

# NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS EQUITY AUDIT

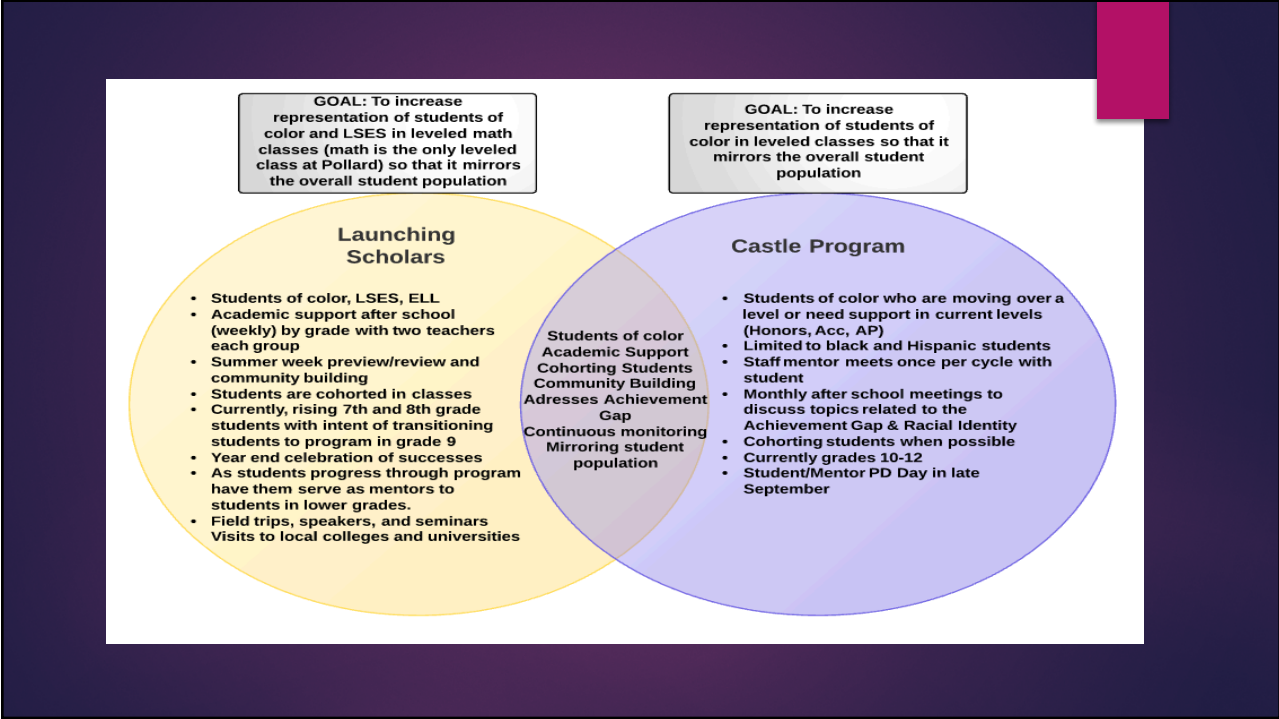
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DECEMBER 19, 2017 PRESENTATION TO NEEDHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

## METHODOLOGY

- Outcomes & process, with priority on evidence-informed approaches
- Individual interviews with more than 50 school leaders
- Focus groups with 55 teachers and support staff, 50 middle school and high school students, 115 parents
- Extensive document review: more than 70 documents
- Promising practices: locally and nationally
- Data timing and national dialog

**Needham recognizes need to incorporate diverse perspectives and build capacity across the system:  
Build on Assets**

- ▶ Social and Emotional Learning
- ▶ REAL Team (Racial Equity and Leadership)
- ▶ Diversity Summit
- ▶ Launching Scholars and Castle Scholars programs
- ▶ Enhancing ELL Capacity and building strong system
- ▶ Own Your Peace: Very effective model at the high school
- ▶ Deep work to strengthen services for disabled students
- ▶ Students of color graduating and attending accredited post secondary institutions
- ▶ Hot Topics Hot Chocolate at Pollard
- ▶ Eliot Elementary becoming a Level 1 School (2015 to 2017)
- ▶ VISION, STRENGTH, GOOD WILL OF MANY INDIVIDUALS AND SCHOOL TEAMS IN PROVIDING RESOURCES, FUNDRAISING, WORKING ON INCLUSION



## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IN NEEDHAM SCHOOL SYSTEM

- Time
- Financial resources: budget allocation and costs
- Staffing
- Competing priorities
- Compensation, union, fairness
- State and federal standards and adherence
- Concern about image, politics, influence of families, even-handed
- Support and mentors
- Schools expected to do everything
- Discomfort talking about race, LGBTQ, religion, etc. Moral compass
- Prevailing cultural norms: race doesn't matter; but it does!

## DATA TRENDS:

analyzed from more than 70 data sources

- ▶ Students of color feel as though they do not belong; are not respected; communication is poor
- ▶ Inequitable handling of discipline
- ▶ Historic lack of equity in access to Honors and AP curriculum options (making limited progress in recent years)
- ▶ Concern from students and parents of color about the curriculum meeting the needs of the child in an increasingly diverse community
- ▶ Disparities in post secondary options
- ▶ Afterschool needs unmet; transportation an issue among marginalized students/parents
- ▶ Substantial time and resources spent on a specific cultural proficiency paradigm

## SYSTEM LEVELS:

Different determinants of systemic equity include different spheres, policies, actors:

- ▶ **Curriculum: K to 12 inclusion**
- ▶ **Ability to manage classroom: micro aggressions**
- ▶ **Consistent systemic changes**
- ▶ **Transparency, Inclusion, Listening**
- ▶ **Professional Learning**
- ▶ **Community and Neighborhood Synergy**
- ▶ **Socioecological Frame: Students and Staff**

Working at multiple ecologic levels is challenging.



Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

## NEEDHAM DEMOGRAPHICS

NPS is becoming more diverse each year with various languages, cultures, faith traditions, types of families, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, learning styles, disabilities, and countries of origin.

Rapid change and growth may present challenges for teachers and administrators.

### Race/Ethnicity

- ▶ White students: 4,387 (78.5%)
- ▶ Students of Color 1,201 (21.5%)

### Gender

- ▶ Male: 2,763
- ▶ Female: 2,825

### Students who are economically disadvantaged

- ▶ 302 (5.4%)

### Students with disabilities

- ▶ 911 (16.3%)

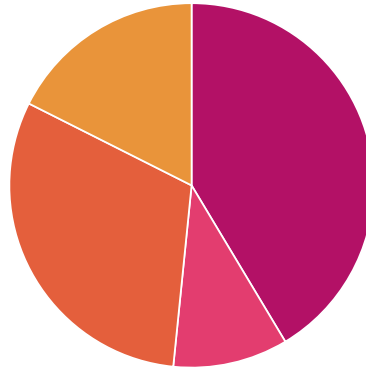
### Students whose first language is not English

- ▶ 520 (9.3%)
- ▶ **47 Languages Spoken in the Schools!**

## Partial Needham Diversity:

Education (GPA, Rank), Race, Ethnicity, Country of Origin, Faith/spirituality, Cognitive ability, Physical ability, Gender, Family configuration, Gender expression, Gender identity, Sexual orientation, Language, Socioeconomic status, Incarceration History, Justice System, Child Welfare Involvement

