

January 24, 2022

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee:

The Shawnee Mission School District was asked to appear before the Kansas House Committee on K-12 Education Budget on our work around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Curriculum, including its goals and services.

A great school district cannot be great for only some of its students. Any district that seeks to be great must be willing to look unflinchingly at its own practices, to ensure it is providing every student with the best opportunity to be successful. In June of 2019, the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) Board of Education approved the 2019-2024 SMSD Strategic Plan. This plan, developed in collaboration with students, staff, parents, community members, and business partners, represents the direction for the district for the next five years and beyond.

The plan has a clear objective: Each student will have a personalized learning plan which will prepare them for college and careers, with the interpersonal skills they need for life success. This is an ambitious goal, one that is worthy of a great school district, but also one that will require significant changes to teaching and learning, in order to meet this objective for all students.

The community direction is clear: These objectives must be met for ALL students. As a district, then, we must be willing to ask ourselves difficult questions:

- Are we really holding all students to the same high expectations?
- Are specific groups of students (such as female students, students with disabilities, students whose first language is not English, students of color) not reaching these objectives, and if so, how can we strengthen our practices, to give them more opportunities to be successful?
- Are our schools places where all students and staff feel connected and have a sense of belonging?
- How do we accomplish these objectives in a manner that ensures that no student, in learning about the complex nature of their school, community and nation, feels diminished or less valued?

We have examined our data, and we are not meeting the needs of all students equitably. To improve our practices, we needed focused attention on why particular students are not succeeding. For the past two years, Shawnee Mission School District has partnered with Corwin Publications to engage in Deep Equity professional development work. This work is

specifically designed to strengthen our ability to give all of our students the best chance for success.

Through this work, our team members have had the opportunity to examine our present environments for teaching and learning. This work, along with an examination of publicly available data, confirms what has been stated above, that we are not being equally successful with all students. This committee expects all of our students to achieve, as does our Board and the Supreme Court in the Gannon decision. Reaching and teaching all students, particularly those not currently meeting district goals, requires new knowledge and skills, and we continue to seek the best tools available.

Through Deep Equity professional development, we are invited to challenge past assumptions about who our different learners are, and to develop better ways to identify, understand, and address their needs. In doing so, we are developing stronger classroom and school cultures where we strive for students to feel connected to their teachers and other students, and to build pride in their school. We are developing greater opportunities for student voice to come forward and help identify barriers as well as solutions, so that our district can become more responsive to student needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs teaches us that students' basic needs, including the feelings of safety and belonging, must be met before higher needs, such as accomplishment and achieving their full potential, can be realized.

Our equity work helps to identify and remove barriers to achievement, so that all students have the opportunity to reach their highest success. It is rooted in a profound commitment to creating a system that is equitable for all students, and a deep and abiding belief in the power of educators to create such a system. Our equity focus enables us to work together to identify how best to challenge past practices that may not have proven effective for all students, and helps our system grow so that all students may realize their fullest potential.