

## Amplifying Student Voice

For K-12 youth, a sense of school belonging greatly influences emotional wellbeing and academics, ranging from grades to academic trajectory (Korpershoek et al., 2020).

Belonging uncertainty is “doubt as to whether one will be accepted or rejected by key figures in the social environment” (Cohen & Garcia, 2008, p. 365).

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A school's culture is a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act.

To change the culture requires that the instructional leader become aware of the culture, the way things are done here. What do you see, hear, and experience in the school? What don't you see and hear? What are the clues that reveal the school's culture? What behaviors get rewards and status? Which ones are greeted with reprimands? Do the adults model the behavior they expect of students? Who makes the decisions? Do parents experience welcome, suspicion, or rejection when they enter the school? (Barth, 2002, pgs. 6-11)

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### Quotes from Interviews Fall 2020

1. I think there's a lot of kids here and maybe on both sides of the aisle that maybe are experiencing some things that they don't feel there's anybody who can identify or relate or anybody that even wants to help them.
2. I think it's a very like tight knit. It's a tight knit community. It's a very closed off community. It can be isolating at times.
3. My perception of Alamo Heights as a district is, I mean, I, I love it and I hate it all at once because it's where I grew up and I have, you know, like that's where I formed my identity. That's where my childhood was. But then it's like, I, as a little girl, like I felt, excluded because I wasn't white.
4. I think the district can improve with making sure that every student has the same amount of love and support. And like sometimes kids can slip through the cracks or kids, you know, quiet kids or kids who aren't in AP classes or aren't in clubs or aren't a part of something or like a niche those kids can slip. It looks like they're not interested, or they don't have passion. But I think those are the kids that you need to give the most love to because they need it the most.
5. I haven't seen or experienced this in the community. (Referring to social media events that happened in the past.) And I didn't like to hear that. I was like, Oh, wait a minute. No, that seems to paint everyone with a broad brush. And we're all getting targeted with that, those hurtful comments that those students put online.
6. So, so we grew up knowing that, and I hope this is not too crude, but we just, we grew up knowing that, you know, the white folks had the power.
7. I mean, it's, for me, this is a point of pride that we were having this equity committee. It doesn't sound like this is something that's been done. The fact that the district recognizes that there's a problem that needs to be addressed. Just the fact that we are making some strides.
8. I can help the adults in this equity council understand what is actually going on at the junior school and how bad the situation actually is and not it's just like one or two kids.

9. I think that they have a good start that they're starting from the right place and their intentions are well. But sometimes it can seem like there's favoring happening or, you know, there's, or it's like, are you sincere about this? Are you genuine?
  10. Cultures start within the classroom or within, you know, the school itself. And that like a lot of what, like the bad experiences that I've had in the district are because a teacher or authority figure failed to see that there was discrimination happening.
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### Quotes from Secondary Surveys Fall 2020

