

Frequently Asked Questions for Equity and Inclusion

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

What is “equity” as it relates to education?

Equity in education is a measure of access and opportunity. It does not mean the outcomes for all students are similar. In an equitable system, all students are provided with what they need to be successful in school which serves as a springboard to success in college, career and life. As such, providing equitable access to learning opportunities in schools is essential to meeting the mission and vision of the Chandler Unified School District.

What is an inclusive learning environment?

Educational research shows student success is linked to their feeling of value, respect and a culture of belonging. The desired outcome for Chandler Unified School District is a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students and staff.

Why is equity a focus for Chandler Unified School District?

Chandler Unified School District (CUSD) is one of the best school districts in the State.

Niche.com announced on August 8, 2019, that CUSD is the top-ranked school district in the metropolitan Phoenix area. The 2020 Best School Districts ranking is based on rigorous analysis of key statistics and millions of reviews from students and parents using data from the U.S. Department of Education. Ranking factors include state test scores, college readiness, graduation rates, SAT/ACT scores, teacher quality, public school district ratings, and more. All 43 CUSD schools graded by Niche.com earned either an "A" or "B" grade, and 79% of those earned an A+, A or A-.

Although CUSD ranks at the top in multiple measures of success, the student performance data identifies individual and groups of students who are not performing academically at the same rate as their peers. A primary focus of this initiative is to identify and eliminate barriers and provide support, so ALL students have equitable access to resources, programs, and learning opportunities.

Is equity a new trend in public education?

Equity in education is not new and it is not a passing phase. The mission of CUSD - **to empower ALL students with the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to excel in college, career and life** – has been in place more than twenty years. The District vision states our diverse population is a strength, and a spirit of equity, collaboration and respect permeates our community. One of Chandler Unified School District’s long-standing core values is equity.

In 2010, the Governing Board created a ten-year strategic plan outlining specific goals and metrics to measure the District's progress using available data. In 2015, the Governing Board updated the strategic plan, Journey 2025, to include specific measures related to student groups who were underperforming.

In 2015, the District created a Culture Committee and began a proactive kindness campaign to impact the climate and culture of schools and departments. "A Place at Our Table", a video depicting an inclusive environment, was disseminated to all staff promoting the message of inclusiveness to internal and external stakeholders. In July 2018, the Governing Board hired a Director of Equity and Inclusion to guide and support this initiative.

If equity is not new, why does it seem to be a priority in public education and specifically in the Chandler Unified School District?

There are three primary reasons that equity and inclusion are areas of focus.

First, there has been a significant demographic shift in the United States, Arizona and in Chandler. The diversity of the students and families in Chandler is evidenced in a number of areas.

- Increased variety of religious backgrounds, family backgrounds, and life experiences
- 170 different languages
- Increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population
- Increased awareness of sexual and gender identities
- Increased numbers of students with mental health needs
- Increased numbers of students requiring specialized educational services

Second, enhanced access to data has been a powerful resource in analyzing student and school performance data through an equity lens. In January of 2018, our Governing Board held a study session to review student achievement and discipline data within the District.

[January 2018 Study Session Presentation](#)

Third, District data reveals discrepancies in academic success by subgroups. The disproportionate academic success rates for students with disabilities, non-English speakers, students living in poverty, and historically marginalized students is mirrored throughout the United States and has been consistent over decades. The issues are complex, and finding a solution is a daunting task. However, the Governing Board has charged school administration and staff with becoming the best school district in the nation. Admittedly, public schools cannot control all societal issues negatively impacting students, but the District is committed to making a difference in the areas we can control. **While we cannot ensure equal outcomes, we are committed to ensure that every child has equal access and opportunity for success.**

How will this targeted initiative affect the welfare of the whole student population?

The focus of this effort is not limited to reducing academic performance gaps.

- It is raising the bar for all students so that they can meet their full potential.
- It is creating environments where all students and staff feel welcomed, valued and respected.
- It is modeling how to effectively interact with individuals and groups with different backgrounds and opinions. Employers are not just looking for a workforce with demonstrated academic success in reading, writing and math. The current and future workforce must be equipped with critical thinking skills, complex decision-making and the ability to communicate and interact in a diverse community.

