

North Kingstown School Department: Equity Audit Report

Public Consulting Group LLC
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Acknowledgements

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About Public Consulting Group (PCG)

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) is a management consulting firm that offers technical assistance, strategic planning, professional development, financial management, systems development, and other management advisory services to public sector clients. Established in 1986, PCG has consistently delivered on its motto of "*Solutions that Matter.*" Our education practice is committed to helping schools, school districts, and state education agencies strengthen their performance, streamline their operations, and improve their programs and instruction so that all students have what they need to succeed.

Public Consulting Group (PCG) Commitment to Educational Equity

Equity demands that we consider the needs of each student, with a discerning eye towards students who are historically marginalized or treated with low expectations, often due to cultural and linguistic diversity, identified disability, or gender identity. Our equity audit work is part of PCG's enduring commitment to supporting equitable practices in districts and schools.

For more information, please see [Equity Education Services: Assess, Implement, and Maintain - PCG | Public Consulting Group.](#)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2022, the North Kingstown School Department contracted with Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) to conduct an independent, external Equity Audit. The audit in North Kingstown was designed to examine all areas of the school system's operations—its policies, practices, and programs—through the lens of equity with the goal of identifying structural and programmatic barriers that inhibit an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

In order to advance NKSD's equity efforts, the district sought a partner organization to conduct an external audit that would develop a set of customized recommendations, grounded in NKSD's data, and help the district proactively address implicit and explicit bias and foster a safe, supportive, and inclusive education environment where each student feels valued, challenged, and prepared for the future.

In alignment with North Kingstown School Committee's definition of education equity,¹ PCG used the following definition for the purposes of guiding this work:

Educational Equity means ensuring all students receive equitable opportunities for successful outcomes.

This Equity Audit takes a step toward expanding the conversation within the district and builds on equity work undertaken in North Kingstown in recent years by the School Committee and in individual school buildings.

EQUITY AUDIT FRAMEWORK

Equity Audits have gained momentum as a strategy for school systems to systemically examine their policies, programs, and processes, and determine actionable steps for the correction of potential inequities. A range of conceptual frameworks have emerged to guide this work.

The framework and guiding questions PCG used for this Equity Audit are built from our synthesis of research-based evidence and extensive experience. The overarching question the audit seeks to answer is:

“How do the policies, practices, and people in North Kingstown School Department promote and sustain educational equity?”

The audit framework seeks to answer this driving question by examining NKSD operations and education service delivery in six focus areas highlighted in the table below. Within each core domain, PCG considers the following guiding questions to identify assets and gaps that propel or inhibit achieving system goals.

Figure 1. Equity Audit Framework and Guiding Questions

Equity Focus Area	Guiding Question(s)
Leadership, Policies, and Practices	To what extent do policies and processes in NKSD promote a diverse, equitable, and inclusive district?
Professional Development	How does district professional development support equity, diversity, and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination?

¹ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Sub-Committee (Approved March 23, 2021). [“Resolution re: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Special Sub-Committee.”](#) North Kingstown School Department. Definition of equity: “To ensure just outcomes for each student, raising marginalized voices, and challenging the imbalance of power and privilege.”

Culture and Climate	To what extent are the culture and climate of NKSD welcoming and supportive of all students and families? What opportunities does NKSD offer for the engagement of all students and families?
Discipline	How are student discipline referrals linked to student characteristics and demographics?
Student Outcomes and Access to Advanced Learning Opportunities	How are student outcomes and access to advanced learning opportunities linked to student characteristics and demographics? What tiered support strategies are offered to promote positive student outcomes?
Resource Allocation	How do policies and protocols in NKSD ensure equitable resource allocation for all students?

STRATEGIES ANALYSIS AT-A-GLANCE

PCG has conducted a **strategies analysis** for each focus area of the Equity Audit investigation: Leadership, Policies and Practices; Professional Development; Culture and Climate; Student Discipline; Student Outcomes and Access to Advanced Learning Opportunities; and Resource Allocation. The strategies analysis aims to provide readers with a high-level overview of the presence or absence of equity-centric core practices stemming from evidence-based strategies.

PCG provides evidence-based strategies and the desired outcomes for each of the focus areas. Strategies were developed by PCG through extensive best practices research and our organizational expertise in executing equitable practices with fidelity. The Core Practices column describes elements needed to execute the aforementioned strategies. The strategies listed in each table are not exhaustive of all potential strategies that a district could adopt towards becoming an equitable and inclusive learning environment. However, it is the assertion of PCG, as backed by research and former experience, that the list of strategies presented in the tables are beneficial in meeting the desired outcomes. Lastly, we indicate in the final column whether the core practices were observed in North Kingstown School Department fully, partially, or not at all. These determinations were made based on the data amassed from the various sources as described in the Methodology chapter and throughout the report.

- A “Yes” designation means that a practice was fully observed or was agreed upon by all stakeholders engaged in data collection.
- A “Partial” designation means that a practice was observed partially, occasionally, inconsistently, or not agreed upon by all stakeholders.
- A “No” designation does not necessarily mean a particular strategy does not exist in the district, it simply indicates that PCG did not observe this practice through any aspect of data collection or analysis.

Figure 2. Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance Template

Desired Outcome:				
• List of desired outcome(s) based on the focus area				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome(s)</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No

REPORT TERMINOLOGY

There are several terms and acronyms used throughout this report that require definition and clarification within the NKSD context. Some terms that appear throughout the report include:

Achievement Gap: The difference in academic performance between different ethnic and racial groups, income levels, gender identities, and learning abilities.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

DEI: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Differently Abled: Students with disabilities who receive special education and related services according to an individualized education program (IEP) or services plan under Part B of IDEA.

Economically Disadvantaged: This term is used synonymously with Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible but is used throughout the report when referencing state data for consistency with state reporting.

ES: Elementary School

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible: Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch program as reported by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

HMI: Students and families of students who hold historically marginalized identities such as BIPOC students, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, students receiving Special Education services, students whose first language is not English, etc.

HS: High School

LGBTQIA+: An acronym used to signify Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and more people collectively. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

MS: Middle School

Multilingual Learner (MLL): Defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education as encompassing all children and youth who are, or have been, consistently exposed to multiple languages. It includes students known as English language learners (ELLs) or dual language learners (DLLs); heritage language learners; and students who speak varieties of English or indigenous languages (WIDA Guiding Principles 2019).²

NKSD: North Kingstown School Department

Opportunity Gap: The disparity in access to the inputs, experiences, and resources needed for each student to be academically successful.

PCG: Public Consulting Group LLC

PD: Professional Development

RICAS: Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System

RIDE: Rhode Island Department of Education

² Rhode Island Department of Education. "[Glossary](#)." *Multilingual Learners (MLLs) / English Learners (ELs)*.

Students with Disabilities: As defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education, students with an IEP or 504 plan.³ This term is used synonymously with Differently Abled but used throughout the report when referencing state data for consistency with state reporting.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The report is organized in 11 chapters:

- **Chapter 1** introduces this report.
- **Chapter 2** describes the current context of North Kingstown School Department community including enrollment and population trends.
- **Chapter 3** describes the audit methodology including our approach to this work and our data collection and analysis processes.
- **Chapter 4** outlines PCG's priority recommendations for NKSD.
- **Chapters 5-10** present key findings divided into the focus areas of the framework: 5. Leadership, Policies, and Practices; 6. Professional Development, 7. Culture and Climate, 8. Student Discipline; 9. Student Outcomes and Access to Advanced Learning; 10. Resource Allocation. Each chapter opens with a brief description of select research-based best practices, At-a-Glance Strategies Analysis, and then presents key findings from the audit and recommendations.
- **Chapter 11** details PCG's conclusions from conducting this Equity Audit.

³ Rhode Island Department of Education (August 18, 2022). "[ADP User Guide](#)." *Rhode Island Assessment Data Portal*.

2. NORTH KINGSTOWN SCHOOL DEPARTMENT COMMUNITY

BACKGROUND

North Kingstown School Department serves approximately 4,000 students in grades Pre-K through 12th grade in nine schools including five elementary schools, two middle school, one high school, and Davisville Academy, which houses a clinical day program for students in grades K-12. There are two elementary schools that receive Title I funds, one of which houses the district's integrated preschool program. Additionally, the North Kingstown High School offers a Career and Technical Education program open to students from other Rhode Island school districts. Within the North Kingstown district, there is a higher concentration of low-income families and immigrant families residing in the northern part of the community, and a higher concentration of White families and affluent families who reside in the southern part of town, dictating school demographics for the elementary and middle schools. The students in North Kingstown School Department are predominantly White (83%). The second largest racial student group is Hispanic / Latinx (7%). Two percent of the North Kingstown student body have been identified as multilingual learners, and 15% of the student body is eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.⁴ The district is governed by a School Committee with five members who are elected at-large, and one member who is chosen as a representative of the neighboring Jamestown community, which sends students to the North Kingstown High School.

CONTEXT

On March 23, 2021, the resolution to form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Special Sub-Committee was approved by the North Kingstown School Committee. The charge of the DEI Special Sub-Committee was revised on September 14, 2021. Two members of the School Committee are required to sit on the Sub-Committee. Additional members currently on the Sub-Committee include district and school administrators, parents, students, teachers, and support staff.

The charge of this Sub-Committee is *"to ensure that students have equitable access to educational opportunities that help them achieve their full potential while supporting and harnessing their individuality as well as the history and backgrounds of their families and the entire North Kingstown community."*⁵ As such, the Sub-Committee has identified several strategies and goals to drive its DEI efforts in the district. These include, but are not limited to:

- *A review, led by the DEI Advisory Special Sub-Committee, to evaluate district-wide programs through an equity lens.*
- *The development and enhancement of professional knowledge, skill sets, and implementation strategies relative to anti-racism, cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, and implicit and explicit bias;*
- *The establishment of systemic equity and inclusivity practices; and*

⁴ Rhode Island Department of Education (2022). "[Public Schools Enrollment Dashboard](#)." DataCenter.

⁵ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Sub-Committee (Approved March 23, 2021).

- *The professional learning, support, and resources needed to develop and implement culturally responsive instruction and curriculum.*

In accordance with achieving these objectives, the DEI Advisory Special Sub-Committee issued a request for proposals from qualified vendors to conduct an independent Equity Audit of NKSD. The School Committee approved the decision to hire Public Consulting Group to conduct an external audit of district practices through an equity lens. The goal of this audit is to capture the current state of NKSD as relates to equity and identify steps needed to ensure equitable opportunities for successful outcomes for each student served by the North Kingstown School Department.

Current Period of Leadership Transition

Given that a key goal of this audit is to provide guidance to the North Kingstown School Committee and Superintendent for future strategic decision-making from an equity lens, it is important to note that during this audit process district leadership has been in flux. When PCG started this work in July 2022, the district was under the leadership of both an Interim Superintendent and Interim Assistant Superintendent as of March and April 2022, respectively. In November 2022, a new Interim Superintendent began and was contracted to serve through June 2023, however, she resigned in January 2023. At the time of this report, the Interim Superintendent position is in the process of being filled. The current Interim Assistant Superintendent will remain in the role until March 2023.

In August 2022, a School Committee member who had served on the DEI Sub-Committee resigned. Additionally, three staff from the district's central office have left their positions since the 2022-2023 school year started: the Athletic Director, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, and Director of Human Resources.

Though the NKSD leadership is currently in transition, this audit's findings and recommendations will serve as a foundational resource to inform DEI decision-making moving forward.

Community Concerns

In order to paint a full picture of community sentiment towards equity in North Kingstown, we must note that there are pockets of stakeholders who do not support the decision to pursue this audit or other initiatives focused on equity in NKSD. These community members express these views during public comment at NK School Committee meetings, in public social media groups, via local media outlets, and through other channels. They also voiced their opposition during PCG-facilitated focus groups and in their responses to the community-wide survey administered during the audit. PCG analyzes these comments in more detail in report Chapter 7. Culture and Climate.

STUDENT, SCHOOL, AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

An initial step towards understanding educational equity in North Kingstown School Department is to examine student racial and ethnic characteristics and high needs status across the district. PCG used data from SY2018-2019, SY2019-2020, SY2020-2021 and SY2021-2022 to provide a comprehensive district snapshot and identify enrollment trends over the previous four years.

Student demographics in the district have remained relatively consistent over the past four years. Two changes of note are the decline in White students, from 86% in 2019 to 83% in 2022, and the decline in students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, from 22% in 2019 to 15% in 2022. The figure below represents elements of the demographic makeup of North Kingstown School Department from 2019 to 2022.

Figure 3. North Kingstown School Department Demographics (2019-2022)⁶

Year	N	African American or Black	Asian	Hispanic or Latinx	White	Native American or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Multilingual Learner	Differently Abled Students	Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible
2019	4,007	2%	2%	7%	86%	<1%	<1%	4%	2%	14%	22%
2020	3,922	2%	2%	7%	85%	<1%	<1%	4%	2%	12%	22%
2021	3,923	2%	2%	7%	83%	<1%	<1%	5%	2%	13%	20%
2022	3,914	2%	2%	7%	83%	<1%	<1%	5%	2%	13%	15%

Please note: The race and ethnicity percentages reported above may add up to more than 100%. This is in effort to accurately include marginalized groups in our breakdown of the NKSD student body. While RIDE may report a subgroup as 0% when there are fewer than 0.5% of students, PCG chooses to represent those students with the <1% designation.

In 2022:

- The district is majority White (83%), 7% Hispanic or Latinx, 5% Multiracial, 2% Asian, 2% African American or Black, less than 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and less than 1% Native American.
- Approximately 15% of NKSD students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. At the state level, 41% of all students qualify. Neighboring districts of South Kingstown and Exeter-West Greenwich have similar rates to North Kingstown (13% and 12%, respectively). Five percent of students in East Greenwich qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.
- Approximately 13% of the district's students are differently abled. This rate is similar to the Rhode Island state average of 16%.
- Two percent of the district's students are multilingual learners. This rate is significantly lower than the state average of 12%. Neighboring districts have similar rates to North Kingstown: South Kingstown – 2%, Exeter-West Greenwich – 1%, East Greenwich – 1%.

⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education (2022). "[Public Schools Enrollment Dashboard](#)." DataCenter.

3. METHODOLOGY

From July through November 2022, PCG conducted an Equity Audit of North Kingstown School Department using a mixed-methods approach. The findings and recommendations are based on our analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the course of the audit. These data sources and our approach are described in greater detail below.

AUDIT APPROACH

PCG's project management approach to the audit is collaborative—we act as an outside agent, with an objective perspective, working alongside NKSD leadership to identify challenges and provide recommendations for improvement including a roadmap for future action.⁷ PCG built frequent touchpoints into the project plan with project leaders from NKSD to foster communication and collaboration, seek clarification and additional information, share preliminary findings, and collect feedback.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To provide a comprehensive understanding of equity in NKSD, PCG developed a research design for the audit that collected data from multiple sources. Stakeholder perception data collected from the community-wide survey and student survey, Leadership Equity Readiness Assessment, interviews, and focus groups informed findings across focus areas. A complete list of supplementary documents and data sources reviewed for each focus area can be found below.

Figure 4. Documents and Data Sources for NKSD Equity Audit

Focus Area	Data Sources
Leadership, Policy, and Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Kingstown School Committee Resolution re: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Special Sub-Committee Student Conduct, Behavior and Discipline Policy Safe School Act Statewide Bullying Policy Davisville and Wickford Middle School(s) Accessibility Policy Transgender, Gender Non-conforming and Transitioning Students Policy Title IX Policy Section 504/ADA Prohibition Against Discrimination Based on Disability Anti-discrimination/Anti-harassment Policy and Grievance Procedure Leadership Equity Readiness Assessment
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PD Offerings Description
Culture and Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NKHS Student Activities Handbook 2020-2021 RIDE Panorama Results Information provided by district Title I Coordinator/Homeless Liaison

⁷ Donis-Keller, C., Meltzer, J., & Chmielewski, E. (2013). [“The Power of Collaborative Program Evaluation, A PCG Education White Paper.”](#) PCG Education.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title I Parent and Family Engagement with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) Policy • LINKS website • Forest Park Info for Equity Audit (Equity Initiatives)
Student Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-level discipline data provided by NKSD: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Infractions ○ Disciplinary Referrals ○ Student Demographics ○ Unique Student ID ○ School
Student Outcomes and Access to Advanced Learning Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhode Island Department of Education Data Center Website (datacenter.ride.ri.gov) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enrollment Dashboard ○ Assessment Data Portal ○ Advanced Placement ○ Course Data • Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Overview Presentation (presented by Jodi, Clark, PhD, Director of Curriculum, September 1, 2021) • North Kingstown School Department MTSS-SEL Framework Presentation (presented by Jodi Clark, Alison Robey, Sherrie Monaco, August 25, 2022) • 2022-2023 Middle School Parent Letter - MTSS Overview • 2022-2023 Elementary MTSS District Letter
Resource Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NKSD School Committee Financial Policies • NKSD website and organizational financial information

Please note: The above data sources were not limited to one focus area but were included where applicable.

Leadership Equity Readiness Assessment

As part of the first phase of the project, PCG administered an electronic survey to all district and building leaders, during September 2022, to gauge leadership's perceptions of current district practices and overall readiness to address institutional racism and inequity. The Leadership Equity Readiness Survey was developed to probe the following four topics: Student Achievement; Disciplinary Practices and Procedures; High-Quality Programming and High-Quality Teachers; and School Culture and Climate. The survey completion rate was 87% (20/23). The participant pool was comprised of 40% Principals, 20% Assistant Principals, 35% District Office Staff, and 5% Other District Leadership positions. The survey included a series of Likert scale and open response questions to gather information on leadership views of challenges in improving equity in NKSD and supports needed to improve equity in NKSD.

Community-wide and Student Surveys

PCG also developed and administered a community-wide web-based survey to gauge perceptions and gather input from families, staff, and recent alumni and a web-based survey for current NKSD middle and high school students. The surveys were available to families and students in English and Spanish. Items in the surveys were grouped by topic and were designed to acquire data from survey respondents regarding their perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion in North Kingstown School Department. The community-wide survey included common items across all respondent groups as well as items specific to the respondent's role. Additional open-ended questions allowed survey respondents to share specific concerns

or experiences. The community-wide survey yielded over 1,600 responses, including approximately 1,330 family members and just over 310 staff. More than 380 middle and high school students participated in the student survey. Sixty-six opt-out forms were submitted by parents who did not want their students to receive the survey link.

Figure 5. Survey Respondents by Role

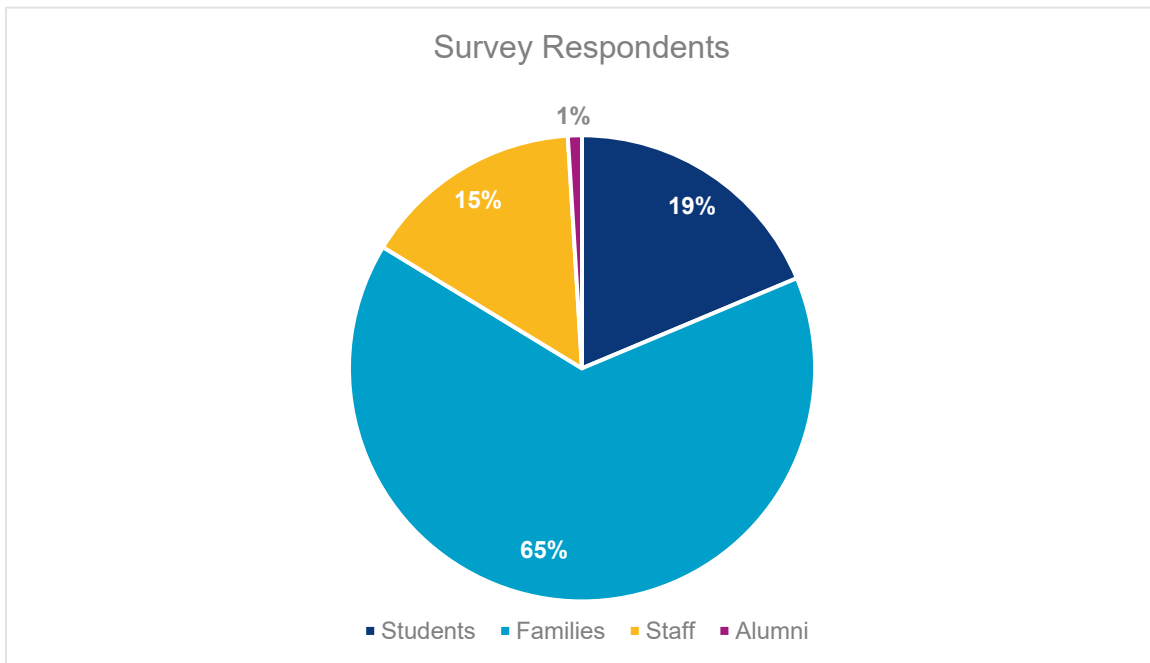


Figure 6. Student Survey Respondent Demographics

Student Survey Respondent Demographics	
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
White	82.6%
African American or Black	2%
Hispanic or Latinx	4.3%
Asian	2.3%
American Indian	0.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3%
Two or More Races	8.2%
Gender Identity	Percentage
Female	59.7%
Male	30.5%
Nonbinary/Other	9.8%

Figure 7. Family Survey Respondent Demographics

Family Survey Respondent Demographics	
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
White	79.7%
African American or Black	1.2%
Hispanic or Latinx	4.1%

Asian	2.6%
American Indian	.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.3%
Two or More Races	11.7%
Gender Identity	Percentage
Female	67.9%
Male	30.2%
Nonbinary/Other	1.9%

Data and Document Analysis

Population Characteristics, Programs, and Achievement and Outcomes Analysis

PCG collected and analyzed a range of student, school, and district data. PCG retrieved school- and district-level student data including characteristics, enrollment, course taking, achievement outcomes, and socio-economic status from the Rhode Island Department of Education website. North Kingstown School Department also provided PCG with additional data that was not publicly reported, including IEP assignments and disciplinary data.

Population and program trends are important equity indicators of the extent to which there is overrepresentation of any group. Student performance data were analyzed to provide a comparative examination of performance by students disaggregated by demographic characteristics.

Document Review

NKSD provided PCG with relevant district documents to better understand district operations and organization, including policies and procedures for resource allocation. PCG also collected and reviewed district and school websites, as well as School Committee meeting materials and news media coverage of the district. An inventory of the documents collected for the study can be found above in Figure 4.

Focus Groups and Interviews

PCG conducted focus groups and interviews with a range of stakeholders including students, parents and guardians, teachers, school leaders, central office staff, and members of the North Kingstown School Committee. PCG worked with district leadership to conduct community-wide outreach to stakeholders, in English and Spanish, to encourage participation.

NKSD engaged in targeted outreach to staff, parents/guardians, and students to promote participation in the focus groups. PCG also organized focus groups specifically for students, staff, and families who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, or with another historically marginalized identity (HMI). Separate focus groups for BIPOC and HMI were created as a means to encourage open dialogue. Research has shown having more homogeneous groups, like BIPOC groups and other historically marginalized identities, often allows participants to feel more comfortable discussing their experiences because other participants may have had similar experiences. Shared experiences may then lead to more in-depth conversations among participants.⁸ Moreover, homogeneous groups are also used to minimize differences in status and authority which may limit or deter participation. “It is commonly recommended that participants within a focus group should be homogeneous, so as to minimize differences in status or power and to prevent the discussion being dominated by higher-status members of the group. However, if such differences in status or power

⁸ Urban Institute. [“Focus Groups.”](#)

nonetheless occur, they may further limit the ability of some members to influence the discussion.”⁹ It is important to note that two NKSD parents who did not identify as BIPOC/HMI attended the BIPOC/HMI virtual family focus group for the purpose of disruption, impacting the level of comfort and willingness of other participants to share their perspectives, as described by a BIPOC and HMI family focus group participant.

