EDUDREAM

Champions of Educational Equity

WHAT EQUITABLE APPROACHES HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SBR?

RQ³

STANDARDS-BASED REFORM EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS

CONTENTS

ABOUT EDUDREAM

Established in 2016 and based in Chicago, EduDream is a Latina-owned education consulting firm that partners with foundations, education agencies, and nonprofits working to ensure educational equity for racially and economically diverse students. We advance our mission by providing research and program evaluation, data analytics and insights, and strategic planning. EduDream is committed to empowering communities and making research and data accessible.

OVERVIEW

This is the third report in a three-part evidence synthesis series on standards-based reform (SBR). For decades, SBR shaped education policy and spurred debates in the United States about public education, educators' practices, and student outcomes. The report series explores three research questions, and this synthesis addresses the third research question. Whereas the first two syntheses relied on *systematic literature review and meta-analysis methods*, this report is a **landscape scan of districts** that were previously identified by their states as low performing, but are now **showing positive academic shifts** for *students of color and students experiencing poverty.* Moreover, these districts are engaging in *intentional equity work* to address the unintended consequences or equity challenges that emerged during SBR.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQs)

RQ1 DID SBR ADDRESS STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION?
How did standards-based assessment and accountability reform address structural inequities in the education system? What were the successes and challenges?

RQ2 WHAT WERE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SBR, PARTICULARLY ON STUDENTS OF COLOR?
What were some of the unintended consequences (i.e., negative impact) of standards-based assessment and accountability on schools and districts serving primarily Black, Latinx, and low-income students? What pushback, if any, did standards-based assessment and accountability receive, and from whom?

RQ3 WHAT EQUITABLE APPROACHES, IF ANY, HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SBR?
Of districts previously identified as low-performing or turnaround but are now demonstrating positive academic shifts for target students (Black, Latinx, and low-income), what actions were taken to address the unintended consequences of SBR? Were equitable strategies and approaches used to address unintended consequences of SBR? If so, what are the emerging results?

APPROACH

In the Fall of 2020, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation partnered with EduDream to better understand Standards-Based Reform and its impact on United States education.

To explore research question three, we relied primarily on a website scan of publicly available data and reports. Secondary research informed our identification of the districts to include in the landscape scan.

The districts needed to meet three thresholds:

1. Identified by their states as low-performing, failing or turnaround during the late No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era;
2. Evidence of positive academic shifts for Black, Latinx or low-income students since NCLB; and
3. Evidence of intentional equity work.

Additionally, districts in three states - Florida, California and Massachusetts - were given priority because of their data availability, accountability reporting, and large proportions of priority student populations. Our methodology and approach yielded 20 districts across six states for inclusion in the landscape scan. This included districts in the states of Georgia, South Carolina and Maryland.

Next, based on our research of school improvement efforts, we identified evidence-based **drivers** (or factors) that affect student learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes, such as interpersonal relationships, course offerings and rigor, teacher diversity, and non-exclusionary disciplinary practices. We crosswalked the drivers to the **National Academies for Press (NAP) educational equity indicators** (see Table 1), and then used the NAP indicators to ground and organize our research findings.

This landscape scan of equity drivers is valuable because it demonstrates that there are districts actively communicating to the school community that equity is a priority. Moreover, districts are being transparent about their practices, initiatives, and policies. However, this landscape scan is not without its limitations. For more details about our approach, see the Background section, Appendix A, and/or contact **EduDream.**

KEY DEFINITIONS

Numerous terms consistently emerge in the literature. To guide our search, we developed working definitions for the most critical words and phrases.

Academic Standards. Academic standards (also called "content standards") define the knowledge and skills that students are expected to master at specified grade levels in their education.

Accountability Pressure. The pressure to raise student test scores in order to remove the label of "failing" and avoid NCLB sanctions (i.e., school restructuring, turnaround or closing.

Accountability System. "An accountability system is the set of policies and practices used to measure and hold schools and districts responsible for raising student achievement for all students, and to prompt and support improvement where necessary (**EdTrust, 2019**)." Traditional accountability systems tend to include two key measures: student performance on statewide standardized assessments and high school graduation rates. Under ESSA, accountability systems also include 9th grade on-track (for high school graduation), chronic absenteeism, SEL or college and career readiness measures.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Although mentioned in the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) became synonymous with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). AYP measures states, districts and schools' yearly improvement and progress toward teaching all students what they need to know (i.e., 100 percent proficiency).[1] In order to make AYP, all subgroups must demonstrate progress and meet state benchmarks.

Closing the Achievement Gaps. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "achievement gaps occur when one group of students (e.g., students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (i.e., larger than the margin of error)." References to the achievement gaps tend to imply the difference in standardized test performance of one racial or ethnic group of students to that of White students. It is common to see references to the Black-White or Hispanic-White achievement gap. NCLB's use of disaggregated data illuminated the achievement gaps within and across schools for low-income and students of color.[2]

Drivers. District factors or efforts that affect students' learning experiences, opportunities and outcomes such as interpersonal relationships, course offerings and rigor, teacher diversity, and non-exclusionary disciplinary practices. Drivers can include policies, practices, programs or systems to address and support students' social emotional needs, basic needs and ensure equitable policies and practices.

Educational Equity. The moral and civil rights obligation to ensure that students receive the support and resources they need to succeed, regardless of background, race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, place of origin, native language, socioeconomic status, or any other discriminating factor. Success hinges on access to a school environment equipped for safe and stimulating learning opportunities. Resources for social and emotional growth and excellent educators who can keep students on track to graduate from high school ready for college or careers are also necessary.

Equitable Accountability Approaches. Equitable accountability approaches take into consideration processes and systems created to ensure access to educational opportunities, responsiveness to student and community needs, data transparency, climate and culture, and student success. Equitable accountability approaches could include quantitative as well as qualitative measures, and seek to get at the root cause of inequities by asking how much are we doing (e.g., equitable funding), how well are we doing it, and who is better off as a result? Potential approaches include: disaggregated data reporting; expansive use of measures (college readiness, SEL, early childhood, etc.); equity indicators or measures, if any; and systems of support for school improvement

Intentional Equity Work. Evidence of district's awareness or acknowledgement of racial disparities, plan to address disparities, and/or actively working to address disparities by changing practices, policies and access to opportunities and supports. Equity work is publicly available and evident in the last five years from 2015-2020 (Oliva and Martinez, 2021).

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[1] **U.S. Departement of Education, Guidance on Standards, Assessments, and Accountability**

[2] **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); and EduDream**

No Child Left Behind (NLCB) Subgroups. A subgroup is a subset of students within a school, district or state education system that can be grouped together based on social markers such as socioeconomic status (economically disadvantaged determined by free and reduced-price lunch status), race/ethnicity, and distinct learning needs (e.g., Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners). Under NCLB, AYP must be reported for all students and disaggregated by subgroups.

Performance Standards. Performance standards (or "achievement standards," as they are called in NCLB) indicate the level of attainment expected with respect to the academic standards. Performance standards are usually established through a process that identifies one or more cut scores on a standardized test that indicates whether a student has attained a specific level of performance, such as "basic" or "proficient." (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2006).

Positive Shifts, also referred to as *positive outliers*, or *beating the odds*. Districts exhibiting positive shifts are those that "excel at supporting the learning of students of color and students from low-income families. In these districts, students of color, as well as White students, consistently achieve at higher than expected levels, outperforming students of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds from families of similar income and education levels in most other districts in the state."[3] This does not necessarily mean the achievement gap has been closed.

Standards-Based Accountability. Standards-based accountability (SBA) is an approach to measuring and incentivizing school performance by attaching consequences to student achievement test scores. Educators and policymakers have used other terms, including "systemic reform," "standards-based reform," and "curriculum alignment," to describe similar ideas that differ somewhat in emphasis or evolution. SBA typically includes standards that indicate what students are expected to know and be able to do, measures of student attainment of the standards, targets for performance on those measures, and a set of consequences for schools or educations based on performance (Hamilton et al., 2012).

Standards-Based Assessment. Large-scale tests developed and aligned to standards that measure student academic outcomes or achievement.

Standards-Based Reform. Although there is no universally accepted definition of standards-based reform (SBR), most discussions include some or all of the following features: **(1)** academic expectations for students (the standards are often described as indicating "what students should know and be able to do"); **(2)** alignment of critical elements of the educational system to promote attainment of these expectations; **(3)** use of student achievement assessments to monitor performance; **(4)** decentralization of responsibility for decisions relating to curriculum and instruction to schools; **(5)** support and technical assistance to foster the improvement of educational services; and **(6)** accountability provisions that reward or sanction schools or students based on measured performance (Hamilton et al., 2008).

Structural Inequity. Sociologists have defined structural inequity (or "structural inequality") as "an inequality in the distribution of a valued resource, such as wealth, information or education, that brings social power." Structural inequality delivers cumulative advantage to some groups of people, and cumulative disadvantage to others, by disparately allocating access to education, employment, housing, food, healthcare, and political power. (Royce 2019).

Systemic Reform. A broad-based approach that embodies three components: **(1)** standards for what students are expected to learn; **(2)** the alignment of other components of the education system, such as assessment and teacher training, to these standards; and **(3)** a restructured governance approach to support improved student achievement (Smith and O'Day, 1991).

Unintended Consequences. In the social sciences, unintended consequences (sometimes referred to as "unanticipated consequences" or "unforeseen consequences") are outcomes of a purposeful action that are not intended or foreseen. The term was popularized in the twentieth century by American sociologist Robert K. Merton.

