Needham Public Schools Equity Audit

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Author Note
The author thanks the dedicated administrators, staff, teachers, students, and parents of the Needham Public Schools. Your candor, insight, vision, spirit and hopefulness are deeply appreciated.

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Context

This equity audit of the Needham Public Schools is based upon extensive data gathered from June-December 2017. Data gathered included a document review, school observations, and interviews and focus groups with students, parents, teachers and staff. A review of the research and literature on education and equity and positive education was also conducted.

Quality education depends upon an understanding of the dynamics that build systemic policy and planning structures that reduce disparities and ensure strong educational outcomes for all types of students. An inclusive and supportive school culture improves the quality of life for students, families, faculty, staff, and administration and bolsters student academic outcomes (Carter, 2011).

Addressing equity in education is crucial, as many historically marginalized communities do not have access to the supports, materials, and education-related policies that affect them. The development of a successful, comprehensive framework depends on the participation of a broad, representative coalition of students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members so that the policies created represent the needs, interests, expertise, and insight of all. Collective wisdom, deep listening, and experience are necessary (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2011).

This audit demonstrated an awareness of the increasing diversity in NPS and a stated commitment to educational equity: District-wide goals include conversant language around equity; the Needham Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) team is increasingly active and a committed group; and efforts on the school level have been implemented to address issues of culture. At the same time, exposure to reported bias may well be a source of the social inequality and stress that contributes to psychological and academic disparities of Needham students. This is confounded by reported discomfort in discussing matters of diversity with students and educators.

This document reviews disparities in the schools, and highlights areas of promise, strengths and assets Needham can build upon.

1.2 Summary of Findings

Review of district goals, emails and other communications showed NPS consistently articulates equity in its values. At the same time, focus groups with students, parents and educators suggested that communication with stakeholders must be enhanced, especially in response to reported micro- and macro-aggressions where there was a felt lack of urgency.

More than 100 instances of micro- and macro-aggressions were reported from every NPS school, grades K through 12. Students in focus groups recounted pejorative remarks from other students that went unaddressed by the school. Several staff members also reported a stressful school culture where they felt uncomfortable, for example, putting up photos of same-sex partners.

According to educators, students, and parents interviewed, the audit found that most NPS educators were reluctant to talk about race, ethnicity, LGBTQ status, religion, and other cultural differences. Interview data reveal that many teachers were hesitant to phone parents of students of color and/or parents who spoke languages other than English. Focus groups with teachers and staff also revealed a willingness and desire for expanded, substantive professional learning[1] around cultural responsiveness. Students in focus groups likewise expressed a desire for enhanced school programming on inclusion.

This audit revealed there are many NPS community members who are dedicated to equity, and/or who want to become more involved, including teachers, staff and parents. There is a hardworking ELL team that is working closely with Guidance and Special Education. Parents who participated in the audit whose children are part of the METCO program expressed a desire to play a larger role in the schools. In addition, many newcomers who attended focus groups want to be part of the NPS civic life. The participating representatives of both METCO and newcomers reported confusion about accessing school information and how to be active in the schools.

Participants in focus groups also suggested that school policies are not consistent, or clear. Students and parents interviewed perceive unfair disciplinary procedures, where students are treated differently depending on their socioeconomic status. In addition, some parents and students felt that classroom placement policies did not sufficiently respond to their concerns around previous micro- and macro-aggressions.

Other areas examined in this audit included teacher and staff diversity and inclusivity in the curriculum. Fewer than 8% of teachers identify as people of color, whereas 22.5% of students identify as people of color. The district has stated a commitment to diversity in their hiring practices and has more work it can do to realize that vision (see 7.5: Teacher & Staff Diversity). The district has also stated an explicit commitment to inclusivity in curriculum in District Goal 2, Objective 1. Parents and students in focus groups urged for an updated curriculum. Some students expressed concern that they do not see themselves represented in the curriculum; some are worried that lack of exposure will leave them ill-prepared when they go to college.

With room for growth, NPS has strengths to build upon:

- A district-level, stated commitment to equity
- Invested community members
- Successes in equity and inclusion. For example:
    - NPS worked to establish a welcoming environment for students with a disability;
    - all individual schools, from the senior level, have developed an appropriate process to accommodate transgender students;
    - there are ongoing efforts to strengthen professional learning to help teachers work with special education students and English Language Learners;

[1] Professional learning is used in this report to describe professional development at the request of NPS.

- small-scale, school-based inclusive data reviews with an equity focus have been very successful.

1.3 Summary of Recommendations

To address concerns raised in focus groups and interviews, and to build upon current strengths, the following general recommendations are offered. For more specific recommendations, refer to the recommendations in the full report.

1.3.1 School Culture

- Enlist the entire school community to work toward building a respectful, trusting, supportive work culture focused around equity and high-quality connections (Dutton, 2003; Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).
- Build a system-wide school culture where all students and staff know that they matter, that they add value and are valued. Feeling a sense of belonging is perhaps the most salient construct in academic achievement.
- Immediately convene the Needham Race, Equity, and Leadership (REAL) team and expand it to include the School Committee, students, parents, and Needham community membership as an overarching leadership body.
- Invest in mental health guidance and support.

1.3.2 School Policies

- Develop, implement, and evaluate a Needham Public Schools Equity Plan that is accessible to the community, accountable and reports to the School Committee.
- Develop a system-wide process for implementation, enforcement, and reporting of disciplinary matters. As a public system, accountability and transparency are a priority.
- Provide more timely responsiveness to parents and students who contact teachers, principals, administrators or the superintendent.
- Develop a system-wide accommodations policy as part of the equity policy and in response to the growing diversity in Needham. This is part of a family engagement strategy and inclusion strategy highlighted in state standards.
- Convene the REAL team to review the student placement policy.

1.3.3 Incorporating Data

- Use data to build organizational and staffing capacities, inform staff learning, and build student academic and social-emotional skills.
- Develop and staff an internal data alignment, program evaluation, and systematic review process.

1.3.4 Professional Learning

- Implement system-wide, evidence-based professional learning programming on the following:
  - cultural responsiveness and courageous conversations on race, ethnicity, LGBTQ, and other identities;
  - effective interventions related to identity-bullying, discriminatory behavior, bias and communication;
  - understanding of child and adolescent development and its relationship to academic achievement.
- Develop a short-term process to build teaching staff competence in their execution of culturally responsive teaching and learning methods. Incorporate these efforts *as quickly as possible*.
- Review, revise, and strengthen the NPS cultural proficiency module to focus on cultural responsiveness.

- Work with an established entity, with a track record of success, facility in child and adolescent development, and cultural responsiveness.

1.3.5 Teacher & Staff Diversity

- Immediately affirm educators who have the skills and facility to handle micro- and macro-aggressions, and work with colleagues as systemic alignment occurs.
- Implement the stated value of equity in evaluation and staffing decisions.
    - Comply with the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) in all performance reviews.
    - Prioritize diversification of staff.
    - Consistently use questions in the interview process to understand candidates' experience, skills, facility, and work with diverse populations.

1.3.6 Building an Inclusive Curriculum

- Build capacity for curriculum development and prioritize inclusion and equity.
- Review textbooks to gauge inclusion.

1.3.7 METCO

- Strengthen the relationship with Boston METCO families and facilitate ongoing clear communication across all grades and all school buildings.
- Prioritize METCO family engagement.

1.3.8 English Language Learners

- Adhere to an equity framework and ensure ELL teachers and staff receive evidence-based professional learning.
- Support cross team functioning between teachers, ELL staff, subject matter experts, and other colleagues for student academic success.
- Expand the ELL team; it is likely that this population will continue to grow.

1.3.9 Parent Engagement

- Build an inclusive parent engagement model where Needham residents, METCO parents, parents of color, and newcomers are welcomed.
- Create a sense of warmth, congeniality, and high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy, Carmeli, Spreitzer, & Dutton, 2013).
- Establish a discrete parent engagement office as a part-time position and a liaison for all parents and families.[2]

[2] *See* Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2014). *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family- School Partnerships: Retrieved February 22, 2016, from* *http://www.sedl.org/pubs/framework/FE-Cap- Building.pdf*.

2 Introduction

The equity audit for the Needham Public Schools was conducted from June 26, 2017 through December 20, 2017 by an area consultant with assistance from educational leaders. Following a series of concerns expressed by a group of Needham Public School parents, the audit was designed to respond to questions posed by the Needham Race, Equity, and Leadership (REAL) team.

The Needham Public School System has recognized the importance of educational equity as evidenced by 1) the establishment of the REAL team; 2) hiring a consultant to conduct an equity audit; 3) professional learning activities specific to cultural difference; 4) academic program enhancements specifically in math to address noted achievement gap concerns; 5) various working groups focused on implementing change at the school level 6) a series of activities that focus on issues of culture including a speakers series, book reading, and family inclusion and engagement platforms.

For this audit, data was collected from websites, district documents, school observations, more than sixty in-person interviews, and more than ten focus groups with parents, teachers, and middle to high school students.

In the interviews and focus groups, individuals reported numerous instances of micro- and macro-aggressions. Staff, teachers, parents, and students expressed concern about ongoing bullying and inappropriate comments in and outside of the classroom and many staff members report being rendered silent on race, ethnicity, and LGBTQ issues. The lack of teachers' ability to talk about sensitive issues was noted as a widespread problem in all eight Needham Public Schools. These matters combine to put heightened stress on the mental health and wellbeing of both students and staff.

The purpose of this audit is to assemble a body of information that will bolster the capacity of the school system, community, and its institutions to:

- grow leaders and support leadership development within the administration, staff, faculty, student body, parent groups, and related stakeholders on education equity.
- facilitate a process to review and analyze data, in order to develop system-wide capacity, skills, and processes to address disparities and inequity.
- think alongside NPS constituents to identify assets and challenges, policies, procedures, entry points, strategies, and aligned endeavors that foster educational equity.
- identify promising practice approaches which will be shared and documented for the benefit of the Needham community.

2.1 Equity in Education

The Department of Public Instruction in Wisconsin defines educational equity as:

> *The educational policies, practices, and programs necessary to a) eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age or other protected group status; and b) provide equal educational opportunities to ensure that historically underserved or underrepresented*

populations meet the same rigorous standards for academic performance expected of all children and youth.

Inequities in education systematically put groups of people who have been traditionally socially disadvantaged (for example, students with disabilities, low-income, and/or members of a historically marginalized racial, ethnic, or religious group) at a further disadvantage with respect to their opportunity trajectory. Equity in education is achieved when students have access to the resources they need so they graduate prepared after high school for academic and personal success. Feeling that they belong is perhaps the most salient factor in an academic setting (Steele, 2010; Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012).

2.2 National Context & Why An Equity Framework Matters

Nearly 25% of public school students in the US have an immigrant parent (Camarota, Griffith, & Zeigler, 2017). Children of color, including those identifying as African American/black, Latino, Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, and biracial constitute nearly 30% of the US population and are among the fastest growing groups in the country (Chappell, 2017).

Unfortunately, these groups are put at a disadvantage due to discriminatory practices codified in US social customs, laws, and institutions (Rothstein, 2017; Lui, Anderson, Lenodar-Wright, Robles & Brewer, 2006; Wilkerson, 2011). This systemic discrimination has been the cause of pernicious group differences in material conditions (housing, education, employment options, and medical care access), and access to power (media control, and political and economic influence). Simultaneous exposure to personal and systemic bias accounts for increased stress and population-wide adverse health outcomes for members of historically marginalized communities (Cammarota, & Romero, 2006; Crosnoe, 2015; Appendix A).

