Student & School Safety Assessment

Presentation for Eugene 4J School Board Work Session

August 4, 2021

SEECHANGE

Executive Summary

- **Purpose:** Promote a shared understanding of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to safety and belonging from the perspective of a diverse range of Eugene 4J stakeholders.

- **Sample of Topics:**

  - What do the terms "safety" and "belonging" mean to district stakeholders, including students themselves? What is going well in the district related to school and student safety and belonging?

  - How does feeling "safe" or like they "belong" correlate to a student's ability to do well in school?

  - What role did School Resource Officers (SROs) play in schools prior to the contract not being renewed with Eugene Police Department last year? What are the range of perspectives about the non-renewal of the contract and what gaps remain without the contract?

- **Focus:**

  - Sample of the communities most likely to feel unsafe and a lack of belonging at school according to national research– not as a comprehensive community engagement and planning process.

2

What did we learn?

There is a disconnect between what students feel are the most pressing safety issues for them and what district resources, policies and practices are addressing.

"I've never felt like I belonged at school. Never had a sense of community. Always felt like a temporary situation…In middle school math and science, there was a sub who asked the White students if I spoke English. When that's what you experience at a young age it adds up over time and has a lasting effect."
– High School Student of Color

"Everyday walking from and to school, a car passes [my friend] calling her the N-word, followed by other harsh words. I feel like it's impacting here life by making her feel very uncomfortable in her skin. She thinks it's very scary. It really opened my eyes though because me personally, I have never had racist comments and/or threat. But my friend coming to tell me this really opened my eyes on how people are harshly affected."
– High School Student

"…it doesn't feel safe to walk around the school. But people feel safe doing racist stuff."
– High School Student of Color

"I wish they knew that my idea of feeling safe isn't just physically. It's emotionally and mentally welcoming. When they try to connect, being a woman of color, understanding what it's like being me in the room."
– High School Student of Color

3

What did we learn?

Strengths

In general, students and educators feel safe at school. There are promising practices happening in pockets throughout the district where students experience culturally affirming environments, there is a focus on relationship building and repair, social and emotional needs are addressed, and there is growing diversity in the educator pool.

"BSU - I can show up and feel supported and safe. There is nowhere else."
- High School Student of Color

"Teachers are really good at differentiation and adapting instruction…We know that they are capable of succeeding." – ECCO Teacher

"The COVID silver lining is that staff has stepped back to reimagine culture and talked about how they want students to feel a sense of safety and belonging… We want students to receive love and care." – Educator
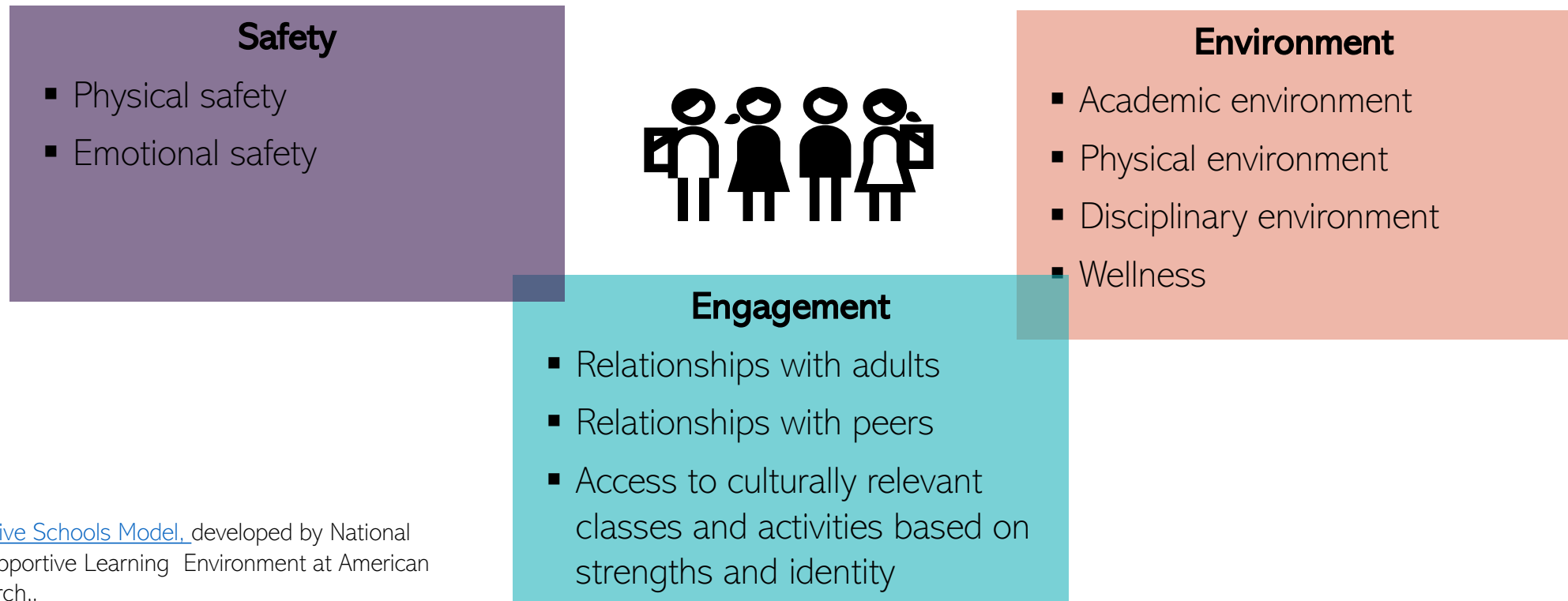
Challenges

There are districtwide, systemic barriers that prevent every student from experiencing safety and belonging including a lack of a north star that drives policy and resource decisions, lack of alignment in professional development, need for a deeper commitment to equity, siloed initiatives and departments, and policies and procedures that leave a lot of room for exclusion, individual bias, and disparities.