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[3] **California Positive Outliers: Districts Beating the Odds, REL Beating the Odds Reports Mississippi, REL Beating the Odds: Finding Schools that Exceed Achievement Expectation with High-Risk Students**

BACKGROUND

Research suggests standards-based reform positively influenced student attendance, teacher and administrator responsiveness, and student learning (Oliva and Martinez, 2021, RQ1). Yet, the hyper focus on assessments and accountability had negative and unintended consequences on schools and districts, particularly those serving primarily Black, Latinx, and students experiencing poverty. As a result, SBR faced pushback from families, communities, teachers, and policymakers (Oliva and Martinez, 2021, RQ2).

The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) marked a turning point in the federal government's role in education policy because it gave states and districts autonomy to revise accountability, assessment, and educator evaluation systems. While the ESEA reauthorization (known as Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA) provided reprieve from accountability pressures, the myriad of inequities revealed through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) remained.

Despite its shortcomings, SBR revealed academic disparities across race and income, and education leaders have been taking steps to address them. This landscape scan is a snapshot of districts that are planning, if not actively, working to address educational inequities. To frame and organize the district scan findings, we use the National Academies Press educational equity indicators.

ALIGNING DISTRICT DRIVERS TO THE NATIONAL ACADEMY EDUCATIONAL EQUITY INDICATORS

In 2019, the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (hereon referred to as National Academy, National Academies Press, or NAP) published a set of 16 indicators that provide a systematic way to identify inequities to educational opportunities and achievement, from prekindergarten through postsecondary readiness.

> The indicators are evidence-based and provide a "framework for a system of equity indicators that align with children's developmental trajectories and with structural and systemic sources of inequity in the education system (NAP, 2020)."

As displayed in Table 1, six NAP educational equity opportunity indicators align to seven drivers examined in this landscape scan. In addition to these six indicators, we used the NAP educational equity outcome indicator, performance on tests, to identify districts for inclusion in the scan. As part of the district identification process, we relied on publicly available standardized test performance data and postsecondary enrollment - a second NAP educational equity outcome indicator.
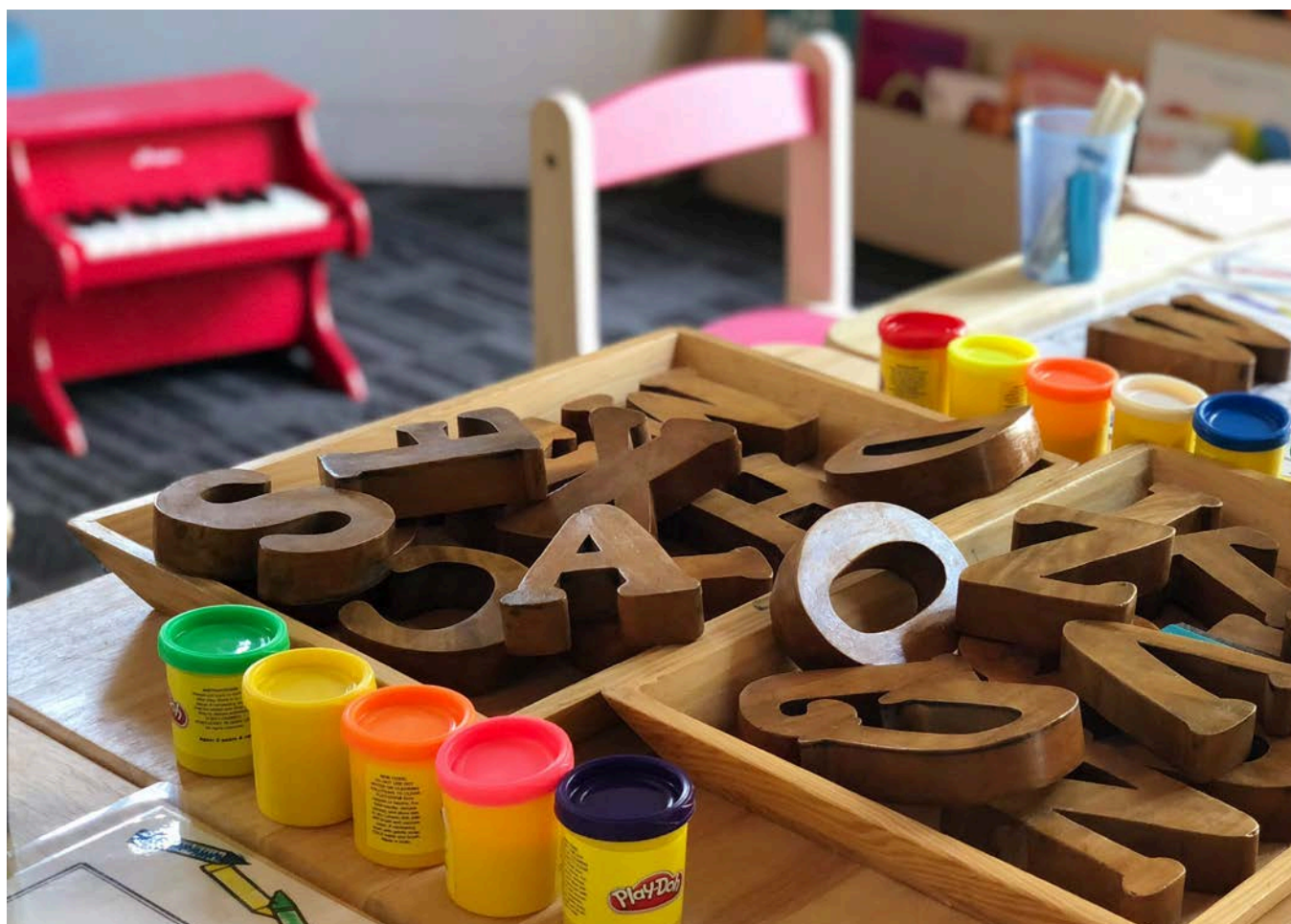
TABLE 1. CROSSWALK OF DISTRICT DRIVERS AND NAP EDUCATIONAL EQUITY INDICATORS

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION	NAP K12 EQUITY INDICATOR	NAP INDICATOR MEASURE
01 **Teacher Diversity**	Efforts to recruit, support and retain teachers who reflect the student populations served. Diverse and effective teachers can positively impact the academic and social and emotional development of students of color.	**Access to effective teaching (opportunity)**	Racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching force
02 **School Culture & Climate**	Efforts to improve how students and adults experience school life (e.g., norms, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures).	**School Climate (opportunity)**	Safety, academic support, academically focused culture, and teacher-student trust
03 **Teacher-Student Relationships**	Efforts to establish, maintain and strengthen teacher-student relationships so that students feel included and supported		
04 **School Discipline Disproportionality**	Use of data, and/or change in policies and practices to reduce racial disparities in student discipline.	**Non-exclusionary discipline practices (opportunity)**	Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions
05 **Student Mental Health and/or Social Emotional Learning**	Efforts (programs, systems, policies, practices) to implement social emotional learning such that students (and educators) learn to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to manage emotions, achieve goals, be empathetic and responsible. Mental health encompasses access to counseling, therapists, psychologists and other trained professionals who can help students process feelings, feel safe, and manage needs from anxiety, depression, trauma, etc.	**Nonacademic supports for student success (opportunity)**	Supports for emotional, behavioral, mental, and physical health
06 **College Going Culture & Postsecondary Advising**	Environment, attitudes, and practices in schools and communities that encourage students and families to obtain the information, tools, and perspective to enhance access to and success in post-secondary education.	**Access to rigorous course-work (opportunity)**	Availability and enrollment in advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment and gifted and talented programs
07 **Special Education Disproportionality**	Use of data, and/or change in policies and practices to reduce racial disparities in student identified (and maintained) for special education (i.e. disabilities)	**Access to high-quality academic supports (opportunity)**	Access to and participation in formalized systems of tutoring or other types of academic supports, including special education services and services for English learners

RQ³ EVIDENCE BASE

WHAT EQUITABLE APPROACHES, IF ANY,

HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SBR?

SBR revealed academic disparities across racial and economic lines while also creating unintended consequences. But, this is not where the story ends for many districts. The landscape scan findings presented here are based on 20 districts demonstrating **positive academic shifts** for students of color and students experiencing poverty, and their efforts to address unintended consequences and educational inequities. The NAP Educational Equity Indicators are used to frame and organize the findings.

