

Assessing Student Experiences of School in the Iowa City Community School District

Executive Summary

This report details the major results from a student survey administered to all 6th, 8th, and 11th grade students in the District in February 2016. The survey and report are the product of a university-community partnership between researchers at the Public Policy Center at the University of Iowa and the Director of Equity and Staffing at the Iowa City Community School District. The primary goal of developing the student survey was to gain detailed information regarding students' own perceptions and experiences of the District's schools. The findings from the student survey demonstrate areas of significant strength across the District schools, and areas for improvement to align with the District's pursuit of creating an inclusive and equitable environment for all students. Below is a list of key findings from each section of the student survey.

Teacher Relationships

District: Overall, students in the district report relatively high levels of positive relationships with their teachers.

Grade: Younger students (6th grade) report higher levels of *Academic Relationship*, *Encouragement*, and *Personal Concern* compared to students in 8th and 11th grade. Students in 8th grade are less likely to report *Supportive Treatment* or *Equitable Treatment* from teachers than 11th grade students with over a quarter (28%) of 8th grade students reporting that teachers are not *Supportive*.

Race: With the exception of Asian students, all non-White students report lower levels of positive relationships (*Encouragement* and *Personal Concern*) with teachers and on average have lower agreement with the three measures of teacher *Treatment*.

Gender: Female students report slightly higher levels of positive relationships with teachers, particularly in regards to teachers showing *Personal Concern*.

Socioeconomic Status: Students of lower socioeconomic status report lower levels of positive teacher relationships and treatment across all the measures, with the largest socioeconomic differences in the proportion of students reporting teachers showing *Personal Concern*.

Mentor Relationships

District: A majority of students in the sample report having an adult who they have a close relationship with at their school, and overwhelmingly a majority of students with mentors report a positive, supportive relationship.

Grade: 6th grade students are the least likely to report having a mentor in their school compared to 8th and 11th grade respondents.

Race: A full 95% of White students report having a *Race-Matched Mentor*. Comparatively, the next highest rate of *Race-Matched Mentor* is for Black students at 32%. Only 62% of Black students report having a *Teacher as their Mentor* compared to 82% of White students and 86% of Asian students, indicating that other school personnel are fulfilling the role of mentorship for Black students.

Gender: The largest gender difference in mentorship is the extent of gender matching between mentor and mentee. Fully 61% of female students report having a gender-matched mentor, whereas only 36% of male students report having a male mentor. Additionally, female students report higher agreement with positive *Mentor Relationships*, which is driven by the higher levels of agreement by female students that they can *share feelings with their mentor*.

Socioeconomic Status: While students of low socioeconomic status are no less likely to have a *Mentor*, students with the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have a *Mentor who is a Teacher*, and are less likely to have a race-matched mentor.

Support Resources

District: The majority of 8th and 11th grade students in the district sample report receiving *Academic Support* within the last academic year, yet levels of *Career Information* and *Personal Counseling* are substantially lower.

Grade: 11th grade students are more likely to report receiving *Career Information* and *Academic Support* than 8th grade students.

Race: In general, non-White and non-Asian 8th and 11th grade students report the highest levels of accessing all three types of support resources. A majority of Black students (83%) report receiving *Academic Support* within the past year, and all non-White students report higher levels of *Career Information*.

Gender: Male and female 8th and 11th grade students report equal levels of *Personal Counseling*. Males are more likely to report obtaining *Career Information*, while females are more likely to report receiving *Academic Support*.

Socioeconomic Status: 8th and 11th grade students with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to report receiving all three types of support (academic, career, and personal).

Negative Experiences of School

District: Overall, more than 50% of students report ever having experienced 6 of the 8 negative experiences. *People think they are better than you* is the most frequent negative experience with 82% of students reporting this has happened to them. Fully, 66% of students in the District report *hearing hurtful comments about race from students*; and one in four students in the district report ever *hearing hurtful comments about race from teachers*.

Grade: 8th and 11th grade students report having more *Negative Experiences* than 6th grade students. In particular, *hearing hurtful comments about race* from both students and teachers increases in prevalence and frequency for the older students.

Race: The frequency of occurrence and accumulation of *Negative Experiences* is far higher for Blacks and Multiracial students compared to all other groups.

Gender: There are limited gender differences in *Negative Experiences* of school. However, males experience more instances of *people acting as if they are afraid of you and acting as if you are dishonest*. In contrast, females experience more instances of *people thinking they are better than you and hearing hurtful comments about race by students*. Fully 75% of Black male students report experiencing that *people act as if you are not smart*.

Socioeconomic Status: Low socioeconomic students have more *Negative Experiences* of school than students with higher socioeconomic status. On average low SES students experience five of the eight negative experiences. Low SES students are much more likely to *have people criticize them for the way they speak, have people think they are not smart, have people be afraid of them, and hear teachers say hurtful things about race*.

