Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Assessment Report for Nova Classical Academy

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for the
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http://www.EquityLiteracy.org

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Section 1:
Introduction and Purpose

In this report we share the findings of a diversity, equity, and inclusion assessment completed by the Equity Literacy Institute (ELI) for Nova Classical Academy (Nova Classical). The school charged ELI with conducting an assessment based on a variety of data gathering initiatives with the goal of assessing the extent to which Nova Classical is an equitable and inclusive learning and working environment. With this goal in mind, in consultation with Nova Classical, ELI collected relevant data through focus groups and discussions with students, parents and guardians, and staff; surveys of students, parents and guardians, and staff; policy analysis; and an evaluation of existing data on patterns of course-taking, extracurricular participation, and staffing across race and gender. A summary of survey participant demographics (as we coded them for data analysis) can be found in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below. (Note that we often have to combine certain categories to increase the likelihood of attaining statistically significant results.)

We examined people's experiences and opportunities at Nova Classical across a variety of identities including race, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, gender and gender identity, religion, and sexual orientation. We provided a separate oral report of our policy analysis, along with annotated copies of the policies we were asked to analyze. So, although we incorporate some attention to the policy analysis into this report, we focus much more heavily on the other data we collected and analyzed.

Based on the outcomes of these data collection and analysis initiatives we offer our findings divided into two sections: (1) insights into what Nova Classical is doing well when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and (2) areas in which the school can improve its diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. We then provide recommendations based on these findings.

We encourage readers of this report to visit the Equity Literacy Institute web site (http://www.equityliteracy.org) to learn about the equity literacy framework, which we used to frame our assessment and make sense of our findings.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Demographics: Parents and Guardians

	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Race/Ethnicity		
BIPOC	102	27.1
White	274	72.9
Gender Identity		
Non-cisgender	3	0.8
Cisgender woman	253	66.9
Cisgender man	122	32.3
Sexual Orientation		
LGBTQ	18	5.0
Heterosexual	343	95.0

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	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Religion		
Christian	189	50.4
Religious, Not Christian	106	28.3
None	80	21.3
Disability		
Yes	70	18.2
No	315	81.8
Relationship		
Parent	375	98.0
Guardian	8	2.0

Table 2. Summary of Survey Demographics: Staff

	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Race/Ethnicity		
BIPOC	12	12.1
White	87	87.9
Gender Identity		
Non-cisgender	--*	--*
Cisgender woman	76	75.3
Cisgender man	24	23.7
Sexual Orientation		
LGBTQ	16	15.7
Heterosexual	86	84.3
Religion		
Christian	50	50.0
Religious, Not Christian	21	21.4
None	28	28.6
Disability		
Yes	32	31.4
No	70	68.6
Role		
Teacher	48	47.5
Administrator	16	15.8
Support Staff	37	36.6

*These data are withheld in the interest of minimizing the possibility of unintentionally disclosing the sources of some of the survey results.

Table 3. Summary of Survey Demographics: Students

	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Race/Ethnicity		
BIPOC	51	41.8
White	71	58.2
Gender Identity		
Non-cisgender	4	3.4
Cisgender woman	75	63.0
Cisgender man	40	33.6
Sexual Orientation		
LGBTQ	49	40.2
Heterosexual	73	59.8
Religion		
Christian	55	47.0
Religious, Not Christian	43	36.8
None	19	16.2
Financial Hardship		
Yes	59	49.2
No	61	50.8
Grade		
8th	9	7.4
9th	20	16.5
10th	32	25.5
11th	30	24.8
12th	30	24.8

Section 2:
How Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Are Working
at Nova Classical Academy

Even as we endeavor to identify and address equity shortcomings, it is important that we recognize, celebrate, and learn from positive equity efforts and successes. These successes provide insights into institutional DEI commitments—areas in which the school has invested meaningful equity energy and effort. They also may offer insight into the aspects of school culture which leaders can leverage to address ongoing DEI challenges.

We identified several examples of positive equity efforts at the school. They are synthesized below.

