EDUCATION EQUITY POLICY IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Prepared for Douglas County School District

March 2023

OVERVIEW

In this report, Hanover Research (Hanover) presents the results of the Educational Equity Policy Implementation Survey conducted on behalf of Douglas County School District (DCSD).

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Identify what DCSD stakeholders want to see happen, and not happen, with the implementation of Board Policy ADB.

- Identify what positive impact on staff and students DCSD stakeholders want to see from implementation of Board Policy ADB.

- Determine the questions and/or concerns that DCSD stakeholders have regarding Board Policy ADB and the potential impact on students and staff.

- Determine which metrics DCSD stakeholders want to see used to measure the impact of implementation of Board Policy ADB on students and staff.

- Understand the recommendations that DCSD stakeholders propose DCSD leadership consider in terms of the implementation of Board Policy ADB.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION & SURVEY SAMPLE

- The survey was administered online in February 2023 via the Qualtrics online survey platform.

- Respondents were recruited via an open link.

- The analysis includes 3,970 respondents following data cleaning.

- This report primarily presents aggregate results.

RESPONDENT QUALIFICATIONS

- Must be a student, parent of a student, staff member, or community member at DCSD.

METHODOLOGY

- After data collection, Hanover identified and removed low-quality respondents.

- Sample sizes vary across questions as some questions only pertain to a subset of respondents.

- Conclusions drawn from a small sample size (n<20) should be interpreted with caution.

- For full aggregate and segmented results, please consult the accompanying data supplement.

- "Don't Know or Not Applicable" responses, and equivalent, are often excluded from the figures and analysis to focus on respondents who did express an opinion.

- Some response options have been abridged for clarity. A dagger symbol "†" designates an abbreviated response. Please see the accompanying data supplement for full response text.

- Data labels for values less than 4% are removed from some figures to improve legibility.