Social Belonging

District: Overall, 80% of students report feeling a sense of *Social Belonging* in school and fully 70% *Feel Valued* in the classroom.

Grade: 6th grade students are more likely to report a feeling a sense of *Social Belonging* and *Feeling Valued* in school.

Race: Black students are the least likely to report a sense of *Social Belonging*, with fully 29% indicating that they disagree or strongly disagree that they feel a sense of *Social Belonging*. More than a quarter of Black, Other Race, and Multiracial students report not *Feeling Valued*.

Gender: Male students are slightly more likely to have a sense of *Social Belonging* and to *Feel Valued* in school than female students are.

Socioeconomic Status: Students with the lowest socioeconomic status report the lowest levels of agreement and students the highest socioeconomic status report the highest levels of agreement with feeling a sense of *Social Belonging* and *Feeling Valued* in school.

Motivations for Attending School

District: Overall, students report high levels of *Academic* and *Social Motivations* to attend school. *Academic Motivations* are higher than *Social Motivations*. The two most agreed upon reasons for attending school are: *doing well now is important to my future* and *getting good grades is important to me*. Unfortunately, the third item of the academic motivations measure – *attending school because school is interesting and challenging* – has a much lower level of agreement with only 70% of students agreeing that this is a reason to attend school.

Grade: 6th grade students are the most likely to report having *Academic Motivation* to attend school while 8th grade students are the least likely to report having *Social Motivation* to attend school or feeling *School Pride*.

Race: Students of all racial groups report high levels of *Academic Motivation* to attend school. Latino and Black students are the most likely to report *Group Expectations* as a reason to attend school.

Gender: Female students are more likely to agree that they have *Academic Motivation*, *Social Motivation*, *School Pride*, and perceive *Individual Expectations* to attend school.

Socioeconomic Status: Across all the motivation measures, students with the lowest socioeconomic status also report the lowest levels of agreement with motivation to attend school.

Perceptions of Discipline

District: 61% of students perceive *Disciplinary Equity* in their schools, meaning that fully 39% of students perceive *Disciplinary Inequity*. 36% of students agree that students *receive positive rewards for doing a good job*.

Grade: 6th grade students are the most likely to perceive *Disciplinary Equity* and *Disciplinary Consistency*. 11th grade students are much less likely to agree that discipline is consistent.

Race: Other Race, Multiracial, and Black students are the least likely to perceive *Disciplinary Equity* in their schools with 41-46% of them not agreeing that there is *Disciplinary Equity*. However, Black students are most likely to agree that students *receive positive rewards for doing a good job*.

Gender: A higher proportion of female students perceive *Disciplinary Consistency* in their schools, whereas a higher proportion of male students perceive *Disciplinary Strictness* in their schools.

Socioeconomic Status: Perceptions of discipline across socioeconomic groups were similar with the exception of *Disciplinary Strictness* where students in the low socioeconomic status group report a higher level of agreement. Lower socioeconomic status students were more likely to agree that *students receive rewards for doing a good job*.

Inclusive Classroom

District: A majority of students in the district report *Material and Content Representation* in class, and agreed that there are opportunities to discuss *Gender and Race* in class. A notable number of students report that they felt unable to share their views in class because of their race or gender (10% and 8% respectively).

Grade: Students in higher grades agree that there is *Material and Content Representation*, and opportunities in class to *Discuss Gender and Race*. However, 8th and 11th grade students are also much more likely to report *Feeling Unable to Share their Views Because of their Race or Gender*.

Race: Black students are the most likely to feel *Unable to Share in Class Because of their Race*, and interestingly, also the most likely to feel *Unable to Share in Class Because of their Gender*.

Gender: Females are slightly more likely to report that there are opportunities for *Gender Discussion*, however, they are also slightly more likely to report feeling *Unable to Share their Views Because of their Gender* in class.

Socioeconomic Status: Students in the lowest socioeconomic status group were the most likely to report feeling *Unable to Share their Views Because of their Race or Gender*, and the least likely to perceive adequate opportunities to *Discuss Race or Gender*.

Salience of Race and Gender for Social Identity and Relationships

District: Over 90% of students in the District report having racially mixed friendship networks that include students from 2 or more racial groups.

Grade: The importance of race and gender to students' identities is higher at for 8th and 11th grade students.

Race: Compared to other groups, Black students report that their *Race Identity and Gender Identity* are most important for their own self-concept, followed by Asian and Multiracial students.

Gender: Overall, there are no notable differences across female and male students in the importance of *Race Identity and Salience of Race for Relationships*.

Socioeconomic Status: A higher proportion of low socioeconomic status students indicate that their *Race Identity and Gender Identity* are important for their self-concept and *Relationships* with others compared to students in higher socioeconomic groups.