

# District Equity Audit

Prepared for Walpole Public Schools  
October 2022

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This equity audit report is the result of an effort initiated by Walpole Public Schools to understand the ways the district can build upon strengths and align resources to meet the needs of the diverse student body, staff, and families, particularly prioritizing those from marginalized populations. Educational equity, when referenced by Walpole Public Schools, means:

*Every child gets what they need in our schools - regardless of where they come from, what they look like, who their parents are, what their temperament is, or what they show up knowing or not knowing. Every child gets what he, she, or they need every day in order to have all the skills and tools to pursue whatever they want after leaving our schools, to live a fulfilling life. Equity is about outcomes and experiences - for every child, every day.<sup>1</sup>*

Through this externally-conducted equity audit, the district hopes to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of stakeholders, as well as opportunities for creating a more equitable, accessible, and inclusive educational system that supports the success of all district stakeholders.

Walpole Public Schools partnered with Mass Insight Education & Research to conduct this equity audit with the following **objectives**:

1. Gather information about the district's current strengths and areas for growth relative to diversity, equity, and inclusive practices and policies;
2. Prompt reflective conversations about the current status of diversity, equity, and inclusivity as compared to its desired state; and
3. Identify opportunities to improve equitable practices throughout the district by providing recommendations designed to focus attention and resources to fully support its diverse students, staff, and community.

The equity audit was informed by an extensive data and artifact review, interviews, focus groups, phone calls, and surveys of students, families, community partners, and school and district staff. Findings are presented in alignment with Mass Insight's Equity Audit Framework, which contains nine domains. The first two domains—Vision, Strategy & Culture and Data—are foundational and intentionally presented first. **Findings** indicate district structural strengths, in addition to adaptive investments that the district has already made, to support its continued growth trajectory on its equity journey.

## **Domain 1: Vision, Strategy & Culture**

- The values espoused by the Walpole Public Schools' Vision are focused on providing each student access to an equitable educational experience.
- The WPS Vision's equity focus is reflected in the goals, action steps, and implementation of the current strategic plan. The extent to which staff, students, and families experience and are impacted as intended by the strategic plan goals varies.

## **Domain 2: Data**

- The district is in the process of developing data systems and routinizing common practices to drive decision-making.
- School level data-driven decision-making is not yet consistently utilized to identify and address differences in student success outcomes.

## **Domain 3: Accountability for Equitable Student Access & Outcomes**

- English learners, students with disabilities, and low income students are three large marginalized populations in the district that are not yet succeeding at the rates of their peers.
- Discipline and behavior policies and practices were named by students, staff, and leaders as opportunities to become more equitable.
- The extent to which all students have access to advanced coursework is unclear.
- The district has systems that support graduation and postsecondary success and further opportunities to ensure equitable student support.
- The district has many systems and structures that support marginalized student populations that can be leveraged to proactively monitor all students' success.

#### **Domain 4: Student Readiness to Learn**

- There is a district-wide focus on creating safe learning environments, supporting students' social-emotional development, and investing in post-graduation preparation.
- The majority of students feel safe and welcome at school, and marginalized student populations experience feelings of belonging and inclusion at lower rates than their non-marginalized peers.

#### **Domain 5: Focus on Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Teaching & Learning**

- District-wide efforts and common spaces in schools show some efforts to recognize and celebrate student cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Differentiation and support by student ability and interest is apparent at lower grade levels and decreases within secondary classrooms. Enrichment, remediation, and intervention opportunities are available, though not yet systematic.
- Structures exist to support teachers' cycles of improvement, which the district can leverage to coherently connect with district-wide priorities.

#### **Domain 6: Family & Community Engagement**

- Walpole Public Schools desires a collaborative partnership with families, and most families feel welcome and included in the district.
- While the vast majority of Walpole families are satisfied with the quantity of communication they receive from the district, families seek more opportunities to be involved in their children's learning.

#### **Domain 7: School Management**

- School leaders have support and autonomy to create conditions at their school in alignment with district priorities to ensure student success.
- The district prioritizes instructional excellence and learning success for all students and uses an evaluation system to ensure staff proficiency at providing rigorous curriculum for students.

#### **Domain 8: Workforce Development**

- Many stakeholders recognize the benefits of and need for a more diverse workforce.
- The district's focus on increasing staff diversity is complemented by an increase in equity-focused professional development for staff.

#### **Domain 9: Governance & Conditions**

- District leaders are attuned to each school's priorities and needs.
- There are examples of differentiated support and conditions that recognize school and student needs.

- The district's vision and strategic plan indicate a desire for greater equity to support each student's success and ensure the inclusion of all members of the educational and greater community, and some recent district policies clearly reflect attention to equitable access.

An analysis across findings surfaced eleven recommendations for the district to consider to advance equity, access, and inclusivity, all of which are in alignment with the existing goals of the district's Strategic Plan 2019-2024. **Recommendations** include steps that the district can take to further equity, access, and opportunities for all students in the district, as well as considerations and resources to support district discussions and decision making.

- **Recommendation 1A:** Create a district-wide arc of professional learning that sets clear expectations for what effective culturally responsive and personalized learning looks like for students at all grade levels, as well as related staff expectations.
- **Recommendation 1B:** Systematize access to and usage of data across all schools, content areas, and measures of student success.
- **Recommendation 2:** Develop family communication and engagement expectations at each school level, with specific expectations for families of high needs students.
- **Recommendation 3A:** Continue investing in equity-focused professional learning opportunities for staff with a focus on connecting equity to instructional practice and navigating challenging conversations with staff, students, and families.
- **Recommendation 3B:** Leverage the Equity Task Force and staff supporting human resource efforts, in partnership with students and families, to develop more inclusive and data-informed recruitment and retention practices.
- **Recommendation 3C:** Revise the Indicators of Accomplishment for the Strategic Plan and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and develop ongoing progress monitoring systems and reporting structures.
- **Recommendation 3D:** Build staff awareness and investment in the district's equity-focused efforts and the reasons for doing so.
- **Recommendation 3E:** Build family and community awareness about the district's efforts to ensure all students have access to a high-quality educational experience.
- **Recommendation 3F:** Identify and remove barriers to students' participation in curricular and co-curricular activities to ensure that all students have access.
- **Recommendation 4a:** Examine the instructional supports available to all students from low-income families in the district to ensure equitable access and high comparable outcomes.
- **Recommendation 4b:** Annually examine the current needs of special education students and the district's programmatic responses, including out-of-district placements.

In conclusion, Walpole Public Schools has a strong foundation established to continue and further its mission as it *"educates all students to achieve success."* By continuing to build upon the work already underway, all stakeholders—and most importantly students—will experience a learning environment where the guiding beliefs of *"all students can learn and achieve success," "emotional intelligence is a foundation of student success," "our schools are safe, inclusive, collaborative, and respectful learning environments," "the diversity in our community is critical to the educational experience of all learners,"* and *"student growth is a shared responsibility among students, families, school, and community,"* are reflected in and experienced in every interaction among staff, students, families, and community members.

# INTRODUCTION

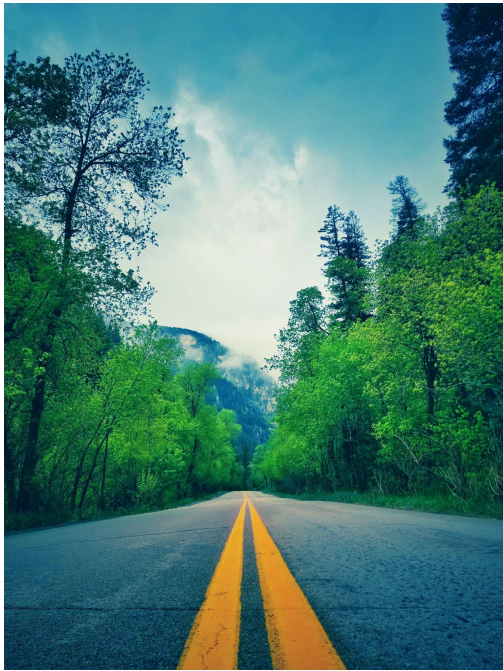


Photo by [Drew Rae](#) from [Pexels](#)

## Equity as a Journey

Walpole Public Schools recognizes the need to better understand the extent to which its systems, policies, and practices are impacting students, staff, and families equitably. While this audit provides a current picture of equity, it is important to realize that increasing equity is an ongoing improvement journey that will require the engagement of all staff, students, families, and community members. Our hope is that this audit will support all district stakeholders to both individually and collectively develop an equity lens and mindset to build upon the strong foundation already in the district so all stakeholders come to see equity as part of their daily work. By championing inclusive and equitable practices, the district will change the education landscape and the lived experience of all stakeholders, particularly those who are marginalized.

Technical adjustments can create some change, but disrupting larger and more systemic access, opportunity, and success gaps requires consistent individual and collective focus to address mindsets, practices, policies, and systems over time. Enacting sustainable change will require ongoing examinations of how decisions, policies, and practices impact the educational experiences of all district students, staff, families, and community.

## Key Definitions

Walpole Public Schools utilizes a set of terms and definitions to create a shared language and framework for equity-related conversations. To build awareness of the district's equity language, the following key terms are provided here to serve as a reference when interpreting this document:

- **Equity:** every child gets what they need in our schools—regardless of where they come from, what they look like, who their parents are, what their temperament is, or what they show up knowing or not knowing. Every child gets what he, she, or they need every day in order to have all the skills and tools to pursue whatever they want after leaving our schools, to live a fulfilling life. Equity is about outcomes and experiences—for every child, every day.<sup>1</sup>
- **Diversity:** diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued.<sup>2</sup>
- **Inclusion:** the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued as a fully participating member. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.<sup>3</sup>
- **Identity:** a person's sense of self defined by a range of social and physical affiliations and one's personal life experiences, memories, relationships, and values.<sup>4</sup>

- Stakeholder: a person with a connection to or vested interest in the welfare and success of a school or district (for example, school and district staff, students, families, partners, and community members).<sup>4</sup>
- Marginalized populations: groups (including but not limited to racial, ethnic, linguistic, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious, cultural, or ability groups) that experience discrimination and exclusion as a result of current and/or historical social, political, economic power dynamics or oppression from dominant groups.<sup>4</sup>

## Objectives of the Equity Audit

During the 2021-2022 school year, Walpole Public Schools partnered with Mass Insight Education & Research (Mass Insight) to conduct a district equity audit to understand the ways the district can build upon current strengths and align conditions to meet the needs of its diverse student body, staff, families, and the greater Walpole community. Specifically, the audit objectives were to:

1. Gather information about the district's current strengths and areas for growth relative to diversity, equity, and inclusive practices and policies;
2. Prompt reflective conversations about the current status of diversity, equity, and inclusivity as compared to its desired state; and
3. Identify opportunities to improve equitable practices throughout the district by providing recommendations destined to focus attention and resources to fully support its diverse students, staff, and community.

This equity audit is intended to inform the next steps that the district can take to create a more equitable and inclusive district for all stakeholders. It is not intended to serve as an equity-focused improvement or strategic plan, but should inform the current and future district priorities. It is not intended to give prescriptive steps to increase equity, as that is part of the work and journey that the district must engage in as a district and community to build the awareness, understanding, and capacity of all stakeholders. This equity audit names the foundational strengths that the district already has in place to take the findings, internalize them, and determine collectively—as departments, schools, and positions need or require—what the next steps are to actively and intentionally continue on its journey to create greater equity and a more inclusive educational environment for every student, staff member, family member, and member of the Walpole community.

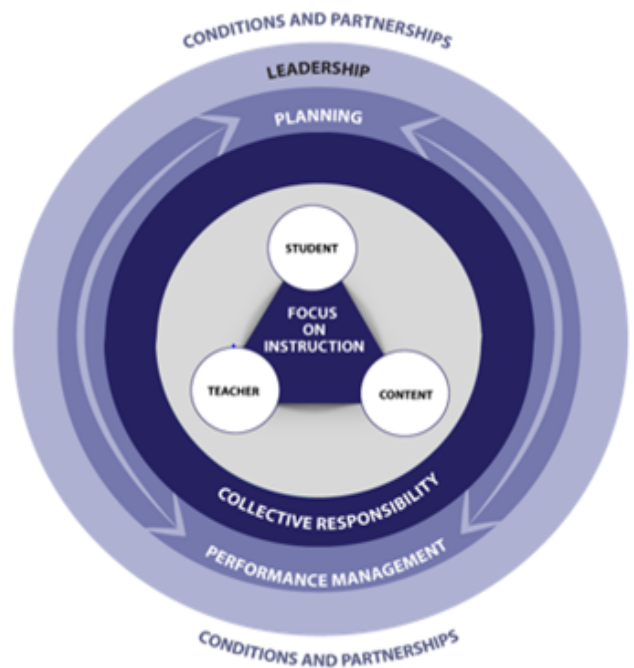
## About Mass Insight and Our Commitment to Equity

Mass Insight Education & Research is a national nonprofit that supports schools, districts, and state education agencies. Our mission is to provide leadership in closing achievement and opportunity gaps for underserved students to drive college and career success by focusing on system transformation and student academic success. Mass Insight is a recognized national leader in school improvement, providing advanced academic program support, research, and strategic consulting services. Since 2009, Mass Insight has worked at all levels of the K-12 education system in Massachusetts and across the country to redesign and reimagine systems and conditions to increase the outcomes and success of students, particularly those who have been systemically marginalized.

Our work is grounded in our Theory of Action, a set of deeply held, organization-wide values and commitments about school improvement, which states:

We believe that schools can substantially improve the outcomes and success of their students, particularly those who have been systemically marginalized, by eliminating barriers to student learning through a focus on:

- Conditions: Schools have sufficient control over people, time, money, and program to address the root causes of disparate outcomes;
- Planning: Evidence-based, actionable improvement plans prioritize meeting the needs of all students and are informed by a review of existing conditions and input from school, district, and community stakeholders;
- Leadership: The principal manages and communicates complexity while maintaining focus on the school’s vision, key priorities, and the success of all students;
- Instruction: Processes and supports continuously help teachers work together to improve and refine standards-based instruction so that all students can access and engage in rigorous learning;
- Collective Responsibility: The school faculty and staff demonstrate collective responsibility for both the quality of instruction and the learning and success of all students;
- Performance Management: Consistent processes are utilized to monitor and measure plan implementation and outcomes, determine what’s working, and inform efforts to improve; and,
- Partnerships: The school develops partnerships with families and community organizations to meet the needs of teachers and students.



Mass Insight believes the school is the unit of change and improvement, and our work with schools and districts begins by understanding local strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Mass Insight believes that all students should have equitable opportunities and access to a high-quality K-12 education, regardless of zip code, economic status, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, or language. Our commitment to equity is grounded in the belief that every student can achieve and exceed common expectations when provided with high-quality education and the support they need.

We also believe that equality and equity are fundamentally different. Achieving greater equity requires an intentional focus on overcoming the historical legacy of racism, discrimination, marginalization, and underinvestment that continues to disadvantage specific groups of people. As equity-minded institutions dismantle inequitable systems, practices, and mindsets, they oftentimes replace equal supports and resources with differentiated or tiered supports to focus efforts on marginalized populations that do not yet have the access and opportunities of their peers. This process requires all stakeholders' willingness “to take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of their students and critically reassess their own practices.

# METHODOLOGY

This section describes the framework, timeline, process, and methods utilized to gather qualitative and quantitative documents, artifacts, and data sources that Mass Insight collected and analyzed to inform the equity audit. Inclusive methods of engagement were collaboratively employed by Mass Insight with the district's full support to ensure the equity audit was informed by stakeholder voice and perspectives, which are described in greater detail in this section.

## Mass Insight's District Equity Framework

Mass Insight believes the school is the unit of change and improvement, and our work with schools and districts begins by understanding local strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Our research-informed [Theory of Action](#) describes in greater detail the various aspects of education systems we believe support the structures, policies, practices, and actions necessary for school leaders and staff in order to develop, implement, and sustain improvements. Our Equity Framework, below, serves as an outline to our process for understanding the current reality and the extent to which equity is experienced by district stakeholders, including staff, students, families, partners, and community members.

Mass Insight's Equity Framework was the lens through which our data and document collection, focus groups, interviews, and surveys were designed, conducted, and analyzed. The Findings are written in alignment with framework domains, while Recommendations are more organic and aligned to the Walpole Public Schools' [Vision and Strategic Plan](#), recognizing the work already underway in the district and the interconnectedness that exists within K-12 educational systems. Mass Insight's Equity Framework consists of the following nine domains and highest performing district descriptors, which are included in the [Appendix](#).

- **Vision, Strategy, and Culture:** District vision, strategy, culture, and priorities reflect a commitment to educational equity and promote a district-wide culture of inclusiveness and a belief that all students can learn and succeed.
- **Data:** The district uses data regularly to identify and address inequities in the system. Disaggregated data is accessible and informs decision-making throughout the district.
- **Accountability for Equitable Student Access and Outcomes:** Policies, systems, and practices enable all students to fully participate in schools, programs, and activities that result in high comparable outcomes.
- **Student Readiness to Learn:** The district and schools create safe, positive, and inclusive learning environments for all students. Students' non-academic needs are proactively addressed so they fully engage and succeed academically.
- **Focus on Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Teaching and Learning:** Curriculum, materials, instructional practices, and learning environments ensure school leaders, teachers, and other school staff constantly improve and refine rigorous standards-based pedagogy that recognizes and embraces students' identities and the district's diversity.
- **Family and Community Engagement:** The district and schools intentionally and authentically communicate with and successfully engage students, families, and community members.
- **School Management:** District policies, structures, and systems enable school leaders to create the school-level conditions that align people, time, program, and money to ensure the success of all students.
- **Workforce Development:** Systems and processes attract, recruit, cultivate, hire, and develop new and diverse staff. All staff receive ongoing professional development that results in the retention of a talented, culturally competent, and diverse workforce.

- **Governance and Conditions:** Clear and equitable school committee/board and central office structures, systems, processes, and practices work together to advance the district towards its vision. The district commitment to equity is reflected in governance and central office structures, systems, policies, and practices.

## Data Sources and Collection Methods

Mass Insight’s equity audit approach focused on a system-wide understanding of equity within Walpole Public Schools as evidenced by stakeholder experiential data, district and school performance data, and various artifacts. It is worth noting that our use of the word “data” is more inclusive than quantitative student assessment results. While it is a common accountability practice to evaluate schools and districts quantitatively with student achievement data, our equity audit process includes and elevates qualitative data to understand the lived experiences of students, families, and staff. This allows us to understand holistically how stakeholders interact, how stakeholder communication functions internally and externally, the extent to which students experience an inclusive and supportive learning-centered environment, the extent to which staff experience an inclusive and supportive work environment, and how welcoming schools and the district are to families and community stakeholders. We invested significant time in gathering the representative voices of stakeholders—students, families, community partners, school staff, school leaders, and district staff—throughout the audit process, in focus groups, interviews, phone calls, and surveys.

The audit process gathered data from upper elementary, middle school, and high school students through surveys, as well as middle school and high school student focus groups. Our process also included family surveys and 1:1 phone calls, staff surveys and 1:1 phone calls, and focus groups with district and school leaders and members of the Walpole School Committee.

It is also important to understand that while the Mass Insight framework is holistic, the audit timeline and scope limits the level of depth at which we are able to examine all elements. For example, the audit did not include an assessment of individual schools, a review of all content area curricular resources, an in-depth financial audit, or an analysis of transportation logistics. All of these were examined at a high level, and some more thoroughly than others based on data from documents, surveys, or focus groups.

## Phases of Data Collection and Analysis

The graphic below displays the timeline, phases and high-level steps in the equity audit process.

<b>Phase 1: Planning &amp; Preparation</b> February - March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kick-off meeting</li> <li>● Customization of tools and processes</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2: Data Collection &amp; Analysis</b> March - May 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District, school, and student data analysis</li> <li>● Document and artifact review</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3: Stakeholder Engagement</b> April - June 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stakeholder surveys</li> <li>● Stakeholder focus groups, interviews, and phone calls</li> <li>● Classroom observations</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4: Analysis &amp; Report of Findings</b> June - September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Analysis and triangulation of findings</li> <li>● Development and delivery of the equity audit report</li> <li>● Presentation to the school committee</li> </ul>

## Documents, Artifacts, and Relevant District and School Success Measures

An extensive list of documents and data was requested of the district by Mass Insight at the start of the equity audit. Publicly available information was also part of the data and artifact review. Superscripts throughout the report denote the sources for quantitative and qualitative data. While extensive documents, artifacts, and data were reviewed, not all are included in the audit or were applicable to the Findings and Recommendations.

Contained in the table below are *examples* of the types of documents, artifacts, and data we examined by domain of our Equity Audit Framework. Note that many additional documents and data sources were examined, but not all are listed here. Examining a wide variety of documents and data sources supports the data triangulation methodology, which removes potential biases and preferences for certain sources of data over others.

Equity Audit Domain	Examples of Reviewed Documents, Artifacts, and Data
Vision, Strategy & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District vision, mission &amp; values statements</li> <li>● Strategic Plan 2019-2024</li> </ul>
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District guidance on data use</li> <li>● Leadership Council goals and updates</li> </ul>
Accountability for Equitable Student Access & Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Special education policies and handbook</li> <li>● English language learner policies</li> <li>● ACCESS data</li> <li>● Advanced coursework enrollment and success</li> <li>● Multi-tiered systems of supports model</li> <li>● Disaggregated student data across multiple indicators, such as attendance, chronic absenteeism, graduation</li> </ul>
Student Readiness to Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District discipline policies and data</li> <li>● District attendance policy</li> <li>● Counseling allocations</li> </ul>
Focus on Culturally & Linguistically Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District-wide assessments</li> <li>● District approved curricular resources</li> <li>● Curricular scopes &amp; sequences</li> </ul>
Family & Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student enrollment materials and process</li> <li>● Partner list</li> <li>● Family advocacy groups</li> <li>● Family communication</li> </ul>
School Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School improvement plans</li> <li>● School performance and accountability measures and processes</li> </ul>
Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District staff demographics</li> <li>● Staff vacancies</li> <li>● Collective bargaining agreement</li> <li>● District-wide professional development schedule</li> </ul>
Governance & Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School committee meeting minutes and recordings</li> <li>● District budget</li> </ul>

## Surveys

Mass Insight’s surveys are an opportunity for all stakeholders to voluntarily share their experiences to inform the equity audit. Our surveys are designed to be anonymous; no identifying information is utilized that would allow us to connect specific responses to specific individuals. The exception to anonymity is if a survey respondent included identifying information in the open responses they provided in the survey. Mass Insight shares all survey responses with districts after the equity audit is complete because it is important for district and school leaders, in particular, to read and better understand the extent to which stakeholders view the district as equitable and inclusive. Prior to our sharing the survey responses, however, we meticulously remove all identifying information (names or references to individuals, staff, or schools) to maintain anonymity.

### Survey Participation Efforts

Surveys were administered in April and May for six stakeholder groups: district-level staff, school leaders, school-level staff, upper elementary through high school students, families, and community partners. Surveys were available on the Survey Monkey® platform and were available for students in English, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, and Russian; family surveys were available in English, Portuguese, Arabic, Hindi, Russian, and Haitian-Creole; and all other surveys were available in English.

As surveys are anonymous and a quick way to gain a broad understanding of stakeholders’ perspectives and experiences, the district was intentional about its outreach methods to encourage stakeholders to participate.

Stakeholders for each of the six surveys were notified in the following ways, and each survey was open for at least three weeks for participants to complete:

- District-level staff: received the survey link via email
- School leaders: received the survey link via email
- School-level staff: received the survey link via email
- Middle and high school students: received the survey link via email from school leaders and/or teachers
- Families: received the survey link via district emails, texts, the district website
- Community partners: received the survey link via email

It is worth noting that surveys were administered near the end of the 2021-22 school year, and subsequently, high school seniors had already completed their year before surveys were administered at the high school.

### Survey Design & Participation

Each survey was tailored to its specific stakeholder group, and some questions were shared among several surveys for comparison purposes. Questions on each survey were designed to inform specific domains of the equity audit framework and provide a high-level understanding of the extent to which stakeholders feel included, supported, valued, and treated equitably within the district. The majority of survey items were multiple choice, and each survey contained 2-5 open response questions.

The following display provides participation information about each survey.

## Survey Participation



<b>1,578 Students</b> available in Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, Russian, Arabic, English	<b>265 Families</b> available in Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, Russian, Arabic, English, Haitian Creole	<b>317 School Staff</b>
<b>1 Community Partner</b>	<b>10 School Leaders</b>	<b>12 District Office Staff</b>

## **Interviews, Focus Groups, and Family Phone Calls**

As an external entity contracted for the purpose of this audit, Mass Insight intentionally works to quickly develop rapport and trust with all focus group and interview participants so we can as thoroughly and accurately as possible understand various stakeholders' lived experiences and perspectives. Our focus group, interview, and phone call processes begin with a description of our confidentiality and anonymity protections to ensure stakeholder trust so they feel as comfortable as possible sharing their personal experiences. Notes from focus groups and interviews will neither be shared with anyone in Walpole Public Schools or outside of Mass Insight, nor used for any other purpose than this equity audit.

### ***Efforts to Increase Stakeholder Participation***

Focus groups and interviews are an additional method for gathering stakeholder perspectives, yet are not completely anonymous, as stakeholders must volunteer, sign up, or agree to participate and are asked a few identifying questions at the beginning of a focus group, interview, or phone call so their responses can be compared to those of like stakeholders. The identities of staff, student, and family focus group participants remain anonymous outside of Mass Insight.

Stakeholders were notified in the following ways about participating in focus groups, interviews, and phone calls, all of which took place between April and June, 2022:

- District-level staff: Mass Insight requested focus groups and interviews with various district-level staff, who were contacted and scheduled with the support of district administrators.
- School leaders: Mass Insight requested principal and assistant principal focus groups, all of which were contacted and scheduled with the support of district administrators.
- School-level staff: The school staff survey included an opportunity for staff to volunteer to participate in a one-on-one phone call. Staff were contacted via email by Mass Insight and asked to sign up for a 15-minute time slot via the Calendly platform that worked best in their schedule.
- Students: The student survey contained an opportunity for students to volunteer to participate in a student focus group, and school leaders and teachers also informed students about the opportunity. School leaders supported Mass Insight with scheduling the onsite focus groups, which took place at Bird Middle School, Johnson Middle School, and Walpole High School on May 25-26, 2022. Mass Insight staff who conducted onsite focus groups completed the CORI process, as required by visitors of any school in Massachusetts, and wore identification badges provided by the district while in the schools.
- Families:
  - Mass Insight requested and received a randomized list of 400 district families' phone numbers, school(s) of attendance, and preferred language. The list was compiled by the district and contained representation of families' contact information from all district schools.
  - Mass Insight conducted a focus group with METCO families, all of which were contacted and scheduled with the support of district administrators.
- School committee members: Mass Insight conducted focus groups with members of the Walpole School Committee, all of which were contacted and scheduled with the support of district administrators.
- Community partners: Mass Insight conducted interviews with key district partners, all of which were contacted and scheduled with the support of district administrators.

Note that focus groups and interviews were conducted by at least two Mass Insight staff members, with the exception of staff and family phone calls, which were conducted by only one Mass Insight staff member. For family and staff phone calls, a standardized protocol was used.

### ***Interview, Focus Group, and Phone Call Design and Participation Rates***

All focus group, interview, and phone call questions were similar across stakeholder focus groups. Focus group questions, similar to survey items, were aligned with the equity audit framework and were designed to help understand the extent to which systems, structures, policies, and practices throughout the district create an inclusive, supportive, collaborative, and equitable learning and work environment. Focus group facilitators were able to ask non-standard questions at their discretion to probe deeper depending upon participants' responses. The table below provides additional information about interview, focus group, and phone call participants.

