

# Irvington Union Free School District

## Root Cause Analysis Report

*An executive summary of the process, findings, and steps for change*

### **Introduction**

On April 29, 2021, the New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU) facilitated a “Root Cause Analysis” Team of 32 individuals, including central office administrators (inclusive of the Superintendent of Schools), faculty, staff, community members and Board of Education members, and led them in a review of District practices, policies, and outcomes through a data-based intersectional lens focused on race, gender, and special education classification. This comprehensive process also included focus groups of parents and students. (Student focus group feedback will be added as an addendum to the NYU report once it is received by the District.) Working together as a team and then later in subcommittees, four focus areas were identified that have informed the District’s current initiatives. These focus areas include:

- Professional learning
- Curriculum and instruction
- Restorative practices and the Code of Conduct
- Community engagement

Additionally, the District has supplemented these focus areas to include the recruitment and retention of a diverse staff. Subcommittees will continue to meet for the foreseeable future and include representation from the broader Root Cause Analysis Team. However, the formal work of the collective Root Cause Analysis Team ended with NYU on July 20, 2021.

### **The CR-S Education Framework**

In 2019, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the New York State Board of Regents, in collaboration with The New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, under the leadership of Dr. David Kirkland, published the [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#) to help “educators create student-centered learning environments that: affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning, develop students’ abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change.” The framework is grounded in four principles:

- ***Welcoming and Affirming Environment***
- ***High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction***
- ***Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment***
- ***Ongoing Professional Learning***

The District hosted building-level staff workshops at IMS and IHS on the topics of implicit bias and culturally responsive education in the Spring of 2020. During the same period of time, Dows Lane Elementary School collaborated with GLSEN, and Main Street School partnered with Welcoming Schools, in targeted professional learning. As schools opened for hybrid learning for the 2020-21 school year, the District contracted with the NYU Metropolitan Center

for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools to provide Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE) framework training for staff, community members, and Board of Education trustees as well as to inform the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work of the District by reviewing the District's policies, including its Code of Conduct, and examining District data. The cost of this training was shared by the District, the IEF, and the PTSA, with further contribution from the IFA.

The District has begun to utilize the CR-SE framework as the foundation for conversations for staff to engage in during the 2021-22 school year to help center the focus on students.

### **IUFSD and NYU**

On September 2, 2020, staff in all four buildings participated in breakout sessions assisted by the NYU facilitators and considered their individual and collective roles as changemakers. This event was supplemented by two community conversations on race and equity, including NYU facilitators, and provided a comprehensive overview of the District's upcoming initiatives. Dr. Kirkland provided the keynote address.

A "Lead Learner" Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education (CR-SE) training, facilitated by NYU, including staff, community members and members of the BOE commenced on January 14, 2021, and continued into the 2021-22 school year, culminating on November 16, 2021. Some participants from the first training were joined by additional community members and staff to participate in the Root Cause Analysis Team that met from April through July of 2021. In addition, IUFSD staff participants from that first training are currently leading a second "Lead Learner" training, with continued participation by NYU, that commenced on January 11, 2022 and is scheduled to culminate in the Spring of 2022. The second cohort, following a gradual release model, is being co-facilitated by three Irvington UFSD staff members and one member of the NYU staff. Following the completion of this cohort the District will have the necessary resources and capacity to independently facilitate future cohorts of learners. On February 12, 2021, NYU facilitated building-based workshops for staff on the CR-SE educational framework.

### **The NYU Root Cause Analysis Report**

At the culmination of its work with the Root Cause Analysis Team, NYU provided a "Root Cause Report" to the District. The Root Cause Report, and its content, style, and the manner in which data is presented therein, were created solely by NYU and its employees. The report's data-based recommendations will help guide the IUFSD as it moves forward in its DEI work under the CR-SE education framework and will inform stakeholders as they continue to work together and plan for the unique needs of the IUFSD community. This executive summary seeks to provide an overview of the main findings contained within the 64 page report. The report will be released in February 2022 and will be presented on March 2, 2022 at a special public meeting of the Board of Education.

