

Task Force Report
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Iowa City Community School District
Multi-Stakeholder School Climate Task Force

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This report relies most centrally on the generous contributions of the task force members who committed their time, energy, and expertise, adding invaluable insight, pragmatism, and momentum behind the recommendations.

Executive Summary

This report details the results of a multi-stakeholder task force convened to gather feedback and prioritize recommendations directed at improving the experiences of students in Iowa City Community School District (ICCSd) schools. Members of the multi-stakeholder task force reviewed 11 recommendations developed by University of Iowa researchers specific to the ICCSD (Table 1). The recommendations were generated using results from a districtwide survey, and refined into three focus areas; specifically, teacher and mentor relationships, inclusive community, and disciplinary environment. The ICCSD Board of Education supported the assembly of a task force to assess and prioritize potential interventions to promote equity in student experiences. The multi-stakeholder task force represented diverse viewpoints including students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the ICCSD as well as community members. The task force met on four occasions to consider recommendations, deliberate options, and provide an assessment for the Board.

Table 1. Review of Recommendations Considered

Teacher and Mentor Relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities that encourage connection and understanding between students and teachers• Professional development for teachers• School-wide programs that promote relationship-building• School-based mentoring programs and targeting teachers• Increasing the diversity of teaching and school-based staff• Non-school-based mentoring programs – after-school groups
School Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Target School Leaders: Culturally responsive school leadership training• Target Students: Brief exercises that target students’ thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in and about school• Target School Community: School-based programs/activities that promote attachment to school
Inclusive Classrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of multicultural education materials and practices.• Teacher training related to cultural competency and implicit bias.
Disciplinary Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restorative justice-based model to address discipline and build community within schools.

The task force provided concrete recommendations for the District to improve the experiences and outcomes of all students. Specifically, addressing the racial and socioeconomic disparities in student experiences identified by the Assessing Student Experiences Survey Report and the District’s persistent academic and disciplinary disparities.

“The District needs to get creative and courageous regarding educating students of color and students of low SES.” – Multi-Stakeholder Task Force Member

While each of the recommendations from the Key Focus Area Policy Briefs was supported by the task force, three recommendations stood out as top priorities.

Top Recommendations of the Task Force

- 1) *The District should adopt a school- and district-wide strategy for addressing disparities in student experiences and outcomes. Task force members emphasized the need for a pervasive and comprehensive intervention in order to affect school climate. One example that gained widespread support was the restorative justice model. This model received support because task force members believe that, if implemented with fidelity, it can be effective at addressing four issues of concern in the ICCSD:*

increasing school community overall, improving teacher-student relationships, and decreasing the use of and disparities in punitive disciplinary punishments.

- 2) *The District should provide training to all District staff, teachers, and administrators to improve the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of how diversity, equity, and inclusiveness are paramount for working relationships. Task force members stressed that trainings specifically related to issues of cultural competency and implicit bias are a foundational need of the District, and see this as a prerequisite for any of the other recommendations or programming targeting the improvement of student experiences and outcomes. In fact, demonstrated districtwide cultural competence was mentioned as a prerequisite in seven of the eleven recommendations discussed.*
- 3) *The District should actively recruit and retain District staff, teachers, and administrators of diverse backgrounds. Task force members suggested more purposeful efforts to increase the diversity of District staff, teachers, and administrators. Task force members believe that there are numerous benefits to having District staff, administrators, and especially teachers that reflect the diverse backgrounds of the students in the District. These benefits include having positive role models, increasing the likelihood of strong teacher-student relationships and mentoring for all students, promoting a more receptive organizational culture, and improving the relationship between schools and under-represented communities.*

Table 2 summarizes recurring themes that throughout the task force meetings that guided the specific recommendations.

Table 2. Guiding Themes in Task Force Recommendations

Climate Themes	
Urgency	Establishing safe and responsive school climates is an immediate concern for all.
Inclusive	Negative climate and experiences are a problem for the entire school community.
Equitable	District policies need to be consistent with and aligned to equity goals.
Committed	Fully commit to decreasing gaps in student experiences, achievement and discipline.
Collaborative	Incorporate feedback from students, teachers, and staff in policy decisions.
Extensive	School experiences affect whole-child needs and development.
Training Themes	
Prioritize	Staff training in implicit bias and cultural competence is a prerequisite to further action.
Comprehensive	Involve all levels in the District: teachers, building leaders, administration, Board.
Continuous	Meaningful changes require long-term commitment of the District; trainings and support resources need to be on-going and long-term.
Accountable	District policy changes, programs and interventions must be evaluated and held accountable for demonstrated change.
Practical	Clearly defined concepts and practices, with tools to implement immediately.
Quality	Expert facilitators for trainings with practical experience, interactive delivery.
Supported	District investment of time and resources; teachers, administrators, and staff need to be supported in efforts to implement changes in practice.
Flexible	Trainings and support resources need to allow for tailoring to specific conditions, such as subject area, age of students, etc.

Introduction

On November 11, three days after the 2016 election, about 400 students from both Iowa City Community School District (ICCSd) high schools walked out of school to protest the discrimination experienced by some students.¹ In a separate rally on November 15, ICCSD students organized a March Against Hate and Discrimination and demanded solidarity and supportive resources from teachers, school leadership, and the community to ensure their safety and wellbeing.² Specifically, the students asked for a written statement of support from school staff regarding bullying, adequate responses to complaints of harassment, procedures to ensure students are aware of their rights and resources, disciplinary action aligned with school policies, student-led workshops on diversity, access to mental health professionals, and mandatory diversity and sensitivity training for students and faculty.²

The immediate catalyst for this action was the tone of the election itself, in which the president-elect, Donald Trump, made derogatory statements, proposed controversial policies, and forged alliances with people and organizations intent on marginalizing people with disabilities, Muslims, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community, and women. In the election's aftermath, ICCSD students reported acts of harassment and bullying directed towards students with minority identities across all domains, including sexual orientation, religion, gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity.¹ One West High student voiced her perception of the shift in school climate after the election, saying, "It's a different environment now, I feel very upset and afraid for my friends. People are using the election as an excuse to discriminate against each other openly."³ Another student from City High bolstered that sentiment, adding, "We just don't feel like our schools are safe enough for us to go there, and there have been lots of incidents where students were threatened."² Students who supported Donald Trump, in turn, reported retaliatory reactions from peers, and feeling unsafe in school.³

"It's a different environment now, I feel very upset and afraid for my friends. People are using the election as an excuse to discriminate against each other openly."

While these post-election events and sentiments underscored the urgency for district action, they were also symptoms of a much broader and deeper set of issues. Ten months earlier, in February 2016, a student survey administered to all 6th, 8th, and 11th grade students in the District exposed deep racial and socioeconomic disparities in school climate and school experience. The survey asked students to report on their experiences of school across a number of areas. An extensive analysis of this survey was conducted and summarized in a report released in April 2016, the Assessing Student Experiences Survey Report. While students overall reported positive relationships with teachers and school-based mentors and a strong sense of social belonging in school, these rates were markedly lower for students of color and students of lower socio-economic status. Student-reported negative experiences and perceptions of disciplinary equity, in turn, were troublingly high across all respondents, and again much higher for students of color and students of lower socio-economic status. While the survey documented "significant strength across the District schools," it also demonstrated a consistent pattern of "disproportional experiences," especially for students of color and for students with lower levels of parental education.⁴ (Table 3)

Table 3. Selected Key Findings from Student Experience Survey, February 2016

Survey Measure	District Average	Race Disparity	Gender Disparity	Socioeconomic Disparity
Teacher Personal Concern	74%	White=77% Black=63% Latino=70%	Female=76% Male=72%	Low=65% Med=73% High=77%
Teacher Equitable Treatment	81%	White=84% Black=75% Latino=84%	Female=80% Male=83%	Low=76% Med=82% High=84%
Teacher Supportive Treatment	75%	White=76% Black=71% Latino=75%	Female=74% Male=76%	Low=67% Med=74% High=79%
Positive sense of social belonging in school	80%	White=83% Black=71% Latino=78%	Female=80% Male=80%	Low=72% Med=77% High=85%
Feel valued in the classroom	70%	White=72% Black=64% Latino=68%	Female=70% Male=70%	Low=62% Med=65% High=77%
Unable to share views in class due to own race	10%	White=5% Black=24% Latino=13%	Female=7% Male=12%	Low=17% Med=10% High=6%
Heard hurtful comments about race from students	66%	White=64% Black=70% Latino=65%	Female=70% Male=61%	Low=68% Med=66% High=66%
Heard hurtful comments about race from teachers	24%	White=21% Black=33% Latino=28%	Female=25% Male=23%	Low=32% Med=26% High=21%

Taken together, recent events and the survey findings offer a stark and direct challenge to the District, and its ability to achieve its overall mission and equity goals. Indeed, some of the impetus for the November 11 students' demands came from the inconsistency and uncertainty with which District staff responded: students reported that some teachers have explicitly stated that their classrooms are a safe space, while others have ignored or intentionally avoided any conversation about effects of the election.³

Background

The ICCSD serves approximately 13,000 students each year in twenty elementary schools, three junior high schools, two high schools, and one alternative high school. The District is considerably more diverse than the average Iowa public school, and has a larger enrollment size and greater diversity than any of the ten neighboring Districts.⁵ Racial and socioeconomic diversity of the school population is most prevalent for elementary schools, although racial and socioeconomic makeup varies considerably from school to school. This diversity is acknowledged, celebrated, and protected by District policies and programs. The stated mission of the Iowa City Community School District (see sidebar for full text) is “to ensure that all students become responsible independent learners capable of making informed decisions in a democratic society as well in the dynamic global community.” In July 2015, the District board fleshed out this mission with an Equity Statement, holding that “equitable classrooms are essential to [student] success,” and that “[e]liminating disparities in educational opportunities is fundamental to the nature of public education.”