1. **Leadership prioritizing equity.** Upper-level leadership appears committed philosophically to creating a more equitable, inclusive, and welcoming school. The school's investment in this equity assessment demonstrates this commitment. We found during the focus groups a general consensus among Nova Classical students, families, and staff (or at least among those who participated in the focus groups) that school leaders are intent on prioritizing DEI in ways it has not been prioritized previously at the school. Additional professional development may help leadership understand the breadth and depth of inequity operating in the school so that it may put its commitment into more consistent and more transformative action.

2. **Generally equitable policy.** Our policy analysis revealed very little explicit and clear inequity codified into school policy.

3. **Openness to confront inequity.** During the oral report of findings from the policy analysis, school representatives in attendance demonstrated an openness to grapple with hard equity questions related to well-established aspects of school tradition and culture, such as the dress code and uniform policy. This bodes well for leaders' ability to hear and consider equity-related feedback.

4. **Explicit commitment to racial equity and gender inclusion.** The existence of the racial equity policy and gender inclusion policy demonstrates the school's willingness to take a public stand on racial and gender equity. Many schools are not willing to do that. We rarely see something like "racial equity" named explicitly in policy. Both policies should be strengthened to focus more clearly on *equity* rather than softer notions of inclusion and diversity.

5. **Diversity of debate team.** When we analyzed the two years of available data tracking participation on the debate team, we noted a move toward gender parity. This we marked as a DEI "positive" in light of national research showing a history of sexism and "Bro Culture" in speech and debate spaces. We similarly noted at least some measure of racial diversity on the debate team.

6. *Mostly* **equitable gender access in STEM and Humanities advanced course-taking.** With some exceptions, which we discuss below under "areas for improvement," patterns of advanced STEM and Humanities course-taking across gender seems fairly equitable if we look over the past three years.

7. **Rigorous and challenging curriculum and high academic expectations for all students.** Student focus group participants consistently shared that the curriculum at Nova Classical is rigorous and challenging and that each year what they learn builds on what they learned in previous years. According to the student survey, there were no statistically significant distinctions regarding students' perception that "my teachers encourage me to achieve at a high level" across any demographic category.

8. **Available and accessible academic support.** Students across identity also shared in focus groups that teachers and other instructional staff offer support at various times if they are struggling with coursework, making help generally easy to access.

9. **Attention to student well-being.** During focus groups students from a variety of demographics consistently shared that they believe Nova Classical staff care about their well-being. Generally speaking, they find Nova Classical welcoming.

10. **Respect for gender identity diversity.** On a more specific note, students reported that teachers generally ask for and use their preferred and proper pronouns, demonstrating an important basic level of equity and inclusion related to gender identity.

11. **Responsiveness to financial hardship.** There appears to be a collective understanding at Nova Classical that lower-income students might struggle to access learning experiences that cost extra money. Many staff members make efforts to find funding sources to address this concern.

12. **Educational assistants' work with students who have behavioral challenges.** Many focus group participants mentioned that Nova Classical's educational assistants are a positive and inclusive force, especially when it comes to their engagement with students who have behavioral or other challenges.

13. **Diversity-related programming.** Nova Classical offers an impressive array of multicultural-themed events that are led or coordinated by student or family groups.

14. **Lower-school leadership open door approach.** Parents and caretakers of students in the lower school praised leadership's "open door" practice, which they felt encourages family engagement and open, honest communication.

15. **Acceptance of religious diversity.** In their respective surveys, students, parents and guardians, and staff overwhelmingly agreed that their religious or faith identities, or lack thereof, were respected at Nova Classical.

Section 3:
Opportunities for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Improvement at Nova Classical Academy

Our research also uncovered several opportunities for Nova Classical to strengthen its equity efforts. Many of the concerns discussed here are similar to those we have identified in most schools for which we've conducted an equity assessment. Others are more unique to Nova Classical's institutional culture and history. None appear egregious or purposefully harmful.

We found four primary theme areas for equity improvement as we analyzed the data: (1) concerns related to curriculum, instruction, and learning opportunities (2) concerns related to institutional equity and inclusion, (3) concerns related to staff engagement, well-being, and accountability, and (4) concerns related to how (or whether) staff members respond to microaggressions and other bias- and inequity-related harm. The findings we describe below are organized into these four themes.