Table 2 presents the landscape scan findings for the 20 districts across the seven drivers. The most prevalent drivers are:

1. School climate;
2. SEL and mental health; and
3. College going and postsecondary advising.

TABLE 2. DISTRICT LANDSCAPE SCAN FINDINGS: AT-A-GLANCE								
	01 Teacher Diversity	02 School Culture & Climate	03 Teacher-Student Relationships	04 School Discipline Disproportionality	05 Student Mental Health and/or Social Emotional Learning	06 College Going Culture & Postsecondary Advising	07 Special Education Disproportionality	EVIDENCE [# of Drivers out of 7]
CALIFORNIA								
Chula Vista Unified School District		■	■	■	■			4
Clovis/Fresno Unified School District		■			■	■		3
Fresno Unified School District	■	■			■	■		4
Long Beach Unified School District	■	■	■		■	■	■	6
Los Angeles Unified School District		■		■	■	■		4
Oakland Unified School District	■	■	■	■	■	■		6
Sanger Unified School District		■	■	■	■	■		5
San Diego Unified School District	■	■			■	■		4
FLORIDA								
Broward County School District	■			■	■	■		4
Escambia County School District					■			1
Hillsborough County School District		■			■	■		3
Palm Beach County School District		■		■	■	■		4

	01 Teacher Diversity	02 School Culture & Climate	03 Teacher-Student Relationships	04 School Discipline Disproportionality	05 Student Mental Health and/or Social Emotional Learning	06 College Going Culture & Postsecondary Advising	07 Special Education Disproportionality	EVIDENCE [# of Drivers out of 7]
GEORGIA								
Atlanta Public Schools		■			■	■		3
DeKalb County School District		■			■	■		3
Fulton County Schools		■		■	■	■		4
MARYLAND								
Montgomery County Public Schools	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	7
MASSACHUSETTS								
Boston Public Schools	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	7
Holyoke Public Schools	■	■			■	■		4
Lawrence Public Schools	■	■	■		■	■		5
SOUTH CAROLINA								
Spartanburg County Schools						■	■	2
TOTALS	9	17	6	9	20	18	3	

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

TEACHER DIVERSITY

01 Cross-cultural studies have consistently demonstrated that teachers who share the same racial/ethnic and cultural background as their students are more effective in connecting school knowledge to students' backgrounds and communities. Of the 20 districts across six states included in the landscape scan, nine had documented initiatives and outcomes on teacher diversity efforts.

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

02 Access to positive school climates is important to improving and sustaining academic achievement and ensuring equitable educational opportunities. Of the 20 districts across six states included in the landscape scan, an overwhelming majority of 17 had documented initiatives, statements, and measures for school climate.

03 A large body of research indicates that students' supportive relationships with their teachers promote positive long-term developmental outcomes, including improved academic outcomes and reduced problem behavior. From an equity perspective, supportive relationships take time and intentionality. Of the 20 districts in the landscape scan, only six directly addressed teacher-student relationships. This includes districts in California, Massachusetts, and Maryland.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DISPROPORTIONALITY

04 During NCLB, schools failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) had increasing numbers of reported student misbehaviors such as suspensions, fights, and offenses reportable to law enforcement. Under ESSA, states and districts must describe in their Title I plans how they will support districts and schools to improve "school conditions for student learning" by reducing the overuse of discipline that removes students from classrooms. Of the 20 districts in the landscape scan, nine showed evidence of disciplinary disproportionality acknowledgment, efforts to address it, and/or reported reductions. Of the nine districts, three in California reported creating or implementing restorative justice. The results of restorative justice have been mixed partly due to challenges with implementation.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONTINUED

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

05 Several ESSA provisions support SEL as it is viewed as a component of school climate. Researchers find that when SEL skills are intentionally taught, practiced, and reinforced in schools, students have better behavioral, social, and academic outcomes (Kendziora and Yoder, 2016). Of the districts included in the landscape scan, all 20 have documented initiatives, statements, and measures for SEL. However, the extent of publicly available documentation on SEL programming, policies and resources varies across the districts.

COLLEGE GOING CULTURE AND POSTSECONDARY ADVISING

06 Researchers and educators identify college-going culture as critical to socializing students from underrepresented communities to gain access to college (Athanase, et. al, 2016). In a school that embodies a college-going culture, high expectations for college-going is central as well as high school supports for college attendance. Moreover, postsecondary advising is particularly important for low-income students and students of color, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. Data show that these students have the greatest needs; and yet, have the least access to counseling and advising in high school (Avery, 2014). Of the 20 districts in the landscape scan, an overwhelming majority of 18 had evidence of documented initiatives, programming, and supports for college going, access to rigorous coursework and postsecondary advising.

SPECIAL EDUCATION DISPROPORTIONALITY

07 Our landscape scan focuses on special education as a form of high-quality academic supports. High quality school experiences are especially critical for students of color with disabilities. Research indicates achievement gaps of approximately two-thirds of a standard deviation between students with disabilities and students without them – the equivalent of about three years of learning (Gilliam, 2005; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Reardon & Portilla, 2015; Reardon & Robinson, 2008). Of the 20 districts included in the landscape scan, only three had documented policies, efforts, or initiatives: Long Beach USD, Boston Public Schools, and Montgomery County Public Schools.

TEACHER DIVERSITY—ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

01 Of the 20 districts across six states included in the landscape scan, nine had documented initiatives and outcomes on teacher diversity efforts.

Today, the notion that high-quality teachers have a positive impact on student learning is indisputable and widely accepted (see Wenglinsky, 2002; Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005; Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor, 2007). Unfortunately, "a significant concern is that teachers with more experience and credentials are not distributed equitably among schools with different student populations" (NAP, 2020). In other words, there are persistent shortages of qualified teachers, especially in schools serving majority students of color and/or students experiencing poverty. Further, cross-cultural studies have consistently demonstrated that teachers who share the same racial/ethnic and cultural background as their students are more effective in connecting school knowledge to students' backgrounds and communities. Yet, the teaching workforce remains far less diverse than the student body (NAP, 2020).

▶ **SBR and Teacher Diversity.** SBR identified the need to:
1. Improve teacher preparation, training and quality,
2. Push for teaching standards,
3. Define and require high-quality teachers, and
4. Incentivize equitable distribution of effective teachers.

> **Yet, diversifying the teacher workforce and addressing teachers' implicit bias were not embedded in standards-based reform plans or policies.**

This changed when ESSA introduced flexibility for states to explore ways to measure and address equity. For example, 23 states' educator equity plans, or nearly half, mention strategies towards diversifying the teacher workforce and developing teacher cultural competencies.

DISTRICT TEACHER DIVERSITY EFFORTS

Access to effective teaching includes equitable distribution of experienced, credentialed, and racially/ethnically diverse teachers. Of the 20 districts included in the landscape scan, nine had documented initiatives and outcomes on teacher diversity efforts. Table 3 (next page) displays publicly available evidence on district teacher diversity efforts for the nine districts. In districts such as Oakland Unified School District (USD) and Boston Public Schools, there are teacher diversity goals, objectives, and plans in place. Oakland USD has made teacher diversity part of its current strategic plan, which suggests there are or will be proactive steps to realize this goal.

Other districts are implementing *"grow your own"* programs that not only focus on recruiting teaching candidates from within the community, but establish teaching pathways for the districts' high school students and graduates. Teachers of color are more likely to enter the profession through an alternative certification pathway than are White teachers, and "grow your own" programs function similar to alternative certification pathways in that they both tend to recruit candidates from local communities. Fresno USD is one district using an alternative certification pathway to increase teacher diversity, and is producing results. From 2013-14 to 2018-19, the percentage of teachers of color increased from 35.5 to 46.[4] Holyoke Public Schools and Montgomery County School District's commitment to teacher diversity is evident in their increased teacher diversity as well.

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4 Education Data Partnership Fresno Unified

TABLE 3.
EVIDENCE OF DISTRICTS' TEACHER DIVERSITY EFFORTS

	EFFORT(S) TO INCREASE TEACHER DIVERSITY
CALIFORNIA	
Fresno Unified School District	Teacher Residency Program to address STEM teacher shortage. Increased teacher diversity to 24% compared to 19% statewide
Long Beach Unified School District	Creating education career pathways for high school students in order to increase teacher diversity
Oakland Unified School District	Teacher diversity goal since 2016. Part of 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. Citywide effort to attract teachers to Oakland.
San Diego Unified School District	In 2012, created the Teacher Pipeline Task Force (TPTF), a collaborative plan to cultivate a highly skilled, effective teacher workforce that draws from district graduates to reflect the student population.
FLORIDA	
Broward County School District	*Grow Your Own* program to recruit, train and retain educators born and raised in local communities
MARYLAND	
Montgomery County Public Schools	In 2014, MCPS launched a teacher workforce diversity initiative and strategic plan. In 2018, the district saw a sharp increase in diverse teacher hiring. Of the new teachers hired by MCPS in 2019, 39% were non-White, representing an 12% increase since 2015.
MASSACHUSETTS	
Boston Public Schools	2016 Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Policy includes the objective of increasing the diversity of teachers
Holyoke Public Schools	HPS is committed to building and retaining a workforce that is not only the most qualified to teach the students of Holyoke, but also celebrates and reflects the rich diversity of our students. Efforts to diversify the workforce have begun to bear fruit. Results: 34% of HPS staff are people of color (2018-19) versus 10% statewide.
Lawrence Public Schools	In 2014-15, the district developed a Staff of Color (STOC) support group and continues to build racial equity leadership capacity among staff.

SCHOOL CLIMATE—
ESTABLISHING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

02 Of the 20 districts across six states included in the landscape scan, an overwhelming majority of 17 had documented initiatives, statements, and measures for school climate.

Recent studies highlight the impact a positive school climate has on student academic performance, graduation rates, and effective risk prevention (NAP, 2020). School climate refers to the qualities of the school environment that are experienced by teachers, administrators, students, and other members of the school community (Schweig, et al, 2019). It is the impressions of these individuals as they experience school policies, practices, and procedures.

While school climate elements or domains are defined somewhat differently across various frameworks, fundamentally they capture similar key features. For example, the National School Climate Council identified five elements of school climate, which include *safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and staff relationships* (O'Brennan and Bradshaw, 2013).

Schools with hostile climates (i.e., lack of connection with peers, mistrust of adults or teachers, concerns about personal safety, etc.) can negatively affect students, and have been linked to student depression, low self-esteem, feelings of victimization, greater risk of dropping out, and lower academic achievement (NAP, 2020).