SURVEY SAMPLE

Which of the following best describes your relationship with DCSD? If you are both a parent and a staff member, please select your role as a staff member. (n=3970)
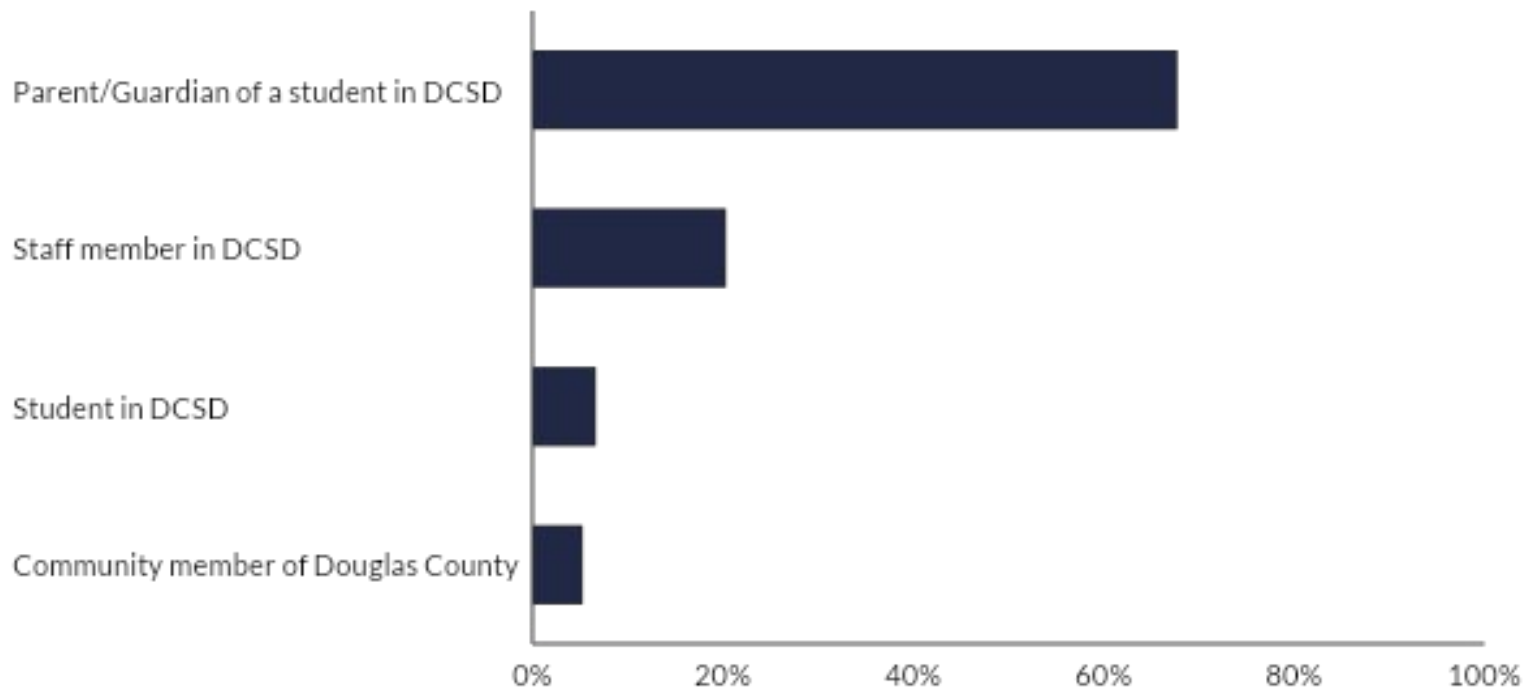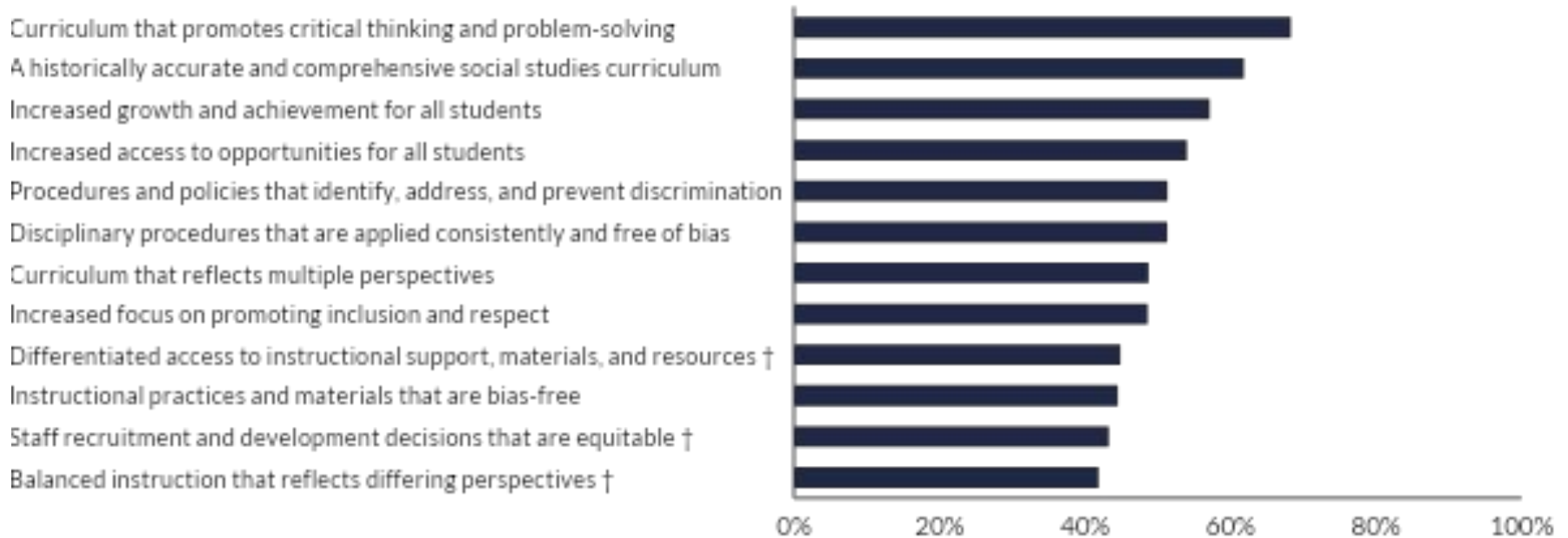
KEY FINDINGS: RESULTS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

More than two-thirds of respondents hope that a curriculum that promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills will result from the implementation of the Board Policy ADB. Many respondents also hope for a historically accurate and comprehensive social studies curriculum (62%) and increased growth and achievement for all students (57%). The closing of subgroup achievement gaps (30%) and equal opportunities for all students (27%) are less important to respondents.

However, students (50%) are more likely than staff (36%) and parents (22%) to hope that *equal outcomes for all students* will result from the implementation of Board Policy ADB.