Students across the nation report the effects of divisive rhetoric and derogatory dialogue (Kamenetz, December 2017). Successful negotiation of discrimination has become a necessity for numerous US children. Notably, children of color, children with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth have needed to build both a bicultural identity and a healthy self-image to mitigate psychological damage and adopt an array of effective coping strategies to improve the likelihood of increasing their goals (Jones & Neblett, 2017; Spencer, 1990; McLloyd, 2004). Belonging is a crucial construct and has been shown to effect performance (Steele, 2010 Walton et al 2012).

In the US, discussions of race, religion, and sexual orientation are often taboo and results in schools being ill-prepared for the enormous diversity in their communities. Silence on these matters forestalls learning how to talk to those who are "different" and the story of "the other" often goes unheard (Pollock, 2004). Disparities and silence hurt everyone in the community and have real implications for academic success (Sanders-Phillips, Settles-Reaves, Walker, & Brownlow; 2009). Additionally, ALL students are impacted for life by what we say and what we do not say (Pollock, 2004; Sizer, 2000). We are not silent about what we love, value, and cherish; the lack of discourse and appearance in school curriculum reinforces the obvious: "they" are of little value. As a result, legions of children who are "other" are isolated, undermining their perceived competence, and mattering daily (Pollock, 2004).

Facilitation of a school climate that fosters a supportive and engaging culture, enhances social belonging and works with a mindset that is conducive for all is an important aspiration (Walton, et al 2012). Equity affects everyone; for those being targeted, there is a decrease in self-efficacy, and an increase in depression and hopelessness (Sanders-Phillips, Settles-Reaves, Walker, & Brownlow; 2009; Appendix A). Children's social experiences and environment have pronounced impacts on developmental and educational outcomes. Thus, they need adults in their lives who help them navigate the bias and discrimination that threaten to derail their healthy development and academic achievement.

Across the US, school systems, communities, leaders, and stakeholders are working together to ensure more equitable outcomes for school-age children and youth in their respective communities (Blank & Berg 2006; Block & McKnight, 2012). There has been an explosion of activity in local communities that cross lines of race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, ability, and profession. School systems and leaders are partnering, building networks, integrating learning, and collaborating with students, families, staff and community leaders to ensure equitable outcomes for all students in creative ways (Larson, 2017; Cohen, Fege & Pickeral, 2009).

It is possible to make strides, but a commitment of time, intention, attention, resources, and persistence is necessary. Disparate treatment is rooted in essential community and policy realities. Broad, persistent systemic efforts are vital to bring about the kind of meaningful change that can enhance the educational environment for faculty, administrators, parents, and staff and to improve the educational outcomes of students (Kotter, 2007).

3 Needham Public Schools

The Needham Public School system, consisting of five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, is a strong school system. With a 13.9:1 teacher to student ratio, the district serves 5,588 students: 2,632 in elementary school, 1,297 in middle school, and 1,659 in high school. The per-pupil expenditure is $16,547. The Town of Needham provides approximately $56 million in local dollars to support education at a rate of 86.7% of the budget, making NPS more insulated from state education aide fluctuations.

Needham Public Schools are becoming more diverse each year with various languages, cultures, faith traditions, types of families, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, learning styles, types of disabilities, and countries of origin. Forty-seven languages are spoken by Needham Public School students and 9.3% of students' first languages are other than English. In FY2017, students of color comprised 21.5% of the student body. Students with a disability comprised 16.3% of the student population and 5.4% of students were designated as economically disadvantaged.

Needham is rapidly changing. Numerous immigrant families, different family configurations, people with various sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, and religious traditions now reside in the town. METCO students and their families from the city of Boston bring additional diversity to the school system.

3.1 Stated Commitment to Equity

The Needham Public School system has identified the core values of Scholarship, Citizenship, Community, and Personal Growth as being fundamental to its mission. These values provide a foundation for educating students and supporting district goals and plans. Needham has established the following published district goals that reflect the commitment to inclusion:

> **Goal One:** Advance learning for all students: To refine and continue to put into practice a system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enables each student to be engaged in challenging, creative, and rigorous learning experiences that are grounded in clearly defined standards.
>
> **Goal Two:** Develop social, emotional, wellness, and citizenship skills: To ensure students develop the knowledge and skills that empower healthy, resilient, engaged, and culturally proficient citizens who act with integrity, respect, and compassion.
>
> **Goal Three:** Ensure infrastructure supports learning goals: To develop promote, and implement a sustainable plan for financial, building, technological, and human resources that support learning for all and is responsive to school and student needs.

The April 15, 2017 report to the Needham School Committee, *Supporting our District in Addressing Racial Equity,* outlines the commitment to advancing educational equity. The school system is interested in learning about systemic models to increase understanding of equity, promising practices, and approaches to advancing equity. The system is working to build greater leadership and advocacy capacity, and to implement community-based strategies that work to advance all families engaged in the Needham Public schools and the larger community.

Needham Public Schools have worked to build a series of programs and events related to inclusion. A small group of deeply dedicated staff have worked for more than ten years to develop programs that strive to promote equity and inclusion. Launching Scholars, IDEAS staff training, Castle, Diversity Summit, the Culture and Climate Committee at the High school, Mentored Homeroom, Own Your Peace/Piece, Hot Topics/Hot Chocolate, and a data-based school-wide equity plan implemented at the Eliot School are promising examples. These programs enhance academic skills, foster leadership development, build student/teacher relationships, and work to address the needs of students who are members of traditionally marginalized groups (including but not limited to LGBTQ students, students of color, students with disabilities and English Language Learners).

3.2 Persistent Disparities

Needham has articulated its commitment to equity in numerous emails, blogs, letters and reports, and each individual school identifies equity and inclusion as one of its key principles. Yet, focus groups with students, parents, teachers, and administrators reveal a significant number of macro- and micro-aggressions in all of the district's public schools. Though perhaps unintentional, teacher and staff silence concerning these matters suggests to students these matters are not important or worthy of discussion.

Both personal and group bias have factored into the present situation in Needham. There have been instances where an individual has been a target (a student bullied because of race, immigrant status, or LGBTQ status); there have been effects across the entire community (N-word on a door, building wall, or restroom wall) and class assignments have been made in consideration of race (a practice that has been discontinued district-wide).

The themes of disparity found in this audit were also evident an equity audit conducted in 2010 by doctoral candidates in Boston College's Educational Leadership Program as part of their coursework (see 5: Findings). While the school system has taken important strides toward improvement, most efforts have been for small groups of selected students or single day events that occur six or seven times during the school year. The school system has yet to implement an effective system-wide approach to equity.

4 Methodology

This audit was conducted over a six-month period, specifically under the guidance of Needham Public School Leadership: the Superintendent; the Director of Planning, Communications, and Community Education; and the Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services. The consultant was interviewed initially by the REAL team, but did not meet with the full committee during the six-month audit process.

Equity audits are typically used as a way for school leadership to assess the degree of systemic equity or inequity present in three key areas: programs, teacher quality, and student achievement. They also provide strategies to improve equity outcomes across an entire school district or system (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).

An equity audit oversamples for historically marginalized communities. The sample of respondents included was broad and is outlined below. It is critical to hear from outliers as they often have critical information that may be "ahead of the curve" and they may provide instructive information for planning. This purposeful sampling included visits to every school in the system and several visits to the middle schools and high school. It is acknowledged that the perspective of middle school and high school students was gathered directly. Parents, teachers, staff, and administrators provided the elementary student perspective. Due to their age and the sensitivity of the subject matter, focus groups were not held in the elementary schools.

4.1 Identity Formation, Intersectionality & Socioecological Frameworks

Identity Formation includes concepts of identity, social relationships, culture, achievement, learning and motivation and is based on a foundation that recasts human needs (Dweck, 2017; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory emphasizes the need for self-coherence: a combination of identity (who I am) as defined by social conventions, role, categories and perceived competences, (Erikson, 1950; Fromm, 1955) and meaning (what I become in my quest to be valued) (Frankl, 1959; May, 1950; Seligman, 2011). Meaning aligns with conceptualizations of mattering and mattering is distinguished as central to human existence (Prilleltensky, 2012). Moreover, the constructs of mattering and meaning align with the prominent need for acceptance (Dweck, 2017; Rogers, 1961). Identity does matter and is a foundational human construct, at the heart of who we are and central to self-coherence. Pivotal research on the importance of belonging and stereotype

threat is emerging from Stanford University. Thousands of studies have been completed and are invaluable for educators (Steele, 2010; Walton, et al 2012).

The *intersectionality framework* seeks to honor, articulate, capture and consider the multiple identities of US students. The theoretical approach behind intersectionalities encourages us to look at the wealth of identities students bring into the classroom and recognize that they frequently are in combination (Collins, 2013; Appendix B). For example, a recent female immigrant from Korea is a person of color, an immigrant, a girl, and an English Language Learner. Support may be needed in all areas as the student adjusts to the language, culture, social norms and school, and establishes unique developmental and learning goals.

Because of this level of diversity in our schools, requisite staff supports, financing streams, and accommodations in teaching and thinking need to be adjusted.

A *socioecological framework* was also used to frame the Needham equity audit. This framework takes multiple levels into consideration from the individual and interpersonal to the organizational and political. Students and parents discussed their expectations of transparency, deep listening and responsiveness. Questions about the curriculum were posed as well as the ability to manage both macro- and micro-aggressions. Queries were posed to understand policy changes and how they are implemented across the system. An overall assessment of professional learning was also undertaken, as well as attitudes around community and neighborhood synergy.

In a socioecological model, healthy children thrive in healthy families, in a healthy school system, in a thriving community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Appendix B). Everyone benefits when school programs K through 12 are responsive to individual student needs, are supportive of parental input, and are aligned with state and federal standards.

4.2 Data Collection & Timeline

The small working group consisting of the Superintendent, Director of Student Support Services, and Director of Planning, Communications and Community Education met on a regular basis, provided data, and arranged interviews and focus groups. A qualitative methodology was utilized to gain a detailed understanding of NPS. This methodology provided the opportunity to highlight perspectives of various subpopulations including students (middle and high school), Needham and METCO parents, teachers and administrators.

Data were analyzed and discussed with the small working group as identified above throughout the audit process. Recommendations were made throughout the audit process to keep administration apprised of the progress and allow for mid-course correction. The final focus group was held in mid-November 2017. Initial findings were reviewed with the small working group and at a meeting of senior administrators and principals in early December 2017. A power point presentation and discussion were featured at the December 19, 2017 meeting of the Needham Public School Committee.

Though the audit process was initiated in June of 2017, much of the data reviewed was from the 2016 to 2017 school year or from earlier dates. It is worth noting that there was a marked change in the national discourse over the course of the year. The ongoing dialogue from

Washington and the nightly news frequently mentioned issues including LGBTQ rights, immigration, refugees, documentation/deportation, bans on religions, incarceration, discrimination against African Americans and Latinos, sexual harassment, and the like. The report, the conversations, and tone of the dialogue changed to be much more fearful, anxious, tense, and at times distraught.

Much of the data is more than a year old and events of the past year have changed many perspectives. This has implications for the application and relevance of data as some information may not be as relevant or reliable as what was reported in the current interviews and/or focus groups.