Other Identification By Category:  
not composite

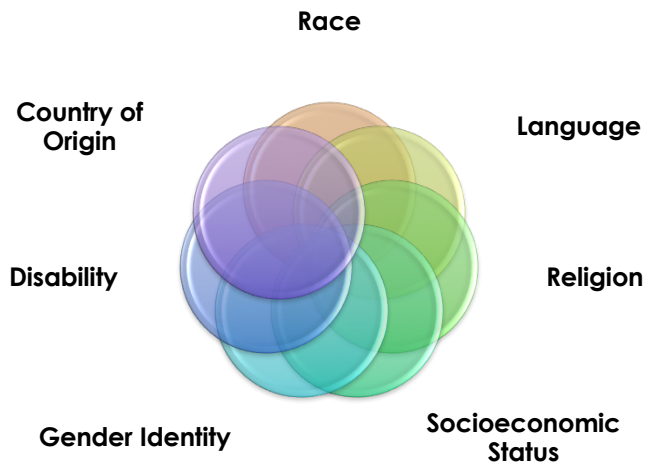


- Students of Color
- Economic Disadvantage
- Disability
- 1st Language not English

## Intersectionalities

Education (GPA, Rank), Race, Ethnicity, Country of Origin, Faith/spirituality, Cognitive ability, Physical ability, Gender, Family configuration, Gender expression, Gender identity, Sexual orientation, Language, Socioeconomic status, Incarceration History, Justice System, Child Welfare Involvement

Simultaneously belong to numerous categories; may have been more marginalized.

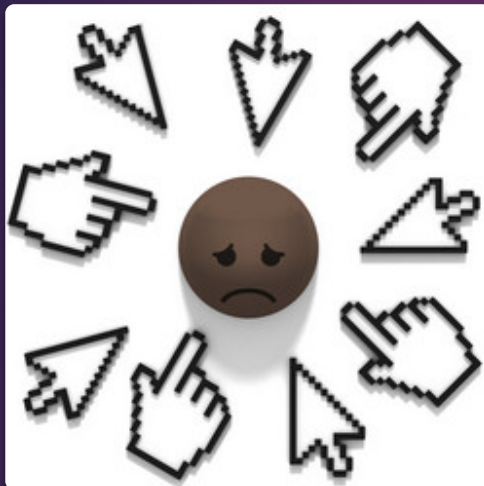


## No mattering without fairness

- ▶ What we say
  - ▶ What we do
  - ▶ What we don't say
  - ▶ What we don't do
  - ▶ What we know
  - ▶ What we believe
  - ▶ "The children are watching us"
- Theodore Sizer, EdD



Prilleltensky, I. (2012). Wellness as fairness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(1-2), 1-21.



Why does all this matter?

Impact on many of the attributes academic institutions value the most

## Stereotypes, Prejudice, Discrimination, and Implicit Bias: Language Matters

**Stereotypes** - cognitive component of attitudes toward a social group consisting of beliefs about what particular groups are like.

**Prejudice** - affective component of prejudice; the feelings we have about particular groups.

**Discrimination** - behavioral component, or differential actions taken toward members of specific social groups.

**Implicit Bias** - thoughts and feelings we are unaware of and mistaken about their nature; preferences or aversions to without our conscious knowledge.



### EXPOSURE TO DISCRIMINATION

- **Exposure at the Micro system (individual level)**
  - Childhood experiences of discrimination (teasing, bullying, isolation)
  - Observation of parent, family member, and peer experiences of discrimination
  - Quality of parenting
- **Exposure at Macro Level (Structural)**
  - Media
  - Schools (teachers)
  - Social, Political, Economic Policies
  - Police and Other Adults

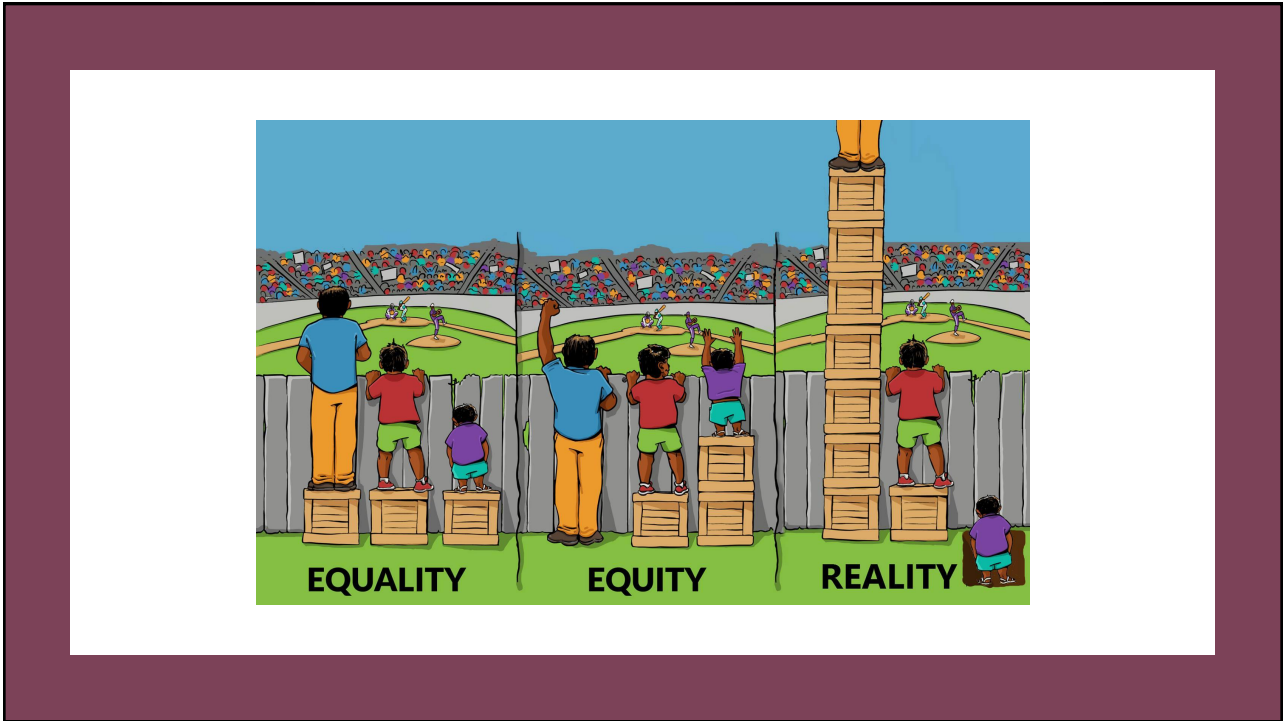
### PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND BIOLOGICAL

- **Decreased self-efficacy**
- **Depression**
- **Hopelessness**
- **Anger/Aggression**
- **Perceptions of Injustice/lower levels of empathy**
- **Changes in Allostatic Load (wear and tear caused by stress)**
- **Decreased immune function**
- **Increased cortisol levels**
- **Increased blood pressure**
- **Increased heart rate**

### CHILDHOOD HEALTH OUTCOMES AND DISPARITIES

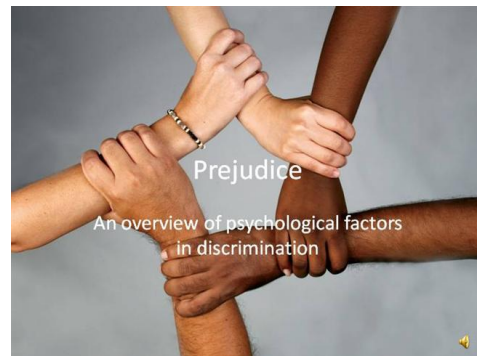
- **Increased likelihood of low birth weight or premature birth**
- **Increased risk behaviors such as drug use and/or sexual risk taking**
- **Increased aggression/violent behaviors**
- **Increased risk of chronic illness such as cardiovascular disease**
- **Increased susceptibility to infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS**

Sanders-Phillips, K., Settles-Reaves, B., Walker, D., & Brownlow, J. (2009). Social inequality and racial discrimination: risk factors for health disparities in children of color. *Pediatrics*, 124(Suppl. 3), S176eS186



## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES:

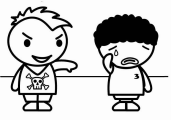
Representative Trends from data review, interviews and focus groups





## DIVERSITY OF SAMPLE

- **More than 40 countries & 25 languages**
- **Sexual Orientation:** including LGBTQ; same sex couples, transgender
- **Family Circumstances:** married, divorced, remarried, single parents, same sex couples, biological parents, adopted parents, foster parents, guardians, grandparents
- **Disabilities:** variety of cognitive and physical
- **Socioeconomic:** variation from very well off to public housing residents
- **Needham Ties:** families who lived in Needham for generations; families who moved in during summer 2017; families with students in NPS; those who live in Needham with students in private/parochial schools
- **METCO:** parents, students, and parents who were in METCO themselves
- **Occupations:** physicians, scientists, lawyers, professors, teachers, administrators, artists, activists, authors, stay at home parents, clerical workers, retail workers



## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES: MACRO AND MICRO AGGRESSIONS

### Experiences of stakeholders at school:

- Separation of students by race
- Chanting and bullying: "Build a Wall"
- N word: graffiti, notes, verbal
- F word used against students
- Student exposes himself; no explanation or apology to parents
- Inequitable treatment; white students privileged and punitive action not same as students of color
- Ignoring inappropriate comments, leers, and cat-calling during hall passing; reported but no follow up action
- Multiple instances of graffiti
- Athletic team use of vulgarities, racial slurs and jokes

### Comments heard by stakeholders at school:

- ▶ "You can't be a princess if you are brown"
- ▶ "Brown is bad, ugly, scary, smelly, poor"
- ▶ "Don't touch me if you are brown"
- ▶ "Only people with yellow hair can be a princess"
- ▶ "All Latinos are from Mexico; they can't speak English; Go work in a field"
- ▶ "All Latinos are drug dealers; What does your daddy do?"
- ▶ "Go back to your country; we don't want you here"
- ▶ "You can never be pretty because you're brown"
- ▶ "Brown people come from apes"

## A CULTURE OF SILENCE and IMPLICATIONS FOR WHITE STUDENTS

- ▶ People who are different really don't matter
- ▶ Never learn to talk to the "other"; understand their perspective
- ▶ Different standards and norms are reinforced, other adults don't even know how to talk to "them"
- ▶ Lack of value reinforced: They are not role models, they do not accomplish, they are not worthy of mention; not in curriculum
- ▶ Lack of civility, respect, team building, understanding, empathy, and compassion
- ▶ Shown a moral standard that dehumanizes the "other"

## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES: PARENTS

- ▶ NPS is complicated terrain to negotiate
- ▶ Students of color and white students notice segregation: sends message on who matters
- ▶ For individual students, profound implications on identity, social and emotional development
- ▶ Written language is beautiful: implementation is lacking; microaggressions; fear of speaking with parents directly
- ▶ Slow response times
- ▶ Lack of consistency between schools and even within schools between classrooms
- ▶ Reservations/concerns about safety & wellbeing during a time of bold national discourse
- ▶ Actions have lasting implications for students and families
- ▶ Teacher training is needed; teachers do not know how to handle disparities; race, ethnicity, language, LGBTQ and some health matters
- ▶ Some parents afraid of retaliation
- ▶ Accountability: Report to School Committee
- ▶ Appreciate Launching Scholars and Castle Program; individual efforts

## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- ▶ Intentional bridge for newcomers; focus on the specific needs of various groups.
- ▶ Need for an onboarding process for new parents. Race and ethnicity should be talked about comfortably and not only in writing. A mentor family process would be helpful. New families could choose if they wanted to be matched with a family of color or not; presumptuous to make such an assignment if not requested. Same grade and gender of child if possible.
- ▶ “Everyone said welcome, I did not feel welcomed. We are a mixed family; my child did not seem to be making friends. Does anyone care in these situations?”

## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES: TEACHERS and SCHOOL PERSONNEL

- ▶ Deepen and intensify professional learning; conversations on race, gender, ethnicity, and managing dialog for all staff. Practices not consistent across schools.
- ▶ Culturally inclusive curriculum needed.
- ▶ Deepen implementation of DESE standards.
- ▶ Lack of openness to staff’s racial, ethnic and gender/sexual orientation. Many are dispirited; difficult climate. Discomfort displaying family photos, feel disrespected and not heard.
- ▶ Additional compensation, or recognition of the value of their contribution to equity work.
- ▶ Extraordinary efforts at fundraising, inclusion, program development, enrichment, tutoring.
- ▶ Potential isolation of students of color; more METCO Buddy families.
- ▶ Lack of participation in afterschool activities due to transportation or cost. Teachers and principals often take this task on themselves.

## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES: STUDENTS

- ▶ Change in school culture needed; adjectives used to describe the school are: hectic, stressed, high academic standards, crowded, no time for the attention needed, lots of mental health problems, lots of work, and not supported
- ▶ Silence on race, LGBTQ issues; request more conversations, just people to talk to
- ▶ Several students recounted pejorative remarks on their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation
- ▶ High School portrayed as being closed, unfriendly, slow to warm up, and not open to interaction
- ▶ Repeated requests for culturally inclusive curriculum
- ▶ Request for more teachers of color
- ▶ Weighted GPA places stress for many reasons
- ▶ Lack of teacher responsiveness in cases

## VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES: METCO PARENTS

- ▶ Feel like they're an after thought
- ▶ Constant comments about lack of inclusion: concerted effort
- ▶ All parents should get email and notice about principal blog
- ▶ All parents should get a letter about their importance and inclusion
- ▶ Professional learning: address stereotypes
- ▶ Respectful candor, listening, move to a higher standard
- ▶ Staff diversity at all levels will help school system deepen capacity
- ▶ Some confusion in communication as multiple systems interact

## COMPOSITE VOICE: ACROSS ALL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

- ▶ Uncomfortable talking about race, LGBTQ issues
- ▶ Uneven systemic understanding of the reality of micro and macro aggressions on students; both those at the margins and all students in Needham
- ▶ Few understand trajectory of racism, discrimination, prejudice, discrimination, implicit bias, and the requisite process to address these issues
- ▶ Emphasis on programs; hope to include as a standard part of K-12 curriculum and the way teachers interact with students
- ▶ Need professional education for understanding differences and moving beyond silos
- ▶ Have a system-wide approach and implementation across all schools
- ▶ Numerous hurtful generalizations and practices: devastating effects of silence; expecting “thicker skin” or children of color to lead; slow or no response to parent and student outreach

