Research Partnership with the Iowa City Community School District
Irvin Rodriguez and Nicole Nucaro
University of Iowa

Background

Disparities in academic achievement, disciplinary punishment, and school experience have been well-documented across the nation, in Iowa, and in the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSD). The graph below shows that while the ICCSD is a high achieving district overall, achievement gaps by race and income are larger in the ICCSD than they are on average at the state level.

2015-16 Iowa Assessments Results:
Percent Proficient in 8th Grade Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Goal

Use a research-practice partnership model to address disparities in the ICCSD and work toward achieving their goal “that all students can achieve at high levels and that equitable classrooms are essential to their success.” The university-community partnership aims to equip the ICCSD with tools and information to tackle disparate outcomes with solutions grounded in evidence.

Process

This interdisciplinary project began in 2015 to leverage social science and education policy research and practitioner knowledge to effectively address problems of policy and practice and improve students’ educational opportunities and outcomes. The project follows a community partnership phased model, working collaboratively to identify and address systematic issues in educational settings in ways that are beneficial, impactful, and sustainable for the District.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Anonymized survey administered to all 6th, 8th, and 11th grade students in February 2016. The survey asked students about perceptions and experiences regarding nine dimensions of school climate, including:

- Teacher Relationships
- Mentor Relationships
- Support Resources
- Negative Experiences at School
- Developed School Profiles with school-specific data

Focus Areas

Drawing on the findings from the needs assessment, three focus areas were identified for the District: teacher and mentor relationships; inclusive community; and disciplinary environment.

For each focus area, a policy brief with recommendations for evidence-based strategies for addressing disparities was developed to answer the following questions:

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

Districts

Demographics

Survey Results, 2,388 total respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Multiracial</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% White Multiracial</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Socioeconomic Status (Parent Education)

- 46% Post College/Advanced Degree
- 18% High School or Less
- 37% Some College or BA

Teacher Relationships

One of the most important aspects of student experiences in schools and classrooms is positive, supportive relationships. Positive relationships between students and teachers, and non-academic mentors, have been found to be associated with higher levels of student achievement.

- Teacher Personal Concern
  - Overall: 74
  - White: 77
  - Black: 75
  - Hispanic: 76
  - Asian: 72
  - Other: 70

Inclusive Community

School climate “the cumulative reflection of staff and student experiences representing their respective goals, values, relationships, and the overall institutional environment of the school.” Staff and student experiences of the school climate are shaped by safety of the school, teaching and learning practices, and relationships among individuals in the school and surrounding community, and the structural environment itself.

- Heard hurtful comment about race from teacher
  - Overall: 29
  - White: 32
  - Black: 26
  - Hispanic: 27
  - Asian: 24
  - Other: 22

Disciplinary Environment

School discipline policies and practices are a crucial feature of the school climate for students. Effective disciplinary policies and practices constitute a fundamental component of school’s ability to create a learning environment conducive to all students’ emotional growth and academic progress.

- Students punished too much for minor things
  - Overall: 48
  - White: 52
  - Black: 45
  - Hispanic: 59
  - Asian: 47

Recommendations

TASK FORCE

1. Adopt a 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
   - decreasing the use of punitive disciplinary punishments
   - decreasing the disparities in disciplinary action

2. Provide training to all district staff, teachers, and administrators to improve the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of cultural competency and implicit bias.

3. Actively recruit and retain staff, teachers, and administrators of diverse backgrounds.

EVALUATION

Using the annual student survey along with other data collection efforts, university researchers evaluate the equity-related programming initiatives and track changes in student experiences and outcomes. We second iteration of the student survey included items that reflect recommendations of the task force and items to evaluate equity programming implemented in the 2016-2017 school year.

Next Steps

The ICCSD is well-positioned to take 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.” We recommend that the District conduct the student experience survey annually. 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 improvements in each of them. Receiving the feedback and recommendation of the task force now represent a clear imperative for the District to act.

Using evidence-based strategies and evaluating their success in the ICCSD is crucial for achieving long-term success.

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