In August 2016, the Director of Equity and Staffing released the second edition of the District’s Comprehensive Equity Plan, which seeks to advance the third goal of the District’s Strategic Plan (“to annually improve the educational experiences for all children through culturally inclusive and responsive school environments and classroom instruction . . . with a focus on equitable outcomes for students in protected classes”). The Equity Plan’s objectives include increasing the composition of underrepresented groups, increasing community engagement and community awareness of district initiatives, reducing disproportionality in student discipline and achievement, and incorporating a more robustly diverse curriculum. For each of these four objectives, in turn, the Equity Plan describes a series of action plans, expected results, a timeline, key personnel that are responsible for achieving the objective and carrying out the action plans, and evidence of success.⁶

Drawing on the findings from the February 2016 survey and the District’s own stated goals and objectives, researchers from the University of Iowa collaborated with the District to identify three themes as key areas of opportunity and growth:

- Teacher and mentor relationships
- Inclusive community
- Disciplinary environment

In August 2016, the research team developed Key Focus Area Policy Briefs focused on each of these areas. The policy briefs, drawing on the relevant academic research, addressed four questions:

- 4) Why is this particular aspect of student experience important?
- 5) What is the extent of the problem in regard to this aspect of student experience in the ICCSD?
- 6) What are the strategies for intervening that have been shown in the education research literature to be effective?
- 7) What are the evidence-based recommendations that can inform the ICCSD decision-making process?

These policy briefs, and their recommendations, were presented to the District board in early August 2016. At this point, the Board agreed with the briefs’ umbrella recommendation—that a multi-stakeholder task force be charged with reviewing the three policy briefs and assisting the

ICCSD Mission Statement

To ensure all students become responsible, independent learners capable of making informed decisions in a democratic society as well as in the dynamic global community . . .” which is accomplished by challenging each student with a rigorous and creative curriculum taught by a diverse, professional, caring staff and enriched through the resources and efforts of families and the entire community.

ICCSD Equity Statement (2015)

The Iowa City Community School District believes that all students can achieve at high levels and that equitable classrooms are essential to their success. Eliminating disparities in educational opportunities is fundamental to the nature of public education. The District is committed to overcoming barriers to learning that have been identified through educational research. The District is particularly focused on student experiences and outcomes related to socioeconomic learner status (identified as low-SES students in the District’s student data management system), special education learner status, English language learner status, race, creed, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, or disability.

Equity Plan Objectives (2016)

- 1) The District shall increase the composition of underrepresented groups in District administrative, certified and support staff with a particular focus on gender, race, and ethnicity.
- 2) The District shall increase community engagement and community awareness of District initiatives.
- 3) The District shall reduce disproportionality in the following areas for protected classes: student discipline, assignment of students to special education, graduation rates, course taking, and student educational achievement.
- 4) The District shall incorporate a more robust multicultural/ gender fair (MC/GF) curriculum and activities throughout each building.

District in prioritizing and enhancing the recommendations described in each brief. The policy briefs outlined a wide range of options and approaches, targeting districtwide administrative policies, teaching practices, disciplinary reform, and community and parent engagement. The policy briefs offered a survey of the best academic research on the subject of each area of concern; the task force added the perspective and priorities of the community, the District, and their stakeholders.

Multi-Stakeholder School Climate Task Force

Following the August 9, 2016 presentation of Key Focus Area Policy Briefs, the Iowa City Community School District Board of Education agreed with the proposal to convene a task force to consider the recommendations in the focus areas of teacher and mentor relationships, inclusive community, and disciplinary environment. The task force included school administrators, teachers, school staff, students, parents, and community representatives associated with local businesses, non-profit organizations, government, and universities. The goal of the task force was to gather input from diverse stakeholders to provide guidance to the District in its efforts to improve the experiences of all students.

Aligned generally with the District's Equity Plan, the convening of the task-force contributed directly to the Equity Plan's second objective: *The District shall increase community engagement and community awareness of district initiatives*—and specifically to the goals of “engag[ing] the community and parents effectively across multiple platforms, especially underrepresented and underprivileged groups and establish[ing] program, policies, and practices to create and foster a relationship with parents and the community, especially underrepresented and underprivileged groups.” The events of November only added urgency to this task: ICCSD leaders, receptive to student demands, directed staff to resources to provide immediate and consistent responses to bias in schools.⁷ The ICCSD Board of Education also addressed the climate shifts in schools, formally stating that the board will provide “clear support ... for faculty, administration and students to push for a more safe, civil and inclusive environment.”⁸

Recruitment and Selection

The research team recruited task force members by announcing the creation of the task force through outlets in the school district and community. All parents and students in the ICCSD were invited to participate in the task force via PowerSchool (Appendix A), the District's secure communications platform. Community members were recruited through e-mails to community groups and professional networks of research team members. In addition, researchers contacted potential task force members based on leads from preliminary contacts. Posters with application information (Appendix B) were displayed on the University of Iowa campus and on public bulletin boards in downtown Iowa City. School staff and teachers were recruited by the Director of Equity and Staffing, and by the Iowa City Education Association (ICEA). Those expressing interest were asked to take a short survey (Appendix C), which collected basic demographic and contact information, and prompted respondents to share their background and interest in the charge and scope of the Task Force. The application survey was closed on September 21, and no late applications were accepted.

The research team identified several key stakeholder groups to include in the task force: teachers, administration, student and family advocates, other ICCSD staff, District Parents' Organization representatives, Equity Committee representatives, students and community members (Table 4).

Table 4. Key Stakeholders

Group 1 ICCSA Staff (10 of 10)	Group 2 District Liaisons/Community (10 of 10)	Group 3 Students & Parents (10 of 10)
Elementary Principals (2) Elementary Teachers (2) Secondary Principals (2) Secondary Administrators (2) Student Family Advocates (2)	DPO representative Elementary (1) DPO representative Secondary (1) Equity Committee Representatives (2) Community Parents and Students Organization Representatives (2) Community Representatives (4)	Students (5) Parents (5)

Selection of applicants was based on a number of criteria, including ability to represent one of the key stakeholder groups, interest in the promotion of equity in the District, experience with schools and students, and commitment to the process (including meeting attendance). Given that the task force was charged with discussing and providing input regarding the differences in experiences of students of diverse backgrounds, selection of task force members was purposeful in recruiting members to reflect a range of identities and backgrounds. A majority of the task force identified as people of color, and included people who had not been actively involved with the school district previously.

From the 35 completed applications, 22 people were selected as parent, student, and community representatives. Because only two ICCSD students applied through the online survey, the research team decided that students were welcome to join the group on a weekly basis. Along with representatives from the groups outlined in Table 3, the multi-stakeholder task force included members affiliated with various community organizations and advocacy groups. See Appendix D for a full list of community groups represented on the task force.

In a welcome letter distributed to selected applicants, guidelines for participation were outlined. Expectations for the task force included regular attendance at meetings, preparation for meetings (participants were asked to read designated sections of the focus area briefs before coming to meetings), confidentiality (participants were asked to refrain from relaying any personal information—including opinions shared by other task force members—to outside parties), and respectful communication.

Process

During the application and selection process, the research team set four meeting dates in October and November, along with topics for each meeting:

- October 6: Teacher Relationships
- October 20: Mentoring Relationships
- November 10: School Climate
- November 17: Inclusive Classroom and Discipline

Each meeting was attended by 15-30 task force members, and small group composition was shuffled each meeting. Task force meetings were structured in the following way:

- 1) The full group reviewed key findings, strategies and recommendations
- 2) Small groups discussed the recommendations, including strengths, weaknesses, and additional considerations (e.g. prerequisites to implementation, unintended consequences, capacity to execute, availability of resources, etc.)
- 3) Small groups shared preliminary thoughts with the full task force
- 4) Small groups prioritized recommendations
- 5) Individuals provided written feedback

The final writing task was used to provide participants with a confidential outlet for input. At the end of each meeting, the research team asked task force members three questions, specifically:

- 1) In your opinion, what is the most important takeaway from the discussion today?
- 2) What do you recommend the District should do to address this issue?
- 3) Do you have any suggestions for improving the task force meetings?