Participant Information	
16 District-level staff	Interviews and focus groups with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superintendent</li> <li>• Assistant Superintendent</li> <li>• Student Services staff</li> <li>• METCO Program staff</li> <li>• Human Resources staff</li> <li>• School Nutrition Program staff</li> <li>• English Language Development staff</li> <li>• Business Department staff</li> <li>• Technology and Digital Learning staff</li> </ul>
12 School leaders	Focus groups with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elementary principals</li> <li>• Middle school principals</li> <li>• Middle school assistant principals</li> <li>• High school principal</li> <li>• High school assistant principals</li> </ul>
18 School-level staff	A focus group with educators of color. Individual interviews with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General education teachers</li> <li>• Support staff, such as counselors, paraprofessionals, media specialists, and data specialists</li> <li>• ESL teachers</li> <li>• Special education teachers</li> </ul>
76 Students	Focus groups with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 students at Bird Middle School</li> <li>• 32 students at Johnson Middle School</li> <li>• 28 students at Walpole High School</li> </ul> Note, identity-based groups were available for students, and Spanish interpretation was also provided.
185 Families	Family phone calls were made to a representative sample of families from all schools in the district. There was also a focus group for families of METCO students.
17 Committee members	Focus groups with representatives from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Committee Chairpersons (6)</li> <li>• Equity Task Force (11)</li> </ul>
2 Partners	Interviews were conducted with two community partners.

## Classroom Observations

Non-evaluative classroom observations were conducted in all Walpole schools, with the exception of the Daniel Feeney Preschool Center, to inform the equity audit findings. One Mass Insight staff member conducted all observations, in order to ensure reliability of observation data gathered. Similar to Mass Insight staff who were onsite for focus groups, Mass Insight staff who conducted classroom observations completed the CORI process, as required by visitors of any school in Massachusetts, and wore identification badges provided by the district while in the schools.

A total of 91 observations were conducted over three days in May. The table below provides more detailed information about the number of classrooms visited at each school and the spread of grade level and content areas that were observed.

Classroom Observations	
36 Elementary School Observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyden: 8</li> <li>• Elm: 7</li> <li>• Fisher: 8</li> <li>• Old Post Road: 13</li> </ul>	31 classroom observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grades K-2: 17</li> <li>• Grades 3-5: 15</li> </ul> Subjects: ELA, math, science, social studies, art 5 non-classroom environments
31 Middle School Observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bird: 19</li> <li>• Johnson: 13</li> </ul>	23 classroom observations Subjects: ELA, math, science, social studies, foreign language, health, homeroom 8 non-classroom environments
24 High School Observations	20 classroom observations Subjects: ELA, math, science, social studies, homeroom, ESL, art, technology 4 non-classroom environments

Mass Insight uses an observation tool aligned to our Equity Framework that focuses on:

- Curricular materials and/or learning environments that reflect, affirm, and/or recognize and honor student identities and connect to students' cultural schema;
- High-quality, standards-aligned, rigorous instruction;
- A positive, inclusive, and welcoming environment with practices in place to monitor and address student needs;
- Equitable opportunities and participation for all students;
- Academic interventions, enrichment, acceleration, and multiple modes of engagement and expression; and
- Mutually respectful interactions between staff members.

Each observation lasted 10-20 minutes, and the observer moved freely around each school throughout the day, quietly stepping in and out of classrooms to observe normal day-to-day activities as much as possible, and taking detailed notes aligned to the Equity Audit domains. Observation data, both quantitative and qualitative, was analyzed in several ways to inform trends and highlight both common practices and disparate practices in alignment with our Equity Framework, and then triangulated with other data sources as described in the following section.

## Data Analysis

Throughout the equity audit process, Mass Insight analyzes and synthesizes data to surface commonalities, as well as discrepancies, among data sources to test developing hypotheses. Qualitative and quantitative data are both necessary to understand the extent to which stakeholders are impacted by systems, structures, policies, practices, and behaviors. Data sources (as described in the previous section) include survey responses; focus group, phone call, and interview responses; quantitative data; and documents and artifacts. The approach of collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing multiple data sources allows the Mass Insight team to organize findings and determine emerging themes that form the foundation of our findings.

Some data collected required additional steps to analyze. First, open responses from the non-English family and student surveys were translated to English by certified multilingual translators. These survey responses were then analyzed separately to understand if there were differences among responses of varied preferred language. The same open response items were also analyzed together with the English survey responses for overall trends and themes. This qualitative analysis used Excel and Dedoose software to determine commonalities and themes in non-multiple choice survey responses.

Similar to open response survey items, all survey responses were compared across respondents to determine discrepancies. For instance, many survey items were asked across surveys, enabling comparisons about, for instance, how district staff, school leaders, and school staff responded to the same question. Some surveys asked respondents whether they identify with a marginalized population, which allowed Mass Insight to filter and determine if respondents who self-identified with a marginalized population responded differently from those who did not. Another example is sorting school leader and staff responses by school level: elementary, middle, or high school.

Throughout the data collection and stakeholder engagement phases, the Mass Insight team analyzed each piece of evidence separately. Once we begin the synthesis and report of findings phase, our team cross-synthesized or triangulated data sources for each domain of the Mass Insight Equity Audit Framework (see [Appendix](#)), again noting common themes and discrepancies that emerged in the findings. The triangulation process also includes comparing the foundational strengths, findings, opportunities for growth, and proposed recommendations against our highest-performing district descriptor of Equity Audit Framework, thus removing potential biases from the process as we prioritize recommendations aligned to research-supported best practices of equitable and inclusive school systems.

The Mass Insight team that supported the equity audit process consisted of one engagement director, four consultants, and an analyst. Team members' identities vary by race, ethnicity, native language, gender, and past educational experience; yet all identities were leveraged to support our process and the resulting report. The team was intentionally designed to be diverse to not only mitigate potential biases throughout our process, but also to create trusting stakeholder engagement experiences for those we engaged with throughout the equity audit. The team met weekly during the equity audit and collectively developed both the findings headlines and recommendations to ensure the report is as unbiased and data informed as possible.

The process of identifying recommendations is cross-experiential and intentionally invites all team members who gathered, collected, and analyzed different data sources to participate equally, thus eliminating potential biases that we individually hold based on differing experiences in the audit process. The findings section was written first, which was the result of triangulating data, documents and artifacts, and responses from surveys, focus groups, interviews, and phone calls. After writing the finding sections, the team identified gaps or areas of need when comparing findings to our highest-performing district descriptors, and then created aligned recommendations that considered the district's capacity, current initiative and strategic priorities, and stakeholder feedback. The recommendations are written to clearly indicate next steps that the district can take to increase equity, access, and inclusivity for all stakeholders.

# DISTRICT PROFILE

This section provides an overview of key data indicators about the current state of Walpole Public Schools at the district level at the end of the 2021-22 school year.

<p><b>3,667 Students Enrolled<sup>12</sup></b></p> <p><b>289.2 Teachers<sup>12</sup></b></p>	<p><b>8 Schools<sup>13</sup></b>  <i>1 Pre-K Center</i>  <i>4 elementary schools (K-5)</i>  <i>2 middle schools (6-8)</i>  <i>1 high schools (9-12)</i></p>	<p><b>Select Student Populations<sup>12</sup></b>          30.1% high needs          4.1% English learners          16.9% low income          15.2% students with disabilities</p>
<p><b>7-Member School Committee<sup>13</sup></b>  <i>3-year terms</i>  <i>Chairperson elected by a majority vote of member</i></p>	<p><b>District Accountability Status<sup>12</sup>:</b>  <b>Substantial progress toward targets</b>  <i>Not requiring assistance or intervention</i></p>	<p><b>FY21 District Budget: \$52.4M</b>  <i>1% increase from FY20</i></p>

Schools	Grades Served
Daniel Fenney Preschool (SY21-22 Enrollment: 88)	Prekindergarten
Old Post Road School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 471)	K-5
Boyden School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 379)	K-5
Fisher School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 445)	K-5
Elm Street School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 438)	K-5
Bird Middle School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 376)	6-8
Eleanor N. Johnson Middle School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 426)	6-8
Walpole High School (SY21-22 Enrollment: 1,044)	9-12

## Student Population

The District has an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student population, with the majority (78.4 percent) identifying as White in the 2021-22 school year. The next largest population is Hispanic or Latino students at 7.2 percent, with the remaining population being:

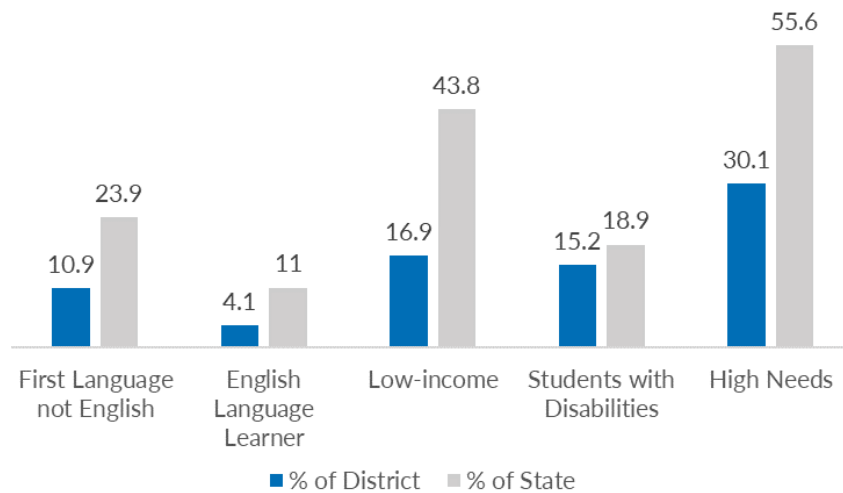
- 7.1 percent Asian,
- 3.2 percent multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino,
- 3.7 percent African-American/Black,

- 0.1 percent Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and
- 0.3 percent American Indian or Alaska Native.

The District has a lower proportion of high needs students than the state average, especially students from economically disadvantaged families<sup>12</sup>.

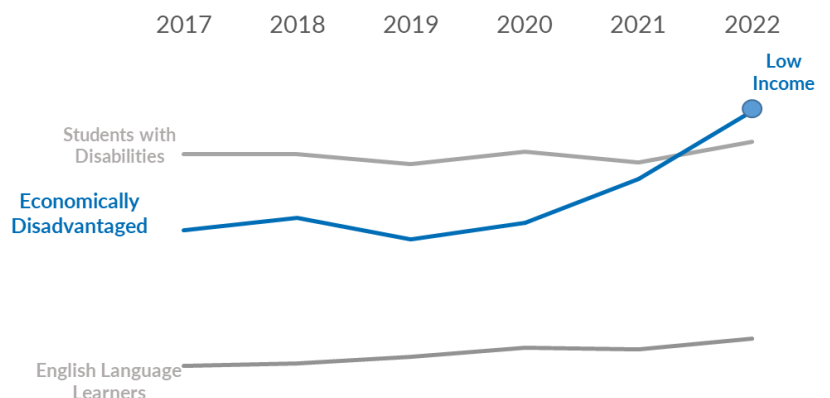
A student is classified as high needs if they are designated as either low income (prior to 2015, and from 2022 to present), economically disadvantaged (from 2015 to 2021), English learner (EL) or former EL, or a student with disabilities. A former EL student is a student who was an EL at some point in the four previous academic years. Just under one-third of district students are classified as high needs (30.1 percent), including 16.9 percent of students who are low income and 15.2 percent who have disabilities. In addition, 10.9 percent of district students speak a first language other than English, with 4.1 qualifying as English learners.

**Percent of total district enrollment in SY21-22 for each subgroup compared to state**



The five-year enrollment trend<sup>12</sup> indicates increases in all selected student populations, especially low income students.

The visualization to the right shows the percent of high needs subgroup population changes from school year 2016-27 to school year 2021-22. The largest enrollment increase over the last five years was among students from economically disadvantaged families (now classified as low income), which increased 55 percent from SY17-18 to SY21-22. The enrollment of students whose first language is not English increased by 18 percent, with a 52



percent increase in the EL population. Students with disabilities increased by 5 percent. The overall high needs enrollment increased by 25 percent in the last five years.

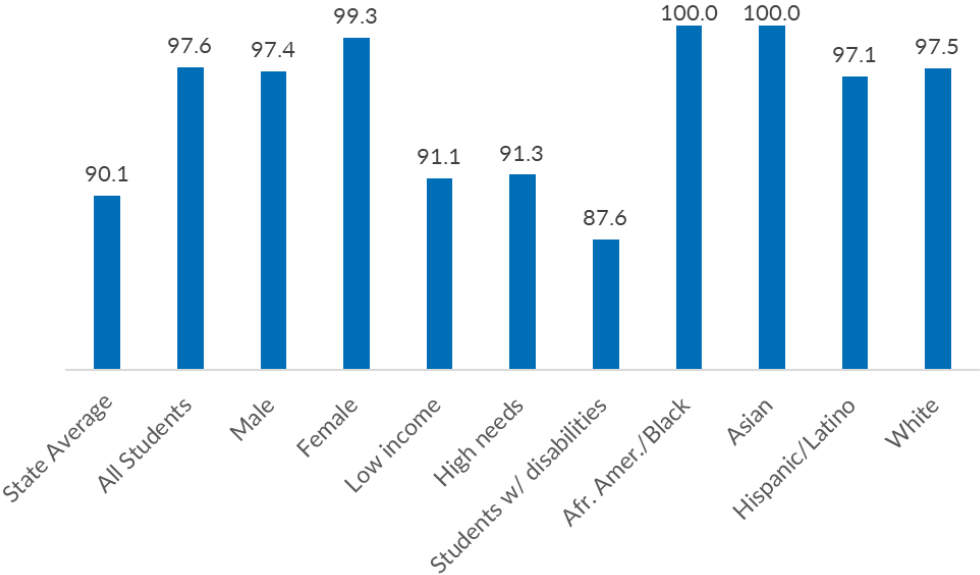
The table below provides all student subgroup populations' percent and number of students enrolled, as well as each subgroup's enrollment change in the last five years.

Student Population	SY21-22 Percentage of Enrollment	SY21-22 # of Students Enrolled	Percent Change in Past Five Years
African Amer./Black	3.7%	136	▼2.7%
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	0.3%	11	0%
Asian	7.1%	260	▲16.9%
Hispanic or Latino	7.2%	264	▲29.2%
Multi-Race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	3.2%	117	▲43.8%
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	0.1%	-	▲100%
White	78.4%	2875	▼5.9%
First Language not English	10.9%	400	▲24%
English Learner	4.1%	150	▲58%
Students with Disabilities	15.2%	620	▲5%
Low Income	16.9%	557	▲66%
High Needs	30.1%	1104	▲25%

**Graduation rates from Walpole High School are above state averages for all subgroups<sup>12</sup>.**

Between 2017 and 2022, an average of 97.6 percent of each class graduated within five years, compared to the Massachusetts average of 90.1 percent. High needs students graduate at lower rates than class averages, including students with disabilities (five-year average of 87.6 percent), and students from low-income families (five-year average of 91.1 percent). In a typical senior class size of 285, fewer than 10 do not graduate in four years; a small number of students (up to 2 per year) will graduate after completing an additional year. Of the 21 students who dropped out between 2016 and 2021, 18 were high needs students, including 14 students with disabilities and 11 students from low-income families.

Average 5 year adjusted cohort graduation rates for each subgroup from 2017-2022



## ABOUT THE FINDINGS

Findings are presented by the domains of the Mass Insight Equity Audit Framework, as referenced in the [Methodology](#) and further depicted in the [Appendix](#). Findings include district strengths (key investments and initiatives that the district has already started or established that focus on equity, access, and opportunity for all students, staff, and/or families) and areas for improvement (areas where the district has more work to develop or fully implement equitable practices, policies, and structures that focus on equity, access, and opportunity for all students, staff, and/or families).

A few things to note about focus group and interview quotes and survey responses depicted in the Findings section:

- Direct quotes from stakeholders are contained within quotation marks. Quotes were selected for their representation value of all quotes gathered throughout the equity audit process.
  - If a quote contains brackets [ ], it indicates that Mass Insight inserted the bracketed words to make the sentence more readable and/or grammatically correct.
  - If a quote contains ellipses (...), it indicates that part of the original quote was removed because it was repetitive or did not provide additional necessary or relevant information.
- Direct quotes from documents are *italicized*.
- Survey responses and the conclusions drawn from them are based on the responses of those representative stakeholders who participated by completing the survey. All district leaders, school leaders, school staff, upper elementary through high school students, families, and partners were eligible to voluntarily complete the survey. More information about surveys and focus group participation can be found in the [Methodology](#).

## DOMAIN 1: VISION, STRATEGY & CULTURE

**The values espoused by the Walpole Public Schools Vision are focused on providing each student access to an equitable educational experience.**

When Dr. Bridget Gough assumed the superintendency at Walpole Public Schools (WPS) in 2019, she engaged in a [five-month listening tour](#) to “gain a deeper understanding of the vision for the school district.” In her [findings analysis](#), Dr. Gough noted that “there is a need to explore opportunities to better communicate the district’s values and culture. For example, each school has its own set of articulated values, the district as a school system does not have articulated core values.” After extensive collaboration with the WPS community, the district was able to adopt a values-based vision that Dr. Gough noted “had a ton of buy-in from our students, our staff, our parents, and our families.” This vision states:

*The Walpole Public Schools is a diverse learning community that empowers students and staff to maximize their full potential. Our professional and caring staff is committed to providing a rigorous education to ensure our students achieve individual success. Through a collaborative partnership with community and families, Walpole Public Schools educates all of our students to become responsible, contributing global citizens and life-long learners.*

*To reach these goals, the Walpole Public Schools provides students with the tools they need to succeed in a complex global society. We challenge every student to master a rigorous curriculum taught by highly qualified, enthusiastic, and inspirational educators. We embrace innovation and technology, and we provide the facilities to support learning.*

*Our students learn future ready skills that enable them to be effective communicators, critical and creative thinkers, and problem-solvers. The Walpole Public Schools is a positive and safe learning environment where students’ physical and emotional well-being and success are paramount.*

*We are committed to maintaining our role as a leader in public education at the local, state, and national levels.*

The WPS vision posits that a rigorous education requires that all students receive a differentiated learning experience. WPS seeks to provide all students a “rigorous education” through which “every student” builds the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a global society. Building an understanding of the variety of cultures, backgrounds, identities, and experiences of Walpole’s “diverse learning community” will prepare students to navigate globally, across cultures. And although the vision does not explicitly name equity, the vision’s focus on equipping all students with the tools they need to become “responsible, contributing global citizens and life-long learners” speaks to a desire for equity in the district. What’s more, the district’s focus on “individual success” acknowledges that success is not defined or measured the same way for all students and that different students may need different supports to achieve success.

**The WPS Vision’s equity focus is reflected in the goals, action steps, and implementation of the current strategic plan. The extent to which staff, students, and families experience and are impacted as intended by the strategic plan goals varies.**

When asked about the process of bringing the vision to life, Dr. Gough discussed the importance of ensuring alignment between the vision, strategic plan, and leader goals: “...all of our leadership council goals have to tie with our strategic plan. My goals and every principal’s goals... have something to do with the leadership council goal and the strategic plan. Our school improvement plans have to align with the strategic plan.” For Dr. Gough, if each leader’s goals are aligned with the district’s vision and strategic plan, their actions will be more likely to actualize the vision and reach the outcomes outlined in the strategic plan. This orientation led to a strategic plan and implemented actions that are deeply aligned with the values espoused by the vision, as the table below illustrates.

Vision Excerpts	Alignment with Strategic Plan Goals	Actions Implemented
<p>“...staff is committed to providing a rigorous education to ensure our students achieve individual success. ...the Walpole Public Schools provide students with the tools they need to succeed in a complex global society.”</p>	<p><b>Goal 1.</b> To provide an engaging curriculum, differentiated instruction, and ongoing assessments for all students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminated English course tracking at the middle school level</li> <li>• Established academic intervention blocks at the middle and high school levels</li> </ul>
<p>“The Walpole Public Schools is a positive and safe learning environment where students’ physical and emotional well-being and success are paramount.”</p>	<p><b>Goal 2.</b> To foster and strengthen the social-emotional well-being of the school community in order to develop responsible and engaged citizens</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired additional counselors</li> <li>• Established systems to report harassment, intimidation, bullying and racism</li> </ul>
<p>“The Walpole Public Schools is a diverse learning community that empowers students and staff to maximize their full potential.”</p>	<p><b>Goal 3.</b> To demonstrate a high level of Cultural Proficiency as evidenced by active promotion of diversity in all aspects of instruction, learning, and participation, thus ensuring equity for all and full inclusion of members of the educational and greater community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired a half-time DEI director</li> <li>• Increased DEI-related staff trainings such as CR 24: Evaluating Curriculum for Bias and Demeaning Generalizations</li> <li>• Contracted external facilitators, such as Dr. Kalise Wornum, to facilitate cultural proficiency training</li> </ul>
<p>“We embrace innovation and technology, and we provide the facilities to support learning.”</p>	<p><b>Goal 4.</b> To ensure that facilities and resources support student learning and well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently undertaking a middle school building project to ensure that facilities support student learning and well being</li> </ul>

Despite the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, the district is to be credited for continuing to take action aligned with its equity-focused, five-year strategic plan, which was developed in 2019. And although district leaders acknowledge that more work is required to further equity in Walpole Public Schools, they are proud of the partnership and progress they have achieved with the strategic plan thus far, particularly considering the COVID pandemic impact. One leader noted that they are “... impressed by how much work, time, and effort has gone into the meetings, the conversation, and looking at a lot of different things. This year it [equity] is not just a stated priority but an actual priority.” Additionally, district leaders feel well supported by the superintendent and assistant superintendent to drive the district’s equity work forward: “We have the strong support of the administration... the leadership at Walpole is pushing all of this forward.” Similarly, principals are encouraged by the boldness with which the superintendent and assistant superintendent fight for the district’s vision: “All the ideas that we’ve been putting together are the right things to do, and I would hope that we continue to be bold.” Assistant principals also feel that they are valued partners in the district’s equity work: “The assistant superintendent and superintendent do a good job of making us feel included.” District and school leaders’ support of the strategic plan and their investment in its objectives is evident.

The impact of the strategic plan is currently experienced less holistically for some school staff, families, and students, as much of the related professional learning opportunities through the end of the 2021-22 school year have been for district and school leaders. This is largely in part because of the district’s investments in equity-focused leadership and professional learning and norming opportunities in the past few years have mainly been with district and school

leaders. It is subsequently understandable that a number of staff feel that equity and equity-focused initiatives have not yet come to life in schools: “Each year teachers and administrators go through the motions of group professional development on the current educational buzzword without truly focusing on the topic and making it a reality in the school.” Some family members acknowledge that their needs are catered to more frequently than others: “My family is well represented in the school... However, I feel more could be done to be more inclusive of other students.” And students see some commitment to equity from staff but very little from their peers: “I feel like they’re trying to be more equitable, but it’s mostly the staff and not much of the students.” The closer one gets to the student and family experience (e.g. district office vs. school staff), the less the vision for equity is currently experienced.

The WPS Vision seeks to establish a “collaborative partnership with community and families” and to create opportunities for students to “exercise critical thinking skills and effectively use their voice to communicate solutions to problems.” Some community members shared during focus groups and surveys that they do not yet feel engaged as partners in the district’s strategic priorities. Students, especially those from marginalized populations, feel that they consistently give the same feedback to the district with no change: “The district should follow through on what they say they are going to do. We’ve had five meetings about hiring diverse staff, but nothing has happened.” School staff feel that they hold a wealth of knowledge and experience that is not adequately leveraged by the district: “I wish the central office would listen more to the ideas of outstanding teachers so similar programs/techniques could be replicated in other schools in the district.” And families, particularly families of students with IEPs, are concerned about one-way communication and lack of opportunities to provide feedback and collaboratively partner with school staff on their children’s learning needs: “Create a better system for receiving feedback from students and parents... to collect data on experiences of students, parents, and teachers that can be conveyed to leadership on issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and neurodiversity.” As the district continues to build partnership with all stakeholders and engage them in district priorities, it has the opportunity to leverage the successful engagement and learnings implemented with district and school leaders as it now intentionally brings school staff, students, and families to the table to engage in district priorities.

More details about how stakeholders currently experience the district’s vision are explored in the following sections:

- [Accountability for Equitable Student Access & Outcomes](#)
- [Student Readiness to Learn](#)
- [Culturally Responsive and Linguistically Sustaining Teaching & Learning](#)
- [Family & Community Engagement](#)



## School level data-driven decision-making is not yet consistently utilized to identify and address differences in student success outcomes.

The district has recently invested in common academic benchmark assessments in order to facilitate a sharper focus on formative data disaggregation and to inform instructional priorities at the school level. As one district leader describes, “We didn't have much of a data practice, in general, across the district. We didn't have a lot of benchmarking, especially in the areas of literacy and in math... And now we have in K-8 some strong math benchmarking and K-5 strong literacy benchmarking. We're looking to expand our literacy benchmarking from grades six to nine as well.” Middle school and high school leaders currently lack formative tools available in the lower grades and shared that they rely on MCAS and i-Ready data, which results in a reliance on report card grades and a limited ongoing understanding of comparative student progress. As one school leader explained, “There are so many things missed when you just look at this kind of data... there are so many different things that we should be looking at that maybe we're not equipped [to see].”

When asked about data practices at the school level, one district leader described processes for classroom-level data collection and analysis that involve many different combinations of tools:

“If you want information on the classroom level, I don't really have that... So that's kind of where we've started... high level because to get it, drill it down to the teachers, we may use different tools. And we're just investigating all these different ways to get it so that teachers can have easier access to some of this information because although X2 [Aspen Family Portal] has an amazing amount of data, then we have Edulastic, and we have i-Ready. And we have all these different programs, but they're housed in different locations.”

Given that school staff are often working across a variety of technology tools and making sense of many data points across platforms, many school staff may feel challenged to triangulate the data in order to make informed instructional decisions. One school staff member described data practices as varying widely within a school and across the district: “We hear about data a lot but we don't see it. People don't know where it's available. How do we gather the data as we move forward, and then how to analyze it, and make that a habit?” Another staff member echoed the need to use data: “I want to have the data practices that I can just execute on. I would like to have data driven approaches to teaching that I can apply.”

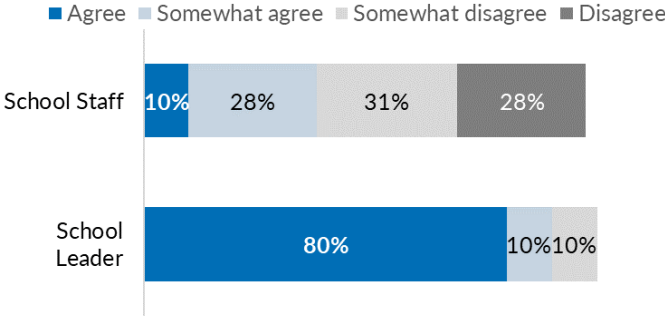
When asked what data is most often discussed during PLC meetings, most teachers described a combination of formative assessment, grades, and attendance. When teachers referenced their data practices, several described investigating the differences between students with and without IEPs or 504s. They also described monitoring their students' attendance or grades. Yet teachers did not describe consistent data disaggregation or monitoring protocols used to identify performance discrepancies for marginalized student populations or high needs subgroups.

The visualizations below portray staff responses when asked if they “have sufficient training and access to disaggregated data”: more staff disagreed (61 percent) than agreed (39 percent). However, when asked specifically about their training needs, 43 percent of school staff indicated that they did not desire additional training in data analysis and data-driven decision making. This indicates that at least for some school staff, data access is key for improving their data practices, rather than additional training.

In contrast to school staff, school leaders overwhelmingly agreed that they have sufficient “training and access to disaggregated data to understand the extent to which student subgroups in my schools are equitably succeeding” (90 percent agreed or somewhat agreed). However, nine out of ten school leaders also indicated that they want at least some training around data analysis and decision making. This likely indicates that for school leaders, access to disaggregated data is at this point less of a need than additional training to take actions based on data.

