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MEMORANDUM

TO: State Public Charter School Authority Board
FROM: Rebecca Feiden, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Initial Steps to Elevate our Focus on Equity
DATE: May 21, 2021

Background

At the July 24, 2020 SPCSA Board Meeting, the Authority discussed actions that the SPCSA can take to support schools in their efforts to serve all students equitably and uphold the SPCSA's values of equity and diversity. Throughout the summer and fall, the Authority discussed this topic at each board meeting and SPCSA staff has continued to incorporate a focus on equity into our work. Below is a summary of the initial steps, including the status of the identified action items. As we look forward to the 2021-22 school year, SPCSA staff expects to build on these initial steps by identifying other avenues by which we can elevate our focus on equity.

Initial Steps to Elevate our Focus on Equity

Site Evaluations

- To ensure a holistic view of the school, the SPCSA will work with the school to ensure that focus groups are representative of the student population and include a statement to this effect in the Site Evaluation Handbook.
- To enable candid conversations about equity, as part of the presentation portion of the site evaluation, schools will be asked to discuss efforts to embed culturally responsive practices into academic and organizational policy and procedure.
- The Site Evaluation Handbook was updated in August 2020 and during the 2020-21 school year, staff has worked with school to ensure representative focus groups and

schools have included information in their presentations on culturally responsive practices. Staff has begun the process of reviewing the Site Evaluation Handbook and proposing revisions for the 2021-22 school year.

New School and Amendment Applications

- The SPCSA will revise application templates to include questions that directly ask about efforts to close opportunity gaps and address disproportionate discipline practices, including the use of restorative justice practices. For applicants that already operate a school, the application will ask for academic and discipline data by subgroup. In addition, the application templates will continue to include questions on family and community engagement practices and SPCSA staff will convey the importance of this work in applicant trainings. Update the New School Application to contemplate a proposed Alternative School.
- For the winter 2021 new charter school application template, staff updated the amendment template to ask about efforts to close opportunity gaps and address disproportionate discipline practices. Staff has continued to emphasize the importance of family and community engagement within the application and during applicant trainings.

Renewal Application

- The SPCSA has revised the Renewal Application to include questions on restorative justice practices, plans to monitor for potential disproportionate discipline practices, and plans to address any opportunity gaps for specific student groups. The SPCSA will update the Renewal Application for the Fall of 2021 to include 1) explicit questions on how the school engages parents and families as well as what trainings the school provides regarding diversity and inclusion, and 2) questions asking the school to reflect on the diversity of their student body, specifically in comparison to local schools and the local school district, and describe their efforts to ensure that they are representative of their local community.
- The Renewal Application was updated in the summer of 2020 to include questions on restorative justice practices, plans to monitor for potential disproportionate discipline practices, and plans to address any opportunity gaps for specific student groups. Staff has begun the process of updating the Renewal Application for 2021.

Access to Equity Data

- Presentations to the Authority on student academic performance will include a heightened focus on understanding performance by student group. In addition, the SPCSA will present data on discipline by student group.
- The SPCSA will identify opportunities to make Equity Data available and accessible to the public.
- The SPCSA will examine the demographics of educators and consider how they reflect the demographics of students served.

- In December, the Authority received presentations on student enrollment, graduation rate, and discipline data, all of which included data disaggregated by student group.
- During the winter of 2021, staff provide schools with training on how to examine their school's discipline data by student group.
- In February, SPCSA staff sent each school a report comparing the demographics of their school to local school district and the zoned, neighborhood school for the community in which the school is located for the 2020-21 school year. The memo accompanying these reports urged schools to review their data and identify ways to address discrepancies.
- SPCSA have reviewed and analyzed data regarding the demographics of licensed educators for the 2020-21 school year. (See Appendix A)
- The SPCSA's website has been updated to provide more streamlined access to information for parents/families seeking to find a charter school. Additionally, a plugin has been added that allows a user to translate the SPCSA's website to a several languages. Staff is also working on creating a version of the "For Parents" webpage in Spanish.

Focus on Schools

- This year's Focus on Schools series at board meetings will be dedicated to hearing from schools about how they are directly addressing issues of equity, including any specific efforts to combat systemic racism.
- So far, the Authority has heard from several schools about how they are directly addressing issues of equity, including any specific efforts to combat systemic racism. Today we will be hearing from representatives from two schools on how they have implemented a weighted lottery in an effort to increase equitable access.

Growth Management Plan Working Group (Updated in February 2021)

- As the SPCSA reconvenes this working group, we will solicit input about how we can work with organizations across our state to elevate our focus on equity. In addition, the SPCSA will look into adding Equity Data into the Growth Management Plan.
- The Community Working Group had its first meeting of the 2020-21 school year in October of 2020. In a subsequent subcommittee meeting, as well as during a full Community Working Group meeting in January, we discussed the SPCSA's Equity Initiatives. Comments focused on 1) efforts to increase access to quality professional development on restorative justice, culturally responsive practices, and diversity, equity and inclusion; 2) opportunities to reduce information and access barriers for historically underserved student groups; and 3) data regarding the demographics of staff in comparison to demographics of the student body. Additionally, Community Working Group participants have been proactive in including SPCSA representatives in meetings and events that relate to education and equity. This has increased our awareness and engagement with community partners. The Community Working Group continues to meet quarterly and will do so going into the 2021-22 school year.

SPCSA-wide Training

- The SPCSA will survey school leaders to determine what training they currently participate in on diversity and inclusion, and what training they would like to receive through the SPCSA.
- SPCSA staff conducted a survey of school leaders regarding existing training and the need for training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. This data shows that of those that responded, 60% have provided training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the last year and 90% would be interested in facilitated by the SPCSA. *Note that any training would be conducted by a third party with expertise in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training.*
- The SPCSA will be participating in the Project Aware Grant. Through this grant, the SPCSA will be able to provide schools with access to training on related topics, including culturally responsive practices and restorative justice.

Equitable Access

- The SPCSA will work to establish lines of communication that would enable more access for those students that are homeless, in foster care or in the juvenile justice system.
- The SPCSA will make updates to our website to make it a centralized source for information that would be helpful for parents and families looking to identify a school for their child and enroll in a school.
- The SPCSA's website has been updated to provide more streamlined access to information for parents/families seeking to find a charter school. Additionally, a plugin has been added that allows a user to translate the SPCSA's website to a several languages. Staff is also working on creating a version of the "For Parents" webpage in Spanish.
- The SPCSA has been in touch with the child welfare agencies responsible for foster care services in each county in which the SPCSA has sponsored schools. We are developing Memoranda of Understanding with each to ensure that the needs of students are met. In addition, staff from child welfare agencies and the juvenile justice system have been invited to participate in the Community Working Group.

Engaging with School Boards

- A letter was sent to the board chairs of each SPCSA-sponsored school that 1) summarized the SPCSA's efforts to elevate equity in our work, 2) proposed initial action steps for school boards to elevate their focus on equity, and 3) invited board members to join meetings to discuss the memo and how they are elevating equity at their school. Three meetings were held in late April and early May and representatives from 10 of the SPCSA's sponsored school boards participated in these meetings.