Task force meeting discussions were captured in two ways. First, each small group recorded their perceptions of each recommendation, including strengths, weaknesses, and other considerations, on poster board paper. Second, two members of the research team took notes during the small group presentations and discussions. These sources, along with the individual written feedback were used to identify themes that summarized the views of the task force and its members.

Teacher and Mentor Relationships

Task force members examined six recommendations regarding disparate student experiences with teacher and mentor relationships. The recommendations covered various approaches and strategies to develop and enhance relationships, including: identifying commonalities, expanding teacher professional development, allocating time for relationship building, diversifying the workforce, incentivizing teacher mentorship across backgrounds, and fortifying existing mentorship programs in the community.

“My takeaway [from the task force meeting] is that I don’t really have a relationship with any of my teachers.” – Current ICCSD student

Recommendation 1: Identify Commonalities

Given the extent of racial and socioeconomic status disparities in student-teacher relationships, with around a quarter of students in the most marginalized groups reporting a lack of encouragement, personal concern, and supportive equitable treatment by teachers, the District may consider an approach that draws attention to the commonalities that students and teachers share. This may be particularly appropriate in school districts such as Iowa City, given the divergence between the social backgrounds of students and teachers.⁹

Activities that encourage connection and understanding between students and teachers	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redirect Focus from Differences• Build Rapport
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential Oversharing• Dismissing the Value of Differences• Time Investment
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Importance of Early Connections• Ongoing Maintenance• and Potential Biases

Strengths

Members of task force deliberated the potential benefits of drawing attention to similarities between teachers and students. Two themes emerged, encapsulating the strengths of this recommendation: **Redirecting Focus from Differences** and **Building Rapport**. Four of the seven discussion groups agreed that identifying similarities could help diminish the apparent differences between students and teachers. Because finding similarities requires personal sharing from both parties, collaborative dialogue is promoted. Along with fostering an environment of mutual respect, this practice would help teachers and students see each other beyond the context of their roles in the school.

The second theme of the discussion, building rapport, focused on the strengthened relationships that could result from an initial identification of similarities. Four discussion groups reported that sharing similarities can “make the teacher more relatable and humanized” to the students, as well as build relationships of trust, respect, and encourage better overall communication. More substantive relationships could lessen adversarial attitudes and ameliorate disciplinary issues.

In addition, groups mentioned that this recommendation would be inexpensive to apply and it could be a good tool for teachers to use for self-reflection and motivation. One task force member expressed the potential benefit for preventing burn-out, saying “This could remind teachers why they got into the profession, to support students.”

“This could remind teachers why they got into the profession, to support students.”

Weaknesses

While discussing the weaknesses of this recommendation, general themes of **Potential Oversharing**, **Dismissing the Value of Differences**, and **Time Investment** appeared throughout the task force discussions. A weakness identified by three discussion groups was the potential for diminished professional boundaries between teachers and students. Many task force members had concerns about privacy and over sharing between students and teachers. In addition, members of the task force were skeptical of the authenticity of relationships formed from a systematic practice.

Three groups pointed out that this recommendation focuses on building relationships based on sameness, while dismissing the value of diversity in social circles. A few participants noted that this recommendation could be an oversimplification of how relationships are developed. Additionally, attempting to identify similarities between students and teachers could have the unintended effect of highlighting differences, reinforcing negative perceptions, forcing inauthentic interactions, and further damaging shaky relationships.

Time investment was another weakness that was mentioned by a majority of discussion groups. Groups noted that this recommendation could be met with resistance from teachers, students, and parents being asked to implement activities within demanding academic schedules.

Considerations

There are several dynamics to acknowledge in the consideration of this recommendation. Participants wanted to acknowledge the **Importance of Early Connections**, **Ongoing Maintenance**, and **Potential Biases** that could exist.

Several task force members proposed that students will have better academic outcomes and enjoy the benefits of a working relationship longer if connections are made at the beginning of the school year. Some suggestions for facilitating relationships early included allotting more homeroom time for students to encourage small group interactions and/or foster learning communities.

The age of students was also a factor for further consideration in this recommendation. Task force members speculated that older students may be intimidated by the pressure to bond with teachers and reluctant to participate, which may not be an issue for younger students.

The theme of ongoing maintenance captures the need to have teacher buy-in, consistent application, and thorough evaluation. Specifically, participants expressed that the integration into all classrooms and curriculums as important, and that preparation and follow-up with teachers and students would be critical. Several groups mentioned that top-down promotion of the recommendation by teachers and administrators was required to normalize meaningful relationships in school culture.

"If even one teacher is not on board with progression then the whole system falls apart."

Examples of preparation needed for this recommendation include guidance on appropriate sharing topics and the threat of preconceived views. Members of the task force expressed concerns that without effective implicit bias training, the results of this recommendation could be skewed because of on unconscious prejudices. One member of the task force elaborated, saying that some people perceive themselves to be relatable to everyone, and may feel that intentionally practicing building relationships does not apply to them. If teachers are unconsciously more engaged with students similar to their own demographic, development of relationships with less similar students could be negatively impacted.

Recommendation 2: Professional Development for Teachers

The District may consider a teacher professional development strategy that emphasizes the importance of student-teacher relationships with students. While the vast majority of students in the District report positive relationships with teachers, the over-representation of more advantaged students reporting this points to the need for teachers to proactively reach out to less advantaged students and work to create and maintain positive relationships with all students. A potential professional development

approach could provide teachers with the information on the disparities among students, and communicate to teachers the importance of developing strong relationships with all students.⁸

Professional development for teachers	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support Staff• Ensure Benefits
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time Investment• Potential Resistance
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accountability

Strengths

The primary theme reflecting the group discussions regarding professional development was **Supporting Staff** and **Ensuring Benefits** in their efforts to make positive changes. Staff support was recommended in several domains, including tangible and intangible resources. Several groups stated that teachers need to be well informed and routinely supported throughout the professional development process. Particularly for the professional development topics like the role of bias in student relationships, teachers need to be supported to promote positive reception. To effectively support teachers, professional development needs to be meaningful and include resources such as specific strategies for implementation and regular follow-up.

“Teachers want to foster those relationships, but feel undermined if the PD is unrealistic, too vague, or not serious enough”

Another aspect of support is systematically providing training, so all teachers and all schools receive the same training. One task force member addressed the motivational capacity of professional development, which could refresh veteran staff. Task force members wanted teachers to feel confident buying into professional development, and knowing clear benefits from proper implementation. Three groups expanded upon the idea of benefits, saying that intentionally bridging divisions between advantaged and marginalized social groups is beneficial for both teachers and students. By reaching out, teachers might save time by avoiding discipline issues while modeling how to be inclusive of traditionally marginalized groups for students.

Weaknesses

As task force members discussed the weaknesses of this recommendation, two themes emerged: **Time Investment** and **Potential Resistance**. Of the seven groups, four mentioned time investment as weakness. Two groups elaborated, saying a single professional development will not change the climate, but must be ongoing and consistent throughout the entire District. Other weaknesses related to time investment include incorporation into the curriculum and ensuring appropriate allotment time and comfortable setting for teachers to practice and develop.

“How do we create a safe place for teachers and administrators to reflect on and learn about biases?”

Members of the task force voiced concerns that a professional development strategy could be met with resistance. Generally, concerns were related to the delivery and content of the training. Depending on the presenter, teachers could perceive varied impressions of the role of bias in teaching practices and student relationships. Some task force members doubted that a training could be generalized to all teachers and schools effectively. Another member suggested that professional development concerning building relationships could be perceived as patronizing. One member speculated that resistance to training could signal that some teachers are insecure in their ability to address issues of bias, and may be reluctant to be vulnerable among peers. This member raised the question, “How do we create a safe place for teachers and administrators to reflect on and learn about biases?”

Considerations

The discussion around other considerations revolved around one theme: **Accountability**. Within this theme, task force members discussed professional development selection, training expectations, teaching practice assessment, responsibilities of teachers, and overall evaluation. Task force members described a need for professional development that could be applied immediately, with specific strategies or tools to use in the classroom and in interactions with students. Members of the task force stated that professional development should be facilitated by people with practical experience, and suggested inviting experts from within the community. Task force members also spoke about accountability during implementation, which included consistency across trainings and districtwide administration (including leadership). Task force members described the need for a clear, ongoing evaluation plan with specific measures to ensure that teachers could demonstrate desired skills in the classroom. One task force member emphasized the importance of adapting teaching practices, saying, “Teachers need to understand the impact of bias on students. It is a ripple effect, so understanding how disparities and inequalities affect the students beyond school.” Some members of the task force debated whether we can expect teachers to establish meaningful relationships with all of their students, particularly for those in secondary settings. One member summarized this idea, saying, “Should teachers engage with every student that they have? Or, should they focus more on students who need it most? In addition, can other faculty assist or will this be a change made by teachers alone?”

“Teachers need to understand the impact of bias on students. It is a ripple effect, so understanding how disparities and inequalities affect students beyond school.”