▶ **SBR and School Climate.** Access to positive school climates is important to improving and sustaining academic achievement and ensuring equitable educational opportunities. Accordingly, ESSA requires states to not only report on academic outcomes, but also include a measure of school quality and student success in their state accountability systems. School climate can be one of these measures. As part of Title 1, schools can develop and implement "counseling, school-based mental health programs, specialized instructional support services, mentoring services, and other strategies to improve students [nonacademic skills]."[5]

For states that have selected to include school climate in their accountability system, most are administering surveys and/or using administrative data such as tracking student absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions.

> **However, to see and sustain positive change, districts need to design interventions and supports that address the various domains of school climate.**

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5   Public Law 114-95 Every Student Succeeds Act

DISTRICT EFFORTS TO MEASURE AND IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Of the 20 districts across six states included in the landscape scan, an overwhelming majority of 17 had documented initiatives, statements, and measures for school climate.

More than 40 percent of the districts indicate using school climate surveys (e.g., the School Climate and Perception Survey, the Climate and Safety Survey, Healthy Kids Survey, etc.). School climate surveys are used to improve school climate by gauging students', parents' and teachers' sense of safety, belonging, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior.

Five districts- Boston Public Schools, San Diego USD, Atlanta Public Schools, DeKalb County School District, and Fresno USD-explicitly state using school climate survey data and/or school climate initiatives to create culturally affirming environments.

> **For example, Fresno USD believes that to achieve a climate where teachers can teach and students can learn, the "curricular and cocurricular programs need to provide opportunities for students to acquire positive attitudes toward racial, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity.**

In 2016, Boston Public Schools created the "Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Policy" which encourages teachers, students, parents, school administrators, and central office staff to come forward and report on any incidents regarding subtle or overt racial bias or discriminatory incidents and activities, without fear of retaliation. The district sees this as a way to achieve a safe, transparent, culturally affirming, and inclusive climate at all levels.
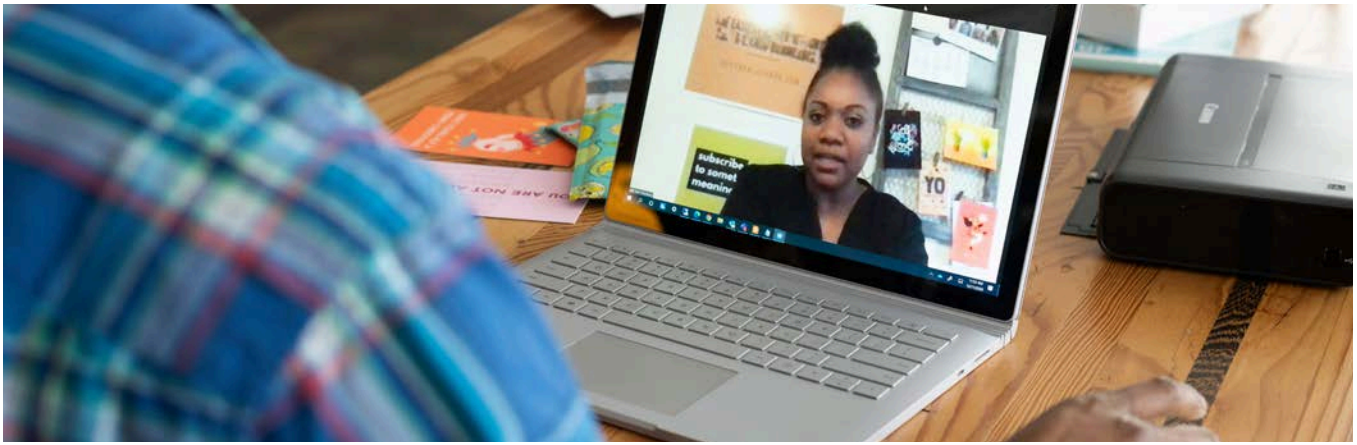
TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS—SCHOOL CLIMATE

03 Of the 20 districts across six states included in the landscape scan, only six directly communicate initiatives centered on teacher-student relationships.

As noted in the previous section, not only is teaching and learning central to how students experience schools, but equally critical are interpersonal and staff relationships, which are part of the school climate. A large body of research indicates that students' supportive relationships with their teachers promote positive long-term developmental outcomes, including improved academic outcomes and reduced problem behavior. Williford and Wolcott's (2015) review of evidenced-based programs focused on the teacher–student relationship and shows that strengthening the bond between teachers and students is linked with greater student social–emotional and academic learning.

> **Young people report that their positive relationships with both adults and peers create learning opportunities (Patrick, et.al, 2007). Thus, it is essential to place great emphasis on establishing, maintaining, and strengthening teacher-student relationships.**

DISTRICT FOCUS ON TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

From an equity perspective, supportive relationships take time and intentionality. The majority of districts addressing school climate are likely focused on teacher-student relationships. However, because school climate is multidimensional, we wanted to examine the extent to which districts directly communicate initiatives centered on teacher-student relationships. Of the 20 districts in the landscape scan, only six directly addressed teacher-student relationships. This includes Long Beach USD, Chula Vista USD, and Sanger USD in California; Holyoke Public Schools and Boston Public Schools in Massachusetts; and Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland.

EQUITY IN ACTION: MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MCPS)

Positive Academic Shifts. From 2014-15 to 2018-19, based on performance on state assessments, Black students experienced an 11 point increase in English Language Arts in grades 3-8, and a 12 point increase in high school. Latinx students also experienced increases (7 points in grades 3-8, and 5 points in high school). In Mathematics, Black students experienced a 15 point increase, but only in grades 3-5. Thereafter, there was little to no change. Latinx students also experienced a large increase (13 points) in grades 3-5, and then experienced a plateau and even dip in high school. The district still has achievement gaps to address.

Intentional Equity Work, Strategies, and Efforts. MCPS has a three-part Equity and Achievement Framework: (1) The Evidence of Learning (EOL) framework consists of multiple measures in classroom, district and external categories that assess student learning; (2) The Equity Accountability Model (EAM) uses EOL data to determine the impact schools have on students who have typically not performed as well as their White and Asian peers; and (3) The Equitable Access to Resources (EAR) portion of the Equity and Achievement Framework examines how well the system and schools are using staff, time, and money as measured by student outcomes, with emphasis on the performance of the five focus groups.

Postsecondary Enrollment. 72% of 2019 high school graduates attended college within 12 months of their high school graduation.

District Accountability Approach. MCPS's Equity Accountability Model goes beyond state and federal requirements to monitor and report performance for specific groups of students "who have not experienced the same level of access, opportunity, or success as other students" (i.e., Black and Latinx students who are not low-income, Black and Latinx students who ARE low-income, and all other low-income students). The model is based on seven components (academic achievement, graduation rate, academic progress, limited English proficiency, students with disability, culture and equity, and priority focus groups) and allows MCPS to monitor and report progress on district goals. Schools are given a score based on the percentage of students meeting multiple measures (e.g., literacy and math) in an evidence of learning framework. Scores are given for each of the student groups for each of the seven components (highest score possible is 100). The overall goal is achieving "equity and excellence" for all students.

DISTRICT SNAPSHOT AND STUDENTS SERVED

MCPS is the largest school system in Maryland.
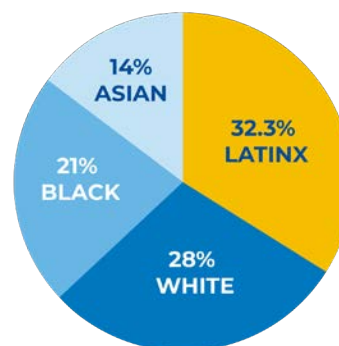
162,680 STUDENTS

206 TOTAL SCHOOLS

134 ELEMENTARY

40 MIDDLE

25 HIGH SCHOOLS

STUDENTS SERVED. The district serves a majority Latinx (32.3%) and White (28%) student population, followed by Black (21%) and Asian (14%). About one-third (36%) of students are experiencing poverty.

36% OR ABOUT 1/3 OF STUDENTS ARE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Sources. MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps (2019) and **College Readiness and Postsecondary Educational Outcomes for 2003 Graduates of Montgomery County Public Schools (2011)**

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DISPROPORTIONALITY—
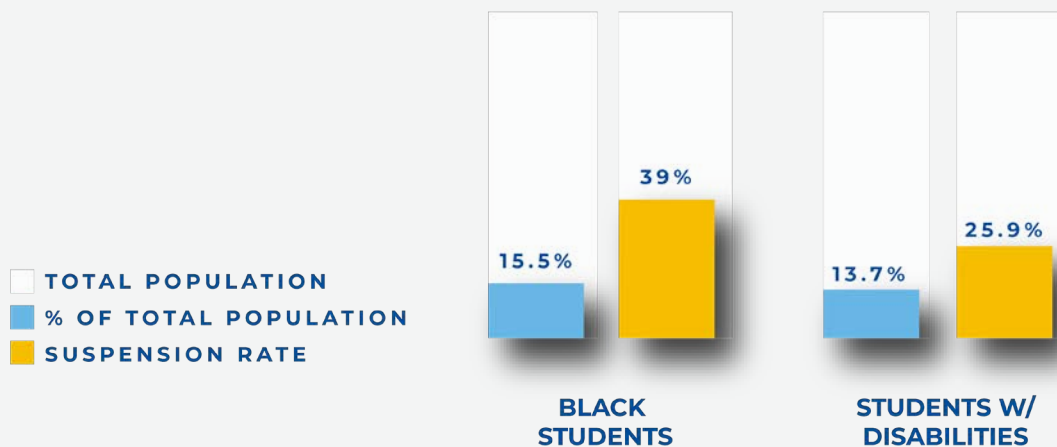# NON-EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE PRACTICES

04 Almost half of the districts (9 out of 20) showed evidence of acknowledging disproportionality in discipline and/or efforts to reduce disproportionality.

