



**Minnesota Department of Human Rights and Independent School District 196
Semi-Annual Report
February 1, 2021
Case File No. 68080**

This is Independent School District 196’s sixth semi-annual report to the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR) pursuant to the Collaboration Agreement entered into by the parties on June 27, 2018. This report provides information concerning District 196’s progress implementing the Collaboration Agreement and District 196’s local plan to address disparities in student discipline. The report will address each strategy in the local plan, including intended outcomes, implementation steps and responsive changes taken in the reporting period, as well as metrics to measure effectiveness. The intended outcomes and metrics remain the same as in past reports. The implementation steps include updates since the last report, although many steps described in past reports are ongoing and not repeated herein. Please refer to past reports for details. A spreadsheet with de-identified suspension data is also attached to this report as required by the Collaboration Agreement.¹

I. Periodic Review of District Discipline Policy

Intended Outcomes – District 196 will periodically review its student discipline policy to improve the fairness and objectivity of the policy, provide alternatives to suspension and allow for community engagement in the development of the policy.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – In December of 2020, District 196 solicited input from its stakeholders on potential changes to its discipline policy for the 2021-22 school year. The District is now in the process of drafting policy revisions based upon the input received and will propose the revisions to the school board. The process is a several month process that is expected to be complete by May, with the revisions to be published and disseminated before the 2021-22 school year. Many of the potential revisions address equity concerns, including alternatives to suspension. Past disciplinary policy changes described in previous semi-annual reports are currently being implemented. In addition to this annual policy review, the District 196 Student Support and School Climate team have been working on a long-term plan to revise the language in the district’s Overview of Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook to reflect the shifting practice from a punitive approach to a restorative approach.

¹ The Collaboration Agreement requires suspension data from the preceding six months to be submitted along with the September and February semi-annual reports. Because suspensions typically occur during the nine months of the school year, and because September and February are not spaced six months apart, the District has designed its suspension reports to split the school year in half. Accordingly, the February report will provide data for the first half of the school year beginning with summer school and ending on the January 15th before the February report. The September report provide data on the second half of the school year beginning on January 16th and ending with the end of the school year. The September report will also include additional data on those students who were suspended in both halves of the year, consistent with paragraph 2(j) of the Collaboration Agreement.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the amount and quality of suggested policy changes. The limited disciplinary data available during the COVID-19 pandemic complicates the district’s present ability to measure this strategy.

II. Data Review

Intended Outcomes – District 196 will periodically review student disciplinary outcomes to increase awareness of the effect of current suspension practices on students.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes –The data review is scheduled to occur three times per year near the end of each trimester at three separate tiers (school, Climate Team and cabinet). Data has been reviewed at all tiers and was also reviewed with all district administrative leaders at meetings in January 2021. District 196 continues to examine the disparities in student discipline and seek ways to reduce or eliminate these disparities. *Please note, the 2020-21 school year began in a hybrid learning model and subsequently progressed to a distance learning model. This resulted in a dramatic reduction in student suspensions and expulsions, but the data is not particularly useful for purposes of this report because of the unusual circumstances.*

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the fidelity of all schools to the data review process. The limited disciplinary data available during the COVID-19 pandemic complicates the district’s present ability to measure this strategy.

III. Alternatives to Suspension

Intended Outcomes – District 196 is actively seeking alternatives to suspension for student misconduct in order to reduce the use of suspension for student misconduct that is nonviolent and unrelated to drug possession, sale or use.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes –As reported in the past, the district has established a Student Support and School Climate Team (“Climate Team”) with a primary purpose of reviewing districtwide disciplinary practices and alternatives to suspension, as well as other matters related to student engagement, attendance and school climate. The work of this team continues and most recently a meeting was held in January. Individual schools also continue to implement various interventions and restorative practices and alternatives to suspension as reported in previous semi-annual reports.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. The effectiveness of this strategy will also be measured by the frequency of the Climate Team’s meetings and the initiatives recommended by the Climate Team.

IV. School Climate Initiatives

Intended Outcomes – District 196 will implement school climate initiatives in all schools to reduce disciplinary incidents and improve student engagement and inclusion.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes –As described in previous reports, the district has identified and is implementing various school climate initiatives. Initiatives are being refined and new initiatives developed, such as “Kindness Councils,” “Equity Action Partners,” staff

connection circles and mindful movement programming. Please refer to past reports for more detail on the various initiatives.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the twice annual reports by the schools regarding their school climate initiatives.

V. Professional Development for Staff

Intended Outcomes – District 196 offers professional development to staff in order to develop a workforce of culturally proficient staff attuned to the social/emotional learning of students.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – As reported in the past, the district has identified and offered many learning opportunities for staff to address topics related to cultural proficiency, school climate, student discipline and social/emotional learning. The district refers the department to past reports. This year, in addition to these offerings, individual schools have increased professional development at the building level to address educational equity and the Superintendent has instituted specific additional leadership and racial equity training for cabinet level administrators through Minnesota State University Mankato. This ongoing training for cabinet includes group sessions with Dr. Melissa Krull and a book study of Dr. Ibram Kendi’s book, *How to Be An Antiracist*.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the number of professional development offerings concerning cultural proficiency (including implicit bias) and student social/emotional learning.

VI. Consultation

Intended Outcomes – District 196 consults with the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center and the Center of Excellence to improve the district’s understanding of needed equity work.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – The district participates in web-based trainings with a cohort of school districts.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the number of consultations conducted.

VII. Staff Review of Policy

Intended Outcomes – District 196 requires all employees to review its anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies to improve staff understanding and awareness.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – As stated in past semi-annual reports, policy review is conducted before the start of the school year at all sites with all staff. This year, it included a review of the district’s anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, including the new Title IX sexual harassment grievance process and the anti-bullying training video. These policies and others are also reviewed with new hires and student teachers.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy is also measured by the fidelity of all buildings to the policy review requirement.

VIII. Family and Community Engagement

Intended Outcomes- District 196 provides numerous community engagement opportunities to improve community engagement and voice.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – As reported in the past, the district has scheduled and conducted various meetings and events for families and community and employs cultural family advocates to work with building sites to support family engagement and connection. In addition, individual schools conduct specific engagement opportunities throughout the year. Examples of these meetings and events are contained in previous semi-annual reports and they continue to be held.

As stated in the district’s last semi-annual report, the school district recently established a new committee titled the Equity Advisory Council, made up of parents, community members, students, staff, the superintendent and three school board members. The purpose of the new Equity Advisory Council is to ensure active community participation and engagement on matters of student equity and inclusion and to provide input to the board and administration to ensure equitable and culturally responsive school district practices and systems. Since the time of the last report, the Equity Advisory Council has been constituted and meetings have taken place and will continue.

Since the time of the last semi-annual report, District 196 has established and posted a new position for a Director of Equity and Inclusion. The person who is hired for this position will report directly to the Superintendent and sit on the Superintendent’s cabinet. The new Director of Equity and Inclusion will supervise the Coordinator of Equity and Inclusion. The district utilized the Equity Advisory Committee and many other district stakeholders to develop the qualifications and attributes of the position and a diverse group of stakeholders are also involved in the interview process. The district hopes to have its first Director of Equity and Inclusion in place in February of 2021.

District 196 has also recently entered into a contract with Paula Forbes of Forbes Solutions PLLC to develop and conduct a virtual student conference that will elevate student voice, capture the needs, and wants of students and inform district strategies aimed at creating an inclusive school culture and equitable education.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the frequency of key community engagement meetings held districtwide.

IX. Reimagine Minnesota

Intended Outcomes – District 196 has and will continue participate in available Reimagine Minnesota activities to enhance inter-district collaboration on the issue of equity.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes –Key district level administrators have reviewed the organization’s action plan and continue to attend available Reimagine Minnesota meetings.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data.

X. Use of School Resource Officers

Intended Outcomes – District 196 limits the role of school resource officers (SROs) in school discipline in order to minimize the criminalization of school misconduct.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – District 196 has ensured that limiting language concerning the role of SROs is contained in school district policy and in the SRO contracts between the district and the cities providing the SRO services. As stated in the last report, District 196 recently added language to its SRO contracts requiring the periodic examination of race and disability based disparities in school-related referral, citation and arrest data and acknowledging the mutual goals of promoting school safety, reducing school violence and enhancing the school climate and agreeing that these goals are best achieved through relationship-building, student support and intervention, clear and respectful communication, de-escalation techniques, conflict resolution and restorative practices. Since the time of the last report, all SRO contracts have been approved by the respective governing bodies. SRO services have been dramatically decreased as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the policy and contract language and by the number and demographics of students referred to law enforcement.