What do you hope will result from the implementation of Board Policy ADB? Please select all that apply. (n=3970)

DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT EQUITY FOCUS GROUPS

Note: This figure presents the top 12 answer options. "†" indicates that the text was truncated for brevity. Please see the accompanying data supplement for full results.
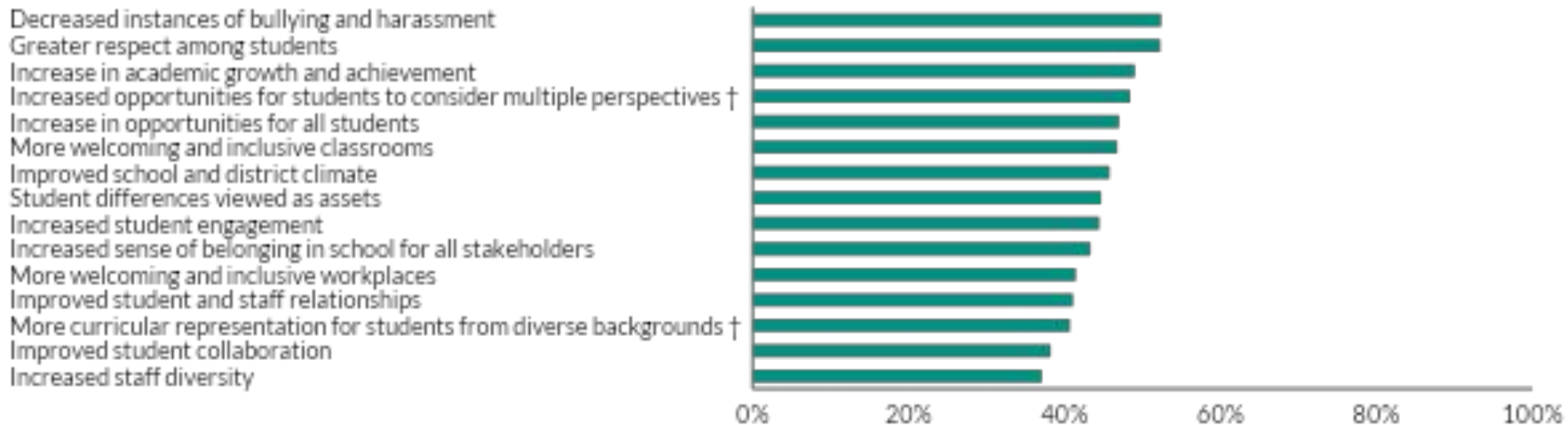
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KEY FINDINGS: EFFECTS ON STUDENTS AND STAFF

Just over half of respondents indicate that the implementation of Board Policy ADB may lead to a decrease in instances of bullying and harassment and greater respect among students. Further, nearly half of respondents report that the implementation of the policy might lead to an increase in academic growth and achievement (49%) and increased opportunities for students to consider ideas from multiple perspectives (48%). However, respondents are less likely to report that the new policy may lead to the elimination of achievement gaps (26%). About 16% of respondents think that the implementation of the policy will have no positive effects on students and staff.

School administrators (76%) are more likely than instructional certified staff (61%) to report that the implementation of the policy will lead to *decreased instances of bullying and harassment.*

Parents (20%) are much more likely than staff (5%) to indicate that the implementation of the policy will have no positive effects on students and staff.

What positive effects might the implementation of Board Policy ADB have on students and staff? Please select all that apply. (n=3970)

Decreased instances of bullying and harassment
Greater respect among students
Increase in academic growth and achievement
Increased opportunities for students to consider multiple perspectives †
Increase in opportunities for all students
More welcoming and inclusive classrooms
Improved school and district climate
Student differences viewed as assets
Increased student engagement
Increased sense of belonging in school for all stakeholders
More welcoming and inclusive workplaces
Improved student and staff relationships
More curricular representation for students from diverse backgrounds †
Improved student collaboration
Increased staff diversity

DOUGLAS COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT
EQUITY FOCUS GROUPS

Note: This figure presents the top 15 answer options. "†" indicates that the text was truncated for brevity. Please see the accompanying data supplement for full results.

Regarding the implementation of Board Policy ADB, respondents are most concerned about the politicization of the school curriculum and school environment. In fact, more than half of respondents indicate that they have these concerns (59%). Further, 42% of respondents are concerned about the *reduced focus on the core academic curriculum* and 38% are concerned about *increased dysfunction in school and district culture and climate*. Respondents are less concerned about *staff discomfort with class content or discussions* (22%) as a potential result of policy implementation.

Parents (64%, 64%) are more likely than staff (51%, 50%) and students (42%, 47%) to indicate that they are concerned about the *politicization of school curriculum* and *politicization of school environment*.

Additionally, parents (43%) are more likely than staff (21%) and students (21%) to be concerned about the *introduction of age-inappropriate content*.

