



**Mass insight**  
education & research

# Chester Upland School District District Diagnostic

*November 2022 - February 2023*

## **Part I: Overview and Key Context**

## **Part II: Findings in Each Element: Strengths & Growth Areas and Opportunities**

## **Part III: Recommendations**

## Purpose of this Collaboration

**The purpose of the collaboration between the Chester Upland School District and Mass Insight Education & Research is to identify district strengths and opportunities for growth in order to increase student achievement and equip leaders with information to support recovery planning.**

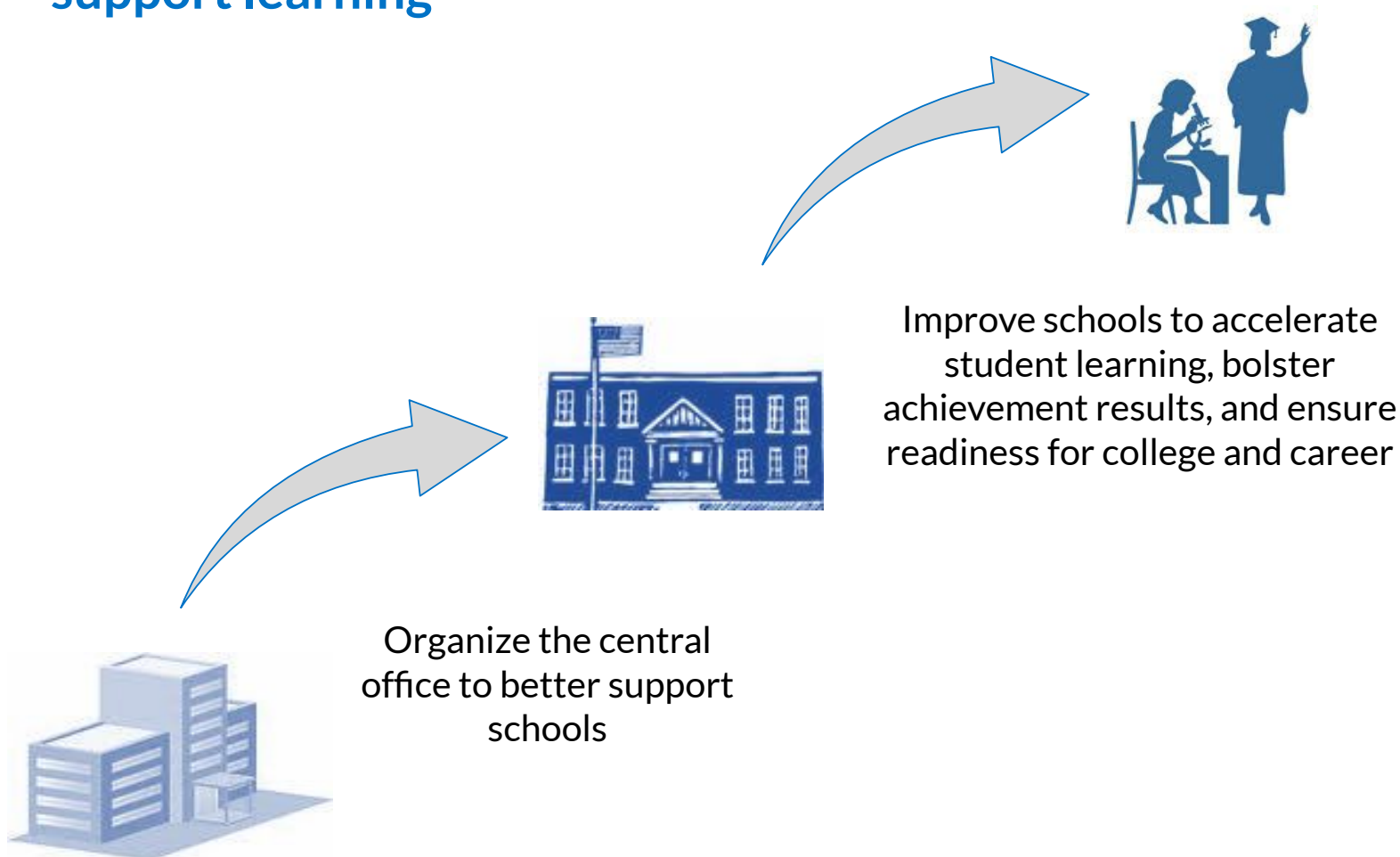


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## Objectives of the District Diagnostic

- 1 To gather information about the district's current status and to identify key strengths and areas of growth.
- 2 To prompt reflective conversations about the district's current performance relative to its desired state.
- 3 To identify opportunities to improve performance by providing recommendations designed to promote organizational effectiveness, and efficiency, while maintaining an unwavering focus on student achievement.

## Core Assumption: The district supports schools to support learning



# Overview: Process to create report



## Step 1: Data Collection & School Visits

Mass Insight collected data from a variety of sources and engaged stakeholders to evaluate district systems and processes. This included performance data, HR data, existing reports and documents, feedback gathered in interviews and focus groups, and surveys collected from school staff, central office staff, students, and families. Mass Insight also conducted school visits at five schools to observe classrooms and common spaces.

### School Visits

Chester High School  
Chester Upland School of the Arts  
STEM Academy at Showalter  
Stetser Elementary School  
Toby Farms Intermediate School

## Step 2: Review & Synthesis

Then, Mass Insight analyzed all information gathered by looking across evidence gathered in each of the ten elements in order to identify organizational strengths and areas for growth and improvement.

## Step 3: Recommendations

Mass Insight developed recommendations based on diagnostic findings. Recommendations are high-level and intended to inform conversation and a planning process.

## Data Collection and School Visits



### Data and Document Review

Includes assessment results, organizational charts, current and prior strategic plans and financial data.



### Survey Results

Surveys of central office leaders and staff; school leaders, teachers, and staff; families; and students.



### Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups with central office leadership, department directors, and staff; school leaders; teachers; and community members.



### Classroom walk-throughs

Classroom walk-throughs/observations in a majority of schools.

**5** School visits

**33** classroom visits

**41** focus groups that included teachers, families, administrators, other staff

**374** district stakeholder survey responses including teachers, students, families, administrators and other staff

## Chester Upland School District Snapshot

2,724 Students  
(2022)

8 Schools/Academies

\$1,432,778.52  
SY 20-21 Budget

202 Classroom Teachers  
(2021)



## 2022 Student Population and Demographics

96.6%  
Economically  
Disadvantaged

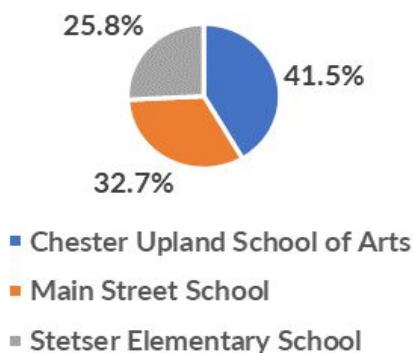
23% Special  
Education

**Race/Ethnicity**  
Asian 0.1%  
Black 85.1%  
Hispanic 10.6%  
White 1.7%  
Multiracial 2.4%

4% English  
Language  
Learners

## 2021 School Enrollment Snapshot

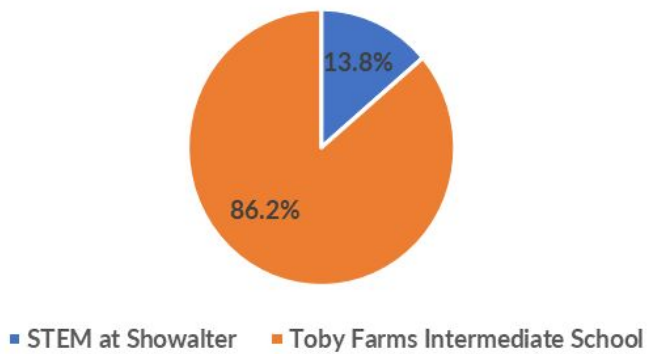
### Elementary Schools



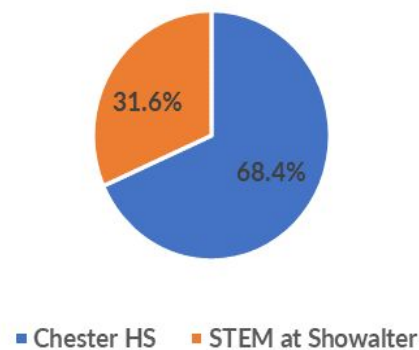
Stetser Elementary School has the highest percentage of students enrolled at the elementary level.

Toby Farms and Chester High School have the highest percentage of students enrolled at their respective school levels.

### Middle Schools



### High Schools



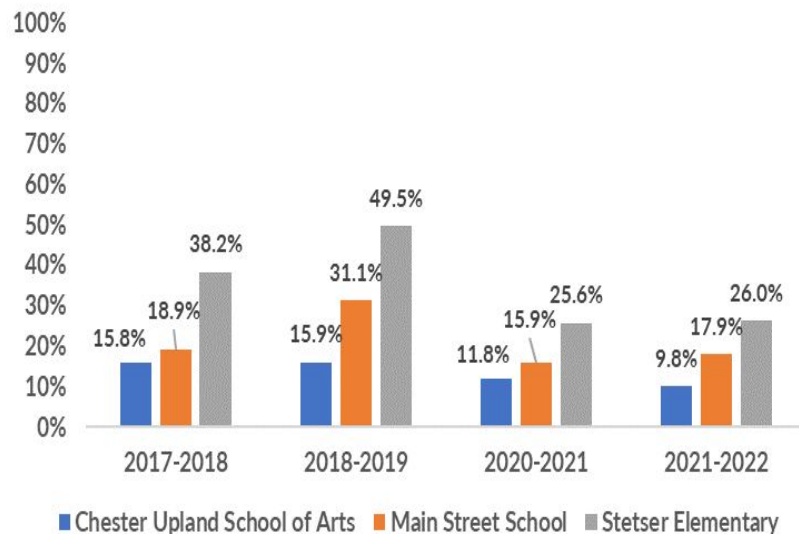
# Elementary PSSA performance has decreased over time. Math performance remains low overall. Performance varies school to school.



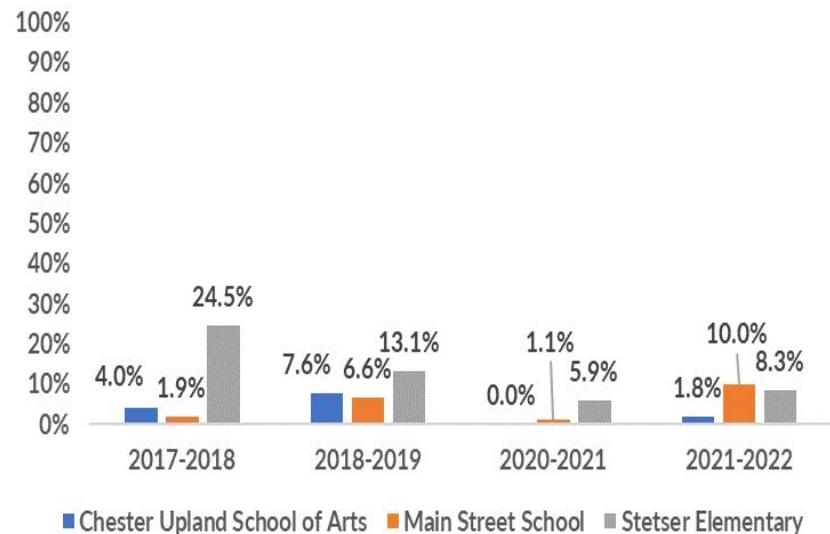
The percentage of students that scored proficient or advanced on the ELA PSSA has slightly decreased across 2017 through 2021. There was a slight increase in ELA performance for Main Street and Stetser.

The percentage of students that scored proficient or advanced on the math PSSA has decreased from 2017- 2021. There was a slight increase in CUSA and Stetser math performance. Main Street had the largest increase in students' proficiency in math performance.

