversations look like within the organization. According to staff and students, these conversations happen sporadically.

Conversations Not Happening: More than one half of focus groups (6 of 9 focus groups) report they have not been engaged in conversations about race, equity, and inclusion. According to some participants, these conversations should be taking place within the organization.

- *"I don't believe we have talked about it at all."*
- *"They do not happen and need to happen a lot more than they to."*
- *"I don't think there are conversations about this."*
- *"It's rare. If anything, it's not a conversation; it's being talked at. The information is given to people. I don't think it has ever been a conversation."*

Conversations are Sporadic: While some staff have not participated in any conversations about race, equity, and inclusion within the organization, participants in 4 of the 9 focus groups report that these conversations happen sporadically, and often within specific departments or buildings.

- *"In my department, they are very open to these conversations. I always feel awkward, conversations about race are not supposed to be awkward but this is what I have dealt with my entire life."*

- *"We have students of color who come to us from all over Portland and we talk about how we are creating a safe space for our students and if the curriculum we use is relevant to them. We talk about why students are referred to us in comparison to their white counter parts."*
- *"We have conversations and meetings; we do equity presentations and more talking. I'm at the point where, are we about to do something because I feel like we just keep talking about stuff.... When are we going to take it somewhere? When are we going to do something?"*

Students similarly described that these conversations are not happening in all classrooms. They also advocated for more of these conversations to take place:

- *"We should have conversations on race at school. Would talk about the definitions of certain slurs and what they truly mean so people can understand what they are saying and how it truly makes people feel."*

What obstacles, if any, do staff face in having more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion within the organization? What would need to change within the organizational culture to encourage more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion?

As conversations about race, equity, and inclusion are not taking place across the entire organization, staff named a number of obstacles they face in having open conversations about race and hard to discuss topics. They named a fear of offending others or having conflict, a lack of time and space to have these conversations, and the impact of current staff demographics.

Discomfort and Fear of Tension: More than one half of focus groups (6 of 9 focus groups) described feeling hesitant to have conversations about race, diversity, and equity due to personal discomfort and a fear of tension or consequences.

- *"Being heard wrongly. Might say something and someone takes it another way and they think the employee is speaking negatively towards them. Fear on both party's part of not wanting to hurt feelings or sound judgmental."*
- *"Formal retribution may not be occurring, but informal, passive retribution is for sure alive and well across the agency. As a result, there is always the brief moment of reflection before speaking up about who is in the room and what the potential kick back may be from any given space."*
- *"It just doesn't have that sense of freeness to do that without some sort of backlash. Speaking for myself. I do know that people feel that this can open a can of worms of consequence or backlash. And just not feeling validated; that's a big one."*
- *"During meetings even though we are in a safe space, staff feel that if I say something I'll get pulled into an office and told what I said was not equitable or okay. They are afraid to speak up."*

*"Not being comfortable, people don't know how to approach the subject on race.... People don't know how to talk about it. **We need to get comfortable discussing race and differences for true change to happen.**"*

Lack of Time, Space, Structure: According to participants in 6 of the 9 focus groups, these conversations do not take place because there is not any dedicated time or space within the organization. Without time to have these conversations, they often go un-practiced.

- *"It's so fast paced and it's not that people don't want to have that conversation; you just have to prioritize what you're going to put your energy towards... I don't think we have time or talk about this. The majority of the conversation is work related."*
- *"We just don't have time to talk about that.... Getting people together is really hard, but I believe people's hearts and the intent is there."*
- *"There is not a lot of time to have these conversations. There's been conversations about having this built into our day, but people have to want to do it to be effective."*
- *"Sense of urgency and timelines feel like they can be a barrier to thoughtful and inclusive processes."*

"If we start talking about race and uncomfortable conversations without already having that structure and knowing that this is a safe space to do that, we are not going to have those discussions at random because people are too worried.... There has not been any space made to have these discussions at all."

Current Staff Demographics: Participants in less than half of the staff focus groups (3 of 8 staff focus groups), noted the impact of the current staff makeup on having open conversations about race, diversity and inclusion. According to these participants, it is difficult to have these conversations in a space with little racial diversity.