What, if any, concerns do you have regarding the implementation of Board Policy ADB? Please select all that apply. (n=3970)

DOUGLAS COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT
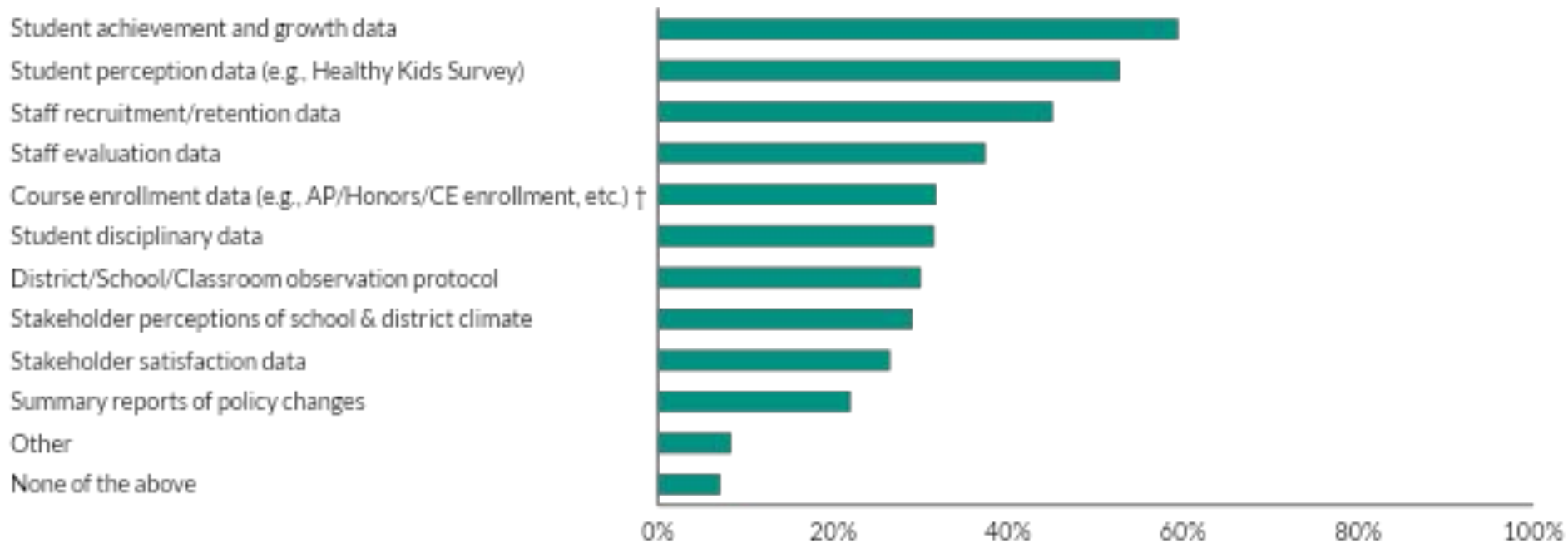EQUITY FOCUS GROUPS
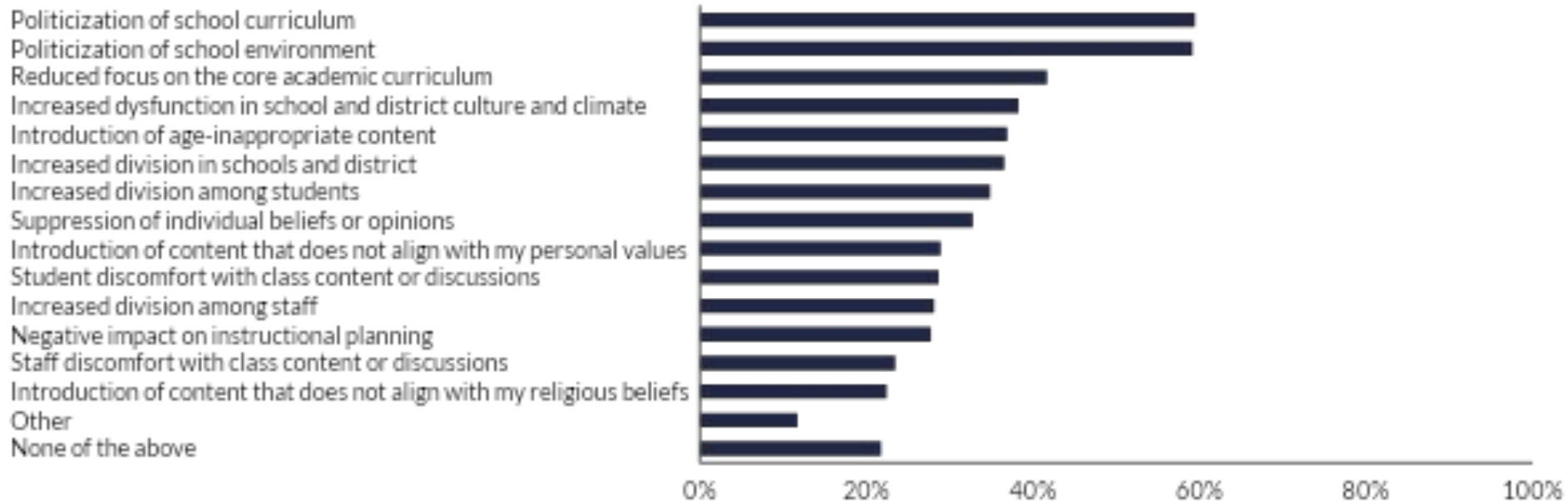
KEY FINDINGS: METRICS TO MEASURE IMPACTS

