

# **Teachers' Perceptions of Belonging and Inclusion in Davis School District, Utah**

Teacher Focus Group Findings 2024/25

Presentation to School Leadership



**Davis School District**

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# Data Analysis



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# Data Description

Table 1. Proportion of participants in attendance at each focus group school venue

*Note:* While 195 teachers participated in the focus groups, only 192 completed the voluntary demographic survey.

Table 2. Grade level taught by participants

*Note:* Other represents Behavior BCA, BTS, Coach Instructor

Table 3. Years spent teaching in the Davis School District

*Source:* Demographic Survey

# Demographic Profile of Participants

Table 4. Proportion of male and female participants in focus groups

Table 5. Age distribution of participants

Table 6. Race and ethnicity of participants

*Source:* Demographic Survey

# Teachers' Voices and Future Directions



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# Teachers' voices (1/5)

## Belonging and Inclusion

<b>District Initiatives and Perceptions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Superficial Inclusion Efforts:</b> Teachers felt district efforts often centered on celebrations rather than substantive, systemic changes.</li> <li>• <b>Failed Initiatives:</b> Programs like "No More, Not Here" were deemed ineffective. Students turned them into jokes, leaving teachers unclear on the next steps. (Secondary level versus elementary level).</li> <li>• <b>Morning Meetings:</b> Highlighted as successful opportunities for building student relationships and fostering belonging proactively.</li> </ul>
<b>Teachers' Desire for Agency and Cohesive Messaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Need for Agency:</b> Teachers expressed a need for more autonomy in addressing inclusion and belonging in their classrooms.</li> <li>• <b>Cohesive District Vision:</b> A unified message and clear guidance on inclusion were seen as vital yet absent.</li> <li>• <b>Proactive Framework:</b> Teachers sought strategies that involve parents, communities, and district-wide alignment.</li> </ul>
<b>Externalization of Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reliance on District Liaisons:</b> Teachers externalized some responsibility to district liaisons, expecting them participate actively in inclusion efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Disconnect Between Levels:</b> Elementary teachers prioritized early interventions, while high school teachers tended to disassociate inclusion efforts from their core responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Disproportionate Burden on Teachers and Staff of races other than White</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tokenism in Inclusion Efforts:</b> Teachers of color reported feeling disproportionately relied upon to lead or support initiatives related to belonging and inclusion, often needing more support.</li> <li>• <b>Emotional Labor:</b> These individuals frequently described experiencing heightened emotional and professional demands to address issues of racism, discrimination, and cultural responsiveness within the school community.</li> <li>• <b>Perceived Expertise:</b> Colleagues and administrators often deferred to staff of color as the "default experts" on issues of diversity, leading to a sense of isolation and inequity.</li> </ul>
<b>Emerging Positive Practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Morning Meetings and Mentoring Initiatives:</b> These were seen as effective tools for relationship-building and fostering belonging.</li> <li>• <b>Teacher Workarounds:</b> Teachers demonstrated agency through creative solutions for addressing diversity and inclusion, even within constraints.</li> </ul>

“Our administration is such a good example of what we all should be.”

“Sometimes we do not feel heard as a faculty. We can talk and talk and talk and our administrator will do what she wants anyway.”

"Our schools pushed the morning meetings this last couple of years, where we do a lot of the SEL stuff.”

