April 14, 2022

City of Winooski Equity Audit Findings Report (Draft)

OPPORTUNITY CONSULTING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Winooski (City) and the Winooski School District (WSD) contracted with Opportunity Consulting to conduct an equity audit, explore areas where experiences in the City and WSD are inequitable, and find the opportunities to adopt equity-focused policies and practices to address these inequities.

Opportunity Consulting conducted the audit using its Outcome-Led Equity (OLE) approach that begins with reviewing outcomes of inequality, then explores their potential drivers, and finally identifies the policies and practices that may contribute to them. The OLE approach centers on grounding the analysis in outcomes, connecting these outcomes to lived experiences through interviews and focus groups, and only then connecting these lived experiences and outcomes with potential policies and practices at the city or school district levels. In addition, the findings are informed by research about the ways in which city life and school experiences are connected and influence one another (for example O'Day and Smith, 2016; Mizrav 2021). This equity audit of the City and WSD identifies connections and ways in which the City and WSD can work together to improve the lives of all residents in the City, whether children or adults.

To conduct this audit, we collected data from the City and WSD regarding student outcomes, discipline in WSD, climate and culture, law enforcement in the City, and voting in the City, as well as other data. Utilizing these data collections, we visualized inequality in the City and WSD. Then, we conducted focus groups and interviews to identify the drivers of this inequality. Finally, themes of inequitable outcomes and their drivers were developed and were outlined in this report. This report also includes recommendations to the City and WSD.

This report outlines the findings in the following seven chapters:

- Chapter 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Winooski. This chapter introduces and focuses on outcomes rather than their drivers. It describes findings related to the City's success in creating an environment that is significantly more diverse than the state of Vermont or the Burlington region. At the same time, the City and WSD struggle with equity and inclusion. Examples are segregation in neighborhoods in the City (resulting in a majority of residents not being exposed to the diversity of the City); Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and New American

residents that have a vastly more challenging experience of living in the City than their White neighbors; and BIPOC students that generally score lower than as their peers while also reporting a more challenging learning environment.

- Chapter 2: Promising Community Engagement and Inclusion Practices. This chapter addresses successes in community engagement practices in the City that are mostly led by the WSD. Those community practices include using community liaisons that play a dramatic role in the WSD's ability to engage with New American families according to educators and parents. Those practices also include the use of WSD as a community hub and the role that WSD plays in city life.
- Chapter 3: Inequities in School Discipline and Law Enforcement. This chapter focuses on the disproportionate use of disciplinary and law enforcement tools against BIPOC residents and students in the City. This includes disproportionality in disciplinary incidents in WSD coupled with reports from students and parents regarding feelings of differential treatment of BIPOC students. In addition, disproportionate traffic stops for Black residents of the City have been identified.
- Chapter 4: Lack of Diversity in the City and WSD Workforce. This chapter discusses a disproportionally White workforce in the City and WSD. This chapter also discusses some of the drivers for this outcome at the City level.
- Chapter 5: Inequitable Resource Distribution. This chapter focuses on how the City and WSD prioritize where to invest resources. It also questions whether investments in equity in the City and WSD are sufficiently prioritized. One issue discussed in this chapter is the lower prioritization of student transportation, despite its disproportionate impact on BIPOC students and the effect this may have on their schooling experiences.
- Chapter 6: The Silencing of BIPOC Voices and Lack of Representation. This chapter describes gaps in BIPOC students' representation in curriculum, particularly in reading, and their experiences with feeling they do not have a voice in their schools' decision-making processes. Similar to the experiences in WSD, this chapter outlines the ways in which the City created barriers for BIPOC residents to participate in civic life, and specifically, in voting and getting elected for different public positions.
- Chapter 7: Inequities in Housing Policy and Practice. This chapter explains how the approach that the City has taken to ensure the supply of affordable housing and adequate living conditions for tenants has profoundly impacted the lives of residents and students.

Following the findings, this report includes the following recommendations to the City and WSD.

1. Use effective, early reading strategies with high-quality instructional materials for multilingual learners.
2. Implement strategies to reduce instances of and inequities in exclusionary school discipline.
3. Afford students regular and structured opportunities to provide input to their education.
4. Develop a strategy to diversify and localize the educator workforce.

We included the following recommendations for the City:

1. Develop affordable housing through research and action planning.
2. Educate and train landlords and renters.
3. Change advertising and recruitment practices to those that effectively create a more diverse workforce.
4. Develop strategies to increase civic participation among BIPOC residents.

We also included the following joint recommendations for the City and WSD:

1. Strengthen WSD-City collaboration and include the WSD superintendent as a member of the City leadership team.
2. Expand the community liaisons program from WSD to the City.
3. Provide school transportation by increasing drivers' pay.

INTRODUCTION

Inequality in life outcomes in the United States is significantly rising. Researchers agree that academic and racial inequality leads to unequal outcomes, including voting, health, and other disparities (Smeeding, 2005).

Research shows this gap is not a result of natural differences in talent or ability, but rather a result of life experiences. For example, research documents educational gaps that begin to develop at age 1, suggesting that nurture rather than nature is behind the gaps. In addition, Black-White achievement gaps closed substantially between 1970 and 2000, before widening again. Thus, gaps are a product of life experiences affected by systemic policies and practices (Mizrav, 2021). O'Day and Smith (2016) explain that race or income-based gaps are rooted in factors such as parental investment in their children's education, whereas gaps between low- and high-income parents are measured at $8,000 annually. This includes external factors not correlated in any way with talent and natural ability. For example, access to preschool is known to be critical for future life outcomes and often is denied to parents without the means to pay tuition to enroll their children in preschool. Additionally, it is broadly agreed upon that the COVID-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated these gaps and worsened existing inequities. Later in life, continued discrimination in public policy further exacerbates these gaps. For example, inequity in mortgage lending has led to inequality in housing outcomes for adults (Apgar & Calder, 2005).

A Combined City and WSD Auditing Approach

With this understanding that life experiences, often shaped by policies and practices, can have a significant impact on widening or shrinking gaps between people's opportunities and outcomes, the City and WSD contracted Opportunity Consulting to conduct an equity audit.

In this report, we present a joint view that connects residents' experiences in the City with students' experiences in school. This opportunity for a joint perspective allows for identifying the linkages between drivers of inequality that happen in the streets of the City or in the hallways of its schools. This joint perspective also identifies joint root causes that may have been impossible to observe using a narrower focus on the City or schools only. Throughout this report, we describe

how experiences shaped by policies determined in city hall can impact student outcomes, and how the practices of WSD may impact their lives outside of the school.

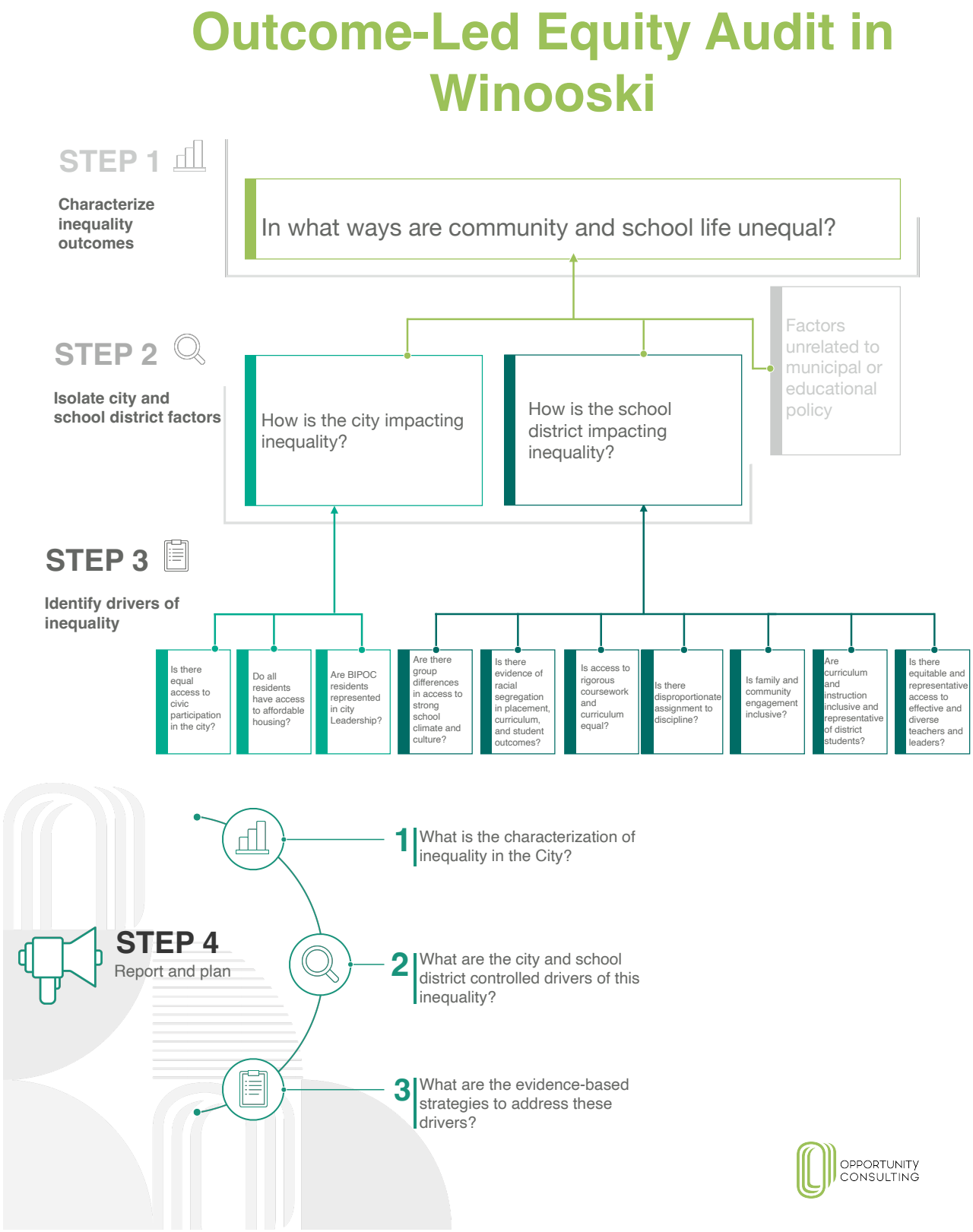
METHODOLOGY

Opportunity Consulting conducted the audit using the OLE framework outlined in Exhibit 1. The OLE audit began by reviewing and characterizing the inequality in the City and WSD before isolating the potential drivers causing the inequalities. Rather than focusing on city and school policies, the audit reviewed actual inequality outcomes before explaining their causes, which makes for a more focused process that will result in real change.

The review followed three steps. The first step focused on characterizing inequality in the City and WSD by asking in what ways are residents' outcomes inequitable and who is impacted by inequality in the City. Then, we conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses that focused on 10 guiding questions based on research, which may identify drivers of inequality in the City. The questions are outlined in Exhibit 1.

Utilizing interviews, focus groups, and administrative data from the City and WSD, we then sought to identify which potential drivers may apply to the City and WSD. To do that, our team synthesized quantitative data shared by the City pertaining to these guiding questions. We used the findings from the analysis to guide our interviews and focus groups with city officials, employees, residents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders. These focus group participants were able to reflect on the findings, corroborate them, and contribute additional potential drivers of inequality that were not identified using the administrative data. The final step of the process focused on tying the characterization of the inequalities—the identified drivers and their potential reasons—to existing policies and practices that could be amended or new strategies that could be adopted. This component of the audit is discussed in the Recommendations section.

Exhibit 1: The Outcome-Led Equity Audit Process



Data Collection

Administrative Data

We collected administrative data from the City and WSD to answer the audit guiding questions. The data included the following:

A. Data from the City, including data about:
   1. Demographics in different neighborhoods of the City
   2. Police traffic stops
   3. Demographics of city employees
   4. Pay of city employees
   5. Demographics of elected officials and people serving in city commissions

B. Data from WSD, including data about:
   1. Student demographics
   2. Student performance in state and local assessments
   3. Disciplinary incidents in WSD
   4. Climate and culture student surveys

Interviews and Focus Groups

To supplement the quantitative data, we conducted interviews with 11 members (current and former) of the City leadership. In addition, we facilitated focus groups of stakeholders to collect data about areas for which quantitative data was unavailable to complement existing data and to deepen the understanding of the underlying root causes of gaps. The following interviews and focus groups were conducted:

- Two focus groups with WSD students
- Three focus groups with the City residents and parents
- Two focus groups with teachers in WSD and one focus group with BIPOC teachers only
- One focus group with WSD leadership
- One focus group with BIPOC city employees

The focus groups were designed to understand the experiences of those who are potentially underserved. As a result, parent and city employee focus groups focused specifically on BIPOC and New Americans in the City. Parent groups were conducted with the assistance of interpreters to minimize language barriers to participation.

Document and Literature Review

Opportunity Consulting reviewed documents related to policies and practices adopted by the City to reflect on existing practices that could be tied to the findings. Opportunity Consulting conducted a separate literature review to identify best practices related to the findings the City could consider adopting.

FINDINGS

CHAPTER 1: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN WINOOSKI

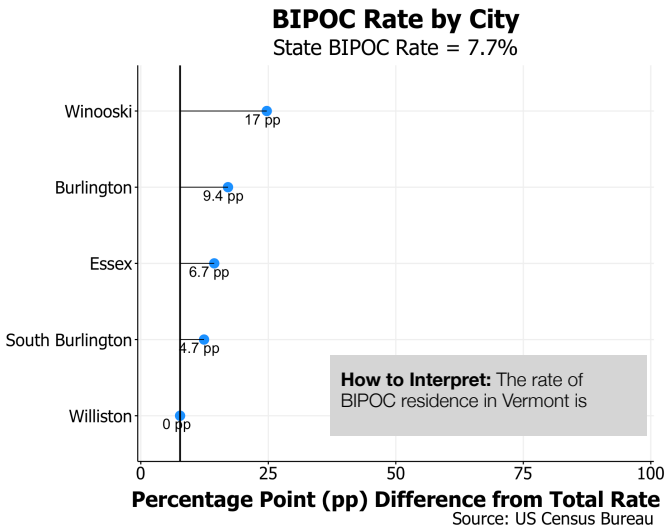
The study begins with an equity-focused review of diversity and equity outcomes for the City and WSD that are explained by findings in subsequent chapters. This is the first component in the review that is meant to characterize the magnitude of the gaps in the City and WSD and to identify which groups are most impacted by them. Other components of the study are used to explain these outcomes. This analysis seeks to demonstrate clearly who is experiencing inequality in the City and schools.