Interviews were conducted virtually, while most focus groups were conducted in-person in North Kingstown School Department buildings. Participants in the family focus groups were offered the option of participating in English or Spanish. Participation in interviews and focus groups was voluntary. In total, 53 individuals participated in these community conversations.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted between September and November 2022. Focus groups were organized by role-alike groups, including:

- Middle School Students
- High School Students, including a dedicated group for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and other historically marginalized identities
- Teachers and Staff, including a dedicated group for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and other historically marginalized identities
- School Leaders
- Families, including a dedicated focus group for families of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and other historically marginalized students

Focus group and interview questions were developed by PCG based on the Equity Audit framework. Each focus group and interview included general questions asked of all stakeholders as well as questions specific to participants’ roles. Questions in both the focus groups and interviews were centered on perceptions of equity and the district educational experience. Interviews lasted 45 minutes and focus groups lasted 45-60 minutes. PCG took formal notes during all stakeholder engagements which were later coded according to themes aligned with the Equity Audit framework. Individual responses to PCG’s questions are confidential and will not be attributed to specific participants.

It is important to note that a key component of our approach to collecting and analyzing qualitative data is the consideration of “onlyness” as it relates to equity. Onlyness is “when a student from an under-represented group is one or one of a few in a class.”¹⁰ As such, experiences may be singular in nature but are nonetheless valid and require further investigation. The inclusion of individual experiences supports the goal of this Equity Audit in ensuring each student receives equitable opportunities for successful outcomes.

⁹ Sim, J. & Waterfield, J (July 16, 2019). [“Focus group methodology: Some ethical challenges.”](#) *Quality & Quantity*, 53(6), 3003-3022. *Springer Link*.

¹⁰ Harper, Dr. Shaun R. (September 26, 2017). [“What Makes Teaching and Learning Inclusive?”](#) *Inclusive Teaching at Princeton University*.

4. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this Equity Audit, PCG recommends North Kingstown School District prioritizes the following items for immediate implementation and focus:

1. Set a clear vision and common language for equity across NKSD.

- **Create an NKSD Equity Vision Statement.** Define and communicate how NKSD's existing vision, mission statement, and strategic goals all relate to equity. Ensure that this statement explicitly includes a vision focusing on equity for all marginalized classes.
- **Engage Stakeholders.** Ask various stakeholders to contribute to and build a shared equity vision that all can rally around. Student voices should be actively included throughout the process. Making an explicit effort to connect with stakeholders will lead to stronger relationships between district leadership and stakeholder groups and foster strong buy in to the work.
- **Publicize the Vision.** Place the Equity Vision Statement front and center throughout the district. It should be placed in all public places, including on the website homepage, in every school, at the district office, and on communications material, in multiple languages.
- **Create an Equity Communication Plan.** This is a district-wide plan to develop key messages around equity to share both internally and externally. This Equity Communication Plan should identify ways to engage all stakeholders in hearing and understanding these key messages, such as how information will be presented to both internal stakeholder groups and the larger NKSD community, including students and families.

2. Develop a district-wide Equity Policy.

The School Committee should issue an Equity Policy for NKSD that recognizes equity as a district-wide priority. This policy will define what equity looks like in district policies, practices, and processes. It will set the expectation that all stakeholders play a role in promoting equity in the NK community.

3. Prioritize Equity-focused Professional Development.

Offer professional development in cultural competence and culturally responsive practices. Considering the district-wide landscape, PCG chooses to recommend the requirement of equity-focused professional development training. While additional conversations may be required due to labor contracts, NKSD may explore ways to include DEI content in other forums such as faculty meetings or professional development. Recommended topics for trainings include: Cultural Awareness, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Culturally Responsive Leadership, Implicit Bias, Gender Bias, LGBTQIA+ Student Support, Neurodiversity, Foundational Equity Courses (i.e., explaining difference between equity and equality), Antiracism, Microaggressions, Anti-Bias, How to talk with students about identities including race, gender, and ethnicity, How to support students with low socioeconomic means, and Instructional practices for supporting students with increased needs for academic support.

4. Review and revise discipline policies and practices from an equity lens.

This includes:

- **Create and consistently implement a Discipline Matrix.** To help address disproportionality in the discipline of students and reduce the perception of unfair treatment of students, a discipline matrix should be created with clear consequences for all actions

against the student code of conduct. A discipline team, representative of all stakeholder groups, should be convened to create an initial draft. Members should be representative of the diversity of the student population and include guidance counselors, MLL educators/support staff, Special Education representatives, and other relevant staff members. Larger stakeholder groups should then be involved with the final crafting and voting of a formal discipline matrix. Ensure the tool is implemented with fidelity.

- **Examine current disciplinary policies and practices from an equity lens to detect biases and inconsistencies.** Eliminate or revise such policies to promote a clear, fair, and appropriate approach to determining consequences for misbehavior.
- **Use restorative discipline practices.** Restorative discipline practices shift the focus away from the mainstream punitive discipline which functions to create feelings of shame and embarrassment and restrict learning opportunities from students who act out by removing them from the classroom environment. Punitive discipline can backfire on students who are acting out, often amplifying the problems that led to the original infraction. Successful restorative discipline gives students the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, reflect on where their behavior came from, and learn from the experience.

5. LEADERSHIP, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES

Guiding Question: To what extent do policies and processes in NKSD promote a diverse, equitable and inclusive district?

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

Leadership

“At its foundation, school leadership for equity is grounded in efficacy, action, and reflection... Leaders for equity are educators who gracefully stand for others, demonstrate courage, and take risks to forge improvement. They are grounded by the confidence that they are doing the right thing. They participate in reflection on their practice in accord with others. Leaders for equity are focused on the significance of their work and are motivated by learning in action.”¹¹

Today's school and district leaders must have the ability and willingness to facilitate courageous conversations about change and to clearly explain the combination of new supports and expectations that will be in place to support that change. They also must maintain the resolve to hold steady and remain focused on implementing and monitoring the chosen strategies despite pushback and discomfort. Effectively leading significant change focused on equity means accomplishing stated goals despite opposition inside and outside the school district. It is important for district leaders to recognize which groups might feel a loss of power or influence if changes focused on equity occur and minimize their opposition by creating an inclusive process where all voices are heard.¹²

Role of the School Committee in Promoting Equity

The school committee plays a critical role in developing a culture of equity, inclusion, access, and belonging by defining the district's mission, vision, and core values. School committees also lead by setting policy that clearly defines what they see as the priorities for school district operations and implementation by the Superintendent as well as the entire district staff. Equitable opportunities for successful outcomes expand when district policies are grounded in the needs of students and are responsive to the local context. School committees also ensure the values and priorities they have defined are reflected in the annual budget they build and present to the community.

In addition to leadership, the school committee is responsible for ensuring the Superintendent and leadership team execute the vision for equity and the established priorities. Moreover, being actively engaged with the community is critical. Leading with an equity lens will create substantial positive change for the entire community. Therefore, school committee members should create opportunities for listening and responding to community input.

Vision for Equity

Developing a clear, explicit, and bold vision for district-wide equity is essential because it communicates to both internal and external stakeholders within the school community that achieving equity is a core priority of the North Kingstown School Department. A district vision not only describes a direction or goal, but also

¹¹ Association of California Administrators (2018). “Promoting Equity in K-12 Schools for school leaders.”

¹² Spiro, J (December 2017). “[Leading Change Handbook](#).” *The Wallace Foundation*.

the means of accomplishing it. The vision guides the work of the organization. It is a picture of the future for which people are willing to work collaboratively to attain.¹³

Having a vision that explicitly identifies equity, as opposed to more broad statements that encompass all students, is essential. When a vision for equity is not clearly articulated, it is more likely that students of color and students of other historically marginalized identities will continue to be marginalized as a result of policies and district norms. Therefore, district leaders must collaborate with school leadership, teachers, students, families, and community members to foster commitment to a vision centered on equity. In addition, school committee members, as key decision-makers, need to apply the equity vision when creating practices and policies to achieve equity for every student in the district. When a vision statement for equity is explicit, it provides the foundation for setting goals; functions as a guide for the district's structures, policies, and norms; and empowers the district to move forward toward equity.¹⁴

Equity Action Plan

When implementing significant changes that affect all stakeholder groups associated with a district or school, designing an action plan is essential to clarify expectations and hold relevant stakeholders accountable. It is difficult to achieve a systematic approach to improvement without a collaboratively designed action plan.

An action plan:

- Provides an opportunity for reflection,
- brings representatives of diverse stakeholder groups together,
- clarifies and communicates objectives,
- builds consensus and understanding,
- creates ownership and accountability,
- sets a specific timeline, and
- identifies metrics for success.

District and school leaders must instill confidence and trust in stakeholders through clear, transparent, and frequent communication. When there is not clear and consistent communication, especially when a serious incident occurs, stakeholders will fill in the missing pieces through hearsay, rumors, and assumptions to create their own narrative. Words have the power to either instill doubt and mistrust or to unite the community and dispel false narratives. Building trust and uniting a community begins with leadership providing accurate information and communicating that information with purpose, frequently.

Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As a first step in addressing inequity within a district, many school districts hire a DEI Director. This person is charged with examining the landscape of equity within a district and subsequently working to remove barriers that prevent student success and well-being. However, the assumption that one person can resolve inequities within a district that have been in place for many years is not realistic. Equity efforts cannot be one person's job, especially when that person does not possess the power to change

¹³ Méndez-Morse, Sylvia (1993). "[Vision, Leadership, and Change](#)." Issues About Change, 2 (3). SEDL.

¹⁴ Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2002). "[What Do You Call People With Visions? The Role of Vision, Mission and Goals in School Leadership and Improvement](#)" Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration, 9–40. Springer Link.

policies and hold every member of the school district accountable for their actions. Every person who interacts with children in a school system plays an integral role in addressing inequity within the district.¹⁵

Many DEI Directors understand they will face opposition and resistance especially as they identify and vocalize inequities within their district. DEI Directors are hired with the goal of changing outcomes within the district and therefore should not be fearful of the repercussions that may occur from doing their job well.

For district leadership, it is critical to think about systems of support that a DEI Director needs to be successful. Questions focused on a systems approach for DEI Director may include:

1. Where is the DEI Director in the central office hierarchy? Is it clear to other staff that they have decision making power within the district?
2. Have the roles and responsibilities of a DEI Director been distributed to all staff members and stakeholders to ensure a systemwide acknowledgement of the work?
3. Does the role of the DEI Director create professional development that staff are held accountable to attend? Who will hold people accountable for the implementation of culturally responsive practices (i.e., principals, DEI staff, superintendent)?
4. How will the DEI Director be empowered to ensure that a DEI lens is being applied to all decision-making at both the district and building level?

Leadership, Practices, and Policies Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district leadership, including the school committee, leads with an equity lens and promotes equity through explicit policies, decision-making, and communications in every aspect of their work. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards this outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of what we might see in a district effectively utilizing this strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
A clear commitment to equity in district communications, documents, and policies	Equity and inclusion are explicitly stated in the district's mission, vision, and core values			X
	Official district policies, including school committee policies, include explicit expectations for equity and inclusion		X	
	Equity is included as an expectation in decision-making in all aspects of the district's work			X
	Stakeholders across the district's community understand and can articulate the district's vision for and commitment to equity			X

¹⁵ Buchanan-Riveria, E (July 29, 2020). "[Want to hire a DEI Officer? Here is what to know first.](#)" ASCD Blog.

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district leadership, including the school committee, leads with an equity lens and promotes equity through explicit policies, decision-making, and communications in every aspect of their work. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards this outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of what we might see in a district effectively utilizing this strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
	The district has a stated equity-focused decision-making tool			X
A clear commitment to equity in district staffing, actions, and decisions	District-wide and school-based priorities and action plans are focused on equity		X	
	The district leaders and school committee consistently utilize an equity-focused decision-making tool in all aspects of their work		X	
	Staff and leaders across the district are held accountable for progress towards equity benchmarks		X	
	The DEI Director, or similar role, is empowered as a leader and decision-maker and has the resources and support to be successful			X
	District leaders are able and willing to facilitate hard conversations and stand for equity-focused decisions in the face of pushback			X
	When conflict or pushback arises, district leaders rely on equity-centered tools and values to make decisions			X

KEY FINDINGS

- Equity Audit.** In line with the goals of the North Kingstown School Committee DEI Advisory Sub-Committee, conducting this equity audit in NKSD is an important step in identifying equity issues within the district and subsequently creating a multi-year plan to address them. Opening the district up to a variety of voices from School Committee members, administration, teachers, parents, and students, ensures all stakeholder groups are heard and valued.
- School Committee Commitment.** The members of the School Committee that PCG interviewed verbalized their commitment to developing a vision for equity for North Kingstown School Department to ensure no group of students is disproportionately impacted by district policies or practices. The School Committee's DEI Advisory Sub-Committee is perceived by many stakeholders as the current driver of NKSD's equity work.
- Equity Vision.** The district's current mission and vision approved by the School Committee in October 2021, as posted on the NKSD website, does not explicitly mention equity or inclusion.¹⁶ A consistent theme across interviews and focus groups was a lack of understanding of a clear vision for equity in the district. Data from the LERA showed **68%** of district leaders agreed or strongly agreed that "The district's mission and vision prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion." This

¹⁶ North Kingstown School Department. "[Mission Statement](#)."

finding suggests that district and school leaders may have a sense of NKSD's vision of equity, but this is not widely communicated to stakeholders.

- Statement on Equity.** There is no explicit district-wide statement on equity posted on the NKSD website. The North Kingstown School Committee DEI Advisory Sub-Committee has articulated a statement of purpose that is driven by equity principles and has highlighted its intention to promote inclusivity: "NKSD believes that the individual's intersecting identities shape who they are, their perspectives of the world, and the ways in which they experience the world. To embrace inclusivity, NKSD will explicitly support the individual in remaining true to themselves, while encouraging a deep understanding, appreciation, and celebration of diverse communities, perspectives, experiences, cultures, and contexts."¹⁷
- Time of district leadership transition.** Given the interim status of the current Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, NKSD will be hiring for these roles in the coming months. Stakeholders identified this transition time as an opportunity for future district leaders to prioritize equity work across NKSD.
- Equity-focused strategic goals.** The initial version of the 2019-2024 NKSD Strategic Plan does not explicitly identify equity as a priority area, nor are there specific equity-focused goals or metrics.¹⁸ During the annual review of the Strategic Plan in August 2022, school leaders and School Improvement Committee members (including teachers, parents, and students) conducted an annual review of the district Strategic Plan and drafted equity-focused language to include in a revised version of the plan. The result is an updated goal to "*Provide a school climate that addresses culture, social, emotional, creative, and physical needs of all students*" and an action step to "*Review the equity audit when complete to strengthen cultural competency training, diversity, student identity, and wellness.*" This updated language has not yet been approved by the School Committee, and it is unclear if and how this addition to the Strategic Plan has been communicated to community members.

Additionally, NKSD does not have a separate action plan specifically focused on equity. Many stakeholders responded to the question "What do you hope comes out of this equity audit?" with desires for clarity of purpose and specific commitments when it comes to equity work. Students, families, and district staff all expressed concern for the perceived lack of direction for equity work, and shared a hope for a cohesive, clear, and explicit plan of action around equity moving forward.

- Equity-driven decision-making and progress monitoring.** Core decisions are not consistently made with an equity lens. There is no comprehensive equity-based framework guiding decision-making at the district level. According to responses in the LERA, there is a discrepancy between expectation and practice. While **94%** of leaders agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "the district sets expectations that teachers will use data to develop and deliver instruction through an equitable lens," **63%** of leaders disagreed or strongly disagreed that "district equity and inclusion goals are measured and monitored." Based on these results, PCG concludes the survey respondents believe there is an expectation for teachers to use data to ensure equity, however, the district does not measure progress on its own equity-centric goals.

¹⁷ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Sub-Committee (Approved March 23, 2021).

¹⁸ North Kingstown School Department (updated Oct 2021). "[2019-2024 Strategic Plan](#)."

- **District policies on anti-discrimination, anti-harassment, and bullying.** The district has the following policies that protect students and staff from identity-based discrimination and harassment. About half of these policies have been updated within the last three years.
 - Student Conduct, Behavior and Discipline (updated in 2012)
 - Statewide Bullying Policy (amended August 2013)
 - Davisville and Wickford Middle School(s) Accessibility (adopted September 2015)
 - Transgender, Gender Non-conforming and Transitioning Students policy (updated May 2018)
 - Title IX Policy (updated May 2021)
 - Section 504/ADA Prohibition Against Discrimination Based on Disability (amended March 2022)
 - Anti-discrimination/Anti-harassment Policy and Grievance Procedure (amended June 2022)
- **Inconsistent and inequitable policy implementation/enforcement.** Although these policies exist, their implementation and enforcement has been inconsistent, according to anecdotal evidence from stakeholders, which included students and staff.

Specifically, student focus group participants and survey respondents noted instances of bullying based on race, gender expression, sexual orientation, and physical appearance that went unaddressed by teachers and school leaders. Students also perceived identity-based discrepancies in discipline enforcement when it comes to which students get asked to show hall passes, who gets reprimanded for disrupting class, and who receives dress code violations. High school students in particular noted that some teachers exhibited favoritism toward certain students, accepting their otherwise disruptive behaviors in class, and some administrators would similarly turn a blind eye for certain students who were violating school rules in the hallways and bathrooms. Results from the LERA align with these student perceptions, with **61%** of leaders indicating they disagree or strongly disagree that “the district’s student discipline process is consistently implemented at all schools.”

Staff participants expressed a desire for improved standardization and transparency in how bias-driven discrimination and harassment toward students and adults is addressed as well.

- **District policies lack equity focus.** Central office staff noted that human resources policies, such as hiring and recruitment, and curriculum selection policies do not currently use an equity lens or framework. School-based staff echoed that this is an area of opportunity in the district.
- **Fear of parental pushback is hindering district’s ability to promote equity.** A common theme that emerged from conversations and survey responses across stakeholder groups (including staff, students, and administrators) was that parents who oppose equity have significant influence over equity-related decision-making across the district. Stakeholders noted examples such as school administrators dismissing student-proposed programming related to diverse topics and instructing teachers not to select certain instructional materials or discuss topics related to diversity for fear of parent backlash. Stakeholders also shared that a group of parents have expressed opposition to administrators and School Committee members against the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms in the middle and high schools and recognizing June as Pride Month. Students, staff, and administrators alike shared that this fear of parental pushback is hindering their ability to promote equity within classrooms and school buildings. Stakeholders expressed desire for district leadership to intervene and be clear and consistent about the district’s stance on equity.

LEADERSHIP, PRACTICES, AND POLICIES RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Set a clear vision and common language for equity across NKSD.** *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*
 - **Create an NKSD Equity Vision Statement.** Define and communicate how NKSD's existing vision, mission statement, and strategic goals all relate to equity. Ensure that this statement explicitly includes a vision focusing on equity for all marginalized classes.
 - **Engage Stakeholders.** Ask various stakeholders to contribute to and build a shared equity vision that all can rally around. Student voices should be actively included throughout the process. Making an explicit effort to connect with stakeholders will lead to stronger relationships between district leadership and stakeholder groups and foster strong buy in to the work.
 - **Publicize the Vision.** Place the Equity Vision Statement front and center throughout the district. It should be placed in all public places, including on the website home page, in every school, at the district office, and on communications material, in multiple languages.
2. **Develop a district-wide Equity Policy.** The School Committee should issue an Equity Policy for NKSD that recognizes equity as a district-wide priority. This policy will define what equity looks like in district policies, practices, and processes. It will set the expectation that all stakeholders play a role in promoting equity in the NK community. *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*
3. **Expect accountability from all staff.** There should be an expectation set for all staff members in the district to adhere to the district-wide Equity Policy. A crucial piece to systematically changing long-held practices is to hold everyone accountable. Examples of how this may be accomplished include: setting explicit expectations for equity-focused work in job descriptions and hiring; goal setting or individual performance plans with a focus on equity; and including equity targets as part of the annual personnel evaluation process.
4. **Opportunity to prioritize equity with district leadership transition.** The future hiring of a new Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent brings the opportunity to consider candidates' qualifications and willingness to prioritize and promote DEI efforts in leadership positions. Additionally, the findings and recommendations in this audit may serve as a roadmap to inform the next Superintendent, along with the School Committee, about areas of opportunity to pursue further DEI-focused initiatives across the district.
5. **Further embed equity into district-wide strategic plan/strategic goals.** District leaders noted that per Rhode Island Department of Education directive for all LEAs across the state, NKSD will undertake the development of a new Strategic Plan beginning in late Spring/Summer 2023. This will be timely, given NKSD's current strategic plan is for 2019-2024, and there will be a new Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent coming on board. PCG recommends the district engages in a strategic planning process intentionally involving diverse voices from across the NKSD community. Equity-focused metrics should be embedded within each of the priority goal areas of the plan. In the meantime, the current strategic plan should be reviewed by a representative group of stakeholders and updated to reflect the district's evolving equity goals. Use disaggregated data to measure progress.

6. **Hire a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.** This director-level position will be dedicated to supporting the successful execution of NKSD's equity vision and Equity Action Plan goals. Though no one individual can hold sole responsibility for the district's equity work, it will be beneficial to have a central office administrator charged with moving efforts forward, monitoring progress on equity work, and ensuring accountability. This individual should also serve as a Co-Chair of the School Committee's DEI Advisory Sub-Committee. It will be critical to clearly define the expectations and responsibilities of the Director of DEI, including decision-making authority, so the position is not viewed solely as a symbolic role, but one with the power to address issues within the district community.

If NKSD is unable to hire a Director of DEI at this time, PCG recommends identifying a current administrator who can lead equity-focused work at the district level. NKSD should also consider creating an Equity Specialist staff position for each school building. This would be a stipend position that can be performed in addition to other duties. The Equity Specialist would be responsible for supporting the development of culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist practices in their individual school buildings. Once these positions are filled, engage in planning for a future Director of DEI to oversee staff and initiatives across the district.

7. **Create an Equity Communication Plan to develop key messages to share the vision for equity both internally and externally.** The communication plan should identify ways to share key messages so they reach all staff. It must include how messages will be presented to internal stakeholder groups in addition to all families, students, and the larger community. Such notices can include information about school-based or district-wide initiatives, professional development offerings, family engagement activities, and more. Ensure these messages are translated into multiple languages for accessibility. *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*
8. **Use an explicit equity decision-making lens for all decisions made within NKSD.** Adopt an equity decision-making framework through which all decisions are reviewed. In order to end individual, institutional, and structural racism and bias in the district, all leaders must consistently and intentionally apply an equity-lens to every decision made. When making decisions within NKSD, leaders should ask, "Who is being well served, and who is left out or harmed by the new policy, practice, or program?" It is easy to say that all decisions will be made with equity in mind, but without an explicit Equity Impact Analysis tool, protocol, or framework, it is highly unlikely that the district can stay true to the vision.
9. **Fairly implement policies.** District and school-based leaders must implement policies using an equity lens to ensure all students, staff, and administrators are held accountable for their actions to promote a safe, inclusive community.
10. **Update district policies using an equity lens.** There is an opportunity to embed equity within existing policies. Specifically, with regards to Human Resources, more can be done to engage and recruit educators who identify as BIPOC or with another historically marginalized identity. More equity training and equity-focused materials (i.e., rubrics, interview protocols, etc.) should be provided to hiring teams meeting with candidates. Additionally, the curriculum adoption and text selection policies should be reviewed from an equity lens. This will help ensure that what students learn in the classroom is relevant, engaging, and reflective of their lived experiences. All School Committee policies should also be reviewed with an equity lens and updated regularly.

- 11. Set clear expectations for families and staff related to district-wide equity work through consistent communication.** As the district moves forward with clearly defining its priorities related to equity and creating equity-centric policies and practices, communicating these shifts to community members and staff is imperative. NKSD must communicate regularly with families and staff to keep them informed about these systematic changes and underscore how they are aligned with the district's mission, vision, and strategic goals related to equity. If there is opposition to decisions made, district and school leaders, as well as School Committee members, can refer to the equity-focused systems, policies, and practices guiding their actions. This will reduce subjectivity when determining how to respond to vocal parents in opposition to equity work. Remind families of district expectations about their role in promoting equity and inclusion in NKSD.