Reduced suspensions and expulsions keep students in the classroom, and therefore increase their opportunities to learn. Yet, studies have repeatedly revealed and confirmed a disproportionate number of students of color, specifically Black students, receiving harsher disciplinary actions at higher rates than White students for the same infractions in the same schools (NAP, 2020; Losen, 2014).

Additionally, students with disabilities are suspended at disproportionate rates. To put this into perspective, the Government Accountability Office reported that while Black students represent 15.5 percent of students in the nation's public schools, they represent 39 percent of students suspended. Similarly, students with disabilities make up 13.7 percent of all students, but represent 25.9 percent of students suspended (Government Accountability Office, 2018).

▶ **SBR and Student Discipline.** A review of SBR accountability successes and challenges found that NCLB accountability pressures negatively affected student behavior (Oliva and Martinez, 2020, RQ1). Schools failing to make annual yearly progress (AYP) had increasing numbers of reported student misbehaviors like suspensions, fights, and offenses reportable to law enforcement. These observations were most visible among low-performing and students of color (i.e., Black and Latinx) students (Holbein and Ladd, 2015). During the Obama administration, **voluntary guidelines** were issued to encourage states and districts to reduce racial disparities and discrimination in school discipline by shifting away from zero tolerance policies toward adopting restorative and inclusive practices. From 2012 to 2016, the percentage of students suspended decreased as districts implemented discipline reforms. Under ESSA, states and districts must describe in their Title I plans how they will support districts and schools to improve 'school conditions for student learning' through reducing the overuse of discipline that removes students from classrooms. States and districts are also required to publish a report card that includes rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement, chronic absenteeism, and incidences of violence, including bullying and harassment. During the Trump administration, the voluntary guidelines were rescinded. Meanwhile, racial disparities in school discipline persist.

STUDENT REPRESENTATION

TOTAL POPULATION
% OF TOTAL POPULATION
SUSPENSION RATE

39%
15.5%

25.9%
13.7%

BLACK STUDENTS

STUDENTS W/ DISABILITIES

DISTRICT EFFORTS TO REDUCE DISCIPLINARY DISPARITIES AND DISCRIMINATION

In the landscape scan, almost half of the districts (9 out of 20) showed evidence of acknowledging disproportionality in discipline and/or efforts to reduce disproportionality. Of the three Georgia districts, Fulton County Schools identified out-of- school suspensions for students of color as an equity gap, and acknowledged a need for improvement. Similarly, Palm Beach County Public Schools in Florida reported working with a consultant to analyze and discuss inequities in student disciplinary actions. In Massachusetts, Boston Public Schools is reporting disaggregated student discipline data, and Lawrence has established an equity advisory committee to review and recommend changes to disciplinary procedures and memorandums of understanding with local police and school resource officers.

▶ **Restorative Justice.** Restorative justice is one approach to addressing the disproportionality in school discipline (Gregory et al., 2016). Research suggests that it can lead to improvements in school disciplinary actions, school climate, attendance, and academic performance (Fronius, et al, 2019). Of the nine districts that showed evidence of acknowledging disproportionality in discipline and/or efforts to reduce disproportionality, three in California reported creating or implementing restorative justice. In California, state performance ratings are based on data from current and prior years that are aggregated into five color-coded performance levels. From highest to lowest the performance levels are: Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, and Red.[6] In 2018, Sanger USD received an orange rating for suspension rates of Black, Latinx and low-income students. As a result, the district created a plan of action that includes using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Restorative Justice. Oakland USD has been using restorative justice practices, and in a three-year period, it decreased overall suspensions by 50 percent and shrunk the Black-White discipline gap.

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?
Restorative Justice derives from "a growing social movement to institutionalize non-punitive, relationship-centered approaches for avoiding and addressing harm, responding to violations of legal and human rights, and collaboratively solving problems. In schools, it often serves as an alternative to traditional discipline, particularly exclusionary disciplinary actions such as suspension or expulsion" (Fronius, et al, 2019).

For almost a decade, Los Angeles USD has engaged in efforts to reduce discipline disproportionality including use of restorative justice practices. In 2014-2015, the district initiated restorative practice training in schools with the highest suspension rates. A 2018 study found that suspension rates decreased and discipline gaps related to race and disability status also narrowed (Hashim, Strunk, & Dhaliwal, 2018). Although the Los Angeles USD reduced suspension rates, our landscape scan found that schools without a fully implemented restorative justice program increased referrals to law enforcement. Without adequate implementation (i.e., training, programming, tools, etc.) of restorative practices, administrators opted for referrals instead of suspensions. Restorative justice is a practice that requires adequate funding, integration into schools, buy-in by and training for educators and leaders, patience and preconditions such as a culture of community building and trust (Fronius, et al, 2019).

6   California Performance Level Descriptors

Positive Academic Shifts. There have been positive academic shifts for Black, Latinx, and low-income students. From 2014-15 to 2018-19, the percentage of Black, Latinx, and low-income students reading on grade level or above increased by 9, 7, and 10 percentage points respectively.[7] There is also evidence that DCSD is closing achievement gaps.

Intentional Equity Work, Strategies, and Efforts. DCSD has been named a National School Boards Association 2021 Magna Award winner for its commitment to advance equity and reduce barriers for underserved students. In particular, the district was recognized for its parent and family engagement facility, services, programs, and initiatives.

Summary of District Drivers: Bright Spots. DSCD drivers include:

5. Cultivating culturally responsive learning environments;
6. Providing teachers with professional learning in trauma informed care, restorative justice practices, behavior management, and discipline procedures to address mental health impacts;
7. Three-component parent and family engagement model;
8. Wraparound services;
9. Creating and maintaining a positive learning climate that is friendly, inviting, and culturally sensitive; and
10. A comprehensive technology program.

DISTRICT SNAPSHOT AND STUDENTS SERVED

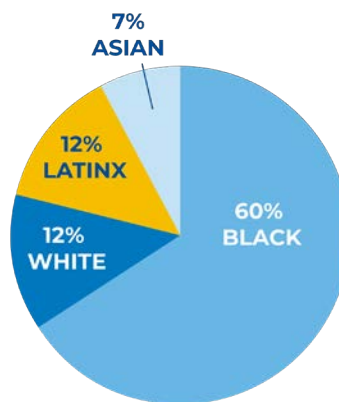**DeKalb County School District is Georgia's third largest school system.***

93,000+ STUDENTS

140+ TOTAL SCHOOLS

76 ELEMENTARY

19 MIDDLE

22 HIGH SCHOOLS

7% ASIAN
12% LATINX
12% WHITE
60% BLACK

STUDENTS SERVED. The district serves a predominantly Black student population (60%). Latinx and White students make up 12% each, and the remaining students (7%) are Asian. The overwhelming majority of students served (73%) are experiencing poverty.

76% OR OVER 3/4 OF STUDENTS ARE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Sources. Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Insights Literacy Dashboard (2019) and *****DeKalb County Public Schools (2021)**

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7   No math performance or postsecondary data found. Literacy data from: https://www.georgiainsights.com/

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)— NONACADEMIC SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

05 Of the districts included in the landscape scan, all 20 have documented initiatives, statements, and measures for SEL.

Although school climate and social emotional learning (SEL) are often addressed separately by researchers and practitioners, they are mutually reinforcing. A positive school climate creates the conditions for social and emotional learning, which is linked to academic gains and behavioral outcomes. The Cooperative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) offers a definition which recognizes the multi-faceted nature of SEL. CASEL defines SEL as "a process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."[8]

> **Researchers find that when SEL skills are intentionally taught, practiced, and reinforced in schools, students have better behavioral, social, and academic outcomes (Kendziora and Yoder, 2016).**

Beyond addressing students' social emotional development and strengthening SEL competencies, schools can support students by meeting their mental health needs (NAP, 2020).

▶ **SBR and Social Emotional Learning.** Prior to ESSA, there was little focus on social emotional learning in standards-based reform policy. Under NCLB, the federal education policy measured learning using high-stakes standardized tests. This narrow view of students as learners came under scrutiny by researchers and educators contending the interconnectedness of learning, social and emotional well-being, and health. The shift towards the "whole child" acknowledges that a student's academic learning is influenced by their social and emotional well-being, and physical and mental health. Given the evidence that a positive school climate supports student's social and emotional learning and promotes academic success, there has been increased demand to measure and assess school climate. Several ESSA provisions support SEL, as it is viewed as a component of school climate. Districts use school climate survey data to measure students' social-emotional well-being and physical safety.

DISTRICT SEL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Of the districts included in the landscape scan, all 20 have documented initiatives, statements, and measures for SEL. In California, all 8 districts indicated some level of focus on this driver. This includes establishing and implementing an SEL framework for counseling or instruction, having SEL standards and programming, and expanding support and funding for mental health services, including psychologists.

In Georgia, DeKalb is using grant funds to provide teachers with professional development on trauma informed care, restorative practices, and discipline procedures to address the long-term mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Florida, publicly available information is far more sparse, and for most districts, we relied on state policy regarding mental health education for middle and high school students. Table 4 (next page) displays the publicly available evidence on district SEL efforts and student mental health supports.