How will CUSD create and sustain a “safe and inclusive” learning environment?

District administration has developed a road map to use as a guide. The roadmap identifies three pathways to success: 1) institutional design 2) individual contribution; and 3) instructional strategies. There are multiple strategies under each pathway and multiple action steps under each strategy. Building a culturally responsive learning and working environment is an important component and current focus of the road map.

[Equity Road Map](#)

What is “cultural responsiveness”?

Cultural Responsiveness is the demonstrated awareness, understanding, knowledge and skills to effectively interact with individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, life experience, and cultural experiences including, but not limited to, abilities, ethnicity, gender, gender identification and orientation (LGBTQ+), nationality, race, religion and socioeconomic status.

Students and families bring deeply held belief systems to the school community. How can a parent be assured the teaching in public school does not influence their children in a manner that is inconsistent with their own beliefs?

A culturally responsive environment is one in which different values and viewpoints are respected. A teacher’s approach to personal beliefs (religious, family, political, etc.) should always be viewpoint neutral, unbiased and non-judgmental. Furthermore, public school employees are prohibited by statute from promoting their own religious or political beliefs.

Actions and beliefs are different. While in the school environment, students and staff are expected to treat others with kindness and respect regardless of opposing beliefs or viewpoints. In a safe and inclusive learning environment students’ rights are not in jeopardy but rather protected.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

What trainings have been offered/and or required to help ensure equitable access and opportunities for students and create an inclusive learning environment?

In the 2018-2019 school year, professional development was offered to teachers and other staff in the following areas:

- Tone and Trust – Building a Respectful Learning Climate
- Implementation of Accommodation Plans (504)
- Suicide Prevention Awareness
- Anxiety/Depression
- Trauma Sensitive Classrooms
- Multi-Tiered System of Support
- Welcoming School Environment
- Family Engagement
- Instructional strategies for English Language Learners
- Positive Behavior Strategies
- Journey 2025 strategic plans

In the 2019-2020 school year, professional development has been (or will be) offered to teachers and other staff in the following areas:

- Tone and Trust, Culturally Responsive Teaching
- High Engagement Instructional Strategies
- Suicide Prevention Awareness
- Anxiety/Depression
- Trauma Sensitive Classrooms
- Multi-Tiered System of Support
- Welcoming School Environment
- Family Engagement
- Special Education for the General Education Teacher
- Academic intervention programs
- Social Emotional Curriculum

How were vendors selected to be used for Equity and Inclusion training?

The monetary amount required to train a large district of more than 5000 employees and 45 sites resulted in a need to send out a formal request for proposals (RFP). The professional development department created parameters for the proposal outlining our needs regarding professional development, population, and expectations related to resources and technology. The request for proposal was processed through the purchasing department and posted on AZPurchasing.org for notice. Thirty-four school districts utilize this site to post bids. Vendors view the posting and respond to the request. Once all proposals were received, a committee of employees, parents, and community members reviewed the proposals and provided feedback. The committee scored each proposal based on an established rubric. Final awards were approved at a Governing Board Meeting. Three vendors were approved for the District to access for initial training: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Corwin, and Human Service Development Collaborative.

Who chose the selection committee for the Request for Proposal?

District leadership invited staff, parents and community members to participate on the committee.

What is Deep Equity?

The District utilized selected portions of the Corwin Deep Equity training for teacher training. The stated purpose of the Deep Equity training is “teaching and leading in such a way that more of our students, across more of their differences, are achieving at a higher level, and engaging at a deeper level, more of the time. In this way, Deep Equity is about serving ALL students in a way that closes education gaps, including those based on poverty, race, language, and special needs. Eliminating these educational disparities is a priority that school districts throughout the country are working on.”

Do you plan to continue to use Deep Equity?

No. As is the CUSD practice with most initiatives, the District builds the capacity of its own staff to develop training to meet current and long-term needs and to replicate professional development for the future. It was never the District’s intent to use an outside vendor for ongoing training. The district is currently focused on developing cultural competency modules for all staff and comprehensive training for teachers on equitable classroom practices.

[Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Checklist](#)

How much money has the District paid Corwin for the Deep Equity training?

The cost of teacher training was less than \$450,000 for more than 2800 administrative, certified and support staff, including training costs, training resources, and substitute teachers. The district offset the cost of training by utilizing grants specifically earmarked for social/emotional learning, safe schools and professional development.

In response to the Request for Proposal, the Governing Board allocated an amount not to exceed \$2 million dollars to be used for equity and inclusion training over the next five years.

I have viewed Deep Equity material on Corwin’s website. Did CUSD use all these materials in the teacher trainings?

No. The District selected topics that best met the needs of its staff. Using a train-the-trainer model, the District training focused primarily on Tone and Trust with more limited activities from Personal Culture and Culturally Responsive Practices.

Student Resources

Is there any curriculum used with the students related specifically to Equity and Inclusion?

The only curriculum related to equity and inclusion used with our students is the adopted Social Emotional Cognitive Curriculum.

- Elementary: Caring Schools Community, Second Step
- Secondary: Nearpod, Responsive Classroom, Second Step

Curriculum can be viewed by appointment at the Melinda Romero Instructional Resource Center located at 500 W. Galveston, Chandler, Arizona.

Is there a component of Deep Equity for students?

Yes. The Youth Equity Stewardship (YES) program is a voluntary program developed for high school students. The stated purpose of the Deep Equity Youth Equity Stewardship program is to empower “students with lifelong skills that deepen relationships across differences, nurture their creative expression and cultivate their stewardship qualities.”

How were participants selected and what type of activities have some of the students participated in?

CUSD began piloting the program in the first quarter of the 2018-2019 school year with 85 high school students. Sixty-seven students have continued to participate during the 2019-2020 school year. No new students were added this school year.

Site administrators, counselors and teachers recommended students to represent the diverse population based upon age, grade level, ethnicity and leadership. Meetings were then held with each student by an administrator and/or counselor to introduce them to the program. Permission slips and program information were sent home to parents before interested students were allowed to participate in the program.

There were five trainings in 2018-2019. Three trainings were scheduled for 2019-2020. (The two remaining trainings for this year will be developed and led by District leaders.) On an optional, voluntary basis, a few students participated in other activities such as the 2019 summer symposium, student panels at staff faculty meetings, and school-based cultural day events and assemblies.

Is the District going to continue to use the Deep Equity YES material and trainers?

No. The Deep Equity YES material and trainers have been discontinued. As is the CUSD practice with most initiatives, the district develops in house programs to meet current and long-term needs. School and district administrators are working together to restructure the voluntary student program aligned with the District goal to build a safe and inclusive learning environment.

How will students be involved in the District goal to build a culturally responsive learning environment?

The on-campus staff leaders have been working with District administration to restructure the student initiative by:

- Establishing a mission and vision to guide the initiative
- Being a voice for all students on their campus in relation to the student perception survey
- Identifying outcomes as it relates to the district strategic plan
- Developing skills to facilitate conversations among their peers and to communicate knowledge to site leadership
- Choosing a name for the program that aligns with the mission and vision

For the 2019-2020 school year, this program will not be operated as a student-led club but a school-sponsored initiative. Participation will continue to be limited to the high school and will be voluntary.

Equity and Inclusion Initiative Going Forward

Will the District continue to prioritize its efforts to provide equitable learning opportunities for students in a safe and inclusive learning environment?

Yes. The District has not wavered from its commitment to provide equitable learning opportunities for students in a safe and inclusive environment. All efforts will be aligned to the Governing Board’s strategic plan and measured by related metrics.

I am part of the Chandler Unified School District community (resident, parent or staff member), how can I provide input regarding the equity and inclusion initiative moving forward?

The District will be hosting round table events to allow members of the Chandler Unified School District community to review the road map and provide input as we move forward. Tentative dates are Thursday, February 6, 2020, or Tuesday, February 18, 2020, from 5 to 7 p.m. After the dates are confirmed, an invitation will be posted on the Equity and Inclusion website.