

Centennial School District Excellence Through Equity Quality Review



Executive Summary April 2019

Facilitated by



Delaware Valley Consortium *for*
EXCELLENCE & EQUITY

To the Centennial School District:

April 2019

The Equity Through Excellence Quality Review Team wishes to thank and commend those District administrators, staff members, teachers, parents and students who participated in this Centennial School District review process. We greatly appreciate the open, positive and professional attitude displayed by all school staff and administration.

The visiting team found the administration, teachers, staff, students and parents/guardians to be most cooperative and willing to discuss all aspects of Centennial's programs and practices. Graciousness, openness and hospitality were evident throughout the three-day visit, making our jobs much easier and allowing us to collect valuable and useful information.

Over the course of 187 individual and group interviews and classroom observations conducted in every school in the district the team collected information in a variety of areas and provided detailed answers to specific questions developed by Centennial stakeholders in advance of our visit. Team members identified needs in the area of equity and made practical recommendations by applying their experience in the field to the on-site data collected, realizing that local conditions will determine local action.

We were pleased to have played a key role in your examination of and ongoing efforts to ensure excellence through educational equity. We wish you continued success in what is probably the most significant challenge for today and tomorrow – educating and preparing *all* of our children for future academic and life success. This report is respectfully submitted by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018-19 the Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence and Equity (DVCEE) initiated a new service to our member districts that has been designed to support the ongoing refinement of their educational equity improvement efforts. The *DVCEE Excellence Through Equity Quality Review* provides a focused examination of equity in school and district opportunity and practice.

Educational equity is based on the principles of fairness and justice in allocation of resources, elimination of institutional barriers to access and opportunity, and creation of the real possibility of equality in positive academic and life outcomes for each student and between diverse groups of students. It means that students' identities will not predict or predetermine their success in our school district, in postsecondary education or in life.

It is based on a shared commitment to ensure that every student receives what they need to maximize that success, and that school districts are committed to assure all students' equitable opportunity to access high level and engaging learning experiences, while actively eliminating institutional barriers in district and school policy and practice that limit or deny this access.

In the Fall of 2018 and at the invitation of Dr. David Baugh, Superintendent of the Centennial School District, a diverse and experienced external team of educators and specialists was convened to complete a thorough analysis of the current status of educational equity in the district.

The Quality Review was based on district leadership team identification of key focus questions based upon the Six Goals of Educational Equity (Bradley Scott 2008), an extensive 3-day process of district and community interviews and school and classroom observations, as well as district document reviews, review of and triangulation of student achievement and perceptual data, and an in-depth study of current equity-related policies, procedures and practices.

The accompanying full report provides a comprehensive and detailed set of needs and recommendations based on the evidence provided to the visiting team members during their three days as guests of the school district. The needs and recommendations are provided in the context of the sixteen focus questions provided by a team of Centennial educators. The visiting team recognizes that the scope and complexity of the recommendations will require ongoing reflection, analysis, decision-making, prioritizing, allocation of resources and integration into the *District Comprehensive Plan 2020-2023*.

We hope that results of this study and this report will provide valuable insights and direction to the Centennial School District as they move forward with their strategic continuous improvement efforts in enhancing the academic and life outcomes for each and every young person they serve, and reducing disparities defined by race/ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, economics, or first language.

We expect that the district leadership will use the outcomes of this process to reinforce and celebrate strengths and promising practices, recognize their organizational challenges, and

establish priorities for future action to address those challenges/barriers to excellence through equity.

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN AND WHERE ARE WE? Context, Overall District Strengths And Promising Practices

During the past year, the superintendent, school district and school leaders, the school board, and a large proportion of teachers have developed a renewed interest in and commitment to the concept of equity in Centennial Schools. This interest in equity has grown on a long-standing foundation of support for diversity and recognition of differences in the Centennial School District.

The Superintendent has set, and the school board has approved, the following Superintendent's and District's Goals for 2018-2019:

Imperative Goal 1: To build a culture of high expectations

District Goal: Operationalize a well-designed distributed leadership model to allocate end-to-end responsibility for improving teaching and learning by end of 2018-2019 school year.

Imperative Goal 2: To improve the academic achievement of literacy of all students at all schools to close the achievement gap

District Goal: Increase the magnitude of proficient/advanced students in literacy.