- *"Discomfort. I think when you have majority white staff and your admin is white as well, it is definitely a different thing to have these conversations and feel comfortable with people."*
- *"People do not realize that people of color want to accelerate the process, but there are hidden roadblocks that make it difficult for them to move the agenda. Sometimes people say, 'well now you have a person of color in these key positions, so now you can do this work.' Not always true. There are peers who don't think they should be in their position only because of their color... There's more pressure as a person of color."*

In what ways, if at all, does MESD show that it is important to recruit, hire, retain, and promote a diverse staff reflective of the demographic diversity of the students it represents? In what ways does it not signal that this is important?

As the K-12 student population becomes increasingly diverse in the United States, the demographics of those who support students have failed to represent the students they serve. Therefore, focus groups were asked about the ways in which they see that MESD prioritizes the recruitment, retention, and promotion of a diverse staff. According to participating staff, they have recently seen more diverse hiring however, MESD staff are still not reflective on the students its serves.

Recent Shift: According to staff in 6 of the 9 focus groups, there has been a recent shift in the hiring of a more diverse staff. Some attribute this shift to staff in specific positions within the organization, particularly the Human Resources Director and Director of Equity.

- *"Based on my experience there has been a big shift in hiring and recruiting in the last year."*
- *"Seeing more diverse employees being hired in different levels in MESD, that helps."*
- *"I believe our new HR director, Dr. Logan, specializes in recruitment and retention of BIPOC staff."*

- *"You have the department of diversity that Director of equity runs. She's clearly doing a lot of these things."*

A Call for More Diversity: Despite any recent shifts in staff diversity, more than one half of focus groups (5 of 9 focus groups) called for an even more diverse workplace, one that is more representative of the students that MESD serves.

- *"That diverse staff is not reflective into the student ratio. FLS classes, and Wheatley sites specifically have a majority of white EA's and teachers taking care of black and brown disabled students."*
- *"I don't think it reflects the students if you look at the student body. Students of color represent 50% of the population."*
- *"Sometimes kids do better when they have someone teaching them that looks like them.... It is important for kids to have leaders around that look like them."*
- *"I can say that often times we reflect upon the people we serve, and it seems as though our staffing should reflect the students we serve. I do not often see that."*

"I don't have any teachers that look like me, no one does.... I would like to see a teacher that would look like me. It would be nice. I have no idea why adults don't look like me. No adults that look like me." – Student Participant

Some participants had ideas for how MESD could more strategically recruit more diverse staff, including more outreach to local education institutions:

- *"Need to do a better job working with local schools, colleges to reach the right demographic we are trying to work with."*
- *"The outreach is something you just have to build... We may have not had the best rapport with diversity in the past, but we need to work at it. We need to showcase that we want you and when we do hire different individuals, not trying to change their personality and fit the mold. Just hire them as they are. Just be supportive of them."*
- *"I think MESD having a specific recruiter position out of HR will help. I don't know how much has been recruited in the past. Though on the interview panels I've been on there is always a question surrounding DEI."*

Retention Issues: When it comes to recruitment, one half of the staff focus groups (4 of 8 focus groups) spoke to issues they have seen with staff retention. Some attribute this to a disconnect that was reported earlier between a stated organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and how that commitment plays out in the day-to-day work.

- *"Retention issues making things circular and losing staff. We talk about our mission work but don't embody that work. We are asking the question but are we following up with it? Interview process asks specifically about fighting for DEI but when staff tried to fight, they were pulled out and told to not do that anymore. We ask staff the questions in interview, but supervisors not onboard. MESD isn't living up to its own internalized values."*
- *"Public wise, MESD shows via videos, pictures, advertising that promotes their ideas. Private wise, that diverse staff is not reflective into the student ratio."*
- *"To retention, staff need to feel safe and supported and valued in their environments and if leadership does not put those practices in place, then we will definitely lose staff."*
- *"Retaining is harder for SHA's due to the nature of the job. It's very stagnant, no lateral or upwards movement. Others will seek out employment elsewhere as there is no opportunity for growth. Limited spots in other departments."*

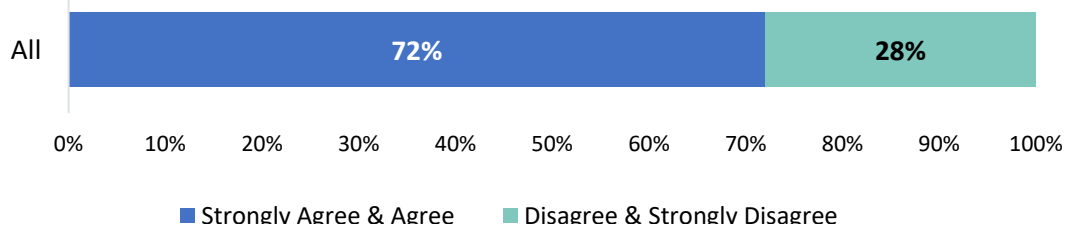
What is your current understanding of how promotions and advancement happen in MESD? What perceptions do you have about what you need to do to get promoted? What do you need to do/who do you need to know to advance? Is there anyone who supports your growth or encourages you to consider training or promotion opportunities?

