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# Priority Work Update

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# Mission Statement

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St. Louis Park Schools sees, inspires, and empowers each learner to live their brilliance in an environment that centers student voice and experience to create racially equitable learning that energizes and enhances the spirit of our community.



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# Priority 1: Culturally Relevant Literacy through the CARE Team Process

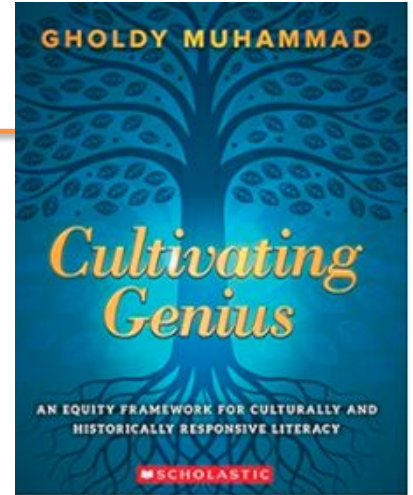
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Sustain and deepen culturally relevant literacy development through the Collaborative Action Research for Equity (CARE) Team process.

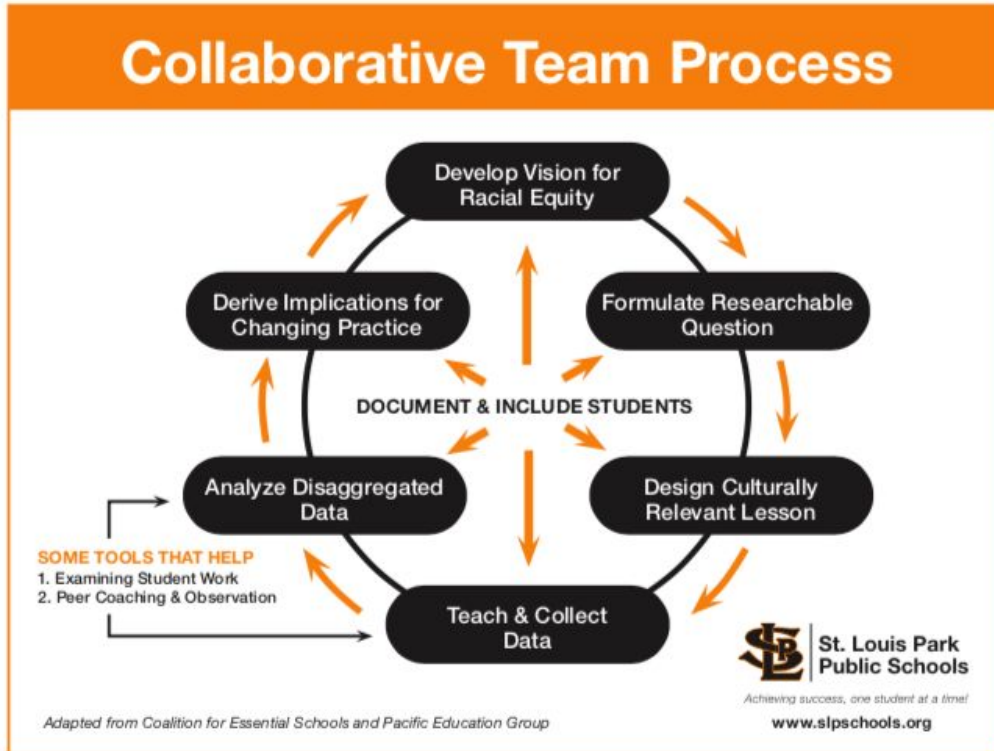
We use Gholdy Muhammad's 5 pursuits as evidence of culturally relevant literacy:

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- **Skills:** Content area, standards
- **Identity:** Learning about self and others
- **Intellectualism:** Building knowledge, critical thinking
- **Criticality:** Engaging student thinking about power, equity, and disruption oppression
- **Joy :** Joy of learning, elevation of the mind, energy, and spirit



# CARE Team Work (Collaborative Action Research for Equity)



March 13, 2020 1:29 PM

# Cycle I: CARE Team Questions/Activities

Culturally relevant literacy as evidenced by the 5 pursuits in Cycle 1

Cycle 1 (71 CARE Team questions)	
Skills	31
Identity	19
Joy	8
Intellectualism	3
Criticality	0