8   CASEL. (2019). What is SEL?

TABLE 4. EVIDENCE OF DISTRICT SEL EFFORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

	EVIDENCE OF DISTRICT SEL EFFORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS
CALIFORNIA	
Chula Vista Unified School District	District identified SEL as an area for improvement. **The district is expanding the number of psychologists and social workers to better address students' mental health.** Chula Vista USD identified SEL as an area for improvement and is creating data tools to provide a holistic assessment of students to better identify student supports.
Clovis/Fresno Unified School District	District trains and deploys transition team coaches, also referred to as student relations liaisons to support SEL. **School psychologists** are in contact with liaisons to help students process **divorce, trauma or grief.**
Fresno Unified School District	Over 70 psychologists and 40 clinical social workers are available to provide **mental health services,** psychological assessments, academic and social emotional guidance, **crisis intervention, and pyscho-education** to parents, community, and students. School support services are provided by Psychologists, School Social Workers, Restorative Practice Counselors, Clinical School Social Workers, Restoring the Learning Environment Counselors (RLE) and School Nurses.
Long Beach Unified School District	The Long Beach instructional framework includes teaching personal coping skills, self-regulation, and self-reflection strategies to support students' emotional well-being.
Los Angeles Unified School District	Uses **telehealth to deliver a range of mental health services for students.** In addition to an SEL unit in the district, there are also wellness centers, **crisis counseling** and intervention services, and student mental health training and technical assistance. The district has guides to help students, parents, and staff who are experiencing **racial trauma** as a result of repeated discrimination, racial violence and aggression. Teachers are provided SEL resources and professional development, and the district conducts student surveys to measure SEL.
Oakland Unified School District	District has adopted SEL standards that are to be integrated into instructional and leadership practices. The district SEL team supports school sites by providing professional development, resources and support to implement PreK-12th grade evidence-based SEL programs.
San Diego Unified School District	San Diego USD created a counseling framework on how to engage students in grades 6-12 with SEL content.
Sanger Unified School District	Sanger **increased funding to hire more school psychologists.** As of 2019, the district employed 16 school psychologists across 20 schools.
FLORIDA	
Broward County School District	*Florida's public schools must now guarantee every student in grades 6-12 at least 5 hours of mental health education a year, but there is no mention of how the district is implementing this requirement.*
Escambia County School District	Florida's public schools must now guarantee every student in grades 6-12 at least 5 hours of mental health education a year, but there is no mention of how the district is implementing this requirement
Hillsborough County School District	In 2017, Hillsborough County Public Schools trained staff to identify signs of depression or anxiety that students may display in the classroom. The district's goal was to achieve the state designation as a Suicide Prevention Certified School. The district also administers the Panorama SEL Survey, and like all districts in Florida, it is required to provide at least 5 hours of mental health education to students in grades 6-12.
Palm Beach County School District	The district partnered with more than 30 agencies to provide counselors during the aftermath of the Parkland High School shooting. Like all districts in Florida, it is required to provide at least 5 hours of mental health education to students in grades 6-12.

TABLE 4, CONTINUED. EVIDENCE OF DISTRICT SEL EFFORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

	EVIDENCE OF DISTRICT SEL EFFORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS
GEORGIA	
Atlanta Public Schools	APS developed a district wide SEL strategy and implemented it in 65 schools (out of 91 learning sites). The district has been delivering SEL programming through partnerships with nonprofits.
DeKalb County School District	The district plans to use grant funds to provide teachers with virtual and, when possible, face-to-face **professional learning in trauma informed care, restorative justice practices, behavior management,** and discipline procedures to address the long-term mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Fulton County Schools	The district employs school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to identify, assess, and explore the barriers that interfere with student achievement. Counselors and psychologists collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community for all students.
MARYLAND	
Montgomery County Public Schools	To help students in a time of crisis, each MCPS school has a student support team consisting of a school counselor(s), a school psychologist, a pupil personnel worker, and a school nurse. Some schools have assigned an English to Other Speaking Languages (ESOL) transition counselor to the student support team. During a crisis, ESOL transition counselors will also support students in schools with large ESOL populations
MASSACHUSETTS	
Boston Public Schools	The district seeks to use SEL to develop student identity and an appreciation of race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, and social class among students and teachers. It also seeks to foster comfort in discussing these issues explicitly in school.
Holyoke Public Schools	The district SEL priorities are high quality instruction for all students, structures for instructional improvement, culture and climate, leadership development and collaboration, and organizational structure. Holyoke employs a director of SEL who is charged with embedding SEL into instruction, tiered supports, and assessment. They are also charged with ensuring that all members of the district and school staff are well-trained, equipped and supported to effectively respond to students impacted by trauma, poverty or mental health issues.
Lawrence Public Schools	The district has many community partners to address SEL (e.g., The Lawrence Boys and Girls Club, The YMCA, Merrimack Valley Community School of Music, etc.). It states its commitment to SEL, using the CASEL SEL framework, and provides several resources.
SOUTH CAROLINA	
Spartanburg County Schools	Schools focus on student mental health needs with guidance counselors, school psychologists, safe zones for students to calm down, and teacher training. One school is implementing the Compassionate Schools Initiative, which seeks to help educators work more effectively with children, especially those who have experienced trauma.

COLLEGE GOING CULTURE + POSTSECONDARY ADVISING— ACCESS TO RIGOROUS COURSEWORK

06

Of the 20 districts included in the landscape scan, an overwhelming majority of 18 had evidence of documented initiatives, programming, and supports for college-going, access to rigorous coursework, and postsecondary advising.

Early postsecondary opportunities in high school create avenues for students to earn college credit and improve the transition between high school and postsecondary. Access to advanced coursework is critical and begins as early as gifted and talented programs in elementary school and continues into middle school algebra and Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in high school (NAP, 2020). Yet, there continues to be disparities in access to rigorous coursework. The Education Trust conducted an analysis to identify schools with high percentages of low-income students and students of color and high rates of AP access and success. They found that the more systematic and purposeful a school is about promoting access, the more likely the school is to achieve high levels of AP success for students of color and/or low-income students (Theokas and Saaris, 2013). Moreover, postsecondary advising is particularly important for low-income students and students of color, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. Data show that these students have the greatest needs; and yet, have the least access to counseling and advising in high school (Avery, 2014).

▶ **SBR and College Going Culture and Advising.** In the 1980s and 1990s, there were concerns over declining high school graduation rates and relatively flat student academic performance (Murnane, 2013; Oliva and Martinez, 2020, RQ1). While SBR policy sought to shift the focus to instruction and student outcomes, it was not until 2010 that NCLB accountability explicitly required states to set high school graduation goals. A recent Brookings Institute analysis confirms that NCLB accountability was a key contributor to increased high school graduation rates (Harris, et. al, 2020). In that same year, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were established to "ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live."[9] During this time, there was a convergence of factors that would move college going culture and advising into focus for policymakers, educators, business leaders, and philanthropists. These include a changing economy with a greater demand for an educated and skilled workforce and low college enrollment and completion rates, especially for first-generation, low-income students and/or students of color.

9   About the Common Core State Standards

DISTRICT EFFORTS TO EXPAND ACCESS TO RIGOROUS COURSEWORK AND PROVIDE POSTSECONDARY ADVISING

Researchers and educators identify college-going culture as critical to socializing students from underrepresented communities to gain access to college (Athanase, et. al, 2016). In a school that embodies a college-going culture, high expectations for college-going is central as well as high school supports for college attendance.

These supports target access to rigorous coursework and college advising and support for students and families to navigate the college admission process (from application and financial aid to identifying fit and match schools). Of the 20 districts included in the landscape scan, an overwhelming majority of 18 had evidence of documented initiatives, programming, and supports for college-going, access to rigorous coursework and postsecondary advising.

Since 2015, the Atlanta Public Schools has been partnering with college access organizations such as OneGoal and College Advising Corps to address its low college completion rates. To expand access to rigorous coursework, Palm Beach has a dual enrollment program, and Holyoke Public Schools has two state recognized early college programs, one with a four year college and one with a community college. Several districts have established their own version of a *college promise*[10] program, such as Long Beach USD and Oakland USD.
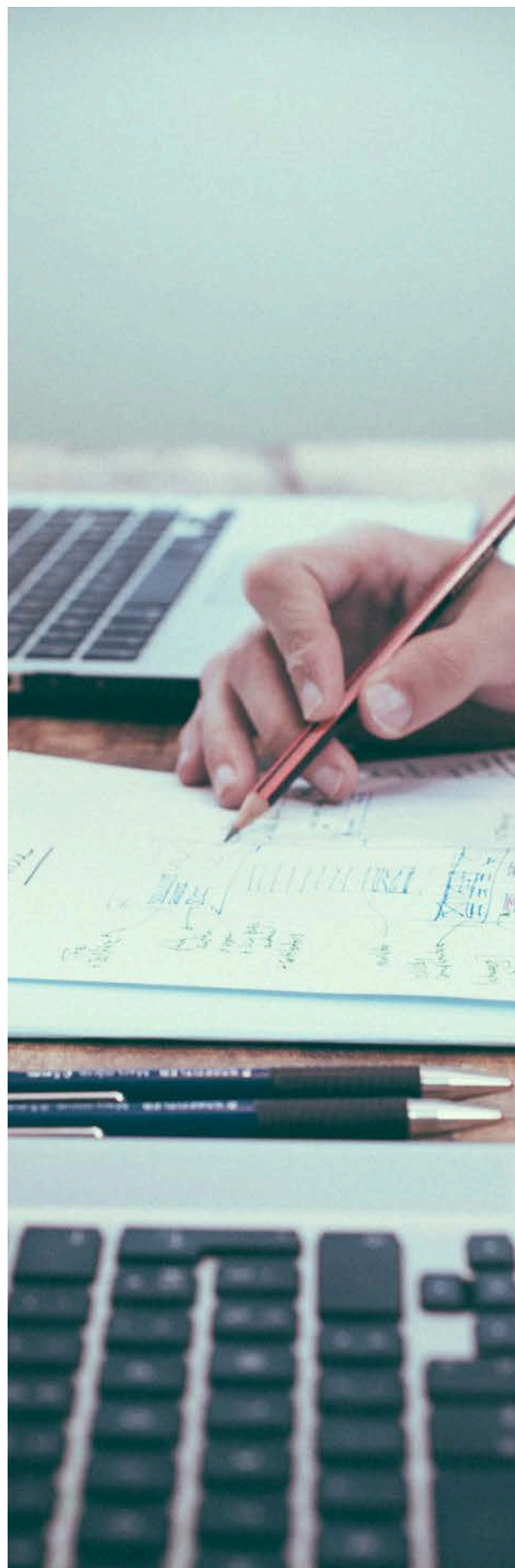
10   Promise programs, or free college programs, are increasingly popular solutions to college affordability issues