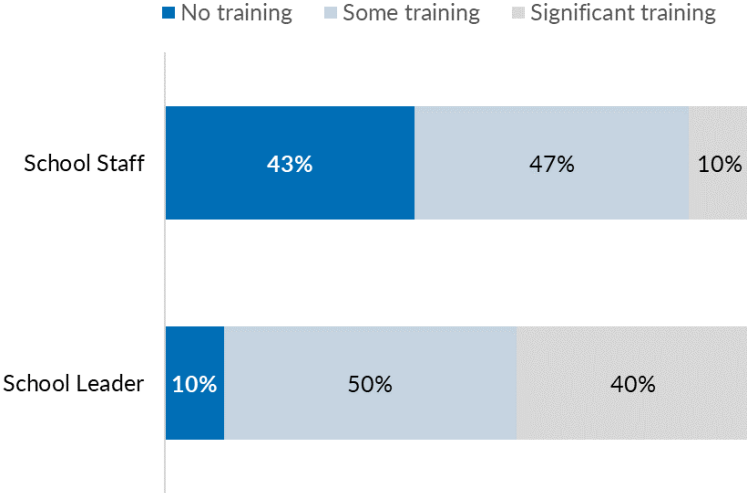
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Staff responses to the statement, “I have sufficient training and access to disaggregated data to understand the extent to which student subgroups in my schools are equitably succeeding.”



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Staff responses to survey question “I desire additional professional learning opportunities in the area of data analysis and data-driven decision making”



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The use of data to inform decision-making is an important component of monitoring, identifying, and addressing inequities and disparities within any system. Walpole Public Schools is building a data-driven ecosystem, and there is important work to continue in this area both immediately and in the long term, as named in the strategic plan. In light of staff responses to their access to and training related to data analysis and data-driven decision-making, it is clear why the district is prioritizing data tools and professional development for school staff, and recent investments in leaders’ data capabilities are reflected in survey results. As the district continues to expand effective data practices to all levels, it will be important to bear in mind that different groups of staff have differing needs: some need enhanced access to disaggregated data, while others need more or specific training and support.

## DOMAIN 3: ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EQUITABLE STUDENT ACCESS & OUTCOMES

The mission of Walpole Public Schools is *Educating All Students to Achieve Success*. In order to determine the extent to which all students are equitably able to fully participate and achieve success, numerous data sources were examined and compared in a variety of ways to capture the breadth of student diversity and representation present within the district. Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ—not only race, ethnicity, and gender—but also national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, and more<sup>2</sup>.

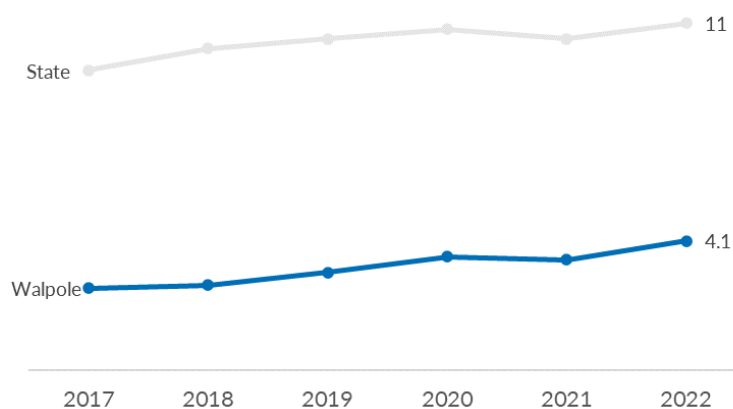
In this section, close attention is paid to measures of access and outcomes for students from marginalized populations as compared to their peers and where there are meaningful differences. Students from marginalized populations include those who identify as belonging to a group/groups that experience discrimination and exclusion as a result of current and/or historical social, political, economic power dynamics or oppression<sup>4</sup>. The populations of students whose access and outcomes were closely analyzed include students with disabilities, English learners, non-White students, and economically disadvantaged/low income students. Current data collection and reporting systems limit data disaggregation based on identity markers, and thus it is worth noting that student access and outcomes will not always be able to reflect the full range of identities and experiences within the district. The following analyses provide a starting point to understand the extent to which all students in the district are achieving success.

**English learners, students with disabilities, and low income students are three large marginalized populations in the district that are not yet succeeding at the rates of their peers.**

### English Learners

During the 2021-22 school year, English learners (ELs) were 4.1 percent of the student population or 152 students. In 2021, the school with the highest percentage of ELs was Daniel Feeney Preschool (13.6 percent or 12 students) followed by Elm Street School (8.4 percent or 36 students). The middle schools had the lowest enrollment of ELs (1.9 percent or seven students at Bird Middle, and 1.6 percent or eight students at Eleanor N Johnson Middle). English learner enrollment in the district has grown at a rate of 58 percent from 2017 to 2022 (from 100 to 152 students), the second highest growth of any subgroup. This increase has mirrored the rate of increase in ELs across the state.

*Change in Enrollment of English Learners in Walpole Compared to the State from 2017 to 2022*



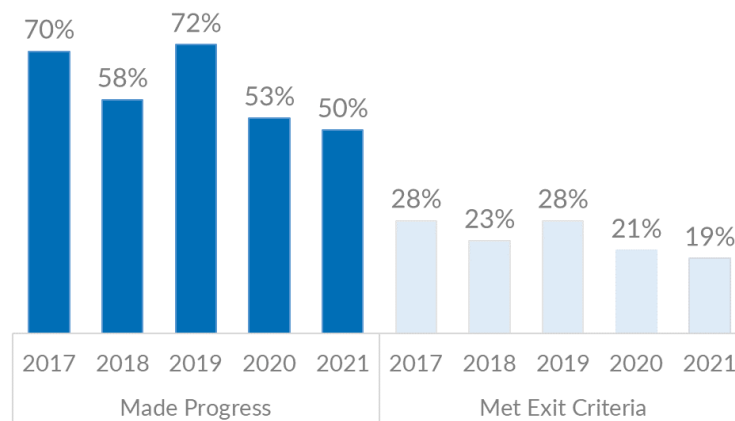
ELs are assessed annually to measure their proficiency and progress in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English, by participating in an assessment called Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs). ACCESS serves as just one of the many criteria that educators consider

as they determine whether ELs have attained an English language proficiency level that will allow them to meaningfully participate in English language classroom instruction. A student is considered to be making progress if they are on track to attain English proficiency (i.e., achieve an overall proficiency level of at least 4.2) within six years<sup>5</sup>.

Over the last five years as the number of ELs has grown in the district, the percentage of students making progress as measured by ACCESS has declined by 20 percent. Since 2019, ELs in the middle school grades have consistently had the lowest percentage of test takers making progress. The percentage of ELs meeting exit criteria has remained between 20 and 30 percent until this school year. In spring 2021, 50 percent of test takers (or 51 out of 101 students) made progress in Walpole. It is also worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected ELs throughout the country and that this trend is reflected nationally in the last three school years.

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*Percent of ACCESS test takers making progress and meeting exit criteria  
2017 - 2021*



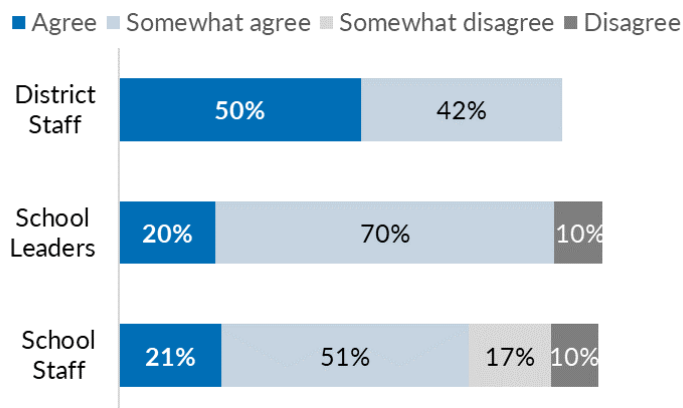
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English learners are supported by designated English language development (ELD) instructional staff whose certifications reflect specialized training in supporting English learners. Besides classroom instruction, ELD staff also facilitate communication between families and other staff. One staff member described that in addition to instructional responsibilities, they must be able to “[keep constant communication and to translate e-mails](#)” to ensure ELs can access content and make progress in school.

There was a range of responses when ELD staff were asked how they collaborate with general education teachers. Some had dedicated time to connect and noted easy communication, while others found that they had to cancel services to meet with other teachers. Additionally, staff described a lack of access to dedicated, targeted curricular materials to support ELD instruction.

When surveyed, more than a quarter of school staff disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement, “My school provides equitable, high-quality education for English learners.”

Staff survey responses to “Our district/my school provides equitable, high-quality education for English learners”



When school staff, school leaders, and district staff were asked “Which school policies, systems, and structures should be re-examined,” support for English learners was tied for the seventh most mentioned area and accounts for four percent of the comments left by staff at all levels. Related staff comments include:

- “Our ESL program does not get the attention/resources it should.”
- “There needs to be more support for ELL students in a regular classroom setting.”
- “EL support/instruction for first year EL students (newcomers) [is needed].”
- “The integration of ELL students into Honors and AP classes and also into extracurricular activities [is needed.]”
- “The policies around EL students are exclusive. Families only get communications from the school in English.”

In summary, the growing number of ELs in Walpole require additional support to ensure that they are making adequate growth. Staff that support ELs need the time to collaborate with general educators, in addition to adequate curricular resources to support ELs’ academic and social growth. And as the population of ELs increase, current district translation and interpretation supports may need to be reevaluated.

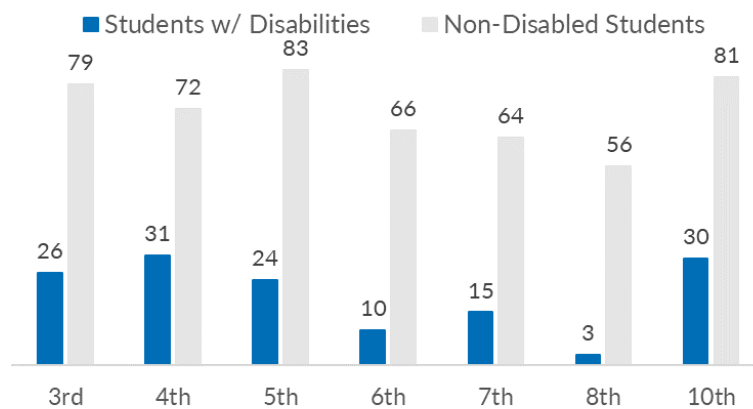
### Students with Disabilities

The district enrolls 601 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)<sup>8</sup> who qualify for special education and 314 students who qualify for Section 504 accommodation plans<sup>9</sup>. Students with IEPs make up 16 percent of the district’s total enrollment. School enrollments range from 7.6 percent at Old Post Road School to 19.9 percent at Blrd Middle School. Daniel Feeney Preschool Center provides an integrated preschool program and subsequently enrolls a larger percent of students with special needs (43.2 percent) than most schools in the district Note that in this section, the term *students with disabilities* references only those students with IEPs who qualify for special education services.

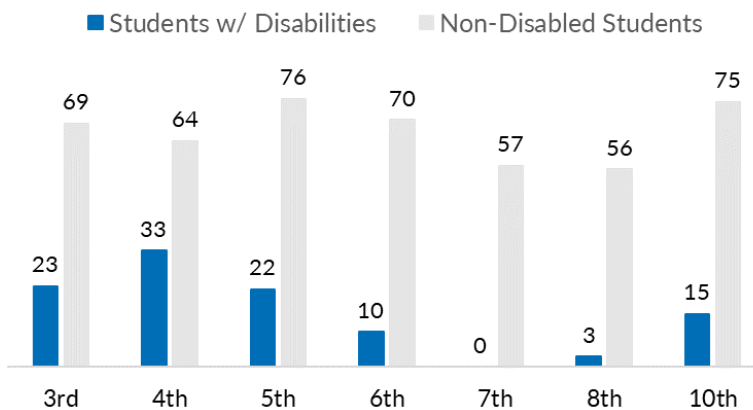
Walpole Public Schools serves students with disabilities in a variety of settings from preschool through high school, including out-of-district placement. In a presentation to the school committee, the Director of Student Services explained that the “majority of students on IEPs’ needs are mild” and are served in a regular education setting by special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers. There are a small number of students whose needs are so unique or intensive that they require specialized programming that takes place outside of the general education classroom. The district is able to serve students in specialized programs throughout the district, but they are unable to provide every program in every building. This means that students may need to leave their neighborhood school to attend the program best suited to meet their needs. Additionally, the district facilitates out-of-district placements for around 40 students. District leaders described coordinated efforts to support students with disabilities’ access to participate in afterschool programming, including staffing, health, and transportation considerations.

At the February 10, 2022 school committee meeting, district leaders shared that the most recent special education determination report from DESE indicated that the district Meets Requirements, and therefore the district does not need to participate in any state-facilitated activities related to Technical Assistance or Intervention for special education. The school committee has a Special Education subcommittee, but it is unclear the extent to which they ongoingly monitor the access and success outcomes of students with disabilities. For example, on the 2021 MCAS, the percentage of students with disabilities who scored Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on MCAS ranged from zero to 33 percent. The percentage of students with disabilities who score Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on MCAS ranges from 31 to 60 percentage points lower than their non-disabled peers, with gaps that persist in every tested grade and subject area.

*Percent of students with disabilities achieving Meets or Exceeds Expectations in English language arts in 2021 compared to non-disabled students*



*Percent of students with disabilities achieving Meets or Exceeds expectations in Mathematics in 2021 compared to non-disabled students*

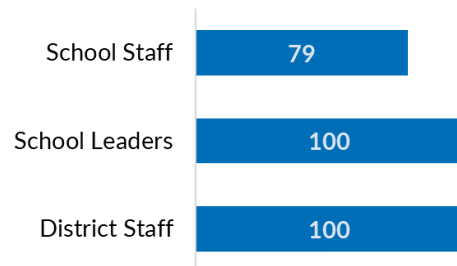


When asked in interviews about disparities that exist between groups of students within the district, district and school leaders repeatedly acknowledged the gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. When school staff, school leaders, and district staff were asked on surveys “Which school policies, systems, and structures should be re-examined,” special education was the sixth most mentioned area and accounts for five percent of the comments left by staff at all levels. When asked if the district or their school provides an “equitable, high quality

education for students with exceptional needs (students with IEPs, 504 plans, or advanced/gifted learners),” school leaders and district staff all completely agreed or somewhat agreed but school staff indicated greater disagreement.

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*Percent of staff that agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement, “The district/my school provides equitable, high quality education for students with exceptional needs (students with IEPs, 504 plans, or advanced/gifted learners).”*



Most families in the district feel that communication frequency and quantity of information shared is just the right amount (see [Family and Community Engagement](#)), and when the data about communication is disaggregated, the families of students with disabilities have varied experiences. Special education or 504 support was named by families as both an area of strength and an area for improvement. Many family members were quick to praise individual staff members who are part of their child’s support team, including counselors, special education teachers, and other support staff:

- “We are currently going through [the] evaluation process for one child and think the school has done a good job with the evaluation.”
- “Whenever I reach out to support staff and aids, I am always responded to promptly. My questions and concerns are always addressed.”
- “[redacted name] has done an excellent job of having my child understand their 504.”
- “Being new to the IEP process, we were very pleased with the explanations and rights we have as parents.”

Many families noted that they received a high degree of support as their children were being evaluated for IEPs; yet once their child qualified for special education or a 504 plan, communication about their child’s progress was limited: “I was engaged from the start and trusted the process. I do not get enough communication around my child’s growth and progress.” Many families described frustration stemming from a lack of proactive engagement and updates from staff to collaborate and problem solve with a sense of urgency. Families share that this places the communication burden on families and students to seek information about IEP progress: “I get emails and some feedback from teachers but most feedback is from my son.” Most family comments indicated communication for yearly meetings about their child’s support plan, but outside of those annual checkpoints, they have to initiate communication with their child’s team. One parent described staff communication about their child’s plan as meeting the “minimum requirements but are not proactive, thoughtful, or welcoming.”

Several families noted that although there are opportunities to learn about their child’s IEP, there are few opportunities to be involved in creating it. With few opportunities for families to provide feedback directly to schools or the district, families feel that they have limited agency in supporting the needs of their children:

- “I feel most teachers and staff do an excellent job communicating, however my child is not doing well. I am not sure what, if anything, can be done additionally for them, but they are experiencing failure after failure, with no workable plan for the future.”
- “Have all teachers follow the IEP and 504 and not shame or deny the kids for having it. Not all people learn the same way. Teach to all kids, not just the easy ones. Many of the teachers do but a group of them do not and get away with it. They permanently impact the child’s self worth, self confidence, academically, and socially.”
- “The failure to design learning programs and methods appropriate for our child’s needs has left our child feeling

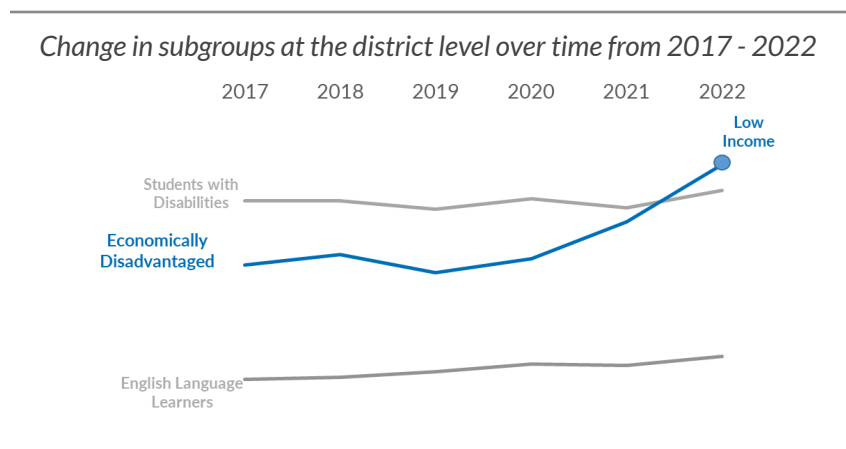
very badly and negatively affected self-esteem.”

- “We have IEP meetings; however, they have been combative rather than collaborative. The school has resisted every request and effort to get our child in programs which would work for our child.”

In summary, most families and staff view the district’s special education program and support as meeting students’ needs. Additionally, families of students with disabilities have varied experiences and desire more frequent communication and involvement in their children’s educational progress.

### Low Income Students

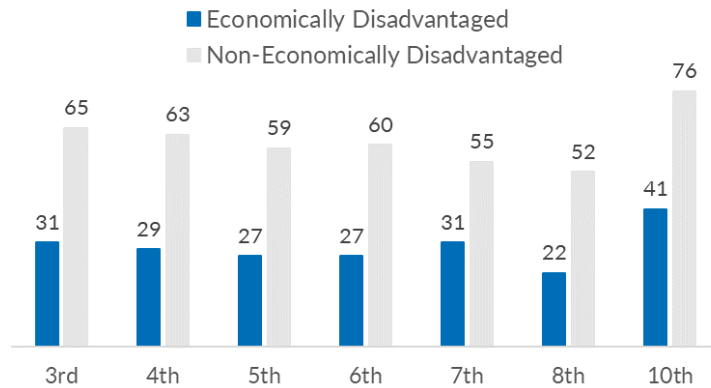
As of the 2021-22 school year, students considered *Low income* make up 16.9 percent of the students enrolled in the district, making them the largest student subgroup in the district. Overall, the population of low income students has grown by 66 percent since 2017, the most growth observed for any subgroup in the district.



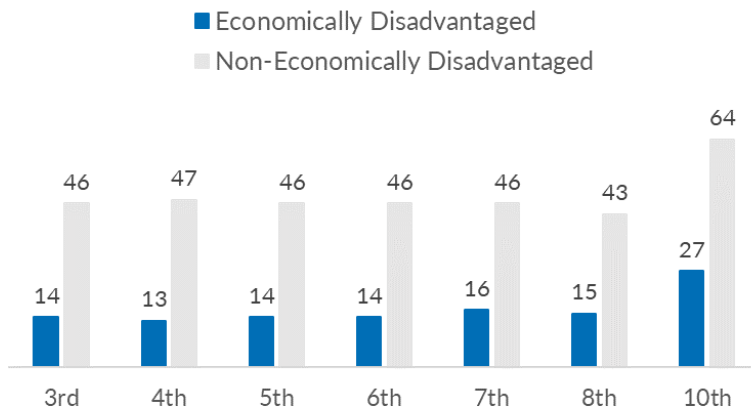
The term *Economically Disadvantaged* has been used since 2015, but in the school year 2021-2022, the term *Low Income* has replaced it in state reporting. The change will “give school districts and charter schools the opportunity to claim the relatively small number of students statewide who qualify as low income under the 185% Federal Poverty Level standard”<sup>10</sup> but who were previously not identified. Additionally, homeless students reported by the district will be categorized as low income. For the purpose of discussing these students in the equity audit report, we will refer to them as *low income* unless discussing specific outcomes from when the term *economically disadvantaged* was still in use.

In examining student performance on the 2021 MCAS, gaps between economically disadvantaged students and their non-economically disadvantaged peers exist in all grades and subject areas. In both the Mathematics and ELA MCAS, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students scoring *Meeting* or *Exceeding Expectations* is, on average, 34 percentage points lower than their non-economically disadvantaged peers. The smallest gap between the groups occurred in 7th grade English Language Arts, where 60 percent of non-economically disadvantaged students achieved *Meeting* or *Exceeding Expectations* and 40 percent of economically disadvantaged students achieved those scores.

Percent of students considered economically disadvantaged achieving meets or exceeds expectations in the English Language Arts MCAS in 2021 compared to non-economically disadvantaged students

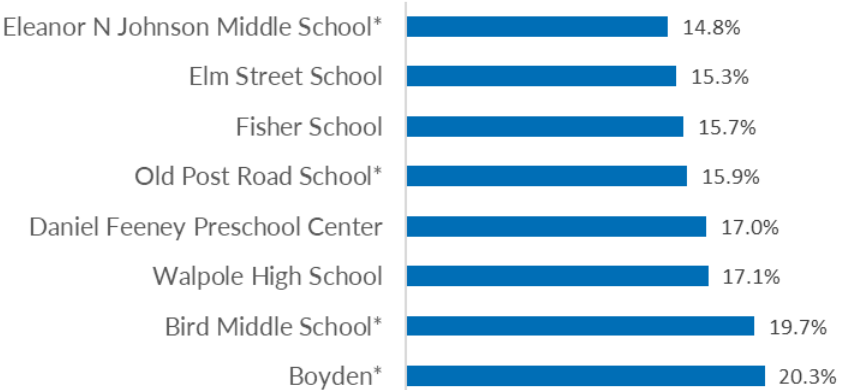


Percent of students considered economically disadvantaged achieving meets or exceeds expectations in the Mathematics MCAS in 2021 compared to non-economically disadvantaged students



When asked what student subgroups are not yet as successful as other student subgroups within the district, district and school leaders mentioned low income students almost as frequently as students with disabilities. As a result, the district makes many attempts to support low income students and their families. The district operates a free summer learning program aimed at supporting students at risk of academic failure and increasingly recruits low income students to attend. Another way that the district supports low income students academically is through their use of Title I funds. According to the district’s Title I webpage, “The goal for the Title I program is to provide additional, supportive instruction to identified students in regular education programming. This instruction usually takes place in the regular classroom in very small groups, allowing for more individualized attention to the students.” The schools currently designated as Title I schools are: Old Post Road School, Boyden School, Bird Middle School and Eleanor N Johnson Middle School.

Percentage of students at each school considered low income in the 2021-2022 school year



\* indicates school is designated Title I

The district also identifies families who are considered low income through the school nutrition program. Direct certification is a monthly process which allows the district to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications. The program also maintains a system for paper and online applications, including translated versions. Children continue to receive meals even if their account to pay for meals shows a negative balance; and when a student does begin to carry a negative balance, school and district staff describe a collaborative process that aims to provide families with a variety of support services from district and community partners. In response to food insecurity concerns during COVID related school closures, district leaders pivoted their existing backpack program to deliver food directly to homes with food distribution support of community partners like the local food pantry.

Many aspects of the student experience in Walpole require families to pay fees, such as extracurriculars like sports and music, participating in AP tests, transportation, and prior to this spring, full-day kindergarten. It is worth noting that district leaders, with the support of the Walpole School Committee and Town Administration, will offer free full-day kindergarten for all students beginning in the 2022-2023 school year. District staff describe a waiver process for many of these offerings, but it is unclear to what extent families utilize waivers. In describing the waiver process, a district staff member stated, "If somebody is eligible for free and reduced lunch... they can still apply, and if they're accepted, then they receive free bus passes." In the case of sports fees, the same staff member described a more informal process not captured in a formal policy: "[The] student makes a request to the athletic director, [then the] athletic director goes through the requests and where needed, will make exceptions and waive fees or give reduced fees just depending on this particular situation." District officials did not describe a process for examining rates of waiver utilization, and there is no clearly identifiable and systematic way for families or students to request waivers for all fee-based activities. Low income students do have access to the late bus to ensure their participation in after school activities, but it is not clear to what extent they are aware of it or utilizing it.

## Discipline and behavior policies and practices were named by students, staff, and leaders as opportunities to become more equitable.

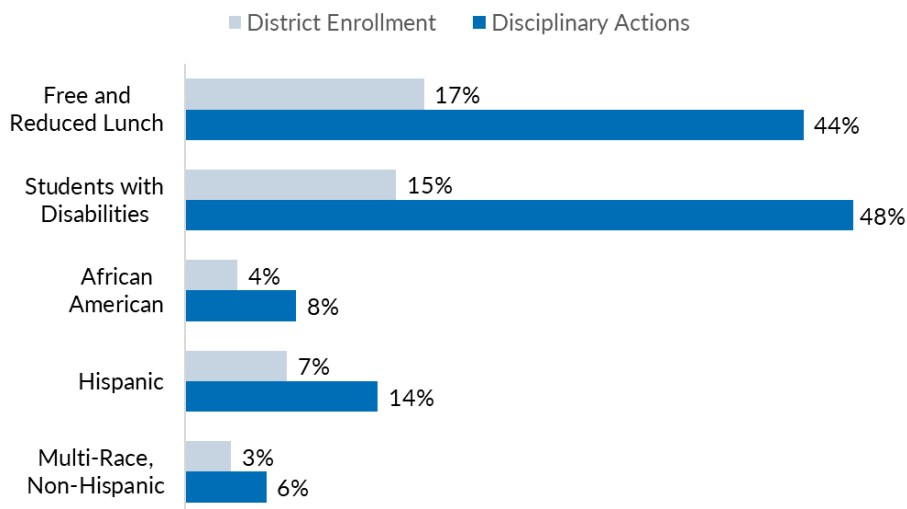
*More than 1 in 4 students surveyed feel that behavior issues are not dealt with in a fair manner at their school.*



When surveyed, most students agreed with the statement, “My school addresses behavior issues fairly;” however, 28 percent of students disagreed. In a survey of school staff, school leaders, and district staff, participants were asked in an open response-style question, “Which school policies, systems, and structures should be re-examined?” Their responses were coded and categorized, and the analysis revealed that student discipline was the most mentioned area worthy of consideration, overwhelmingly so by school staff more frequently than the second and third most common responses combined.

