

LEBANON CITY SCHOOLS: FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION & HARASSMENT

“We talk about equity a lot in day-to-day work and before we didn’t. That is in a large part a result of work with the Center. [We moved from] compliance to ongoing training on these [equity] issues to make sure we have safe and inclusive schools for everybody.” –Mark Graler, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Lebanon City Schools

Background

Lebanon City Schools is located in one of the oldest cities in Ohio. It is situated 30 miles north of Cincinnati and 30 miles south of Dayton in a county that is experiencing significant population growth and changes in economic, racial, and ethnic demographics. This growth has shifted the district from serving a rural community to serving a larger more diverse suburban population. Currently, the district serves nearly 5,800 students of which approximately 88% of students are White, 6% Latinx, 4% Multi-racial, and 2% Black. Although 12% of the student population are students of Color, 99% of teachers/staff are White.

Request for Assistance

Lebanon City Schools (LCS) entered into a Resolution Agreement with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in August 2017 resulting from an investigation of racial harassment prompted by a complaint filed by parents of a Black student. LCS requested technical assistance from the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP Center) to promote “racial sensitivity” and to address race-based harassment.

LCS received technical assistance (TA) at the Center’s top tier (Tier III) of services for 3 years. Tier III services are for organizations committed to engaging in a sustained partnerships with the Center to advance transformative systemic change towards educational equity. Tier III partners enter into a formalized agreement with agency leadership in order to collaboratively work mutually agreed upon partnership goals. These goals are documented in a memorandum of understanding, and detailed in a proposed project scope, including timeline, and stated responsibilities for both the requesting agency and the Center. The overall focus of the technical assistance provided to LCS was to increase district administrators’ and school level educators’ capacity to implement culturally responsive practices and ensure safe and inclusive school cultures and climates for all students.

Technical Assistance Goals & Services

MAP Center staff and LCS district leaders collaborated through strategic questioning. This questioning identified factors that were most likely contributing to discriminatory treatment of students based on race, including outdated district policies, practices, and procedures related to

discipline, bullying and harassment, as well as uncoordinated and insufficient professional development and support structures to promote positive inter-racial interactions among students and between students and staff.

Based on this analysis, the district and MAP Center created the partnership goal to advance the capacity of the district to ensure safe and inclusive schools, free from harassment and discrimination. The two objectives related to this goal were: (1) support district administrators in leading conversations on foundational educational equity concepts and increase staff awareness of civil rights legislation related to race, sex, national origin, and religion; and, (2) develop and support the implementation of a comprehensive, district-wide anti-harassment and discrimination plan to support the creation of safe and inclusive school environments.

TA was provided in two phases.

Phase One

During the first phase, district administrators participated in a series of Center-led professional learning sessions designed to improve administrators' capacity to lead equity efforts by advancing their awareness of foundational equity concepts and marginalizing ideologies and practices that are barriers to educational equity, increasing educators' understanding of their legal responsibilities to protect students from harassment and discrimination, and increasing their ability to apply a research- and practice- based framework for creating safe and inclusive school environments. In addition, MAP Center staff facilitated a series of planning sessions with a task force of diverse stakeholders consisting of district and community members for the purpose of identifying district equity goals, equity indicators, and related strategic actions.

Phase Two

The second phase extended district administrators' capacity to lead equity efforts by also including school level administrators in targeted professional learning experiences. In addition, district and school level leaders participated in the development of a Principal Leaders Toolkit designed to support administrators in engaging staff in equity-focused professional development. During phase two, Center staff engaged district and school leaders in planning sessions to develop a comprehensive professional development and monitoring plan.

Partnership Outcomes

As a result of partnership with the MAP Center, Lebanon City Schools defined four district equity goals and 21 strategic actions that will affect school and district level policies, redressing discriminatory structures and practices. Additional technical assistance outcomes included the

development of a 3-year comprehensive district-wide professional development and monitoring plan, the provision of a variety of articles, publications, and videos to inform the creation of a district online community (Padlet) of equity resources accessible to district staff, and the development of a principal toolkit to support school level administrators in leading staff professional development on a series of equity topics. The technical assistance provided to the district has the potential to impact each of the district's five schools, with an estimated 500 adults and 5,483 students.

This partnership illustrates an example of systemic transformation toward equity, as the MAP Center's technical assistance supported the district in engaging in equity-focused district improvement at the classroom, school and district levels, as well as across multiple systems domains, including leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, community partnerships, professional growth and development, and school culture and climate, ultimately impacting students by ensuring all students experience safe and inclusive school environments.