6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Guiding Question: *How does district professional development support equity, diversity and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination?*

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges within a school or district. To be effective, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation that includes feedback to ensure it responds to educators' learning needs. Educators who participate in professional development then must be expected to apply their new knowledge and skills to the work of teaching and learning.¹⁹

Defining and designing effective professional learning opportunities for educators is vital to the effective classroom implementation of new knowledge, skills and strategies that lead to increased learning for students. When designed well, professional learning is interactive, sustained, and customized to a teacher's needs. It encourages teachers to take responsibility for their own learning and to practice what they are learning in their own teaching contexts. Conferences, the one- or two-day professional learning sessions prior to the start of a new school year, and one-time workshops are good opportunities for awareness, connecting educators to the latest in research or to introduce new knowledge and strategies, but they cannot change practice in the classroom.²⁰

Moreover, professional development opportunities within schools and districts often ignore discussions about culturally responsive practices. Professional development is more than ensuring that educators receive the technical skills, such as creating lesson plans, developing assessments, implementing instructional strategies, necessary to function in the classroom.²¹ Educators must also acquire a foundational understanding of equity-oriented practices by developing and cultivating critical consciousness and critically reflecting on their professional growth and practice in order to create effective learning opportunities for each student. Equity oriented practices are those which critically examine all aspects of the learning environment including educators' beliefs and attitudes about difference as well as instructional practices and materials.

In December 2020, Learning Forward updated their Standards for Professional Learning.²² The standards have embedded equity throughout their new framework. Specifically, they include the following as a condition of success and as a transformational process:

- **Equity Foundations:** "Educators establish a vision for equitable access to high-quality professional learning, create structures to ensure such access, and sustain a culture that supports the development of all staff members;" and
- **Equity Drivers:** "Educators reflect individually and collectively to identify and address their own biases, support and collaborate with diverse colleagues, and cultivate beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors that accelerate ambitious outcomes for all educators and students."

¹⁹ Mayes, H. (2010). "[Why Professional Development Matters](#)." *Learning Forward*.

²⁰ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (March 2020). "[Professional Learning Guidelines for Student Success](#)."

²¹ Bay, U., & Macfarlane, S. (2011). "Teaching critical reflection: A tool for transformative learning in social work." *Social Work Education*, 30 (7), 745-748. *Monash University*.

²² Learning Forward. (December 5, 2020). "[Revised Standards for Professional Learning Discussion Draft](#)."

As a national leader in setting standards for professional learning, Learning Forward has created the expectation that equity must be a foundation and driver for all professional learning in schools and districts throughout the country. Moreover, the Illinois State Board of Education adopted new [Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards](#)²³ to prepare future educators to teach diverse students. ISBE's [Diverse and Learner Ready Teacher](#) (DLRT) Network developed the standards, which educator preparation programs in colleges and universities will integrate into their course content and field experiences by October 2025. Forward looking districts will begin aligning their own professional development to the new standards to support the new teacher workforce entering their district. The new Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards include:

- Self-reflect and gain a deeper understanding of how their life experiences affect their perspectives.
- Understand that systems in our society create and reinforce inequities.
- Learn from and about their students' cultures, languages, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their students' lives.
- Value students' feedback and leadership.
- Support and create opportunities for student advocacy.
- Develop relationships with families and the community.
- Curate the curriculum to include and represent a wide spectrum of identities.
- Ensure the diversity of the student population is represented within the broader learning environment.

Developing a plan for effective professional learning starts with analyzing student achievement data to define student learning needs and then identifying the teacher knowledge and skills required to address those needs. Teacher professional learning outcomes are defined by improved professional practice, but the long-term goals focus on improved student achievement targets.²⁴ An effective district-wide professional development plan should identify student learning needs, the evidence that supports these identified student needs, and the adult learning needs that will enable educators to support student success in meeting these needs. Long-term professional development plans for district, building and individual plans should be aligned and focused on student learning outcomes supported by improved educator practice.

An effective district-wide professional development plan²⁵ includes the following:

- Identifies student and educator learning needs.
- Specifies who will benefit from the professional learning.
- Identifies learning outcomes, benchmarks, and observable/measurable evidence of change in teacher practice and student learning.

²³ Illinois State Board of Education (December 16, 2020). "[Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards for All Educators](#)."

²⁴ Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W.-Y., Scarloss, B., and Shapley, K. (2007). "[Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement](#)." *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest*.

²⁵ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020).

- Specifies the learning opportunities and sustained follow-up planned to support implementation (at the district and building level, plans should include the differentiated learning opportunities that will be offered for educators).
- Identifies resources needed to support the professional learning.
- Identifies how professional learning will be offered and evaluated.

Professional Development Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders have access to learning content about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. • All district staff (including instructional, administrative, and support staff) and school committee members are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
District offers professional learning in various methods, times, settings, and communicates options to all stakeholders, where applicable	PD/Learning is offered in several formats, i.e., in-person, webinars, self-paced courses, group activities, book sessions, independent learning, college courses, conferences			X
	PD/Learning is offered at various and multiple times, i.e., before, during, and after school; lunch, recorded webinar for viewing at any time			X
	PD/Learning is offered in various settings, i.e., teacher Learning Communities, School Conferences, School PD day, Afterschool Committees, etc.			X
	NKSD markets/communicates equity-centric learning opportunities in various platforms; shares information widely based on the target audience i.e., school website, flyers, bulletin boards, school announcements, emails, meetings, etc.		X	
District requires all personnel to have, at minimum, a foundational understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging topics with the use of accountability measures	All staff are required to participate in foundational DEI&B courses		X	
	Majority of support staff have shown proficiency in foundational DEI&B topics as demonstrated by required accountability measures			X
	Majority of instructional staff have shown proficiency in foundational DEI&B topics as demonstrated by required accountability measures			X
	Majority of instructional staff have shown proficiency in DEI&B topics as related to instructional practices, as demonstrated by required accountability measures such as earning teacher credits or follow-up activities			X

Desired Outcomes:

- All stakeholders have access to learning content about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- All district staff (including instructional, administrative, and support staff) and school committee members are proficient in applying practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as applicable to their school role and held accountable for their practice.

Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
District offers professional development based on student and staff data	District uses benchmarks to determine which staff are required to participate in trainings			X
	District uses student data to inform the types of PD to offer and require			X
	District has a district-wide goal of staff participation and proficiency in DEI&B topics			X
	District monitors participation and proficiency rates for all NKSD staff			X

KEY FINDINGS

- Several stakeholder groups echoed **the need for professional development in equity**. Specifically, LERA survey respondents, school staff survey respondents, family survey respondents, student focus group participants, and individual interviewees all noted the need for professional development of school staff and leadership.

Stakeholders asked for the following types of trainings for school and district staff:

- Cultural Awareness
- Implicit Bias
- Gender Bias
- Neurodiversity
- Course on how to talk with students about identities including race, gender, and ethnicity
- Foundational equity course (i.e., explaining difference between equity and equality)
- **No equity-focused professional development offered since 2019.** Among the evidence provided for professional development (PD) offered by NKSD, a training entitled Cultural Competency was given to faculty, staff, and paraprofessionals. The mode of communication to garner participation was sufficient as evidenced in the **95%** participation rate. Furthermore, the content made an impression on members of staff, as evidenced by staff members requesting the presenter to return and provide additional information. However, there was no formal method to gauge efficacy of the professional development.
- **Stakeholders requested more training for teachers regarding social emotional wellness and empathy.** Noted by student survey respondents, family open-survey responses, and family and student focus group participants, there is a need for teachers to understand and support their

students' mental wellness struggles post-pandemic, and lead with empathy when interacting with students. Students explicitly expressed the need for staff to be more empathetic and "nicer."

- **Staff training is needed on how to work with marginalized student groups including students of color and students from low socioeconomic means.** LERA open-survey respondents, school staff survey respondents, and family survey respondents detailed a lack of understanding from teachers on how to work and communicate with different student groups. One participant believes staff equates "poor" students with "dumb," others noted the differing expectations that teaching staff have for students based on what part of town they are from. Specific staff trainings requested by stakeholders include Culturally Responsive Teaching; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion basics; Antiracism, Microaggressions, and Anti-Bias. The deficiency in professional development offerings is echoed by the **74%** of leaders who disagree with the statement, "district and school staff have received professional learning focused on engaging historically marginalized families into activities that respect their language(s), culture, concerns, and aspirations for their children," as posed in the Leadership Equity Readiness Assessment.
- **There is a need for training on equitable discipline practices.** Several examples were provided by families, staff, and students regarding biased discipline practices in which students of color received more severe punishments for similar infractions as their White counterparts. Open survey responses by staff noted the need to examine training specific to the intersection of race and discipline and the ways in which discipline is administered and escalated depending on the race of the student.
- **Staff training is needed for working with neurodiverse students and students who need additional academic support.** Families in open-survey responses and district staff open survey respondents described a need for teachers to improve their methods of reaching students with varied academic needs. There is a current perception that teachers have limited training and expertise in helping students who are not already high achievers. "They prefer...high academic students..." as described by a staff survey respondent. There was also a call for Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) compliance training for staff charged with supporting special education students from family open survey responses.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the district-wide landscape, PCG chooses to recommend the requirement of professional development described below. While additional conversations may be required due to labor contracts, NKSD may explore ways to include DEI content in other forums such as faculty meetings or professional development.

1. **Require staff participation in trainings regarding cultural competence and culturally responsive practices.** While **46%** of leadership staff say they "have opportunities to participate in professional development activities focused on culturally responsive practices" as indicated on the LERA survey, all stakeholder groups expressed a need for more training around equity and culturally responsive instruction for teachers, building staff and district leadership. All persons should be required to participate in deep, reflective learning about this topic and its implications. To that end, the following PD topics should be offered at varying levels for staff and building leadership: Cultural Awareness, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Culturally Responsive Leadership, and a course on how to talk with students about identities including race, gender, and ethnicity. (*This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.*)
2. **Require recommended trainings for staff.** Echoed by stakeholders' responses, PCG recommends the following professional development trainings be required of staff: Implicit Bias,

Gender Bias, LGBTQIA+ student support, Neurodiversity, foundational equity courses (i.e., explaining difference between equity and equality); Antiracism; Microaggressions; Anti-Bias; How to support students with low socioeconomic means; Instructional practices for supporting students with increased needs for academic support. These trainings can start as the first layer of PD requirements for instructional and leadership staff to ensure all persons have a similar understanding of equity principles and practices. Note, all trainings are not required for all staff, however, foundational, entry level trainings should be mandated across the district for all staff. *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*

3. **Provide trainings in multiple modes, levels, and times.** To help ensure maximum participation in trainings and promote accessibility to staff, PD should be offered at varying times, in different modalities (i.e., online, webinar, in-person, independent learning, etc.), and for different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced).
4. **Ensure mandatory trainings require evidence of learning and practical application.** To ensure that lessons learned in professional development are implemented with fidelity in the classroom, all PD should have a requirement to provide evidence of content learned through one or multiple methods. Evidence of learning data collection might include lesson plans, student work, self-reflection journals, group discussions, etc.
5. **Create a logic model for your professional learning goals focused on equity.** Through the creation of a logic model (or similar template) focused on each equity goal, there is a roadmap to not only provide an overview of the on-going professional learning, but also the expected outcomes both short and long-term. A logic model also provides a visual that can be communicated to all stakeholders. The model should minimally contain the goal, inputs the district is providing, outputs such as the various activities that align to the goal and targeted stakeholders, and the outcomes both short, and long-term impacts NKSD expects to see. NKSD should also include examples of data used to provide evidence of the impact. Finally, NKSD should require participants to show what they have learned in the larger equity plan, i.e., 50% of the school can demonstrate cultural competence by end of 2023 school year; 75% of the school staff can demonstrate cultural competence by end of 2024 school year.
6. **Prioritize the focus areas of professional learning.** As NKSD creates an action plan based on a logic model, determine which focus area(s) will be prioritized. This is necessary to ensure that there are multiple opportunities for teachers dig deeper into key focus/content areas that will help meet the NKSD professional learning and equity goals. Scaffolding trainings from foundational knowledge to more rigorous content will ensure staff have multiple opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills, and comfort level to meet the district's expectations and can apply learnings with confidence.

7. CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Guiding Question: To what extent are the culture and climate of NKSD welcoming and supportive of all students and families? What opportunities does NKSD offer for the engagement of all students and families?

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

District and school culture and climate play a critical role in setting the tone for how students, families, and staff are included and welcomed in the community. According to the National School Climate Center, “school climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.”²⁶

A positive school climate impacts all community members. Numerous research studies have demonstrated the association between a positive learning environment and greater student achievement, social emotional well-being, students' sense of agency, and students' sense of connection to the school community. In positive learning environments, teachers are more empowered and have a greater sense of efficacy in their roles.²⁷ Creating and sustaining a positive school climate also involves engaging parents and families of all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, helping them feel connected to the community in culturally and linguistically inclusive ways.²⁸

A synthesis of school climate literature highlights several practices essential to sustaining a positive school climate that promotes equity, including:

- Open and inclusive communication accessible to all community members (students, families, and staff).
- Employing an asset-based view of diversity.²⁹
- Proactive culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement practices and partnerships.³⁰
- Supportive, reciprocal relationships (between teachers and students, teachers and their peers, and students and their peers).³¹
- Institutional structures, norms, and expectations in place to sustain a positive school climate.³²
- Use of restorative disciplinary practices.³³
- Creating a sense of belonging among students and staff.³⁴

A recent REL Northwest report (2019) elaborates a similar set of practices, and emphasizes “leading through collaboration and by example”:

²⁶ National School Climate Center. [“What is school climate and why is it important?”](#)

²⁷ Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D' Alessandro, A (2013). [“A Review of School Climate Research.”](#) Review of Educational Research, 83(3), 357-385. *Sage Journals*.

²⁸ Mapp, K.L. & Bergman, E (2019). [“Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships.”](#) *Dual Capacity*.

²⁹ Hyler, M.E, Carver-Thomas, D, & Wechsler, M & Willis, L (January 12, 2021). [“Districts Advancing Racial Equity \(DARE\) Tool.”](#) *Learning Policy Institute*.

³⁰ Mapp & Bergman, (2019) and Thapa, A et al (2013).

³¹ Thapa, A et al (2013)

³² Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M (September 1, 2018). [“Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success.”](#) *Learning Policy Institute*; Bryk, A.S and Schneider, B (March 1, 2003). [“Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform.”](#) *Educational Leadership* 60 (6), 40-45. *ACSD*.

³³ Hyler, et. al (January 12, 2020).

³⁴ Blad, E (June 2017.) [“Students' Sense of Belonging at School Is Important. It Starts With Teachers.”](#) *Education Week*; Allen, K. (August 9, 2019). [“5 Ways to Boost Students' Sense of School Belonging.”](#) *Monash University*.

“The policies and actions of school leaders influence school climate, how staff members interact with students, and teachers’ classroom management practices. All stakeholders should have the goal of promoting a welcoming and caring school climate for all students – a major component of which is building and sustaining a culture that embraces diversity (something that requires strong leadership and a shared commitment to equity among all staff members) ... [which also] requires the collaboration and engagement ... of parents and students.”³⁵

In conducting the analysis of culture and climate within the North Kingstown School Department, PCG observed and reviewed practices in NKSD related to building a positive school culture and climate. The practices are assessed below in the Culture and Climate At-a-Glance Chart. Additional details are provided later in the section.

Culture and Climate Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members of NKSD feel welcomed and supported at school and school related/associated events • Families of students in the NKSD community feel welcomed and supported at school and school-sponsored events • Students of NKSD have a sense of belonging, feel welcomed and included in classes, broader school campus, and school-sponsored events 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
District maintains a positive school climate for staff with mechanisms in place for continued improvement	Staff members feel supported in their classroom and instructional decision making		X	
	Staff feel their opinions are taken into consideration when school-wide decisions are made		X	
	Staff have an asset-based view of diversity		X	
	Staff receive consistent and clear communications regarding professional practices and equity		X	
District maintains a positive school climate for families with mechanisms in place for continued improvement	District provides information in a variety of platforms and languages		X	
	District communicates with transparency		X	
	Families know where to voice their concerns and are provided with timely responses		X	
	Families are offered multiple means of participation in school groups		X	
	Families are provided an opportunity to voice their thoughts and concerns in multiple modes		X	

³⁵ Nishioka, V, Williams, J, & Jaffery, Z (April 2019). [“Identifying Strategies to Promote Equity in School Discipline.”](#) *Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest*, 8.

Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members of NKSD feel welcomed and supported at school and school related/associated events • Families of students in the NKSD community feel welcomed and supported at school and school-sponsored events • Students of NKSD have a sense of belonging, feel welcomed and included in classes, broader school campus, and school-sponsored events 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
	Families feel their children are safe at school (physically and psychologically)		X	
	Culturally responsive messaging and practices are used to engage families		X	
District maintains a positive school climate for students with mechanisms in place for continued improvement	Affinity clubs are made available and sponsored at all schools, where age appropriate	X		
	A variety of school-sponsored social events are offered and accessible to all students		X	
	Students feel welcomed at school and at school-sponsored events		X	
	Participation in extra-curricular activities is accessible to all students		X	
	District communicates information in a variety of platforms and languages		X	
	Students feel included at school and at school-sponsored events		X	
	Teachers have high expectations for all students		X	
	Student voice is part of the decision-making process		X	
	Students' sense of belonging is encouraged and supported, i.e., respectful relationships with teachers and other students		X	
	Culturally responsive teaching, messaging, and practices are used to engage students			X
	Students feel physically and psychologically safe at school and school-sponsored activities		X	

KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key findings for the culture and climate of student and family stakeholder groups from the collection of quantitative and qualitative data.

Students

- **Students have positive feelings and perceptions about aspects of their educational experiences.** Many student focus group participants and survey respondents shared how their

favorite parts of school were spending time with friends, taking interesting classes, and having nice teachers.

- **There are numerous student engagement opportunities across schools.** Student focus group participants and survey respondents noted excitement for the opportunity to participate in clubs, electives, and other activities aligned with their passions (i.e., music, theater, sports, engineering, CTE programming). During the 2020-21 school year, the NK High School Student Activities Handbook listed 11 pages worth of options from which students could choose. Based on materials submitted as part of this audit, it appears that some elementary schools have more activity and club offerings for students than others. This also seems to be the case across middle schools.
- **There are spaces where students do not feel safe.** Student focus group participants and survey respondents noted there are times when they do not feel safe in the hallways due to rough-housing and inappropriate behavior, particularly in the high school. Similarly, students noted they did not feel safe in the bathrooms because students vape there on occasion and exhibit other behaviors that make them feel uncomfortable. There are notable differences in perceptions of safety in school spaces across student groups. Specifically, **30%** of non-binary student survey respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement “I feel safe in all school spaces (e.g., hallways, bathrooms, locker rooms, classrooms)” compared to **67%** of students who do not identify as non-binary. Additionally, **56%** of BIPOC student survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree with this statement about feeling safe in school spaces, compared to **64%** of their White counterparts.
- **Students participate in affinity groups as a means of support and belonging.** BIPOC and HMI student focus group participants described their appreciation for the affinity groups such as the Racial Equity Alliance and the Sexuality and Gender Awareness (SAGA) Club. They shared that most of their friends were in these groups, which serve as safe spaces to discuss identity-related topics that are not otherwise taking place in the classroom. As one student reflected, “I feel a little afraid to speak about these things in front of other people, there are people in my classes who will go around and share what I said. The clubs are a good outlet for talking...without fear...” It is important to note that **75%** of BIPOC student survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree with the statement “I can be proud of my racial or ethnic background at school,” compared to **93%** of their White counterparts.
- **BIPOC students are experiencing racism and/or marginalization.** Students in the BIPOC and HMI focus groups, as well as survey respondents, described racist behavior from staff members and students towards Black students. These students noted incidents such as the use of the “n-word”, microaggressions, and a recent situation that was perceived by students, and some members of staff, as a student wearing “blackface” to class at North Kingstown High School. These students reflected that there seems to be a lack of consequences for such discriminatory behavior, which impacts their sense of safety at school. Additionally, they noted that a perceived lack of disciplinary action sends a message that such behavior is acceptable and that other students can get away with it. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy in how students of color and White students perceive race-based bullying at school. **50%** of BIPOC student survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree that “students at my school are teased or picked on about their racial or ethnic identity, nationality, religion, or first language.” **16%** of White students indicated they strongly agree or agree with the same statement.
- **Students in the LGBTQIA+ community do not always feel a sense of inclusion and belonging.** High school and middle school student focus group participants shared the perception that there is a lot of bullying targeting students in the LGBTQIA+ community. Of non-binary students who completed the Equity Audit survey, **82%** indicated they strongly agree or agree with the

statement “students at this school are teased or picked on about their sexual orientation or gender expression” compared to **54%** of students who do not identify as non-binary that strongly agree or agree with the statement. Additionally, **33%** of non-binary student survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree with the statement “I feel like I belong at my school” compared to **78%** of students who do not identify as non-binary that responded.

BIPOC and HMI student focus group participants shared additional examples of situations that impacted their sense of inclusion and belonging:

- Students perceived limited access to gender-neutral bathrooms. The gender-neutral bathrooms require a code to use, which means that students must ask an adult to use them. Students perceived this as potentially “outing” peers who might not want teachers or administrators to know they prefer to use this bathroom.
- Students were making “sheep sounds” / bleating targeted at peers in the LGBTQIA+ community.
- There was a rumor early in the 2022-2023 school year started by an elected town council member targeting transgender and gender-nonconforming students. The claim, first posted on social media, said that the district was accommodating students who identify as cats, setting up litter boxes in the bathrooms. The Interim Superintendent at the time publicly denied this rumor in an email to community members calling it “baseless”, and shared strong support for every NKSD student. The circulation of such rumors, which are rooted in transphobia, were known to be taking place in other school districts around the country last year.³⁶ NKSD students shared that this rhetoric was hurtful.
- **Students have a limited voice in the decision-making process.** Students have some opportunities to serve in leadership positions, such as representatives on the School Committee, or in student government for the middle and high schools. According to the student survey, **64%** of all respondents strongly agree or agree that “at this school, every student has the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas about how to improve their learning experiences.” While this finding is promising, *every* student in NKSD should feel confident their voice is heard and valued. Therefore, more can be done by teachers and administrators to facilitate the inclusion of student voice in decision-making. Several family survey respondents similarly identified incorporating more student voice as an area of opportunity within the district. With regards to being heard by adults, some student focus group participants, including BIPOC and HMI students, expressed frustration about instances where they proposed activities and LGBTQIA+ programming which were shut down by administrators.
- **Students identified a fear of backlash from parents in response to discussing diverse topics in schools.** Students focus group participants perceive that teachers and administrators’ decisions are dictated by the fear of upsetting parents in the district who are vocal against equity initiatives. Specifically, they mentioned the administration halting initiatives proposed by students focusing on identity-based topics, such as an assembly on LGBTQIA+ topics or recognizing June as Pride Month. Staff focus group participants and survey respondents echoed this perception, noting the limitations it presents to pushing equity work forward in the district.
- **Students expressed a desire for more effective communication from school and district leaders.** High school student focus group participants noted that they wish there was more

³⁶ Waterman, Michael. Interim Superintendent (September 8, 2022). “NKSD – Clarification on Litter Boxes.” *Email to Members of the North Kingstown School Community*.

information shared with them about recent situations, including the investigation of staff for inappropriate behavior, the aforementioned “kitty litter” incident, and notification of a teacher’s recent death. Students shared that the lack of communication resulted in limited awareness and understanding about the supports/resources at their disposal to help them navigate the challenging situations.

Families

- **Office of Family Learning (OFL) seen as an asset in the district.** Services include literacy-based early childhood education, parenting development and training (including the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, no cost and available to all North Kingstown residents, after-school and summer learning programs, community health programs, and a professionally staffed Family Center at Quidnessett Elementary School. The OFL Board includes parental representatives and seeks to involve parents in the design and delivery of programs when appropriate. Across interviews and focus group participants, there was mention of the Office of Family Learning’s limited capacity given its few staff. Stakeholders commented on the need for greater communication about the opportunities provided by the Office of Family Learning to expand access to more families. It is worth noting the Office of Family Learning information on the NKSD website was only posted in English.
- **LINKS program.** LINKS, or Laymen in North Kingstown Schools, is an organization in the community since 1970 which “recruits, trains, places, and supports parent, community, and business volunteers to enhance the educational experience of all students in the North Kingstown Public Schools.”³⁷ Volunteer opportunities include serving as an academic reading and math guide for one hour/week, primarily working with elementary school students and serving as a mentor to a child for one hour/week. Both placements occur during the school day. A third volunteer opportunity is to be a Child Outreach Screener for the Office of Family Learning’s Child Outreach Services Program, working with preschool children to determine if they need additional support services. Volunteers can also contribute to the Parent Teacher Resource Center, creating visual aides to use in NKSD classrooms. Notably, on the LINKS website, there is no mention of equity or details about volunteer training, including training on culturally responsive practices.
- **While many families feel welcome at school events, some noted barriers to access and participation.** Family focus group participants and survey respondents highlighted that there are PTOs at some schools that are very active in having events and programming for students and families. In response to the survey question, **89%** of family respondents, strongly agree or agree with the statement “I feel welcomed at school and at school events” and **87%** strongly agree or agree that “there are opportunities for me to be involved at school.”