To learn more about what retention and promotion look like within MESD, focus group participants were asked to describe their own experiences with promotion and advancement. Many focus groups named the impact of personal connections on promotions. Others stated that processes for promotions and advancement often feel unclear, and in some cases, limited.

Who You Know: Many staff focus groups (6 of 8 focus groups) explained how they see personal connections helping with obtaining promotions. Some described having informal connections to other staff who can help provide information or support, while others described not having any personal connections to turn to.

- *"I feel like looking good on paper helps. It's who is pushing and who is supporting what you're wanting. Relationship based."*
- *"In my specific department there is a lot of gatekeeping of who gets asked to be part of specific professional development or growth opportunities. It's very much on one person and who they choose to invite."*
- *"We are still seeing good old' boys club as to who is offered the advancement opportunities. Still a split situation happening. Seems to be dedication from Grow Your Own so hoping it will bring different folks to the forefront with those programs. Hear a lot about seniority but not much diversity in who is getting the positions."*
- *"I do not have a mentor... I would like a mentor to meet with and go over things."*

Survey Artifact: About three-fourths of staff (72%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *I feel that there are long-term career opportunities for me at this organization.*



Unclear/Limited Processes: According to half of the staff focus groups (4 of 8 focus groups), processes for promotions and advancement are not clear to all staff. In some cases, staff expressed that they do not feel that there are many opportunities for advancement within the organization.

- *"It would be helpful to know what positions are out there to be promoted to and what training needs to be taken to be eligible for the job...It would be nice to have written documentation/form that describes MESD positions and steps needed to take to promote to them."*
- *"Moving upward after being a supervisor is limited as it's like a pyramid. Less people supervising... In my position there is no place for advancement. I am not saying it is a dead end, but it seems like there is no other place to go in my area."*

- *"It is not clear what growth opportunities are there since our agency has grown so much."*
- *"Is there anything other than an RN to promote to? Not everyone wants to be an RN and many SHA's want to stay within MESD but don't know how to do that..."*

Advancement Across Identity Markers: Five staff focus groups were asked specifically about any discrepancies that they may notice in career advancement among any racial/ethnic/gender identities. According to staff in these focus groups, discrepancies may exist more within school buildings.

- *"I do not see that at all. I believe it's fair. It's based on their performance."*
- *"Haven't noticed that there is any ism's that are being promoted."*
- *"I would say because we serve all of the districts, yes, but within MESD no."*
- *"No discrepancies as much but in this [school] building, there are something like 10 teachers and I am the only black teacher. There is another teacher of color, but that's it. The population we serve, there are a lot of students of color. There needs to be more representation."*

Thinking about unspoken norms in the organization-related to decision making, social structures, etc. Have you experienced or witnessed situations where there seemed to be invisible or hidden rules/policies in place-or where the rules seemed constantly to shift?

To continue to understand how staff experience equity and inclusion within the organization, focus groups were asked if they have experienced any unspoken norms or shifting expectations. Some described shifting rules and decision making while others reported that they have not personally experienced any such thing.

Inconsistent Decisions: More than half of the staff focus groups (5 of 8 focus groups) referenced inconsistent decision-making, where rules and decisions seem to be applied differently across staff. In some cases, this occurred across racial lines.