"They [district and building leaders] have to understand why they are doing what they're doing. If they don't understand the 'why,' all of this is just busy work. We'll keep going with no clear vision or plan, no active engagement, no follow up. We need resources to make this work successful."
– Educator

"[t]heir experience has been 10-11 years of being told to sit in the hall and yet we expect them to keep showing up somewhere where they aren't welcome."
– Educator

Framework for Student Belonging

Based on the research and literature review, this Assessment takes the position that the relationship between safety and belonging is one in which belonging is an umbrella term and achieving it requires attending to students' basic needs and their feelings of physical and emotional safety. The Assessment framework used throughout this report was derived from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments' framework and is modified as depicted below based on the literature review.[1]

Safety

- Physical safety
- Emotional safety

Environment

- Academic environment
- Physical environment
- Disciplinary environment
- Wellness

Engagement

- Relationships with adults
- Relationships with peers
- Access to culturally relevant classes and activities based on strengths and identity

5

Context leading up to this Assessment

May 2020   National calls to end policing in schools begin, prompted in part by the police killing of George Floyd

June 2020   Eugene 4J School Board votes to "extend the contract with EPD [Eugene Police Department for SROs] only until December 31…"[2]

Sept. 2020   Oregon Department of Education creates the All Students Belong rule (and renames it later to "Every Student Belongs"); requires every district to adopt and implement policies and practices that prohibit use and display of hate symbols and affirms that students have the right to an education free from bias incidents, hate speech, and harassment, and discrimination.[3]

Dec. 2020   Eugene 4J School Board adopts the formerly "All Students Belong" rule required by Oregon Dept of Education.[4]

At its work session, the School Board set All Students Belong priorities and defined a "north star" to address racial inequities and work toward safety and belonging for all students. Their priorities included "reorient[ing] discipline and safety practices towards transformative justice so all students feel safe at school." Further, discipline practices "should not disproportionately harm students of color, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, or any other groups of students."[5]

April 2021   Lane County declares racism a public health crisis.[6]

[2] June 17, 2020 Board meeting minutes. The board did not renew the contract after December 31 in later actions.
[3] Oregon Administrative Rule 581-022-2312.
[4] December 02, 2020 Board meeting minutes. Policy ACB Hate Symbols and Bias Incidents.
[5] December 16, 2020 Board Work Session materials, 12/16/20, Presentation for School Board Work Session on Safety Plan, p. 6.
[6] Lane County Order and Resolution No. 21-04-21-01, adopted April 21, 2020.

Methodology & Participation

Student Outcomes Assessment

- Discipline
- Attendance
- Grades

Policy & Resource Review

- Board-adopted policies
- Discipline reporting forms
- District current/recent work on safety and belonging
- Student handbooks
- Budgeting protocols
- SRO contract
- Student safety and wellness resources
- Resources for professional development re: equity
- Literature review
- Eugene 4J Student and Community Engagement archives from 2020 and 2021

Focus Groups, Interviews, & Surveys

- Students
- Teachers
- Classified Staff
- School Administrators
- District Administrators
- School Climate Survey

Equity Committee Engagement

- Led the committee over 3 meetings to make meaning of preliminary analyses on student discipline data, student focus group data
- Invited feedback on process

33
Hours of interview and focus group data

83
Students, parents, guardians, community members, and educators participated in interviews and focus groups

516
Surveys from educators (teachers, administrators, classified staff)

Interview and Focus Group Participants

28 Students*

7 Participate in an Asian Student Union

12 Participate in a Black Student Union

5 Enrolled in special education

3 Attend an alternative program

1 Participates in Equity Youth Educators

School-based affinity groups, such as Black Student Unions, are open to all students regardless of their racial/ethnic and other social identities. The student categories in this chart reflect affinity groups and education programs that were included in outreach. The students who participated in each group represented diverse racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and other social identities. The student categories do not reflect all groups and programs that were invited to participate, instead they reflect the groups and programs that had participants.

15 Parents

5 Black, African American

10 Latino, Hispanic

The NAACP's local chapter assisted with outreach for the Black/African American parent/family focus group; The Latino/Hispanic parent/family focus group was organized and facilitated in Spanish by a school-based family coordinator.

40 Educators

13 Teachers

15 Classified Staff

12 Administrators

The local teachers' union assisted with outreach for a focus group with teachers of color.

*Only high school students participated due to the focused outreach through high school affinity groups

Defining Safety & Belonging

Definitions

SAFETY

Most research defines school safety in terms of feeling and being physically safe.[7] Examples include:

- school shootings
- threats and injuries with weapons
- bullying (including cyberbullying)
- students' use of alcohol and drugs
- fights
- crime victimization

Other literature, including the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, also notes the importance of emotional safety, defined by "an experience in which one feels safe to express emotions, security, and confidence to take risks and feel challenged and excited to try something new."[8]

BELONGING

In the context of their relationships with their peers and school adults and in their environment, belonging includes feeling:[9]

- personally accepted,
- respected,
- included, and/or
- supported by others in school.

Research indicates that the greatest predictors of a student's sense of belonging are:

a) their "mental and physical conditions" and
b) their general health.[10]

This implies that supporting student health and wellness is key to improving belonging.

[7]Irwin, V., Wang, K., Cui, J., Zhang, J., and Thompson, A. (2021). Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2020 (NCES 2021-092/NCJ 300772). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC. Retrieved July 1, 2021 from https:// nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2021092.
[8]National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments webpage, available at: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/emotional-safety.
[9] "Belonging and Balance in the Lives of Students and Staff: A Literature Analysis of the Role Belonging and Balance Play in School Success." (2019). Generation Schools Network.
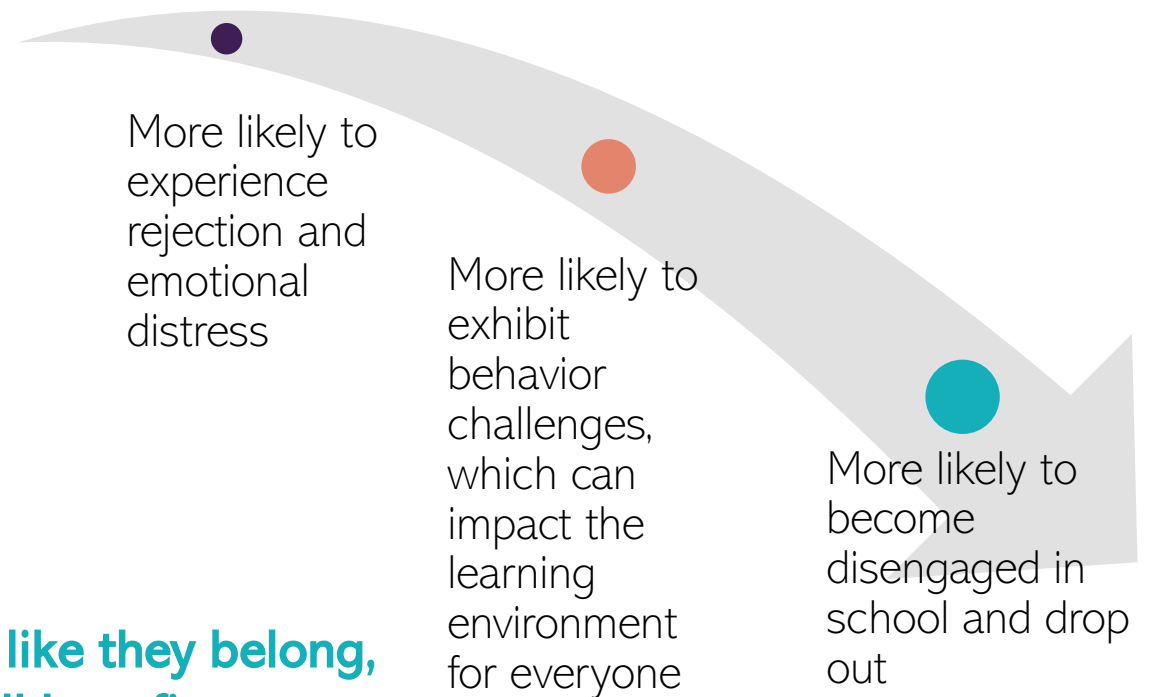[10] Ibid.