SPECIAL EDUCATION DISPROPORTIONALITY— ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

07 **Of the 20 districts included in the landscape scan, only three had documented policies, efforts, or initiatives to address special education disproportionality.**

High quality school experiences are especially critical for students of color with disabilities. Research indicates achievement gaps of approximately two-thirds of a standard deviation between students with disabilities and students without them – the equivalent of about three years of learning (Gilliam, 2005; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Reardon & Portilla, 2015; Reardon & Robinson, 2008). Additionally, schools are supposed to provide support to ensure English Learners (ELs) reach English proficiency and achieve positive academic outcomes.

As of 2014-15, ELs made up about ten percent of the nation's K-12 students. This percentage is higher in states such as California (18.6 percent)[11] and Florida (20.9 percent). Although NAP describes high academic supports as special education and English proficiency services, as well as academic support classes, tutoring, early warning systems, and high school transition activities, our landscape scan focuses on special education. More specifically, the landscape scan sought documentation of efforts to address special education disproportionality.

A 2018 analysis found that while African-Americans are 15.5 percent of all students enrolled in K-12 public schools, they make up 19 percent of students with disabilities. In addition to racial disproportionality, studies have also documented apparent discrepancies in the levels of referral and placement of limited English proficient children in special education. While there is evidence that Black students are being underidentified for special education services (Morgan, et.al, 2015; Morgan, et.al, 2017), there is also research that suggests students of color are overidentified for special education.

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11   Facts about English Learners in California

► **SBR and Special Education Disproportionality.** Prior to SBR, the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted - a key federal law to ensure schools meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. The IDEA Act was reauthorized in 2004, and aligned with NCLB (e.g., requiring students with disabilities to participate in state assessments, but with accomodations). After a history of low expectations for students with disabilities, IDEA 2004 sought to expand access to high academic expectations and general education curriculum. For the first time, under NCLB, schools were accountable for the academic outcomes of students with disabilities, and appeared to improve outcomes. Advocates of students with disabilities continue to maintain a careful watch over ESSA. A review of ESSA state plans by the National Center for Learning Disabilities found that states could do more to: a) develop accountability policies that are inclusives of students with disabilities; b) set more ambitious long-term performance goals; and c) incorporate the performance of students with disabilities as a subgroup in their rating systems (NCLD, 2018). During NCLB, concerns about special education disproportionately emerged and in 2016, the Equity in IDEA regulation was passed to address disproportionality in the identification, placement, and discipline of students with disabilities.[12] The regulation was supposed to be effective as of July 2018; however, the Trump administration delayed it. Inevitably, lawsuits ensued, and the courts sided against the delays. Furthermore, although ESSA continues to require administration of state assessments and appropriate accommodations, IDEA reauthorization is overdue and necessary to align language across the two policies.

DISTRICT EFFORTS TO ADDRESS SPECIAL EDUCATION DISPROPORTIONALITY

We found evidence of documented initiatives, policies, or efforts to address special education disproportionality for three of the 20 districts included in the landscape scan: Long Beach USD, Boston Public Schools, and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Of the three districts, MCPS contains the most explicit and equity-centered policies and efforts to address special education disproportionality. MCPS created a personnel position whose responsibilities include monitoring system wide placement of students of color in special education. The district's previous strategic plan identified eliminating special education disproportionality as a milestone. Similarly, Boston Public Schools' 2016 Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Policy requires an annual equity analysis of special education identification and placement to ensure staff understand the policies and are aware of potential biases. The LBUSD initiative is much more targeted and focuses on English Language Learners (ELL). This 2018 initiative seeks to mitigate disproportionate participation of ELL students in special education and intervention classes.

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12   [Fact Sheet: Equity in IDEA]

EQUITY IN ACTION: LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (LBUSD)

Positive Academic Shifts. From 2014 to 2017, all students experienced increases in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. This includes Latinx, Black, and students experiencing poverty. Proficiency rates among Black students grew from 31% to 34% in ELA and from 17% to 23% in math. Proficiency rates among Latinx students also grew from 33% to 40% in ELA and from 22% to 32% in mathematics. Similarly, proficiency rates among low-income students grew from 32% to 40% in ELA and from 22% to 31% in mathematics. There is evidence of LBUSD closing achievement gaps.

Intentional Equity Work, Strategies, and Efforts. LBUSD has focused on supporting schools in removing barriers to advanced coursework, while supporting students' social and emotional learning. Long Beach's hiring process had an equity orientation; the interview process sought to assess teachers' attitudes toward teaching students of all backgrounds and levels and hiring only those who believe these youth could be successful.

Postsecondary Enrollment. 71% of 2018 high school graduates attended college within 12 to 16 months of their high school graduation. LBUSD has a higher graduation rate than the state for Black (86%) and Latinx students (84%).

District Accountability Approach. LBUSD created a school accountability and improvement system that includes data on student academic growth, high school readiness, students' social-emotional skills and school culture and climate, along with traditional measures of test scores, graduation rates, and absenteeism. LBUSD has several systems for monitoring schools' progress toward district-wide goals on an ongoing basis. For example, it has developed evidence-based goals and expectations related to instruction and student outcomes but encourages schools to determine focus areas based on their contexts. The district also provides data systems that help school leaders tailor their goals and strategies to student needs. In addition, the Collaborative Inquiry Visit—a peer observation system—is conducted three times a year at each school and offers an opportunity for teacher, school, and district leaders to observe the goals and strategies of other schools, offer feedback, and bring learnings back to other sites. In essence, the district's system of accountability is designed not to punish schools for poor performance, but to build the collective efficacy of the district through learning.
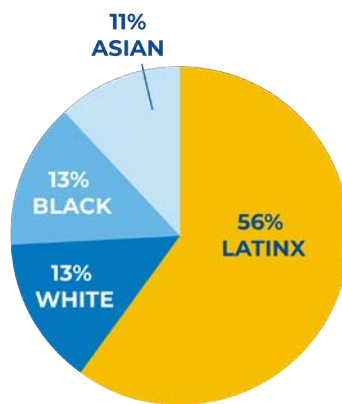
DISTRICT SNAPSHOT AND STUDENTS SERVED

LBUSD is one of the five largest school districts in California.

70,000
PK-HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

85 TOTAL SCHOOLS

5 CITIES INCLUDING LONG BEACH, LAKEWOOD, SIGNAL HILL, AND AVALON ON CATALINA ISLAND

11% ASIAN
13% BLACK
13% WHITE
56% LATINX

STUDENTS SERVED. The district serves a predominantly Latinx population (56%). Black and White students make up 13% each, and 11% are Asian.

63% OR OVER 1/2 OF STUDENTS ARE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Sources. California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments (2018-19), *Learning Policy Institute's* **Long Beach Unified School District Positive Outliers Case Study (2019; data from 2017),** and Long Beach Unified School District. (n.d.). **About—Long Beach Unified School District.** (accessed 12/7/21)

CLOSING REMARKS

Improving student academic performance is about more than increasing test scores. It is about the conditions that need to co-exist within schools for students to feel safe, learn to understand and manage emotions, establish positive relationships with peers and adults, and have access to effective teachers, culturally responsive teaching, rigorous instruction, and technology.

To conduct this landscape scan, the EduDream team identified twelve evidence-based drivers (or factors) that affect student learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes. Next, the drivers were mapped to the National Academies for Press (NAP) educational equity indicators, which were then used to ground and organize the landscape scan findings. This landscape scan is a snapshot of 20 districts that are planning to, if not actively working to, address educational inequities by focusing on some or all seven drivers that are mapped to NAP indicators. All, or almost all, the districts are focusing on school climate, SEL and mental health, and college-going and postsecondary advising supports.

Further investigation would confirm if school climate efforts expand beyond school climate survey data. For example, what impact have school-based mental health programs, specialized instructional support services, and mentoring services had on school climate and SEL? Nevertheless, it is evident that numerous districts offer mental health training to educators, services to students, and in some cases, families. Increasing efforts to provide access to rigorous coursework, and college advising and support is also promising for students experiencing poverty and students of color postsecondary outcomes.