At this meeting, members of the District administration who were participants in the Root Cause Analysis Team will present an overview of the Root Cause Analysis Process, highlight its findings and identify strategic steps forward to address the necessary areas for growth.

Additionally, community members in attendance will be engaged in an activity that will assist in prioritizing future initiatives.

### **NYU “Root Cause Analysis” Process**

NYU met with 32 members of the IUFSD community over the course of six sessions. The team included District administrators, educators, related-service providers, school board members, parents and community members – this group was called the “Root Cause Analysis Team”. NYU led the Root Cause Analysis Team through a variety of activities including: introductory training in disproportionality, root cause analysis and culturally responsive behavior support; reviews of discipline and academic data, the results of a staff survey, parent/caregiver focus groups, the [District Code of Conduct](#), and building-based discipline referral procedures; and 10 first steps toward the creation of an “initial outlining” for a multi-year action plan (NYU 6-9)<sup>1</sup>.

### **Parent/Caregiver Focus Group**

NYU requested that parents/caregivers representative of historically marginalized subgroups be invited to focus groups that would be facilitated. The District invited parents to participate and assured the participating community members that their identities would remain confidential. Those who were invited were provided with the necessary Zoom link to participate, but the balance of the focus group process remained under the direction of NYU. NYU reports that it invited 19 parents/caregivers to participate in a focus group; 10 parents/caregivers accepted that invitation and participated in focus groups from June 29, 2021 to July 21, 2021. Results of the focus groups were then reviewed with the Root Cause Analysis Team. There was at least one participant for each school building in IUFSD. (NYU 8-11 ; 49-50).

The District is actively using the focus group feedback and its school community members’ experiences to guide its actions, professional learning, and planning. This data presents the opportunity for necessary growth and learning for all school community members in the shared commitment to create the most welcoming school environment possible. Generally agreed upon goals identified by the report as a result of the focus group include:

- Increasing the diversity of teaching, administrative and other school staff
- Ensuring the provision of diversity training for current staff
- Providing additional language support for parents/guardians/caregivers who are not confident in their English skills when speaking to school staff. (NYU 8-11)

### **NYU Data Sets: Discipline and Academics**

NYU’s senior research associate, with the assistance of District staff employees, collected data from IUFSD reflecting two years of District student outcome data (2018-2019 and 2019-2020). The related data was provided to Root Cause Analysis members for their independent review. (NYU 11-30). NYU analyzed District and school level discipline outcome data by race, gender, IEP status, and grade level using composition index, risk index and relative risk ratio. (NYU 11-30) The indexes are defined below as the NYU report does not provide such detail:

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<sup>1</sup> References throughout the Executive Summary, such as (NYU 8-11), cross reference the NYU Root Cause Analysis report.

Composition Index: Gives the proportion of students by race/ethnicity in a particular outcome. Composition index is used to determine if a particular group is over- or underrepresented in a particular outcome.

Risk Index: Identifies at what rate or percentage or risk students of a particular racial/ethnic group have in a particular outcome.

Relative Risk Ratio: Compares the risk of a particular outcome for one group to the risk of the remaining group(s) experiencing the same outcome.

Demographic data<sup>2</sup> for the period of analysis:

Total number of students academic year 2018-19: 1761

<b>Race</b>	<b>%</b>
Hispanic	9.07%
Indian	0.16%
Asian	11.26%
Black	5.10%
White	69.10%
Two or More Races	5.40%

Total number of students academic year 2019-20: 1767

<b>Race</b>	<b>%</b>
Hispanic	9.10%
Indian	0.19%
Asian	10.86%
Black	5.50%
White	69.30%
Two or More Races	5.11%

*Note: Data collection, and therefore its analysis, was limited to existing systems such as the Student Information System, eSchool Plus, and other New York State Education Department (NYSED) reporting portals. As a result of the systems' structures and organization, further*

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<sup>2</sup> Demographic data was collected from the Irvington UFSD student information system, eSchoolPLUS. Race categories are those required for New York State reporting requirements.