Finding 1.A

The City and WSD are a model for diversity but are challenged with equity and inclusion.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are terms that are often combined and used interchangeably, and the acronym DEI is common for referring to equity-related work in general. But the findings in the City and WSD point to the important distinction between these three elements. Diversity is the actual presence of differences in race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, and other characteristics. Equity is focused on promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Inclusion is about ensuring everyone is able to participate fully in the decision-making processes and development opportunities within an organization or group (eXtension Foundation, 2022).

Exhibit 2: BIPOC Residents Rate in Burlington Region

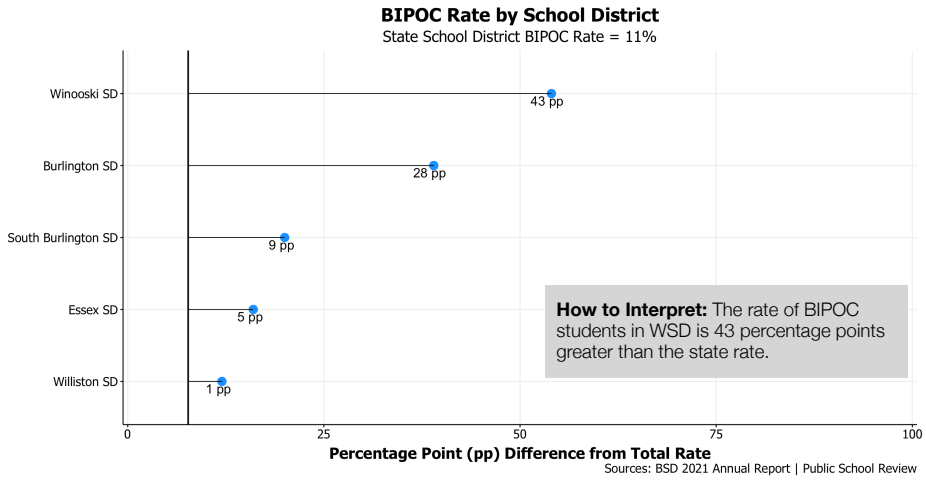


When looking at diversity, we find the City and WSD were successful in creating diverse city and school environments compared to the state of Vermont. Winooski is the most diverse city in the state of Vermont with BIPOC residents making up nearly a quarter of the City's population compared to the statewide average of 7.7% (see Exhibit 2). The City

certainly deserves recognition for its example within Vermont as a place that has increased citywide diversity successfully, especially regarding its openness with refugee resettlement.

Like the City, WSD is also more diverse than its neighboring districts. Exhibit 3 demonstrates how the demographics of WSD are much more similar to the diversity of the country than to the more racially homogeneous state of Vermont.

Exhibit 3: BIPOC School District Rate in Burlington Region

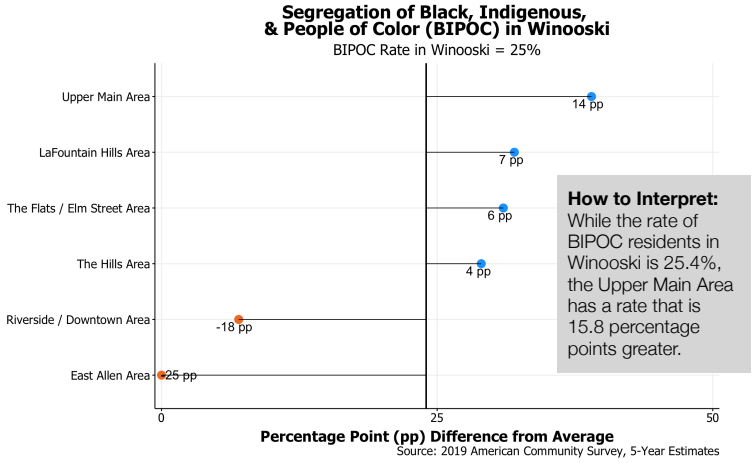


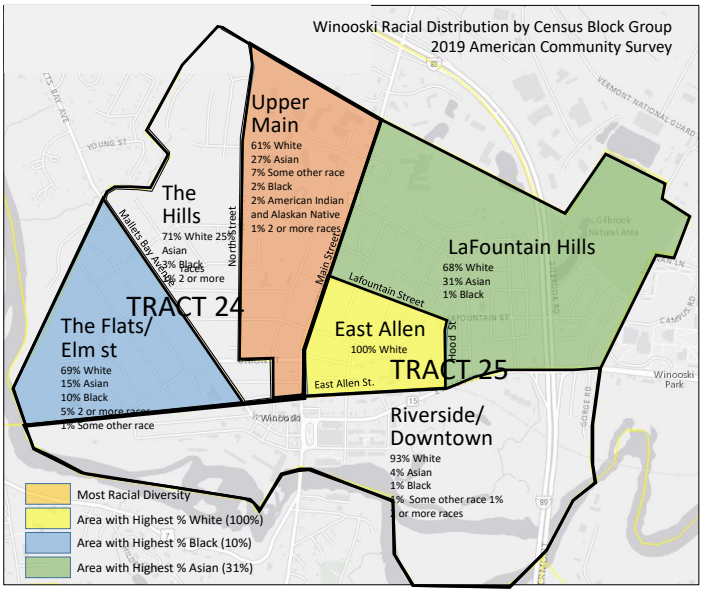
However, when we examine equity and inclusion, the picture looks different. From our conversations with the City and WSD employees, BIPOC residents, and parents or students of the WSD, the perspectives shared with us demonstrated how having a diverse city, on its own, is not sufficient to create an equitable and inclusive community. In general, the BIPOC residents we spoke to emphasized how warm and welcoming the residents of the City have been to them, and that Winooski's diversity relative to the rest of Vermont contributes to a feeling of acceptance and comfort. For instance, one person remarked that they "feel at home a little bit more in Winooski than anywhere else in Vermont, because literally, I can see people that look like me … we're in the grocery store, I'm walking down the street, and you see another Black or Brown person and you're like, there's the nod that happens. It's an instant connection that happens in Winooski." Another BIPOC resident and small business owner stated that "[at my business,] feedback from the community this year felt really comfortable. I was blown away by how nice everyone was. I didn't have one angry customer this year. It was a beautiful experience."

However, surface-level congeniality conceals important differences in experiences and perceptions between the City's White and BIPOC residents. We heard repeatedly from BIPOC residents that while the City is diverse by Vermont standards, it is not diverse by national metrics,

and this does not go unnoticed. One resident remarked that “I do feel very welcomed in Winooski, but I do feel like, I mean you do count how many people are in the room with you, always, no matter what. And you're always noticing who is with you.” The result is siloed communities. Without explicit effort to create a community that is inclusive of individuals from all backgrounds and perspectives, the community that results reflects a majoritarian perspective. As one resident observed, “the feeling of community exists in Winooski, but I think it exists in pockets. There are communities within communities in Winooski.” These feelings are reinforced by the demographic segregation of the City.

Exhibit 4: Neighborhood Segregation in Winooski



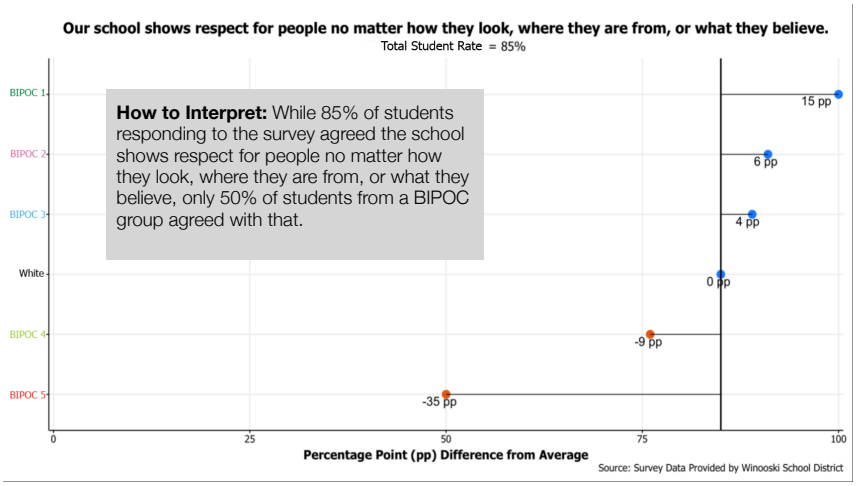


As shown in Exhibit 4, BIPOC residents are much more likely to live in the Upper Main and Elm/Flats neighborhoods, and they are very underrepresented in the Downtown and East Allen areas. Residential segregation serves to segment community life, which hurts the City’s efforts to foster public life that is equitable and inclusive.

We identified similar trends in WSD. Despite the diversity of the student body, BIPOC students in focus groups have shared more challenging experiences than their White peers on issues, such as discipline, climate and culture, and other topics. In a survey WSD gave to students, a disproportionally lower number of BIPOC students shared how they feel the school shows

respect for people "no matter how they look, where they are from, or what they believe" (Exhibit 5).[1]

Exhibit 5. Differences in Survey Responses on Respect for Students



De facto exclusion from community life, even if unintended, also reduces BIPOC residents' perspectives and voices in decision-making that could improve the community's inclusivity. One resident observed that "we [BIPOC residents] are relatively voiceless. I would say that's true for all of us in terms of the Winooski community. We are largely voiceless, whether it's either by the absence of the vote [or] whether it is culture language. But I do find the absence of the Black American perspective here really peculiar." The BIPOC community's voicelessness in Winooski prevents them from developing a relationship with the City, such that "they [city hall] might hear about [BIPOC and New American] residents, but I don't think they truly know them that well and how diverse they are and how [many] different types of ideas that they have and they hold…and I don't think the City hears it enough."

Finding 1.B

BIPOC student groups are consistently underperforming across subjects and grade levels.

City
School

Exhibit 6 visualizes differences in proficiency across different groups in WSD. The charts depict a consistent trend of inequality, where BIPOC students are underperforming compared to White students, and compared to the average proficiency for WSD. For example, 22% of WSD students

[1] Note: Survey conducted in 2020 with a sample of 168 student participants. Some of the racial and ethnic groups are extremely small in number, therefore limiting the ability to use the responses to make generalizable inferences. To protect student privacy, all BIPOC groups are not named.

are proficient in English language arts (ELA); however, the rate is 15 percentage points lower (7%) for one of the BIPOC groups. In mathematics, 13% of WSD students are proficient; however, that rate is only 2% for one of the BIPOC groups.

In addition, Exhibit 7 attempts to identify whether gaps are primarily a result of racial or income inequality or a combination of the two. The charts suggest that differences in income are consistently significant for White students, but not for others. For other groups, income either does not result in any variation in performance or it results in a small variation that is not significant. In other words, BIPOC students in the City are predicted to perform lower regardless of their income. As a result, it is our assumption that race is a significant root cause in the inequitable results observed in the City and poverty alone is insufficient in explaining these results.

Exhibit 6. Gaps in ELA and Math Proficiency

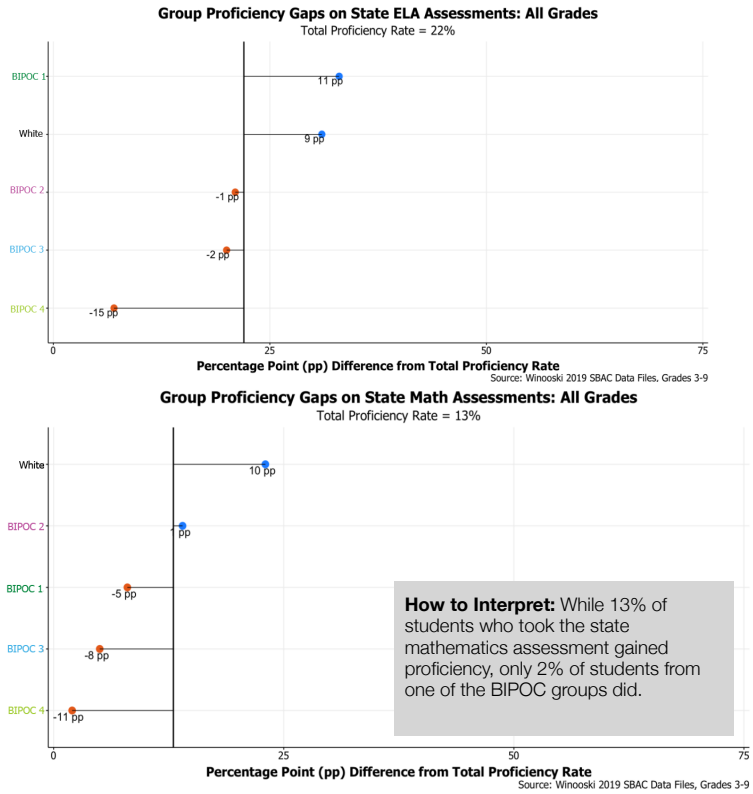
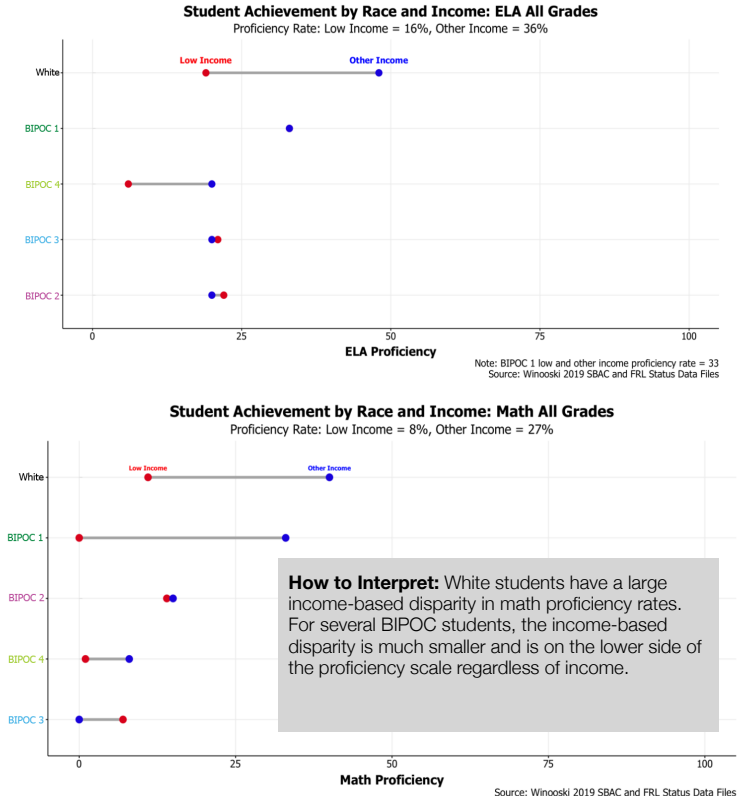


Exhibit 7. Student Achievement Gaps by Race and Income



Are the Results "Statistically Significant?"