Imperative Goal 3: To improve the academic achievement of mathematics of all students at all schools to close the achievement gap through the development of a more rigorous and aligned mathematics program

District Goal: Increase the magnitude of proficient/advanced students in mathematics K-12 in 2018-2019

Imperative Goal 4: To improve the academic achievement of all students in all schools at risk of not increasing academic proficiency

District Goal: Implement a well-designed Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model to allocate end-to-end responsibility for decreasing special education referrals and increasing access to Core Curriculum for all students at risk of failing to grow by end of 2018-2019 school year

Most recently, the school district has recognized that a lack of continuity of leadership in the past, especially at the Superintendent level, in Human Resources, in Special Education/Pupil Services, and in English Language Learning, has hampered the attainment of strategic goals. The school district is taking steps to ensure future continuity and stability of leadership and to build a leadership team that will advance the work on the four imperative goals.

In 2018, the development and assignment of the Principal of Practice position has enabled the school district to significantly increase focus on building needed system capacities to ensure equity. The Principal of Practice has been charged to focus on addressing achievement gaps, outreach and engagement with historically underrepresented families, and coordination of professional development and equity teams in each school. The Principal of Practice has also recently initiated a district-level equity team. The Principal of Practice is tasked with integrating equity work in all aspects of the office of Learning and Innovation and is viewed as an active participant and advocate for equity and family engagement, in the district, in the buildings and in the community.

Centennial's Office of Learning and Innovation has spearheaded the district's initiatives in design thinking, project-based learning, staff engagement, and innovative teaching and learning. Increasingly student learning is connected to partnerships with universities, hospitals, research organizations, retailers and manufacturers.

Our contacts with Centennial professional and support staff revealed a genuine sense of ownership of the mission of the school district and a passion for fostering the growth and excellence of the community's children.

The priority of school safety and security - physical, social, and emotional – was evident to the visiting team members as we visited classes and lunchrooms and met and interviewed members of the school communities. Many Centennial educators have been trained in and employ positive behavioral supports to encourage students to contribute to a safe and inclusive environment.

Centennial schools plan and sponsor a large quantity and variety of co-curricular and after-school programs and opportunities K-12 that allow students to pursue a variety of interests and needs. High school students who might not otherwise feel included or welcome in traditional sports, activities or clubs are able to participate in and lead affinity groups that represent diverse interests and needs. Additionally, school counselors K-12 organize and provide a number of support groups to assist students with emotional or behavioral needs, or to help students deal with family, friendship, or relationship issues.

Centennial Schools have recognized the growing number of English language learners and have taken steps to welcome and include them and their parents/guardians in the academic and social life of the schools.

In order to use time to promote equity and excellence for all students, the District has initiated or expanded a number of best practices that adjust the use of time, scheduling and resources to better meet the individual needs of learners and promote educational equity. These include:

- Full-day kindergarten for all students. This provides the school district's youngest learners with engaging, developmentally appropriate instruction and more time for enhanced literacy development. Kindergarten summer boot camp provides additional learning time and helps to reduce the disparity in children's levels of readiness to begin school.

- Heterogeneous grouping through fifth grade. This provides elementary school students with a common core of instruction, while allowing for individualized instruction within the class grouping.
- The investment of substantial resources in the training for and use of technology as a learning tool, a communications tool, and a means of differentiating instruction.
- Recent elimination of the “B” track in high school courses, which has helped to reduce a culture of low expectations on the part of students and teachers.
- Changes to the high school schedule in order to provide students in grades 9-12 with learning pathways and more elective choices.

In recent years the school district has begun to assess their school’s culture and climate and the potential effects on student achievement. The Education for the Future Student Questionnaire was administered though 2016. In 2018 the school district initiated the Youth Truth Student Survey, which will be used to provide students’ perspectives on their experiences in Centennial schools. Youth Truth Student Survey data will ideally inform and guide efforts to address critical culture and climate variables and equity in the schools.

Finally, the school district’s participation in the *Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence and Equity* has resulted in contact and collaboration with a significant network of more than forty regional school districts, and advanced training with regional and national thought leaders and practitioners on issues of equity.

