

Summit Hill School District 161

Equity Audit Update

9.8.2022

As the final equity audit report becomes available, we are happy to share additional information pertaining to the District 161 equity study that took place during the 2021-2022 school year. Please review the following information to learn more about the equity study process.

What is the goal?

The goal is to ensure we have schools where all students feel safe, valued, heard, and challenged. Through our work with equity, we hope to build a sense of acceptance, belonging, and community throughout our entire district.

When did this originate?

The equity audit process was brought forth to the Board of Education at an annual planning session (special meeting) on March 10, 2021.

The Board of Education reviewed new business regarding the equity audit process at a regular meeting on March 17, 2021. A yearlong process was approved.

The Board of Education heard updates on the equity audit at regular meetings on May 19, 2021, October 20, 2021, and May 18, 2022.

Is the Illinois State Board of Education requiring this?

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recently released a three-year strategic plan identifying goals and priorities for 2020-2023. ISBE states, "Equity underlies every strategy and goal in this strategic plan. Formalizing the role of equity in decision-making and evaluation of success also serves as its own goal. The strategies under this goal seek to operationalize equity in the agency and in each school district so that we truly move the needle toward equitable student outcomes in our state."

To summarize the importance of this goal, ISBE has also identified the following statement on equity, "Illinois has an urgent and collective responsibility to achieve educational equity by ensuring that all policies, programs, and practices affirm the strengths that each and every child brings within their diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and by delivering the comprehensive supports, programs, and educational opportunities they need to succeed."

The strategic plan further identifies the following external goal: An Equity Journey Continuum will be used to publicly indicate where each Illinois school district is on its equity journey. This will be incorporated into each district's public Report Card by the 2022 reporting year.

**By end of the
2020-21 school year**

An Equity Journey Continuum will be developed for the field and the agency to pilot.

**By end of the
2021-22 school year**

Districts will pilot and provide feedback with the continuum being finalized at the end of the school year.

**By end of the
2022-23 school year**

The Equity Journey Continuum will be published on each school district's 2022 Report Card.

What is an equity audit?

An equity audit will provide baseline information about where we currently are and where we need to go in our equity journey, we have conducted an equity audit with an external consulting firm. This was a yearlong process; however, our equity work will be ongoing. With the help of the consultant, we engaged the stakeholders of Summit Hill School District 161 in several focus groups. The consultant also analyzed quantitative data provide by the District. This data includes attendance, demographic data, academic programming, student discipline, assessment data, etc. This was a fact-finding process that aids in the development of tangible recommendations to mitigate inequities.

What is the benefit of utilizing a third-party?

Collaborating with an independent consultant allows the District to gain unbiased information on this topic. The consultant has extensive expertise in the area of equity and has worked in other local school districts.

What is a focus group?

The purpose of a focus group is to learn from individual experiences in school so we may celebrate what we are doing well and determine areas where we may wish to grow. Focus groups were facilitated by our consultant. This allowed stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback about their experiences with equity in our school(s)/district.

A series of five to eight questions were asked and a discussion took place. The consultant led each focus group by asking participants to respond to open-ended questions for approximately one hour. Participation was voluntary. The consultant scribed responses to capture stakeholder input, but names were not aligned to statements to maintain confidentiality. A total of eighteen focus group sessions took place.

Were students involved?

Focus groups took place in 5th-8th grades with a limited number of participants. Two student sessions took place at Summit Hill Jr. High and two sessions at Walker Intermediate. Students/parents had to sign-up in order to participate - - this was not a school-wide activity. For the student sessions, a Summit Hill 161 teacher supervised and monitored the groups.

What questions were asked?

A series of five to eight questions were asked and discussion took place. In general, the questions revolved around an individual's perspective and lived experiences about feeling welcome, included, and valued. Participants responded based upon their interactions within the school and district.

Some of the **student** questions included: What do you like about your school? What would you change about your school? Do you see yourself reflected in assignments? In what ways have adults asked for your input?

Some of the **family** questions included: What comes to mind when you hear equity? What do you like about your child's school? What would you change about your child's school? Do you feel your child and family are represented in the curriculum?

Some of the **staff** questions included: How do you define equity? In what ways has your school engaged in conversations about identity? How have students been affirmed? Are you treated equitably?

What is Critical Race Theory (CRT) vs. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading (CRTL) Standards?

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is not a curriculum; it is more of a practice. CRT is a complex framework that examines if, and how, systems and policies perpetuate racism.

District 161 is not exploring CRT.

The Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading (CRTL) Standards have been adopted by Illinois. They require teacher training programs (colleges and universities) to incorporate concepts such as implicit bias, inequity, advocacy, and social-emotional development into educator training coursework.

District 161 values the experience of all of our students and are committed to making learning relevant for our students.

What is the District Equity Leadership Team?

The District Equity Leadership Team (DELT) is a committee comprised of approximately 40 staff members, including the superintendent, several district and school administrators, teachers, and staff members. The DELT is open to any staff member. It is recommended to include staff members that work with special populations such as English Learners and students with an IEP. There is no special training required to be a member of the DELT.

On August 16, 2021, a DELT meeting was facilitated by the consultant. This was an organizational meeting to determine the logistics of the equity audit – general overview, make-up of focus groups, and determine questions that will be asked. During this initial year, the DELT formally met with the consultant one time. The DELT will be instrumental in future years to interpret the audit information and formulate next steps.

What units of study are currently mandated by ISBE?

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) maintains a list of Illinois Instructional Mandates for all schools across the state. The last update was published on July 18, 2022. It is typical to see an annual update reflecting new legislation.

This is a guidance tool to help schools and districts identify the areas of study that are mandated by the Illinois School Code and the Illinois Administrative Code. Statutory and regulatory references are included for all curriculum areas and should be reviewed carefully to ensure that schools are meeting all requirements.

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IL-Mandated-Units-of-Study.pdf>

What are the next steps?

The final equity audit report will be shared with the Board of Education, DELT, and posted online for our school community. With input from the DELT, the findings within the report will be prioritized and an equity action plan will be created. The equity action plan will be shared with our stakeholders. This will be an ongoing process... priorities will shift as we continue our equity journey.

