



Bend-La Pine Schools' Excellence and Equity Review

Summary Report: Staff Listening Sessions

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Purpose

To understand the district's most important strengths and areas for improvement, the data collected must extend beyond quantitative student achievement and growth data. The voices of those closest to the experiences provide essential qualitative information. As part of the Excellence and Equity Review process, Bend-La Pine Schools spent considerable effort ensuring that the voices of students and families were heard. In addition, it was critical to the process to include the voices of the staffs working in the schools that serve these students.

Methods

Each school in the district was asked to devote one School Improvement Wednesday (SIW) session to an onsite staff listening session between October 9th and November 13th. Building leaders were encouraged to include as many classified staff as possible, along with all certified staff, who are required to attend SIW's.

The 90-minute activity was divided into several parts. First, building leaders shared pertinent school and district data with staff. This data was disaggregated by historically underserved groups of students (HU: students experiencing poverty, students with disabilities, nonwhite students, linguistically diverse students) and those students who do not belong to any of these categories. Teams reviewed some or all of the following information: chronic absenteeism levels, percentages of freshmen on track to graduate, graduation rates, levels of student achievement on Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA) or the ACT, or student growth on SBA.

The next steps involved time first for individual reflection, then small-group discussions/consensus, and finally whole-group discussion/consensus on the following three questions: 1) Based on your professional experience, as well as these results, list 1-2 things the adults at your school are doing well to support students' success; 2) What adult actions would lead to more equitable outcomes for historically underserved students in our school; and 3) What support do we need?

Summaries were sent to E & E team staff, who compiled and analyzed the data for the Excellence and Equity Review's final report.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in analyzing the data submitted. First, although almost all schools completed the activity and submitted the results, one of the seven high schools did not. Because it's a small sample size, this could have an impact on the themes that were selected as predominant in staff discussions.

Second, some schools followed the instruction to achieve large-group consensus in responding to the three questions; other schools simply submitted what emerged from the small groups. In analyzing the data, the E & E team attempted to avoid "overcounting" ideas that were received in this form, but these staffs' ideas may be either over-represented or under-represented in the final discussion.

The notes submitted were summaries, without any direct quotations from individual staff. In the "findings" section, then, the power of staff voices cannot be captured. While this should not change the identification of key themes, it perhaps impacts inferences made by the analysts or the readers' interpretations.

Finally, in their discussions, many staffs seemed to blend their responses to questions #2 and #3. So, rather than focusing on adult knowledge, skills, and dispositions that might impact students' outcomes, many staff discussions focused primarily on additional resources schools needed. The E & E team attempted to organize this information correctly, but some ideas might have been analyzed inappropriately.

Findings

At all three levels, the greatest strength identified was the school culture, characterized by strong relationships, high levels of collaboration, empathy for students, and a sense of community.

At the elementary level, the other strengths most often identified were a focus on social and emotional learning; high-quality instruction, with an emphasis on student growth; and strong systems of academic interventions. The middle school teams also identified instructional practices as a strength, citing literacy instruction, an emphasis on problem solving, and real-world connections as strengths. In addition, common themes around strengths at the middle school level included support for students' social and emotional well-being and schoolwide systems, such as EBISS, AVID, Middle Years Programme, and EL Education. At the high school level, beyond positive school culture there were few common themes among schools about their strengths.

When asked about how adults in schools might continue to develop and improve their practices, the most common theme was the need to more effectively connect with families, particularly those from historically underserved populations. High school staffs also identified the need to help students see their education as relevant, motivating them to attend regularly and get more involved in school. Both middle and elementary school staffs shared the theme of more effective strategies for supporting historically underserved students, academically and emotionally. Middle school staffs prioritized more effective universal supports and

interventions for struggling students, as well. Finally, elementary staffs discussed the need for more authentic work around language and culture, including more culturally relevant curriculum materials.

When asked about resources that can support staff, two themes dominated the listening sessions. The first was reducing class size, so that teachers have more opportunities to develop strong relationships, provide effective feedback, and support a range of learners. The second involved providing more support for struggling students, whether in terms of social and emotional well-being or academics. Suggestions ranged from counselors to behavior specialists, from trained educational assistants to mental health professionals. A third theme that emerged from the middle schools was the need for collaborative work time for staff.

Conclusion

The findings from the district's school listening sessions mirrored some of the themes identified by families and students: strong relationships with students and families, as well as among staff, are foundational to success. School staffs overwhelmingly rated their emphasis on relationships as their biggest strengths, but many also acknowledged that building stronger connections with students and families from historically underserved populations as a need.

The discussion of resources needed was also reflective of other data the district has collected. Reducing class size and providing more resources to support students' social, emotional, and mental health have been recurring priorities in surveys conducted in Bend-La Pine Schools, as well as in districts throughout the state.