Why does safety and belonging matter for student success?

When students feel like they belong at school, they are:[11]

- More likely to enjoy their classes and be interested in school
- More likely to have a positive sense of self
- More likely to succeed academically and graduate on time
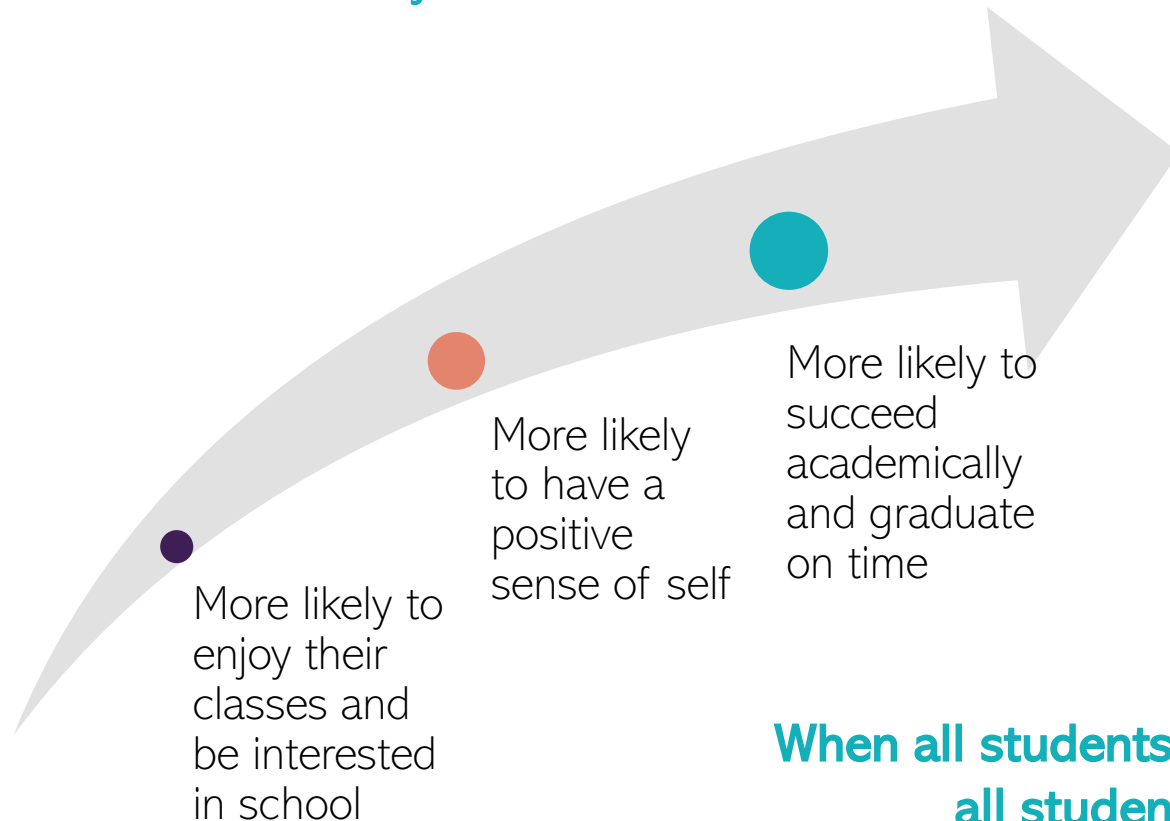
When students feel like they do not belong at school, they are:[12]

- More likely to experience rejection and emotional distress
- More likely to exhibit behavior challenges, which can impact the learning environment for everyone
- More likely to become disengaged in school and drop out

When all students feel like they belong, all students will benefit

[11] Osterman K.F. Students' Need for Belonging in the School Community. *Review of Educational Research*. 2000;70(3):323-367.
[12] Osterman, K. F. (2010). Teacher practice and students' sense of belonging. In T. Lovat, R. Toomey, & N. Clement (Eds.), International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing (pp. 239–260). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8675-4_15.

Findings & Insights

"There is a strong correlation between academic performance and sense of belonging that is shown to benefit all students across all levels of economic and social advantage and disadvantage (Appleton & Christenson, 2008). All students benefit from feeling that they belong to a group, regardless of their background or situation in life; however, this is not to say that all students achieve this sense of belonging with the same ease or difficulty. For some student populations, it can be more challenging to feel that they belong, creating more obstacles for school leaders and teachers to intentionally overcome in ensuring these students can establish a sense of belonging."[13]

[13] Belonging and Balance in the Lives of Students and Staff: A Literature Analysis of the Role Belonging and Balance Play in School Success (2019). p. 6.

Safety

Which students tends to feel safe and not safe:

- White students, including those experiencing disabilities, were more likely in focus groups to say they feel safe compared to students of color.

"I haven't had to try to feel safe or fit in. When you are White and around people who look like you, you don't have to try."

- White High School Student

"At BSU [Black Student Union] I can show up and feel supported and safe. There is nowhere else."

- Black High School Student

How do students define safety and what safety issues are most salient:

- Students feel the least safe at school when they experience racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, sexism, and other acts of hate and bullying.