Recommendation 3: Allocate Time

One particularly crucial aspect of building relationships is time spent together. Therefore, any strategy that the District uses to address disparities in student-teacher relationships should include opportunities for students and teachers to interact and spend time together in order to foster strong relationships.⁸

School-wide programs that promote relationship-building	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to Implement• Models Healthy Socialization
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inflexible Schedules• Lack of Structure
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customizable• Unforeseen Expenses

Strengths

A majority of the task force agreed that creating opportunities to nurture relationships could motivate and support students academically and beyond. The main themes from this discussion of the strengths of this recommendation are that it is **Easy to Implement** and **Models Healthy Socialization**. Some task force members believed that extending time in homeroom or reserving times for teachers to be available for personal interactions would be a simple way to improve relationships. One discussion group perceived this recommendation as promoting change by intentionally creating opportunities for creativity.

“Role model connections can be really imperative for some students. We have seen positive results - students developing the mentality of, ‘I can do this!’”

One discussion group suggested that having time to interact with teachers would be especially important for students that may not have a strong role model in their homes. One member noted that increased access to a positive role model in school could promote healthy development of students’

self-esteem, efficacy, independence, identity. One task force member stated that, “Role model connections can be really imperative for some students. We have seen positive results - students developing the mentality of, ‘I can do this!’” In addition to benefits between student and teacher relationships, perceptions of inclusivity in the school may improve for parents and families of students who are less involved.

Weaknesses

Themes that arose during the discussion of weaknesses of this recommendation included **Inflexible Schedules** and **Lack of Structure**. Members of the task force pointed out that free time for socializing has already been virtually eliminated from curriculums in order to meet other requirements. Many members commented that teachers simply do not have enough time to build relationships with students. Students also have full schedules, especially with added responsibilities as they near graduation.

Several groups were uncomfortable with the lack of structure within this recommendation. Many members were concerned about the lack of clarity regarding “spending time together,” and that a structured process is needed to fully benefit from additional opportunities to interact. One member noted that comfort with unstructured time varied by personality types and skills, suggesting that students and teachers might be uneasy participating in unguided mingling, especially if certain outcomes are expected. Many members agreed that forging connections can be difficult to navigate, and lacking structure and strategy could be detrimental to the implementation of this recommendation.

Considerations

Members noted that this recommendation is easily **Customizable**, but were wary of the potential for **Unforeseen Expenses**. Members of the task force thought that allocating unplanned time would allow school and classroom level autonomy to serve particular purposes. For example, schools could be flexible with the frequency and length of free time, use of time, goals, and attendance expectations.

Several members of the group predicted that unstructured time would lead to additional costs in teacher training, planning, and supplementary resources.

Recommendation 4: Incentivize Teacher Mentorship Across Backgrounds

Given the overall high rates of mentorship in the District currently, it may not be necessary to implement a program that is designed to increase mentorship overall. However, one of the key findings from the survey was the substantially different rates at which Black and low socioeconomic students have mentors *who are teachers*. Having teachers as mentors (as opposed to having mentorship relationships with other adults in the school) may provide distinct advantages related to student achievement and generally better relationships between teachers and students. Therefore, the District may consider implementing a policy or program that incentivizes teachers being mentors to students regardless of their social backgrounds.⁸

School-based mentoring programs and targeting teachers	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bolsters Connections• Potentially Broad Impact
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compulsion
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Role Variation• Sustainability

Strengths

After reading and discussing this recommendation, the task force identified strengths, which fit into two themes: **Bolsters Connections** and **Potentially Broad Impact**. Many task members observed

that intentionally reaching out to students with different backgrounds would strengthen student connections to school. Along with reinforcing student and teacher relationships, incentivized mentorship could help students navigate relationships with their peers and families.

“Encourage students and teachers and staff to look each other in the eye and say ‘hello.’”

One impact beyond the teacher and student could include building positive regard for diverse social circles. Establishing rewarding relationships across backgrounds can increase the agency of students and teachers to continue interacting with people unlike themselves. In addition, several task force members expected the general climate and morale to improve if teachers and students were proactively in participating in a mentorship program. Teachers could also benefit in a role as mentors by learning about the needs and qualities of students beyond an academic lens.

Weaknesses

Many task force members identified **Compulsion** as a weakness of this recommendation. Three of the five discussion groups in the task force suggested that the recommendation might force insincere attempts at relationships. Members wondered if compensation is the right motivation for teachers who are undertaking a complex and sensitive task. Task force members insisted that interested teachers should be well prepared for interactions with students of different backgrounds, to avoid potentially insensitive exchanges. Another weakness of this recommendation was the possibility that more “naturally occurring” connections could be forfeited.

“Helping students of color and other minority students should begin with recruiting more mentors/ teachers/role models that they can identify with and feel comfortable around.”

Considerations

Considerations for this recommendation fell into two major themes of **Role Variation** and **Sustainability**. Several task force members expressed concerns about the challenge of shifting roles for students/mentees and teachers/mentors. Specifically, members wondered how mentorship would affect relationships during class and how to maintain varying boundaries depending on the setting. Along with having dual roles, task force members thought that adequate oversight would be needed to ensure interactions between teachers and students are appropriate and healthy.

The sustainability theme includes consistent student interest and participation, and covering additional expenses of the incentive. Task force members thought that identifying students who would benefit from additional mentorship would be priority candidates, but it was debated whether students would be interested in participating. If teachers would make arrangements and preparations to mentor, some guarantee of student interest and commitment would be needed. Additional discussion explored options related to the criteria to determine which students would be eligible for mentorship, and process to match interested students and teachers. A final consideration regarding sustainability is whether finances would be regularly allocated to support teachers as mentors long-term.

“Have students and teachers take a survey about what they like, and match teachers and students.”

Recommendation 5: Diversify the Workforce

One of the potential reasons why there are lower rates of teacher mentorship with Black and low socioeconomic students may be due to the tendency for mentors and mentees to share social characteristics. We see evidence of this with the exceptionally low rates of race matching between mentor and mentee for Black, Latino, and low socioeconomic students. Given that the majority of teachers in the District are white professionals, it is not surprising to find higher rates of mentorship

with students of similar backgrounds. One strategy the District could pursue to equalize teacher mentorship and race- and gender-matching would be to increase the recruitment and retention of teachers from diverse social backgrounds.⁸

Increase the diversity of teaching and school-based staff	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visibility• Enhancement
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reception• Expectations
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruitment and Retention, Prerequisites

Strengths

In the discussions about diversifying the workforce, members of the task force identified strengths that fit into two themes: **Visibility** and **Enhancement**. Several discussion groups mentioned the benefits for all students to see people of diverse backgrounds in positions as leaders, teachers, and mentors. This recommendation could be particularly beneficial for students of color, who reported lower rates of belonging in school in the student climate survey. Actively recruiting people with diverse backgrounds (including bilingual, disabled, or minorities in race, creed, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status) in the workforce would lessen the demographic differences between staff and the student body. One task force member commented that diverse representation within fields largely perceived as dominated by white men, such as math and science, is especially important for students who rarely see people like themselves in those fields. Task force members theorized that marginalized students may be more likely to approach, relate to, and build relationships with diverse teachers. Research supports this sentiment, with one recent study linking racial minority teachers to more favorable perceptions from students of all races.¹⁰

“Diversity makes us all smarter, it challenges our brains in different ways and is extremely beneficial.”

Three groups agreed that including more diverse perspectives amongst teaching staff would lead to more inclusive classroom discussions and encourage participation from a wider base of students. One member of the task force spoke to the benefits of a diverse workforce for staff members saying, *“Diversity makes us all smarter, it challenges our brains in different ways and is extremely beneficial.”*

Weaknesses

The weaknesses of this recommendation are included in the themes of **Reception** and **Expectations**. Several discussion groups anticipated complications concerning the reception of an initiative to increase staff diversity. Many task force members suggested that the value of diversity is not respected consistently throughout the District and community. Members believed that the depth of commitment from leadership and strategic framing of this recommendation would determine whether purposeful hiring practices to increase diversity would be met with resistance. Another weakness of this recommendation was the potential for predetermined expectations to be placed on diverse hires. Some members noted that expectations to take on added responsibilities, such as working with marginalized students or acting as a diplomat for community outreach should be avoided. Additional strain on new hires would undermine the long-term goal of retaining diverse staff.

“Check in with teachers of color. Don’t alienate teachers of color.”

Considerations

The task force members had several considerations for this recommendation, which fell into two themes, **Prerequisites** and **Recruitment and Retention**. Several task force members voiced concern regarding the readiness of the District to successfully implement this recommendation. Most members agreed that diversifying the staff necessitated districtwide implicit bias training to ensure equitable hiring processes and culturally competent workplaces. Along with training, additional policies could be adopted to promote inclusivity, such as diverse hiring and interview teams, and explicit procedures to guide the current workforce in welcoming and supporting new hires.