4.2.1 Document Review

The document review began in June with more than one hundred pieces of Needham documentation. Additional documents were provided by principals, the superintendent, school administrators, and focus group members as the audit progressed.

The equity audit of 2017 builds upon data from documents that examine explicit issues of equity related to the Needham Public Schools: a) an equity audit conducted in 2010 by doctoral candidates in Boston College's Educational Leadership Program as part of their coursework; b) a 2014 METCO Program Review; c) the Staff of Color Survey on Recruitment and Retention Practices (May 2017) and d) the 2017 ELL Action Cycle for Implementation.

4.2.2 Interviews

Interviews were scheduled by the school administration with more than fifty senior administrators, all principals, and representatives from every school and division. The consultant team met with principals and administrators in their respective offices thereby having the opportunity to observe the schools. An interview protocol is attached (Appendix D). Participants were voluntary and self-selected.

4.2.3 Focus Groups

A total of ten focus groups were held. Needham Public School administrators invited participants and sent out emails. Focus groups were scheduled to last one hour, however nearly all the groups remained well over an hour. One group stayed for more than three hours. A focus group protocol is attached (Appendix E).

All participation in focus groups was voluntary and no compensation was given. The purpose of the audit is to identify trends; therefore, it is critical to retain confidentiality; no names of students, teachers, or schools were taken. One exception was Needham High School as there is only one high school in Needham. Pollard and High Rock were also mentioned as there are no other middle schools. Some of the participants elected to introduce themselves to other members of their respective communities. No identifying data was collected by the consultant team. However, there was representation of every school and neighborhood in Needham in the process.

4.2.3.1 Parents

Total: 170 Parents; Attendees were approximately 2/3 female and 1/3 male.
Invitations were sent by the administration to parents via the parent email list, superintendent blog and other posts. Two parent focus groups were held in the evening in Needham at the Administration Building. METCO parents were invited through the METCO Director. Two

parent focus groups were held at the Twelfth Street Baptist Church. Requests to participate were made until the end of the data collection phase.

4.2.3.2 Students

Total: 57 students

Principals, teachers, and staff recommended and invited student participants. Student focus groups were held in the following schools: High Rock Middle School, Pollard Middle School, and Needham High School. The middle school groups were conducted during the lunch hour over pizza. The high school groups met immediately after school. There was no elementary school focus group. It was assumed that the parents would speak on behalf of the younger children; there was a robust discussion of elementary school matters.

4.2.3.3 Teachers & Staff

Total: 52 teachers/staff

Two focus groups were held for teachers and staff immediately after school in the administration building. Principals also recommended and contacted teachers/staff members who expressed interest.

5 Findings

Equity is a stated priority of NPS and appears throughout all district material, emails, and is on all school websites. All who participated in the audit were aware of the existence of the stated policy and equity as a concept was understood clearly by participating students and parents, some teachers and increasingly by the administration.

Nearly all participating parents, students, and teachers/staff of color and those with specialized developmental training understood the significance, magnitude, and breadth of disparities. A deeper understanding of the depth of disparities, the relevance of the intersectionality framework and the implications for the entire community became clear during the audit.

A review of findings from the 2010 Equity Audit show disparities persist in 2017. Findings from the 2010 audit read:

- *Almost all interviewees identified students from at least one subgroup as being marginalized, disenfranchised or treated unfairly.*
- *Students of color were brought up by almost all of the participants as a growing subgroup in Needham whose needs are not being addressed both in the classroom and in the community at large.*
- *Many reported that these students are not connecting to the community and experience a cultural gap relative to their white peers.*
- *Many reported that staff…don't have the cultural awareness training and skills to properly address students of color to create a learning environment that is responsive to students from a variety of cultural backgrounds.*

In this audit, document review, interviews and focus groups reveal similar themes as above: a school culture that avoids dialogue around issues of culture and race and where micro- and macro-aggressions are pervasive and students, teachers, staff, and parents report feeling as

though they don't belong. Other themes include: inconsistencies or confusions in terms of school policies and communications; the need for a more inclusive curriculum; and a willingness and desire on behalf of teachers and staff for professional learning around cultural responsiveness. These themes, and others, are discussed below.

5.1 Lack of Dialogue

Interviews and focus groups showed widespread concern around the lack of dialogue in matters of difference. Students and parents felt faculty and staff were ill-prepared or unwilling to handle difficult conversations and faculty and staff expressed their own discomfort (see 5.3: Professional Learning).

It is of note that recent arrivals from private and parochial schools expressed concern about the lack of ability to discuss diversity, manage classrooms, and teach in an inclusive manner that engages diverse perspectives. Parents in focus groups who have moved to Needham from other places consistently expressed concern. In the words of three parents:

> *Issues of race and identity are not discussed here; I am very surprised, I am a white parent, and this matters a great deal to me. We came from a private school system that provided so much more to our children.*
>
> *Race and ethnicity should be talked about comfortably and not only in writing*!
>
> *At home, race is a part of life. You talk about it. This is just odd; what is wrong here? No one asks about my country of origin, I am happy to talk about me and learn about you!*

Instances were also recounted where staff/faculty and administration of NPS appeared to be uncomfortable and/or inappropriate in responding to parent queries, phoning parents, meeting with parents, and engaging in ongoing dialogue. The discomfort noted most often involved uncomfortable conversations between teachers and METCO parents, parents of English language learners and others, around issues of race, ethnicity, language and socioeconomic status.

More than half of student respondents reported being in an interaction where very inappropriate language was used, and teachers did nothing. Students feel abandoned, often traumatized and unable to focus on schoolwork due to this silence. Some students tried to address the situation on their own leading to further confusion, isolation and mistrust. In students' words:

> *People tend to ignore diversity here. We do not celebrate it. The school gives a superficial nod. It is weird.*
>
> *There are students here who are just being mean. They are ignorant. No one seems to care. It is not this way at other schools. I went to a school where people spoke up, teachers were woke, we talked about this issue. Here people don't talk. Lots of ignorance, the teachers too. It is like they don't know anything about black, Latino or gay kids. I guess they don't.*

According to the students who were interviewed, the silence on issues of race, sexual orientation, religion, country of origin, and other attributes is deafening for students. Middle

and high school students want guidance as to how to talk with classmates in an increasingly diverse world. They want to understand. Many expressed their personal needs for support as they struggle to come to terms with their own racial, sexual, gender, religious, or other identities.

5.2 Micro/Macro Aggressions

During focus groups and interviews, nearly every parent of color, immigrant family, many ELL families, families of LGBTQ students, and all high school students reported numerous instances of discriminatory behavior that they perceived as deliberate. More than 100 instances were reported and a representative sample is included below to show the pervasiveness of this issue. Reports were received from every NPS school grades K to 12.

Some students from historically marginalized communities expressed dismay about stereotypes. Several students recounted pejorative remarks on their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and appearance. A recurring theme was a lack of teacher intervention. In the words of two different students:

> *People are just dismissive and disrespectful. We were talking about the genocide in Rwanda and people were laughing. This is not something to laugh at. People started teasing about it in the hall afterward. It made me feel sick. Some students don't want to learn and hold others back; some teachers say nothing.*

> *I was handing out information at my table and there was this group of kids, jeering, laughing, really foul language. The teacher was right there and did nothing. I had to handle the whole thing. It was unfair and just wrong. It is hard for me to respect a teacher like that, they clearly do not respect me.*

This data is consistent with national research that shows almost all (98%) of black Americans report having experienced some type of racial discrimination in their lifetime (Landrine & Klonoff,1996). This data is also consistent with the findings of the Needham 2010 Equity Audit. In the 2017 focus group process, Asian youth specifically reported racism from teachers/staff and peers. Black and Latino girls reported vile language, discriminatory comments, exclusion, and misogynistic comments.

Staff members (which includes administrative staff, guidance, school health, sports and athletics, and other support staff) reported that the school climate in some schools is stressful even for them. They said they feel discomfort putting up family photos of same-sex partners and/or a partner of another race or ethnicity due to an uncomfortable level of gossip and joking. Staff were also concerned about the lack of sensitivity that exists among adults across the system. They worry students do not receive the guidance they need.

There are ongoing, troubling trends that highlight significant disparities, as the following sample of parent, student, teacher and administrator reported micro- and macro-aggressions experienced by students in traditionally marginalized communities in the Needham Public Schools shows:

Reported Examples of Mirco/Macro Aggressions

- Multiple instances of racist and homophobic graffiti
- N word: in graffiti, written notes, verbal taunts

- F word used against LGBTQ students; in graffiti, verbal taunts
- Anti-Semitic graffiti
- Unequal treatment for infractions; white students privileged and punitive action not same as students of color
- Inappropriate comments, leers, and cat-calling during hall passing; reported to staff but no follow up action
- Athletic team use of vulgarities, racial slurs and jokes

Reported Comments Heard By Stakeholders:

- Chanting: "Build a Wall"
- "You can't be a princess if you are brown"
- "Brown is bad, ugly, scary, smelly, poor"
- "Don't touch me if you are brown"
- "Only people with yellow hair can be a princess"
- "All Latinos are from Mexico; they can't speak English; go work in a field"
- "All Latinos are drug dealers; what does your daddy do?"
- "Go back to your country; we don't want you here"
- "You can never be pretty because you're brown"
- "Brown people come from apes"

5.3 Professional Learning & Cultural Responsiveness

All stakeholders expressed interest in professional learning opportunities to address the lack of dialogue and urgent need for increased cultural responsiveness.

Needham teachers and staff urged for a deeper and more comprehensive investment in professional learning. They showed a deep interest in specific tools and methodologies to converse more effectively with youth of color, and about LGBTQ issues, disability, and issues affecting all traditionally marginalized communities. Concerned they will be perceived as insensitive, some teachers expressed unease with the wide diversity of race, languages, learning styles, abilities, and ethnicities of students. Many teachers stated their uncertainty about what is appropriate to discuss and what is inappropriate discuss. Many staff admit they do not intervene in hearing student conversations that are hurtful or inappropriate because they do not know what to say. One participant shared:

> *I would love to know more, more specifics. There is a great deal to handle. I want to get this right. It is important.*

Teachers were also concerned about the isolation of some historically marginalized students:

> *They are just by themselves a lot of the time. It is sad to see.*

Several educators, staff, faculty, and administrators expressed frustration with the current cultural proficiency programming. Those who had participated in the programs were thankful for the opportunity but explained they were ready to move on to much more substantive work. Several teachers and staff want deeper, more intentional, and meatier conversations as well as concrete tools. There has been no formal program evaluation of the 2015-2017 cultural proficiency training. Therefore, there are no process or outcome measures or baseline data.

Many teachers and staff felt that mandated training was very helpful in shedding light on these issues. As one participant stated:

> *With our previous program (IDEAS), we were all on the same page, it was easier to work together and speak a common language. We all attended the same training.*

However, others interviewed mentioned the reluctance of some colleagues to engage in meaningful dialogue about cultural differences, and several accommodations were and continue to be made to make staff more comfortable with the topics discussed. There was concern expressed that great care is given to staff feelings and much less to the delicate psychological effects on children. There was active debate on this topic. One participant said:

> *I am just not ready to discuss those topics yet.*

Staff appear to be urgently seeking clarity on what it means to be a Needham Public School educator in terms of the skills, commitment, understanding, and capacity to dialogue and work with students, parents and colleagues about race, diversity and education. Many educators who participated in the focus group urged a requirement of facility in cultural responsiveness.

