# How Do Districts Implement Equity in Afterschool and Summer Programs?

## A Report to the Wallace Foundation

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# Executive Summary

In- and out-of-school experiences represent unique and significant settings for youth development. Both in- and out-of-school settings have the potential to reduce inequities in children and youth's opportunities and experiences. Yet too often inequity is compounded across these settings, with students from historically marginalized backgrounds being served by the least resourced schools and also having less access to high quality and enriching out-of-school time activities. As part of an effort to support equity in the out-of-school sector, The Wallace Foundation commissioned researchers at the Youth-Nex Center at the University of Virginia to examine the current state of district-based equity work in large school districts across the United States, with a focus on how these efforts are included (or not) in districts' out–of-school programming. Our goal was to identify a set of exemplary school districts doing deep equity work in order to understand how this equity work translates to out-of-school time (after school and/or summer programs). Our work was guided by three overarching questions: 1) What does equity look like in the OST (afterschool/summer) programs offered by ~10-15 districts considered to be leading efforts to center schooling around equity; 2) What challenges do the districts face in infusing equity into their OST programs? What actions could districts take to meet these challenges; and 3) What further research studies are needed to better inform policy and practice relevant to expanding equity in district-based OST programs?

Through a scan of the literature and existing equity audits for education systems and out-of-school programming, we identified seven areas in which school districts can engage in deep equity work: 1) Physical and contextual landscape; 2) Systems and administration; 3) Teaching and learning; 4) Social emotional learning / School Climate; 5) Professional development; 6) Family engagement; 7) Community connectedness. Within each area, we identified specific indicators that represented a district's work within that area (see Appendix A). We began by examining the websites of 105 U.S. school districts to find evidence of the equity indicators. We coded district websites for the presence of equity language in five structures: 1) the public reporting on student level data; 2) the presence of disproportionality in student discipline or achievement data; 3) the implementation of strategies or policies to address inequities; 4) evidence of equity-focused professional development opportunities; and 5) evidence of culturally responsive curricular materials. Most the districts (97%) reported strategies or policies to address inequities, and almost three-quarters of the districts engaged educators in equity-focused professional development opportunities, with 84% providing educators with culturally-responsive classroom and/or curricular materials. Each district was also coded for the presence of an equity statement, with 60% of districts having an equity statement on their websites.

From the 63 districts that had an equity statement, we considered for potential inclusion in the final sample those that were coded as having evidence of at least 5 of the 6 indicators (n=21). Additional districts (n=5) were added to this list based on recommendations from colleagues and research team connections. We invited these 26 districts to be screened for inclusion in the study and conducted short screening interviews with the 12 districts that accepted our invitation. Our sample for the final study included seven districts and three intermediary organizations that partnered closely with districts to provide afterschool and summer programming. From these 10 organizations (representing 9 communities across the U.S.), we interviewed a total of 59 stakeholders across multiple stakeholder groups.

Stakeholders reported a variety of equity-supportive efforts implemented across their communities. Many adopted holistic approaches to equity that included historically marginalized student demographics across racial / ethnic groups, ability statuses, gender identities, language, transience, and sexual orientation. Additionally, these communities emphasized the importance of identifying and understanding family needs, drawing on equity metrics (i.e., discipline /achievement data), and considering the availability and students' access to enrichment programs to inform their comprehensive definitions of equity.

Four key themes were identified in the data that were by and large supportive of districts' equity efforts. These four themes include: 1) ensuring equitable access to enrichment programs; 2) engaging families to understand family, student, and community needs; 3) ensuring strong district-wide leadership that allows for local flexibility; and 4) acknowledging barriers to equity work and working towards continuous improvement. While some of the barriers identified by participants are common in the OST literature (e.g., transportation,  waitlists, enrollment caps), new barriers were also discussed, such as 1) spacing and staffing constraints due to funding and Covid; 2) a lack of consistent funding for equity-focused programs or expansion of programs to historically marginalized communities; and 3) a disconnect between school-day / district-wide equity initiatives and those integrated into the OST context.

School districts' equity efforts are beginning to make the transition into OST contexts. A focus on access to programming and SEL were integrated into OST programs across the majority of the sites in our sample.  However, there is still more to be done to intentionally integrate many of the leading school day supports, such as professional development opportunities, culturally responsive programming, and mental health supports to name a few. Districts who developed and maintained a close partnership model with local Community-based organizations (CBOs) and/or intermediaries reported more comprehensive and equitable supports to students and families.

We recommend focusing more intentionally on integrating districts' equity efforts into OST spaces. We identify strong but flexible leadership at the district level as important for success. We also recommend districts partnering more directly with local CBO's. This includes both drawing on the expertise and opportunities offered by CBO's to broaden districts' portfolios of culturally responsive programming and providing training and communication to partners around the district's priority areas, including equity. There are multiple post-Covid opportunities that communities can build on to strengthen the integration of their equity and OST initiatives. This includes sustaining new partnerships that grew out of needs for remote learning sites, continuing to offer multiple modalities for families to engage with schools and programs, and sustaining or building new intermediaries or community-wide systems to help support these efforts and increase the integration between the in- and out-of-school learning contexts. We also recommend that funders look for ways to help communities sustain programs that were implemented with relief funds but that are at risk of being dismantled as these dollars disappear.

# Introduction

Equity has become a focus of public discourse about education, with both educators and families pushing for greater attention to ensuring that every young person in the United States is given equitable access to the resources and support they need to succeed. This attention is well-deserved. Disparities in academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes are frequently observed among youth in the United States who have been historically marginalized (i.e., those who have been subject to legal and cultural practices intended to subjugate one group over another) relative to those who have not.[1] There are a variety of contributing factors associated with inequitable outcomes in the United States educational system. Importantly, evidence points to systemic, cultural, and ecological factors – not individual differences - as the root causes of these disparities.

In- and out-of-school experiences represent unique and significant settings for youth development and learning. Both in- and out-of-school settings have the potential to reduce inequities in children and youth's opportunities and experiences. Yet too often inequity is compounded across these settings, with students from historically marginalized backgrounds being served by the least resourced schools and also having less access to high quality and enriching out-of-school time activities. Indeed, research demonstrates that our nations' learning environments have grown increasingly segregated (Frankenberg et al., 2017; Orfield et al., 2012), and that this segregation is associated with stark racial achievement gaps (Reardon, 2016) and discipline disparities (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2019), with students of color and students from low-income communities being disciplined (e.g., suspensions) at consistently higher rates than their White and middle-class peers (Edwards, 2016). Inequities are further amplified by differences in out-of-school time (OST) experiences, such as during the summer, when children from families with fewer economic resources lose an average of 2-3 months of learning, while their more economically advantaged peers gain a month of learning (Cooper, Borman, & Fairchild, 2010). Inequities become even further amplified, and the role of OST programs in addressing those inequities even more clear, during the summer months, when there are stark differences in access to both basic needs (e.g., food, safe environments) and enrichment activities (NASEM, 2019). These disparities became increasingly more complex during the COVID-19 pandemic, as children engaged in learning that would normally take place in the school building in a variety of different settings, further amplifying pre-existing inequities.

Thus, equity is a vital aspect of education regardless of context. Be it formal educational settings (i.e., schools), or informal settings (i.e., afterschool programs, extracurricular activities), it is imperative that education stakeholders think critically and make proactive efforts towards creating safe and growth fostering environments for students to learn. Yet public and policy conversations about equity tend to focus on the formal educational sector, i.e., schools. Despite a history of serving children and families from marginalized backgrounds (Halpern, 2002), equity efforts in and for the out-of-school sector have received far less attention.

The development of equitable spaces requires wrap-around support from policymakers, educators, community members, and students alike. Further, creating equitable spaces involves increased awareness of diverse cultures, experiences, and systemic [racial] bias embedded in our

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[1] We use the terms minoritized and marginalized to make explicit the fact that it is not individual identities such as race, gender, or sexuality, that are associated with particular outcomes, but rather it is the way in which young people with those identities have been positioned in relation to social, economic, and educational systems.

institutions that influences pre-existing norms and/or standards. Thus, in order to create systems that best support students, educational stakeholders should regularly assess their approaches to equity, engaging in continuous improvement processes that support their progression into deeper equity work.

We would be remiss not to acknowledge the unique historical context in which this work is being conducted, during co-occurring viral (COVID-19) and social (racial injustice) pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved itself to be persistent, and many have argued that it is no longer a pandemic, but now should simply be considered endemic, something we will need to learn to live with, as we do influenza. Yet the disruptions to the educational system that COVID-19 has caused will need to be addressed intentionally and deeply, even as we develop new ways to adapt to the virus. At the same time, the increased attention to racial injustice on the national stage, and the continued witnessing of violence against Black and Brown people, has also impacted students. For educators, the politicization of equity adds an additional, challenging dimension in their efforts to address equity for their students. The inequities that have been amplified by both pandemics, and the effects on youth in terms of learning loss, mental health issues, trauma, and social and emotional difficulties, are priorities for both in- and out-of-school time programs immediately and moving forward.
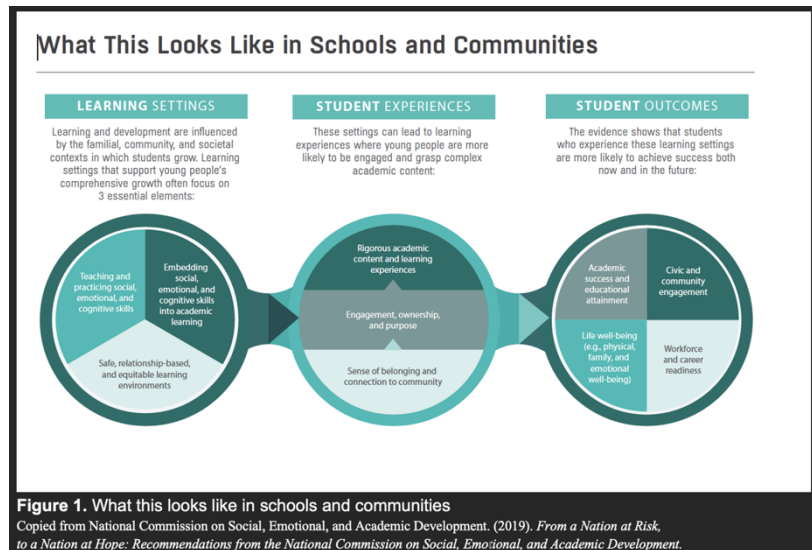
As part of an effort to support equity in the out-of-school sector, The Wallace Foundation commissioned researchers at the Youth-Nex Center at the University of Virginia to examine the current state of district-based equity work in large school districts across the United States, with a focus on how these efforts are included (or not) in districts' out–of-school programming. Thus, in this project, our goal was to identify a set of exemplary school districts doing deep equity work in order to understand how this equity work translates to out-of-school time (after school and/or summer programs).

This study set out to respond to three overarching questions. First, what does equity look like in the OST (afterschool/summer) programs offered by school districts that are considered to be leading efforts to center schooling around equity? More specifically, within this research question, we explore 1) what characteristics, strategies, policies, or other factors make these districts "leaders" in the field; 2) how do these districts define and/or envision equity; 3) how do their definitions shape their approaches to enacting equity; 4) what policies, procedures, leadership, routines, or tools are adopted by the districts to enact their equity vision, and; 5)how do policies and procedures affect or shape the OST programs offered by the districts? The second overarching question that guided our study was, what challenges do these districts face in infusing equity into their OST programs and what actions could districts take to meet these challenges? And, finally, what further research studies are needed to better inform policy and practice relevant to expanding equity in district-based OST programs?

This report presents the results of that work. We begin by presenting the theoretical framework which we constructed to guide the study, followed by the sampling and methods for the study. We then discuss the seven equity areas which we identified from a scan of the literature as being key to educational equity work and the results from our initial scan of districts for the presence and prevalence of equity indicators. Finally, we present the results of our study of communities identified as being engaged in deep equity work, including recommendations drawn from the data for each main theme identified in the results.

# Race, Equity, and Education: An Overview

Our approach is heavily informed by ecological theories of human development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Coll, et al, 1996). These theories emphasize the ways in which our immediate environments, the proximal influences on child learning and development, are embedded within and shaped by more distal layers of the social ecology, including policies, cultural norms and values, and social-historical trends. These ecological approaches are reflected in the visual (see Figure 1) taken from the 2019 National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, report which illustrates the ways in which social and community contexts shape student experiences and thereby student outcomes. This figure highlights why we focus on social and community forces and influences as part of our consideration of educational equity. Although Figure 1 does not explicitly address the role of values and culture, they are embedded within the "familial, community and societal contexts" that are noted to influence learning settings. Thus, in line with our ecological approach to understanding educational equity, in this study we emphasize approaches that: 1) focus on systemic rather than individual intervention approaches, and; 2) acknowledge and challenge dominant belief systems.



**Figure 1.** What this looks like in schools and communities
Copied from National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2019). *From a Nation at Risk, to a Nation at Hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.*

The long-standing presence of inequitable educational experiences by race in the United States is well-documented (see Groeger, Waldman, & Eads, 2018). Whereas it is true that socioeconomic status is also a powerful influence and predictor of educational outcomes (Broer, Bai, Fonseca, 2019; Reardon, 2013), racial and ethnic background remains a defining category of educational experiences both in combination with socioeconomic status and on its own (Reardon, Kalogrides, & Shores, 2019). Indeed, American schools today are still heavily racially segregated, despite the *Brown v. Board* decision of more than 60 years ago, and Black children are far more likely to attend both racially segregated and high poverty schools (Garcia, 2020). Historically, White families living in urban city centers took advantage of redlining real estate policies supported by federal legislation that permitted their relocation to new suburban communities (Rothstein, 2017). These laws simultaneously prevented Black families from moving into communities and devalued housing prices in communities where Black families were able to purchase homes or live (Rothstein, 2017). De-facto school segregation associated with this "White Flight" had an impact on the tax base that finances public schools because of the lower value of homes in urban communities and dissolved the school-community connection (K, 1980); Rossell & Hawley, 1981). While Black teachers were being displaced because of education policies instituted after segregation (Thompson, 2022), such as licensure (Mawhinney, 2014), White teachers were no longer residents of the communities in which they taught and had no real

investment, knowledge about, or connection to the mostly Black children and families they were commuting into cities to teach.

Yet it is not segregation alone that produces inequitable educational experiences and outcomes. Even within districts that are technically integrated (i.e., the demographics of students in individual schools within the district are heterogeneous) the data demonstrates that students still experience differential educational experiences depending on their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Reardon, 2016). This is reflected in statistics on discipline disparities and exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from the learning environment, such as zero tolerance policies, suspensions, and expulsions, which disproportionately result in students of color being suspended and expelled from school (Edwards, 2016), as well as enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, which show the reverse pattern, with students of color being under-represented in such courses (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019).

Many of these disproportionalities stem from the fact that systemic racism still shapes teacher training, curriculum, and administrative and discipline policies. Further, because all Americans, regardless of our racial, ethnic, or cultural background, live in a society that favors whiteness (i.e., positions white dominant culture as the standard and confers power and privilege along a racial hierarchy with whiteness at the top; Hytten & Warren, 2003; NMAAHC, 2020), this disadvantages students with minoritized identities, even in districts where they are the majority student body. For example, unfounded or misinformed assumptions that these students and their families do not value education (Ogbu & Fordham, 1986; Puchner & Markowitz, 2015) often translates to lower academic expectations, punitive discipline, labeling, and tracking Black students into remedial classes and programs (Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Oakes, 2005; Puchner & Markowitz, 2015; George 2019). Students and families must navigate systemic bias at an individual level, and school and district reforms seldom uproot, uncover, or address the underlying systemic racial bias.