# Cycle I Questions

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- Elementary teams almost exclusively focused on skills (reading)
- Middle School teams focused on Identity
- Evidence of Intellectualism in High School questions

# Elementary Schools

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- Focused on reading skills
- Implementing curricula (CCC, UFLI, Lexia etc.)
- Looking at curricula assessments as well as Fastbridge and MAP to measure reading outcomes
  
- Some examples of the other pursuits:
  - “Observing and celebrating with joy when we can apply a strategy to reading a new word!”
  - Explicitly incorporating 5 pursuits in daily lessons



# Middle School: Identity

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Middle School teams all wrote questions about “belonging”. Each team gave students a pre-survey about their feelings of belonging. They then used the results to provide a variety of activities focused on increasing their sense of belonging.

Examples: Talk to focal students one-to-one about their survey responses, build relationships, allow them choice in how they showcase their brilliance (in ways most motivating to them), encourage students to share their cultural backgrounds, incorporate cultural identities into lessons



# Middle School: Findings

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- Student voice increases a sense of belonging and community
- Students value connection and representation to activities such as sharing cultural food, stories, and holidays
- Asking students to share their identities increases feelings of being seen and heard
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) more engaged when paired to work with other BIPOC

# High School

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**Intellectualism:** *“How can we more explicitly teach critical thinking skills to impact the student experience?”*

- One group had students synthesize 2 texts while applying their own critical thinking and experiences to the texts
- Critical thinking needs to be explicitly taught and scaffolded

**Identity:** Multilingual students were engaged in activities/lessons designed around exploring identity.

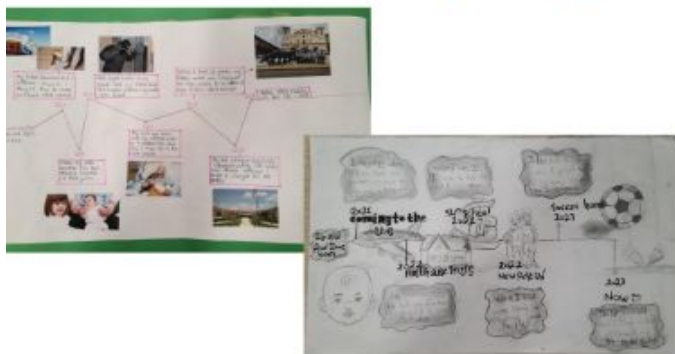


# ML CARE Team

Researchable Question: How is the ML experience improved when teachers incorporate ML students' interests, identities and strengths?

We each selected an activity from Ellevation (Develop Sociocultural Competence: Cultural Identity).

## Guzman - My Life Map

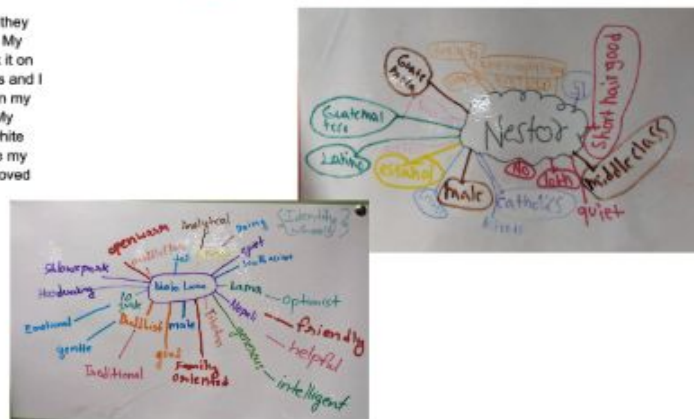


## Lorentz - Just Like Me

For lunch my mom and my sister are cooking Pabellon. While they are preparing the ingredients I will be watching them excitedly. My sister is preparing the carne mechada in a red cup to then cook it on the stove, while my mom prepares the beans and cold plantains and I keep seeing how everything is looking, smelling the meat. Then my mother and my sister together are preparing to make the rice. My mom pours the rice into a blue cup and begins to stir it with a white ladle. I am excited because the pabellon is almost ready. While my sister is serving the food, my mom is making fried plantains. I loved how all the food turned out.