More than half of respondents indicate that DCSD should measure and evaluate the Board Policy ADB's impact on students and staff with student achievement and growth data and student perception data. Nearly half of respondents report that the district should use staff recruitment/retention data to measure and evaluate the policy's impact on students and staff (45%). Only about a quarter of respondents report that the district should use stakeholder satisfaction data (26%).

Parents (61%) are more likely than staff (55%) to report that DCSD should use student achievement and growth data to measure and evaluate the Board Policy ADB's impact on students and staff.

Additionally, staff (52%) are more likely than parents (45%) and students (30%) to indicate that the district should use staff recruitment/retention data to measure and evaluate the policy's impact on students and staff.

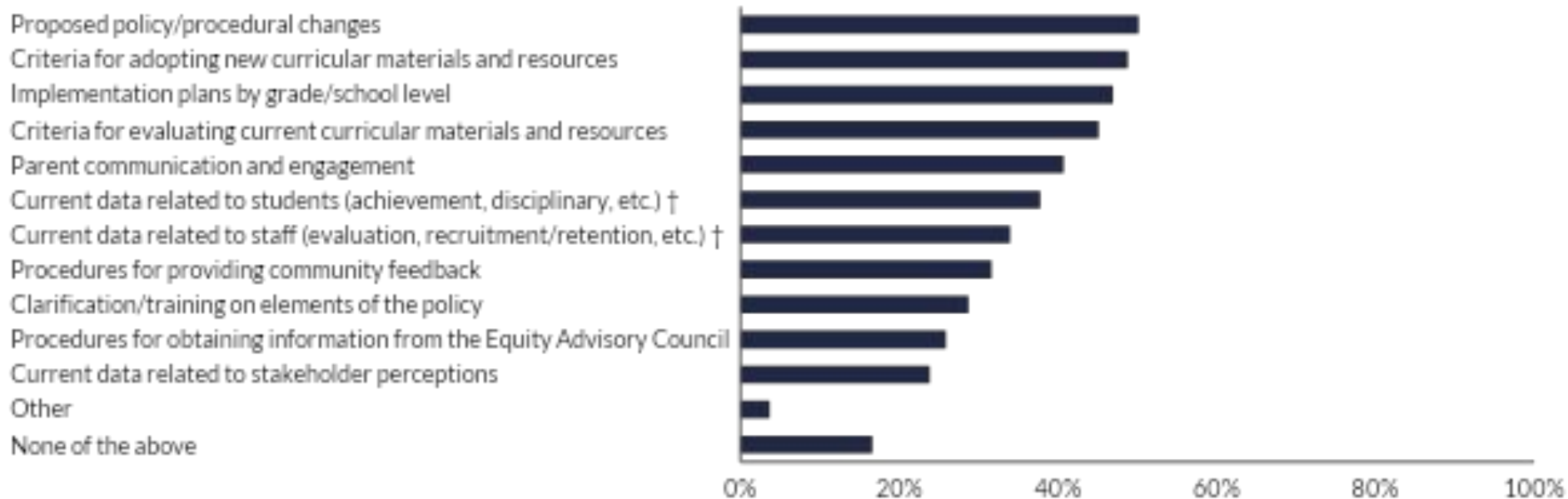How should DCSD measure and evaluate Board Policy ADB's impact on students and staff? (n=3970)

Note: "†" indicates that the text was truncated for brevity. Please see the accompanying data supplement for full results.

KEY FINDINGS: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Approximately half of respondents report that they would like to receive additional information about proposed policy/procedural changes and criteria for adopting new curricular materials and resources. Further, nearly half of respondents would like additional information about the implementation plans by grade/school level (47%) and the criteria for evaluating current curricular materials and resources (45%). Only about a quarter of respondents are interested in receiving additional information about the procedures for obtaining information from the Equity Advisory Council (26%) and the current data related to stakeholder perceptions (24%).