Recruitment and retention was a prevalent theme during discussions of increasing ICCSD staff diversity. Some task force members suggested expanding recruitment efforts to more diverse universities and regions, which would require an investment in time and resources. One task force member noted that many school districts are similarly motivated to actively recruit diverse applicants, and the market for quality candidates is competitive. Further discussion is needed to parcel out logistical pieces of recruitment, such as recruitment strategies to attract diverse candidates.

Task force members advised that retaining diverse hires would require an understanding among staff of the importance of diversity. One task force member noted that increased diversity itself would be conducive to sustaining a diverse workforce. In addition to short-term goals, some task force members suggested two long term strategies, which included 1) encouraging current ICCSD students from diverse backgrounds to consider careers in education and 2) encouraging current diverse staff to advance their careers into higher levels of leadership within the District. Another idea involved promoting careers as educators to underemployed members in the community who have advanced degrees in fields other than teaching as a way to cultivate diversity in the District, widen outreach, and invest in the community.

Recommendation 6: Fortify Existing Mentorship

Another strategy the District may consider pursuing would be to focus on increasing any type of mentorship. The District could build on and support the existing programs that expand the network of adults that interact and form supportive bonds with students outside of the classroom setting.⁸

Non-school-based mentoring programs – after-school groups	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equipped Infrastructure• Community Engagement
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capacity• Unforeseen Expenses
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment• Duplication

Strengths

Two themes developed out of the discussion of the strengths of this recommendation: **Equipped Infrastructure** and **Community Engagement**. In regards to the equipped infrastructure theme, several members mentioned that the existing structure needed for community integration is already in place with several programs and organizations already providing successful models to follow. Task force members noted that focusing on external mentorship would reinforce and sustain current effectual programming.

“Define what mentor programs exist already in the school and in the community and use those as starting point for improvement.”

The task force suggested another strength of this recommendation would be a more robust relationship between the school district and community. Formalizing mentorships through the school system would invite diverse perspectives and engage new partners in the discussion about school climate improvement. In addition, task force members suggested that external mentor-

student relationships would be more student-centered and develop more naturally, compared to recommendations which only involved utilizing current school staff. Task force members agreed that linking teachers, students, and mentors would open communication and build trust that would contribute to meaningful classroom relationships.

Weaknesses

Task force members identified two main weaknesses within the proposal to expand current programs and network of adults that interact with students, namely **Capacity** and **Unforeseen Expenses**. One identified weakness of this recommendation was the limited capacity of existing volunteer and community groups, particularly to serve the needs of marginalized students. One task force member added that automatically fortifying current programs would not necessarily address existing disparities and contribute to overarching equity goals. When considering expansion of programs, many task force members were concerned about the expenses associated with integrating mentorship into the educational system. The District would be responsible for contributing resources to the screening, training, and selection of qualified people and effective programs; whether the District would dedicate staff and space or contract community organizations to accomplish those tasks. Finally, mentor relationships could potentially supersede teacher relationship and negatively impact classroom dynamics by interfering with the development of student-teacher relationships.

Considerations

Many task force members noted how the lack of structure in implementation could make evaluation difficult. In contrast, some members suggested that the lack of structure would be positive because it could allow mentors creative freedom and individualized planning. Additionally, interpretations of effectiveness would vary based on the needs of students, meaning decision-making regarding mentorship expansion would need a comprehensive definition of meaningful services and flexible timeline.

Along with assessing outcomes, several task force members recommended an initial needs assessment to identify existing deficits and avoid duplication of services prior to further consideration. Specifically, the task force wants to know *who are the involved parties, what programs already exist, what is working, and for who?* Task force members noted that community organizations would need to be open to working more closely with the District. Finally, several groups noted that mentorship should be implemented within schools rather than outside the school and classroom setting, reasoning that relationships built outside of school do not impact the school climate.

Inclusive Community

Task force members dissected four recommendations regarding disparate student experiences in the domain of inclusive communities. The recommendations covered various approaches to develop and enhance inclusion, including: professional development for leadership, social psychological interventions, school-based activities, and incorporating culturally relevant teaching practices and materials.

Recommendation 7: Professional Development for Leadership

School leaders play a crucially important role in creating a supportive and inclusive school climate. Given that all schools in the District have disparities in several aspects of their school climates, the District may consider conducting an in-service training for school leaders to ensure that all building-level leaders have the tools and strategies they need to foster inclusive and equitable experiences for all students in their schools.¹¹

Target School Leaders: Culturally responsive school leadership training	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated Commitment and Reception
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variability
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform versus Adaptable

Strengths

Task force members identified several strengths of this recommendation, which fell into two themes: **Demonstrated Commitment** and **Reception**. Because this recommendation employs a top-down approach to promoting positive change in school climate, those in leadership positions would be responsible for disseminating culturally responsive practices. One strength is that resources could be focused on a relatively small group, which could translate to more frequent, thorough, high quality trainings. Task force members identified the **demonstrated commitment** from leadership as a strength, because it signals that cultural relevance is a priority in the District. Effectively training leaders would deploy role models throughout the District, who would be culturally competent resources for teachers, staff, and students. Investment into leadership could normalize the need for culturally relevant training and reflection and increase comfort in conversations related to race and culture. One task force member clarified the need to engage in difficult discourse, saying, “It is hard to come up with solutions when it is hard to even bring it up.” Task force members agreed that culture is relevant in all interactions, and District employees should be equipped to have appropriate and consistent conversations with all students and parents.

“It is hard to come up with solutions when it is hard to even bring it up.”

Task force members concluded that training leaders would promote positive **reception** among school district teachers and staff. Many members of the task force commented that this approach would differentiate cultural competence trainings from previous professional development and would be associated with leadership competencies. In addition, several task force members reasoned that culturally responsive practices imparted to teachers from leaders would carry over to cultural competence throughout the student body.

“We have to commit to a long-term, institution-wide approach”

Weaknesses

Task force members identified **Variability** as a weakness in this recommendation. Many task force members were concerned about the consistent delivery of secondhand training. For instance, if a building leader was not receptive to the training, teachers in that school may receive a distorted version, or no training at all. Essentially, the success of districtwide adoption depends on the individuals chosen to undergo this initial training and the quality of the training itself. Additionally, three of the five discussion groups were skeptical about positive reception of additional training, since it would add to workloads.

Considerations

The considerations developed by the task force members revolved around the conflict between intervention **uniformity versus adaptability**. While many task force members saw benefits in the uniform delivery of training across schools, others were concerned that leaders could effectively translate training to apply in a classroom setting. Some task force members suggested that role-specific trainings would be more effective.

Another area of concern within adaptability addresses varying starting points for trainees. Several task force members pointed out that in order for all leaders to reach this standard of cultural competence, some may need more preparation than others to project a uniform stance on equity. For example, some trainees may need to unlearn years of damaging practices, while some may

already exemplify culturally competent attitudes and practices. The District needs to define clear expectations and standards for training, including observable and measureable outcomes. One task force member summarized the need for training application, saying, “We should stop concentrating on changing people’s hearts, and focus on changing their hands.”

“We should stop concentrating on changing people’s hearts, and focus on changing their hands.”

Recommendation 8: Social Psychological Intervention

Racial and socioeconomic disparities are evident across several aspects of school climate: Students in the most marginalized groups report the highest levels of people acting afraid of them and treating them as if they are not smart, and the lowest levels of social belonging. For these reasons, the District may consider a social-psychological intervention that can improve marginalized students’ academic resiliency and affirm their self-concept. This may be particularly appropriate in the schools that have higher levels of racial and socioeconomic disparities in achievement and experience. In addition, many of the above mentioned social psychological interventions have strong research evidence of effectiveness and are relatively easy to implement.¹⁰

There are a number of strategies to integrate a social psychological intervention into District practices. During the task force meeting, members primarily discussed an approach that consisted of giving out writing tasks to students in the classrooms. About half of the students would get an “intervention” writing prompt that would ask about personal values. Essentially, this task would prompt student self-reflection. The other half of the students would get a “control” writing prompt that would ask them a simpler question.

Target Students: Brief exercises that target students’ thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in and about school	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotes Self-Esteem• Ease of Implementation• Relationship Implications
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vulnerability
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation• Prompts• Measurement

Strengths

The task force discussion regarding the strengths of this recommendation resulted in three main themes: **Promotes Esteem**, **Ease of Implementation** and **Relationships Implications**.

Members of the task force agreed that a strength of this recommendation is the **promotion of self-esteem** through student self-reflection and identity affirmation. Members of the task force believed that the self-esteem building element within this recommendation would foster a sense of autonomy which could reduce the achievement gap. One task force commented on the need for targeting self-esteem, saying, “Teaching self-affirmation and reflection is more important now than ever, there is so much negativity around us these days. It could be helpful to give students positive language about themselves.” Other task force members added that free time is habitually used to check phones, and designated opportunities to self-reflect without distractions from media or technology could restore a sense of community in school climates. Many task force members noted that this recommendation would be **easy to implement**, because it uses supplies already available in classrooms and would not demand excessive classroom time or teacher training.