The district collects data on disciplinary incidents and the corresponding consequences, which includes student demographic information, which allowed for an analysis of incident responses. District data<sup>9</sup> from the 2021-22 school year shows 2,976 conduct violations and 1,783 unique corresponding disciplinary actions. Examination of disciplinary actions found that the percentage of multi-racial/non-Hispanic, African American/Black, and Hispanic or Latino students who received disciplinary consequences was outsized compared to their respective rates of enrollment in the district. Additionally, two other groups of students had higher than expected rates of discipline when compared to their rates of enrollment: students with disabilities and students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

*Percent of students enrolled in Walpole compared to percent of disciplinary actions by subgroup in the 2021-22 school year*



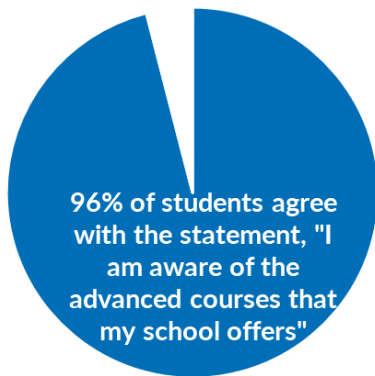
Administrators have discretion to levy a range of disciplinary actions, from parental conferences and notifications to demerits to detention. District data indicates that detentions made up 37 percent of the disciplinary actions given to students in the 2021-2022 school year, with smaller percentages made up by demerits (16 percent), student

conferences (14 percent) and parent notification (13 percent). Data also indicates there were 152 suspensions issued across the district, which accounts for 4.8 percent of total disciplinary actions.

The student handbook describes suspension as “a very serious penalty,” that “can result from a number of causes.” The handbook goes on to explain that “an administrator may suspend any student for any act considered sufficiently serious. The number of days suspended and the conduct mark will be determined by the administration. Suspension may be assigned in school or out of school, depending on the nature of the offense.” Suspension data was analyzed to determine who and for what reasons students are most often suspended in the district, and the extent to which student subgroups were proportionally suspended and thus had equitable access to instruction and school activities. Our analysis indicates students with disabilities account for 15 percent of the WPS population but 65 percent of the suspensions were given to students with disabilities. It is unclear how many unique students with disabilities are included in the data set, as student identification numbers were not included for analysis to protect student privacy. In addition to the rates of suspensions given to students with disabilities, there are other disciplinary actions that are more often given to students with disabilities. All disciplinary actions that might be considered exclusionary—such as a suspension, hallway restriction, emergency removal, and bus suspension—appear to be disproportionately levied to students with disabilities. Five out of the seven cases or 71 percent of bus suspension were given to students with disabilities. And while not exclusionary in nature, it is worth noting that 278 out of the 494, or 56 percent, of demerits were given to students with disabilities. It is important to note that there were several instances where administrators included notes that indicated that a student with a disability would attend classes and receive the services outlined in their IEP throughout the duration of their suspension.

Similar trends can be observed when comparing the rates of suspension for students who qualify for free or reduced meals. Although students who qualify for free or reduced meals make up 17 percent of the students enrolled in the district, they received 51 percent of the suspensions in 2021. It should be noted that the data set used for this analysis did not include EL status and so disaggregation for ELs was not possible.

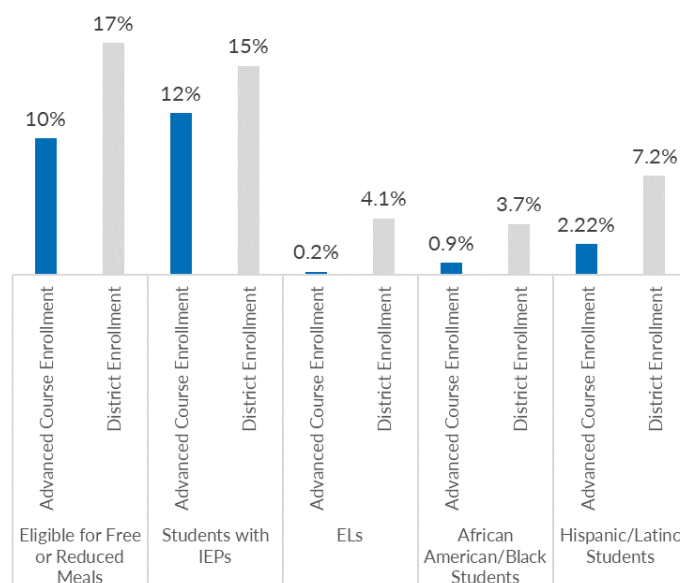
### The extent to which all students have access to advanced coursework is unclear.



Student survey data indicates that middle school and high school students are aware of the vast course offerings available, as evidenced by their overwhelming agreement with the statement, “I am aware of the advanced courses that my school offers (i.e. honors, CP, AP, and above-level Mathematics courses for 7th and 8th graders).” Out of the 4 percent of students who disagreed, 62 percent were middle school students.

Teachers and administrators described the prerequisites to enrolling in advanced courses, such as a grade of 93 percent or higher in the previous course. In an attempt to provide flexibility, a waiver system exists so that students can petition to enroll without meeting established prerequisites. Much like the waiver process for fees, there is little evidence that the district tracks or analyzes the rate of waiver application or acceptance for advanced course enrollment. However, one administrator stated “one of the most inequitable things at the high school level, in my mind, is our waiver process.” They went on to explain, “it’s the savvy parents with the savvy kids who end up getting the waivers,” and that typically, they don’t see many students of color obtaining waivers to gain access to advanced courses.

While students feel aware of advanced course options, there remain subgroups of students who are enrolled in advanced courses at rates below their rate of enrollment within the district—namely, students who are eligible for free or reduced meals, students with IEPs, ELs, and African American/Black students, and Hispanic or Latino students.



Coded and categorized survey responses from school staff, school leaders, and district staff when asked “Which school policies, systems, and structures should be re-examined,” revealed that course placement was the seventh most mentioned area worthy of consideration. Staff comments about the leveling system questioned the extent to which all students, particularly students with disabilities, are being challenged “to master a rigorous curriculum,” as emphasized in the district’s mission statement.

**“Our academic leveling system does not seem to benefit all students.” - school staff member**

The flexibility offered by a leveling system is meant to provide students with the most appropriate learning environment based on their past performance; yet criteria or performance measures that determine the level of best fit are often limited and can result in disproportionate representation and access barriers. In focus groups and surveys, staff expressed concern with the district’s current leveling system and policies, particularly at the high school. As one district official explained, “We have some low expectations for some of our special education students and for some of our high needs students, and that’s where they end up... at the high school level... in our CP2 courses... or in on-level classes.” Enrollment in those CP2 courses is not the concern, as the district official further explained: “The pedagogy and the practices are not as rich and engaging at that level.” The district’s Course Catalog document describes College Preparatory 2 courses as: “intended for students who are partially meeting academic expectations and require additional support to access the curriculum. Courses are designed to develop an understanding of the fundamentals of the subject and application of concepts” while Honors courses are described as going “beyond fundamental concepts” and are designed to “challenge [students’] previously held beliefs.” Many students are appropriately placed in these courses, and the concern voiced by staff is about the extent to which these courses meet the bar of “high expectations supported by quality instruction.”

Notably, the middle schools recently moved to heterogeneous grouping in English-Language Arts classes, which removed course leveling. The impact of this decision should continue to be monitored throughout high school to determine if there is an opportunity to expand those efforts across other subject areas if it positively impacts the number of students participating in honors or advanced English coursework.

## **The district has systems that support graduation and postsecondary success and further opportunities to ensure equitable student support.**

Survey responses indicate over 96 percent of high school students agreed or somewhat agreed that they are “aware of the requirements needed to graduate,” 90 percent of high school students know whether or not they are on track to graduate, and 88 percent of high school students “feel informed and supported” about options and next steps after graduation.

The counseling team at Walpole High School consists of six counselors whose goal is “to provide all students with timely and appropriate academic assistance and support, to supply them with the college and career information necessary for effective decision-making, and to provide personal counseling as it relates to school performance.” In addition to the counseling team, there are additional staff—such as social workers, an adjustment counselor, and school psychologist—who provide additional and more targeted therapeutic support for high school students. These efforts, when coupled with instructional staff and leaders, result in overall district graduation rates that exceeded the state average for the last four years: consistently 95 percent or above for the four-year cohort and 96 percent and above for the five-year cohort.

### **Plans of Walpole High School Graduates from 2018-2021**

While graduation rates remain high within the district and an overwhelming majority of students go on to enroll in college upon graduation, the self-reported plans for students who graduate from Walpole Public Schools has changed over the last four years. Notably, the percentage of students who have plans to enroll in some manner of postsecondary education has declined from 94 percent to 86 percent in the last four years. This eight percent decline from 2018 matches state and national trends.

In light of this decline, it is important to examine the programming and support in place for students who do not plan to enroll in college after graduation, namely support and preparation for career, military service, and other non-college routes. Vocational and job skills training courses can be found in the district’s Special Education program descriptions and in references to their partnership with The Education Collaborative (TEC). There are eleven courses listed under the Engineering and Technology Department section of the Course Catalog that provide an introduction to career fields like carpentry and AutoCAD. Additionally, the Walpole School Committee recently approved a new position for a work study coordinator at the high school to support students seeking a pathway to a career or trade.

While there are many bright spots about the way in which Walpole Public Schools supports students in preparing for life beyond high school, there are meaningful trends concerning which students are persisting to graduation.

### **Student Drop-out Trends and 9th Grade Pass Rates**

Graduation rates from Walpole High School are above state averages for all subgroups. Between 2017 and 2022, an average of 97.6 percent of each class graduated within five years, compared to the Massachusetts average of 90.1 percent. Of the 20 students who dropped out between the 2017-2021 school years, 17 (or 85 percent) were students with disabilities and/or considered economically disadvantaged/low income, and they were more likely to be White males. Also, 25 percent of students who dropped out in this timeframe were Hispanic or Latino, which is a higher percentage than their average enrollment rate of 6.3 percent from 2017 to 2021.

The gap between economically disadvantaged/low income students and their peers at the high school level can be observed in MCAS data, as previously discussed, and also when examining 9th grade course passing rates. In 2021, 22 of 38 students considered economically disadvantaged passed all their 9th grade courses, a 58 percent passing rate for the subgroup. The only other subgroup with similarly low passing rates were Hispanic or Latino students. The gaps between the passing rates of economically disadvantaged/low income and Hispanic or Latino students and their peers exist in both English language arts and mathematics courses.

## MassCore Completion

Among the many measures of graduate success across the commonwealth is the completion of MassCore courses while in high school. MassCore is “a state-recommended program of study intended to align high school coursework with college and workforce expectations,” which also aligns with the minimum four-year state college and university admission standards. MassCore was designed with equity in mind, as a way to encourage a recommended and core course of high school study that sets all Massachusetts students up for postsecondary admission and success through learning experiences that are rigorous and aligned with the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#).

While not mandatory for districts to follow, the state annually reports how many graduates complete their coursework in alignment with MassCore. For the last five years, less than five percent of Walpole graduates have graduated having completed the courses as outlined in MassCore. A comparison of MassCore Framework and WPS graduation requirements below indicates where the differences are and why MassCore completion rates are so low.

MassCore Framework	WPS Graduation Requirements
4 units of English language arts	4 years of English
4 units of mathematics	3 years of math; 4 years recommended
3 units of lab-based science	3 years of science
3 units of history and social science	3 years of social studies
2 units of the same foreign language	1 year of foreign language; 2 years recommended
PE as required by law	5 semester of wellness
1 unit of arts	3 years of non-core electives (business, technology, art, music, and media)
5 units of additional core courses	

MassCore remains optional for districts to follow, and its equity-centered intent extends beyond high school course access. As DESE indicates, “MassCore prepares students for college and career success. If students want a job that will support a family, provide health benefits, and offer a chance for career advancement, they’re likely to need an education beyond high school: at least a two- or four-year degree, apprenticeship program, military training, or workplace license or certification.”<sup>11</sup>

## The district has many systems and structures that support marginalized student populations that can be leveraged to proactively monitor all students’ success.

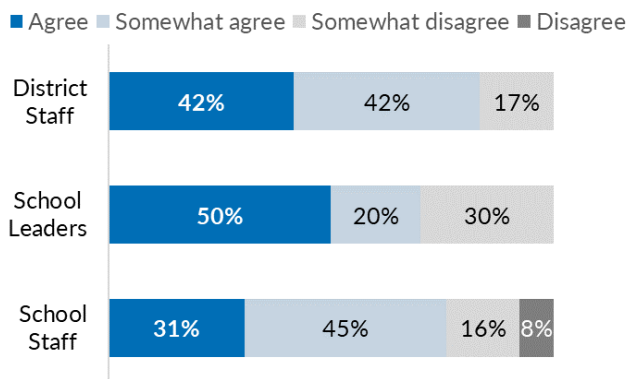
Walpole Public Schools implements several programs to support the needs of marginalized students:

- METCO is the METropolitan COuncil for Educational Opportunity. Currently, 33 school districts participate in welcoming thousands of Boston students each year into their learning communities dedicated to increasing diversity and reducing racial isolation;
- Title I is a Federal grant-funded support mechanism that provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards<sup>6</sup>;
- Homeless liaisons are district staff who assist homeless students with enrollment and ensure that they receive the educational services for which they are eligible;
- ELD programs and staff;
- Special Education program and staff corresponding to Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) law; and

- 504 plan implementation for students who meet eligibility requirements outlined in another Federal law called The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

These kinds of supports have very specific student populations that they target. Research and data indicate students at risk for adverse educational outcomes often do not fit neatly into these buckets or might need to be identified by schools in order to be provided these supports or services. When staff were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement, “Our district has clear systems and structures for the identification and assessment of students needing specialized services (e.g students with disabilities, advanced/gifted learners, English learners),” not all staff agreed.

*Staff agreement with “Our district has clear systems and structures for the identification and assessment of students needing specialized services (e.g students with disabilities, advanced/gifted learners, English learners)”*



A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), which is described by DESE to be proactive and preventative: “As opposed to a reactive model that responds to student achievement declines as a rationale for resources and services, MTSS puts the onus on the system, not the student, and is proactive in getting all students what they need.”<sup>7</sup> Students, staff, and families all described support for struggling students as reactive and designed in ways that does not currently result in support and access for all students. There are times when, despite giving students proactive, targeted resources and support, data reveal that a student is still not making expected progress. As a result, a multidisciplinary team may decide to evaluate a student for eligibility for specially designed instruction via special education or 504 accommodations.

In interviews and focus groups, staff members voiced concerns about the perception that students with families who could afford or had the awareness or resources necessary to hire an advocate are more likely to receive an evaluation for special education: “We have some kids who definitely should be helped by an IEP. But because their parents aren’t very educated in the process or persistent, the school easily dismisses those. I feel like it’s the parents who have an advocate, they’ll get the IEP.” When asked about their experience with their child’s special education or 504 plans, many families explained that getting their child the support they needed was challenging:

- “Initially getting the IEP was challenging”
- “I fought for 2 years for additional support.”
- “One child [was] added in HS which was way too late, and no support [was] given, just study hall. [My child] needed social skills and tutoring... although [they] never met IEP goals, nothing was done to help but push [them] through.”

When asked, “What would you like the district or your child or children’s school to improve so they have a better educational experience,” several family members mentioned a desire to have been informed earlier when their child was struggling and to feel confident that their child will receive support, even without an IEP or 504 in place:

- “Support for kids that is one-on-one even when/if not on an IEP.”

- “Share ‘the plan’ on how the school will help kids succeed when they are failing, rather than just ‘they WILL fail.’”
- “Provide extra help earlier to kids struggling academically. I feel like they wait too late in the year to bring up that a problem exists and then it is hard for the kids to catch up to where they need to be even with extra help.”
- “More communication in early stages when my child is struggling.”

Stakeholder feedback indicates an opportunity for the district to revisit its ongoing student monitoring practices—particularly for high needs students—and how they are identified, assessed, and they and their families supported in an individualized manner that recognizes their learning needs.

## DOMAIN 4: STUDENT READINESS TO LEARN

There is a district-wide focus on creating safe learning environments, supporting students' social-emotional development, and investing in post-graduation preparation.

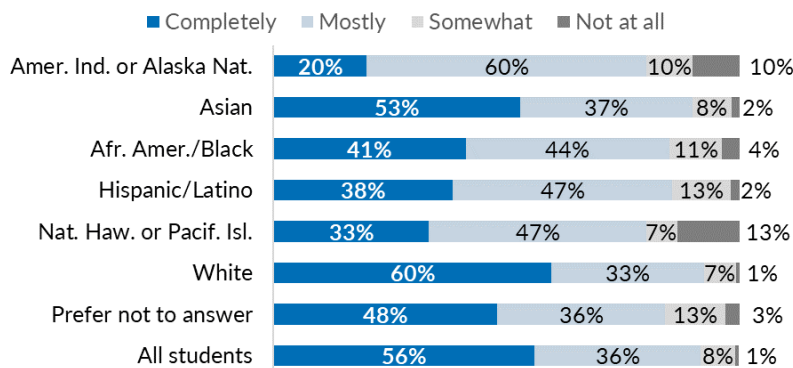
Walpole Public Schools strives to empower students and staff to maximize their full potential. By addressing the social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of students, staff encourage healthy psychological, social, and emotional development in their students to reduce barriers to learning. The district values emotional intelligence as a foundation of student success, as evidenced by district investments in staff that supports students' academic, college, career, and mental wellness. Each school within the district has at least one counselor on campus to support Goal 2 of the [Strategic Plan](#): *To foster and strengthen the social-emotional well-being of the school community to develop responsible and engaged citizens.* In addition, the district provides a host of services essential to student well-being and campus climate, such as staff professional learning opportunities about social and emotional learning and ongoing assessments of staffing levels to support students' SEL development.

### Programming to Promote School Safety

At WPS, a guiding belief is to create learning environments that are “safe, inclusive, collaborative, and respectful.” As a result, WPS staff actively develop students' social and emotional competencies such as self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making in and out of the classroom. As they begin to understand and experience more complex emotions and social situations, students rely on the current structures that uphold their physical safety at school, such as the bullying prevention and intervention plan.

As indicated in the data below, 56 percent of students report feeling completely safe at school, with an additional 36 percent who report feeling mostly safe. Student responses also indicate that students' feelings and the extent to which they feel safe varies by students' race. Students who self-reported that they identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, or Natlive Hawaiian/Pacific Islander all indicated lower agreement than White students that they feel completely safe at school.

Student survey responses to the statement, “At school I feel safe.”



The bullying prevention and intervention plan supports staff capacity to prevent and respond to bullying issues within the context of other healthy school climate initiatives. District staff described that schools have a system for students to report any bullying that they experience or witness. At leadership meetings, school leaders monitor the reports as their ongoing commitment to the well-being and safety of students. Staff are also provided safe schools training in order to build their awareness of and response to bullying. In addition, school leaders meet throughout the year with the Wellness Committee and school councils to solicit feedback and suggestions for improving school safety. As a committee, they work together to monitor and evaluate the implementation of district health and wellness policies and programs, as well as advise the school committee and district leaders on related school health issues.

Student survey responses, as shown in the graph to the right, indicate students know how to report acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

During focus groups, a Walpole high school student shared, “I feel like I’m treated better here than in my home country... I used to get bullied a lot... When I came here to [Walpole Public High School], I was shy at first, but I noticed how different teachers treat me and I feel more welcomed here. I love that [staff] reassure me that I am okay. They sit down and have a conversation with me.” Another high school student added, “I feel free [to] be who I am and do things freely. The teachers help me a lot, they always understand and listen when I have something difficult. They tell me where to get help.”



A positive school climate is the product of a school's attention to fostering safety, promoting a supportive academic and social environment, and encouraging and maintaining trusting and affirming relationships among students and staff.

### ***Strategies and Support to Promote Student Success After Graduation***

At WPS, the guiding beliefs of “learning is a life-long process” and “all students can learn and achieve success” are central to the short- and long-term planning demonstrated by WPS staff. The district aims to create a culture in which students have both the aspiration and ability to pursue college or career training after high school graduation. Therefore, the district supports promising post-graduation preparation strategies, primarily through counselors who support students in college, career, and life readiness. High school counselors' primary responsibility is to help students prepare for the transition to college and beyond, which is supported by grade-level development goals provided in group seminars and individual meetings:

- In 9th grade, readiness seminars focus on study skills, time management, and note-taking. Strategies include tools and instruments that help students understand and appreciate their current strengths and areas for growth.
- In 10th grade, readiness seminars focus on exploring potential careers and gaining awareness of their short and long-term interests.
- In 11th, readiness seminars are focused on post-high school planning. Career planning strategies make explicit links between career options and educational decisions.
- In 12th grade, the goal is to finalize post-secondary plans by helping students create a plan for after graduation. In partnership with the counselors, students discuss their post-graduation concerns, learn strategies to manage their anxiety and stress, and gain better clarity on their next steps for achieving their post-graduation plan.

As a result of these strategic practices, over 75 percent of students who completed the survey agree they are aware of the requirements needed to graduate. As expressed by a high school student, “I have an amazing counselor that really helps me. We talk about college and look over my grades often.”

In addition to academic support, WPS counselors are committed to assisting students with personal and mental health concerns. Counselors at all levels help students to understand and deal with social, behavioral, and emotional problems. Students can schedule appointments with their counselors via Google sites. The accessibility of counselors has positively contributed to 8 out of 10 students agreeing on the student survey that “I have an adult who I trust at my school that I can go to if I need help.” Students shared:

- "The guidance counselor called home to make sure parents were aware of the situation."
- "The main person I talk to is my counselor. I had an emotional breakdown a few times when [a family member] passed away. I go to her and talk to her; she listens to what I have to say."
- "Our guidance counselors are good with support, and I see my counselor often."

As an integral part of the district's student support system, counselors work hand-in-hand with psychologists, social workers, and nurses to create a school climate that prioritizes offering direct services to students as part of their annual wellness check. The school psychologist administers psychological evaluations for all students within the district and oversees creating learning plans for students in need of support. Additionally, counselors gather and share resources with teachers to help the staff develop their classroom management and teaching effectiveness.

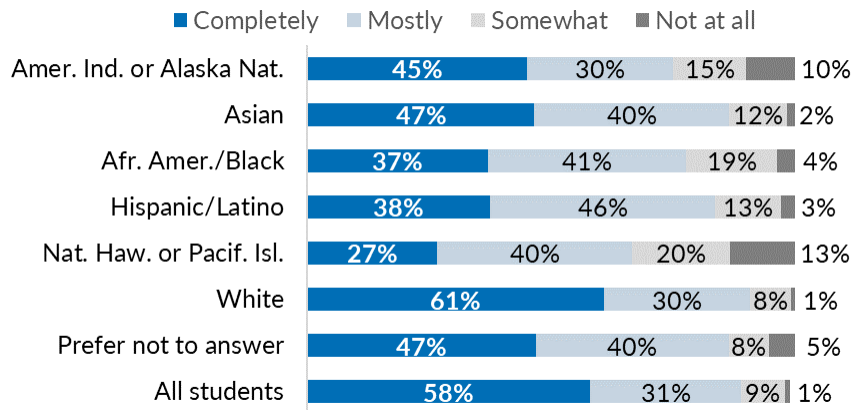
**The majority of students feel safe and welcome at school, and marginalized student populations experience feelings of belonging and inclusion at lower rates than their non-marginalized peers.**

Welcoming and inclusive educational experiences, in addition to comparable access and success outcomes, are essential to a productive learning environment. Student survey data indicates:

**Overall, nearly 6 out of 10 students indicated on surveys that they feel completely welcome at school.**

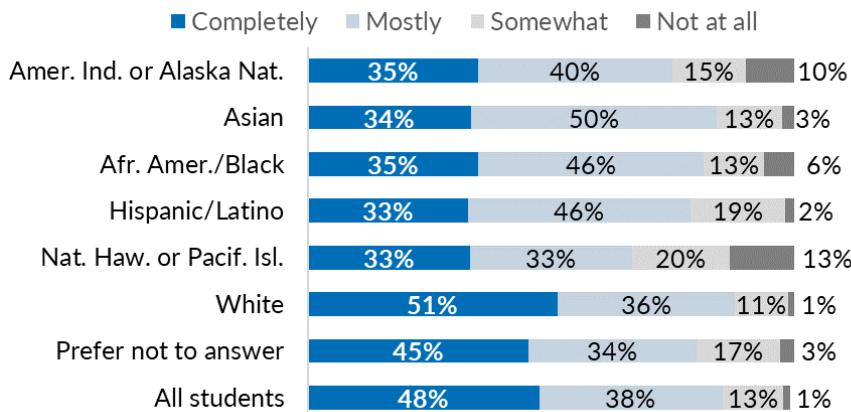
While data indicates that 56 percent of all students reported feeling safe at school and 58 percent of all students feel welcomed at school, when disaggregated by students' self-identified race, it paints a slightly different picture of the extent to which safety and welcomeness are experienced.

*Student survey responses to the statement, "At school I feel welcome."*

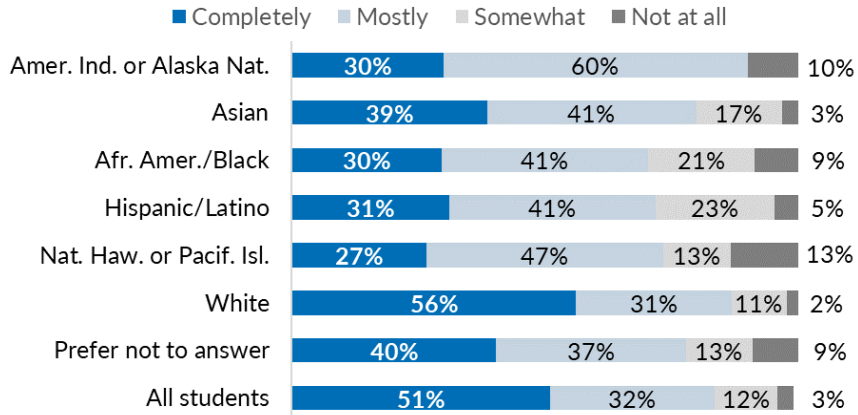


Feeling safe and welcome at school is vital to a child's development and ability to learn and engage at school. Maximizing students' sense of belonging is a high priority in the district; yet African American/Black, Hispanic or Latino, and other students of color within the district report having a lower sense of belonging when compared to White students, as the data below indicates.

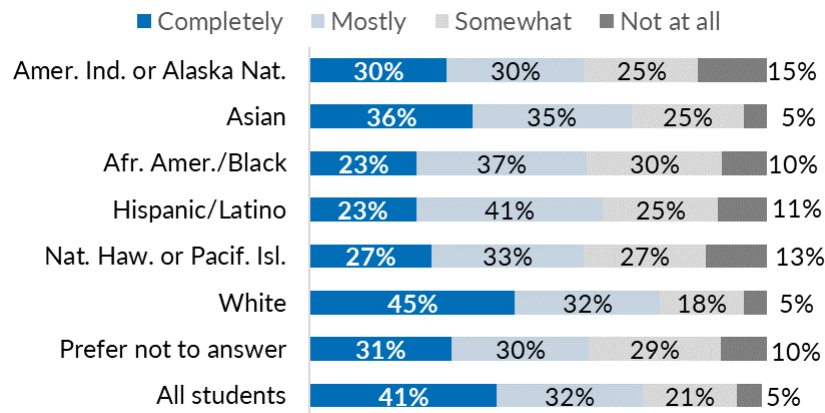
*Student survey responses to the statement, "At school I feel included."*



Student survey responses to the statement, “At school I feel like I belong.”



Student survey responses to the statement, “At school I feel like I can be my full self.”



Disaggregated data indicates that White students report feeling a sense of belonging and being able to bring their whole self to school at almost double the rate of their non-White peers. These findings demonstrate a varying sense of inclusion and belonging among students based on their lived experience as non-White and/or as an English learner (EL), as student comments further indicate. Students who racially self-identify as non-White (i.e. African American/Black, Hispanic or Latino and Asian) report feeling heightened scrutiny and different treatment versus their White peers, negatively impacting their learning experience. Among students of color, some students of Brazilian origin, who are mostly non-White racially and who are often English learners (ELs), describe being treated differently based on their status: “With POC [people of color], there’s a huge group of Brazilians, [and] they are often targeted. When we were wearing masks, there was a cluster of White girls walking without their masks. But as soon as I walked in, they targeted me to put my mask on. If I am not smiling, they will not approach me... I get dress coded more often.” Some students of color also described experiencing increased judgment and behavior monitoring from teachers, staff, and even other students: “I feel I get treated differently. I am not a bad kid, [but] they like to keep an eye on me. The way I act is an issue in class; some teachers have an issue with how I act. Some kids call me ‘ghetto.’” Some students whose first language is not English report feeling like they cannot be their full self at school, which negatively impacts their academic experience. Some ELs feel less able to contribute to classroom discussions and experience bullying from other students: “Sometimes I want to joke with

people, but I worry if I made a mistake with people, with my accent, that I don't want to be underestimated if I made a mistake. It once happened when I was a freshman; a kid walked up to me and said something, made fun of the way that I said something."