As additional context to this data, family focus group participants and survey respondents noted that the cost of events can be an obstacle to participation. Family survey respondents also commented that the timing of activities and meetings can make these engagement opportunities inaccessible to students and families. Limited access to bussing/transportation options also emerged as a significant barrier to engage in afterschool offerings, including academic support and extra time with teachers.

Communication can also be a barrier; if families do not know about opportunities to get involved in their children’s schools, they will not be able to participate. Lastly, some families noted that more

³⁷ [LINKS North Kingstown](#)

intentional efforts can be made by the PTO to more effectively include parents who have not previously been involved before.

- **Families expressed a desire for more communication from school and district leaders, especially about equity initiatives.** Family survey respondents noted that currently they did not receive much communication about NKSD equity work. They commented that overall, district communication could be more accessible and streamlined; it is currently happening across multiple platforms. Families, especially those with students in middle and high school grades, expressed wanting to know more about updates from their children's schools and progress about how their individual needs are being met.
- **Translation of materials.** It appears that the website does not have a translation feature. Notably, the district's mission and vision statements, bullying policy, and information about the Office of Family Learning are only posted in English on the NKSD website.
- **Leadership's perception of culturally responsive outreach practices.** According to the LERA responses, **74%** of NKSD leaders strongly disagree or disagree that district and school staff have received professional learning focused on engaging historically marginalized families into activities that respect their language(s), culture, concerns, and aspirations for their children. This is an area of opportunity for NKSD.
- **Families expressed a lack of clarity and agreement across the district about the definition and application of equity.** Family open-survey responses included a wide range of perspectives regarding equity as seen below:

Figure 8. Family Survey Questions with Conflicting or Differing Responses

Supportive of continuing and deepening equity initiatives	Supportive of halting any focus on equity
Try to meet kids at their level. Try to include children who may like different things than other children. Promote inclusiveness for all races, ethnicities, religions, sexualities, etc. Be proactive against bullying. And make sure every child feels heard and safe.	Stop polarizing students...stop emphasizing sex... stop emphasizing differences...the DEI work being done in the school is only causing more divide and more problems.
Continue to normalize and destigmatize the experiences of nonbinary and LGBT students. Support has been good. It's unfortunate that elected officials and community adults are poor role models in this regard.	Stop penalizing and persecuting white normal students who feel they are walking on eggshells in fear of saying the wrong thing in our "woke" society. It has gotten to the point in our school that we have gone far beyond "equity" which means equal... Let's get back to a meritocracy whereby students are rewarded for hard work not sexual orientation or race.
Have greater diversity in teachers and administration. Examine unconscious biases in staff and in policy. We can have the best intentions but still fall short if we are unaware	Stop pushing transgender and sexual orientation on every child. It is not fair to have all of this shoved down the throats of the kids that are "normal."
Consistent ongoing support for existing Diversity/Equity/Inclusion policies and programs, and further development of more. Teachers should be mindful of gender identity	Stop trying to create a problem, to solve a problem. This district has so many opportunities for all children. Stop talking about skin color, sexual preference, "equity", "inclusion of all"... you are subconsciously perpetuating racism. Let kids be kids.

and expression, especially in language classes. More gender-neutral bathrooms would be great!	
Celebrate diversity by reading diverse authors. Introduce foreign language skills early. Have all teachers and staff learn about unconscious bias and how it impacts their teaching. Encourage growth among all staff and students.	Stop spending [money] on garbage DEI programs that do nothing to improve outcome regardless of a person's living situation, ethnicity or orientation you cannot create Equity this idea is rooted in communist and socialist society's which history has proven over and over to fail horribly and cost the lives of millions. Get your ideology's out of our public schools and stop promoting and creating racism and segregation where it has never existed.

As a result, families need more clarity and information about how equity is defined, promoted, and assessed in NKSD. As described above, several family open-survey respondents believe the students are negatively affected by the district's focus on equity. That said, it is important to note the majority of the feedback from families was in agreement about the need for more equity work.

CULTURE AND CLIMATE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Mandatory professional development for administrators and teachers, as well as learning sessions for students, should occur along with greater penalties for hateful speech and behavior.** As a response to experiences of racism, marginalization, homophobia, and/or transphobia noted in the Key Findings section above, PCG strongly recommends all staff and students should be required to participate in professional development (for adults) or learning sessions (for students) regarding standards of behavior, especially regarding race and gender identity. These opportunities for learning should include behavior policies and consequences (see Chapter 8. Student Discipline for more details), as well as strategies for supporting BIPOC students, LGBTQA+ students, and students with other historically marginalized identities. Families and students should be made aware of the consequences of racist, transphobic, and/or homophobic behavior in the student handbook. Families should also be provided the opportunity to participate in these learning sessions.
- 2. Require administrators and teachers to participate in an implicit bias professional development course with accountability measures.** The Harvard Implicit Bias test is a common tool used to gauge implicit bias across a myriad of identities. Requiring professional development in which an implicit bias test is used as data may be helpful in assisting teachers with their understanding of their own biases and how their bias affects students. This activity could also be facilitated during an existing professional development training or a faculty meeting, rather than a separate, stand-alone required session.
- 3. Conduct a deeper review of activities offered across different elementary and middle schools and examine student participation data by subgroup.** Taking inventory of programs available across school will help to identify different opportunity gaps for students. There may be gaps because programs are not available at their schools, or because there are other barriers to participation, such as cost or lack of transportation accommodations. Information gathered by reviewing activity offerings across the district and participation data can inform strategies for resource allocation and cross-school collaboration, and as well as updated policies and procedures, to ensure all students can access and attend the events, activities, and programs offered by NKSD schools.

4. **Create district-wide practices around how to welcome students and families in culturally relevant ways.** NKSD should launch a parent survey, periodically asking parents the best ways to communicate and any needs each family may have. These responses can inform district-wide practices as well as provide an understanding of each family's communication and engagement preferences. A similar approach should be taken in welcoming students to the district.
5. **Increase community engagement events** to allow greater family, teacher, staff, and student involvement and connection to NKSD schools. Creating spaces in which families can meet teachers and school leaders outside of the school building can assist with creating a greater sense of belonging to the North Kingstown community. Offering individuals different venues to connect may create spaces for more enjoyment and harmony. The School Committee issued a Title I Parent and Family Engagement with Local Education Agencies (LEA's) Policy (revised in 2017) that outlines expectations and practices for engaging parents and families with federal funds. Though the policy is directed at the district's Title I schools (Quidnessett and Fishing Cove Elementary Schools), the practices identified are worth considering as every NKSD school moves towards more equitable community engagement.
6. **Develop a district-wide communication strategy focused on strengthening ties with the NKSD community.** In addition to the Equity Communication Plan recommended in Chapter 5. Leadership, Policies, and Practices, NKSD should develop protocols for tailored, culturally responsive messaging to families, students, and staff about district-wide events and activities, as well as incidents and other important updates. Messages should be consistent across communication platforms (email, Canvas, flyers sent home, etc.) and available in multiple languages for accessibility.
7. **Increase opportunities for student voice in areas valued by students.** Formalize communication channels and protocols for students to actively provide input to school and district leaders. Ensure these opportunities are widely known and accessible to all. Continuing to administer a district-wide survey for middle and high school students (such as the RIDE Panorama tool) with questions about culture and climate, student leadership, and student voice, including open response options, can help capture a wide range of input and inform effective future two-way communication between students and school and district leaders. Establish a practice of regularly sharing survey findings and resulting action steps to show students how their input is taken seriously and is used to inform decision-making at classroom, school, and district levels. This will empower students to continue to share their perspectives about how to improve their education experiences.

8. STUDENT DISCIPLINE

Guiding Question: Are student discipline practices consistent, transparent, and equitable for all students?

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

When looking at student discipline as a measure of educational equity, disproportionality occurs when students from one racial, gender, or other demographic subgroup are disciplined at markedly higher rates than their peers. Many studies have shown over different samples and years that Black students and male students are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers.³⁸ Research by the Indiana Education Policy Center shows that despite the disproportionate rates of disciplinary referral for African American students, there is no evidence that these students act out more frequently than their White peers.³⁹ Disproportionality in disciplinary referrals have significant negative impacts on disciplined students, especially students of color. Teachers may hold negative assumptions about the ability, aspirations, and work ethic of students who are disciplined more often, therefore impacting the students' opportunities for success in the classroom.⁴⁰ Similarly, research shows a strong correlation between suspensions and low achievement and dropping out of school.⁴¹

The U.S. Department of Education (2014) has created guidance for district and school leaders and stakeholders to promote improvements in school discipline grounded in best practices research. The guidance is organized by three guiding principles and subsequent action steps:

Guiding Principle 1: Create positive climates and focus on prevention.

Action Steps:

1. Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates.
2. Prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports.
3. Promote social and emotional learning.
4. Provide regular training and supports to all school personnel.
5. Collaborate with local agencies and other stakeholders.
6. Ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers' roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.

Guiding Principle 2: Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors.

Action Steps:

1. Set high expectations for behavior and adopt an instructional approach to discipline.
2. Involve families, students, and school personnel, and communicate regularly and clearly.
3. Ensure that clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences apply for misbehavior.

³⁸ Rudd, Tom (February 2014). "[Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline: Implicit Bias is Heavily Implicated](#)." Kirwan Institute Issue Brief, 1-8. *Ohio State University*.

³⁹ Skiba, Russell (June 2000). "[The Color of Discipline. Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment](#)." Indiana Education Policy Center, 1-26. *Indiana University*.

⁴⁰ Rudd, Tom (February 2014).

⁴¹ Ibid.

4. Create policies that include appropriate procedures for students with disabilities and due process for all students.
5. Remove students from the classroom only as a last resort, ensure that alternative settings provide academic instruction, and return students to class as soon as possible.

Guiding Principle 3: Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

Action Steps:

1. Train all school staff to apply school discipline policies and practices in a fair and equitable manner.
2. Use proactive, data-driven, and continuous efforts, including gathering feedback from families, students, teachers, and school personnel to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences.

RISK RATIO ANALYSIS

The section below examines data on student discipline in North Kingstown School Department disaggregated by student characteristics of race, gender, learning ability and income status. One of the analyses included is a calculation of risk ratio which is used to compare student groups in discipline referrals to examine whether students from different subgroups are disproportionately represented.

This risk ratio analysis method compares the likelihood of a student in a certain demographic subgroup to have a particular educational outcome to the likelihood that students of all other demographic subgroups will have the same outcome. To calculate risk in educational settings, the risk of a particular outcome for students in one racial or ethnic group (numerator) is divided by the risk of that same outcome for children in all other racial ethnic groups within the same setting (e.g., school or LEA) (denominator). The example below illustrates this calculation using disciplinary referrals.

**Risk
Ratio**



Number of students from a subgroup with a discipline referral ÷ the total number of students in the data set from that subgroup

Total number of students with discipline referrals excluding the same subgroup ÷ total number of students in the data set excluding the subgroup

Numerator

of students from a demographic subgroup with a discipline referral ÷ the total number of students in the school from that demographic subgroup

Ex: # of Hispanic or Latinx students with a disciplinary referral ÷ # of all Hispanic or Latinx students at the school

Denominator

of students with a discipline referral excluding the same demographic subgroup ÷ total number of students at the school excluding that demographic subgroup

Ex: # of students with a disciplinary referral excluding Hispanic or Latinx students ÷ # of total students at the school excluding Hispanic or Latinx students

A risk ratio of 1.0 means there is no association between the student's demographic group and their likelihood of receiving a disciplinary referral. A risk ratio of 2.0 or greater indicates a risk of overrepresentation in disciplinary referrals, while a risk ratio of less than 1.0 indicates possible underrepresentation. Student subgroups with fewer than ten (10) students in the school were excluded from this analysis.

Discipline Review At-a-Glance

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district ensures fairness, equity, and continuous improvement in applying discipline practices. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
The district has discipline policies that are consistent, equitable, and align with restorative justice practices.	The district has a discipline matrix that standardizes clear and consistent disciplinary policies			X
	Administrators and teachers are proficient in applying a district-wide discipline matrix			X
	No student demographic groups are disproportionately represented in students who are disciplined			X
Create positive climates and focus on prevention.	School staff are trained to apply school discipline policies and practices in a fair and equitable manner			X
	Administrators use proactive, data-driven, and continuous efforts, including gathering feedback from families, students, teachers, and school personnel to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences			X
	The district provides regular training and supports to all school personnel regarding discipline			X
	The district prioritizes the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports	X		

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district ensures fairness, equity, and continuous improvement in applying discipline practices. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
	The district promotes social and emotional learning	X		
	Use of restorative disciplinary practices		X	
Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors.	There are high expectations for behavior and school and district leadership has adopted an instructional approach to discipline		X	
	Families, students, and school personnel are involved and communicated with regularly and clearly			X
	Clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences apply for misbehavior			X
	Disciplinary policies include appropriate procedures for students with disabilities and due process for all students			X

KEY FINDINGS

District-wide Discipline

The following data was provided by the North Kingstown School Department for the 2021-22 school year for eight schools in the district (Davisville Academy was not included in the data shared). This analysis includes all types of infractions (e.g., inappropriate behavior, interrupting class, excess tardiness, tobacco/alcohol, etc.). Consequences resulting from the infraction (ex: suspension, detention, discussion, phone call home, etc.) are considered 'disciplinary referrals' in the following analysis.

Figure 9. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Race: 2021-22

Race	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
African American or Black	83	24
Hispanic or Latinx	287	61
Two or more races	211	39
White	3,242	325
Total	3,914	463

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 10. Discipline Referral Risk by Race: 2021-22

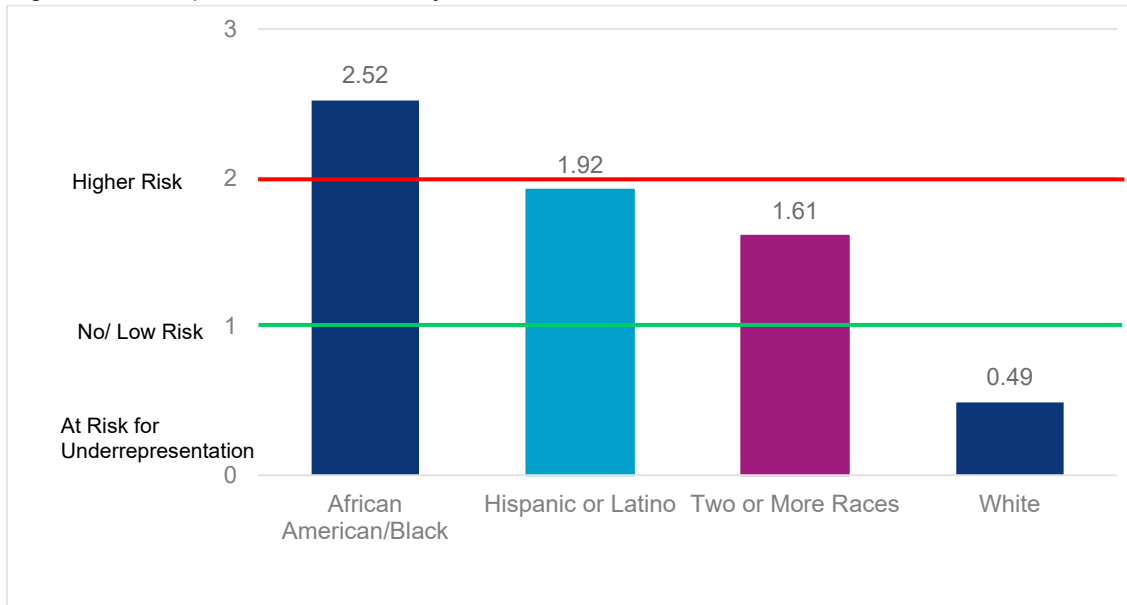


Figure 11. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Gender: 2021-22

Gender	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Female	1,909	122
Male	2,005	341
Total	3,914	463

Figure 12. Discipline Referral Risk by Gender: 2021-22

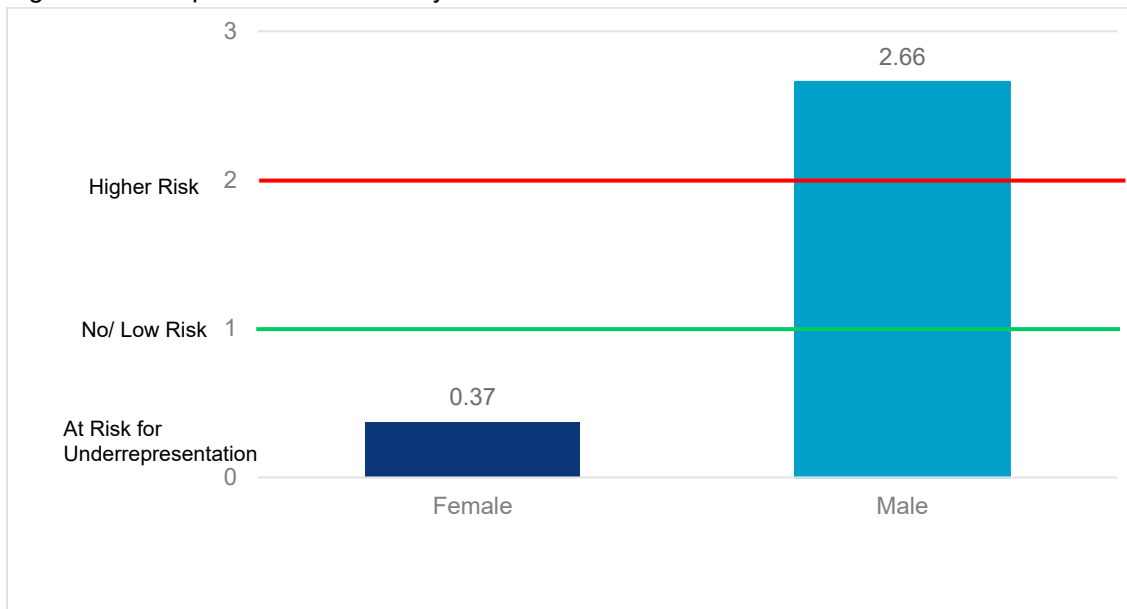


Figure 13. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Learning Status: 2021-22

Learning Status	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Differently Abled Students	562	96
General Education Students	3,352	367
Total	3,914	463

Figure 14. Discipline Referral Risk by Learning Status: 2021-22

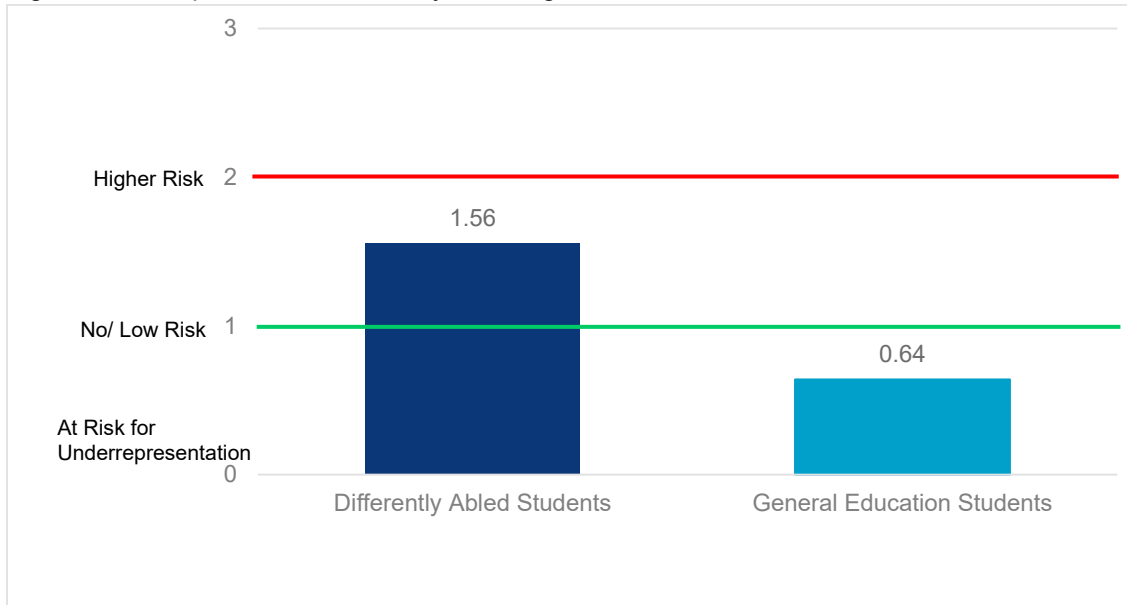
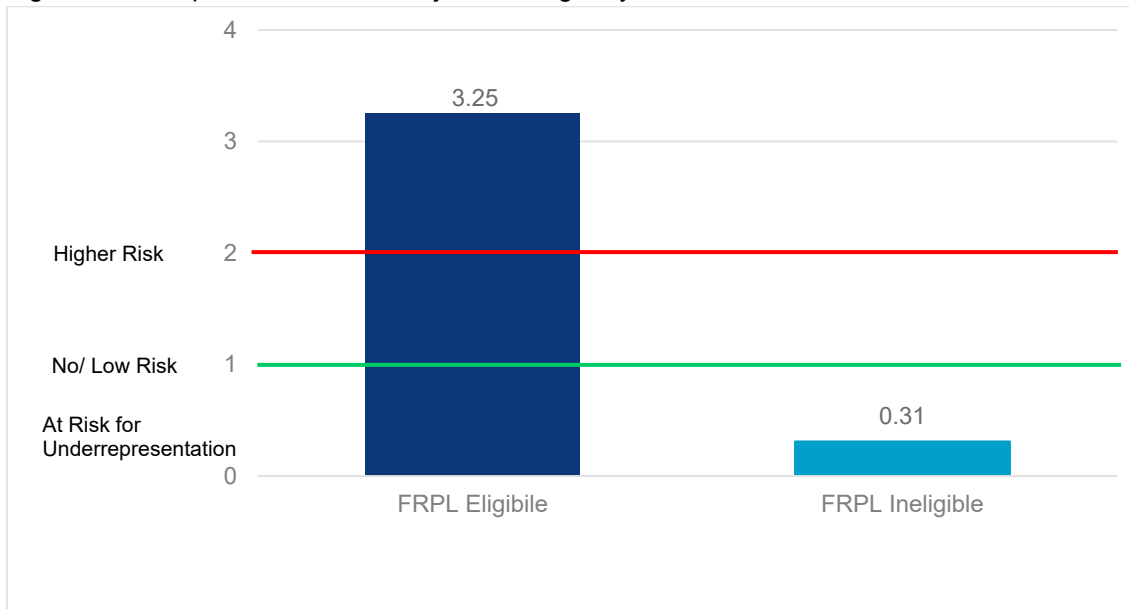


Figure 15. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by FRPL Eligibility: 2021-22

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
FRPL Eligible	569	165
Not FRPL Eligible	3,345	298
Total	3,914	463

Figure 16. Discipline Referral Risk by FRPL Eligibility: 2021-22

**Discipline Risk Ratio Analysis:**

- African American or Black students have **2.52 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Hispanic or Latinx students have **1.92 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Multiracial students (two or more races) have **1.61 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Male students have **2.66 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Differently abled students have **1.56 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.
- Free and reduced-price lunch eligible students have **3.25 times** the risk of receiving at least one disciplinary referral as all other students in the district.

Suspension at the Middle and High School Level

The following data was provided by the North Kingstown School Department for school year 2021-22 and encompasses North Kingstown High School, Davisville Middle School, and Wickford Middle School. This analysis specifically examines students who received an in-school or out-of-school suspension, regardless of the infraction.