Although we include in this section some findings related to academic achievement as reported during focus groups and open-ended survey questions, we should note that the general scope for this assessment was meant to focus more on student, parent, and staff experiences than quantitative academic outcome comparisons across student demographics and other quantitative measures of student achievement. We were instructed that Nova Classical has existing internal mechanisms for tracking, and assessing patterns of, academic outcomes.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Learning Opportunities

1. **Passive learning.** Students raised concerns during focus groups about the heavy reliance on unengaging pedagogies such as lecturing as the primary instructional method.

2. **Insufficient and inaccurate curricular diversification.** Students noted in particular that Indigenous histories often are misrepresented in the curriculum or not included at all. More generally, students of color shared that they do not see themselves reflected in the literature they're assigned to read or the broader curriculum. Students and their families often feel responsible for filling in the blanks or correcting misperceptions. Buttressing this finding, survey data show that white students were more likely than students of color to feel that the curriculum at Nova Classical incorporates the voices and experiences of people who share their identities. Similarly, heterosexual students were more likely than their LGBTQ peers to feel that the curriculum incorporates the voices and experiences of people who share their identities. A possibly related finding was that white students also were more likely than their peers of color to feel that their teachers teach in ways that keep them interested in what they're learning.

3. **Overreliance on singular sources.** Students also shared concerns that teachers too often rely on single textbook sources that contain misinformation about the histories

and experiences of marginalized groups rather than drawing on multiple and more representative sources.

4. **Gender-related course-taking disparities.** Although, as stated earlier, Nova Classical appears to be ahead of the national curve on gender parity in advanced STEM course-taking and advanced course-taking overall, there are some courses in which gender disparities persist, such as AP Physics, which disproportionately attracts boys, and AP English Literature, which disproportionately attracts girls.

5. **Race-related course-taking disparities.** Similarly, Black and Hispanic students appear to be underrepresented in many advanced tracks. It's difficult to identify the full extent of this disparity without knowing more about who was identifying as "multi-racial" in the data the school provided to ELI.

6. **Gender and socioeconomic disparities in access to and participation in First Tech Challenge.** Despite the fact that, in many ways, Nova Classical is ahead of the national curve when it comes to gender parity in advanced STEM course-taking, there remains a consistent gender disparity over the past three years in participation in the First Tech Challenge extracurricular activity, which focuses on engineering, robotics, and teamwork. This disparity more closely mirrors national trends of STEM-related access and participation. As we investigated the program to learn more about it, we also were concerned with the $225 fee. (This is the fee from 2022.) We wonder how Nova Classical's lower-income students might access this program.

7. **Socioeconomic barriers to extracurriculars.** Extracurricular activities that cost money or require students to stay after school are largely inaccessible to students from lower-income families, who are less likely to be able to afford the fees or to have reliable transportation. As one specific example, due to the lack of a reliable transportation system for athletic events, access to sports is at least somewhat limited to students who have or can arrange transportation for themselves.

8. **In need of skills for responding to bias incidents.** Instructional staff were asked in the survey whether they feel they have the knowledge and skills to respond effectively if a bias incident occurs in their class. They were asked separately about bias incidents related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Although a majority feel that they are prepared, many don't. Only 57% agreed or strongly agreed that they are prepared to respond effectively to a bias incident related to sexual orientation, 59% to one related to gender identity, 68% to race, and 72% to disability. This jibes with student concerns that adults at Nova Classical do not do an adequate job responding to these sorts of incidents.

Institutional Equity and Inclusion

1. **Racial disparities in connection, safety, and perceptions of equity.** Compared with students of color, white students are statistically significantly more likely to have a peer group at the school with whom they feel connected, to feel safe at the school,

and to believe that school rules are applied fairly to everybody at the school. During focus groups, students of color shared a variety of experiences of racial bias and marginalization at Nova Classical and shared their perception that many white people at the school would be surprised to hear about their experiences.

2. **Gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation disparities in connection and community.** Compared with their cisgender male peers, non-cisgender students and cisgender female students are more likely to feel pressure to change the way they speak, dress, or act in order to fit in at Nova Classical and less likely to feel that the school does a good job cultivating community among students. LGBTQ students are more likely than their heterosexual peers to feel pressure to change the way they speak, dress, or act in order to fit in.