During focus groups, some students from marginalized groups also report feeling minimized academically, receiving less support from teachers than their White peers: "Sometimes she'll ask the White kids questions and they'll give a short answer and she'll fill in the blanks. But when she asks kids of color, she'll make us go into great detail." While some teachers appear supportive of contributions from White students, some students of color feel like they must prove themselves and validate their arguments, as one student explains, "They're more restrictive on us with what we can and can't do."

Students of color realize that they are a small proportion of the student body in the district, accounting for 22 percent of the students enrolled, while White students make up 78 percent. Walpole is a METCO district, and METCO is a program funded by the state of Massachusetts to expand educational opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation by permitting students from Boston to attend public schools in other communities that have committed to increasing diversity within their schools. And while Walpole METCO students are appreciative of attending Walpole Public Schools, they also suggest, "They should make more space for the METCO program; only a certain amount of us can come. I think there are five of us... So they should make an effort to get more of us here."

As expressed in the district's guiding beliefs, there is a desire for schools within the district to be a place where all students can learn and achieve success. In addition, there is a commitment to make all of the community's schools safe, inclusive, collaborative, and respectful learning environments. Data suggests that the student experience differs for marginalized student populations, particularly the extent to which they feel welcome, included, and able to be their full selves in their learning environment.

## DOMAIN 5: FOCUS ON CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY SUSTAINING TEACHING AND LEARNING

**District-wide efforts and common spaces in schools show some efforts to recognize and celebrate student cultural and linguistic diversity.**

Goal 3 of Walpole Public Schools' Strategic Plan 2019-2024 is: *To demonstrate a high level of Cultural Proficiency as evidenced by active promotion of diversity in all aspects of instruction, learning, and participation, thus ensuring equity for all and full inclusion of members of the educational and greater community.* Hallways and common spaces in schools reflect this strategic priority with identity-affirming messages, such as:

- "Everyone is welcome here" sign with various skin tones
- Display of different kinds of pride flags
- A world map with all different flags around it
- A rainbow poster with the message "Everyone is welcome here. Everyone belongs."
- Posters of famous Black people throughout history
- "Don't discriminate - live love support" poster
- A "Welcome" sign in many languages
- "All are welcome here" in shades of brown and rainbow with diverse figures

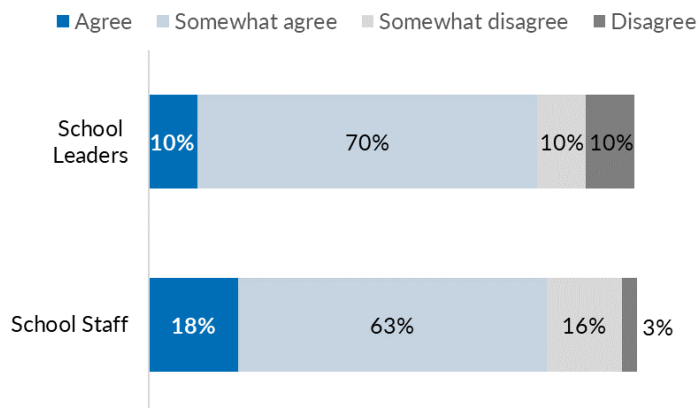
Many school and classroom libraries visibly feature diverse books, a result of district-wide efforts and partnership with Be Inclusive, Inc., a local organization that donates diverse, multicultural books each month. However, as one staff member wrote, "We are appreciative of the quality children's books we have received to share with students, but more resources and work are needed."

Within classrooms, there is wide variation in observable culturally responsive and linguistically sustaining practices and messaging. Most classrooms show surface-level evidence of awareness that reflecting student diversity is important, such as diverse cartoon characters in classroom decorations or quotations from diverse people throughout history. Observations of many classrooms in all schools showed that a more meaningful understanding of or commitment to culturally responsive teaching depends on individual teachers. Some examples of culturally responsive classroom decorations viewed during observations include:

- A classroom covered with student-made posters about historical figures, mostly Black, with an emphasis on connections between history and present-day
- A classroom running literature circles with broadly diverse, high-quality titles selected, Teaching Tolerance standards posted, and a display of two visual culture models
- A Spanish classroom with flags from many Spanish-speaking countries and a display of famous women who speak Spanish
- A classroom with student biographies based on a book featuring a Black character and written by a Black author.

Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of responding teachers somewhat agree with the statement "Our district's curricula, materials, and resources are responsive and inclusive of students' cultures, experiences, needs, and interests," with the remainder split evenly between agree and disagree/somewhat disagree. When asked to respond to a similar statement, 10 percent of school leaders fully agreed, with 70 percent somewhat agreeing and 20 percent disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing.

Staff survey responses to the statement, “Our district’s curricula, materials, and resources are responsive and inclusive of students’ cultures, experiences, needs, and interests.”



One teacher described the recent efforts that have gone into making the curriculum more inclusive: “Our curriculum is becoming more diverse and equitable to expose kids to a variety of ideas, thoughts, and authors... Our students were able to do a poetry project and they could pick a Hispanic [poet]. Students could choose authors that represented their identity.” Another teacher shared that in department meetings, educators examine the curriculum and texts they teach: “Are they offensive or out of date? What’s the goal of teaching this text? We identify texts that aren’t diverse but we can teach through a lens of racism and privilege.”

Other teachers expressed concern about the lack of depth and consistency of cultural responsiveness measures district-wide:

- “I believe that teachers need more structures in place to help guide them through teaching about various cultures and holidays.”
- “Whenever it’s Black History month, students hang up their work in the hallways, they talk about general talks, they don’t go too deep into it.”
- “As a department, we are looking at ways to be more equitable in our practices and curriculum, but administrators don’t support us specifically to answer those questions. I go to my colleague who is well-versed. Everyone is very busy, and that diversity stuff, doing that work, is not in the top five things.”

Many classrooms displayed Pride flags, Black Lives Matter flags, or Safe Space stickers, and many classrooms throughout the district were dominated by decorations with inspirational and individualistic themes such as “growth mindset” and “effort is what matters.” At the elementary level, the vast majority of classroom teachers observed had intentionally brought individual students’ personalities and interests into the classroom visual space, with biographies, photos, and student work. Classrooms with older students rarely highlighted student individuality, with the exception of posting student work. Instead, many upper level classrooms were sparsely decorated, or featured pop culture decorations that seemed to relate to the teacher’s interests, such as movie posters of Harry Potter, Marvel movies, and A Christmas Carol; New Yorker covers; Dr. Seuss posters; and art prints by famous European painters.

When asked to respond to the statement, “The textbooks, lessons, media, and materials used in my classes reflect my identities, experiences, needs, and interests,” about one-quarter (24 percent) of White students and one-third (33 percent) of non-White students disagreed or somewhat disagreed. Disaggregated further, 43 percent of African American/Black and 34 percent of Hispanic or Latino students did not feel reflected in curriculum and classroom materials, revealing a difference in experience that impacts engagement and learning.

Students responded to the question, “What would you like your school and/or district to improve to help you have a better school experience in Walpole Public Schools?” with many suggestions around inclusivity, learning about other

cultures, uplifting voices of marginalized populations, and bringing more student interests and experiences into the classroom.

- “Making it more common for students to have a space to express their life experiences in class as a form of learning from their peers and having a chance to tell people about their lives and their experiences. Embracing the different identities of students and highlighting those who are able to overcome burdens and achieve success.”
- “They could improve by being more understanding of students and by teaching us more modern material that applies to our lives more.”
- “To talk about LGBTQ+ stuff because I have never heard teachers talk about it outside [of] health class, even then it is not very inclusive.”
- “Include more class lessons so everyone is included rather than the majority of kids.”

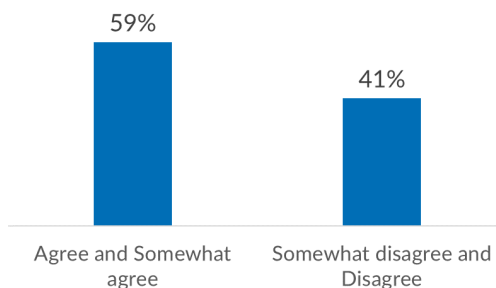
As one district leader noted, “I worry about those students who... are not typically representative of the Walpole population... and making sure that they have... the adequate voice and presence in our classrooms.”

**Differentiation and support by student ability and interest is apparent at lower grade levels and decreases within secondary classrooms. Enrichment, remediation, and intervention opportunities are available, though not yet systematic.**

Goal 1 of Walpole Public Schools’ Strategic Plan 2019-2024 is *To provide an engaging curriculum, differentiated instruction, and ongoing assessments for all students.* Over 40 percent of school staff survey respondents, including 50 percent who identify with a marginalized population, disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement, “My school has an effective monitoring system to identify and support students who need additional support (attendance, academics, behavior, social-emotional, on-track-to-graduate, etc.) to engage and succeed.” The district has taken some steps toward effective data practices and comprehensive tier 1 supports, yet barriers exist for students without documented learning needs to access accommodations or extra help, especially at upper grades.

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*School based staff survey responses to the statement: “My school has an effective monitoring system to identify and support students who need additional support (attendance, academics, behavior, social-emotional, on-track-to-graduate, etc.) to engage and succeed.”*



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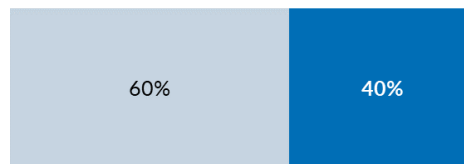
Related Strategic Plan sub-goals include 1.2, *Provide personalized learning through flexible instructional practice that fosters growth for all students,* and 1.3, *Utilize qualitative and quantitative data to inform instruction and improve practice.* The gathering and use of benchmark data is an area the district has identified as one of recent and future growth; the district now has benchmarking systems in place for mathematics K-8, and for literacy K-5, with intention to expand to grades 6 through 9. Teachers use iReady, an online assessment and instruction platform for reading and mathematics, as well as other common assessment tools—such as DIBELS and cluster assessments— to understand student growth. The iReady assessment platform is used K-5 in literacy and 6-9 in math, with a pilot in grade 10, and the iReady instructional platform is used in math and literacy for grades 6-8 for tier II interventions.

When school leaders were asked to respond to the statement, “My staff need additional professional learning opportunities in the area of data analysis and data-driven decision making,” 40 percent of leaders responded that staff needed significant training, with the remaining 60 percent responding that some training was needed. District leaders highlighted other related areas of need, such as an over-reliance on state assessment data at the high school level and a need to more clearly connect classroom practices to data, such as “what a teacher might be doing in some classes to reach students more thoughtfully and more successfully than in other classes and talk about their practices.”

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*School leader survey responses to the statement: “My staff need additional professional learning opportunities in the area of data analysis and data-driven decision making,”*

■ No training   ■ Some training   ■ Significant training



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Efforts to meet the needs of all students in the classroom show similar progress and room for growth. At the elementary level, the recently implemented workshop model for reading and writing provides a natural avenue for differentiation by student interest and ability. Students were observed reading and writing different texts at different levels within the same genre or theme, with teachers conferencing with individuals or groups to provide targeted instruction. A district leader described the motivation for adopting this approach in the last few years: “The reason we chose that specific model is because of the workshop model where teachers will differentiate their instruction to personalize or meet the needs of every learner in that classroom.” The assistant superintendent further explained the motivation for transitioning to a workshop model at a November school committee meeting:

“More and more deliberate efforts, that our tiered support that we’re providing is a lot more Tier 1 push-in. So we’re scheduling accordingly; we’re strategically thinking about the way that students learn. In years past, 4-5 years down the road, if a student might have struggled in literacy, that student would have received 1:1 literacy support during the literacy time period. That is happening far less now. We are more strategic even in our instructional model. We do more workshop model, which allows for differentiated small groups, where our specialists can push in and not just work with those students who have higher needs, but might also be working with all students in the classroom.”

District leaders also shared plans to adopt a K-5 mathematics curriculum with a similar workshop model, supporting teachers in meeting the needs of diverse learners. Other accommodations for various learning styles and abilities observed were physical supports (seating, bouncy bands), references taped to student desks (number line, multiplication table), group engagement methods such as nonverbal signals and partner sharing, a second teacher pulling students or groups aside, and on-the-fly differentiation in how teachers ask students to respond.

In upper grades, differentiation was less apparent. In most general education classrooms, all students were doing the same work, with no observations of services for students with language or other learning needs, or variation in how students receive or express knowledge. Exceptions were largely seen in non-academic spaces, such as the computer lab, TV studio, and art room, where students were engaging in many different ways with various projects relating to their interests, around a central curriculum theme. In many classes, one or two teachers circulated to individually check in with students and provide targeted support on the spot. A few classes stood out as being consciously inclusive of student ability, learning style, and interest. For example:

- a full inclusion class working in intentionally formed mixed-ability groups;
- an upper-level class in which all students were writing pieces on a modern social issue of their choice;

- a content lecture in which students were taking visual, colorful graphic notes that supported all learners' content and vocabulary development; and
- a teacher who asked for the right answer to be explained in several different ways by different students.

The district has other supports available to students, many of which are available outside the school day or supplant access to tier 1 instruction. A homework club and extra help are available to students after school, and the district provides free summer school for struggling K-8 students. Ninth graders have intervention during study time, and any student in the high school can find help from content teachers on a rotating schedule in the library. Other supports come through various departments, such as academic skills classes or the METCO office. One of the only formal supports available to students without an IEP is at the middle school level, where there are interventions (either within a weekly schedule cycle or when the student is pulled out of the mainstream class for small group instruction) for students who require extra or targeted instruction. At the high school level, academic support for students at risk of course failure is supported by a Wednesday afternoon intervention and enrichment block. Students can proactively sign up for extra help, enrichment support, make up an assessment, or sign up to take an assessment in an alternative setting. Through the same intervention form, staff can assign students to the Wednesday intervention block who need more individualized support or have missing or incomplete work or assessments.

When students were asked, "What does your school and/or district do well to help you have a positive educational experience?", responses were overwhelmingly in favor of the Wednesday intervention block, and many students praised teachers for being supportive and offering extra help:

- "Most of my teachers will make sure I understand the topic and they are willing to do as much review as needed."
- "Provide extra help and are very supportive in the classroom on a daily basis."
- "Provides a way to reach out to teachers/staff at any time for help with anything in their capability of trying to solve."
- "Provide extra opportunities to work one-on-one with teachers on subjects we are struggling on, such as the Wednesday intervention block."
- "My school provides a lot of extra help programs, like intervention, that I know I can take advantage of when needed."
- "They give you chances to come up for lunch or after school if you need extra help."

Students also responded to the question, "What would you like your school and/or district to improve to help you have a better school experience in Walpole Public Schools?" There were patterns of wanting to keep the Wednesday intervention block, add more challenging material, and have more hands-on learning, as well as many comments about a greater need for support in and out of the classroom:

- "Making sure that the teachers can adapt to different students' different learning styles."
- "Make learning more individualized."
- "I would want them to make there more ways for students to get help on a topic."
- "Make getting 1 on 1 extra help easier."
- "Offer periods in school for extra help."
- "Teachers to say when they are available to stay after."

It's clear that many students are aware of and appreciate opportunities for extra help, yet some still struggle to access needed support. Overall, a baseline level of tier 1 interventions happening within the classroom or as part of the school day is not consistently in place, which can have disproportionately negative effects on marginalized students.

A recent review of the middle school special education programming highlighted that, "The schedule in both [middle] schools does allow for general education interventions, but the decision-making process to determine which students access these supports and the targeted nature of the supports themselves should be reviewed." Additionally, staff acknowledged that leveling practices at the high school level are problematic and contribute to the lack of true implementation of MTSS. One staff member shared:

"Specifically at the high school level, our 'class levels' are problematic. Often our EL students are placed in the lowest level (CP2) classes because of limited English language proficiency. The CP2 level classes are also problematic because they frequently have a large number of students with Special Education Ed Plans. These students are 'tracked' into lower level classes with lower expectations rather than placed in the "on level" CP1

classes with support structures. This has been a long-term issue at the high school. Students should not be in low-level classes, but rather they should be placed in on-grade-level classes with supports to enable them to be successful at that level.”

When asked what school policies, systems, and structures should be re-examined, many teachers mentioned IST (Instructional Support Team), MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support), or RTI (Response to Intervention) as systems that needed closer examination:

- “The lens through which we look at students and what kinds of supports we feel are necessary.”
- “Support opportunities for students built into the school day.”
- “There needs to be more support for ELL students in a regular classroom setting.”
- “I think we could benefit from having more of a variety of support for all students.”

Taken together, the data gathered from various sources indicate a lack of consistent tier 1 monitoring and support for all students, especially at upper levels.

### **Structures exist to support teachers’ cycles of improvement, which the district can leverage to coherently connect with district-wide priorities.**

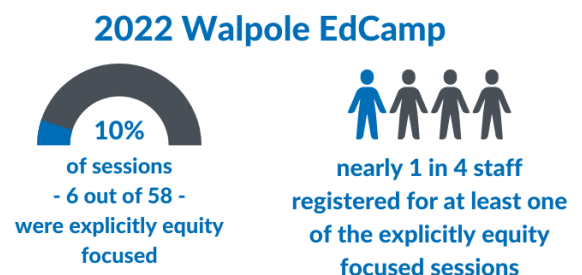
School staff survey responses to, “I have support to constantly improve and refine rigorous, standards-based instructional practice” were overall positive, with 83 percent agreeing or somewhat agreeing. However, an overall throughline of teacher development tied to district goals as stated in the strategic plan is not yet in place, which results in wide variation in students’ classroom experience across the district.

Classroom teachers at Walpole Public Schools have dedicated time to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) every week during the school year. Teachers and leaders referenced a practice of discussing curriculum, aligning expectations, and creating common assessments, but it’s unclear if there is an overarching structure or expectation for how PLC time is spent and the desired impact on instructional practice.

- “We provide PLC opportunities for teachers to engage and use common assessments, primarily formative and summative assessments.”
- “We have PLC every 7 school days, and we do talk about curriculum matters and stuff like that. It does have some impact on my curriculum, but not much.”
- “It’s up to individual PLCs to decide whether to look at data, especially from an equity standpoint.”

Additional professional development time is set aside for district-wide learning. In the 2021-2022 school year, instructional staff spent two professional development sessions developed and led by Assistant Superintendent Hahn on the topic of CR24: Evaluating curriculum for bias and demeaning generalizations. This training module allowed volunteer school staff the opportunity to participate in and then lead the CR:24 training for their colleagues at their schools. The outcome of the CR:24 training was the opportunity for teachers to evaluate their own curriculum, materials, and resources to determine 1) if they contain “simplistic and demeaning generalizations, lacking intellectual merit, on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin and sexual orientation,” and 2) if curricular activities “provide balance and context for any such stereotypes depicted in such materials.”

When asked what types of additional professional learning opportunities they desire, most school-based educators responded that they desired some or significant training in both culturally proficient practices (100 percent of school leaders and 81 percent of school staff) and culturally- and linguistically-relevant instruction (100 percent of school leaders and 82 percent of school staff). The district has hosted equity-focused guest speakers, and several of the optional sessions for EdCamp, a full-day professional development day with a variety of opt-in sessions offered, were focused on DEI.



Information about EdCamp is contained in the visualization to the right.

When considering the breadth of equity-focused professional learning opportunities that staff have recently had the opportunity to attend, many teachers currently report a lack of consistency and coherence:

- “The biggest thing with all the training—a lot of times, it feels very one and done, checking off a box. The training is good but you need to do the work—reflect on your practices and change. Training is useless without that.”
- “The training has been very disjointed, resulting from so many people advocating for so many individual groups. It becomes scattered. Some presenters are prepared to do a series but it doesn’t happen.”
- “It’s a lot of talk, but not a lot of concrete actions. We might have PDs but it doesn’t translate into much.”

As the district moves to more intentionally engage school-level staff in equity- and inclusion-focused professional learning and practices, the way in which staff understand its applicability and expectations to practice will be key to ensuring collective responsibility in all classrooms throughout the district.

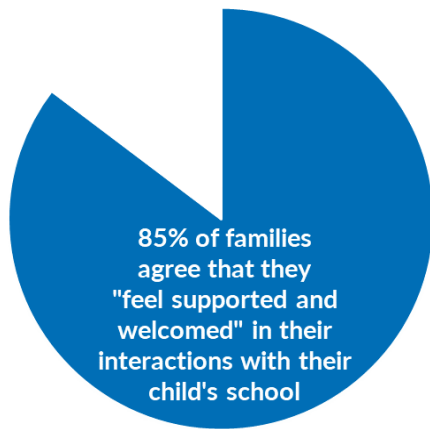
## DOMAIN 6: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Walpole Public Schools desires a collaborative partnership with families, and most families feel welcome and included in the district.

*Through a collaborative partnership with community and families, Walpole Public Schools educates all of our students to become responsible, contributing global citizens and life-long learners.*

*-Vision Statement, Walpole Public Schools*

The WPS Vision Statement aspires towards a collaborative partnership between the district and its families. The nature of this collaborative partnership is defined in Objectives 2.1 and 2.3 of the [Strategic Plan](#): *engage, educate, and partner with families by consistently analyz[ing] results from family surveys to measure climate and ensur[ing] that there is effective communication about ongoing district work.* For Walpole Public Schools, a collaborative partnership requires that the district a) stay attuned to how families are feeling about their experiences in the district and b) maintain open lines of communication with families.



Of the 265 families who responded to the family survey, the majority of families reported feeling supported and welcomed in Walpole Public Schools. In survey responses and family interviews, numerous families spoke favorably about the friendly rapport and open lines of communication that they have with teachers and counselors. However, a number of families acknowledge that they have had a welcoming experience because they identify with the dominant demographics in the district:

- “My family is well represented in the school because we are a White, heterosexual, cis-gendered family. However, I feel more could be done to be more inclusive of other students.”
- “We feel our family and culture is supported but we feel helping our children understand more about other cultures and learning differences should be emphasized more in order to create a better understanding of all.”
- “I feel very included; I don’t know if everyone else does.”

It is a strength that some in the dominant demographic—although they feel welcome—acknowledge that more work can be done to ensure that *all* families feel welcome in the district. The fact that both the dominant group and marginalized families are oriented towards diversity and inclusion signals broad support for Walpole’s equity journey.

Coded family survey responses revealed three identity categories that families believe should be more intentionally attended to: culture and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and religious practice. With regard to these categories, families seek greater ethnic and gender/sexuality representation on staff, more opportunities for students to learn about other cultures and gender/sexual identities, and structures that acknowledge religious diversity in the district. Examples of family feedback are included in the table below.

Culture & Ethnicity	Religious Practice:
<p>“Contract more Spanish-speaking staff. Do cultural activities and projects that deal with the different Latin American cultures, and thus all the children can relate and learn more.”</p> <p>“Hire at least 1 Black teacher or guidance counselor. More diverse leadership [is needed] across the board.”</p>	<p>“Despite efforts, recognized and included holidays tend to be heavily Christian. Children of other faiths would feel more welcome and supported if other holidays were highlighted on the same level as Christian holidays and traditions.”</p> <p>“Put way less emphasis on religious holidays. We are atheists at a public school, with Jewish</p>

<p>“Continue to share different books, stories with representation of different structures and cultures. Allow more opportunities to share cultural information.”</p> <p>“Add all cultural celebrations to the school calendar and recognize Black History outside of the original pillars... Consider the huge discrepancy in cultural recognitions.”</p> <p>“I think it's important for school staff to take courses on cultural sensitivity and White privilege. We live in times when in order to improve our children's experience in schools, they need to feel safe in all areas, respected and listened to.”</p>	<p>heritage. Every winter we pull up to a school decorated with reindeer and wreaths/holly.”</p> <p>“Give major Jewish holidays off from school or at the very least don't have major assignments, projects, presentations, or tests, etc. the day of a Jewish holiday”</p>
<b>Gender &amp; Sexuality:</b>	
<p>“Have more faculty &amp; staff of color; faculty &amp; staff who are publicly out as LGBTQ.”</p> <p>“Allow the teachers to be out to their students. If heterosexual teachers can talk about their families, then gay teachers should be able to as well.”</p> <p>“More trainings on non-binary, trans, and gay children. Proper pronouns and respecting their identity. I understand race is a big issue, but it is not the only one.”</p>	

There is a spectrum of perspectives in the district about Walpole Public School’s equity journey. However, it should be noted that in family surveys and focus groups, the number of families who explicitly asked for more diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work was nearly four times greater than those who explicitly asked for less. Most families who explicitly asked for less DEI work did not want to limit the voices of marginalized populations but wanted to ensure that the needs of their children did not get lost: “Faith based and traditional family values are not factored into these new initiatives and programs.” And some families who explicitly asked for less DEI work had an understanding of equity that differs from the district. For example, a parent who shared that the district should “Hold high expectations for students. Get rid of any equity in curriculum,” sees *high expectations* and *equity* as being in conflict with each other, whereas the district seeks to use *equity* so that all students can independently reach *high expectations* over time. Ultimately, much of the resistance to the district’s equity journey lies in either families not seeing their values honored or differences in understanding of equity and other DEI-related terms.

<p>Families who <b>explicitly</b> asked for <b>MORE</b> diversity, equity &amp; inclusion</p>	<p>Families who <b>explicitly</b> asked for <b>LESS</b> diversity, equity &amp; inclusion</p>
<p>42</p>	<p>12</p>

**While the vast majority of Walpole families are satisfied with the quantity of communication they receive from the district, families seek more opportunities to be involved in their children’s learning.**

Families in Walpole Public Schools report that the district uses multiple strategies to communicate with them. Families

most frequently mention written communication, such as e-mail and newsletters, followed by verbal/face-to-face communication via phone calls and parent-teacher conferences. Of these communication methods, the vast majority of families feel that communication frequency and quantity of information shared is just the right amount, as indicated below.



What’s more, many families speak highly of the accessibility and responsiveness of staff in addressing their questions and concerns:

- They have excellent communication. They return my emails and calls quickly.
- It's helpful to get the weekly emails. We always kind of know what's going on.
- There are regular email updates from teachers and principal, Open House, parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights. We can always write to the teachers if we have any questions.
- We receive emails about the SEL lessons in class, materials from our daughter's classroom teacher, and weekly blog posts. Our daughter's teacher has also been very responsive to email.
- Keeping parents updated with emails from principals, daily and weekly. Teacher are easily accessible. They ask for volunteers and I've volunteered a handful of times.

While the majority of families are satisfied with the district’s communication methods and the responsiveness of staff, many feel that the information shared is not always useful, as indicated to the right. This barrier to collaborative partnership is more acutely felt in secondary schools than elementary schools. In elementary classrooms, there are numerous opportunities for families to support their children’s learning. A family member of a current elementary student shared, “This year we were able to be mystery readers, carnival volunteers, or field day volunteers. We made an impact in that way.” However, as students progress to higher grade levels, families note that these opportunities become less frequent: “In the elementary school, there's more opportunities to volunteer... but at [the middle school level], parents don't really spend time in the school.” And by the time a student reaches high school, families almost exclusively receive information like grades and schedules and less information about how students are progressing socially and what is taught in classes:



- “As the child moves up in grades, parents have less information on how things are going. Getting a sense just from grades only offers so much... offering more information would be helpful.”
- “[We need] more communication and insights to what is being taught, progress being made, and how the social setting in the classroom/school is playing out.”
- “Share what my child is reading/examples of what they are doing academically rather than just sending home their busy work/morning work.”

With less information about students’ development in middle and high school, families find it difficult to support their children’s learning at home, and school-to-family communication feels more like a one-way street rather than a partnership. Families are seeking more opportunities to be involved in their children’s learning.