## The Present Study

This study sought to identify whether and how large school districts in the United States which are identified as having strong equity efforts are translating those efforts into their out-of-school spaces. We used a combination of review of publicly available data and interviews with key stakeholders across the phases of the study, detailed below.

## Methods

### Sampling

We selected communities for inclusion in the study sample according to the screening procedures visualized in Figure 2. First, we engaged in an interactive process of examining the websites of the very large and large school districts across the United States for the presence of equity indicators. Starting with a list of 82 districts identified based on their large or very large student populations, and 25 districts identified in prior research reports for their equity efforts, our team coded a total of 105 U.S. based school districts for six distinct equity indicators. During this coding process, we examined district websites and related web pages to find evidence of each equity indicator. Four trained researchers engaged in the coding process. Each district was double coded, and any discrepancies were discussed to 100% consensus. The four researchers met weekly to reconcile discrepancies and discuss emerging themes. Following all coding and reconciliation, we performed descriptive analyses (i.e., frequencies) to investigate the extent to which school

districts report on equity efforts.  Additionally, the four researchers wrote analytical memos during the coding process to document any challenges or insights.

In our review of district websites, we looked for the presence of equity language in five structures: 1) the public reporting of student level data; 2) the presence of disproportionality in student data; 3) the implementation of strategies or policies to address inequities; 4) evidence of equity-focused professional development opportunities; and



**Figure 2.** Description of selection procedures

5) evidence of culturally responsive curricular materials. Of the full sample of 105 districts, 74% published their student level data, and over half of those (63%) reported disproportionality in their student data. Most districts (97%) reported strategies or policies to address inequities, 72% of districts engaged educators in equity-focused professional development opportunities, and many districts (84%) supplied educators with culturally-responsive classroom and/or curricular materials. We provide more detail on the trends identified from this review in Appendix B. Each district was also coded for the presence of an equity statement, which we considered to be a necessary but not sufficient indicator of equity efforts. The 63 districts that had an equity statement, 60% of the initial list, were considered as possible sites for the study.

From the 63 districts with equity statements, we selected districts for the final sample that were coded as having evidence of at least 5 of the 6 indicators (n=21) as potential districts to include in our study sample. Additional districts (n=5) were added to this list of communities based on recommendations from colleagues and research team connections. The communities in the screening sample represented variability across geographic location as well as the size and type of community (e.g., rural, suburban, urban).

In order to gain deeper insight into the 26 districts identified as having evidence of strong equity work from either coding of their publicly available information or recommendations from colleagues, our team reached out to representatives to have an initial 15-20 minute conversation ("screening interview") about the district's equity efforts, particularly in relation to their out-of-school and summer programming (see Appendix C for screening interview protocol). In most cases, we reached out to the personnel identified on websites as being in charge of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts. In cases where we had a connection with the district via a team member or a colleague, we reached out to that person and asked for a connection to the person who was best suited to have this conversation. In total we spoke to twelve districts, seven from the original list and five identified by the team through suggestions from colleagues or because of connections we had with districts. Screening interviews were conducted over the phone or by Zoom, depending on the interviewee's preference, by members of our research team. The interviewer took detailed notes, which were then examined for cross-cutting themes across the districts. Each interview was examined by two members of the research team, a primary and secondary reviewer, who identified key themes, with the secondary reviewer also confirming consistency across the themes identified by themselves and the primary reviewer.
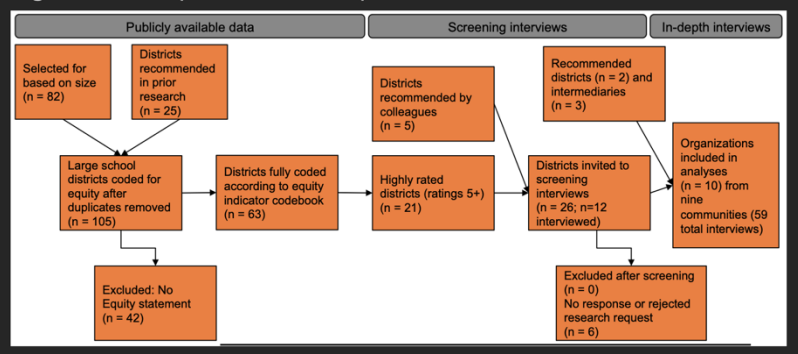
We reached out to 12 districts from the screening sample and invited them to participate in the full study. Of those 12, five agreed to participate. In addition, we recruited two districts that were recommended to us by other sources and/or to address geographic gaps in our data (see Figure 2). These districts also met the aforementioned equity indicator criteria. Finally, we decided to include some intermediary organizations in our sample in order to get the perspectives of afterschool intermediaries that partner with districts. We included two intermediary organizations from cities that were not in our sample to ensure greater geographic diversity as well as one intermediary that partners with a district in our sample. Thus, a total of 9 communities are represented in the sample across 10 organizations (7 districts, 3 intermediaries).

We began our interviews with the equity coordinators and/or Program leads and from there asked for the names of four or five additional staff from the organizations to share a bit of their experience. We suggested these people might include: (a) district administrative staff; (b) leaders of the afterschool and summer learning opportunities; (c) principals; (d) district DEI/equity director; (e) family/community liaisons and/or community members; (f) staff of afterschool and summer learning programs. Depending on the organization, we were provided names or our liaison distributed an email throughout list-servs and we were contacted by people interested in participating. We interviewed a total of 59 individuals from the 10 organizations, with a range of two to nine participant interviews within each organization (See Figure 3 for information on participants). Geographic regions represented in the sample are the Northeast (n=1), the South (n=3), the Midwest (n=2), and the West (n=4 organizations in 3 communities).

**Figure 3.** Description of Participants

| Site Location | Type of Site | Number of Interviews | Participants' Primary Roles |
|---|---|---|---|
| South | District | 6 | • 4 District level administrators<br>• 1 District level OST administrator<br>• 1 Equity Official |
| South | Intermediary | 7 | • 1 District level administrator<br>• 1 District level OST administrator<br>• 3 Program administrators (CBO)<br>• 2 Intermediary program administrators |
| West | District | 6 | • 1 District level administrator<br>• 1 District level OST administrator<br>• 1 School level administrator<br>• 2 Program administrators (CBO)<br>• 1 Program staff (CBO) |
| Northeast | District | 8 | • 4 District level administrators<br>• 2 School level personnel (teachers, counselors)<br>• 1 School level administrator<br>• 1 Program administrator (CBO) |
| Midwest | District | 9 | • 3 District level administrators<br>• 1 District level OST administrator<br>• 3 School level personnel (teachers, counselors)<br>• 1 School site coordinator<br>• 1 Equity Official |
| West | District | 2 | • 1 District level administrator<br>• 1 District level OST administrator |
| South | Intermediary | 5 | • 1 District level administrator<br>• 1 District level OST administrator<br>• 3 Intermediary program administrators |
| West | District | 3 | • 1 District level administrator<br>• 2 District level OST administrator |
| West | Intermediary | 6 | • 5 Program administrators (CBO)<br>• 1 Intermediary program administrators |
| Midwest | District | 7 | • 5 District level administrators<br>• 1 Equity official<br>• 1 School level administrator |

## Data Collection & Analytic Process

Interviews were conducted over Zoom by members of the research team (see Appendix D for the interview questions). The questions were the same regardless of who the interviewee was and whether they were district, community-based organization (CBO), or intermediary based, but we informed interviewees that we did not expect all participants to be knowledgeable on all topics, so participants did not respond to questions that were outside their knowledge area. Interviewers typed notes and also recorded and transcribed the interviews in Zoom. Transcripts were checked against the recordings and cleaned (correcting for any transcription errors, identifying speakers) by research assistants to ensure accuracy. Throughout the interview process, the research team met regularly and discussed what we were hearing from across the interviews as well as when we felt we had reached saturation for different communities. Following data cleaning, all interview transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose for coding and data analysis. As a team, we did an initial round of systematic transcript reading to generate a set of open codes, focused on the overarching organizational constructs that are key to answering the research questions. Using these codes and a priori codes from the literature, we developed a codebook and trained research assistants to support data coding and analysis. See Appendix E for the codebook.

Researchers coded each transcript using the codebook and weekly team meetings were used to address coding questions and refine code definitions as needed. After data were coded into the major organizational codes for the study, we read data within each code as a whole, identifying key themes related to each coding category. We used data matrixes of code co-occurrences to examine patterns across the dataset. Transcripts were tagged with the role of the interviewee and the organization ("descriptors" in Dedoose) to examine patterns and prevalence within and across communities and role statuses.

To answer each research question, we summarize themes from within and across codes. Throughout the report, we present quotes as examples of the themes identified in the data, but do not provide any identifying information about the speaker to maintain confidentiality. Quotes have been slightly edited to remove verbal tics and fillers (e.g., "like" and "um") and to remove identifying information.

# Findings

## Seven Equity Areas

We began this project with a high-level scan of the literature and existing equity audits for education systems and out-of-school programming. In doing so we identified seven areas in which school districts can engage in deep equity work. The areas we have identified are:

- Physical and contextual landscape
- Systems and administration
- Teaching and learning
- Social emotional learning / School Climate
- Professional development
- Family engagement
- Community connectedness



Figure 4. Equity Indicators as overlaid on Bronfenbrenner's model
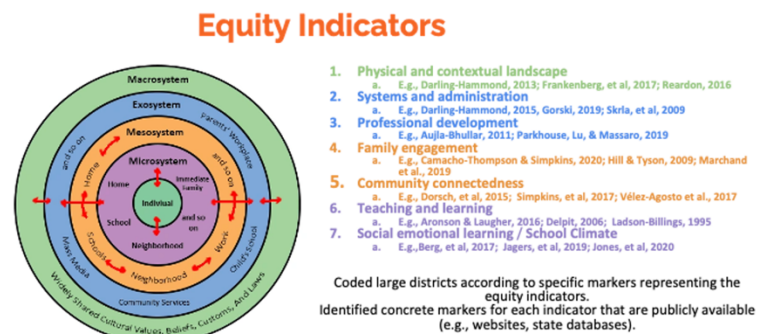
We believe that each of these equity areas is critical to developing a comprehensive approach to equitable education for all students (Jones, ND). In Appendix A, we provide a complete list of specific indicators within each domain. These indicators are informed by empirical research and existing equity audits, and also include indicators that our team found valuable that have yet to be captured in the prior work. We use the terms "surface" and "deep" to differentiate indicators that may appear with more superficial equity efforts from those associated with more intensive equity

efforts. Additionally, figures 4 and 5 demonstrate the alignment between these seven equity areas and the ecological model.

Below we summarize our conceptualizations of each domain, including a brief literature review highlighting the importance of each domain and listing some of the key indicators within each domain. We then report district-level findings related to each area (where relevant), ending with key questions this raises for the OST field.

**Equity Indicators and Markers**

Public reporting of student level data
Physical and contextual landscape
Systems and administration
Family Engagement
Community connectedness
Social emotional learning / School Climate

Disproportionality in student data
Physical and contextual landscape
Systems and administration
Teaching and learning

Implementation of strategies/policies to address inequity
Physical and contextual landscape
Systems and administration
Family Engagement
Community connectedness
Social emotional learning / School Climate
Teaching and learning

Equity-focused professional development opportunities
Professional development

Culturally responsive curricular materials
Teaching and learning

## Physical and Contextual Landscape

According to extant literature, a school's geographic, contextual, and demographic landscape is associated with (in)equitable educational opportunities. In its most obvious form, school resources (i.e., funding, teachers, building) form the basis of students' access to high-quality education (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Consequently, it is imperative to consider the physical space of the school building when investigating equitable education from a broader lens. Additionally, research demonstrates that our nations' schools have grown increasingly segregated (Frankenberg et al., 2017; Orfield et al., 2012), and that this segregation is associated with stark racial achievement gaps (Reardon, 2016) and discipline disparities (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2019). In fact, this segregation is two-fold in that schools are segregated both racially and economically, highlighting the importance of considering segregation at the district-wide, school-wide, and classroom levels. Further, segregation occurs both systemically and by self-segregation. Systemic segregation refers to segregation that is influenced or determined by policies, institutions, or other social forces which sort people by racial or ethnic categories. Self-segregation is segregation wherein individuals may select to separate into racial or ethnic groups, sometimes for support and/or as a means to cope with microaggressions (Tatum, 2017). Due in part to this systemic- and self-segregation, students and educators alike often lack an in-depth understanding of cultural differences, further exacerbating equity issues such as disproportionate disciplining of Black and Latinx students (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2019) as well as the over-identification of Black and students from low-income communities in special education programs (Artiles, 2011).

Given the disparities associated with the physical and contextual environment of schools and districts, there are multiple indicators of physical and contextual equity that typically fall within the following categories:

- racial composition of students
- knowledge of cultural differences
- school segregation
- school resources.

It is important to note that not all of these indicators are accessible through publicly available data, limiting the public's ability to fully investigate district-wide equity efforts. Nevertheless, each of

the physical and contextual landscape indicators listed in the appendix are critical to a comprehensive approach to equitable education for all students.

## District Level Equity Efforts Related to Physical and Contextual Landscape

Although no participants discussed physical indicators such as school buildings or segregation, communities' definitions of equity were shaped by and give some sense of the context of their school systems. When we asked interviewees which populations were a focus of their district's equity efforts, participants would often begin by stating that they focus equity efforts on those who have been historically marginalized, in particular by the school systems. This often started with a focus on communities of color, including Black, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian, and Asian-American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, but expanded to include other historically marginalized populations. For example, one participant explains, *"I think more broadly, you know, our strategic plan identifies African American male students, but also what we would call students furthest away from educational justice … It's students that have not been well served by public systems generally for a long time."*

Many participants articulated similar sentiments in their explanations, demonstrating how their districts focused equity efforts across a variety of student populations including but not limited to African American males, students experiencing housing or food insecurity, English Language Learners, and students who identify as LGBTQIA+. English language learners were frequently discussed as were students from low income communities and students on free and reduced lunch. Multiple stakeholders mention a holistic approach to equity that takes into account marginalization across multiple social categories, including race/ethnicity, ability status, income or wealth, gender, language, housing status, and sexuality. The student groups that were a focus

> **Physical and Contextual Landscape in Districts**
>
> *[W]e would broadly say [our district focuses equity efforts on], those who have been traditionally marginalized by systems in the past…different racial and ethnic backgrounds…, LGBTQIA+, income inequality, or those who are living…in either unstable housing or unstable food situations. Other types of poverty…perhaps, gender based marginalization…*
>
> *"…it's about embracing, it's about understanding the student. That equity is beyond race and ethnicity… It embeds children with disabilities. It embeds sexual orientation and embeds all levels of backgrounds."*
>
> *I think everything my team does is equity work… [L]ike our job is to advocate for families, make sure their voices are heard…I think the families we support tend to be the most vulnerable families in the district, and our job is to not lecture or come in from above, but to really partner, walk alongside, make sure their voices are heard in the right places at the right times so that they get what they need.*

of equity efforts varied across districts and reflected the unique sociopolitical, historical, and educational context of each community. A few interviewees referenced the communities that their schools and programs served, highlighting the importance of understanding students and contexts.

Moving beyond student demographics, some districts referenced school level data as helping provide guidance on how to focus equity efforts in their district. Such districts used metrics such as academic achievement, data related to student behavior, and information about facilities and access to extracurricular programs and technology to identify and define needs related to equity.

Families were also noted as important in equity efforts, and discussions of family engagement frequently occurred within discussions of equity efforts. Oftentimes districts' definitions of equity start with needs identified by parents. In this way, family engagement, community engagement, and parent insight (a code we identified while reading through transcripts) were somewhat synonymous in terms of how they informed districts' definitions of

equity. Many participants also noted the use of widespread surveys to identify family needs and issues related to equity, with some districts even having specialized advisory boards (e.g., African American Advisory Council, Hispanic American Advisory Council) to help identify needs.

What does the physical and contextual landscape mean for OST?

As we dug further into thinking specifically about the intersection of equity efforts and the districts' afterschool and summer learning spaces, participants often described thinking about equity in terms of access to afterschool and summer programming. In fact, interviewees frequently discussed increasing access to opportunities for enrichment (both in- and out-of school activities) within their descriptions of their districts' equity efforts. District stakeholders seem most concerned with ensuring that opportunities for enrichment are available for all students, particularly those from historically marginalized and traditionally underrepresented backgrounds.

Importantly, participants did appear to recognize that "availability" does not guarantee "access," and thus interviewees also reported that their districts made conscious efforts to ensure access for students who have been historically underrepresented or marginalized. In this way, much of the conversation was geared around ensuring access and opportunities as well as mitigating barriers to participation. Similarly, other districts and community partners highlighted intentional recruitment of students as a key piece of ensuring access over availability.

> **Physical and Contextual Landscapes in OST**
>
> *W]e tend to see schools where, depending on their location or depending on how strong their parent base is, they tend to have many more resources than a school that might be in a tougher area of our city…So I feel like a lot of our focus has really been looking at the inequities…and ensur[ing] that these kids…have the same opportunities that kids in the other schools districtwide are receiving…*
>
> *[W]e will make sure that there are late buses available so that students don't have a transportation barrier. We will work on the cost of the event and try to seek grant funding to allow students to participate for free, those kind of things, that are barriers to the program. If there's a student with a special need, in terms of a physical or cognitive disability, we will work with that family to say what accommodations are needed.*
>
> *One of the school district's strategic goals…is to ensure kids, who are what they call furthest from educational justice, have access to high-quality learning, wraparound services…*

Thus, districts across our sample thought critically about equity of access in relation to afterschool and summer learning spaces. This access theme will be discussed in more detail in later sections of the report that focus specifically on districts' equity efforts in relation to OST. Yet it is important to note the ways in which access was folded into districts' definition of equity.

## Systems & Administration

The structure of education systems, including their design, practices, policies, and resources, can advance or impede equity (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Smith et al., 2017; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). Building more equitable educational systems requires transforming inequitable organizational structures and processes. Although there is little empirical evidence about the role of explicit commitment to equity in shaping outcomes, literature on equity audits suggests that mission statements and other key documents should include specific language expressing a commitment to equity (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Green et al., 2015; Skrla et al., 2009). Relatedly, equity-oriented policies can play an important role in advancing equity, particularly when designed and implemented effectively (Skrla et al., 2009; Trujillo, 2013; Turner & Spain, 2020). Additionally, data-driven decision making can support equity goals and promote transparency and

accountability. However, educators need opportunities to engage meaningfully with data and interpret it through an equity-minded lens (Datnow et al., 2017).

Education equity also depends on the (re)allocation of resources, both material (e.g., physical buildings and technology) and nonmaterial (e.g., relatable curricula, equity-minded teachers) (Gorski, 2019). Darling-Hammond (2015) argues that teachers are the most inequitably distributed resource in the United States. Teacher qualifications, including experience and certification, are linked to students' academic outcomes, and less qualified teachers are found at schools serving high numbers of low-income students and students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Moreover, the diversity of teaching staff matters. For example, research suggests there are academic benefits when students and teachers share the same race/ethnicity (Egalite et al., 2015).

Researchers have identified several structural factors linked to equity, including:

- commitment to equity

- equity-oriented policies

- data use and accountability

- distribution of resources

- curriculum

The complete list of 13 indicators for systems and administration can be found in Appendix A.

## District Level Equity Efforts Related to Systems and Administration

Whereas the school districts in the sample all had specific equity offices and/or staff dedicated to equity efforts, they viewed the work as being districtwide. This includes setting districtwide equity goals and providing leadership from above, including districtwide communication about issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Leadership also includes supporting multiple levels of personnel to undertake equity work (e.g., teachers, principals), and providing flexibility for schools, programs, and staff to engage their expertise and knowledge of the communities they serve.

> **Systems and Administration in Districts**
>
> *I think [the superintendent is] doing a really good job in addressing equity. She's been very intentional... [W]ell her communication was very clear always, like publicly speaking about seeing every child, seeing their individual needs...*
>
> *[O]ur equity stance is based on transformative change, system change... part of [our leader's] stance is to actually remove barriers and give access to the program manager to do their jobs so she's not micromanaging... I feel like this is a game changer for school districts where you have pecking orders and then you have supervisors who are not equipped to supervise amazing staff who understand equity...leadership in equity is a game changer.*

One aspect that seemed to characterize these districts is their view of equity as a collective effort. The districtwide work of equity varied somewhat across districts, but there were common themes. In some districts, this includes creating new ways of handling discipline and conducting gifted and talented identification to address long-standing disparities. Such efforts include the use of data to identify and monitor inequities, a strategy that will be discussed further below. Some districts created committees of personnel to address various issues related to equity (e.g., reviewing policy language that may be

outdated). One district talked explicitly about ensuring every student has an adult in the school who they trust and feel supports them as part of equity efforts.

We should note that whereas curriculum is obviously a critical aspect of schools, and is an indicator for equity efforts in districts, it was not evidenced on district websites. Further, likely because our interviews focused intensively on OST, where there is less formal curriculum, we did not gain insight about districts' curricular materials from our data. However, there were sometimes discussion of programmatic content, particularly programs aimed at particular populations or with specific cultural content, which is discussed elsewhere in the report.

What does systems and administration mean for OST?

Interviewees within CBOs discussed issues of leadership, policies, and decision making more frequently than interviewees from intermediaries, districts, or schools. This may not be surprising when considered in relation to the fact that they were also more likely to discuss the connection and integration (or lack thereof) between school and out-of-school time. From the CBO perspective, district level policies and leadership were likely seen as driving connections between the schools and OST programs. Indeed, program level administrators were more likely than either school or district level administrators to talk about leadership and policies. This appears to be a growth area for districts, and is connected to the challenges with building integrated systems that support students more holistically, an issue discussed in detail later.

The focus on ensuring that all students feel a sense of belonging in school was common across districts, and in some cases linked directly to districts' OST efforts. For those districts, afterschool and summer were seen as opportunities to further engage students who may be feeling disconnected from school by increasing their sense of belonging in the school community. Some districts were also implementing community school models, providing wrap-around services for students and families, which also has the side effect of increasing students and families engagement in the school space.

## Teaching & Learning

Over 80% of today's teaching workforce are female, White, and from middle to upper-income backgrounds (USDOE, 2016). Similarly, standardized curricula and pedagogy used in most public schools center White values and practices leaving out the experiences of the 55% of students who are non-White, multilingual, and often from marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings, 2021). These facts are problematic given that differences in race, culture, language, and socioeconomic status between teachers and students, coupled with a lack of cross-cultural experiences between pre-service teachers and their future students, contribute to "cultural conflict" in the classroom (Delpit, 2006). This cultural conflict can lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and tension in school, interfering with students' academic and social outcomes (Gay, 2010) such as higher referral rates for special education (Albrecht et al., 2012) and exclusionary discipline (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2019).

With this in mind, as the population of PK-12 students becomes more diverse, it is more important than ever that school districts implement equitable teaching practices that emerge from asset-based lenses such as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Ladson-Billings (1995) developed the theory of CRP as a challenge to the deficit narrative that existed in research about African

American students, suggesting three tenets: Students must 1) experience academic success; 2) develop and maintain cultural competence, characterized by knowledge and appreciation of their own cultural identities as well as the cultures of others (Ladson-Billings, 2014; pg 75); and 3) develop critical consciousness that they can use to challenge inequalities in their society. Critical consciousness is defined by Ladson-Billings (2014) as "the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze and solve real-world problems (p.75)." Critical consciousness has been identified as an especially important protective factor for marginalized youth (e.g., Diemer, Rapa, Voight, & McWhirter, 2016; Hope, Smith, Cryer-Coupet, & Briggs, 2020; Watts,& Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

Using an asset-based framework, such as CRP, that focuses on students' strengths rather than deficits, can inform teachers' curricula materials and teaching practices, particularly impacting the social and academic outcomes of students from minoritized and marginalized backgrounds (Aronson & Laugher, 2016). Teachers who seek to engage in equitable practices should begin internally by critically reflecting on their lived experiences and those of others. They should strive to use student-centered approaches to bridge students' backgrounds to curricula materials and instructional practices. More specifically, to ensure that all students are experiencing equity in the classroom, teachers should implement practices such as fostering pedagogical dialogue and critical reflection (Auirre & Zavala, 2013), connecting curriculum materials to students lived experiences (Tate, 1995; Civil & Khan, 2001; Martell, 2013), soliciting and valuing the perspectives of students (Fulton, 2009), and teaching students how to critique the status quo and racism (Dimick, 2012; Gutstein, 2003).

The ten equity indicators related to teaching and learning are detailed in Appendix A. Teaching and learning was particularly difficult to assess with publicly available data, given the key role of classroom materials and teacher practices, which are not typically observable from public facing materials.

What does teaching and learning mean for OST?

Despite a lack of publicly available information on equity-focused teaching practices, in our interviews there was regular discussion about the types of programmatic materials used in the afterschool and summer learning spaces. Although there was not always overlap between district-level teaching initiatives related to equity, some districts did have specific culturally responsive OST programming. This theme is detailed below in the sections on partnerships and program content.

## Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and School Climate

SEL refers to the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for youth and adults to develop healthy relationships with others, manage their own feelings and emotions, and make responsible decisions. As related to schooling, students who demonstrate greater social-emotional competencies tend to receive better grades, fewer discipline referrals, and have better health and economic outcomes long term (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015; Belfield et al., 2015). Given the positive short- and long-term outcomes directly related to educational goals, schools are increasingly interested in developing social-emotional skills alongside traditional academic outcomes. One widely used SEL framework, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model, describes five competencies – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making – necessary for promoting students' success in school. These competencies are related to a wide range of

positive outcomes including student behavior, grades (Durlak et al., 2011), as well as long -term outcomes including employment and physical health (Taylor et al., 2017). Because of the relations between SEL competencies and desirable outcomes, schools and after-school programs are taking an increased interest in SEL development (DePaoli et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017)

Despite this interest, there is mixed evidence for how to effectively promote these SEL competencies. On the one hand, research suggests that SEL competencies can be developed if schools and after-school programs engage in planful processes that involve 1) assessing the needs of the students, 2) selecting and implementing evidence-based program practices shown to support SEL development, and 3) using data to evaluate if the program or practices had the intended effects (Bradshaw et al., 2012; Merrell et al., 2011). On the other hand, concerns have been raised about the validity of the assessment tools and interventions used to support SEL competencies. In particular, when SEL programs are implemented haphazardly, or without strong attention to research evidence, null (and in some cases negative) outcomes have been observed – particularly among students who have been historically marginalized (e.g., Black and immigrant students). Thus, careful data collection and evaluation of these services are necessary to understand, and equitably serve, all students.

As a consequence of these mixed findings, researchers and school leaders have begun to consider how the systemic factors within a child's environment facilitate or inhibit the development of SEL competencies. Rather than simply focus on the child as a point of intervention (e.g., teaching the child self-management skills to cope with experiences of racism), researchers have begun to show that school or community organizations also consider how the environment can promote (or inhibit) the development of SEL competencies. Overemphasizing the child as the point of intervention – historically the focus of SEL programming – has been criticized as being a colorblind approach (i.e., ignoring racialized experiences of youth). Colorblind approaches focus on emphasizing that all people are the same, regardless of skin color and racial or ethnic background (Bartoli, Michael, Bentley-Edwards, Stevenson, Shor & McClain, 2016; Zucker & Patterson, 2018), but in doing so ignore inequities shaped by social forces. Such an approach perpetuates the notion that racial inequities are largely observed due to individual, not systemic, differences (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

Jagers and colleagues (2019) recently described an approach, called transformative SEL, that emphasizes not only individual but also environmental changes needed to promote SEL. The authors consider transformative SEL to be a means for fostering educational equity because of its explicit attention to systemic issues related to culture, identity, agency, belonging, and engagement. Transformative SEL inserts considerations of systemic issues and social positioning and power within the existing and widely used five CASEL competencies, e.g., understanding one's implicit biases as part of self-awareness, understanding social positioning, power, and privilege as part of social awareness.

Transformative SEL has particularly important implications for minoritized youth who may encounter overt and covert acts of racism, prejudice, or discrimination while attending school. Racism, prejudice and discrimination are distinct yet related, and are often confounded and expressed as racial microaggressions, the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental, intentional or unintentional, slights, snubs, or insults which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages about people based on their marginalized identities (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin; 2007).  To help counter this, within the SEL competency of self-awareness, the authors recommend schools include support for teachers and staff to be aware

of biases and collective history. In addition, the authors suggest that to support relationship skills (another CASEL competency), adults must practice strategies like cultural humility (i.e., lifelong engagement with one's own cultural identity and assumptions and how they have shaped one's own understanding of other people's experiences; Yeager & Baer-Wu, 2013).

Out of the work on transformative SEL, CASEL provides specific recommendations to programs focused on promoting the five SEL competencies with attention to issues of equity. Broadly, these recommendations include using data to identify potential sources of disproportionality (e.g., disciplinary referrals, differences in perceptions of school climate), focusing on both individual as well as systems-change when implementing SEL curricula, meaningfully incorporating the voices of other adults (e.g., parents guardians, caregivers) into the design and direction of SEL programs, and, finally, engaging other stakeholders – including community organizations (e.g., afterschool programs, community mental health centers) – into the delivery of these services.

Because transformative SEL (and subsequent recommendations) require attention to systemic variables, school climate is often thought to be one important indicator of environmental support (Berg, et al, 2017; Jones, et al, 2020). School climate, broadly speaking, reflects the collective experience of students within a school. The myriad relationships within the school, students' sense of safety and belonging, and students' perceptions of the school all comprise the school's climate (Jones, et al, 2020). Berg and colleagues (2017) define the following components of school climate as particularly relevant to SEL: "emotional and physical safety, connectedness and support, challenge and engagement, and...peer and adult social and emotional competencies (pg. 7)." They further highlight the intersection of SEL and school climate and the importance of their intersection to educational equity. Importantly, students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds tend to perceive school climate differently, with students from racially minoritized groups often reporting more negative perceptions of school climate than White students, which can be masked if schools only report aggregated school climate data (Voight, et al, 2015; for a recent exception to this finding see Jones, et al, 2017).

From the literature on SEL and school climate, which we combined due to the way in which these areas are intertwined when SEL is considered from a system lens, we identified ten equity indicators (listed in Appendix A). None of these indicators appeared to be publicly available in our initial review of districts, although information was gleaned from interviews about districts' efforts in these areas.

## District Level Equity Efforts

### SEL

One thing that seems to distinguish these districts is their commitment to approaching social emotional learning (SEL) through an equity lens. Districts not only used SEL as a tool to promote equity, but also saw SEL, mental health, and cultural responsiveness as deeply entwined. In addition, some district leaders talked about the link between equity and students' mental health, social emotional learning, and sense of belonging at school, and the ways in which programming addressed these different needs.

Consistent with principles of transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019), stakeholders talked about ensuring a welcoming space for every student and making sure that every student has a space to be their "authentic self." District leaders discussed various approaches to doing this work. In

some cases, specific elements of SEL programs, such as opening circles, were infused across district programs. Some districts talked about programming that focused on the identities of both students and staff (e.g., offering courses such as African American Studies or Latinx in the United States for students and having identity-focused readings for staff). In addition, some districts also included affinity groups that take schoolwide action to build welcoming spaces (e.g., Black student unions, gender and sexuality affinity groups). A couple of districts talked about the tools they used to assess social emotional learning, such as the Panorama survey or the Weikert Center tools, the latter of which could help focus staff on their interactions and relationships with students.

The role and training of teachers and other adult staff was important to these efforts. In some districts, teachers were provided with professional development for culturally responsive teaching or specific lesson plans to celebrate different cultures and were encouraged to draw on parents and community members as outside speakers. A stakeholder from one district talked about the importance of translating SEL and school climate to specific actions that the adults can take. Professional development will be discussed in detail later, but it is important here to note the role of adults in creating welcoming school climates that support student SEL and mental health.

> **SEL and Mental Health in Districts**
>
> *We see and understand social-emotional learning as being in service of addressing inequitable conditions…it's part of that effort to dismantle, disrupt inequity, to create equitable learning environments….*
>
> *…[for students with behavioral needs, it ]is not only the access to the services, but just being really conscious of how we're treating students and how we're responding to their needs, and ensuring that we're not just putting them on this pathway to something extremely intensive when they could have potentially responded to something a little bit less.*

### Mental Health Services

Although districts talked about social emotional learning, school climate, and mental health in relation to each other, interviewees acknowledged that mental health services were an area in which there was a need for a focus on equitable resources and access. This included dual efforts to both increase access to mental health services for under-served families and reduce disparities in identification and diagnosis of behavioral health needs. Aligned with the transformative SEL approach noted earlier, school leaders discussed a need to focus on systemic factors that hinder access to SEL and mental health supports. In particular, one participant noted the importance of providing a range of SEL, mental, and/or behavioral supports to students prior to identifying a child with a disability. Specifically, the participant discussed a need to support staff in considering how cultural or environmental factors (e.g., stigma, overidentification of racial minorities in special education) might influence student behavior and mental health.

Districts talked about offering both universal and tiered supports and using an equity lens and a trauma-informed approach in their mental health services. Those familiar with districts' mental health infrastructure discussed case management approaches, looking at what each individual student needs, and ensuring that their needs assessments encompassed both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Staffing was important, and also a challenge. One stakeholder mentioned casting a wide net to consider how they are utilizing all the adults within a school so that counselors are not overwhelmed.

What does SEL and mental health mean for OST?

Whereas SEL and mental health resources were more typically talked about in relation to the formal school day, one district had embedded mental health services in their summer programming "*so they could bring that expertise and then they could also provide individual… or small group or even whole group support.*" While this was not commonly mentioned by our interviewees, it is an important potential approach for districts, particularly as schools face increasing mental health struggles amongst students. Further, it links to wrap-around models of community schools, something discussed later in relation to family engagement. In general, there did not seem to be a lot of integration of in-school SEL initiatives into the OST programming. This is discussed in detail in the later section on SEL, mental health, and cultural responsiveness.

## Professional Development

While requirements vary from state to state, there is a minimum number of professional development (PD) sessions that certified teachers must attend annually. Teachers are further incentivized to attend professional development because they receive credit and are compensated for their attendance. PD for teachers often focuses on pedagogical improvements that are associated with content areas, ed-tech resources, or classroom management. However, PD that focuses on the topics of ethnicity, race, language, culture and religion are important (Aujla-Bhullar, 2011) and often facilitated independent of subject area PD. Students from marginalized communities show higher rates of academic achievement—-across subject areas, motivation, self-confidence, and self-efficacy —when their teachers are well -equipped to foster inclusive and equitable classrooms, (Parkhouse, Lu, & Massaro, 2019).

PD programs that integrate pedagogies that center the experiences of marginalized students, such as Culturally Responsive Teaching, are influential for improving student outcomes and for addressing Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Part of DEI PD is providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their personal biases and how they may be influencing their expectations for and engagement with diverse students. Although schools and districts are engaging in DEI PD, there is not a model for delivering PD on DEI topics (Parkhouse, Lu, & Massaro, 2019). In Appendix A, we list eight indicators of "deep" DEI Professional Development that can be used to identify and assess school districts' equity efforts.

### District Level Equity Efforts

The districts in our sample talked about professional development as part of their equity efforts. This included DEI training for teachers and school staff as well as training around issues such as trauma informed care and vicarious trauma. Some districts mentioned engaging in specific identity-focused, anti-racist, or culturally responsive professional development, such as trying to foster "courageous conversations" amongst staff in their districts.

> **Professional Development in Districts**
> *Many professional development sessions are offered around [a courageous conversations program] for teachers, [school] staff, and district staff to start having those conversations around race…amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been more conversations around equity, access, and the lack thereof within groups of students of color and underserved, economically disenfranchised communities.*

What does professional development mean for OST?

It was not always clear that districts' DEI-related professional development efforts moved from the school day to after-school spaces. Even in districts that talked about specific professional

development related to their equity efforts, professional development for OST staff was often missing. In some places, however, there was acknowledgement that CBO's had more expertise related to cultural responsiveness and/or specific connections with the populations of youth that the district served. Findings related to professional development within OST specifically will be discussed in detail below.

## Family Engagement

It is widely understood in the field of education that parent involvement is associated with greater academic functioning (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parents are the first teachers of children (Collins, et al., 2000) and as a child enters school, educators join in that partnership with parents (Epstein, et al, 2018). Researchers have identified a few ways in which parent involvement in organized after-school activities is linked to positive academic functioning for youth and higher motivation in their activities (e.g., Camacho-Thompson & Simpkins, 2020). One way is that teachers build positive dispositions of parents they perceive to be invested in the schooling of their children, and teacher perceptions of this investment translate to teacher investment in the student via high expectations and positive student-teacher relationships. As Lareau & Horvat (1999) note: "Educators define desirable family-school relationships as based on trust, partnership, cooperation, and deference (pg. 42)." There are inequities within these foundations of parent involvement and family engagement as schools have been more responsive to the needs and desires of wealthy and White (i.e., privileged) families.

There are several indicators of parent involvement that mostly fall into one of the following (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Ross, 2017):

- parent interactions with teachers and other school personnel

- parent volunteering to support school functions

- attending parent-teacher conferences

- schoolwork support and any out-of-school learning

- conversations parents have with their children about school

These indicators, however, can serve to disenfranchise minoritized parents. Indeed, "scholars have recognized that White, middle- to upper-class parents engage in these behaviors more easily, as a result of greater flexibility in their schedules, availability of capital, and power structures within schools that systematically marginalized parents of color." (Marchand et al., 2019). For example, one study found that familial stress among Mexican-origin families predicted lower levels of academic involvement at home, while financial strain predicted lower school involvement (Camacho-Thompson, Gillen-O'Neel, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016).

Equity centered research has begun to make distinctions between parent involvement and parent engagement (Reynolds, 2010), the former being school/educator prescribed standards in interfacing with schooling agents and the education system and the latter self-directed. This distinction is important for equity work. As noted above, expectations of prescribed forms of parent involvement in schools, which is typically defined by White middle class norms (i.e., dominant or mainstream culture), often alienate non-traditional or marginalized families (e.g., low-income and families of color) (Cooper, 2009). Families of marginalized identities have unique perspectives that can inform efforts geared toward engaging them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Salter & Adams, 2013; Volpe et al., 2020).

Thus, equity driven programs will seek input and feedback from all families on ways to best serve them including but not limited to curriculum, scheduling of events and programming, as well as creating opportunities for building trusting relationships between guardians and program staff, meaningful collaboration, and parent leadership opportunities (Fenton et al., 2017). Parent surveys, focus groups, advocacy groups, or feedback forms/loops built into programming that reach all families served are good indicators of these efforts. Equity driven family engagement programming has a plan for regular family outreach that welcomes parents into the school or out-of-school time (OST) program space. It is critical that these interactions are not centered on child behavior, especially negative behavior (Fan & Williams, 2010). Equity driven family engagement programs will hold events to welcome parents/guardians, get to know them personally, and establish warm and trusting relationships with guardians with a foundation of clear communication (e.g., open houses, multicultural potlucks, talent shows, youth concerts, performances, showcases, or sports held at times and locations best for families). Overall, parents find ways to become involved when provided the opportunity to do so (Monzo, 2013; Simpkins et al., 2011; Simpkins et al., 2013).

We selected ten equity indicators that we believe best capture the key elements from the literature. These indicators are presented in Appendix A, but it is important to note that only one of these could be consistently assessed via publicly available data. Whereas district participants regularly discussed family engagement efforts, the discussion of these findings are included below in relation to the OST space specifically.

## Community Connectedness

Community organizations are youth programs available to families outside of the school setting, such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, or Upward Bound. It is common for community organizations to partner with school settings or districts to provide opportunities for participation in organized after-school activities for youth and their families. Participating in community can generate opportunities for families to connect both with other parents as well as strengthen connections with school personnel (Dorsch et al., 2015; Riggs & Medina, 2005). Theoretically, connections between these contexts (i.e., families, schools, and communities) are beneficial for youth development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Empirical evidence shows that parents who are involved in community activities have children who are more likely to participate for more years and in more activities (Fletcher et al., 2000; McGee et al., 2006). This sustained participation, in turn, shows benefits in physical (e.g., (Thompson et al., 2003) and socioemotional health (García-Poole et al., 2018).

Participating in community activities can be even more advantageous for kids from historically excluded and minoritized backgrounds (Lauer et al., 2006). Research with these populations is limited and typically focuses on barriers to involvement such as family or community socioeconomic resources leading to fewer community centers (Weininger et al., 2015; Wimer et al., 2008) or community violence (Camacho-Thompson & Vargas, 2018; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014). Although it is important to keep these in mind—in one study neighborhood safety was linked to a 40% increase in participation (Coulton & Irwin, 2009)—it is also important to note that families do find ways to participate even in the face of barriers (e.g., Jarrett et al., 2011). Barriers that may seem obvious to activity leaders may not be barriers to families. For example, a qualitative study found that activity leaders perceived language differences of parents to be a barrier to connecting with parents, but parents viewed their adolescent children as a tool for bridging that gap (Simpkins, et al., 2013). Towards the goal of increasing family engagement, it

may be more consequential to understand within-group differences that parents and youth decide to engage in community activities. For example, some low-income parents (e.g., immigrant parents) may not see the benefits of organized community activities, especially if they were not available in their country of origin (Simpkins et al., 2011) but others see them as a means towards social mobility (Duffett et al., 2004; Outley & Floyd, 2002). Simpkins and colleagues (2017) expand on how paying attention to culture can inform eight recommendations provided by the National Research Council's (NRC) Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), providing a framework for assessing how culturally responsive an organization's practices are to the youth they serve.

We have identified seven equity indicators to assess a school district's efforts around community connectedness (see Appendix A). These indicators demonstrate whether and to what extent districts are making an effort to embed themselves in the local ecosystem of student support, spanning in- and out-of-school programming and connecting with families and community resources across these spaces. Given the partnership nature of this equity area, findings are discussed in detail below.

## What does equity look like in the OST programs offered by districts that are considered to be leading efforts to center schooling around equity?

Participants in the sample regularly identified equity-supportive practices in place across their communities. When discussing their equity efforts, interviewees were most likely to reference the following themes:

- Challenges and barriers

- Access to Programs

- Decision making/Policies/Leadership

- Family engagement

- Growth areas.

This seems to reflect four major points in relation to these organizations' approaches to equity. First, equitable access to programming is a predominant area of focus for communities. Second, the communities in our sample, despite being identified as doing strong equity work, still face many barriers to their work and see areas for continued growth. Third, leadership matters. The infrastructure in which decision making happens and equity efforts are implemented is important, with a combination of strong leadership from above with local flexibility around specific decisions appearing to be viewed as most supportive of equity efforts. Finally, engaging families is a significant piece of equity work, one that often overlaps with both access to programs and challenges/barriers. As noted above, families also played a role in identified areas of need, which helped to define how organizations thought about equity. Below we discuss the nine major themes that were present in interviewees' discussions of equity efforts in OST programs.

### Administrative Systems to Support Equity Efforts

Key to equity efforts are the administrative structures and systems that provide leadership, resources, and shared goals for equity efforts. In some communities, there were deep equity efforts that involved multiple components both within and outside of the school day. This included

viewing equity holistically, as well as providing specific funding for equity related programming. Interviewees who were situated within either community based programs or intermediary organizations were more likely to talk about issues related to systems and administration than district or school based interviewees.

A number of participants mentioned equity practices in their districts that included providing transportation, fee waivers, and free afterschool programming opportunities. For some, this also meant ensuring that they were working with and connecting students and families with resources across parts of the community-wide system.

In some school districts, this included connecting across departments, providing shared access to data across OST and the school day, and partnering with CBOs to provide meals and transportation. District staff talked about using data to make connections between students and programs, supports, and services as an important way to monitor and ensure equity in access across student populations.

> **Administrative Systems to Support Equity Efforts**
>
> *I also think that part of the equity work of what we do is making sure that we are very visible members of the community. [T]hat means building relationships with school staff and school administrators. It means building relationships with resources in the vicinity of the school so that when I'm referring you to this outpatient clinic, I'm not just handing you a phone number and saying good luck. I'm connecting you with [staff person] who I've met, who is going to walk you through every step of this process, make sure it's respectful of the language that you speak and the cultural needs that you may have…*
>
> *There's direct connection [between OST and our district's equity goals] because…for the summer schools programming, they're pulling from data…But at the same time, they offer such broad programming that it's really for … everyone, and they provide transportation and we provide meals, … so we're making sure that… everyone has basic needs met.*

## Sustainable Funding Models for Equity Efforts

Funding was a consistent issue related to equity efforts in the OST space. As organizations sought to provide accessible, affordable programming, they struggled to develop sustainable funding models. Funding challenges will be discussed in detail later. In this section, we focus on ways that organizations used funding to support equity efforts. In general, districts deployed funding to support equitable opportunities across the district, ensuring that lower-resourced schools, or schools that served historically marginalized students, received resources they needed to ensure more equitable access to services and programming for their students and families. In one district, a stakeholder noted creative funding initiatives to ensure greater equity across the district's schools. One stakeholder reported that across schools in their district "*some both well-resourced and under-resourced [PTA's] have come together and talked about how they can share funding and really think about fundraising [for] school buildings[.]*

One stakeholder, in whose district there was a levy that provided funding for youth programming across the county, pointed out that districts and community-based out-of-school programs can't really meet the needs of children and families on their own within existing educational funding structures: *"it takes more than a school district and a community provider. It really takes kind of the intentional funding."* In that same district, a stakeholder mentioned that as part of equity efforts, SEL-focused funding for summer programming was prioritized for programs that are both led by and service primarily people of color. Following the racial justice movement reigniting in the summer of 2020, some communities developed funding lines for culturally responsive programming which had not been present previously. This also opened up districts to partnering with and providing funding to smaller programs which were deeply involved in local

communities and had specific equity expertise and/or experience serving populations which had been historically marginalized in their schools but had not received resources from schools previously. Relatedly, districts talked about the ways in which they were investing in equity efforts via hiring specific DEI focused staff and specialists. This occurred at both the district and the school levels.

## Ensuring Equitable Access to Quality Programs

Access to programs was one of the most commonly discussed issues relating to equity. Stakeholders across all types of programs and roles discussed access to programs, but interviewees who worked in CBOs discussed program access more frequently than those in intermediaries, schools, or districts.

Stakeholders recognized inequities present across the district in terms of the resourcing of schools, which led to inequities in access to programs. As noted above, districts thought about how to provide resources and funding to help ensure greater equity in access to opportunities across schools in their districts. In particular, districts noted how they address

> **Ensuring Equitable Access to Quality Programs**
> *...what [schools] offer is different, so we have some schools, especially with our high schools, that have unbelievable amounts of clubs, programs, sports, and then we have some schools that don't have many things at all. So you do see like some inequities there in regard to kind of what's offered.*

gaps in access to OST and enrichment programming in part by using school demographic data (e.g., the percent of students on free/reduced lunch) to decide in which schools and neighborhoods different programs will be located.

Related to this, districts took different approaches to student enrollment to increase access to high quality programs. Most districts prioritized certain under-served or high need populations, such as youth in foster care or homeless youth, before opening up enrollment on a first-come-first-served basis. Some districts began to use single enrollment forms for all their OST programming to minimize the barriers to enrollment for families. One district even talked about moving to "no-enrollment" programming where kids could just show up as needed to programs. In what may first seem at odds with a prioritized enrollment system, but is actually meant to increase access to quality summer programming, some districts had begun offering districtwide summer programming that was open to all students instead of just certain populations. This was made possible in some districts by the Covid relief funds, and thus it is not clear how sustainable that model will be going forward. Districts also waived fees and provided sliding fee scales for programs to ensure equitable access to OST programs.

One of the most frequently mentioned foci of districts in relation to access was transportation. This not surprising to anyone familiar with the out-of-school field, where transportation is a continual issue, one that was made worse by Covid. Districts tried to address issues of inequitable access to afterschool and summer programming by providing transportation to all programs, partnering with outside organizations to address transportation challenges, having their own fleet for transportation, and providing transportation between schools for afterschool programming.

Some districts noted that it was not just fees and transportation that prevented students from being able to participate. For older students in particular, lost wages from the student who would otherwise be working to support family could be a barrier to accessing afterschool and summer programs. This led some districts to try to find ways to financially support the youth and family to allow the student to take advantage of OST opportunities without the family losing out financially.

A similar challenge presented itself with youth who were needed at home to care for younger siblings. Thus, at least one district talked about providing childcare to help increase access to programs for students who may serve as caretakers within their families. In some districts, there were efforts to infuse enrichment activities into the school day to ensure equitable access to activities for students who were not able to attend after school programs.

## Staffing for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In terms of staffing, programs and districts highlighted their efforts around hiring program staff from the school/district community as well as staff that are reflective of students' identities and lived experiences. Though this was not consistent across all communities, a few provided tangible examples of word-of-mouth recruitment efforts that supported the development of culturally and linguistically diverse staff.

In alignment with these recruiting efforts, some districts voiced that they were intentional during the interview process to ensure that they were hiring staff who had a shared vision and mindset for diversity, equity, and inclusion. One participant noted that they wanted to hire staff who easily adopted a "we're all learners" mindset.

Two organizations (one district and one intermediary organization) highlighted innovative approaches to staffing such as supporting staff of color through affinity groups and creating combined positions which allowed them to provide full time positions to school staff. For example, one stakeholder noted that "*sometimes we're able to access [instructional aids] who want full-time employment, so they work for us after school.*"

> **Staffing for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
> *...we try as best we can to match the [staff to the student] demographic pool...[O]f course, we can't screen for race and gender and ethnicity, but we think a lot about how do we continue to build the pipeline so that the likelihood of [staff] that make it into our coaching pool better match the [students]...*
>
> *We typically will promote [job] opportunities throughout our existing staff and then out in the community. So we post publicly and then go through a regular sort of interview process and bring people on board... A lot of times if it's staff from that school building they already know that they're interested and saying... we've got a posting out there for after school help.*
>
> *We take eighth graders as volunteers, and then high school students...can work with us all four years. They can do service learning or they can be paid...probably about 10% of our [staff] were [students]in [program name] as elementary school students...*

Finally, across communities, we consistently heard the importance of strong site-level leadership (i.e., site coordinators) as they enable program staff to do their work and enact their expertise in the classroom with students. Interviewees who worked in CBOs spoke more frequently about staffing than interviewees in intermediaries, districts, or schools. Not surprisingly then, program administrators spoke more than interviewees in other roles about staffing, closely followed by district-based OST administrators.

## Community-Aligned Program Content

Another equity supportive practice that many districts referenced was aligning program offerings with: 1) student interests / identities; 2) program data, and; 3) feedback from students and families. In this way, districts selected and developed programs that were aligned with the needs, desires, and interests of the community. As noted above, a few districts even reported having program offerings and curriculum that was culturally responsive and/or helped students learn about other cultures and their own, such as ethnic studies curriculum and programming. In

some cases this included specific social justice programming, which not only aimed to be culturally responsive, but aimed to engage students in considerations of issues of (in)equity.

One way that organizations discussed equity in relation to program content was offering activities aimed at addressing specific inequities in program or activity participation. For example, offering girls-only programs for activities where there are gender imbalances in participation (e.g., chess), providing science and engineering programs at schools that serve populations that are under-represented in STEM, or offering particular enrichment activities at high poverty schools to address economic barriers to participation (e.g., fine arts or music lessons). Some districts also talked about having the focus of programs shift with student age to meet the different needs of youth across the school years (e.g., literacy in early grades, navigating academic systems in middle school). Many organizations talked about diversifying their program offerings, including offering more enrichment programs in addition to academic support programs and offering summer programs focused on re-engaging students rather than just academic recovery. Summer learning loss programs were still common, however.

> **Community-Aligned Program Content**
>
> *...a lot of our programs are really designed to infuse "we want you to be your whole person here, you're accepted here." Those who want to advocate will often seek out an opportunity in after school for that… So I think it's tied in very nicely, it's often a place where we can do more of that celebrating of identity because we're not so strictly tied to the state standards as the school day.*
>
> *[With some of the funding for summer and OST programming] kids are on a race and equity team, to discuss issues of inequity. And there's different, both school staff-led and CBO-led type programming that brings in social justice-based education to kids and also making meaning of it outside of the classroom and connected to their classroom experience and asking about how this shows up for them or doesn't.*
>
> *[E]ven though…we hold a systemic view that equity is…in all our spaces, both for students and adults…I think there tends to become a bias towards what's happening during the day in a classroom at school, and not consider…what's happening…before the…student's going to the classroom…[or] after school?*

Many organizations discussed their efforts to create interest driven programming and often drew on community partners for specialty programs. Similar to the need for flexible leadership from above, school and program leaders also noted needing flexibility to customize programs for their local communities. Some organizations talked about using youth advisories or asking youth and families for input to determine program content. Interviewees from CBOs were more likely to talk about programming being influenced by students or incorporating student voice than those in school districts or schools. Some stakeholders also talked about creating consistency between the school day and afterschool programming in terms of content, while also ensuring that the content was delivered with a "youth development focus" so that it does not feel like additional hours of school.

Despite this, there was not a lot of discussion of how out-of-school programs should be intentionally designed to meet the diverse needs of the student groups identified in their equity efforts or infusing programming related to culture and equity into afterschool and summer programming. One district stakeholder explicitly noted that there was often a disconnect between the district's equity efforts and out-of-school time.

## Professional Development for OST Staff

Most organizations noted that they provide some kind of additional training or professional development opportunities for afterschool and summer staff, and that these opportunities are often paid. It is important to note that the majority of these opportunities across organizations were not equity focused, but rather based on program administration and curriculum training needs. There were also sometimes challenges in relation to who had and had not received training on school-related initiatives that the district wanted to carry over into the OST space. Yet in at least one district and two intermediaries, training around their equity goals was provided to partners to ensure alignment with the district's priorities.

> **Professional Development for OST Staff**
>
> *I would say summer we did [bring the curriculum and supports around SEL and mental health into the programming] quite a bit and part of the reason for that is many of the adults who were leading ...our new summer school model came out of the schools that were already implementing the SEL curriculum, and so the teachers already had that training. They had that material and they infused it right in.*
>
> *...the professional development that we offer for summer school teachers would be more specific to the kind of program that we're running over the summer. So for instance, last year, our focus was really on...inquiry based learning, so we really needed to spend time with teachers during their professional development over the summer, to really help them wrap their minds around this kind of teaching[.]*
>
> *We aim to infuse equity...in all the work that we do around partnership, and providing training to partners on racial equity practices that are aligned to what our district is trying to do...trying to figure out how we support providers to serve students with unique needs – students with IEPs or students who don't speak English as a first language – how do we make sure that those programs are getting the support and the connections within our system to the expertise that they need...*

In general, professional development around equity in the OST space appears to be an opportunity for growth for most districts. The districts that had maintained a stronger emphasis on partnership, either with CBOs or intermediaries, seemed to provide more comprehensive professional development series that included an equity orientation.

## Linking SEL, Mental Health, and Cultural Responsiveness in OST

As noted in the section on district-based equity indicators, the districts in our sample appeared to see SEL, mental health, and cultural responsiveness as connected and too approach them with an equity lens. The majority of this work was discussed in relation to in-school initiatives. Beyond school-based staff, some districts drew on community partners for specific programming related to social emotional learning and mental health. In other cases, district personnel met with community partners to ensure alignment to districts' SEL goals and approaches. This was less common, however, and in many districts there was not a tight alignment between in- and out-of-school initiatives related to SEL. As one stakeholder noted, when afterschool programs are not taught by classroom teachers from the district, the staff are unlikely to come to the program with the district's SEL aims in mind, so there is a need and opportunity for districts to provide greater SEL training to their partners. Despite this, CBO and school based interviewees discussed SEL and mental health supports about equally, with intermediary based interviewees speaking about these topics less than any other interviewees.

## Family Engagement Efforts

Engaging and supporting families' needs was an area frequently discussed in relation to communities' equity efforts. Family engagement was most frequently discussed by interviewees who worked in CBOs, with program administrators and school level personnel being the two sets of people who talked most often about engaging families.

Participants often discussed engaging families in relation to those for whom English was not a first language and the efforts districts made to provide translation for families. For example, in one of the more linguistically diverse districts, stakeholders regularly highlighted the comprehensive translation and community engagement efforts taken to ensure that students and families across their various language communities had access to materials promoting the afterschool and summer learning opportunities.

> **Family Engagement Efforts**
>
> *We have gone to different culturally specific groups and asked them to host parent engagement sessions...And so we have had a number of groups led by speakers of that language for parents... We go out into neighborhoods... and we will host parent events there... There is a family and community engagement coordinator at the district level and then buildings themselves have people in the role of family engagement coordinator.*
>
> *We use the Remind App that sends out surveys and things of that communication, we use hard copies. We also go to schools, open houses, and events that they have at their school... When parents come to pick up their kid from the afterschool program, we're always there trying to share as much information as possible...We've had some showcases [when]we bring parents in [to] see what we're doing.*
>
> *We also offer adult education, GED classes for our parents. We are making sure that we support that whole family concept. In turn, you get the whole child, the whole family, then you get a whole community.*

Most districts had specific family engagement staff at the school and/or district level. In addition to hosting special events and listening sessions in neighborhoods, districts also mentioned going door to door to register families, ensuring there is staff available who speak the language most common among the families they serve, meeting parents at pick-up to help them register for after school or summer programming, having virtual parent meetings to lower barriers to attendance, and having a parent advisory committee. Some districts also made sure that they connected their extended day departments directly with families.

In addition to engaging families with schools and afterschool and summer programs, districts also talked about connecting families with other types of support and services as part of their equity efforts. Some districts tried to address resource gaps in their communities by providing all meals for free and connecting families with wraparound services. Others used multi-tiered systems of support as part of meeting families' needs. Finally some districts provided training for parents on how they could help support their students. This was seen as particularly important during the pandemic when there was a need for digital engagement which could be a struggle for some families.

Despite these efforts, the translation of family engagement into the OST space remains an area of growth for many districts. While many report engaging families in terms of surveys/polls about program activities and meeting families' needs, only a few CBOs and intermediaries mentioned efforts to bring families into the OST space or provide families with educational support. Thus, there is room for growth in that other CBOs and districts should adopt similar strategies to engage families in deep and meaningful ways that move beyond sharing information and connecting families with community resources.

## Connecting to and Partnering with Local Communities

Districts' equity efforts were deeply informed by their communities, as evidenced in the themes discussed above. One way that schools connected with their communities in relation to equity efforts is partnering with community-based organizations and local programs. This reflects long-standing best practices in the OST field, wherein connections between schools, programs, and communities strengthen programs' abilities to support positive youth development. Districts talked about having an awareness of the diversity of partner organizations' resources and specifically partnering with programs to address equity issues. For example, some districts or schools intentionally partnered with organizations that offered cultural programming that reflected their student populations. As noted earlier, these partnerships did not always include tight linkages between the in- and out-of school days. But some districts did report having meetings with their partner organizations to go over specific areas of focus for their schools or intentionally addressing equity issues by providing training for their partners. One stakeholder talked about the importance of district and school leaders recognizing the strengths of partner organizations in engaging youth, saying that they *"don't care who helps the kid as long as someone does."* Although districts reported persistent challenges with these efforts (discussed in detail below), community partnerships did provide broader access to programming for students.

The strengths of community connections could also be seen in the districts with intermediaries. Three intermediary organizations served as sites for our study, and in one case, the district in that city was also a study site. In another city, there was a long-standing partner organization that provided programming, although it was not a comprehensive intermediary. The depth of equity efforts within the OST space appeared to be particularly strong in sites with strong intermediary and community partnership models. In some ways this may reflect the greater diversity of program offerings and resources available when efforts are both collective and connected. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

## Challenges in infusing equity into OST

Despite the different equity practices discussed by organizations, all participants acknowledged that their respective districts had room for improvement in terms of how intentionally they integrated equity efforts in their afterschool and summer programs. In this section, we detail some persistent challenges that participants voiced. Access to Programs was the topic mentioned most frequently (100 times) in relation to challenges and barriers to integrating equity into OST, suggesting that access remains a top challenge that organizations face in their equity work. Other common themes identified within discussions of challenges and barriers were Leadership, Policies, and Structures (92 times), Covid Impact (53 times), Staffing (46 times), Partnerships (32 times), and, to a lesser extent, Funding (31 times). We review each of these themes below in order of frequency from most commonly co-occurring to least frequent. We conclude this section with an overall review of the lack of intentional connection of equity efforts between the school-day and OST spaces.

## Barriers to Equity in Access to Programs

Community stakeholders regularly mentioned barriers to program access that are common in the OST literature such as waitlists, enrollment caps, and transportation. These traditional challenges serve as barriers to equitable access to programming as students are left on waitlists or unable to attend programming due to an inability to get to the program site or home from the site. Consequently, many organizations were unable to serve as many students as they would like either due to transportation, space, or staffing challenges.

In at least one district, there were also space challenges, wherein school-based programs had to compete with each other for space within school buildings. These challenges with space were exacerbated due to the additional social distancing restrictions at play during Covid. By and large, organizations demonstrated how some of the challenges detailed below inhibited their ability to serve more students.

> **Barriers to Equity in Access to Programs**
>
> *So there are enrollment caps. There are never fees. Transportation can be an issue…we do offer bussing… because of the pandemic, there's a huge bussing issue currently… That's going to be an issue because if the kids can't get home on their own, then they probably can't stay for after school.*
>
> *We could use 10 times the transportation system that we currently have for youth, but that's part of the reason we have a lot of things at school because they're already there, and then...we just have to get them one way, back home again.*

## Inflexible Leadership, Policies, and Structures Can Inhibit Equity Efforts

Some of the challenges to equity were related to systems-level issues in districts in terms of top-down approaches that did not always provide flexibility for individual schools and programs to respond to the needs of their specific communities. Related to the definitions of equity as being contextually situated in relation to the communities which schools and districts served, some interviewees noted that it would be helpful to have more autonomy to ensure that they could meet the specific needs of their schools' communities. At the same time, a stakeholder from another district noted that for them, decentralization meant that there was variability across schools in some equity related efforts. It appears that whereas it is important for districts to be flexible and give autonomy to schools to meet the needs of their communities, equity also needs to be prioritized and supported at the district level and not left purely to individual schools or programs.

> **Inhibiting Leadership, Policies, & Structures**
>
> *Principals…being able to make decisions more on their own, they do with the budget here and there, but also… things would make more sense for your own community if we were allowed to have that autonomy in those decisions that would make a school run better. For example, having off on the Lunar New Year for our families would probably be a really important piece,  but we don't have say on the district[.]*
>
> *We're a pretty decentralized system, which is one of our challenges…We're also a very racially and economically diverse district… as a system, we all agree that family voice should be influencing what we do… and family engagement is a priority. I think we still have a lot of work to do in making that a reality universally, and so I think the experience of families can be wildly different depending on the school.*
>
> *So all of our equity training is coming directly from the district… [district leadership] push the equity, it is a big initiative and it's a language that is being talked about all of the time, so it's a part of your school. But it's coming down from the district.*

Related to this, stakeholders noted that leaders also needed training and support for how to design policies that prioritize equity. Leadership turnover at the district level could also be a barrier to equity efforts, as leaders varied in their commitments to equity. Even between leaders who shared commitments to equity, their priorities and strategies could

differ. In addition, OST partners voiced frustration when district leaders made decisions that impacted families and OST providers without engaging those stakeholders in the decision-making process. For example, as schools made decisions about shifting school schedules to accommodate transportation shortages, families and programs had to juggle their own schedules to adjust to new start and end times for students. Lack of clarity around how decisions were made, and/or lack of city-wide data on which to base decisions were other challenges voiced by interviewees.

## Covid Presents Both Challenges and Opportunities for OST

The COVID-19 pandemic offered numerous challenges for OST programming, which have been widely documented. Indeed, the impact of COVID-19 was the third most common topic talked about in relation to challenges for equity work in OST. Yet the people we interviewed also pointed to opportunities that have grown out of the pandemic, as well as accompanying challenges that they hoped to be able to overcome as they looked to the third summer impacted by COVID.

With the provision of CARES funding, districts were able to advance or expand programs or ramp up existing or planned efforts in their summer programming space, sometimes implementing efforts that they had not previously been able to due to a lack of funding. Therefore, districts were able to develop comprehensive summer programming, yet had to do so quickly due to short notice around the CARES funding. These summer programs moved away from remediation and towards experiential and hands-on learning, potentially widening access to such programs for a larger population of students. One district in particular noted their use of summer programming to specifically reengage students who were struggling. Yet, as noted above, there was some uncertainty about the sustainability of such programs after CARES funding ends. Because these programs were being built or expanded with a temporary funding source, their long-term future was unclear. In some districts, there was even concern about starting programs that would then have to be cut when the funding ends.

One benefit of Covid that some districts reported has been the implementation of online / virtual family engagement efforts. These virtual efforts have led to increased participation of families, likely due to the ease with which one can access such virtual events without needing to find transportation or child care.

**Challenges and Opportunities of Covid**

*[This summer] we were very fortunate that we had a district wide summer program that we haven't had in such a long time…we had always had summer program opportunities open for kids, and then with budget things get[ing] cut. [It]t went from being open to all students to then only being open to students with a specific need, or only being open to students in specific areas, and then this summer was open to everyone. [A]nd they really [saw] a boom in enrollment and that was amazing because it not only provided opportunities for more kids, it also provided many more opportunities for our staff, our counselors, and our teachers to really access kids during the summer months[.]*

*We are trying to target those students [who are just below the proficiency level] by having them come out and audition to be a part of a performing arts camp this summer so that we can focus on the talent. Then, we would like to build a district symposium where various schools can be showcased, and various students can be showcased based on their talent, but it will be the Gifted and Talented exhibition…We're hoping that we are going to be re-engaging students who have no interest in school because we're tapping into something that is internally a passion or something they would like to try. And they get to work with professionals through [center] to spark their interest and get them engaged…[school attendance is] a qualification [to participate so], hopefully, that would be a catalyst to get more re-engagement.*

*Being forced to go into the virtual world…opened the door for access that schools weren't always utilizing. And we have found that we have a lot of parents who work crazy hours and aren't always available to come to a school, so it almost forces… schools, in a way, to become creative and start having these virtual meetings and these virtual information sessions…[I]t's just really improved that access, in that communication with parents.*

## Staff Recruitment and Retention is a Challenge

Another challenge that districts faced in providing equitable access to programming was around program staffing. Staffing was voiced as a challenge both in-school and in afterschool / summer contexts, which further contributed to challenges with student waitlists and transportation to and from programming. Part of the challenge to staffing was related to the low pay offered to OST personnel, which resulted in a limited pool of qualified people. The low pay made it difficult to both recruit and retain staff, leading to high turnover in program positions. Further, Covid also impacted staffing, as there are high levels of burnout in teachers and youth workers, further magnifying staffing issues with turnover and retention. While various districts reported targeted recruitment efforts, staffing shortages remained a key challenge.

## Stronger Partnerships with Greater Communication are Needed

An important consideration in afterschool and summer learning programming is the importance and benefits of partnerships with CBOs and intermediary organizations. We found a great deal of variability across our sample in terms of partnership models. Some districts lacked robust partnerships, whereas others had comprehensive partnership models or worked with intermediary organizations. Some districts had internal out-of-school offices that coordinated or ran programming, whereas others did not have dedicated OST personnel. Even in districts with robust partnership models, there could be variability across schools.

Districts with more robust partnership models reported stronger efforts around professional development, evaluation, and mitigating barriers to access. For example, one district in a city with a strong intermediary organization, which also had an internal office of community partnerships, has a database of partners and CBOs and partnership agreements to ensure that all of their partners meet base-level standards for serving students. The district also infused equity into consideration of their partnerships. The partnership office "*manages a calendar of free trainings for community partners that's open to anybody… they definitely have a focus on equity and are meant to support overall alignment to school and district goals.*" This district also has agreements that communicate and build in district priorities during the partnership planning process. Even with this district wide infrastructure, variability still existed in how much partnerships aligned with equity goals.

The CBOs which partnered with districts generally felt that the partnerships would benefit from better communication and integration between school day and OST. There was desire for district leadership to involve OST partners more in decision making that affects them. CBO stakeholders voiced that inconsistent communication and lack of partnership on district-wide approaches inhibits their abilities to closely integrate school-day curriculum and practices into the OST contexts. Even in the district above, which had a robust infrastructure for partnerships, there were still disconnects from the perspective of the CBOs, and desire for stronger prioritization of OST in decision making and leadership. This leaves CBOs and program providers feeling like an afterthought to the school day. Many stakeholders also expressed a desire for districts to think about students' lives both in- and out-of-school when making decisions, including decisions about space and scheduling, in a way that prioritized children's holistic healthy development.

## Lack of Sustainable Funding

A lack of and disjointed funding served as an additional challenge to providing equitable programming. Interviewees based across all types of organizations (CBOs, intermediaries, districts, and schools) talked about funding in approximately equal measure, with district level OST administrators being the specific people who spoke about funding most often. Many districts stated that they use a combination of Title 1 and 21st Century grants to support programming. However, they voiced concerns that these funds did not allow them to provide programming to historically marginalized students who do not attend Title 1 schools.

Other funding challenges included the limited amount of money that was dedicated by districts for OST programs. One stakeholder explicitly linked this to state budget models, and the ways in which education funding flowed down from the state, to districts, and finally to schools.

Further, whereas districts reported benefits of the federal funds dedicated as a result of the CARES act and other federal responses to COVID-19, the temporary nature of that money, and the timeline on which it was delivered, led to other challenges, especially around sustainability of efforts. Two different stakeholders from the same district talked explicitly about their concerns related to sustainability of efforts related to the recent influx of federal funds for summer programming. Thus, the disjointed nature of afterschool and summer program funding left gaps in program access for specific schools. One stakeholder explicitly called out the need for greater investment in the summer months.

> **Lack of Sustainable Funding**
>
> *Another limitation is some of our partner organizations are not funded to go to schools that are not title schools… [T]hat can lead to a dearth of opportunities at those schools and a lot of opportunities at some other schools.*
>
> *I think that schools are budgeted certain amounts of money that we refer as EC, which is like extracurricular. I'll be honest, I don't know how the determination comes for who gets what. But I know schools have a certain amoun… [A]s we know, with [the] times, with budget cuts, that's where the money typically gets cut first.*
>
> *My personal concern with [the CARES Act and ARP money] is what do we do when it goes away because it is limited funding… [I]t's not sustainable, and it can be traumatic too if we're going to put something in place but then take it away…[W]e can't just give them something for two and a half years… [W]hat about the rest of their school career?*
>
> *We're like, "Oh my God, this is great!" and it's also very challenging because we can't get programming off the ground for next school year for most of this stuff… You can't build for just two years, right? I think it's tricky, it's like we don't want to miss the opportunity and we don't want to create something that then disappears for kids...we want to figure out how to sustain them, but there's not a lot of options…We don't have a lot of public dollars for after school and summer, like federally or in the state. [W]e're hoping to build a model that will be exciting and attractive to private philanthropy, but we'll see.*
>
> *[W]e need to invest more into summer in that gap and the traps that kids fall into…we have great after school programs… and then we decided just to do nothing [for the summer]… the most important thing that we could do is invest in those kids in the summer, year round. And those programs shouldn't come at cost and shouldn't underpay the individuals doing these different kind of things because they're emphasizing those relationships and having fun.*

## Overall Disconnect Between School and Out-of-School

By and large, there seems to be a lack of purposeful connectivity between school-day equity efforts and afterschool / summer learning contexts. For example, some efforts around social-emotional learning (SEL), such as calm corners and morning meetings, are integrated into OST contexts. Yet equity-oriented staff training and curriculum, even when available to in-school personnel, are often not offered for OST staff.

In some districts, however, there was intentional training of partners on SEL efforts and other district wide priorities. As noted earlier these efforts were not particularly common and were more likely to be present in districts with strong partnership models and/or intermediaries.

Therefore, while some SEL efforts were adopted in the OST space, there was generally a lack of intentionally focused PD and training for afterschool and summer staff around in-school priority areas such as equity and SEL, or their intersection. Further, there was a lack of equity-focused curriculum, evaluation, and partnerships across many districts. One stakeholder encapsulated this when they shared that their district doesn't "*have great systems of evaluating our CBO-run programs, just like full stop. We don't.*"

Yet some districts specifically brought in partners to address equity areas, as noted previously. These efforts were more present in districts with larger partnership models, where intermediary organizations supported PD and evaluation efforts. One intermediary has a particularly robust evaluation tool that centers equity within its assessment by acknowledging that program implementation will look different in different programs in different contexts. They recognize not only differences in program mission and aims, but also resources. While the intermediary included consideration of differences between programs in their assessments, they also prioritized ensuring that all programs were incorporating priority areas, such as making sure that every program included enrichment activities as part of its offerings. In districts with fewer partnerships, however, the specific training and evaluation for OST was limited and lacked an equity-focus. It is not surprising, then, that evaluation was discussed more frequently by CBO or intermediary based interviewees than by interviewees who worked in either districts or schools.

## The Sociopolitical Context

Finally, participants talked about the current political climate, specifically the politicization of equity and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a challenge to their equity efforts. Across the study sample, stakeholders voiced concerns that current narratives and tension around equity efforts have slowed their work in relation to equity.

# Recommendations

Given the robust and multifaceted nature of the findings presented above, we propose a variety of recommendations for afterschool and summer stakeholders as they continue to consider how they might intentionally integrate equity into their OST spaces. In the section that follows, we provide a host of recommendations for district-, school-, and program-stakeholders. A shorter list of recommendations by stakeholder group is available in Appendix F.

## Integrating Equity Efforts in OST Spaces

In our sample, the focus on access, while important, also allowed equity of experience and outcomes to take a back seat to ensuring that students in identified populations had access to programming. In other words, there did not appear to be a focus on how the afterschool and summer learning experiences and outcomes compared across student groups. In order to support the integration of equity efforts more fully in afterschool and summer learning programs, districts should move towards expanding their focus to include not only equity of access and opportunity but also equity of experience and outcomes. A few considerations to accomplishing this include regularly examining student outcome data for disparities, creating intentional integration of school-day equity supports into OST learning contexts, and cultivating strong partnerships with equity oriented community based organizations (CBOs). Indeed, schools with stronger partnership models appeared to be able to draw more on the expertise of local programs and organizations to bring culturally responsive and equity/social justice focused programming that reflected the needs, interests, and backgrounds of their students and communities.

Similarly, stakeholders across all districts identified afterschool and summer learning programs as a growth area for their equity efforts. In fact, many participants voiced appreciation for the interview questions, which prompted them to think more deeply about how they might consider integrating equity efforts into these spaces. Thus, as districts plan for and implement afterschool and summer learning, it is important that they create space for intentional conversations and implementation of school-day equity efforts into the afterschool and summer learning contexts, emphasizing equity experience and outcomes in addition to their current focus on access.

During these conversations, districts thinking about ways that culturally responsive practices could be transferred from the school day and implemented in districts' out-of-school time programs could also support a stronger focus on the experiences of students from historically marginalized and culturally diverse backgrounds. Simpkins and colleagues (2017) have developed a framework outlining the ways in which out-of-school time organizations can review their structures and practices for cultural responsiveness, and this frame may be useful for districts to consider as they push to think not only about access but also experiences and outcomes.

## Leadership for Equity

Leadership is critical to equity efforts. The districts in this sample were selected because they were identified as having strong equity practices already in place. Common across the sites was a districtwide, collective approach to equity, led by messaging and resourcing from the top. At the same time, flexibility was important, and local sites needed to be able to adapt equity initiatives and guidelines to meet the specific needs of their students and communities. There are two key areas that districts need to consider in relation to building strong leadership for equity. The first is in ensuring balance between district leadership with community level autonomy that allows for adaptability in local contexts. Flexibility should not provide a window for dodging equity

requirements even while it provides opportunities for aligning programs and initiatives with specific student and community needs. The second is intentionally and explicitly including before and after school and summer programming into equity initiatives. Despite these districts being identified as strong in relation to equity, there are still gaps in their inclusion of OST in their collective efforts. Strong leadership is needed to message the importance of both equity and OST not only through rhetoric but also through resources.

At the department level, OST and summer leaders should regularly seek feedback from students, families and community partners on how to best serve the community. This includes the meaningful integration of family and caregivers into leadership opportunities. Further, leaders of OST departments should ensure that all staff are appropriately trained in ways that enhance district-wide equity efforts (e.g., culturally responsive curriculum, restorative practices, etc.). Finally leaders in these departments should work with community partners to bring in the cultural expertise of the community, providing equity- and social justice- focused programming to students.

## Partnering with Local CBOs

To address the challenges reported, educators at the district level should create intentional spaces for collaboration and value CBO partners in word and in action. In other words, community partners should have a seat at the table when discussing and developing wrap around supports for students. At the school level, administrators should work to implement structures that facilitate communication between school day and afterschool / summer educators. Formal paths of communication foster more comprehensive supports for both students and families. Community-based partners expressed a desire for districts to take a more holistic view of students when making their decisions, and this includes thinking about the implications of their decisions for the full breadth of a student's day, including their OST hours. Creating partnerships that more fully integrate the CBOs into the district level discussions and decision making, rather than just as external providers of services, will help ensure greater connections across the school day and OST and build more seamless systems of support for students.

## Moving forward from Covid

We need to consider how districts can support the efforts that they implemented or expanded in response to COVID moving forward. The expansion of experiential learning in the summer space, for example, is a positive step for ensuring that historically under-served students have greater access to enriching summer activities. Yet without sustained funding, these efforts are likely to disappear. Once again, students from under-resourced schools and under-served communities are likely to have less access to the same quality and variety of enriching summer activities as their peers from more highly resourced schools and communities. As noted in the introduction, such disparities in opportunities in the OST space simply compounds the inequities that exist for historically marginalized students within the educational system. Thus, funders should consider how they could advocate for and provide follow-up funds to help sustain OST initiatives that benefited from the infusion of CARES funds.

Further, the increase in family engagement via virtual events is a trend that some Parent-Teacher Organizations have also reported. This suggests that including virtual as well as in-person opportunities for family engagement can support family engagement moving forward.

During Covid, some districts intentionally partnered with CBOs and OST providers to

serve as remote learning sites or to help address the need for additional afterschool and summer programming. As noted above, increasing partnerships between districts and CBOs is recommended to help strengthen the integration of districts' equity efforts within the OST space. Additionally, we noted the greater depth of work happening in locales with strong intermediaries and/or partnership models. Coming out of Covid, the opportunity exists to build on the community wide efforts to meet the needs of children and families that became more common during the pandemic. Taking this moment to secure intermediaries and/or other community-wide systems in places where they exist, and create them where they don't, would help provide needed infrastructure to OST systems. Opportunities exist to strengthen connections made during the pandemic, sustain existing relationships, and foster new partnerships. But to be realized, such opportunities need both funding and developmental support. The organizations that serve young people, including both schools and CBOs, are stretched thin and under tremendous pressure. There is little space for organizations to take on new initiatives or even expand current equity efforts without resourcing them with both human and financial capital.

## Future Research

There are a variety of avenues for additional research within the study of equity in afterschool and summer learning spaces. For one, additional research should be conducted to understand the partnership more fully between districts and CBOs, highlighting best practices and areas of growth. Further, continuing to explore high-quality district / intermediary partnership models will highlight these best practices for partnership. Second, it is important that we seek to understand how districts move past access in their pursuit of equity in afterschool and summer spaces, highlighting key practices that center a comprehensive view of equity (e.g., equitable access to programming, equitable quality of programming, equitable outcomes for students, equitable practices within programs). Finally, in terms of sustainability, it will be important for future research to explore the impact of the sunsetting of CARES and ARP funds on districts' OST programming. Documenting the impact of the cessation of the funds, as well as investigating various ways that districts may attempt to extend the opportunities provided by the funds, will be important for understanding the longer-term implications of COVID-19 and federal funds on the OST field. Given the concerns expressed by some stakeholders, documenting districts' programming and outcomes across the years preceding, immediately following, and two-to-five years out from the Covid pandemic, will be important to guide future investments and funding policies.

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# Appendix A: Equity Indicators

**Does the District…**

| Equity Area | Equity Indicator | Data Publicly Available |
|---|---|---|
| **Physical and Contextual Landscape** | Surface Level Indicators<br><br>1. Have in place practices to ensure equitable resource allocation, distribution, sources of funding (i.e., hard or soft; local or state and federal), timeliness and appropriateness of funding (i.e., resources when they are needed, where they are needed)<br><br>2. Monitor facilities' maintenance, care, rejuvenation, upkeep, resources, and access utilization patterns to ensure equitable support is being provided to all learners<br><br>3. Ensure that physical buildings and virtual platforms (websites, social media) show diverse students of varied racial, ethnic, language, gender or gender identity groups, and people with disabilities in a variety of roles<br><br>4. Make available materials, notices, and other communications in multiple languages, Braille, or audio versions?<br><br>Deep Level Indicators<br><br>5. Make efforts to achieve classroom integration when students self-segregate in the classroom (e.g. teams for contests, groups for instruction, or other forms of classroom organization)<br><br>6. Appropriately communicate the root causes of issues affecting schools and communities<br><br>7. Express the value of and integrate the assets of school, home, and community so that all partners become engaged from their positions of strength as equals rather than members in deficit-model school-home interactions | 1. Ensure that physical buildings and virtual platforms (websites, social media) show diverse students of varied racial, ethnic, language, gender or gender identity groups, and people with disabilities in a variety of roles.<br><br>2. Make available materials, notices, and other communications in multiple languages, Braille, or audio versions. |

| Systems and Administration | Surface Level Indicators<br><br>1. Have an easily accessible mission statement that clearly articulates equity goals<br><br>2. Have a policy-based, formalized process to investigate student and family reporting of discrimination or bias (in instruction, discipline, etc)<br><br>3. Use exclusionary or alternative disciplinary policies<br><br>4. Regularly collect, analyze, and disaggregate data by student groups (race/ethnicity, language, ability, gender, SES, etc) in the following areas:<br><br>   a. Course level enrollment (gifted, advanced/AP, special education, vocational)<br><br>   b. Grade point average /achievement scores<br><br>   c. Standardized test scores<br><br>   d. Student discipline, suspensions, and expulsions<br><br>   e. Participation in school activities and honors<br><br>   f. Graduation rate/diploma type/post-secondary attendance<br><br>5. Share student equity data with all stakeholders (staff, families, and community stakeholders) in an easy to access and understand format (e.g., an Equity Dashboard)<br><br>6. Have strategies/policies to address disparities<br><br>7. Have an equity plan that:<br><br>   a. Includes measurable goals to monitor progress that narrows gaps between student groups.<br><br>   b. Indicates which groups or individuals are accountable for implementing the plan. | 1. Have an easily accessible mission statement that clearly articulates equity goals<br><br>2. Have student level data publicly available<br><br>3. Data indicate disproportionate representation by student groups in the following areas: Course level enrollment (gifted, advanced/AP, special education, vocational); Grade point average /achievement scores; Standardized test scores; Student discipline, suspensions, and expulsions; Participation in school activities and honors; Graduation rate/diploma type/post-secondary attendance<br><br>4. Has implemented strategies/policies/plans to address disparities<br><br>5. Have an equity plan<br><br>6. Have emblems, mascots, team names, and other symbols that are free from racial, ethnic, language, gender or gender identity, or disability bias |
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c. Allocates resources to support the implementation of the equity plan.

d. Identifies equity lead(s) with clearly defined role(s).

e. All stakeholders (staff, parents, students, and community) participate in the development of the equity plan.

8. Have an anti-racism policy that:

   a. Identifies, remedies, and prevents racially inequitable outcomes

   b. Examines, removes, and rejects all forms of racism

   c. Prohibits racial discrimination

   d. Is regularly shared with all stakeholders (staff, families, students, and community)

9. Hold administrators and teachers accountable for decreasing disproportionate rates of student group representation

10. Have a teaching staff that is representative of the racial/ethnic/gender/disability composition of the student body and larger school community.

11. Have emblems, mascots, team names, and other symbols that are free from racial, ethnic, language, gender or gender identity, or disability bias

Deep Level Indicators

12. Include all stakeholders (staff, families, students, and community) in the development and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of equity policies, statements, and plans

13. Data reflect reduction of disparities over time by student groups (race/ethnicity, language, ability, gender, SES, etc.) in the following areas:

    a. Course level enrollment (gifted, advanced/AP, special education, vocational)

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| | b. Grade point average /achievement scores<br><br>c. Standardized test scores<br><br>d. Student discipline, suspensions, and expulsions<br><br>e. Participation in school activities and honors<br><br>f. Graduation rate/diploma type/post-secondary attendance | |
| **Teaching and Learning** | Surface Level Indicators<br><br>1. Invest in and take personal responsibility for student success. (e.g., meeting with students before/after school to support them, engaging in PD to learn how to "teach" culturally and linguistically diverse students, and embracing student success and their failures as their own)<br><br>2. Provide / use equity-focused or culturally responsive curricular materials<br><br>3. Encourage and support teachers socially and academically empowering students<br><br>4. Model, scaffold, and clarify challenging curriculum through peer collaborations, outlining expectations, and monitoring student learning<br><br>5. Build and facilitate cooperation and respect for each other, ensuring students feel a sense of belonging and know the high expectations and enforcing logical consequences (warm demander)<br><br>6. Revise eurocentric school curricula to represent multiple perspectives (works of authors of color, primary sources materials, diversity of visual imagery)<br><br>7. Build on students' experiences, strengths, and funds of knowledge and bridge the gap between students' assets and curriculum (e.g., infusing students cultural tradition in math | 1. Provide / use equity-focused or culturally responsive curricular materials |

| | strategies and processes, honoring students' home languages) | |
|---|---|---|
| | Deep Level Indicators | |
| | 8. Promote and provide opportunities for cultural and racial socialization (e.g., learning about Afrocentric education) | |
| | 9. Engage students in social justice work (e.g., can students identify real-life issues in their communities and plan steps to address them?) | |
| | 10. Make explicit the power dynamics in mainstream society and help students navigate and challenge those inequalities (e.g., traffic stop data). | |
| **Social Emotional Learning and School Climate** | Surface Level Indicators | |
| | 1. Use SEL as a framework to examine the importance of the range of adult and student identities and assets, reflect on and appreciate diversity, and foster inclusive environments | |
| | 2. Guide schools in adopting evidence-based programs and practices that are culturally-affirming and relevant to their communities and needs | |
| | 3. Focus implementation on creating the conditions that promote social and emotional growth for all students, including building trusting relationships, welcoming learning environments, consistent routines, engaging teaching strategies, culturally-relevant practices and authentic family and community partnerships | |
| | 4. Mandate that district staff examine disaggregated data, analyze root causes of disparities, and engage various stakeholders to co-develop policies and practices that support equity | |
| | 5. Provide support for student affinity groups | |
| | Deep Level Indicators | |
| | 6. Provide meaningful ways for students, families, and community partners to be active | |

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| | partners in the planning and implementation of SEL and play a role in district decision-making<br><br>7. Require District leaders to use reflection tools such as: <u>SEL and Equity- District Reflection</u><br><br>8. Provide opportunities for adults to reflect on their own identities, assets, and biases, and engage in culturally-responsive practices and conversations around equity<br><br>9. Develop and implement efforts to amplify student voices<br><br>10. Have practices in place to ensure that all students have developmentally appropriate opportunities to engage in discussions with each other, raise problems, and identify solutions in their schools and communities, productively challenge the inequities that they see, have a voice in how the school district operates, and take on authentic leadership roles | |
| **Professional Development** | <u>Surface Level Indicators</u><br><br>1. Provide opportunities for staff at all levels and in all job descriptions (teaching and non-teaching staff) to obtain training regarding educational equity issues and priorities and concerns relevant to specific populations<br><br>2. Provide staff members with training to increase their effectiveness in working with diverse populations<br><br>3. Use presenters and facilitators for professional development programs that are representative of the gender, racial, ethnic, and disability composition of the district and larger community<br><br>4. Provide DEI PD development opportunities multiple times throughout the school year<br><br><u>Deep Level Indicators</u><br><br>5. Integrate DEI PD into the school curriculum | 1. Provide opportunities for staff at all levels and in all job descriptions (teaching and non-teaching staff) to obtain training regarding educational equity issues and priorities and concerns relevant to specific populations |

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| | a. Are they transforming PD materials into classrooms and school wide activities?<br><br>b. Do they use PD beyond the PD day?<br><br>c. Are they creating Action Plans?<br><br>6. Actively involve teachers in the PD opportunities<br><br>7. Measure the effectiveness of PD with an evaluation and assessment plan<br><br>    a. Does the PD increase cultural awareness and knowledge?<br><br>    b. Does the PD increase self awareness (biases, beliefs, attitudes, etc.)?<br><br>    c. Does the content or subject have a positive impact on student learning?<br><br>    d. Is there teacher buy-in?<br><br>8. Use PD to create an awareness of the community being served (i.e., varied demographic groups and neighborhoods in the school)<br><br>    a. How connected is the school or staff to the community?<br><br>    b. Are they visiting communities?<br><br>    c. Do they know the community issues? | |
| **Family Engagement** | <u>Surface Level Indicators</u><br><br>1. Have a system in place to gather stakeholder perspectives from all families<br><br>2. Engage in family outreach only through PTA, one-point events (back-to-school nights or P-T conferences), or only when a child is struggling behaviorally or academically<br><br>3. Create opportunities for family participation (e.g., dinner nights, parent informational nights, flexible schedules) | 1. Have trained parent-community liaisons, family coordinators, or similar staffers |

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| | a. To what extent are parent engagement opportunities prescribed or self-directed?<br><br>b. Do districts create family events with or without input from parents?<br><br>c. Are all events held at the school or does the program hold events in the community?<br><br>4. Have a system for maintaining positive, regular communication with parents<br><br>    a. What strategies are employed to maintain positive and regular communication with families?<br><br>    b. How do districts build trust with families?<br><br><u>Deep Level Indicators</u><br><br>5. Have trained parent-community liaisons, family coordinators, or similar staffers<br><br>6. Provide transport for families that need it<br><br>7. Provide opportunities for parent participation in programming (e.g., teachings skills, offering cultural resources/knowledge)<br><br>8. Leverage family strengths<br><br>9. Develop action plans with family and youth input<br><br>10. Employing evidence-based family-school connections (e.g., Bridges Program) | |
| **Community Connectedness** | <u>Surface Level Indicators</u><br><br>1. Have personnel such as leaders with cultural or ethnic match in positions of power<br><br>2. Have translators on staff<br><br>3. Demonstrate awareness of the issues facing the local underrepresented communities<br><br>4. Provide financial support through fee waivers<br><br><u>Deep Level Indicators</u> | 1. Have personnel in power such as leaders, who appear to reflect the cultural and ethnic background of the student community<br><br>2. Have translators on staff |

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| | 5. Coalesce and coordinate community services and district and school-site resources for benefit of improving learning conditions for students, instructional practice of teachers, and engagement of families<br><br>6. Use nontraditional means such as home visits or other community centers (e.g., churches, cultural centers)<br><br>7. Pay attention to location histories [e.g., Latinx families in cities with a historically strong presence of similar families (e.g., California) may have different resources and needs than those who migrate to newer host cities (e.g., rural North Carolina)] | |

# Appendix B:  Overview of Findings from Coding of
District Websites for Equity Indicators

We found that a majority of the districts reported on some aspects of our equity indicators, but the extent of reporting varied drastically. For example, providing specific information like the types of professional development opportunities offered, their content, and their attendance requirements provides more context than simply stating culturally-relevant training exists. Nearly all the districts (97%) reported that they have strategic plans or policies to address disparities in their district. Similarly, districts frequently reported having culturally-responsive classrooms or curricular materials (84%). In addition, most districts published their own student data (74%) and reported providing educators with equity-focused professional development opportunities (72%).

It is important to note that engagement in these efforts varied vastly from district to district. For example, some districts stated they had professional development (PD) goals related to cultural responsiveness in strategic plans, whereas others provided a calendar of professional development opporutnities ranging from trauma informed care to anti-racist teaching strategies. Though these districts may be at different places on the continuum towards equity, their reporting of these efforts allows educational stakeholders to not only be informed of current offerings, but also advocate for additional forms of PD in alignment with community needs.

However, just over half of the districts in our sample reported on disproportionality in their student data (63%). For example, while many districts did report student-level data, they did not always disaggregate this data by student identity categories (i.e., race/ethnicity, ability status, language learner status). Consequently, the prevalence of disproportionality in many districts remains undisclosed to the average educational stakeholder, limiting the extent to which the districts can be held accountable. Secondly, fewer districts published explicit equity statements (63%), despite mentioning equity as a value or goal in other areas of their website, or having an assigned task force or committee. In these circumstances, it makes it more difficult to evaluate how committed a district is to pursuing equity without the provision of supporting information.

While it is positive to see that a majority of districts reported on equity efforts to some extent in each category, the variability in the level of transparency and detail with which information was reported suggests that some districts may not be deeply engaged in transformative equity work. Transparency is not just the presentation of information; but rather the intentional translation of information to stakeholders. A lack of transparency in equity efforts may obscure areas where growth is needed, misdirect time, effort, and resources, or make stakeholders feel misinformed about current efforts or feel undervalued in the process. Therefore, it is important to provide recommendations for all districts to pursue deeper and more transparent reporting on all equity efforts, regardless of their space on the equity continuum. For more on these recommendations see our advisory note in Educational Leadership (Henrici & Sjogren, 2022).

Forty-two districts did not have a clear equity statement on their website. The states represented by these districts are: AL (2), CA (5), CO (1), FL (8), GA (5), HI (1), IL (1), MD (1), MI (1), NC (1), NM (1), OH (1), TN (2), TX (9), UT (1), VA (1), WI (1). We defined evidence of "deep" equity work as the presence of 5 or more indicators; 26 districts from 13 states met that criteria: CA (8), FL (2), IL (1), KY (2), MA (1), MD (2), MN (2), NV (1), PA (1), TX (2), UT (1), VA (2), WA (1).

# Appendix C: Screening Interview Protocol

As a reminder, we are currently working on a project looking at the ways in which equity is considered in various districts and are conducting these brief interviews as a way to identify a smaller sample of districts to work with more in-depth. In this brief conversation, we would like to ask you a few questions about what equity looks like in your district. We are particularly interested in learning about how this work plays out in afterschool and summer learning spaces.

1. To get started, what student populations does your district tend to think about or focus on with regards to issues of equity?

2. You noted that [*student groups identified from question 1*] are a focus for your equity efforts. What sort of approaches does your district use when seeking to understand the experiences or barriers of those students and their families?

3. Does your district set aside specific funding or resources to support [*identified student groups*]?

    a. Can you provide an example of how they use these funds?

4. Are [*identified student groups*] a group of students that your district prioritizes in afterschool and summer learning activities?

    a. If so, what are the programs / activities implemented and their goals?

5. Some districts use state data, interviews with families, external evaluators, or other tools to make improvements in afterschool and summer learning spaces— how do you evaluate and make improvements in these spaces?

    a. [If families]:

        i. How does the district specifically seek feedback from families of *[identified student groups]*?

        ii. Can you provide an example of how your district has used feedback from families to make improvements in afterschool and summer learning spaces?

    b. [If data]:

        i. How does the district review data for afterschool and summer learning spaces?

        ii. Can you provide an example of how your district has used data to make improvements in afterschool and summer learning spaces?

    c. [If external resource / other tool / other program]

        i. How does the district work with [external resource] to inform changes in the afterschool and summer learning spaces?

<ol type="i" start="2">
<li>Can you provide an example of how your district has used an [external resource] to make improvements in afterschool and summer learning spaces?</li>
</ol>

<ol type="a" start="4">
<li value="4">[final probe after they describe how they evaluate and if it wasn't answered in previous responses]
<ol type="i">
<li>As you engage these data sources, what outcomes or other markers of effectiveness are you most concerned about in relation to out-of-school and summer programming?</li>
<li>How, if at all, are the benefits or effectiveness of afterschool and summer learning programs evaluated, specifically improve access or quality of services for their benefit to [*identified student groups*]?</li>
</ol>
</li>
</ol>

<ol start="6">
<li>Given what we have talked about, and thinking about your experiences with your district's equity efforts overall, how would you rate your district's approach to equity on a scale of 1-10?</li>
</ol>

<ol start="7">
<li>If your district is included in our final sample, who would you recommend that we speak with about equity in afterschool and summer learning spaces?
<ol type="a">
<li>Are you able to provide an email address for each person?</li>
</ol>
</li>
</ol>

**Researcher Notes:** use this space to record general observations, your reactions, questions and your thoughts after you have completed the conversation/interview. These notes will be shared with the research team.

**Observations:**

**General reactions to the conversation:**

**Outstanding questions to discuss with the research team:**

# Appendix D: Interview Protocol

**Introduction:** We are asking questions about a variety of different topics related to equity, afterschool, and summer programming in your district. We know that COVID has likely changed your afterschool and summer learning plans. Given this, we are interested in your district/program's current, as well as prospective, plans for afterschool and summer learning opportunities for students. We are speaking with a number of different stakeholders from your district, so we don't expect every person to be familiar with every topic we are asking about. If you don't have information about a topic, just let us know and we will move on to the next.

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**Overview: *In this section, we are interested in understanding your district/programs' efforts around equity and after school/summer learning programming.***

1. Please describe your role in the district/program, specifically in relation to equity and/or afterschool/summer programming?

2. What student populations does your district/program tend to think about or focus on regarding issues of equity?

3. Next, we would like to hear about the families in your district.

    a. What roles do families play in the district?

    b. In what ways does your district seek to understand the needs of the families served by the district?

        i. *How is this input received (e.g., surveys, focus groups, feedback forms) and what efforts are taken to ensure these opportunities are reaching all families?*

    c. What strategies does the district use to maintain positive and regular communication with families?

        i. *Does the district and/or program have trained parent-community liaisons, family coordinators, or similar staffers?*

    d. In what ways, if at all, do you connect families with resources?

4. What types of afterschool and/or summer learning programs does your district provide for students?

    a. Do you partner with any community organizations for your afterschool and/or summer learning programs?

    b. What is the core focus of these programs?

    c. Are there differences across schools in what programs are offered?

        i. *If yes, what determines these differences*

    d. How are your after school/summer learning programs connected to your district's equity goals?

    e. What resources has your district drawn on to plan for afterschool and/or summer programming (e.g., best practice guides, studies of other programs)?

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**Social-Emotional Learning:** *In this section, we are seeking information about how your district/program supports students' social-emotional and/or mental health needs across both in-school and after-school/summer programs.*

5. What does your district do to support student social-emotional or mental health?

    a. Can you describe the processes that led to your district to select and implement the supports mentioned above?

    b. In what ways do these efforts support your equity goals?

    c. To what extent are these supports integrated into afterschool and/or summer learning opportunities that exist in your community?

6. Does your district provide opportunities for students to learn about the history and culture of their own and other racial/ethnic groups?

    a. Are these opportunities provided in afterschool and/or summer learning spaces?

    b. Are there intentional connections between these efforts during the school day and afterschool and/or summer learning hours?

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**Afterschool and Summer Learning Programming:** *In this section, we are interested in understanding more about your afterschool and summer learning programming.*

7. How do students/families learn about and access your afterschool and/or summer programs?

    a. Are there any criteria that students must meet to participate in programs?

    b. What programmatic factors make it difficult for students/families to access afterschool and/or summer learning programs, such as transportation, enrollment caps, fees, waitlists?

        i. *How has your district/program attempted to address these access challenges for students and families?*

8. How do the demographics of students who attend afterschool and/or summer learning programs compare to the overall demographics of the district?

    a. Does your data demonstrate any disparities in terms of which students attend these afterschool and summer learning programs?

    b. How does the district promote the engagement of students from [*identified student groups*] in afterschool and summer learning spaces?

9. How do your district's afterschool and/or summer learning programs create opportunities for family participation/engagement (e.g., in programming, teaching, facilitation)?

    a. What times of day do you offer programming for families? How did you decide on those times?

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**Program Administration:** *In this section, we want to think about specific program details and decisions such as funding, staffing, and program quality.*

10. How are afterschool and/or summer programs funded across the district?

    a. Does funding vary from school to school?

    b. Is there funding set aside for equity-focused programming specifically?

c. Who is in the room making these funding decisions?

d. We know that some districts have received an influx of funds for summer and OST programming this year from the CARES Act. Has your district received such funds?

   i. *If yes, how are you using those funds?*

   ii. *Are those funds allowing you to do things this summer that you have not been able to do before? If so, what are those things?*

   iii. *Do you have plans to try to sustain any of those activities in future years?*

11. How are staff hired for your afterschool and/or summer programming?

a. How representative of your student population is the staff in your afterschool and/or summer programming?

   i. *What, if any, practices do you have in place to try to recruit and retain a diverse afterschool and summer work force?*

12. What training and/or professional development does afterschool and summer staff receive?

a. What training do staff receive around culturally-relevant teaching practices and programming?

b. Are staff paid and/or incentivized for training and PD?

13. How do you evaluate the success of afterschool and/or summer programs?

a. What tools do you use to measure that (e.g., survey, interviews, achievement data, etc)? Is data collected internally or externally?

b. How does your district/program use data to make decisions?

c. Is this data made publicly available to all stakeholders?

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**Final Questions**

14. Given our discussion today, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your district's current efforts in relation to equity in afterschool and/or summer learning programs?

a. What are some of your current challenges?

15. What are major areas of growth you would like to see your district address in the next 1-3 years?

a. What support might your district need to accomplish these goals?

16. Who else would you recommend that we speak with about equity in afterschool and/or summer learning spaces?

# Appendix E: Codebook Dictionary

Access to Programs: How students and families learn about and access the OST and summer learning programs offered.

- Includes challenges/barriers to access and solutions to those challenges/barriers.

Challenges/Barriers: Challenges in effective implementation of OST/summer programs or barriers to achieving equity goals (e.g. waitlists, transportation, etc.)

- Includes the participants' comments about how they've overcome these challenges/barriers?

Connection/Integration/Continuity between OST & School: The extent to which there is connection, integration, and/or continuity between in-school programming/curricula and the OST and summer learning programming/curricula.

- Identifying where and how the in-school and OST domans reinforce each other (or not).

Covid Impact: How Covid has impacted the way that OST and summer learning programs are funded, developed, implemented, facilitated, accessed, evaluated, etc.

Decision-making/Policies/Leadership: How policymakers and district/program leaders make decisions about OST and summer learning programs, and how those decisions (and who is making them) impact program implementation, experience, and outcomes.

Definition of Equity: How participants describe or define equity, including what student demographic groups their equity efforts are focused on.

Equity Efforts: Efforts that the district/program is making to promote equitable student outcomes.

Evaluation: Any metrics that the district/program uses to evaluate its programming on any criteria.

Family Engagement: Efforts that the district/program makes to engage families in the learning community.

- Includes both efforts to strengthen the home-school connection to support student success, as well as resources and programming offered for family members.

Funding: Types of funding received and how those funds are being used to support OST and summer learning programs.

Growth Areas: What the participant identifies as the district's/program's areas of growth.

Includes the participant's opinions about the district/program and their understanding of the district's/program's mission and vision.

Parent Insight: Parents / caregivers providing insight into programming (i.e., activities, focus, etc.)

Partnerships: Any mention of partnerships with organizations from outside of the school district.

Position: The participant's position in their district/organization (e.g. principal, assistant superintendent).

Program Demographics: Demographic information about students who access the OST and summer learning programs, as well as the staff who run these programs.

Program Description: Description of the purpose, organization, and function of the program that the participant is involved in.

- *Types of Programmatic Activities:* Examples of different programs and their activities (e.g. an academic enrichment program with tutoring, PBL, and field trips).

SEL/Mental Health Supports: Examples of SEL and mental health supports that are embedded in OST and summer learning programs or within the school day. This includes discussion of opportunities to learn about the history and culture of their own, as well as others', racial ethnic groups.

Staffing: Anything related to the staffing of programs, including hiring practices, staff positions, staff retention, etc.

Student Influenced: Decision makers including program features based on what they know / presume about students

Student Motivations: Examples of content, qualities, or elements of programs that motivate students to participate.

Student Voice: Opportunities for student perspectives of OST/summer learning programs to be heard and valued in decision making.

- This may occur at various levels: classroom, program, school, district, etc.

Systems/Administration: Information about the district level administrative structures and organization.

Training/PD: Descriptions of training and professional development offered to staff.

# Appendix F: Recommendations List

Educational contexts such as afterschool and summer learning spaces are influenced by a variety of systems, environments, and people. It is therefore important that all stakeholders take an active role in ensuring the intentional integration of equity efforts into afterschool and summer learning contexts. Below we provide explicit, evidence based recommendations by stakeholder groups. We organize these in relation to the ecological model, from micro to more macro contexts of influence. However, we also note that those individuals in the more macro contexts (e.g., district level leadership) hold much of the system-level power needed to advance equity initiatives.

**Families / Caregivers:**

- Families / caregivers should advocate for opportunities to share their voices, desires, and needs with OST and Summer program leaders (e.g., advocacy committees based on similar goals, parent focus groups, increased opportunities for public comment, online feedback forms and surveys).

- Families/caregivers should be empowered by their school districts and local programs to engage with leaders to advocate for programming that is culturally responsive, sustaining, and relevant.

**Program Providers / Community-based Organizations (CBOs):**

- Providers should bring in expertise of local programs and organizations to provide culturally responsive and equity/social justice focused programming that reflects the needs, interests, and backgrounds of their students and communities.

- Providers should include virtual as well as in-person opportunities for family engagement.

**School Level Leaders:**

- School level leaders should work to implement structures that facilitate communication between school day and OST / summer educators.

**District Level OST / Summer Program Departments:**

- OST departments should develop processes and systems that regularly review for equity of access, opportunity, experience, and outcomes.

- OST departments should begin a practice of regularly reviewing OST / Summer outcome data for any disparities.

- OST departments should begin or continue the expansion of experiential learning in their OST and Summer programming (e.g., arts-based learning, community exploration programs).

- OST departments should develop formal pathways for communication between school level leaders and partnering OST providers.

- OST departments should ensure that the training and staffing of program-providers is designed to enhance current equity efforts (i.e., being intentional about the program's equity goals during the interview process; supporting staff of color through affinity groups; creating combined positions which allow staff to be present full-time; and hiring older students to work in their programs). Training and staffing should mirror the needs of the respective student population.

- OST departments should seek input and feedback from all families on ways to best serve them including but not limited to curriculum, scheduling of events and programming, as well as creating opportunities for building trusting relationships between guardians and program staff, meaningful collaboration, and parent leadership opportunities.

**District Level Leadership:**

- District leaders should adopt a more holistic view of students when making their decisions (i.e., thinking about the implications of their decisions for the full breadth of a student's day, including their OST hours).

- District leaders should design a collective approach to equity that intentionally includes family engagement, after school, and summer learning efforts.

- District leaders should create intentional integration of school-day equity supports into OST learning contexts (i.e., restorative justice, culturally responsive curricular materials, etc.).

- District leaders should cultivate strong partnerships with equity-oriented CBOs.

- District leaders should create partnerships that more fully integrate the CBOs into the district level discussions and decision making ensuring that community partners have a seat at the table when discussing and developing wrap-around supports for students.

- District leaders should regularly assess their approaches to equity, engaging in continuous improvement processes that support their progression into deeper equity work.

**Researchers:**

- Researchers should seek to understand the partnership between districts and CBOs, highlighting best practices and areas of growth.

- Researchers should explore how districts move past access in their pursuit of equity in afterschool and summer spaces, highlighting key practices that center a comprehensive view of equity.

- Researchers should explore the transition from CARES funding to more long-term support of new initiatives to highlight how funders can help maintain equity of access.

- Researchers should help to document districts' programming and outcomes across the years preceding, immediately following, and two-to-five years out from the Covid pandemic.

**Funders and Community Leaders (including policy makers, politicians, and school boards):**

- Funders should consider how they can advocate for and provide follow-up funds to help sustain OST initiatives that benefited from the infusion of CARES funds.

- Community leaders should work to secure intermediaries and/or other community-wide systems in places where they exist, and create them where they don't.

- Advocate for the intentional integration of equity efforts and supports into the OST / Summer Space.

For more information on these recommendations, please read the findings from the full report.