Several task force members identified **relationship implications** as a strength of this recommendation, meaning reinforcing student self-esteem and identity can lead to formation of healthier relationships among peers and teachers. Students could perceive these exercises as a form of reaching out, and infer that teachers care about hearing students’ personal narratives. This could

lead to a sense of improved emotional support, empowerment, and validation among students. In addition, teachers will be more informed about self-perceptions and sense of belonging of students, which could inform classroom interactions and teaching practices.

“Teaching self-affirmation and reflection is more important now than ever, there is so much negativity around us these days. It could be helpful to give students positive language about themselves.”

Weaknesses

Task force members noted that a weakness of this recommendation was the potential to make students feel **vulnerable**. Students may not feel comfortable sharing personal information, which involves building trust or having an option to keep writing tasks private. One task force member summarized this sentiment, saying, “This is sensitive stuff, we want to make sure that the students feel safe.” Members came to a general consensus that implementation in small groups would convey a safe environment without singling students out. Student privacy and confidentiality should be guaranteed and information shared should be handled with discretion.

“This is sensitive stuff, we want to make sure that the students feel safe.”

Considerations

When discussing all the possible implications and outcomes of this recommendation, three themes were prominent: **Presentation**, **Prompts**, and **Measurement**. Members of the task force agreed that the **presentation** of this recommendation is important for garnering meaningful participation and setting intentions. While this intervention has shown the most substantial positive impact among marginalized students, task force members felt it was important to avoid targeting individual students, since all members of the school community contribute to the climate. In addition, task force members felt that clarification regarding values and accepting differences across cultures is an important pre-implementation discussion for teachers and students. Prior to presentation to students, genuine teacher buy-in will impact student investment and cooperation, so emphasizing benefits for teachers is critical.

“Don’t assume that detached students are a problem to be fixed. The system should work for all.”

Many task force members speculated about the subject matter of the writing **prompts** and the elicited content from students. To begin, developing appropriate prompts was mentioned as a consideration in nearly every task force discussion group. Along with modifying activities according to grade level and learning abilities, several task force members wanted assurance that prompts would be strengths-based, relevant to all cultures, and inclusive of diverse values.

The task force discussed the results of social psychological interventions in other schools, one of which was a steady GPA increase for marginalized students. In response, members noted that GPA should not be the only **measurement** of success, since high GPAs do not necessarily mean students feel capable and valuable. Other discussions regarding measurement included consistent teacher delivery in the application of the intervention, and routine follow-up with invention and control groups.

Recommendation 9: Promote Attachment with School-Based Activities

The District may consider strengthening the options and accessibility of school-based organized activities, including school-wide social functions. Given the disparities across social groups in their experience and perceptions of school climate, developing school-based organized activities that target relationship-building and contact across groups, both with students and teachers, can improve the overall school climate and student attachment to the school.¹⁰

Target School Community: School-based programs/activities that promote attachment to school	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusivity • Positive Associations
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Influence • Cultural Competence

Strengths

The task force recognized several strengths within this recommendation, which fit into the themes of **Inclusivity** and **Positive Associations**. This recommendation supports **inclusivity**, meaning additional opportunities to interact with schools may draw a wider range of students and families. This recommendation promotes connectedness and contact between students, families, and teachers outside the typical classroom structure and could include school staff, District leaders, volunteers, and community members. Inviting existing groups within schools would allow for members to be familiarized with projects across groups and introduced to new opportunities. Bringing together already active groups could invite collaboration between groups and spur interest for forming more specialized or underrepresented groups.

Several members of the task force suggested that school-based activities would foster **positive associations** with schools. School based activities would bring together different groups in a relaxed environment, so unconnected people could mingle and be recognized for various endeavors. Another strength is the provision of a safe space within the school for parents to get acquainted with staff and activities outside of academics or discipline. Task force members stressed the need for student attachment to and investment in school, which is contingent on safe school climates. School-based activities would provide an opportunity for teachers, students, and families to interact outside the classroom and develop deeper understandings of one another. In addition, task force members thought that school-based activities would establish a comprehensive approach to education that extends beyond academics, which would help redefine the institutional culture.

Weaknesses

During discussions about the weaknesses of this recommendation, the major theme was **Accessibility**. While most programs in schools are open to all students, many are not universally **accessible**. Student participation is often contingent on parental support and resources. One task force member illustrated potential transportation barriers in accessing school activities, saying, “If you can’t make it to 7:30 a.m. show choir practice every day, you’re never going to be part of the show choir during your time at school, period.” Similarly, barriers to accessing additional school based activities could exclude students further. Another element in accessibility involves the timing of any school based activities. Task force members suggested that planning events early in the school year would offer new students an informal orientation and opportunity to get involved with school groups. One task force member pointed out that students and parents who are English Language Learners (ELL) can be excluded from school events because District communications have limited translations.

“If you can’t make it to 7:30 a.m. show choir practice every day, you’re never going to be part of the show choir during your time at school, period.”

Considerations

During discussions about the considerations of this recommendation, themes included **Student Influence and Cultural Competence**. Many task force members noted that **student influence** and leadership would determine the reception of this recommendation. Students should be closely involved with any school-based activity planning to embed relevancy and authenticity; both would be essential for high participation rates. One task force member suggested that students accustomed to an inclusive and highly involved school environment could have difficulty transitioning to less structured routines after graduation.

“Talk to students! They live it, they know it. Their views and suggestions would help shape the solution.”

Many task force members asserted that the lack of diversity and inclusion in currently offered school programs is associated with disparate outcomes in student attachment and belonging. Decisions regarding student group formation and membership should be made with a lens of **cultural competency**, to ensure that all students have access to extracurricular opportunities that are accepting of diverse members and culturally relevant. Many task force members noted that addressing disproportionate participation in school activities should begin with collecting data to track current involvement and types of programs offered.

Another issue within cultural competency arose when task members were discussing integration of groups during school-based activities. Cross-cultural conversations can be productive or destructive, depending on the competencies of involved parties. One task force member expanded upon this idea, saying “Cultural exchange should not be reduced to cultural tourism.” With this in mind, people who are well versed in cultural competency are needed to lead by example and encourage others to initiate connections across groups. In addition, task force members noted that multi-grade interaction could expand communal opportunities for minorities, but should maintain age appropriate content for all members. Finally, further analysis is needed to gauge the readiness of resources, time, and facilities needed to carry out this recommendation.

“Cultural exchange should not be reduced to cultural tourism.”

Recommendation 10: Target Teacher Practices

There are quite extensive racial and socio-economic disparities across the majority of school climate experiences. This is strong evidence that the District needs to proactively intervene to improve the overall school climate for students. Given the widespread extent of disparities in student experiences of school climate, it is recommended that the District consider adopting one of the more holistic, school-wide strategies for improving school climate. In terms of inclusive education experiences, there are pervasive racial and socioeconomic status disparities across almost every measure – from feeling unable to share their views and hearing hurtful comments about race, to not having material or content representation. These types of disparities point to the importance of having a strong district commitment to multicultural education and having staff and teachers well-prepared to address the challenges of teaching an increasingly diverse student population.¹⁰

Create Inclusive Classrooms by Targeting Teacher Practices and Incorporating Multi-cultural Material	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Culture of Responsiveness
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inconsistent Application
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustainability• Selection Criteria

Strengths

The main theme in the discussion of recommendation strengths revolved around establishing a **Culture of Responsiveness**. Several groups suggested that additional training on inclusive classroom practices, such as incorporating multicultural content, could shift focus to a more student-centric approach and promote a more responsive culture throughout District practices. While teachers are required to meet standards concerning *what* is being taught, assessing *how* they are teaching is often a secondary matter. Task force members suggested that incorporating concepts like reflection, self-evaluation, implicit bias, and empathy into professional development could help educators contemplate how teaching practices can either discount or engage diverse students. In addition, multicultural materials in the curriculum might increase class discussions and understanding of diversity. Because teaching practices are foundational in school climates, meaningful change in this area could have a lasting and self-sustaining impact districtwide.

"Look at things from the students' side, not a third party."

Weaknesses

Several discussion groups agreed that a weakness of this recommendation was the potential for **Inconsistent Application**. Several task force members noted that application of skills disseminated through training could vary by individual teacher. For example, some teachers could completely overhaul their teaching practices to be more culturally relevant, while others could fulfill the minimum expectations by inserting multicultural materials as an excerpt. Superficial application of training would hinder the evaluation of this recommendation, and would subdue cultural change within schools. Task force members added that adoption of training depends on the quality and maintenance of professional development. Task force members felt that teachers should leave trainings confident in their ability to apply training skills to their subject area and students along with having access to resources to support implementation specifics.

"Clearly and purposefully define to teachers the 'why' this is important to address and create a 'buy in' and 'all in' culture"

Task force members identified resistance to and fatigue with professional development as factors that could interfere with consistent application of trainings. Discussion groups recognized that achieving equitable practices is contingent on acknowledging implicit biases and deficits in current materials. Task force members added that particularly with topics concerning race and implicit bias, people are prone to disengagement or defensiveness. Overcoming implicit biases is an ongoing process for everyone, and mistakes should be expected and worked out in productive conversations. In addition, some people may disregard implicit bias trainings because they feel they have already mastered the concept and application.