An equity audit of this type naturally and deliberately focuses on groups that are in minority, often small in size and not represented by the majoritarian trend. WSD is a particularly small school district, and specific racial groups within WSD represent population size that is unlikely to result in inferences that statisticians may deem as "statistically significant." Nevertheless, Opportunity Consulting recommends treating the gaps and differences among the groups reported here with seriousness and intent. We suggest considering the following:

1. The purpose of this study is not to use the results from WSD to make generalizations regarding higher-level trends (which is when and why statistical significance is examined), but rather to describe inequality in the district.

2. "Statistical significance" is a concept that represents an arguably arbitrary cutoff that some academic journals are moving away from. Statistical significance usually means 90% or 95% of the time we would measure using this group of students the results would be consistent. As others have argued (McShane, 2019), establishing 80% or 70% level of certainty does not make the findings unimportant. We should know the caveats to the study and fill the blanks with other sources of data, as we do on this report.

3. Consider that it is not the fault of Black, Latino/a, Native Americans, and other groups that are in minority in WSD that they are, in fact, the minority groups. Even though their small number makes it so almost no inference that includes them would ever be "statistically significant," they deserve our full attention. Gaps visualized here that are consistent across grade levels and subjects suggest they are likely to be real and should not be ignored.

CHAPTER 2: PROMISING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION PRACTICES

Finding 2.A

The WSD is the heart of the Winooski community and serves as a successful community engagement hub.

Across the country, the charter school model distributes students across several buildings independent from school district lines (Mizrav, 2021). While these approaches offer more choices and opportunities for some students, there also may be negative implications, such as the detachment of schools from their communities, as was observed in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Perry, 2017). But recently, there has been growth in research and practice in models that strengthen the connection between schools and communities. For example, California recently invested $3 Billion in community-based schools that become a neighborhood hub for parents (Maier & Niebuhr, 2021).

We found a community-based model already exists in the City. The community strength that WSD has developed was evident in all focus group conversations. Prior to COVID-19, it was noted that the community meetings held at the school allowed students and families to share their experiences safely and securely. The multilingual liaisons are also a critical component of the strength of the Winooski community.

Many students talked about how proud they were to be from the City and how much they enjoyed the diverse environment at the school where they have the opportunity to meet and learn from other students from all over the world. The sense of community held strong, even across different age groups, with high schoolers joining middle schoolers at sit-in protests to support them.

Students said they felt they had adults in the school they knew they could talk to about problems they were having and believed their teachers cared about them. In addition, parents mentioned many teachers check up on their students regularly. While COVID-19 and the lack of in-person interaction it caused made maintaining a sense of community difficult, it also facilitated more regular (albeit digital) communication between some teachers and parents, which allowed them to build even stronger relationships in some cases.

Finally, we found that WSD plays a significant role in acclimating New Americans to the City. New American parents with children at school have more engagement with other parents who are American-born. Their children sometimes serve as interpreters to their parents. In addition, the school is used to disseminate communication about important issues that are sometimes unrelated to education, such as voting information. While this may create a gap for residents who do not have children in WSD, this is a very positive feature of WSD that should be further utilized to integrate and promote inclusion in the City.

Finding 2.B

The school's use of community liaisons is a national best practice for family and community engagement.

City
School

Teachers, administrators, and New American families all noted the important role of multilingual liaisons inside and outside of the school, describing how many of them go above and beyond to support families and help them integrate into the community. In focus groups, multilingual liaisons were credited with informing parents of critical information about students, making sure parents were aware of and attended meetings, and helping parents navigate daily life outside of school, such as taxes and other paperwork. In a focus group, parents shared how liaisons helped acclimate them to the community upon their arrival and kept them informed about their children's behavior at school. Parents explained when they first came to the country, the school helped them with housing supplies, setting up internet, and doing paperwork. They would bring the paperwork to the liaisons and the liaisons would do it for them. If their students did very well, the liaisons would let them know the students did good work. Likewise, if the students did something wrong, the liaisons would tell them what their students did and say, "Let's work together so they don't do that again."

> *"I do think that most teachers really respect liaisons. …I think as they've become, it seems more and more supported, teachers have felt more confidence seeking out their perspectives and collaboration. … the new people that we keep hiring, they are such go-getters. They want to not just translate. They want to mentor, support in the classroom, and be a resource to teachers to learn and understand."* (WSD Leader)

Outside of school, multilingual liaisons support families in a number of ways. District leadership also shared an example of a program taught by one of the school's multilingual liaisons that was created to help New American students feel safe and supported: "We're going to be starting a skills group that's taught by one of our multilingual liaisons and a clinician from Connecting Cultures with support from ALB (a group of high school boys who are Swahili speaking). …it's really about building a safe place where they feel comfortable learning and talking about living within two cultures, adapting to the U.S., and [being] able to ask their questions. …[It's] really just

building skills around resiliency to improve mental health over time. … [One of] the other components of that [is] the ALB works a lot with our families here, our multilingual families. They have case workers they're working with… also, USCRI (the refugee resettlement program) provides a lot of support to families when they first arrive. So those are resources that some multilingual, resettled families really access in order to just adapt to living in the U.S."

In addition to helping families understand and trust the educational context of a new home country, the liaisons also help school staff better understand New American families. One member of WSD leadership shared, "I really look at the liaisons as the new leaders. So, families call them for all kinds of different things, and they really help us understand our student's cultures better, family by family… . I do sometimes feel like we have such a rich understanding of our students sometimes, more so than some of our English-speaking students, because we have that [liaisons]." Moving toward equity and preventing bias begins with understanding. Not only understanding the radicalized identities of New American families or their cultural backgrounds, but also understanding that each family is unique. For these reasons, multilingual liaisons are a critical component in helping build cultural understanding.

Multilingual liaisons were noted to be so effective at engaging New American families that they were actually more represented at school meetings relative to other parent groups. A member of the WSD leadership shared: "We have noticed that at any parent engagement opportunities that we tend to have more multilingual families than White families come. …that's because liaisons do personalized phone calls, and if [a liaison] calls you and tells you to come to school for a meeting, you're coming. You're just not going to say no to him. If he says it's important, it must be. …we don't do that for our English-speaking families."

Liaisons not only ensure parents attend school-wide meetings and parent-teacher conferences, but also attend these meetings as well to interpret, help build trust between parents and school staff, and build trust and understanding of the American educational system. A WSD teacher shared: "[Multilingual liaisons are] totally vital to our institution being what it is… I think their hard work around conferences means that we generally have [a] great turnout and that those conferences do go a long way to building strong home-school connections for sure."

One liaison shared the way they support families in understanding the differences between the educational system here and in their home countries. The liaison explained that voicing criticisms or concerns are not welcomed where they are from, so they work to explain to families that the context is different here and engaging with the school, even if it is to voice concerns, is welcomed. “We make them understand about how people are welcomed in this country. Our people are really scared to go to school, very scared to go to the City, because they fear the police. … [in our country] if you're not happy with school, you cannot talk with the school in our area [country]. If you go and talk to the school, the police will take you. So, all of these things we are doing so that people are comfortable in order to go to school and provide the stable bond with the community.”

Liaisons also help communicate with families about what educational options look like after graduation. One teacher shared how she was met with distrust and some skepticism from parents when trying to recommend community college as an option, but the message was received much more positively when it came from a liaison. "The right person delivering the same message that I've delivered to all of them, but they could hear it differently when it was said from the people that they trust from their community. …that is an important bridge for a lot of messages that we need to develop with the community." Because liaisons are often from the same background as the families they work with it helps establish trust between the liaisons and the families. In turn, it also helps build trust and build the relationship between the families, the school district and the greater Winooski community.

CHAPTER 3: INEQUITIES IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

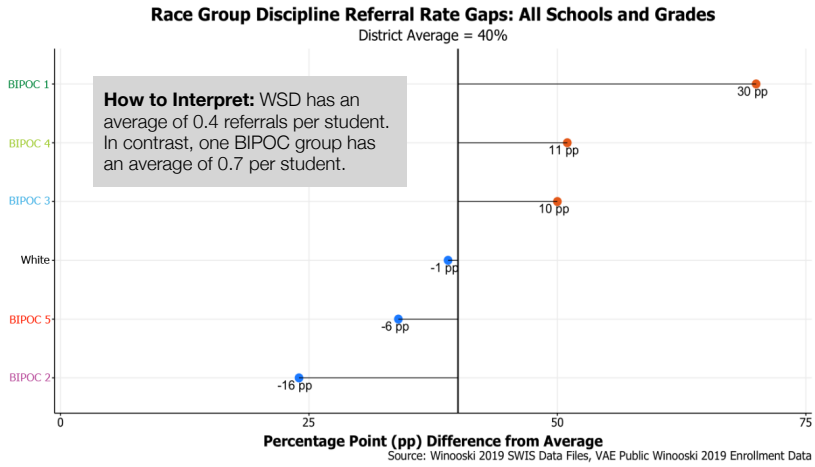
Finding 3.A

BIPOC youth and adults are disciplined at school and pulled over on the street at higher rates than their White peers.

Across the country, BIPOC students are experiencing disproportionate disciplinary action against them in schools, and BIPOC adults experience inequitable law enforcement treatment (Pierson et. al., 2020; Smolkowski, 2016). Exhibit 8 shows the differences in disciplinary referrals by race at all grade levels. It shows WSD’s overall rate of disciplinary incidents of 40% (calculated as incidents

divided by number of students) against the rate for each racial group. This visualization shows that Black, Latino/a, and multiracial students are much more likely to receive disciplinary referrals relative to their peers. In addition, these students are much more likely to receive disciplinary referrals despite making up a much smaller percentage of the school population.

Exhibit 8. Disparities in Disciplinary Incidents in WSD

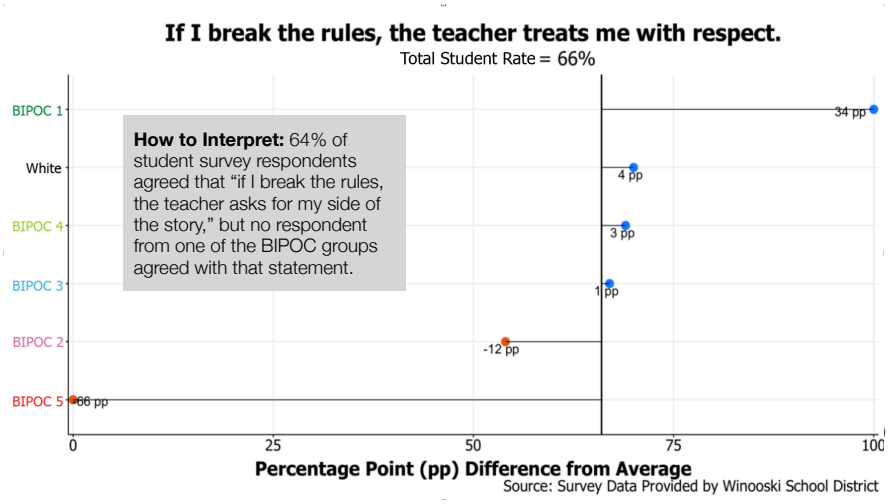


In focus groups with administrators and teachers, there was acknowledgement and recognition of this issue. Teachers in focus groups discussed multiple examples where they had observed or heard about students of different races receiving different levels of disciplinary response for the same behavior, such as vaping. "I can think of a handful of times where a student has done, like you said, something that someone else did and that punishment has been randomly severe in a way that wasn't understandable to me. So, I'm sure it wasn't understandable to the student." This is consistent with national research on disproportionate discipline, which finds that race-based differences in disciplinary referrals occur even after controlling for behavior (Smolkowski, 2016).

Teachers and administrators suggested WSD needed more consistent disciplinary policies, and the lack of a clear policy might be one of the factors driving racial gaps in disciplinary referrals. In focus group discussions, students also agreed the reason for disciplinary referrals was not always clear. Exhibit 9 also shows differences among students along racial lines with regard to how teachers treat them if they misbehave. Lower rates of BIPOC students agreed if they broke the rules, the teacher treated them with respect or the teacher asked for their side of the story. Student responses also varied along similar demographic lines when asked if they agreed with the statement, "If I cause harm, I am given an opportunity to understand the harm." BIPOC student groups were least likely to agree to that statement.

When asked about the cause of the disciplinary gap, some administrators attributed this to the infraction of absenteeism and tardiness. Higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness in non-White student populations were attributed to cultural differences (such as differing relationships with the concept of time) and out-of-school factors (such as pre-existing trauma) that might impact a student's ability to regularly attend school. While cultural responsiveness is important, and the administration acknowledges this, New American students are not a homogenous group; therefore, cultural differences might not be an appropriate explanation in this case. In focus groups with parents and students, they both noted the biggest challenge to getting to school on time and regularly was the lack of consistent transportation (transportation is discussed in depth in Chapter 5).

Exhibit 9. Differences in Survey Responses on Asking Students' Side of the Story



WSD leadership and teachers also discussed that some of the differences in discipline observed might be attributed to disruptive behaviors caused by students with disabilities. District leadership discussed how the students are more likely to be students of color, because of the population of students who are refugees and have experienced high incidence of trauma and poverty before entering the school. National research finds that students of color and multilingual students are identified with disabilities at much higher rates than their White peers and are identified with disabilities that are the most subjective (i.e. things like "emotional disturbance" which is subjective versus visual impairment which is not) and least likely to be associated with or caused by past traumatic experience or poverty (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). Administrators at WSD specifically referred to a high number of New American students being referred to special education for emotional disturbance and autism.

Disproportionality in Discipline and Special Education Disparities

Some teachers remarked that, until recently, they were "not allowed" to refer multilingual students to special education services. Teachers cited that part of the reason they were given the rule was that it may be difficult to differentiate between students who cannot speak English and those who have difficulty learning for other reasons. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with limited English proficiency that may be in need of services must be referred and tested in their native language or provided interpretation services. This is federal and state law. "All evaluations and assessments of a child and family must be conducted in the native language of the child and family members being assessed, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so" (2360.5.4 Evaluation of the Child and Assessment of the Child and Family, Section c4 Vermont Agency of Education). Providing special education testing in multiple languages can be a logistically challenging and an expensive endeavor, but it is necessary to ensure the success of multilingual students with disabilities.

WSD leadership acknowledged that distinguishing if a student has a true disability or simply lack English proficiency is a complex process, and the district is working to support the teaching staff in the process. Nationally, students of color and multilingual students are over referred to special education services, "the term 'significant disproportionality' is used to describe the widespread trend of students of certain racial and ethnic groups being identified for special education, placed in more restrictive educational settings, and disciplined at markedly higher rates than their peers" (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). When students of color and multilingual students are referred to special education, they tend to be placed in the most restrictive settings and are kept in these settings or in services for longer than their White and native English-speaking peers. In addition, their academic and behavioral outcomes are often worse after entering these settings than before they entered (Klingner & Harry, 2006). In multiple matched sample studies, research shows students of color are regularly assigned to more restrictive services than their White peers, and other studies have shown that certain subgroups of students of color actually leave special education with lower IQs than when they entered (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988).

Teachers also noted that even referring students without language needs to special education often required burdensome amounts of paperwork. There may be provisions in Vermont Act 230 that assist with the reduction of some of this paperwork. Whether or not these provisions are

already being utilized, it is clear that teachers need more resources and support to better serve students with disabilities, particularly those that are multilingual. These resources and supports must be implemented thoughtfully, so the types of disability supports provided to students do not further exacerbate equity gaps or cause trauma.

In a focus group, one teacher described a way in which racial differences in discipline are connected to disability identification. The teacher described a White student with behavioral problems who was frequently disruptive in class. The student's parents came to meet with the school to help develop a 504 plan. As part of the plan, it was determined that when the student needed a break or was at risk of acting out in ways that might disrupt other students, he should be given a pass to go to the library and spend some time there. The student was supposed to self-monitor and ask the teacher for the pass when needed, but in reality the teacher reported the student would often be disruptive on multiple occasions before she had to then suggest to him that he make use of his pass. The teacher noted that the same type of behaviors, if committed by a student without this type of accommodation, would certainly lead to a disciplinary referral. This differential treatment is referred to as enabling and debilitating practices based on race that is "ignoring White children when they act out, while punishing Black children for the same behavior" (Stanford University, 2020) and is a major contributor to equity gaps in the classroom.

The national research on special education referrals, the focus group findings regarding the lack of bussing, and the anecdotes from WSD about differential treatment for bad behavior all suggest it is not BIPOC students with disabilities or students with past trauma that are the cause of the problem, but rather the accommodations and resources available to students that may differ by race or based on the native English proficiency of the students or their families.

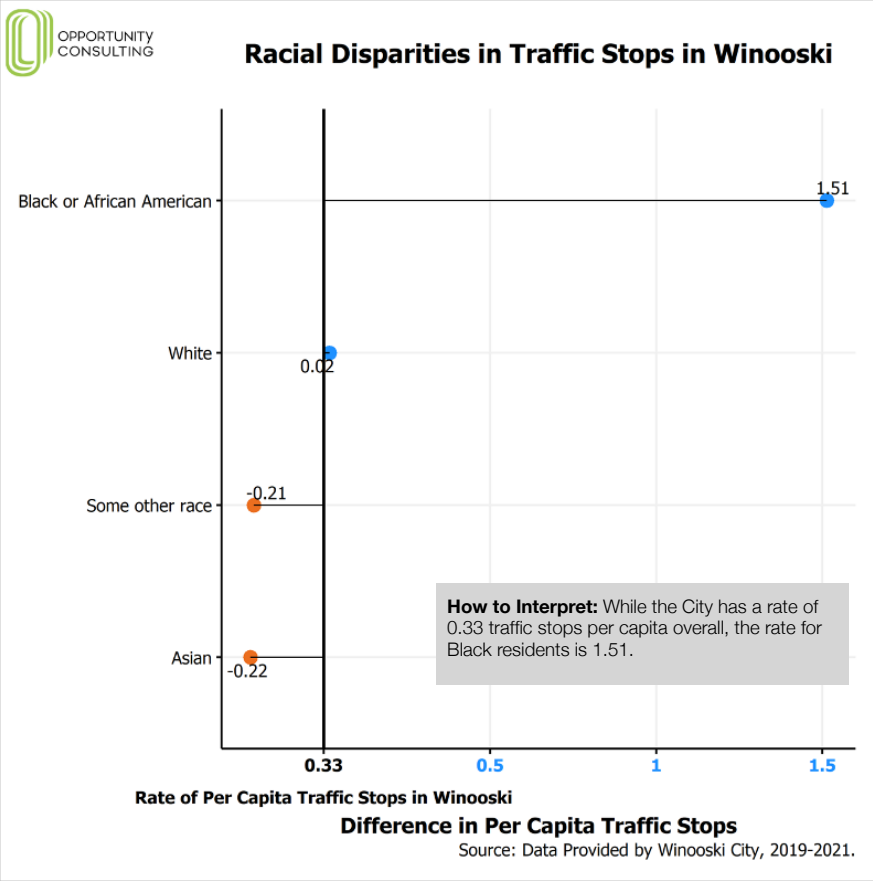
Connection to Disparities in Traffic Stops

When referred to disciplinary action, students of color are more likely to be recommended for exclusionary discipline than their White peers (such as suspension or expulsion). This type of treatment was discussed at WSD in the context of vaping. Within a period of a few months two different students were caught vaping: one was suspended and the other was not. "Well, we had a student suspended this week (three days) … a few students did the same thing a few months earlier and didn't get suspended at all, [instead they] got sent home." How students are treated

and punished in schools begins to create a narrative about them to themselves and to the community. Exclusionary discipline sends students the message that they are not welcome, and begins the construction of a criminal identity that can have life long impacts. Differential and exclusionary treatment at school effectively "isolates [Black] youth from participating in the life of the classroom" (Annamma, 2020).

This isolation is mirrored by the isolation that New American and other BIPOC adults in the City face in their isolation from participation in many aspects of public life. This isolation begins in school and can have devastating and long-term effects, leading to a "punishment mindset" that can further equity gaps, cause learners to become disengaged, and cause a cycle where students act out and fall further behind academically. Students experiencing exclusionary discipline are much more likely to drop out of school and experience incarceration later in life (Annamma, 2020). This process in BIPOC students in WSD creates a stereotype that lasts beyond their tenure as students.

Exhibit 10. Disparities in Traffic Stops in Winooski



As they are more likely to be disciplined in schools, national data shows that BIPOC residents are likely to have their first interactions with police at a young age and develop a reputation as troublesome or lawbreakers, which can inform authorities' attitudes toward these individuals later in life. BIPOC individuals continue to have a greater number of encounters with law enforcement than their White peers later in life. Exhibit 10 shows that Black residents are stopped at exponentially higher

rates than residents of other backgrounds by police for routine traffic stops. Such disparities cannot be explained by random chance; and therefore, merit a discussion on systemic root causes that could drive them.

The diversification of the City workforce is encouraging development that recently led a successful process of intentionally and strategically hiring officers from diverse backgrounds. This could potentially help in improving these reported disparities.

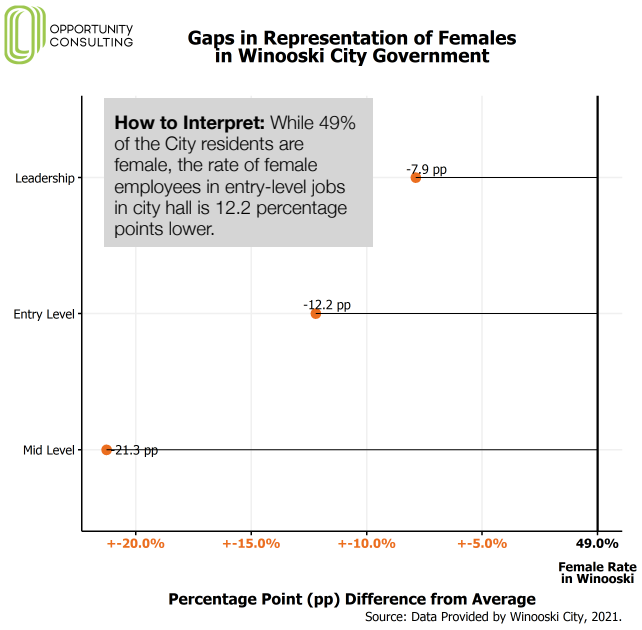
CHAPTER 4: LACK OF DIVERSITY IN THE CITY AND WSD WORKFORCE

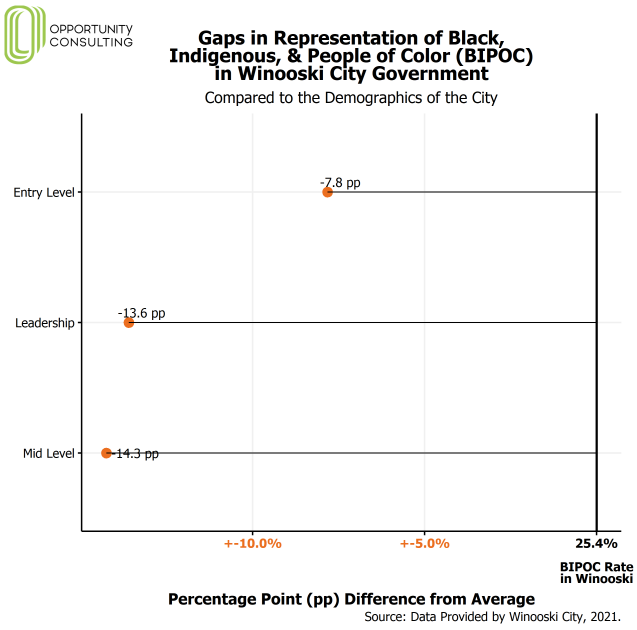
Finding 4.A **Winooski's approach to recruitment, promotion, and retention prevent the City's workforce from diversifying.**

City

Winooski's city workforce is overwhelmingly White and male. Across nearly all the City's departments, female and BIPOC residents are significantly underrepresented (see Exhibit 11). We discussed the diversity of the City workforce through interviews with city leadership and focus groups with BIPOC residents. In general, everyone we spoke with agreed the lack of diversity within the City workforce is an issue, and one the City should actively address. However, the differences arose when we asked about the underlying factors driving this inequality.

Exhibit 11. Racial and Gender Disparities in City Government





Recruitment Strategies Do Not Target BIPOC Applicants

All respondents agreed a significant factor is the City's inability to attract and recruit female and BIPOC applicants. However, not everyone within the City's workforce agrees on the importance of using recruitment as a tool for increasing the diversity of the workforce. Specifically, BIPOC city employees stated the City cares about improving diversity within the workforce in name only. According to one respondent, "there was very little effort being made in actually going and really putting in a lot of time and effort into making sure that these job opportunities were actually making it to everyone in Winooski." Even in situations where department heads may genuinely care about improving diversity, it may not be a priority. Many respondents expressed that departments would initiate collaboration with the recently established equity director, so when they are pressed on their equity efforts they can respond that they are "working with the equity director." Essentially, this collaboration serves as an alternative to deeper and more intensive equity efforts.

The City's recruitment strategies illustrate how the lack of an explicit equity-focused lens can work to entrench existing inequalities. From our conversations with employees and leaders in the City, we found most city departments advertise open positions by posting them on the City website, on JobSeeker (an online job advertising platform), on the O'Brien Community Center public bulletin board, on Front Porch Forum (a free social network), and in Seven Days (a free local periodical). Yet, we learned from our conversations that there are numerous job openings for the City and significant underemployment of Winooski's BIPOC residents, especially in the New American community. What factors are preventing matches between the City and residents in need of employment? One city employee remarked that many of the positions advertised in the mediums listed above are often open for months at a time and often will only result in a single application.

From our interviews, we found that city employees generally were uncertain why BIPOC and New American residents are not applying for the city positions; however, BIPOC city employees were able to cite numerous reasons why this disconnect may be occurring. First, the application needs to be translated into languages spoken by the community, which is not occurring with postings in

the local paper and bulletin boards. To respond to an online application, an individual must a) have access to a computer and decent internet access, and b) know where to find job applications. To diversify the recruitment pool, respondents suggested "it's best to advertise job openings where everyone else is, instead of where just the city hall has access to." Methods that have proven successful thus far rely on advertising through personal networks. One city employee reported receiving several interested responses after talking about a city job opening on Snapchat, and others stated they received positive feedback from residents by going door to door to advertise open positions. Just as important as diversifying the current pool of applicants is the importance of building a diverse pipeline of future candidates. City employees and residents stressed the importance of training, professional development, and outreach about city employment to high schoolers, especially from the New American community.

Gatekeeping Siloes BIPOC and Female Employees

Another hurdle BIPOC individuals face is gatekeeping by existing members of the workforce. BIPOC individuals are overrepresented in the community services department, yet underrepresented in all other departments. This is a fact these individuals attributed to the perception of BIPOC individuals as "caretakers," a stereotype also commonly applied to female workers. Gatekeeping can occur in a manner meant to be protective. One city employee remarked that she would not feel comfortable bringing a female applicant into her division, because it is "so misogynistic." While intended to be protective, such action also serves to block opportunity.