It is more likely for parents than it is for staff and students to want additional information in almost all surveyed areas. For example, parents (56%) are more likely than staff (41%) and students (31%) to want to receive additional information in proposed policy/procedural changes.

In which of the following areas related to Board Policy ADB would you like to receive additional information? (n=3970)

Note: "†" indicates that the text was truncated for brevity. Please see the accompanying data supplement for full results.

EQUITY FOCUS GROUPS

Prepared For: Douglas County School District

March 2023

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

In March 2021, Douglas County School District (DCSD) passed an educational equity policy titled Board Policy ADB. DCSD partnered with Hanover Research to better understand its school community members' needs and perceptions regarding the recently passed educational equity policy.

✔ **Understand** perceptions of potential impact that implementation of the policy could have on students and staff.

✔ **Explore** the DCSD community's questions and concerns regarding the policy and its potential impact on students and staff.

✔ **Determine** what metrics DCSD leadership should consider in terms of the implementation of the policy.

METHODOLOGY

Hanover Research conducted **ten (10) focus groups** with 74 total individuals including students, community members, staff, employees, and committee/council group members.

Note:

Qualitative research is exploratory and designed to add insight and a depth of understanding to a particular question or topic. Qualitative findings provide commonalities and trends but are not intended to be statistically significant or to provide generalizable conclusions.

KEY FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF POLICY

- **Perspectives vary about the educational equity policy within the school district that houses more than 370,000 constituents.** Overall perceptions of the policy align with the following themes: inclusive, ambiguous, a starting point, and purpose.

- **DCSD's educational equity policy is praised for its inclusivity and definitions of key terms, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion.** Participants perceive the terms as clarifying the purpose of these efforts in the district's schools.

- **DCSD constituents find the equity policy ambiguous and lacking specific language required to define and outline processes, particularly for addressing violations and implementation plans.** Community input and involvement are highly valued, with participants calling for the school district to lead action planning for implementation.

- **Participants see this policy as a standard equity policy and wonder why the policy was not implemented district-wide before.** Participants perceive the policy as a starting point to align the DCSD community on these topics.

- **DCSD constituents express varying opinions about the policy's purpose.** Numerous participants perceive the policy as an essential measure, highlighting the importance of establishing a standardized policy framework that upholds the fundamental values and critical services required for the benefit of students in Douglas County.

KEY FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF ED EQUITY

- **Feelings of misalignment and confusion develop in the school district due to varying definitions and understandings about diversity, equity, and inclusion.** These definitions are perceived to be influenced by individual experiences.

- **Participants perceive open enrollment, programming resources, and fundraising capabilities to be inequitable in Douglas County.** Participants perceive these areas as causing the siloing of resources, students, staff, and funding, which negatively impacts minority groups.

- **Douglas County schools are perceived to be missing faculty and staff that represent the changing population of the overall county.** Participants suggest this creates a less-than-welcoming environment for some student groups.

- **Many community members and students highlight concerns with the reporting structures within the school district**. This lack of trust in the accountability of the administration frustrates students.

- **Participants across groups cite historical inaction within the district.** As a result, many are not confident that the educational equity policy will be effectively implemented.

- **Many Douglas County students have experience with inequities in school.** Some are faced with more direct forms of discrimination while others experience more subtle microaggressions.

KEY FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION

- **Many participants have concerns that national narratives, politics, misinformation, and misunderstands might influence the school district's decisions around implementation.** The groups of community members were especially apprehensive that their voices were going to be overlooked or ignored.

- **Students acknowledge the importance of a reporting structures within the school district's implementation plan.** Currently, many do not trust these structures because they have not supported them in the past, causing them to feel ignored or disregarded.

- **Many participants acknowledge the importance of the district recognizing and endorsing the policy.** Without district support, participants feel it will be hard to enforce the policy in each individual school due to the district's overall size.

KEY FINDINGS: METRICS

- **Student and staff groups suggest tracking longitudinal achievement rates to ensure equitable treatment of students.** Some areas of interest include testing and assessment data, achievement rates and gaps, and retention and graduation rates.

- **A variety of groups propose looking into disciplinary trends to see if there are any disparities between certain races, ethnicities, or genders.** Many believe that making this data more easily and readily available to DCSD constituents would help increase visibility into some of the trends within the schools.

- **Many participants across groups acknowledge the importance of providing students with consistent space to make their voices heard.** According to participants, qualitative and anecdotal data will provide the means for students to share their personal experiences and stories in ways that surveys may not otherwise capture.

- **Community members, in addition to those within the schools, want to be kept in the loop about any changes and updates.** Community members desire an increase in transparency and communication from the school district regarding the results of annual surveys and data collection regardless of the topic, but especially related equity.

