

Lower Merion School District: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Continuous Improvement Project

Project Overview

In partnership with the Lower Merion School District (LMSD), we propose an equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) continuous improvement project to inform the district's current efforts to advance equity and to identify areas for growth and improvement. This new scope of work includes the components initially outlined in the RFP, additional activities to capture the district's progress in advancing equity, and an expansion of ongoing communication efforts. New activities include:

- Conduct a landscape assessment
- Administer a districtwide caregiver/household and student survey
- Facilitate curriculum review planning meetings
- Develop a curriculum review evaluation plan
- Engage the district community meetings, a one-pager, and ongoing and frequent updates
- Attend biweekly implementation team meetings with LMSD leadership

The timeline for this study has been extended through **December 2022**. Items marked with an asterisks (*) are identified as expansions from the original proposal in response to the RFP. Costs associated with these items are included in the budget section of this document.

Activity Descriptions

This section provides an overview and description of key tasks for the seven activities in this project.

***Activity 1: Conduct landscape assessment | June 2022–December 2022**

From our initial site visits, conversations with educators, and discussions with the study advisory team, we learned that each school has its own identity and approach to equity. It is important for us to highlight and acknowledge this work. It is also important to understand the historical equity policies and practices that have been implemented in the district. A landscape assessment will help us understand the current context surrounding equity and inclusion as well as the historical and political context. This activity will also provide opportunities for stakeholders to share their perceptions and experiences around equity. In addition, the landscape assessment will ensure the EDI continuous improvement project builds on current efforts and leverages existing resources to ground this work in the local context.

Key tasks of the landscape assessment include:

- **Document review:** These documents could include previous equity reports, web materials, social media, and policies implemented that describe the district's current and historical efforts to advance equity.
- **Semi-structured interviews with school building admin and staff:** We will conduct **up to two** semi-structured interviews/focus groups with school administrators and staff members from each school building to understand their efforts to advance equity (e.g., educator and student

affinity groups, equity events, types of curricula used, training and support) and the types of support they received from the district for these efforts.

Activity 2: Assess staff diversity and hiring decisions | September 2021–May 2022

The purpose of the staff diversity and hiring assessment is to examine the impacts of ongoing recruitment and retention efforts related to diverse teaching candidates, administrators, and staff members. Four learning questions guide this assessment.

- What are the impacts of ongoing recruitment and retention efforts related to diverse teaching candidates, administrators, and staff members?
- What are strengths and areas of growth related to recruiting and retaining candidates from majority groups who have an aptitude for equity and inclusion?
- What are strengths and areas of growth related to recruiting and retaining minority candidates?
- What are the impacts of staffing and hiring on students and educators?

Key tasks of this activity include:

- **Review documentation:** Review LMSD recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention practices and HR policies and documentation (e.g., employee handbook, interview protocols, job descriptions, guidance documents).
- **Focus groups with BIPOC educators (completed):** We conducted focus groups with administrators and educators of color to understand their experiences related to recruiting, hiring, and onboarding.
- **Interview with HR director and team (completed):** We conducted a semi-structured interview with the HR director and team to better understand current policies related to recruiting, hiring, and retaining educators and staff members.
- **Administer survey to building administrators and hiring committee members:** We will administer an EDI survey to building administrators and staff members who participate in hiring committees to understand the policies and practices used to recruit, hire, and retain educators of color.

Activity 3: Assess professional development and learning opportunities | September 2021–May 2022

Four learning questions guide our assessment of professional development opportunities.

- How have EDI professional learning opportunities impacted teachers, staff members, and administrators?
- How have EDI professional learning experiences impacted students?
- How impactful are structures to support all teachers in the continuum of EDI professional learning?

- How impactful are structures to support teachers/educators of color in the continuum of EDI professional learning?

Key tasks of this activity include:

- **Document review:** Review professional development materials provided by the district regarding the types of programs offered, topics covered, and types of tools provided to teachers to facilitate the implementation of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining teaching practices.
- **Districtwide staff survey (completed):** This survey seeks to examine the perceived changes in teaching approaches and strategies, motivations, and self-efficacy in teaching the curriculum as well as access to organizational support.
- ***Districtwide caregiver/household and student survey:** Student and caregiver surveys will help determine the impact of professional development on students' classroom experiences. The survey questions will be developed in collaboration with the advisory team. Potential topics include experience with particular teaching approaches, strategies, and techniques taught in professional development as well as how students and their families perceive the efficacy of teachers and instructional assistants as they implement these teaching practices.
- **Staff focus group:** Conduct ***five focus groups** with a sample of LMSD staff to represent the 10 schools in the district including a special session for educators of color. The purpose of the focus groups is to understand successes and barriers related to implementing EDI curriculum in the classroom.

Activity 4: Assess curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy | September 2021–December 2022

We propose four learning questions to guide the review of LMSD curriculum, instruction, and teaching practices.

- To what extent is the district's curriculum diverse, equitable, and inclusive in embedded and explicit ways?
- To what degree is there fidelity to and accountability for implementing EDI curricula?
- To what extent do all students see themselves in the curriculum?
- To what degree is a culturally responsive, racially literate perspective embedded in the day-to-day experiences of everyone in the district?

We propose a two-step process to the curriculum review. The first phase will consist of a series of data collection and planning meetings. During this phase, we will co-construct a plan for reviewing the curriculum, which will begin in summer 2022.

Planning of the curriculum and instructional review | September 2021– June 2022

Key tasks include:

- **Districtwide staff survey (completed):** Survey all LMSD teachers and instructional assistants. The survey will assess instructional practices, pedagogy, and implementation of culturally responsive and diverse curricula.

- **Review current curricula and documentation:** Review samples of curricular materials such as textbooks, teacher manuals and handouts, book lists, videos, presentation materials, and readings that accompany the district’s adopted materials and coursework.
- ***Facilitate planning meetings:** We will meet with LMSD staff members including Alexis McGloin, Jennifer Gaudio, and Megan Shafer to plan the areas of study for the curriculum review. During these meetings, we will review the data collected in the districtwide educator survey, identify materials to include in the review, share how this work has been approached in similarly sized school districts, and develop an approach for implementing the review.
- ***Co-create a plan for assessing the curriculum and instruction:** At the conclusion of the planning meetings, we will develop an assessment plan for the curriculum review.

Implementation of the curriculum and instruction review | June 2022–December 2022

Potential tasks for the implementation of curriculum review include:

- **Assess district curriculum using a scorecard:** In collaboration with the advisory team, we will develop a checklist to guide our observations of classrooms and teaching practices.
- **Administer student and caregiver surveys and/or focus groups:** The surveys and/or focus groups will gather feedback from students and families regarding their experiences with the curriculum.
- **Conduct classroom observations:** Culturally responsive teaching entails using cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning more relevant and effective for all students. To choose classrooms for observation, our team can collaborate with the curriculum planning and advisory teams to identify classrooms that represent the typical experience of a student in the district. Alternatively, we can follow a focal group of students throughout the day to understand their experiences.

Activity 5: Community engagement | Ongoing through the end of December

Community engagement is a new and important aspect of this project. Most activities in this section are an extension of our original contract. We would like to work in collaboration with LMSD Director of School and Community Relations Amy Buckman to ensure ongoing communication with the community.

- ***Site Visit (completed):** In November 2021, two Education Northwest staff members, Emi Fujita-Conrads and Mary Martinez-Wenzl, conducted a three-day site visit to LMSD. During the site visit, they met with staff members, educators, and district leadership and facilitated a series of conversations that provided a deeper contextual understanding of the school environment and the community perspective regarding the equity study.
- **EDI advisory team:** Continue to facilitate meetings with the 12-member advisory team. The advisory team is instrumental in helping design the study and develop strategies for implementing and disseminating study findings. The advisory team will meet with the study team up to five times over the course of the study period. (We completed one meeting in 2021 and will meet four times in 2022.)
- ***Community meeting input:** We will provide updates for LMSD to share at monthly and quarterly district-led meetings (e.g., Ad Hoc Committee, CARE meeting, Achievement Imperative Task Force meeting).

- ***EDI study one-pager (completed):** The one-pager will be used as a marketing tool to provide information to the larger community. It will feature a link to a digital suggestion box that members of the LMSD community can use to share feedback, suggestions, or questions directly with the study team.

Activity 6: Project management and client engagement | Ongoing through the end of December 2022

- **LMSD monthly leadership team meeting:** We will continue to meet monthly on the third Thursday of the month with the district leadership team to provide status updates regarding the project.
- ***Biweekly implementation team meeting:** The Education Northwest study team will meet biweekly with members of the district to have a brief (30–45 minute) meeting to discuss and troubleshoot strategies related to study implementation (e.g., recruiting participants, gathering relevant documents).
- **Ongoing team meetings and administration:** The Education Northwest team will continue to meet biweekly to discuss strategies related to study implementation and our finance team will continue to monitor the project budget.

Activity 7: Reporting and dissemination | Ongoing through the end of December 2022

A research brief is a short (10–20 page) document that highlights background information, key findings, and recommendations. We plan to develop four research briefs to highlight the results of the landscape assessment, staff diversity and hiring decisions assessment, professional development and learning opportunities assessment, and curriculum and instructional review. The research briefs will include text and infographics to highlight the data that we captured. These briefs can be shared with internal and external audiences.

Budget

Below are the added activities and costs associated with extending the contract through December 2022.

Timeline	New Activities	Estimated Staff Hours	Cost
June - December	Landscape scan (with added research brief)	110	\$ 14,003
June	Districtwide caregiver/household survey	48	\$ 6,366
May - June	Planning phase of curriculum review; Developing plan for accessing curriculum	10	\$ 1,566
October/November	Additional advisory team meeting to share findings from the curriculum review	8	\$ 1,024

June – December	Ongoing project management and client engagement (bi-weekly implementation, LMSD leadership, and internal team meetings, community updates, and general project administration)	134	\$ 15,295
June – December	Three separate research briefs (instead of one central report)	75	\$ 10,117
Completed (not in original scope)	EDI study one-pager	15	\$ 1,958
Completed (not in original scope)	In-person site visit	44	\$ 6,219
Total additional work:			\$56,546
Total project costs			\$206,546