**Special note about non-English speaking families.** It should be noted that the families whose first language is not English had particularly low engagement in surveys and interviews to inform the equity audit. English Language Development staff were able to give insight into likely causes for lower engagement, citing limited staff-supported interpretation for district-to-family, school-to-family, and teacher-to-family communication throughout the school

year. The district does have a translation service that all staff can access to support communication with non-English speaking families.

**Special note about families of students with IEPs.** Please see [Accountability for Equitable Student Access & Outcomes](#) for context on how the families of students with IEPs experience communication and collaborative partnership with the district.

## DOMAIN 7: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

**School leaders have support and autonomy to create conditions at their school in alignment with district priorities to ensure student success.**

School leaders report feeling supported by district office staff in the implementation of their school improvement plans (SIPs), as well as the leadership and management aspects of their roles. As further described in the [Governance & Conditions findings](#), school leaders feel supported because of the collaborative relationships that exist among themselves and district leaders, particularly through the Leadership Council. These consistent forums break down walls of hierarchy and engender transparency, while keeping school leaders and district leaders aligned on district and school priorities: “We meet every two weeks, we meet consistently... We're always in connection. [We] kind of have a cycle of observation and partnership with our principals.” The culture of collaboration and transparency is reinforced by the ease of access with which school leaders communicate with district leaders. Many school leaders indicate that district leaders are active and present in school buildings and that district leaders are easily accessible. School leaders report supported autonomy around staffing, time, programming, and use of funds, with principals making strategic decisions in service of their school’s unique needs while receiving support from district leaders.

**The district prioritizes instructional excellence and learning success for all students and uses an evaluation system to ensure staff proficiency at providing rigorous curriculum for students.**

Research indicates that school leadership has an enormous impact on the quality of schools, second only to classroom instruction. While there are many sources of leadership in WPS, principal instructional leadership remains at the core. The district uses the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation, which entails rigorous standards for administrators and teachers. The current district evaluation system consists of a one-year evaluation cycle for principals and other school-level administrators, with a formative assessment occurring mid-cycle. In partnership with the superintendent and assistant superintendent, principals conduct a self-assessment using current analysis of student learning, growth, and achievement data. This clear structure for instructional excellence aligns district leaders, principals, department chairs, and instructional staff around instructional expectations with principals positioned as the instructional leaders of their school: “We are the instructional leaders of the building... We understand what good solid teaching looks like. We have a lens or rubric for proficiency.”

Similar to the teacher development model, when principals enter the district they receive a mentor colleague. The purpose of this partnership is to support the onboarding of the staff member into the new role. This process, however, is less formal, as described by district staff: “I don't know if we have a formal onboarding [experience for new principals into the district].” The district member added, “I can say however, that I believe our principals are well supported even without the [formal structure for their development].”

In alignment with the district’s collaborative learning structure, WPS leaders have been able to tap into each other’s expertise and shape a vision of academic success for all students, create the conditions necessary for teaching and learning, guide instructional decisions that improve teaching and learning, and manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. As the primary instructional leaders within their schools, principals are the drivers of the vision of success for all students. They convey this vision to teachers, students, and parents through not only their SIP priorities, but also in staff development opportunities. Artifacts and stakeholders confirm that leaders and school staff have recently participated in professional learning opportunities about Response to Intervention (RTI) and social emotional learning (SEL).

These learning opportunities are linked to goals 1 and 2 of the strategic plan: *To provide an engaging curriculum, differentiated instruction and ongoing assessment for all students*, and *To foster and strengthen the social-emotional well-being of the school community in order to develop responsible and engaged citizens*. In alignment with strategic plan goals, teacher development is currently centered on supporting students’ mental and emotional well being, and through RTI, identifying struggling students in reading and math. Leaders mentioned recent initiatives such as literacy and math

benchmarks, Readers and Writers Workshop, and a new reading intervention program for elementary grades. School leaders also shared that since the pandemic, “We’ve analyzed the results of students to measure current support for students’ emotional health.” Another school leader added, “We were proud of the fact that for the last several years we’ve been able to install counselors at all our elementary schools.”

Recent professional learning opportunities are clearly connected to district strategic priorities, and yet as mentioned in other domains (see [Student Readiness to Learn](#) and [Focus on Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Teaching & Learning](#)), leaders and staff recognize the need for continued learning opportunities and support in their full implementation. Data indicates there is a clear need to connect, refine, and ensure application of professional learning to instructional practices to operationalize the district’s guiding belief that “all students can learn and achieve success.” It is presently unclear the extent to which observation and feedback (whether in the form of coaching or informal or formal evaluation processes) intentionally connects and sets the expectation for staff to implement professional learning into their classroom practices. It is also unclear from staff survey and interview responses the extent to which collaborative staff structures, such as PLCs, are leveraged to collectively examine data and use that data and the experience and expertise of colleagues to refine instructional practices.

## DOMAIN 8: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### Many stakeholders recognize the benefits of and need for a more diverse workforce.

Walpole Public Schools is in its initial stages of building a more diverse workforce. As is outlined in the [2019-2024 WPS Strategic Plan](#), the district is currently *completing an equity audit [and] ...developing systems to track audit findings and data/metrics [for] recruitment and hiring*. Doing so will support the district's vision of building a *diverse learning community that empowers students and staff to maximize their full potential*.

#### **Support for a Diverse Workforce**

There is broad support throughout the district for increasing staff diversity. In surveys and focus group interviews, numerous students noted that staff is composed of mostly White females and advocated for more male, LGBTQ+, and diverse racial representation. Students from non-marginalized groups shared that having a more diverse staff would allow them to “learn about different things and different cultures.” By contrast, students from marginalized groups acknowledged the personal impact that a diverse staff would have on their feelings of belonging and self-worth: “You would grow up your entire life believing that [because] I don't see anyone who looks like me, maybe what I feel isn't right.”

Families echoed students' sentiments, adding that staff members who have similar identities and experiences as their children can serve as role models: “My child's elementary school did not have one teacher of color; we need more teachers of color so that children can have a role model with someone who looks like them and understands them.” Several families made specific requests for hiring Black, LGBTQ+, and Spanish-speaking staff. Staff members echoed student and family sentiments and added that the district could do more to retain existing diverse staff: “I believe we need to try and retain a more diverse staff and a staff that better reflects our diverse student population.” As both stakeholders and the strategic plan indicate, the district is now focused on recruiting, hiring, developing, and retaining a more diverse workforce.

#### **Recruitment and Hiring Structures**

When district leaders and principals were asked how the district recruits staff for open roles, they shared the following process:

1. Communication of open roles: Open roles and role descriptions are created and shared with all current staff. These roles and descriptions are shared on SchoolSpring and the district website for external candidates. Principals attend job fairs to advertise open roles with external candidates.
2. Interviews: Principals review candidate resumes and identify candidates to invite for an interview. The principal and/or a principal-designated committee conduct interviews.
3. Decision and offer: Principals send hiring recommendations to the superintendent and assistant superintendent. The superintendent and/or assistant superintendent conduct a final interview and make an offer. When an offer is accepted, the Human Resources staff sends onboarding paperwork to the candidate.

District and school leaders all echoed the same recruitment steps, indicating that there is a clear and shared understanding of that process. Despite this clarity, however, the recruitment process struggles to attract a diverse pool of applicants. As one staff member shared, “I have been on a hiring committee multiple times, and we have been interested in interviewing diverse candidates; however, very few people of diverse backgrounds seem interested in applying to work at our school.”

#### **Barriers to a More Diverse Workforce**

Stakeholders surfaced two potential barriers to recruiting a diverse workforce: public perception of Walpole and the use of data-informed practices in the recruitment process. One potential barrier for attracting a diverse candidate pool is a perceived lack of inclusivity in Walpole. Multiple staff, families, and students cited the [recent publicity](#) about the former Walpole mascot name, the Rebels, as a deterrent to educators who might consider applying to work in the district. Although Walpole alumni successfully petitioned the Walpole School Committee to change the mascot name, the motion recommended that “past banners and trophies emblazoned with the Rebels name remain unaltered, and that no new budgetary funds be appropriated to replace athletic gear outside of normally scheduled purchases or through donations.” During staff interviews, one staff member noted that Rebel remnants are still visible throughout

the community, particularly at the high school, with “concession stand confederate swords... [Rebel] flags in the gym... parents saving their [Rebel] memorabilia and kids carrying/wearing them.” And one administrator connected Walpole’s inability to shed its ‘racist’ past to the district’s difficulty with recruiting diverse staff: “I wouldn’t say we’ve had a lot of success recruiting diverse staff... I think one of the challenges with that has been that the town itself has had a reputation historically of being a non-inclusive environment.” Ultimately, the district’s diversity recruiting struggle is a community public relations struggle.

Although the district has made efforts to rebrand itself by changing its mascot name, constructing a district vision and strategic plan centered on educating “all students to achieve success,” and increasing staff professional development around DEI and SEL, the district is not yet externally communicating this rebranding in its open role descriptions. Inconsistencies in role descriptions also hinder candidates’ understanding of these roles, and thereby, candidates’ likelihood to apply. While some descriptions give detailed information about the scope of the role, others do not. As one recently hired staff member shared, “from the outside, I didn’t totally know what the job was.” For example, consider two of the job postings below for open roles in the 2022-2023 school year. While the Assistant School Nutrition Director description gives significant insight into the purpose and responsibilities of the role, the Severe Special Needs Teacher description does not. Additionally, both descriptions provide limited insight into the district’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assistant School Nutrition Director</b></p>	<p>The Walpole Public Schools is seeking an Assistant School Nutrition Director effective mid September, 2022.</p> <p><b>Position Summary:</b> The role of the Assistant School Nutrition Director (ASND) is to provide support for the day to day operations of the Walpole School Nutrition Department. This position reports directly to the School Nutrition Director (SND). In the absence of the SND, the ASND must be able to use his/her understanding of the School Nutrition operations to independently support the program by using critical thinking and problem solving skills to resolve issues raised by families and staff. The position also requires the ASND perform a variety of administrative duties such as the management of the free and reduced application process and the daily processing of payments received in the School Nutrition office as well as through the online payment service, My School Buck’s. The ASND will be expected to exercise independent judgement and actions in accordance with delegated responsibilities from the SND. The ASND may be asked to provide training to staff on the POS system and other departmental software programs.</p> <p>This position requires a high degree of accuracy, accountability, and confidentiality. The ASND will be expected to provide clerical support to the SND with the administrative and financial audits conducted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Walpole School’s Business Office.</p> <p><b>Essential Job Functions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as liaison between the community, the schools and other internal and external stakeholders</li> <li>• Maintain the integrity of information systems, databases, and office files as required, attend evening events in place of SND</li> <li>• Utilize absence management software to keep track of departmental attendance and arrange for subs when the online system does not provide subs</li> <li>• Provide administrative support to the SND, School Nutrition staff and Central Administration as directed, including attending meetings, recording and distributing minutes</li> <li>• Work independently to research problems and provide resolutions</li> <li>• Attend professional development offerings provided by DESE and other organizations to stay current with changes in School Nutrition operations and reporting</li> </ul> <p>Salary commensurates with experience.</p> <p>The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Walpole Public Schools is to demonstrate a high level of Cultural Proficiency as evidenced by active promotion of diversity in all aspects of instruction, learning, and participation, thus ensuring equity for all and full inclusion of members of the educational and greater community.</p>
<p><b>Severe Special Needs</b></p>	<p>Walpole Public Schools is seeking a Severe Special Needs Teacher for the Career and Education</p>

<b>Teacher</b>	<p>Program at Walpole High School for the 2022-2023 school year.</p> <p><a href="#">Career and Education Program</a></p> <p>Interested candidates, please send cover letter, resume, three current letters of reference, copy of certification and copy of transcripts to Human Resources via email to <a href="mailto:hr@walpole.k12.ma.us">hr@walpole.k12.ma.us</a> or you may apply directly via SchoolSpring.</p> <p>Salary and benefits per WTA Contract</p> <p>The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for Walpole Public Schools is to demonstrate a high level of Cultural Proficiency as evidenced by active promotion of diversity in all aspects of instruction, learning, and participation, thus ensuring equity for all and full inclusion of members of the educational and greater community.</p>
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A second potential barrier for attracting a diverse candidate pool is insufficient recruiting data to evaluate and adjust its recruitment strategies. Over the past school year, district and school leaders have undertaken multiple strategies to refine recruitment and hiring practices, attending multicultural job fairs, hiring consultants to work with leadership teams on effective ways to attract diverse candidates, and working with the district’s Equity Task Force to revise interview questions. When asked about the data that the district reviews to assess the effectiveness of these strategies, district leaders shared that a process for collecting and analyzing recruitment and hiring data does not exist. Without data collection and analysis, the district is unable to determine if or which strategies and investments are attracting potential hires, particularly those who could contribute to a more diverse workforce.

**The district’s focus on increasing staff diversity is complemented by an increase in equity-focused professional development for staff.**

As the district works to recruit a more diverse workforce, the district hired a half-time DEI director, increased DEI-related staff trainings such as *CR 24: Evaluating Curriculum for Bias and Demeaning Generalizations*, and contracted external facilitators such as Dr. Kalise Wornum to facilitate cultural proficiency training. In surveys, focus groups, and interviews, numerous educators cited professional development sessions on courageous conversations, cultural competency, defining equity, gender identity/sexual orientation, implicit bias, socio-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practices as evidence of a “thematic” focus on equity: “PD for teachers this year has a clear theme revolving around gender identity, diversity, and racism.” These strategic investments in staff development support a more inclusive district culture, and increasing district diversity without developing current staff’s understanding of inclusive and culturally responsive practices would undermine the district’s vision for equity and inclusion. While these efforts move the district toward greater inclusion, many staff find them to be insufficient. As one staff member noted, “The training and the information are good, but only if we individually reflect on where we can improve and put this into practice.” Although the quantity of equity-focused professional development has increased, more attention is needed to the continuity of that development, as well as subsequent support with implementation.

<b><i>How confident are you that adults at your school can have honest conversations with each other about race, ethnicity, culture, or other aspects of diversity?</i></b>	
<b>Extremely / Quite Confident</b>	<b>Somewhat / Not Confident</b>
42%	58%

Survey responses indicate nearly 60 percent of staff are somewhat or not confident that they can have open and honest conversations with their peers about equity-related topics. This lack of confidence has resulted in surface-level conversations during equity-focused professional development and pockets of tension among staff. Some pro-DEI staff

members believe that many of their peers are resistant to discussing DEI topics and bringing more equitable practices into their classrooms: “I am comfortable having these conversations...[but] there are a significant population of teachers who do not believe that conversations around race or identity have a place in their classroom and there are plenty of teachers who believe that they are equitable without doing any real self reflection.” A staff member of color connected this DEI resistance to the negative experience and retention of staff of color in the district; this is supported by staff survey responses which indicate that 42 percent of staff members do not feel “The district encourages and supports the creation and facilitation of inclusive spaces for diverse staff.” By contrast, staff who are perceived as DEI-resistant have voiced that they fear being “verbally attacked” if they were to voice their true opinions. And finally, one staff member posited that those who seem resistant are actually just unaware of the state of inequity in Walpole: “People want to do the DEI work, but there’s some that don’t see a reason for it. Numbers don’t lie... If people see hardcore data, if they see the need for more staff of color, more representation of students of color in AP classes, that might spur the need for action.” A lack of awareness is a likely root cause for DEI-resistance given that a district-wide definition of equity has yet not been provided or explained to staff, nor disaggregated data used to ground staff in what the district is working for, toward, and why.

Because staff are not fully aware or bought into district-wide efforts to create more equitable and inclusive learning and work environments, staff currently struggle to translate these conversations into action or practice throughout the school. One staff member remarked that “each year teachers and administrators go through the motions of group professional development on the current educational buzzword without truly focusing on the topic and making it a reality in the school... Topics such as 21st century learning skills, project-based learning, UBD and UDL, RTI, DEI, and SEL, have become checkboxes for administrators instead of something they are invested in.” With instructional staff perceiving DEI-focused professional development as a “checkbox” instead of an instructional expectation, teachers are left to decide the extent to which DEI guides in their classroom practices. However, teachers who choose to incorporate DEI principles in their curriculum and classroom culture feel that they receive mixed messages and a lack of support from administration. For example, multiple staff members and students recounted how administrators required a teacher to remove an LGBTQ+ safe space sign from their classroom after parents complained about it being too political. Instances such as these have led numerous staff members to believe that DEI is policy rather than practice and that the district will appease parents who are uncomfortable with DEI in the classroom:

- “While I am comfortable having “vulnerable conversations”, I worry that local administration and the district may not support me if a family and I have a challenge or issue around topics within the conversation.”
- “At times, I worry about the backlash we might experience from families if we address “controversial” topics that families do not approve of.”
- “The students have very little training to discuss these issues and White parents often intervene with the curriculum. The White parents are very powerful in this district.”
- “If a teacher tries to incorporate diversity or gender inclusion in the school, administration does not support or protect the teacher from the retaliation from parents. Nothing can change if parents are intimidating administration to control the school and the culture.”
- “I feel like we are told, as teachers, that some race/ethnic/cultural topics are “off the table” because they are too “political”, which sends extreme[ly] mixed messages.”

In addition to a lack of support in discussing DEI practices with families, many school staff shared on the survey and in focus groups that they do not currently feel adequately supported to incorporate DEI practices in classroom instruction. This separation unintentionally communicates that the district views DEI and instructional practices as separate rather than deeply connected and undermines the district’s vision of improving the academic experience and outcomes for marginalized populations. As one teacher noted, “I often feel the district mission of ‘educating all students to achieve success’ is more of a soundbite than a reality as most of our PD is for checkbox reasons rather than actually trying to make learning more accessible for our students.” Some educators try to find connection between DEI and instructional practices but are unsure how to fit equity in their curriculum and find administrators unable to answer their questions: “As a department, we are looking at ways to be more equitable in our practices and curriculum but administrators don’t support us specifically to answer those questions.” And although every teacher has PLC time, there does not seem to be a set structure or expectations for how PLC time is used to inform instruction either through data analysis or the creation of culturally responsive curriculum or instructional practices: “We’ve tried working on a curriculum, but there’s no time afforded to do it.” Both administrators and teachers clearly see the need and urgency to

grow and develop more culturally responsive curricula and instructional practices, and also name that time and consistency in process and practices are limiting current efforts.

## DOMAIN 9: GOVERNANCE & CONDITIONS

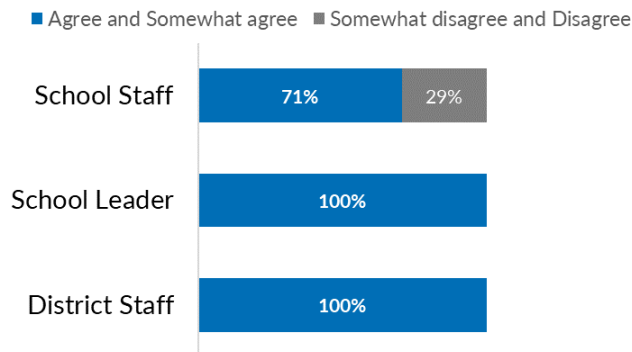
### District leaders are attuned to each school's priorities and needs.

District leaders and school leaders all describe experiencing open and collaborative working relationships. In focus groups responses, leaders mention alignment of school priorities to district priorities, while also recognizing each individual school's priorities. Coordination of efforts was also apparent in focus groups, as well as district artifacts and resources, which likely stems from the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council consists of district leaders and school leaders and meets every other week. The Leadership Council's annual goals are aligned with the strategic plan goals and objectives, and Leadership Council meetings provide a recurring opportunity for leaders to consider progress and needs in light of data to inform implementation efforts and impact. One school leader mentioned that Leadership Council meetings allow leaders the opportunity to not only bring their school-specific needs to the table, but also hear and consider the needs of the PK-12 span of schools and how addressing needs in one grade band can positively impact other grade bands. The Leadership Council's goals contain action steps and evidence of success, which do not currently include key performance indicators (KPIs) or school, staff, or student data that can be disaggregated to inform the extent to which action steps are yielding the desired outcomes for staff or students, particularly marginalized populations.

District and school staff survey responses also indicate that staff recognize "opportunities to provide feedback to our district about the services and support they provide, which informs decision making and best practices." The responses displayed below indicate that 100 percent of district staff and school leaders agree or somewhat agree with this statement, as did 70.6 percent of school staff.

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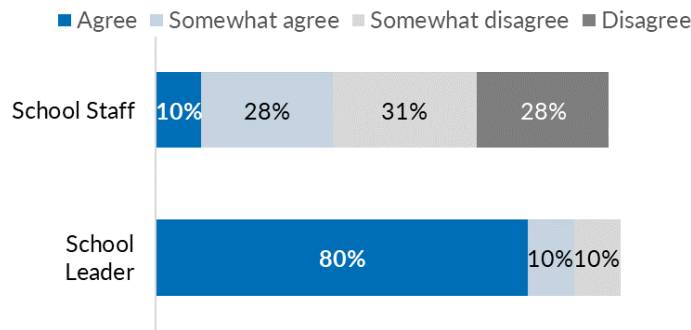
*Staff survey responses to the statement, "Our district office provides school leaders and staff with opportunities to provide feedback to the district about the services and support they provide, which informs decision making."*



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District and school leaders referenced a common open-door practice and way of operating, which has supported strong relationships between district- and school-level leaders, as well as district engagement with circumstances on the ground at each school. It is unclear, however, the extent to which all leaders routinely use disaggregated student data (academic, behavior, SEL, or other) to learn about successful initiatives and practices or draw attention and provide targeted support to students whose success outcomes are not at the level of their peers or the district's average. A district leader shared that they "would like to see data to be incorporated more to not only identify needs, but show progress... showing that those groups [students with disabilities or low income students] that we've tried to help are making progress." District staff, school leaders, and school staff largely report having "access to disaggregated data to understand the extent to which student subgroups" are equitably succeeding.

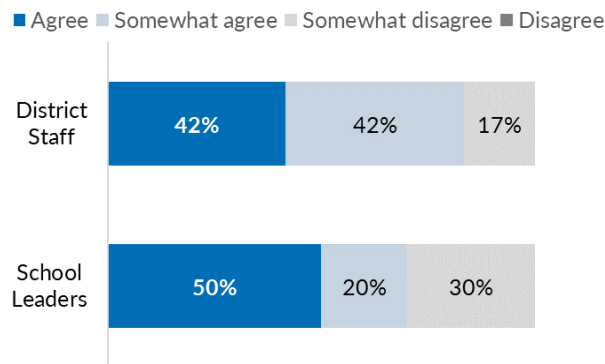
Staff responses to the statement, "I have sufficient training and access to disaggregated data to understand the extent to which student subgroups in my schools are equitably succeeding."



Middle school leaders indicated a slightly greater need for access to disaggregated data than elementary or high school leaders, and staff at all levels report a continued need for training and development around data analysis and data-driven decision making. Leader and staff access to and effective use of disaggregated student data to inform decisions is further reflected in district staff and school leaders' responses about the monitoring systems to "identify and support students who need additional support to engage and succeed."

Half of school leaders (more in elementary and middle school than high school) and over half of district staff identify the need for a more effective monitoring system to support struggling students.

District staff and school leader survey responses to the statement: "My school/district has an effective monitoring system to identify and support students who need additional support (attendance, academics, behavior, social-emotional, on-track-to-graduate, etc.) to engage and succeed."



In summary, communication and relationships are open, consistent, and supportive among district staff and school leaders and staff. There is also the opportunity for the district and schools to openly share and leverage already existing successful practices and initiatives and replicate them across the district. And there is a need for more intentional use and development of data-driven practices and decision-making to ensure that student needs, particularly those of marginalized populations, are accessible via multiple data sources and used by all.

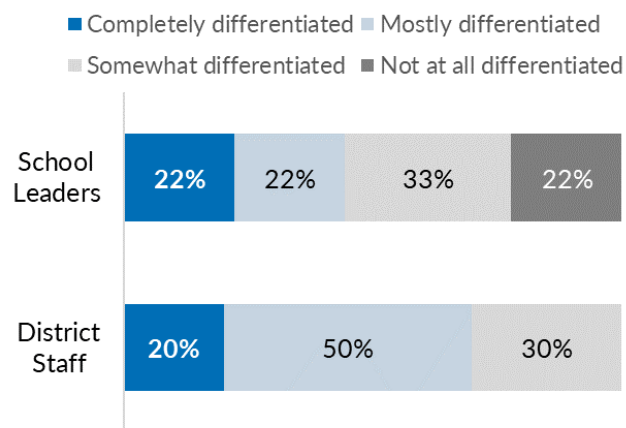
## There are examples of differentiated support and conditions that recognize school and student needs.

When Mass Insight references conditions, it is about the ways in which a district differentiates the allocations and structures of people, programs, time, and funding in a way that not only recognizes and recognizes school needs, but also prioritizes marginalized populations. At WPS, the Leadership Council is one structure that supports the district's ability to differentiate support and conditions to recognize school and student needs. Aside from that collaborative meeting, district leaders responsible for a particular department or programmatic support also work to support schools with needed resources and conditions.

School leader and district staff's survey responses about the extent to which "The district office differentiates resources and supports to schools based on school needs and context" are similar, with the exception of funding.

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*School leader and district staff survey responses to the statement: "The district office differentiates resources and supports to schools based on school needs and context, with respect to funding."*



While 70 percent of district staff feel funding is completely or mostly differentiated to schools, 44 percent of school leaders feel the same.

The following sections provide examples of conditions that were highlighted during stakeholder engagement activities and the ways in which they further equitable access and outcomes for marginalized populations.

### *People, Programs, and Time*

The district has invested in staff development opportunities in alignment with [Strategic Plan](#) Goal 1:

- All staff participated in CR24 bias training (see more about this in [Student Readiness to Learn](#);
- Department chairs with the support of the assistant superintendent are revising curriculum maps for bias, as well as ensuring their consistency and alignment PK-12;
- Instructional staff are developing common formal and informal assessments;
- Time is allocated in all schools' schedules to support PLCs for staff to collaboratively engage in instruction-focused conversations; and
- Administrators and educators received professional development to support tiered instructional practices, the use of student-centered learning pedagogies, and personalized learning experiences that connect students to the real world.

The extent to which these efforts and opportunities have impacted instructional practices remains unclear, as some are under development and some are ongoing efforts, and supporting structures such as observation and feedback, coaching, and evaluation practices are not yet aligned to these specific strategic plan goals.

The district is also committed to student access, engagement, and SEL development, as well as staff and family

preparedness to support students. In alignment with [Strategic Plan](#) Goal 2, the district has invested in:

- Student and family surveys to gauge SEL climate;
- Investments in counselors at all elementary schools to support SEL learning and development;
- Free full-day kindergarten for all students, which will start in the 2022-23 school year;
- 1:1 computer devices for all students K-12, as well as educational software to support student learning; and
- Late buses to ensure students can participate in after school activities.

Evidence indicates that few staff have participated in trauma-informed education, and that there is not yet a district-wide approach or programming for SEL and development.

The district also strategically engages with community partners to support schools and students. Some key partners named by stakeholders include: the METropolitan COuncil for Educational Opportunity (METCO), school parent advisory councils (PACs), English learner (EL) PAC, special education (SE) PAC, Be Inclusive Inc., the Walpole Police and Fire Departments, the Walpole Board of Health, the Walpole City Council, the Walpole Public Library, the Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Awareness, local food banks, and the Hailer House. District staff, students, and families benefit from these partnership in many ways, including:

- Family engagement and decision-making at the school level, as well as programmatic support for students who are English learners and students with disabilities;
- Books for school libraries that lift the voices of underrepresented and marginalized populations;
- Support, training, and resources for staff that build resilience and self-compassion and foster parent-school collaboration;
- Access for families who experience food insecurity; and
- Coordination of city and school district support and resources.