3. **Bullying and harassment of non-cisgender students and LGBTQ students.** According to survey data, non-cisgender students are more likely than cisgender students to have been bullied or to have experienced sexual harassment at Nova Classical. In fact, 50% of non-cisgender students agreed that they had been sexually harassed at the school. Also, LGBTQ students are more likely than heterosexual students to have been bullied.

4. **Sexual harassment.** Overall, 7% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they had experienced sexual harassment at Nova Classical. Although this sounds like a small percentage, if we project it across the entire student body, it's a lot of students. And really, any number is too high.

5. **Physically or verbally intimidated by staff.** 27% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they had felt verbally of physically intimidated by an administrator, teacher, coach, counselor, or other authority figure at the school. Non-cisgender students, students of color, and LGBTQ students were most likely to agree with this statement.

6. **Bullying.** Similarly, 27% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they had been bullied at Nova Classical, including 75% of non-cisgender students, 40% of LGBTQ students, and 40% of non-Christian students.

7. **Access disparities related to socioeconomic status.** Students who participate in the free lunch program are more likely than their peers to avoid events at Nova Classical that cost extra money and to feel that costs and expenses associated with attending the school are a financial hardship for their families.

8. **Experience-related disparities among parents and guardians across race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.** Parents and guardians of color, LGBTQ parents and guardians, and non-cisgender parents and guardians are significantly more likely to feel that Nova Classical is not a welcoming, affirming space than their white, heterosexual, and/or cisgender peers. More specifically:

a. White parents and guardians are more likely to feel welcome at the school, to feel there are staff members at the school with whom they can share their concerns, and to indicate that they would still send their children to the school if they had to do it over again.

b. Cisgender parents and guardians are less likely than their non-cis peers to feel pressure to change the way they speak, dress, or act to "fit in" when visiting the school and more likely to feel the school adequately addresses the challenges their children face.

c. Heterosexual parents and guardians are more likely than their LGBTQ peers to feel pressure to change the way they speak, dress, or act; more comfortable sharing their opinions with Nova Classical staff; more likely to encourage a friend to send their children to the school; and more likely to feel welcome at the school. Notably, LGBTQ parents and guardians are more likely than their heterosexual peers to indicate that the school's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion played a role in their family's decision to send their children to Nova Classical. So, it may be especially troubling to those parents and guardians that there are gaps between their perception of the school's commitment to equity and their experiences at the school.

9. **Gaps in understandings of bias and inequity among parents.** According to quantitative survey data, privileged-identity parents appear to have less consciousness about how bias and inequity may be operating at Nova Classical than their marginalized-identity peers. This especially cuts across sexual orientation, gender identity, religious or faith identity, and race.

10. **Disparities in staff experiences across race and sexual orientation.** On average, staff of color and LGBTQ staff experience Nova Classical differently from their white and heterosexual colleagues. For example:
    a. Staff of color are less likely than their white colleagues to feel respected by their colleagues and are more likely than their white colleagues to witness or experience—or perhaps to notice—racist jokes, comments, or name-calling.
    b. LGBTQ staff appear on average to experience Nova Classical as a particularly repressive place. They are more likely than their heterosexual peers to feel pressure to change the way the speak, dress, or act in order to fit in at Nova Classical (56% as compared with 17%) and to witness or experience heterosexist or cisgenderist jokes, comments, or name-calling incidents. They are less likely to:
       - feel comfortable sharing their opinions at staff meetings,
       - feel comfortable being themselves at the school,
       - feel that leadership does a good job cultivating community among staff,
       - agree that Nova Classical is a nurturing work environment, and
       - feel comfortable engaging in conversations about equity and diversity with colleagues.

11. **Disproportionate celebration of boys' athletics.** A concern raised in several focus groups and in open-ended survey items was that boys' athletics are supported and celebrated considerably more than girls' athletics, and that boys' athletics are supported and celebrated considerably more than academic clubs or contests.

12. **Unaddressed mental health concerns.** During focus groups many students shared a concern about how student health issues are under-addressed for a variety of reasons, including not knowing to whom to report them, not feeling connected enough with administrators to share these concerns with them, and worrying about overburdening counselors (who already appear to many students to be overburdened with work responsibilities). Notably, as we mentioned earlier, students generally believe that staff care about their well-being. They worry that staff do not have the knowledge or skills to put that care into consistent action.