- Mental and emotional health are bigger priorities among Eugene 4J students than threats of physical force.

"Teachers need to be educated on how to address racial slurs, and they need to address it. The whole class hears [the slurs] and then they don't address it."

- High School Student

51% of teachers and classified staff say that training in addressing hate speech, racism, and bullying would help them feel safer at school.

*"**Easy access to mental health and counseling services is the most important policy concern of students [in an Oregon statewide survey] today.** However, only 58 percent of students agree that there are services for mental health available at their school…"*[14]

Percent of students who have observed racism in school

Sample read: Thirty-one percent of Latino/Hispanic elementary school students have observed racism in school, compared to 26% of White elementary school students.

Key Takeaways: The students who are most likely to observe racism at middle and high school tend to be Black/African American, Multiracial, and Asian/Pacific Islanders, according to School Climate survey data.

White and Alaska Native/Native American students are the least likely to observe racism at middle and high school.

While there are some differences in elementary school data, Black/African American students are consistently among the most likely to observe racism across all levels.

	Elementary School*	Middle and High School
Alaska Native, Native American	30%	38%
Asian, Pacific Islander	20%	58%
Black, African American	45%	62%
Latino, Hispanic	31%	54%
Multiracial	30%	62%
White	26%	48%
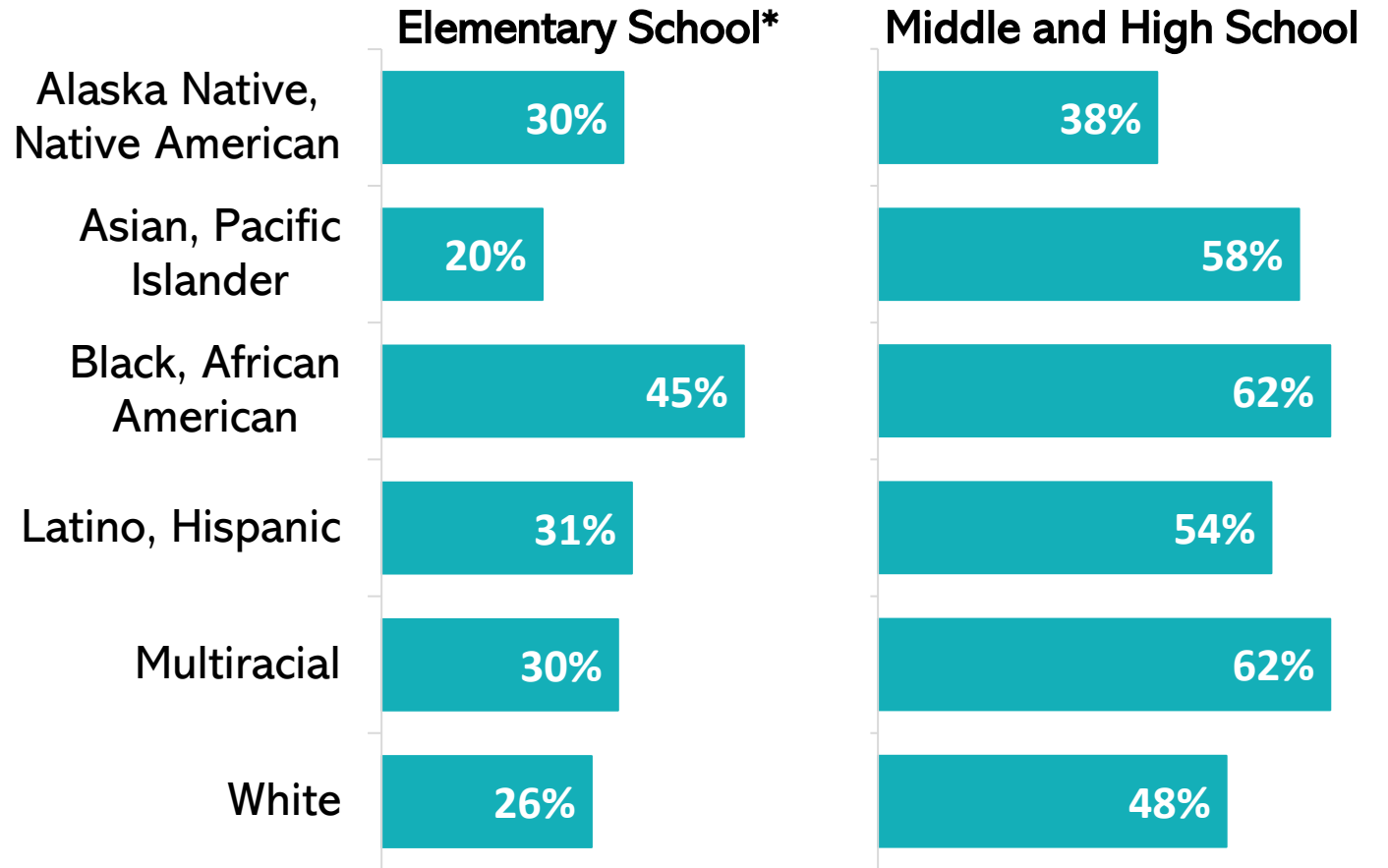
*Eugene 4J administers the School Climate Survey to elementary students in grades 3-5, therefore that is what represented throughout all Climate Survey data in this report.

Source: Eugene School District 2019-20 School Climate Surveys data; analysis produced by SeeChange.

16

Safety

How do educators perceive their own safety at school?

- Teachers, classified staff, and administrators typically feel safe at school.

- Among administrators, the most salient issues were: students causing other students emotional or psychological harm, students' sense of belonging, students' connections with trusted adults, and students causing other students physical harm. In focus groups, administrators expressed concerns about "volatile parents."

- Among teachers and classified staff, fear of school shootings and students causing other students physical or emotional/psychological harm were salient.

In surveys, 86% of administrators, teachers, and classified staff said they "rarely" or "never" feel unsafe at school (during a typical year of in-person instruction). Approximately 11% said "sometimes" and 3% said "usually" or "always."

"[Schools feel safer when] principals and administrators with a strong antiracist stance are willing to support, defend my inclusion of such discussions and courageous conversations in my class!"

- Teacher of Color

Engagement

What cultivates a sense of safety & belonging for students?

- Culturally relevant curricula
- Classes & activities that with interests (CTE, project-based learning, etc.)
- Diverse educators
- Teachers that listen to them, check in on them, interrupt bias/hate on the spot

67% of middle and high school students reported that their school offers enough courses to keep them interested.

Alaska Native/Native American, Black/African American, non-binary, and LGBTQ students were less likely to think their school offered enough courses.

"My kid…I believe if he sees a teacher, principal, volunteers that look like him, that will make him feel safe."

- Parent of Color

"Check up on me. I have a difficult time doing work which makes it really difficult to be in school. It means my grades are really bad…I like hands-on learning."

- High school student with a disability

What helps families be supportive to their children's education and engaged in the school community?

- Cultural and linguistic relevance
- Time to engage

"It is amazing that the North Region has a beautiful Dual Immersion Program but embarrassing that the High School has no bilingual office help. When we have questions or want to call an absence there is no one to assist us."

- Parent of Color

"Please hold SPANISH ONLY meetings. We do not feel segregated if this is done. We actually feel respected, because you are giving us the time to engage, process and to participate in the meeting rather than just be talked at and not receive our feedback." - Parent of Color
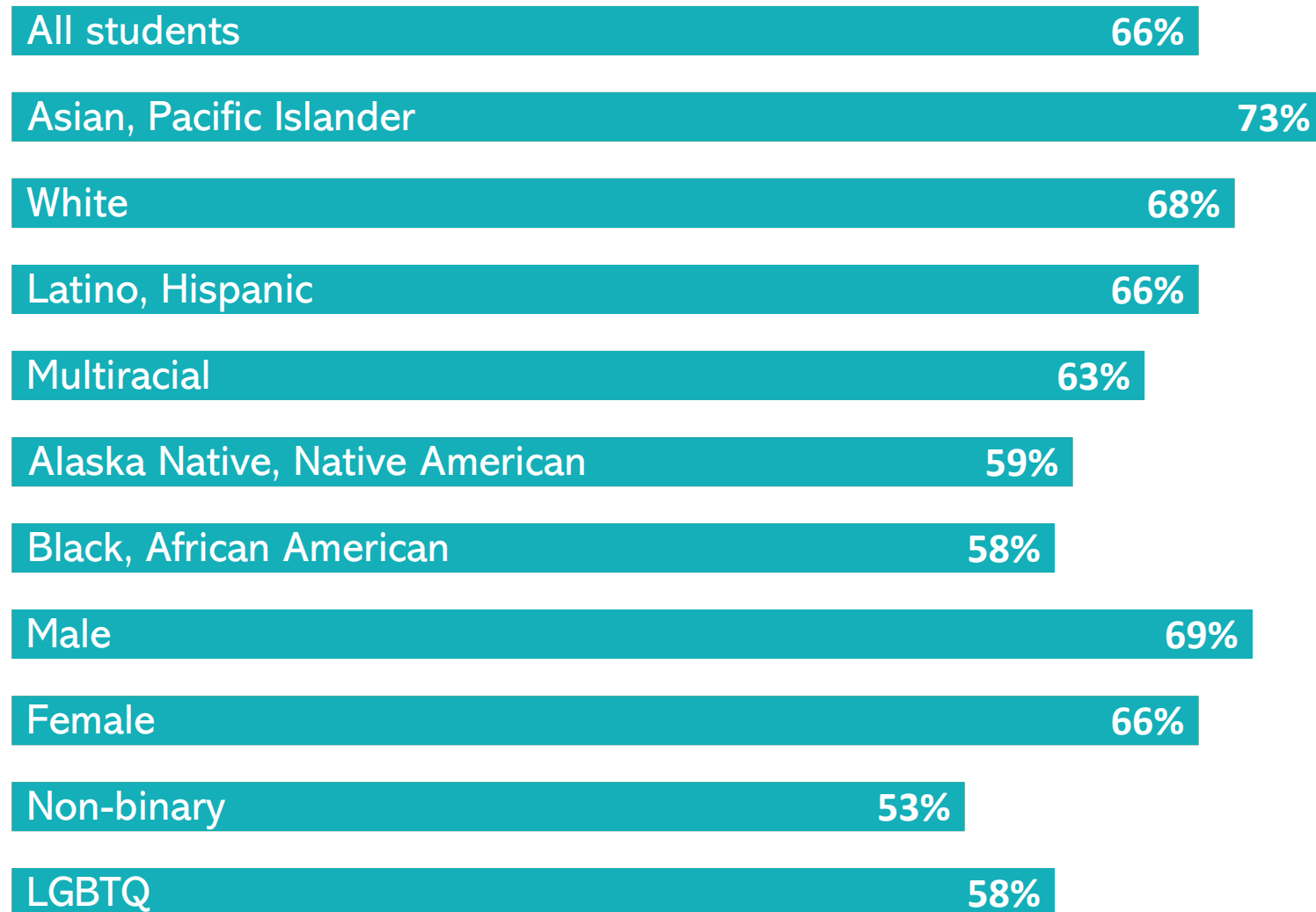
Percent of middle and high school students who think their schools offer enough courses to keep them interested

Sample read: Sixty-eight percent of White students think their schools offer enough courses to keep them interested, compared to 58% of Black/African American students.

Key Takeaway: Two thirds of middle and high school students overall reported that their schools offered enough courses to keep them interested.

Non-binary, LGBTQ, Alaska Native/Native American, and Black/African American students reported the lowest feeling of interest, whereas Asian/Pacific Islander, White, and male students reported the highest amount of interest in the available courses.

Group	Percent
All students	66%
Asian, Pacific Islander	73%
White	68%
Latino, Hispanic	66%
Multiracial	63%
Alaska Native, Native American	59%
Black, African American	58%
Male	69%
Female	66%
Non-binary	53%
LGBTQ	58%

Source: Eugene School District 2019-20 School Climate Survey data; analysis produced by SeeChange.

The difference between student racial/ethnic diversity and teacher racial/ethnic diversity, by school

Sample read: Forty-seven percent of students at César Chávez Elementary School are students of color compared to 7% of teachers who are teachers of color.