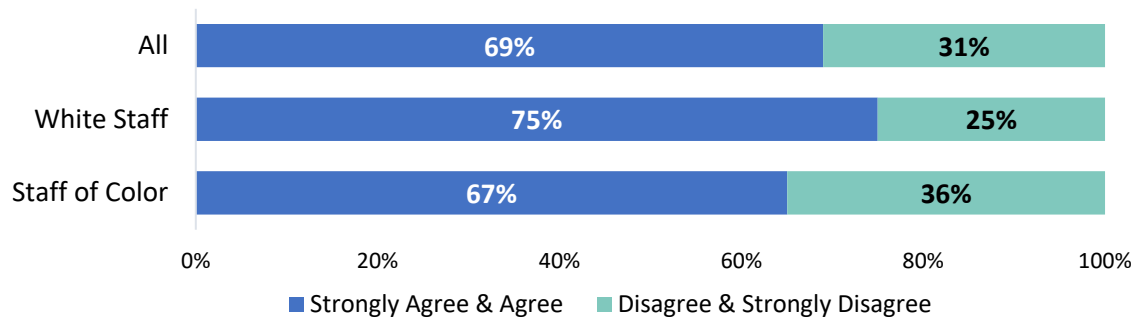
- *"We had a previous admin, my expectations and what I could do was very different than what my colleagues were told. I would ask something, it would be a no. Another teacher would be a yes."*
- *"I asked to work from home due to COVID in the building and was told no. Within minutes of me asking, another teacher asked, and they were told yes. This person was not a teacher of color."*
- *"I remember trying to implement some decision making and was having my decisions questioned by individuals who reported to me... It was almost as if they were trying to provoke a response from me. From my white counterparts, they did not have as much push back."*

According to focus group participants, decisions and policies often feel finite and concrete. Staff may not feel part of the decision-making process or that their input is not welcomed.

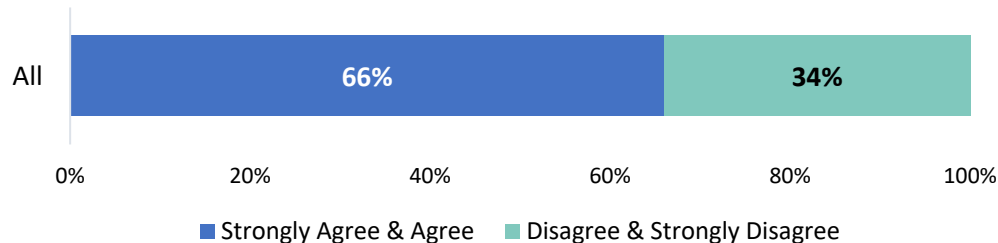
- *"As far as decision making, I feel like it really comes from an admin level. Same goes for recruitment or advancement. I rarely have been in conversations where I was asked about shifts or changes for MESD as an agency whole."*
- *"There are a lot of policies and procedures in our business department and risk management and when we try new things, there's not even a question that we can change them. It's a rock-hard wall. Or it's very hard to get them changed."*

- *“MESD needs to look at rules and regulations, then come together. Fear about speaking up, fear of losing their position, we shouldn't have to come to work with fear on our minds. We are here to help and do the best we can.”*

Survey Artifact: About two-thirds of staff (69%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *I have trust in management decisions*. White staff (75%) were more likely to agree with this statement than staff of color (67%).



Survey Artifact: About two-thirds of staff (66%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: *MESD seeks employee involvement in decision making*.



Unspoken Norms Not Experienced by All: Half of the staff focus groups (4 of 8 focus groups) report that they have not personally experienced any unspoken norms or shifting expectations. This was often true for staff who are newer to the organization or who work in a siloed environment.

- *“I have not seen it personally, but I have only been here for a few years.”*
- *“So far, in the years here I am feeling very happy, my supervisor is the best one I have. Very open and I love to work here. I feel like it's a fair agency. Of course, if you encounter everything you can speak up.”*
- *“I would say no, only because I have spent this entire time working from home in the pandemic, so I really haven't had much of an opportunity to interact with large groups to see how others interact with social norms and cues.”*
- *“I feel that my department is so specific that I have this really beautiful environment to where I only interact with folks of color.”*

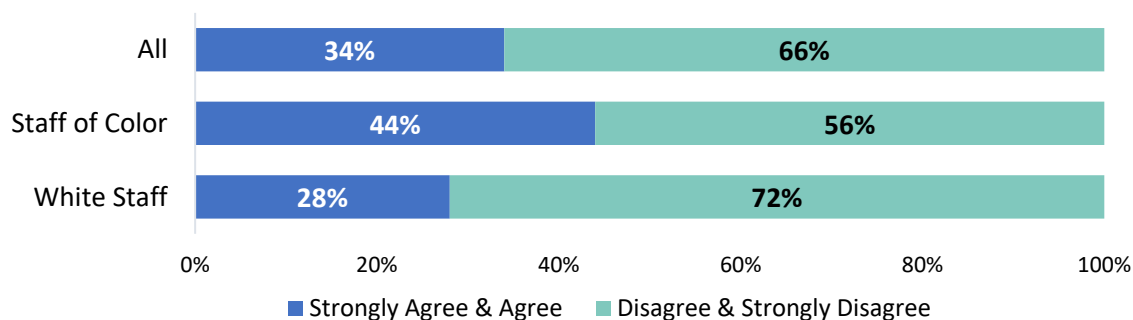
What would make MESD a more welcoming, culturally responsive, and equitable organization?