Considerations

The task force brought several considerations for this recommendation, which fit into the themes of **Sustainability** and **Selection Criteria**. The second theme of discussions, selection criteria, addressed the need to update curricular materials to accommodate the student body. Specifically, class materials need to highlight accomplishments of people with diverse identities and backgrounds to challenge stereotypes and biases. One task member expounded on this idea saying, "Curriculum materials should be selected with a critical and mindful lens, not just because it has people who look different in it." Many task force members were concerned about the sustainability of this recommendation throughout an entire school year and upcoming years, as regular updates may be required and implementation may be more or less time-consuming across teachers and schools.

"Curriculum materials should be selected with a critical and mindful lens, not just because it has people who look different in it."

Disciplinary Environment

Task force members dissected one recommendation regarding disparate student experiences in the domain of disciplinary environment. The recommendation detailed incorporating a restorative justice model to reform disciplinary practices that would complement current Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programming.

Recommendation 11: Restorative Justice-Based Model

Given that the District has some of the worst racial disproportionality in school suspension in Iowa, and there are moderate racial disparities within the ICCSD for all of the measures of disciplinary equity, a holistic approach that includes restorative justice-based models and Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) to address school discipline seems appropriate. The element of collectively assigning discipline is especially relevant to ICCSD, considering less than half (45%) of students reported thinking that the severity of punishment is appropriate.¹²

Implementing a restorative justice-based model to address discipline and build community within schools.	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Builds Community• Reinforces Agency
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time Investment• Shifting Dynamics
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expectations• Consistency

Strengths

The task force identified several strengths within the restorative justice model recommendation, and they all fell into the themes of **Building Community** and **Reinforcing Agency**.

Many task force members noted that restorative justice practices would build community in classrooms and schools. Since restorative justice models employ collective problem solving and encourages input, students and teachers will be required to cooperate to determine appropriate action. Task force members mentioned that holding students accountable without using punitive exclusion is another strength of the restorative justice recommendation. The task force members stated that rationale behind rules of communities would be better understood by students who participate in enforcing rules. Another way restorative justice builds community is the capacity for reconciliation, meaning that the victims, offenders, and bystanders have opportunities to express their motivations and reactions to conflicts. This approach creates space for a learning moment, in which restoration is positively reinforced as the purpose of discipline.

“Reassess the student-teacher hierarchy –students should not be the only ones learning in the classroom, teachers shouldn’t have to have all the answers.”

One task force member noted that having input in disciplinary decisions reinforces agency among students. Allowing students to influence outcomes in their environment is engaging, empowering, and encourages critical thinking. In the long-term, students may take principles learned from restorative justice in class and apply them to unsupervised situations or even outside of school.

Weaknesses

As task force members discussed weaknesses of this recommendation, two themes arose: **Time Investment** and **Shifting Dynamics**. Task force members noted that implementing restorative justice practices would require **investing time** into training, executing, and maintaining the process. Teachers and staff would need to be trained to effectively implement the restorative justice practices, which would require additional time commitment during class. In addition, measureable results might require a lengthy amount of time, since a reduction in conflicts are contingent on sustained

cultural change. Task force members pointed out that while a restorative justice model requires time and effort, proper implementation and consistent practice would save time long-term.

“Show that this is an issue that is important by mandating/ creating time for this to happen in our classrooms.”

Task force members foresaw a **dynamic shift** in student-teacher and student-student relationships. Some task force members thought that collective decision making would upend the teacher’s role as an authority figure in the classroom. Furthermore, if teachers and students don’t establish mutual trust, the restorative practice could generate tense uncertainty and go awry. In addition, relationships between students could change. For example, if students feel responsible for addressing the actions of classmates, a misbehaving student could endure more intense peer scrutiny, which could exacerbate behavior issues and further alienate students. In addition, parents may be resistant to the principles of restorative justice. Practicing restorative justice at school could alienate parents who favor more traditional approaches to discipline at home. Particularly if their child is a victim of bullying at school, parents may insist on punitive action and disrupt the restorative justice implementation.

Considerations

Task force discussions revolved around two considerations for the recommendation to supplement existing PBIS programming with restorative justice practices: **Expectations** and **Consistency**. Several task force members noted that restorative practices could be very difficult for some, particularly those who experience social anxiety or have challenging circumstances outside of school. For example, it would be misguided to expect a student whose misbehavior was triggered by past trauma to be able to discuss the reason for his or her actions with the class. Restorative justice protocol may unfairly cause some students more distress and exposure compared to alternative means of correction. Students lack the training and knowledge to appropriately handle sensitive situations or serious violations, and some matters should be turned over to professionals.

One member of the task force questioned the expectations of transferability for programs like PBIS, which reward good behavior. The member pointed out that outside of schools, good behavior is not directly rewarded, and wondered if students who were motivated by PBIS would continue positive behavior on their own accord. In addition, task force members acknowledged that expectations for the impact of restorative justice practices would be contingent on backing from school leadership, teachers, parents, and students. Considering this, the District should prepare to seek feedback from stakeholders and provide supportive resources during a transition in practices. Task force members also discussed **consistency** within restorative justice implementation. For instance, task force members wondered if initiating a restorative justice practice would be a subjective decision according to the judgment of each teacher, or if teachers would be trained to recognize certain cues for situations to engage in a restorative practice. If teachers are expected to implement the program consistently, a plan to monitor and evaluate fidelity of application would need to be adopted.

Conclusions

The task force provided concrete recommendations for the District to improve the experiences and outcomes of all students, with a particular focus on addressing the racial and socioeconomic disparities in student experiences identified by the Assessing Student Experiences Survey Report, and the District's persistent academic and disciplinary disparities.

As the chapters in this report indicate, each of the eleven recommendations considered by the task force received positive support. However, three recommendations stood out as priorities.

Top Recommendations of the Task Force

- 1) *The District should adopt a school- and district-wide strategy for addressing disparities in student experiences and outcomes. The specific model that garnered widespread support was the restorative justice model. This model received support because task force members believe that it can be effective at addressing four issues of concern in the ICCSD: increasing school community overall, improving teacher-student relationships, and decreasing the use of and disparities in punitive disciplinary punishments.*

"We have to commit to a long-term, institution-wide approach. Repairing relationships will help students not fall between the cracks in the meantime."

In making this recommendation, task force members noted the **Urgency** in establishing safe, responsive school climates given the current social and political climate in the nation and in our local community. Task force members were also concerned that the District be **Committed** to decreasing the gaps in student experiences, achievements and discipline, and align its current practices and programming with the **Equity** goals already in place. Task force members overwhelmingly agreed on the importance of having a strategy to address climate and student experience concerns that is **Extensive** and all-encompassing, not focusing narrowly on specific skills or behaviors. Task force members expressed their view that negative climate and experiences should be seen not as a problem of specific students, but as a problem of **Inclusion** which involves the entire school community. Task force members expressed the importance of having the District's reform efforts be **Collaborative**, incorporating feedback from students, teachers, staff, and community members.

- 2) *The District should provide training to all District staff, teachers, and administrators to improve the knowledge, understanding, awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. Task force members believe that trainings specifically related to issues of cultural competency and implicit bias are a foundational need of the District, and see this as a prerequisite for any of the other recommendations or programming targeting the improvement of student experiences and outcomes. The District needs to be proactive in preventing and addressing training fatigue and resistance by enlisting teacher, parent, and student input in the selection and setting of professional development.*

"It will require a cultural shift in what has been the norm and can be outside of what is and has been comfortable. However, the positive outcomes far exceed the challenges."

Task force members **Prioritized** providing **Comprehensive** training to all District employees because they saw this as a necessary foundation before other reform efforts could be successful. In making this recommendation, task force members elaborated several important characteristics that these trainings need to be successful. The trainings need to be **Continuous**, providing on-going and long-term support for improving understanding and changing practices. The trainings need to be **Practical** with clearly defined concepts and practices, and with tools or strategies that can be implemented immediately. The trainings need to be **High Quality**, with expert facilitators with practical experience and utilize interactive delivery. The trainings need to be **Flexible** and allow for tailoring to specific conditions such as subject area, and age of students. The task force members also emphasized the critical importance of the District's **Support** by investing District time and

resources in these trainings and support resources. Lastly, the task force noted the need for any trainings or programmatic changes to be **Accountable** for success.

- 3) *The District should actively recruit and retain District staff, teachers, and administrators of diverse backgrounds. Task force members believe that there are numerous benefits to having District staff, administrators, and especially teachers that represent the diverse backgrounds of the students in the District. These benefits include having positive role models, increasing the likelihood of strong teacher-student relationships and mentoring for all students, and improving the relationship between schools and under-represented communities.*

“Helping students of color and other minority students should begin with recruiting more mentors/ teachers/role models that they can identify with and feel comfortable around.”