13. **Lack of understood reporting structure.** When it comes both to mental health concerns and concerns related to bias and discrimination, many students and parents or guardians are confused about the reporting structure. They report often being redirected or sent from person to person to person, having to share their experiences of bias and marginalization over and over before it is addressed. This may further traumatize students who have been harmed at school. Eventually it may result in students not reporting concerns that ought to be reported.

14. **Lack of racial representation in staff.** Students of color do not see themselves represented in the racial demographics of teachers at the school.

15. **Well-intended, under-prepared staff.** For the most part, students and parents/guardians are complimentary toward school staff. They appear to like a vast majority of staff members. But they also feel that staff are not prepared with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide an equitable learning environment. Specifically, they want staff to have the knowledge and skills to:
    a. create and deliver an equitable, inclusive curriculum,
    b. address oppressive comments and ideologies when they are shared in class or appear in learning materials, and
    c. recognize and respond to cultural appropriation, which many identify as consistent problem at Nova Classical that is rarely addressed.

16. **Gender inclusive restrooms.** The gender inclusive restrooms that do exist are located in inconvenient places for most students. Many other restrooms are over-the-top gender exclusive, painted blue or pink.

17. **Insufficient accommodations.** We heard somewhat confounding stories from several students that the school does not stay open and accessible to those who stay after school because of missing a bus, waiting for somebody to pick them up, or having a gap between the end of the school day and the start time for an afterschool activity. They shared that they often have to wait at a nearby gas station or another neighboring business. This, again, could have the worst impact on the students least

likely to have transportation, but it's also anti-community and potentially dangerous for students.

18. **Disconnected parents of color.** Many parents of color reported during focus groups that they feel disconnected or alienated from school culture. Notably, on the parent survey, while 84% of white parents or guardians agreed that there are staff members at Nova Classical with whom they feel comfortable sharing concerns, only 65% of parents or guardians of color agreed with that statement.

19. **Lack of prayer space.** Students who need to pray during the day pointed out that there is no permanent facility space where they can do so.

20. **Scarce conversations about equity and inequity.** Staff who participated in focus groups shared that there is very little collective conversation about inequities at Nova Classical or what student success looks like. Perhaps because of the lack of a bigger institutional accounting of inequity, many staff are hesitant to speak up or engage colleagues when they witness injustice or bias. On the survey, only 64% of staff indicated that they feel comfortable engaging in these conversations with colleagues, including 55% of staff of color and 44% of LGBTQ staff.

21. **Punished for reacting to inequity.** We heard several stories of students being punished for reacting in reasonable ways to bias and inequity they experienced at the school. The perception often is that they are being punished for the school's failure to ensure a bias-free, equitable learning environment.

Staff Engagement, Well-being, and Accountability

1. **Comparatively low pay.** Many Nova Classical staff feel significantly underpaid compared to their counterparts at other charter or public schools. (During an oral report of these findings we were told that in fact Nova Classical's pay is in line with the pay of other charter schools in the state, but significantly lower than the average pay at traditional public schools.) This appears to be having an impact on staff morale. The low pay as compared to traditional public districts is likely making it more difficult for the school to recruit and retain teachers and paraprofessionals. Notably, many students who participated in focus groups appear to be aware that teachers at the school are not well paid. Several mentioned not wanting to overburden staff who they felt were overworked and underpaid.

2. **Inconsistent accountability for differentiation.** Staff who participated in focus groups noted that their job is made more difficult because many of their colleagues are not willing, or not prepared, to be responsive to individual student needs, such as by differentiating instruction.

3. **IncentFit program's inequities.** The IncentFit program appears to unintentionally undermine morale for some staff. It is inequitable to offer incentives for activities that cost money or require time or a particular level of physical well-being. So, the

program could create privilege for people who already have privilege, who don't have disabilities, or who have the time and resources to do the sorts of things that are incentivized.