Educators and parents also repeatedly requested professional learning opportunities for teachers who were ill-prepared to address the outlined instances of bias, discrimination and disrespect. In their view, in some cases, educators worsen the situation due to lack of experience and insight. For example, in a focus group it was reported that one educator, in response to the N-word scrawled in the bathroom at an elementary school commented: *Those children should just get a thicker skin*. In general, parents were concerned by teachers' apparent lack of capacity to handle bias:

> *I am embarrassed as a parent; this is sad. Teachers are not familiar with handling issues of diversity or discussing race or ethnicity. The students notice, ask questions, we talk about it at home all the time. The school is not supporting us in our efforts.*
>
> *All of our kids are affected! I do not want my child to be witness to slurs, chanting, negative remarks. I did not move here for this, I am a white parent, but I am raising a child to be compassionate and respectful. Some students come to school and say horrific things to students. Teachers must intervene*!
>
> *These are not isolated instances. There was a second instance, the emails sent are beautiful; the educators do not have experience and tools to handle the situations in a thoughtful, compassionate, and effective way.*

Many students expressed desire for more development in cultural responsiveness and more dialogue on issues of race, culture and identity:

> *The high school is very segregated by race, gender, queer status. We often have to speak up in class and we are not the teachers. It should not happen only on special days; it should happen all the time. We are not black, Latino, or gay one or two days of the year; but every day!*

We should have small group conversations, ongoing to discuss school culture. Often the same students are invited to things like this and that is not so great a thing. Others need to learn. It is good to hear from others why mocking other people is hurtful, why some feel the way that they do. I try to talk with them but there is little time for that type of learning here, it is important. Can we reach a day when I can invite them in? It would be great for the entire high school community to come together for one hour every other week. We determine the topic. We should put it on the schedule. The principal could come if he is able. Just to talk, and listen, and learn like this. We can learn from each other. What's on your mind? Talk about issues, diversity, openness, feel like you matter and are valued.

5.4 School Programming on Inclusion

Like teachers and staff reported in focus groups, students in focus groups expressed a willingness and desire for more programming around cultural inclusion. They cited some successful programming and suggested these programs be integrated earlier into their education.

Here is a sample of student responses:

We have these days where we talk about diversity. There is Own your Peace/Piece; that is really good. There is a group at the high school. There is Reach Out Day and they encourage you to cross the line and work against hate. It is good to see. But it is only one day. It should be every day! I mean, it should be in all the classes. This is relevant, but it is like the teachers don't know how to make it part of what we learn. We could though, like when we talk about Shakespeare and stuff; it could be part of the classes.

We had a day when we were given an identity packet. We talked about disability and ALS. We read articles, saw videos. I learned a lot. It was sad because some kids never read the packet. They made jokes all day. There should be a way to help on student attitude. This is an example where the school did the right thing, but students did not want to. I guess they are ignorant and scared, but it ruined it for the rest of us.

We should start this in kindergarten and it should just be part of every day in every way. They wait until high school, have these special days. The kids have a mindset by then. If kids started earlier it would be different, they would learn how important other people are.

5.5 School Policies & Communications

All eight schools have engaged leaders and staff. Each school operates with a great deal of autonomy; principals lead their respective schools independently. The specifics and implementation of many initiatives are developed and implemented by principals. Much of the interpretation and implementation of policy, terminology, and specificity is determined by the principal and the teachers depending on the building.

Presently, there seems to be a lack of consistent discussion between schools about promising practice, models or strategies. The implementation of the equity vision does not seem to have been fully incorporated in any of the Needham schools though specific teachers,

administrators, and staff members have shown individual commitment, vision, valor, and have made extraordinary commitments to equity.

5.5.1 Disciplinary Policies

Though there are thorough disciplinary policies at NPS, the parents who were interviewed expressed that they are not aware of their existence. Parents stated that policies are implemented differently in different schools at the discretion of the principals and in some schools, implementation is left to the classroom teachers.

There is a felt lack of consistency across the school system, and in some cases, within individual schools. Parents discussed their own confusion and the confusion this created for their children. This results in a perception that disciplinary action is capricious, a patchwork of misunderstood standards, and the lack of consistency serves to exacerbate the perception of disparities. One student stated:

> *People are not treated the same here. We all have some opportunities, but they are different and turn out differently. Kids who are wealthy are treated differently; their parents get them off the hook; if your parents are doctors, lawyers, those kids disrespect the teachers and administrators. The parents intimidate school officials. The high school does not want to be in conflict with the privileged.*

5.5.2 Classroom Placement

Students, parents, and educators who were interviewed remarked on the impact of classroom placement, seat assignments, and pairings on student achievement. Students and parents reported classroom placement with teachers who have been silent during instances or students who had been aggressors in micro- and/or macro-aggressive behavior; many have been traumatic for targeted students. Respondents stated that often the impact on the offended student was minimized. Even if apologies are made, the level of trauma experienced by students has been substantial in cases, warranting a re-examination of classroom placement and groupings.

Respondents requested flexibility, prudence, respect, and deep listening to students as young as kindergarten in respect to classroom placement. Students and parents reported placements that were traumatic for students. For example, following micro- or macro-aggressions, some students have been seated next to a student who was an aggressor or in a classroom with a teacher who was silent in the face of a disparagement. They discussed the impact on the student and the need to listen to their requests. For some students, the preoccupation with the event has a lasting effect and impairs their ability to concentrate on academics. The longevity and trauma associated with macro- and micro-aggressions in NPS justifies student and parent requests for placement changes. Students and parents reported toxic atmospheres for some students and the need for professional counseling because of aggressions and silence in the face of danger.

> *Can we listen to student's voice if they feel uncomfortable in a class or with a certain teacher? Is there an ability to be moved? My daughter is afraid to go to school, she fears some of her classmates and the teacher does nothing. I want her moved.*

Some students are in classes because they raise the test scores, MCAS averages, and help staff meet numbers. Placements are not always made in the best interest of the student. My child is in school to learn.

5.5.3 School Communications

Parent respondents found Needham to be a complicated community and closed to newcomers. There were reports of difficulties in establishing rapport with schools and the town, being accepted, and being heard.

In communication with schools, interviewed parents reported numerous instances where they felt dismissed. They cited a lack of follow up, lack of transparency, and superficial information, and many perceived a lack of equity because of their child's identit(ies). Some told of instances of preferential treatment where established families, wealthy families, and well-known families received special or rapid resolution of issues; in fact, this preferential treatment was recounted by parents, teachers, administrators and students. This behavior has resulted in an increase in the threat of legal action against the school system and it is seen by many as the only way to get a timely, respectful and informative response. One parent stated:

They return your call when they have a letter from a lawyer. I had to hire a lawyer just to get a straight story. They don't want bad press.

Due to the frequency, number, and types of micro- and macro-aggressions and the lack of responsiveness and delays from senior administration, many parents expressed misgivings about the commitment to equity at NPS and the will to prioritize action. Interviewed parents generally perceived the school system as being slow to respond due to a combination of disregard and disrespect. The urgency of the issues, communication glitches, and delay in developing an inclusive process was also noticed regarding planning processes related to the equity audit itself.

Moreover, parents mentioned fear of personal retaliation or expressed concerns that their children will suffer should they speak up about these issues. The reticence and the reluctance of some parents to be recorded for this reason was noted in this audit.

As already discussed above, teachers and administrators also expressed concern over persistent lack of dialogue and communication.

5.6 METCO

Needham has participated in the METCO program since 1969 and currently there are 172 METCO students in NPS grades K through 12. The Needham METCO program is robust and engaged and parents are committed members of the Needham Public School community. The parents interviewed complimented METCO staff for their work and efforts in making their children and them feel welcomed and included.

Yet, many METCO parents also reported feeling isolated and that their children were stigmatized due to their METCO status. Many parents were concerned about the bias, labeling, and the separate groupings of METCO students. They felt as though being seen and treated as "a METCO student" was limiting and demeaning:

Aside from getting on the bus, why is my child labeled METCO? She is a METCO student and so what? It seems as though it is an issue, a shame, why does it matter? It clearly seems there is bias there.

Some parents reported a sense of confusion regarding communication about school matters: *There are a lot of people involved, the teacher, principal, METCO staff, superintendent, transportation; I wish communication was clearer and smoother. When it says, "Needham Parent" I am not sure if I am invited or not since I do not live in Needham.*

There was confusion expressed about the location of web-based information, such as the superintendent's blog, appropriate attendance at meetings, and meeting schedules in general. METCO parents want to be involved in school matters affecting their children and they want access to all appropriate information.

5.7 Newcomers & English Language Learners

Respondents expressed interest in more intentional focus on the specific needs of various immigrant, refugee, and English Language Learning (ELL) communities in Needham. As the ELL population in Needham Public Schools has tripled in the last three years and 47 different languages are represented in the school system, one size does not fit all. Needham Public Schools has a dedicated ELL team but presently they are understaffed even though the ELL student population is growing rapidly.

Many newcomers attended focus groups; the repeated theme was the superficial welcome that lacked substance and depth. Many expressed confusions regarding information, access, and ways to become knowledgeable and engaged in order to support the development of their children and the public schools. This audit revealed a need to develop an intentional bridge for immigrant, refugee, ELL, and all-newcomer communities to fully participate in the civic life of NPS.

Everyone said welcome, I did not feel welcomed. We are a mixed family; my child did not seem to be making friends. Does anyone care in these situations?"

At home, race is a part of life. You talk about it. This is just odd; what is wrong here? No one asks about my country of origin, I am happy to talk about me and learn about you!"

While there is much work to be done, the ELL team is hard-working and committed to students and families. A strong partnership exists between Guidance and the ELL department, and Special Education has been developing a strong partnership as well. A close review of instructional models, practices, and shared vision of ELL teachers is underway.

5.8 Teacher & Staff Diversity

Teachers and staff of NPS are in general a well-educated group who care for and are deeply interested in their students; they have a high level of compassion and dedication to their work.

Review of teacher & staff demographics showed inconsistency with the demographics of the student body. There are few male teachers: 20%. In FY2018, students of color comprise

22.5% of the student body, while fewer than 8% of teachers are people of color. The district has stated a commitment to hiring more staff of color. Despite efforts, there has been limited success, and reports indicate that some faculty and staff recruitment strategies are implemented inconsistently.

Many teachers, administrators and staff participating in this audit have previously worked in or have come from urban areas that were diverse. About 25% of the respondents in this group represent racial or ethnic communities or self-identified as LGBTQ, a person with a disability, or from a low SES background. These are tremendous assets brought into the classroom as the insider knowledge grounds their authentic understanding and credibility with students and families from similar backgrounds. These are recognizable faces that students and parents can rely on, and some parent respondents said that they identity with these staff.

Some staff of color and LGBTQ staff reported being overlooked. Others reported being looked to in instances to resolve challenges with other students. They expressed they feel overextended, used, and undervalued. They reported being brought in to clean up after the fallout from difficult circumstances and complained there is often no systemic follow-up, nor acknowledgment of their value. In addition, time on committees, drafting emails and correspondence, translating, etc. takes time. They said that their skills go unrecognized and not taken into consideration in the performance review process. Support for these staff and assuring their retention is an issue of concern. A system that values equity values these capacities explicitly.