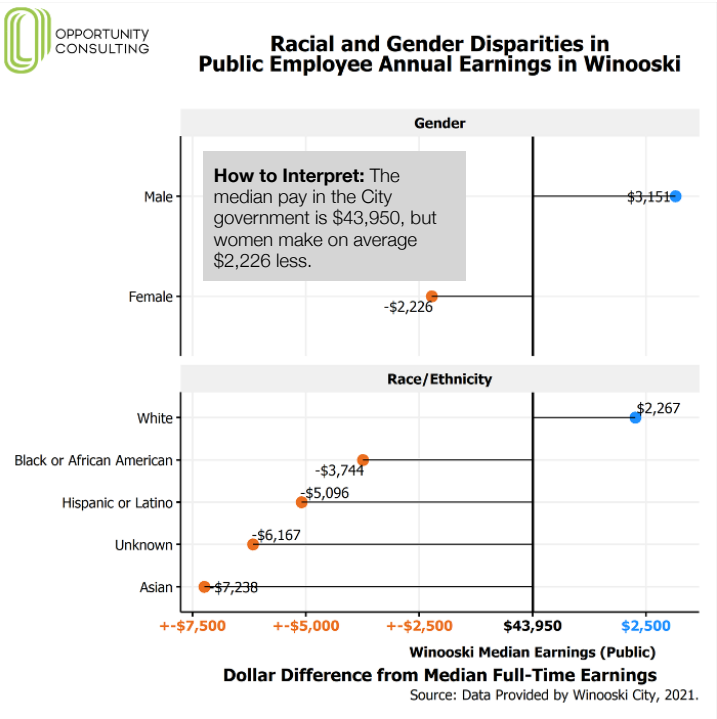
Finding 4.B **Lack of diversity and low pay result in high turnover for BIPOC and female city employees.**

City

A second facet of diversifying the City workforce is retaining employees from marginalized backgrounds. BIPOC and female employees cited several reasons that pushed workers like themselves out of the workforce or hurt recruitment efforts. This included the network-style effects of increasing diversity, pay, low turnover, and informal attitudes that funnel women and BIPOC workers into specific roles. The issue of pay is especially impactful. Exhibit 12 shows that female

and BIPOC city employees earn significantly less on average than their male and White counterparts, respectively. Though these disparities may be due to a complex host of factors, we can identify some of the challenges facing these groups. Female employees expressed concern about the lack of transparency in public salaries, which prevents them from comparing their salaries to peers of comparable tenure. This depresses the ability of females to renegotiate their own pay. BIPOC employees cited the fact that they disproportionately hold entry-level positions, which generally have the lowest pay. They also face barriers to promotion due to low turnover at higher employment levels.

Exhibit 12. Racial and Gender Disparities in Pay



For BIPOC employees specifically, the combination of low pay, few options for career advancement, scope creep—a phenomenon of increasing responsibility within a role without a commensurate increase in pay—and few BIPOC role models in leadership positions all act to discourage long-term employment within the City workforce. The importance of representation in the leadership cannot be overstated. BIPOC city employees remarked on the inspiration they draw from Yasamin Gordon, Winooski's Director of Equity, and the benefits of the informal mentorship they receive from her. As one respondent put it, "If they had more [BIPOC] people in there, it would be a lot easier to feel comfortable to even think about the idea of being in a higher position within the municipal government that we have."

Finding 4.C There is a lack of teacher diversity in WSD.

School

District leadership and teachers addressed a number of barriers to increasing teacher diversity in WSD. One challenge they noted was a lack of structures and resources at the schools that would

enable them to recruit more diverse teachers. They also noted that until recently they did not have any dedicated Human Resources staff. While there are many diverse candidates who are already connected to the district, such as former students, parents, or liaisons, there does not seem to be a viable pipeline to becoming teachers. School staff also acknowledged there was not a strong "culture of welcome" in place to make it easier to recruit diverse candidates.

SPOTLIGHT: Equitable Promotions

As discussed above, the City of Winooski uses a traditional approach to hiring candidates – responding to an online posting with a resume and cover letter – for city government positions, which favors candidates that are familiar with this method of seeking out and applying for jobs. This method may not be familiar to all of the City's residents, however. One department head we spoke to relayed the story of a New American employee who was recently promoted to a Directorship role and has thrived in this position, despite their subpar written English. The choice to promote this individual required the director to challenge their priors about the importance of written English (and cover letters as a hiring mechanism). Additionally, some of the employee's success may be derived from the Director's willingness to search out an alternative, collaborative method to build up the employee's skills, which they accomplished by creating templates and working together on writing projects. Finally, the Director realized the importance of the employee's 'soft skills' – empathy, dedication, trustworthiness – which are key to successful work in public service. This example provides the beginnings of a framework for recruiting, retaining, and allowing BIPOC and New American Winooski residents to thrive in the City workforce.

CHAPTER 5: INEQUITABLE RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

Finding 5.A **Investments in equity are not prioritized in the City and WSD.**

City
School

"Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the beliefs that all culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development, and they are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources....it is not enough to help students celebrate their own and others' cultural traditions. We must ask tough questions… where and for what purposes are resources allocated?" (Klingner et al, 2005).

Investments in equity in Winooski can help build a school and city that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and environmentally improved for all Winooski residents. School administrators and teachers discussed the limited resources available to the school district as a result of a small tax base. In addition, inequalities in state funding formulas were a major challenge that prevented them from adequately resourcing certain programming, staff positions, and multicultural services. "We have complex learners. …to really build a system that is going to give them everything that everybody has talked about, we need more resources." Limited resources may be a barrier in WSD, which makes it more important to invest strategically and prioritize equity investments that will uplift not only marginalized populations, but also the entire community of Winooski. Additionally, higher resourced schools do not always have better outcomes (DeGrow & Hoang, 2016). While more resources may be beneficial to student success in the the City context, as the quote above says, the City must ask difficult questions about where the available resources are being allocated. This scarcity of resources should lead the City residents to be thoughtful and intentional about the usage of the resources available.

Teacher Professional Development

One Winooski teacher shared her perspective regarding the resources and supports granted to teachers in WSD. "I know they have supported me in what was required." Supported in what is required, but nothing more. Another teacher presented a way she believes some of this scarcity

can be overcome through a simple, creative, professional development strategy, "I think…the general feeling is we don't have enough. I recognize that's a very deficiency viewpoint, and I feel like one thing that we could really benefit from is more time to collaborate as teacher teams... . More of a learning community where we really sit down together and we say, 'Here's what we're doing. What's working? What's not? What could we do better? How can we support each other better to support the kids better?' That time doesn't exist in our day really, and when it does, it's really up to the teacher teams themselves to take that work on."

When teacher professional development is structured around how to best serve students from diverse backgrounds, research supports investments in the form of structured time for teacher collaboration and points to the benefits gained toward promoting a school culture that is inclusive, culturally responsive, and improving student outcomes. "Practitioners thrive and are better able to innovate, support student effort, and generate improved outcomes when their organizations support and encourage their cultural inclusivity through systems of leadership that also meet standards of culturally responsive practice. Organizational support for culturally responsive practice must, in turn, be supported by initial educator preparation and ongoing professional development" (Klingner et al, 2005).

WSD already has experience providing culturally responsive professional development trainings, although according to focus group participants one of these positive practices has been discontinued. "When you come into this school district, I think even as an experienced teacher, there's a lot to learn, but I mean, learning about the different cultures from the perspectives of the liaisons was always a really rewarding thing. And I hope that they will return… . I think that was one way that we really helped support creating just some real humanity around those expectations and cultures."

Investment Priorities: Community Pool and School Bus

Two recent examples of public funding highlight how the lack of equity and inclusion in the Winooski community manifests in public decision-making. On November 6, 2017, the Winooski City Council voted to allocate funding – in the form of a $3.9 million, 20-year bond – to renovate the Myers Memorial Pool, which was an effort subsequently voted on and passed by Winooski voters (City of Winooski, n.d.-a; City of Winooski, n.d.-b).

To access the pool, residents must pay a nominal entrance fee and, if underage, must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. BIPOC and New American residents pointed out that both of these policies hindered their children's ability to access the pool. Even at a nominal fee, such a cost is more burdensome for low-income residents than it is for other residents. As a non-essential expense, it may be one of the first expenses cut from a household budget, thereby creating a barrier to entry. Additionally, BIPOC and New American residents are more likely to work jobs with non-traditional working hours, limiting their ability to accompany their children to the pool. Additionally, a far larger share of the New American residents we spoke to were not even aware that a community pool existed.

Unlike the community pool, providing a school bus for families with school-aged children and no other means of transportation is a basic service. Even though the City is a small community, walking to school is not always viable or safe. Many families do not have cars, and walking 20 or 30 minutes both ways can be untenable for students and for many working parents. Moreover, walking to school may be unduly challenging for young children or for all students during Vermont's harsh winters (Walsh, 2015; Young, 2018). School officials have stated that providing a bus was untenable given the budget limitations and inability to find drivers. To contextualize these comments, residents we spoke to said the rate offered by the City ($21/hour) for the driver position was uncompetitive with the pay offered by Uber, while the City is paying $83,000 in the first year after the renovation to operate the pool (City of Winooski, n.d.-b).

These are explicit choices around what, and by extension who, deserves funding. These choices have very real impacts on residents' lives. Without the bus, children from New American families walk over a mile each way to school. With icy conditions in the winter, this trip becomes hazardous. A city official remarked that the City has taken this into consideration in its decision to invest in sidewalk plows, a decision that was framed explicitly as an equity initiative. Framing the provision of basic services as equity initiatives provides the rationale for the City to not take additional efforts that would actually promote equity. Despite the City's insistence that the icy roads issue has been resolved, walking to school in the winter was clearly still an issue facing the New American residents. One resident starkly laid out the consequences for his family. His wife walks his child to school, as he works during those hours. He worries about his child's safety, but

he focused on his wife. She is currently pregnant, and he worries that if she falls on the ice, she may lose the baby.

CHAPTER 6: THE SILENCING OF BIPOC VOICES AND LACK OF REPRESENTATION

Finding 6.A

Curriculum and instruction are neither inclusive nor representative of district students.

School

In teacher focus groups, the City teachers expressed a desire for greater flexibility in curriculum and the ability to create lesson plans and activities that meet students' needs relative to their academic levels, interests, and cultural backgrounds. Teachers also expressed frustration that they feel the current curriculum does not allow for students' or teachers' voices to be heard and does not provide opportunities for student-driven learning and exploration. One teacher shared, "Any curriculum that's a top-down, dictated, scripted curriculum doesn't allow for enough student voice and choice and teacher creativity and student creativity." Some teachers also stated they are not sure there are safe spaces for students to express when the curriculum does not meet their needs. In student focus groups, students echoed some of these frustrations, and many discussed their enjoyment of the iLab, which allowed them to direct their own learning, and their disappointment at the decision to eliminate funding for the iLab next school year.

Student-Centered Learning

Students voiced frustration by the WSD's decision to cut the iLab and described holding sit-in protests in the cafeteria in which many middle and high schoolers participated. Students expressed how the self-directed component of the iLab made it an especially valuable resource for multilingual learners, and they did not feel the WSD considered their concerns with regard to the decision to cut iLab.

WSD leadership and teachers agreed there was some movement toward more student-centered learning, but it got derailed when priorities shifted due to COVID-19. A parent shared one

example of what she found to be a very meaningful activity that centered student identity. "My daughter just brought home a cookbook that the fifth grade put together that was recipes from all over the world, which the assignment was to identify a recipe that might mean something to you and why it's important and how it's part of your identity. I hadn't seen that before."
This type of activity is something that many teachers did not feel they had the opportunity to incorporate into their classroom, despite wanting to provide more inclusive and individualized learning opportunities for their students. One teacher described the challenge as, “I feel like for sure there is a gap between student’s home realities, … lives and interests, … contexts, and the school. I mean, they have teachers that are White and don't look like them. They have texts that, I mean, we're getting better for sure, but we have a lot of texts in the classroom that don't reflect the realities and experiences and physical characteristics of our students. …we do have a very strict schedule that doesn't allow for a lot of freedom for exploration of students' own interests and capitalizing on their natural curiosities. Those sorts of things aren't built into our schedule. Like in Kindergarten, we have explore time, that's probably the closest we get to student-driven learning. But after that, it's a very regimented day with your 60 minutes of literacy or your 60 minutes of math and those curriculums don't necessarily keep in mind who we're working with and how we make it engaging for them."

Student-driven learning is an approach that centers prior student knowledge and experiences and adapts to their needs. It can be beneficial not only to support students from different cultural backgrounds, but also any students with unique learning needs or interests (Parker et al, 2017). One teacher described the newfound excitement in learning that two of her students experienced when they were able to engage in student-driven learning by exploring tech, “…being excited about their learning is important. You just don't have many of those options and opportunities. Like taking kids to tech yesterday. I mean, two of our most disengaged students went to tech with me yesterday [and] used the plasma cutter. You couldn't get them off the plasma cutter. The two gentlemen walked out of the building and were [saying], ‘This is so much better than school,’ and I was able to say to them, ‘This is school.”'

These types of student-centered learning approaches (such as the recipe book and the plasma cutter) are not only more inclusive of students from different cultural backgrounds and those who may have unique learning needs/interests but also result in better student outcomes. Research shows student-centered learning environments produce learners who are not only more engaged,

but also learners who perform higher than their peers in standardized tests, graduate at higher rates than district and state averages, and complete more required coursework for college admission relative to state averages. (Stanford Center for Policy Opportunity in Education, 2014).

Despite this, WSD leadership expressed interest in implementing a more prescriptive curriculum to ensure more consistency in instruction. While prescriptive or scripted curricula are increasing in popularity, particularly in school districts with diverse student populations and a large number of multilingual learners, research shows that these types of curricula are actually detrimental to student learning and engagement and widen achievement gaps (Hos and Kaplan-Wolff, 2020).

Literacy and Language

When discussing challenges in the classroom, teachers and district leadership pointed to literacy as one of the most formidable. Many students come to the WSD having spent time away from any formal schooling; therefore, many come in far below grade level. Some students may be literate in their own language, and not have sufficient English proficiency to read and write in English. Others may not read or write well in their first language so the challenges of literacy in English are compounded.

Students in the district also discussed literacy challenges, but their concerns were with the loss of literacy and language proficiency in their native languages. The sentiment that, "I mostly forgot how to write in my own language" was repeated by students in focus groups. One middle schooler shared, "When I was in elementary school in my country, they usually teach us Nepali and how to read and how to write, but I mostly forgot all of it because all I speak and write is in English. So I forgot all about it." Students did not feel there were opportunities to use or celebrate their native languages in school and were uncertain about their ability to get class credit for their knowledge of languages other than English.