<u>How (or Whether) Staff Members Respond to Microaggressions and Other Inequity-Related Harm</u>

1. **Culture of inaction.** Many staff members do not feel comfortable speaking up or engaging colleagues when they observe bias or injustice. There can be many reasons for this. For example, some staff might worry that they will be alienated or pushed to the margins of institutional culture if they speak up. Some might want to be more active, but aren't sure how. Others could feel it's not very important. So, this could be partially an institutional culture issue. Are people rewarded for speaking up? It also could be a professional development issue. Is Nova Classical providing people with the knowledge and skills necessary to intervene? It could even be in part a hiring issue. Is the school hiring people who would find it important to address equity concerns? Students have a sense that staff members on average are uncomfortable and avoidant when it comes to addressing bias or inequity, except perhaps in cases of very blatant individual incidents.

2. **Unaddressed systemic inequity.** Students who participated in focus groups shared that systemic inequity—sexism, heterosexism, and racism, in particular—is rampant at the school and that the school is not responding to those conditions adequately. The student survey data, especially the comparisons across demographics that show how students experience Nova Classical differently depending on their identities, support the focus group finding of systemic inequity. Interestingly, what we found fairly unique was that the students don't see the problem as purposeful—as, for example, the result of bigotry among adults who have no desire for equity—but instead as adults' lack of time, resources, or knowledge to make the school equitable.

3. **Athletic department unresponsive.** Many students and parents/guardians reported that concerns have been raised repeatedly about gender inequities and other equity issues operating through Nova Classical's athletics department and that these concerns have gone unaddressed, despite the fact that they're well-known across the Nova Classical community.

4. **Inconsistent overall responsiveness.** Overall, students and parents/guardians feel that staff responsiveness to bias and inequity is at best inconsistent. Again, the perception is not necessarily that the school is full of bigoted adults meaning to do harm, but that perhaps staff have not been provided with the strategies and support necessary to do a better job.

Section 4:
Recommendations

The following recommendations are informed by several factors. First, we considered suggestions that were shared repeatedly in focus groups and in open-ended survey questions. Secondly, we drew on our own expertise and research on what sorts of changes and actions deeply and sustainably redress the equity concerns with which Nova Classical is grappling. We also considered how to leverage the positive work already happening at the school to support continued equity growth.

In response to a request to align these recommendations with existing organizational categories the school uses for strategic planning, we've organized our recommendations roughly under the headings Classical Education, Academic and Student Support, Extracurriculars, Inclusive Community, Facilities, and Staff Support, along with the additional heading, Leadership.

Classical Education

1. **Demystify equity.** The school's leadership and board should frame equity, diversity, and inclusion, not as *adjustments to* classical education, but rather as *essential aspects of* classical education. Institutionalize this framing. There is no way to effectively provide a classical education without a commitment to equity. If equity is presented as a separate or optional lens or as an "initiative" or "program" or topic to discuss for a day or two in class, the overall impact of equity efforts will be small and tokenistic. As Nova Classical considers its path toward equity and all of its components, from professional development to curriculum design to policy adjustments, the core question, even through a classical education lens, should be, "How do we make this school as equitable and just as possible?"

2. **Uniform guidelines.** Continue to reimagine the uniform guidelines and "dress and grooming" codes, many of which seem archaic, arbitrary, and out of touch with contemporary understandings of what may be valuable or harmful about school uniforms. Address implicit presumptions of "character" and "proper-ness" that might have some connection to traditional conceptions of classical education but are not well-aligned with current knowledge about the roles and impacts of uniform guidelines and dress codes or with deep commitments to equity.

Academic and Student Support

1. **Further analysis of course-taking disparities.** We recommend additional analysis, perhaps through targeted surveys, interviews, or focus groups, to develop a better understanding of why gender- and race-based advanced course-taking disparities persist. There are always a variety of factors driving these disparities, including students' sense of whether they "belong" in certain courses, bias in who receives recommendations for advanced tracks, differences in which parents feel most comfortable forcefully advocating for their children, societal conditioning regarding

what people ought to be interested in, and more. It's important to identify the causes of these disparities so that strategies for shrinking them will be effective.

2. **Embrace engaging pedagogy.** After leading the focus groups and reading comments left in the open-ended survey items, we wonder whether some staff might confuse the *content or curriculum* of classical education with the *pedagogy*. We've never heard so often about lecture-style rote teaching. Notably, research has shown for decades that most students learn best with a more engaging, interactive, collaborative learning approach, although of course there are times when incorporating lecture or "direct instruction" is important, too. Student are requesting more group and collaborative work. We recommend that the school consider this when thinking about professional development and when considering who the school hires to teach.

