Frequently Asked Questions for Equity and Inclusion

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

What is "equity" as it relates to education?

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

What is an inclusive learning environment?

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

Why is equity a focus for Chandler Unified School District?

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

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

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

Is equity a new trend in public education?

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

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

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

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

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

First, there has been a significant demographic shift in the United States, Arizona and in Chandler. The diversity of the students and families in Chandler is evidenced in a number of areas.
- Increased variety of religious backgrounds, family backgrounds, and life experiences
- 170 different languages
- Increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population
- Increased awareness of sexual and gender identities
- Increased numbers of students with mental health needs
- Increased numbers of students requiring specialized educational services

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

January 2018 Study Session Presentation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Equity Road Map

What is "cultural responsiveness"?

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

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

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

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

Student Resources

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

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

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

The District is not teaching Critical Race Theory or a comprehensive sex education program.   All curriculum is aligned to Arizona State Standards.   Curriculum adoption is an extensive process which allows for review and input by parents prior to approval.   Curriculum currently used by CUSD schools can be viewed by appointment at the Melinda Romero Instructional Resource Center located at 500 W. Galveston, Chandler, Arizona. Community members, parents, and students may also provide feedback using this online feedback form: Curriculum Feedback Form

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

Student engagement and input is critical as each school establishes a safe and inclusive environment.   School administration and teachers regularly engage students to assess and improve the school climate. These students are a voice for all students on their campus, providing insight and recommendations in relation to the student perception survey, and facilitating conversations among their peers and to communicate knowledge to site leadership.

Equity and Inclusion Initiative Going Forward

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

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

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

The District hosts round table events to allow members of the Chandler Unified School District community provide input. In addition, parents are invited to preview any new curriculum during the 60-day adoption process. Should the adoption process be completed, parents and community members are encouraged to submit feedback and/or questions regarding curriculum and adopted resources using the Curriculum Feedback Form located on the Curriculum and Instruction website. The Curriculum Feedback Form allows for stakeholders to be contacted by the Curriculum and

Instruction Department if requested in the completion of the form.