## Seeling - Identity Wheel



In conclusion, our recently arrived MLs were engaged and interested in exploring their identities through the projects. However, the needs of our experienced MLs are different from the needs of our newly arrived MLs.



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# Priority 2: Retention of Staff of Color

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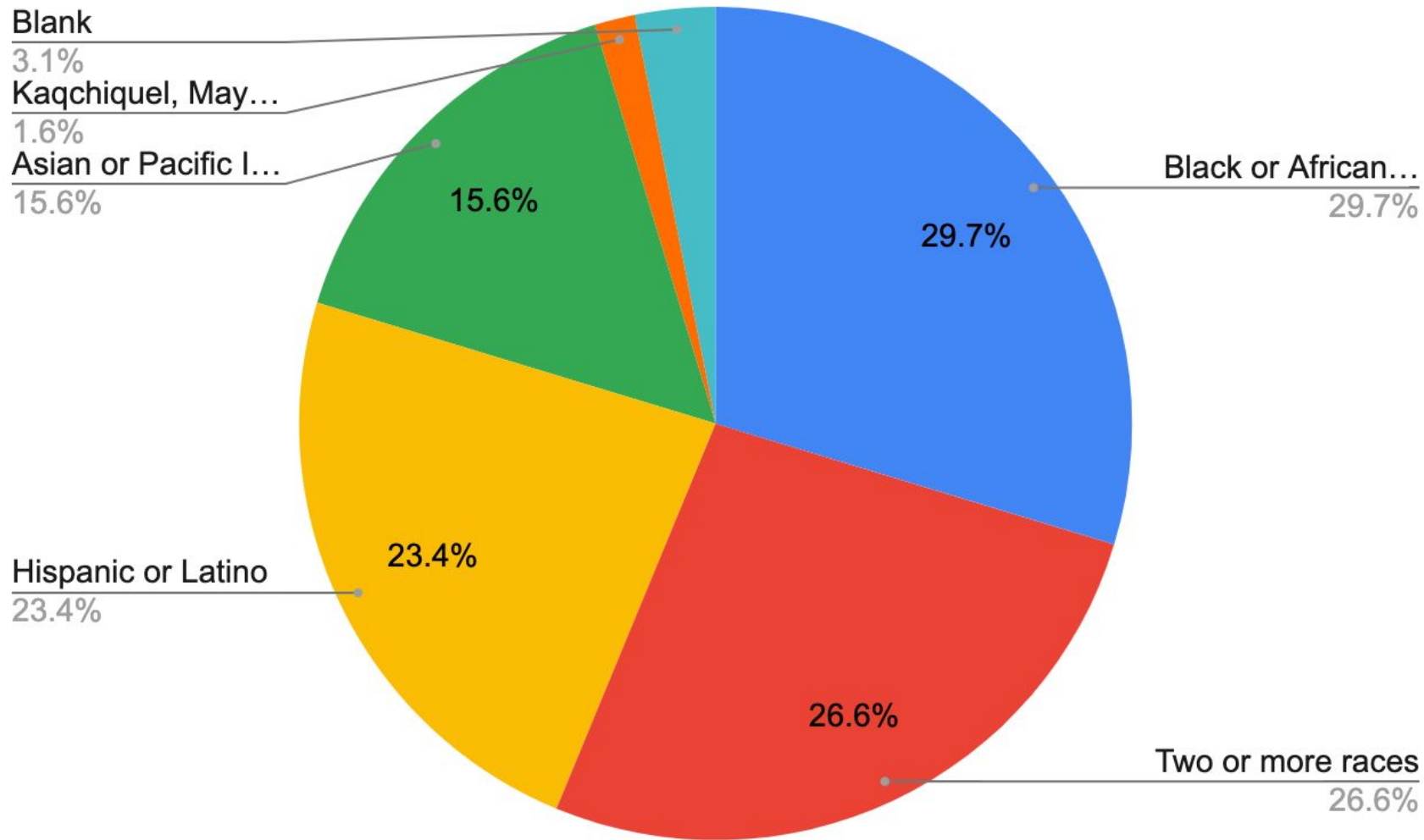
Develop a retention strategy that amplifies the voices, perspectives, and needs of staff of color leading to a **safer, more empowered, and fulfilling culture of belonging** focused on retaining racially-conscious staff.