WHERE ARE WE GOING? Priorities for Improvement

The focus on “Excellence Through Equity” is deliberate choice of words. Equitable practices are not developed at the expense of academic excellence. Equity and Excellence go hand-in-hand: the school district’s development and enhancement of equitable practices will necessarily lead to improvements in all students’ academic achievement.

Building on the strengths and promising practices identified in the previous pages, the six priorities that follow are intended to provide areas of executive focus as the school district develops long-range efforts to build a strong and vibrant system of excellence through equity. These long-range efforts toward equity cannot be considered a “stand-alone” initiative: they must be coordinated with and integrate with other school district goals as stakeholders develop the *District Comprehensive Plan 2020-2023* during the coming months.

Priority 1: Develop a detailed and comprehensive plan for Excellence Through Equity

Priority 2: Assess and dedicate available resources to promote Excellence Through Equity

Priority 3: Confront individual and collective lowered expectations for learners as defined by race, English language proficiency, economic disadvantage or neighborhood.

Priority 4: Increase student access to effective instruction as a route to Excellence Through Equity

Priority 5: Enhance communication as a means to foster Excellence Through Equity

Priority 6: Amend the *Professional Development Plan*

WHERE ARE WE GOING? Next Steps

The key first step is to define a process for building a robust and inclusive Excellence Through Equity district team that will be held responsible for extensive review of the full report and development of actionable next steps in addressing Priority 1.

As the school district begins to address these six priorities on an organizational level, district leaders must direct their attention to two important practices that shape the daily lives of the 5900 students attending Centennial schools: a cycle of continuous improvement and the use of an equity lens in day-to-day decision-making.

Continuous Improvement Process

The common use of a cycle of continuous improvement provides a deliberate, thoughtful and strategic framework for building high performance organizations that target high quality student performance. The cycle of continuous improvement ensures that decisions are made base on an analysis of data in the context of overarching goals and their strategies. It identifies those responsible for actions, provides resources and support, and requires accountability for results.



Considerations for Making Decisions Through an Equity Framework or Lens

While there are strong arguments for basing decisions on standards that maintain consistency for all students and staff, educational equity principles suggest a strong need to base decisions on serving the best interests of each individual or unique population of students who have historically underachieved in the system. How do district and school leaders choose from options to make the most fair and ethical decisions that are in the best interest of these students? Critical short and long-term decisions are being made at every level of our school system every day that are impacting district/school policies and practices that influence student outcomes. In

making decisions from the organizational to the individual student level, it is imperative that before finalizing our decisions that we consciously reflect upon both the intended positive and potentially adverse outcomes of our decisions.

When making a decision, some critical, overarching, reflective questions might include:

- What are the critical decision points in our deliberations about policies, programs or practices that impact our expected organizational or equitable student outcomes? For example:
 - Board Policy Review
 - School and District based Operations
 - Curriculum Review and Implementation
 - Instructional Design
 - Assessment
 - Student Program or Course Placement
 - Special Education
 - Gifted Education
 - Honors Level or Advanced Placement
 - Human Resources
 - Hiring Practices
 - Staff Supervision, Performance Evaluation and Professional Development
 - Resource Distribution
 - Human Capital
 - Financial Capital
- What decisions/actions may be reinforcing our current observed inequities? What alternative decision/action options might produce different outcomes? Which decision/action will best to advance more equitable outcomes?
- Will this decision open or close doors of opportunity, access or inclusion for individuals or groups of students?
- Who is most likely to benefit from this decision? Are there individuals or groups that may be negatively impacted and how? Have we considered potential unintended consequences of our decision?
- Have we intentionally engaged the stakeholders, including students, parents/caregivers, educators who are most impacted by the decision? Have all voices been heard?

The following list includes organizational divisions in the school district that should embrace an equity lens in their decision making:

- Board Policy and Administrative Regulations
- District Operations
 - Business Office
 - Budgeting and Accounting
 - Child Nutrition
 - Facilities and Maintenance

- Transportation
- Human Resources
- Community and Business Partnerships
- Communications and Public Relations
- Technology
- Academics
 - Athletics and Co-Curricular Activities
 - Library and Media Centers
 - Gifted and Special Education
 - Pupil Services
 - Learning and Innovation
 - Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment