Together, Toward Equity: A Research-Practice Equity Audit to Understand High School Opportunity Gaps

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the research-practice partnership between Syracuse City School District (SCSD) and Syracuse University (SU) and the work to conduct an equity audit. Syracuse, the city at the center of this collaborative equity audit, is one of the most hyper-segregated cities in the nation, with one of the highest concentrations of African-American and Latinx poverty. An equity audit is a systematic examination across the practices of the school or organization to understand how educational equity is playing out. This audit focused on the opportunity to access advanced academics, performing arts and athletics. As such, we sought to address the following research questions: Who is taking advanced academic classes and where does participation match proportional representation and where does it not? Who is participating in Performing Arts and where does participation match proportional representation and where does it not? Who is participating in Athletics and where does participation match proportional representation and where does it not? The identification of disproportionality in educational settings has focused on two indices: descriptive statistics and the composition index. The article presents the findings from the first year of the audit—which found disparity in participation across many demographic groups—and initial actions SCSD has taken as a result. Our team came to believe that part of the power of this research/practice partnership was that together we were focused on a tangible product—collecting and analyzing data for this equity audit.

This research-practice partnership, while not a PDS, addresses some of the Nine Essentials of PDS. It is primarily focused on #5) research and results, but also secondarily addresses #3) professional learning and leadings, #7) shared governance structures, and #9) Resources and Recognition.

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Sitting on the sidelines of yet another soccer game, I (co-author Ashby) started counting students of color. Two, that was all I counted; two out of over twenty energetic female athletes. My two children attended one of the five high schools in the urban district that is the focus of this article. The student population of this school was 57% black and only 20% white, yet nearly the entire team was white. Why? Sadly, counting children had become a sort of unconventional hobby - how many black students were there in orchestra? How many students with disabilities were in the AP English class? These questions plagued me as a researcher and as a parent. We had chosen to live in this urban district with the express desire for our children to experience a school that reflected the diversity of the rest of the world. A few weeks later, I found myself sitting in a meeting with university faculty and district leadership as we talked about potential shared interests, and from across the room, co-author Gentile raised the question that was stuck in my head. "Why don't the cast lists for our school musicals reflect the diversity of our schools? How do we change that?" As soon as the meeting ended a small group of us found ourselves talking in a corner. "You know, we could look at this together!" And a partnership was born.

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As a teacher in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), I (co-author Gentile) would attend various performances around the district to support former students and my colleagues. It was always hard not to notice that the students on the stage were overwhelmingly white while the schools themselves were much more racially diverse. I would raise the question often at department meetings. I would also branch out with my questions to wonder about beyond race to areas such as special

education students and English language learners. Much of the time, others would challenge my observation as overreacting and without actual hard participation data, it was difficult to move the conversation further. As I moved into administration as the Supervisor of Fine Arts in the same district, I continued my focus on who was participating and more importantly, who was not participating.

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I (co-author Williams) was hired into SCSD as a data analyst focused on disciplinary disproportionality. I spent over three years looking at current and historical discipline data, disaggregated by subgroup, building, grade level, etc.. . . I observed changes in staff and administrator mindset and behaviors, and there was a significant decrease in the number of incidents that were occurring. Yet, the distribution of disciplinary incidents by racial/ethnic groups showed little change. These two data points illustrated to me that changing minds was not enough - structural elements needed to be examined. When I heard there was a collaboration occurring between SU and SCSD that was examining student opportunities and the students' lived experience, I immediately wanted to be involved.

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Growing up in a northern suburb of Syracuse I (co-author Devennie) had very limited exposure to educators or classmates whose backgrounds differed from my own middle-class, White upbringing. After teaching for five years in suburban schools reflecting the same demographics as my own upbringing. I chose to pursue a doctorate at Syracuse University. During this time, I learned to listen and question with ferocity. Over the past several years, I have noticed deep gaps in my own understanding of social justice and struggle daily as I've come to recognize troubling silences and gaps in equity around me. Themes of uneven access and opportunity now permeate my thinking.

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Early on in my career as a physical education teacher in SCSD, I (co-author Steuerwalt) learned that not all our students had consistent access to fresh produce as many children may take for granted. With the help of administrators and other community stakeholders, we secured a USDA grant which provided daily servings of fresh fruits and vegetables to every child in our elementary school and eventually, every elementary school throughout the district. This experience shaped my perspective on equity and gave me insight to contribute to this team. It is my hope that this work will expand the district's capacity to provide equitable access to athletics for all students.

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What does equity look like? How do you measure it? What kind of actions can a district take to become more equitable? These were questions that I (co-author Franz) was struggling to answer as a district administrator in SCSD. Part of my struggle was due to the isolated nature of the job. I was frustrated so I reached out to Syracuse University with the hopes of establishing an informal solution. My former professor from SU (co-author Theoharis) had an idea. He proposed simply having SCSD district administrators and SU faculty get together, eat lunch, and discuss questions like the ones above. After just one of these lunches, I started feeling less lonely and priorities felt clearer. The informal collaboration led to more formal ones centered around answering these questions.

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I (co-author Theoharis) went into educational leadership with the idealistic belief that education was a driver toward a more just world. As I moved into the principalship, I learned about proportional representation and equity audits - a simple way to see data that provided an important lens on equity. I could ask and answer questions like, how representative of the school is our choir? How representative are the suspensions? How representative is our special education program? This disaggregated data analysis did not ensure a more equitable school, but it pointed out places that needed attention. Now, as a professor, it is important to sit with others to do the messy and unglamorous work of this kind of audit. This project has been painful and tedious. We are imperfect in our approach, in our skills, and in our collaboration, but we come back to the table, laughing and eating; trying together.

Development of the Partnership

This article is the product of a research-practice partnership between Syracuse City School District (SCSD) and Syracuse University (SU). Coburn and colleagues (2013) define these partnerships as, "Long-term, mutualistic collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are intentionally organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving district outcomes." This research-practice partnership meets all those criteria and is place-based (Coburn et al., 2013) in Syracuse. This partnership consists of district-office leaders, university faculty and doctoral students focused on the Syracuse urban district where the administrators work, and the university is located. Together we mutually construct the research agenda and engage in data collection and analysis. We have engaged in this collective work in the spirit that Cooper (2007) argues; research-practice partnerships are key to closing equity and opportunity gaps.

While there were multiple ways the district and university have historically collaborated, lacking was a formal relationship between K-12 content administrators and the SU faculty with matching expertise in literacy, arts, math, science, special education, and English as a new language. By late 2015, co-authors Theoharis and Franz had activated a network of

colleagues to share ideas and build relationships, leading to mutually beneficial collaborations. In 2016, both organizations provided seed funding to jump-start multi-year collaborative projects involving SU faculty and administrators/teacher leaders in SCSD. The district's superintendent, Jaime Alicea, said at the time: "This type of partnership is exactly what the students of Syracuse need." One of these projects was the equity audit described in this article.

Context of the district

Syracuse, the city at the center of this collaborative equity audit, is one of the most hyper-segregated cities in the nation, with one of the highest concentrations of African American and Latinx poverty (Jargovsky, 2015). The city is bisected by an interstate that runs through the middle, dividing it racially and socioeconomically, rendering some quadrants hyper-segregated by race and SES. The city is also home to a large refugee and immigrant population, although new entrants have dropped drastically over the last few years. There are 31 schools in this mid-sized urban district (15 elementary schools, 4 alternative programs, six middle schools, 5 K-8 schools, and 5 high schools). When the study began, approximately 20% of SCSD students were classified as students with disabilities, well above the 14% national classification rate; 18% were identified as English Language Learners and 82% were classified as economically disadvantaged, 1% American Indian, 50% Black, 13% Latinx, 8% Asian 8%, 22% white, and 6% multiracial.

SCSD has experienced significant gains in graduation rates across the district in the past fifteen years, improving the four-year graduation rate from about 50% to 70%. While important progress, the graduation rate was still well under the state four-year graduation rate of 85%. The SCSD four-year graduation rate for students with disabilities was 44% and 50% for students that are classified as Limited English Proficient.

When we began this work the audit was not an institutional priority for either the university or the school district. Regardless, the historical context and timing were key to the audit. A key contributor to laying the foundation for this audit was the fact that for the two years before the audit began the district was put under monitoring by the attorney general in part for disproportionate discipline of students of color and students with disabilities. As part of this process, the district engaged with the State-wide equity technical assistance center (TAC-D Center at New York University) that provided a variety of professional development opportunities around equity and disproportionality. A multiyear focus and community discussion about race and disproportionality prepared the district and community context for the audit by raising consciousness across the district and through the administrative team around equity and disproportionality issues. In other words, the conditions were right for formation of the team to conduct the audit and for these results to be accepted and valued by district leadership.

Research-Practice Equity Audit for Advancing Equity

Equity audits

What are Equity Audits? Essentially, an equity audit is a systematic examination across the practices of the school or organization to understand how educational equity is playing out – where there are gaps and where there is greater equity. This is a purposeful way to collect and examine data to provide a picture of how different states, districts, schools, and students are impacted by educational policies and practices. Skrla and colleagues (2009) explain that when we are speaking about equity audits in school contexts, it is essential to clarify that we are speaking about educational equity, which they define as:

> the educational policies, practice and programs necessary to (a) eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status; and (b) provide equal educational opportunities and ensure that historically underserved or underrepresented population meet the same rigorous standards for academic performance expected of all children and youth. . .Educational equity activities promote the real possibility of equality of educational results for each student and between diverse groups of students. (p. 3)

An essential part of this process is examining the experience of historically underserved or underrepresented populations. This required disaggregating data by the range of demographic and identity markers (i.e., race, class, ELL, special education). Capper and Young (2015) describe this as anchoring equity in the idea of proportional representation. For example, proportional representation means understanding the number and percentage of Black students in advanced classes and comparing that to the local proportion in the population. If 30% of the student population is black, we would expect to see that 30% of the students in advanced classes are also Black. If 10% of the students in advanced classes are Black, we have identified an opportunity gap as the proportion of Black students in advanced classes does not match the natural proportion of Black students in the school. Typically, these audits examine proportional representation through descriptive statistics and composition indices.

How have equity audits been used? Equity audits have been utilized by schools, districts and educational organizations in their work to create more equitable schools (Capper & Fraturra, 2009; Skrla et al., 2004, 2009). Capper and Young (2015) explain the history of equity audits in the field. These audits were initially used to examine broad policies that impact access to certified teachers or disproportionate levels of school discipline or other measures of school achievement for students of color or from lower SES backgrounds (Skrla et al., 2004). Those kinds of audits provide essential information for documenting equity and inequality as a catalyst for policy

change. Skrla et al. (2004) detail layers of inequity that these audits can uncover. They examine the conditions (e.g., teachers teaching outside of their certification, funding, etc.), school programs (e.g., placement in special education, discipline, etc.) and outcomes (e.g., graduation rates, enrolling in college, etc.) as places worthy of investigation. Equity audits have primarily been used to understand and show equity gaps at all three of those levels and how the conditions relate to program and outcomes in a blossoming array of research projects.

Scholars have used equity audits in diverse schools and districts, including across rural, suburban and urban contexts (Cleveland et al., 2012; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Green & Dantley, 2013; Skrla et al., 2009) and across both secondary and elementary schools. For example, Bleyaert (2011) investigated equity audits used with five high schools working toward math curriculum mandates and Brown (2010) used equity audits in a systemic examination of dozens of elementary schools. More recently, Green (2016) employed equity audit tools to create a community-based audit to support equitable school-community relations.

Far more often than for research studies, equity audits have been used as a practical tool in educational leadership. Many educational leadership preparation programs across the nation use them to support future and current leaders' development about their equity work. Likewise, many of the resources about equity audits (see, Capper & Frattura, 2000; Capper & Fraturra, 2009; Skrla et al., 2009, McKenzie, 2011; McKenzie et al., 2019; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2020) are geared for school leaders to engage in this work. Additionally, across the country a variety of educational consultants and non-profits do equity audits for school, district, and state educational systems. Thus, while the scholarly field has used and continues to use equity audit in research, it is more often an applied tool for practicing school leaders. This current project is built upon this multi-decade foundation of equity audits. We believe that equity audits are key tools to explore and make visible disproportionality and inequity—to understand opportunity gaps.

Opportunity Gaps

Since the late 1980's there has been significant scholarly and popular writing about the achievement gap (Delpit, 1995, 2013; Ferguson, 2007). While there are many factors that contribute to that gap, there is consensus that largely school achievement results from *opportunity* gaps (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010)—some children receive fewer or less robust opportunities than others. We know that these gaps can exist along racial, economic and disability areas of difference. Salisbury (2019) uncovered that while making progress on improving graduation rates, schools can set up structures that impede students of color and low-income students from access to a variety of enriching experiences. In other words, to change their graduation rates, Salisbury found reduced opportunities for many marginalized students leading to more space being created in advanced and enriching programs for white students. Syracuse City Schools has experienced a steady rise in graduation rate, and undertaking this audit resonates with Salisbury's (2019) warning and is a key step on a path to a more equitable district.

As a field, we know that access and opportunity gaps in advanced class are key gatekeepers for high school students in determining post-secondary success. Research is also clear that performing arts and athletics are important areas to consider in terms of identifying meaningful opportunity gaps since these areas provide a myriad of developmental benefits for adolescents (Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Feldman, & Matjasko, 2005) that correlate with positive academic, social and emotional outcomes. Benefits of participating in fine arts and/or athletics include increased engagement in school (Dotterer et al., 2007), lower drop-out rates and decreased delinquent and risky behaviors (Guest & McRee, 2009). Social networks and peer cultures are cultivated through fine arts and athletics (Fredricks et al., 2002), influencing identity-development and feelings of belonging (Brown & Evans, 2002; Knifsend & Graham, 2012). Class identities, including social and cultural capital, are passed through arts and athletics, and pro-social interactions such as mentoring and cross-cultural encounters have been linked to participation (Kim et al., 2015). Finally, fine arts and athletics correlate with higher executive functions such as task initiation and follow-through, planning, sustained attention, and goal-directed persistence (Diamond & Ling, 2016).

Kraehe and colleagues (2016) document the persistent realities of inequity around arts in urban education. Building on the known benefits, with the clear-eyed reality that too often students in urban settings have less access to the arts, we purposefully made performing arts one of the focus areas of the audit. In addition, given the long-documented benefits of student participation in athletics (Broh, 2002), we were purposeful to include athletics with arts and advanced academics in this work.

While our team understood this body of literature on the opportunity gaps that exist in K-12 schools for students from marginalized identities, the experiences of our team members contextualized this literature into the local reality. Our team engaged in this project because of our personal experiences seeing the opportunity gap play out in SCSD specifically. We wanted to firmly understand the realities in our city and to move to amelioration.

SU/SCSD Research-Practice Equity Audit: A Tool to Understand Opportunity Gaps

Many equity audits look at district or school conditions and how they relate to school programs and long-term outcomes. We were trying to understand what happens in between the conditions of the school district (staffing, certification, funding, etc.) and the long-term outcomes (graduation rates, post-secondary education, employment, etc.) that initial equity audits sought to investigate. We focused not on the conditions, but on the much more granular level of student participation/opportunity resulting

from those conditions. We layer the work of Ladson-Billings (2006)—that opportunity gaps are a central and driving force in disparate outcomes and disparate schooling—onto Capper and Fraturra (2000) and Skrla et al.'s (2004) tool of the equity audit to understand how those opportunities play out across demographic groups of students—where opportunity gaps exist and where they do not at the local level.

To accomplish this, we created an audit that focused on student participation in important educational opportunities; thus, giving our partnership student level information about how issues of access and opportunities play out across SCSD high schools. We focused on a specific understanding of opportunity; the opportunity to access advanced academics, performing arts and athletics. Therefore, we investigated student-by-student participation data in three areas (advanced academics, performing arts, and athletics).

We argue that this type of equity audit allows leaders to monitor and assess equity along the way toward graduation and other long-term outcomes—adjusting conditions, policy and practices to improve access if gaps are identified. Our team proposed that this creates the potential for working toward more just and equitable schools when leadership can make adjustments in order to create the conditions for marginalized students increased participation in enriching experiences. Given the importance of these enriching opportunities, we position this use of an equity audit as a place to investigate the realities of equity (or inequity).

Engaging in a Collaborative Equity Audit

For this audit project, our research-practice partnership was interested in the representation of specific groups of students within particular opportunities at the high-school level focused on access to advanced academic courses (including Advanced Placement [AP], International Baccalaureate [IB] and dual-enrollment college credit courses), performing arts opportunities, and athletics. By examining who participates in these three areas, we use student experience to understand the system's outcomes. It is the system that has produced the participation and opportunities (or lack thereof) not individuals. We find this method useful for schools and districts to examine the outputs of their work as they produce equity or inequity in opportunity and access. As such, we sought to address the following research questions:

1. Who is taking advanced academic classes and where does participation match proportional representation and where does it not?
2. Who is participating in Performing Arts and where does participation match proportional representation and where does it not?
3. Who is participating in Athletics and where does participation match proportional representation and where does it not?

Research-Practice Audit Team

Our team consists of seven primary members: The Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning (SCSD), the Supervisor of Fine Arts (SCSD), a Data Analyst (SCSD) in the school district Office of Shared Accountability, a teacher on special assignment overseeing Athletics (SCSD, a Professor in the Teaching and Leadership Department (SU) whose area is leadership, an Associate Professor in the Teaching and Leadership Department who is also a district parent (SU), and a doctoral student in education (SU). The school district leaders coordinated the collection of data, and the team met bi-weekly to problem solve, plan, enter, and examine the data and the team engaged other key players as needed.

Data Collection

Part of the power of doing an equity audit with a team is gathering concrete data about multifaceted equity issues and this requires specifically gathering info with regards to various student identities/demographics. For this project, we focused on three key areas of student opportunity: Advanced academic classes, performing arts, and athletics. We defined advanced academic classes as any course that was weighted for GPA purposes and earned the students dual credit (such as AP, IB, or college credit). Performing arts opportunities included any performing ensemble like band and choir as well as participation in plays and musicals. Sports included any high school athletic team—freshman, JV, and varsity at each high school and combined teams across high schools.

For all three areas, we examined the proportional representation of the students involved across gender, race, socio-economic status, disability status, ELL status, and other potentially relevant markers. Part of the intent of the project was to see this as an important means to collect baseline data—clear data to help identify systematic challenges. Overall demographics are based on the district's Basic Educational Data System (BEDS) Institutional Master File for the New York State Education Department's Information and Reporting Services.

We assumed data collection would be straightforward in that we needed to create 3 lists:

1) An index - the list of all possible courses that met our criteria for advanced academic, all sports teams, and all performing arts groups/opportunities;
2) a participation roster (PR) - a database of all students who participated in any of the opportunities in the index; and
3) a demographic roster (DR) - a database with all high school students for the academic year and their demographic information.

The team began with gathering a DR of all the high school students in the district. This DR consisted of identifiers regarding race, socio-economic status, gender, neighborhood,

disability status, immigrant status, home language, etc. and consisted of 5,845 discrete student records.

Data collection proved not to be straightforward; while the district Data Analyst was able to download registration information for all advanced classes, neither athletic nor fine arts extracurriculars were tracked via electronic databases. The Supervisor of Fine Arts secured physical copies of all programs and performing arts rosters. The only available copies of athletic rosters were hard copies stored in a filing cabinet in the athletic office. In many cases, athletic rosters and fine arts programs included student names rather than student identification (ID) numbers. Further, many names on the athletic rosters were misspelled, requiring cross-checking with the project database to locate ID numbers. The team cross-checked the available athletic rosters with the index and found 22 rosters missing. The team secured high school yearbooks and had high school administrators identify the students. In total, the team was able to secure 105 of the 111 athletic rosters.

Then, all participant data for performing arts and athletics was hand-entered by the team from paper copies. The team divided the rosters and programs to hand-enter participants into the participation roster—each bimonthly meeting from October 2016 to May 2017, members would leave with several hard copies to key and submit electronically for compilation on the Participation Roster. Student ID, Building, Domain (Academic; Fine Arts; Athletics), Season (fall, winter, spring), Activity (i.e., Track; Musical), Level (Varsity, JV) and Course Number were the seven areas preserved in the PR. Only 8 students could not be identified in the DR.

For this project, the identification of disproportionality in educational settings has focused on two indices: descriptive statistics and the composition index (Bollmer et al. 2007; Hosp & Reschly 2003; Parrish 2002; Skiba et al. 2006). We used both the participation roster and the demographic roster for the descriptive statistics. The most important descriptive statistic used for this project was a basic count. For example, using the demographic roster we generated how many students were in high school, or using the participation roster we counted how many Hispanic students participated in fine arts. These descriptive statistics—counts—provided the foundation of this analysis through a basic picture of who are the students in the high schools by demographic group and who is participating in each activity (advanced academics, athletics, and fine arts).

Since the 2016 school year the district has partnered with New York University's Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality (TAC-D) to identify and address differences in how students of color are referred to the disciplinary system and special education. Since the beginning of this collaboration, District leadership has routinely analyzed these disproportionality metrics in the context of student discipline. While additional statistics can be calculated (Coutinho & Oswald 2000), the statistics calculated for this project are composition index to maintain consistency with the district's previously established data review practices.

The composition index is the percentage of individuals in a given population from a particular subgroup. For example, 49% of students in performing arts receive free or reduced priced lunch or 38% of the students enrolled in advanced academic coursework are white. The composition of a population cannot suggest disproportionality without a comparison group for reference (IDEA Data Center 2014, Skiba 2006). For this study, the subgroup composition of students in enrichment activities was compared to the subgroup composition of student enrollment at the secondary level to identify differences. For example, performing arts participation district wide is made up of 47% white students and 38% black students as compared to the high school student population which is 23% white and 52% black.

Audit Findings and District Responses

The team completed the initial audit findings (the descriptive statistics and the composition index) across advanced academics, athletics and performing arts. These data informed a variety of conversations, formal and informal, across the Syracuse district. First, co-authors Franz and Williams presented the findings to the senior leadership team—the superintendent and the top administrators who oversee all parts of the district. Next, the senior leadership team wanted the results to be shared with the district leadership academies. The academies are made up of principals, vice principals and administrative interns. From the beginning of this project the position of the district has been that collecting and making the data public was acceptable, as long as something was done with it. It was that feeling and the convictions of individual leaders in response to the data that led to specific initial steps in each of the three areas that are described next. We have continued to collect data and are conducting further analysis, but we report here on first year findings and district responses.

Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics for all high school students in terms of advanced academic opportunities and participation. The first column labels the demographic groups, the 2nd column includes the total number of students in that group; the 3rd column shows who are enrolled in at least one advanced academic course during that year; the 4th column shows the total number in that group that did not take any advanced academic courses, and the 5th-8th columns show the number participating and not participating in athletics and performing arts respectively. The 9th column contains the number of students who participated in any of the three areas (at least one advanced academics, athletics or performing arts), and the final column indicates how many students did not participate in any of the three areas. The vast majority of students are not participating in any of the three areas, 4,073 out of 5,845.

Advanced Academics

Initial Findings in Participation in Advanced Academics. The data clearly shows that many high school students are *not* taking any

Table 1. Number of Students by Demographic Groups: Participating in Advanced Academics, Athletics and Performing Arts

		Advanced Academic Participation		*Athletic Participation*		*Fine Arts Participation*		*Any Participation*	
	Enrollment	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*
All Students	5845	1095	4750	974	4871	279	5566	1772	4073
Asian	534	147	387	67	467	16	518	172	362
Black	3054	464	2590	532	2522	115	2939	896	2158
Latinx	708	97	611	85	623	17	691	162	546
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	65	13	52	9	56	0	65	19	46
Multiracial	139	21	118	23	116	6	133	42	97
White	1345	353	992	258	1087	125	1220	481	864
Students with Disabilities	1086	52	1034	113	973	36	1050	173	913
Students without Disabilities	4759	1043	3716	861	3898	243	4516	1599	3160
ELL yes	1082	68	1014	83	999	10	1072	147	935
ELL no	4763	1027	3736	891	3872	269	4494	1625	3138
Free/reduced lunch	4284	660	3624	583	3701	143	4141	1103	3181
Not free/reduced lunch	1561	435	1126	391	1170	136	1425	669	892

advanced academic classes—4,750 out of 5,845 (about 81%). For example, 2,590 Black, 611 Latinx students, 1,034 students with disabilities, 1,014 ELL students, and 3,624 students receiving free and reduced lunch did not take advanced academic classes.

Figure 1 depicts the composition index for advanced academics. Each arrow shows one demographic group. The circle on the arrow identifies the group's percent of high school enrollment. The point of the arrow shows the group's percent of the students in advanced academic classes (the percent of participation). The arrow points to the right (and colored black) if the group is over-represented in advanced academics; the arrow points to the left (in grey) if the group is under-represented. If the point of the arrow is on top of the circle, then the group's participation fairly closely matches its enrollment percentage. The longer the arrow the greater the over or under representation. For example, Black students comprise 52% of the high school students, but they are underrepresented in advanced academics since Black students make up only 37% of the students in advanced academic classes. Therefore, the arrow is grey and pointing to the left, showing that Black students are underrepresented in advanced academics.

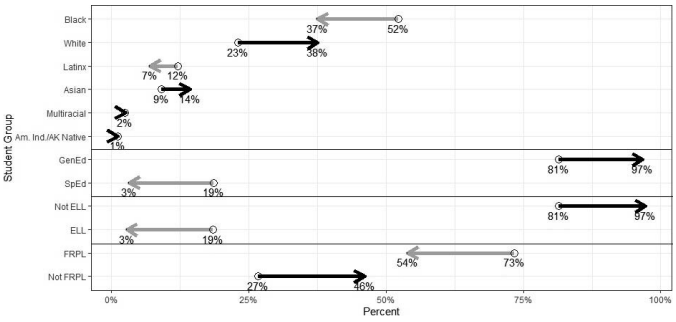

Figure 1. Student Enrollment Compared to Participation in Advanced Academic

Note: GenEd= students without disabilities as defined by IDEA. SpEd=students with IEPs; Not ELL = students who are not receiving English language learner services; ELL = students receiving English language learner services; FRPL= students who receive free and reduced-price lunch, not FRPL= students who do not qualify for free or reduced lunch.

District Initial Responses Seeking Greater Equity in Advanced Academics. Using data from the audit, district administrators initiated two changes that were intended to change the trajectory of advanced academic enrollment over time. First, the audit led to focused change designed to increase advanced academic participation by underrepresented groups at the International Baccalaureate (IB) High School. This resulted in a policy shift that moved away from only select students being part of the IB program—a long standing practice that resulted in students of color, low income students, students with disabilities and ELL students being underrepresented in the IB program. This shift moved all 9th and 10th graders into the IB program for those grades, ensuring that all students at this high school were taking advanced classes. Then, in 11th and 12th grade, students can choose to continue toward an IB diploma or work toward a traditional diploma or career and technical program diploma.

Second, the audit was used as the district changed enrollment procedures for the choice schools. There are a handful of schools that families can choose to send their children, for example, the accelerated elementary school, the Montessori school, the Expeditionary Learning Middle School, the Tech High School, etc. The district moved to weighted prioritized lottery systems that focused on proportional representation—giving greater access to students who have been disproportionately underrepresented.

Athletics

Initial Findings in Participation in Athletics. Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics for all high school students in terms of athletic opportunities and participation. The 5th column has the number of students who are participating on at least one athletic

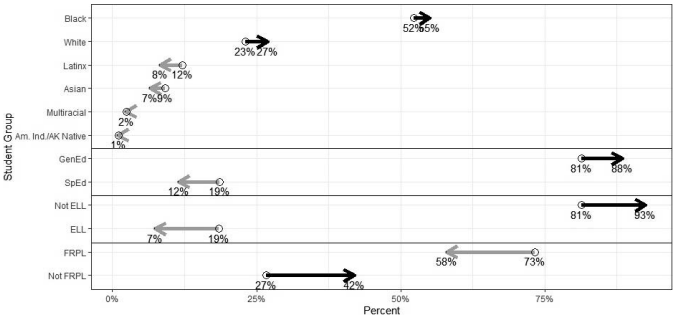

Figure 2. Student Enrollment Compared to Participation in Athletics

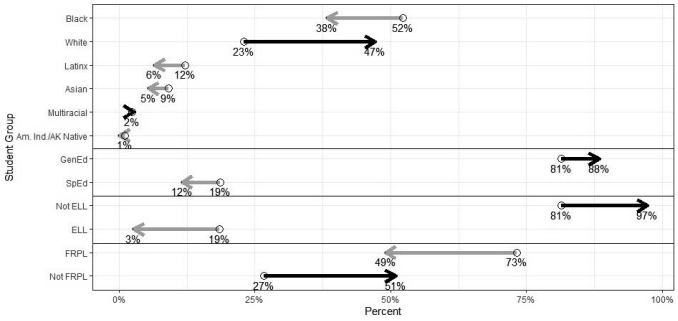

Figure 3. Student Enrollment Compared to Participation in Performing Arts

team that year; the 6th column shows the total number in that group that did not participate in any athletic teams. The data clearly show the vast majority of high school students are NOT participating on any athletic teams—4,871 out of 5,845 (about 83%).

Figure 2 depicts the composition index for athletics in the same manner as used above for advanced academics. For example, students in special education (SpEd) comprise 19% of high school enrollment but are underrepresented in athletics comprising 12% of students involved in athletics. The arrow is grey and pointing to the left.

District Initial Responses Seeking Greater Equity in Athletics. Using data from the audit, district administrators initiated two changes that were intended to improve athletic participation for underrepresented groups. First, in seeing that so very few students with disabilities participate in athletics, SCSD added and then expanded unified sports teams. Starting unified sports teams and rolling implementation out across the high schools over 2-3 years is a direct result of the district administration seeing and being uncomfortable with the under-representation of students with disabilities in athletics. Unified sports teams are inclusive athletic opportunities specifically designed to engage students with disabilities in sports with non-disabled peers. This is in contrast to Special Olympic sports that are intended for students with disabilities or traditional varsity sports. Second, the district is engaging in a review of attendance policies in relation to athletic participation. Traditional athletic policies hold participation in athletics contingent on maintaining particular grade and attendance levels. Given the data on underrepresentation and our hypothesis that participation in athletics is correlated with improved attendance, the district revised the participation policy.

Performing Arts

Initial Findings in Participation in Performing Art. Table 1 also depicts the descriptive statistics for all high school students in terms of performing arts opportunities and participation. The 7th column shows the number of students who are participating in at least one performing arts opportunity that year; the 8th column shows the total number of students in that group that did not participate in any performing art. The data clearly show the vast majority of high school students are NOT participating in performing arts- 5,566 out of 5,845 (about 95%).