# Teachers' voices (2/5)

## Classroom learning environment: Effectiveness in the classroom

Time Constraints and Teacher Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Need for more time:</b> Lack of time to build meaningful relationships with students or engage in discussions about belonging and inclusion.</li><li>• <b>Isolation Among Teachers:</b> Limited collaboration opportunities across disciplines or schools.</li><li>• <b>Desire for Fun:</b> Elementary school teachers yearned for the return of fun and flexibility in classrooms, essential for fostering inclusive environments.</li></ul>
Fear and Uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Fear of Retribution:</b> Apprehension on issues of race, gender, and inclusion, fearing potential job-related consequences.</li><li>• <b>Legal and Policy Confusion:</b> House Bill 261, created ambiguity. Clarification needed on boundaries for classroom discussions.</li><li>• <b>External Legislative Pressures:</b> Socio-political tensions put teachers in a precarious position, further complicating their work.</li></ul>
Pedagogical Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ELA Curriculum:</b> While the new language arts curriculum could foster multicultural understanding, rigid pacing requirements hindered deeper exploration.</li><li>• <b>Trauma-Informed Practices:</b> Concerns emerged about mandated materials that were not trauma-informed, negatively affecting vulnerable students.</li><li>• <b>Fear of Using Supplemental Materials:</b> Teachers felt constrained by DSD policies, fearing repercussions for using external resources, even when beneficial.</li></ul>

“It'd be amazing if there were just teachers talking and doing ...trying to come up with new things, with a new curriculum....”

“This is my last year of teaching because I just can't deal with all of it anymore. ...Always having to pick and choose which part of the curriculum is safe to teach.”

“What can we say without getting the parents mad, about the parents calling in the district, without getting sued?”

“We're so worried about using the wrong term, so we just take them out altogether.

“A lot of the things I have done in the past I am afraid to do now,”

“One toe over one line with the wrong parent is going to find me in front of the board, the superintendency. I've seen parents ruin people's careers; ...and reputations.”

“I'm not against CKLA...We need a little bit of flexibility and the time with the curriculum to be able to teach SEL.



# Teachers' voices (3/5)

## Resources and support

Professional Development Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Compliance-Focused Training:</b> Teachers reported that training primarily focused on what to say, what not to say, and how to report incidents, with little depth on culturally responsive teaching strategies.</li><li>• <b>Need for Proactive Strategies:</b> Teachers want robust, ongoing professional development to address inclusion beyond reactive measures.</li><li>• <b>Mixed Effectiveness:</b> Some professional development, such as reporting protocols, was seen as helpful, but teachers need for year-round support.</li></ul>
Teacher Burnout and Psychological Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Exhaustion from Lack of Support:</b> Teachers reported significant psychological fatigue due to limited DSD support and the high demands of inclusivity efforts.</li><li>• <b>Overemphasis on Academic Standards:</b> Rigid academic pacing left little room for flexibility, creativity, or addressing students' social-emotional needs.</li></ul>

“Some of the people, like the aides who don't go to all of those trainings, I think they need it,... there's hardly any [training] ...and they're kind of getting lost...”  
“Our district is good at providing a lot of training. It's not always applicable, I do think they're trying. ...I wish that everybody would have been invited to attend, The district has so many resources. Let's get it out to everybody.”  
“I think it's a compliance thing right now. We do the training. We sit through the training, we sign that we've done the training, and it stops there. ...It's a checkmark, that we did it.”  
“I do think our district could do a better job of supporting teachers when an OEO incident happens...I don't feel they are as helpful towards teachers as they have been towards students...”  
“I think the district could be better to help us as teachers be able to communicate with these parents, ...”

# Teachers' voices (4/5)

## Awareness of Policies and Procedures and Reporting: Effectiveness of belonging and inclusion district efforts

Ineffective Communication,  
Policy Clarity and Reporting  
challenges

- **Inconsistent Messaging:** Discrepancies between district directives and classroom needs leads to inaction and confusion.
- **Hesitation to Participate:** Some teachers were too fearful to attend focus groups, perceiving them as punitive. Linked to a lack of trust in DSD from perceived district surveillance.
- **Lack of Feedback on Reports:** Teachers expressed frustration over slow response times and limited follow-up on harassment and discrimination reports.

“I feel...we have been taught how to document and the words and all this [...] but what are we doing to change that environment?”

“A big part of this micromanaging is coming from trying to meet all of these policies, all of these laws, and trying to avoid issues that would be a violation or would cause more issues with the DOJ.”

“I have to help write these OEO reports that we get. And it is time-consuming. I get why we have to do it, and we have to follow through the right steps. ...And it ended up being that the word was nerd. These students don't know [...]. So, I spent three hours of my time doing all of this paperwork, because even though he said nerd, I still had to fill out the OEO report because he had claimed that he was getting the N word said to him. It is super time consuming for admin and behavior specialists....sometimes it's not even worth the report.”