3. **Curriculum transformation.** Engage in an equity- and inclusion-based curriculum review and transformation process. There are powerful ways to do this in which instructional staff in essence "workshop" one of their courses to learn how to transform it with equity in mind. In doing so, they learn how to apply that transformative lens to their other courses. Many staff will need support and coaching to do that. Two particular areas of needed support are (1) learning how to recognize and respond to bias and misinformation in textbooks and other learning materials, and (2) learning how to identify more accurate, inclusive learning materials. A more specific area of support is how to incorporate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives and how to equitably teach about Columbus Day and Thanksgiving.

4. **Student mental health.** Develop a plan for attending more effectively to student mental health challenges. Make sure students know who they can go to and what resources are available. Many students requested identity-specific resources.

5. **Counselor and other student support staff.** Nova Classical needs more student support personnel such as counselors—especially those who are able to provide mental health and other emotional supports.

6. **Educating about racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression**. Students of color felt that there was little general awareness among their peers about the racism they experienced at Nova Classical or about racism in general. A community that doesn't recognize racism can never become a community that eliminates racism. So, it's important to consider how Nova Classical is preparing all members of the community to move the school forward when it comes to equity. It might include preparing teachers to have conversations about these issues when relevant in their classrooms. It might mean training students to engage younger students in equity learning.

Extracurriculars

1. **Evaluate equity in athletics.** We recommend a separate evaluation of equity concerns related to athletics, as it is an area of concern raised consistently and

passionately throughout this assessment. Among the issues that might be assessed, particularly across gender, are uniform/equipment purchases and court/field time.

2. **Elevate non-sports pursuits and women's sports.** Consider developing a system for recording how resources and energies are distributed when it comes to various school activities.

3. **Extracurricular accessibility.** Do whatever is necessary to make extracurriculars more accessible to students. This includes providing more reliable and consistent transportation, leaving the school open so students don't have to loiter in local businesses, and making it easier for students to attend school events. It appears that to attend activities like sports events, students have to purchase tickets online and be accompanied by a parent. Consider to whom, exactly, that makes those activities accessible. Student athletes mentioned the challenge of finding rides to their games which, again, could result in some students simply not being able to participate.

4. **First Tech Challenge.** Review and eliminate possible gender and economic barriers to participation.

Inclusive Community

1. **Honest reckoning.** Like most schools, we believe Nova Classical would benefit from an honest reckoning with the inequity that has persisted there. Our sense is that leadership is committed to doing better, but that can't happen without a process of mapping out exactly how inequity is operating and the ways the school has been reluctant to address it directly. It also requires the inverse process: mapping out the progress that has been made and how the resources and efforts that enabled that progress can be leveraged to support more progress. The tendency in most schools is to do this piece-meal: add a program here, change a policy or practice there. But what is required is a deeper reckoning with layers of institutional culture, starting with the day-to-day microaggressions with which many students cope.

2. **Equity visioning and planning.** We believe Nova Classical would benefit from bringing in an organization to facilitate that reckoning process in preparation for developing a 5- to 10-year vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion progress. The visioning and planning process should identify specific actions and goals for responding to the recommendations in this report.

3. **Ongoing staff professional development.** Each adult in the school should be required to attend ongoing professional development related to equity philosophy and practice. It should be based around a *central model or framework* so that the school can work toward depth of understanding and application. It should be endorsed strongly by leadership. Again, by adopting a framework and developing a five-year plan, the school can move intentionally toward providing staff with the skills and support necessary to enact its diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments.

4. **Responding to inequity and bias incidents.** One urgent focus area for school-wide professional development revolves around preparing adults to effectively and consistently respond to racist, heterosexist, sexist, and otherwise oppressive comments, name-calling, and jokes. Additionally, clear policy should provide basic guidelines for how adults will handle these situations in the future. We recommend prioritizing this focus area, offering professional learning on it as soon as possible, and then making it part of on-boarding for new staff each year.