XI. Culturally Inclusive Curriculum

Intended Outcomes – District 196 reviews and improves curriculum to ensure the inclusivity of curriculum and academic offerings in District 196.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes –The Equity in Instructional Resources Guidance Team (EIR Team) was formed in January 2020 with the charge of *“To ensure racially, culturally, and linguistically inclusive instructional resources by identifying foundational values/beliefs, developing a common language/framework, and creating related rubrics, tools, and resources for use in the selection process for curriculum resources both at the district and building level.”* The 35-member team, made up of students, parents, community members, teachers, administrators, school board members, and Teaching and Learning Department staff, worked together through March 2020 to:

- Review relevant educational research and professional literature
- Identify values/beliefs related to equity in instructional resources
- Develop a common language and a working framework
- Review available resource selection equity rubrics
- Identify or develop a recommended equity in instructional resources rubric for District 196
- Identify or develop related resources and tools to guide the selection of texts/resources, and
- Establish a communication plan and means to organize and share related resources with stakeholders

As of February 2021, the EIR Team is entering the final phase of drafting the instructional resources rubric, adapted with permission from an absent narratives rubric created by the

Minnesota Humanities Center. After review by a teachers of color affinity group and other stakeholders, the draft rubric will be finalized in spring 2020 and a corresponding professional development and implementation plan will be developed by the team. The goal is for teacher teams and committees to begin utilizing the rubric to help guide conversations in summer 2021 and into the fall at both the district and building level.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy is also measured by the participation of students of color in AP classes and by overall participation in the AVID program described in past reports.

XII. Mental Health Support

Intended Outcomes – District 196 provides various mental health supports to meet the needs of students with mental health needs.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes – The district has many initiatives in place to address student mental health needs. Please see past reports and other sections of this report for previously reported, ongoing initiatives. As noted in the last report, in 2020-21 staffing for mental health support will increase by .5 FTE at the elementary level, 1.0 FTE at the middle level and 1.5 FTE at the high school level. The district has also added a Social Emotional Support TOSA who will be supporting all ongoing mental health initiatives and working to create alignment around social and emotional learning practices within our MTSS system. Other recent steps include the following:

District-level:

1. The district’s Student Support TOSA is participating in the MDE Comprehensive School Mental Health Community of Practice in partnership with the National Center for School Mental Health. This includes examining district-level practices across the 11 domains of comprehensive school mental health systems and testing quality improvement ideas.
2. The district’s Student Support TOSA is preparing proposed scope and sequence for new hires that provides professional development in the areas of mental health, suicide prevention, trauma-informed care and teacher wellbeing.
3. The district’s Student Support TOSA & identified leaders (i.e. school counselors, school nurses, school psychologist and school social workers) are reviewing suicide assessment tools and practices.
4. The District Implementation Team is partnering with Dr. Clay Cook from the University of Minnesota on comprehensive whole child practices that center equity and social-emotional learning.

Building-level:

1. The additions of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers have been essential in addressing student access and engagement issues as the district has navigated various learning models due to COVID-19. These staff have been deeply involved in building teams who are initiating follow-up with students who are not showing up for virtual learning or those who are present for virtual learning but are not engaged/completing work.
2. Cross-collaboration between school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers (& others) and school-linked mental health providers (Associated Clinic of Psychology and Life Development Resources) has ensured that students with mental health needs are referred for additional services/supports.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy is also measured by the number of buildings served by collocated mental health providers.

XIII. State Diversion Committee

Intended Outcomes – District 196 participates in the Diversion Committee to generate best practices to address disparities in student disciplinary outcomes.

Implementation Steps and Responsive Changes - The district has identified District 196 representatives to serve on the Diversion Committee and has participated in all meetings to date. Current representatives include District 196’s Student Support Specialist, Social and Emotional and Student Support TOSAs, Union President, Elementary and Secondary Administrators, School Safety and Climate Coordinator and Equity and Inclusion Coordinator. Further responsive changes are expected as the Committee develops best practice recommendations. The district representatives and the District 196 Student Support and School Climate team have been meeting to work on future revisions to language in the district’s Overview of Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook to reflect the shifting practice from a punitive approach to a restorative approach which has proven to be more equitable for the district’s black, brown and special education students.

Metrics – The effectiveness of all strategies will be measured, in part, by District 196’s suspension data. This strategy will also be measured by the number of diversion committee meetings attended by District 196 representatives.