The WSD leadership touted a new biliteracy certificate program that was recently developed as one way to acknowledge student's language skills. The certificate would be given to students who proved a certain level of proficiency in a language other than English upon graduation from high school and would be something students could use to demonstrate proficiency to postsecondary institutions or employers. However, when asked about this certificate, most high

schoolers in focus groups were unaware of the opportunity. The biliteracy certificate is well intentioned and a great step toward acknowledging the prior learning with which New American students arrive. However, students as early as middle school are reporting having forgotten how to read and write in their native language. Without an opportunity to practice their native languages, students will never be eligible for this certificate. Allowing students opportunities to practice, celebrate, and share with their native languages with their peers will help engage all students more deeply and will promote equitable learning outcomes.

Finding 6.B **BIPOC students do not feel they have a voice in decisions that impact them.**

School

Exhibit 13 shows that 84% of WSD students that responded to the district survey believe their teachers ask for their thoughts and ideas about decisions that affect the school and 79% believe they have a voice in defining how they should act in the classroom. However, the exhibit also demonstrates some disparities along the lines of students' racial backgrounds, suggesting different experiences for different groups of students.

In student focus groups, one student said, "There isn't much student voice at this school. [The administration] say they're trying, but if they're trying, then they should be taking action as well." A number of students shared experiences inside and outside the classroom in which they felt their voices were not heard or they did not feel safe raising concerns at school. Students were frustrated about the lack of transparency when a beloved teacher was let go. Students acknowledged that following their sit-in protest in the cafeteria, administration allowed one student per table to meet with them to discuss their concerns, but that nothing changed following the discussion. Another student gave an example of a sports game in which the opposing team made racist comments and slurs toward members of the Winooski team. Students brought their concerns to the school administration and were frustrated with what they felt was a lack of meaningful follow-up.

Students also noted that they rarely had opportunities in class to discuss current events or issues that were relevant to them. Students discussed how meaningful it was when one of their teachers took the time to discuss Black history month with them, even though it was not an official part of

the curriculum. The student also noted that none of their other teachers had ever done that. “So, what he [the teacher] said was he's a White man in power, and so he's here to listen. That's what he said when we were talking about Black history month. We need more teachers like that.”

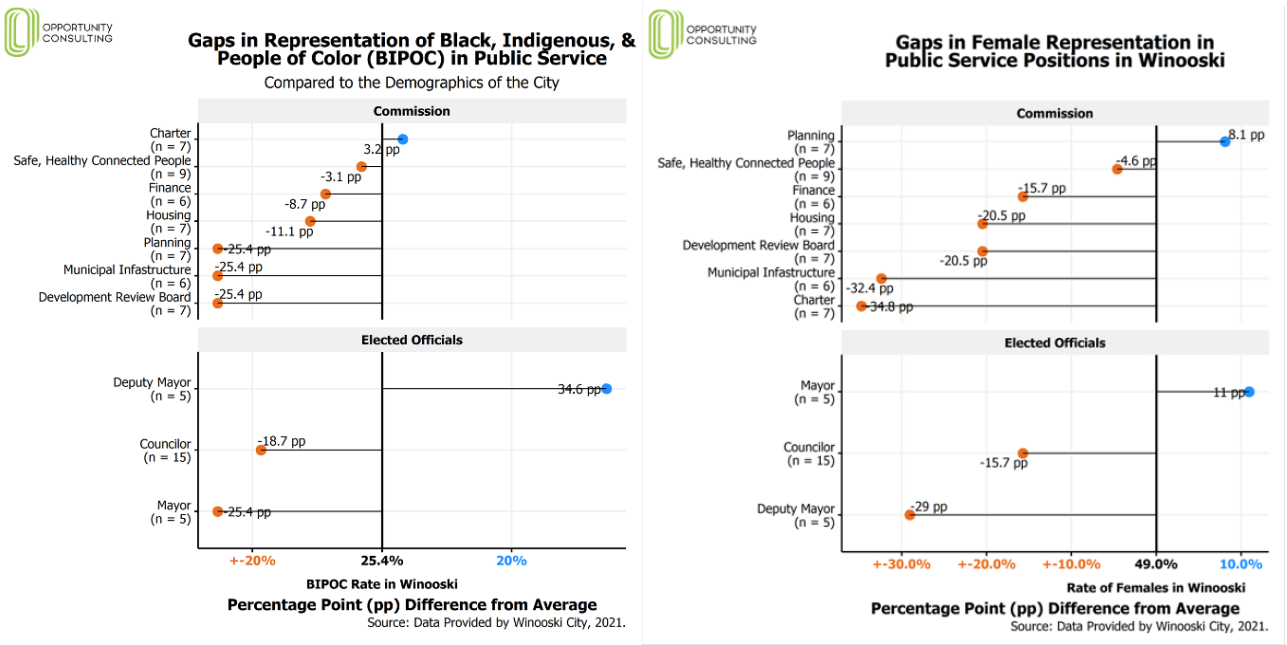
Overall, considering the data on diversity, climate survey, and information provided by students and teachers in focus groups, we find that there is room to strengthen and elevate student voices in the school, including in each classroom and across the school.

Finding 6.C **BIPOC residents lack access to voting, representation, and a voice in decisions that impact them.**

City

The loss of voice among BIPOC residents extends to the City as well. Through the course of our interviews, we found the widespread belief that the City government is not responsive to the needs faced by BIPOC and New American communities. Such a belief persists in spite of the positive efforts made by the City to make city voting more accessible and more inclusive. For instance, the City of Winooski has translated ballots and voting materials into six languages and, beginning with the upcoming election cycle, has passed legislation allowing non-citizen residents to vote in municipal elections. In addition to efforts explicitly targeting New American communities, the City has also implemented rules to make voting generally more accessible, including by mailing ballots to all residents, allowing absentee voting, and publicly posting information about candidates running for elected office.

Exhibit 14. Gender and Racial Representation Gaps in Elected Positions



However, this audit focuses on the outcomes of policies and not intentions, and those point to significant disparities on the questions of who is running for office, who is getting elected, and who is participating in the voting process. Disparities in racial and gender diversity are presented in Exhibit 14.

Winooski's Electoral Structure

At the most basic level, people are unlikely to vote for a candidate unless they believe that individual understands the issues they face and will advocate on their behalf to address such issues. In the City, this basic connection between BIPOC voters and elected officials does not exist. We have identified two primary institutional factors that reduce the incentive for creating these connections. First, the City is comprised of a single district, so all elected officials represent the entire city. Second, to get on the ballot, a potential candidate must create a petition and collect signatures from eligible voters in the City, a highly labor-intensive activity. Finally, the elected positions of the City Council pay only $1,500 per year, and the Mayor is paid $1,700 per year. The low pay for such elected positions combined with the time-intensive nature of the roles create barriers for many individuals who cannot afford to take time away from earning wages.

The combination of these factors creates the conditions in which only specific individuals and communities can access an elected office targeted for civic participation. First, the requirements and pay of the position effectively excludes those who do not possess the money and time to invest in running and holding a low-paying, time-intensive position. Getting onto the ballot also requires significant investment. Inherent to the process of collecting signatures is another problem. Since the City is a single district, potential candidates can campaign for signatures in any part of the City. Given that BIPOC and New Americans make up only 28% of the City and tend to live in segregated neighborhoods (see the discussion in chapter 1), candidates do not need to campaign in heavily BIPOC or New American communities to be placed on the ballot or be voted into office. This presumption has been verified by our conversations with BIPOC residents. No participants in our BIPOC focus groups knew their City Council Representatives, and only one resident stated he had ever been approached by a candidate to ask for his vote (the candidate in question was BIPOC as well). The system was designed inequitably where elected

officials do not have an incentive to engage actively with nor respond to the needs of BIPOC and New American communities to secure their votes.

Winooski's Access to Non-English Voting Information

Representation is not the only factor depressing civic participation among Winooski's BIPOC residents, however, and the issues faced by New American communities are particularly acute. Many of the factors affecting diversity within the City workforce apply to voting as well, chief among them being access to information. As stated earlier, the City has translated ballots into six languages. However, at least 21 languages are spoken in Winooski, and speakers of the remaining 15 languages are unserved by this policy and remain effectively locked out from civic participation. There is also the question of how information about voting and candidates is dispersed to the community. Information shared in online portals and the local newspapers are less accessible for the City's BIPOC residents than its White residents.

Finding 6.D **Winooski has not made enough effort to identify and address the systemic barriers to voting for New Americans.** City

Though not universal, Winooski's New American communities generally do not have the same experience with democracy and civic participation as their American-born neighbors. New Americans and refugees from countries where political violence is common (politics are a venue solely for corruption and patronage) or where there is little to no democratic tradition will not instinctually view voting as a right or civic responsibility. This theory is verified by our findings. During a focus group, one respondent remarked that "they [New Americans] are scared to go out and vote… if they are voting for some kind of rights, they are not treated well by the government. They are thrown in jail."

Others may not fear voting but still do not understand the purpose or potential benefits of civic engagement. Another resident told us that some members of his community are not familiar with voting in general and would need education around what it is, how to do it, and why it is important. These residents' lack of knowledge around voting extends to the physical process itself. Numerous residents pointed out barriers to voting for members of their communities, such as not understanding the differences between the candidates, confusion about how to fill out a

ballot, and illiteracy. All of these barriers hinder the ability New American residents to advocate for themselves and have their issues addressed through the political process.

CHAPTER 7: INEQUITIES IN HOUSING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Finding 7.A

The approach to housing management and planning generates trauma for BIPOC residents and students.

One of the greatest issues facing Winooski's BIPOC residents is access to affordable, quality housing. Residents, WSD leadership, and City officials all highlighted concerns with the City's housing equity. They commented on the City's low supply of affordable units for families, substandard housing conditions, and frameworks that funnel New American families into housing blocks with well-known quality concerns. While distinct, these factors are interrelated, mutually reinforcing, and contributing to the residential segregation present in the City. As a result, BIPOC residents are overwhelmingly concentrated in the Upper Main and Flats/Elm Street neighborhoods and are generally excluded from the Downtown and Riverside areas. Residential segregation is by no means unique to Winooski, since 70% of the largest metro areas in the U.S. would require significant resident redistribution to achieve integration (Matthew et al., 2016). Experts have identified numerous factors that lead to and reinforce residential segregation, including zoning policies, "steering" BIPOC families to certain neighborhoods, and selective acceptance of housing vouchers by landlords (Matthew et al., 2016; Cunningham et al., 2018).

These issues resonated with the lived experiences of the BIPOC community members we spoke with. During our conversations, BIPOC and New American residents described the state of their living conditions. Among the issues raised were pest infestations (i.e. rodents, cockroaches, and other pests), poor insulation and freezing temperatures (e.g. ice on interior walls), mold, and poor construction (e.g. unstable staircases). Long-term residents of Winooski pointed out that these quality issues are not a new phenomenon, and their attempts to work with their landlords to remedy these issues have not proven successful. Unresponsiveness among the landlords who own the buildings in question appears commonplace. The stories we heard all underscored the

landlords' unwillingness to address even routine maintenance and safety. Residents complained of moving into units that had not been cleaned or had no basic repairs completed. Another resident remarked that it took more than a week for management to repair the heating during the middle of winter, leaving families in freezing conditions. Even the residents with longer tenure in the City that felt comfortable pursuing repairs from their landlord still faced difficulties in having their requests answered. One such resident remarked that it took numerous contacts with the landlord over a period of months to have an apartment repainted, and the landlord never conducted any maintenance proactively.

In addition to resident complaints, city officials also expressed knowledge of ongoing quality issues with specific landlords and buildings. Both parties identified a similar set of factors correlated with the poor housing quality that BIPOC residents can access, the low supply of appropriately sized and affordable units, "funneling" BIPOC residents to specific buildings or neighborhoods, and power imbalances between renters from marginalized backgrounds and landlords.

Available New Housing Construction

Winooski has seen significant housing development in the past few years. Despite the City's recent construction boom (Walsh, 2019), and some of this development has been focused on affordable housing. According to the city leadership, 20% of the housing stock in Winooski is affordable housing. And yet, BIPOC families report significant difficulty finding housing that fits their needs. BIPOC residents in the City, especially New Americans, are more likely to need affordable housing and multi-room apartments or homes to accommodate larger, multi-generational families. However, the City officials acknowledged that most new construction consists of studio and one-bedroom apartments and luxury buildings boasting significant amenities, such as the City Gardens building and proposed development at 340 Main Street (Baird, 2021). According to one City official, studio and one-bedroom apartments made up 73% of new construction in Winooski over the past five years. At the same time, the amount of affordable housing constructed over the same period has not kept pace with the increasing demand. Residents cited a new Redstone building as an example with one-bedroom units renting at $1200 per month. One of the residents said none of the people in the community could afford this type of unit. Another resident put it more succinctly, "They are not building for the

community." For these families, the most suitable housing would be single family homes, which tend to be available for purchase rather than rent. This also keeps suitable housing to purchase out of reach for BIPOC and New American families that have less wealth and access to credit than their White counterparts. Conversely, the City's housing policy and planning creates barriers for home ownership for lower income and New Americans, including those who work and live in the areas for years. Many research studies confirm that home ownership is still one of the biggest positive drivers of and financial stability and wealth creation (2019 Survey of Consumer Finances).