Figure 17. Number of Students with Suspension Referrals by Race: 2021-22, Middle and High School

Race	All Students	Students with Suspension Referrals
African American or Black	39	10
Hispanic or Latinx	160	10
Two or more races	105	26
White	1,925	44
Total	2,284	90

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 18. Suspension Referral Risk by Race: 2021-22, Middle and High School

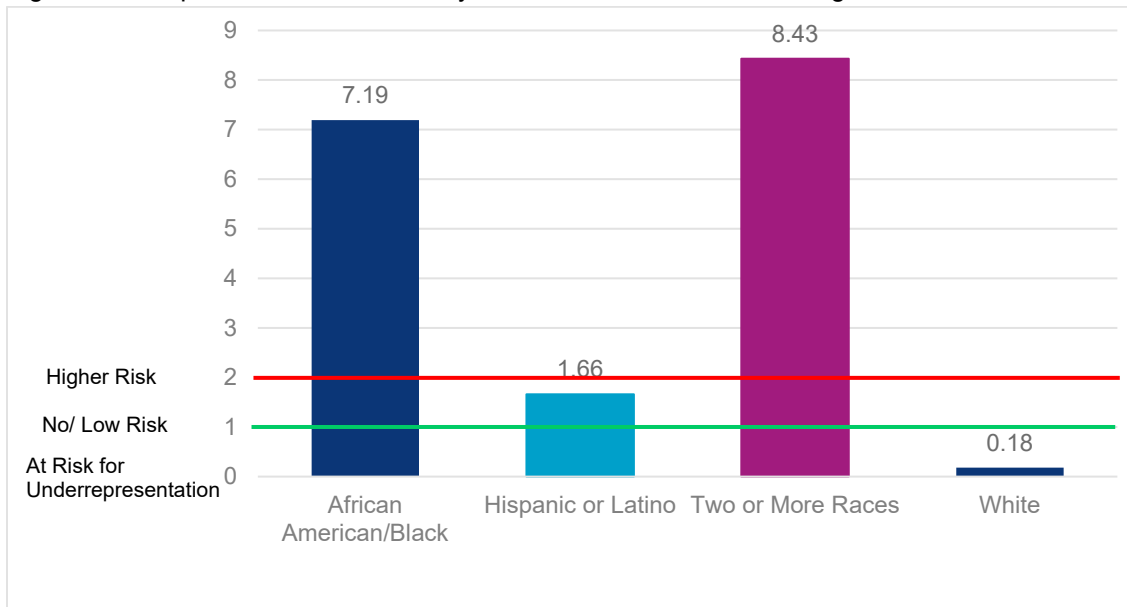


Figure 19. Number of Students with Suspension Referrals by Gender: 2021-22, Middle and High School

Gender	All Students	Students with Suspension Referrals
Female	1,117	24
Male	1,167	66
Total	2,284	90

Figure 20. Suspension Referral Risk by Gender: 2021-22, Middle and High School



Figure 21. Number of Students with Suspension Referrals by Learning Status: 2021-22, Middle and High School

Learning Status	All Students	Students with Suspension Referrals
Differently Abled Students	243	27
General Education Students	2,041	63
Total	2,284	90

Figure 22. Suspension Referral Risk by Learning Status: 2021-22, Middle and High School

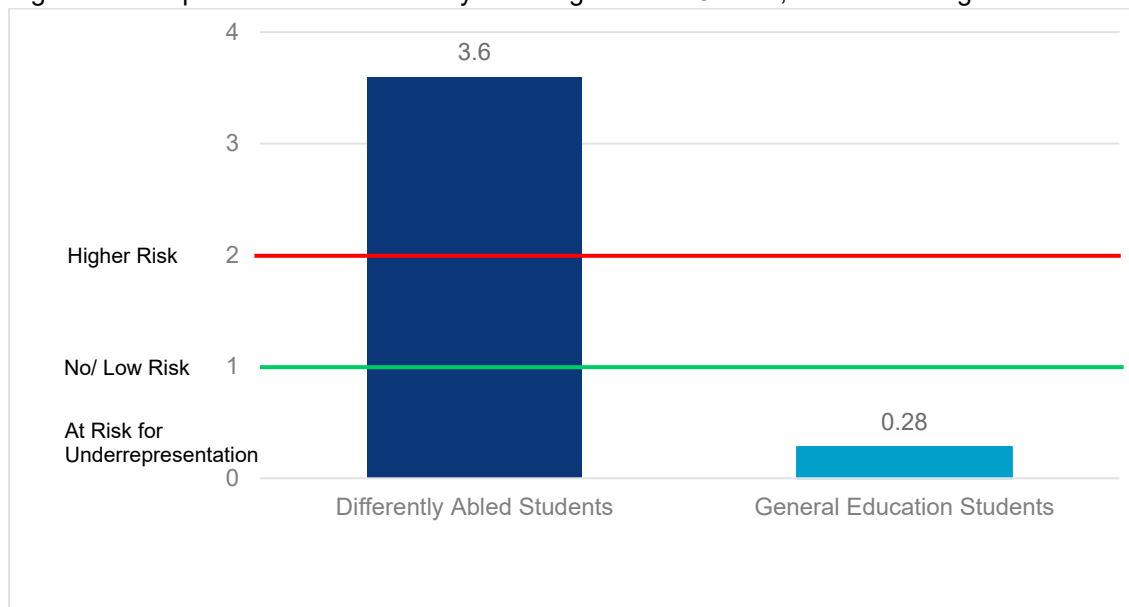
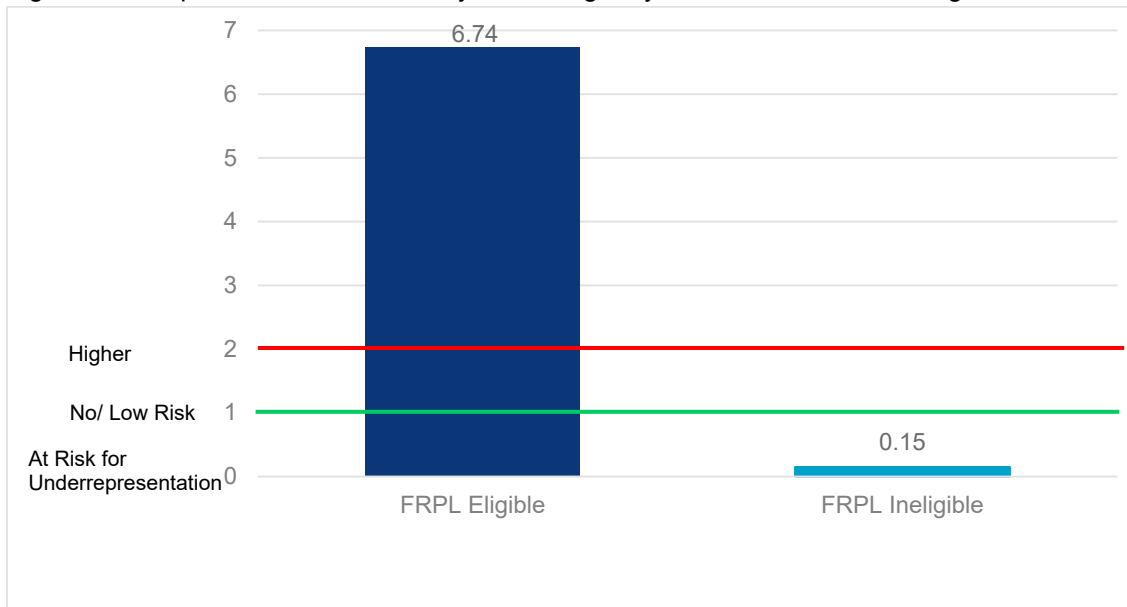


Figure 23. Number of Students with Suspension Referrals by FRPL Eligibility: 2021-22, Middle and High School

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with Suspension Referrals
FRPL Eligible	273	43
Not FRPL Eligible	2,011	47
Total	2,284	90

Figure 24. Suspension Referral Risk by FRPL Eligibility: 2021-22, Middle and High School



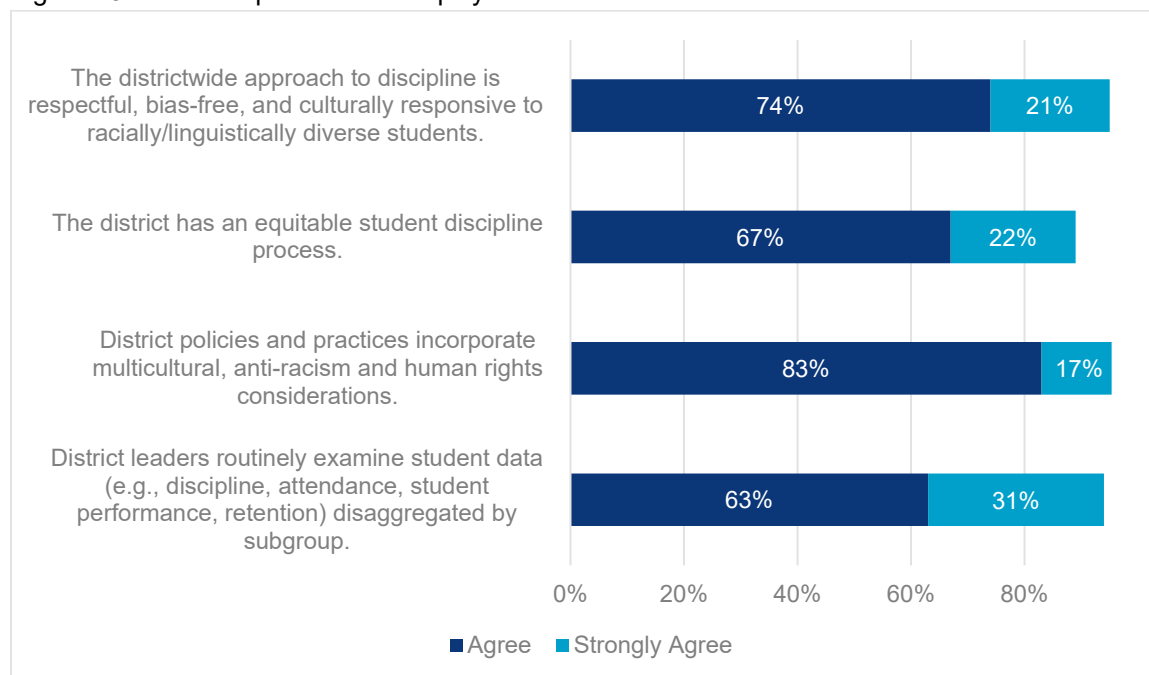
Suspension Risk Ratio Analysis:

- African American or Black students have **7.19 times** the risk of being suspended as all other middle and high school students.
- Hispanic or Latinx students have **1.66 times** the risk of being suspended as all other middle and high school students.
- Multiracial students (two or more races) have **8.43 times** the risk of being suspended as all other middle and high school students.
- Male students have **2.63 times** the risk of being suspended as all other middle and high school students.
- Differently abled students have **3.60 times** the risk of being suspended as all other middle and high school students.
- Free and reduced-price lunch eligible students have **6.74 times** the risk of being suspended as all other middle and high school students.

The results of the Leadership Equity Readiness Assessment shown in Figure 25 illustrate discrepancies in district leaders' perception of NKSD policies and how they impact students in practice.

- All district leaders (**100%**) agree or strongly agree that district policies and practices incorporate multi-cultural and anti-racism practices;
- **95%** agree or strongly agree that the district-wide approach to discipline is respectful, bias-free, and culturally responsive to racially/linguistically diverse students;
- **94%** agree or strongly agree that district leaders routinely examine district data by subgroup;
- **89%** agree or strongly agree that the district has an equitable student discipline process.

Figure 25. Leadership Readiness Equity Assessment



DISPROPORTIONALITY IN DISCIPLINE REFERRAL COUNTS

The above risk ratios look at the demographics of the individual students who received a discipline referral during SY21-22, regardless of how many referrals each student received over the course of the year. This risk ratio looks to answer the question: “what is the risk of a student of a certain demographic group to receive at least one disciplinary referral over the course of the year as compared to his or her peers?” Another way to look at this disproportionality is to look at the total *number* of discipline referrals given across student demographic groups.

The below table contains the percentage of discipline referrals given by subgroup compared to that subgroup’s population in the district. Student demographic groups with fewer than 10 students are not included in the data below. We show that students of color, male students, differently abled students and FRPL eligible students are overrepresented amongst students who were disciplined in SY2021-22.

Figure 26. Disciplinary Referrals by Student Demographics: District-wide 2021-22

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent of Student Body	Percent of All Disciplinary Referrals
Hispanic or Latinx	7%	13%
African American or Black	2%	5%
Two or More Races	5%	8%
White	83%	70%
Female	49%	26%
Male	51%	74%
Differently Abled Students	14%	21%
FRPL Eligible Students	15%	36%

STUDENT DISCIPLINE QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Student discipline practices emerged as a significant theme across focus groups, interviews, and open survey responses.

- **Bias-based bullying is unaddressed.** Student and family focus group participants and survey respondents reported that bias-driven bullying and other incidents are not taken seriously or addressed appropriately by school staff.
- **Many students and families perceive inconsistent, biased implementation of student discipline.** Student focus group participants and survey respondents perceive that school leaders and staff demonstrate identity-bias in how they choose to discipline students. For example, students shared stories about differences in which students are asked to show their passes when walking through the hallways during class time. Specifically, administrators demanding that students of color show hall passes while paradoxically assuming that White students are not causing any trouble. Student focus group participants reported instances where school administrators act “buddy buddy” with certain students and let their disruptive behavior go unaddressed. **45%** of student survey respondents indicated they disagree or strongly disagree with the statement “my administrators apply school rules fairly to all students.”

Family survey respondents submitted over 50 comments via open response questions related to inconsistent or harsh discipline practices. This equated to approximately 11% of all open response submissions from families. That said, a higher percentage of family survey respondents, compared to students, indicated agreement with statements in support of district discipline policies. **75%** of all family survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree that “teachers apply school rules fairly to all students” and **77%** of a family survey respondents indicated agreement that “administrators apply school rules fairly to all students.” Lastly, **73%** of family respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree that “the punishment for breaking school rules is applied fairly to all students.”

- **Students expressed hesitation to reporting incidents due to concerns of embarrassment or inaction.** Student focus group participants and survey respondents noted that they might not report an incident to an adult out of fear or embarrassment, as well as the feeling that if they did say something, no action would be taken to remedy the issue. **68%** of all student survey respondents strongly agree or agree that “students know how to report issues going on at school and where to

go to ask for help when needed.” Students also perceived that in some discipline cases, staff fear pushback for disciplining students, and therefore just avoid addressing issues. One student commented, “if teachers noticed what was happening, and said more, then maybe students would follow their example. Students would feel more comfortable to step in.”

- **Staff have not received comprehensive anti-bias discipline training.** Teachers reported needing more professional learning in recognizing and addressing bias-based bullying, racial incidents, and marginalization of students, especially BIPOC students. **51%** of school-based staff survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree with the statement “staff in our school have been trained on how to equitably enforce the measures contained in the school-wide discipline plan for misbehavior.” **35%** of district leader survey respondents indicated they strongly agree or agree that “staff in NKSD have been trained on how to equitably enforce the measures contained in the discipline plan for misbehavior.”
- **There is openness to revise the district’s current discipline plans.** **39%** of district leaders strongly agree or agree with the survey statement “I support our district-wide approach to discipline.” With **54%** of district leaders responding that they strongly agree or agree with the survey statement, “our district’s discipline plans are restorative rather than punitive.” There is a significant opportunity to review current plans and policies to embrace more restorative practices and ensure there is adequate training for administrators and staff.
- **Disciplinary action warranted by violations of the bullying policy are not clear.** The bullying policy includes a list of a “range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against a perpetrator for bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation”, but is not explicit about how what actions should be taken in response to specific types of bullying incidents. The current bullying policy was most recently amended in August 2013.

STUDENT DISCIPLINE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Create and consistently implement a Discipline Matrix.** To help address disproportionality in the discipline of students and reduce the perception of unfair treatment of students, a discipline matrix should be created with clear consequences for all actions against the student code of conduct. A discipline team, representative of all stakeholder groups, should be convened to create an initial draft. Members should be representative of the diversity of the student population and include guidance counselors, MLL educators/support staff, Special Education representatives, and other relevant staff members. Larger stakeholder groups should then be involved with the final crafting and voting of a formal discipline matrix. Ensure the tool is implemented with fidelity. *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*
2. **Examine current disciplinary policies and practices from an equity lens** to detect biases and inconsistencies. Eliminate or revise such policies to promote a clear, fair, and appropriate approach to determining consequences for misbehavior. *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*
3. **Use restorative discipline practices.** Restorative discipline practices shift the focus away from the mainstream punitive discipline which functions to create feelings of shame and embarrassment and restrict learning opportunities from students who act out by removing them from the classroom environment. Punitive discipline can backfire on students who are acting out, often amplifying the problems that led to the original infraction. Successful restorative discipline gives students the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, reflect on where their behavior came from, and

learn from the experience. *(This recommendation is included in Chapter 4. Priority Recommendations.)*

4. **Regularly monitor discipline data.** Reviewing data is key to ensuring that no student group is receiving disciplinary referrals at disproportionately high rates. As such, data findings will also inform the district about any need to revisit and revise policies and practices. As a first step, the district needs to ensure all reported discipline data is accurate, up to date and consistently tracked across the district.
5. **Solicit student input about the current disciplinary system.** Convene students to hear their perspectives about and experiences with the current disciplinary system. They are directly impacted by the policies and how they are enforced. Their voices will provide valuable insight into which policies are viewed as unfair or biased, if they feel students of different backgrounds are disciplined more than others, and if there is interest in a shift to a more restorative justice approach.
6. **Provide equity-focused professional discipline training for staff.** School and district staff expressed a need for more training to ensure appropriate and consistent enforcement of disciplinary actions that do not disproportionately impact students of color. This could involve discussions of personal implicit bias and how it impacts decision-making about disciplinary action. Reviewing the discipline matrix with staff would also help provide clarity about expectations for enforcing rules consistently and fairly.
7. **Offer an anonymous and accessible reporting system for students.** Provide an easy-to-use tool, like a mobile app with options to report incidents of bias, discrimination, and identity-based bullying, and access resources for help. This will empower students to speak up about issues in the community and strengthen school climate. NKSD should develop a plan for including anonymous reporting for race- and gender-based harassment and incidents of bias within district-wide reporting systems. This reporting system tool would be distinctly separate from the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System, which is mobile app that NKSD community members currently use for school violence prevention.

9. STUDENT OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO ADVANCED LEARNING

Guiding Question: *How are student outcomes and access to advanced learning linked to student characteristics and demographics? What tiered support strategies are offered for positive student outcomes?*

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

Dr. Wayne Hoy and his colleagues suggest that connecting three important characteristics of schools can produce a potent and positive influence on academic achievement, even in the face of low socioeconomic status, previous performance, and other demographic variables such as school size or minority enrollment.⁴² Hoy's definition of "academic optimism" is grounded in social cognitive theory and positive psychology. It embraces the following characteristics:

1. **Academic emphasis** – the extent to which a school is driven by a belief system that includes high expectations for students to achieve academically.
2. **Collective efficacy of the faculty** – the belief that the faculty can make a positive difference in student learning.
3. **Faculty's trust in parents and students** – faculty, administrators, parents, and students cooperate to improve student learning; trust and cooperation among parents, teachers and students influence student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices.

The shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty has the capacity to help students achieve, and that the students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them in the effort—in brief, a school-wide confidence that students will succeed academically. A school with high "academic optimism" believes that faculty can make a difference, students can learn, and achieve high levels of academic performance. Findings from research showed that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' academic optimism and students' academic achievement.

⁴² Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). ["Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement."](#) *Working Paper*. The Ohio State University.

Student Outcomes and Access At-a-Glance

Desired Outcomes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district is driven by a shared belief system that emphasizes high expectations for all students' academic achievement. All students are active participants in their learning experiences and receive the support they need to succeed. All students have access to enriching extracurricular opportunities. District decision-making is driven by ongoing analysis of student level data. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
The district offers professional learning on implicit bias for school staff and administrators to combat potential bias that affects students.	School staff and administrators are proficient in recognizing and countering their own implicit biases			X
	School staff and administrators are proficient in recognizing and countering their colleagues' implicit biases			X
There is clear communication from the district that there are high expectations for academic achievement from all students	District has explicit language in their strategic plan and other relevant materials affirming that all students in the district are capable of high academic achievement		X	
The district has strategies to prioritize closing the achievement gaps and opportunity gaps between student subgroups, ensuring that every student has access to supports and services they need to be successful in school and beyond	There are no significant gaps between student demographic groups when analyzing performance on the state standardized test			X
	There are no significant differences in graduation rates across student demographic groups			X
The district has strategies to ensure equitable enrollment of students in advanced coursework	Enrollment in advanced classes is representative of the student body			X
District policies for IEP assignments follow consistent evaluation rubrics developed from an equity lens	No student demographic group is disproportionately represented amongst students with IEPs			X
The district has systems in place for students to share input to inform school and	There are clear, accessible, well-known channels and opportunities for students to give feedback to		X	

Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district is driven by a shared belief system that emphasizes high expectations for all students' academic achievement. All students are active participants in their learning experiences and receive the support they need to succeed. All students have access to enriching extracurricular opportunities. District decision-making is driven by ongoing analysis of student level data. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
district decision-making/be actively engaged in their education experiences	inform classroom-, school-, and district-level decisions			
	School staff routinely engage in PD on effective practices to incorporate student voice into daily classroom instruction			X
	Students are aware of and utilize opportunities to connect with teachers and seek additional support, whether academic or non-academic	X		
The district has a strategy to promote equitable access to extracurricular activities	Students from low-income families can participate in extracurricular activities at reduced or no cost		X	
	After-school transportation is provided to all students participating in an after-school enrichment activity (sports, music, theater, academic support)			X
	Information regarding extracurricular activities is shared widely in an easily accessible location to all stakeholders, including non-English speaking families		X	
The district has processes in place and a designated data team responsible for analyzing student-level data related to access to advanced coursework, achievement outcomes, and access to extracurricular opportunities	Data team routinely examines data from advanced course enrollment, AP performance, SAT participation, SAT performance and state assessment scores to understand which students are being underserved	X		
	Data team routinely examines data from IEP and 504 assignments to identify disproportionality amongst student subgroups			X
	Data team routinely examines discipline data to identify disproportionality amongst student subgroups			X
	Findings from data team are routinely summarized and presented to school and district leadership	X		

KEY FINDINGS

Student Assessment Outcomes District-wide Trends 2018 – 2021

In 2018, the Rhode Island Department of Education introduced the new Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) in English Language Arts and mathematics for grades 3-8. PCG examined gaps in outcomes between all students and identified subgroups on RICAS tests from 2018 to 2021.⁴³ Due to the RICAS being administered in the spring, we exclude data from 2020. The years analyzed were 2018, 2019 and 2021. In the following section, we employ terminology for identified subgroups that were used for statewide reporting.⁴⁴ The terminology used by the Rhode Island Department of Education includes “students with disabilities”, “economically disadvantaged students” and “English Learners” to refer to differently abled students, FRPL eligible students and multilingual learners, respectively.

On both assessments in 2021, NKSD students demonstrated a drop in proficiency rates. From 2019 to 2021, proficiency for all students in NKSD dropped by 2-percentage points on ELA and by 6-percentage points on mathematics. The following longitudinal analysis shows that students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic students, Multiracial students and Black students have been consistently underperforming on standardized assessment when compared with their peers.