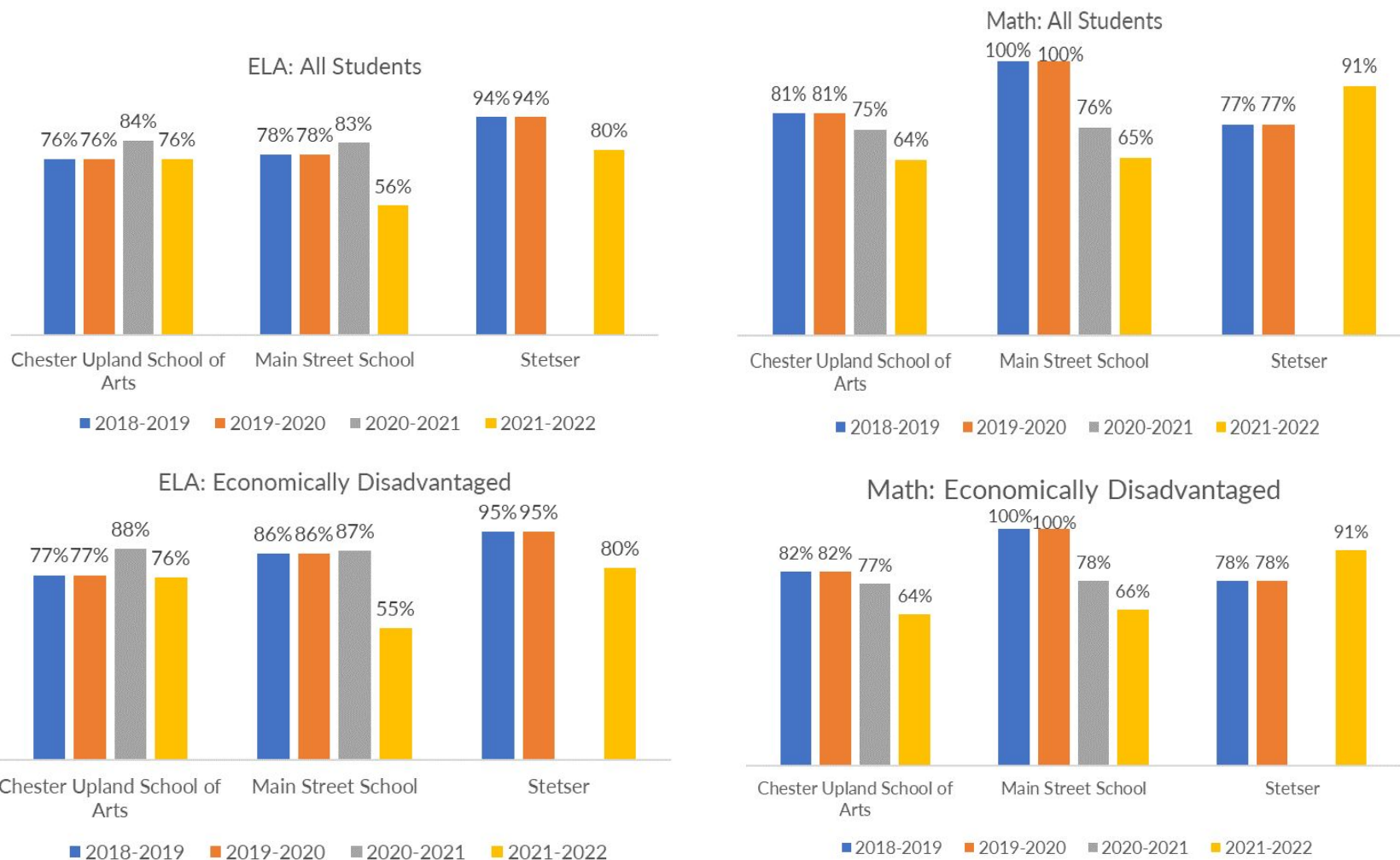
### ELA Performance



### Math Performance



# The percentage of elementary students meeting or exceeding state growth goals decreased in most schools.

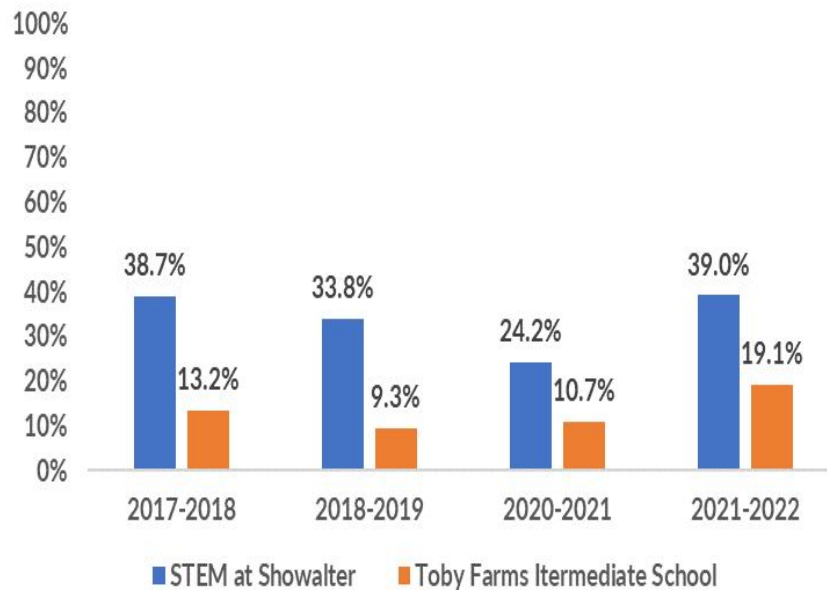


# Middle school ELA PSSA performance remained relatively stable from 2017-2022. Math lags behind ELA and performance varies school to school. Mi

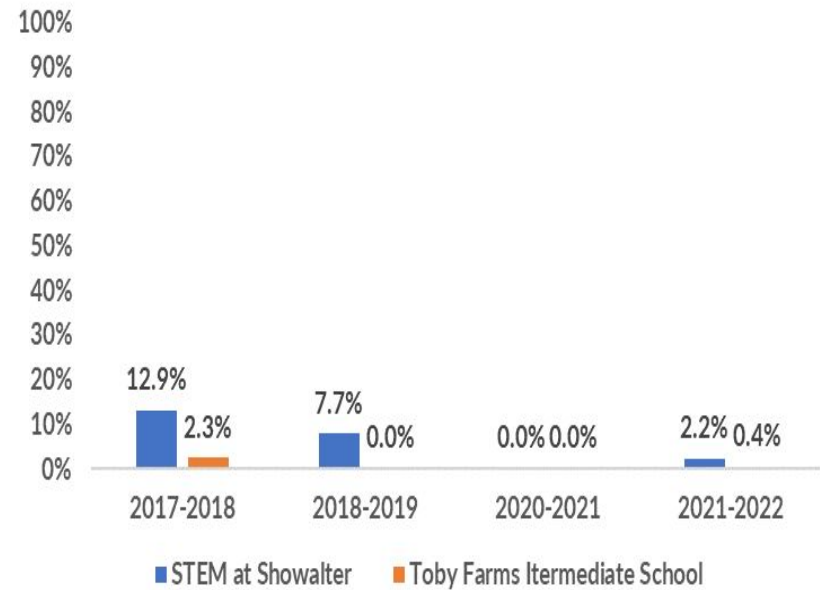
The percentage of students that scored proficient or advanced on the ELA PSSA has remained relatively consistent from 2017 to 2021. The percentage of ELA proficient student increased in 2021-2022.

There was a relatively low percentage of students that scored proficient or advanced on the math PSSA. There was a slight increase in math performance in 2021-2022.

### ELA Performance



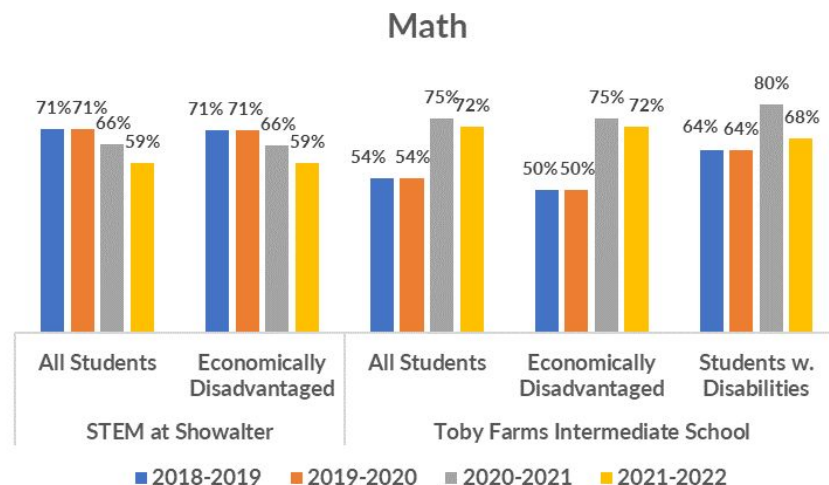
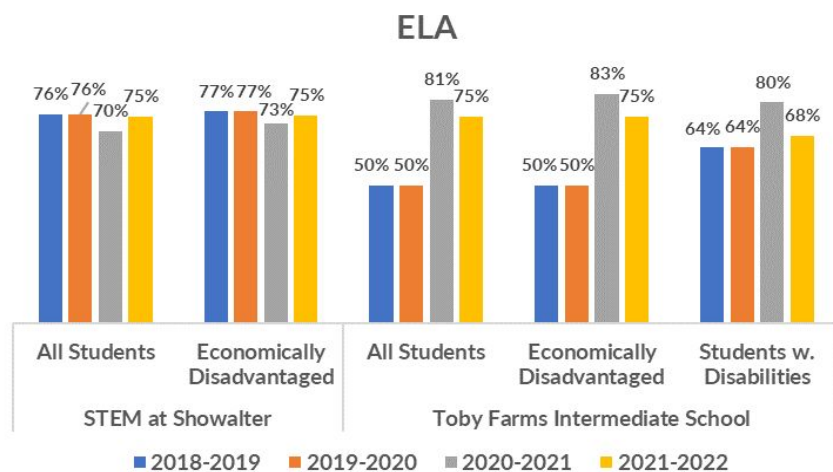
### Math Performance



# The percentage of middle school students meeting or exceeding state growth goals at Toby Farms improved since 2018-19, and at STEM remained relatively consistent or declined. Students with disabilities experienced the steepest decline since 2020-21.

The percentage of students meeting ELA goals increased in the past year at STEM for all students, and those who are economically disadvantaged. Toby Farms had a decrease in students meeting ELA goals from 2021 to 2022. Students with disabilities experienced the steepest decrease at about 20% fewer students from 2021 to 2022.

The percentage of students meeting math goals decreased at both STEM at Showalter and Toby Farms Intermediate School. Students with disabilities demonstrated the steepest decrease at 15% fewer students in 2022 compared to 2021.

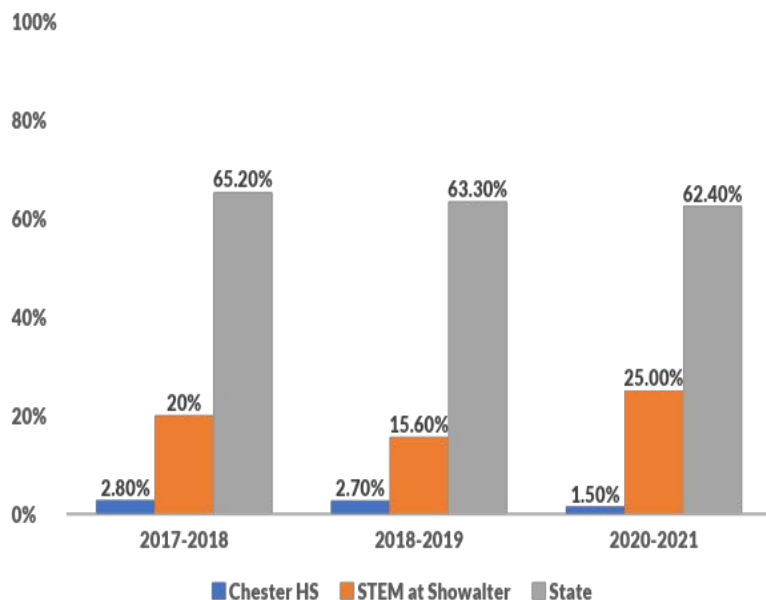


# STEM has made some improvements in Algebra I, and Chester HS has made some improvements in Literature from 2017-18 to 2020-21, but Keystone performance remains low.

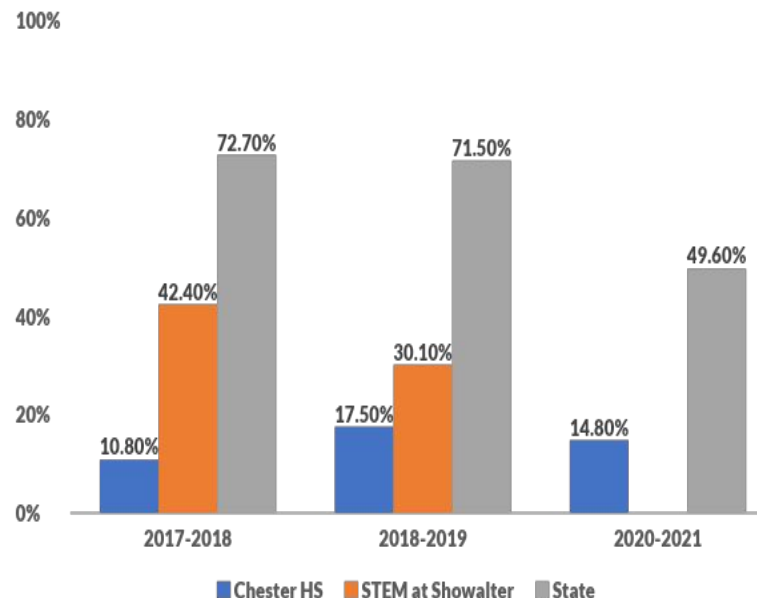
The percentage of students performing at the advanced or proficient level on the Algebra I Keystone has slightly increased in the past year at STEM. Chester HS math performance remains low.

The percentage of student performing at the advanced or proficient level on the Literature Keystone has decreased in the past year.

**Keystone Algebra I:  
Students Advancing or Proficient**



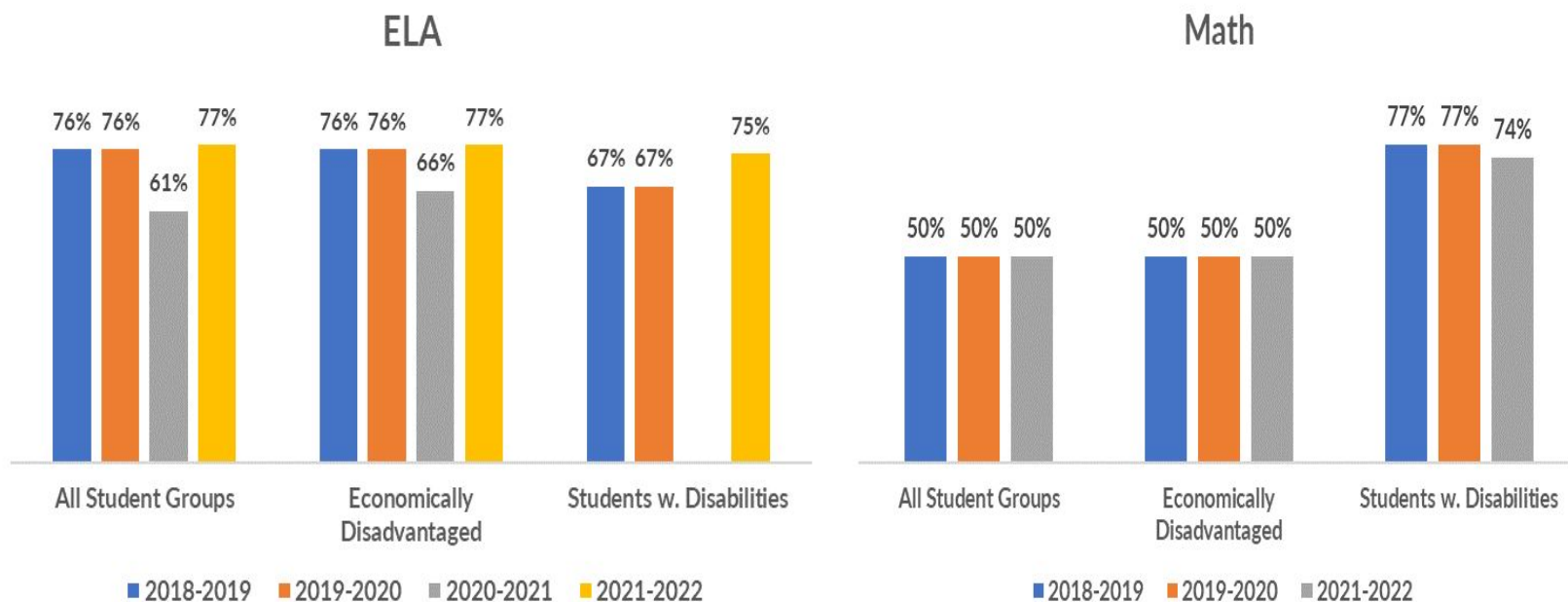
**Keystone Literature:  
Students Advanced or Proficient**



## The percentage of high school students meeting or exceeding state growth goals in ELA increased slightly for all student groups. Growth rates for math remained the same or decreased.