5. **Expectations for equity responsiveness.** Leadership must express clear expectations that staff respond clearly and decisively to derogatory language and jokes. There must be a sense of accountability for staff who hear oppressive language and don't respond. But again, that accountability has to be matched with professional development so that staff have the skills and confidence to respond effectively.

6. **Equity specialist.** Nova Classical should consider creating a position for, and hiring, an equity specialist. Although there are several people in the school who are passionate about, and have considerable expertise related to, equity and diversity, the school could use the support of somebody whose expertise and experience are focused on strengthening equity knowledge and practice. If this is not financially feasible, we strongly recommend that the school develop a long-term relationship with an organization that has this expertise to lead the professional development efforts and coach district and building leaders as they grow toward more advanced equity practices.

7. **Eliminate fees.** Fees associated with extracurricular activities such as student clubs create a hierarchy of access. Minimize or eliminate fees related to all school-related events or activities.

8. **Policy equity.** Attend to the separate analysis and recommendations offered through the policy analysis the Equity Literacy Institute completed for the school.

9. **Staff and leadership diversification.** Work on diversifying staff and leadership, especially across race and ethnicity. Contract with an organization that can help the school develop a plan for doing so. This is not just about *recruiting* more strategically. It's about *transforming* the school so that prospective teachers of color know it's an affirming place to be.

10. **Reporting system.** Develop a clear reporting structure for students, families, and staff who are raising concerns about bias, inequity, bullying, and harassment. If somebody raises a concern, they should *never be passed off over and over* to other people. Staff may need training on how to respond, including how to validate concerns raised by students and families. The school definitely needs to identify a few people—people students of color, LGBTQ students, and students from other marginalized groups trust—to create a formal process and to make sure that all concerns are validated and that all reports lead to actionable responses.

11. **Gender-inclusive restrooms**. Place them in more central locations. Repaint any restrooms currently painted pink or blue.

12. **Accessibility of parent groups.** Ensure that parent/caregiver groups are intentionally inclusive and welcoming and that any barriers to engagement are removed. Consider meeting times, for example, and remember that some families might not have stable transportation or the resources to cover childcare if necessary to attend.

13. **Racial Equity Policy and Gender Inclusion Policy.** Reimagine these and other existing diversity-, equity-, and inclusion-related policies to be more equity-focused, more institutionally transformative. These are the values to which future leaders will hold the school accountable, so they need to be strong and transformative.

14. **Parent alienation.** Develop a plan to intentionally address concerns about alienation and exclusion among parents of color, non-cisgender parents, and LGBQ parents. Work with parents who are especially passionate about equity to consider how to do this, but be careful about over-taxing their emotional labor.

Facilities

1. **Prayer space.** Designate a prayer space for students. If it must be a shared space, reserve it for Muslim students at least during Ramadan.

Staff Support

1. **Staff morale.** Develop a plan for attending to staff morale concerns related to pay and workload. It is difficult for a school to work toward long-term equity goals while paying staff below-industry-standard salaries (as compared with average pay rates at traditional public schools), because doing so means you're expecting people who are not treated equitably to treat people equitably. It also means you risk losing competitions among schools to hire people with equity and diversity expertise.

2. **Staff alienation.** Develop a plan to intentionally address concerns about alienation and inequity experienced by staff of color and LGBTQ staff. Work with staff of color and LGBTQ staff on how to do this, but make sure also to compensate them for the emotional and other kinds of labor they expend helping the school make progress.

Leadership

1. **Leadership development.** Leadership should engage in ongoing professional learning and coaching on the intricacies of equity leadership. We recommend developing a five-year plan for leadership professional development.

Conclusion

Nova Classical has the potential to make tremendous strides toward equity-related goals. Progress comes down to (1) a willingness to make hard decisions that may rub against "the way things are" or even against traditional "classical education" sensibilities, (2) a willingness to seek out the supports required to add layers of depth to the school's equity efforts, and (3) an unbending commitment by leaders. We believe Nova Classical can become a regional model for equity in charter schools if school leaders, including board members, embrace these challenges.

We hope Nova Classical considers the Equity Literacy Institute a resource moving forward, if not supporting the school's efforts directly, then recommending organizations that can do so. We look forward to following the school's equity growth.