The final question asked of focus groups was for suggestions or input on how MESD could be a more welcoming, culturally responsive, and equitable organization. Staff would like to see more actions being taken to prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion across the organization, such as more training and space to have difficult conversation, as well as more opportunities for networking and cross-organizational connection.

Equity commitment: Staff would like to see more concrete actions being taken to prioritize equity, diversity and inclusion across the organization. A majority of focus groups (6 of 9 focus groups) detailed instances of inequity or microaggressions that run counter to the organization's commitment to inclusion.

- *"Walk the talk." If you're going to talk about equity, be about equity.*
- *"I think it's hard when you are serving the population you serve to be equitable. Unless we have a significant shift in hiring teachers of color and people who are willing to do the work to support our kids, that it is a hard spot to be equitable... There are some people who walk away and say, 'well I did my best' and really that's not a great mindset and it's not equitable. Portland in general is not an equitable city. It's a bigger thing that just MESD, so focusing on the staffing would help."*
- *"There are classrooms that do not have books that represent the population you serve. That's a disservice. When certain students walk through the door you already have it in your mind how this student is going to be... The list is real long. We've talked about this before. We've had meetings about this before. But to me, nothing ever comes of them. I think for me it's a hard spot. The other teachers want to talk about why recess is overlapping. That deep work is not being done. There are some big things we should be talking about."*
- *My name is spelled wrong often. Six times in the last two weeks. If it was a name like Mary Smith, this would not be a problem.*
- *"Internalized white supremacy - promote diversity but then you do x (ex. call a black child greasy), and it is not acknowledged as part of racism. Had to watch bias filter on children that are black and brown in color."*

Survey Artifact: About one-third of staff (34%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *I have personally witnessed a racist comment or microaggression from MESD staff*. Staff of color (44%) were more likely to agree with this statement than white staff (28%).



More training and conversations: One half of the staff focus groups (4 of 8 focus groups) asked for additional opportunities for training and practicing difficult conversations. It was particularly noted that this would be helpful for new staff as it would signal an organizational commitment from the beginning of their MESD experience.

- *"I would like to be part of courageous conversations. The problems are still there, and we are not talking about it."*
- *"If there was some type of onboard training for inclusion and diversity at the beginning, that would be great. This is a big topic."*
- *"When we are doing an orientation, to incorporate community groups that represent the population...cast a guest speaker or someone to come in and provide cultural sensitivity training. Some type of training for this new group so that right away, they see that this is important."*
- *"Staff having access to and wanting to engage in trainings. Not just the required ones..."*
- *"I would like to see Admin get strong anti-racism training in order for them to lead classes and lead people in the direction of the work. Admin meaning supervisors, teachers, whoever leads a 'team'."*

Networking and affinity spaces: Finally, four staff focus groups requested more space for networking and cross-organizational connection. The idea of providing affinity spaces, based on role, race/ethnicity, or other identity markers was mentioned as well.

- *"We are a very spread-out organization, and we don't get to see much ethnicity and diversity. Just to feel supported to know that growth is possible, to hear others that have had success within the company. More opportunities to get to know each other. Maybe some ethnic groups to connect since the organization is so spread out. Or role-alike groups."*
- *"More opportunities for people within the agency to connect. And making it more visible or offered."*
- *"I have been part of BIPOC affinity groups at past positions. It would be nice to have that space at MESD to talk about those issues."*
- *"One thing I think would be helpful instead of reported videos of Dr. Coakley, once a month do a live zoom for participation and then have the videos available after the meeting. Everyone feels more included and knows what is happening."*
- *"I am having to work harder to connect with the staff."*
- *"It would be great to have someone that represents your diverse population, to have someone from that is from MESD that connects and mentors you and connects with you. Makes you feel welcome. Not just an email That says right there they care about keeping you."*

Appendix A: Overview of Equity Audit Process

The Leadership Academy's equity audit process enables organizations to identify areas of inequity, uncover root causes, and build a plan of action for making improvements. The process includes the collection of data specific to particular areas of concern, and the organization of that data to allow for the opportunity to identify the policies, practices, and behaviors that may be contributing to gaps in outcomes, access, and experience.