The percentage of students at Chester High School meeting ELA growth goals increased from 2021 to 2022. For all student populations, there was at least an 8 percent increase.

The percentage of students who met math growth goals was steady for all students and students who are economically disadvantaged from 2019 to 2022. The percentage of students with disabilities meeting math goals slightly decreased from 2020 to 2022, about 3 percentage points.



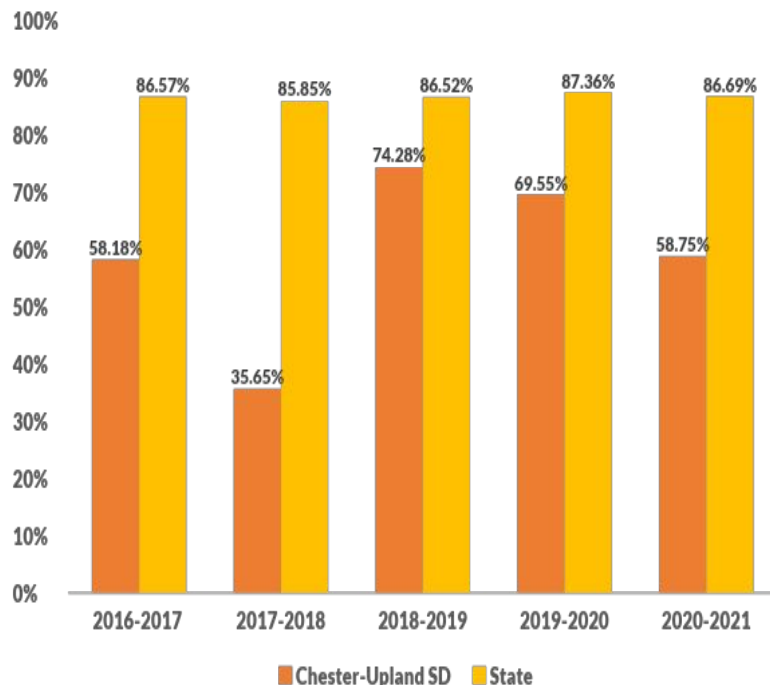


# 4-year graduation rates reveal large differences school to school, and a need to support persistence to graduation at Chester High School.

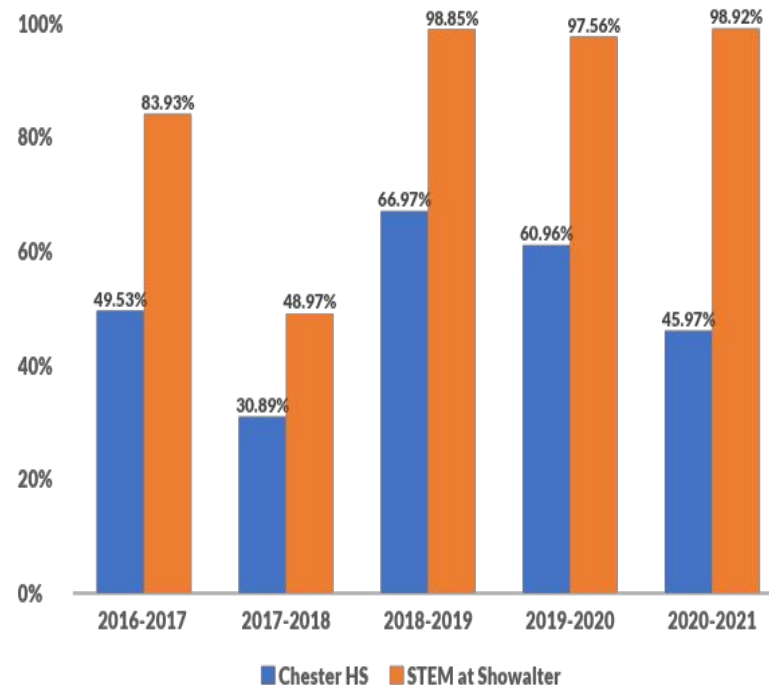
CUSD graduation rates have fluctuated over time and lag behind state averages.

The average 4-year graduation rate for STEM is approximately 98% and 46% for Chester HS.

4-Year Graduation Rate



4-Year Graduation Rate



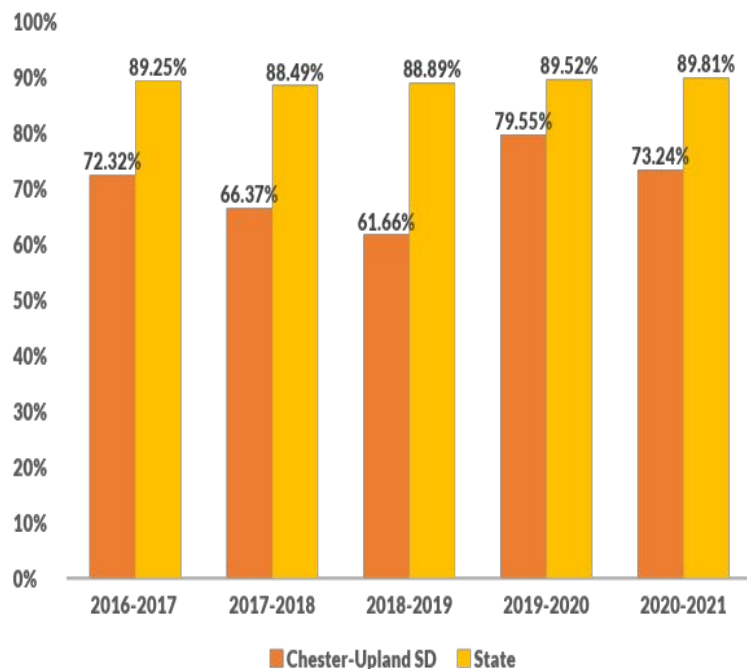
# 5-year graduation rates reveal that some CUSD students may benefit from an extra year to reach graduation.



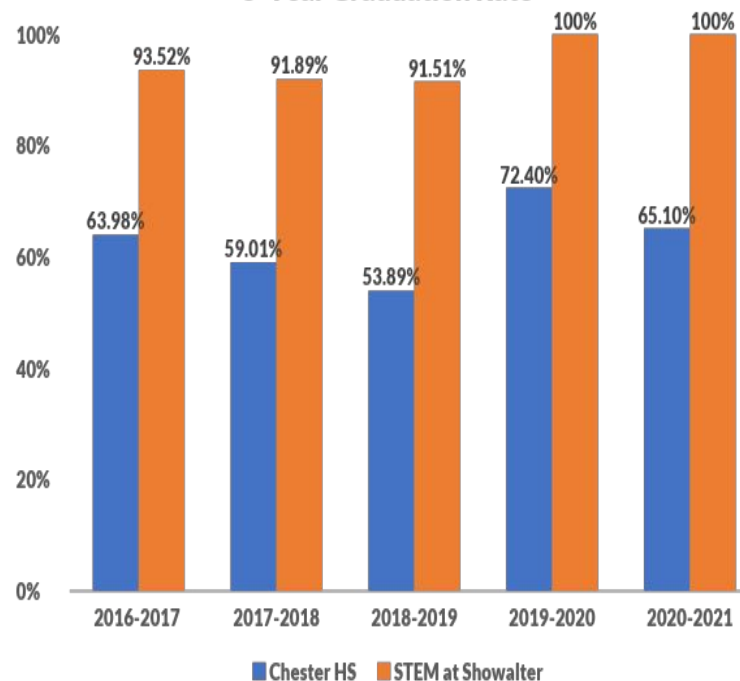
The average 5-year graduation rate for Chester Upland is 73%, about 15% higher than the 4-year graduation rate in 2020-2021.

When looking at individual school outcomes, the average 5-year graduation rate remains relatively consistent over time. Chester High Schools 5-year graduation rate is about a 20% greater than the 4-year rate in 2020-2021.

5-Year Graduation Rate



5-Year Graduation Rate



## **Part I: Overview and Key Context**

## **Part II: Findings in Each Element: Strengths & Growth Areas and Opportunities**

## **Part III: Recommendations**

## Organization of Findings by Element

- Mass Insight's findings are organized into ten elements of our District Diagnostic Framework.
- In each element, the report focuses on a few findings, which include District strengths and/or District opportunities for improvement.
- Findings are based on information gathered from school visits, survey data, focus groups and interviews, as well as a review of data and documents.
  - *Quotes provided represent themes in perceptions across multiple stakeholders, surveys, and focus groups.*
- After this section, the report digs deeper into recommendations that cut across all elements to inform next steps and updates to District plans.

# District Diagnostic Elements

- 1 **Vision, strategy, and culture:** Clear vision, strategy and manageable set of priorities for the district that recognize the local environment (e.g. *regulations, statutes, contracts, funding, politics, governance*) and district's capacity for change while promoting a culture of excellence and high expectations for all.
- 2 **Organizational clarity and collaboration:** Clear central office structures, processes, and policies that work together to support school and student success.
- 3 **Focus on the instruction:** Curriculum, materials, tools and supports that help school leaders, teachers and other school staff constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice.
- 4 **School management:** Policies, structures, and systems that create the conditions needed for school success, maintain accountability for results, and enable effective school leaders.
- 5 **Central services and operations:** Effective delivery of services to schools, allowing school-based educators to focus on teaching and learning.
- 6 **Finance:** Alignment of financial resources with district needs and priorities.
- 7 **Talent Management:** Systems and processes to recruit, place, develop, and retain talented staff.
- 8 **Stakeholder engagement and communications:** Intentional systems and processes to maintain open lines of communication with staff, family and community stakeholders.
- 9 **Data:** Data is available and informs decision-making at all levels of the district and in schools.
- 10 **Focus on equity:** Policies, structures, systems, and resources ensure equitable, high quality education for all students, including students with exceptional needs.

# 1 Vision, Strategy, and Culture

Clear vision, strategy and manageable set of priorities for the district that recognize the local environment (e.g. regulations, statutes, contracts, funding, politics, governance) and district's capacity for change while promoting a culture of excellence and high expectations for all.

## Strengths

- There are shared values for a focus on students first and commitment to recovery and improvement.
- Leaders are in the process of revising the comprehensive plan, and have committed to updating and ensuring coherence with the recovery plan.
- Cabinet and central office leaders have a shared understanding of their lived priorities this year.
- There is a desire and intent to be accountable to the district's recovery plan, and the cabinet is establishing routines for aligned goal-setting among leadership and weekly time to check-in on district progress.
- Many central office leaders and staff report positive perceptions of new district leadership.

## Growth Areas & Opportunities

- There is still a need to clarify, communicate, and build investment in the district's vision and priorities, and their rationale.
- The district's recovery plan is outdated, and there is a need and desire to strengthen coherence across all improvement efforts.
- The draft comprehensive plan lists four strategic priorities, but there is an opportunity to increase specificity in plan goals and to articulate connections between priorities and school needs.
- While leaders talk about the importance of building trust with the community, stakeholders at large report a lack of mutual districtwide trust.
- Some staff report a culture of burnout and a lack of consistently high beliefs and expectations for all students.

# 1 Vision, Strategy, and Culture

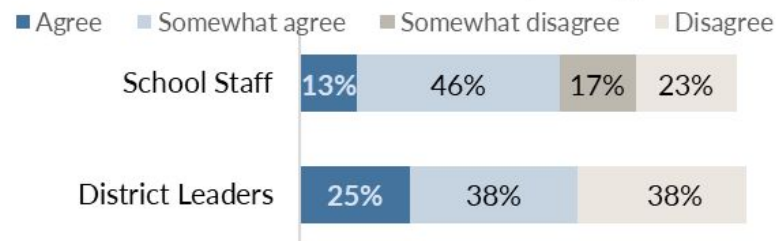


**Finding 1:** Many staff believe that the central office has a clear vision. Yet, there is an opportunity to continue to develop a shared understanding among all staff of the vision for success in CUSD and how it informs decision-making, particularly at the school level.

## What central office leaders and staff shared...

- “The vision we have now for the district is stability from top on down - and for us to provide exceptional services for young people...For the betterment of our children.”
- “Vision is provide students with resources and tools to be successful in any area they wish.”
- “Everyone has their own vision, but we haven't come together.”
- “Slogan is for the betterment of the children...At the end of the day it comes down to test scores, we can't coast in that way.”
- “I am unaware of what the vision is.”

The district has a clear and compelling vision.



## What school leaders and staff shared...

- “There is little communication about what the teacher's role is in achieving a vision. We are given a lot of extra tests to give our students to gather data, but we are not told how it fits in with a larger purpose.”
- “There is a vision - “For the Betterment of Our Students” - however, many of the decisions made by administration do not align with that”
- “The Vision and strategy isn't portrayed to all staff. A lot of hear say from peers.”
- “...don't recall seeing our vision and strategic plans since [convocation].”

# 1 Vision, Strategy, and Culture

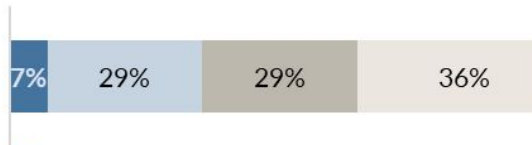


**Finding 2: The district's recovery plan is outdated and the comprehensive plan is in development. Stakeholders believe that planning and strategic improvement efforts should be more coherent, clear, and centered on school needs.**

## School Staff

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree

The district has a plan to achieve that vision that has been clearly articulated to all employees.



The district has established a manageable set of priorities informed by school data and student needs.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



## Families

I am aware of the district's strategic priorities to improve schools and the student learning experience.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree



## Regarding plans and priorities, what staff shared...

- “We spent a lot of time doing it [the comprehensive plan] but I can't tell you what we got out of that process.”
- “I believe priorities have not been set...we put out fires everyday but that's not sustainable.”
- “I do think the priority initially was to pull district back together, raise test scores, and pull the children up where they should be but it got lost along the way...”
- “Everything seems to be a priority...a hierarchy of priority has not been communicated.”
- “While we have a catch phrase for the vision/mission, no strategic plan has been presented on how we will better the lives of our students.”



# 1 Vision, Strategy, and Culture



**Finding 3: Stakeholders describe a desire and commitment to recovery. While many believe the district is on the right track under new leadership, perceptions vary and many report a culture of distrust, low morale, and burnout. There is a need to build trust and positive culture districtwide.**

## What central office leaders and staff shared...

- *"There is a lot of struggle and there has been trauma. There are people who are very committed to students."*
- *"The district's reputation in the community is becoming more and more positive."*
- *"I can see a difference with the new administration."*
- *"Trust is a major issue, and when you don't have trust or have limited trust, it makes it that much harder to get things done."*
- *"The culture is horrific...If you are not part of a clique, you become an open target, you are not given the same privileges nor raises....Yes the vision of providing a better opportunity and education for the kids is the goal, but people cannot help fulfil that goal if they themselves are always insecure and expecting the axe to come down on them."*

## What families shared...

- *"...at some point the trust level is eroded so that you don't believe they are following through."*
- *"Academics are there but they are burned out."*
- *"We have a serious issue with transparency and complete communication. We throw words out but don't follow through with actions..."*

## What school leaders and staff shared...

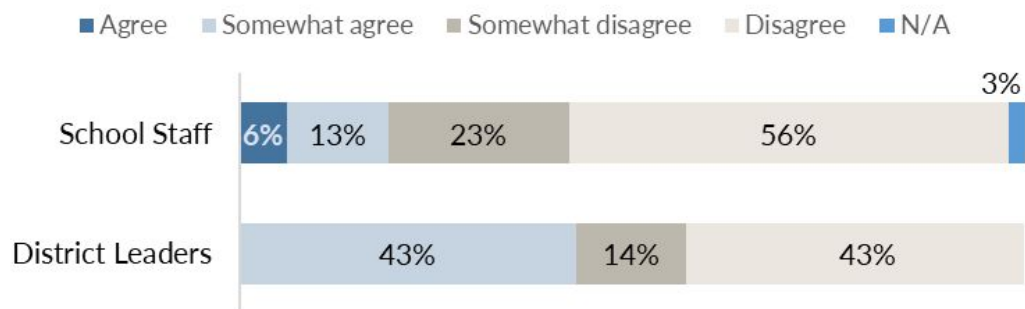
- *"Morale in buildings is stressful. We get promises with no follow through; I don't trust admin based on past experiences."*
- *"It doesn't feel like we are on the same team."*
- *"Morale in the District is the lowest I've ever seen."*

# 1 Vision, Strategy, and Culture

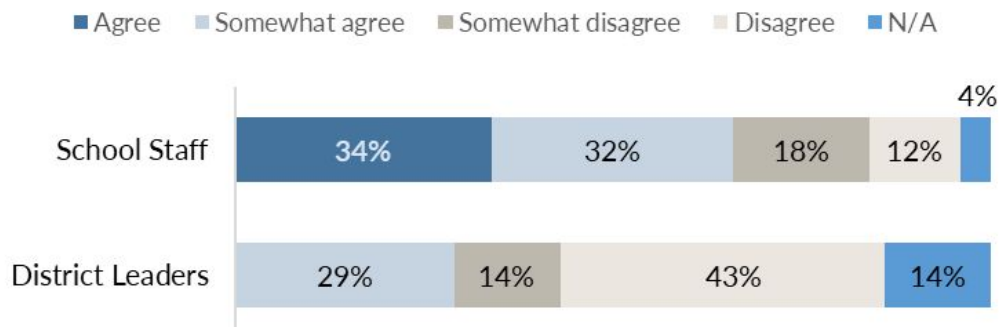


School staff in surveys report lower levels of trust, but more positive perceptions about staff's beliefs in all students, than district leaders do.

There is mutual trust between school-level employees and the central office.



All district employees believe that all students can succeed.

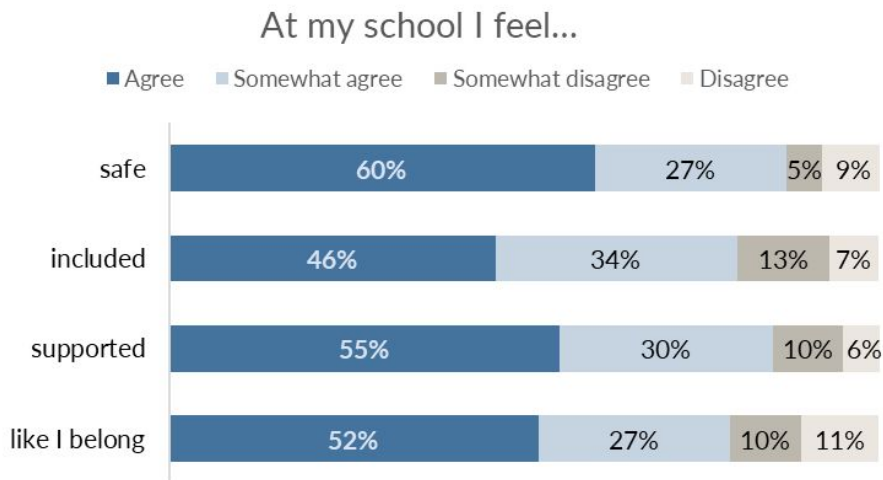


# 1 Vision, Strategy, and Culture

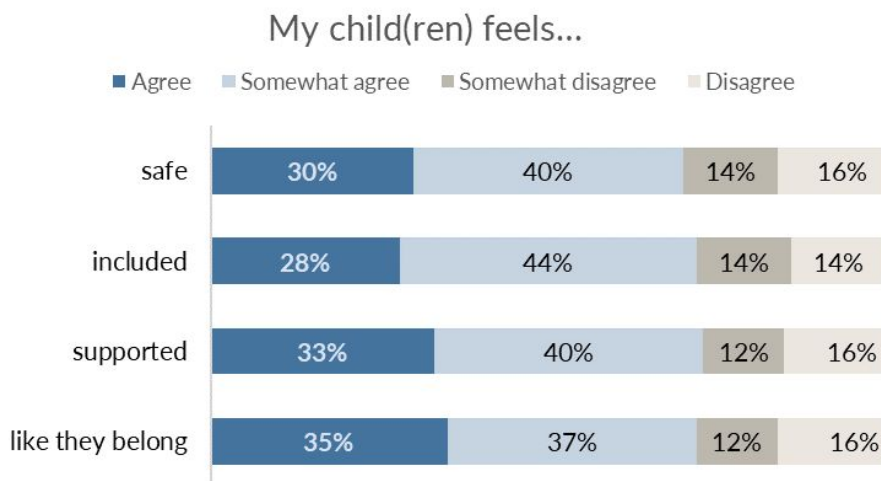


A majority of students and families responding to surveys report positive perceptions about student and school culture and climate.

## Students



## Families



## Organizational Clarity and Collaboration

Clear central office structures, processes, and policies that work together to support school and student success.

### Strengths

- There is an updated organizational chart with clear reporting and work streams in place. The chart indicates a significant investment in special education personnel.
- There is a clear chain of command for decision-making and for establishing united action plans and school-level response.
- There is a recent and comprehensive district facility study that highlights major improvement needs across buildings. It also highlights the \$20M dollar budget required to make necessary improvements.
- Some central office administrators highlight improvements in communication, operating procedures, and compliance. The growth is linked to the new CUSD administrative team and to a commitment to uphold systems and processes that improve operations.

### Growth Areas & Opportunities

- The organizational chart is described as “in flux” or “in progress”. There is not yet clarity on the structure of the organization. It is unclear that district enrollment can sustain personnel at this scale.
- It is unclear that the organizational chart and central roles fully align to the needs of schools. For example, human resources personnel, truancy officers, and academics are leanly staffed - staffing, attendance, and academic growth are top challenges and priorities.

## 2 Organizational Clarity and Collaboration



**Finding 1:** Organizational systems and structures are improving at CUSD. The district has made efforts to define and clarify roles, create standard operating procedures, and empower central office personnel through ownership of responsibility and collaboration.

### What stakeholders said...

- *“Things are so much better than when I started working here. We had no standard operating procedures or even basic compliance in place.”*
- *“There have been significant efforts to combine MTSS and SEL services.”*

### What documents revealed...

- An updated organizational chart with clear reporting and work streams, and a significant investment in special education personnel.
- Completed district facility study that highlights major improvement needs across buildings.
- Comprehensive plan that provides theory of action statements on the rationale behind each priority.

### What surveys illuminate...

**100%** of central office leaders responding to surveys agree or somewhat agree with the statement *“I am clear about my role, responsibilities, and the expectations for my role.”*

**87.5%** of central office leaders responding to surveys agree or somewhat agree with the statement *“My office/department has the appropriate ownership and authority to be able to deliver on our responsibilities.”*

**87.5%** of central office leaders responding to surveys agree or somewhat agree with the statement *“Central office and schools work together to improve and refine standards-based instructional practice.”*

## 2 Organizational Clarity and Collaboration



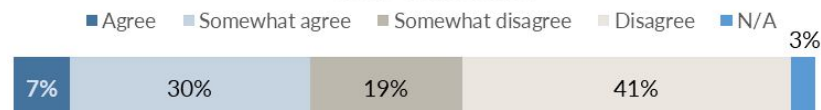
**Finding 2: Stakeholders report a need for greater organizational alignment to school and student needs and improved access to central service staff.**

### School Staff

Central office staffing is organized to support school and student success.



School-based staff can easily access appropriate central office staff with questions and concerns.



### What documents revealed...

- Staff highlight an organizational chart that uplifts operations over academics.
- Human resources personnel, truancy officers, and academic personnel appear leanly staffed; staff absences and turnover alongside academic growth are top priorities.

### What stakeholders said...

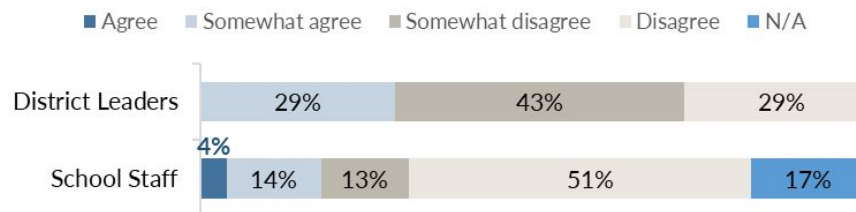
- “Expectations of roles and departments do not seem to be explicitly defined or written down in an accessible location. If this exists, I’m not aware.”
- “We are being viewed as an Emotional Support School, yet we have no ES classroom or teacher.”
- “Learning Support needs to be addressed, to many students are waiting for testing or are placed in the wrong support class.”

## 2 Organizational Clarity and Collaboration



**Finding 3: A majority of CUSD staff elevate accountability and consistency within central office as pathways to continuous improvement.**

The district measures the performance of central office services and holds them accountable for the delivery and quality of their services.



### What stakeholders said...

- “The state is the accountability structure. No clear idea on whether what they are doing is right or wrong.”
- “Stick to the plan no matter how hard it is. If there is a plan we agree to, stick to it. The goal post can’t keep changing. It’s reactive. Then there’s no way to assess the interventions.”
- “We do a lot of strategy but not really assessing if it’s actually moving...”
- “[CUSD has] established an evaluation committee and advisory committee with board members and stakeholders...Would like to have implementation tracker/scorecard.”
- “The key to everything is about consistency. If there isn’t a strong foundation and people don’t understand what needs to be done, then these efforts turn into failure.”

### 3 Focus on Instruction



Curriculum, materials, tools and supports that help school leaders, teachers and other school staff constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice.

#### Strengths

- CUSD is committed to improving academic outcomes and has begun to establish a vision, priorities and structure for teaching and learning:
  - *A streamlined curricula and the use of PLCs and DDI to support instruction across the system.*
  - *A vision for academic courses beginning with mathematics and intends to expand CTE options available provided to students.*
  - *Curricular maps and instructional resources are observed in all courses including CTE.*
- Teachers use resources with fidelity and maintain pace across classrooms and schools. There is evidence of strong practice in all schools.
- Many schools appear replete with student-facing resources and technology to support teaching and learning.
- There are notable improvements in academic performance in ES, MS, and HS, and for students with disabilities.

#### Growth Areas & Opportunities

- The district is in the early stages of solidifying and communicating an instructional vision for CUSD.
- At the time of observation, less than 5% of classrooms show evidence of direct instruction to students.
- A substantial number of teachers struggle with classroom management to address minor (ES) to highly disruptive behavior (MS/HS).
- Overall academic performance still has room to improve.
- Achievement in Middle School mathematics is a top challenge.



### 3 Focus on Instruction

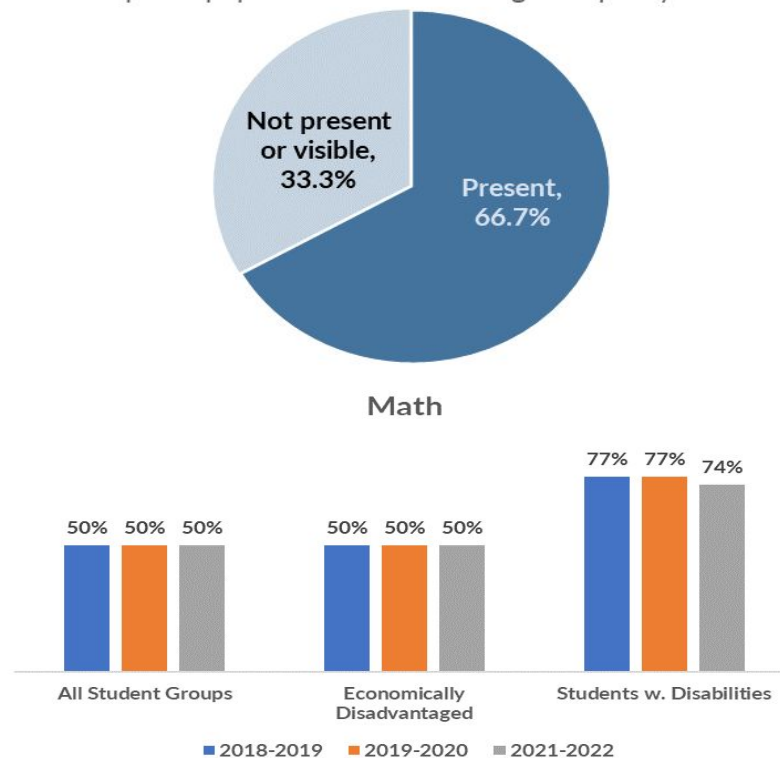
**Finding 1: A standards-aligned infrastructure and teacher force, special education programming, and jumps in academic achievement and growth provide an opportunity to accelerate academic improvement across CUSD.**

*"All students can learn." - CUSD Value Statements*

#### What observations revealed...

- Standards-aligned curricular resources are in place to support instruction in all observed courses including CTE. There is evidence that curricular maps have been created and teachers are maintaining pace and fidelity across classrooms and schools. Strong practice is every building.
- Students with disabilities have equal access to high quality instruction and in many cases demonstrate performance that outpaces all students. One of the most rigorous lesson was taught to SWDs at Chester HS. Toby Farms SWD practice is also notable.
- Main street increase in Math, Stetser increases in ELA, Toby Farms ELA and SWDs jumps, HS jumps in SWDs and relatively consistent ELA performance.

All students have equitable opportunities and participation (ELs, students with disabilities, racially/ethnically diverse students). Services for special populations are of the highest quality.



### 3 Focus on Instruction

**Finding 2: Most students have access to resources in class and academic opportunities in school that prepare them for a range of post secondary options; a majority of students graduate within 4 years and feel included while attending school.**

#### What Observations revealed...

- Students have equitable opportunities to participate, to receive a high quality education and have access to resources including leveled readers, classroom libraries, class pets, manipulatives, and anchor charts were visible across elementary classrooms.
- All teachers and students have access to technology and use it as a core aspect of lesson delivery and progress monitoring.
- Teachers use technology for language translation for ELs in class.

I have the opportunity to enroll in courses to prepare me for a career or military service after I graduate.



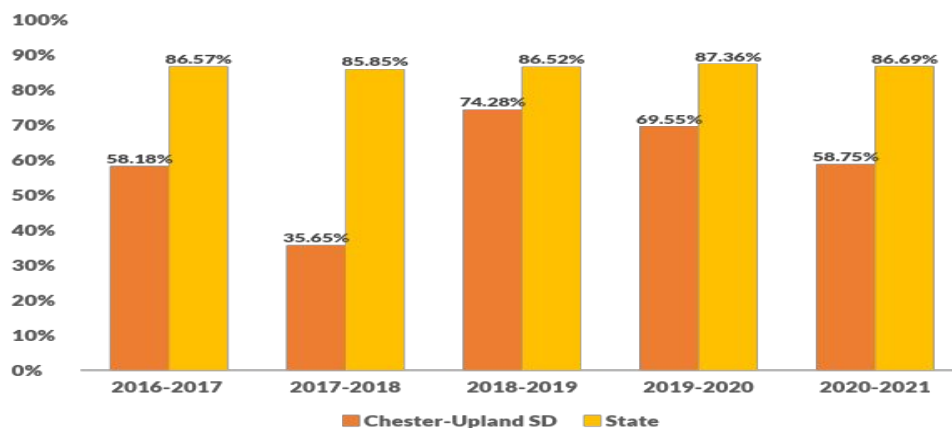
I have the opportunity to take: advanced courses (AP/IB/honors), college prep courses, and/or dual enrollment courses.



I am aware of advanced courses (AP/IB/honors), college prep courses, and/or dual enrollment opportunities.



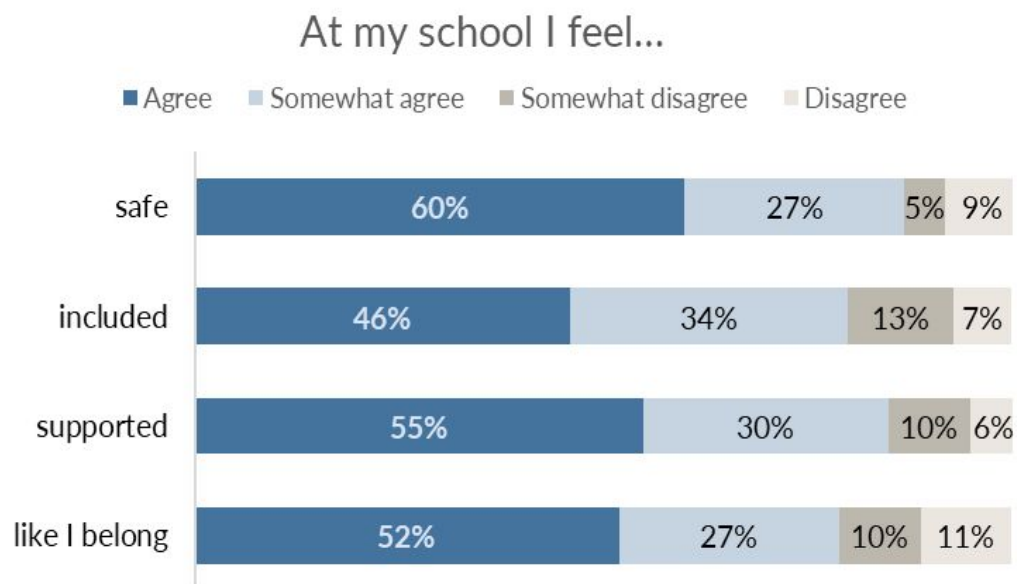
#### 4-Year Graduation Rate



### 3 Focus on Instruction



A majority of students responding to surveys report positive perceptions about school safety and about the support they receive from teachers.



### 3 Focus on Instruction

**Finding 3:** CUSD's values include *"Students should be valued and respected."* In support of this, CUSD has dimensions of effective practice in place, however there is room to increase academic and cultural expectations for students.

Observations revealed primarily secondary teachers need support in classroom management to address highly disruptive behavior:

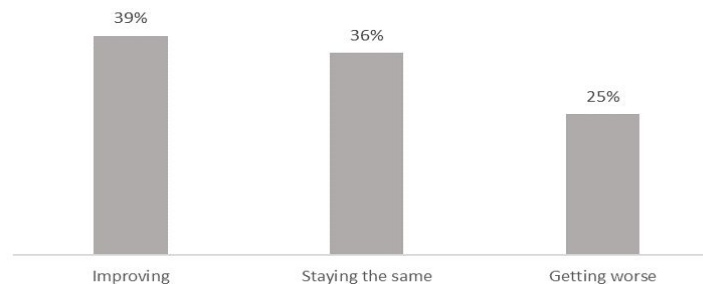
- The MI observer heard girls called profane names in hallways.
- In some cases, teachers spent more time engaging with a small number of highly off-task students than teaching the bulk of students ready and willing to learn.
- Students were observed watching fights online in class in some courses.
- Students were observed roaming the halls when teachers were absent, despite the presence of hall monitors.
- ELL students demonstrate great desire and persistence through chaotic classrooms.

The district sets clear and high expectations for all students.

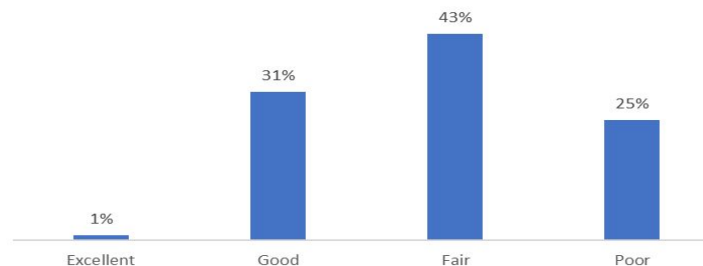
■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



Overall, I think the quality of education in the district is



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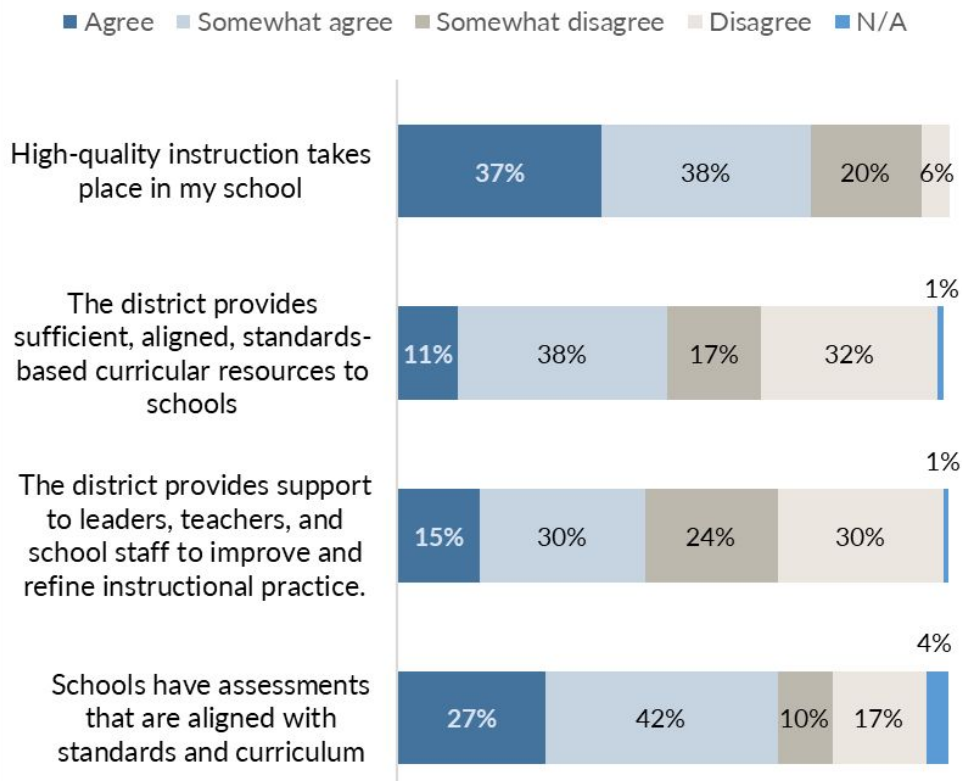


### 3 Focus on Instruction

Observations revealed that only 5% of teachers provided direct instruction:

- Many teachers could be concluding units and reviewing prior content.
- The value of mini lessons is significant when closing achievement gaps.
- The “I do” portion of the gradual release is essential when providing new content.

#### School Staff



## 4 School Management



Policies, structures, and systems that create the conditions needed for school success, maintain accountability for results, and enable effective school leaders.

### Strengths

- Central office teams participate in action planning and work collaboratively (Superintendent, Receiver, CAO, Assistant Superintendent) to review essential tasks.
- Walkthroughs are scheduled monthly to visit schools and observe classroom instruction. This process is designed to be collaborative and to include both district and school based personnel.
- There is at least one exemplary teacher in every building with replicable skill sets in classroom management, lesson design, pedagogy, and teacher-student rapport.
- Prior approaches to School Improvement Planning are robust, data-driven, and produced thoughtful school leader engagement.

### Growth Areas and Opportunities

- It is unclear how the comprehensive plan drives school-based action planning and how those plans drive quarterly and daily work.
- There is concern that school management supports are top-down and distant to the work of schools. When school leaders are invited to participate, it is unclear they have the time to participate fully.
- Unclear there is a systemic approach to developing school leaders. There is a need to rethink central office staffing in order to assign much needed support to leader development and school-based action planning.
- Leaders worry that decisions, resources, and directives are not timely and often “last-minute”. As a result, leaders report feeling unprepared to advance curriculum resources and to unpack academic results with staff.

## 4 School Management



**Finding 1:** There is an opportunity to build on school improvement planning processes at CUSD to sustain school leader-led action planning and enhance a culture of data driven decision-making.

### What stakeholders said...

- *District leaders reported that “central office teams participate in action planning and work collaboratively (Superintendent, Receiver, CAO, Assistant Superintendent) to review essential tasks.”*
- *District leaders said and school leaders confirm that school “walkthroughs are scheduled monthly to observe classroom instruction.” This process is designed to be collaborative and to include both district and school based personnel.*
- *School leaders reported they “closely monitor student data to refine school practices and uplift growth.”*

**71%** of district leaders responding to surveys agree or somewhat agree with the statement “Schools have school improvement plans that address the root causes of low performance.”

### What documents revealed...

- *School improvement planning included:*
  - *Steering committees were in place to co-create strategy and support distributed leadership models in schools*
  - *Visions for learning were crafted to define expectations and inspire action.*
  - *School leader reflected strengths and challenges aligned to PA future ready indicators and to grade level and subgroup performance*
  - *School leaders self assessed the conditions for effective teaching and learning aligned to PA essential practices for schools*
  - *Goal-setting processes occurred across CUSD schools including defining annual priorities and goals.*

## 4 School Management



**Finding 2: Approaches to school management are not perceived as timely, consistent, or strategic enough to drive differentiated school improvement efforts.**

### What documents reveal...

- Walkthroughs have limited documented strategy:
  - Documents to support school walkthroughs were not available to clarify instructional strategy.
  - Frameworks that clarify priority actions and provide clear definitions for instructional practice are not yet in place.
  - Walkthroughs do not appear to surface the current state of each school or have a mechanism to uplift differences in school practice and needs.
- The alignment, coherence, and urgency in district's comprehensive plans do not yet support school-based action planning in meaningful ways.

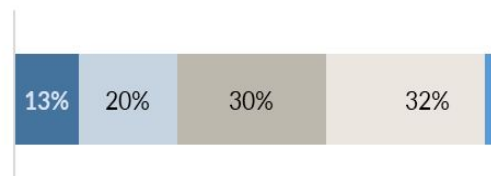
### What stakeholders said...

- *School leaders described decisions, resources, and directives as “last-minute”. They further reported feeling “unprepared to advance curriculum resources and to unpack academic results with staff.”*
- *School leaders indicated that meetings with central office leaders are “inconsistent”. One leader noted, “our built in team collaboration time is cancelled many times.”*

### School Staff

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A

The district has a school management structure that supports the needs of each individual school.





## 4 School Management



**Finding 3:** There is significant potential for CUSD to prioritize accelerated, job-embedded learning opportunities by tapping effective teachers and leaders at each campus. Teacher training approaches may provide a model for leader development.

### What stakeholders say...

- School leaders said that meetings “*limit the opportunities for discussion with and among school leaders.*”
- School leaders reported that “*collaboration while a goal*” is constrained by “*school leaders anchored to school sites during the school day.*”

The district has a school support structure that develops school leaders.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



### What observations revealed...

- *There is at least one exemplary teacher in every building with replicable skill sets in*
  - *classroom management*
  - *lesson design*
  - *pedagogy*
  - *real-world learning*
  - *teacher-student rapport*

### What surveys revealed...

**86%** of district leaders responding to surveys agree or somewhat agree with the statement “The district provides practice-based and differentiated professional development to teachers.”

## 5 Central Services and Operations



Effective delivery of services to schools, allowing school-based educators to focus on teaching and learning.

### Strengths

- There are acknowledged attempts by the district's central office leadership to address the conditions of schools through the assessment of existing structures.
- Efforts to centralize the delivery of services and organize department functions to address existing gaps in services and fiscal year projections.

### Growth Areas & Opportunities

- Communication structures between the central office and schools are underdeveloped, resulting in increased misinformation and awareness of district direction.
- There is limited staff engagement in district and school improvement efforts due to the lack of feedback and involvement opportunities.
  - District departmental functions, structures, operating fiscal budgets, and goals are not yet defined or understood by school and district staff.
  - School staff have difficulty navigating central office support structures and understanding staffing structures and job functions.
- Existing needs analysis, support monitoring, and reporting structures are not functioning to support school-based educators to focus on teaching and learning.
- There is insufficient evidence to point to a functioning process to assess and understand the impact of outside vendor programming.

## 5 Central Services and Operations



**Finding 1: District departmental communication structures do not yet fully support collaboration and improvement efforts between central and district-based staff.**

### What central office & school staff shared...

*"There is NO communication between central office and the anyone else in the district least of all the teachers."*

*"Because of the lack of communication, teachers are becoming confrontational towards each other, sometimes leading to the racial division."*

*"The opportunity to collaborate is few and far between."*

*"There is no way to communicate without fear of reprisal."*

*"Some administrators from central office are trying to work and move the district in the right direction but I feel that some staff that has been here is not looking to move in a better direction."*

*"Communication is great in areas of danger and threats, however it is horrific in things that impact the staff and self."*

### Central office staff

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A

Central office communicates effectively with school staff to keep them fully informed on matters affecting them.

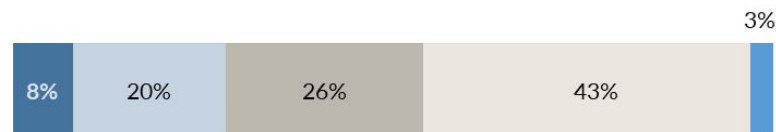


School staff have opportunities to provide feedback on the nature and quality of central office services.



School staff have opportunities to provide feedback on the nature and quality of central office services.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



## 5 Central Services and Operations

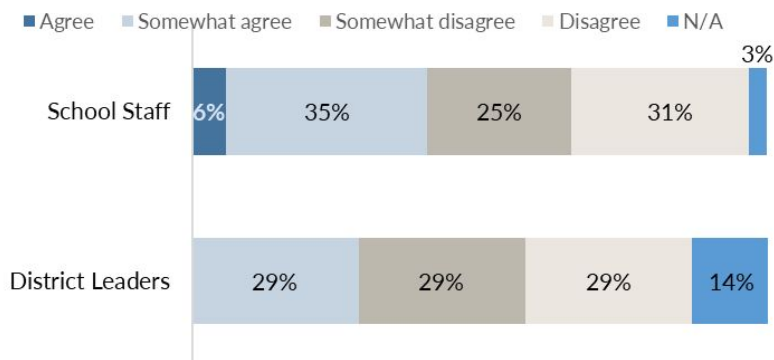


**Finding 2: While much work remains, there is an acknowledgement from district stakeholders that the distribution and monitoring of services is improving as a means of understanding individual school needs.**

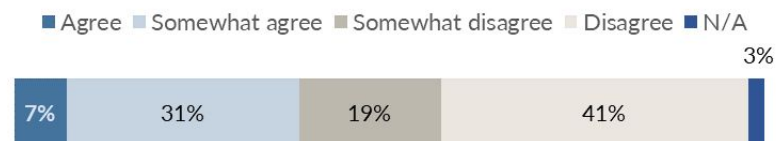
### What central office staff shared...

- *“Decisions are made in alignment with the betterment of our children. If a parent raises an issue or a community member raises concerns, those comments are not brush away. It is our decision to make, but the service is key.”*
- *“We have a much better structure than a year ago. Current administration is responsible for the improvement.”*
- *“Everything has a procedure. If something comes out of the blue or is something major, I can’t just go say yes unless it’s an emergency. Other than that, the receiver, the superintendent and assistant superintendents are involved.”*

Services and operations allow school-based educators to focus on teaching and learning.



School-based staff can easily access appropriate central office staff with questions and concerns.



District departments effectively collaborate.



## 6 Finance

Alignment of financial resources with district needs and priorities.



### Strengths

- Improving fiscal controls is a clear priority for leadership and the district has taken numerous steps to clearly report and track expenditures.
- CUSD received positive feedback from PDE on their ESSER monitoring.
- The district seeks and uses state and federal grant funds to support programming and facilities for students, including ESSER and CTE.

### Growth Areas & Opportunities

- At the time of the site visit, CUSD was still working on the 19-20 audit, making it difficult to articulate and project the district's current financial status. When completed, the audit revealed a negative fund balance.
- Financial status remains strained and it is not clear how CUSD is planning for financial sustainability through multi-year budget development and projections.
- Financial decisions seem to be more about meeting the need right now than aligning to strategic priorities (*e.g., to school improvement plans, staffing strategies, etc.*).
- Policies, processes, and protocols for budgeting, invoice approvals, documentation, and other financial management needs are unclear to those outside of the business office or cabinet team.

## 6 Finance



**Finding 1:** The district has focused on stabilizing by implementing fiscal controls, resulting in a number of improvements to business office practices. There is an opportunity to build from points of progress to develop longer-term systems and strategies for a sustained financial recovery.

### Points of Progress:

- New cash flow spreadsheet
- Use of financial platforms like eFinance (for accounting, payroll, etc.)
- Adjusting payment schedules to balance cash flows
- Review and renegotiation of vendor and partner contracts
- Securing state and federal grant funds (e.g., ESSER, CTE, etc.)
- Positive feedback from PDE on ESSER monitoring
- Central office leaders largely believe CUSD is moving in the right direction

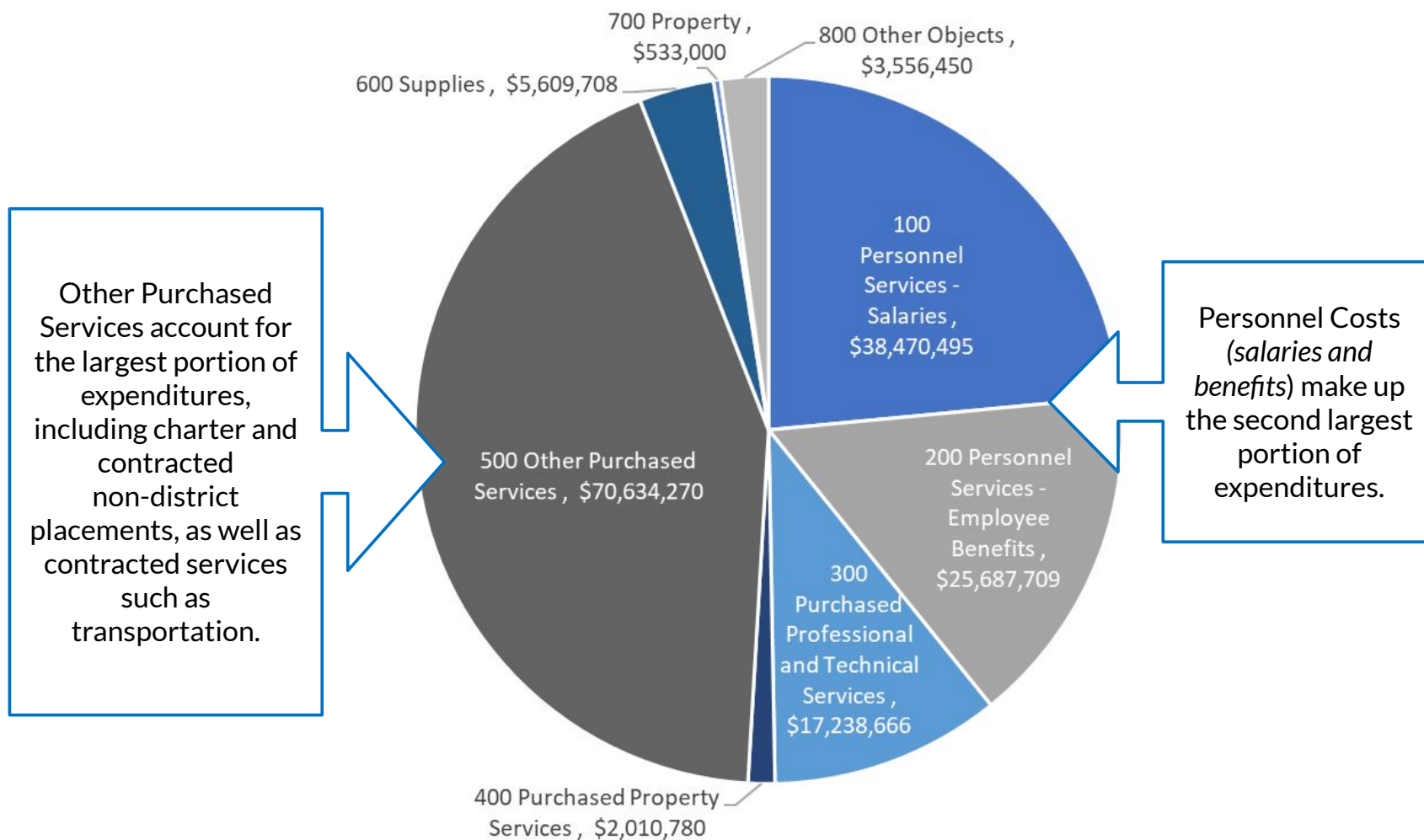
### Challenges:

- No available financial audit information that's more recent than 2019-20
- Recent audit data and 22-23 budget projections show a negative fund balance
- Charters and special education services remain significant cost drivers
- CUSD does not yet have a multi-year budget or data-driven budget projections
- Standard operating procedures for budget and finance remain unclear to all leaders and are not fully defined
- Stakeholders express concerns about use and availability of funds (*e.g., purchase of new building, alignment to school need, etc.*)

## 6 Finance

Zooming in on cost drivers...

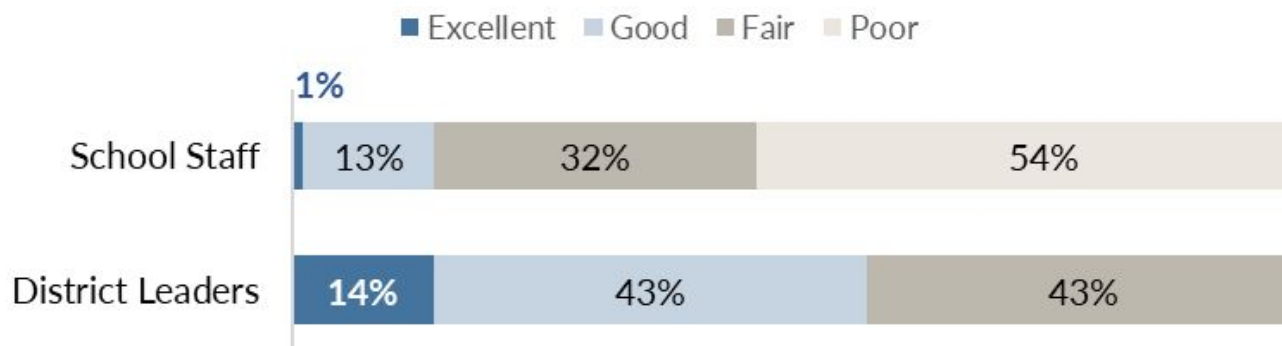
Expenditures By Code



## 6 Finance

**Finding 2: Stakeholders continue to report strain as a result of the district's financial status and a lack of clear financial operating procedures. Central office leaders are more optimistic about the financial status and improvement of the district than are school staff.**

*How would you characterize the current quality of finance and budget in CUSD?*



### What central office leaders & staff shared...

- *"Hard to tell without audits. Assumes there's a negative fund balance."*
- *"If we had procedures in place that outlined the needs and funding requests... we could get people approved before the start of the school year."*
- *"We were just monitored for our ESSER - we did really well."*

### What school leaders & staff shared...

- *"No matter what is requested...we are told "there is no money for that."*
- *"Once finances have been "approved" there's many hurdles."*

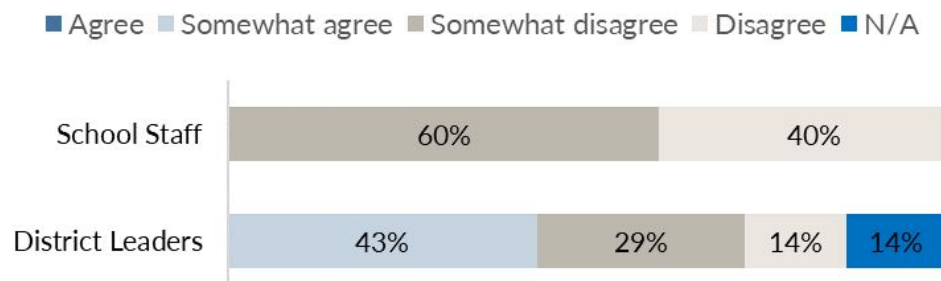


## 6 Finance

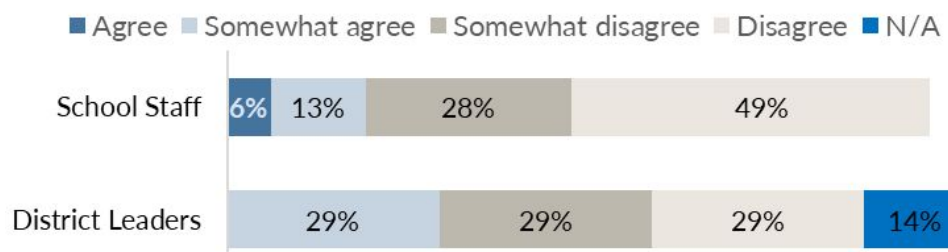


**Finding 3:** There is an opportunity to better align financial resources with school-specific plans and needs, in addition to district-wide priorities, and to develop a multi-year budget to sustain financial improvement.

Financial resources are aligned to district priorities.



Schools have the financial resources they need to be successful.



### What school leaders & staff shared...

- “When we receive financial assistance, it does not always go where it needs to.”
- “Accessing building level funds is difficult and extremely frustrating.”

### What central office leaders & staff shared...

- “Some of the budget was not aligned to goals. That’s discouraging.”
- “3-5 year budget plan would be helpful [and a] short term plan would be helpful to build capacity.”

# 7 Talent Management

Systems and processes to recruit, place, develop, and retain talented staff.

7

## Strengths

- District talent management structures and practices are developing to create alignment and meet talent needs.
- CUSD uses PDE-provided guidance, tools, and success measures defined by the Future-Ready Index and evaluation protocols.
- CUSD engages in a partnership with Widener University in support of teacher professional learning and development.

## Growth Areas & Opportunities

- Systems to track, monitor, and analyze recruitment, placement, development, and retention strategies with clear responsible ownership for strategy implementation and outcomes are not yet functioning.
- The district does not yet have a defined strategy to attract, grow or retain talent at the central or school level.
- There are district and school-based concerns over the district's ability to adequately attract and vet the applicants.
- The global pandemic, national teacher shortage, and challenges with educator retention are significantly impacting student access to qualified, licensed, and diverse educators.
- According to stakeholder engagement data and a review of the evaluation process, staff don't yet have widely understood or adopted evaluation process to assess staff performance, impact, and growth at all levels.



## 7 Talent Management



**Finding 1: Limited school-level staffing capacity is significantly impacting the district's ability to effectively support student learning and development.**

### What school leaders and staff share...

*"It sometimes comes down to money. And the district wants to see if they can ... and make it work without hiring more people because people cost money. As far as you know, why jobs are not posted?"*

*"There is an extremely low level of understanding and commitment to keeping teachers aware of curriculum and instruction, as well as the hiring of qualified teachers."*

*"Your school improvement plan does not address the hiring of non-certified teachers and expecting schools to make miracles happen with test results."*

### What families share...

*"Start at least a hiring process to feel seats where teachers are missing."*

*"Those people need to sit in hiring spaces so they get people who want to be here for the long run... Our students can make the best progress this year and then go right back the next year. If staff is not consistent, nothing else matters."*

*"Get proper staffing and professionals that are well trained to work in this specific capacity."*

*"Academics are there but they [teachers] are burned out. My son doesn't have a geometry teacher. What does that mean for him moving forward for next year?"*

Classroom observations reveal that educator absences impact the structure and the pace of academic instruction and student learning/engagement.

## 7 Talent Management



**Finding 2: Staff elevate human resources as an area of need. There is an opportunity to clarify and improve accessibility of human resource operating and communications structures for all staff.**



Central office & school staff acknowledge the challenge associated with addressing pre-existing and current staffing needs and defining departmental goals and measures of success, yet share a desire for more organized and defined communication structures that allow all to receive adequate and timely support.

### Central office & school staff shared...

- *"Since starting HR has been great. But there is not clarity on what is actually going on or being collaborated."*
- *"HR, payroll, and other employee concerns are not addressed in a timely fashion and in the absence of a table of organization, we do not know WHOM should be contacted about WHAT issue."*
- *"I have never found it this difficult to receive communications... [departments] should always be responding to employee questions/concerns promptly and treating them with kindness/respect."*
- *"...most of the time, principals get candidates that don't have the credentials. The reply is slow, or sometimes not available."*
- *"The problem isn't that people are new, it's the lack of clarity and communication."*
- *"There's not a written training guide for anyone in this district. You come in and you get assigned and that's it."*

## 7 Talent Management

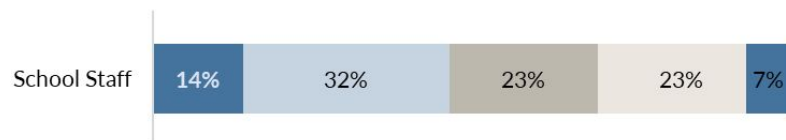
**Finding 3: The district does not yet have a defined and fully implemented strategy to attract, grow or retain talent at the central or school level.**

### District Leaders

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree

The district provides new staff with induction and extra support during their first few years in the district.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



School staff are held accountable for performance and results.



Staff evaluation focuses on leveraging strengths and addressing opportunities to improve performance.



### Regarding development, what staff shared...

- "Although new teachers attend induction, there is not much done to support them throughout the school year. We could also benefit from programs and incentives to retain old/seasoned staff members that are valuable to the district."
- "True leadership is developing leaders within our organization and empowering them to move up the ladder."
- "Teachers are not trained in nor provided enough time to deeply dive into critical data to truly design data-driven instruction. We are given short periods of time here or there during PDs but ONLY to fill in some district-required "worksheet."
- "PD is not what staff ask for. We put in survey after survey the Pd we want, every year, it doesn't happen."

## 7 Talent Management

The district acknowledges staff recruitment as a priority in its comprehensive plan. While recruitment remains an area of need, there is also an need to focus on talent retention.

District Leaders  
Recruitment and placement processes  
intentionally seek diverse staff.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



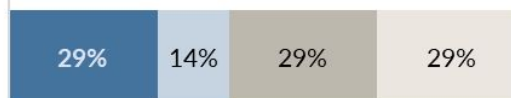
District Leaders

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree

The district has systems for  
developing potential school  
leaders.



The district and schools work  
to retain talented staff.



### Regarding retention, what staff shared...

- “We need a comprehensive training plan for all staff to support retention.”
- “There is no focus on retaining talented staff.”
- “The district is not only not attempting to hire teachers for all positions it has (currently listed positions do not include MANY of the teaching positions that are open), but it also does not work to retain the dedicated teachers who have worked within CUSD.”
- “This is my first year at [school], and since the beginning of the year, several staff members have left the school. Students notice this and frequently comment on it. In addition, comments have been made by both administrators and teachers to me \*since my new hire orientation\* about how hard it is to keep staff in the district. This did not engender feelings of support or confidence.”

## 8 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications



Intentional systems and processes to maintain open lines of communication with staff, family and community stakeholders.

### Strengths

- Stakeholders at all district levels have opportunities to engage in direct and indirect feedback protocols, including monthly School Board and mandated oversight meetings.
- The district has worked to establish the Parent University as a means on connecting families, services, and outside resources. As a result of Parent University, the district has created opportunities that allow for parent advocacy, access, and engagement. Thus equipping parents with the tools necessary to develop their leadership skills.
- District stakeholders report that they communicate and collaborate regularly with intermediary units, state partners, board members, and other partners in support of improvement and recovery efforts.

### Growth Areas & Opportunities

- Internal communication structures do not yet reflect consistent and clear messaging to engage and disseminate information to staff adequately.
- There is not yet consistency in how high-priority and decision-making opportunities are shared with school leaders and staff.
- There are opportunities to create clear, widely understood, and practiced communication structures organized at the central office levels and managed/differentiated by schools.
- There are opportunities for the district to create an engagement strategy that enables families to share feedback and actively participate in district offerings.

## 8 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

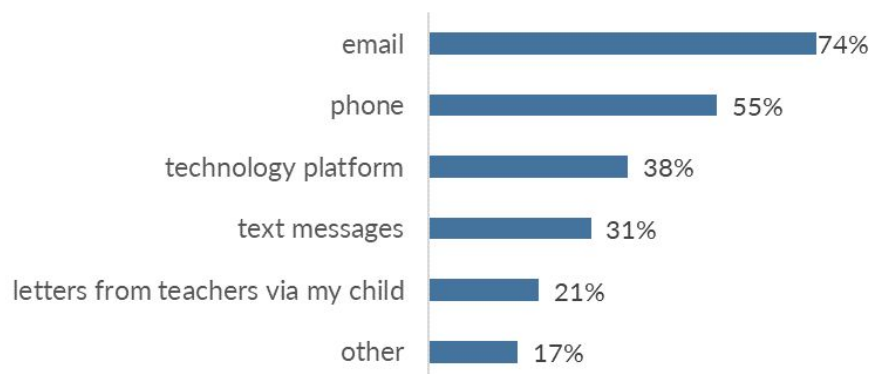


**Finding 1:** District efforts to acknowledge the diversity of the community and address the accessibility of information are evident. Stakeholders believe there are opportunities to improve.

### Points of Progress:

- Parent University
- Engagement of families and other district stakeholders in the diagnostic process, and other improvement efforts
- Superintendent walkthroughs of schools
- Increased participation of school committee and other district partners engagement efforts
- District newsletters and use of social media

How does the district communicate with you?



Interactions with the district and my child(ren)'s school(s) are respectful of my family's cultures, races/ethnicities, and other aspects of our identities.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree





## 8 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications



### What families shared...

- *“Communicate to parents in early stages of a problem instead of waiting until [it] really gets out of control.”*
- *“Effective constant professional communication.”*
- *“It’s good to know when your child is falling behind... it would be great to know that they are performing to expectations or exceeding expectation.”*
- *About School Board- “They do updates but you can not ask questions unless it is something on an agenda.”*

### What staff shared...

- *Communication with families and community members appears to be lacking. Many, many students have incorrect or missing parent/guardian contact information, and it is very difficult to reach them.”*
- *It would be helpful for the schools and staff to be informed about changes admin makes based on parent feedback and surveys.*
- *“Parent university leads have relationships with families and the community.”*

### What staff shared specifically regarding the needs of students receiving special education services

- *“Communicate..[students’] needs more effectively.”*
- *“Communication, other ways of getting the homework out for special need kids.”*

## 9 Data



Data is available and informs decision-making at all levels of the central office and in schools.

### Strengths

- Multiple leaders and staff share examples of using data to understand student and school needs. For example:
  - Some staff report using student data to determine trends in student performance and academic growth.
  - Non-academic data is collected via CASEL from students and teachers.
  - PACE survey data collected by The Boys & Girls club is also shared with community and parents.
  - Leaders engage in walkthroughs to gather observation data.
- PA Future Ready Index data are used as a primary infrastructure for academic data.
- There are efforts to process and organize financial and operational data.

### Growth Areas & Opportunities

- Data practices that drive decision-making and differentiation can be strengthened and more consistent to improve instructional practices and establish a stronger data culture district wide. *Staff reported a need for time, protocols, and supports to improve data practices.*
- MTSS is inconsistently implemented across schools and still in development districtwide.
- A robust system for using data to monitor the progress monitoring of English learner students is not yet fully established.
- Gathering data for the purpose of the Mass Insight District Diagnostic was a challenge signaling an opportunity for information to be further organized and more accessible across the district. *The diagnostic report can be an opportunity for CUSD to tell its story in a way that honors district progress.*

## 9 Data

**Finding 1: School level data procedures and practices are currently being established to support student learning. Central office and school leaders and staff described multiple examples of how they use data to understand student needs and identify support.**

### What central office & school staff shared...

*"We developed a data protocol for teachers to use benchmark data...then during principal meetings we will share the data."*

*"With positive action there was a lot of data provided, CASEL with the 5 competencies, endorsed by many companies, slides with statistical data on how SEL impacts attendance, academics, and behavior."*

*"Growing academic data was a priority."*

*"The district is focusing on keystones. We are using baseline data to show we are growing. We use MAP baseline scores."*

*"If no [students make] progress, look at additional supports to put in place... increase levels of students from supplemental to itinerary, [and] supervisors meet with school based teams once a week to discuss specific students, provide meaningful data for specific students."*

District Leaders: District information systems are up to date, accurate, and accessible

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree



School Staff: The district has a data- and performance-driven culture.

■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Disagree ■ N/A



## 9 Data



**Finding 2: There are opportunities to strengthen data practices districtwide to support improvement efforts. Staff report a need for greater access to data, time and protocols for analysis, and support to use multiple sources of data to make decisions at classroom, school, and central office levels.**

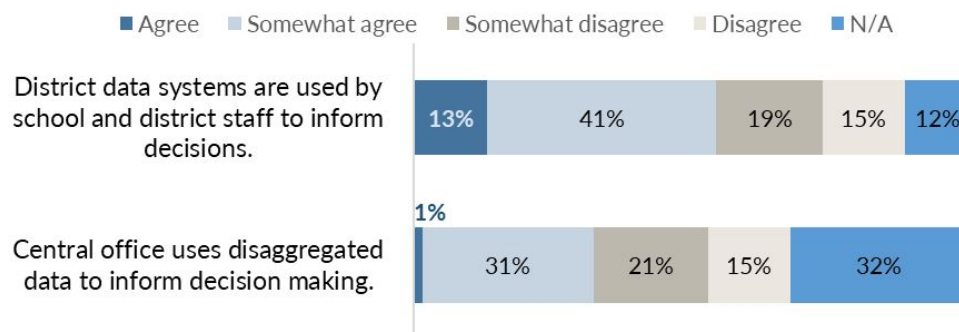
### What central office leaders & staff shared...

*"I have been asking for read only access to data. They never got back to me, and said I don't need that information. I'm a special education teacher. I need to see evaluations and ARD."*

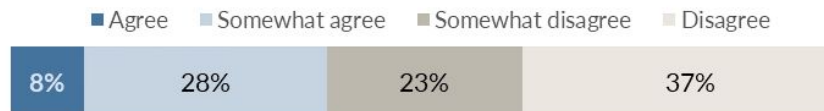
*"At this point, data is always relevant, I don't know the extent to which academic data is relevant because some scores are just 0. It's not a true picture of what's happening with kids. It's just a snapshot... like how do you have a student for a full year and there is no movement at all?"*

*"We are part of a validation pilot, so much of the data is not clean, if it's not clean then the decisions are not effective and the goal is to design a platform that would mirror reporting we would send to the state."*

### School Staff



School staff: Teachers have the time and protocols needed to use assessment data to inform instruction.



# 10 Focus on Equity

Policies, structures, systems, and resources ensure equitable, high quality education for all students, including students with exceptional needs.



## Strengths

- District invests in and makes efforts to improve special education services with an equity focused lens.
  - CUSD provides supports to students with IEP plans before students are referred outside the district for services.
  - Students with 504 plans are given IEP consultants to serve as consultants.
- Based on PA Future Ready data, the percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding state growth matches or exceeds the percentage for all students.

## Growth Areas & Opportunities

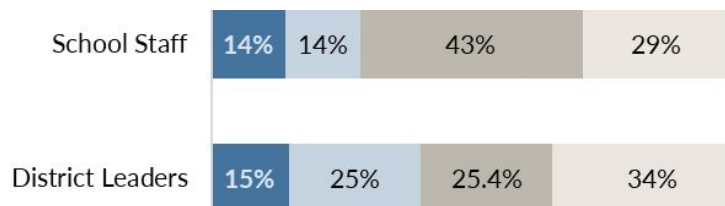
- Staff believe additional supports are needed for special populations. For example, they share that ELL students translation services are not always accessible in real time, and that there is a need for more progress monitoring for ELLs.
- Some stakeholders express concern about inequitable access to school partnerships and advanced programming.
- Multiple stakeholders report that staffing challenges limit schools' ability to adequately meet student needs.
- Student outcomes vary school to school, signaling an opportunity for accelerating learning through both district-wide and differentiated, school-specific support strategies.

## 10 Focus on Equity



**Finding 1: While the district provides supports for students in special populations, services are still needed to adequately address students' needs. Staff also report a need for organization, professional development, common planning time, and resources to best serve all students.**

The district provides equitable, high-quality education for students with exceptional needs (students with disabilities, English learners, and advanced/gifted learners).



### What staff shared....

*"The special education does not respond in a timely manner. Professional developments for special education are not always geared toward special education, and special education teachers at the [school level] DO NOT receive common planning time."*

*"Special education is always the last to receive what it needs... Directives are inconsistent and it appears the admin puts funding themselves before acquiring materials and staff necessary for ALL special education students to receive the education they deserve. Special Ed teachers are going way above and beyond to provide for our students."*

*"There seem to be little to no focus on ensuring that the students and teachers have the tools they need in order to succeed."*

*[when asked about data] "That's the weakest part. Right now we utilize WIDA access test every year. There isn't a lot of progress monitoring, but that's what we're working on. The same structure we're working on for all students, we need to set up for ELs."*

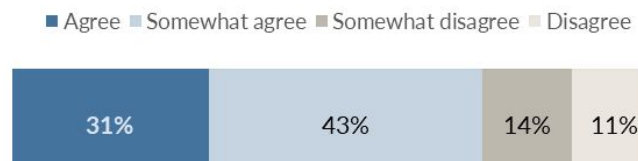
# 10 Focus on Equity



**Finding 3: Stakeholders report that student social emotional needs are surpassing current programming structures and staffing allocations, and share a need for more consistency in these supports across schools.**

## Families

My child(ren)'s school supports their academic, social-emotional, identity, and behavior development.



## What stakeholders shared...

*"Right now we have a lot of children with social emotional needs, and our program is concentrated at one school, so how do we make sure everyone is getting equal access to those resources?"*

*"There are fights everyday at [the school] and student attendance is very inconsistent, yet the only consequences seem to be suspension and failing grades. It continues to be unclear whether there are strategies in development that would address the root causes of these issues."*

*"There is no equity among schools within the district. Things are done very differently at each school. Some schools have assistants in many classrooms while other schools share assistants between 2-3 classrooms. Some schools are responsible for an entire population of emotional support students without enough teachers and aides for the students."*

*"The fact that the district "jumped" into the full inclusion model has been very detrimental to our students. Learning support and emotional support students who are used to being in small class setting for core subjects are overwhelmed being in large classes. They are not receiving the support they need."*

*[We do] "intervention plans and behavioral support plans, and we just don't have the staff."*

**Part I: Overview and Key Context**

**Part II: Findings in Each Element: Strengths & Growth Areas and Opportunities**

**Part III: Recommendations**



## Assumptions Regarding Recommendations:

- Recommendations are intended to identify potential strategic priorities for the district. They do not address every challenge or opportunity identified in the diagnostic but attempt to build on the district's identified strengths and address its most critical challenges.
- We advise that the district not attempt to implement all of the recommendations at once, instead we suggest that a manageable subset should be selected for inclusion in the first year of the district's Recovery Plan.
- For CUSD, we define "manageable" as 3-5 major new activities at any given time. Efforts to improve existing initiatives should be taking place on a continuing basis.
- We are also assuming that the district will conduct a planning process that will engage stakeholders in identifying root causes, determining priorities and developing strategies. We expect to help with the planning effort and bring what we've learned during the diagnostic to the table.

## Summary of Five Recommendations:

- 1. Improve communication structures to build trust, engagement, and collective responsibility among all CUSD stakeholders.**
- 2. Align district strategy and resources to meet school needs and increase coherence and timeliness.**
- 3. Prioritize the operationalization of internal district functions to effectively meet the needs of schools, students, and CUSD's improvement strategies.**
- 4. Create accessible, aligned learning, leadership, and development opportunities at all levels.**
- 5. Accelerate student learning through differentiated training and consistent systems for school management.**

# 1. Improve communication structures to build trust, engagement, and collective responsibility among all CUSD stakeholders.

Change management (e.g., [Kotter's 8-Step Method](#)), community-building (e.g., [Peter Block's Community](#)), and liberatory leadership (e.g., [National Equity Project Framework](#)) experts emphasize the importance of relational trust and a shared sense of purpose and possibility for the future.

With a long history of recovery and receivership status and leadership turnover, there is a continued need to focus on rebuilding trust with the entire CUSD community. Leaders already see this need, and have launched some new engagement and communications structures. CUSD should continue to improve and develop new approaches to engaging with the community in order to build trust and collective responsibility for sustained change.

# 1. Improve communication structures to build trust, engagement, and collective responsibility among all CUSD stakeholders.

To improve trust and communications, CUSD can consider the following:

- Develop cross-departmental, school-to-district, and district-to-school communication norms and processes that increase transparency and access to information and supports (e.g., *define single points of contact for school needs, uphold expected response timelines, solicit school staff feedback*).
- Expand two-way communications around district priorities and initiatives with all stakeholders. Share data, rationale for decisions, and how feedback received is addressed.
- Gather community input to co-define a vision for the future of CUSD, and clarify how the community will support CUSD in maintaining shared accountability for getting there.
- Share out positive examples of leadership follow through, acknowledgement and responsiveness to community feedback, orientation towards school needs, etc.
- Re-establish opportunities for community engagement with school board and administration.

## 2. Align district strategy and resources to meet school needs and increase coherence and timeliness.

Multiple stakeholders report a need to update district plans, and better align efforts and resources to school improvement plans.

CUSD is already taking some steps for alignment. As CUSD develops sustainable routines for academic and financial recovery, it will be important to identify short-term school needs and projected needs (e.g., *enrollment and staffing projections, curricular materials, scope and sequence of staff PD, etc.*) at the start.

This can ensure that school plans are actionable and grounded in data, and that district plans directly address school needs. It also allows CUSD to then align and allocate financial, material, and personnel resources towards those plans and needs.

**The Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework** reinforces the importance of coherence in district systems and “*the interdependence of various aspects of their school district – its culture, systems and structures, resources, stakeholder relationships, and environment – and to understand how they reinforce one another to support the implementation of an improvement strategy.*”



*Adapted from Tushman and O'Reilly's Congruence Model, 2002*

## 2. Align district strategy and resources to meet school needs and increase coherence and timeliness.

To align strategy and resources, CUSD can consider the following:

- Update, align, and monitor progress of the recovery plan, comprehensive plan, and school action plans. Further define district wide priorities, strategies for improvement, and goals.
- Engage school leaders and staff in regular examination of quantitative and qualitative data to assess holistic school strengths and needs.
- Define measurable goals/key performance indicators for specific improvement strategies and clearly map district strategies to school needs.
- Develop and implement a multi-year budget, supported by clearly defined and understood financial policies and procedures, a deep understanding of individual school needs, and staffing projections.
- Establish shared accountability systems to monitor both implementation progress and impact towards intended outcomes of strategy and resources. Protect the time and space to do so through a regular cadence for progress monitoring, and involvement of additional key stakeholders.
- Continuously align and adjust central systems to identified school needs - balancing responsiveness in the moment with strategic and sustained focus on results.

### 3. Prioritize the operationalization of internal district functions to effectively meet the needs of schools, students, and CUSD's improvement strategies.

Creating effective support structures to meet the needs of the CUSD community requires an extensive review and understanding of how departments function, deliver and organize the distribution of services.

Throughout the diagnostic process, stakeholders did not have a clear understanding who and which departments oversaw the needs of students, schools, and staff members.

There are opportunities for CUSD to invest in building the capacity and internal functions of its district leaders. Building a central understanding of who leads what and how is critical in ensuring effective lines of communication between departments and making support more accessible for leaders and staff.

To build capacity and cohesion among the department teams, district leadership can provide the group with time, resources and human capital to receive facilitated guidance to set a vision for their work. By collaborating, the group can utilize the goals in the district improvement plan to define specific department goals.

### 3. Prioritize the operationalization of internal district functions to effectively meet the needs of schools, students, and CUSD's improvement strategies.

**To best organize internal systems and structure to meet, CUSD can consider:**

- To manage, understand, and build capacity and sustainability, start with the CUSD organizational chart and build a simple workflow diagram that describes each part of each department function. Then, consider each function as a phase and organizational structure around what, how, when, who, and why. Workflows can help sequence and document steps and clarify specific tasks or activities.
- Regularly convene department team leads to develop cross-departmental structures, communication, and trust.
- Engage department lead and teams and school-based leadership in training that clarifies functions and services to schools.
- Conduct quarterly tool/platform effectiveness analysis by surveying and engaging staff at the central and school levels.



## 4. Create accessible, aligned learning, leadership, and development opportunities at all levels.

Investments in staff development opportunities create more robust practices aligned with district priorities. Staff who feel invested in developing skills that improve their practice and feel valued by their district. And staff who feel valued particularly diverse staff, tend to stay in their district longer.

Staff, at all levels shared that they receive baseline but not yet standardized professional support to carry out their duties; others expressed frustration about the lack of access to district-embedded professional development support. Organizing resources and defining the structure for professional learning is one of the steps CUSD can take to prepare an equity-focused workforce.

Next, the district needs to broaden the reach of professional learning to classroom support roles. While the professional development for instructional teaching staff is developing, non-instructional, central office leadership, and support staff should be thoughtfully considered to participate in district-sponsored training, as their interactions with other staff, students, families, and the CUSD community should reflect district values.

## 4. Create accessible, aligned learning, leadership, and development opportunities at all levels.

**To implement more structured and aligned professional development for staff, consider:**

- Begin by utilizing the outlined strategic priorities and PDE focus areas to understand how existing professional learning and development structures align with the collective goals of the district.
- Focus on collaborative conversations with school leaders to identify staffing learning needs and differentiate learning opportunities based on student support areas. This will allow for leadership development and capacity-building strategies for principals and central office staff.
- Along with school and instructional leaders, define, publish, and train staff on instructional practices aligned with adopted curriculum and student success measures.
- Support all district staff to see themselves as directly connected to the work furthering the district improvement goals and their impact on student success as a working ecosystem. Some questions to consider: *How are the elements of the district improvement plan woven into content-specific professional development? To what extent do financial restrictions impede specific staff from attending professional development? What platform exists or could be created for all district staff to access professional learning information?*

## 5. Accelerate student learning through differentiated training and consistent systems for school management.

CUSD is committed to improving academic outcomes and has begun to establish a vision, priorities and structure for teaching and learning. Observations, student and staff survey responses, and academic data reveal positive practices to build from and room to improve and accelerate learning.

There is an opportunity to continue to strengthen, align, and norm around instructional practices, use of curricula/assessment resources, student expectations, student supports, and school leadership and management to accelerate learning and scale positive practices. Staff elevate district support to leaders, teachers, and staff to improve and refine instructional practices as a growth opportunity. As CUSD works towards improvement goals, there is a need to establish standardized and consistent practices for school management and support, while at the same time ensuring that support and training are differentiated based on data and identified needs.

With all of these factors in mind, many stakeholders report a sense of readiness and momentum for improvement in CUSD.

## 5. Accelerate student learning through differentiated training and consistent systems for school management.

**To accelerate student learning and increase student access to constantly positive learning environments, consider:**

- Address issues around school climate/environment in secondary schools.
- Provide foundational training in classroom management and gradual release to teachers.
- Create a more focused vision for instruction and align walkthrough processes to a prioritized set of indicators.
- Create internal learning labs by highlighting effective practice at the school leader and teacher leader level.
- Support schools to develop and maintain focus on strong and clear school improvement plan strategies and action steps through data-driven progress monitoring.
- Use a variety of school data to identify individual and cross-school needs, and develop districtwide and differentiated, school-specific strategies and supports.
- Invest in school instructional leadership development, support, and retention strategies to build from and scale existing best practices.
- Explore opportunities to continue to expand student access to enriching and rigorous learning, to address social emotional needs, and to increase student voice.