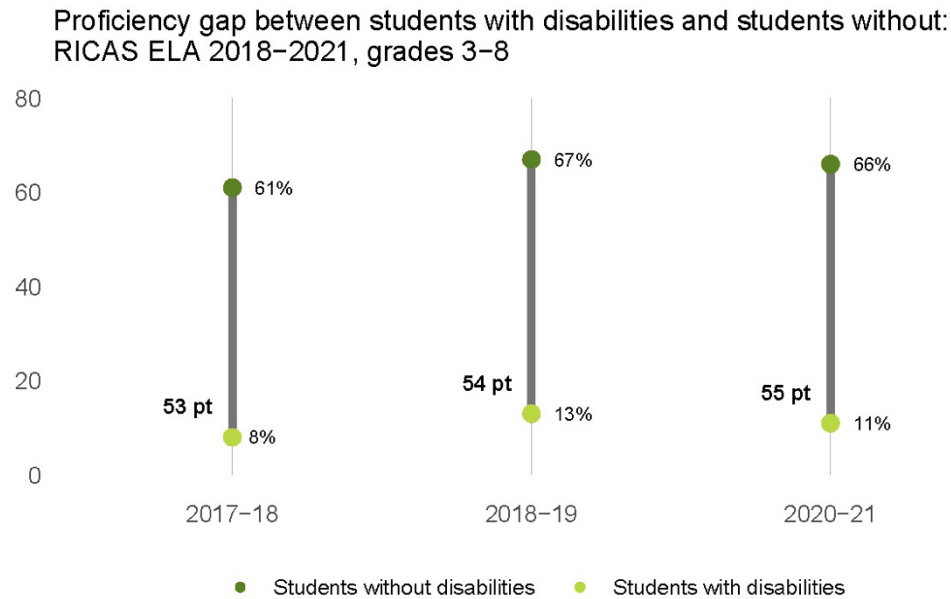
Students with Disabilities

In the years ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proficiency gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities was significant, hitting a 54-percentage point gap in 2019 on the ELA assessment. Following the COVID-19 pandemic only **11%** of students with disabilities were proficient on the ELA assessment, compared to **66%** of students without disabilities. On the mathematics assessment in 2021, only **8%** of students with disabilities demonstrate proficiency. This is 43-percentage points lower than students without disabilities (**51%** proficient).

⁴³ Rhode Island Department of Education. “[ADP](#).”

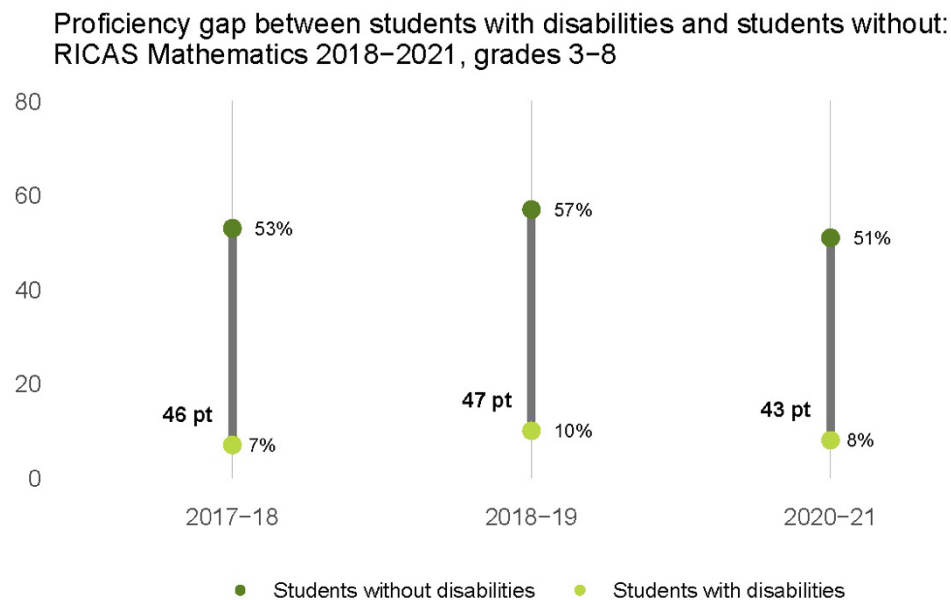
⁴⁴ Rhode Island Department of Education (June 2, 2022). “[Data Collection Specifications – Enrollment](#).”

Figure 27. Gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 28. Gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8



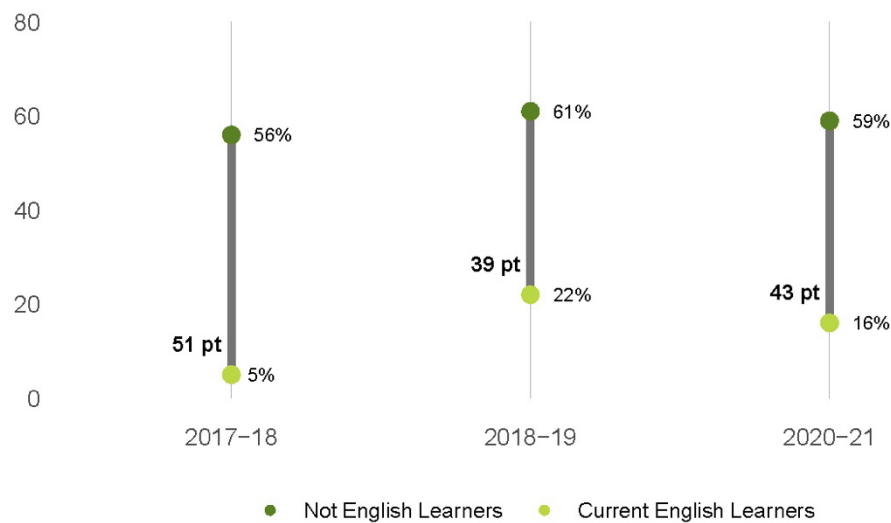
Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

English Learners

In the first two years of the RICAS, the proficiency rate for current English learners on the ELA and mathematics assessments was improving, jumping 17-percentage points on the ELA assessment from 2018 to 2019, and 10-percentage points on mathematics. From 2019 to 2021, the proficiency rate for English learners fell on both assessments, from **20%** to **17%** on mathematics and from **22%** to **16%** on ELA. In 2021, the gap between current English learners and not English learners (students not receiving ESL services) remains large: 43 percentage points on the ELA assessment and 28 percentage points on the mathematics assessment.

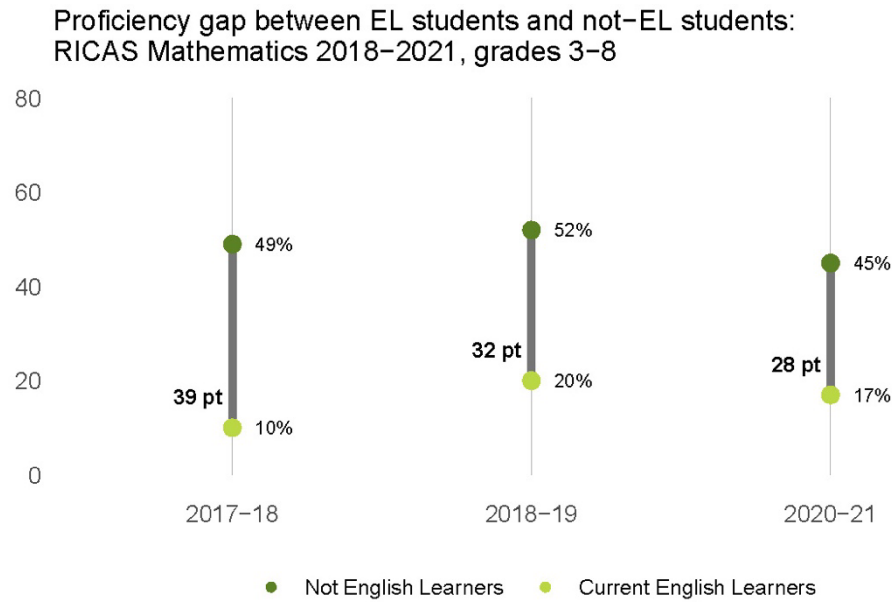
Figure 29. Gap between current EL students and not-EL students: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between EL students and not-EL students:
RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 30. Gap between current EL students and not-EL students: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8



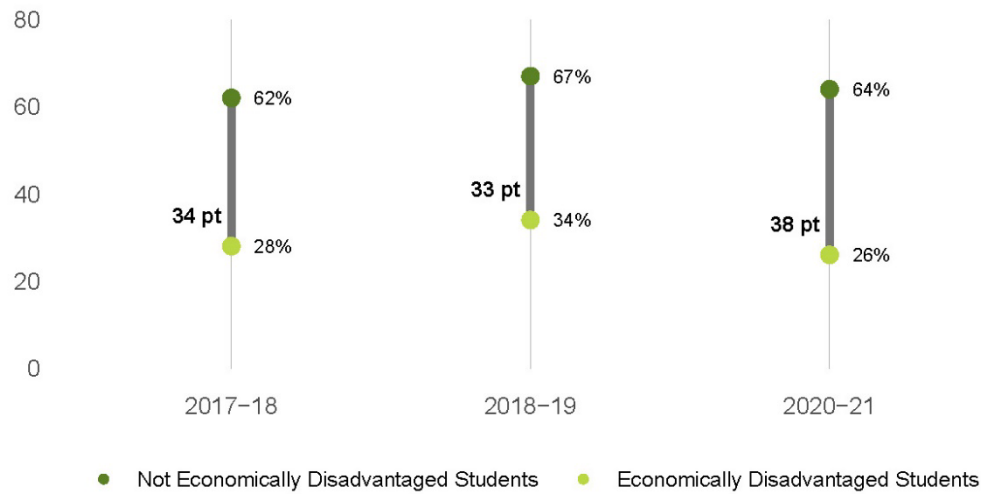
Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Economically Disadvantaged Students

There is a significant proficiency gap between economically disadvantaged students and not-economically disadvantaged students on both mathematics and ELA assessments. Notably, economically disadvantaged students suffered losses over the COVID-19 pandemic: the ELA and mathematics proficiency rates both dropped by 8-percentage points from 2019 to 2021. The comparison group demonstrated a similar decline on the mathematics proficiency rate (falling 9-percentage points) but only fell 3-percentage points on the ELA assessment. In 2021, **26%** of economically disadvantaged students are proficient on the RICAS ELA, and only **12%** are proficient on the RICAS mathematics.

Figure 31. Gap between economically disadvantaged students and not-economically disadvantaged students: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8

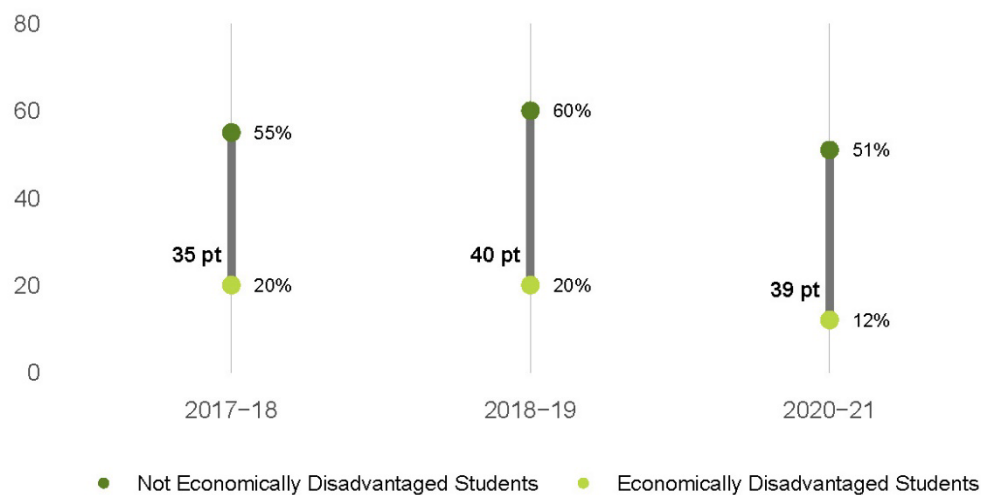
Proficiency gap between economically disadvantaged students and not economically disadvantaged students:
RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 32. Gap between economically disadvantaged students and not-economically disadvantaged students: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between economically disadvantaged students and not economically disadvantaged students:
RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8



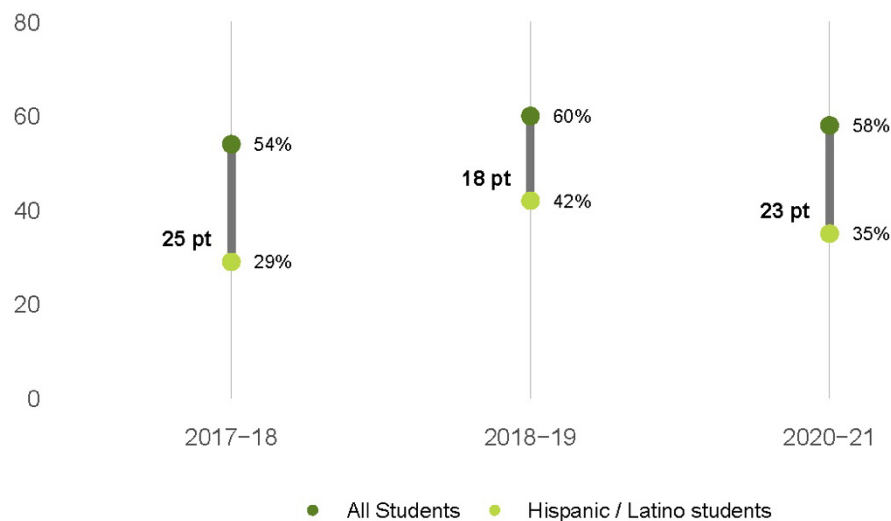
Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Hispanic or Latinx Students

The proficiency gap between Hispanic students and all students on the ELA assessment had a 3-year low of 18-percentage points in 2019. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Hispanic students' proficiency fell by 7-percentage points, from **42%** to **35%**, leaving a 23-percentage point difference in 2021. The proficiency gap between all students and Hispanic students on the mathematics assessment has remained relatively stable in the previous 3 years, ranging from 23 percentage points to 24 percentage points. In this time, the Hispanic student's proficiency rate has ranged from a high of **27%** to a low of **21%** in 2021. The 6-percentage point fall from 2019 to 2021 is also seen in the comparison group (all-students) which fell from **51%** to **45%**.

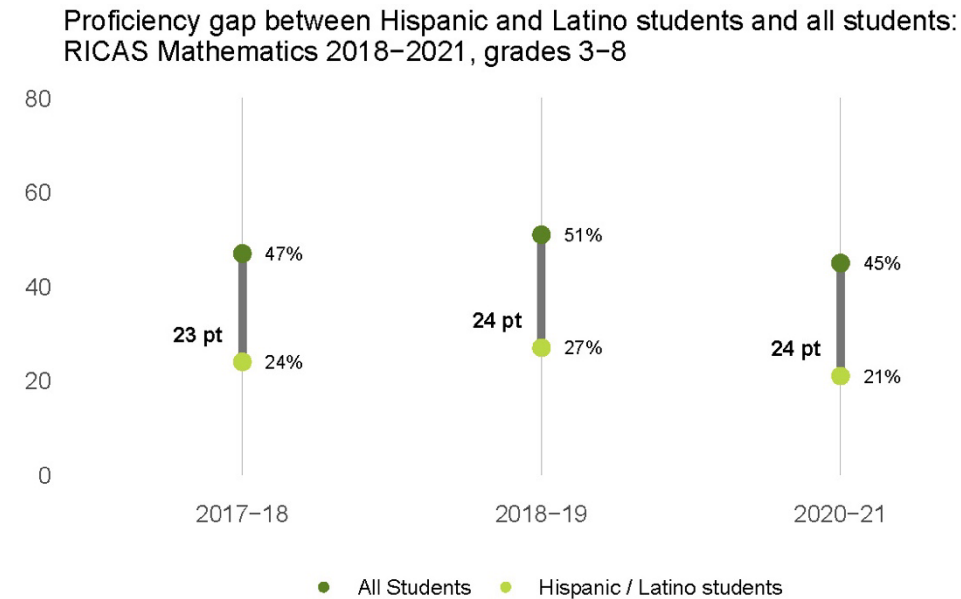
Figure 33. Gap between Hispanic or Latinx students and all students: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Hispanic and Latino students and all students:
RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 34. Gap between Hispanic or Latinx students and all students: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8

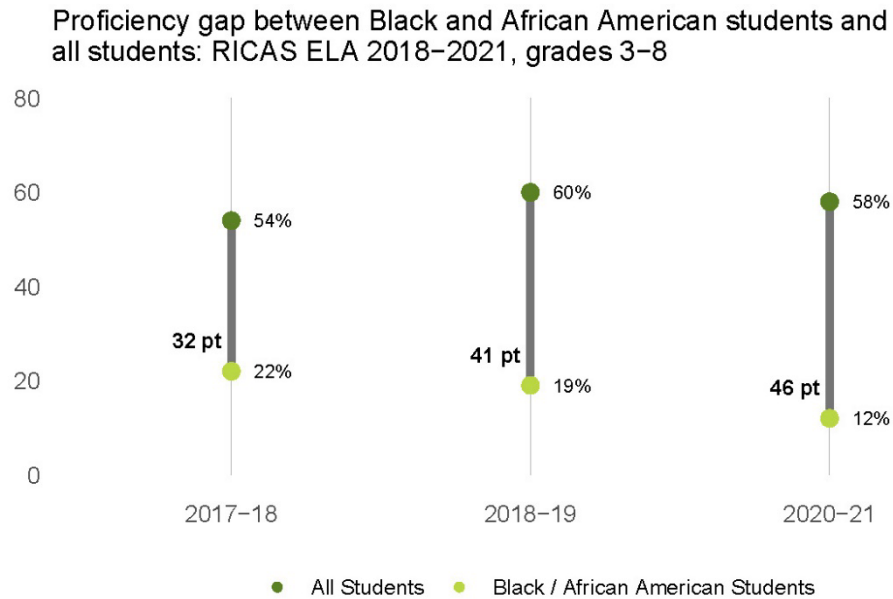


Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

African American or Black Students

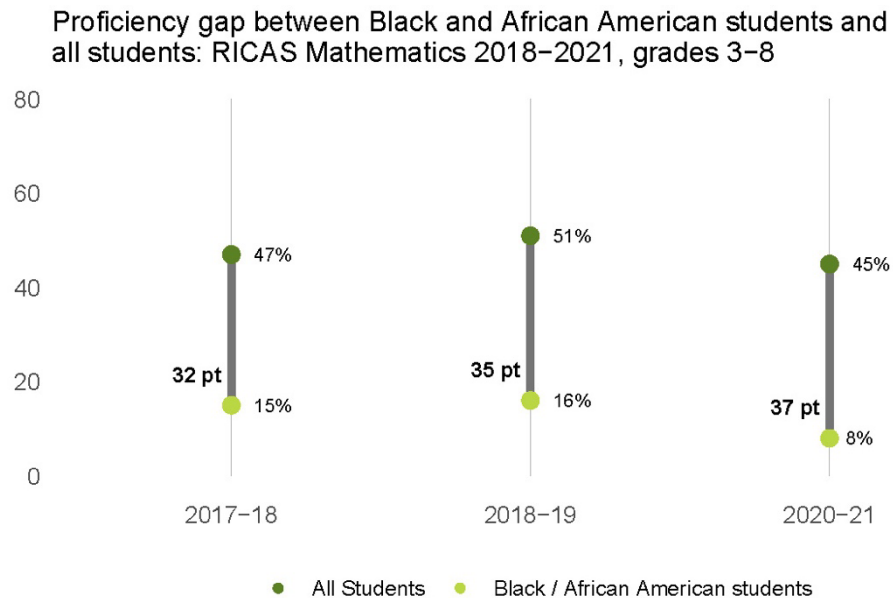
The gap between Black students and all student's proficiency rate on the ELA assessment has been steadily growing. From a low of 32-percentage point difference in 2018, to a 46-percentage point difference in 2021. Only **12%** of Black students were proficient on the 2021 ELA assessment. Similarly in mathematics, the gap has been growing steadily, from 32 percentage points in 2018 to 37 percentage points in 2021. In 2021, only **8%** of Black students were proficient on the mathematics assessment.

Figure 35. Gap between Black or African American students and all students: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 36. Gap between Black or African American students and all students: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8



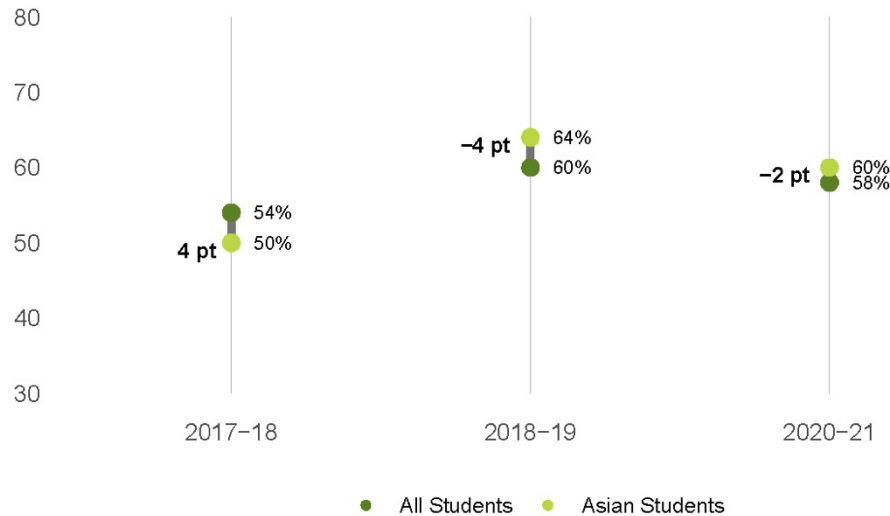
Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Asian Students

Asian students have consistently achieved a higher proficiency rate on the ELA and mathematics RICAS tests when compared to the all-student rate. However, from 2019 to 2021, the proficiency rate for Asian students dropped by 4 percentage points on both the mathematics and ELA assessments. In 2021, Asian students have a higher proficiency rate than the comparison group by 2-percentage points on ELA (**60%** demonstrating proficiency), and by 15-percentage points on mathematics (**60%** demonstrating proficiency).

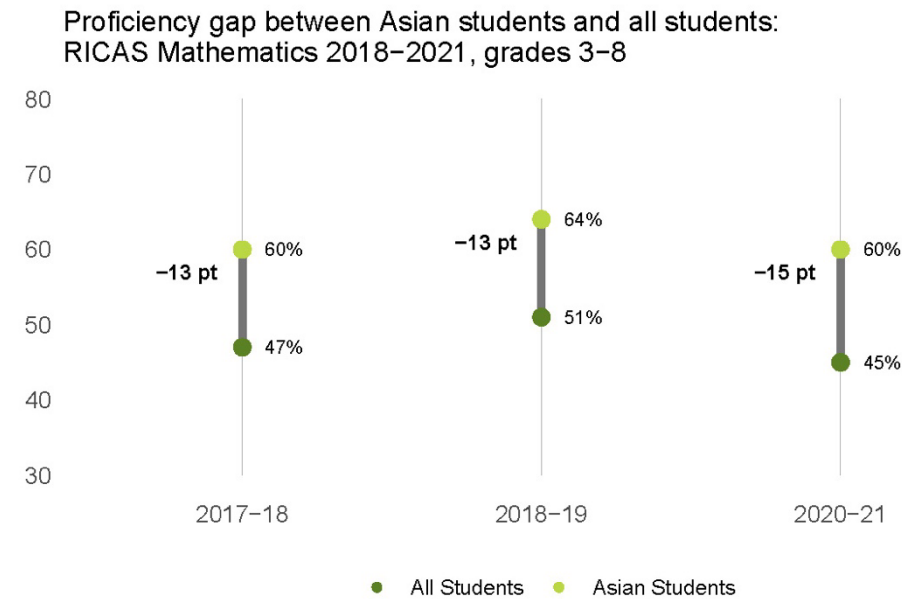
Figure 37. Gap between Asian students and all students: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Asian students and all students:
RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 38. Gap between Asian students and all students: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8

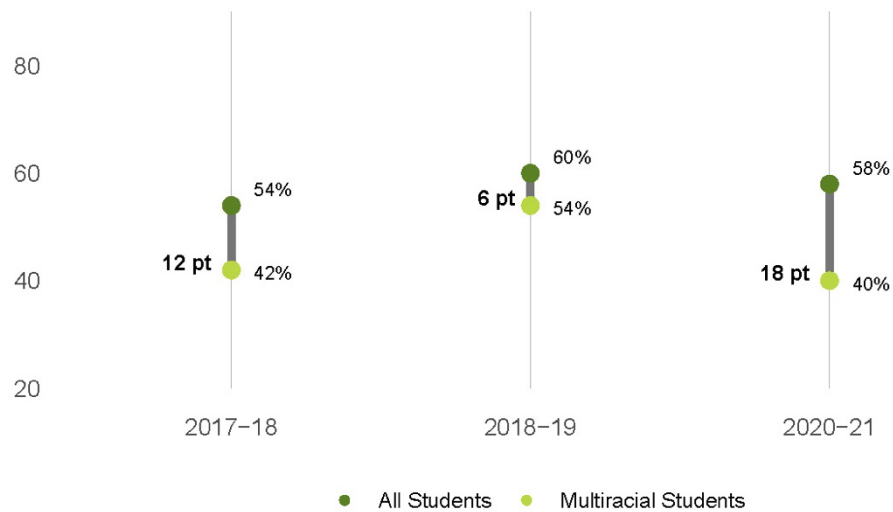
Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Multiracial Students (Two or more races)

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the proficiency gap between multiracial students and all students had shrunk from 12-percentage points in 2018 to 6 percentage points in 2019, on the ELA assessment. However, from 2019 to 2021, the proficiency rate for multiracial students fell from **54%** to **40%**, giving way to an 18-percentage point difference with the all-student rate in 2021. On the mathematics assessment, the proficiency rate for multiracial students has dropped from **38%** in 2018 to **30%** in 2021, giving rise to a 15-percentage point difference with the all-student rate in 2021. Multiracial students and the comparison group of all students experienced similar drops over the COVID-19 pandemic, 7 percentage points for multiracial students and 6 percentage points for all students.