# Staff of Color Survey

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- Sent to 175 staff of color
- 64 responses, response rate was 36.6%



# Racial Affinity Groups

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Prior to the pandemic, St. Louis Park Schools held some Racial Affinity Groups for staff of color to gather for discussion, camaraderie, and fun. These spaces were valuable to some, but were unable to accommodate all staff of color and were not sustained.

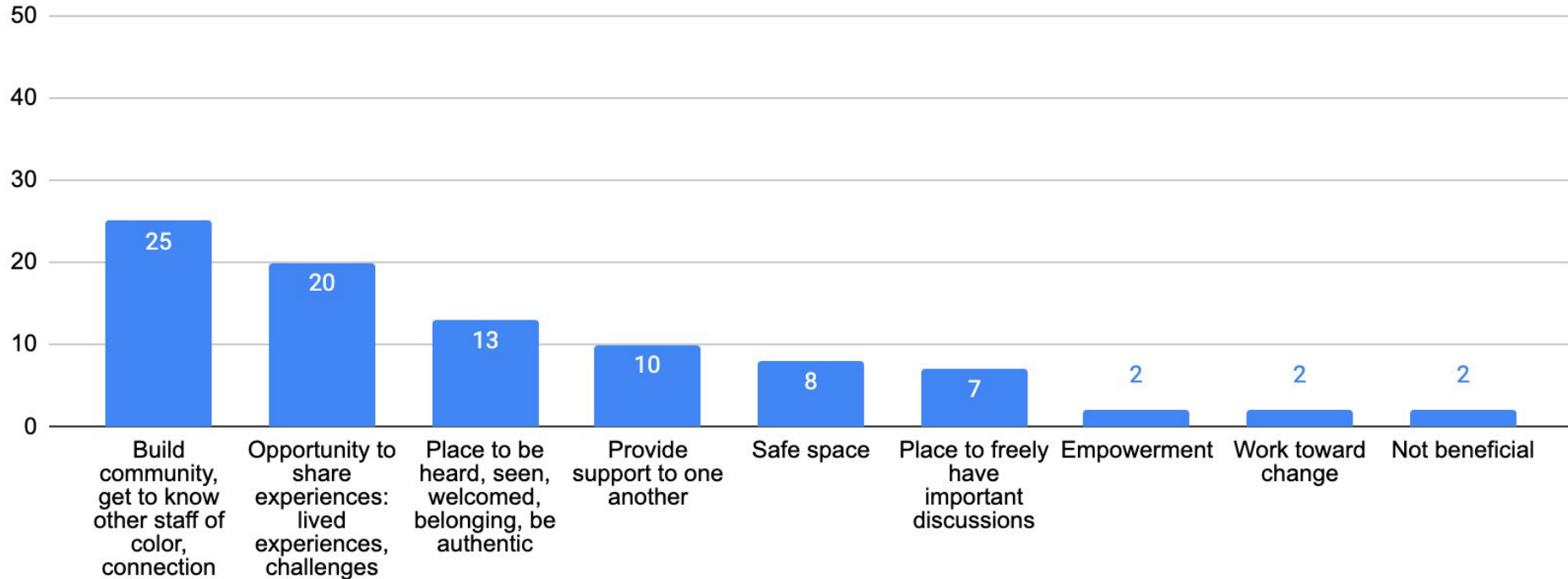
- This year, we asked staff of color about their interest/ability to attend an affinity group and what they would like to see in one





Current Perspectives on Affinity Groups (2023-2024)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree
<b>I would value the opportunity to spend time with other staff of color</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>84.4%</b>
Racial Affinity Groups would be beneficial to the district as a whole	6.3%	78.1%
A Racial Affinity Group would benefit me in terms of learning and/or work	7.8%	70.3%
A Racial Affinity Group would benefit me in terms of learning and/or work	7.8%	70.3%
A Racial Affinity Group would benefit me in terms of camaraderie and/or fun	6.3%	68.8%
I would be interested in participating in a Racial Affinity Group	10.9%	68.8%

# How could racial affinity groups benefit you and your peers?



# How could racial affinity groups benefit the district?

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“It also allows staff of color to lean deeper into relationship building with students of color - knowing we have supports built in to help us when this gets to be emotionally overwhelming.”