A heartfelt plea on behalf of students was made for more teachers of color and more diverse teachers:

> *If diversity is real here then call out the names of those doing the work. It should be part of the curriculum. Where are the people in this school who look like me? It is very isolating. Kids are not making the connections, it is not part of their lives.*
>
> *I worry that people do not care. My race and my skin; it is hard for me to take it. They could hire more teachers of color; it is good for everyone. We talk about diversity and it is all the same people year after year. We could hire more teachers of color; I have had teachers of color before I moved here. Bring in teachers, bring in mentors, reach for the attainable. I want to meet diverse people, I want friends of color; they are not here.*

The Needham Public School system has made efforts to be more inclusive in its hiring process. More diversity is reflected than at the point of the 2010 Equity Audit, but it is clear from this audit the system has much work to do in this area to recruit and retain a diverse staff at every level of the system. Recently there have been successful efforts in hiring additional staff of color. However, the dearth of senior administrators who self-identified as belonging to any of the diverse groups in the data collection process for this equity audit is notable. More than 90% of employees of NPS are white, though they may have other social identities.

Many respondents expressed frustration that diverse candidates do not advance to the interview stage. Questions on cultural responsiveness have been written and approved, however, these questions are not consistently included in the interview process according to

numerous respondents. The audit suggested a consistent comfort level has not yet been reached among those on the interview panels. The merit of equity may not consistently be valued or understood as a school system priority. The value of diversity and a community where everyone matters is an aspirational value at NPS.

5.9 Curriculum & Inclusivity

The need for an inclusive, culturally responsive curriculum (Appendix F) was raised numerous times. Middle school to high school youth, parents and teachers made this request repeatedly. One teacher reported: "*Some areas of the curriculum have not changed in 20 years; this is a problem*."

NPS stated its commitment to the alignment and revision of the curriculum as required by the program standards of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. District Goal 2, Objective 1 calls for curriculum and instruction that are "culturally sensitive". This audit showed some creative teachers have taken this issue on independently and are weaving multicultural course content into their classroom discussions and assignments. The NPS library is a repository of excellent resources on equity issues that can be tapped by system educators.

However, all of the focus groups raised questions regarding the district's attentiveness to inclusive curricula. They expressed dismay that the impetus to diversify the English curriculum came from a student. Concerns on this matter were uniform from students and parents across every identity who participated in the focus groups.

Parents and students express interest in finding ways for the curriculum to be truly inclusive with representation of gender (especially women, of all races and religions), people of African, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Latino backgrounds, representations of all faith traditions, inclusion of LGBTQ communities, and inclusion of people with disabilities. Many of the students stated that they rarely see people who look like them, or that they can identify with, nor do they see their histories and cultural perspectives represented in course materials. In addition, several students said they were worried about being ill-prepared when they go to college.

> *Whose history are we teaching here? Whose literature?*
>
> *History here is all about white America. It is sad. I know my education would be so different if I was in India. People here don't even know who (Indira) Gandhi was. We learn about a few parts of the world but not nearly enough. There were really important women; we never talk about them. It is hard here sometimes being a girl; you want to hear the woman's viewpoint. Where is it? You have to go to the library and stuff. Why not just have it so everyone can discuss this openly*?
>
> *You are not made fun of outright, but you are mocked. Cultural proficiency is the butt of a joke. It has been talked about but never really done. It is a PC thing with nice words, but it has not been implemented, it is not practiced here. I come from another school where diversity was part of the curriculum in an ongoing manner. All we discuss here is famous white men. I think Madame Curie is the only woman scientist I have studied here, it is sad. I am a junior, I am worried I will be behind when I go to college.*

I am a girl interested in math and science. No woman scientists. Really! I mean really? I do not see myself at all.

5.10 Attrition

Focus groups included some families who had chosen to leave NPS due to ongoing disturbing trends and a seeming lack of understanding of the gravity, urgency and reality of persistent disparities. The conversations around the choice to leave NPS showed a felt lack of respect for students of color, English language learners and LGBTQ students.

The 2016-2017 attrition rate was 6.1% for children of African American ancestry (10 students out of a total 162), 5.3% for multiracial youth (14 students of a total 268), and 3.3% for Latino youth (10 students of a total 302), 3.7% for students with disabilities (34 students of a total 911), 6.8% for ELL students (10 students of a total 140), and 3% for white students (132 students of a total 4,387); this data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Assessment/Accountability, School and District Accountability and Assistance. The ELL attrition, African American attrition, and multiracial attrition rates are twice the 3.2% average for all students, meriting further understanding of the relationship between race/ethnicity and premature school departure in Needham. Parents estimate that if historically marginalized communities returned to attend NPS schools, the historically marginalized student population would double.

6 Commendations

The Needham Public School System has many assets to build on. There are a plethora of skills and talents that educators and staff bring to their work. It was evident throughout the equity audit that across the system, there is a core team of approximately 20% of the educators and staff who are deeply committed to equity issues. These staff bring significant insight, energy, creativity, curiosity, perspective and hope.

The Needham Public School System is rich with strengths. Some specific strengths and successes to build upon are outlined below.

6.1 District-level Stated Commitment To Equity

- NPS has a stated commitment to equity. NPS has published and acknowledged that achievement and opportunity gaps exist among various racial, ethnic, special education, and economic subgroups. Equity goals and diversity and inclusion language appear on the websites at all eight schools in the district. The language used in these venues is beautifully articulated.
- The Needham Public School's District Curriculum Accommodations Plan is completed. It is a thoughtful, comprehensive, and inclusive document.
- The emerging Social Emotional Learning framework is promising. This plan is emerging and was not part of the formal audit process.
    - SEL is the process through which children and adults develop skills for decision-making, communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, problem solving, and developing healthy relationships for work and play. SEL helps all students become self-aware, self-managed and self-directed within healthy

relationships and a productive life. SEL skills are best achieved through a layered approach of lessons, infusion into curricula and classroom practices, all within a learning community that models SEL values. As students become emotionally and socially competent, they are more able to focus themselves, persevere through a difficult task, collaborate in a group, learn from a mistake, set goals, and use other skills that positively impact academic achievement.

- The system-wide focus is encouraging, as is the inclusive framework. In this model, communication moves within school buildings, across buildings, and to and from administrative offices. This framework is one that may be of assistance in implementing a school system-wide equity plan.

6.2 Invested Community Members

- Needham Public Schools has a committed and dedicated School Committee that is willing to become more deeply engaged in addressing disparities. Their commitment is admirable.
- The commitment, dedication, and innovation of the Guidance Department at Needham Public schools is commendable. They are a strong asset to build upon with insight and capacity across the school system.
- Needham has a small, core group of deeply dedicated staff who have worked for more than ten years to develop programs that strive to promote equity and inclusion. Launching Scholars, IDEAS staff training, Castle, Diversity Summit, the Culture and Climate Committee at the High school, Mentored Homeroom, Own Your Peace/Piece, Hot Topics/Hot Chocolate, and a data based school-wide equity plan implemented at the Eliot School are examples. These programs enhance academic skills, foster leadership development, build student/teacher relationships, and work to address the needs of students who are members of traditionally marginalized groups (including but not limited to LGBTQ students, students of color, students with disabilities and English Language Learners).
- The Needham story also includes community engagement. Well over 100 people reached out as part of this audit to volunteer to sponsor or serve on a school-based equity team. They offered deep expertise and skills; they represent many communities and are treasured partners.

6.3 Inclusion & Equity Successes

- The Needham Public Schools have worked to establish an inclusive and welcoming climate for students with a disability; this was evident in visits to schools. Students with a range of disabilities participated in the focus group process and their parents also participated as part of their respective focus groups. They are an accepted part of the Needham Public School family.
- All individual schools have worked from the senior level to develop appropriate processes to welcome transgender students. The commitment from the most senior level in every school was clearly articulated.
- There are ongoing efforts to strengthen professional learning program opportunities that help teachers further their understanding of instructional practices for special education students and English Language Learners. The English Language Learning team is growing and strong.
- The ELL team is hard-working and committed to students and families; a strong partnership exists between Guidance and the ELL department, and Special Education

has been developing a strong partnership as well. A close review of instructional models, practices, and shared vision of ELL teachers is underway.

- The Eliot School conducted a systemic school-wide process that commenced three years ago. Individual student data was reviewed, and plans were developed for the entire school. Each grade was engaged, and in each classroom subject matter experts provided extensive technical assistance. As a result, the school moved from level two to level one. There was an equity lens embedded in the work and special attention was paid to boys of color who have traditionally been less academically successful for several reasons that are school based. The process, led by the principal, was highly successful. The model he designed which included parents as integral to improving their children's chances for success, served to raise achievement, improve the school culture, and deepen the skills of all instructional staff.
- Educators have undergone training on special education laws and there have been recent civil rights training and professional learning sessions.

6.4 Data

- Needham has voluminous data on students. In the aggregate, this provides a wealth of information on individual schools, trends, program success, teacher success, endeavors of certain systems (ELL and/or Special Education for example) and the school system. Small-scale school-based inclusive data reviews with an equity focus have been very successful in Needham.
- Elementary principals have developed intentional processes to review student data, identify strengths and challenges and develop teaching strategies to improve data outcomes. The development of co-teaching models, working collaboratively with student supports, conducting interviews, developing comprehensive reports, and adjusting and accommodations are all at the heart of high expectations teaching and a move toward equity.

7 Recommendations

During the process of this equity audit, several themes arose and guide the following recommendations to address issues in: school culture, school policies, incorporating data, teacher and staff diversity, professional learning, inclusive curriculum design, METCO, and English Language Learners.

7.1 School Culture

- Enlist the entire school community to work toward building a respectful, trusting, supportive work culture focused around equity and high-quality connections (Dutton, 2003; Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).
    - Build rewards into the system for team building, sharing, care, and competence.
    - Invest in a system-wide clarification of values and shared definitions, working with articulated values and vision and an incremental implementation across the entire school system.
    - Consider alternative evaluation models and hold conversations with staff and faculty about the evaluation purpose and process. The 360-review process is shown in numerous research studies to result in destructive competition (Haidt, 2006). The new model, based in positive psychology principles can be found at: http://www.shiftpositive360.com/

    - Align the school culture framework with the developing Social and Emotional Learning platform that is easily understood, visible, and agreed upon by educators, parents, and students. The REAL team would serve as the coordinating body for this framework.
    - Move the system toward the inclusion of full budgetary support for programs and staff who are working to bring equity frames to NPS. Programs such as the Culture and Climate Committee at Needham High, Launching Scholar, and CASTLE should be expanded to reach more students. Financial resources to implement inclusive models demonstrate prioritization of equity.

- Build a system-wide school culture where all students and staff know that they matter, that they add value and are valued. Feeling a sense of belonging is perhaps the most salient construct in academic achievement.
    - Initiate a series of courageous conversations within the school communities as soon as possible (after evidence-based professional learning; optimally facilitated by a professional in the field).
    - Hold meetings with teachers, METCO staff and METCO parents, students of parents of color, LGBTQ community, students with disabilities etc. on specific issues relevant to them. Deep listening to the students, parents, and staff who hope to be part of a more inclusive transparent process of development is crucial.
    - Promote an affirming school culture using the values of Accountable Talk and High Expectations teaching. Needham High School's core values—to think, to respect, to communicate—are laudable. Implementation of the values is ongoing.

- Immediately convene the Needham Race, Equity, and Leadership (REAL) team and expand it to include the School Committee, students, parents, and Needham community membership as an overarching leadership body.
    - Work actively to make REAL a visible, recognized, and leading voice in NPS where authentic dialogue is encouraged.
    - Use REAL to develop a consistent system-wide equity plan that includes tools, mentors, leadership development opportunities, evidence-based professional learning, supports, implementation, and active engagment of people from all historically marginalized communities.
    - Ask REAL to report to the NPS School Committee every six months.

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- Invest in mental health guidance and support. As Needham becomes more diverse the needs for increasing supports for students and staff increases. Strengthening mental health and guidance supports in each school augments the strengths of each individual school and is a systemic investment.
    - Note that many of the traumatic implications of micro- and macro-aggressions are psychological challenges for targeted students, bystanders, perpetrators, and the school community. Data from the youth risk behavior survey, reports from staff of color, and the parent district survey also call attention to this unfortunate trend and support the need for more services.

7.2 School Policies

- Develop, implement, and evaluate a Needham Public Schools Equity Plan that is accessible to the community, accountable and reports to the School Committee.
- Develop a system-wide process for implementation, enforcement, and reporting of disciplinary matters. As a public system, accountability and transparency are a priority.
    - Establish agreement on terminology so that all in the system have a clear understanding of equity, implementation, infractions, and disciplinary actions.
    - Provide an overview of disciplinary policies and specific online location on back to school night.
    - Provide a brief online video on how to access the policies online for working families, newcomers to the system, and those who may need a refresher.

- Provide more timely responsiveness to parents and students who contact teachers, principals, administrators or the superintendent. The respect of a phone call and a meeting to clarify a concern when needed will go a long way. Community members want validation.

- Develop a system-wide accommodations policy as part of the equity policy and in response to the growing diversity in Needham. This is part of a family engagement strategy and inclusion strategy highlighted in state standards.
- Consider reasonable requests for accommodations so that students may practice cultural or religious traditions at school. For example, Muslim students have asked for a place to pray. In addition, students from other traditions have asked for recognition of holidays not celebrated in the US. Part of the recognition could be on a school calendar, and some may request an excused absence for such a day.

- Convene the REAL team to review the student placement policy.
    - Develop a process of documentation to justify the request for moves in the primary interest of student health and wellbeing, not school convenience or test scores.
    - Communicate the process clearly to parents.
    - Listen to student and parent requests about classroom placement and changes.
    - Make requested moves as soon as possible after any macro- or micro-aggression to minimize adverse effects on targeted students.

7.3 Incorporating Data

- Use data to build organizational and staffing capacities, inform staff learning, and build student academic and social-emotional skills.
    - Begin data collection by looking at the use of policies, intersectionality designations and a reporting system to outline and categorize macro and micro aggressions, challenges, and ongoing obvious equity matters.
    - Use data collected for purposes including but not limited to: demographic trends, performance trends, student improvement, and cohort improvement focused on multiple intersectional categories such as but not limited to: ELL students, special education students, and students with disabilities.

- Document school-based data utilization models so that all elements of process: staffing, dosage, timing, engagement, alignment, etc. are noted in the interest of potential replication.
- Document the specifics of the Eliot Elementary School model (2014 - Spring 2017) so that it can replicated.

- Develop and staff an internal data alignment, program evaluation, and systematic review process.
  - Charge an internal data-driven program evaluation team with looking at the effectiveness of program models focused on improving equity across the system.
  - Develop and staff an internal program evaluation system; this may build system capacity to measure the efficacy of initiatives. For example, CASTLE and Launching Scholars (Appendix H) are examples of evidence-informed practices that should continue over time. An evaluation of these programs that is data informed might suggest elements that could be refined and expanded. A true evaluation looks at numerous factors including but not limited to: dosage, staffing, staff attributes, content, qualitative, and quantitative elements.

7.4 Professional Learning

- High Priority: Implement system-wide, evidence-based professional learning programming on the following:
  - cultural responsiveness and courageous conversations on race, ethnicity, LGBTQ, and other identities;
  - effective interventions related to identity-bullying, discriminatory behavior, bias; and communication;
  - understanding of child and adolescent development and its relationship to academic achievement.

- Develop a short-term process to build teaching staff competence in their execution of culturally responsive teaching and learning methods. Incorporate these efforts *as quickly as possible*.
  - Engage all levels and every staff member of NPS in ongoing trainings that are repeated regularly.
  - Require participation of all NPS staff in a day-long forum on equity.
  - Leverage the strong relationships with the Needham Educational Foundation, The Metro-West Health Foundation, and the Needham business communities to underwrite costs for a full day all NPS staff convening on equity. This would move the school system toward 100% participation in crafting a vision that is shared and implemented by every member of the team and supported by the community.

- Review, revise, and strength the NPS cultural proficiency module to focus on cultural responsiveness.
  - Consider moving toward organizations such as:
    - IDEAS (See EDCO Appendix G), recommended by several respondents.

        - Consider Courageous Conversations on Race, who has trained several members of the Newton School System and is working at the state level with Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
    - Adopt the train-the-trainer model and incorporate master teacher models (Saphier, 2016).

- Work with an established entity, with a track record of success, facility in child and adolescent development, and cultural responsiveness.
    - The strongest recommendations from area school systems and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are for organizations with significant depth, breadth, and experience. Particularly: Mica Pollock, author of ColorMute; Courageous Conversations on Race (Glenn Singleton); and High Expectations Teaching (Jon Saphier).

7.5 Teacher and Staff Diversity

- Immediately affirm educators who have the skills and facility to handle micro- and macro-aggressions and work with colleagues as systemic alignment occurs.
    - Clarify how equity is valued in writing but most importantly, in daily action.
    - Offer incentives, rewards, recognition, promotions, and evaluations that credit participation and exceptional work on equity and related matters and possible career advancement.
    - Work to retain stellar performers recognizing their value and contributions.
    - Recognize how diverse people bring diverse skills, insights, and proclivities with retention efforts, promotion, job crafting/creation, additional compensation, and/or benefits.

- Implement the stated value of equity in evaluation and staffing decisions.
    - High Priority: Comply with the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) in all performance reviews.
        - Offer counseling and evidence-based professional learning for those who need assistance with a timeline for improvement.
    - Prioritize diversification of staff.
        - Send a powerful message to all schools that diversity matters through hiring a diverse staff (Wells, 2009).
        - Consistently interview all applicants to NPS on issues related to substantive equity experience and prioritize qualified applicants who meet these articulated requirements.
        - High Priority: Consistently use questions in the interview process to understand candidates' experience, skills, facility, and work with diverse populations.
        - Require evidence-based professional learning to build the comfort level of all staff in HR to engage in courageous conversations on differences and understand its importance in building a culture that is open and affirming.

7.6 Building an Inclusive Curriculum

- Build capacity for curriculum development and prioritize inclusion and equity.

        - Short-term: Look at ways to expand the images, links, biographies, achievements, challenges and histories students are exposed to in the curriculum to show the breadth and diversity of all traditionally marginalized communities. There are hundreds of internationally and nationally admired leaders from a broad range of communities: people with disabilities, various religious and faith communities, women, people of color, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ, etc.
        - Long-term: Look at the alignment of culturally responsive curriculum with accreditation bodies and subject matter experts in each area. (Appendix F)
            - Evidence-based professional educator organizations (Association of Social Science Teachers, Literature Teachers etc.) each have guidelines and carefully considered recommendations for integrating diversity and inclusion into teaching practices.
- Review textbooks to gauge inclusion.
    - Assess whether images, messages, and social constructs that are being promoted and perpetuated in the texts are outdated.
    - Include parents and students in these discussions. This a way to recognize and value their perspective. Many focus group participants have a keen sense of inclusion and may value being included in such a discussion group.

7.7 METCO

- Strengthen the relationship with Boston METCO families and facilitate ongoing clear communication across all grades and all school buildings.
    - Ensure that the mechanisms are in place to assure that they feel as though they are part of the NPS community.
        - Clarify METCO parents' status and value as members of the NPS community.
        - Create an onboarding process for METCO families that informs them about: online resources, schedules, the superintendent blog, and the location of policies.
        - Create an online tutorial on access to blogs and various posts and where they are located on websites to facilitate access to important information.
    - Review sensitivity of language usage in communication between the schools and Boston METCO parents. Using the term "Parents of Needham Public School Students" is a simple change that can be adopted for use by all teachers, administrators, and members of the NPS community.
    - Schedule a meeting with the superintendent and METCO Director to clear up any lingering questions on inclusion and a sense of being isolated.

7.8 English Language Learners

- Adhere to an equity framework and ensure ELL teachers and staff receive evidence-based professional learning.
- Support cross team functioning between teachers, ELL staff, subject matter experts, and other colleagues for student academic success.
- Expand the ELL team; it is likely that this population will continue to grow.
    - Hire additional staff with international experience or those from outside the US to enrich the entire school community with their worldview.

7.9 Parent Engagement

- Build an inclusive parent engagement model where Needham residents, METCO parents, parents of color, and newcomers are welcomed.
- Create a sense of warmth, congeniality, and high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy, Carmeli, Spreitzer, & Dutton, 2013).
- Establish a discrete parent engagement office as a part-time position and a liaison for all parents and families.[3]

Gratitude

This report was made possible by the generous families, students, staff, parents, and administrators who are the Needham Public Schools. Their gracious gifts of time, insight, candor, responsiveness, openness, engagement and perspective are deeply appreciated. Hopefully, this report can be a helpful tool and a valuable resource to reflect upon the status of NPS and set equity goals for the future. Needham has so many assets to build upon.

[3] *See* Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2014). *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family- School Partnerships: Retrieved February 22, 2016, from http://www.sedl.org/pubs/framework/FE-Cap- Building.pdf.*

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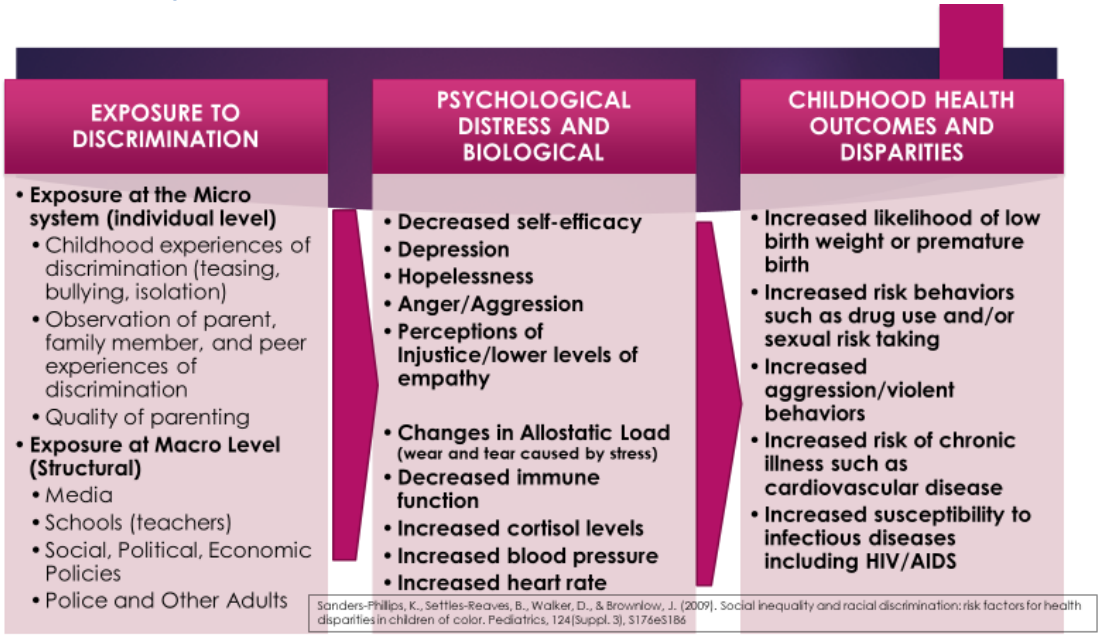
9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO DISCRIMINATION IN CHILDREN/YOUTH OVER LIFE COURSE

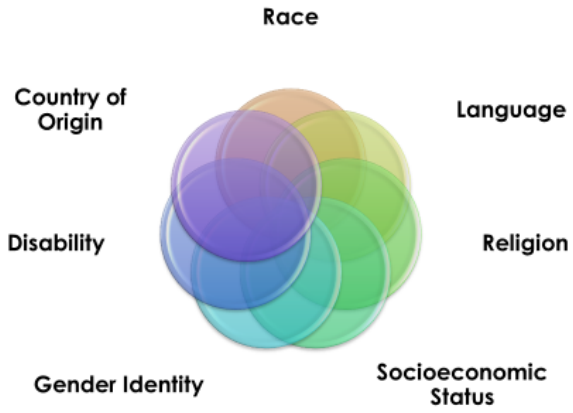


9.2 Appendix B: INTERSECTIONALITIES & SOCIOECOLOGICAL MODELS

Intersectionalities

Education (GPA, Rank), Race, Ethnicity, Country of Origin, Faith/spirituality, Cognitive ability, Physical ability, Gender, Family configuration, Gender expression, Gender identity, Sexual orientation, Language, Socioeconomic status, Incarceration History, Justice System, Child Welfare Involvement

Simultaneously belong to numerous categories; may have been more marginalized.



SYSTEM LEVERS:

Different determinants of systemic equity include different spheres, policies, actors:

- **Curriculum: K to 12 inclusion**
- **Ability to manage classroom: micro aggressions**
- **Consistent systemic changes**
- **Transparency, Inclusion, Listening**
- **Professional Learning**
- **Community and Neighborhood Synergy**
- **Socioecological Frame: Students and Staff**

Working at multiple ecologic levels is challenging.

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9.3 Appendix C: WORKING DEFINITIONS –THE SHORT LIST

Bias: Thoughts and feelings we have, and may not be aware of; implicit biases are preferences or aversions that permeate our world view without our conscious knowledge and become explicit when openly expressed (blonds have more fun).

Character: (1) Someone's nature, natural attributes as formed by habit or (2) The expression of a unique individuality.

Children of color: include those identifying as African American/black, Latino, Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, and biracial. These identities constitute ~30% of the US population and are among the fastest growing populations in the country. Any child in this category, born in the US, immigrant, refugee, or temporary resident is included in this category for this audit.

Class: Relative social status based on income, wealth, race, power, position, occupation and education.

Culture: The way of life of a group of people; the behaviors, beliefs, and truths they accept.

Cultural Responsiveness: A set of congruent behaviors, knowledge, will and skills that enable just and effective work in multicultural settings. Cultural responsiveness is never fully achieved, but is an ongoing process.

Cultural responsiveness can be developed by individuals, organizations, communities and beyond.

Individuals develop their cultural responsiveness by building knowledge, values, skills, and will that help them to:

– develop self-awareness and an understanding of one's own culture(s);
– understand and appreciate other cultures;
– facilitate understanding among people of different cultures;
– confront inconsistencies, biases and unconscious assumptions of cultures; and,
– act to ensure fairness and access and correct for the results of historic inequities.

Organizations develop their cultural responsiveness by building the knowledge, values, skills, and will of individuals, and building equitable, accessible and inclusive organizational culture, expectations, policies, structures, systems and processes.

(Adapted from Garth Ham, Alliance for Nonprofit Management)

Discrimination: How we act toward members of social groups. A form of inequality where either non-legal or legal systems may perpetuate exclusion of certain groups and is manifest in different ways.

Discriminatory practice: May be perpetuated toward a person, group (METCO students/parents; students of color, ELL students, LGBTQ students) and/or ingrained in

institutional practices; no child who is not a US citizen may enroll in a public school is an example of a potential systemic discriminatory policy.

Diversity: Groups of individuals reflect multiple dimensions of difference including: race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, cognitive styles, and much more. Valuing diversity means embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of difference that exist in groups. (Adapted from Diversity Initiatives Campaign, The Diversity Project).

Equity: All groups have access to the resources and opportunities necessary to eliminate opportunity and resource gaps, and thereby, improve the quality of their lives. (Adapted from Equity and Inclusion Campaign).

Inclusion: A value and practice of ensuring that people feel they belong and that their input is valued by the whole (group, organization, society, system, etc.), particularly regarding decisions that affect their lives. (Adapted from Equity and Inclusion Campaign).

Prejudice: The feelings we have about particular groups (distaste, fear, repulsion, anger, frustration, pity, etc.)

Race: A socially constructed way of grouping people based on skin color and other apparent physical differences, which has no genetic or scientific basis. The concept of race was created and used to justify social and economic oppression of blacks and other people of color by whites. (From *Race: The Power of an Illusion*)

Racial equity: A situation where one cannot predict an individual or group's access to resources or likelihood of well-being and social status based on their race.

Racial justice: The creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment and outcomes for all people, regardless of race. (Applied Research Center).

Racism: a form of oppression based on the socially constructed concept of race exercised by the dominant racial group over non-dominant racial groups.

Racism operates on four levels: (Applied Research Center)

1. Internalized Racism is the set of private beliefs, prejudices, and ideas that individuals have about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of people of color. Among people of color, it manifests as internalized oppression. Among whites, it manifests as internalized racial superiority.
2. Interpersonal Racism is the expression of racism between individuals.
3. Institutional Racism is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and practices, inequitable opportunities and impacts within organizations and institutions, based on race.

4. Structural Racism is a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequality.

Social inequality: A social condition wherein certain populations have unequal status due to gender, religion, ethnicity, race, or other defining characteristics.

Stereotypes: The cognitive components of attitudes toward a social group consisting of beliefs about what specific groups are like (Steele, 2011).

Systemic discrimination: Creates primary and suppressed groups who differ in levels of power (prestige, visibility, attention, social, and personal) and access to attention, resources, and services (e.g. tutoring, opportunities, promotion, time in a system).

9.4 Appendix D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: CUSTOMIZED FOR RESPONDENT AND TIME CONSTRAINTS

1. Introduction:

A. Interested in getting to know you a bit and a bit about your philosophy and approach to education, to leadership and to system-wide endeavors. Might you share a bit with me about your background and how you came to become XXX?

How do you work with the Superintendent and other Directors?

B. Might you share a bit more about your approach to systems change. How does NPS move from goals to implementation? (Brief example and timeline)

How are priorities determined? Any examples of a system wide priority and a brief overview of the process of identification, moving toward "solution/system wide policy and change"?

How was the decision made? What rationale was used?

What data was used and how was it utilized? What was the timeline? How did the process unfold?

Was there any documentation and/or evaluation?

C. Are there any race specific policies or protocols for NPS?

Might you please tell me what they are?

Who established them? When they were developed?

How were they developed and communicated?

Why were they developed? Where were they implemented?

D. Is there any documentation on these efforts? Any evaluation?

E. Is there any ongoing process, formative, or outcome evaluation?

F. If so, what are the implications?

G. How are these communicated and to whom?

H. I am interested in understanding if there is any system-wide understanding of, terminology, and discussion of issues regarding race and ethnicity? Is there any Glossary of terminology about race? (Racial equity, cultural responsiveness, etc.)

Opportunity Gap:

A. How are opportunity gaps defined in NPS?
B. What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes in NPS?
C. What programs, systems, processes predict more equitable outcomes in NPS?
D. What is the impact of eliminating the opportunity gap?
E. What is done system-wide to eliminate these gaps?

Specific Division by Race:

A. Are there any programs that use race as a factor to subdivide students?
B. What is the rationale?
C. How are students assigned?
D. Are there any objective evaluation measures? Documentation?
E. What is the outcome?
F. How does this practice contribute to children learning or to teaching more effectively?

G. Is the practice harmful?
H. Are special curricular materials used?
I. How does this practice effect student confidence and future development in being able to interact with all peers and adults?

Communication and Engagement:

A. How does NPS involve families/members of the communities in a dialogue about racial equity as part of the core work of the NPS system?
B. How does NPS involve family and members of the community on issues related to race, ethnicity, and equity?
C. How does NPS perceive that members of the community are affected by racial equity?
D. How are METCO and non-METCO families of color engaged?
E. Is there shared expertise on parent engagement in NPS system?

Resources:

A. How does NPS as a system enhance strategies and allocate resources to ensure each learner's individual and racial/ethnic needs are met?
B. What is done specifically? By whom? When? Where? How? Process?
C. What programs or approaches are utilized to ensure that racial/ethnic student needs are met? What resources are needed to ensure that individual needs are met? How is this determined?

General prompts to be used throughout the process:

Can you tell me what you mean when you say?
Is it possible for you to say more about .....?
Have the thoughts you shared been shaped by others or is this your own personal perspective?
Why do you think others might want to challenge your perspective?

9.5 Appendix E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

9.5.1 Draft Research Focus Group: Students

Introduction: Hello and Welcome to this group discussion. My name is Christine Robinson and I am here working as the facilitator of this focus group for the Needham Public Schools. My role is to help get a conversation going and to make sure we cover many important topics that they would like your input on.

Purpose: First, I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to come here and discuss your ideas. The overall goal is to hear your thoughts about equity and inclusion in the Needham Public Schools.
NPS is becoming more diverse becoming more diverse with each passing year incorporating various languages, cultures, faith traditions, types of families, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, learning styles, disabilities, and countries of origin. This rapid change and growth may present challenges for teachers and administrators. We are interested in your views about policies, programs, and trainings that can make the school system stronger and improve outcomes for all students.
We are asking you because you are valued members of the school community. We are doing a small number of focus groups in the interest of getting input from a diverse mix of perspectives. You were recommended by leaders and teachers in the school system.
I would like to take a moment to explain the way of operating today in this meeting:

- You are the experts and we are here to listen and learn from you
- This is strictly voluntary
- I will be taking some notes later. **[If applicable: but we would also like to audio tape/ video tape what you say so that we don't miss anything important and so that we can go back and revisit the information if we need to].**

Housekeeping:
The total length of time of the focus group meeting is expected to be about 1 hour.
As far as the focus groups are concerned, there are a few *ground rules*:

- I might move you along in conversation. Since we have limited time, I'll ask that questions or comments off the topic be answered after the focus group session concludes.
- I'd like to hear everyone speak so I might ask people who have not spoken up to comment
- Please respect each other's opinions. There's no right or wrong answer to the questions I will ask. We want to hear what each of you think and it's okay to have different opinions.
- We'd like to stress that we want to keep the sessions confidential, so we ask that you not use names or anything directly identifying when you talk about your personal experiences. We also ask that you not discuss other participants' responses outside of the discussion. However, because this is in a group setting, the other individuals participating will know your responses to the questions and we cannot guarantee that they will not discuss your responses outside of the focus group.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS SO FAR?