The audit process focuses on racial equity because racial inequities are so pervasive in the U.S. and in American schooling. For example, students of color and economically disadvantaged students are more likely to have inexperienced teachers, attend under-funded schools and face lower expectations as evidenced by less challenging curriculums (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Black and Latinx students are less likely to attend schools where advanced courses are offered, and when they do, they are less likely to be enrolled in those courses (Patrick, Socol & Morgan, 2020).

Equity audits offer organizations a practical process for developing a more comprehensive and insightful understanding of the problems they are trying to address, which will lead to better strategies and theories of action that promote equity and inclusion (Skrla et al., 2004; Cheatham, Baker-Jones, & Jordan-Thomas, 2020). Those who study equity audits reveal that their power is in the collaborative process because it creates space for collective decision-making, gathering and grappling with the meaning of data, and mutual planning for change (Bleyaert, 2011; Green, 2017).

The Leadership Academy's audit process is broken up into four distinct phases:

Launch	Capturing the Current State	Root Cause Analysis	Developing a Plan of Action
Process introduced to full committee Collective purpose, goals and focus areas set Committee community building	Data is gathered through focus groups and a survey The Leadership Academy's research team analyzes data and creates a summary report with patterns and trends	Summary report provided to the committee Committee triangulates and unpacks data, uses root cause analysis tools to identify institutional causes Development of a problem statement(s)	Development of a theory of action and action plan based on findings with timeline, responsibilities, and data measure The Leadership Academy prepares a final report based on committee plans

Launch: In April 2022, an equity audit task force came together to help lead the work. The committee includes the following:

- Reiko Williams, Director of Regional Equity (co-chair)
- Kealani Balfour, Coordinator – Career Technical Education
- Ben Baldizon, Administrator for Paraeducators
- Renee Caballero, Community Liaison Administrator
- Dan Coehnstadt, Principal
- Amy Dustin, Principal
- Elisabeth Ferreira De Azevedo, Administrator, Curriculum & Instruction
- Todd Greaves, Coordinator – Director of Student Services
- Angela Hubbs, Senior Administrator, Curriculum & Instruction
- Jonathan Harrison, Assistant Principal
- Deon Logan, Director of Human Resources
- Sascha Perrins, Assistant Superintendent
- Nate Waas Shull, Coordinator – Grow Your Own

Leveraging The Leadership Academy's *Non-Profit Equity Continuum*, a tool designed to provide organizations with a means for assessing where they are on their equity journey, the audit committee chose two focus areas:

- **Professional Development** focuses on how the organization fosters ongoing equity-focused learning and growth for staff at all levels to sustain a culturally relevant school experience for all students and families.
- **Staff Diversity** focuses on how the organization recruits and retains a diverse staff that is reflective of the community they serve.

Committee members met between May and July 2022 to develop focus group to collect stakeholder perspectives on the chosen key areas.

Establishing the Current State: Insights and feedback were collected across 9 focus groups in September 2022.

Sampling and Data Collection - Focus group questions were created collaboratively between The Leadership Academy and the Multnomah Education Service District equity audit committee. The Leadership Academy provided guidelines for how to recruit and select focus group participants to help ensure that a range of views would be represented, and MESD was responsible for reaching out to potential respondents. Focus groups were conducted by Leadership Academy staff. All focus group participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential to encourage candor. A total of 9 focus groups were conducted with the following stakeholder groups:

- Administrators of Color
- Educational Assistants
- Equity & Inclusion Advancement Committee members
- New Employees of color
- Students
- School Health Assistants of Color
- Teachers of Color
- Tenured Employees of Color

In addition to focus groups, data from the MESD Employee Satisfaction Survey conducted in April 2022 was also reviewed. A total of 447 MESD employees responded to this survey of which:

- 51% identify as white and 17% identify as a person of color
- 42% are classified staff (such as educational assistant or administrative assistant)
- 34% have worked at MESD for 5 or more years
- 52% work on-site at a partner district site or at another MESD-operated facility

Data Analysis - Trained note takers took extensive notes during the focus groups. The Leadership Academy's Research & Evaluation team coded these focus groups according to the discussion topic (e.g., focus group guide question), and the themes within each topic. The *Non-Profit Equity Continuum* served as a framework for the analysis. Themes that emerged repeatedly across focus groups serve as the findings.