Available Housing for BIPOC and New American Residents

In addition to cost considerations, we discovered through our conversations that BIPOC and New American residents are "steered" toward specific housing – methods that include targeted advertising and accepting Section 8 vouchers (Cunningham et al., 2018). This helps explain why so many BIPOC and New American families reported issues with housing quality. One long-term, BIPOC resident described the lifecycle of this process. The resident explained when searching for housing, the resident was more likely to look for ads in free sources, such as Craigslist, rather than paying for a local paper to view classifieds. Ads placed in these sources target low-income renters through targeted language and incentives, such as waived credit checks. During an apartment visit, sources told us landlords would show the prospective tenant a "show unit" that was clean and in good repair. Often, renters were not allowed to view the actual unit, stating it was either being renovated or the previous tenant was in the process of moving out. The

Spotlight: Evictions at 300 Main

On 2 February 2022, 24 families living at the apartment complex on 300 Main St were handed eviction notices that directed them to vacate their homes by the end of June. The tenants – primarily low-income New American families with children in the WSD – face the daunting prospect of locating new housing in a county where both affordable housing and multi-bedroom units are in short supply and rents are rising. The purported rationale for the evictions is to undertake renovations to address code violations identified by the City (Elder-Connors and B., Liam, 2022). However, the City officials have noted that previous code violations at the location were remedied prior to the evictions; therefore, such reasoning hints that the likely motivation is to remove Section 8 access and raise rents, displacing economically disadvantaged families.

tenant would then move in and discover the unit they rented was in greater disrepair than the show unit. If the renter chose to break the lease upon discovery of the poor quality of the unit, the renter would forfeit the security deposit, thereby increasing the difficulty of finding a better housing situation or securing counsel for legal redress.

Finding 7.B **Winooski has not provided New American families with the knowledge and tools to advocate for their rights as tenants.**

City

The story of housing for New American families differs from the experience of BIPOC individuals born in the U.S. Housing for many immigrant and refugee families begins with the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), a nonprofit organization that works with in coordination with U.S. federal agencies to place refugees in communities like Winooski. As part of the resettlement process, USCRI secures housing for the refugees it resettles (USCRI, n.d.). Through conversations with the City officials, we discovered USCRI maintains relationships with a select number of landlords in Winooski who are willing to take refugees and accept housing vouchers. Landlords are not required to accept vouchers, which places an additional limitation on where low-income residents can live (Cunningham et al., 2018). While such action helps refugees navigate a complex process during a stressful transition period, the partnership between USCRI and landlords removes the accountability link between the landlords and refugees. According to some of the New American residents, USCRI's assistance lasts only six months, after which they must navigate the negotiations of everyday life on their own, such as dealing with a landlord. The issue with this arrangement is that, in the initial period of resettlement, New Americans focus on concerns most immediate for daily life, such as enrolling their children in school, securing employment, figuring out transportation, and locating a grocery store.

More intangible concepts, such as rights and self-advocacy, were not pressing concerns until they became a necessity according to New American families who have been through the resettlement process. Even as the salience of these concerns increased, residents highlighted factors that inhibited their ability or desire to relocate. These factors included not wanting to disrupt their children's educations or worries about not being able to find a new apartment and then having to bridge the gap with a potentially lengthy, costly hotel stay.

A "Hands-Tied" Mentality Toward Housing Issues

Through our conversations with the City officials, it became clear the City government is aware of the issues in Winooski's housing market. However, officials often caveated their observations of housing issues with the constraints on the city government's power to address these issues. Such constraints included the market's preference for high-end, small apartments; an inability to mandate the type of units that developers build; restrictions attached to Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding; zoning laws; and macro economic and demographic trends. The City has taken some action to relieve some of the strain on the housing market, such as reducing parking requirements for apartment buildings to reduce cost and establishing and funding a housing trust. The City also conducts building inspections, and many of the buildings housing New American and BIPOC residents are subject to HUD minimum standards, which are less stringent than those adopted by the City. In summary, the City's awareness of housing issues and the actions taken to remedy these issues have not been inclusive of BIPOC's and New American's concerns and have been insufficient to affect change.

CONCLUSION: DIVERSE BUT NOT INCLUSIVE

In the preceding sections of this report, we highlighted areas where inequalities in outcomes and experiences exist between BIPOC and White residents of Winooski in specific areas. However, our research in the City revealed a general divide between BIPOC residents and the rest of the City driven by feelings of exclusion and a disconnect from the wider community. For instance, one BIPOC resident remarked that, despite comprising a quarter of the City's population, other BIPOC community members are infrequently seen patronizing restaurants, shops, and community spaces within the downtown area. BIPOC individuals in positions of authority within the City also expressed frustration at having their perspectives and opinions dismissed or glossed over by their colleagues.

Within the New American community, this disconnect from the community of Winooski runs deep. From our conversations with school liaisons, interpreters, and nonprofit workers, we found that the New American communities generally feel excluded from the wider community. Because new arrivals lack the experience to navigate and access even the most basic services (how to open a bank account, navigate transportation, figure out their rights, etc.), their focus remains directed at

solving basic issues, which reduces the available time to participate in and integrate with the community more broadly.

The City has made efforts to open decision-making to the community broadly (opening city hall meetings to the public and broadcasting them on Zoom) and expand services to the New American community (employing school liaisons to translate city resources). The City should be commended for these efforts. However, our conversations with New American residents reveal these efforts have been insufficient. For instance, although the City has translated materials and resources, New American respondents were unaware these resources existed. They also expressed frustration toward the confusing and complicated language of legal and administrative documents, which act as an additional barrier to those trying to parse the rules but are unfamiliar with these structures. Across all our conversations, we repeatedly heard New American residents express the belief they are being taken advantage of because they cannot speak the language or understand the procedures of their adopted home; therefore, they are unable to advocate for themselves.

This report has emphasized the discrepancy of Winooski's experience, as a community making progress on diversity and openness to refugees, but where many barriers to full equity and inclusion remain. One city employee summarized the sentiment succinctly: "If I had to emphasize anything, the thing that's always frustrated me is we've sat around and said we're the most diverse community in the state and kind of rested on those laurels. …[Yet,] we don't have relationships across cultures to speak of. We don't live together."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WSD

Recommendation 1: Use Effective, Early Reading Strategies Using High-Quality Instructional Materials for Multilingual Learners.

Providing effective, early literacy instruction and programs is critical for the many migrant and former refugee students attending school in Winooski. However, WSD educators argue there is insufficient flexibility in the curriculum, as well as in their ability to create lesson plans and activities tailored to meet the needs of their diverse students.

For recent migrants and multilingual learners, as with all students, early literacy is critical to their experiences in school, academic success, and longterm outcomes. There are a number of strategies the City can implement to support early reading for their many students who are non-native English speakers.

The district can support the development of their native language (Williams, 2020). Research suggests that enhancing students' abilities in their first language helps them academically and assists in learning English more effectively (Valentino & Reardon, 2014). Leveraging the district's liaisons and, most importantly, engaging with students' parents and family can help with this process. Educators can encourage reading, playing, and singing in their native language. This is particularly important as some students shared that forgetting their native language poses barriers for them to communicate with their own parents. In short, expose young children to as much language in whatever tongue possible. This will foster the skills and letter recognition students need to learn any language, which ultimately supports English acquisition (Klass, 2017).

Schools can support these efforts directly. For example, providing books in students' native language can help engender feelings of belonging and support student learning. Libraries can also include translations of core texts, or a listening library that offers summaries of important texts for non-native English speakers (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017). Using culturally relevant texts throughout classroom instruction also helps (Freeman & Freeman, 2020). High-quality instructional materials designed for multilingual learners are essential (Mavrogordato et al., 2021). The Century Foundation compiled a list of online high-quality materials, lesson plans, early literacy,

and other materials to support multilingual students (Williams, n.d.). Additionally, after school programs that include curricula and activities oriented to English language acquisition are effective (He et al, 2019).

The Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) model is an evidence-based framework that provides a school-wide strategy to center and to support multilingual students and their needs. The approach includes family partnerships, dual language literacy, and culturally responsive curricula (SEAL, 2021). Fresno Unified School District in California has found success supporting multilingual by expanding their dual language programs and through specific dual language learner professional development (Crolotte, 2019).

Recommendation 2: Implement Strategies to Reduce Instances of and Inequalities in Exclusionary School Discipline

Nationally, students of color, students with disabilities, and multilingual students are disproportionately disciplined (Lose & Martinez, 2020; NCLD, 2020; Herrera & McNair, 2021; Burke, 2015; Villegas, 2021). Exclusionary discipline adversely affects students' academic and long-term outcomes (LiCalsi, Osher, & Bailey, 2021). Indeed, schools with high rates of discipline harm the education of all students, even those who are not suspended or expelled (Hinze-Pifer & Sartain, 2018).

These problems and inequalities in school discipline are present in WSD. Teachers acknowledge that non-White students are disciplined differently from the same behaviors as White students. This is consistent with the research into school discipline practices. In fact, "the evidence suggests that discipline disparities may be explained more by the behavior of adults—teachers and principals in schools—than by student misbehavior" (Welsh & Little, n.d.). Subjective adult decisions, most often committed by teachers, are at the core of school discipline judgements and drive many of the disparities. As such, student-teacher racial mismatch, classroom management, and implicit bias can all play a role in discipline disparities (Welsh & Little, n.d.).

Teachers suggest that unclear policies around discipline may contribute to discipline disparities in WSD. Clear policies are important. However, given that discipline decisions are inherently subjective, establishing policy alone will not be sufficient to address disparities in school discipline.

For example, zero tolerance policies are clear, but produce wildly disparate outcomes among student groups (Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, 2000).

There are a variety of strategies that districts can employ to reduce overuse of discipline practices, such as suspensions or expulsions, and to reduce disparities in discipline. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidenced-based framework designed to improve practices and systems to address behavioral challenges and ultimately improve school culture and student outcomes. In fact, there is a statewide effort, Vermont PBIS (VTPBIS), to help schools systemically improve students' social and academic outcomes (Vermont PBIS, n.d.). Another approach is to implement restorative practices to resolve conflict and heal harm in lieu of exclusionary discipline (NGLC, n.d.). Evidence suggests these models, when implemented well, can reduce the rate of exclusionary discipline, as well as improve school culture and climate overall (McIntosh, et al., 2021; Gregory & Evans, 2020).

To reduce disparities in school discipline, the educator training program called My Teacher Partner (MTP) program has proven to reduce race-based discipline disparities (Gregory, et al., 2019; UVA Today, (2016)). MTP is a teacher training program focused on improving student-teacher interactions. The program includes a video library of best practices, a three-credit college course, and online individualized coaching. MTP-S is designed specifically for middle and high school teachers.

Recommendation 3: Afford Students Regular and Structured Opportunities to Provide Input About their Education

Some of Winooski's students report that "student voice" – their perspectives and experiences – is under considered by school leadership. Recently, teachers were dismissed who students felt were particularly effective and whose teaching thoughtfully addressed diverse issues and topics. Many students did not understand the decision and wished there had been an opportunity for them to voice their experiences and to explain why they found these teachers to be especially effective.

To be clear, there may be any number of reasons that these teachers no longer work in WSD. Student support, no matter how vociferous, may not have been able to change the outcome.

Nonetheless, young people and adults appreciate the opportunity to offer their opinions and to be engaged in the decision-making processes that affect them. Once a decision has been made, particularly one that affects students directly, it is important for leadership to explain the choice even if only after the fact.

There are many benefits to incorporating student voice into school operations. Giving students greater ownership over their own education and incorporating their ideas and perspectives into their schooling can increase student engagement, improve programs, and influence school decisions (Benner, Brown, & Jeffrey, 2019; Shafer, 2016). Moreover, formal structures for students to share their perspectives can help to address inequalities in school (Fernandez, Down, & Steiner, 2021). As such, it is critical for schools and districts working to elevate student perspectives ensure they are engaging with students from diverse backgrounds.

There are a wide range of policies and practices that schools and districts employ to gather and incorporate student input into the school. Regular student surveys can be effective tools to solicit students' views, experiences, and ideas. For example, Illinois uses the Illinois Youth Survey to get insight into student perspectives and experiences (Benner, Brown, & Jeffrey, 2019). A more direct and consistent approach to incorporate student voices in school leadership is to give students an active role in decision-making committees. This model gets students insight into decisions that affect students and gives them the opportunity to provide their perspective (Banner, Brown, & Jeffrey, 2019). Included in school-level leadership, students can help guide schools to more inclusive and interesting practices, policies, and instructional materials (Schmidt, 2005). There are many districts and schools that take this approach, such as the Boston Student Advisory Committee or the Montgomery County Public School Board of Education in Maryland, which includes an elected student with full voting rights (Banner, Brown, Jeffrey, 2019). Other promising practices include student government, youth participatory action research, and student journalism (Benner, Brown, & Jeffrey, 2019).

There is no perfect approach. Each strategy to engage with students in school leadership and decision-making comes with trade-offs. The City will need to identify the model that best suits leadership and student needs. Any choice, however, must be sure to solicit diverse student perspectives, have clear objectives, and build on strong relationships between students and adults.

Recommendation 4: Develop a Strategy to Diversify and Localize the Educator Workforce

WSD should develop and implement a high-priority plan to diversify and localize its educator workforce. It is now well established that a diverse teaching workforce is a significant component of effective and equitable instruction and can be a critical driver of closing achievement gaps. Research has documented that diversity can lead to improved outcomes for students of color, such as academic gains, graduation rates, and college enrollment. Without diversity, minority students may be overlooked, lack a role model in the classroom, and suffer from the implicit bias of their teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Goldhaber & Mizrav, 2022; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

WSD may want to consider ways in which it can create new pipelines for teaching in the school district that capitalize on the diversity of the City and WSD while including pathways for career changers, educational paraprofessionals, and high school students in WSD. Programs that create such pathways to professions include Grow Your Own (GYO)-type programs, “2+2” partnerships between local colleges and universities, and other strategies. Such programs were proven effective in other school districts across the country not only in diversifying the teacher workforce, but also in creating a local teacher cadre that is more effective with longer retention rates as a solution for growing educator shortages (Carver-Thomas, 2018, Kimmel et. al., 2021). In WSD, as in other school districts, coupling these strategies with retention-focused strategies, such as mentoring and induction for new BIPOC teachers, will be key in maintaining any gains in workforce diversification.

JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WSD AND THE CITY

Recommendation 5: Strengthen WSD-City Collaboration and Include the WSD Superintendent as a Member of the City Leadership

The report discusses the strength of already having a community school in the City of Winooski, and the multiple roles that the school is playing in shaping community life for students and families. Recommendations 6 and 7 discuss areas where the school and city could collaborate, including on growing the community liaison program, and ensuring ongoing student

transportation. These are just two examples that reflect an opportunity in expanded collaboration between the City and WSD.

Our study underscores that the school superintendent is a key leader, not just for the school district, but for the Winooski community. Therefore we see the importance of treating the superintendent as a member of the City leadership and having him or her join, at least periodically, City leadership meetings to bring a critical perspective to decisions affecting the residents. The study revealed several places where the schools can help the city and vice versa, and that collaboration is critical for advancing equity.