Figure 3 depicts the composition index for performing arts in the same manner that was used for advanced academics and athletics. For example, Black students comprise 52%, Latinx 12%, and students receiving free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) 73% of high school enrollment. All of these groups are underrepresented in performing arts as they comprise 38%, 6% and 49% respectively with grey arrows pointing to the left.

District Initial Responses Seeking Greater Equity in Performing Arts. The data helped fuel two steps in the effort to increase participation in performing arts. Using the data about drama participation and disproportionate representation, the Supervisor or Fine Arts engaged all drama teachers and drama directors in courageous conversations around the disproportionate data of drama participation and created a multi-year orchestra plan to provide greater and consistent access for students across the district to instruments and instruction. The initial plan from these conversations was to engage in intentional recruitment of underrepresented students into drama. Each high school staff developed specific recruiting strategies to target students from underrepresented groups to participate in drama. Second, the Supervisor of Fine Arts created a 4-year plan, approved by the school board, to significantly invest in orchestra across the district: beginning at all elementary schools and expanding to all middle and high schools with specific focus on curriculum, teacher development, and purchasing additional string instruments.

Partnership Matters

We encountered a variety of reactions as we shared the findings from the audit with different stakeholders. As a team we discussed the heavy feeling of seeing the disparities presented so clearly in our findings. Gentile, Supervisor of Fine Arts, summed this up with her reaction to the performing arts data, "It was all stuff I knew; the disparity was why I wanted to do this work, but it is nauseating to see the reality so clearly in the data."

For the most part the senior leadership in the district was conscious of the disparate realities for African American students in SCSD but were struck by the pervasiveness of the

disparities for Hispanic students. For the most part this kind of audit produces important and actionable local data (Cooper, 2007), but not ground-breaking research findings; disparate opportunities are documented widely.

Our team came to believe that part of the power of this work for the larger scholarly community is the research/ practice partnership engaging in this local and tedious work together. Together we were focused on a very tangible product—collecting and analyzing data for this equity audit. This work took equity out of an abstract ether and grounded it in concrete realities of our local community resonates with the scholarship on research-practice partnerships (Coburn et al., 2013). We see the actionable and material nature of the audit as important to sustaining the partnership and the work. These qualities made it easier to share our work with others across the district; the audit became a practical way for others to think about this one aspect of equity. In the face of the variety of equity issues that challenge many districts today, creating a concrete product that led to specific conversations and actions felt rewarding to our team. A desire to unearth inequity and then hopefully make positive changes to district policy and procedures were driving reasons why we started this project. Thus, given the specific and substantive changes the district was making, continuing to engage in this work felt potentially productive—again resonating with the scholarship on research-practice partnerships.

Yet, part of the unintended power of doing this work has been discovering other places in the district systems that needed attention. When we began this audit, we quickly learned neither arts nor athletics were tracked via the electronic student data management system. Thus, we entered thousands of lines of data by hand, painstakingly matching misspelled names with the master database to accurately identify participants. Our initial data gathering was messy and time-consuming, taking well over a calendar year to complete. We learned that incorrectly spelled names often impacted other items for students, including misspelled school awards or scholarships. We wrestled together with the feeling of how culturally irresponsible it is to misspell many students' names in a racially and ethnically diverse district. In deciding which classes would count as advanced academic courses for the audit, we found that there were inconsistencies in how particular advanced classes were being recorded in the system for some students.

The granular level of our data efforts, student by student and experience by experience, was the reason we identified these other equally important issues, issues that would have gone undetected without this painstaking effort. Finding and working through these issues was time consuming and emotionally weighty. It was the collective time sitting together, hand-entering data, sharing our outrage about the disrespect of misspelled names, finding errors about advanced classes, and sharing our fears about what that might mean for specific students led to the district creating a mechanism to keep track of arts and athletics in the student data management system and the correction of recording the advanced courses for all students enrolled. These were not intended outcomes of this project but have helped make concrete and important improvements. These improvements buoyed our team to continue to move forward together.

We realize that either organization (district or university) could have done this audit on our own, but neither of us did. We found that it was the collaborative nature of this endeavor that advanced this work. Being in the same room week after week and year after year was a key element of developing and sustaining this research practice partnership—no one organization needed to maintain momentum in the face of data issues, hours of tedious work, and soul crushing findings.

The collaborative nature of the school district/ higher education team created a space to begin and sustain this work. Working together pushed this time consuming and uncomfortable (in the process and results) project forward. Being together accomplished this initial audit and created space for hopeful steps toward greater equity. SUP

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