“They help create a more welcoming and fair environment for everyone in the school community.”

**“Having Racial Affinity Groups empowers the district to address and tackle racial issues that affect our community. By engaging in dialogue and organizing collective action, these groups become platforms for advocacy, education, and social change within our specific racial community and beyond. They can provide a powerful voice to raise awareness about racial injustices, challenge stereotypes, and promote inclusivity and equity in broader society.”**



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# Affinity Groups

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- Largest challenge seen is the logistics of time, schedules, space
- Staff of Color would like to see a space for:
  - Discussions
  - Social Activities
  - Connection
  - Sharing food
  - A variety of times offered
  - An agenda or purpose for each meeting, to be productive


# School Culture

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*Background:* Focus groups with staff of color were conducted in **2016**. Some findings from the focus groups were that staff of color see a lot of whiteness culture in the schools, a wondering about whether and how we talk about race with students, and feelings of being heard but not understood. In addition, staff of color found the Courageous Conversations protocol to be helpful.

<b>Current Perspectives on School Culture (2023-2024)</b>	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree
Discussion of race and racial identity (through or outside of curriculum) has increased in classrooms in the past few years	9.4%	67.2%
Discussion of race and racial identity has increased in the workplace in the past few years	10.9%	65.6%
Awareness of the presence of whiteness at the sites has increased in the past few years	20.3%	51.6%
Awareness of the presence of whiteness in the workplace has increased in the past few years	18.8%	54.7%
I can think of examples of whiteness being identified at our sites	10.9%	54.7%
Structures, behaviors, and beliefs rooted in whiteness have begun to be addressed in the past few years	21.9%	40.6%






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Please describe your perspective on the presence of whiteness in our schools and any ways you see that things are improving or not improving at SLP schools.

- 42 responded to this question
- Only 3 cited examples of improvement:
  - One building leader in particular disrupts whiteness
  - More staff of color are being hired
  - Allowing for multiple ways of being in the classroom (movement, calling out answers, engagement based on student needs)
- One respondent said that staff are finding ways to address whiteness, but gave no specific examples





Please describe your perspective on the presence of whiteness in our schools and any ways you see that things are improving or not improving at SLP schools.

- The most frequent response (n = 13) was that ***awareness/conversation/discussion is increasing, but no real change is happening***
- 4 said that whiteness is pervasive and not improving
- 4 said there is a lack of diversity in leadership



## 17 respondents gave some examples of whiteness in our schools

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Said more than once:

- Leaders of color get resistance and blame
- Inaction of white leaders, avoiding discussions
- Only staff of color keep conversations about race going
- Teachers:
  - Afraid to talk to Black students or hold them accountable
  - Make assumptions based on race (e.g., in the hallway)
  - Give white students but not students of color chances to correct mistakes

*“Leaders of color, along with a few white leaders, are often the ones that have to carry the weight of dismantling racist systems and then explaining it to our families, students and teachers.”*



# Examples of whiteness

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“I am also disheartened by the lack of conversations surrounding racial equity in the Special Education department. I feel that there needs to be more conversations being led by our Special Education administration to address the lack of cultural responsiveness in our white educators and how this may be leading to overidentification.”

“ I do not see much evidence of diverse cultural perspectives in the contents I am teaching.”

“I feel I will always be looked at through a microscope and judged off of my actions or past situations or incidents way worse than white males or my white colleagues.”

“I see presence of whiteness in our school every time a person "forgets" I am half-Hispanic.”