*disaggregation such as IEP status and discipline reporting was modestly hindered. Additionally, it is important to note that the data sets reviewed were reflective of two years.*

NYU analysis of the data concluded the following:

- *Discipline:* IUFSD's Black and Latino/Latina students are at a disproportionately high risk of receiving disciplinary referrals and/or suspensions when compared to their white and Asian peers. (NYU 11-15 {2018-2019 data}; NYU 15-19 {2019-2020 data}<sup>3</sup>)
- *Academics:* IUFSD's white and Asian students are overrepresented in AP and Honors enrollment at the secondary level. IUFSD's Black and Latino/Latina students are generally performing at a lower level than their peers at the elementary level and at a disproportionately high level of risk for failing a course (English/Math/Social Studies/Science) at the elementary level (NYU 19-25 {2018-2019 data}; NYU 26-30 {2019-20 data})

*Note: During the Root Cause Analysis Process other subgroups of students were discussed, such as students with disabilities and those with limited economic resources, as well as discrepancies in disciplinary data for students of color based on gender, but no findings are memorialized in the report. This represents opportunities for further research.*

### **IUFSD Discipline (District Code of Conduct/Building-Based Discipline Referrals)**

NYU led the Root Cause Team in a review of the IUFSD [District Code of Conduct](#) and its building-level referral and documentary practices.

- ***NYU Recommendations for Code of Conduct:***
  - Remove ambiguous/criminalizing/subjective language;
  - Specifically provide new language regarding restorative approaches to discipline as well as related training for staff and students in restorative practices;
  - Include language that centers equity and recognizes cultural variations in student behavior;
  - Provide a “clear matrix” illustrating a specific discipline incident resulting in a consequent disciplinary action;
  - Ensure annual review of the Code of Conduct that includes input from “students and families of color and language differences”;
  - Confirm annually that the Code of Conduct is distributed to all students, staff and families with follow-up to confirm understanding.
- ***NYU Recommendations for Building-Based Discipline Referrals:***

In terms of robust, clear, and consistently applied discipline referral practices and procedures, the team found that the elementary level buildings are doing a better job than the District's secondary level buildings. With that in mind, the NYU report recommends specific changes in the discipline referral K-12:

  - Remove ambiguous/criminalizing/subjective language;

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<sup>3</sup> Disproportionality continued despite school closures due to the pandemic.

- Add restorative approaches and restorative practices;
- Increase professional development regarding the disciplinary referral process for all staff who have contacts with students that may result in discipline;
- Create single “District discipline referral data collection form” that reflects:
  - Student name
  - Student grade
  - Adult reporter incident description
  - Student incident description
  - Demographic information about student
  - Intervention supports/tiered behavioral supports
  - Differentiation for developmental appropriateness
  - Ultimate outcome
  - Inclusion of restorative approaches and specific restorative practice reflected in all documents related to discipline referral and the code of conduct;

(NYU 31, 35-38; see also Table 18a, NYU 31-35; Table 18b, NYU 36-37; Table 18c, NYU 37-38).

### **MTSS, Referrals and Tiered Supports**

NYU’s report concludes that District-provided data “provides a sense of the wide spectrum of supports and interventions [that] students are offered in the District. Particularly from the elementary level there is a distinct vision from leadership of what the multi-tiered system of support looks like and the academic and behavior pathways available to students. That said, across the K-12 spectrum, interventions are not grounded in culturally responsive practices” (NYU 39, see also Table 18d, NYU 39-40 ). The report recommends that IUFSD should increase the grounding of MTSS Referrals and Tiered Supports in “equity, diversity and inclusion” and “culturally responsive implementation” (Table 18e, NYU 41). Specific recommendations include:

- Tier One:
  - Resolving conflicts at the secondary level between “student access to electives/interests and ...ability to access support classes and extra help”;
  - Alignment of scheduling and prioritization of time to support streamlined MTSS between elementary and secondary levels;
  - A more student and family centric approach;
  - Addition of assessment of intervention fidelity;
  - Provision of common language/messaging around interventions that are available to all students;
- Tier Two:
  - Tailoring of interventions and supports to better respond to cultural/racial/linguistic differences;
  - Provision of training to support culturally responsive implementation;
  - Added consistency in tracking effectiveness of interventions.

(Table 18e, NYU 41)

### **NYU Staff Survey**

In June 2021, [NYU prepared a survey](#) that was distributed by the District to 380 staff members. 120 staff members completed the survey.

- NYU found the following areas of strength:
  - Staff maintains a high level of ownership and accountability for student success;
  - Staff maintains a high level of awareness when it comes to understanding and acknowledging their professional responsibility;
  - Staff focuses on the strengths of students, not on perceived weaknesses (i.e. staff shows a low level of “deficit-thinking” when it comes to students);
  - 91% of respondents feel they can refer students to resources for academic and behavioral interventions.
- NYU recommends increased professional learning and development targeted to the following areas in need of improvement:
  - “Color evasiveness”<sup>4</sup> (avoidance of substantive discussion or acknowledgement of race);
  - Racial/cultural understanding and knowledge to improve accommodation to the diversity of cultures represented by students;
  - Feedback on teaching practices related to intervention and referral processes

(NYU 7, 42-44)

### **The Multi-Year Action Plan (Five Year Plan)**

At the final session of the Root Cause Team, NYU’s review of quantitative and qualitative data led it to choose the following focus areas for the District’s multi-year action plan (five year duration with “SMART” goals). The team was split into four subcommittees to reflect the foci:

- Culturally Responsive Restorative Practices
- Teaching and Learning
- Professional Learning and Development
- Family and Community Engagement

NYU (46)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This area of improvement uncovered by the survey is “common with primarily [w]hite participants engaging in racial equity work for the first time. Understanding that equity means seeing individuals and communities for everything they are, including their racial background” (NYU 6). In light of the demographics of the Irvington schools community, parents and families may also benefit from educational opportunities in this area.

<sup>5</sup> NYU only provided introductory forms and instructions for developing a “multi-year plan”. (NYU 8). Thus, this aspect of the work is being and will continue to be led by the District with the support of its Root Cause Analysis Team members independently. As this work is still in process it cannot be summarized here.

Subcommittees will continue to work under the leadership of Dr. Gail Duffy, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Curriculum and Human Resources during the 2021-22 year and beyond.

Further, the District, under the guidance of Dr. Duffy, has launched a fifth subcommittee to explore “Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention” in the context of human resources best practices and to ensure that the welcoming community extended to students in IUFSD is also reflected in staff’s experience in the school environment. Its first meeting took place in February 2022.<sup>6</sup>

Committee work will continue to be an opportunity for community input and collaboration.

### **Final NYU Recommendations<sup>7</sup>**

NYU’s final recommendations to IUFSD track many of its observations reviewed earlier in this executive summary. Where relevant, planned or current programming that will support NYU’s recommendation is noted:

- The District will continue to support the creation, implementation, and progress-monitoring of the Multi-year Action Plan with the support of the four subcommittees, beginning SY 2021-22 and continuing through SY 2025-26.<sup>8</sup>
- The District shall prioritize professional learning for all teachers and staff with a focus on creating and welcoming communities for historically marginalized students and to grounding all its actions in cultural responsiveness so as to reduce and eventually eliminate disproportionate impacts on Black and Latino/Latina students and students with IEPs.
- As planned by the District, in advance of its work with NYU, the District will review the pathways that assign students to secondary level Honors, Acceleration and AP classes with a focus on removing “the disproportionality that currently exists within those offerings”.
- Both staff and students must be trained in culturally responsive restorative practices with the goal of eventually adding peer-to-peer restorative work in the District.<sup>9</sup>
- The District will work with its community partners<sup>10</sup> to improve family engagement pathways to Black and Latinx families, under-resourced families, and families of students with IEPs. Parents/guardians/caregivers will be included in planning and executing this work and student voices should be solicited and included.