OVERALL PERSPECTIVES

Douglas County is home to more than **370,000**[1] people, of which **63,000**[2] **are students.** DCSD offers a variety of programs and resources across the county. As such, **perspectives of the educational equity policy vary among participants. Overall, perceptions of the policy align with the following:**

Inclusive Language

- *Comprehensive language*
- *Definitions of equity related terms*

Ambiguous Phrasing

- *Missing processes and plans*
- *Lack of defined action items*

Starting Point

- *Baseline standard policy*
- *Room for continued development*

Varied Purpose

- *Necessary step*
- *Community confusion*

PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

IMPACT OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Participants sense the greater Douglas community **defines equity in a variety of ways based upon individual perspectives and experiences**. As a result, a **misalignment and confusion about the purpose, value, and use of these ideologies within the district develops**.

STUDENTS CRAVE DIVERSE CURRICULA

Students desire **curricula that is culturally diverse**. Most students referenced their **history classes as spaces** for these lessons and conversations to occur.

While students recognize that some opportunities are available, the opportunities are often inaccessible, not well advertised, or students are dissuaded from pursing these classes due to their perceived ability to succeed. Students feel that **teaching cultural differences will increase overall awareness and appreciation** which will, in turn, improve learning environments.

STUDENT POPULATION NOT REFLECTED IN STAFF

Students and community members perceive that the school district **lacks faculty and staff that represent the evolving population** of Douglas County. This is perceived to create an environment that is **not as welcoming for students as constituents would like it to be.**

Several DCSD students shared their experiences with inequities and discrimination. Some experience more **direct encounters with racism at school**, such as racial slurs.

Additionally, some students experience **more subtle inequities**, such as being made to feel as if their **culture is an inconvenience to their educators**.

INEQUITIES IN FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Inequities are perceived to impact funding and resources within the district. Many in the district describe the **inequitable distribution of resources which they** perceive impacts student outcomes.

Site-Based Decision Making and Open Enrollment

Parents can select which school their student attends, causing students and **resources to be siloed into certain schools which are perceived to operate independently.**

Funding for Special Needs and Gifted Programs

Participants perceive programs are **not given the necessary resources** to meet the needs of certain student groups.

Fundraising Capacity

Some schools are perceived to have a **greater capacity to fundraise**.

DISTRUST IN REPORTING PROCEDURES

Participants express many concerns about the **accountability and reporting processes in** the school district. Participants assert there are often **no known repercussions for those who violate rules**, perpetuating **negative environments for some student groups**.

The following concerns **perpetuate a lack of trust** between constituents and the district:

Political Bias

Students feel uncomfortable reporting incidents to some teachers based on political affiliations expressed in school.

Accountability

Students and community members express frustration with a lack of accountability for those who violate policies.

Communication

Constituents report poor communication from administrators following reported incidents.

PERCEIVED HISTORIC INACTION TO CONTINUE

Constituents across groups share concerns that the district will **not commit to incorporating their perspectives into actionable changes**. Primarily they are concerned because **historically their perspectives are perceived to be unheard**.

The policy recognizes the Equity Advisory Council but does not award any true decision-making power to the council, **which is perceived to negate the purpose of the council**. These factors combined cause participants to **feel frustrated and have little confidence in future DCSD equity plans.**

IMPLEMENTATION

UNIFY EDUCATION TO COMBAT MISINFORMATION
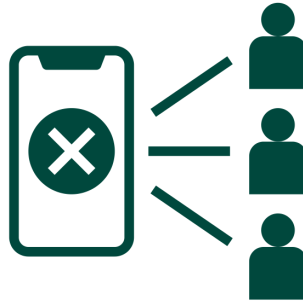
Many participants are **concerned that national narratives, politics, misinformation, and misunderstandings** could potentially influence the district's implementation decisions. To combat these concerns, the district should educate the entire Douglas community and not just those with K12-aged children.

CONTINUE TO INCLUDE STUDENTS

All focus group participants **appreciated the opportunity to voice their concerns** and opinions about the policy.

They expressed **continued interest in ensuring students can make their voices heard** as they are the ones who will be directly impacted by the implementation of the policy.

LEGITIMIZE REPORTING STRUCTURES

Participants, especially students, **acknowledge the importance of reporting structures** within the district's implementation plan. Currently, **many do not trust existing reporting structures** because they have **not felt supported in the past.** A few participants even spoke to situations in which they, as the reporters, were even targeted by others for "snitching."