Key Takeaway: All except one school (Buena Vista) in the district has an educator diversity gap, meaning the teacher workforce is not as diverse as the student population.
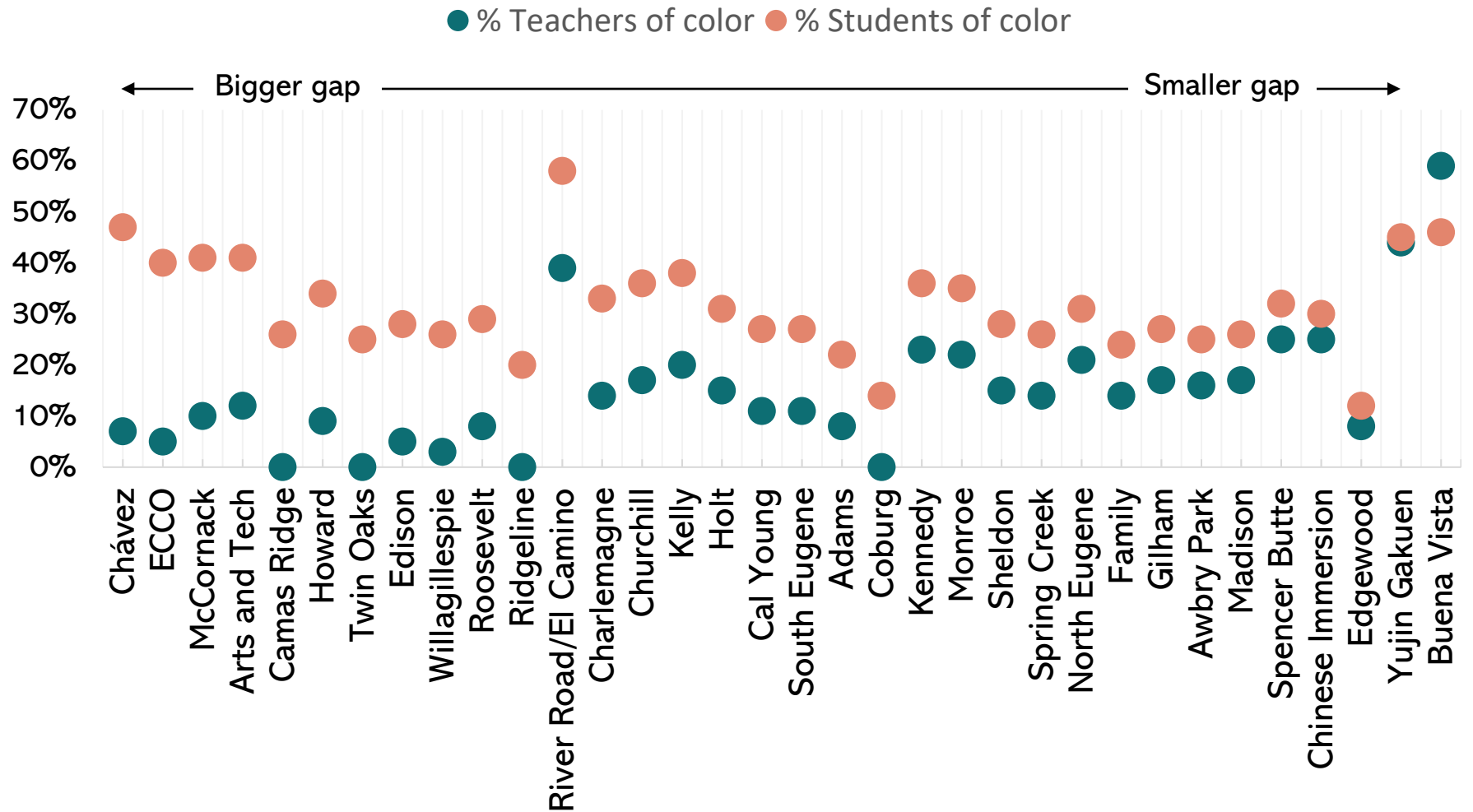
Source: ODE "At-a-Glance" Reports; analysis produced by SeeChange.

School Environment

What is the nature of the district's culture around the academic and disciplinary environments and who is most impacted?

- Schools disproportionately discipline students of color and students with disabilities according to an analysis of two years of data.

- Discipline policies and routines are inconsistent across schools and classrooms and leave room for educators' implicit bias and/or considerable discretion.

- A districtwide culture of excluding students from classrooms and schools disproportionately affects students of color and students with disabilities.

In focus groups and interviews, educators shared that due to sparse and inconsistent guidance, training, and accountability from their schools and the district, disciplinary decisions are left up to individual educators.

"The three Ds [defiance, disrespect, disruption] are all extremely cultural and dependent on tone and the size of a child's body. "

- Educator

"There has been a years long debate over hoodies...but some colleagues draw a line in the sand. It's the more subjective stuff in teacher practices and policies. Those policies aren't going to help.
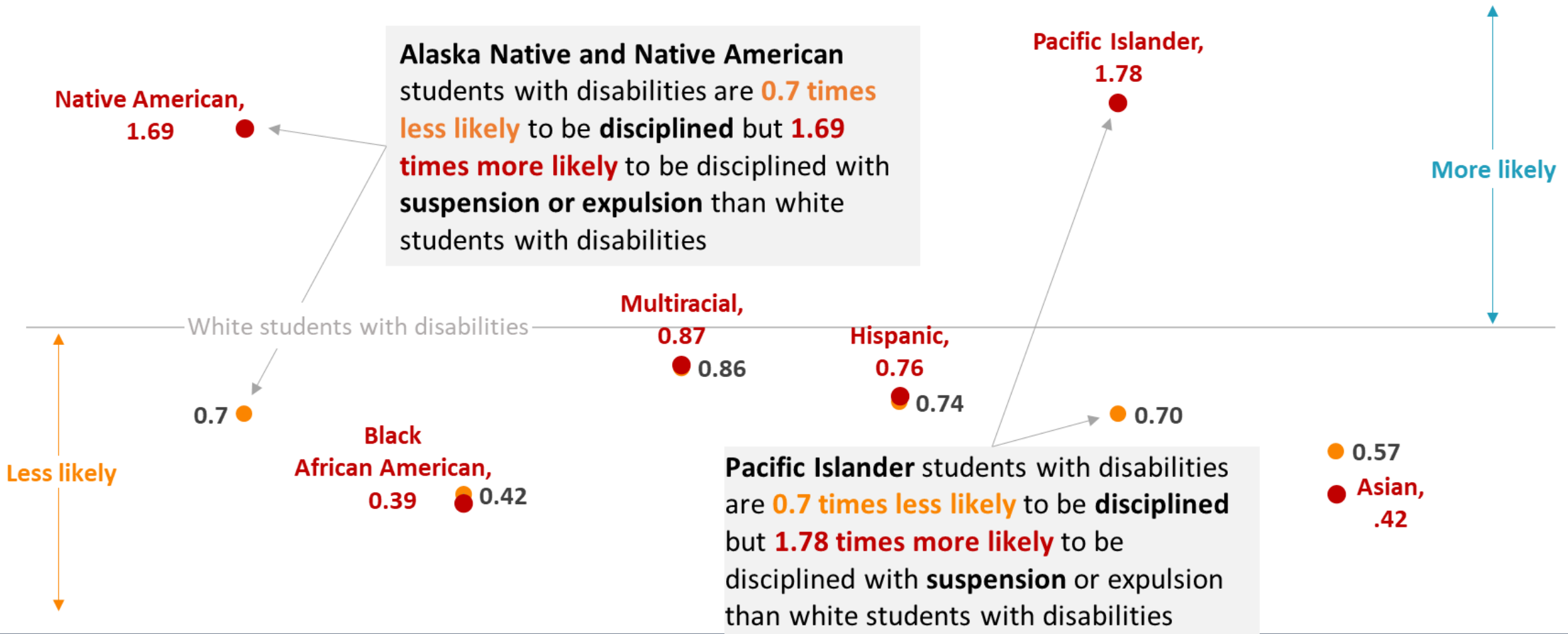
- Teacher of Color

Elementary and middle schools are more likely to discipline students with disabilities; all school types are disproportionately disciplining Pacific Islander students.

21

Likelihood of a student of color with a disability being disciplined and suspended or expelled compared to a White student with a disability

- 🔵 Greater likelihood of discipline
- 🟠 Lesser likelihood of discipline
- 🔴 Likelihood of suspension or expulsion

Alaska Native and Native American students with disabilities are **0.7 times less likely** to be **disciplined** but **1.69 times more likely** to be disciplined with **suspension or expulsion** than white students with disabilities

Pacific Islander, 1.78

Native American, 1.69

More likely

White students with disabilities

Multiracial, 0.87 — 0.86

Hispanic, 0.76 — 0.74

0.7 🟠

🟠 0.70

Less likely

Black African American, 0.39 — 0.42

🟠 0.57

Asian, .42

Pacific Islander students with disabilities are **0.7 times less likely** to be **disciplined** but **1.78 times more likely** to be disciplined with **suspension** or expulsion than white students with disabilities

Source: Odds-ratios estimated using Eugene School District 4J student-level discipline data from the 2018-19 school year.

School Environment

What role did School Resource Officers' play prior to the suspension of the contract with Eugene Police?

- Educators relied on SROs for a breadth of responsibilities, including wellness and safety checks on students outside of school, addressing conflicts with parents, addressing threats from the community surrounding the school (including trespassers), and investigating and/or intervening in incidents related to physical violence and harm (e.g., sexual assault, rape, suicide, and child abuse).

- To fill the void without SROs, many administrators plan to call the Director of Public Safety.

- There is a misalignment between SROs' duties and what helps students feel safe (primarily emotional/mental health).

97% of administrators rely on SROs to do wellness and safety checks at students' homes or in the community.

"I do not believe SROs are the appropriately trained specialists for most of the issues that make our schools 'unsafe' or enable them to be a place where "all students belong. "

- Teacher

"Not having a school resource office to turn to anymore [makes it feel unsafe at school]. They did so much more then just keep the school safe."   - Teacher

"A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found that school discipline rates increased following the adoption of SROs…Moreover, some studies show evidence of racially disparate effects such that Black students might be disproportionate recipients of exclusionary discipline and arrest when SROs are placed in schools."[15]

[15] Viano, S., Curran, F., & Fisher, B. (2021). Kindergarten Cop: A Case Study of How a Coalition Between School Districts and Law Enforcement Led to School Resource Officers in Elementary Schools. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 43(2), 253-279, p. 4.

Educators relied on SROs for a breadth of responsibilities

Sample read: Ninety-seven percent of administrators relied on SROs for wellness and safety checks at students' homes or in the community.

Administrators **Teachers and Classified Staff**

Responsibility	Administrators	Teachers and Classified Staff
Wellness checks at students' homes or in the community	97%	39%
Addressing conflicts with parents	69%	13%
Building relationships with students	69%	16%
Responding to crimes in the school neighborhood	66%	15%
Addressing conflicts between students	59%	13%
Patrolling school grounds, enforcing trespassing rules	59%	31%
Interpreting legal documents (e.g., custody orders)	55%	28%
Personal property searches	31%	29%
Addressing conflicts between students and adults	21%	33%
Supervising entry into school buildings	21%	21%
Did not rely on SROs		28%

Key Takeaway: Combined across all educator groups, SROs were most used for wellness and safety checks on students in their home.