Again, your participation here today is totally voluntary. So, if you are okay with moving forward, we would like to get your consent.

- What is it like to be a student at xx school?
- You all have different identities; including racial, ethnic, religious, being an athlete, a bookworm, those who struggle with school. Today I am hoping to talk with you about diversity and your thoughts about how diversity is handled and discussed in Needham Public Schools.
- Does any anyone want to speak to this?
- Is everyone treated the same or are there differences?
- What do you think should be done?

I think we've come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.
Again, thank you very much for your participation today. We really appreciate your help.

9.5.2 Draft Research Focus Group: Teachers

Introduction: Hello and Welcome to this group discussion. My name is **Christine Robinson** and I am here working as the facilitator of this focus group for the Needham Public Schools. My role is to help get a conversation going and to make sure we cover many important topics that they would like your input on.
Introductions

Purpose: First, I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to come here and discuss your ideas. The overall goal is to hear your thoughts about equity and inclusion in the Needham Public Schools.
NPS is becoming more diverse becoming more diverse with each passing year incorporating various languages, cultures, faith traditions, types of families, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, learning styles, disabilities, and countries of origin. This rapid change and growth may present challenges for teachers and administrators. We are interested in your views about policies, programs, and trainings that can make the school system stronger and improve outcomes for all students.
We are asking you because you are valued members of the school community. We are doing a small number of focus groups in the interest of getting input from a diverse mix of perspectives. You were recommended by leaders and colleagues in the school system.
I would like to take a moment to explain the way of operating today in this meeting:

- You are the experts and we are here to listen and learn from you
- This is strictly voluntary
- I will be taking some notes later. **[If applicable: but we would also like to audio tape/ video tape what you say so that we don't miss anything important and so that we can go back and revisit the information if we need to].**

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- I'd like to hear everyone speak so I might ask people who have not spoken up to comment
- Please respect each other's opinions. There's no right or wrong answer to the questions I will ask. We want to hear what each of you think and it's okay to have different opinions.
- We'd like to stress that we want to keep the sessions confidential, so we ask that you not use names or anything directly identifying when you talk about your personal experiences. We also ask that you not discuss other participants' responses outside of the discussion. However, because this is in a group setting, the other individuals participating will know your responses to the questions and we cannot guarantee that they will not discuss your responses outside of the focus group.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS SO FAR?
Again, your participation here today is totally voluntary. So, if you are okay with moving forward, we would like to get your consent.

- Are there any situations that come to mind that was challenging or troublesome? PLEASE DO NOT NAME THE STUDENT, TEACHER, SCHOOL, but might we speak generically about what happened and what the challenge was?
- What was needed?
- What do you wish had happened?
- How well prepared you are to handle some of the issues raised?
- What did you need help with?
- What type of help?
- What type of trainings, information, programs, policies, protocols, and/or resources might be helpful?
- What do you wish people understood about the work you do or your work with diverse populations?

I think we've come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.
Again, thank you very much for your participation today.

9.5.3 Draft Research Focus Group: Parents

Introduction: Hello and Welcome to this group discussion. My name is Christine Robinson and I am here working as the facilitator of this focus group for the Needham Public Schools. My role is to help get a conversation going and to make sure we cover many important topics that they would like your input on.

Purpose: First, I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to come here and discuss your ideas. The overall goal is to hear your thoughts about equity and inclusion in the Needham Public Schools.
NPS is becoming more diverse becoming more diverse with each passing year incorporating various languages, cultures, faith traditions, types of families, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, learning styles, disabilities, and countries of origin. This rapid change and growth may present challenges for teachers and administrators. We are interested in your views about policies, programs, and trainings that can make the school system stronger and improve outcomes for all students.
We are asking you because you are valued members of the school community. We are doing a small number of focus groups in the interest of getting input from a diverse mix of perspectives. You were recommended by leaders and colleagues in the school system.
I would like to take a moment to explain the way of operating today in this meeting:

- You are the experts and we are here to listen and learn from you
- This is strictly voluntary
- I will be taking some notes later. **[If applicable: but we would also like to audio tape/ video tape what you say so that we don't miss anything important and so that we can go back and revisit the information if we need to].**

Housekeeping:
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- I might move you along in conversation. Since we have limited time, I'll ask that questions or comments off the topic be answered after the focus group session concludes.
- I'd like to hear everyone speak so I might ask people who have not spoken up to comment
- Please respect each other's opinions. There's no right or wrong answer to the questions I will ask. We want to hear what each of you think and it's okay to have different opinions.
- We'd like to stress that we want to keep the sessions confidential, so we ask that you not use names or anything directly identifying when you talk about your personal experiences. We also ask that you not discuss other participants' responses outside of the discussion. However, because this is in a group setting, the other individuals participating will know your responses to the questions and we cannot guarantee that they will not discuss your responses outside of the focus group.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS SO FAR?

Again, your participation here today is totally voluntary. So, if you are okay with moving forward, we would like to get your consent.

- How well do you think NPS IS deal with issues of equity, inclusion and diversity? Why do you say that?
- If you see any challenges, might you please provide an example? PLEASE DO NOT NAME THE STUDENT, TEACHER, SCHOOL,

- What do you wish the schools would do?
- Schools have a lot to attend to please discuss some of the areas that schools should focus more attention on. There may be examples of social emotional learning, gender identity, religious differences, ethnicity, etc.
- Do you have any questions for the schools? (I will chart these and bring them back to NPS for response.)
- Is there anything on your mind you would like NPS to know about this topic?
- Are there any programs, practices, and/or policies that you think would be helpful?

I think we've come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.
Again, thank you very much for your participation today. We really appreciate your help.

9.6 Appendix F: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, LGBTQ status, disability, country of origin, and a range of identities in learning. Culturally responsive teaching integrates visual images, frames of reference, perspectives, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is contingent on a set of racial and cultural competencies. These include:

- Seeing cultural differences as assets;
- Creating caring learning communities where cultural different individuals and heritages are valued;
- Using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, languages, family configurations, and communities guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students;
- Challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression; and
- Accepting cultural responsiveness as endemic to educational effectiveness in all areas of learning for students from all ethnic groups. (3)

Researchers have found that culturally responsive classrooms motivate students to learn. "The essentials of this motivational framework are that it 1) respects diversity; 2) engages the motivation of a broad range of students; 3) creates a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment; 4) derives teaching practices form across disciplines and cultures; and 5) promotes equitable learning." (4)

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(3) Gay, Geneva. *Culturally Responsive Teaching : Theory, Research, and Practice*. 2nd ed. Multicultural Education Series (New York, N.Y.). New York: Teachers College, 2010

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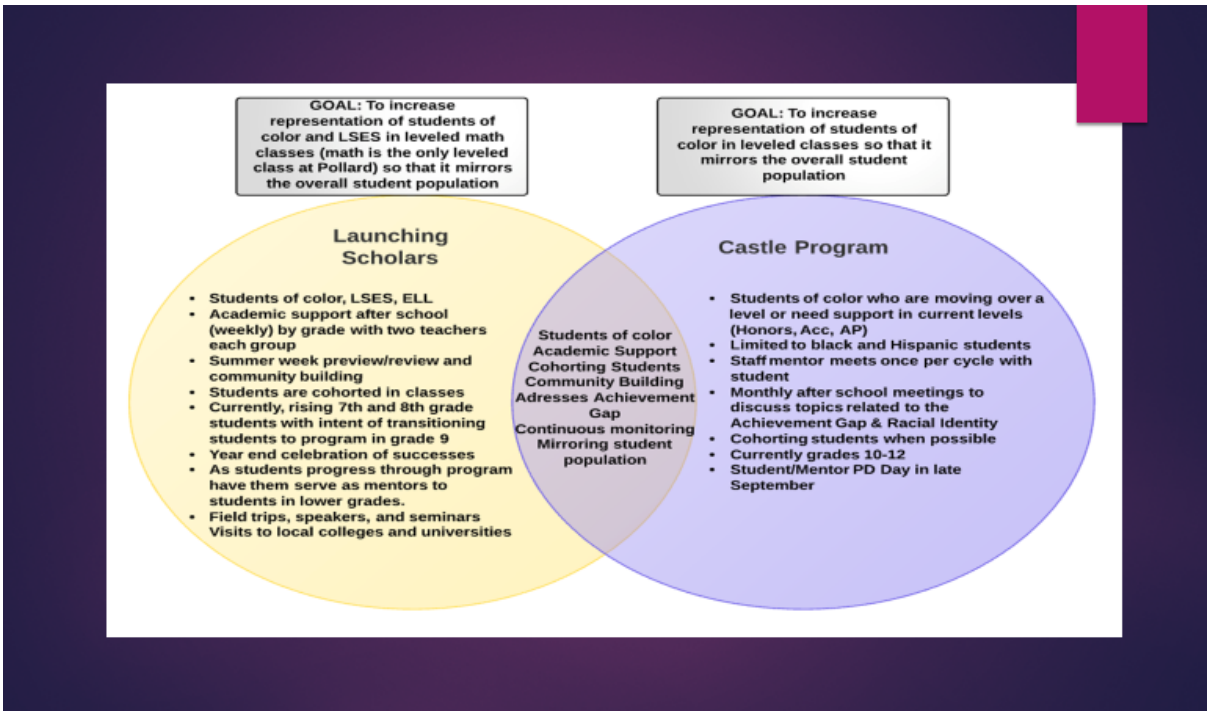
9.7 Appendix G: EDCO Collaborative

Mission: Improve education through inter-district and inter-agency collaboration. Provide high quality education and related services to students-at-risk. Enhance equity, intercultural understanding, and equal opportunity in education.
Programs:

- EDCO Youth Alternative Program: Provides a full academic program, along with counseling and related support services for students who have dropped out, are significantly at risk of dropping out, or are several years delayed in earning a high school diploma.
- Boston Public Schools, Title I and Title IIa: A fiscal agent for the Boston Public Schools in providing Title I and Title IIa services to eligible students and staff at twenty-eight parochial and private schools in Boston. Services for Title I children take the form of tutoring, small group instruction, computer assisted instruction, and summer programming in reading, math, and language arts. In FY16, over 1,000 children were provided supplemental Title I services by thirty-eight staff including six full time teachers, and twenty-two part-time teachers, tutors, and Computer Assisted Instruction Lab managers. Over thirty-five consultants were engaged to provide direct and indirect services such as tutoring and coaching in support of this effort.
- Initiative for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students (IDEAS): IDEAS is committed to achievement and success for all students via culturally responsive classrooms and schools that honor the individuality of students and families of all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. IDEAS build upon EDCO's mission in supporting member and non-member districts as they focus on culturally responsive schools and classrooms. During FY16, twelve courses were offered through IDEAS with over 200 educators participating.
- Title III consortium: Title III consortium focused on English language learning for six EDCO districts who would not otherwise have had access to the funds. The funds ($58,915) supported before and after school and summer tutoring for ELLs, and professional learning with regional and national experts, including Jeff Zwiers of Stanford University.
- Special Education Surrogate Parent Program: Through a shared grant of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, EDCO Collaborative's Special Education Surrogate Parent (SESP) Program works in partnership with the Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs to provide trained special education decision-makers to students with disabilities whose parents are unable to represent them in the special education process. For FY16, the SESP Program generated 543 SESP appointments, the most in any fiscal year since FY11.

9.8 Appendix H: LAUNCHING SCHOLARS/CASTLE PROGRAM