Root Cause Analysis and Development of An Action Plan: After engaging with the summarized data, the equity audit committee will engage in a root cause analysis protocol to further understand why these patterns and trends emerged and ensure proposed strategies are aligned to the real challenges the organization needs to address. Over a series of meetings, through a cycle of inquiry, the committee will develop strategies and action plans to address what was surfaced during the data collection phase.

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Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

Staff Questions

1. How would you describe MESD's beliefs, values, and assumptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion? In what ways do you see these impacting how the organization operates?
2. What are the knowledge and skills that MESD staff need in order for MESD to be a diverse, equitable and inclusive organization?
 - a. What types of professional learning and support do you need to develop those knowledge and skills? How would this look different for MESD leadership/supervisors (if at all)?
 - b. Are there examples of trainings, resources, forums, etc. that you have experienced that you would like to highlight?
3. What do conversations about race, equity, and inclusion look like within your department or MESD more broadly? How would you like to see conversations about race, equity, and inclusion addressed?
4. What obstacles, if any, do you face in having more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion within the organization? What would need to change within the organizational culture to encourage more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion?
5. In what ways, if at all, does MESD show that it is important to recruit, hire, retain, and promote a diverse staff reflective of the demographic diversity of the students it represents? In what ways does it not signal that this is important?
6. Thinking about unspoken norms in the organization—related to decision making, social structures, etc. Have you experienced or witnessed situations where there seemed to be invisible or hidden rules or policies in place—or where the rules seemed constantly to shift? If so, please explain.
7. What is your current understanding of how promotions and advancement happen in MESD? What perceptions do you have about what you need to do to get promoted? What do you need to do/who do you need to know to advance?
 - a. Is there anyone at MESD who supports your growth or encourages you to consider training or promotion opportunities? Who does this? In what ways?
8. Do you see discrepancies in career advancement among any racial/ethnic/gender identities? Why or why not?
9. What would make MESD a more welcoming, culturally responsive, and equitable organization? What would you like to see or experience that hasn't already been mentioned?

Student Questions

1. What do you think of when you hear the terms diversity, equity and inclusion? How do you experience diversity, equity and inclusion as a student in MESD?
2. What do your school staff need to know and understand in order for MESD to be a place where everyone feels seen, known and valued?
3. What do conversations about race look like within your classroom and school? How would you like to see conversations about race, equity, and inclusion addressed?
4. What makes it hard to have conversations about race, equity and inclusion in your school? What would need to change to encourage more open conversations about race, equity, and inclusion?
5. How common is it for you to have teachers and other adults who look like you? How does it make you feel?
6. What would make MESD a more welcoming place for students of color? What would you like to see or experience that hasn't already been mentioned?

Appendix C: Glossary of Terms

Bias: A form of prejudice that results from our need to quickly classify individuals into categories. (University of Washington)

Culturally responsive organization: A culturally responsive organization effectively meets the needs of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. It involves understanding the societal oppressions faced by various groups of people and creating an environment which centers and affirms the multiple identities of its members. This understanding is reflected in its services, staffing, philosophies, and policies.

Diversity: Diversity encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another, including race, gender, age, religion, language, disability, sexual orientation, ideology, values, etc. (UC Berkely Center for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity)

Equity: Children and adults receive what they each need to achieve their potential, and their race, culture and other characteristics of their identity should not prevent access to opportunities and resources (The Leadership Academy)

Ethnicity: A social construct that denotes groups that share a common identity-based ancestry, language, culture and values. It is often based on beliefs and customs as well as memories of migration or colonization. (Center for the Study of Social Policy).

Inclusion: A state of belonging, when persons of different backgrounds and identities are valued, integrated, and welcomed equitably as decision-makers and collaborators. Inclusion involves a sense of coming as you are and being accepted, rather than feeling the need to assimilate. (Center for the Study of Social Policy).

Race: A term used to artificially divide individuals into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical traits (skin color, hair texture, facial features), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, or history (Pacific University)

Racial inequity: Two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing (Ibram X. Kendi)

Systemic Racism: Also known as structural racism, it is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to White people resulting in disadvantages for People of Color. (University of California - Marymount)