Evidence indicates that many partnerships do support marginalized populations, such as METCO, EL PAC, SEPAC, local food banks, and the Hailer House. The extent to which other partnerships explicitly focus on the needs of marginalized students and families is unknown, as are the other outstanding needs of marginalized students and families that could be supported through strategic local partners.

### *Funding*

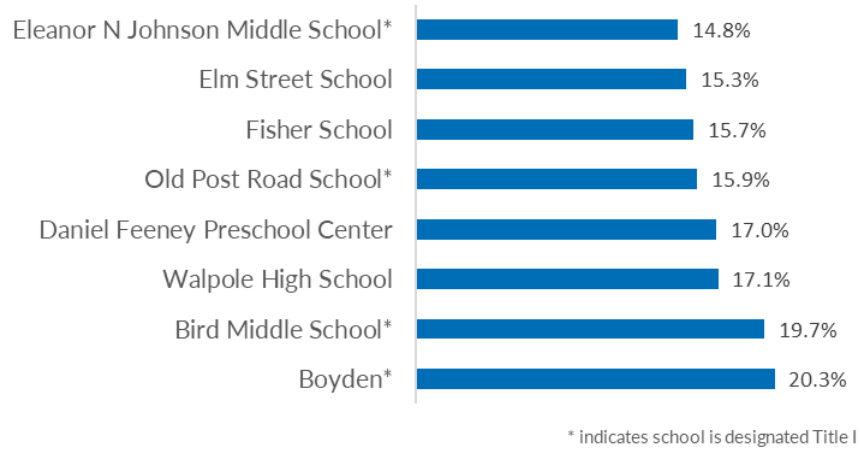
School leaders describe a school-based budgeting process that provides leaders with transparency, autonomy, and district support to make budgetary decisions based on their school's needs. School leaders report engaging their staff in the process as well. And even with recent level-funded budgets for goods and services, school leaders feel they have adequate budgetary allotments, supportive additional personnel allocations, and some alternative revenue sources.

District budget processes are clear and openly shared through publicly available budget documents and school committee presentations. A budget analysis indicates that grant and non-grant funding adequately addresses the needs of students with disabilities and English learners in alignment with state and federal guidance. Additionally, the 2022-23 school year budget includes \$823,000 in allocations (63.2 percent of all increased funds from the previous budget) that represent equity-focused investments, including full-day kindergarten, one special education FTE, an English language development coordinator, a METCO academic advisor, a middle school counselor, and a high school work study program. Other budgetary allocations, such as investments in STEM instruction and a middle school ELA/history coordinator, may also positively impact marginalized students.

Other district budget priorities do not yet clearly indicate differentiated funding based on school or student need, particularly for students classified as low income. Low income students are the largest student subgroup population in the district, with 738 low income students in the 2021-22 school year. The district received \$140,792 in federal Title I funds in the last school year, which was earmarked to serve low income students in four of seven schools and provided additional instructional services and support to 377 low income students (51 percent of the district's low income student population). Title I funding was used for a full-time Title I intervention teacher at Boyden Elementary and Old Post Road Elementary, and part-time after-school liaisons at Johnson and Bird Middle Schools.

The graph below indicates the percent of low income students at each school during the 2021-22 school year. Title I schools receive Title I funds to provide additional support for low income students at that school. Walpole Public Schools does not qualify as a Title I district, so the Title I funding it receives can only be invested at schools that qualify. Title I funds at the four schools indicated in the table below during the 2021-22 school year were used for academic

interventions and intervention support staff to support low income students. It is unclear from budgetary financial allocations how the 361 low income students (49 percent of the district’s low income students) enrolled at Elm Street Elementary, Fisher Elementary, and Walpole High School received targeted comparable academic interventions and support to those in designated Title I schools.



A school committee member commented, “We all recognize that what we fund is what we value, and I think that in the budget discussions that we have, what comes up over and over again is ‘how are we best meeting student needs?’” While the budget process is transparent and to an extent considers the needs of marginalized students, public-facing budget documents and interview data provide limited evidence that leaders and school committee members analyzed, cited, and leveraged disaggregated student and school data to determine budget priorities. Yet when reviewing internal talking points about the budget, it is evident that budget allocations are not only data informed, but also directly linked to strategic plan priorities. There is an opportunity in public forums, such as budget discussions with the school committee, to share more of the data behind funding allocations, particularly how they are tied to strategic plan priorities and support the needs of marginalized student populations. For example, expected budgetary accomplishments are vague and do not reference data-informed outcomes; no key performance indicators (KPIs) were found in budget documents or presentations; and budget documents and discussions did not indicate how budget allocations addressed the district’s Strategic Plan action steps and would lead to achieving the plan’s desired outcomes. Similarly, disaggregated student data—both current data and trend data—indicates that economically disadvantaged/low income students are underperforming their peers on MCAS, have larger attendance gaps (average attendance, days absent, and 10+ days absent), and have academic success gaps (9th grade course passing, advanced course participation and completion, and college attendance). A school committee member mentioned the tension they feel when making equity-focused budget decisions that explicitly support marginalized students: “How do you express the idea that we of course want to worry about everybody but there’s extra concern about certain kids?” More data transparency would support school committee and district conversations about the why behind key district financial allocations.

**The district’s vision and strategic plan indicate a desire for greater equity to support each student’s success and ensure the inclusion of all members of the educational and greater community, and some recent district policies clearly reflect attention to equitable access.**

Walpole School Committee members described their roles as threefold: 1) hiring and evaluating the superintendent, 2) approving the budget, and 3) setting district policy. School committee members describe the policies they set as supporting the district leaders in doing their job, while balancing the level of policies, which do not impact classroom day-to-day decisions. Several recent decisions, in alignment with Goal 3 of the [Strategic Plan](#), demonstrate the district’s desire to ensure greater equity and inclusion, including but not limited to:

- Changing the high school mascot;
- Investing in a district equity audit;

- Adding counselor and English language development (ELD) staffing positions;
- Allocating time at all schools for professional learning communities (PLCs);
- Hiring a DEI director; and
- Approving full-day kindergarten for all students.

The school committee members feel it is their responsibility to “promote the values of the district,” and yet also named that they are seven White, middle-to-upper class people who have not personally faced many of the experiences and inequities that they confront. School committee members have participated in workshops, and through the work of subcommittees and content-area and department presentations at school committee meetings in the 2021-22 school year, have learned more about curriculum and the METCO, ELD, and special education programs. Many committee members also mentioned the time investment spent to bring the full-day kindergarten program to fruition, and how data clearly demonstrated that investment in kindergarten would support leveling the playing field by providing access to all students. School committee members also mentioned a desire for tools or protocols that would support them in justifying their decisions to the public and conveying the reasoning behind policies and budget allocations, which would not only create greater public understanding, but also mitigate bias in their process.

Survey responses from district staff, school leaders, and school staff indicate areas where they believe greater equity particularly for marginalized populations could be achieved if policies, systems, or structures were reexamined:

- District staff mentioned discipline and course placement as the areas most worthy for consideration.
- School leaders contrastingly mentioned attendance policies most frequently, as well as curriculum, MTSS, family communication, special education, course placement, homework, grading, and staff diversification.
- The most frequent response from school staff was discipline, followed by curriculum, MTSS, family communication, special education, EL support, attendance, and course placement.

It is also worth noting that 17 percent of district staff and 7 percent of school staff respondents indicated that no policies, systems, or structures needed to be reexamined. And 8 percent of district staff, 10 percent of school leaders, and 5 percent of school staff indicated all policies, systems, and structures “should be reexamined to ensure they equitably support the success of all students, particularly marginalized populations.”

The district describes inclusion as “the act of creating environments in which any individual or group feels welcome, respected, supported, and valued as a fully participating member irrespective of differences, as evidenced in the words and actions of all people.”<sup>3</sup> Cultural competence is one aspect of inclusion, which 90 percent of staff feel district communication and interactions demonstrate for all students, staff, and families. Similarly, 89 percent of family survey respondents agree or strongly agree that they “feel supported and welcome in interactions” with their child’s school. And 89 percent of students likewise responded on the survey that they feel included at school. (Greater detail about student subgroup responses can be found in [Student Readiness to Learn](#)). While largely positive, it is worth noting that around 10 percent of responding staff, family, and students reported not feeling included or welcome. Suggestions from families for creating more welcoming and inclusive interactions can be found in [Family Community & Engagement](#), and while equity audit surveys did not explicitly ask staff about the ways in which greater inclusion could be created, it is an opportunity that staff would likely be willing to provide feedback about as it reflects their work environment culture.

## ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations describe the next steps that the district can take to create greater equity, access, and opportunities for students, staff, and families. Equity is a journey, and as with any journey the district embarks upon, it has to work through layers of stakeholders, structures, policies, and practices to understand, determine, and support changes. As in any journey, different people in the community have different levels of engagement with and exposure to the full spectrum of the district's strategic work. The [Strategic Plan 2019-2024](#) outlines the district's process for intentionally engaging each stakeholder group in the work of living out its mission of educating "all students to achieve success." Work through the end of the 2021-22 school year has largely focused on developing district and school leaders in shared vision and understanding of equity-focused leadership and instruction. Findings in the previous pages reflect great alignment and progress of leaders to continue this work, as the district now moves forward to bring school staff, students, and families along in understanding and supporting next steps toward creating a work and learning environment that is inclusive of all stakeholders and focused on the success of every student.

The recommendations that follow are designed with the district's context in mind, acknowledging staff capacity, resources, existing initiatives, and timelines. Recommendations have been written in alignment with the current strategic plan goals to support the district's next steps. The recommendations contain research-informed immediate, short-term, and long-term next steps, as well as resources and considerations to guide decision making. Many recommendations are not quick fixes that one or two people can solve, but rather parts of a series of intentional and coordinated actions among various stakeholders that recognize and leverage current strengths, foundations, and work already underway, as well as access and opportunity barriers.

It is important to mention that a district-wide commitment to equity and equity mindset that informs all decision making is essential to not only understand where practices and policies are disproportionately impacting some stakeholders, but also to understand the impact—whether intended or unintended—of adjustments to policies and practices. A shared commitment to equity, particularly from district and school staff, is critical to sustain equity-focused improvement efforts.

To further support the district's next steps are a few guiding principles that not only acknowledge the work already underway, but also support the systemic and mindset changes through all layers of stakeholders, from the district office to students and families:

- **Communicate the district's vision, guiding beliefs, and strategic plan to all stakeholders in a highly visible and recurrent way that provides the context and resources for the district's next steps.** As the district makes decisions, demonstrates growth and impact, and rolls out new and next steps, it will be key to engage students, families, staff, and community members whenever possible. Conveying the rationale and data behind decisions, celebrating growth and successes, and transparently discussing areas for growth and targeted support will bring the greater school community along in the district's equity journey to ensure all students achieve success.
- **Seek feedback from stakeholders to inform decision making.** As more stakeholders become aware of and engaged in supporting district priorities, the district should consider the ways in which stakeholders can provide feedback, as well as the modes and accessibility available to all stakeholders to do so. Consider involving participants who have a specific interest or stake in the decision (such as existing committees or groups), have the experience or expertise to contribute to the decision, and mirror the various aspects of diversity present in the district. Follow up with and/or publicly acknowledge the feedback that was provided and how it informed decisions so that stakeholders see that the district is using community feedback to guide decisions and next steps.
- **Build stakeholder awareness, understanding, and engagement in the district's equity journey.** As the district continues to build upon the work already underway to infuse equity-minded learning opportunities, policies, and practices that support the success of all students throughout the district, the process will be strengthened and accelerated when there is broad engagement from all staff, students, families, and community members. Though there are broad perspectives and different understandings of the current state of equity in the district and how it should be addressed, the district is building the capacity to respond to and engage community members in building a more inclusive district that is grounded in awareness and a mutual understanding about

the district's opportunities to leverage its strengths and grow to fully live its mission: Walpole Public Schools educates all students to achieve success.

# RECOMMENDATIONS IN ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 1

In alignment with Goal 1 of the strategic plan—*To provide an engaging curriculum, differentiated instruction, and ongoing assessments for all students*—are the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1A: Create a district-wide arc of professional learning that sets clear expectations for what effective culturally responsive and personalized learning looks like for students at all grade levels, as well as related staff expectations.**

As the district continues to develop curriculum maps in core content areas for PreK-12, it can now shift attention to the consistent implementation of providing rigorous and personalized learning experiences focused on the individual growth of each student. To do so, the district needs to leverage all staff development opportunities—from dedicated district and school professional development times and PLCs, to coaching and observational/evaluative feedback—to define and develop the learning experiences it desires, ensuring all students have equitable access, opportunities, and success outcomes. And as these systems and structures are aligned to strategically address this critical district priority, clearly connecting desired student learning experiences, resulting instructional expectations, and the developmental support received by staff will be critical to staff awareness and buy-in.

At this early stage in the district's equity journey, the district should create and commit to expectations about the student learning experience to guide and align the next stages of work towards the district's vision of all students learning and achieving success. Action steps under Objective 1.2, *Provide personalized learning through flexible instructional practice that fosters growth for all students*, include *Identify models of instruction and student-centered learning pedagogies and authentic learning experiences*. Descriptions and examples of what personalized learning and cultural proficiency look and sound like across grade levels and content areas (including both student experience indicators and aligned instructional expectations) would support all school staff to work towards a common goal of learning environments that meet the individual needs of each student.

Resources:

- MA DESE's [Culturally Responsive Look-Fors](#)
- New York's [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining \(CR-S\) Framework](#)

## ***Professional Learning Opportunities***

The district has demonstrated a commitment to equity-focused professional learning experiences, yet staff perceive many past professional development sessions as disconnected from each other and from classroom practice and teacher evaluation, as indicated in the [Workforce Development findings](#). Many equity-focused professional development sessions are currently either “one-and-done” or optional and only attended by a portion of the staff. To ensure that professional development moves the needle on instructional practice across the district, the district could either invest in internally developing or externally sourcing a professional learning series that includes intentional and actionable content aligned with district goals, targeted integration into classroom practice, and cycles of reflection and evaluation.

Possible options for external professional development collaborators include:

- [The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning](#)
- [The Highlander Institute](#)
- [The Anti-Defamation League](#)

Professional development time throughout the year can be used to collectively further develop staff's related instructional practices, during school-based common planning time (e.g. Wednesday afternoons) or district-wide professional development time (e.g. EdCamp). District in-service days, such as EdCamp, should be planned intentionally to ensure that all participants are meeting the district's goals for the day. Requirements may be specific (e.g. a common session for all staff as part of the year's professional learning arc) or by topic (e.g. choose from a list of sessions related to using technology to personalize instruction). And if one goal of district in-service time is teacher

wellness and rapport, consider dedicating one block to those sessions or offering them to supplement the day's professional learning (e.g. offering a yoga class before the first session, or a nutrition class during the lunch period), while still leveraging the majority of the day for sessions clearly aligned to district priorities.

### ***Feedback and Observation***

To ensure that the district's vision for best practices is clear and accessible to all staff, closely align professional development and evaluation. Using key indicators from the state evaluation system, determine which ones support personalized learning and culturally proficient instruction, and align informal (observation, coaching) and formal (evaluation) feedback to those key indicators. This will clarify and clearly indicate to staff the district's instructional expectations and accountability, and also the ways in which they will be supported and developed to ensure equitable and inclusive learning experiences for all students.

### ***Celebrate and Leverage Strong Instructional Practices***

Further, find ways to celebrate and leverage strong instruction happening throughout the district. Determine which teachers are excelling at district goals and priorities and highlight their classrooms. Consider asking strong teachers to share a unit or a classroom practice with their team or school, giving educators an example and an opportunity to learn from each other.

## **Recommendation 1B: Systematize access to and usage of data across all schools, content areas, and measures of student success.**

### ***Data and Processes to Inform Instructional Practice***

The district is in the process of ensuring that all grades and content areas have benchmark assessments. To continue this work, evaluate what is needed and develop or invest in formative and summative assessments K-12 and ensure that all staff have access to data disaggregated by race, high-needs status (receiving special education services, ELD, or low-income), and any other available indicators. Teachers at all grade levels and content areas should have access to diagnostic and progress monitoring data and tools within their classrooms and across teams.

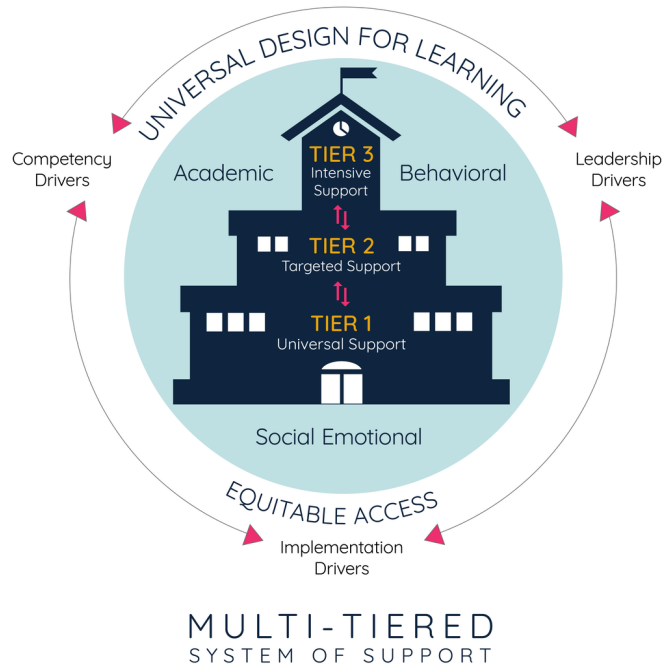
### ***Processes to Monitor Struggling Students at all Levels***

Create a district-wide system for ongoing monitoring of student success outcomes (academic, behavior, social-emotional) and protocols for how the system will be coordinated and used at the district, school, and grade level of all WPS schools. Already existing structures, such as professional development and PLCs, should incorporate data analysis, systematizing across schools and grade levels what data should be regularly examined at the classroom and school level on an ongoing basis, as well as training for the protocols used to analyze data and then plan responsive instruction or individualized support plans based on student needs.

Data protocol examples for PLCs or teaching teams:

- [Examining Data Protocol](#) from EL Education
- [Looking at Data Protocol](#) from the School Reform Initiative

According to Massachusetts DESE's Multi-Tiered System of Support framework (see below), classrooms that meet the needs of all learners a) are grounded in strong tier 1 instruction that is universally designed and culturally responsive, and b) regularly analyze data to determine which students need additional targeted support. Ensure that teachers and teams are proactively identifying students at risk of adverse outcomes well before a grading period ends, supported by easily accessible data and structures or protocols for analysis as suggested above. Then, embed evidence-based intervention into students' academic schedules as a required part of their class or school day, rather than outside of their regular coursework. The district already has some of these structures in place, and infusing responsive data practices throughout the district will further the goal of all students learning and achieving success.



Resources:

- [MTSS Blueprint](#) from MA DESE
- Learning Acceleration PD Session 3: [Designing Strong Instructional Scaffolds for Tier 1 Instruction](#) (recording)

***Celebrate and Leverage Strong Data-informed Supports***

Finally, as in the previous recommendation, create opportunities to examine and determine high-quality and successful practices and initiatives that can be replicated throughout the district. Give educators the opportunity to learn from colleagues with strong data and intervention practices, and make space for teams to share how they monitor and respond to student success data in ways that can be spread to other grade levels, content areas, and/or schools.

## RECOMMENDATION IN ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 2

In alignment with Goal 2 of the strategic plan—*To foster and strengthen the social-emotional well-being of the school community in order to develop responsible and engaged citizens*—is the following recommendation:

### **Recommendation 2: Develop family communication and engagement expectations at each school level, with specific expectations for families of high needs students.**

Families are uniquely positioned to understand and support the socio-emotional and academic needs of their children. The district's communication methods position it to capitalize on this asset, as nearly 90 percent of family survey responses indicated that families feel supported and welcomed in Walpole Public Schools. What's more, many families spoke favorably about the friendly rapport and open lines of communication that they have with teachers and other school staff. While the vast majority of Walpole families are satisfied with the frequency of communication they receive from district and school staff, many families desire more opportunities to be involved in their children's learning. This is especially desired by families of students in upper grade levels, families of students with disabilities, and families who do not fluently speak English (see [Domain 3 Findings](#)). Creating communication expectations at each school level for how staff communicate with and engage families in their child(ren)'s learning experiences would help strengthen the collaborative partnership between the district and its families.

To create communication expectations and opportunities for engagement that reflect the needs of Walpole families, the district could start by consulting its existing family councils and committees, such as the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), the Special Education Advisory Council (SEPAC), the English Learner Parent Advisory Council (ELPAC), and school councils. District and school leaders could leverage family feedback to understand what families need and/or desire to feel informed, aware, and actively engaged as partners in their child(ren)'s learning and school.

Once the district better understands families' needs and desires, leaders along with family volunteers could create a draft of communication and engagement expectations that balances both family needs and staff and district capacity to address those needs. Considering the specific communication and engagement expectations of families of students with disabilities, English learners, and low income families may also necessitate differentiated plans of support that could be coordinated with district, department, and school leaders. For example, staff and families identified a need for more translation or interpretation services to more intentionally engage with non-English speaking families. With updated expectations for engagement with non-English speakers, staff may potentially need additional (or a refresher) training about how to use the existing translation service that the district already has in place.

Finally, the district should consider ways to assess how families are experiencing these expectations throughout the year so that adjustments can be flexibly made to better meet the needs of families, prioritizing the engagement of families of high needs students. To accomplish this, the district could work with the previously-mentioned family councils and committees to not only make them aware of the district's communication and engagement expectations, but also leverage their feedback to inform the district's implementation efforts through the extent to which families feel the impact of those expectations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS IN ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 3

In alignment with Goal 3 of the strategic plan—*To demonstrate a high level of Cultural Proficiency as evidenced by active promotion of diversity in all aspects of instruction, learning, and participation, thus ensuring equity for all and full inclusion of members of the educational and greater community*—are the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 3A: Continue investing in equity-focused professional learning opportunities for staff with a focus on connecting equity to instructional practice and navigating challenging conversations with staff, students, and families.**

In the last two years, the district has taken numerous actions to advance the district’s vision for an equitable and inclusive district culture, including hiring a DEI director, increasing DEI-related staff trainings, contracting external facilitators for cultural proficiency trainings, and engaging in an equity audit to better understand how the district can meet the needs of all students so that they all achieve success. Multiple educators have emphasized the clarity of the district’s focus on equity, however, many educators seek more support from leaders to incorporate equity in their instructional practice and navigate challenging conversations with colleagues, families, and students.

To support educators with incorporating equitable and inclusive practices into their classrooms, the district should first provide a few foundational sessions to build awareness and understanding about the "what" and "why" of equity in education. These sessions might include what an equitable classroom looks and feels like, what an inclusive classroom looks and feels like, and the intent and impact of choices that are made about the classroom environment and learning activities. Secondly, the district should ensure that all equity-focused professional learning experiences allow the facilitator to model a teaching strategy using the principles covered during the session. *For example, a session focused on eliciting the voices of marginalized populations during instruction might involve the facilitator modeling the use of a “randomizer” strategy to eliminate bias regarding which students teachers call on during instruction.* Thirdly, equity-focused professional learning sessions should include an opportunity for staff to practice incorporating the modeled instructional strategies in an upcoming lesson, receive feedback from their peers, and set a student-centered goal to incorporate the strategy into their classroom practice. *For example, after a teacher practices using a randomizer strategy with a small group of their peers acting as students, peers could provide feedback on how the strategy felt as a student participant and recommend adjustments the teacher can make so that the strategy is effective for their students; the teacher might set a goal to get two traditionally quiet students regularly contributing to classroom discussion each week.* Finally, instructional coaches or leaders should follow up with targeted observations and coaching around the strategies being implemented. *For example, an observation debrief with an instructional coach might include discussion of progress the teacher has made towards the goal they set, actions that are supporting and/or hindering that progress, adjustments that the teacher can make to reach or further their goal, and an opportunity to practice the adjustment in the moment.*

To support educators in navigating challenging conversations with colleagues, families, and students, district and school leaders should consider some of the local challenging conversations that they and their staff have recently encountered and navigated. Using these scenarios, leaders could construct and engage in a practice-based professional learning series in a safe space with colleagues about how to respond to these scenarios in a way that is aligned with the district’s values and that engages all parties in constructive learning. After district and school leaders have normed on the district’s approach, principals can then facilitate similar practice-based development with their staff so that leaders and staff are aligned on how they navigate challenging conversations with colleagues, families, and students. As new or different questions and conversations arise, it could be helpful to capture and archive these in a shared and accessible location for all staff, to not only support further staff alignment, but to also support continual learning and support in navigating difficult conversations. Finally, the success of the development around challenging conversations can be measured throughout the year by the number of staff who respond positively to quick survey questions such as, “How comfortable are you having vulnerable conversations about race, ethnicity, culture, or other aspects of diversity with colleagues? ...families? ...students?” Baseline data for this question is available via the staff equity audit survey.

### **Recommendation 3B: Leverage the Equity Task Force and staff supporting human resource efforts, in partnership with students and families, to develop more inclusive and data-informed recruitment and retention practices.**

Many staff, students, and families recognize the benefits of and call for a more diverse workforce. And while the district has multiple structures and internal support to recruit and hire a diverse workforce, barriers exist to attract diverse staff. As identified in the [Workforce Development findings](#), these barriers include a perceived lack of inclusivity in Walpole and a lack of data-informed practices in the recruitment and hiring processes.

To mitigate a perceived lack of inclusivity in Walpole, the district should first leverage the expertise of the Equity Task Force, given that they have already established a subcommittee around hiring and retention. This subcommittee should work with a diverse and representative group of students, families, and staff to develop language around the district's commitment to equity that is reflected in all recruitment communication, including job postings, promotional materials, and conversations with prospective applicants. Once this language has been approved and adopted by the district, leaders and staff involved in the hiring process should participate in practice-based training to use the language when speaking with prospective applicants. The Equity Task Force could also be leveraged to support the design, training, and implementation of consistent protocols and practices that all staff utilize throughout the hiring process.

The Equity Task force subcommittee on hiring and retention should also continue to identify in-person and virtual recruitment locations and platforms that attract diverse applicants, such as diversity hiring fairs and Boston-area and New England colleges and education organizations. These locations should be shared with staff supporting human resource efforts so they can compile an annual schedule for recruitment engagements that outlines which school/district representatives will attend these engagements. A list of colleges, education organizations, and HR resources is included below.

Throughout recruitment engagements, the staff supporting human resource efforts should collect and analyze data on actions that led to candidates submitting an application, participating in an interview, receiving and accepting an offer to work in the district, and choosing to remain in WPS:

- First, develop a system for tracking which recruitment outreach strategies attracted a more diverse applicant pool. This could involve including application questions such as “How did you hear about Walpole Public Schools?” and “What led you to apply to work with Walpole Public Schools?”
- Second, develop an interview scoring rubric based on the interview question responses provided by candidates. This rubric could include a space for each interviewer to record candidate responses, rate if those responses provide evidence of the desired employee characteristics, and provide a hiring recommendation based on the rated responses. This would necessitate providing practice-based training to hiring managers and interviewers in using this rubric.
- Third, collect data on staff's work experience and intent to return via an annual staff survey.
- Finally, the district, supported by school administrators, the Equity Task Force, and the superintendent, should review these data points annually and make adjustments to the recruitment, hiring, and development processes that support the retention of a diverse workforce. The Alliance for Resource Equity's [Resource Equity Guidebook: Teaching Quality & Diversity](#) provides tools to analyze the root cause of a non-diverse workforce and generate potential action steps, beginning on page 31.

Storing applicant data in an array of folders and tracking data via spreadsheets is a time-consuming and burdensome process to support effective human resources staff and processes. The district could consider investing in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, such as [Greenhouse](#), which securely stores interview documents such as resumes, work products, interview tasks, and interview notes, and automatically analyzes interview scores and demographic data. Given the sensitive nature of collecting demographic data, it is recommended that the school district consult with its legal team to understand the nuances of collecting demographic data to guide recruiting processes.