Task Force Guidelines for Implementing Recommendations

Along with the recommendation outlined in the executive summary, the task force provided general guidelines for the implementation of programs and policies in the recommendations.

Specific to the recommendations to move forward with professional development on the topics of restorative justice and implicit bias, task force members insisted that these initiatives are implemented with proactive provisions to promote sustainability and accountability. For instance, task force members advocated for regular and rigorous process and outcome evaluations of professional development. Evaluation will aid identification of facilitators and barriers of equity-focused interventions, so the District can adjust implementation accordingly. Additionally, results of evaluations should be available to the public to establish transparency and trust among teachers, staff, parents, and students.

In regards to the recommendation to purposefully recruit diverse candidates, task force members reemphasized the need for sustainability and accountability, including examining current recruitment strategies and adopting protocol to retain current and future diverse staff.

Similar to the collaborative process utilized for the task force, members advised that any future District initiatives should incorporate input from a variety of stakeholders. Representative and shared decision making increases ownership, diminishes resistance, and can guide strategic direction by identifying potentially advantageous or unfavorable options which leadership alone might overlook.

Next Steps

The ICCSD is well-positioned to take meaningful, concrete action to work toward achieving their goal “that all students can achieve at high levels and that equitable classrooms are essential to their success.” The District and the University of Iowa research team have followed a successful community partnership model, working collaboratively to identify and address systematic issues in educational settings in ways that are beneficial, impactful, and sustainable for the District. From the existing survey and administrative data in the District, we have identified three key focus areas and provided evidence-based recommendations for strategies to make improvement in each of them. Receiving the feedback and recommendation of the task force now represent a clear imperative for the District to act.

As part of the on-going research partnership, we recommend that the District support continuous evaluations of the equity-related programming currently in place in the District, as well as any future programmatic changes. Using evidence-based strategies and evaluating their success in the ICCSD is crucial for achieving long-term success. We also recommend that the District conduct the student experience survey annually, along with additional forms of data collection to inform the District in making data and evidence-based decisions to further their mission and goals regarding educational equity.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Task Force E-mail Invitation

Good Evening Parents, Students, and Community Members of the Iowa City Community School District,

In February 2016, a student survey was administered to all 6th, 8th, and 11th grade student in the District. The survey asked students to report on their experiences of school across a number of areas including relationship with teachers, mentor relationships, support resources, negative experiences of school, social belonging, motivations to attend school, perceptions of discipline, inclusive classrooms, and the salience of race and gender for social identity and relationships. An extensive analysis of this survey was conducted and summarized in a report released in April 2016, Assessing Student Experiences Survey Report. Drawing on the findings from the report, three focus areas have been identified as areas of opportunity and growth for the District: teacher and mentor relationships; inclusive community; and disciplinary environment.

In August 2016, the Board agreed with the Report's recommendation to convene a community stakeholder taskforce to review the three focus areas and make recommendations based on the report findings. This taskforce will include administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. Taskforce meetings will take place on Thursdays from 5:30pm-7:30pm. The first meeting will take place on October 6th and the taskforce will have its final meeting on November 17th (more detailed schedule is below). Members of the committee need to make a commitment to be at all the meetings in order to efficiently and effectively meet our December deadline to the School Board. Below is an link to apply to become a part of the committee. Applications are due **Wednesday, September 21st at 5pm**. Thank you for your consideration and your time in this effort! Please send any questions to **Kingsley** Botchway, Director of Equity and Engagement, at Botchway.kingsley@iowacityschools.org or [319-688-1000](tel:319-688-1000).

Taskforce Meeting Schedule

October 6th (5:30pm-7:30pm)

October 20th (5:30pm-7:30pm)

November 10th (5:30pm-7:30pm)

November 17th (5:30pm-7:30pm)

Please apply at the following link(paper applications are available upon request): https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6RstiDX93LqsBQF

ICCSA School Climate Taskforce

The Iowa City Community School District and University of Iowa Public Policy Center are seeking community members, parents, and students to convene a taskforce.

The taskforce will discuss and make recommendations in three areas of school climate: teacher and mentor relationships; inclusive community; and disciplinary environment.

Thursday Nights
5:30 to 7:30 PM

October 6
October 20
November 10
November 17



If you are interested in applying, or would like to know more information, e-mail Kingsley Botchway at

Botchway.Kingsley@iowacityschools.org

by September 21 at 5:00PM



**IOWA CITY
COMMUNITY
SCHOOL DISTRICT**
Child-Centered • Future-Focused



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Public Policy Center
Social & Education Policy Research Program

[illegible]

Appendix C. Task Force Application Survey

Hello,

You have expressed interest in participating as a member of the Iowa City Community School District's School Climate working group. This short survey serves as the application process for membership on the working group. The deadline for submitting this application is **September 21, 2016 at 5:00 PM**. Applications submitted after this date will not be considered. As we complete the selection process, you will be contacted when decisions are made.

This project is part of a collaboration between the Iowa City Community School District's Equity Department, and the University of Iowa Public Policy Center. For more information about the project, you can find reports and updates [here](#)

Meetings for the working group will be held at Tate High School on Thursday nights from **5:30 to 7:30 PM** on

October 6

October 20

November 10

November 17

Are you comfortable committing to meeting during these dates and times?

- ☐ Yes, I can be counted on to attend meetings regularly
- ☐ No, my schedule will interfere with regular meeting attendance
- ☐ My schedule for these dates is uncertain

Are you affiliated with the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSd)? If so, in what way?

- ☐ Currently enrolled as a student in the ICCSD
- ☐ Former student at the ICCSD, year of graduation or transfer
- ☐ A member of your family is a student at the ICCSD, please indicate your relationship with the student (parent, grandparent, sister, uncle, etc.)
- ☐ Employed by the ICCSD, please describe your position
- ☐ Community Member within ICCSD, no direct connections to the school district
- ☐ Other, please describe

What makes you a good candidate for participating in the working group?

For example, what are your thoughts on the current policies and practices at the school district? How do these policies impact students? What experience do you have working with groups? What experience do you have working on equity and diversity issues?

Please do not exceed 250 words

Demographics

The next set of questions will ask you about your identity. Part of the goal with the working group is ensuring that the members offer diverse or underrepresented perspectives. Please feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer.

How would you describe your race? Select all that apply

-
- ☐ African American or Black
 - ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous
 - ☐ Arab or Middle Eastern
 - ☐ Asian or Asian American
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latina or Latino
 - ☐ Multiracial or Biracial
 - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - ☐ White or Caucasian or European American
 - ☐ Prefer not to answer
 - ☐ Other racial identity

Please indicate the **highest level** of education you have completed

- ☐ Less than a high school diploma (includes currently enrolled)
- ☐ High School diploma
- ☐ Associate's degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate degree (PhD, JD, MD)
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What gender do you identify yourself as?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to Answer

We will need to contact you after the selection process, what is the best way to reach you?

- ☐ First and Last Name
- ☐ Primary Phone
- ☐ E-mail
- ☐ Mailing address

Appendix D. Task force member affiliations

Student and family advocates provide support and resource referrals across many domains, including mental health case coordination, school supplies and clothing needs, transportation, housing, school registration, and navigating ICCSD school policies and procedures.
Iowa City Area Development (ICSD) aims to continue to create, collaborate and lead regional economic development initiatives that contribute to the creation and growth of companies, wealth and quality of jobs through a spirit of innovation and a culture of sharing that transforms knowledge into economic opportunity.
District-wide Parents' Organization (DPO) is committed to facilitating and enhancing communication and education throughout the Iowa City Community School District, as well as advocating for students in our community.
The Iowa City Education Association (ICEA) is a local branch of the ISEA (Iowa State Education Association) and the NEA (National Education Association). We are the certified bargaining representatives for all the teachers and paraeducators within the ICCSD.
The Equity Committee seeks to advise the Director of Equity in matters regarding concerns of multicultural/gender fair education. The committee also relays information to the school community regarding fair education, relays community interests to the school board and administration, reviews all district programs and employment policies, etc. Working with the Director of Equity the committee hopes eliminate disparities in educational opportunity regardless of race, SES, or gender.
The Iowa City Police Department provides service and public safety to the Iowa City area
Community Parent Student Organization (CPSO) Community Parent Student Organization is an extension of the ICCSD Equity Committee and will be implementing programs that promote positive inter-group relations and address issues of community interest.
The University of Iowa is one of the nation's top public research universities, located in Iowa City, Iowa.
Cornell College is a liberal arts college in in Mount Vernon, Iowa.
Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County is a community based, family centered human services agency offering programs in area schools and neighborhoods.
United Action for Youth is a Johnson County community organization whose mission is to nurture the potential of all youth to create, grow and lead.
Greater Iowa City Area Student Scholarship expands opportunities to provide educational benefits and monetary support to area high school students in post-secondary education.
Any Given Child assists the community in planning strategically to provide an equitable arts education for all students in grades K-8.
Iowa Sexual Assault Hotline provides free, confidential, trauma-informed service for people in Iowa affected by sexual violence.