#### **“What do you wish the adults in your building knew about equity, inclusion, and culture?”**

11. Being an ethnic minority, I would say that I don't want the focus to be on my ethnicity or culture. I want school to be a place where we learn first and foremost, and that they celebrate the students because of who they are and their accomplishments, not solely because of their race or ethnicity. Coming from outside the district to the high school as a freshman, it was very difficult to make friends and meet people, not because I'm Hispanic but because these students have known each other since elementary school and they felt like their friend circles were done growing. I feel like these methods of constantly talking about race and the past is not progressive and is just an attempt to pander to us. Yes, we should know about our history but to constantly bring up ethnicity or race only creates further division. I have friends from all different cultures, ethnicities, races, and backgrounds, but not just because they are a different race but because I enjoy their company and their friendship. This school doesn't have a problem with racism, there are always a few bad apples, but it's not systemic, nor widespread. This school does, however, need improvement on including the new kids. They need ways to be introduced to students, perhaps even families in the area, so that they don't feel excluded. Thank you for this opportunity to let me speak about my experiences. It's a good school, it just needs some improvement.
12. Honestly, I don't know. I don't really have any experiences with race, ethnicity, or culture at school.
13. I believe this equity council was built to pander to minorities like me. I believe the main problem with inclusivity at our school has nothing to do with race and all about how long a student has been at the school. If a student has been here since fifth grade, they are more likely to be accepted than me. They don't reject me because I'm Hispanic, there are tons of Hispanic 'prep' kids that reject me too. Inclusivity has to do with, does a new kid feel welcome to sit with a group at lunch, or do they sit by themselves for two whole weeks straight without someone ever considering saying hi? Is it that a new kid is not welcome in a clique student group? I believe AH has done a great effort to include me as a Latina, but as a new girl to a new district I've gotten nothing but closed doors. I've been here for four years and students still believe I'm new. I've participated in five sports, piano UIL, been district debate champion, and participated in many student groups...I'm not new. I wish the school could find a way that students would be open to new people to the district. This equity board will accomplish nothing because despite diagnosing the right problem they've come up with the wrong (and ineffective) solution.
14. I feel that people do not treat people of color or lgbtq+ people at this school fairly at all. I hear people at this school saying several slurs that do not belong to them and this school does absolutely nothing about it. I feel this school does not care about the unfairness that people of color and lgbtq+ people experience on the daily. I feel this school really only cares about the white cis gendered people at this school and only cares about the bullying they face. I don't see anything being done about that bullying of minorities at this school and that must be changed.
15. I feel that teachers here are very good at ignoring or brushing off situations when racism occurs. The only time they speak out on it is if another adult is watching or if they are a good person which is rare.

16. I have to just be completely honest here, though I may feel a bit uncomfortable with this. I am from an extremely German family on both sides, and I believe in heritage I am over 60% German at least. Anyways, I had a couple of students call me a Nazi for it, and I just had to play it off. They were calling me one just because I was German. It wasn't funny. Also, some of my friends have experienced racism. It isn't funny. Don't hate on someone just because they differ from "Normal." What is normal? Normal isn't looks. Normal isn't skin color. Normal isn't really a thing if you ask me.
17. I wish more of them were open to learning and understanding. I myself don't have many experiences to share with regards to my race or ethnicity, but I know there are countless voices that are not allowed to speak out and tell their stories. In most of my classes, at least 3/5 of the classroom is white. I wish someone saw that and thought, "huh, that's interesting. Why is that?" This is kind of an extension of that, but I think it's also worth noting that the Heights program for Elementary kids is actually not beneficial. I know every parent would disagree but know that 75% of students probably agree. The mental stress to perform exceptionally for students who were "Heights kids" is astronomical going into middle school, and they carry that same stress with them to High School. For those that weren't "Heights kids", we think we're not good enough and we constantly wonder why going into middle school. If we don't perform better in middle school, most simply won't try in High School. Not entirely sure how that contributes to the question, but I thought it necessary to point this out.
18. I wish that the teachers knew that I am indigenous and Filipino. My teachers sometimes accidentally show a us against them mentality when referring to the native population and "Americans". Sometimes they just expect everyone to be a cookie cutter white kid, unaffected by racial tensions and experiences. Also they mix me up with the other Asians in my grade.
19. I wish that we could learn more about the history of different races, the history of different cultures and that we are all people, I think that this school on the surface is inclusive, but when it comes to punishment or the majority of students in the school, wealth is in close proximity to safety. Safety meaning that they may not get in trouble as much as others in the school of a different race or ethnicity.
20. I wish they knew that some students don't take it seriously since they will never experience what others feel like. Talking about race, ethnicity, and culture is sadly a political topic and that is why I don't express my opinions widely with others I know do not have the same beliefs as me. I wish there were a way to make everyone engaged and willing to talk about this issue without it being a political statement.
21. Everyone is always mad. Why can't everyone just be nice?
22. It's rough out there. Most of you are trying your best. Keep listening to what everyone has to say on either side of the fence. I don't blame anyone for keeping out of politics and even conversations about race nowadays because of how violent people can get on either side of the fence. Thanks for being a teacher during the year 2020, I could never do it.