# Current Experience at SLP Schools

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- We asked Staff of Color about
  - How they feel at SLP schools
  - Their intention to stay
  - What they like about working here
  - The challenges of working here
  - What would help them feel included, safe, and/or empowered here at SLP schools




Current Experience at SLP Schools	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree
I intend to continue to work in the district for the foreseeable future	7.8%	56.3%
I feel like I belong here at SLP schools	18.8%	56.3%
I feel empowered to be my authentic self at work	25.0%	54.7%
I feel safe at SLP schools	20.3%	50.0%
I feel empowered to speak my truth at work	31.3%	48.4%
I feel empowered to make anti-racist changes in SLP schools	26.6%	43.8%
District-wide professional development focused on racial equity has improved school/work for staff of color	31.3%	29.7%
I believe that staff of color feel more understood at work than we did a few years ago	28.1%	25.0%

# What do you like about working at SLP Schools? (n=54)

	Percent of responses
Staff/colleagues/team	24.1%
Mission Statement, commitment to racial equity	22.2%
The students	16.7%
Community (close-knit, supportive, students/families, staff)	14.8%
Diversity (students, teachers, families)	9.3%
The size of the district	7.4%
I can make a difference (live purpose as anti-racist leader, provide representation for students, share my culture/language)	7.4%
Student-centered	5.6%





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**“One of the aspects that I truly appreciate about working in the St. Louis Park School District is the sense of community that permeates throughout. It is a place where all members, including students, parents, and staff, come together to create a supportive and inclusive environment.”**

**“I love how diverse SLP schools is! Among students, teachers and families, it is a beautiful community to be a part of.”**

**“I think the majority of the staff (staff of color and white) are very kind and student centered. I believe that the majority of our staff also hold high academic expectations for kids. I also believe that our kids are amazing.”**




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# What do you find challenging about working at SLP schools? (n=51)

	Percent of responses
Environment: white spaces, no alike peers, feel like "token" Person of Color	21.6%
Talk without action	11.8%
Not feeling heard, seen, valued	9.8%
Teachers who resist change and are not held accountable	9.8%
Behavior issues/lack of consequences	7.8%
Not seeing change or change is slow	5.9%
Disconnect between district and site	5.9%





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**“I am unsure that we are truly "walking the walk" when it comes to enforcing our Racial Equity Strategic Plan. I believe that there is a lot of performative anti-racism occurring in our buildings. Being the only POC on my team, I feel that conversations surrounding racial equity can become dangerous very quickly. I am usually the only person on my team to advocate for students of color.”**

“ Working in a mostly white environment. - Working where the staff does not proportionately represent the student/family population.”

“It feels anti-racism and education of white staff happens on the backs of staff of color.”



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# What would help you to feel more included, safe, and/or empowered at SLP schools? (n = 49)

	Percent of responses
Increased diversity/representation in staff, leadership, curriculum, extracurricular activities	16.3%
Feeling like my voice is heard and valued	12.2%
Community/affinity groups, Employee Resource Group	8.2%
Call out aggressions in the moment, accountability for white staff	6.1%
Accountability for student behavior	4.1%
Less emotional labor	2.0%
HR/cabinet address negative experiences of POC, LGBTQ+, women	2.0%



# Supervisor Support

	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree
My supervisor is committed to the district mission and strategic plan	12.5%	68.8%
My supervisor creates a climate of inclusion and safety for staff of color	23.4%	60.9%
I believe other supervisors in the district are committed to the district mission and strategic plan	18.8%	39.1%
I believe other supervisors create a climate of inclusion and safety for staff of color	21.9%	32.8%
My supervisor works to support each employee in their unique needs in order to feel included, respected, and able to do their best work	23.4%	56.3%

# What do you need from your supervisor to feel seen and heard?

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Create space for conversations/check ins

Hear our voices, listen, acknowledge

Take action, educate self, interrupt


See, value, support

Follow through

Acknowledge local/world events

Be ok with conflict





“Acknowledgement district-wide and community-wide about how race shows up in every space for BIPOC educators. Our educators of color are hurting. Unpack the reality of racial equity work being implemented and how it lives on paper but is it being operationalized. Interruption and calling in of colleagues that are unwilling to do the work at their sites. The heavy lifting cannot be on the backs of Black and Brown individuals.”



# Next Steps

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- This work will inform our thinking in identifying Priority Work for 2024-2025
- Collect second round of data on CARE Teams this Spring
- Working with staff of color to develop a strategy for retention