## RECOMMENDATIONS

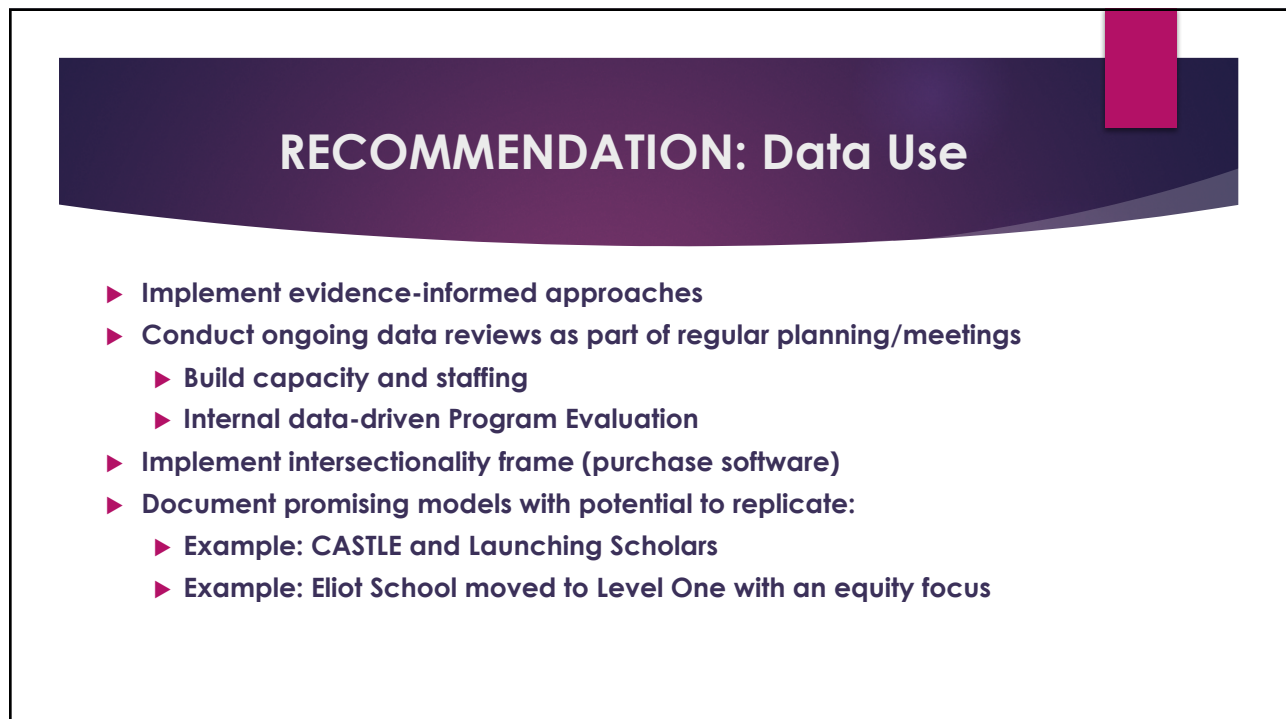
## RECOMMENDATIONS: from Stakeholders

- ▶ Listen deeply to the perspectives of diverse communities
- ▶ Respond in a timely manner
- ▶ Conduct professional learning for all staff to support this work
- ▶ Standardize protocols for incidents; communicate with parents directly/explicitly
- ▶ Demonstrate value of equity work by recognizing, compensating or promoting stellar performers; include equity work as part of all staff evaluations
- ▶ Hire staff from communities who are under-represented; support retention, promotion, recognition; evaluate staff using DESE standards
- ▶ Implement a culturally responsive curriculum K -12
- ▶ Prioritize systemic change; policies, standards, trainings district wide; place on regular agendas; inclusion
- ▶ Launch informal group to support students at the high school and middle school
- ▶ Implement inclusive practices for newcomers and METCO students and families
- ▶ Budget for a long-term commitment to this work

## RECOMMENDATION: Build On Assets

- ▶ Build upon existing networks
  - ▶ Official implementation of REAL team; inclusive process
    - ▶ Recognition and compensation for contributions
    - ▶ Grow to include parents and students
  - ▶ Meet regularly due to urgency
  - ▶ Report directly to School Committee; update regularly
  - ▶ Develop a complete framework and plan; consider John Kotter model
  - ▶ Develop short term strategies; focus on long term evidence informed system





**RECOMMENDATION:  
Potential  
Resources,  
Partners,  
Supports**

Janie Ward, Ph.D.: Teacher and School- based strategies

Positive Education Framework: Character Education

John Kotter's Approach to Systems Change

Jon Saphier: High Expectations Teaching

Ron Ferguson: 7 C's

Karen Mapp: Parent Engagement

Courageous Conversations about Race: Newton and State

Data wise: Elizabeth City

**Courageous Conversation  
COMPASS**



Courageous Conversations About Race, Singleton & Linton, 2005

**RECOMMENDATION:  
Talk About Race,  
Ethnicity, LGBTQ  
Matters,  
Low Income, etc.**

**Open  
school  
culture**

- Place of warmth, welcoming, affirming, engaging, supportive: **My words; what does Needham want?**
- Engaging parents as partners, welcoming perspective

**Student  
discussion  
groups**

- At high school every 2 weeks for one hour; open agenda; open to all students; diverse staff facilitation
- Open discussion groups at both middle schools; open to all; facilitation by diverse staff



**Many stories of promise**

**Assets to build upon**

*"Not everything that is faced can be changed,  
but nothing can be changed that is not faced."*

*-James Baldwin*