Figure 39. Gap between Multiracial students and all students: RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8.

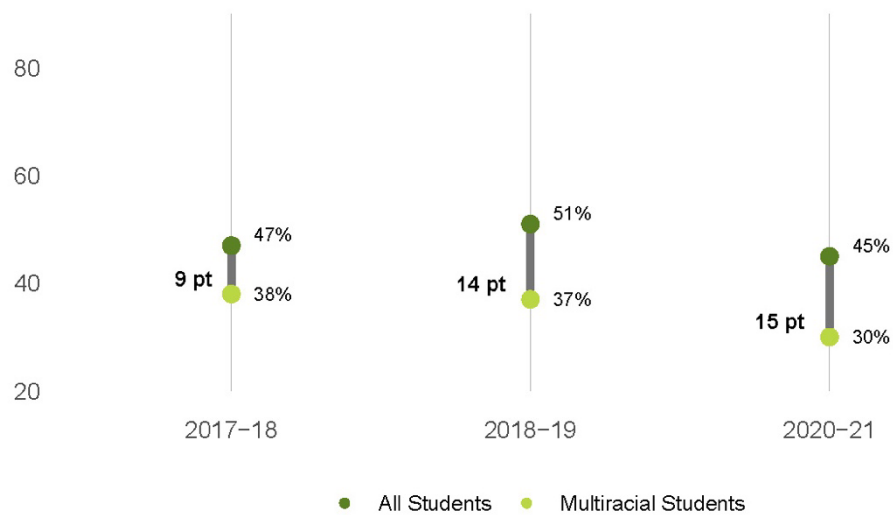
Proficiency gap between multiracial students and all students:
RICAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

Figure 40. Gap between Multiracial students and all students: RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between multiracial students and all students:
RICAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8



Source: ride.ri.gov/ADP

There are large gaps in proficiency between several demographic groups in comparison to all students. An overview of side-by-side proficiency gaps for the 2020-21 assessment is presented below for grades 3-8.

Figure 41. Proficiency gap between select student groups in grades 3-8 in comparison to all Students for the 2020-2021 School Year.

Student Groups	In Comparison to...	
	All Students, grades 3-8 2020-2021 ELA	All Students, grades 3-8 2020-2021 Math
White Students	+1	-3
Students with IEPs	-47	-37
EL Students	-42	-28
Economically Disadvantaged	-32	-33
Hispanic or Latinx	-23	-24
African American or Black	-46	-37
Asian	+2	+15
Multiracial	-18	-15

Please note: **Positive numbers** indicate the number of percentage points this demographic is scoring **higher than all students**. **Negative numbers** indicate the number of percentage points this demographic is scoring **lower than all students**.

Targeted Supports

MTSS. In accordance with Rhode Island Department of Education guidelines, NKSD uses a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) “to organize and use resources to improve academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for all students.”⁴⁵ The framework utilizes student performance data and other screeners⁴⁶ to determine if students are eligible to receive additional targeted academic and/or social-emotional supports for students in grades K-12. These interventions are offered to meet a student’s individual needs to be successful in a classroom environment. There are regular Administrative Council meetings held every other week, which includes the Director of Curriculum, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, COO, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and building principals meet to review student level performance data to inform provision of additional supports and other service offerings. Data analysis is reported out three times a year and a data-based decision-making protocol is used to determine action steps to address gaps. A goal for the Administrative Council during the 2022-23 school year is to look at behavior/discipline data as the new SEL/Behavioral MTSS framework is rolled out.

It is worth noting that although MTSS is being implemented in NKSD, several stakeholders identified differentiated instruction as an area of opportunity. Family and student survey respondents commented about the need for more individualized supports in the classroom to better meet students’ individual needs. Specific comments noted accommodations for 504 plans and ADHD needs as particular areas for improvement.

Access to support services across schools and grade levels. Focus group participants and survey respondents noted the need for a review of interventions and supports offered across school of the same grade level (i.e., elementary and middle) to ensure equity in access to these services. Additionally, stakeholders commented on the importance of alignment of services offered across grade levels (elementary to middle school, middle to high school) to ensure a smoother transition for students.

⁴⁵ [BRIDGE-RI](#)

⁴⁶ Clark, J, Monaco, S, & Robey, A (Presented August 25, 2022). “North Kingstown School Department MTSS- SEL Framework.” Presentation. *Administrative Council Meeting*.

Special Education Services

Access to Special Education services. Stakeholder focus group participants and survey respondents noted challenges to access special education services. Family members expressed frustration about having to tirelessly advocate for their children to get IEPs and the services they need. They noted the perceived burden placed on families in this process was inequitable, as not every parent/guardian has the resources to pursue the district in this way to get the supports their student needs. Other stakeholders noted different services provided across schools, and a detrimental lack of supports available to students in the middle schools.

STUDENT OUTCOMES RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop Equity Student Data Reports.** Use data to prioritize closing the achievement gaps and opportunity gaps between student subgroups, ensuring that each student has access to the supports and services they need. Leverage scheduled Administrative Council Meetings to further dig into student performance data, summer school program enrollment data, advanced course enrollment and achievement, CTE enrollment and performance (by pathway/cluster), all disaggregated by student subgroup.
2. **Review academic support offerings outside of classroom instruction time.** Ensure that all students have equitable access to academic supports, such as homework club and after-school support from teachers. Ensure transportation is available for all students participating in after-school activities. Survey the demand for additional support offerings and identify additional personnel needed to meet the demand. Communicate academic support offerings widely to counselors, parents, students, and teachers via messaging platforms and the school websites, translating materials in multiple languages.
3. **Require differentiation of instruction among instructional staff.** Provide instructional staff with required training on differentiated instruction with accountability measures. Then, launch student surveys in which learning profiles of students are captured including learning styles, multiple intelligences, and other affective characteristics for instructional staff use.
4. **Conduct a special education review** to understand any gaps in services between schools and supports received by families. Ensure all staff members follow federal, state and district-produced policies and practices regarding all aspects of special education services, including students who may need services but are not yet officially identified as special education students.

ACCESS TO ADVANCED LEARNING

Research-Based Best Practices

The US Department of Education's Elementary and Secondary Act defines gifted and talented students as those who "give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities."⁴⁷ However, research consistently shows that children of color and children in poverty participate in gifted programs at lower rates than White and Asian and wealthy students.⁴⁸ A recent study from Vanderbilt University and the University of Florida found

⁴⁷ Title IX, Part A, Definition 22 (2002). "Elementary and Secondary Education Act."

⁴⁸ Siegle, D (2019). "[Inequity Persists in Gifted Programs. National Institute of Gifted Education.](#)" *Institute of Education Sciences*.

that students from high-income families are seven times more likely to land in gifted programs than their other classmates with similar reading and math scores.⁴⁹ There has long been concern that high-ability students from underserved populations, those who are limited English proficient, disabled, or from minority or low-income backgrounds, are consistently underrepresented in advanced classes and in programs for students identified as gifted. While many districts have made improvements in identifying and serving a broader range of advanced students, there is still a lot of room for improvement to ensure that all high-ability students receive appropriate gifted or advanced education services to meet their needs.⁵⁰

Students have different needs and abilities that must be addressed in every classroom. However, the practice of tracking students may not be the answer to support stronger academic growth given the inequalities of opportunities resulting from that practice.⁵¹ Most times, tracking leads to an unequal educational experience. Students who experience advanced classes are often taught enriched, challenging content, focused on creativity and problem solving while students not receiving those opportunities are often given lessons which include a reliance on low level worksheets and memorization.

On the Leadership Equity Readiness Assessment, **100%** of district leaders agreed or strongly agreed that “the district sets high expectations for every student regardless of their race, ethnicity, language, disability, or LGBTQIA+ preference” and **76%** agree or strongly agree that “instructional staff employ a variety of strategies to accommodate the needs of racially and linguistically diverse learners (ex: hands-on activities, visuals, oral language development, reading/writing workshops).”

Advanced Placement Test Taking

The table below shows that Hispanic or Latinx students, male students, differently abled students and students eligible for FRPL are significantly underrepresented in Advanced Placement enrollment at North Kingstown High School.⁵²

White students, Asian students, African American or Black students, multiracial students, and female students are enrolling in advanced coursework at proportionate rates to the entire student body (within 5% of the “All Students” rate).

Figure 42. Advanced Placement Course Participation by Student Demographics: North Kingstown High School (2021-22)

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent of Students Enrolled in Advanced Coursework (2021-22)
All Students	38%
White	39%
Hispanic or Latinx	14%
African American or Black	33%
Two or more races	33%
Asian	38%
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible	23%

⁴⁹ Grissom, J & Redding, C (2016). “[Discretion and Disproportionality: Explaining the Underrepresentation of High-Achieving Students of Color in Gifted Programs](#).” *AERA Open*.

⁵⁰ National Association for Gifted Children. “[Identifying Gifted Children from Diverse Populations](#).”

⁵¹ Wells, C. L (2018). “Understanding issues associated with tracking students in mathematics education.” *Journal of Mathematics Education*, 11(2), 68–84.

⁵² Rhode Island Department of Education (2021-22 school year).

Students with disabilities	2%
Male	30%
Female	45%

Please note: Percentages were calculated using only data for students in 11th and 12th grade at North Kingstown High School. Interpretation: Of all male students in grades 11 and 12, 30% of them completed advanced coursework in the 2021-22 school year, compared to 38% of all 11th and 12th grade students who completed advanced coursework.

High School Graduation Rates

The following table shows that Hispanic or Latinx students, multiracial students, FRPL eligible students, differently abled students and multilingual learners graduate at significantly lower rates than the cohort average.⁵³

White students, Asian students, African American or Black students, female students and male students graduate at proportional rates to the entire student body (within 5% of the cohort graduation rate).⁵⁴

Figure 43. Graduation Rates by Student Demographics: North Kingstown High School (2021-22)

Student Demographic Subgroup	Graduation Rate
All Students	84%
White	88%
Hispanic or Latinx	77%
African American or Black	82%
Two or more races	76%
Asian	88%
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible	76%
Students with disabilities	65%
Multilingual Learners	69%
Male	80%
Female	87%

Special Education

When looking at the rates of students who are assigned IEPs as a measure of educational equity, disproportionality occurs when students from one racial, gender, or other demographic subgroup are assigned IEPs at markedly higher rates than their peers. Overrepresentation and misidentification of students for IEPs poses a threat to a students' educational opportunities. Students who are misidentified with learning disabilities are likely to be exposed to a less rigorous curriculum, lower expectations from teachers, and will have fewer opportunities to successfully transition to postsecondary education.⁵⁵ Misidentification can also have social consequences; students may suffer from lower self-esteem⁵⁶ and face racial separation in classrooms.⁵⁷ Additionally, once a student is misidentified for an IEP, they are

⁵³ Rhode Island Department of Education (2021-22 school year).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ National Education Association (2007). "Truth in labeling: Disproportionality in special education."

⁵⁶ Pavri, S. and Luftig, R (2001). "The social face of inclusive education: Are students with learning disabilities really included in the classroom?" *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 45(1), 8–14.

⁵⁷ National Education Association (2007).

unlikely to ever leave the special education program for the remainder of their academic career.⁵⁸ The following data comes from a risk ratio analysis on students with IEPs in North Kingstown School Department for the 2021-22 school year.

District-wide IEP Risk Ratios

Figure 44. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity

Race / Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
African American or Black	83	25
Hispanic or Latinx	287	57
Two or More Races	211	66
White	3,242	402
Total	3,914	562

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaska Native students.

Figure 45. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity

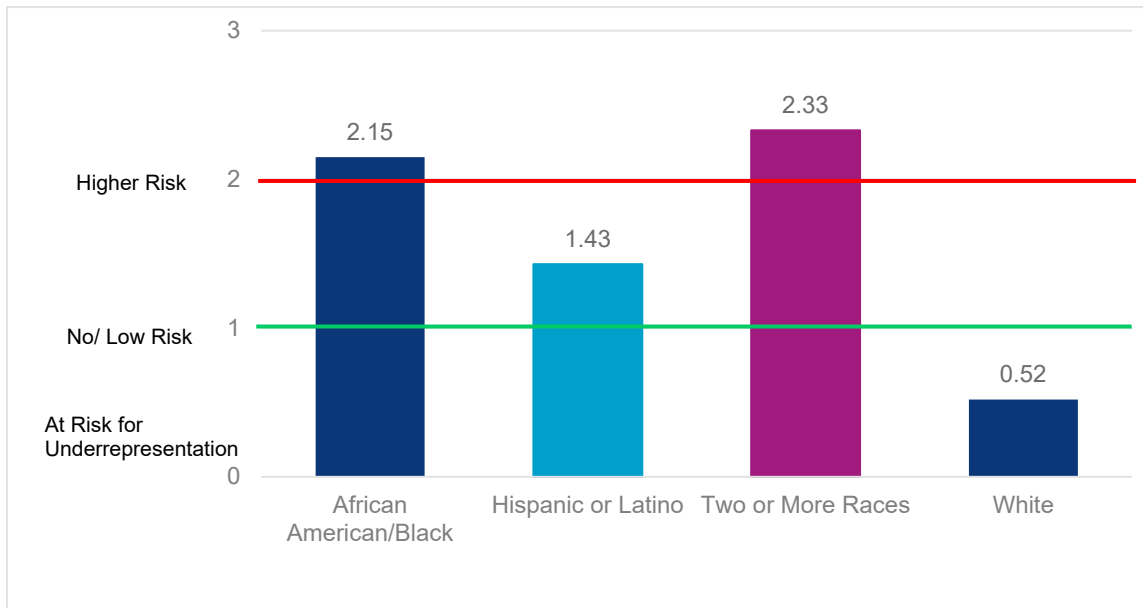


Figure 46. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	1,909	192
Male	2,005	370
Total	3,914	562

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Figure 47. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender

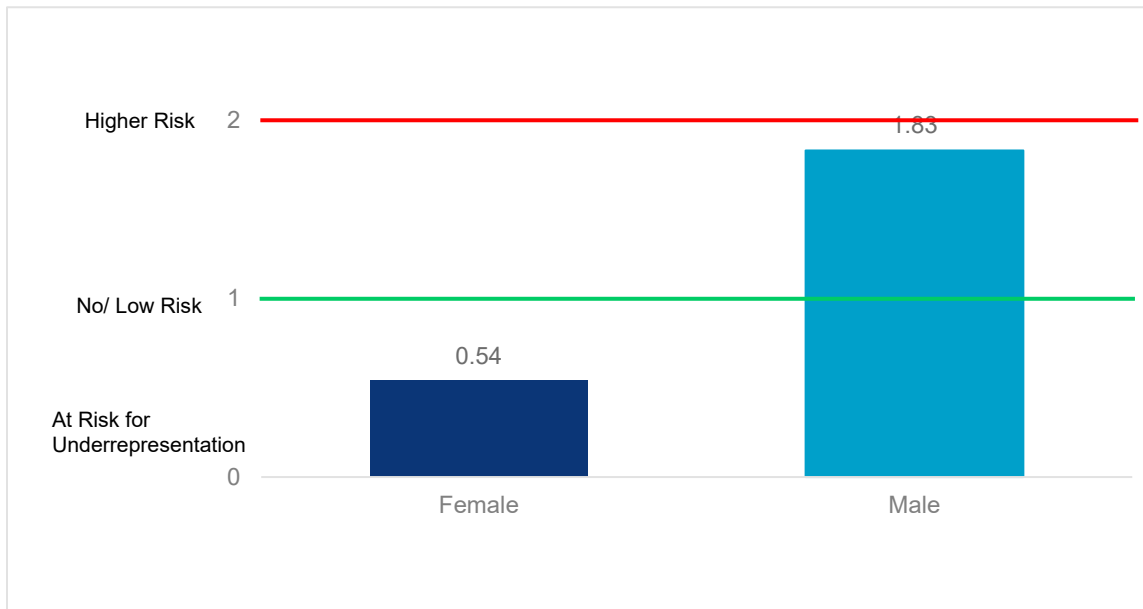


Figure 48. Number of Students with IEPs by FRPL Eligibility

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with IEPs
FRPL Eligible	569	223
Not FRPL Eligible	3,345	339
Total	3,914	562

Figure 49. IEP Assignment Risk by FRPL Eligibility

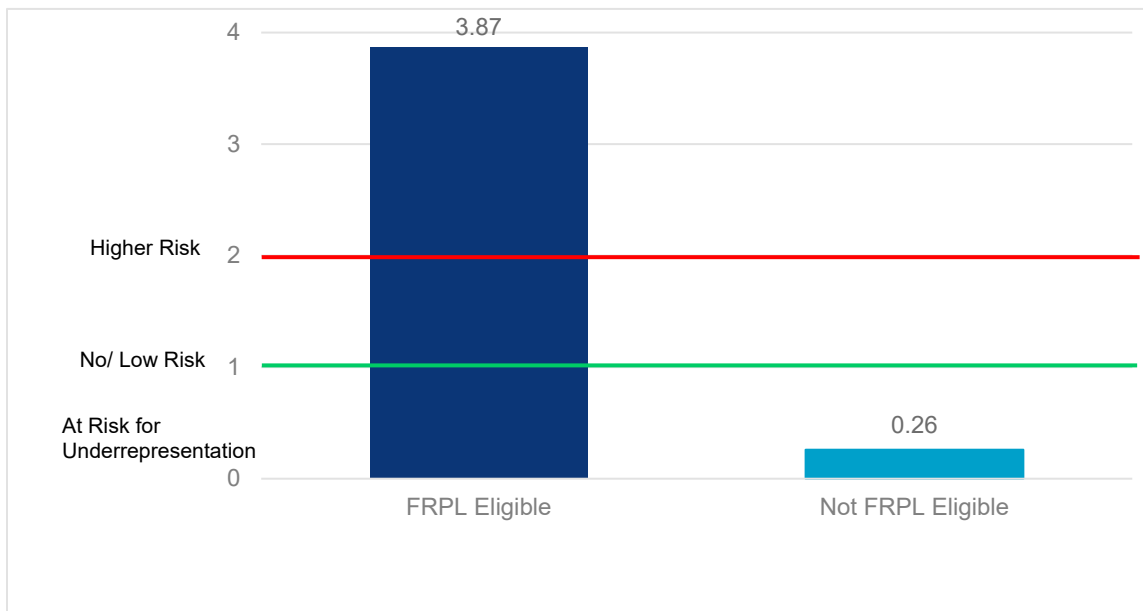
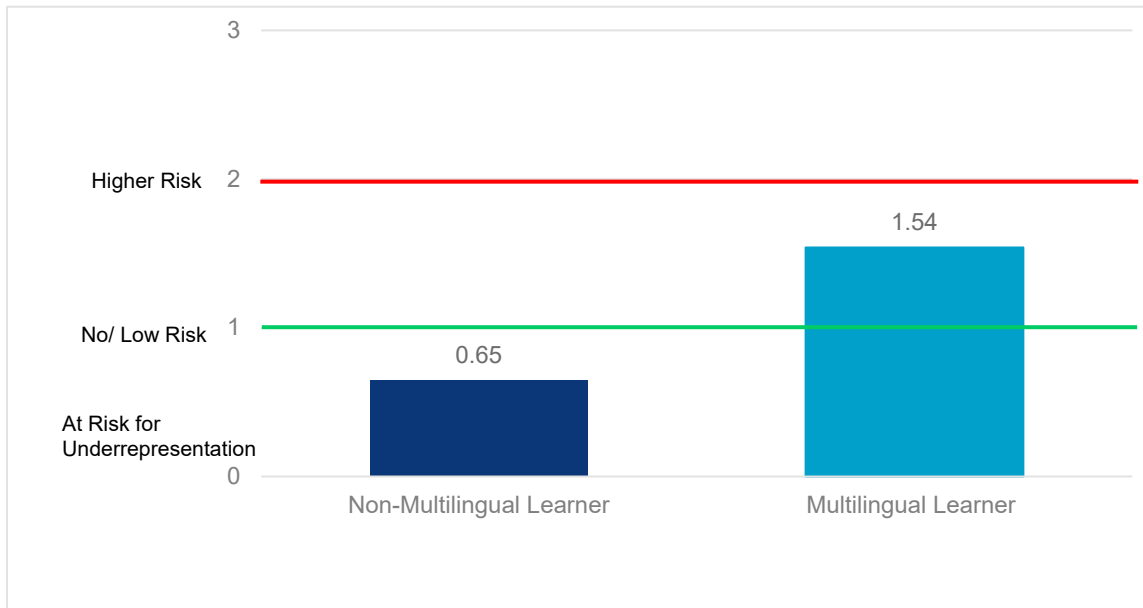


Figure 50. Number of Students with IEPs by Multilingual Learner Status

Multilingual Status	All Students	Students with IEPs
Multilingual Learner	73	16
Non-Multilingual Learner	3,841	546
Total	3,914	562

Figure 51. IEP Assignment Risk by Multilingual Learner Status



District-wide in North Kingstown School Department:

- African American or Black students have **2.15 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- Hispanic or Latinx students have **1.43 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- Multiracial students (two or more races) have **2.33 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- White students have **0.52 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- Female students have **0.54 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- Male students have **1.83 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch have **3.87** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.
- Multilingual learners have **1.54** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in the district.