"TOP-DOWN" APPROACH IS DESIRABLE

District/Superintendent

Schools/Principals

Teachers/Students
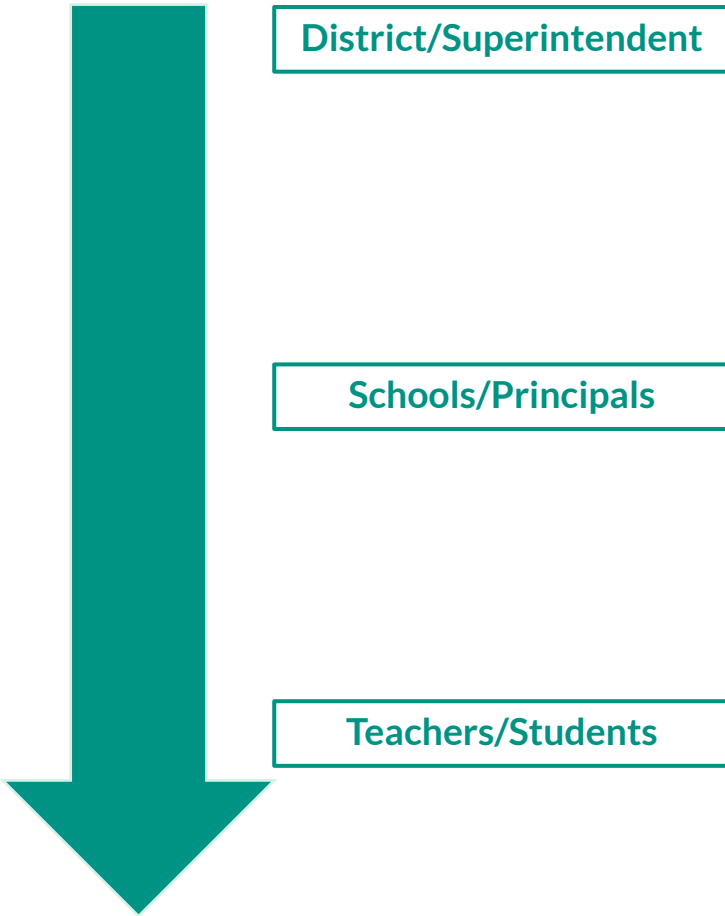
Many participants acknowledged the **importance of the district's recognition and endorsement of** the policy. They believe the district's backing will legitimize the policy as it is implemented throughout the schools.

The students, however, believe that the schools should also play an **active role** in implementation given the immense size of the district and often site-based decision-making processes.

SUPPORT FROM DISTRICT LEADERSHIP IS NECESSARY

Many participants **expressed concerns about policy support** from the district and the superintendent.

The groups of community members were **especially apprehensive that their voices were going to be overlooked or ignored** when considering implementation suggestions.

Constituents **want to be kept in the loop** throughout the implementation process and appreciated that there was a space for them in this study but hope to see continued interest in their voices. At times, they are **distrustful of the district** due to **past instances where they felt their opinions were disregarded.**


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EQUITY FOCUS GROUPS

METRICS

TRACK LONGITUDINAL ACHIEVEMENT

Student and staff groups **suggested tracking longitudinal achievement rates** to **ensure** equitable treatment of students. Possible areas of investigation include:

- Testing and assessment data

- Benchmarking school data within the district

- Achievement rates and gaps

- Retention and graduation rates

- Post-secondary success

COMPARE AND SHARE DISCIPLINARY TRENDS
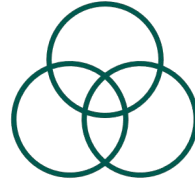
A variety of groups proposed looking into disciplinary trends to see if there are any disparities between certain races, ethnicities, or genders.

Relatedly, there should be **clear instructions for reporting procedures** as this will in turn impact the disciplinary trends and data.

Many believe that making this data more easily and readily available to constituents would help increase visibility into some of the trends within the schools. Further, it would allow the district and the community to compare schools within the district to see if there are **any noticeable differences in parts of the district or specific schools.**

STUDENT VOICES REMAIN MOST IMPORTANT

Many participants across groups **acknowledged the importance of providing students with consistent space to make their voices heard.** As one of the groups of individuals who will be directly impacted by the implementation of the policy, it is important that **the district take a regular pulse on student perceptions** of the success of these efforts.

According to participants, **qualitative and anecdotal data** will provide the means for students to share their personal experiences and stories in ways that surveys may not otherwise capture.

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION IS IDEALIZED

Community members were **especially interested** in implementation and measurement efforts.

Community members, in addition to those within the schools, want to be kept in the loop about any changes and updates. They **desire increased transparency and communication from the district** around the results of annual surveys and data collection regardless of the topic.