.
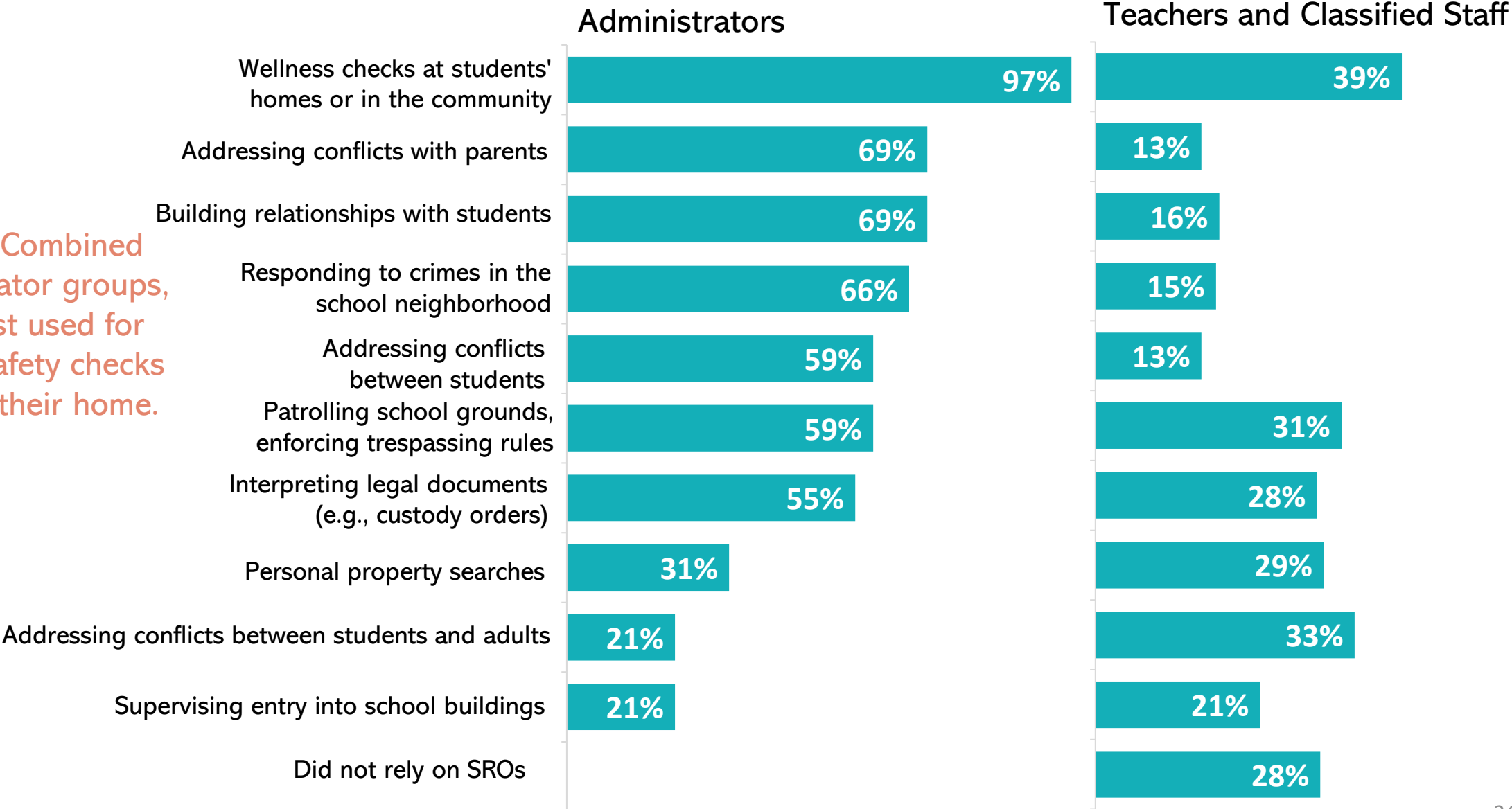
Source: SeeChange school safety assessment administrator and teacher/classified staff surveys.

Summary of systemic conditions that impact safety & belonging

Strengths	Challenges
1. Professional development focused on inclusion and antiracism	1. Lack of shared, district-wide north star and a plan to get there
2. Dedicated resources to build relationships between educators and students/families	2. Lack of substantive, long-term priorities that center inclusive education for all students in all schools and shift district culture
3. Strengthened focus on social/emotional needs of students and developing a more robust wrap-around program	3. Work that supports safety and belonging tends to be caught within competing district priorities and is often de-prioritized
4. Growing diversity in educator workforce	4. Policies and protocols leave room for interpretation of individuals and often result in practices that cause disparities in outcomes based on student ability and identity
5. Several promising practices happening in pockets throughout the district	5. Lack of retention of educators of color

Student experiences and system challenges at 4J are similar to other districts
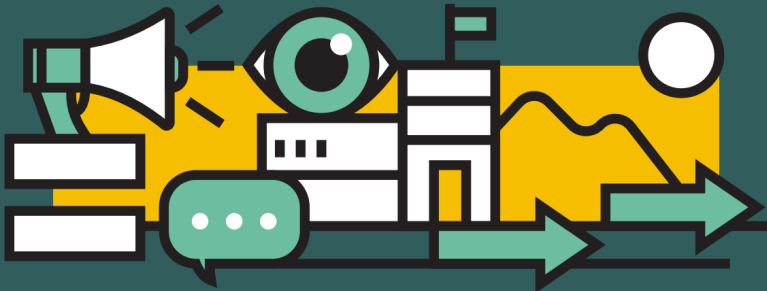
State of Our Schools

Examining Oregon's high schools through students' eyes

Experience in school: **Students generally like going to school and feel safe in the environment; however, students feel that their schools lack an atmosphere of respect and resolution.**

- While most students agree that they enjoy going to school (68 percent agree and 25 percent disagree), only 58 percent of students agree that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their schools (32 percent disagree).
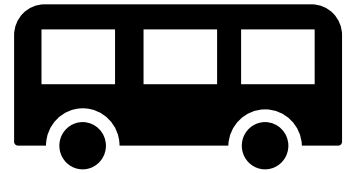
  Students report several concerns that may be influencing how they experience their school culture: (a) limited supports to overcome challenges, (b) a disconnect in communication between administrators and students, (c) inconsistencies in school discipline, and (d) failure to prevent prejudicial actions and behavior.

Source: State of Our Schools: Examining Oregon's High Schools Through Students' Eyes, Oregon Student Voice, 2018.

Process Recommendations

Process Recommendations

Begin a community visioning process to develop a shared north star for safety & belonging

Focus the engagement on co-developing a north star

Design clear roles for students, community members, educators, and board members for the process in order to align the vision with implementation

Engage the student and family communities that are most impacted

Allocate appropriate time and resources to do this work well

Develop a plan to align policies, practices, & resources according to north star

Align districtwide initiatives through the development and implementation of a collaborative strategic planning process

Ensure that all district initiatives, such as Learning for All, the Behavior Framework, and Positive Behavior Intervention Support System, connect to the key goals articulated as part of the All Students Belong north star

Implement the plan, ensuring that building-level leaders have clear expectations regarding their role in carrying out district priorities and are supported to translate them to local school community contexts

Develop clear roles, expectations and supports to meet this vision.

Recommendations for Further Exploration

1) **Conduct a deeper dive on discipline data and practices**

   - How do discipline practices and outcomes compare across schools and within schools at the classroom level?

   - How do patterns in discipline outcomes compare over time?

   - How are students and families impacted by discipline practices, especially students with disabilities, students color, and students of color with disabilities?

2) **Understand data capacity strengths and needs for strategic use of school- and district-level data**

   - What types of data do educators have access to at the school level and how are they used?

   - What are the expectations district- and school-wide about how data should be used?

   - Where are data teams being implemented, who is on those teams, and how do they operate?

3) **Assess translation and interpretation services across the district**

   - Are there consistent policies for providing translation and interpretation services for families? Are school leaders and families aware of them and do they have the expertise/resources to use them?

   - What are the barriers to providing accessible and high-quality translation? How could they be addressed?

   - Where in the district are families satisfied with translation and interpretation services? What could be replicated from those sites?

Questions & Discussion