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<sup>6</sup> The challenges faced by school districts across the state in achieving educator diversity are amply described in the New York State Education Department’s 2019 ["Educator Diversity Report"](#)

<sup>7</sup>While the Root Cause Report collects 20 team member comments collected by NYU over the course of the six Root Cause Training sessions, without reference to the source for the observations contained in those comments, the executive summary will focus on the NYU recommendations based on its professional analysis of those comments as well as all other qualitative and quantitative data amassed under its leadership (see NYU 44-46)

<sup>8</sup> As recommended, *supra*, an additional subcommittee dedicated to Recruitment/Hiring/Retention shall be formed.

<sup>9</sup> The District has reached out to BOCES to engage trainers to support its efforts to train in restorative practices.

<sup>10</sup> While the recent hiring of an additional social worker and CSE chairperson is intended to support this work, partnerships with the PTSA, especially through its Bulldog Family Fund and SCAFLD ("Supporting Children And Families With Learning Differences") can be instrumental to its success.



- As had been embraced and implemented by the District in advance of its work with NYU, the District has begun to significantly increase its use of Data and Assessment tools in monitoring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of all interventions/programs/trainings instituted to carry out NYU's recommendations.

(NYU 46-47)

### **Conclusion**

The District appreciates the hours of work of the Root Cause Analysis Team, facilitated by NYU. Their work will ensure that culturally responsive-sustaining education practices already underway in the District, shall take permanent root, grow, and continuously improve the school culture, student experience, and learning environment throughout the Irvington school community. The District is committed to listening, learning and reflecting on the lived experiences of our school community in order to make lasting changes to promote a welcoming and affirming environment for all. The District acknowledges that managing meaningful change is a critical responsibility that is shared among all stakeholders. As the District takes strategic steps forward in addressing recommendations and findings identified throughout the Root Cause Analysis Process, the engagement of stakeholders, including student and parent voices, will be essential to the realization of lasting change.

The Irvington UFSD acknowledges both the results of the Root Cause Analysis and the responsibility to consider the implementation of the necessary changes that must occur to ensure that the Irvington schools provide welcoming spaces for each student, regardless of their identity, to succeed and that learning experiences are reflective of a global society and the diversity of our student body.

## **Acknowledgements**

*The Irvington UFSD extends its appreciation to the many school community members who have dedicated their time and passion to the Root Cause Analysis process. Their time, emotion, and support has contributed to the realization of the need to change and will forever have a positive impact on the school experiences of generations of Irvington children.*

### **Irvington Board of Education**

Mr. Brian Friedman, President	Mr. David Graeber, Vice President
Ms. Beth Propper, Vice President	Ms. Maura Gedid, Trustee
Mr. Michael Hanna, Trustee (2020-21)	Ms. Erin Bernstein, Trustee
Ms. Jayne Wissner, Trustee	Ms. Susan Brunenavs, Trustee (2021-22)

### **District Administration**

Dr. Kristopher Harrison, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Gail Duffy, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Human Resources (2021-22)  
Ms. Mary Ellis, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Human Resources (2020-21)  
Ms. Carol Stein, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations

### **Root Cause Analysis Team**

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### **Strategic Partnerships**

*Without the dedication of financial resources, the Root Cause Analysis process would not have occurred. The District extends its appreciation to the:*

Irvington Education Foundation (IEF)  
Irvington Faculty Association (IFA)  
Irvington Parent Teacher Association (PTSA)