Elementary Level IEP Risk Ratios

Figure 52. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Race	All Students	Students with IEPs
Black or African American	44	12
Hispanic or Latinx	125	22
Two or More Races	104	37
White	1,285	181
Total	1,592	255

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 53. IEP Assignment Risk by Race at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

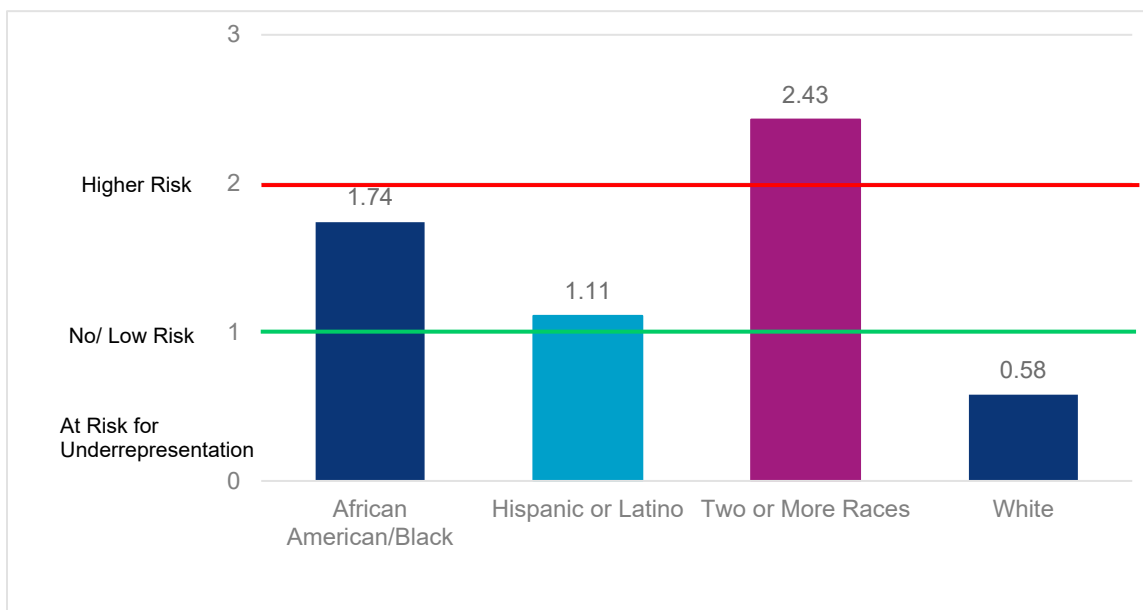


Figure 54. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	780	81
Male	812	174
Total	1,592	255

Figure 55. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

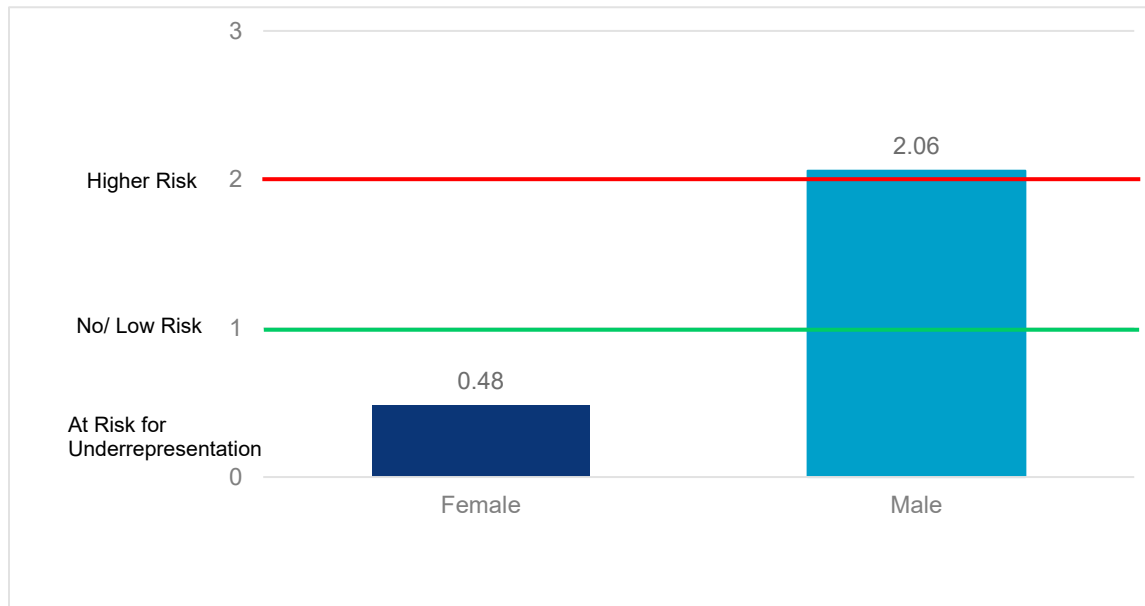
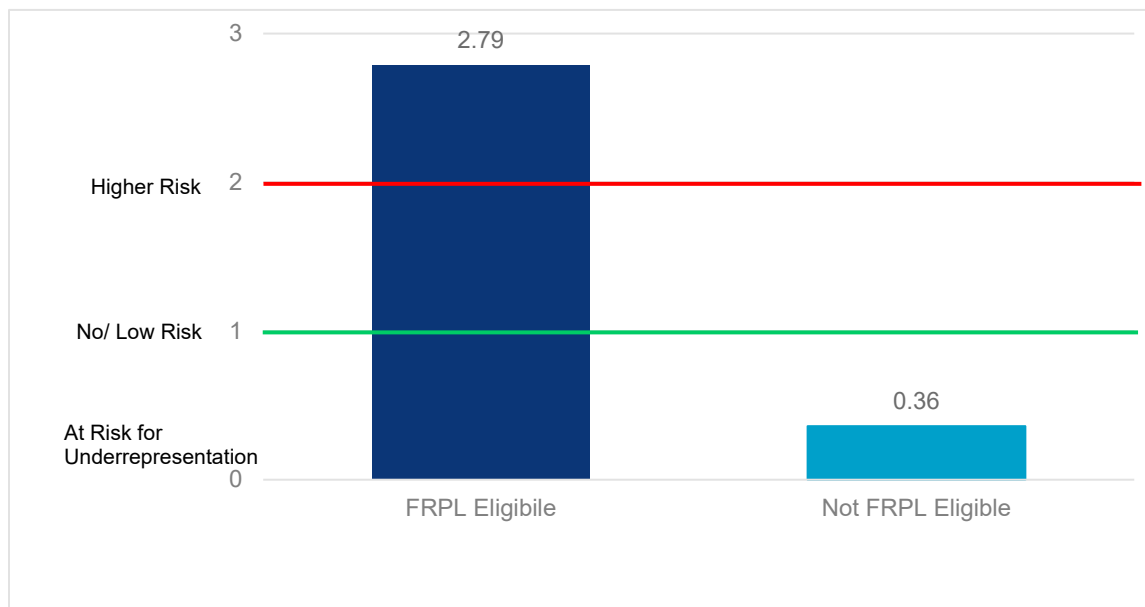


Figure 56. Number of Students with IEPs by FRPL Eligibility at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with IEPs
FRL Qualifying	283	96
Not FRL Qualifying	1,309	159
Total	1,592	255

Figure 57. IEP Assignment Risk by FRPL Eligibility at the Elementary and Pre-K Level



In elementary and preschools at North Kingstown School Department:

- African American or Black students have **1.74 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Hispanic or Latinx students have **1.11 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Multiracial students (two or more races) have **2.43 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- White students have **0.58 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Female students have **0.48 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Male students have **2.06 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.
- Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch have **2.79 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in elementary and preschool.

Middle School and High School IEP Risk Ratios

Figure 58. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity at the Middle and High School Level

Race	All Students	Students with IEPs
African American or Black	39	11
Hispanic or Latinx	160	31
Two or More Races	105	23
White	1,925	177
Total	2,284	248

Please note: Totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 59. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity at the Middle and High School Level

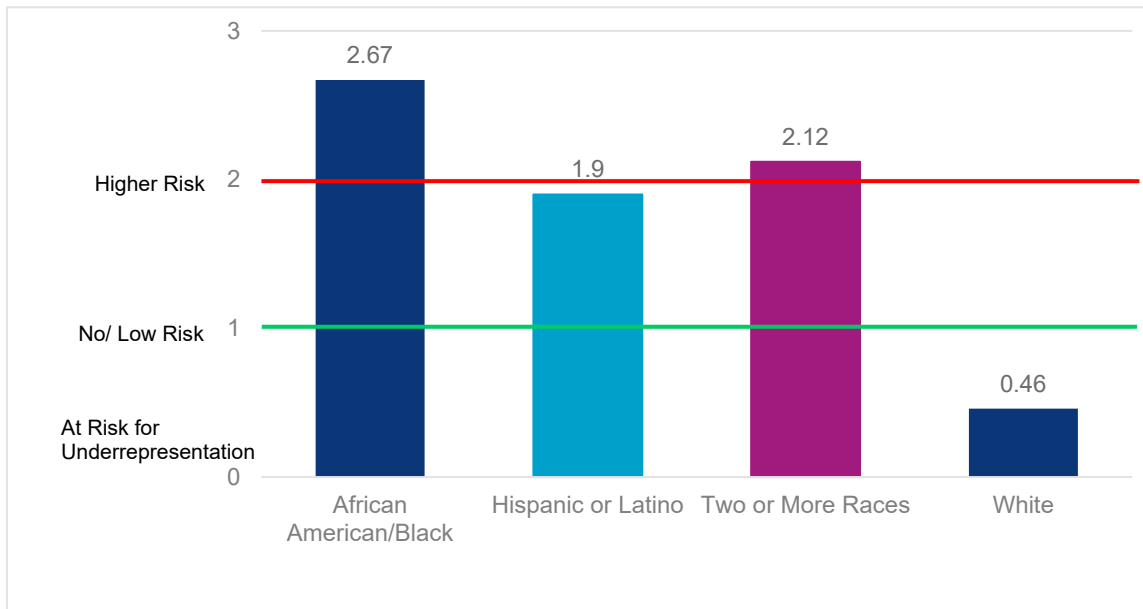


Figure 60. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender at the Middle and High School Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	1,117	93
Male	1,167	155
Total	2,284	248

Figure 61. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Middle and High School Level

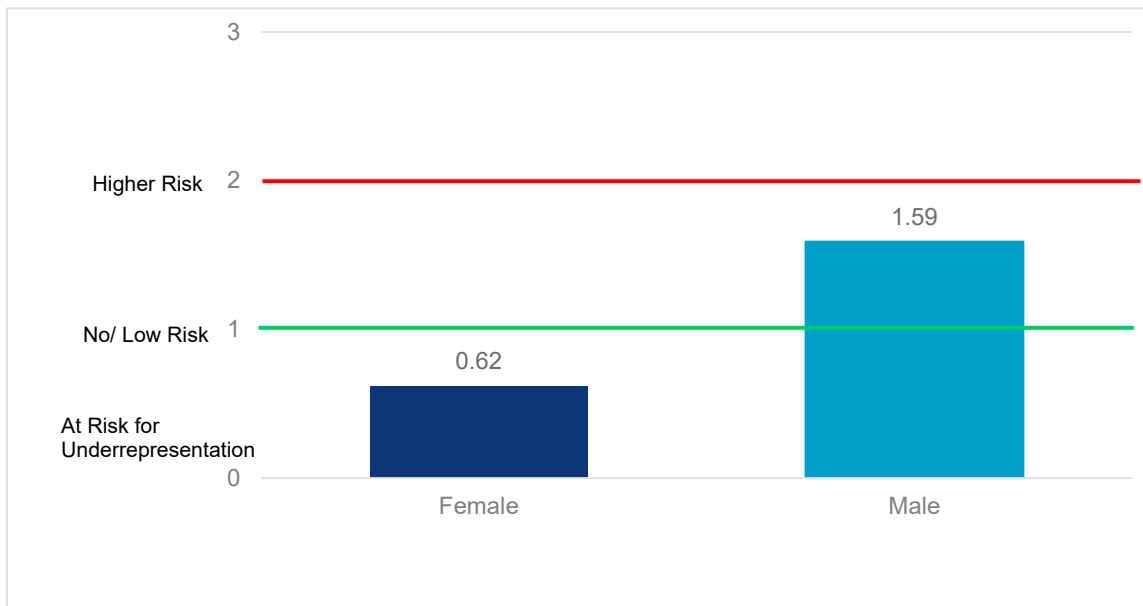
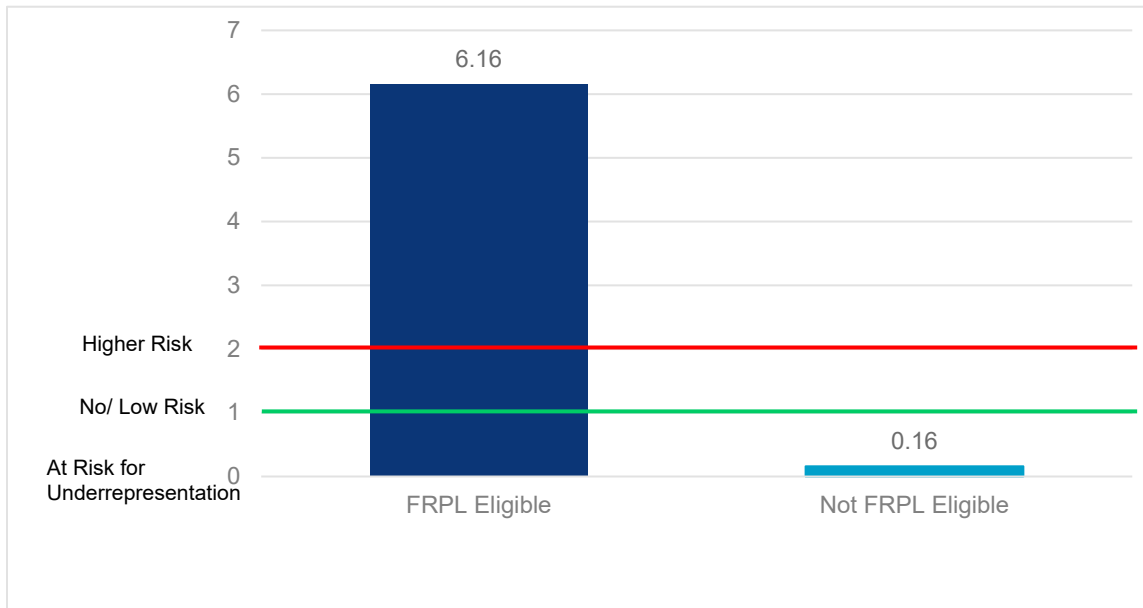


Figure 62. Number of Students with IEPs by FRPL Eligibility at the Middle and High School Level

FRPL Eligibility	All Students	Students with IEPs
FRPL Eligible	273	113
Not FRPL Eligible	2,011	135
Total	2,284	248

Figure 63. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Middle and High School Level



In North Kingstown High School, Davisville Middle School, and Wickford Middle School:

- African American or Black students have **2.67 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.
- Hispanic or Latinx students have **1.90 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.
- Multiracial students (two or more races) have **2.12 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.
- White students have **0.46 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.
- Female students have **0.62 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.
- Male students have **1.59 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.

- Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch have **6.16 times** the risk of IEP assignment as all other students in middle school and high school.

ACCESS TO ADVANCED LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Use data to inform and monitor the identification/classification of students as needing an IEP.** According to PCG's analysis above, in NKSD non-White students, multilingual learners, students eligible for FRPL, and male students are more likely to be assigned an IEP. This finding suggests that students with these identities are currently over-represented amongst students with IEPs. NKSD should regularly review disaggregated student level data by race/ethnicity, gender, multilingual learner status, and FRPL eligibility to inform future decision-making and considerations for alternative interventions and supports to effectively and appropriately address every student's need.
2. **Continue to examine the adverse effects of certain requirements that present barriers to enroll in advanced courses,** disproportionately impacting students of color, differently abled students, and multilingual learners.
3. **Be clear about the process to access advanced courses.** Ensure policies are communicated in an accessible way to families and students regarding opportunities and requirements to participate in advanced courses.
4. **Provide professional learning on implicit bias for school counselors, teachers, and department leaders.** This will help staff to understand implicit bias and learn ways to counter bias in recommending students for advanced learning or programming as well as the experiences of some students of color in advanced classes. According to student survey respondents, there is a discrepancy between BIPOC and White students' feeling of encouragement to pursue advanced courses. **61%** of BIPOC students indicated they strongly agree or agree with the statement, "my teachers encourage me to take on challenge classes," compared to **76%** of their White counterparts. This gap is smaller with regards to encouragement from school counselors, with **67%** of BIPOC student respondents indicating agreement, compared to **71%** of their White counterparts.
5. **Regularly review enrollment data for advanced courses.** This data should be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as well as English proficiency, income status and disability status. Enrollment data should also be compared with students requesting to be enrolled in advance courses to address any disproportionality in access.

10. RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Guiding Question: *How are resources distributed across the district? What are the drivers/processes that determine their distribution?*

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

A growing body of evidence shows that increased spending on education leads to better student outcomes.⁵⁹ When districts develop more equitable school finance systems, student achievement levels rise, and the positive effects are even greater among low-income students. In order to overcome issues of poverty, low-income students need additional funds. Some research shows that students in poverty require twice the funding as students from affluent backgrounds. These dollars should attract effective teachers, improve curriculum, and fund quality programming. States and districts with successful, equity-driven efforts have provided more total funds to their low-income students, and in some areas, low-income students receive more than 20 percent more in total funding than their affluent peers.⁶⁰

Equitable school budgeting is rooted in the belief that schools should be resourced commensurate to their need. Funding levels within the district should reflect the costs of the different educational needs of the students in each school. A review of relevant research found several best practices in setting and implementing equitable school budget policies and practices:

- **Pay for priorities.** School budgets can have the most impact on student learning when they are rooted in the priorities of the district. Intentionally created, equity-focused priorities provide a strong basis for making budget decisions across the district.⁶¹
- **Prioritize equity-focused investments.** Districts should use funds to build the capacity of schools with the most concentrated student need. Investments should be designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students in the district by prioritizing funding for high-impact strategies including hiring, instructional and curriculum supports, and strategies to allow for more personalized learning.⁶²
- **Center marginalized voices.** All decisions on distribution and redistribution of school and district resources should be directly informed by the communities most impacted by inequities in the district. This, in combination with a clear alignment between the district's stated values and the decisions being made, will build trust and buy-in from stakeholders across the community.⁶³

A key element in implementing an equity-driven school budgeting system is the investment in managing the culture shift required to make the new processes successful. At the center of an effective, equity-based budgeting system is a fundamental shift in the vision for what the district believes will give students the best opportunities to succeed and a realignment of decision-making to fund that vision.

⁵⁹ Jackson, C, Johnson, R, & Persico, C (January 2015). "[The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms.](#)" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131 (1), 157–218.

⁶⁰ National Center for Education Statistics (2012). "[Table A-6: Current expenditures per pupil in membership, by poverty quartile and state, FY 2011–2012.](#)"

⁶¹ Smarter School Spending (2017). "[GFOA's Smarter School Spending Framework.](#)" *Best Practices in School Budgeting: Set Instructional Priorities.*

⁶² Cardichon, Jessica (April 7, 2020). "[Using Federal Stimulus Funds to Advance Equity and Opportunity.](#)" *Learning Policy Institute.*

⁶³ Levenson, N (2015). "A Better Way to Budget: Building Support for Bold, Student-Centered Change in Public Schools." *District Management Journal*, 18.

Resource Allocation Strategies Analysis At-a-Glance

Desired Outcome:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district makes equity-focused, data-driven decisions about resource allocation that address student need. 				
Evidence-Based Strategies <i>Strategies needed to effectively move towards the desired outcome(s)</i>	Core Practices <i>Examples of a district's effective use of the evidence-based strategy</i>	Observed in NKSD?		
		Yes	Partial	No
Budgets and budgeting decisions are directly aligned with the district's stated priorities	The district uses data to understand and respond to resource needs		X	
	The district uses funding and resource allocation decisions to make progress towards stated goals and priorities			X
Budgets and budgeting decisions are prioritized through an equity lens	Funds are allocated according to need		X	
	The highest need students and schools receive more funding than those with fewer need		X	
	Funds are targeted to provide additional services to help close opportunity and achievement gaps		X	
	Structures or tools are in place to guide decision-makers through an equitable budgeting process			X
The methodology for allocating funds is transparent and understood across the community	There is a clear definition for resource equity that is shared across the district			X
	Diverse perspectives and voices are meaningfully included in the budget decision-making process			X

KEY FINDINGS

- Desire to address inequities.** When needs arise, such as when a student is interested in music and does not have the resources to access an instrument, teachers, and the district work hard to meet the needs that exist. District leaders mentioned an existing “prepaid list” of students for field trips and activities to ensure that no student is unable to participate because of financial barriers. However, staff members shared instances of having to pay out of their own pockets for students’ technological or other needs because the families were unable to afford them, and the district provided no support. In several interviews with district leaders there was a desire expressed to understand how to ensure greater equity in resource allocation.
- Lack of systematic, equity-focused strategies.** As mentioned above, NKSD appears to be eager to meet needs as they arise. However, the execution of these efforts is haphazard and inconsistent. While it is commendable that the district rises to these occasions, the lack of awareness of these supports across stakeholder groups and the individual nature of the supports shared indicate that the district lacks a systemic and transparent process for accessing and distributing resources.

The School Committee’s policy on budgeting and financial management contains no mention of equity or equitable resource distribution. District leaders and School Committee members shared

that there is no equity-focused protocol or tool used in budgeting conversations and equity is not explicitly part of the conversation when resource decisions are being made.

- **Resource-based barriers to access.** Across interviews, focus groups, and survey responses, members of the NKSD community shared examples of ways in which access to programs, events, and activities is limited to families with significant financial resources. The most common example cited across all sources was lack of access to transportation for afterschool academic supports, extracurricular activities, events, and athletics. The lack of afterschool transportation was mentioned in open responses from family surveys, in focus groups with families and staff, and in individual interviews with district leaders.

Another common example of resource-based barriers to access was the cost of school events. Several families communicated that the cost of attending field trips, athletic games, and PTO events was a large obstacle for families with limited resources to attend. Many families stated that they believed that the only students who were able to participate in athletics and after-school activities were those with financial resources and transportation.

- **Disconnects in community perceptions.** Families and many staff members echoed the same concerns about lack of access for families without resources – particularly around transportation, as described above. However, in interviews with School Committee members and district leadership, several individuals shared that they stopped offering the after-school buses because of lack of use and excessive disciplinary infractions occurring on the bus rides. Families in NKSD made it resoundingly clear that the lack of transportation options is a major barrier to access. The disconnect with the perceptions of district leadership raises questions about the implementation and decision-making processes in this area.
- **Strength of the Office of Family Learning.** Many stakeholders mentioned the Office of Family Learning in NKSD as a strong source of resources and support for families. Several district leaders and families pointed to their outreach around Free and Reduced-Price Lunch eligibility as an example of a strength to build on in the district. As discussed in Chapter 7. Culture and Climate, stakeholders commented on the need for greater communication about the opportunities provided by the Office of Family Learning to expand access to more families.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Build a vision for the district's budget that aligns with the vision of equity for the district.** Ensure that the district's explicit vision for and commitment to equity is built into how resource allocation decisions are made. Explicitly connecting funding decisions to district priorities and communicating about the expected gains to come from the decisions will help to build broad support.
2. **Use an equity analysis and equity lens in all decision making.** Facilitate an active shift in the district's mindset away from equality and towards equity. Decisions around resource allocation are not easy, but NKSD can mitigate potential conflict by standardizing the use of explicit equity measures in all decision making and by clearly communicating the connection between resource allocation changes and community and district values.

Included in this is a thorough review of district policies. The School Committee financial planning and budgeting policy should be revised to have an equity lens and the expectations for centering equity in resource decisions should be communicated and upheld across central office and to all school leaders.

3. **Develop district and community wide buy in through transparency.** Stakeholder perceptions about funding and how resource decisions are made vary widely across NKSD. Because community members do not have a shared understanding of the facts of how and why financial decisions are made in the district, building widespread support for change will be challenging. Craft messaging around school spending and budgeting that is clear and compelling and combats the spread of misinformation or inaccurate perceptions.
4. **Utilize data to inform all resource allocation decisions.** It is imperative that NKSD leadership set the expectation that resource allocation decisions are grounded in data that is explicitly looking at equity of impact and outcomes for each student. In addition to analyzing needs and potential impacts, the district should regularly survey students and families to understand the current needs of the community and utilize survey data to directly inform budget decisions.
5. **Lower barriers to access.** Establish systemic, equity-centered protocols, processes, and policies for increasing student access to extracurricular activities, athletics, field trips, after-school, and weekend events. These resources should be compiled and shared broadly to ensure that all students and families understand how to access them. In the instance that a resource is not being fully utilized (e.g., the perceived lack of use of the afterschool buses), the district should examine root causes of the disengagement before cancelling or removing the resource. If stakeholders are unaware of a resource or if a resource is scarce (e.g., transportation only offered on days that after-school activities do not occur) the district needs to adjust its offerings to find and meet the true demand rather than cancel the initiative. PCG recognizes that a shortage of transportation options and qualified drivers is not a challenge unique to NKSD and is something that districts around the country are trying to address.

11. CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by NKSD related to equity and inclusion are those shared with many school systems across the country. The key findings and recommendations presented in this report are grounded in the thorough analysis of data collected for this audit and are drawn from research-informed strategies and best practices recognized to improve equity and student outcomes. We believe that a commitment to carry forward the recommendations in this report and the active engagement of a wide range of stakeholders in the planning process and implementation will position the district well to provide an inclusive and equitable education for every student in the North Kingstown School Department.

Enacting change, the kind of change that will fundamentally improve outcomes of all students, and especially those from historically marginalized groups, requires focus, a strong vision from the Superintendent and School Committee enacted by district leadership staff, an appropriate allocation of resources, mandated professional development, and clear, non-negotiable, accountability measures. This type of reform will require the involvement and commitment of every staff member, family, and student.

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