## Colleges & Organizations

- [The InSPIRED Initiative](#) consists of the Statewide Affinity Network and InSPIRED Fellowship which are Massachusetts pools of current and prospective educators of color.
- [Nonprofit HR](#) provides free events aimed to support HR professionals to deepen their understanding of diversity and inclusion related to HR vision setting and practice.
- [American Association of School Personnel Administrators \(AASPA\)](#) holds a variety of training and development opportunities for increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in education-based HR practices.
- Culturally-based organizational partners that could share employment opportunities with their members include:
  - [The India Society of Worcester](#)
  - [The Brazilian American Center \(BRACE\)](#)
  - [The Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University](#)
- Colleges of education whose undergraduate and graduate programs are sources for pipeline development, outreach, recruitment, as well as continuing education and certification programs:
  - American International College
  - Assumption College
  - Bay Path University
  - Clark University
  - College of the Holy Cross
  - Elms College
  - Framingham State University
  - Worcester State University

### Resources:

- [“Promising Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategies: For a Diverse Massachusetts Teaching Force”](#)
- [“20+ SWOT Analysis Templates, Examples, and Best Practices”](#)
- DESE initiatives, grants, and technical assistance resources, such as [Diversity in Education - Teach Massachusetts](#)

### **Recommendation 3C: Revise the Indicators of Accomplishment for the Strategic Plan and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and develop ongoing progress monitoring systems and reporting structures.**

While Walpole’s Strategic Plan and SIPs contain a comprehensive set of Actions to achieve district goals, many of the Indicators of Accomplishment lack specificity and measurability of implementation and impact. For example, consider the Actions and Indicators of Accomplishment for Objective 1.2 in the table below. While the Actions demonstrate a clear focus on increasing professional development opportunities to support student learning, the Indicators of Accomplishment do not identify what counts as evidence of professional development participation or how the district will capture or measure improvements in individualized learning and flexible instruction. Providing greater specificity and measurability in the district’s Indicators of Accomplishment will allow the district to more effectively progress monitor its actions so that the district can demonstrate achievement of its goals.

Objective 1.2 Actions	Objective 1.2 Indicators of Accomplishment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicate Professional Development time to support the curriculum coaching model</li> <li>• Dedicate Professional Development time to learn of and share student-centered learning pedagogies and authentic learning experiences that connect students to the real world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of professional development participation</li> <li>• Coaching and/or peer feedback that improves individualized learning and flexible instruction strategies</li> </ul>

Providing greater specificity and measurability in the district’s Indicators of Accomplishment will require that the district develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). KPIs are the metrics that describe the outcomes of goals supported by the district planned Actions and invested resources. KPIs show to what degree plans and actions result in measurable equitable outcomes and impact, which necessitates analyzing growth or changes in staff practices and/or student growth or performance. Greater equity is achieved when measurable growth occurs or when performance or success gaps decrease among marginalized students and their classmates.

When developing KPI’s, consider these best practices:

- Less is more. The District should not overload planning documents with KPI’s, but instead select a small number (2-5) for each objective.
- Select KPIs that reflect already existing priorities and strong plans that, when implemented with fidelity, are likely to show the desired growth toward more equitable outcomes for marginalized stakeholders.
- Use both quantitative and qualitative data. The district is focusing on academic and social-emotional support for students, which should both be recognized in KPIs, particularly as SEL supports students’ abilities to engage and succeed academically.
- KPIs should largely reflect student measures, but staff and family measures should also be included to ensure monitoring of district priorities beyond student success measures.

Resources:

- [28 Key Performance Indicators in Education](#)
- [Academic Key Performance Indicators](#) from Council of Great City Schools’ 2020 Report
- [Sample Measurable Annual Goals](#)

### **Recommendation 3D: Build staff awareness and investment in the district’s equity-focused efforts and the reasons for doing so.**

One of the district’s guiding beliefs is “the diversity in our community is critical to the educational experience of all learners.” The district’s definition of diversity highlights diversity as “all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued.”<sup>2</sup> Cultural awareness is fundamental to providing an equitable learning environment for all students and staff. A district that values *equality* is not the same as one that values *equity*. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they represent two approaches to teaching with very different goals and outcomes. Cultural competence is a system of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable staff to work effectively with students cross-culturally. If intentional efforts are not

made, staff are left to their own understanding and implicit bias to make those connections. The district must actively work to engage and develop all staff in alignment with the district's guiding beliefs and equity-focused initiatives.

The first key is understanding that cultural proficiency does not happen in a short period of time. It is a process that requires an understanding and willingness to change and unlearn noninclusive attitudes, beliefs, and practices. This multi-year process includes:

- **Starting with awareness.** Before staff can implement culturally responsive instruction, they must first recognize their own cultural background. Reflecting on one's own background will help uncover ways in which it is similar to or different from that of students and families. Staff can then begin to identify ways to bridge any culture gaps.
- **Confronting implicit bias** by training and developing school-site and district leadership to recognize and respond to bias. By identifying the ways in which their lived experience differs from that of their students, families, and community members, educators can begin to consciously examine whether those differences in lived experiences have created unconscious attitudes or stereotypes. Questioning those attitudes and encouraging an open mind helps dismantle implicit biases, particularly when this happens in a safe and supportive environment where growth and learning are clear staff expectations.
- **Communicating with cultural awareness.** A person's cultural background shapes the way they communicate. For example, some cultures may avoid direct eye contact, speak a different language than the teacher, celebrate different holidays, or have distinct attitudes about authority and family dynamics. Teachers who take these cultural norms into consideration will be better able to communicate with and gain input from students and families from all walks of life.
- **Viewing staff as learners.** Because staff do not always share the same background as their students, it's crucial that they allow themselves to constantly learn from those students and their cultures. Whether through professional development courses or discussions with students and their families, educators who seek opportunities to better understand different cultures can help bridge some gaps that impede learning.
- **Exploring *The Ready for Rigor Framework* authored by Zaretta Hammond.** In alignment with the work in other high-performing school districts in Massachusetts, this framework positions students to become leaders in their learning. The framework calls on awareness, learning partnerships, information processing capacity, and learning communities and environments. This will allow the district to understand further what it means for students and staff to "be their authentic self" by engaging deeply with the three levels of culture: surface, shallow, and deep culture.

Resources:

- [Checklist for assessing cultural competence](#)
- [Ready for Rigor Framework](#)
- [A Guide to Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard Toolkit](#)

### **Recommendation 3E: Build family and community awareness about the district's efforts to ensure all students have access to a high-quality educational experience.**

One of the district's guiding beliefs is that "all students can learn and achieve success," which is closely related to another guiding belief, "student growth is a shared responsibility among students, families, school, and community." As the district continues to ensure all students' learning success in a way that acknowledges and celebrates diversity, it is critical to leverage families and the community in also doing so. By building awareness, understanding, and engagement, the district's efforts will extend beyond the classroom and throughout the Walpole community. Some considerations for how the district might proceed include:

- **Investing time and resources to ensure families and the community understand what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean in education, specifically within the context of the district.** The district can build trust with families by providing progress updates about critical components of the district’s equity journey. By clearly articulating the ways in which the district is working to fulfill its mission of educating “all students to achieve success,’ families and staff can work together as partners to build and strengthen their shared understanding and engagement in creating inclusive learning environments. Some possible ways of doing this may include:
  - Hosting and facilitating equity audit community circles for families. By offering a space where families can come together and learn about the equity audit process, findings, and recommendations, families can begin to unpack and understand the district's commitment to equity.
  - Creating and sharing a monthly calendar of district activities and events so families are aware and invited to attend the different opportunities.
  - Asking teachers and staff to make at least two positive phone calls home each week. Communication with families is a cost-effective investment.
  - Creating parent academies with short workshops on topics such as building self-esteem, language development, motivating children, encouraging reading, talking with kids about diversity, etc. Workshops should be made available in the morning and evenings during the week and on weekends and could be recorded so families can access it at a time that works best for them.
  - Sending home “resource bags” filled with reading materials and instructions on specific topics families can engage with children at home.
  - Taking student learning information on the road. Identify churches or community centers where groups of families congregate. See if that location can host a meet-and-greet with admin and parent leaders in order to meet families where they are rather than expecting them to always come to the school. For some families, school environments can be intimidating and unwelcoming. Help them get to know the players in the school, and the school site itself might become more comfortable in the future.
  
- **Using data to indicate where students are succeeding, and being transparent about where data indicates that some students need additional support to succeed.** It is understandable that all families are concerned that their child(ren) have access to all opportunities to learn and be prepared for their next steps after graduation. And it is important for families to also understand that some students need additional support in order to learn and be prepared for next steps after graduation. As the district continues to make data-informed decisions about how to leverage staff and resources to fully support those students who need additional learning support, it will be key to transparently engage the community with the data that reflects district investments and priorities. Some possible ways of doing this may include:
  - Using school and district events as opportunities to share school and district data. Invite families to ask questions and ask for family input about how to best support the success of all students.
  - Inviting families to partner with staff in reviewing family engagement survey results and making plans for continuous improvement.
  - Providing families with opportunities to interact with their child(ren)’s data so they understand how learning is assessed and supported.
  - Considering ways to more explicitly connect district investments with student learning needs.
  - Gauging family awareness of the district’s and community’s resources that can support them and their child(ren). Leverage this information to determine and highlight family and student needs that the district and/or community partners can support.
  
- **Creating committees with student and family representation to review current policies to ensure district-wide conditions for inclusive learning and work environments.** Ongoing data collection and analysis are essential for the district to determine and examine technical or structural changes, as well as adaptive or mindset/practice changes. As policies are written or revised, family and student representation inclusion and input is essential to ensure those most impacted by the policies and changes were consulted about the intent and impact of those policies. Some ways of doing this may include:
  - Leveraging existing family and student groups.
  - Inviting participation from students and families who are most closely affected by changes to existing policies or new policies.

- Using family survey feedback to inform which policies are most pressing to immediately address.
- Asking for student and family volunteers, but also directly recruiting students and families who are best positioned to represent the district’s diverse population.

**Recommendation 3F: Identify and remove barriers to students’ participation in curricular and co-curricular activities to ensure that all students have access.**

The district’s recent decision to offer free full-day kindergarten for all students reflects an intentional effort to level the playing field so that all students can participate in kindergarten regardless of a family’s financial situation. This decision reflects a years-long effort to address visible learning gaps that district and school leaders could see between those students who did attend full-day kindergarten and those who did not. This move is a clear example of how the district is living out its mission to educate “all students to achieve success.”

Walpole Public Schools offers students a wealth of co-curricular activities at all school levels, many of which are opportunities for students to pursue their areas of passion and interest beyond the classroom. And yet, as with kindergarten prior to the 2022-23 school year, participation in many aspects of the student experience requires fees, such as sports and music, AP tests, and transportation. Many district staff described a fee waiver process in place to support students and families that could not otherwise participate; yet it is unclear to what extent families are aware of or utilize fee waivers. As such, examining and identifying barriers to participation in curricular and co-curricular activities will help ensure that all students have access to the activities.

It is challenging to identify the ways in which finances impact a student’s opportunities with regards to academics and co-curricular activities. Some ways that the district and schools could consider doing this include:

- Consulting existing family councils, such as the school councils, Parent Advisory Council (PAC), Special Education Advisory Council (SEPAC), and English Learner Parent Advisory Council (ELPAC). These families could provide valuable information about the extent to which families are aware of the waiver process, as well as share their child(ren)’s experience in academic or co-curricular activities that involved fees to participate.
- Outreach efforts to build family awareness, such as:
  - beginning of the year messaging to families in school and district newsletters,
  - counselor messages about academic opportunities, or
  - coach or sponsor messages about co-curricular activity participation.
- Targeted outreach to low-income families, homeless students, and non-English speaking families, which may include direct phone calls or home visits, to make sure they are aware of and take advantage of fee waivers so their child(ren) can participate in activities that are beyond their family’s financial means.

The district office should designate a point person to coordinate efforts around the district’s efforts to ensure student access to curricular and co-curricular activities. This point person’s responsibilities may include:

- Compiling information about the fees associated with each curricular and co-curricular activities;
- Compiling data about who and how many students and families request fee waivers for each activity;
- Gathering data from families about how they became aware of fee waivers and their experience in the process of seeking a waiver; and
- Coordinating efforts with counselors, the school nutrition program, activity leaders/coaches, and district and school leaders to ensure staff, student, and family awareness and use of fee waivers.

Biannual meetings to examine the above data could then inform policies and practices that yield more student and family use of fee waivers, when appropriate, to ensure all students can participate in all of the curricular and co-curricular activities that the district offers.

A related waiver process currently exists for students at the high school level to participate in advanced coursework when they don’t meet the eligibility requirements. Yet stakeholders shared that it is unclear the extent to which all students and families are aware of this opportunity if they want to pursue a more advanced course than in the course in

which they were placed. Similar to the approach described above, the district and specifically the high school should consider creating a team of teachers, counselors, and administrators to understand:

- The advanced course requirements for each content area;
- How staff make decisions about appropriate student course placements;
- How students and families are informed about course placements, as well as waiver processes for more advanced courses; and
- How many students and families are taking advantage of waivers and students' success rates in advanced courses.

As the district learns more about course waivers, data can be leveraged to inform policies and practices to ensure equitable student access to advanced coursework.

## RECOMMENDATIONS IN ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 4

In alignment with Goal 4 of the strategic plan—*To ensure that facilities and resources support student learning and well-being*—are the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 4a: Examine the instructional supports available to all students from low-income families in the district to ensure equitable access and high comparable outcomes.**

Low-income students in Walpole consistently struggle academically at higher rates than their peers, a discrepancy that the district is aware of and actively working to improve. District and school committee conversations about MCAS data have focused on Student Growth Percentiles (SGP, which ranks a student's growth compared to other students with a similar test score history, or "academic peers"), and through the district's efforts, there are some examples increases in low-income students' SGP. However, given that MCAS proficiency levels for low-income students at all grade levels are consistently lower than their peers', low-income students need additional support in order to significantly accelerate growth and achieve high comparable outcomes.

Recent Title I funding was used to support students at Boyden Elementary, Bird Middle, Old Post Road Elementary, and Johnson Middle schools, serving in total about 51 percent of the district's low-income student population. Moving forward, the district should examine the effectiveness of recent Title 1 programmatic offerings and consider scaling impactful supports district wide in order to impact all low-income students. For example, on the 2021 MCAS in Mathematics for grades 3-8, the SGP for Title I students was 43.7, compared to 36.2 for non-Title I students. An examination of the specific Title I interventions in mathematics at those grade levels (and a comparison to interventions in English Language Arts, which did not show the same pattern of high growth) could lead to replicated evidence-based supports for low-income students across the district that would accelerate learning and growth.

Because Title I funding fluctuates, the district should also consider leveraging MTSS to strategically support not only low-income students, but also all students at risk for adverse outcomes. If the examination of the Title I math interventions serves as a generalized strategic intervention, then the district could consider including it in the district MTSS framework guidance and provide training to more staff to implement it with a broader group of students. Another recent example of a tier 2 targeted support is the district's strategic use of the summer school program to engage low-income students. Drawing on recent intervention programs and other successful strategies that have demonstrated growth in key student learning outcomes, the district could create a tier 2 programmatic approach during the 2022-23 school year that provides ongoing targeted support to low-income students, which could be more sustainable, less dependent upon Title I funds, and support all academically at-risk students in the district.

### **Recommendation 4b: Annually examine the current needs of special education students and the district's programmatic responses, including out-of-district placements.**

As the programmatic needs of students identified as needing special education support services changes, it is important for the district to ensure that current programs at each grade band (elementary, middle, and high school) are sufficient and aligned to student programmatic support needs, and that budget forecasting process adequately captures the anticipated needs of students. The middle school consolidation effort may provide a first opportunity to consider programmatic consolidation, expansion, and/or budget forecasting reviews and processes. The district could consider using this review process as an opportunity to look into potentially offering, or supporting through partnerships, more specialized or intensive services for special education students (as appropriate and determined by their team) so more students can remain in their home district or school, which might impact special education students currently served in out-of-district placements. This could be an evolving process worth revisiting annually to consider if additional programming should be developed or expanded to serve the district's special education student population. As one school committee member said, "We have an opportunity to meet some of these challenges... The

middle school is a huge opportunity to sort of reimagine how we do certain things... And it doesn't have to wait two years."

## SUMMARY

Walpole Public Schools is a district on an equity journey, working towards fully realizing its mission, vision, and guiding beliefs through its strategic plan. Its guiding beliefs are clearly understood and embraced by the Walpole community, and are in the process of being brought to life in classrooms, through instructional practices, coordinated academic support, social-emotional learning support, and consistent professional learning opportunities.

Through the equity audit process, district leaders, school leaders and staff, students, and families have all participated and shared their perspectives and ideas in order to support the district's next steps. As one staff reflection indicates:

“Although there is always space for additional growth, our school district has made great developments in becoming more supportive in relation to diversity and equity measures. Our student population along with our staff is increasingly becoming more diverse, and our recent updates to our curricula is reflective of these positive changes. Moreover, our district continues to develop and to update services and supports for our students and staff which will make learning and working experiences more equitable.”

Both classroom observations and stakeholder feedback throughout the equity audit process has been reflective of the district-wide shift that is in process, with some stakeholders seeing recent growth and some stakeholders seeing the room for growth remaining.

With the equity audit in hand, the support of dedicated and equity-minded leaders, and a community that wants “all students to achieve success,” the district is well poised to take its next steps on its equity journey and create a more welcoming work and learning environment for all stakeholders.

# APPENDIX

## Mass Insight’s District Equity Framework

At Mass Insight, *We envision a world in which student achievement and related life outcomes no longer correlate with race, gender, ethnicity, social class, or zip code because all students have equitable opportunities, supports, and access to quality education.* We believe the school is the unit of change, and our work with schools and districts begins by understanding local strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth. Our research-informed [Theory of Action](#) describes in greater detail the various aspects of education systems we believe support the structures, policies, practices, and mindsets necessary for school leaders and staff to develop, implement, and sustain equitable learning environments for all students.

Mass Insight is fundamentally committed to quality educational experiences for **all** students. We also intentionally focus on the access, opportunity, and success outcomes of marginalized and underserved populations to ensure equity for **all**. Our District Equity Framework is the lens through which we understand the current reality of district systems and the extent to which equity and inclusivity is experienced by stakeholders, which includes district and school staff, students, families and guardians, partners, and community members. As partners in a district’s equity journey, Mass Insight uses district-selected definitions for key terms during our partnerships in order to create community ownership and align with the district’s vision, common language, and the work already underway.

Domains	Highest Performing District Descriptors
<p><b>Vision, strategy, and culture:</b> District vision, strategy, culture, and priorities reflect a commitment to educational equity and promote a district-wide culture of inclusiveness and a belief that all students can learn and succeed.</p>	<p>The district has an inclusive organizational culture that welcomes, respects, and values the identities and perspectives of all students, families, staff, and the district community regardless of racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, sexual orientation, gender, and age differences. District leadership sets and models high expectations, and all district staff accept responsibility for the success of all students and hold each other accountable. The district has a strategic plan aligned to the district mission and vision that addresses district conditions and challenges. The plan explicitly addresses data-informed disparities in student performance and success and provides opportunities for aligned staff development and stakeholder cultivation. Each strategy has a clear theory of action that describes the desired change and expected impact. The district has a process for communicating, managing, and monitoring plan implementation and tracking and reporting on impact.</p>
<p><b>Accountability for equitable student access and outcomes:</b> Policies, systems, and practices enable all students to fully participate in schools, programs, and activities that result in high comparable outcomes.</p>	<p>District policies, systems, and practices reflect a commitment to equity and accountability for the success of all students, particularly focusing attention on marginalized student populations. Schools are held accountable for ensuring that all students can succeed. In addition to complying with laws and regulations, the district ensures that services for special student populations (e.g. English learners, students with IEPs or 504 plans, and gifted/talented students) are of the highest quality. As data on academic achievement and other student outcomes are disaggregated and analyzed, there is high comparable performance for all identifiable groups of learners, and performance gaps are virtually non-existent. District and school practices reflect ongoing monitoring of disaggregated student success indicators (e.g. early warning system for students’ academics, behavior, attendance, etc.), particularly for marginalized populations, and intentional steps are routinely taken to address disparities through a tiered system of supports (e.g. MTSS model). The district differentially supports schools to provide all students with equitable opportunities, including unobstructed entrance, involvement, and full participation</p>

	(access + inclusion) in all school programs and activities, understanding that not all schools and students need the same support and resources.
<p><b>Governance and conditions:</b> Clear and equitable school committee/board and central office structures, systems, processes, and practices work together to advance the district towards its vision. The district commitment to equity is reflected in governance and central office structures, systems, policies, and practices.</p>	<p>District governance structures prioritize stakeholder equity through the district's vision and strategic plan. The school committee/board and central office regularly examine systems, structures, policies, practices, and data to identify and address inequities and biases. The superintendent and district leadership prioritize the success of marginalized populations in establishing goals, making decisions, and collaboratively organizing support to schools. Central office departments implement clear and equitable structures, systems, processes, and policies for addressing school and student needs, and coordinate services and communication with schools and staff across offices. District departments differentiate supports and conditions (i.e. people, money, time, program) to align with school needs and prioritize marginalized populations. Specifically,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● District financial allocations reflect its mission, vision, and strategic priorities. Projections of revenues and expenses are data-informed and reliable, the majority of funds follow students, and marginalized populations are prioritized. The district budget process equitably appropriates financial resources to school and student needs, as informed by data.</li> <li>● Principal supervisors are trained in best practices in instructional leadership and coaching and provide principals with high-quality coaching and job-embedded professional development aligned to district and school priorities.</li> <li>● The district uses key performance indicators, including input from school staff, students, and families, to measure the effectiveness of district office functions.</li> <li>● The district supports schools and teachers with the development of instructional practices and curricula that recognize marginalized populations and are inclusive of all students' identities and interests.</li> <li>● The district has an early warning system for ensuring students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional developmental needs are monitored, identified, and supported internally and/or externally by partners.</li> <li>● The district provides guidance to schools for managing internal and external partnerships and evaluating their effectiveness in supporting student and family needs. Partnerships with local and regional organizations are developed to bridge gaps in outreach and resource allocation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Focus on culturally and linguistically sustaining teaching and learning:</b> Curriculum, materials, instructional practices, and learning environments ensure school leaders, teachers, and other school staff constantly improve and refine rigorous standards-based pedagogy that recognizes and embraces students' identities and the district's diversity.</p>	<p>The district has a vision and plan for ensuring high-quality, standards-aligned, rigorous instruction for <i>all</i> students in <i>all</i> schools. Instructional staff are professionally developed and have the curricular and instructional resources necessary to deliver instruction that takes place in learning environments designed to be inclusive of and validate students' identities, experiences, needs, and interests, and that connects to students' cultural schema to maximize their learning opportunities. Instructional staff have the time, support, and resources needed to plan culturally and linguistically sustaining units, lessons, and assessments, and the time, support, and resources to use aligned assessment and evaluation data to inform, improve, and refine their instruction. The district has a system of instructional support for schools that prioritizes marginalized student populations to ensure equitable access and opportunity so students receive the necessary academic interventions, enrichment, and remediation programming.</p>
<p><b>Student readiness to learn:</b> The district and schools create safe, positive, and inclusive</p>	<p>The district supports schools' implementation of policies, systems, and practices that create positive, inclusive, and welcoming classroom and school environments. Schools and school staff embrace and recognize diversity and students' unique</p>

<p>learning environments for all students. Students' non-academic needs are proactively addressed so they fully engage and succeed academically.</p>	<p>identities. As a result, all students feel safe, valued, cared for, supported, and like they belong in their school.</p> <p>The district and schools have systems and practices to monitor, identify, and address students' social-emotional, engagement, mental health, and developmental needs. Internal processes and structures, as well as partnerships, collaboratively connect and provide students and their families with resources, interventions, and support services to enable all students to fully engage in learning.</p>
<p><b>Workforce development:</b> Systems and processes attract, recruit, cultivate, hire, and develop new and diverse staff. All staff receive ongoing professional development that results in the retention of a talented, culturally competent, and diverse workforce.</p>	<p>The district has a non-discriminatory approach to attract and recruit a highly diverse workforce that is reflective and inclusive of the community and student population. The district and the talent office have a set structure to grow and cultivate prospective hires and coordinate efforts to provide needed testing and certification support. The talent office and school leaders are collaboratively engaged in the recruitment, outreach, interview, and selection process. The talent office accurately forecasts workforce needs and has structures that result in a strong, diverse candidate pool for each opening.</p> <p>The district supports new teachers with induction and mentoring during their initial years in the classroom. District-sponsored professional development is practice-based and differentiated by role, and emphasizes the development of cultural competence. The district has systems for identifying and developing an internal pipeline of school leaders (e.g. principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and department chairs) and recognizes staff contributions and high performance. The district encourages and supports the creation and facilitation of inclusive spaces for diverse staff (staff of color, immigrant staff, LGBTQIA+, staff with disabilities, bilingual, etc.). The district provides schools with the necessary resources and tools to create safe and positive work environments that support staff retention. The staff evaluation process recognizes strengths, supports areas of improvement, and monitors cultural competency. The district uses evaluation data to identify, develop, and retain staff aligned with district values.</p>
<p><b>Family and community engagement:</b> The district and schools intentionally and authentically communicate with and successfully engage students, families, and community members.</p>	<p>The district has multiple strategies for communicating and engaging with students, families, and community members to better understand systemic inequities and the work of creating more inclusive and just educational experiences. District interactions and communication demonstrate cultural competence and respect for linguistic and cultural/ethnic identities and diversity. Student, family, and community input and feedback is routinely sought in multiple ways, analyzed, and used to inform district and school decisions. Family and community communication and cultivation efforts yield increased participation and engagement.</p>
<p><b>Data:</b> The district utilizes data regularly to identify and address inequities in the system. Disaggregated data is accessible and informs decision-making throughout the district.</p>	<p>District information systems are current, accurate, and used by school and district staff to inform decisions. District departments collect, review, and utilize qualitative and quantitative data to drive district-level decisions and to monitor, identify, and address inequities and disparities in the system. Disaggregated school and student progress data is regularly examined at district and school levels to identify and address disparities in school, staff, and student performance and access. Staff receive training and resources to accurately gather, analyze, and make decisions from qualitative and quantitative data sources.</p>
<p><b>School management:</b> District policies, structures, and systems enable school leaders to create the school-level conditions that</p>	<p>District systems support principals in the development of coherent equity-focused school improvement plans (SIPs) that are data informed and support the success and needs of all students and prioritize marginalized populations. Principals are held accountable for both the implementation of their school improvement plans and the success of all students. Principal supervisors work with principals to develop</p>

<p>align people, time, program, and money to ensure the success of all students.</p>	<p>leadership capacity and support ongoing management of SIPs to ensure successful implementation and desired outcomes.</p> <p>Principals have the authority to create staff configurations, design positions, hire candidates, and implement an induction process in alignment with the school's instructional model, needs, and SIP priorities (e.g. principals place high-performing teachers to serve high-needs students).</p> <p>All teachers and support staff receive accurate and specific feedback to improve their professional practice through the evaluation process. Evaluation data is utilized by the principal for staffing decisions (e.g. placement and retention).</p> <p>Principals have the authority to make changes to the school schedule to include time for PLCs/CPTs, interventions, and/or other school-based professional development or instructional activities so the school can meet the needs of all students.</p> <p>Principals have sufficient understanding of and control over their budgets so they can allocate resources to meet school and student needs, prioritizing marginalized populations. The school budgeting process is clear, data informed, and differentiated by school needs. The principal has the authority to align the school's financial resources with SIP priorities.</p> <p>The principal has sufficient authority to shape instructional approaches, and the authority to make programmatic choices and select partners and related services to advance the school's mission and meet the needs of all students, prioritizing marginalized populations.</p>
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Note:descriptors contained within the Mass Insight equity audit framework were informed by research and best practices including 1) Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices from Boston Public Schools, and 2) the Intercultural Development Research Association.

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