“You guys seem well versed in your school's reporting. I have no idea. That's not something that we talk about. I would have to ask, at this point, if that happened in my classroom, ‘what do I do?’ And I don't know how that is dealt with.”

# Teachers' voices (5/5)

## Effectiveness in addressing racism, discrimination, bullying, and harassment

Inequities in Teacher and Student Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disparate Support: Teachers in schools with more diverse populations felt unsupported in addressing racial issues, while others struggled to approach such topics in less diverse settings.</li><li>• Exclusion of Arts: Academic pacing demands eliminated opportunities for creative, inclusive activities like painting and storytelling.</li><li>• Bullying and Harassment: Younger teachers or those vocal on racial issues reported non-racialized bullying and harassment within DSD.</li></ul>
<b>Role of Parents and Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community Barriers: Teachers identified a disconnect between school efforts and practices at home, complicating classroom dynamics.</li><li>• Parental Engagement: Greater collaboration with parents was suggested to align messaging and foster inclusive environments.</li><li>• <b>Community and Family Barriers:</b> Teachers emphasized the challenges posed by a lack of inclusivity and understanding in students' homes.</li></ul>

“[We go] from zero to 60. I feel some kid says something that he doesn't even know is racist. [...] And we go from here to suspension, and I'm like, wait a second. Let's give him a lesson. Let's teach them, because usually a lot of people don't really know what they're saying. [...] So that's where I come in as a teacher and go, ‘This is what you said, this is how it's perceived. This is how it made him feel, or her feel, right? We've skipped the whole learning. [...] and they have no idea the word they just said, or because we never say it, right? They don't even know what the word is. [...] But we go from zero to 60 without the teachable moment.”

“Why wouldn't you want a mature adult having these conversations rather than sending them to have that conversation with their friends, which you know they're going to have?”

“I wish we could get more parents in the schools to be able to have maybe a more realistic perspective, more cross-talk, more connection....Maybe there's just a disconnection between teachers and parents.... I feel like that a lot of time. It's parents versus teachers instead of collaboration. “

“You don't know what these kids are hearing at home, people have really strong feelings, on opposite ends.”

“In our school, we have so many OEO reports of racial slurs, it is ridiculous.”

“As soon as you tell a student not to say something, they say it.”

“You put a spotlight on it, and it becomes more of an issue than it needs to be.”

“We've never talked to our kids about why it's wrong. We never tell them why the N word shouldn't be used. We just say, ‘don't say it.’”

# Teachers' Voices on Future Directions

- **Inclusion in Decision-Making**

- Teachers expressed a desire to be actively included in belonging and inclusion efforts as valued team members, emphasizing trust in their professional expertise, care, and dedication to their students.

- **Strengthening School-District Connections**

- Teachers highlighted the need for more substantial alignment between schools and the district, including a sense that district leaders are aware of classroom realities and that teachers are informed about district resources and initiatives available to their schools.

- **Clarity and Support in Planning**

- Teachers called for an organized and coherent plan with clear expectations and support for implementing belonging and inclusion practices. They want to avoid punitive responses and instead be recognized as frontline practitioners essential to this work.

- **Proactive Leadership and Community Engagement**

- Teachers envision district administrators proactively promoting positive messaging and fostering stronger relationships with the community. This includes using clear language, setting boundaries for the work, and effectively communicating its significance to teachers and the broader community.

# Exit Ticket: Specific Actions



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**Exit Ticket Question 3: What specific actions would you like to see from Davis School District leadership to strengthen trust between staff and district leadership around the work of belonging?**

Trust and support teachers

DSD leadership spending more time in schools

Approved curriculum, verbiage and books (or other tools) to teach effectively.

Parent engagement and community outreach

Guidance, standards and consistency

Continuity of belonging and inclusion initiatives

*Source:* Exit Ticket worksheet