Almost half of the districts included in the landscape scan focus on teacher diversity and discipline disproportionality. For the remaining districts, it is unclear whether evidence is not publicly available or not a priority. About a quarter of the districts explicitly focused on teacher-student relationships and far less

had documented evidence of policies, efforts or initiatives to address special education disproportionality. Although teacher-student relationships may be captured under school climate, the EduDreamresearch team suggests maintaining a discrete focus on relationships, SEL, and mental health. The last two years of remote learning, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, have created isolation and increased anxiety among students, thereby affecting depression and suicide rates. As most students return to the classroom this school year, it is highly likely that educators and administrators will observe increased social emotional developmental and mental health needs. Confirming these observations will rely on trusting and positive relationships between educators and students, as well as strong SEL programming and access to mental health services. Recently, a principal shared how the pandemic has affected students' interpersonal relationships and school culture:

> **Students have not been together, and how they are handling interpersonal conflict isn't the best. There is some social media drama. It can quickly escalate. We had an established culture in the building before the pandemic. Now we need to reestablish that ecosystem.**[13]

Moreover, the interrupted learning, due to the pandemic, will likely require expanding access to high-quality academic supports such as tutoring, early warning systems, English language services, and special education. Districts may need to pay closer attention to special education disproportionality to ensure students are neither overidentified nor underidentified for services.

13   Back to High School, After Missing So Much

Evidence of Key Drivers. Table A (next page) summarizes findings for five drivers that are not discussed in the main report, but were examined in the landscape scan. These five drivers did not map to the NAP educational equity indicators, but are still important for student learning. Of the five drivers, two are present across almost all 20 districts: culturally responsive pedagogy and parent/family voice and engagement.

As an example, one of Boston Public Schools' objectives is to vet curricula for bias and cultural competency. By 2017, cultural proficiency became part of every schools' annual accountability reports. The district has fully staffed a team to provide cultural proficiency training to every school principal and a subset of teachers. In Long Beach USD, teachers are required to apply their understanding of students' socio-cultural and linguistic assets to better select instructional activities.

In contrast, we found the least evidence for the drivers, wraparound services for students and families and equitable funding. In Massachusetts, Holyoke Public Schools has "full service community schools," which bring together community organizations, families, and school staff to align supports. Los Angeles USD allocated funding to support 30 community schools by 2021-22. The other three districts are in the beginning stages of exploring, building, and piloting their first community school.

Of the five districts with evidence of efforts to address equitable funding, the most comprehensive documentation came from Los Angeles USD. In 2018, the district school board approved the School Equity Index, which includes community indicators to identify the highest need students and invest additional state funding into those schools. Additionally, the school board approved creating an equity-based formula to be used as the primary funding model by the district. Some of the other districts' documented evidence was more general such as "school budgets are developed using Board approved formulas and guidelines that ensure both equal and equitable funding to all schools."

Access to Technology. Given the technology needs (access to internet and devices) that became evident at the start of the pandemic as schools shifted from in-person to online instruction, our team was interested in exploring the extent to which the driver equitable access to technology was a focus of districts, pre-Covid.

We found that about half of the districts were taking steps to address technology accessibility. For example, Sanger USD used their local control funding formula to provide Ipads for students in grades 4-12 in all their schools. Although the purpose of the Ipads was to support the administration of online assessments, this likely helped the district make the smooth transition from in-person to remote learning. Similarly, Atlanta Public Schools proposed, as part of its 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, to move towards a one-to-one ratio of computer to student. Other districts focused on internet or broadband access, such as Oakland USD. Their 2014-2018 Technology Plan sought to ensure students had internet access both in and out of school, and at least one device with internet access to use in and out of school.

TABLE A. OTHER DRIVERS EXAMINED IN DISTRICT LANDSCAPE SCAN

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION	EVIDENCE [# of districts with driver present out of 20]
Culturally responsive pedagogy	Efforts to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy or reframe curriculum and instruction by using methods that validate and reflect the diversity, identities, and experiences of all students.	16
Parent/Family voice and engagement	Efforts to engage families, including culturally affirming strategies such as involving families and communities as co-designers of their own futures, engaging multiple identities and perspectives in interactions and relationships.	15
Wraparound services for students and families	Evidence of community school models in district and wraparound services (e.g., laundry, dental, eye, mental services, vaccinations, etc.) for students and their families.	5
Equitable funding	Efforts to understand and track how school-level financial data is related to other student data, allocate additional funding for underserved students, etc.	5
Equitable access to technology (pre-Covid)	Efforts to ensure students have access to internet connectivity, devices and digital resources including teachers trained to leverage technology to create quality learning experiences.	9
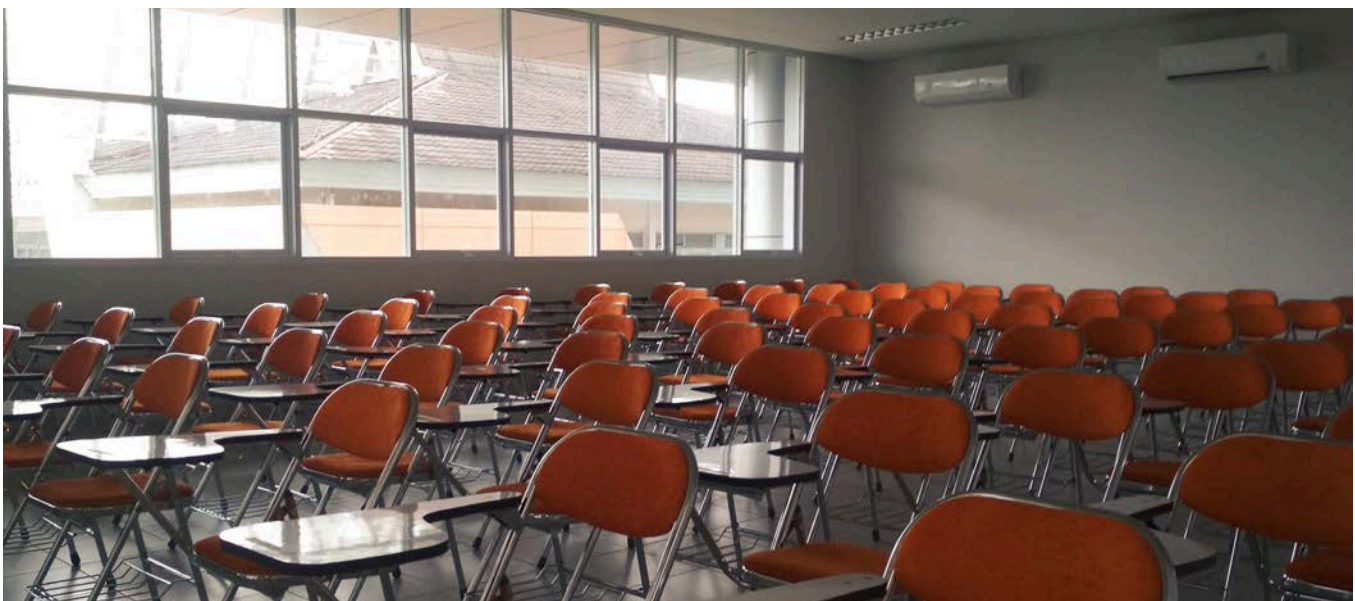
A landscape scan is useful when seeking to learn about existing or new trends across a field. Scans can be used to focus on a specific community and topic, or they can be broad to help understand opportunities, emerging issues, and trends across a wide geographical location (for example, state, multi-state, or nation). Landscape scans identify existing tools, strategies, and practices to avoid reinventing the wheel, while also identifying opportunities (Sherry, 2013).

Scans tend to draw on existing documents that are publicly available. Depending on the research questions, resources available to investigate the questions, and timeframe, scans can consist of only secondary research (i.e., existing documents), or a combination of primary (new data) and secondary research.

For this landscape scan, the EduDream research team relied on existing documents found through online search engines and district websites. Although the scan focuses on districts as the unit of analysis, we recognize that evidence of efforts to address drivers could be taking place in some schools that districts are not publicizing on their websites. Using the drivers as key terms in searches, the research team reviewed district websites for evidence. We scanned mission statements, goals, and strategic plans, as well as any driver related policies, strategies, models, measurements, or professional development used at the district level. A limitation is that public information about district efforts on the drivers are not always available. Thus, no evidence of district efforts does not mean that a district is not focused on the drivers.

Scope & Limitations

There were constraints on the scope and depth of information we were able to collect and analyze during a three-month period. This landscape scan would have been strengthened through a verification process (i.e., reaching out to districts to confirm evidence and request additional documents to fill our data gaps). Further, interviews with district administrators would have provided more expansive and current information on districts' efforts and progress. Other data collection methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews, extant data analysis) would have provided additional insights on driver outcomes.

Finally, it is important to note that the scan was conducted during a time when district websites were quite dynamic. Because of the ongoing pandemic, districts were continuously updating their websites with COVID-19 dashboards, resources, online learning information, etc. As a result, it could be that information that was once readily available online was moved further down the districts' sitemaps, temporarily hidden, or altogether removed.

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Improving student academic performance is about more than increasing test scores. It is about the conditions that need to co-exist within schools for students to feel safe, learn to understand and manage emotions, establish positive relationships with peers and adults, and have access to effective teachers, culturally responsive teaching, rigorous instruction, and technology.

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