Recommendation 6: Expand the Community Liaison Program From WSD to the City

WSD is perhaps the most diverse school district in Vermont. The district serves a considerable and growing population of students and families from across the globe, many of whom were former refugees. Many of the City's students have lived through traumatic experiences, had their education severely disrupted, and grew up speaking a language other than English. As a result, the transition to American public schools and to American life can be challenging. Meeting these students' needs can require tailored interventions and supports.

In an effort to serve all students well and integrate them into the school and community, WSD hired several part-time school liaisons who know the language and culture of many of the students. For example, the district employs liaisons who speak Nepali and Swahili. The liaisons support students' academics and socio-emotional wellbeing. They also serve as a bridge between the school and parents who are often non-native English speakers and less familiar with American schooling. Research points to these types of paraprofessionals as playing a crucial role in supporting recent immigrants and refugees (Pryor, 2001).

The community liaison program has been a success and serves as a promising practice for similar school districts. Teachers, parents, and students attest the liaisons are a critical component of the school community and provide important support. The liaisons form strong relationships with students and families, which research suggests are critical to integrating new immigrants and refugees successfully into the school and community (Dryden-Peterson, et al., 2019; Powers, 2022). It is reasonable to expect students' experiences in the City's schools to vary based on their

access to a liaison who speaks their language. The precise impact on students and families is worth further investigation.

Despite these successes, the program simply is too small. There is not a liaison for each of the languages present among WSD's students, such as Pashto. Moreover, the current liaisons are only part-time employees, which limits the positive impact they can have on students and the school. Offering liaisons only part-time employment increases the risk of turnover. This threatens the critical role they play for students as a consistent, supportive person who understands their language and culture and who can build meaningful relationships with them.

Our focus groups and interviews revealed that the liaisons are more than just interpreters at the school, they are also community leaders. The success in family engagement in WSD can and should be capitalized on to utilize their work to address other areas. For example, liaisons could be used to encourage and support New Americans in voting. Liaisons could train residents who do not speak English on the voting process. Liaisons can even facilitate a mock voting day, where parents practice the voting process and receive guidance from the liaisons. Liaisons could also support tenants in understanding their rights if those are not available in their spoken languages.

For that reason, we recommend the City fund the liaisons in full-time positions working under the City Director of Equity instead of under WSD. In the spirit of this report and overall recommendations, a city-school collaboration would allow liaisons to maximize their contribution to the community on a range of issues. To attract and retain liaisons, Winooski can increase salaries and expand the job to a full-time position. As full-time employees, these liaisons can undertake additional services and activities within schools and the entire community. This would help the liaisons and the families they assist further integrate into the school's culture, contribute to a more positive experience, and help to raise student performance.

To scale the program, WSD may also want to explore a partnership with nearby Burlington School District. Like WSD, Burlington established a liaison program to support its refugee and multilingual population. The district currently employees 11 staff members, as well as several others who are on-call to deliver services to students who speak a language that does not have a full-time liaison. WSD may be able to develop a partnership with Burlington to provide students access to these

important services and supports. This would be particularly helpful for students who speak a language that is not represented among current liaisons in the school district.

Recommendation 7: Provide Transportation by Increasing Drivers' Pay

School transportation is a consistent challenge for many families in Winooski. Without school bus service, many students, particularly those in low-income communities and among recent arrivals to this country, struggle getting to school on time and are more likely to be absent from school altogether (Garcia & Weiss, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Without consistent, reliable public transportation to school, students are at greater risk of chronic absenteeism and tardiness, which negatively affects their achievement and experiences in school.

Bus drivers are traditionally hired by the school district and not the City. However, the report describes how transportation can be fundamental to the lived experiences of residents in the city. School transportation is in fact a bridge between the streets and homes that are under the responsibility of the City, and the school which is under the responsibility of WSD. As such, we believe that establishing collaboration to ensure adequate and consistent school transportation may be a key area for collaboration. Failing to provide students with transportation to school has greater consequences than an inconvenient commute. It can damage students' academic and long-term outcomes. Students who miss school typically do worse academically. Indeed, the more school a student misses, the worse they perform (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). Early in a student's academic career, chronic absenteeism significantly reduces their likelihood of reading on grade level by third grade. In turn, this increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Hernandez, et al., 2012). Inconsistent attendance is related to markedly higher dropout rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Emerging research finds the presence of chronically absent students can also reduce outcomes for other students in the school (Gottfried, 2019).

Tardiness is also a problem and was mentioned by teachers in WSD as correlated with the availability of school bus service. Arriving late to school reduces a student's learning time and less time in the classroom is a problem in general, and one that is more acutely felt by students who are already behind academically or who are learning English. Additionally, a late arrival can mean students miss out on school-provided breakfast, which also has adverse consequences on overall student wellbeing and academic performance.

Providing buses to transport students to school on a predictable and reliable schedule can help to mitigate these challenges. Recent research finds that students who take the bus to school are absent less often and are also less likely to be chronically absent (Gottfried, 2017). Yet, finding drivers and navigating transportation costs are real concerns. There are several strategies other districts have undertaken to mitigate these issues and ensure students have safe and reliable transportation to and from school.

The bus driver shortage has been a consistent problem nationally that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Rosales, 2019). One way districts have attempted to address the issue is by raising wages to attract and retain bus drivers (Defoe, 2021; Associated Press, 2021; Zero, 2021). Raising pay can entice new drivers and help to retain current ones. However, even with higher pay, offering only part-time, seasonal work can make it more challenging to find and keep bus drivers. Given those challenges, coupled with the opportunity to better support student learning by providing busing, WSD should consider providing services year-around. This would eliminate the hiring challenges arising from offering only seasonal work. To offer full-time employment, WSD may also want to develop hybrid positions that include bus driving and other services that would benefit the City, district, schools, and students. As many as half the adults working in schools are not classroom teachers, and yet they fulfill important roles providing high-quality education to students (Loeb, 2016). Given the considerable population of new Americans settling in the City, the WSD may want to pay potential candidates within these communities to get their commercial driver's license, to serve as bus drivers and community liaisons, or to perform other roles supporting students. This way, a bus driver may have multiple duties to accommodate full-time pay.

Paying current teachers to get their commercial driver's license and drive a school bus is another approach districts have undertaken to address the bus driver shortage (Rosales, 2019). A rural district in North Carolina now requires newly hired, non-teaching staff to complete bus driving training (Mitchell, 2019). Paying existing teachers or staff to undertake the additional responsibility of driving a bus can be a more cost-effective way of providing this important service to students. It also can be a more enticing offer, since the majority of district employees are already employed full-time year round and receive health and retirement benefits.

Finally, to address transportation concerns some districts adopted ride-sharing programs to meet the needs of specific populations of students. For example, Los Angeles Unified School District contracted with HopSkipDrive (https://www.hopskipdrive.com/) to provide transportation for foster youth to ensure they have access to their schools of origin even if they move to a new community (Tiano, 2019). WSD would need to conduct a budget and community need analysis to determine whether this is a viable option for the district.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CITY

Recommendation 8: Development of Affordable Housing through Research and Action Planning

To address housing affordability and availability, the City should identify the drivers of housing inequality. Areas of research that are of particular interest include the history and impact of zoning laws and their interaction with income and wealth inequality.

The Center for American Progress summarizes the history of zoning in its 2019 report "Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation" (Solomon et. Al., 2019). This report details how the creation of zoning was "explicitly race-based" and how the emergence of "single-family" zoning, which barred those who could not afford single-family homes from living in the area, is directly tied to this heritage. The report connects this history to its contemporary consequences. Typically, wealth and the access to loans acted as prerequisites to purchasing homes in neighborhoods zoned for single-family housing, which favored White homebuyers. The resulting neighborhoods became racially segregated without any explicit racial pretext. The history of zoning and its consequences is an important lens to assess current zoning laws. The City could research how its current zoning laws could be contributing to the residential segregation highlighted in this report.

Zoning laws are typically viewed as restrictions on what type of units can be built in specific areas. However, coupled with income and wealth disparities, zoning laws can exacerbate residential segregation. The Brookings Institution identified this combination as a "major obstacle for racial integration and economic mobility" (Schultz, 2020). This report has demonstrated that income

gaps exist between White and BIPOC city employees in Winooski. White public employees (the only group to earn greater than the median salary on average) made just over $6,000 more per year than the highest earning BIPOC group and almost $9,500 more than the lowest earning BIOC group. In another piece, Brookings states, “when there are wide economic gaps by race, as we have in the U.S., exclusionary land-use policies based on families’ economic circumstances entrench racial segregation” (Matthew et. al., 2016) . Researching the interaction between racial economic disparities and Winooski’s zoning laws will be an important first step in developing an action plan that effectively and equitably addresses the housing affordability crisis in the City.

Reforming zoning laws will not be sufficient to address the housing affordability crisis in Winooski. In addition, the City should evaluate its current housing stock and development a pipeline that accounts for the community’s housing needs. Recent reporting shows a significant amount of development has occurred in the City over the past decade. However, our interviews with City officials and residents revealed the type of units being built in the City do not fit the needs of the community’s most vulnerable members. For instance, apartments with three or more bedrooms, which would fit the needs of New American families, have been ignored in favor of luxury studio and one-bedroom apartments. Identifying how existing policy may be creating unintentional barriers to providing housing that fits the community’s needs is the first step to formulating an action plan to rectify these policies.

Recommendation 9: Educate and Train Landlords and Renters

From our conversations with community members, we found that Winooski’s New American residents generally are not aware of their rights as tenants. When asked about their rights, most individuals stated the information they have on renting relates to their responsibilities as tenants, such as paying rent. Thus, a gap exists in the City between information about housing rights, where it exists, and the BIPOC community members’ knowledge of this information. The City should work to bridge this information gap. Making information accessible on the website would not be sufficient. The City should consider more proactive measures to ensure that renters know their rights. This could include the use of the community liaisons in expanded capacity as discussed in Recommendation 6.

Renters in Winooski need easy access to information about housing rights and resources. A great example of how to inform residents of their housing rights and resources is Pennsylvania’s

Housing Equality Center (2022). This organization offers several comprehensive fair housing guides broken down by type of reader (i.e., consumer, local government, etc.) with information about the Fair Housing Act, as well as local relevant fair housing information, offered digitally and physically. To increase the dissemination of housing information, Winooski may consider the Pennsylvania example by developing its own fair housing guide. Such a resource, if developed in print and digital formats, could serve as a key mechanism for transmitting fair housing information, guidelines, and resources from HUD, the State of Vermont, and the City of Winooski to residents. Given that the City's New American residents do not have experience with U.S. housing upon their arrival in the U.S., it is especially important that the City takes the initiative to provide them with this information, as they may not be exposed to it without assistance. Renters may be unsure which resources exist, where they can be accessed, if they are available in their native language, and whose responsibility it is to acquire this information. The City can create a single resource, available in all languages spoken in Winooski, that renters are provided upon moving in.

Another option to improve access to housing information could be improving the fair housing resource accessibility. A good example would be Pennsylvania's Housing Equality Center Resource page (2022). This resource contains links to information for consumers and landlords, HUD resources, a guide for local governments, and more. Importantly, the website is extensive, clear, and accessible. The links lead straight to easy-to-read, well-organized documents, rather than redirecting to a separate webpage. Adopting this format would be beneficial for individuals needing access to this information that do not have as much technological experience. Clicking through a series of links and webpages to find information can discourage and confuse information seekers.

Education can be accompanied by mandatory fair housing training. Numerous residents spoke of their inability to hold landlords accountable, citing poor living conditions and even routine maintenance that would go unaddressed for extended periods of time. Training landlords on their responsibilities to their tenants can help make landlords aware of their responsibilities. Such trainings could also extend beyond landlords to include elected officials and zoning board members (Pennsylvania's Housing Equality Center, 2020). Vermont's housing resource page includes a Fair Housing Law classroom module that discusses fair housing and protections in the Vermont context and includes a discussion of anti-discriminatory advertising and best non-

discriminatory practices for landlords (State of Vermont, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, 2022).

Recommendation 10: Change Advertising and Recruitment Practices to Ones that Are More Effective at Diversifying the Workforce

Current and former city employees expressed concern that recruitment methods used to recruit new talent do not reach BIPOC residents, and the City does not give enough consideration to advertising and recruiting techniques that would reach BIPOC applicants. The analysis presented in this report highlights the disparities in BIPOC and female representation in Winooski public employment. In interviews, former employees suggested that the City adapt its advertising practices to more modern methods, such as posting job listings on social media. Additionally, former employees suggested that the City should leave job postings up for longer periods to gather a diverse set of people interested in applying before closing off the availability of the position.

Solutions should be part of an intentional, strategic plan to diversify the city workforce. Such plan could also include practices such as the following:

- Adopting an affirmative diversity policy or statement included in job advertisements or on the government website.
- Performing an internal demographic assessment of departments and determining affirmative diversity goals.
- Partnering with WSD and minority-serving institutions in the area to develop recruitment plans or advertising partnerships.
- Creating a diverse recruitment or hiring team.

Recommendation 11: Develop Strategies To Increase Civic Participation Among BIPOC Residents

The City can approach increasing civic participation among BIPOC residents through two avenues: by playing a larger role in educating New Americans about the democratic process and

opportunities, and by improving its efforts to engage BIPOC communities in the democratic process.

The Center for American Progress (2018) identifies feelings of alienation from the government as a potential cause of low voter participation. The City can invest in explaining why voting is important for the community, how voters can benefit from civic participation, and why voting in safe for everyone.

The City could also invest in training New Americans before election day. Sample ballots could be provided to residents to familiarize potential voters with the process ahead of time (especially for individuals that have no experience with ballots) to avoid complications at the polls.

Grassroots efforts have been effective for increasing voter participation (Dale & Straus, 2009). Grassroots efforts can also build communities through one-on-one, personal interactions between residents and the canvassers. The responsibility of canvassers can include physically registering residents to vote; providing information about candidates; and informing residents of how, where, and when to vote (Center for American Progress, 2018). We expanded in Recommendation 5 on the vital role that community liaisons can play in this effort.

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Prepared by Opportunity Consulting
www.opportunityconsulting.com
info@oppportunityconsulting.com